

To my beloved community of the Pacific Northwest Conference of the United Church of Christ,  
Go now to <http://pncucc.org/donate> and support the PNCUCC.

Is that too blunt? Let me share some of my thoughts and feelings and see if that helps.

In the year 2020, what has happened – Wow! Would you like to wake up and find out that it was all a bad dream? In the summer of 1969, when I was 13, the song “In the Year 2525” hit number 1 on the pop charts. *“If man is still alive, if woman can survive, they may find.”* This is a song imagining a future where humanity loses its way, forgets its potential, forgets its very identity and purpose. The lyrics take us through a millennium at a time to this eighth and ninth verses.

*In the year 9595  
I'm kinda wondering if man's gonna be alive  
He's taken everything this old earth can give  
And he ain't put nothing back nothing*

*Now it been 10,000 years  
Man has cried a billion tears  
For what he never knew  
Now man's reign is through  
But through the eternal night  
The twinkling of starlight  
So very far away  
Maybe it's only yesterday.*

I loved this song as a kid. I guess it seemed like a fun song then. Now these lyrics lead to some deeper reflection. This song puts 2020 in perspective for me. In this year of pandemics; from COVID 19, to the reckoning with deep racial injustice sustained by our institutions, our culture, and even much of Christianity – everything seems to be crashing. In a time such as this the pandemic implications of Climate Change have been pushed to the back burner.

I am not trying to heap on to the panic and despair you might already feel. Instead I want us to see the *“twinkling starlight, so very far away, maybe it's only yesterday.”* I see all the way back to Creation's beginning that is still visible across time. I remember who I am and see the hope for me, for us, and for our planet.

But I didn't remember this by myself or from one song from my youth. I remember because for the last 30 years I have been firmly planted in the United Church of Christ and my beloved Pacific Northwest Conference. Each of you have come together in a network of communities to enfold me in an identity of God's love. You have reminded me that there is a unity, a necessary connection of all things in God's Creation. You have reminded me that success in life comes from transforming the dynamics; from power over to power with. You have helped me to see my own privilege which has benefitted me for sure, but also how that privilege blocked access for someone else. You have been examples of inclusion, helping me reject a God of judgement and exclusion. You have fed the fire in my belly to work for justice to repair the breaches in our communities that do so much harm.

In the Pacific Northwest Conference of the United Church of Christ, I have been blessed. In 2020, I have needed all the support, encouragement, and reinforcement you could give to keep my feet solidly on the ground. Our Conference leadership brought us together often this year. So many of

you have been essential workers to me! We don't demand uniformity of belief in the UCC yet I have experienced a unity that brings me strength.

This is why I give! I have been given so much through the life of this Conference. There is what I call a "UCC sensibility" that is our connective tissue across our diversity. It is a Spirit flow that is always inviting, never forcing. It is an understanding that my way does not make your way wrong. The many experiences over Zoom/Ring Central these last months have deepened my gratitude for the community that is this Conference. We can't meet in person and I miss the hugs but truthfully, I am feeling hugged by all of you more than ever before.

In gratitude, I will continue to give to "Friends of the Conference", to OCWM, to all the special UCC Offerings, to our Camps. And if I am missing anything, let me know and I will give to that too! The world around us needs our spirit and good work. Let's give here in our Conference and beyond.

<http://pncucc.org/donate>

In gratitude,

Rev. Jim CastroLang  
Pastor, First Congregational UCC  
Member, PNCUCC Stewardship Committee