The Holy Spirit gave me an unexpected gift early in my tenure as Conference Minister: a call to acknowledge my “privileges.” Beloved colleagues in the wider setting of the United Church of Christ, particularly people of color, people in the LGBTQ+ community, and those who identify as anything other than a white, heterosexual, middle-aged man, helped awaken me to the necessary work for a more just world.

My childhood was surely not lavish, but we never wanted for nutritious food, a safe home, solid schools, or the support of family, friends and church. I was raised with three terrific sisters and two loving parents who guided us with firm principles yet wide permission to explore life.

I was fortunate to graduate from both college and seminary debt free thanks to generous parents and scholarships. When Trinn and I married—the preacher and the teacher—we reminded ourselves often that we were blessed to have meaningful vocations and fortunate to have sufficient means. I was called to Pilgrim UCC in Grafton and thereafter Trinn landed a position teaching early childhood special education in Cedarburg. We built a home and began a life of beautiful memories, enduring friendships, and deep roots for our three children. We feel deep gratitude for good health and fortune. Our faith compels us to live generously and work toward a more just society. One small way we try to live out this commitment is by sharing our resources with the Church.

These days we are particularly mindful of the 215 congregations in the Wisconsin Conference UCC, as we face the many challenges that require adaptive changes in our ministries. We believe in the covenantal work of the Conference, which equips and supports congregations and spiritual leaders to become the Church of tomorrow. And so, we have decided to name the Wisconsin Conference of the United Church of Christ in our will and to prioritize this wider ministry reach in our legacy planning.

“Contact Andrew Warner at awarner@wcucc.org or 414-758-6233 to share your planned giving story or learn more about options for estate gifts.”
Thankful for “Generous Leaders”

By the Rev. Dr. Timothy R. Perkins, Milwaukee

When I was a young minister, decades ago, I was the recipient of great generosity. I’m not talking about a benefactor who bestowed wealth upon a financially strapped parish pastor, although I am eternally grateful for the faithful people who gave, often from their own limited means, to support the ministry of their church and the pastor who served with them.

I’m not thinking of generosity in just monetary terms, but of colleagues and congregational leaders who led with a certain generosity of spirit that continues to inspire me. They were leaders who gave me room to grow, not only as a pastor, but as a person. They walked with me and offered me the gift of an open ear and an open heart. They listened empathically and allowed me to talk through my struggles and my challenges while also genuinely celebrating the victories. They shared their wisdom, which was abundant, and rarely preached at me. They cried with me, laughed with me, challenged me and encouraged me. In their own humble ways, they led me to seek to become the husband, the father, the pastor, the person that I knew God was calling me to be.

How grateful I am for all that generosity of the heart! How grateful I am to the faithful church members that I’ve served with, to my colleagues (denominational, ecumenical, interfaith and “no faith”) who have been companions on the way, and to my family and friends (especially my wife, Bonnie Andrews) for their generosity in sharing their lives and the journey.

Remembering all who helped me grow UP as a leader, I am especially grateful to our Wisconsin Conference for the covenantal support we offer one another. Conference staff leaders and committee and board and congregational leaders throughout the state help us find the God-given wisdom within us to meet the challenges of life and ministry and to envision our best selves and a hope-filled future. Community of Practice group facilitator leaders meet with us monthly (and sometimes in between

“Remembering all who helped me grow UP as a leader, I am especially grateful to our Wisconsin Conference for the covenantal support we offer one another.”
meetings) to encourage us as we seek to care for and learn from each other. Consultant leaders guide us through Appreciative Inquiry and Readiness 360, as our congregations envision their futures. Conflict resolution leaders help us find our way through conflict to a new and healthier community life. Teacher leaders build up our faith and our understanding through the Damascus Project and those who help our congregations strengthen the Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations (radical hospitality, passionate worship, intentional faith development, risk-taking mission, and service and extravagant generosity).

They are all generous—leaders willingly and faithfully sharing their gifts to build up the Body of Christ that we might all live generous lives sharing the love of God made known through Jesus the Christ, that the world might be a more generous and loving place for all God’s children.

May we pause and give thanks for all that we have received from leaders who lead with a generous spirit.

Join the Conversation

Almost everybody knows somebody who has read and loved Robin Wall Kimmerer’s essay collection *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*.

Now, the Wisconsin Conference Creation Care Team is encouraging congregations throughout the Conference to read *Braiding Sweetgrass* in the months ahead—a Big Read—in order to spur a statewide conversation as a response to the Kairos Call to Action on behalf of God’s good, but threatened, Creation.

Check the Conference website—wcucc.org—after Sept. 1 for activities and resources available to support the Big Read in your congregation.

Do you have questions about the Big Read? Email Bob Ullman at rjullman@gmail.com.
Helping St. John’s Move into a Second Century

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the founding of St. John’s of La Pointe, Wisconsin. As Julie Stryker said in the new centennial book about the congregation: “St. John’s is the visceral connection of our quirky community.”

The congregation decided to launch an endowment building campaign with the Rev. Andrew Warner to ensure St. John’s remains strong for the next 100 years, too. “This COVID pandemic has taught us that the future is unpredictable,” said Lee Baker, a leader on the committee. “Tomorrow’s challenges are uncertain. I, for one, feel a sense of urgency to invest in St. John’s and to create a measure of certainty for this church, for this community, and for our future.”

A church member stepped forward with a significant challenge, offering to match up to $250,000 in gifts given by Jan. 31, 2022. “Every dollar added to the Second Century Endowment, now, will begin, immediately, to expand our support of spiritual, artistic, social, and economic needs of those who call Madeline Island home,” said St. John’s pastor, the Rev. Rachel Bauman.

At the same time the congregation is promoting planned gifts that may not come to the congregation for many years. Whether it’s by making a gift in a will or trust or through other estate planning options, people on Madeline Island are investing in the future of the Wisconsin Conference.

“Working with Andrew is a joy. With his guidance, I have been able to expand my support of St. John’s ministries and community outreach initiatives. I consider Andrew a valuable part of my financial planning team. He is helping me refine what’s most important to me and be intentional about how to ensure my family’s financial security while also providing lasting support for my church - now and beyond my lifetime.” – Lee Baker, member of St. John’s UCC

“We’re excited about the investment people are making in our community,” Baker said. While the campaign is far from over, the congregation already raised more than $2.5 million in gifts, pledges and planned gifts.

**Please contact the Rev. Andrew Warner at 414-758-6233 or by email at awarner@wcucc.org if your congregation would like to partner with the Wisconsin Foundation UCC to promote planned giving and grow the endowment of your congregation.**

---

**Join Us in Giving to Your Local Church**

*By Michael Childers and Glenn Carlson*

We have made a decision. We intend to leave the bulk of our estate to St. John’s UCC and Woods Hall on Madeline Island.

As many on Madeline Island know, our small business—Madeline Island Candles—grew from the inspiration and opportunity of Woods Hall—a mission of St. John’s.

From our first days on the island, learning to weave at Woods Hall, and then participating in the governance of both Woods Hall and St. John’s, we have come to value the extraordinary role of St. John’s and Woods Hall as a beacon for life on Madeline Island. A place to worship and a place to grow. A place to develop skill and artistry with the gift of a sales gallery that promotes opportunity and community. A place where we share joy and sorrow as we care for one another.

It’s not just Woods Hall, but other missions like the Food Shelf, Island Closet and Island Harvesters that have convinced us that there is no better organization than St. John’s/Woods Hall to provide stability and support to our island community as we face an uncertain future.

We have faith that the current and future leadership of St. John’s and Woods Hall will build upon the 100-year history of St. John’s, and with that confidence we believe that our opportunity to help provide for the future is to invest. Every gift makes a difference and in our case that includes a small business, our home, life insurance, along with cash and investments.

And so—the bulk of our estate will be left to benefit St. John’s and Woods Hall directly and through the Second Century Endowment Fund provide financial support in perpetuity, to continue a mission of service to the Madeline Island community.

Will you join us in remembering your local congregation and its mission through a gift in your will?
Catalyst Grant Funds Free Community Clothes Closet

By Amy Gauthier
Salem UCC, Campbellsport

Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you. This is the essence of all that is taught in the law and the prophets.

In late February, the youth ministry group and Pastor Ruth Hansen discussed ways to use the vacant 1,000-square-foot, 100-year-old schoolhouse that sits on the property of Salem United Church of Christ Campbellsport. Together, the group came up with a Free Community Clothes Closet offering gently used donated clothing items. The exciting project became a great learning experience for the youth and church members.

Our Free Community Clothes Closet will serve Washington and Fond du Lac counties. 2020 data provided by the Wisconsin United Way identified the challenge posed by poverty to members of our community and why this Free Community Clothes Closet would have such an important impact.

The Clothes Closet opened just before the start of the 2021-2022 school year. We partnered with the local school district, human services agencies, and local churches to ensure people know to use us as a first line of assistance to help families and individuals through their difficult times. A $2,500 Catalyst Grant from the Wisconsin Conference, which our congregation matched, provided the funds needed to update and repair our building. The repairs included electrical work, heat, paint, new door, clothing fixtures and hangers, lighting and other miscellaneous setup costs. We know this will be a successful adventure, needed community resource and valuable mission for years to come.

Have an innovative idea? Apply for the next round of Catalyst Grants by September 30, 2021. More information at wcucc.org/catalyst
Community Bridge Building Funded by Catalyst Grant

By Greg Barnes
First Congregational UCC, Eau Claire

“For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink; I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” Matthew 25:35

Inspired by the 2019 General Synod in Milwaukee, members of First Congregational UCC of Eau Claire attended a border event held each year at Good Shepherd UCC in Sahuarita, Arizona, just south of Tucson. Four of us attended this conference and others visited the area on their own.

We learned firsthand of the tremendous need for sponsors for families seeking asylum in the United States. Hearing this call, members of First Congregational, along with members of the wider community, formed an ecumenical coalition called the Chippewa Valley Bridge Builders. Support came from the Wisconsin Conference, too. A Catalyst Grant helped provide our sponsorship group with the financial resources needed to carry out the project.

The initiative supports asylum-seeking families fleeing persecution in their home countries. We accompany the family on their journey to self-sufficiency, providing support as needed.

We met our first family at the Minneapolis airport at the beginning of June. A father, mother, elementary-age boy and infant girl carried the sum of their worldly possessions in knapsacks. They had quite a journey to arrive here. We hear similar stories from other immigrants.

The project energized members of our congregation. We found many ways to give support. And it inspired us to see the broader community join in this effort. Often people described how the desire to help welled up from the deepest part of their hearts. Together, we built metaphorical bridges between cultures, communities and countries.

“And the King will answer them, ‘Truly I say to you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’” Matthew 25:40
Raise Funds to Sustain the Ministry of Your Congregation

Contact the Rev. Andrew Warner to learn how your congregation can partner with the Wisconsin Conference to encourage planned gifts to support the ministry of your congregation and the conference. You can read about the experience of St. John’s UCC on Madeline Island on pages 4-5 of this newsletter.

“I am so grateful for the support Andrew has provided St. John’s. As a solo pastor at a small church I was initially daunted at the prospect of embarking on a 2.5 million Endowment Campaign. However, with Andrew’s consistent accompaniment this process has been a joy and successful beyond my dreams! Andrew brings extensive knowledge and expertise about best practices for congregational philanthropy as well as concrete tools for us to implement immediately in our context. In addition, Andrew approaches this work through the lens of faith, inspiring all of us to see our Endowment and Stewardship campaigns as an essential component of our mission to grow in our faith and serve our communities.” – The Rev. Rachel Bauman, St. John’s UCC