

Ecumenical Connection

Publication of the Illinois Conference of Churches



February 2016

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Annual Assembly approves new membership format!

The Illinois Conference of Churches voted at its 2015 Annual Assembly to forge a new membership structure. Previously, the governing bodies of denominations, located in Illinois were members – judicatories and they continue to be the foundation of our organization.

But the ICC is broadening this structure. Going forward, individual persons, individual congregations or churches (regardless of its judicatory being a member) and organizations, can become ecumenical partners and attend Annual Assembly where they will have a voice at the table. Voting is done by consensus and will continue to be the responsibility of the judicatory leaders and delegates.

All members and ecumenical partners must agree with the Mission Statement of the ICC:

“The Illinois Conference of Churches seeks to be an inclusive community of churches that celebrates and makes visible our sacred bonds of unity in Christ. We will do this by: Promoting an honest sharing and understanding of both our common and divergent theological convictions; and Making public, prophetic witness to Christ’s love for all people, particularly by addressing poverty and racism. To these ends the members of the Illinois Conference of Churches proclaim our common faith in Jesus Christ. In word and deed, we give expression to Ephesians 4:5 – there is “... one Lord, one faith, one baptism...” – as we unite in cooperative ministries.”

To become an ecumenical partner please fill out and submit the form on the website under “news” electronically, or download and print the form to mail. By submitting or mailing this form you attest that you agree with the mission statement. Thank you for your generous support of the ICC.

We are seeking nominations for the Rev. Donald E. Mason Ecumenical Award which will be presented at Annual Assembly from now on. For a simple nomination form, due Sept. 1, 2016 please email us and request one. The award recognizes ecumenical initiatives of individuals, leaders, local churches, judicatories, or other organizations which serve to: nurture growing relationships among Christian churches through worship, education, and fellowship; and generate ecumenical witness and mission expressing the reconciling love of Jesus Christ. ***Thanks.***

Save the date!

2016 Illinois Conference of Churches Annual Assembly “The Face of the Young Ecumenist – the Next Generation.”

Friday, Sept. 30

8:30 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Grace Lutheran Church

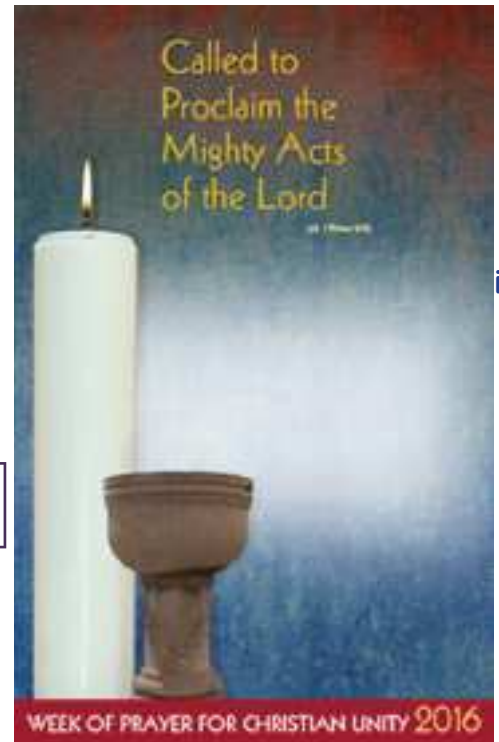
313 S. Prospect Ave., Champaign, IL

(If you are no longer the delegate or if there are any changes your contact information please let us know! Thanks.)

For a copy of proposed by-law changes go to our website under “events” or request a copy by email, after Sept. 1.

Our Forum presenters will be a panel representing four seminaries in Illinois.

Rev. Dr. John Rickard, Presbyter of the Blackhawk Presbytery, Presbyterian Church USA, will give the morning message during our ecumenical worship spotlighting the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2016 scripture and order of worship.



Submit a nomination for the Rev. Donald E. Mason Ecumenical Award by Sept. 1

Earlybird registration \$35 until midnight Sept. 1 - no exceptions!

Register online using the events tab on our website or e-mail Laurie to request a registration form by email. \$10 for students, \$45 for all others, includes breakfast, lunch and materials.

Questions? Contact Laurie Vial, Executive Director, at laurie@illinoisconferenceofchurches.org or at the phone number below.

Lodging: Rooms are blocked at Wingate by Wyndham, 516 W. Marketview Dr., Champaign, IL (217) 355-5566 at \$85 plus tax. Rooms must be booked prior to Sept. 15 to assure the discounted rate.

**Illinois
Conference
of
Churches**



1608 W. Church St., Champaign, IL 61821 217-522-7099
www.illinoisconferenceofchurches.org

ICC makes public statement on refugees

Our Leadership Team, working closely with our Public Policy Team, our new Interreligious Team and our antiracism Team (Illinois Christians Encountering Racism, ICER) adopted the following public statement released on Nov. 24, 2015. It is also on our Facebook page. *"You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt."* Deuteronomy 10:19, NRSV

"The Leadership Team of the Illinois Conference of Churches, in light of recent acts of terrorism, issues the following policy statement and invites our members, which includes 13 Christian denominations, to join us in affirming our responsibility to welcome refugees who seek asylum in our country. We trust the screening process for refugees, already in practice, to do what it is intended to do. We call on Governor Bruce Rauner to follow federal law relating to refugees. We are particularly offended by the suggestion that any group of people would be singled out for exclusion and particularly by the suggestion any group would be asked to wear labels or have separate registration. By giving in to fear we are creating further division in our communities. We strongly denounce all acts of terrorism and offer condolences and sympathy to all victims and their families. In making this statement we are keenly aware of the scriptures on which our faith is based and how our savior was once a refugee seeking shelter in a foreign land while fleeing oppression."

Annual Assembly 2015 Forum theme provides springboard for new Interreligious Team

An especially positive outcome from the most recent Annual Assembly Forum of the ICC has been the formation of a new Team - a Team focusing on Interreligious engagement. Team members met in November and January to outline their goals and possible courses of action. Their next meeting is slated for March 17 in Bloomington, IL.

The Team is headed by Rev. Catiana McKay who will also sit on the Leadership Team. She is joined by Dr. John Charlton, Fr. Kevin Laughery, Rev. Dr. Sheldon Culver, Hakan Berberoglu, Donald Rubins and Alicja Lukaszewicz-Southall.

The Team already played a valuable role in forming the public statement above.

What true faith demands of us after Paris attacks

By Fr. Kevin Laughery

Posted Nov. 20, 2015 at 9:13 PM State Journal Register, Springfield, IL

On Friday, Nov. 13, I was in Champaign attending a meeting of the Leadership Team of the Illinois Conference of Churches. The ICC, founded in 1930 in Springfield, has for these past 85 years worked to develop greater unity among Christians in our state.

At this meeting, we were taking a further step. So many of us who work for unity among Christians also are active in relationships between Christians and members of non-Christian religions. We began to make plans for “interreligious” activity as our Christian organization seeks to develop ties with non-Christians.

After the meeting, I headed back to the Springfield area, stopping in Oreana to see my parents. My father asked me, “Have you heard the news out of Paris?”

I had not heard anything. We sat down to the television and our computers, and followed the slaughter, which was still in progress.

I expected to hear that the murderers would say that their actions were inspired by God, and that they were living out the demands of the Muslim religion. And so it happened.

Thinking about the meeting I’d just attended, I realized how vital it is for people of faith to interact and unite at an interreligious level, so that with one voice we can condemn, not only such twisted and evil acts, but also the ongoing lies of people whose idea of religion is an insult to humanity.

I have been fortunate, in my nearly 30 years of activity in the Greater Springfield Interfaith Association, to have become acquainted with local Muslims. Much of that “acquaintance” has taken the form of sharing the suffering which comes with public misunderstanding of the role of religion in the tensions our world is experiencing.

The depraved acts of supposed “believers” in God have nothing whatever to do with the faith lived out by fellow citizens who give true glory to God by their prayer-filled lives and their generosity to people in need. Any one of us might ask ourselves: What if our religious faith were to be associated with undistilled evil? What if a majority looked upon us as suspect and traitorous?

This is exactly what our Muslim brothers and sisters have lived with for far too many years. I have found myself changed as I have become better aware of the injury inflicted by the ignorance which is allowed to perpetuate itself because we lack a real knowledge of one another.

As a Catholic Christian, I cannot forget that our Second Vatican Council, 50 years ago, affirmed the kinship of Jews, Christians, and Muslims, since all three religions trace their belief in one God to the faith of the patriarch Abraham and his wife Sarah.

“So, are all the religions going to merge?”

By Fr. Kevin Laughery

This column originally appeared in *Catholic Times*, the diocesan newspaper of the Catholic Diocese of Springfield, Nov. 15, 2015.

“So, are all the religions going to merge?” This was the gist of a couple of questions I have received concerning the Parliament of the World’s Religions, held in October in Salt Lake City.

I imagine that such unrealistic expectations are spurred by that word, “parliament,” which was first used in 1893. We tend to think of a parliament as a legislative body; therefore, we might imagine delegates of various religions deliberating resolutions which might be adopted by all religions.

In fact, the Parliament conforms to its description in the sense of its French root, *parler*, to speak. The Parliament is, above all, an occasion for various religions to tell their story.

And the stories were, seemingly, unending. Approximately 10,000 people took part in the Parliament, and about one eighth of them were presenters. At any given hour, as I wandered through the massive Salt Palace Convention Center, quite close to Temple Square and the headquarters of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, there were perhaps 40 different sessions on offer, not to mention hundreds of exhibitors.

I attended a Quaker meeting (the silence, which predominates in such meetings, was beautiful), and I heard six Mormon scholars share some of the history of the religion and the attempts of various theologians to classify the faith in the midst of Christianity and world religions in general.

I listened to a lecture on Jainism, an ancient religion of India — although the number of adherents is far outnumbered by those of Hinduism — and I was introduced to a fascinating cosmology and theory of the purpose of human life. In the midst of a universe without beginning or end, Jains believe, human beings are called to limit violence as much as possible, and this limitation includes our choices of food. To eat animals, for instance, is a greater “violence” than eating plants.

After attending sessions on Buddhism and on an “Abrahamic Reunion,” in which Jews, Christians, Muslims and Druze work together for peace in the Holy Land, I concluded my Parliament activity with a concert held at the Salt Lake Tabernacle. A Salt Lake City Catholic parish choir performed an original song based on a prayer of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta.

Since the revival of the Parliament in 1993, Parliaments have been held in Chicago, Cape Town, Melbourne, and Barcelona, before returning this year to the United States. The Council for a Parliament of the World’s Religions is headquartered in Chicago and is working on determining the location of the next Parliament. The Parliament as a worldwide phenomenon seems to have gained momentum. Instead of waiting four or five years for the next such event, we learned, it is anticipated that it will be possible to schedule a Parliament every two years. The Parliament has yet to be held in Asia or South America; I think it’s a good bet that a 2017 Parliament will be on one of these continents.

If there is something upon which various religions are developing a consensus, it’s this: in accord with the encyclical letter *Laudato Si’* of Pope Francis, care for our “common home,” the earth, is the goal of many religious adherents. Many world religions, such as the Jains whom I’ve already mentioned, incorporate vegetarianism into their religious practice. Such simplification of the human diet is looked upon as a means of aiding the “sustainability” of the human family on this planet. I don’t find this dietary prospect immediately appealing; but our Christianity is all about “conversion,” and we must obviously be open to creative change.

ICC forges formal partnership with Faith in Place

The Leadership Team of the Illinois Conference of Churches is pleased to announce a formal partnership with the faith-based environmental group, Faith in Place. We urge you to go to their website faithinplace.org and check them out. We have invited them to conduct a Faithful Citizen Workshop at our Join Teams meeting on May 3 in Bloomington-Normal, IL. Our Public Policy Team looks forward to working with their policy director.



Our Vision

Faithful people caring for the Earth.

Our Mission

Faith in Place inspires religious people of diverse faiths to care for the Earth through education, connection, and advocacy.

Since 1999, Faith in Place has worked with over 1,000 houses of worship throughout Illinois to protect our common land, air, and water. With outreach staff working across the state and offices located in Chicago, Lake County, and Central Illinois, Faith in Place inspires faithful people to care for the Earth through four program areas: Energy & Climate Change, Sustainable Food & Land Use, Water Preservation, and Advocacy.

Our Principles

In order to inspire as many people of faith as possible to take action with significant environmental impacts, Faith in Place's programs are designed to be adaptable and engaging. We respect theological and social diversity and strive to make our programs relevant to faithful people of any religion, age, race, and socio-economic class.

In living out our principles, we often host conversations on race and the environment, and many of our programs have been created out of ideas that emerged in these discussions. Faith in Place works for all people of all faiths throughout Illinois, helping each faith community apply their own unique culture, history, context, and theology with practical steps for them to better care for the Earth.

It's a Big Small World

By Fr. Kevin Laughery

This column originally appeared in *Catholic Times*, the diocesan newspaper of the Catholic Diocese of Springfield, Dec. 13, 2015.

As of Wednesday, Dec. 9, Catholics worldwide have entered the second half-century since the close of the Second Vatican Council. Vatican II gave us a vision of the Church, the People of God, in its role of transforming humanity in accord with the gift of Jesus Christ.

The Council left us Catholics plenty of work to do. This column, as you know, concentrates on Catholic relationships with other Christians and with people of other religions. It should be clear to all of us that, in our personal relationships, we have numerous opportunities to fulfill the mandates of the documents on Christian unity and on respect for people of non-Christian religions. We are mandated to develop relationships for the sake of harmony with non-Christians and for the sake of unity with non-Catholic Christians.

In the realm of Christian unity, we need to make sure that we are cultivating the means by which we interact with other Christians. And so we must consider the Illinois Conference of Churches.

The ICC was established in Springfield in 1930, and for the past 85 years it has been the official means in our state by which Christians of various communions meet and work together. At the end of Vatican II, the Catholic dioceses of Illinois joined the ICC. I have been representing our diocese at the ICC since 2001. I currently serve on the Leadership Team of the ICC.

The ICC offers opportunities for Christians of various communions to get to know one another and to collaborate. The Annual Assembly each September provides a "forum" which often treats questions of how Christians of diverse traditions understand one another's teachings. The Public Policy Team provides the chance for Christians to work together on issues of common concern. We are especially proud that many years of collaboration paid off when capital punishment was abolished in Illinois in 2011. Our anti-racism team, Illinois Christians Encountering Racism, provides training for Christians who feel the urge to explore the ironies of that strange American topic, race, as it impacts our society. We have just begun to look beyond the confines of Christianity as we contemplate official activity with non-Christians.

In recent years, the ICC has found it more and more challenging to provide this necessary interaction. The budgets of many judicatories (administrative units analogous to Catholic dioceses) have been severely cut in recent years, and the ICC has felt the effects of the budget cuts. In response, we have made difficult adjustments. In recent years, the ICC has had very few people on the payroll; currently, there is one part-time paid executive director. Not long ago, the ICC was renting office space; now, the office is in the executive director's residence. **To keep the budget balanced, we have recently drawn upon investments but, if the current state of affairs continues, the ICC will stop functioning within two years.**

I am happy to report, however, that our diocese has been faithful for many years in meeting its annual assessment. So, in accord with the current expression, collectively, we're "good." It may well be, however, that parishes, groups, and individuals will want to make a special effort to support the ICC financially.

We keep in mind the mandates of Vatican II and we prayerfully consider how each of us may be called to invest ourselves in coordinated Christian work in our state.

Editor's note: To donate go to our website and read the News page and then donate using PayPal on the Donations page. Please consider reprinting this column in your denomination or congregational newsletter or writing your own column in support of financial support of the ICC. For a text file email Laurie. To our past, current and future supporters - we thank you.

News snapshots



Judicatory visits and major meetings

Laurie Vial, executive director of the Illinois Conference of Churches, is traveling around the state and meeting individually with all Judicatory executives.

Another of Laurie's goals is to attend the major meetings of each denomination and where possible have an information table in the exhibition space. Please help out the ICC by communicating about your major meetings and forwarding registration forms for exhibition space. She could also address these gatherings and bring a brief greeting from the ICC.

Looking forward

Another goal of the ICC Leadership Team is to be more proactive. And the major focus of the ICC is alleviating racism and poverty. The Leadership Team seeks other ways to become more involved statewide. If you have a suggestion, please contact Laurie.

Would you like to join an ICC Team?

If you would like to serve on the Public Policy Team, the Illinois Christians Encountering Racism (ICER) Team, or help plan next year's Annual Assembly Forum – e-mail Laurie Vial and let her know. We also have a new Interreligious Team. If you would like to suggest someone to serve on this Team, please contact Laurie.

Grants

Now that the Illinois Conference of Churches will be seeking grants to supplement denomination donations in our working budget, we need you to be our eyes and ears. If you hear of appropriate grant opportunities from foundations or your own denomination, please notify the executive director. Thank you for helping in this way.

Donations/Pledges

The Illinois Conference of Churches relies on the generous donations of its 13 member Christian denominations for financial stability. Other generous supporters are affiliated members and individual congregations as well as the generosity of individuals.

Thank you for keeping current with your 2016 donations. Please contact the executive director if you need an update on your status.

ICC to host conference for college chaplains

The Leadership Team has learned the college chaplains in Illinois feel a need to meet together once a year to network and share common concerns. Please notify Laurie Vial, our executive director, to give her contact information for chaplains in your denomination or any that you know. This event will be hosted by a Christian college and sponsored by the Illinois Conference of Churches. Please forward this information to any chaplains that you know. Please put Chaplain in the subject line.

Is there a way for Judicatories to share more resources such as training sessions?

The Christian Church Disciples of Christ has led the charge by opening their annual anti-racism training to anyone in our 13 member denominations. Everyone is watching their budget including travel budget and trying to be good stewards of the environment by not driving as much. If your denomination has a training session, a special speaker, an event, a workshop or any other "happening" that you would like to open to your fellow ICC members, please let us know. We will promote these events on our website and in our newsletter. Our Leadership Team would really like to grow this opportunity for more ecumenical encounters. And we'll all meet more brothers and sisters in Christ and have more networking opportunities.

This can be observed any time during 2016. For additional information and materials see the website www.geii.org.

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2016 Theme Announced

BACKGROUND: Introduction to the theme

By the Graymoor Ecumenical & Interreligious Institute

Called to Proclaim the Mighty Acts of the Lord (cf. 1 Peter 2:9) has been selected as the 2016 theme for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. The theme finds its origins in the First Letter of Peter. The relationship between baptism and proclamation, and the calling shared by all the baptized to proclaim the mighty acts of the Lord was inspired by two verses from the First Letter of St Peter. It is this calling forms the theme of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity for 2016.

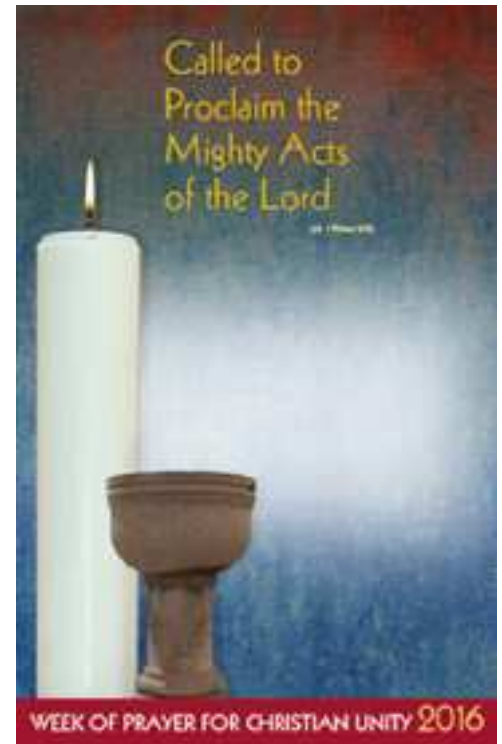
St Peter tells the early Church that in their search for meaning prior to encountering the Gospel they were not a people. But through hearing the call to be God's chosen race and receiving the power of God's salvation in Jesus Christ, they have become God's people. Baptism opens up an exciting new journey of faith, uniting each new Christian with God's people throughout the ages. In the shared sacred texts of the Bible, we hear of God's saving acts in salvation history: leading his people out of slavery in Egypt, and the great mighty act of God: the raising of Jesus from the dead, which opened new life to all of us. As Christians seeking the unity of the Body of Christ we are all called to recognize the mighty acts of God in our own lives and the life of the Church.

PREPARATION: Observing the Week of Prayer

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity gives Christians an annual opportunity to continue their quest for the unity they already share in Christ. It is also a time to gather in praise of the Triune God and to deepen the understanding of the ecumenical movement. By joining in this annual celebration Christians raise their voices, hands and hearts to God seeking the fulfillment of the prayer of Jesus, the Son of God, "that they all may be one."

The Week of Prayer also invites those who participate to use it as an opportunity to examine the effectiveness of the ecumenical movement in seeking to end the divisions among Christians. From the smallest to the largest communities, from all cultures, races and language groups, from all the baptized to all those in ordained ministry, the Week of Prayer is also an opportunity to ask examine the level of support they have given to this important movement in the life of the Church. An accounting of each Christian's discipleship and faithfulness to the proclamation of the Gospel—the good news of reconciliation—can be taken every year during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

On our web page are some suggestions that we hope can assist Christians observing the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. This is by no means a comprehensive listing. We hope that as you create your own opportunities of prayer for Christian unity you will share those with others. Each new experience of prayer and gathering provides the Christian faith community with opportunities to grow in our understanding of one another as we celebrate our unity and common mission.



The National Workshop on Christian Unity

April 18-21, 2016

Louisville, KY

www.nwcu.org

Registration is now open. Rooms blocked until March 28.





Like us on Facebook!



Keep up with the Illinois Conference of Churches via social media. Keep in the loop on upcoming events and timely issues we are following. And be prepared to have a little fun along the way.

www.facebook.com/pages/Illinois-Conference-of-Churches



Teams of the Illinois Conference of Churches

We welcome new members to our teams. Please contact Laurie Vial, executive director, with questions or to join a team.

Leadership Team

Rev. Gary McCants, co-chair

African Methodist Episcopal Church
4th Episcopal District
Springfield

Rev. Wally Carlson, co-chair

United Methodist Church
Great Rivers Conference
Canton

Dr. John Charlton, treasurer

American Baptist Church
Great Rivers Region
Springfield

Fr. Kevin Laughery

Catholic Church
Diocese of Springfield
New Berlin

Rev. Galda McCants

African Methodist Episcopal Church
4th Episcopal District
Springfield

Dr. George Johnston

Presbyterian Church – USA
Southeastern Illinois Presbytery
Rantoul/Monticello

Rev. Megan Dean

United Methodist Church
Northern Illinois Conference
Waukegan

E. Garnet Fay

Religious Society of Friends
Western Yearly Meeting
Chicago

Rev. Sharon Patton

Christian Church, Disciples of Christ
Region of Illinois/Wisconsin
Charleston

Greg Krohm

Catholic Church
Archdiocese of Chicago
Wilmette

Fr. George Pyle

Greek Orthodox Church
Springfield/Champaign

Alicja Lukaszewicz-Southall

Episcopal Church
Diocese of Chicago
Wauconda

Rev. Catiana McKay

United Methodist Church
Northern Illinois Conference
Chicago, Rogers Park

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United Methodist Church
Great Rivers Conference
Canton

Rev. Catiana McKay

United Methodist Church
Northern Illinois Conference
Chicago, Rogers Park

Marianne Stowers

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Region of Illinois/Wisconsin
Springfield

Fr. Bob Flannery

Catholic Church
Diocese of Belleville
Carbondale

Illinois Christians Encountering Racism (ICER)

Rev. Kevin Laughery, co-chair

Catholic Church
Diocese of Springfield
New Berlin

Rev. Galda McCants, co-chair

African Methodist Episcopal Church
Springfield

Rev. Dwight Bailey

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Region of Illinois/Wisconsin
Aurora

Rev. Mark Harkness

United Methodist Church
Northern Illinois District
Walnut

Martha Herrin

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Region of Illinois/Wisconsin
Stewardson

Rev. Christine Hopkins

Episcopal Church
Diocese of Springfield
Champaign

Rev. Jim Nolan

United Church of Christ
Illinois South Conference
Fairview Heights

Rev. Megan Dean

United Methodist Church
Northern Illinois Conference
Waukegan

Donald Rubins

Episcopal Church
Diocese of Chicago
Forest Park/Flossmoor

Continued on next page

Interreligious Team

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United Methodist Church
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Chicago, Rogers Park

Rev. Dr. Sheldon Culver

United Church of Christ
Illinois South Conference
Highland

Dr. John Charlton

American Baptist Church
Great Rivers Region
Springfield

Fr. Kevin Laughery

Catholic Church
Diocese of Springfield
New Berlin

Hakan Berberoglu

Niagra Foundation
Chicago/Peoria

Donald Rubins

Episcopal Church
Diocese of Chicago
Forest Park/Flossmoor

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Rev. Wally Carlson

United Methodist Church
Great Rivers Conference
Canton

Rev. Michael Winters

Presbyterian Church – USA
Chicago Presbytery
Oak Lawn/Oak Park

Rev. Dr. John Rickard

Presbyterian Church - USA
Blackhawk Presbytery
Oregon

Rev. Jim Nolan

United Church of Christ
Illinois South Conference
Fairview Heights

Racial Taboo

The Illinois Christians Encountering Racism Team (ICER) reports showings of this documentary in Springfield and Champaign with organized discussion groups following. Check out the film at racialtaboo.com.

Watch your media sources for showings in your area. We welcome your discussion on this film in months to come.





All are welcome

March 5

Harvard Park Baptist Church

2401 S. 9th St., Springfield, IL

Time: 7:30am - 6:00pm

Cost: In Advance:

Adults \$10.00

Teens (13-19) \$5.00

Children (0-12) Free (Must accompany adult)

At Door:

Adults \$15.00

Teens (13-19) \$10.00

Vision Statement: Through Faith, Education, Fellowship, and Support we will grow together tearing down stigma walls within the Body of Christ. One person at a time as our eyes remain focused on Christ we will grow to accept one another without any justifications or expectations. We will integrate Faith as a part of recovery, so that each person may become complete in mind, body, and Spirit.

The Breaking Sacred Ground conference will open doors to opportunities for individuals, churches, local groups and organizations to bring Mental Health awareness and action to reduce stigmas in our society. There are several guest speakers, testimonials, a time of Praise and Worship, a time of Fellowship, and education to help you with these tasks of which God has called each one of us to.

For more information please call
Janet Ealey at 217-638-0968 or Angela at 217-481-4618

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