

November 2015

Dear Members and Friends of the United Church of Christ in Iowa,

Two millennia ago Jesus offered life – abundant life! – to his listeners. It's another of those remarkable promises offered to all who follow him.



The only way to make any sense of the continuing existence of the church is through this promise. After all, churches have been promulgating both life and a stunning mishmash of foolishness ever since and yet even those internal contradictions have not been sufficient to make it go away.

Make no mistake, however, about the limits of this observation. Even though the church universal has had an unbroken existence of 2000 years, the on-the-ground humanly-constructed expressions of that one, holy, catholic church have come and gone with stunning regularity. The body of Christ goes on and on and on, but the human institutions in which Christ's presence is found come and go. These words should cause all church-folk to sit up straight and worry a bit.

Our common work as one expression of Christ's church – what we call the United Church of Christ in Iowa – matters to everyone who reads this letter. We care about the Iowa Conference, we are grateful for ways it has enriched our lives, and we dare to imagine that we have something important to offer to friends and neighbors throughout our state and around the world. But there's no guarantee that these forms, structures and institutions we so love will persist without end. Our ways of being church must be carefully and rigorously nourished. And they must evolve so as to maintain relevance in a society which itself is evolving at a dizzying rate.

This is the work to which the staff of the Iowa Conference is dedicated. We remind ourselves day after day that "it's all about the churches" and we mean it! But the ministry to which we are called cannot be merely comforting or we will gradually, but inexorably, disappear. Instead, our common ministry is one of challenge as well as comfort, disruption as often as peace-making, questioning as frequently as answering.

Our work is fairly simply described:

- Helping churches find the very best pastors possible.
- Guiding women and men sensing God's call toward pastoral ministry.
- Providing support and growth opportunities to our clergy so they will be competent to lead with faithful excellence in these challenging times.

We don't do this work as an end in itself – we do this work because we dare to believe that following Jesus is the way of life....the way of grace....the way of justice....the way of community. We do this work

because we believe that local communities of faith are the vehicle God usually uses to promulgate abundant life. We do this work because we believe your local church matters!

For as long as the United Church of Christ has existed (not a very long part of the overall existence of the universal church), this kind of work has been financially supported by freely proffered gifts from our member churches (OCWM – Our Church’s Wider Mission). That is still the most significant part of how this ministry is paid for, but OCWM continues to wane while the need for local church support continues unabated.

That, in a nutshell, is why I write to you and ask you to consider a gift – a generous gift – for the support of the United Church of Christ in Iowa. Yes, there are many kinds of churches in our state, but we are still a relatively unusual part of the whole church. We are the folk who dare to imagine that God is Still Speaking! I am profoundly convinced that the entire faith community of Iowa would be diminished were the openness and audacity and progressiveness of the UCC to disappear. Your support is needed to help ensure ongoing vitality for the UCC in Iowa.

Please consider a generous gift to help augment the role that the conference staff plays in supporting this ministry of assistance and challenge and support. I promise to use your gift with care and with gratefulness.

God bless you! May you experience the “Abundant Life” that Jesus promises! May you “Trust in the Promise” to the end that the UCC in Iowa is a part of Christ’s church viewed by God with pleasure and approval.

With Hope and Gratefulness!



Rich Pleva  
Conference Minister  
The United Church of Christ in Iowa



PS – There are several ways you might give:

- You are welcome to mail a check. We have included a support form you may fill out and return to the Iowa Conference.
- You also have the option of online donations through our website at [www.ucciaconf.org/donate](http://www.ucciaconf.org/donate) where you may use the “Electronic Giving- Individual Donations”. This electronic option lets you choose whether to give a one-time sum or spread payments out to monthly or quarterly from your checking or credit card accounts.
- Perhaps you’d appreciate the tax advantages of donating appreciated stock. Give me a call. We can help make that easy for you.

I’ve enclosed a copy of our board and staff mission priorities. It says what I’ve said above in a different way. Thanks for giving it a careful read!