

May Post

Thank you to the many volunteers who worked diligently and faithfully to bring the 2022 Annual Meeting to the conference delegate, clergy, and visitors. Also, a big thank you to all who attended and participated in the Annual Meeting.

Quick Links:

Mike's Denton's [blog](#)
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[World Labyrinth Day!](#)

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Transitions

The following are transitions confirmed by the Committee on Ministry in April.

Amy Johnson was unanimously approved for ordination. She has been called to serve as the Minister for Sexuality Education and Justice in the national setting of the UCC, Justice and Witness Ministries.

Rev. Emily Linderman's transfer to the Northern California Nevada Conference was completed. She was ordained in our conference in 2020 but her transfer was delayed.

Terry Rice's ordination paper was accepted, unanimously.

Conference Calendar

If you'd like your committee meeting or event added to the calendar, please send an email to office@pncucc.org.

May

- 1 PNC-UCC Annual Meeting; online; 10:30am-noon
- 4 Courtney's Office Hour; <https://v.ringcentral.com/join/006421246>; 9:30-10:30am
- 5 Moderators Check-in; online; <https://v.ringcentral.com/join/333224991>; 7:00-8:30pm
- 6 Admin & Finance Check-in; Video call link to be determined; 1-2:00pm

- 9 PNCUCC Moderator & Board Office 1.5 hours; new link to be determined; 6-7:30pm
- 11 Courtney's Office Hour; <https://v.ringcentral.com/join/006421246>; 9:30-10:30am
- 11 Church Development Committee; online; 1:00-3:00pm
- 12 Westside Committee on Ministry; online; 9:30am-2:30pm
- 13 Admin & Finance Check-in; Video call link to be determined; 1-2:00pm

- 17 Board of Directors meeting; online; 6:30-8:00pm
- 19 Moderators Check-in; online; <https://v.ringcentral.com/join/333224991>; 7:00-8:30pm
- 20 Eastside Committee on Ministry meeting; online; 10:00am-2:00pm
- 20 Admin & Finance Check-in; Video call link to be determined; 1-2:00pm

- 26 Stewardship Committee meeting; online; 6:00-7:30pm
- 27 Admin & Finance Check-in; Video call link to be determined; 1-2:00pm

- 30 Memorial Day; Conference Office Closed

June

- 3 Admin & Finance Check-in; Video call link to be determined; 1-2:00pm
- 5 Ordination and Installation of Amara Oden; Suquamish UCC; 3:00pm

A STEWARD'S MESSAGE

Tara Leininger, Vice-Moderator

When I was a young child, I received fifty cents every Sunday morning. Half of this was to go into the plate that went by me during church. Being 6 or 7 or 8, it didn't mean much to me – only that I was supposed to do it. The other half was for later in the day when my siblings and I would walk the half-mile down to the “little store” to purchase some penny candy and split a bottle of cream soda. Two things: that mile walk never seemed long to me, and what ever happened to those little stores? (*My little store is now a bridal shop and a mile walk is now all about time.*)

The point is that when you are young, church finances were all about putting a quarter in the plate. You gave something to God, we were told. All of that changed the minute I became an Elder in the church I attended as an adult. Church finances now were the reality. It was no longer about giving something to God, it was about fixing the broken cement steps and paying the bills and planning for a donation to a mission project in South Africa.

Church finances are messy. There is a world of differences between paying your bills and taking care of a church – even though some of the outlay is much the same. The main difference is you are using everyone's money to take care of church finances, while it's your personal income you are distributing- your money, your decision. For church finances, making decisions on what gets how much is a more delicate matter.

Imagine how stewardship feels for a conference... When the budget is being planned, when the stewardship committee is considering a fundraising goal, when there is suddenly a great deal of dedicated funds for anti-racism work; this is not putting a quarter in the plate. This is about sometimes having to making tough decisions. This is about being careful with the bottom line and contemplating ramifications. This is about doing the work of Christ's church with faithfulness to God and to those who supply the funds. This is not easy!

For my first years on the Board of Directors, reading financial reports and reviewing the budget was all I had to really worry about. All that changed when I accepted the position of vice-moderator. I was sitting in Stewardship Committee meetings, where tough discussions are being made. It is easy for someone who just waits for the plate to go by to make observations and suggestions (no matter how helpful or not). It is different when you are actually making the decisions, and then having to face criticisms, suggestions, or even praise.

Like that little girl in the pew putting in her quarter, we can happily put in our quarter without much thought to what it means or what it does. You and I, we don't have that luxury anymore. We are the stewards, each of us, for our individual congregations, for our conference, for our denomination, for God's presence in the world. It takes courage and devotion to be a steward. My thanks and blessings to those who do so for us all.

Annual Meeting Reflection - Mike Denton

Rev. Mike Denton PNCUCC Annual Meeting Address April 30th, 2022 I've struggled more with this particular message than any other I've ever shared with you. When developing the theme for this meeting, the idea that emerged was around hope, recognizing the exhaustion of almost everyone.

It's entirely the right theme, and I was looking forward to hearing from someone else about it. I'm struggling with staying hopeful, too. On the one hand, the idea that I might have anything to say about hope feels almost ludicrous when I'm feeling a lot of what can best be described as despair. As I told it to a friend during one of the days I was struggling with this message, me speaking about hope today almost feels like inviting Eeyore to be your motivational speaker. On the other hand, writing this has forced me to stop simply ruminating about the general sense of despair and fight my way towards a slightly better place. Maybe it will do that for you, too.

I don't know how else to start this off, honestly, but to say that, these days, what hope there is frequently seems trapped under the rubble of a collapsing world. It doesn't help that, in some ways, it seems like every single day brings some new horror or atrocity. War with threats of nuclear weapons. Violent political acts. Climate collapse. The pandemic. Inflation. Continued individual, institutional, and systemic actions that deny the humanity of others through denigration, deprivation, and violence. Racism, heterosexism, sexism, ableism, classism, ageism, cissexism, and other forms of oppression spread and even seem to multiply.

We tend to look at these as separate issues or problems, but they are not. They are all part of a system of domination and control that consumes and consumes and consumes until there is nothing left to consume. Although we have beautifully diverse experiences and ways of living in the world, the means of oppressing people, exploiting the earth, and minimizing the value of life reflect a unity of oppression that include methods such as:

1. Naming a difference as separation and beginning the process of "othering."
2. Asserting the innate superiority of those with similar characteristics and the innate inferiority of those with "other" features.
3. Devaluing the gifts of the "other."
4. Suggesting the dependency and irresponsibility of the "other."
5. Naming "the other" as dangerous and needing to be "tamed" or "controlled."
6. Building systems that reinforce, protect, promote, and rationalize these practices.
7. Eliminating any evidence to the contrary, whether present in a person, movement, science, religion, art, or other ways of knowing.
8. Continuing to feed the system of domination and consumption by othering new groups of people, new pieces of the earth, and naming new differences as separations.⁴

Systems of domination corrupt everything, including good intentions. Even the intent to counter this system with inclusion sometimes gets corrupted by unintentionally reinforcing the legitimacy of this system to include and exclude. What seems like a win against parts of this system sometimes sustains and protects other parts of the system. The initial value of good intentions is quickly degraded by this system's practiced means of defense and deflection.

However, even though these means of othering and consumption are pervasive, they are not sustainable. They never were. This system always takes more than it gives. It is content with consuming a potentially better future in exchange for a more gluttonous present.

My Siblings in Christ, we are not at the precipice. We are not near it. We are over it. Now, maybe we can hear the phrase "We are all in this together" not just as words of hope but also as words of warning. The "other" was a false idea made real, an idea so weak that it is requiring all the world's resources to sustain it.

Even with the separations demanded by the pandemic, we are seeing each other face-to-face in a way that we have at few other moments. We know more about ourselves than we might like as our facades - our armor - falls away in this time of collapse. The system of domination continues to try and consume its way out of its death by having us turn on and consume each other on its behalf instead of turning towards each other. A house divided cannot stand, and this house we all live in is falling.

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As accurate as I believe this to be, there is also this from 1 Corinthians:

"For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love."

Despite what sometimes seems like evidence to the contrary, I've seen the truth of these words, too. These three things are a trinity of rootedness that will be the spiritual grounding that helps us make it through to something new if there is life on the other side of the precipice.

We've heard these words from this scripture so often that it's easy to take them for granted, and we can't. These ideas have been intentionally co-opted as weak, sentimentalized ideals - minimized to only apply to romantic love - because systems of domination can not survive their persistent practice. Faith, hope, and love damn systems of domination because tapping into them⁵ makes us less dependent, less afraid, and less able to see the differences between us, the earth, and all creation.

Where faith, hope, and love abide, life blooms. As much as systems of domination may try to sentimentalize and diminish them, faith, hope, and love can overwhelm systems of domination. They can help us turn towards each other instead of on each other. They can help us participate in systems of liberation and recovery with a wisely-reckless, spirit-led, faithful abandon.

These three things are all connected like a vine, its fruits, and its roots. To talk about one is to talk about all of them. Within the UCC, specifically, there is a wide breadth of belief among our members, and people are free to participate as little or as much as they'd like. This was part of what attracted me to the UCC in the first place. However, there are significant vulnerabilities in this, too, because faith isn't just about what we believe but also about our practices and disciplines that are separate and interwoven with corporate life.

All too often, I can say that I've become a consumer of a faith that I expect to come from others instead of recognizing my responsibility to practice faith. I have sometimes fallen into the trap of looking for others to provide spiritual "products" instead of building that relationship of faith with a community in a mutual, challenging, and authentic way. I can say that, personally, this COVID Lenten period has been a time of personal faith deconstruction centered in prayer, journaling, and being open to the movement and conviction of the Spirit so that I can be a better participant in communities of faith. When I participate in worship as a leader, I have the capacity to recognize that my responsibility is to bring something to the service. I've struggled, recently, to attend worship as a fellow worshipper and participant; not just expecting to receive something but also bringing what I have and who I am.

In my visits with people or conversations about their church, it's not unusual for people to talk about not "being fed" by a pastor's sermons or worship leadership. At the same time, there is not always the self-reflective work that asks, "What am I bringing to the potluck?"

I'm not saying there aren't times we need help and that there aren't times we genuinely have nothing to bring because we're in pain or grief. Those are the moments we carry each other and share with one another. However, we have to resist the powers or domination that suggest that we're entitled to be fed all the time without nurturing our spiritual gardens. Even when we try, we also have to resist the powers of domination that whisper in our ear that what we might grow there is unworthy of being shared. Nurturing our faith gives ourselves and our communities access to the abundance of God, a practice we co-create through the experience of prayer, study, service, repentance, deconstruction, reconciliation, and action. When faith is a consumerist or consumptive expectation, it collapses in on itself. When it taps into the abundance of God, it becomes a celebration of hope and a feast overflowing with love.

Love, as only a sentimental idea, is not love. I get that whole fluttery, beautiful part, but that is a benefit of love. It's not necessarily love in and of itself. To interact with love is to interact with a powerful and untameable force. Many have talked about love as the most powerful force in the universe. Others have suggested that God's power must surely be love if God is all-powerful. Love is not something we control but a force we are shaped by and learn to flow with as it is present in the world. When we serve Love, it blossoms within us.

The systems of domination seek to prevent our access to love. Instead of the mutually beneficial rewards of the give and take that comes with abundant love, we are promised to be rewarded with the gifts of being independent and self-sufficient. It's a false, unsustainable promise exposed at this moment in time more than any other. Seeking out to be wholly independent creates a redundant, deepening pit of need and want that, now, is collapsing in on itself. We're all hearing stories of congregations, non-profits, businesses, and governments in collapse. The planet itself is collapsing under the unsustainable weight of our expectations and desire for more and more power and independence.

Only the power of love can confront and diminish the system of domination's love of power. I am not so naive as to believe it will ever disappear, but I believe it can be diminished with practice, vigilance, and all the tools that love provides.

This brings me back to hope.

I am sure that many of you were inspired by this year's Lenten devotional that Courtney coordinated, focusing on sharing stories about those moments that provided hope. When we tap into the idea of seeing hope and looking for hope, there are ways and places we end up finding it, discovering it, and uncovering it. But, I think we're doing something else, too.

I'm also coming to understand that depending on hope as solely an external force that someone else provides has its limits. It gets us right into the consumer mindset. At its worst, hope is doled out by the systems of domination like a drug that builds a dependence on the system. At its worst, what is called hope by systems of domination becomes the carrot at the end of a stick that is always out of reach yet manipulatively sets our direction and choices. What looks like a promise becomes a taunt. I'm becoming convinced that, somewhere along the way, we were taught to consume some product dressed up to look like hope and slowly forgot that Hope. Is built.

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The New Century Hymnal's version of the old hymn is, "My hope is built on nothing less, than Jesus' love and righteousness, on Jesus' love and righteousness...."

Hope. Is. Built.

And maybe not in the way we expect. In Rebecca Solnit's 2009 book "A Paradise Built in Hell," she writes about communities that emerge during natural and human-made disasters. One of the quotes from this book I have shared before is this:

"The possibility of paradise hovers on the cusp of coming into being, so much so that it takes powerful forces to keep such a paradise at bay. If paradise now arises in hell, it's because, in the suspension of the usual order and the failure of most systems, we are free to live and act another way."¹

Within the communities she writes about, leadership and structure emerges but only in so much as it serves the community. Instead of being seen as a class of people who somehow have innate leadership skills, leaders are empowered as the community needs them. Instead of being a product of leadership, a mutual, co-equal community becomes the nurtured norm. Leadership emerges from the consent of the community members as a temporary role to serve a function. I know this idea runs contrary to a lot of what is shared as common sense, but I believe that leadership is not essential except as a situational form of service based on the needs of the community.

Before the pandemic, the US spent around 45 billion dollars a year on leadership development work. In the five years before the pandemic, this amount had increased by about 39%. However, it's not working. Trust of those in institutional leadership is crashing. Trust in religious, business, and government leaders is below, and in some cases well below, 50%.

¹ Solnit, Rebecca. A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities that Arise in Disaster. Penguin Books, 2009.

It's interesting that leadership training took off in the 80s at about the same moment as the resurgence of overt movements to reinforce family values, white values, male-centered hierarchical systems, and the defunding of social programs. It's interesting that, at the same time, funding for civics courses started to decline, and, in the church, we actively began to look toward customer service models to attract members. As part of those customer service models, it's interesting that we started to drop membership classes, diminish community responsibilities, and began, more and more, to talk about the services we provide for members.

6 I recognize that the idea of membership has its challenges but replacing it with a more business-based consumer model or a corporate democracy model, or a non-profit client model has also been problematic. Just because Amazon, Netflix, or Costco call the fees we might pay them "memberships" doesn't mean we are actually members. The influence we have is as customers or consumers, not as members. However, some of these same expectations have become ingrained into church life. In these cases, leadership does not emerge from the members as part of a transformative movement of a community but functions only to sustain the product's life and expand its use. When we commodify the church, our souls become the commodity.

Do we need to identify and train those the community calls to leadership roles? Absolutely. Do we need to help prepare the whole community for being called into leadership roles? Yes. And, do we desperately need to figure out how to build community in a way that is mutual, and fair, and honest, and able to resist the systems of domination when they remerge in the post-collapse world? Please God, yes.

Hope. Is. Built.

Yes, we are in a time of collapse, but sometimes, a breakdown can lead to a breakthrough.

Hope. Is. Built.

I don't see any way that the coming days aren't going to get more challenging, but on the other side of it - and I do believe there will be another side - there might be better days if we remember that

Hope. Is. Built.

When we make promises now to the generations that will follow us.

Hope. Is. Built.

No one is going to deliver us hope, provide us with hope, because

Hope. Is. Built.

On the foundation of the love of God and with the tools of faith.

Hope. Is. Built.

Amen.



UCC Webinar

Climate Migration: Responding with Faith, Care, and Equity

According to a recent UN climate report, 20 million people have been displaced each year since 2008 due to extreme weather that is often exacerbated by the climate crisis. There is much we can do as people of faith in responding with deeply held values to this critical situation. To inform and guide us, this webinar will feature Drocella Mugorewera from Bridge Refugee Services, Tomas Matom Ramirez from the Indigenous Maya Ixil people, and the Rev. Irene Hassan from the UCC's Minister of Refugee and Migration Services. Even if you can't make the scheduled time of 1 pm ET on Wednesday, May 11th, still sign-up, and we will send you a recording. [Register now!](#)

[Hyperlink: https://UCC.zoom.us/webinar/register/4416498793564/WN_2MRTMq84TrGEG2Y-RSEzGw]

**A low-cost loan
from Cornerstone Fund
is just a click away!**



A LOW-COST LOAN FROM THE CORNERSTONE FUND IS JUST A CLICK AWAY!

Sometimes you need to ask the difficult question. Deep down inside, you may already know the answer. But it's not until you actually take the time to assess and realistically address the situation that you decide to act on the solution. While this scenario applies to a variety of issues in life, the topic at hand is the condition of your church property.

Is your congregation considering making improvements on your building to expand ministry or increase revenue? Is it finally addressing deferred maintenance items that worsen every year? Are you ready to reduce your building's carbon footprint and save money on utilities in the process? Can you enhance digital capabilities to maintain and grow your online community?

If any of these questions apply to you, then now is a good time to talk with the Cornerstone Fund about low-cost loan options that will directly improve your facility and potentially strengthen your congregation.

Maria Coyne, President & CEO of Cornerstone Fund, explains how her organization can help. "The United Church of Christ Cornerstone Fund helps local churches and non-profit organizations improve their facilities and create change within their communities. We do this by offering a variety of transformative lending products and investment options that not only empower these communities, but also help clients earn more on their investment."

Many building issues, such as facility additions, major infrastructure improvements, technology upgrades and use of space enhancements, may be addressed by Cornerstone Fund products like mortgages, bridge loans, and lines of credit. States Coyne, "Many churches and organizations find that the Cornerstone Fund offers better financing packaging than a local bank. Plus, since the Cornerstone Fund only works with churches and nonprofit organizations, the Fund understands your unique needs

and can offer both lending expertise and flexibility – along with great interest rates – that you won't find anywhere else.”

“For congregations looking to reduce their carbon footprint, the Creation Care Loan Program is specifically dedicated to environmental justice efforts and allows us to offer lower subsidized loan rates to UCC affiliates,” says Coyne. This Creation Care loan product, a new product developed in 2021, may be used for renewable energy installments, building efficiency improvements and other environmental care projects.

Congregations and UCC-affiliated organizations across the country have taken advantage of Cornerstone Fund offerings. Regardless of your church or organization needs, the United Church of Christ Cornerstone Fund may be able to assist. Visit www.CornerstoneFund.org to learn more or contact a lending specialist at 888-UCC-FUND (822-3863) or lending@cornerstonefund.org.



In-person Owl Training by the UUA

[Our Whole Live](#)

Facilitator Training returns
in person

Coming to Bellevue WA

Sept 3-5, 3 levels offered

[Elementary K-1/4-6](#)

[Secondary MS/HS](#)

[Young Adult, Adult, Older Adult](#)

Registration open 'til full. Contact registrar: Amanda Radak

pwrregistrar@uua.org

(720) 663-7693



May Celebrations

Best wishes to our clergy and their partners on their special days.

Ordinations

2	Lindalee Purdy	13 years	17	John Rogers	60 years
10	Pat Bennett	41 years	23	Elizabeth Gordon	1 year
10	Sharon Benton	19 years	23	Judith Hjorth	57 years
11	Kris Ostrem	20 years	23	Wayne Wilson	23 years
13	Ruth Brandon	49 years	24	Lisa Horst Clark	13 years
15	Emily Tanis-Likkel	17 years	29	Dennis Hollinger-Lant	45 years
16	Cameron Sharp	46 years	31	Kendall Baker	58 years
17	Penny Matthews	47 years			

Birthdays

1	Bianca Davis-Lovelace	14	Deborah Rose	24	Joy Haertig
4	Leah Atkinson Bilinski	18	Tara Leininger	27	David Brown
4	Cathryn Cummings	18	David Royer	27	Nathaniel Mahlberg
4	Mae Durland	19	Kathy Turner	28	Ron Blake
7	Lauren Cannon	21	Cristina Airaghi	28	Marci Scott-Weis
8	Linda Crowe	22	Bobbi Virta	30	Donene Blair
12	Kathie Forman	22	David Morris		
12	Jeffrey Lee Barker	24	Tara Barber		

Anniversaries

1	Sharon Benton & Jamie Kepros
2	Davi & Rachael Weasley
18	Allen & Carla Chase
19	Cameron & Kathryn Sharp
20	Anthony & Linda Robinson
22	Craig Rennebohm & Barbara Bennett
25	Randall Mullins & Sharon Pavelda
27	Philip & Patricia Eisenhauer
27	Richard & Joyce Wyanski
29	Dee & John Eisenhauer
31	Janna Born Larsen & Steve Larsen