

LEADERSHIP
FORWARD



Wisconsin Conference
United Church of Christ



Leadership matters.



The Church of Jesus Christ serves the Gospel, inspires disciples, and changes lives when its leaders are fully equipped, confident, and whole. The future of our congregations depends on the quality of faithful leadership provided by clergy and laypeople.

The Wisconsin Conference of the United Church of Christ connects, supports, and resources local congregations and leaders as they find creative and meaningful ways to live out the values of Jesus while helping our people recognize and embrace faithful change.

The pandemic underscored this reality:
Leadership matters.

The Church requires investment in good leadership.

- We must develop the next generation of lay leaders so the UCC can thrive into the future. **Therefore, we invest in the Damascus Project.**
- We must encourage creative new forms of ministry in our congregations and to advance our social justice work. **Therefore, we invest in the Catalyst Grant program.**
- We must ensure that those who serve our community as clergy are cared for in every season of their pastoral careers. **Therefore, we invest in Ministerial Assistance.**

Please give to the Leadership Forward Campaign.

Installation of Pastor Lois Buchholz
at Mukwonago UCC

LEADERSHIP FORWARD



The **LEADERSHIP FORWARD** \$2 million campaign aims to equip laypeople, clergy, and congregations with wisdom and skills to meet God's challenge to be the Church today and tomorrow.

Together, we can ensure our congregations continue to have high-quality, faithful leadership.



Damascus Project Endowment

Inspired by the story of the Apostle Paul's transformation, the **Damascus Project** offers lay and staff leaders, spiritual seekers, members-in-discernment, and authorized ministers fresh ways to prepare God's people for faithful living and for ministries of healing, justice, and transformation. The Damascus Project and its predecessor, the Lay Academy, have evolved over 25 years to become a robust provider of practical training for clergy and lay people.

“Here's a place where it's Ok to question, to see things differently, to ask the tough questions. ... You're there with a group of people that you feel comfortable with and you feel like you can be vulnerable with.”

—Julie Kramer

“No one ever said to me: You're way off base here. You really got that wrong. That's not the way it is. Lay Academy allows you to ask the questions, to have the doubts and that's OK. It's a very open, loving environment and group of people. ... It's OK to have questions and doubts. It's a safe place to explore.”

—Randy Koppenhaver

- **Faith Foundations** is a one-year exploration of scripture, theology, history, and spiritual practice that provides laypeople with the practical and personal understanding of Christian discipleship upon which effective leaders rely.
- **Leadership Skills** is an ongoing course of study that provides laypeople with practical skills for leadership in their congregations.
- **Ministerial Skills** is designed to equip lay leaders and members-in-discernment to lead worship and preach, to provide pastoral care and faith formation. Combined with other coursework, the Damascus Project can provide an alternative path to ordination for members-in-discernment.
- The **Damascus Project Network** is an online gathering place for learning, resource sharing, idea generation, and connection — a space where like-minded people of faith can meet, exchange ideas, resources, and spiritual practices, and offer mutual support.



Larry Littlegeorge

Damascus Project Changes Lives

The learning environment of the Damascus Project and its predecessor Lay Academy has provided a powerful community. Participant comments reveal deep appreciation for the Damascus Project as a sacred and holy space in which people are free to explore what they believe and who they are as they learn and grow. The value of places like this in today's rapidly evolving, confusing world cannot be overstated.

“The program equipped me to be more forthcoming about my faith and discussing it with others. It provided me with the desire to look more carefully at the Bible stories/Scriptures that I have heard for so long and dig deeper for the true meaning. The program also provided the will to serve on the Wisconsin Conference Board of Directors and learn more about the workings of the UCC here in our state and nationally, and pass the knowledge along to my congregation.”

—Steve Ottman

LEADERSHIP FORWARD

The LEADERSHIP FORWARD campaign seeks to raise \$1 million to sustain the Damascus Project in perpetuity — recognizing that congregations and communities will need fully equipped and confident leaders as generations and circumstances change.

The Damascus Project is building the next generation leaders of the United Church of Christ in Wisconsin. A gift to the Damascus Project endowment is perhaps the single greatest investment we can make in the future of our denomination.

Catalyst Grants to Congregations

The world is changing and so must the church. **Catalyst Grants** foster the development of innovative approaches to ministry at the individual church level that might one day be spread across the entirety of our Conference. Since 2016, the Catalyst Team of the Wisconsin Conference has provided grants totaling \$142,500 to 62 congregations, Conference organizations, and partnerships. Catalyst Grants are intended to empower congregations to increase their visibility and impact in their communities. Grants have paid for congregational projects such as street ministry to LGBTQ youth, a community food collection program, a racial justice speaker series, and neighborhood outreach efforts.

Catalyst Grants Change Congregations

These projects demonstrate some of the ways Catalysts Grants have helped congregations expand mission and ministry.

First Congregational UCC of Eau Claire helped provide housing and legal support for an immigrant family seeking asylum.

Salem UCC of Wayne made improvements needed to create a free clothes closet for the community. ▼





▲ **Bethel-Bethany UCC of Milwaukee, Lake Edge UCC of Madison and First Congregational UCC of Port Washington**

introduced anti-racism projects in connection with the wider community.

St. Stephens UCC of Merrill and St. Johns UCC of Sheboygan were able to start and expand community feeding ministries to the wider community.

Zwingli UCC of Monticello was able to purchase livestreaming equipment for use by the church and the community.

Campus Ministry at UW-La Crosse developed a student-run coffee shop and entrepreneurial incubator for students.

Plymouth Church UCC of Milwaukee created a quarterly event for youth within the Southeast Association.

Christ Church UCC of Milwaukee ▶ created educational programs for children with special needs and low-income families.



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LEADERSHIP FORWARD seeks to raise \$500,000 to be used for:

- Supporting at least 20 additional church-based projects each year and at least 125 distinct congregations or communities in a five-year period.
- Creating an opportunity for two or three larger (\$10,000 to \$15,000 each) multiyear grant projects each year for five years.



Ministerial Assistance

The **United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance** is the philanthropic arm of the Pension Boards UCC. It provides direct financial support to active and retired clergy and lay church workers in the Wisconsin Conference. In 2021, 19 servants of the church in Wisconsin received ministerial assistance of approximately \$60,000 to supplement small pensions, help pay the cost of health insurance, and provide emergency grants to meet personal financial challenges.

In addition, UCBMA provides programs to nurture and sustain pastoral leaders at each phase of their ministerial careers, recognizing that effective leadership relies on personal wellness and continued learning.

“I was born with cerebral palsy and an unidentified hearing loss. In fifth grade, testing by the school system in Houston, Texas, discovered my hearing loss would impede my education. My hearing aids are my ears. And they are expensive, but the world of sound is exciting to me. I am grateful to the United Church Board of Ministerial Assistance and the Wisconsin Conference for financial gifts that make it possible for me to hear and participate in conversations and listen to music. I could not have answered the call to ministry without having hearing aids.”

—Pastor Jeanne Tyler, retired

Clergy of the Wisconsin Conference already participate in these UCBMA leadership programs:

The Ministers Financial Vitality

Initiative provides younger authorized ministers with personal financial management training and individualized financial counseling, grants to service educational debt and to seed a retirement account, and a supportive cohort to navigate the often-stressful circumstances of clergy finances.

The Next Generation Leadership

Initiative equips and empowers younger United Church of Christ pastors to build up vibrant congregations. Each annual cohort of 15 pastors learns skills for transformative leadership, including organizational dynamics, community engagement, and family systems theory.

The Annuitant Visitors Program

addresses the needs of retired clergy through regular visits by a team of trained visitors. Annuitant Visitors help retirees optimize their benefits, identify those who might qualify for assistance grants, and, on behalf of the whole church, express appreciation for their faithful service.



“The student loan debt I have carried continues to be a substantial weight I have never been able to get out from under. The sheer size of these loans has impacted my financial health across the board and has even colored the way that I engage the financial ministries and health of the congregations I serve. I am excited that Ministers Financial Vitality Initiative will give me gifts and skills to find financial stability and am grateful to the Pension Boards for investing in both my well-being and that of the congregation I serve now and those I will serve in the future.”

—*Pastor Bridget Flad*
Union Congregational, Green Bay



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LEADERSHIP FORWARD seeks \$500,000 to ensure that these assistance and leadership programs continue to reach those who serve in the Wisconsin Conference.



“Little did I know that the Next Generation Leadership Initiative through the Pension Boards would be one of the most useful and transformative educational experiences of my life. In this program we learned leadership, developed deeper understandings of systems, learned relevant communication techniques, and built friendships. Taken as a whole, my ministry has been enriched and my church fed because of this unique and wonderful experience. I value it as highly as my seminary education.”

—*Pastor Nick Hatch*
First Congregational, Appleton

LEADERSHIP FORWARD

Goals

Leadership Endowment *\$1,000,000*

Ensuring support for lay and clergy leadership through the Damascus Project

Grants to Congregations *\$500,000*

Expanding Catalyst Grants to foster innovative ideas in individual congregations that have the potential of spreading across the Conference

Ministerial Assistance *\$500,000*

Supporting programs for active and retired pastors and leaders in partnership with Pension Boards' United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance



Bethel-Bethany UCC of Milwaukee

LEADERSHIP FORWARD

Make a gift!

Gifts and pledges to the **LEADERSHIP FORWARD** initiative can be made online at wcucc.org/leadership or mailed to:

The Wisconsin Foundation UCC
4459 Gray Road
DeForest, WI 53532

For gifts of securities or questions about donations, please contact
Rev. Andrew Warner
awarner@wcucc.org, 414-758-6233

Gifts in a will or other bequests can be made by designating the:

**The Leadership Forward Fund
of the Wisconsin Foundation
United Church of Christ**
4459 Gray Road
DeForest, WI 53232
Tax ID Number: 84-2128752

For more information:

To learn how to invest in this exciting initiative, visit wcucc.org/leadership or contact:

About the Campaign or Making a Donation

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www.wcucc.org