

THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

A Voice for Ecumenical Congregations and Christians Around the World

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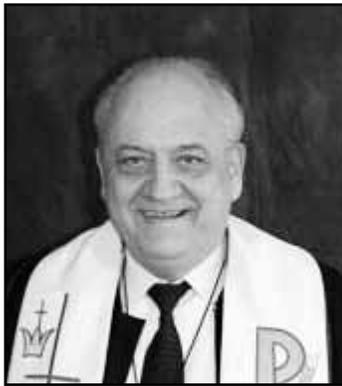
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FAITHFUL FOCI

"See, I am making all things new." [Rev. 21:5]

"ICCC is very important to me. I come away from the Annual Conference inspired and uplifted and looking forward to attending the next one.

"I have made ICCC a beneficiary in my trust and I hope I can serve in some capacity in the future."

President's Message Rev. Dr. Richard O. Griffith

How can one summarize an Annual Conference that has the potential of being one of the most pivotal in our 65 years? We, together, experienced inspiring worship, a unique approach to Bible study, challenging presentations, ministries with the Ohio Food Bank and Habitat for Humanity, and commitments to ministry for the Council and the communities we serve. In effect, we experienced faithful foci.

Varieties of preaching styles enriched our time together. I especially appreciated our opening Communion service because, for me, the normative worship experience for the Christian Community is around bread and wine, remembering the "body" and the "blood" that binds us together in a unity that does not require uniformity. That also is the time when the saints present remembered the saints past in our Memorial time.

I appreciated the process of participatory Bible study that mixed exegetical insights and individual understandings. This is the way I try to do Bible study in my ministry settings.

One of our pastors talked about the possibility of a workshop on domestic violence; a workshop on this issue, as well as the focus of one of our luncheons to deal with this pressing issue was organized. Workshops on Multicultural churches, social media and Agape also benefitted several.

But why do I believe this past Annual Conference has the possibility of being one of the most pivotal in recent history? I believe that it is possible that God is making a new thing because of our Council's commitments to Agape, Creating Community, Alleviating Hunger, and finding a permanent Council Minister.

I was part of the process that resulted in Don being invited to be the Interim Executive, which he has preferred to call Council Minister. We had two other superb candidates,

committed to the Council, well known, and respected. The committee was unanimous that we had a difficult choice with the embarrassment of riches with the candidates we had, but Don was the one to whom we should offer the opportunity.

In his time with us, he has provided energy, humor, administrative expertise, unflagging zeal, wisdom, commitment to the ecumenical church and the Council. He has been the exemplar of "Unity without Uniformity."

It is tempting to retain "interims" for an indefinite (and unending) term, especially when their ministries have been avowedly exceptional. But that is not fair, not only to the interim, but also to the Council. The Directors have started a process which is designed to have a permanent Council Minister by next Annual Conference.

Another initiative from the Directors initiated which the Delegates affirmed was the ministries of Agape, Creating Community, and Alleviating Hunger. People are being recruited and plans being implemented, as seen in Don's message in this issue of the Christian Community. We will hear more in the months to come.

As one of our delegates said, "ICCC is very important to me. I come away from the Annual Conference inspired and uplifted and looking forward to attending the next one. I have made ICCC a beneficiary in my trust and I hope I can serve in some capacity in the future."

Yes, God is at work with us, making all things new!

Facing the future with faith and hope.

Dick

Mission Statement



"As people devoted to following Christ we are committed to community, to treasuring diversity, to living our faith in service and love."

THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

A Voice for
Ecumenical Congregations
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New Outreach Missions

Don Ashmall
Council Minister

The 2015 Annual Conference was historic! Three Council outreach missions were adopted and made a part of the life of our fellowship: "Agape;" "Creating Community;" and "Hunger Alleviation."

The obvious first questions about the outreach missions are:

1. What are we going to do about each of the outreach missions?
2. What direction will we take with each of the missions?
3. What difference if any will it mean to my local congregation?

Question one: "What are we going to do about each of the outreach missions?" is already being answered. Local churches and ministry centers across the fellowship are taking action right now to build communication and understanding across the boundaries of race, ethnicity and more. Congregations are bringing people together in small groups and large, to create real community where none existed before. Churches and ministry centers are reaching out to neighbors on the next block and on the next continent to feed the hungry. We as individual congregations are doing it all, right now. What we haven't been doing in an organized fashion is telling one another about best practices, sharing innovative ideas that work; and combining forces to gather resources that some of us didn't even know

existed. When committed and inventive people get together, the synergy that results is greater than the sum of those involved. That's God at work in us!

Question two: "What direction will we take with each of the missions?" The honest answer is "none of us knows." As we share ideas, best practices and resources, answers will emerge that none of us can now envision. This is an exciting time for our congregations, leaders in the community church movement. We can't yet see a promised land, but in our sharing we are trusting the One who gives us promise. It's a virtual certainty that our dedicated labors pursuing each of the missions will involve others outside the Council, and that's a good thing. By stepping forward together, we can be the leaven in the larger loaves of the ecumenical movement, interfaith dialogue and community-wide effort.

Question three: "What difference if any will it mean to my local congregation?" At the least each of our churches and ministry centers will learn some tactics that have been successful – and some that haven't. That means that as your congregation's ministry grows you won't need to reinvent any wheels. More significantly, the sharing and resourcing can help your congregation grow in both spirit and numbers. The challenge for the (upper case "c") Church in the

present day is to preach the gospel effectively by what we do as well as what we say. Only a visible gospel will draw others to join us in our God-given pilgrimage. Each of these missions (and your congregation's visible involvement in it) answers the challenge.

I've been asked another question: "how do these outreach missions differ from the 'endorsed missions' we've heard about for decades?" Endorsed missions are worthy "outside" agencies that meet the Council's criteria of ministry without discrimination, transparency in finances and the like. What makes the three outreach missions different is that they are ours, with all the imagination and initiative coming from within our own fellowship. That's new, and it is exciting!

The most important question is: "What are YOU going to do about it?" For each of the missions to advance we need some live bodies, some willing spirits, and some imaginative minds. Look again at the three emphases. Agape is communication. Creating community deals with both small groups and larger institutions. Hunger alleviation is both local and world-wide. Which fits your skill-sets and your God-given talents? Choose one. Assemble your contact information (including what ICCC congregation, if any, you belong to) AND a statement that explains what you have to offer to make the mission and its ministry thrive, including any specific experience and/or expertise you have. Email it all to iccc60423@sbcglobal.net and you'll receive an invitation to join one of the three teams! As a team member your first and continuing task will be to turn vision into reality as you raise awareness in your local congregation and in your area and region. May I hear from you today?

"Don't keep the faith. Instead, share the faith."

The International Council of Community Churches is grateful for the following 2015 Annual Conference Sponsors for their investment in the community church movement:

We-Mac Manufacturing Company, Kansas City, MO
Antioch Community Church, Kansas City, MO
Two Anonymous Donors

We thank you for your financial support of a conference program.

REVIEWS

Dr. Robert M. Puckett



HOW TO READ THE BIBLE AND STILL BE CHRISTIAN:

Struggling with Divine Violence from Genesis through Revelation: by John Dominic Crossan, Harper One, 2015, Hardback, 263 pages, \$33.50

John Dominic Crossan is professor emeritus at DePaul University and a leading scholar in the Jesus of history seminar along with Marcus Borg and others. He was a Catholic priest until he realized that celibacy was overrated and left the monastery to be married. He claims to have been a Christian before he became a scholar and a theologian before he became a historian. He has long held the conviction that: "reason and revelation or history and theology or research and faith cannot contradict one another unless we have one or both wrong." (p. 4)

I have had the privilege of hearing several of his lecture series and have read quite a few of his published books. He has always proven to be both challenging and inspiring. He consistently insists that it is not possible to understand Jesus apart from the context in which he lived. A major theme in this book is Jesus's nonviolent resistance to Roman imperial occupation and Rome's concept of peace through forceful victory. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus points to victory through peace.

Crossan describes a problem that anyone encounters who reads the Bible through and takes it seriously. The Bible presents conflicting views of both God and Jesus as both violent and non-violent, and Crossan examines those opposite views from Genesis through Revelation. There is not a single uni-

fied view of God or Jesus in the Bible. Christians are responsible for discovering which is the best and purest revelation of God and Jesus in order to know how to read the Bible and still be Christian.

"The problem of the Christian Bible is that its God is portrayed both non-violently and violently; its Christ, proclaimed as the human image of that God, is also portrayed both nonviolently and violently" (p. 235) The Jesus of history as seen in the Gospels as one who rides of a donkey of peace on Palm Sunday rather than the war horse of violence as described in the book of Revelation. The nonviolent Jesus says "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven, for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous." (Matthew 5:44-45) Jesus turns the other cheek, loves his enemies, and overcomes evil with good.

On the other hand the book of Revelation pictures Jesus as the horseman who makes war "His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems; and he has a name inscribed that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies of heaven wearing fine linen, white and pure, were following

him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. (Revelation 19:11-16)

HOW TO READ THE BIBLE AND STILL BE CHRISTIAN speaks repeatedly of the "biblical temptation's on distributive justice, that is, on justice as primarily about the fair and equitable distribution of God's world for all God's people. But that God is both a 'God of justice' and a 'God of Love,' so to be a Christian must involve both love and justice." "Justice is the body of love, and love is the soul of justice, Separate them and you do not get them both--you get neither; you get a moral corpse. Justice is the flesh of love, and love is the spirit of justice... Justice without love may end in brutality, but love without justice must end in banality. Love empowers justice, and justice embodies love. Keep both, or get neither." (p. 445)

Violence continues to escalate in our world today. "Escalatory violence now directly threatens the future of our species and indirectly undermines solutions to other survival such as global warming, over population, and resource management." (p. 244) John Dominic Crossan calls upon us to follow the God of nonviolence rather than the violent God found in the Bible in order to read it and still be Christian.

“Way Too Soon!”

by Rev. Dr. Michael Donahue, VP for Informational Services and Outreach

Death is a part of life, but when it happens unexpectedly, it is like being punched in the stomach. Such was the case with the passing of Nanci Harris. I have known Nanci (and her husband, Jess) since joining the International Council of Community Churches in 1994. Since that time I have worked with her on AGAPE and in doing so, she became one of my best friends.

If you ever met Nanci you were aware that the ICCC was her passion. She believed in all that the ICCC stood for and especially the direction of AGAPE. Nanci was one of the original members of the AGAPE Team and was very excited that AGAPE had been resurrected.

Ella Clay had this to say about Nanci:

“WCF is deeply sadden by the passing of our dear sister Nanci Harris. Nanci was a tremendous asset to WCF. Nanci was instrumental in the missions work of WCF. She personally sought out various shelters where individuals had been affected by addictions, domestic violence, homelessness, poverty and donated various items. Nanci was a Jewel. Psalm 116:15 states, “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.” We take courage in believing that Nanci is peacefully resting in the Lord. May healing and peace rest upon all.” - Ella Clay, former WCF President

Another comment about Nanci reads:

“We will miss you, Nanci - but we will see you again one day - thank you for your life and your gifts – Namaste” - Roberta Smith

And another was:

“She will be surely be missed. Her knowledge of ICCC and her beautiful spirit.” - Charles Addison.

Words can not express the loss the ICCC will feel with the passing of Nanci or my deepest sadness that she was taken too soon!

The following by Roberta sums up what I have heard from many:

“I must say ... I was floored by this news. And I have not been able to speak of it until now. I have been at Conference every year for the last 12 but it has only been in the last 3-4 years that I have gotten to know more about Nanci. She loved the Council and its members - she made friends and gave of her time, talents and resources. She had a vivacious spirit. I can still hear her laugh. All I have been able to think is that we may all be one breath away from our last breath. Love the Lord, love your family, love your friends - have that conversation you know you should have - take that trip with your loved ones ---”

The loss of Nanci to the ICCC and especially the AGAPE Team is a very large one, but the greatest tribute to her is for the ICCC and the AGAPE Team to go forward with a renewed spirit and enthusiasm. Nanci, we will all miss you, but we also know you are watching over us and saying, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Philippians 4:13



Nanci Harris

Pastor's Annual Performance Review

Local congregations have a variety of ways of assessing their pastors' performance. A few actually vote on re-appointing the pastor each year, thus providing a very final and annual “pass-fail” judgment on their servant-leader. Some congregations elect or appoint a pastoral relations or personnel committee with instructions to meet with the pastor on a regular basis, reviewing the pastor's activities and making suggestions in a variety of areas.

To learn more, please visit the ICCC website (icccusa.com). Under Resources, you will find the document “A Pastor's Annual Performance Review.”

Speaking to God

“Acquire the habit of speaking to God as if you were alone with God.

Speak with familiarity and confidence as to your dearest and most loving friend.

Speak of your life, your plans, your troubles, your joys, your fears.

In return, God will speak to you -- not that you will hear audible words in your ears, but words that you will clearly understand in your heart.” ~ Alphonsus Liguori

Thanks to Bishop Serge A. Theriault, Christian Catholic Rite of Community Churches for sharing this.



ICCC Church Has Major Role in Successful Food Drive

This past May, ICCC founding member church, The Church in Aurora located in Aurora, Ohio, participated in a highly successful community "Fill A Bag-- Feed A Family" food drive sponsored by Food2Share, Inc.

The week-long drive collected 15,000 lbs. of food and raised \$5,000 to purchase another 6,000 lbs. of food for the city's food pantry.

The Church in Aurora provided 40 volunteers from its adult and school age youth members. Some of whom dropped off empty bags for food at more than 1,300 homes in the city. Other volunteers from the church helped pick up filled bags of food a week later from the households while still other sorted and stored the collected food.

ICCC Council Minister Rev. Don Ashmall and Bob Harris, chair of the Council's Endowment Fund also helped sort the collected food.

Some of the church's volunteers made mailings to roughly 500 homes asking for \$25 donations. This was done in subdivisions that wouldn't allow food bags to be distributed.

Despite being the wealthiest city in its county, the demand for food from the food pantry by city residents has increased by 400% since the Great Recession. Thanks in part to the efforts of The Church in Aurora's congregation members, for the first time in 35 years the pantry will not have to ration food during the summer months

This was not only a community effort but an ecumenical one as well. The church teamed with a local Catholic and a Lutheran church along with community service organizations to support this first-ever project for the community.

Liz Sutter, The Church in Aurora's Christian Education and Youth Director, oversaw the church's Food2Share involvement and said that the drive had several benefits for the church:

- It played a key role in feeding the city's food-challenged families;
- It increased the church's visibility as a member of the community;
- It supported the church's community outreach mission
- It turned out to be a special fellowship building opportunity;
- It helped demonstrate the importance of community service to the church youth who participated.

The Fill A Bag—Feed A Family campaign made front page news in the local paper. The Church in Aurora received free publicity for being mentioned as an organizer.

Food2Share, Inc. is a charitable organization founded by Bruce Harris, brother of Bob.

LEADERSHIP MATTERS!

ICCC colleagues and friends,

As the newly-elected Vice President for Leadership Development, I am asking you to complete this short, five-question online survey to give you (clergy and lay leaders) an opportunity to identify pressing leadership needs in your local church. The ICCC is a fellowship that exists to support you and your local church or ministry center. This survey will take a few minutes of your time. As I said, it has five questions. Please go to the link below and tell us how the ICCC may support you in helpful, practical ways with immediate benefits to all. Please share this survey with your leadership teams. Everyone's response will be deeply appreciated.

This is the link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/XJJY2S9>

It is also posted on the ICCC Facebook page.

Thank you for your input. Your thoughts will be taken seriously. We are here to serve the local churches of this wonderful ICCC fellowship.

Kind regards,

Stephen York
Vice President for Leadership Development, ICCC
Post Office Box 460
Stonington, Maine 04681
207.367.5807

The ICCC's Facebook page is open to you!

Join the group, learn what's happening around the Council, and post notices and photos of your church's exciting ministries!



Sharing Joys:

- News from **Bishop Theriault, Christian Catholic Rite of Community Churches**: Ms. Catherine Hoen was admitted to the third order of the Society of the Precious Blood (SPB) on April 12, during Mass, in Ottawa. Ad multos annos! Rev. Ray Henson, Hope Chapel, Nashville TN, will also be admitted to the SPB if he can come to Ottawa for his induction during summer. **Rev. Willard Dionne, St. Bernard & St. Gregory, Ottawa**, toured the Holy Land April 16-25 with his wife Suzanne, walking in the footsteps of Jesus. "What an experience and how moving it was! We visited the main places of this sacred land, foundation of the Jewish and Christian religions. We discovered the Sea of Galilee, the Mount of Beatitudes, Nazareth, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Qumran, Dead Sea, etc. Country of the Old and New Testament, Israel is of special interest to us Christians. We thank the Lord for allowing us to make this beautiful trip." Rev. Willard.
- Congratulations to **Rev. Dr. Bruce Merton** and his wife Jill, who retired as Senior Pastor from **Peace Community Church** April 6th! A retirement celebration was held at the Lexington Country Club in Fort Myers, FL on March 28th. ICCC President **Dick Griffith** attended the occasion. Entertainment at the event.... **Darryl & Andrea Gatlin!** For those who attended the 2015 Annual Conference in Ohio, you know how much fun that must have been. Bruce has been an ordained minister for 42 years.
- Happy 50th Wedding Anniversary to **Jim & Susan Miller, Norris Religious Fellowship, Norris TN!** The congregation held a reception in their honor on September 13th.
- **Greendale People's Church** marked their 120th year of ministering to the Worcester, MA community on April 8th. Several events were planned at the church to celebrate, such as a block party, and a birthday party. **Rev. Carla Dietz** is the Senior Pastor at the church.
- On August 28th, **Zion Temple Community Church, Vince Holmes**, Senior Pastor participated in P.U.S.H. – Pray Until Something Happens. 100 pastors, citizens, local & state leaders gathered at 100 major intersections in the city of Los Angeles to pray, provide 100 meals and provide clothes for 100 people in that community. For more information on the #PUSH100 movement visit www.greaterzionchurchfamily.com.
- **A BIG Welcome** to: **R.C. Fleeman** as he begins his journey as the new Senior Pastor at **Peace Community Church, Fort Myers, FL**. Pastor Fleeman and his wife, Gail, have attended annual conference in the past and are active ICCC members. We look forward to seeing and hearing from them in the future!



Our prayers are with:

- The family of **Nanci Harris, Church at Litchfield Park, Rev. Dale Hopely, Sr. Pastor**. Nanci passed away May 31, 2015, as was an ICCC Regional Trustee. Please see **Rev. Michael Donahue's** tribute to her in this issue of the *Christian Community*.
- The family of **Raymond Paquin**, retired university professor, who died on March 3. **Bishop Theriault, Christian Catholic Rite of Community Churches**, officiated at his funeral on March 7 in Gatineau. Also with the family of **Bert Poirier**, retired police officer, who died on April 7th. An impressive service was held on May 2nd at the Royal Canadian Legion on Kent Street in Ottawa, with more than 200 in attendance. Rev. Dionne officiated. Bert was a lifelong devoted Mason and Noble Shriner. May they both rest in peace with the Lord. • All those affected by the earthquake in Nepal: we offer the words of the psalmist, "Be strong and take heart, all who hope in the Lord" (Psalm 31:25).
- **Rev. Tony Begonja, Heart of Jesus Ministries, Des Plaines, IL** and his family with the passing of Tony's dad, **Stanko Begonja** on July 26th. Stanko was 85 and a WWII Navy veteran. He passed away in his homeland of Croatia.
- **Christ Community Church, Orlando, FL** and the family of Senior Pastor **John Tattersall**, who passed away July 20th. The church is now recovering and has been blessed with a wonderful Interim Pastor, **Jorge Pinto**. Please keep the congregation in your prayers as they seek for a new permanent pastor.

Seeking a Senior Pastor

Cosmopolitan Community Church is actively seeking and accepting resumes for the position of Pastor.

They are a historic church established in 1923 under the leadership of the late Dr. John Russell Harvey. The church has been led by three outstanding spiritual leaders: the late Dr. John Russell Harvey (1923-1932), the late Dr. Mary G. Evans (1932-1966), and Rev. Dr. Henry O. Hardy (1967-retirement, December 2014).

Cosmopolitan has consistently been a pillar in the urban landscape for over 90 years. The church has historically been involved in the spiritual growth and civic development of the local community. They are searching for a Senior Pastor with the passion and creativity to get them growing in both numbers and impact. They look forward to what God has planned for them next.

Interested candidates should mail resumes to:
 Cosmopolitan Community Church
 P. O. Box 805771 • Chicago, IL 60680
 Attn: Pastoral Search Committee

Norris Religious Fellowship

The Norris Religious Fellowship is seeking a new spiritual leader to join our loving, caring, worshiping church family. Our church was established in 1933 by the residents of Norris, Tennessee. Norris was a new planned community created by the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) to house the workers who built the first TVA dam, as well as their families, and to serve as a model community. Since this was a new community the residents all moved to the area from somewhere else, bringing their various religious experiences with them. Thus the Fellowship was founded as an interdenominational Christian church, which it remains to this day.

The Fellowship is affiliated with the International Council of Community Churches, and is graced with over 100 members, along with children and non-member friends. We are a tithing church, meaning that 10% of our annual budget is donated to various charitable organizations. Over the years our ministers have come from many denominations, including Congregational, American Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Church of God, United Church of Christ and Unitarian. It is required that a candidate for minister be a graduate of an accredited Christian seminary. A passion for counseling the ill and grieving is desirable.

The position will be available starting in March of 2016, as the minister who has led us for the past seventeen years has decided to retire in February of 2016. Compensation for the position is negotiable, commensurate with training and experience. One member, who has been a part of our church for seventy-nine years says he prays, "God, please send us the person that we need and that needs us."

If you feel that you might be that person please send inquiries to:

Norris Religious Fellowship
Attention: Pastoral Search Committee
P.O. Box 1069
Norris, TN 37828

Email Address: search@norrisrf.org

Deadline for applications: October 31, 2015

Seeking Settled Pastor

The Pensacola Beach Community United Church is seeking a dynamic Settled Pastor gifted with the skill sets needed to meet the requirements of uplifting preaching, insightful and centrist bible interpretation, and patient ministering to the needs of a congregation of both younger and older members. The called Settled Pastor will provide the energetic leadership to grow our church membership and increase the average worship attendance (currently 80), to guide and counsel the lay leadership, to underscore and expand the meaningful relevance of our Church's mission (Building God's Beach Community) to our members and the permanent and transient residents of our resort community, and to introduce proven/new outreach programs and approaches to enhance the impact of the ministry of our Church in the community at large.

In reality, we are seeking a visionary Pastor who will initially deserve, based upon the scope of responsibilities, gifts, and skill sets required, to receive more compensation than the \$50,000 (negotiable) plus parsonage that we can provide at this time. We fully expect to adjust and compensate more appropriately as we and our Pastor grow together. The Pensacola Beach Community United Church has historic ties to the ICCC and is affiliated with The United Church of Christ. More detailed information about, and a virtual tour of, our Church is available via our website www.thebeachchurch.com. Interested candidates may send a brief resume to pnsbeachchurch@att.net.

Seeking an Associate Pastor

The Church at Litchfield Park, a historic and dynamic independent community church located in a beautiful resort community west of Phoenix, is searching for an Associate Pastor to join our wonderful staff. A qualified candidate should have a theological degree from an accredited institution, be ordained by a Christian denomination and have a servant's heart manifested in the pastoral gifts. Specific areas of ministry will include: visitation, counseling, teaching, and occasional preaching. CLP is a progressive church "aspiring to be as inclusive as the love of God." Qualified candidates should email a resume and cover letter to: info@churchatlitchfieldpark.org with "Associate Pastor Search" in the subject line.