



Iowa - Nebraska - South Dakota Conferences of the UCC

Des Moines Office:
5609 Douglas Ave
Des Moines, IA 50310
515.277.6369

Sioux Falls Office:
3500 S Phillips Ave, Ste 100,
Sioux Falls, SD 57105
605.338.8738

Iowa Board of Directors:

- *Jennifer Cohrt
- Becky David
- Bob Deranleau
- Molly Dowell Baum
- Joey Feldmann
- Marjorie Groves
- MaryBeth Hartenstein
- Brice Hughes
- Sue Johannsen
- Kate West
- Diana McHenry
- Onita Mohr
- Kathleen Murrin
- Chad Savage

Nebraska Board of Directors:

- Fay Ann Blaylock
- Dennis Ditloff
- Penny Greer
- Lisa Hadler
- *Barry Hemmerling
- Scott Jones
- Pat Lamberty
- Joan Michelsen
- Beth Peterson
- Barry Rempp
- *Sue Shear

South Dakota Board of Directors:

- *Dustin Bartlett
- Louie Blue Coat
- Toni Buffalo
- Rosanne Dyce Anderson
- *Mary Edelen
- Mary Kay Fausch
- Donanne Fugman
- Alexander Haines
- *Lorah Houser Jankord
- Mike Kampa
- Jean Morrow
- Jim Oleson
- Barb Paulson
- Michelle Redman
- Al Schaefer
- Joseph Schulte
- Martell Spagnolo
- Sharla Steever
- Vickie Sylvester
- Linda Sue Weidenbach
- Melinda Williams

Tri-Conference

Board of Directors:*

- Conference reps: * above
- Jim Judkins, Iowa-At Large
- , Nebraska-At Large
- Mary Edelen, South Dakota-At Large

October 29, 2018

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

I am holding you all in my prayers. As clergy and faith leaders in our communities, you are called to an incredible responsibility. There are days and weeks when that responsibility also carries with it great joy and hope! Then there are days and weeks, like those we are living through recently, that carry with them deep pain and despair.

As we have listened to the stories and read the accounts of events in the past weeks, we have heard and seen an undercurrent of hate, judgment, and division on full display in our culture and our country. In the assertion that immigrants walking thousands of miles to move away from fear and despair in search of hope and security are a threat to our security, the very real threat of death and damage posed by pipe bombs mailed to those who oppose our current president and his administration, the shooting of two unarmed African Americans in a grocery store after the accused shooter initially attempted to enter a church, and this weekend's massacre of 11 Jewish Americans during services at Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, it is hard to find cause for hope in our country. This is where we are called into action.

The constant and deafening rhetoric of hate and divisiveness calls for a response from the faith community. Regardless of which boxes we check on any ballot we may cast (side note: please vote!), it is our responsibility to speak up on the side of justice, humanitarian treatment of our neighbors, and safety in our places of worship. We have the blessing of living and serving in a diverse nation. That diversity is a divine gift from God, as each of us are created in the image of our Creator. As leaders in faith, we are called to seek out opportunities to share our voice, amplifying the voice of Christ, in ways that bring peace, call out injustice, and offer inspiration and compassion to our communities.

Please join me and write a note of encouragement and love to our neighbors at Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh. Invite your congregation members to do the same. Mail them from your local church to them at 5898 Wilkins Ave, Pittsburgh, PA 15217. And seek out local synagogues and Jewish Community Centers near your congregation and send them notes as well.

Participate in a vigil or a peaceful worship process in your community. And if there isn't one nearby, please plan one!

And, dear ones, tend to your own souls. Find moments to connect with ones who know you and love you anyway. Cuddle pets, or babies, or pets and babies. Walk. Drink water. Say, "I love you." Watch a movie. Read a book. Nap. Take another nap. This is a beautiful and profound calling, to love the world with God's heart. Remember that you too are a part of this Creation in need of loving.

Read these poignant words written by the Rev. Enno Limvere, Pastor at Brentford Congregational UCC in Brentford, SD:

"I want..."

I want to stand in front of the world and scream, "I don't care anymore." But the problem is I do care.

I want to stand in front of those I oppose and scream, "You aren't worth anything." But the problem is to God they are worth everything.

I want to retreat to my corner with people who agree with me and say, "We are strong, we are good, and we are justified." But the problem is that God places me out in front of the world to say, "You are strong, you are good, and the only actions and words that have justification are those of love, mercy, and justice."

I want to stop caring, for I see many hurting and angry and held down and held back, those of all ages, tongues, cultures, and orientations. But I can't and my heart breaks and in those cracks God's light pours forth to shine in the world.

In the Greatest of Hope,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brigit". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'B' and a long, sweeping tail.

Rev. Brigit F. Stevens
Executive Conference Minister
IA-NE-SD Conferences of the United Church of Christ