



Pacific Northwest CONFERENCE NEWS

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Spring 2026

Youth instill vigor and music in Annual Meeting

PNC-UCC delegates gather to consider the theme “Come and See.”

PNC Moderator Sandy Wisecarver opened Annual Meeting 2026, inviting attendees to view the many “Come and See” videos created by more than 30 PNC congregations on their ministries. They are now available on the PNC YouTube channel at youtube.com/@Pacific-NorthwestConference.

Along with the business sessions, there were four workshops. Two are reported on pages 8 to 11.

Youth from across the PNC led worship, songs and dances. Many had practiced and prepared for weeks in advance.

The business included reports, and discussion and votes on the Constitution and Bylaws and on the PNC budget.

This report was compiled with the
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Youth and adults from Samoan churches led worship songs and danced.

Photo courtesy of Phil Hodson

Moderator invites members to join Board meetings

The Executive Committee of the PNC-UCC Board of Directors will be interviewing candidates in April and hiring an acting conference minister by May so the new person will have some time to overlap with Phil Hodson, who ends as designated conference minister in June, said Sandy Wisecarver, board moderator.

She also reported that Annual Meeting 2027 will be held Saturday and Sunday, April 24 to 25, at the Double-Tree Hotel in South Center again.

“The location is convenient for those in Alaska to come,” she said, inviting donations to help youth and delegates coming from Alaska with air fare and the hotel costs. “We are also returning to that hotel because they provided good technology to connect with people who

**Annual Meeting
will be held
April 24 to 25, 2027**

were on Zoom,” Sandy said. “With everyone in the same hotel, we were able to visit after the meetings and spend more time building relationships.”

The Youth Leadership Council, proposed at the Annual Meeting and approved at the April Board meeting, will choose a representative to serve on the Board to bring more youth voices to it.

Sandy said that the Board of Directors meets from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. on first

Tuesdays each month.

“**If anyone wants to come** and observe and have voice but no vote, they should let me know so I can send the link,” said Sandy.

“The Board is living into the new Constitution and Bylaws and will figure out the new term limits for members, with terms being three rather than two years,” she continued. “We aspire to have one-third of each of the committees to be BIPOC and other historically underrepresented groups.”

In addition, she invited people with ideas for forming new committees, such as in social justice areas, to ask the board to form a committee or advisory council.

The board will hold a retreat June 5 to 6 at Fautleroy UCC in Seattle.

Keep building the church the world needs

Reports & Comments



By The Rev.
Phil Hodson
Designated
Conference
Minister

**Your
voice
matters.
Your
presence
matters.
Use
them.**

As I prepare to conclude my time with the Pacific Northwest Conference and step into ministry with the Missouri Mid-South Conference, I want to say this as plainly as I can: I love you, and I am deeply grateful for you.

You have trusted me, partnered with me, and shown up again and again for the sake of the gospel. I have seen your courage. I have seen your willingness to try new things. I have seen your care for your communities and for one another. That has mattered to me more than I can fully put into words.

So this is my prayer for you as you move into your next chapter.

Stay clear about who you are.

Claim your progressive Christian theological voice without hesitation. The world does not need a quieter church. It needs a clearer one. It needs a church that speaks hope, that lives justice and that is rooted in real relationship—the kind of relationship the gospel calls us into.

I keep coming back to the line often attributed to theologian Karl Barth: preach with a Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other. That's not a metaphor for someday. That's for right now.

Holy Week made that unmistakably clear. You proclaimed resurrection hope while also marking Transgender Day of Visibility. You showed up for youth who are paying attention to whether the church will protect them or not. You navigated the weight of the Supreme Court decision in Colorado and what it means for LGBTQIA+ young people and their safety. That is the work. That is the public witness of the church.

Keep doing that.

Do not retreat from the public square. Speak clearly. Act boldly. Offer a better vision of faith—one that heals instead of harms, includes instead of excludes, and actually reflects the love we talk about. That kind of witness is evangelism. People are not looking for perfection. They are looking for something

real. When they see it, they come and see.

Here's the other thing I want to say directly: this conference is shaped by the people who show up.

If you care about the future of this conference, be involved. Serve on committees. Engage with camps and outdoor ministries. Talk to your Board of Directors. Tell them what you need. Tell them what you hope for. Don't assume someone else will carry that for you.

Your voice matters. Your presence matters. Use it.

I also want you to hear this clearly: You are doing good work.

I have seen it up close. I have watched you lead in hard moments. I have watched you stay when it would have been easier to step back. I have watched you care for people in ways that reflect the heart of the gospel. The Spirit is at work among you. I am confident of that.

Thank you for letting me be part of this season with you. It has been an honor. Truly.

I will carry you with me. I will pray for you, and I trust you.

Keep going. Keep showing up. Keep building the kind of church the world actually needs.

With deep gratitude and love.

Phil Hodson has accepted a call to serve as the intentional interim conference minister of the Missouri Mid-South Conference, beginning June 1. His last day serving as as PNC designated conference minister is May 31.

The PNC Board of Directors is in consultation with the national ministries of the United Church of Christ on next steps in conference leadership while the Conference Minister Search Committee continues its work.

Transitions announced

Naomi Schulz was installed as pastor of Fox Island United Church of Christ on April 12. Being new to the Conference, she seeks to connect with others whose ministry is shaped by justice work. Her ministry has been rooted in environmental organizing and economic equity and interfaith communities schulznaomi@gmail.com

Earth Summit is April 25

The theme for the fourth annual UCC Earth Summit on April 25 is “A Future with Hope” (Jeremiah 29:11). The Jim Antal Keynote Lecture will be delivered by the Kenneth Samuel, an advocate and organizer for justice who is pastor of Victory for the World Church in Decatur, Ga. The two-and-half-hour summit will also feature a panel discussion on “Power to the People: Energy Justice for an Equitable Future” with panelists Shalanda Baker, former head of the Office of Energy Justice and Equity at the Department of Energy under the Biden Administration, and Chandra Farley, chief sustainability officer for the City of Atlanta.

The summit will include announcing the winners for the Dollie Burwell Prophetic Action Award and the Climate Hope Art Contest for children and youth, and recognition of the newest UCC Creation Justice Churches and the first Climate Hope Affiliates.

For information and to register, visit https://ucc.zoom.us/webinar/register/2317725508886/WN_f_JcT9dSQ-DyLT2hHDgSboA#registration.

DEIB training held July 22

Diversity Equity Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) Training for authorized and lay ministers will be offered from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., PDT, Wednesday, July 22, on Zoom by the New York Conference UCC.

It fulfills the DEIB requirement for parish pastors, specialized, dual standing, lay and retired authorized ministers in the PNC. Training is required every three years.

Register at <https://www.ultracamp.com/info/sessiondetail.aspx?idCamp=367&campCode=nss&idSession=536241> Find DEIB July 2026 Training and click on “Register.” The cost is \$55.

Email Cindy Bauleke, Westside Com-

mittee on Ministry chair at cindybauleke@gmail.com.

UCC plans visit to West Bank

The United Church of Christ Movement for Palestinian Solidarity (UCCMPS) plans a UCC delegation to the West Bank for August 2026—with the possibility it may be delayed to a time in 2027.

The visit is to keep faith with Palestinian partners who continue to endure horrific violence and ethnic cleansing—from Gaza to the West Bank. For partners, it’s critical that UCC friends know what they’re facing and visit.

The plan is to gather with Palestinian partners (Sabeel) in May—for a Zoom meeting that to clarify plans. Those interested in participating may register to join the Zoom meeting, when there will be a decision about delaying or going, said Dave Grishaw-Jones, UCC-MPS Delegation Planning Team.

OWL observance set

Per a resolution passed at General Synod 35, all settings of the church are invited to participate in an annual observance of Our Whole Lives in May, which is Sex Ed for All Month.

Yearbook updates due

The Yearbook update deadline has been extended to April 17 because of a bug in the yearbook reporting form that prevents churches from uploading ministerial support data. When the section of the form is reached where users are asked to select the categories of minister they need to report for, there are no options to choose from. If a church has already entered support data, they are unable to add or update categories.

For the time being, however, we are encouraging churches that do run into it to skip the section and go directly from finance to congregational engagement.

Each year, the National UCC office is required to collect data from the UCC churches across the U.S. to comply and retain its umbrella 501(c)(3) status, which UCC churches .

National UCC offers resources

The United Church of Christ has prepared a program, “Love Knows No Borders,” to support churches responding to the rising tide of systemic hatred and fear

directed towards immigrant, refugee and LGBTQIA neighbors.

“Know Your Rights, Know You’re Loved is a bilingual resource available in English and Spanish that combines practical legal knowledge with spiritual affirmation. It outlines your legal rights when confronted by ICE agents and offers biblical grounding for the inherent dignity and worthiness of every person, reminding us that God’s love extends to all people regardless of immigration status.”

For information, visit <https://www.ucc.org/love-knows-no-borders/>. Download the pamphlet at <https://www.ucc.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Know-Your-Rights-Know-Youre-Loved-Bilingual.pdf>.

Board fills vacancies

“Why Trust Is Essential to Democracy” is the theme of a Zoom presentation by Jacob Lewis, associate professor of politics, philosophy and public affairs at Washington State University, at 7 p.m., Monday, April 20, at Magnolia UCC in Seattle.

He will discuss how the global erosion of democratic institutions and norms comes from a crisis of trust, which builds slowly but can be destroyed quickly.

He will speak about the “three verbs” of trust: bonding, bridging and breaking and give an overview of how trust operates within democratic societies. His research focuses on the relationship between trust, conflict and democracy. This talk is underwritten by a grant from Humanities of Washington and presented in partnership with The Thomas S. Foley Institute for Public Policy and Public Service.

To register, visit https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/zh_jf1drSIKEi-Ho4vwwuIQ#registration.

Musicians discuss staff issues

The UCC Musicians Association president, Eric Dundore, will talk with host Amanda Udis-Kessler about music staff relations in churches in a Saturday Sharing conversation at 9 a.m., PDT, Saturday, April 25.

They will address questions such as: How can church musicians collaborate effectively with pastors and staff? What are the best practices for music directors managing multiple staff musicians? How can directors support volunteer musicians from the congregation?

To register for the link, visit <https://ucema.wildapricot.org/event-6636080>.

Conference
News
Briefs

Delegates heard PNC reports and made decisions

Continued from page 1

assistance of Ron Patterson, PNC scribe.

In his report to the Annual Meeting, Designated Conference Minister Phil Hodson shared about changes during 2025, beginning with closing the conference office at Broadview UCC in Seattle and shifting to a 100 percent virtual office.

That meant digitizing PNC records into a database system through Salesforce to store and update clergy, congregational and conference information.

Phil added that Conference accounting manager Andy Warren also consulted with congregations on financial matters, and Beth Astarte, the new conference registrar began assisting clergy, committees and congregations, working in partnership with Arlene Hobson, executive administrator for 27 years, through the end of 2025.

Mark Boyd and the staff and volunteers at both camps and retreat centers have worked to strengthen both sites.

Phil's time included visiting two to three congregations in person a month on Sundays each month and assisting search committees. Five are completing church profiles for upcoming searches, and all active searches have been completed successfully.

He participated in 10 Samoan pastors receiving dual standing, along with celebrating installations and ordinations. He has also tried to consistently offer Wednesday morning Zoom "office hours" to meet with clergy and laity on their concerns about church and conference life.

Mark Boyd, executive director for Outdoor Ministries at N-Sid-Sen and Pilgrim Firs, reminded of the power of relationship. He thanked Randy and Linda Crowe for their volunteer efforts at N-Sid-Sen, shared a video of the camp's 90th year, told of restoring part-

ner groups and an anonymous gift of \$50,000 to repair Forrester Lodge's roof and a gift from Broadview to renovate Spirit Lodge.

Mark then introduced Zak Nornberg, the associate director at Pilgrim Firs, and presented a video on Pilgrim Firs. The ministry of Pilgrim Firs is to support congregations and their members as well as the wider community with veterans, first responders, guitarists, carvers and other groups using the site.

He noted that N-Sid-Sen is a turning corner and a special task force is evaluating its future. A search is underway for a new site director.

Board moderator Sandy Wisecarver told of the Board gathering at N-Sid-Sen and setting goals to grow relationships, build bridges, improve communication, complete re-writing the Constitution and Bylaws, call a settled Conference Minister and define next steps for N-Sid-Sen.

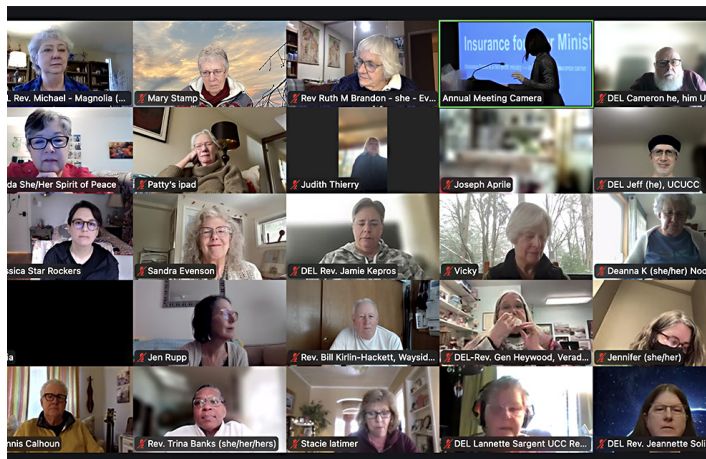
The improve communication with churches the PNC uses the weekly news, the quarterly newsletter, and the conference listserv, she said.

The Constitution and Bylaws was the focus of discussion during the board's fall retreat at Pilgrim Firs/ The Board presented the 13th edition for approval of the Annual Meeting delegates. The board held six listening sessions for suggestions.

The board has opened search for a settled conference minister after Phil withdrew his candidacy. It has named a diverse search and call committee, which hopes to present a candidate at a special meeting before the end of 2026. Phil will remain with us through the end of May.

The board also heard the call for greater youth participation, which was facilitated by the Annual Planning Committee.

The theme for this year's gathering, "Come and See,"



Many participants attended Annual Meeting 2026 on Zoom.

came out of the board's spring retreat with the goal of encouraging conversations among churches about their unique ministries.

Finally, the board worked with the Veredale UCC after the vandalism of their property and approved a \$30,000 loan to help them update their safety systems. The church has a grant to complete the work, but the funds would only be released after the project was finished, so the loan allowed them to begin the work immediately.

Following Sandy's report, Dawn Kaloi, vice moderator, invited Cameron Sharp to help her present the proposed Constitution and Bylaws. Dawn introduced Cameron.

He said the proposed Constitution speaks of the PNC's fundamental principles, vision and its ministry while the Bylaws are the legal documents.

In 2018 a group of board members began reviewing the Constitution and Bylaws and recommended that new documents were needed. They sought input from conference members and reviewed documents of other UCC conferences and the national UCC.

In 2024, the Board invited Cameron to research the history, context and examples. A small group and then the full board reviewed his work as

he crafted editions of the draft document. Phil gathered members of the BIPOC community for their input. The board reviewed it at retreats and meetings. Heather Kimmel, general counsel for the UCC checked if it complied with Washington State law and was in harmony with the UCC Constitution and Bylaws. In Advent 2025, with a 12th edition completed, a series of meetings for conference members were held. Three more hearings were held early in 2026 to introduce the 13th edition. More suggestions were incorporated.

Cameron said the Constitution and Bylaws are a jumping off point that need to be continually reviewed.

"We must covenant with one another to find God's justice and revisit these documents often to ensure that they reflect our aspirations," Cameron said.

In open discussion, further recommendations were made and there was discussion of the standing committees and other committees that may be empowered by the Board to act.

Cameron said the proposed list of standing committees are those necessary for the PNC to function and that task forces may organize around specific mission goals of PNC members and congregations.

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Lillian Daniel reflected on Good Samaritan and PNC

For her sermon during the PNC Annual Meeting opening worship, Michigan Conference Minister Lillian Daniel wove her personal experiences in with the gospel narrative of the Good Samaritan.

“We are often more comfortable accusing than confessing and that silence is our besetting sin,” she said, pointing out that “in Christ, everybody gets to grow and change” and that worship is a gift given to God.

Lillian described the parable of the Good Samaritan as a subversive story that reveals that everyone is a minister in a context in which God is still speaking.

“We imagine that we are the ones called to be the Good Samaritan, when instead we are all in or have been in, the ditch,” Lillian said, recalling that, in her life, when she was in the ditch, Jesus was with her.

“**Being in the ditch can** make us wise,” she said, speaking of “Ditch University” as “the place we might need to discover our calling as ditch dwellers.”



Lillian Daniel preaches and reflects at PNC Annual Meeting.

Photo courtesy of Lillian Daniel

Given the opportunity to offer a closing meditation and reflections to the Annual Meeting on Saturday afternoon, Lillian observed that people in the PNC know what they have to work on and “have tremendous resources in people with diverse points of view.”

She likened the people attending the conference meeting to a cat that always lands on its feet when thrown in the air.

She recognized that “you have faced hardship, prejudice and unfairness, and land on your feet,” but advised that when grieving, “it’s time to stop throwing cats in the air and it’s time for loving kindness” especially when needing to make a major decision.

Lillian sees the PNC as brave, honest and serious.

“In the UCC, we are like a bunch of kayakers, independent

thinkers who want a voice,” Lillian noted. “So our systems need to be transparent. We need to work with the lights on, to present ourselves honestly when candidates for conference minister come.”

Lillian said that she is impressed with the strengths of the PNC.

“Your financial resources are way above other UCC conferences, and your camps are not draining you. That is rare,” she commented. “I’m impressed that you have stayed at tables in times disagreement and have self-corrected while being told important truths.

“That takes courage. Lillian continued. “That is not common.

“**When we are at our best,** we turn on the lights, tell the truth and stay at the table. We need to do this more often,” she said. “We need to make intentional spaces where we don’t just come to make decisions and vote, but where we just listen and have deep conversations.”

Compiled with assistance of notes of Ron Patterson, scribe.

Annual Meeting adopts new constitution, bylaws, budget

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Asked about attaining the inclusive makeup of the board and committees was asked, Phil and Cameron said that the goals “are important and aspirational.” The aim is to be invitational “to increase the diversity of voices at the table,” with awareness that the lived experience needs to be welcoming.

A Youth Leadership Council was formed, and the board will include a representative from it.

Sandy called for a vote and the new Constitution and Bylaws were approved, with no negative votes and with two abstentions. The new Constitution and these new Bylaws are now

the Constitution and Bylaws of the Pacific Northwest Conference of the UCC.

Sandy then gave an update on the search and call process for a settled conference minister and affirmed Phil’s positive contributions to the PNC.

The board formed a Search Committee and appointed Cameron as chair. Other committee members are May Alaelua, Tyler Torres, Lauralee Sorenson, the Rev. Bianca Davis-Lovelace, the Rev. Ann-Marie Illsley and the Rev. Dee Eisenhauer

The committee began work Feb 28, meeting with Diane Weible, conference minister search coordinator for the national UCC. The committee will

hold listening sessions around the conference to receive input for preparing a profile.

Jim CastroLang then asked about the process the board had followed in reviewing the designated conference minister. Various people spoke to that.

Andy Warren, accounting manager, presented the budget, prepared with treasurer Diane Kutas and the Stewardship Committee. He reported that OCWM (Our Church’s Wider Mission) income has been slowly decreasing, down \$60,000 from two years ago. The proposed conference ministry budget shows a \$27,000 deficit. He thanked those who give individual gifts. The bud-

get includes a drawdown of 4 percent from PNC endowments to support its mission.

OCWM gifts are divided between conference and national. The deficit is covered by undesignated reserve funds. Andy said Pilgrim Firs revenue will exceed expenses by \$52,000, but at the time expected N-Sid-Sen to show a loss of \$72,000, but it has actually ended the fiscal year in the black.

Diane shared the list of 18 churches that gave to five of the five national UCC offerings: OCWM, One Great Hour of Sharing, Strengthen the Church, Neighbors in Need and The Christmas Fund.

Sandy called for a vote and

Youth workshop raises ideas for drawing youth

Va'a Alaelua, pastor of Christian Worship Center in Anchorage and an organizer of youth participation in the 2026 Annual Meeting in Seattle, opened a workshop on youth and young adults, saying, "Young people are not just the future of the church but are an important part of the church right now."

He opened the workshop with reference to the biblical story of Josiah, a young king who "was just a kid when he became a king. He saw things that were broken and didn't wait until he was a grown up to fix them. He stood up and he changed his world."

Va'a invited workshop participants to share their voices, dreams and goals for the PNC-UCC

"What brings you? What bores you? How can we make things better together?" he posed as discussion questions, also inviting parents to speak. "We want to know how we can move forward as a church that's inclusive."

He encouraged that the workshop be a safe space to share concerns and make plans.

"Your voice matters today," he challenged youth. "Are you ready to rise and make a difference."

"Worship is based on movement and we worship God this way," Va'a said.

"We honor the younger generation. We honor our parents as well," he added.

"In my Samoan culture, youth voices are usually not in the conversation. Today, let us honor the young generation who will take over as we plant the seeds in their generation" he said.

Va'a opened conversation with recognition that many kids tell him he is boring, so he tries to speak in a more Pentecostal way, as long as the gospel message gets to them and connects



Va'a Alaelua, top, of Christian Worship Center in Anchorage facilitated discussion for the youth workshop, including comments by Ishmael Togi, center, and a youth from Fauntleroy, bottom.

then to God and the church community.

"What do the youth of today want for the church of tomorrow?" he asked.

The first youth to speak said that the church needs to be like a park where "we can have fun and fellowship."

Va'a said some Samoan pastors try to speak English, and use both languages, so youth understand the message in multilingual communities.

A girl from Fauntleroy said to have a youth worship is not interesting. "We need to make sure youth understand what's in

worship so they hear the gospel and engage in conversation."

Va'a said his church involves youth through dancing and singing.

When one person expressed concern to involve youth at Annual Meeting beyond entertaining, Va'a explained that "this is the way we worship and create ways to engage youth. As Samoan born and raised in America, I'm a minority. In Samoa, I'm a half breed, a second class citizen."

Ishmael Togi of Ala I Le Ola Church #5 in Seattle, wants more youth representatives on

church and PNC boards.

"In my church, few people in leadership are under 30 or under 20. In Matt. 18:1-4, when disciples asked Jesus who greatest, he called a little child and said, "Unless you become like little children, you will not enter kingdom. Whoever welcomes a child welcomes me."

"In most churches, we put older people in leadership, assuming they have more wisdom, but we need the innocence of child to get in heaven. That's why youth leadership is important. As people grow older, they may be corrupted to ways of the world," Ishmael said. "We invite youth to take leadership in church to bring more perspectives. We need to be open to hear perspectives of young children and invite them to speak in board and church meetings."

Va'a asked: "Is PNC-UCC willing to listen and open its doors?"

A Seattle pastor suggested the challenge of representation is clear and important to hear. It includes meeting when young people are not at work or in school. It includes making space for young people and realizing that when they come, youth may not know Roberts rules of order.

"We need to trust in young people as way to trust in God," she said.

A retired UCC pastor asked how to break through to initiate a conversation with young people who are caught up in their tech communication.

A girl from Anchorage, told of four youth gatherings her church had and that she had "never had seen so many Polynesian youth." Growing up in a church grounded in tradition where youth were looked down on and not allowed to speak, she is now vice president of the church youth.

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Youth seek more leadership roles in churches

Continued from page 6

“Let youth know that their voices matter,” she said.

Tevita Fakasiieiki, a member of Westminster UCC in Spokane and represents young adults on the PNC-UCC Board, said that in Tonga, “women make a tapa bark cloth, like the Samoan siapo. The point is not the end product but the process of making it—building relationships and community. When I came on the board, it challenged me to do better. Now on the board for four years, I see a strong and growing youth and young adult presence. We need to build relationships between elders and young, so we have both the wisdom and ummph of God.”

A young woman from Seattle Samoan Church II said that with youth immersed in technology, churches need to be savvy in tech and tiktok. They need to livestream services and have it done with quality for those work night shifts. She challenged Pacific Islander churches to align with technological advances and hopes the PNC-UCC can help with that.

John Eisenhauer, who was on the Annual Meeting tech team, offered that he consults with churches on tech and helps them find funds to do quality livestream.

Va’a then asked, “What challenges do you see in the church today as a youth? and What keeps young from wanting to be involved?”

A participant from Alki UCC said its youth group has grown steadily over the years and it continues to offer opportunities to be engaged and inter-generational connection. There are adult mentors for youth in confirmation.

One youth in a group of six said some come because their parents make them come. She wants more to come because they are interested.

A girl at First Congrega-



Fili Togi of Ala I Le Ola, told how he built the youth program.

tional Bellingham is one of two kids in youth group, looking for ways to engage more youth.

Ishmael said that when his father, Fili Togi, was called as pastor of Ala I Le Ola Church in 2022, there were seven or eight youth. Now there are 40 to 50. We have youth outings, like bowling and skating, and invite other kids to come. When their families and friends come, they build relationships. They invite friends from school and other churches. Our youth fellowship is not just for our church. We allow others to come and grow organically.

“We need to remember that we are not individual churches in the UCC. We need to lean on one another. A church with two youth can get together with a church with seven and work together,” Ismael said. “We need to be inclusive and inviting.”

His father, Pastor Fili Togi, then commented: “I love to see different people come together. What happens when we come together despite differences in colors, cultures and languages? God created our hearts. If we have a brown heart or a white heart, it is God’s heart. That is the beauty of this conference. The base of our relationship is love. Love never changes.

“Show that you love God.”

he advised. “Kids are looking for a place to come that has love. When find place that loves, they stay there. We need that in these days. May the Lord be with our leaders to provide wisdom to come up with ideas to fulfill dream. It is sad to look at news and watch TV. We need love. God’s mission for us is to love.”

A parent from Everett UCC recognized that parents need to connect with kids and be good examples by going to church every Sunday, loving each other and connecting with their community.

A Samoan parent told of feeling left out as a kid and makes sure to invite youth to help. “Some youth struggle to understand how to connect to God in school with friends who have problems. They also struggle with questions on faith and doubt. Youth need strong mentors.”

Va’a asked: “How can we help to raise youth voices?”

Phil Hodson, designated conference minister, then offered some observations.

He told of serving a church where the youth sat in the back bored. When he asked why they came, some said, “My grandmother makes me come.”

He asked each to bring a

friend at 6 p.m. Sunday for two months. He asked elders for money for pizza and soda. The first Sunday there was more than nine could eat.

“For the first hour, we talked about God and next hour ran anywhere in building and played,” Phil said. “Nine turned to 22, because we gave youth a safe space to come and be kids.

He also suggested connecting kids with PNC-UCC camps, noting scholarships are available. Churches with no youth can raise money to empower youth by sending them to camp.

“We need also money for tech,” he added.

What is the goal of the Gospel? I hear Jesus and love, but to have those we need fellowship and relationships, which are alive and well in this room,” he said.

Phil invited youth: “Each one bring one.” He invited adults to find resources to create safe and fun spaces.

“Every board member can mentor the next generation, pouring into them wisdom and experience to empower them to lead. It will change the shape of church. These are things we can and must do,” Phil said. “Faith exists to be interpreted by each generation that receives it. Faith not static. It’s ever growing. Meet each generation where they are. Where they are is already is where God is showing up.

“You are the church. I see the future of the church is bright, strong and now. Pour out your spirit over those who have come. Come and be with them and us in relationship as we go out into an uncertain world,” he said.

“We need to build bridges for a church filled with hope and knowledge to pass on to next generation by being mentors to walk beside youth as partners on the journey,” Phil concluded.

Two pastors describe their churches' ministries

Gen Heywood, pastor of Veradale UCC, and Warren Johnson, pastor of First Congregational Church Forks, who entered ministry on different paths have unique ministries serving two different PNC-UCC congregations, one in Eastern Washington and one in Western Washington.

They co-lead a workshop on "Knowing the Culture of Your Community," exploring how churches can be "vibrant, welcoming centers of connection, service and hope within their communities."

They discussed how their churches are centers for gathering, worshiping, learning, caring and collaborating to meet the needs of their communities. While their ministries differ, they remain in covenant through the Pacific Northwest Conference.

Gen, who grew up in Durham, Me., felt called to ministry at the age of 11. In 1983, she earned a bachelor's degree in German and music therapy from Emmanuel College in Boston. She worked as a music therapist while studying at Andover Newton Theological School, where she earned a master of divinity in 1989. She served churches in Maine moved to California, married, had two children and served churches in California, before coming Veradale UCC in 2014.

Warren was the church's janitor, when in 2008 God called him into ministry. He was licensed in 2014 and ordained in 2024, after he retired from the Department of Corrections.

The demographics of their churches and communities shape their ministries as both partner to meet local needs. They agreed there is no one formula for churches, just an invitation to be faithful where they are.

Veradale UCC began in 1910 as the only church in a



Gen Heywood, center right with stole of hearts, gathered an interfaith vigil with Faith Leaders and Leaders of Conscience before the March No Kings rally in Spokane.



Gen Heywood, right, lead a workshop on Faithful Advocacy with Karen Stromgren of Muslims for Community Action and Support for the Eastern Washington Legislative Conference.

small farm town that became a suburb east of Spokane and is now the City of Spokane Valley. In the early years, they picked up neighbors of many different denominations with a horse drawn cart.

"The church was founded with a spirit of inclusivity that has been with it through the years," said Gen.

Members listened to low-income parents of children in the school across the street and developed a lay-led program to provide healthy snacks to children after school.

One member also devel-

oped a blessing box to offer scarves, mittens, toothpaste, toothbrushes, sunscreen and seasonal items.

With the Baha'i community, some members created birthday cake kits for the ecumenical food bank.

The church had a harvest festival until there were not enough members to prepare it. They had a community garden, until others developed community gardens. Now they may use the space for solar panels.

They partner with other Spokane Valley congregations through Partners Inland North-

west to provide a food bank, clothing bank and other services.

"We give witness to what it means to be a church that welcomes all," Gen said.

Displaying Black Lives Matter and LGBTQ flags, the church became the target of hate crimes and has worked to bring justice and challenge white supremacy.

Members partner with others to work for justice and inclusiveness. Inspired by the Poor People's Campaign challenge to racism, poverty, militarism and climate change, they formed Faith Leaders and Leaders of Conscience (FLLC), a coalition whose members show up at city council and school board meetings and write letters to the editor as an interfaith witness to challenge Christian nationalism and bigotry.

"We go out to stand with people who don't have to come to the church," said Gen, who wears a clergy collar when she does to city council.

She showed slides of an FLLC Earth Day vigil with Tibetan nuns from Newport, the retired chair of the Spokane Tribe and people of faith joining the rabbi in a Jewish dance at the Episcopal cathedral.

"We connect with NAACP Spokane, Spokane PRIDE, No Kings rallies and 509 Be the Change rallies to support people doing good," Gen said.

Forks First Congregational is a small church on the Olympic Peninsula that has grown in recent years by engaging with the community.

The church started about 1900 in a schoolhouse. The first pastor came and built the first church in a mile outside the town. In 1922, they used tractors and trucks to pull the church on skids to the middle of town. In 1955, the members raised \$70,000 to build a new

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Congregations serve different cultures, locales

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building with a big fellowship hall in the middle of town that is a community center.

Warren, who first attended in 1981 at Christian and Easter to watch his children's programs.

He became more involved over the years and was moderator in 1997, when the pastor was forced to leave. About that time, he felt "the Lord calling me to put him first," which Warren did for 11 years. In 2008, the church was down to \$20,000 and six members, on the verge of closing.

"The Lord came to me and said, 'Are you ready to lead my people?' I said OK," said Warren, who began studies to be licensed and then ordained.

"It's been quite the journey. With people who come to church, I teach them the history of the church," he said. "It's important for us to know where we come from, so we know where we're going and how we fit in our community."

He suggests that churches ask how they are meeting needs of their community and volunteer.

"By doing that we bring people back in the church," said Warren, who is also president of the local food bank.

He suggests opening the church building for meetings of the historical society, business and professional association, men's groups, senior meals and other organizations.

People become used to coming to the building, and then some may start attending church.

Forks, which began as a logging community, started drawing people from all over the country and the world, liberal and conservative. Some have started coming to church.

"Our doors are open. People come in off the street when it's raining cats and dogs,"



Warren Johnson prays over Super Bowl Sunday offering.

Photos courtesy of Warren Johnson



Warren Johnson volunteering at Olympic Corrections Center.

Warren said. "We offer a warm bowl of soup and food.

Some church people at first thought it was crazy to invite strangers who were dirty. Warren reminded that Jesus tests the church to see how they treat people coming through the door.

"We covenant with God and Jesus, who are the head of our church," he said. "We set our differences aside no matter what they are, so we are working for the betterment of the whole church and go out into the world.

People walking through

the front door, which is open, see the church life, ecumenical Bible study classes, community meals, senior meals and ways the church can meet their needs, he said.

Community members attending church functions expect to be asked to give to support efforts. In addition, Warren volunteers with local organizations, so people know him in the community.

When the food bank was down to \$38,000, he and the executive director went to the community and raised \$240,000

to feed hungry people.

On Super Bowl Sunday, he passed a soup pot and collected more than \$1,800 during worship.

This year, Forks First Congregational Church's 40 members gave \$7,500 to the food bank. Six years ago, they gave \$5,000 to the hospital foundation for a new mammogram machine. Another time they raised \$10,000 with other churches towards a bus for the long-term care center.

The church prepares a Senior Luncheon on the second Wednesdays of the month. Attendees put donations in a jar. Children from the school across the street and home schools sometimes help serve the food.

In the years since 2008, when plaster was falling off the wall, there were single-pane windows and they had diesel furnaces, the church invested \$400,000 for heat pump furnaces, new double-pane windows, other building improvements, Wi-Fi and a good speaker system. So the church is a comfortable place for the community events and means and has the tech to host conferences.

"We preach the word of God to the people of God, so they serve as a community church. I'm the spiritual shepherd and lead by example," Warren said, noting that the members make things happen."

"We are two different churches with different ways of doing things. Together we work for God's Kingdom, meeting the needs of our people, our cultures and our communities," Warren commented in concluding his workshop presentation.

Workshop participants then shared how their churches are reaching out to their communities and building partnerships to meet local needs.

For information, email genheywood@gmail.com or wrfork@hotmail.com.

Mark Boyd announces both camps end year profitable

During April, Pilgrim Firs offered a Giving Back Camp with 34 coming to do eco-restoration projects like cleaning out invasive species, creating wildfire barriers, clearing trails, doing yard work and starting to plant the garden.

Coming up for the PNC-UCC will be Kids Camp for those entering grades two to four led by Shirley Asmussen and Tyler Torres of Fauntleroy UCC in Seattle. You and Me Camp for those entering grades one to four will be led by Kristen Miller of Fauntleroy and Lauren Stoneberg of Kirkland UCC.

Other PNC-UCC events and retreats held at N-Sid-Sen include the Women's Retreat May 15 to 17 on the theme, "A Shelter from the Storm." It will be led by Andy CastroLang of Westminster UCC and Lara Crutsinger Perry of Olympia.

There will be a one Giving Back (Work) Camp at N-Sid-Sen June 14 to 20 to prepare the camp for the summer season and another one Oct. 4 to 10 to provide volunteers opportunities to care for the site.

After the summer camps, N-Sid-Sen will host a Pride Camp, "Rising Above with Love," to cultivate connection among groups often isolated.

Mark reported that Pilgrim



Mark Boyd reports on outdoor ministries at Annual Meeting.

Firs dates are mostly full and there is a waiting list for new groups.

"We are saving spaces and times for Pacific Northwest Conference UCC churches," he said.

June through October there are no open weekends or weekdays.

He is pleased with progress on summer hiring at both sites and noted that N-Sid-Sen's cook will be a couple from Pullman.

"Hiring cooks is a challenge for most camps that are far from urban areas," Mark said.

He said the deadline for applying for manager at N-Sid-Sen was April 15, and already

there are three candidates. The candidates will be interviewed the end of April and the goal will be to have someone in place in early summer to overlap with Randy Crowe.

"I'm working on a report to the PNC Board on the future plans for N-Sid-Sen," Mark said.

"Finances for both N-Sid-Sen and Pilgrim Firs will the fiscal year on May 31 will end with more income than expenses," he reported,

"Kudos to Randy and Linda Crowe for the gift of their experience, their work and their lives that has made a real difference for N-Sid-Sen financially and more," said Mark, noting that groups are coming back and

new groups are coming.

Casting for Recovery, a women's breast cancer retreat, which has been coming to Pilgrim Firs, will come to N-Sid-Sen.

Similarly, Warrior PATHH (Progressive Alternative Training for Healing Heroes), a national organization that works with people with PTSD—which they are reframing as Permission To Start Dreaming—has come 12 times to Pilgrim Firs and will come twice to N-Sid-Sen this year.

"Both of those retreats focus on healing, which is what we are called to do as the church," Mark said.

Two new groups include Holistic Alliance, a group involved in holistic medicine, and a new group of Buddhists are scheduled for a silent week before Christmas.

"Some people come to more than one retreat. Some in Warrior PATHH and the Buddhist retreat also come to the guitar camp," said Mark.

The camp websites have been improved and have additional information, so he encourages people interested in camps and retreats to find more information at pncucc.org and click on the camp name.

For information, visit pilgrim-firs.org.

Randy Crowe announces UCC camps at N-Sid-Sen

Randy Crowe, manager at N-Sid-Sen Camp and Retreat Center on Lake Coeur d'Alene, announced plans for Pacific Northwest Conference UCC summer camps and gave an overview of other groups using the site, resulting in the camp ending the fiscal year in the black, despite expectations at Annual Meeting that it would be behind.

"It has happened because of incredible gifts of time, tal-

ent and money in the last nine months," said Randy.

From April 20 through September, N-Sid-Sen has only a few open dates. Groups using the camp include Temple Beth Shalom, quilters, a wedding, three Montessori schools, a yoga retreat and Catholic youth before the summer.

The camp staff will be young adults from PNC-UCC churches.

The Women's Retreat,

May 15 to 17 is led by Andy CastroLang of Westminster UCC in Spokane and Lara Crutsinger-Perry of Olympia.

The theme of the ecumenical curriculum summer camps will use is "In the Wilderness."

Intermediate and Junior High camps will share the week of July 12 to 18. Senior High Camp will share the week of July 19 to 25 with You and Me camp July 19 to 22 and Kids Camp July 22 to 25. Fam-

ily Camp is July 25 to Aug. 1, and Camp Together is Aug. 2 to 8.

Randy announced the camp directors.

Mary Lu Vait and her husband John Hubbe of Westminster UCC in Spokane will lead Intermediate Camp for fifth and sixth graders.

Amara Oden, pastor of Suquamish UCC, will co-direct Junior High Camp with Leah

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Clergy Retreat is time to recreate, relax, rest

The Post-Easter Clergy Retreat Monday to Wednesday, April 6 to 8 at Pilgrim Firs, said PNC-UCC executive director of outdoor for clergy to step away after a busy season of Easter.

Cindy Bauleke, who has lived 48 years in Bellingham where she served Bellingham First UCC and Lummi Island UCC, finds the post-Easter clergy retreat a treat, coming for two days to recreate, relax and recuperate after Easter. She retired in 2015 and was inactive for a while for health reasons.

This year nine women pastors came, compared with more last year when many Samoan pastors joined the retreat.

"In future years, we hope our Samoan pastors and wives will join us again, as well as more PNC ministers and partners," said Cindy.

The clergy spent time kayaking, canoeing, hiking around Lake Flora, playing games and



Lake Flora at Pilgrim Firs was a peaceful spot for clergy.

Photo courtesy of Pilgrim Firs

walking the labyrinth.

"It's a casual time to connect with other pastors," said Cindy, who came because she now chairs the Committee on Ministry Westside. "Members of the conference minister Search Committee asked us to be trial subjects for questions to be asked of churches to broaden participation in the search.

"In the evening, we heard frogs. In the morning we heard birds. It was a delight to be in the woods, and to share delicious meals and conversation with other pastors," she added.

Naomi Schwartz the new pastor at Fox Island. Being new to the conference, she was eager to learn about the conference and its work on social justice.

"I came away feeling filled up with ideas and wisdom from my colleagues," continued Cindy, who has participated in previous Pilgrim Firs clergy retreats and leader retreats at N-Sid-Sen.

Baptized at Plymouth UCC in Seattle, her family attended Magnolia Presbyterian, and she was Christian education director in three Presbyterian churches in Bellingham before earning a master of divinity at San Francisco Theological Seminary in 1986.

"What a gift," commented Emily Tanis-Likkel, pastor at Alki UCC. "Late night games, quiet walks, heart-to-heart talks, naps and blessedly no agenda. The only thing on the schedule is fabulous food.

"The annual Clergy Retreat at Pilgrim Firs is my #1 way to refuel after a depleting Holy Week and Easter. I wouldn't miss it," she asserted.

For information, visit pilgrim-firs.org.

N-Sid-Sen hires staff for summer 2026 programs

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Bilinski, pastor of Fauntleroy.

Aislyn Crane of Admiral UCC Seattle will co-direct Senior High Camp with Bob Feeny, pastor of Westminster UCC.

Becca Hughes and Debbie Peterson of Fauntleroy UCC in Seattle will lead You and Me Camp, just before Kids Camp, led by Kim Kotlan of Westminster UCC.

Leading Family Camp are Ryan Lambert, pastor of Kirkland UCC, and Emily Hanson of Fauntleroy UCC.

Camp Together co-leaders are Linda and Randy Crowe of Westminster UCC, along with Dee Eisenhauer who just retired as pastor of Eagle Harbor UCC in Bainbridge Island.

Randy has hired five staff for the summer, four of whom are from PNC-UCC churches.



Randy Crowe does some spring road work at N-Sid-Sen.

Photo courtesy of N-Sid-Sen

The staff roles include kitchen tasks, cleanup of buildings and grounds maintenance. Two will also be lifeguards.

The lifeguards are Marin Lambert of Kirkland UCC and Freddy Tanner, whose family has a cabin nearby and who was lifeguard last year and an earlier year.

The other staff are Terrance Belletoone from the Chewelah UCC, Sonia Cassell of Bellevue First and Eva Bernard of Plymouth UCC in Seattle.

With the process underway for hiring a new manager at N-Sid-Sen, Randy and Linda said they would be flexible to stay to orient the new manager as long as needed.

"This site deserves and demands good management," Randy said. "A lot goes into running this site well, and that includes both love and a sense of ministry."

For information, visit n-sid-sen.org.

N-Sid-Sen hosts first Textile Retreat in March

Twenty-seven from Seattle, Tri Cities, Spokane Veradale and other communities attended N-Sid-Sen's first Textile Retreat, a PNC-UCC retreat led by Mary Lu Vait of Westminster UCC in Spokane. It was so well received that retreat attendees scheduled another Textile Retreat in Oct. 15 to 18.

The retreat was held March 26 to 29.

In addition to engaging in quilting, knitting, rug weaving, cross stitch, crocheting and basketweaving, they learned from Marta, a Guatemalan backstrap weaver, whose participation was underwritten by Phil Eisenhauer. She came with her husband, Carlos, who engaged in some "Giving Back" projects with Mark Russell.

Phil met Marta and Carlos on several trips to Guatemala and Linda and Randy Crowe, volunteer N-Sid-Sen co-managers for the past year, had met them 13 years ago on a visit to Guatemala.

Marta brought some of her weavings to sell and worked on a 14-inch-wide piece.

One woman brought some of her grandfather's Hawaiian shirts to make a memorial quilt.

Participants made 10 quilt tops as a gift to N-Sid-Sen,

While the group included many from UCC churches, it included others who were agnostic or atheist, said Mary Lu, but they were open to sharing in singing graces before meals because N-Sid-Sen is a church camp.

Mary Lu, who grew up in Minnesota and Southern Oregon, became a registered nurse after earning an associate's degree at the Community College in Albany, Ore., in 1983. She also studied nursing at Washington State University, earning a bachelor's in 1999 and a master's in 2001. She was an RN for 20 years and a nurse practitioner for 20 years before



Basketweaving was among the textile arts many did.

Photo courtesy of N-Sid-Sen



Mary Lu Vait organized PNC's first Textile Retreat.

retiring in 2020.

In 1984, Mary Lu and husband, John Hubbe, moved to Richland where he worked at Pacific Northwest National Lab, Batelle. With her from a Catholic background and him Quaker, they found Shalom UCC in Richland 38 years ago, when their daughters, Laura and Mari, were young.

In 1989, Mary Lu went for the first time with their oldest daughter to Kids Camp, offering to help.

"I loved it, starting with driving there," said Mary Lu, who has been involved over the years in directing a kids, intermediate or high school camp, coming as camp nurse and serving several times on Outdoor Ministries Committee.

She has also come with Shalom UCC-Richland retreats and helped direct Midwinter Youth Retreats a few times.

"I have come at least one week each summer, and have also attended and have led women's retreats," she said.

Helping at one of several Giving Back camps in the fall and spring, Mary Lu learned from Linda Crowe of the need for more quilts for beds. From that grew the idea for the Textile Retreat.

Mary Lu had some fabric and knew how to make quilt tops.

"I made a few calls, and people signed up," she said. "We made 10 quilt tops. Most made baskets and others had other projects."

For Mary Lu, N-Sid-Sen is "my place to connect with nature, to get away from work and stressors, like news. It's God's pocket for me, a place I feel protected and safe.

"I'm not a pastor or Bible scholar, but I try to live out the values of being a true Christian by sharing and singing what faith is about," she said.

At the closing circle, Kaila Russell read Maya Angelou's poem, "Continue," which Mary Lu said summed up the sentiments of participants to continue the pieces they started and to come back for another Textile Retreat.

Mary Lu said she learned for the first time from Mark

Russell, who helped design the electrical connections at Stillwater Lodge, that it was set up for quilting retreats with each of the outlets along the walls on its own circuit so it could handle having both an iron and sewing machine plugged in.

"I look forward to the next 20 years of supporting the camp, whoever the managing director is. I look forward to continuing to be willing to help," she said, adding that her husband John, who has often served as camp musician, shares that commitment.

The day Mary Lu was interviewed, an article appeared in the Spokesman-Review about another textile project in which she is involved.

Since January, she and a group of about 12 women in Spokane have been knitting or sewing together fleece for red hats as a way to protest the Immigration and Customs Enforcement overreach. They were inspired by women in Norway made hats to express their opposition to Nazi occupation.

"We are using the same pattern they used. Donations people give to buy the now more than 100 hats they have made have raised \$2,400. We have used those funds to buy three billboards to call people to resist," Mary Lu said.

One billboard speaks of people in rural Eastern Washington having to make painful choices between medicine or food. Another at Ritzville said, "When (If) the hospital closes, how far will we have to travel for medical care." Soon after that, 300 were given pink slippers at that hospital.

"We are getting out the message to resist," Mary Lu said, noting that even little, old ladies with white hair can do it.

For information, call 509-375-3040, email marylu.vait@gmail.com or visit n-sid-sen.org.