



Pacific Northwest CONFERENCE NEWS

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Summer 2025

PNC administrator retiring, mentoring successor

Arlene Hobson retires on Dec. 31, 2025. Beth Astarte began in June as registrar/administrator for PNC & CPC.

When she retires at the end of December this year, Arlene Hobson, executive administrator, will have served more than 28 years through 11 interim, acting, designated and full conference ministers.

She has been flexible, adapting to serve each with their different ideas, approaches, beliefs and styles in three office locations, and since May remotely.

For her first years, beginning as office manager, the office was in a 6,000-square-foot mansion on Capitol Hill in Seattle. In 2000, the office moved to the parsonage of Bethany UCC and then a modular unit there. From 2008 until May, the office was 1,000 square feet on the top floor and then moved

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Arlene Hobson will have served the PNW Conference 28 years when she retires.

Board of Directors welcomes new board members

The new PNC-UCC Board of Directors moderator is **Sandy Wisecarver**, has been pastor of the United Church of Christ (Congregational) of Blaine, since 2014, but her 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. job is as a gerontological social worker at Northwest Regional Council (NWRC). She works evenings and weekends as pastor.

“My call has always been to serve small churches who couldn’t afford to hire a full-time minister,” she said.

Growing up in Sterlington, La., a town of 2,000, she knew her neighbors and especially loved visiting with elders.

Majoring in history at Louisiana Tech, her plan was to work in a library.

She went on to earn a master’s in teaching and taught in both Arkansas and Oregon, eventually opening a bak-



ery in Lebanon, Ore.

“I received my call to ministry at this time and started at the Northwest Theological Studies in Salem, Ore. I had to move to complete seminary and chose to move to Broomfield, Colo., to finish up at Iliff School of Theology.

Sandy decided to do a dual degree and worked on a master’s degree in social work.

“I eventually finished this degree at

the University of Louisville and finished my formal education with a doctorate of ministry in 2023 at Wesley Theological Seminary,” she said.

Before coming to Blaine, Sandy’s first church was Broomfield UCC.

“Being from a Methodist background, I love working at the conference level and uniting churches together,” she said.

“I enjoy serving as your moderator and look forward to getting to know the conference better,” said Sandy, who previously served as the Northwest area representative on the Board.

“This year the board is working on the constitution and by-laws and starting the process of hiring a designated con-

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UCC comes together at General Synod

Reports & Comments



By The Rev. Phil
Hodson,
Designated
Conference
Minister

***At General
Synod,
God
stirs us up
and sends
us forth
to do
the work
of the Divine
in the world.***

When we gather as the General Synod, we bear witness to one another and the wider world the very best of the United Church of Christ.

Across the breadth of geography, representing faith communities of every size and form, the richness of ethnic and racial diversity, gender identity and theological perspectives.

We come together to worship, to witness to our shared and lived out faith in Jesus Christ, and even to prophesy as we listen for and respond to the movement of the Holy Spirit among us.

Through the work of the General Synod, the denomination speaks to the many settings of our beloved Church and the ways we might impact the world together through the resolutions that we debate and pass.

It is where we learn about and can individually and collectively engage with the vast array of ministry partners who exist to bless our own ministries, the communities we serve, and the world at large.

It is a time when new friendships are forged and, for many, a “family reunion” where we continue to strengthen, across the years, the ties that bind us together.

The greatest gift of our coming together in Kansas City this year, for me, was witnessing the Divine encourage, engage and enliven our Pacific Northwest Conference delegates and guests.

I saw first-time delegates become deeply passionate about the witness of our denomination to the genocide continuing to happen in Gaza.

I watched “old hands” at Synod embrace long-unseen friends and share ideas for ministry.

We had representatives of our newest Marshallese and Samoan congregations and their pastoral leadership join us as well, and my heart sang when I overheard one mention how welcome and included they felt among the gathered body right from the start!

General Synod celebrates the abundance that is found because of the depth and breadth of our diversity as a “big tent” Church.

Where we are greater than the sum of our parts.

I am thankful for this time with our delegates and guests.

I am hopeful for the ways our witness will speak to and through our local churches in the Pacific Northwest Conference.

I am excited about the possibility of even more of our laity and clergy being able to attend as delegates and guests in three years, when we come together again in Cleveland, Ohio.

General Synod is one of many places where God stirs us up and then sends us forth to do the work of the Divine in the world. May it be so for all of us!

Transitions announced

The Rev. **Randall Mullins** died last Sunday, June 22. He was ordained in 1977, was a member of Fox Island UCC and is survived by his spouse, Sharon Pavelda.

A celebration of life was held June 28 at Fox Island UCC.

Sunnyslope Church celebrated the life of the Rev. **Bob Jackson**, a retired pastor in the PNC at a service in April.

Nancy Edquist, PNC moderator in 1994, worked at University Congregational UCC and Magnolia UCC in Seattle, died June 5. She organized women's retreats and family camps at Pilgrim Firs, Seabeck and N-Sid-Sen. She worked 14 years at Horizon House and was a founding member of the Center for Creative Aging.

The Rev. **Davi Weasley** was installed June 8, as the new pastor at Everett UCC. He was previously pastor of youth, young adults and mission at First Congregational UCC in Bellingham.

The Rev. **Phil Hodson**, conference minister, has transferred his standing from the South Central Conference.

The Rev. **Naomi Schulz**, a member of Suquamish UCC, has transferred standing from Northern CA/NV Conference.

The Rev. **Jessica Star Rockers'** privilege of call was approved.

The ordination of **Adina Meyer**, who has been called as designated pastor of Keystone UCC in Seattle, has been approved.

The Rev. **Debra Jarvis** has been called as designated pastor by University UCC in Seattle.

The Rev. **Margo Richardson** is interim pastor at Northshore UCC in Woodinville.

The Rev. **Kara Markell**, a Disciples of Christ minister, has been called to United Christian Church in Renton.

The Rev. **(Chelsea) Chiung-Yuan Chiu**, of Taiwan has been called as settled minister for the Taiwanese Christian Church (UCC)

Stanley Ou Yang is the moderator of the UCC congregation and a Member of Westside Committee on Ministry.

The Taiwanese Christian Church (UCC), which previously worshipped at Keystone Church, UCC, is now worshipping with the First Taiwanese Presbyterian Church of Seattle at the Mercer Island Presbyterian Church.

The Rev. **Rolf Hansen** has transferred standing from NCA/NV Conference.

The Rev. **Christine Tata** has been called as pastor to serve both the Chewelah UCC and the Colville UCC.

The Rev. **Ninja Jerry Chang** and the Rev. **Gregg Brekke** are both on leave of absence and the Rev. **Jim Spraker** has been granted exempt standing.

St Paul's marks 120 years

On Oct. 5, St. Paul's UCC celebrates its 120 years of ministry, 40 years of hosting recovery groups, 30 years as an open-and-affirming church and one year as home Edible Hope Kitchen. It has been a beacon for those seeking recovery, shelter, warmth and radical

hospitality, serving the Ballard community and beyond. Speakers include Darrell Goodwin, Courtney Stange-Tregear, Tim Devine, Dotty Armstrong and Kerri Berlin.

For information, call 306-783-6733 or email info@stpucc.org.

Anti-racism training offered

PNC anti-racism training for "Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging" for ministerial standing for lay and authorized ministers may be completed by the end of 2025. Here are options

1) People's Institute for Survival and Beyond: Undoing Racism: Zoom and in person, \$350, three days, pinwseattle.org/#.

2) Upcoming one-day New York Conference UCC Training Module 1: Culture and Race are being offered for \$50 to \$80 by the PNC on Zoom on Oct. 11, Nov. 18, Jan. 10. Contact: cindybauleke@gmail.com. Three weeks before the training, registrants receive an email with the cost for the link.

3. Convergence: Anti Racism Training for Clergy & Leaders on Zoom, \$75, self-paced, convergencecolab.org/p/anti-racism-training.

Ministers may seek approval from the East or West Committee on Ministry chair for other trainings or if they had one of these trainings in the past 24 months.

Women's Retreat is Nov. 7-9

The UCC triennial Northwest Regional Women's Retreat on "Embrace Joy" is Nov. 7 to 9 at Skamania Lodge in Stevenson, Wash., for the PNW and Central Pacific conferences This open and affirming gathering welcomes all who identify as women. The keynote is the Rev. Andrea

Rose Cano, the worship leader is the Rev. Danée Ashley and the music leaders are Linda Srb and Susan Moore.

Registration by Aug. 4 is \$240 and Aug. 6 to Oct. 4 is \$265. Groups or individuals may register for guestrooms until Oct. 8, said Sarah Ackers, volunteer and engagement coordinator for Fauntleroy UCC and a 2025 NRWR Planning Committee member.

For information, visit nrwr.org or facebook.com/groups/369665646394.

Interim training planned

The Center for Congregational Health in Winston-Salem, N.C., is offering Virtual Intentional Interim Ministry Training of eight half days from 12 to 4 p.m. ETn this summer. Week 2 is Monday Aug. 11 to Thursday, Aug 14.

For information, call 404-550-2842 or email mlmorg@bellsouth.net or visit healthychurch.org/events-and-training/upcoming-events-classes/?event_id2=7901.

Communities in Practice set

The new Communities of Practice (COP) year of gatherings to meet with and learn from colleagues runs from Sept. 1 through mid-June 2026. In this support program groups meet usually monthly in person or on Zoom. Participation will include the Pacific Northwest, Montana/North Wyoming and Central Pacific conferences.

The Rev. Amy Hitchens is designated by the Committee on Ministry to coordinate COP this year. New and returning participants and those interested in facilitating groups may contact her. There is a \$50 non-refundable registration fee and scholarships are available.

For information, email amy@npucc.org or visit ultracamp.com/info/session-detail.aspx?idCamp=367&campCode=ns&idSession=52955.

Board news continued...

ference minister" she said.

"Since Annual Meeting, the board has had a retreat and met several times. We meet from 6:30 to 8 p.m. first Tuesdays," she said, inviting people to topics that need the board's consideration early, because the board plans its agenda a week in advance.

For information, text 360-595-4821 for a reply at the end of the day or email pastorsandywisecarver@gmail.com.

Conference News Briefs

Arlene Hobson recalls her 28 years with PNC

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to 300 square feet on the second floor on Broadview UCC, which closed in May.

Now conference staff work from their homes. The files are in storage and will be digitized.

"We now need to streamline the records to keep up information on the national data hub," she said.

Arlene found the hardest change was the pandemic, when the PNC had to adjust its communications, do committee meetings and hold two Annual Meetings online. Now hybrid Annual Meetings require a team of skilled tech people.

In addition to working with conference ministers, she has connected with countless church moderators and committee members. As the primary communications person, she is the go-to staff member who knows people, the 78 churches and has access to information to help staff, committees and congregations operate.

"When someone calls with a question, I may not have the answer right away, but I know where to find the answer," she said. "I have accumulated knowledge over the years of where to go and who to ask to find an answer I don't have."

Arlene, who earned a bachelor's degree in fine arts in 1981 at the University of Akron, Ohio, did prepress work for six years after moving to Seattle. She answered a newspaper ad for the PNC-UCC office manager job and was hired by the conference minister, Lynne Fitch (Simcox), joining a receptionist, planned giving coordinator and bookkeeper.

During her years with the conference, there were four managing directors at Pilgrim Firs and four at N-Sid-Sen.

When she started, information was primarily sent by paper and mail, but now most is online and immediate.



Phil Hodson, left, helps Dawn Koloi, right, present gifts from the Board of Directors to Arlene Hobson at Annual Meeting for her years of service.

For example, in 2007, Monthly Packets shifted to electronic delivery. Recently she has prepared and emailed Weekly E-News, a task she has transferred to Beth.

Arlene started using a computer with Ecunet, learning on the job, developing the website, using three different programs over the years. Now it is being done by Benjamin Crosby of Harrison, Idaho.

When she first came, there was also a receptionist, planned giving coordinator and bookkeeper.

"When I began, each staff person was designated as support staff for each committee. Now committees take responsibility for most of their own work," Arlene said, who was primarily responsible for the Committee on Ministry (formerly Church and Ministry Committee) and worked closely with the Annual Meeting Planning Committee to

coordinate details.

Arlene has appreciated working with the many clergy and lay people in the conference who have volunteered to do the work of the conference.

"Each person brings their own skills and dynamics to the conference work," she said. "Getting to know different people over the years, I have in recent years valued writing obituaries for clergy and spouses in the conference, so people know a bit about who they are."

Arlene has also represented the PNC at many of the services celebrating their lives.

Serving the conference has strengthened Arlene's faith. In her early years, she was a Catholic when she was hired by the PNC but transitioned in her faith to join Keystone UCC, where she is still a member and her son is director of music.

"I feel more faith filled, more connected with people in

the churches, caring for people and recognizing that we can find God everywhere, because God is everywhere," she said. "I also see more holiness in the world, which may be strange to say in these times.

"I used to think faith and politics were separate but now I see them as connected," she continued. "I value the different beliefs and denominations."

Being the PNC executive administrator has been a big part of Arlene's life, but she will step back so Beth can develop her role with new ideas.

"Change is good," she said. The office phone number will be transferred to Beth.

With Beth having a different job title and role, some things Arlene has done will be taken on by committees and working remotely will be different.

For information, call 206-725-8383, email arlene@pn-cucc.org or visit pn-cucc.org.

Beth Astarte brings new set of skills to new role

Beth Astarte, who began in June as the registrar/administrative assistant with the Pacific Northwest Conference and Central Pacific Conference, is working with Arlene Hobson, PNC executive administrator, for the rest of the year, learning all the aspects of the PNC administrative work.

Beth will focus on data management, event coordination, and resourcing the Committees on Ministry.

As she starts, she is attending the Conference Minister Phil Hodson's Wednesday Office Hours on Zoom to have an opportunity to get to know more folks around the Conference.

Beth will work two-thirds of her time with the PNC and one-third time with the CPC, along with her work as an independent contractor.

The new role will be about 20 to 30 hours a week, which Beth will do remotely from her home office in Chehalis.

Her primary workdays will be Tuesday to Thursday, and as needed on Mondays and Fridays.

She brings more than 30 years of administrative and database management and book-keeping experience and a heart for working with churches and nonprofits.

Beth worked at Bethel Congregational UCC in Beaverton, Ore., as program coordinator and financial administrator for eight years before moving to Washington in 2022. She continues as their book-keeper.

"Arlene has many responsibilities and carries much institutional knowledge," she said. "The CPC has been operating without someone for their administrator since their administrator retired at the end of 2024. My main role will be to learn and manage, Salesforce, a new database for both conferences.

"I will continue the communications role and have already been doing the Weekly e-News, and I will continue Arlene's role supporting the Committee on Ministry," said Beth, aware Arlene has kept up with what is happening and has skills "I am living into."

Beth added that submissions for the PNC-UCC weekly Friday eNews are due to Beth by 5 p.m., Wednesdays for inclusion. Items sent later will be for then next week.

The conference will hire a company to scan the documents that the national UCC Ministerial Excellence, Support and Authorization (MESA) team requires to keep all ministerial records in perpetuity.

"Paper files degrade over time and more and more companies are digitizing documents which can be kept on thumb drives and through cloud storage," Beth said, pointing out that today pdf files are the standard for storage and accessibility.

The PNC has been using Basecamp for meetings and so Annual Meeting reports are kept on that, she added.

Beth feels connected to the UCC, not only from working at Bethel in Beaverton, but also attended Fauntleroy UCC when she lived in Burien.

"I am passionate to help people connect to God and to support people on their faith journeys wherever they are at," she said.

Her ecumenical upbringing and commitment to educating people in faith began from her Catholic roots, as a high schooler teaching kindergartners in CCD, through involvement with Assembly of God camps, Baptist prayer meetings and several years as the wife of a Disciples of Christ minister.

In 2017, she became a licensed interfaith minister through a Celtic organization,



Beth Astarte began in June as clerk and administrator of the PNC and the Central Pacific Conference.

Photo courtesy of Beth Astarte

Anam Cara Connections.

Recently, she has been involved at the nearby Unity Church, helping them as they made the difficult decision to close and then with the associated grief and work involved in closing and selling their building.

Beth earned an associate degree in biblical studies in 1984 at Northwest Christian College (now University) in Eugene before attending business school to earn a certificate as a legal administrative assistant. In 2008, she earned a bachelor's degree in business administration from Warner Pacific College.

She worked with the Eugene Chamber of Commerce, a small Eugene company, Paci-

fiCorps, a utility company in Portland and then left the corporate world doing different jobs before the job at Bethel.

"It was wonderful to work in a church to combine my business skills with my heart for helping people build their relationship with God," she said.

Beth has three grown children, one in Kenmore and two in Beaverton, and enjoys spending time with her three grandsons, traveling, camping and playing the harp, guitar and ukulele.

"I am glad put my skills to use with to help the PNC and CPC carry out their missions, with which I align," Beth said.

For information, email of- fi@pncucc.org.

Broadview UCC closes after 96 years of ministry

At the closing service for Broadview Community United Church of Christ on May 4, the focus was on ending and beginning. Members were encouraged to continue their faith journeys and to seek relationships with new faith communities to nurture it.

The neighborhood church, which recently had an average of 12 of its 30 members attending in a large older building, voted by a majority to close. They sold the building quickly for \$1.8 million to a network working with Ukrainian immigrants.

The funds and endowments will be distributed to nonprofits and the conference, said Dan Stern, who was pastor from 2000 to 2014 when there were 100 members with 40 attending. Dan gave the sermon for the closing worship.

Among nearly 100 attending the closing worship were 10 former pastors, interim pastors and conference ministers.

At the service and a potluck dinner the evening before, members and clergy who served the church shared memories of the church's impact in the community, conference and world.

Broadview's ministries included refugee family sponsorships, new citizenship advocacy, opposing racist housing policies of redlining, defending a neighborhood drug treatment center, advocating for low-income housing, offering an extravagant welcome to persons with physical and mental disabilities, protesting war, offering non-military service options to high school youth, becoming one of the first Open and Affirming (ONA) congregations, and more than 30 years of LGBT pastoral leadership.

The congregation also supported the Church Council of Greater Seattle, Washington Association of Churches, the Church of Mary Magdalene,



Joanie Henjum, a member, and Dan Stern, a former pastor, shared reflections on the church.

the Multi-faith AIDS Project, Gay Pride, New Horizons Ministry, 1st Ave Service Center, Phinney House and the UCC 5 for 5 special offerings.

Speaking on behalf of the Helping Hands Team, which purchased the building, Serg Lobodzinskiy said they will "continue using this building as a place of blessing, service and purpose for the local community," using it to enhance the value of the property and improve lives of people whose lives they touch.

The Helping Hands Team works with immigrant families and low-income communities, "particularly newcomers from Ukraine, providing them with the guidance and support to become homeowners and build stable lives in the United States," he said.

They invited donations to help them keep the building a safe, welcoming, and functional space.

Broadview UCC was first organized in 1928 as a Sunday School for 50 children, as a

mission of St. Paul's UCC in Ballard.

It was incorporated as a congregation in 1929, and its first pastor was E. Horstman. Over the years, the two churches collaborated. Both were among the few Evangelical and Reformed background churches in the Pacific NW.

St. Paul's received mission church funding from the national UCC until 1945, and Broadview until 1951.

Broadview and St Paul's co-sponsored refugees from Vietnam in the 1970's and recently from Afghanistan.

From 1976 to 1992, more than 200 joined Broadview. Since then there was attrition from people moving away, disagreeing with ONA, aging and dying.

Basing his sermon for the closing service on Luke 13:6-9 and Isaiah 55:10-13, scriptures about trees that get cut down, Dan remembered working all day with his father to cut down an acre of old apple trees on his family's orchard near

Wenatchee for firewood and to make space to plant young organic trees.

Reminding that "all living things one day die," regardless of how fruitful they are, he affirmed that the faith story is centered on Easter—not one spring day of flowers and singing but a continuing everyday reality, Dan said.

After the devastation of the Mt. St. Helens eruption in 1980, even though microbes in the soil perished, surviving birds flew over, dropping lupine seeds that grew into flowers.

"The whole foundation of our faith is the hope and on the physical reality that life goes on," he said, citing Martin Luther King Jr's quote that "the arc of the universe bends toward justice," and adding it also bends toward resurrection and "abundant reflowering."

"Coming to the final worship for a relatively small but mightily long-lasting congregation, we remember that they weathered a Great Depression,
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Broadview pastors, members share memories

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a second World War, devastating epidemics, ruined roofs, squirrels popping out of pianos, opposition to its early open, affirming, peacemaking, justice-seeking, diverse, equal and inclusive ways,” Dan pointed out.

“Does all that good just die?” he asked. “Or do we believe Jesus who once told his disciples that where two or three continue to be gathered, there forever Christ will be in our midst?”

Dan, now a member at Richmond Beach UCC in Shoreline, invited those in the closing congregation “who have always taken a broad view of things” to go forth and discover where best to continue to gather—in homes, a neighboring congregation, such as Luther Memorial, Richmond Beach or St. Paul’s UCC or becoming part of thriving congregations farther away.

“Don’t for a minute think that this time of dying is the last or the final part of the story,” Dan affirmed.

Gail Crouch, a former interim pastor and one-time head of the PNC Committee on Ministry, helped plan and lead the final service, including a liturgy that gave thanks for more than 100 years of ministry in a neighborhood and invited people to let go of the church.

A member since moving to Seattle in 1993, Joanie Henjum was inspired by the church to work with the conference and eventually to study for and be ordained a UCC minister. She said it was moving that the closing litany included encouragement for each person to continue their faith journey and seek a relationship with a new faith community.

Joanie served at Mary’s Place and did interim ministries at Guemes Island UCC and University Christian but always attended Broadview one Sun-



Nearly 100 former pastors, PNC leaders and Broadview members joined the closing worship service for Broadview UCC in May.

Photo courtesy of Broadview UCC

day a month.

“In our last year together, I valued our anti-racism work, including a four-week course with Andrew Conley-Holcom, and reflecting on films and books,” said Joanie. “The church gave a lot to the world, the community and the conference over its 96 years.”

Other clergy at the service included Gary Southerton, who served the church from 2016 to 2024. He had left his ministry as a Catholic priest in Seattle to work at the nonprofit, Multifaith Works, with people with HIV/AIDS.

Then, while working with Plymouth Healing Communities to help unhoused with mental health issues, he connected with the UCC and transferred his ordination to do a four-way

call with Plymouth Healing Communities and as three-fourths time pastor at Broadview.

“The church was a tight knit worshipping community that took care of each other. The building served as the conference office, rented to two other churches and AA groups until COVID dried up the rental income,” Gary said.

With meeting rooms upstairs, it was a challenge for older people, he noted, adding that the community was on a growth path before COVID but declined after COVID.

The Broadview board will continue to wrap up issues of closing, said Gary, who now serves as the PNC representative on the board of Horizon House and does pulpit supply.

Other PNC pastors attending the closing service included Jim Halfaker, who was there from 1966 to 1971, Courtney Stange Tregear, Jan Van Pelt, Tim Devine, Jane Sorenson and Vincent Lachina.

In the last nine months, Sara Funkhouser, pastor from the neighboring Luther Memorial Lutheran Church, did the preaching.

Moderator Marc Hoffman, who has been with the church seven years, said, “It’s sad and is hard on everyone. Churches are families. There is grief for a small congregation that worked closely together. As a congregation, we tried to do the best we could for the world.”

For information, call Marc at 206-240-4500 or email danstern2051@gmail.com.

Ben Crosby now designs PNC, camp websites

From his home three miles north of N-Sid-Sen at Carlin Bay on Lake Coeur d'Alene, the Rev. Benjamin Crosby, a retired UCC conference minister and pastor, makes changes every few days to the websites of the PNC-UCC, N-Sid-Sen and Pilgrim Firs websites.

He and his wife, the Rev. Alice Ling, who was pastor from 2014 to 2022 and continues as supply pastor at Wallace UCC—his home church—returned to North Idaho in 2012 after he retired.

“At this stage of my life and the live of the church, how we communicate and interconnect is critical,” Ben said. “Websites are one way to create those connections.”

He uses WordPress as the backbone of the websites he does, noting that it is the basis for 40 percent of the websites in the world.

Ben also hosts the website for the United Church of Christ Zimbabwe, with which he was in regular contact as conference minister of New Hampshire. The UCC Zimbabwe and the New Hampshire Conference had a partnership. He also visited Zimbabwe and Mt. Selinda Mission several times during that time.

When Mark was at N-Sid-Sen, Ben conversed with him about the camp website and began doing it about 2020, doing



Ben Crosby, retired New Hampshire UCC Conference minister created new PNC websites.

several re-designs since then. Then he talked with Phil about the PNC website, and again with Mark, now at Pilgrim Firs about that website.

The three websites are more interconnected now.

Ben, the son of a geologist growing up in Wallace, studied sociology and religion at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, graduating in 1968 and heading to United Theological Seminary in the Twin Cities, where he graduated in 1971.

He served three churches full time in Minnesota over 16 years and did about five years of interim work before he and Alice moved to New Hampshire,

nearer her family in Vermont. She served several churches in New Hampshire and worked at Bangor Theological Seminary in Maine.

Ben and Alice have been working behind the scenes at N-Sid-Sen since Mark left, walking the grounds almost every day when no one was there.

“N-Sid-Sen is a beautiful place with a spiritual presence that is rare and valuable,” he said. “Alice and I do what we do for the camp and conference as a gift.”

He retired from the New Hampshire Conference and maintains his standing there, so has not been active in the PNC

until recently.

Ben first went to a camp at N-Sid-Sen in the mid 1950s. During his early years, he said, Wallace was a raucous mining town of several thousand people. Since the mines closed, it now has a population of about 900, reframing itself as a tourist destination.

When there was a greater population, the Wallace UCC had 300 adult members, another 300 in the Sunday school and an active Pilgrim’s Fellowship. The church was active at N-Sid-Sen.

Ben, who lived in Silverton, worked summers during college in the mines.

“It was a practical way for me to learn why I wanted to have a higher education,” he said. “Work in the mines is a hard life.”

Now, he said, there is a membership of about 20 and attendance of 10 to 20.

“While North Idaho has a reputation for being conservative, our church seeks to be a progressive voice in the Silver Valley,” he said.

For information, call 208-704-1724 or email ben@carlinbay.net.



Mark Boyd named executive of outdoor ministries

Conference Minister Phil Hodson announced in July a new path for outdoor ministries at Pilgrim Firs and N-Sid-Sen with Mark Boyd, who has served as managing director at N-Sid-Sen and Pilgrim Firs, serving as the first executive director for outdoor ministries.

Mark will step back from day-to-day operations at Pilgrim Firs to oversee staff and operations at both sites, strengthen donor and partner relationships, and work with the Board, Stewardship Committee and a new Futuring Team to develop a long-term plan for both sites.”

“We are grateful for the blessings poured out in this season, and eager to see the abundance ahead as we work together to strengthen the church in these sacred spaces,” said Phil.

Mark said the new model grows from a need for collaboration of the work at the two sites. He will look at the history of running both camps, having served as managing director from 2012 to 2022 at N-Sid-Sen and from 2022 to present at Pilgrim Firs.

Mark grew up in a family of plumbers who moved in 1969 to Olympia, where he helped manage a plumbing business. At United Churches of Olympia, his part time work for 11 years as youth director included leading youth camps at Pilgrim Firs and family camps at N-Sid-Sen. He worked three years as full-time maintenance staff at Pilgrim Firs before 2012.

“The camps both need consistency, someone with expertise on both sites, but not running the day-to-day work of the camps. We needed someone to run the business, do promotion and work with a vision for the future,” he said, noting that nonprofits generally raise 25 to 30 percent of their budgets from donations, but the camps draw 5 percent. “Someone run-



Mark Boyd is the PNC executive director for outdoor ministries.

ning a camp year round does not have time for that. It’s important for me to have a team because the two camps are far apart geographically, in culture and in what the sites offer.

“We need someone to look at both and figure out how to run and staff them,” he said. “Both staff need someone to support them and connect them to the conference staff. We need someone whose responsibility is to the churches.”

He will survey groups supporting N-Sid-Sen.

In addition, Mark will recruit a committee to look at other similar sites to find sustainable models of drawing donors and staff configurations to help decide where the PNC camps are going.

“Since the interim left in the winter, I have been wanting N-Sid-Sen to have a local team or group to support staff at both sites and with someone on each team with overall picture of both sites,” he said.

Based on the proposed model, there will be associate directors at both sites working with the executive director who oversees both sites.

Zach Norenberg, who has been assistant director at Pilgrim Firs, will continue and will work in collaboration with his

counterpart at N-Sid-Sen. They will share information and visit each other’s sites twice a year, getting to know each other and collaborating.

The executive director will handle day-to-day dynamics of building relationships on site, coordinating with staff and helping to fill staff roles, Mark said.

He will also build collaboration with partner groups, so they are a bigger part of sustainability along with churches.

“We will look at other sites that are similar in size, number of beds, to compare pricing, staffing and facilities, such as cabins with bathrooms that draw different clients,” he said.

For example, the Girl Scouts Camp Four Echoes has cabins with no bathrooms, like N-Sid-Sen, while Lutherhaven has cabins with bathrooms. Both appeal to middle- to low-end clients, as Pilgrim Firs and N-Sid-Sen do, said Mark, noting the need to set prices based on what they offer and who comes.

“Do we need to do a different thing? What are the returns? What clientele to do we appeal to? Are the buildings accessible?” he listed as considerations. “The Futuring Team will look at who we think we are, who we are and where we

want to go. There’s a difference between who we think we are and who we are really.”

The Futuring Team will report in Spring 2026 and may propose a site director for N-Sid-Sen by then.

Mark suggested a plan to mentor site directors.

“How can we create mentoring for leaders and staff so new leaders are ready to fill the role,” he said.

He considers strong youth camps essential to assure sustainability into the future. Some camps build leaders by hiring a program person each summer, in addition to having clergy as volunteer camp directors.

Mark encourages clergy to invite youth to camps and look beyond their pews.

“Many forget that those in the pews have nieces, nephews and grandchildren who could come,” he said.

Mark noted that the Presbyterians have national and regional camp directors to support site directors and that collaboration with the Central Pacific Conference might bring options.

In addition, he wants to involve Samoan youth leaders to help lead PNC camps.

Mark knows that site directors are often too busy running the sites—securing supplies, staff, equipment and maintenance—to do connecting and outreach. The executive director can connect across conferences and with nearby camps.

Mark wants to send more camp staff to ecumenical trainings, so more have skills to sustain the camps.

“Jesus led by example, not by saying do this but by doing things and inviting people to follow. To build camp leaders we need to share the work,” he said.

For information, call 360-876-2031 or visit pilgrim-firs.org.

N-Sid-Sen camps led to summer of smiles, ties

Randy and Linda Crowe, who began in June serving as the volunteer acting managing directors, spent the summer smiling starting with Work Camp at N-Sid-Sen drawing more than 30 people coming for one to nine days and a few for several weeks.

"We had a lengthy list of tasks for cleaning, maintenance, repair and planting flowers," said Linda, praising the bravery of Carrie Kissinger climbing on scaffolding to clean the ceiling fans in the Forrester hall.

"They had not been cleaned in years and are now white again," Randy noted.

Campers cleaned brush, split firewood, washed and vacuumed.

Then Regis Bernard of Plymouth in Seattle proposed that each of the weeks of summer camps there be a "Giving Back Time" for campers to continue helping with tasks. All the UCC age group, intergenerational and family camps, which drew about the same number as in 2024, joined in.

As projects were completed, more were added to the list, so there is still a long list of projects for the next Work Camp, which will be Oct. 5 to 12.

"Now some of the tasks are for beautification of the site," said Randy.

N-Sid-Sen provided a box of work gloves in assorted sizes for campers.

When Kids Campers helped pick up sticks and branches and load them on a pickup, one girl commented, "Oh, that was fun!"

Even the Latter-day Saints camp and Montessori group in June and the Unitarian Universalist group in August help do more work.

"We had an overwhelming To Do List for work camp, but enthusiastic, energetic workers, showed up and shared their gifts to get much of it done, and



Junior high campers join in tie dying, top.
Kids campers help "give back" by piling branches and sticks into a pickup, middle.
Kids campers learn Bible stories by improv drama, bottom



Work Camp was just the beginning," said Linda.

The theme for the UCC camps, "Another Way," was written by the UCC, United Methodist, Disciples of Christ, Presbyterian USA and Church of the Brethren outdoor ministries leaders.

Emily Hanson, who co-directed Family Camp, found at the last minute that the other co-directors tested positive for COVID and could not come. Her husband, Brent, enjoyed driving the camp's old tractor to haul chunks of wood around the grounds to a place where they could be split for firewood.

Through the summer, N-Sid-Sen had four on staff as the cleaning crew, including college students from Plymouth UCC in Seattle, Bellevue First and Chewelah UCC. Cooking was done by the same caterer as last summer.

N-Sid-Sen is looking for a full-time maintenance person and someone to clean as needed for the coming year, said Randy.

The camp is full into October and then will be quiet, so Randy is working at recruiting groups.

Linda summed up some anecdotes from camp.

Kids campers learned Bible stories, not by reading the texts but by borrowing the Christmas pageant costumes of Westminster UCC in Spokane and doing improvisational drama.

One Kids camper said every day, "Best day ever!"

One Camp Together camper, a 21-year-old woman, was baptized on the front beach by the campfire.

At a Family Camp campfire, a three-year-old especially enjoyed singing along and making motions as John Eisenhower led a song, "Put your finger on your nose, on your nose."

Linda did eight tie dye sessions in three-and-a half weeks – tie dying t-shirts, scarves and even a dress.

"Through the summer, Linda and I laughed and smiled a lot," said Randy. "We love what we are doing and know people are affected in a positive way."

"Randy and I talked a lot before we agreed to be full-time volunteers at N-Sid-Sen, but this feels like what God expects us to be doing now, with cleaning, maintenance and interactions with people," Linda added.

They will stay through the season but are open and have offered to stay a year to help rebuild the camping at N-Sid-Sen.

"Continuity is good for a time of rebuilding," Linda said. "The summer has been rich with blessings, and so many are coming to the 90th anniversary celebration."

Phil Hodson, conference minister, reported that Annual Meeting exceeded its goal of raising \$6,000 for camper health and safety equipment at N-Sid-Sen, raising \$7,000, along with the gifts of time and talent led to many volunteer workers improving the facilities for the camping season there.

For information, call 208-689-3489 or visit n-sid-sen.org.

AM preacher uplifts the power of relationships

Freeman Palmer, conference minister for the Central Atlantic Conference, said that as a same-gender loving person, he left the African American Baptist congregation in Washington, D.C., he grew up in but it left an indelible mark on his faith.

"Every Sunday was praise, crucifixion, resurrection and the climax scripture from Acts 10 that Jesus 'went about doing good.'"

"The good Jesus did was counter cultural, revolutionary, pushing against Roman Empire that kept people politically, socially and economically oppressed. The religious system oppressed people, too," Freeman said, "so Jesus overturned the tables of money changers."

Realizing the good Jesus did get him crucified, Freeman said, "We need to create a sacred space for everyone."

When Jesus healed a man on a Sabbath, he challenged whether it was more important not to heal on the Sabbath or to heal a man.

When the rich create poverty and undermine the well-being of people, it's not time to follow them.

"Today 37 million live below the poverty line and lack what they need to survive," said Freeman, adding that the marginalized include youth, oppressed and black people, women, Native Americans and indigenous people, transgender people, immigrant communities and religious minorities.

"If we have an old fashioned church potluck dinner, there needs to be a place for the voiceless, the marginalized, oppressed and othered," he said.

"When rules create sacred spaces for the healing and the well-being of people, that is the time to follow them," he said. "However, when rules don't create sacred spaces for the healing and well-being of people, it is time not to follow



Freeman Palmer gave two Annual Meetings presentations.

them, no matter who is in power and making up the rules!

"If we are going to have a church dinner that is pleasing in God's sight, then the people we need to send the invitations to are the marginalized, oppressed and the other," he repeated telling of his experience in his childhood home, where his mother still lives.

Her table has a leaf, and whenever there are more than four or five people at the house for a meal, she takes out the leaf, pulls the table apart and puts the leaf in so that more can sit at the table and eat the meal.

"By putting that leaf in, we are deconstructing the table in order to create a bigger one so everyone my mother invited for our meal can be at the table," Freeman said.

He believes the analogy holds for the spiritual table the church sets. If the number of people invited are too many for the table, then "let's insert a spiritual leaf, deconstruct the table that is and make a bigger table where the marginalized can sit, the oppressed can have voice and the othered can be served," Freeman said. "We need to create a sacred space. There is no excuse to say there is no room at the table. There is always room if we make it.

"When we host of such a gathering, we will experience a blessing of resurrection, even if the guests may not return the favor in the same way we expect," Freeman quoted the sentiment of the scripture.

"People will tell stories and change our perspectives of the world that may not conform us to the world but transform us," he continued. "The church needs resurrection. We need to rise out of our tombs of indifference, narrowmindedness, insularity, in maintaining a building—community that is fear based, compared to speaking the truth to power.

"When we invite people we rarely invite, we create space for resurrection to happen," he affirmed. "What space do we want to create? Do we want to create sacred space where all come to the table? When we do create space for resurrection?"

In his Saturday morning message, Freeman made the point that the church's mission since its beginning has been to create sacred space wherever it can create it through its witness of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

"Creating sacred space for all people, especially for the other, is why we are here today. During the course of time, someone received a revelation

from God that said the church's mission was to create sacred space for someone who was previously denied that space," he said.

Freeman said that is one way the church can follow Jesus to speak truth to power.

While some churches may believe that they are never to mix politics with the gospel, he thinks that idea often comes from a confusion between what is political and what is partisan.

"What is going on in the U.S. today are attempts to make the gospel partisan. I believe it the gospel should not be partisan, but profoundly political," he said, aware that "being a church that creates sacred spaces for all people is a risky business, but the Church has grown to where it is today because of people who took a risk of faith."

What's at stake in creating sacred space is the future of the Church, the movement of God's hands and feet in the world as God intended it to be as the body of Christ, he said.

"In contrast, the barrage of executive orders coming out of Washington DC are intended to make people feel powerless and overwhelmed," Freeman observed. "We as people of faith need to be strategic and focused. To stay on course and speak truth to power, we need to collaborate around what we believe is right, and we need to united in our faith and our faithful resistance," he said.

"Creating sacred space is the mission of the church. We are here because someone said we are sacred," he said.

There are times silence is not golden when we see what is happening such as in Nazi Germany and in Birmingham, Ala., when Martin Luther King Jr wrote a letter to churches.

"We have to speak truth to power," Freeman asserted.

For information, email fpalmer@cacucc.org or visit cacucc.org.

Two PNC church choirs perform in UK churches

This July and August, the choirs of First Congregational Church Bellevue and University Congregational UCC in Seattle teamed up for a concert tour of the United Kingdom.

Leading the choir were Stephen O'Bent, minister of music and the arts at First in Bellevue where he grew up, and Benjamin Sederquist, director of music ministries at UCUCU since 2020.

"Seventy-four participants took our conference's message of love and inclusion overseas," said Stephen. "It was a moving and memorable journey filled with music, connection and discovery."

Performances took the combined choirs to beautiful, historic places in the region, including Belfast, Iona, Edinburgh and York.

"Each location offered its unique challenges and beauty, giving us a sense of the cultural differences between Ireland, Scotland and England," he said.

"Singing in centuries-old churches and sacred spaces deepened our appreciation for the role of music in community and worship, and the enthusiastic reception from local audiences reminded us of the universal connections made possible through music," pointed out Stephen, who grew up in Bellevue and earned a bachelor's degree in music from Occidental College and a master's degree in choral conducting from the University of Washington.

For him, the most meaningful stop was on the small Scottish island of Iona, the site of St. Columba first monastery from 563 AD.

"We were honored to sing in the ancient Iona Abbey, where a progressive Christian community continues to work for justice and send out inspiration across the world," he said. "Sharing our music for a



Stephen O'Bent, minister of music at Bellevue First, and Benjamin Sederquist, director of music ministries at UCUCU, lead a choir of 76 for performances in UK several churches and cathedrals.

Photo courtesy of Stephen O'Bent

church whose values align with our own was special."

Experiencing Iona as a church for everyone, Benjamin, who graduated from Western Illinois University in 2018 with a bachelor's of music in instrumental music education and from Western Governors University in 2021 with a master's of education in learning technology, felt like it was a home away from home.

Benjamin said the trip was in the works for two years. Stephen and they have collaborated for four years, building fellowship and community among their choirs.

They worked with ACFEA, a music ensemble-centered tour company, to develop the tour also as an opportunity to learn about the places where they sang. Choir members had guided tours in the towns where they performed. They talked with pastors about the churches and cathedrals where they sang.

Stephen was grateful for the chance to talk with local people after their performance in Iona about the ways music can feed the souls of those who work for equality.

The choir sang music from a diverse group of composers, including pieces by Michael Sederquest, as well as Florence Price, Elaine Hagenberg, Craig Hella Johnson, Michael Bussewitz-Quarm and W.A. Mozart.

Benjamin observed the challenge of singing in the different churches with differing acoustics.

"We had to adjust on the fly and choir members had to be attentive to the conductor," Benjamin said.

"Equally meaningful were the relationships we built along the way. As we traveled, rehearsed and explored together, bonds among choir members grew stronger, offering the kind of deeper connections that are harder to achieve in our busy

daily lives," Stephen said.

"The cross-congregational connections were a joy, getting to spend time with those from another nearby church, whose warmth and shared love of music made each stop even more special," he continued.

"I'm particularly grateful for the friendship and collaborative spirit of Benjamin, without whom this journey would not have been possible, and who brought such musicality and organization to our trip," Stephen said.

"This tour was not only an artistic endeavor but also a spiritual and relational one, an experience that will echo in our hearts long after the jet lag subsides," he added.

Benjamin pointed out that some in the choir were singers and some were non-singers, commenting, "If you have a voice you have a song," and encouraging people not to hold back from joining a choir because they think they are not a good singer."

Stephen echoes that sentiment.

"Few things bring me more joy than building community through music-making. It's my weekly honor to lead our chancel choir, which includes everyone from seasoned pros to folks joining their very first choral ensemble, in singing weekly anthems in a wide range of musical styles. I hold deeply the conviction that everyone has a place in the choir, that every gift is welcome."

Along with their work at University Congregational UCC, Benjamin is the director of choirs at Skyline High School in Issaquah and tenor-bass section leader for Seattle Pro Musica.

For information, call 425-454-5001 or email stephen@fccbellevue.org or call 206-524-2322 or email musicdirector@universityucc.org.