

THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

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International Council of Community Churches

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President's Message

Bob Fread

ICCC, a community of churches, and life-long friendships



What is the best thing about being president of the ICCC? Our churches and you! Even though I live in Iowa, I'm writing this in Ohio in mid-October as I visit ICCC churches and attend a gathering of our newly restructured Lake Erie Area Fellowship of Community Churches.

What is most amazing for me as I visit is getting to see our churches and their worship and ministry spaces and hear about their various ministries and ways they serve their community. Then, even better, seeing you.

Many of us are friends, getting to see each other for four days every July. But it's amazing to see you on your "home turf" where you live, in your own church and in your community, and seeing and hearing firsthand how you serve that church and community. Central to the ICCC are our churches, our communities and you.

In recent weeks a few of our churches and their communities have lived through tremendous tragedy because of Hurricanes Helene and Milton. As a community of churches which love and care for one another, I hope you will consider a gift for our ICCC Hurricane Offering, so we can reach out to our churches and communities devastated by these hurricanes.

But we don't reach out to churches just following a disaster; our love and support of one another is shown to all our churches through our Local Church Mission grants. As your church serves your community through a food pantry, meal program, senior program, or maybe an after-school program, there is opportunity for the ICCC to stand with you in service to your community.

So, what is the best thing about the ICCC? Our churches and you!



Pictures of Bob's visits, left L Bradford Woods Community Church (Bradford Woods, PA); right: People's Community Church (Berea, OH) and below: People's Community Church (Detroit, MI)





Executive Director's Message

Bruce Merton

The Season of Thanksgiving?

The writer of Ecclesiastes proclaimed, "To everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven..." (3;1) There follows a list of contrasts which the writer uses to demonstrate the point: "a time to be born, and a time to die...a time to love, and a time to hate...a time for war and a time for peace."

There is no mention of a time or **season of thanksgiving** or its contrast. From a Christian perspective, I have wondered why! Certainly, there should be, in the topsy-turvy world we live in, a **season of thanksgiving** where we could spend a few moments or days breathing easy, relaxed without conflict, comfortable with ourselves, others and our surroundings and grateful to God for all the good things in life.

Perhaps there should be NO season of thanksgiving! No few moments or few days reveling in "the good things of life"!

Could God, in Christ, be calling you and me to an every moment, every day, every breath awareness of **thanksgiving**?

If so, how and why do I exercise thanksgiving in the face of the indiscriminate killing of thousands in Gaza, Israel and Lebanon?

How and why would I offer thanksgiving in the face of the death and destruction brought by Hurricanes

Helene and Milton and other natural disasters around our globe?

How and why would I offer thanksgiving in the face of our nation's penchant for mass shootings and killings?

How and why would I offer thanksgiving in the face of the deaths of family, friends and loved ones?

How and why would I offer thanksgiving considering the incredible political, social and cultural divisions and dissension in the UNITED States of America?

How and why would I offer thanksgiving with the knowledge that the influence of the Christian movement and presence is rapidly shrinking between our shores?

For me, the how and why of thanksgiving as an every moment, every day, every breath attribute of life is rooted in the assurance I find in Paul's Letter to the Romans, Chapter 8. Paul is writing to Christians experiencing abundant prosecution and persecution even, in many cases, unto death.

"I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us...We know that ALL things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to God's purpose...What then are we to say

about these things? If God is for us, who can stand against us?... Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?... No in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life...nor things present, nor things to come...nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The world around me may whirl with darkness, dismay, descension, decay and even death. I may be caught in its tornadic madness or be bound to it by forced observation, BUT no matter the circumstance or its apparent result there is nothing in all creation that separates you, me and the world we live in from God's love in Christ Jesus. That is incredibly good news and, when owned, lived and shared with others, it results in a life of thanksgiving and not a mere season!

"Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ...beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain." (I Corinthians 15:57,58)

May grace, peace and THANKSGIVING be in you and through you to others!

ICCC NOVEMBER 2024

75th Anniversary Theme: Reflecting the Majesty of God (Revelation 4:3 ESV)



Book REVIEW

By Rev. Kenneth N. Nelson



As the ICCC celebrates 75 years of fostering Christian reconciliation and unity, our book reviews will reflect the intersection of faith, community, and social change. The following three books offer a unique perspective on how faith can address today's challenges. *Cherished Belonging* emphasizes healing through kindness and connection, *The Spirit of Justice* highlights the historical role of Black Christians in resisting injustice, and *Uncommon Courage*, a compelling call to action, advocates for defending Christian values in the public sphere. Each book, with its unique focus, provides valuable insights into the power of faith to shape communities, confront injustice, and inspire social change, instilling a sense of commitment and responsibility in our readers.

Cherished Belonging: The Healing Power of Love in Divided Times

Gregory Boyle, \$30 (256p) ISBN 978-1-66-806185-5



In *Cherished Belonging*, Jesuit priest Gregory Boyle, founder of Homeboy Industries, paints a hopeful picture of healing fractured communities through radical kindness and belonging. Drawing from decades of experience with the world's largest gang intervention program, Boyle emphasizes that recognizing the inherent goodness in every person and fostering a sense of mutual belonging can transform lives and communities, offering a beacon of hope in the face of social challenges like crime,

homelessness, and division.

Boyle's message challenges narratives that divide people into "good" and "bad," instead attributing harm to loneliness and despair. He calls readers to embrace early Christianity's spirit of collective healing, equality, and compassion, encouraging acts of radical kindness as defiance against division. Through moving anecdotes, such as that of Pooka, a former gang member leading Homeboy's housing division, Boyle illustrates how belonging transforms lives.

However, some may find the narrative disjointed, with personal reflections and theological musings lacking a clear structure. While the book offers inspiration, readers seeking practical strategies for systemic issues like mass incarceration might feel frustrated. Yet, Boyle's call to reimagine community through love and compassion remains a compelling invitation to personal and communal healing.



Uncommon Courage: Defending Truth and Freedom While There Is Still Time

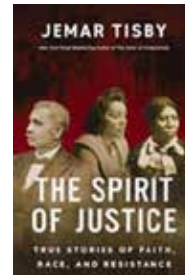
by Keisha Toni Russell, Harvest House, \$18.99 trade paper (256p) ISBN 978-0-73698-640-3

In *Uncommon Courage*, constitutional lawyer Keisha Russell presents a passionate defense of Christian values in the face of what she describes as a cultural shift toward "soft totalitarianism." Russell argues that ideologies like secular humanism and

Marxism are eroding religious principles and creating a hostile environment for Christian beliefs. She addresses contentious issues such as abortion, education, and same-sex marriage, urging believers to engage in cultural debates with conviction and align society with biblical principles.

Russell's tone is urgent, warning that restrictions on religious expression, such as school prayer bans and the Obergefell v. Hodges decision, threaten Christian freedoms. However, her rhetoric may feel alarmist to some readers, with certain claims—such as linking changes in marriage norms to the rise of pedophilia—lacking sufficient evidence. Her interpretation of the separation between church and state may also alienate those seeking more nuanced discussions on faith's role in public life.

Despite the challenges it presents, *Uncommon Courage* will resonate deeply with readers who feel marginalized by secular trends and are searching for faith-based strategies to influence culture. While the book's confrontational tone may limit its broader appeal, it offers a powerful and validating message for Christians seeking to defend their values in a society that often seems divided.



The Spirit of Justice: True Stories of Faith, Race, and Resistance

by Jemar Tisby, Zondervan Reflective, \$29.99 trade paper (272p) ISBN 978-0-31014-485-4

In *The Spirit of Justice*, historian Jemar Tisby traces the role of Black Christians in fighting racism, from the colonial era to the present. He highlights activists such as Harriet Tubman, Martin Luther King Jr., and lesser-known figures like William J. Seymour, founder of the multiethnic Pentecostal movement. Tisby also explores the contributions of Prince Hall, cofounder of the Black Freemasons, and Reverend Albert Cleage Jr., who used Christianity to support the Black Power movement by commissioning an 18-foot painting of a Black Madonna.

The book dismantles the misconception that Christianity is a "white man's religion," showing how Black Christians have drawn on biblical themes of freedom and equality to shape the civil rights movement. Tisby's research is enriched by historical detail, highlighting the essential role of faith in Black resistance movements.

While the book provides a powerful narrative of faith-based activism, it may leave some readers wanting clearer calls to action for tackling contemporary issues. Nonetheless, *The Spirit of Justice* is a crucial resource that provides insight and inspiration for ongoing activism, motivating readers to engage in the fight for social justice.

SHARE YOUR COMMENTS. Please share your about having a book discussion at ICCCNOW@sbcglobal.net by the end of the month. For example, Did the book inspire you to take action, change your behavior, or think differently about something? Let us know if you are interested in having the book discussion. Also, let us know if we can quote or paraphrase your comments. Thank you for your feedback, and have a blessed month.

2025 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

Each year, Christians around the world come together for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, held January 18-25. This week encourages churches to pray, reflect, and work towards greater unity and cooperation among all Christians. In 2025, the theme for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is rooted in John 11:17-27, where Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead. Specifically, the encounter between Jesus and Martha highlights her confession of faith: "Yes, Lord. I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God" (John 11:27).



This theme honors the 1700th anniversary of the First Council of Nicaea (325), which established the Nicene Creed as a cornerstone of Christian unity. The theme was jointly approved by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches and the Catholic Church's Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity in collaboration with the ecumenical monastic community of Bose in Italy. Resources for the 2025 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity are available in the United States through the Graymoor Ecumenical & Interreligious Institute (GEII) website: (geii.org/2025-wpcu).

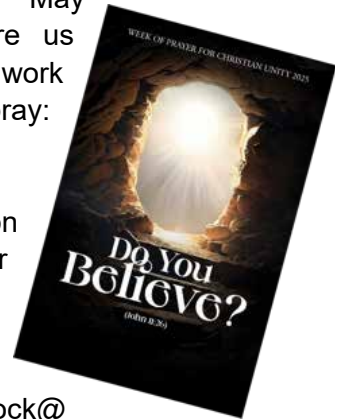
We invite all ICCC member churches and ministry centers to participate in this special week of prayer and reflection. As we celebrate our anniversary, let us reaffirm our legacy as a post-denominational movement built on a foundation of unity and reconciliation. May our participation in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity renew our commitment to this enduring vision. We encourage you to reach out to neighboring congregations, local councils of churches,

or ministerial groups to co-plan a joint service or event during this week.

You might also consider partnering with a congregation from one of the other nine member communions of Churches Uniting in Christ (CUIC), deepening our ties and fostering greater unity. Learn more about CUIC and its member denominations at (ChurchesUniting.org). We can strengthen our bonds and demonstrate our commitment

to Christian unity by joining forces. May Martha's confession inspire us to proclaim our faith and work towards visible unity as we pray: 'I believe.'

If you're seeking ideas on animating ecumenical or interfaith work in your local ministry setting, I'm here to help! Please don't hesitate to reach out to me at rock@mayallbeone.org. I'm always happy to explore ways to build bridges and foster unity in your area. In Unity,



Rock

Rev. Rock R. Fremont Jr.
VP Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations

The ICCC is Moving!

As many of you know, the ICCC is moving to Loudon, TN. We are in the process of making all arrangements, packing, etc. As of right now, we are scheduled to ship the office Nov. 7th-19th. We will be limited in what work can be done. Phone calls and emails will be received and answered, as usual. Watch our website for more information and updates as they become available. Thanks for your patience during this time!



ICCC's Women's Christian Fellowship Message

To the family of Mary Catherine Elizabeth Summers,

On behalf of the Women's Christian Fellowship Executive Board, we extend our heartfelt condolences to you during this time of loss. We are deeply saddened by the passing of Mary Summers, who was not only a dedicated member of our board but also a beloved friend to many.



Mary served as our treasurer with unwavering commitment and integrity. Her meticulous nature and strong faith helped guide our fellowship through numerous challenges. We will always remember her for her generous spirit, her warmth, and the way she brought people together.

Her contributions to our community were invaluable, and her presence will be profoundly missed. Please know that our thoughts and prayers are with you and your family as you navigate this difficult time.

If there is anything we can do to support you, please do not hesitate to reach out.

With deepest sympathy,

Winessa Crutchfield

Winessa Crutchfield
President
Women's Christian Fellowship Executive Board

Sharing Joys with:

- **Lonnie Miller and the Family of Irmgard Kranz.** Mrs. Kranz is Lonnie's beloved Aunt (wife of her mom's brother), who passed away recently, just short of her 98th birthday. Irmgard was the last of Lonnie's parent's generation.
- **Capt. Kenny Lewis**, ICCC Chaplain who retired from the Army July 1st. He is thankful to the ICCC family who has supported him for the last eight years. "Right when I needed your help the most, you were there for me. Much love to you and the whole team." ~ Ken.



ICCC Resource About Raising Funds for your Congregation

Did you know that ICCC has a resource that provides ideas on raising funds for your congregation/center/community? It's titled Fundraising 101, and you can download it from our ICCC webpage at <https://www.icccnow.org/council-other-agency-resources/>.



Gifts have been received for the following:

- In Memory of: Martha and Marcel from Lonnie Miller
Rev. Frank Sanders from The Center
Jean Scanlan from Robert Scanlan
Timothy Barta from Joseph Barta
Toni Harris from Bob Harris
Joseph L. Higgins from Eileen Higgins
Vermelle Barnes from James Jones
Mr. & Mrs. Frank Ashby from Grace O'Neal
- In Honor of: Percy Bright, Jr. from Marion Bright
Park Road Community Church
from James Jones



PASTORAL SEARCH COMMITTEE

Seeking Senior Minister

Church of the Loving Shepherd (CLS) is an inclusive, ecumenical community church located in West Chester, Pennsylvania and is rooted in the Christian tradition with 85 members and a typical Sunday attendance of 35 to 50.

Our sanctuary is a beautiful 205-year-old barn with a meditation grotto and garden. CLS is situated on fifteen acres containing meadows, woods, a labyrinth, a pond and a 170-year-old, historic, serpentine-stone manor house with an adjoining office.

Our pastor is retiring, and we are searching for a replacement. We are seeking an ordained pastor with a degree from an accredited seminary who has experience in conducting worship services, in providing pastoral care, and in congregational and community development. This position is for 30 hours per week.

Applicants should value and respect all faith traditions. Considerations that are important to us include openness, a positive outlook, community involvement, dedication to our food ministry program, and a strong interest in our music program.

We are seeking a pastor for an evolving community—a person who is open to sharing with, learning from, and growing with the congregation.

Please submit your resume and cover letter to churchofthelovingshepherd@gmail.com.

Ordained Interim Pastor

Wilson Memorial Church, an interdenominational church located in Watchung, NJ, is seeking an ordained interim minister for the period of one year starting Fall 2024.

Responsibilities include: service planning, preaching, performing the sacraments, pastoral care, funerals, weddings, baptisms, and collaborating with leadership.

During the interim's contract period, the church will be performing a congregational study and developing a pastoral search process. Hours and salary negotiable based on availability and experience. Housing available if needed.

Interested candidates should send inquiries and resume to personnel@wilsonmemorialchurch.org.

Please also visit our website wilsonmemorialchurch.org for more information.



Interim Pastor

The Protestant Community Church (also known as the Cathedral of the Woods) of Medford Lakes, NJ is seeking to fill the position of Interim Pastor. This will be a position beginning January 1 of 2025 and continue for the next 8-12 months. The Protestant Community Church (PCC) is located in a bucolic setting fewer than 20 miles east of Philadelphia. PCC is an interdenominational and congregationally governed church with an average attendance of 90-120 between two services at 8 o'clock and 10 o'clock.

The interim pastor is responsible for providing leadership and administrative oversight of the church's ministries, including worship, music, preaching, teaching, mission service, stewardship, and fellowship. This individual will work with the church staff to provide opportunities for members to engage in worship, discipleship, and mission. This individual will use their developed interim-specialist skills to assess the congregation's current and long-term needs and provide counsel and leadership to the church. The Interim Pastor will help to prepare the congregation for a new pastoral leadership.

The Interim Pastor is accountable to the PCC congregation and its Board of Trustees. The applicant must hold a degree from an accredited or recognized Seminary or Bible College, be Ordained or Licensed Minister, have experience as a Lead or Senior Pastor, preferably with interim training.

If interested in this position, please submit the following:

- Cover letter that includes salary expectation
- Current resume (including email address and contact telephone numbers)
- Personal Statement of Faith
- Submit three personal and two professional (minister/pastor) letters of reference
- Copy of Ministerial License and/or Certificate of Ordination

Please submit your information to:
The Protestant Community Church
c/o Carol R. Vahlstrom
100 Stokes Road
Medford Lakes, NJ 08055