

# THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY



OCTOBER 2025

*International Council of Community Churches*

Volume 76 |

*A Voice for Ecumenical Congregations and Christians Around the World*

| Number 1

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## Conference Wrap Up



As people arrived for registration on the gorgeous campus of Lake Forest College they were greeted by a bevy of volunteers and a large custom picture crafted for the 75th Anniversary of the I.C.C.C. It highlighted the I.C.C.C.'s past, present and future and with it participants were immediately reminded of why they were gathering for our Annual Conference. With the completion of their registration, each of the 80 attendees received a Commemorative Book celebrating the I.C.C.C.'s history. The book was made possible by the congratulatory ads that a multitude of churches purchased. It was designed and assembled by Rev. R.C. Fleeman and a team of volunteers from Peace Community Church in Fort Myers Beach, Florida.



**Dr. Linda Abington,**  
**VP for Conference Planning**



Our conference theme, "Seeking God's Vision: Remembering the Past, Dreaming the Future", was imagined by Past President Rev. Bob Fread and brought to full and rich reality by a host of folks including our conference planning committee; the Women's Christian Fellowship; the Samaritans; CiCi, the puppet; workshop leaders; many volunteers and the Progressive Community Church Family.



With a three-day format the conference focused on the I.C.C.C.'s past, present and future and the fact that our 75th Anniversary was a "Banner Year." Drawings for displayed banners were held throughout the conference events.

Emcee for the three days was Rev. R.C. Fleeman. He moved us deftly and with humor through the entire conference.

**Tuesday** focused on the **I.C.C.C.'s Past**. We were treated to a great video retrospective presentation done by Rev. Fleeman. It ended with Sandra Nelson, a born and raised I.C.C.C. member, calling us to remember that we are family. Conferees enjoyed the first of 3 visits from CiCi. She shared a dialogue with our Executive Director who frequently responded to her comments with, "I see, CiCi."



With evening upon us, we gathered at the beautiful First Presbyterian Church for a delicious banquet that preceded our evening worship. Before worship started we were treated to an impromptu piano concert from Roberta Smith and she continued to lead our music through the worship service. The Rev. Don Ashmall, Council Minister Emeritus, gave an outstanding and encouraging message which focused on remembering the past in such a way that a future could be assured. All in attendance participated in the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Table was uniquely prepared with the traditional elements surrounded by things old, new and blue. Table runners (the old) were made by Louis Joy. The 75th

*continued on page 7*



## *President's Message*

**Janet Millben Burch**

### *Welcoming a Season of Shared Purpose and Gratitude*

I write to you today with profound humility and heartfelt gratitude upon being entrusted with the role of President. It is both an honor and a privilege to serve this diverse and inspiring fellowship, united by faith, vision, and a commitment to community.

The International Council of Community Churches stands as a beacon of hope in a world often fractured by division and discord. Our mission to unite people across boundaries of race, nationality, and denomination serves as a vital reminder that our differences need not divide us. They can enrich us, teaching us new ways of understanding, cooperating, and growing together as one global community.

This mission is not just aspirational; it is practical, grounded in the work we do every day to foster collaboration, celebrate diversity, and create spaces where everyone feels they belong. It is a testament to our belief that unity and diversity are not opposites but complements. They are the two pillars upon which our community stands.

Each of you are invited to join me in committing to the work ahead. Leadership is not a solitary endeavor but a shared journey—a partnership between all of us who believe in the transformative power of community.



**Unite people across  
boundaries of  
race, nationality,  
and denomination**

Your ideas, your passion, and your dedication are the lifeblood of this Council, and I am eager to collaborate with each of you to achieve our goals.

Let us also remember that every small action we take has the potential to ripple outward, touching lives in ways we may never fully understand. Whether it's a kind word, a bold initiative, or an act of service, each contribution matters. Together, we can build a world that reflects the

values we hold dear, a world where love, justice, and unity prevail.

The success of our Council is not the achievement of one, but the endeavor of many. Teamwork is rooted in mutual respect and shared purpose. It has always been the cornerstone of our greatest accomplishments. As we step forward together each of you is invited to bring your wisdom, your passion, and your unique gifts to the table. It is through collaboration that our mission will flourish and that we will nurture the bonds that make our community truly vibrant. Team work will make our dream work.

Humbly, I thank you for the trust you have placed in me by electing me as your President. I am deeply grateful for your support and for the opportunity to work alongside each of you. I look forward to listening, learning, and partnering with you as we envision new possibilities, address challenges, and celebrate the spirit that animates our Council. May we continue to walk this path united in Christ with purpose and spirit.

With my sincerest thanks and anticipation for all we will accomplish,

Janet Millben Burch



## Executive Director's Message

**Bruce Merton**

### *The I.C.C.C. – Profiles in Generosity?*

On January 21, 1961 I watched, as an almost 12 year old boy, John F. Kennedy deliver his inaugural address. It was a Saturday and it cut into the time I usually watched cartoons and Sky King.

My Mom and Dad made me and my five siblings watch "history being made because he is Catholic." One sentence in that speech stuck with me and remains with me, in a variety of forms, to this day. "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country."

The following Monday I, joined by other classmates, asked Ms. Sweeny, our sixth grade teacher, what Kennedy's phrase really meant. She said, as I recall, "It means we should find ways of giving to the public good rather than expecting our country to provide for that good."

To this day, Kennedy's exhortation is reframed and rephrased in my mind, heart and soul. "Ask not what your family can do for you; ask what you can do for your family." Ask not what your community can do for you; ask what you can do for your community." "Ask not what your church can do for you; ask what you can do for your church." And on Day Two of our recent 75th Anniversary Conference, I openly held before conferees this exhortation: "Ask not what the I.C.C.C. can do for you; ask what you can do for the I.C.C.C."

To paraphrase my sixth grade teacher, it meant that we should find ways to give to the I.C.C.C.'s good rather than expecting the I.C.C.C. to provide that good."

Why is the rephrasing of J.F.K.'s exhortation and the paraphrasing of my teacher's interpretation necessary?

It is necessary because it is a fundamental and essential need that must be met if the I.C.C.C. is to survive! It is great to hear the conference attendee choir sing, "We love conference and we'll see you next year." It is wonderful to talk about all the I.C.C.C. has been. However, the harsh reality is that NOW we desperately need the singers and conversationalists to become much more engaged in giving and encouraging others to be giving, too.

Individually and collectively we **ALL** need to give time, talent and treasure to the I.C.C.C.'s good rather than expecting the I.C.C.C. to provide the goods!

Be inspired by this!

#### **"I.C.C.C. Profile in Generosity."**

He is 91 years of age and frail in health. He has not been able to attend conference after years of being a regular. He has had to give up driving and cannot get to the I.C.C.C. church he regularly attended. He is looking at the end of his life. There is little to nothing that the I.C.C.C. is doing for him here and now. But he believes in and loves the I.C.C.C. and he firmly believes that you give even when you don't get. Consequently, he just made major gifts to the Endowment and Jordan Scholarship Funds. He gives the I.C.C.C. more than money. He gives us **"A Profile in Generosity!"** which we should embrace and emulate. The Scripture says in II Corinthians 9:7, "God loves a cheerful

giver." This **Profile in Generosity** cheerfully gives because, as he says, "I love the I.C.C.C."

Six years after hearing JFK's speech and internalizing his life altering way of thinking about myself in relation to my world, I sat in 12th grade civics class and was reintroduced to Kennedy's address. I discovered a portion of that speech which holds equal importance and authority to the line learned in 1961.

"With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking God's blessing and his help, but knowing that here on earth God's work must truly be our own."

With his gifts of past and present our **Profile in Generosity** would say: "With a good conscience my only reward, with history the final judge of my deeds, I go forth to lead the I.C.C.C. I love, asking God's blessing and his help, but knowing here on earth God's work must truly be my own."

The challenge before us! Will the people and churches of the I.C.C.C. say, "With a good conscience our only reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, WE go forth to lead the I.C.C.C. WE love, asking God's blessing and his help, but knowing here on earth God's work must truly be our own."

IF WE pray, own, and live the words above, the I.C.C.C. will be filled and empowered by the reality that WE are, by God's grace and call, **Profiles in Generosity!**

Grace and Peace,

*Bruce*



# ICCC OCTOBER 2025

*Celebrating 75+ Years*

*"Anchored by Grace, Transformed by Renewal: A Call to Revival." Ezra 9:8 and Romans 12:2)*

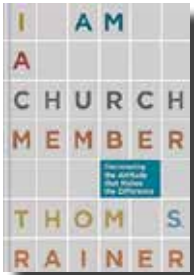


## Book REVIEW

By Rev. Kenneth N. Nelson



Revival in any generation begins with God's grace (Ezra 9:8) and is sustained by the transformation of hearts and minds (Romans 12:2). Books that address revival, renewal, or reformation can be evaluated against this framework: how they highlight God's preserving grace for a remnant, and how they inspire transformation that resists conformity to the world. Here are some **books for renewal, tools for ICCC growth and loyalty**.

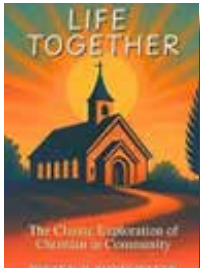


### ***I Am a Church Member* – Thom S. Rainer**

**Quote:** "Church membership is not about having your name on a roll; it's about your role in the body of Christ."

**Biblical Sources:** 1 Corinthians 12:12–27; Romans 12:4–5; Ephesians 4:11–16; Philippians 2:3–4

Rainer challenges congregations to move from passive affiliation to active responsibility. For smaller ICCC churches, where every member's contribution matters, this book reframes membership as covenantal discipleship. By using it as a six-week study in prayer meetings or Sunday School, congregations can cultivate loyalty, humility, and shared responsibility.

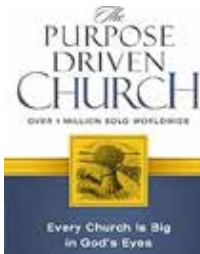


### ***Life Together* – Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

**Quote:** "The person who loves their dream of community will destroy community, but the person who loves those around them will create community."

**Biblical Sources:** Acts 2:42–47; John 13:34–35; Hebrews 10:24–25; James 5:16

Bonhoeffer's reflections on Christian fellowship align with ICCC's motto of "unity without uniformity." He warns against idealized notions of community and instead calls believers to love the people God has placed among them. This makes *Life Together* an essential retreat text for ICCC multicultural congregations, offering guidance on prayer, confession, and authentic unity that transcends difference.

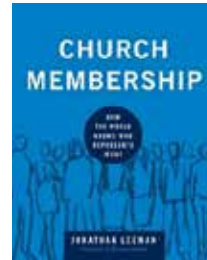


### ***The Purpose Driven Church* – Rick Warren**

**Quote:** "You don't grow a church by focusing on church growth. You grow a church by focusing on church health."

**Biblical Sources:** Matthew 22:37–40; Matthew 28:18–20; Acts 2:42–47; Ephesians 4:12–13

Warren offers a roadmap for congregational vitality rooted in five biblical purposes: worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry, and mission. For ICCC leaders balancing pastoral care and community witness, this book provides a practical framework for long-term growth. At council gatherings, it could be used as the foundation for a leadership development track, helping churches define and live out their "purpose profiles."

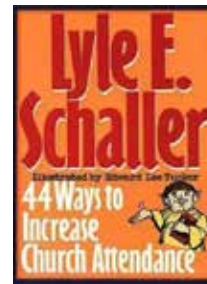


### ***Church Membership: How the World Knows Who Represents Jesus* – Jonathan Leeman**

**Quote:** "It's not the church that makes you a Christian; it's the church that publicly affirms you as a Christian."

**Biblical Sources:** Matthew 16:18–19; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Corinthians 5:1–13; 1 Timothy 5:9–12

Leeman clarifies the theological meaning of church membership as a covenantal act of public accountability. For ICCC, where unity across traditions is celebrated, his work highlights that membership is more than mere attendance — it is a testament to faith in Christ. This book can strengthen the theological backbone of ICCC's membership practices, particularly during plenary sessions at annual conferences.



### ***44 Ways to Increase Church Attendance* – Lyle Schaller**

**Quote:** "There is no single key to increasing attendance, but there are dozens of small keys that can open doors to new vitality."

**Biblical Sources:** Luke 14:23; Matthew 5:14–16; Colossians 4:5–6; 1 Corinthians 9:22–23

Schaller provides practical strategies for revitalizing congregational attendance. His wisdom is especially valuable for ICCC churches seeking small but meaningful steps to increase vitality — whether through outreach events, bilingual worship, or partnerships with schools and community groups. At the council level, his ideas translate into workshops where leaders brainstorm context-specific strategies to open "new doors" of engagement.

These five books strike a balance between theology, spirituality, and practice.

**Rainer** reminds members of their covenantal responsibility. **Bonhoeffer** grounds ICCC in authentic fellowship. **Warren** charts a path to healthy, purpose-driven growth. **Leeman** clarifies the meaning of covenantal membership. **Schaller** offers practical tools for vitality.

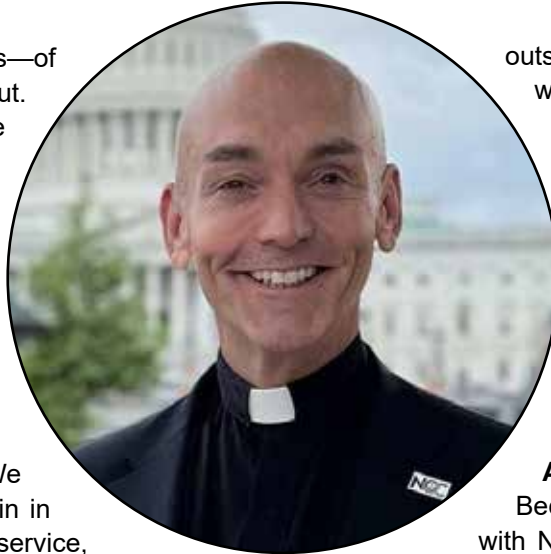
Together, they create a renewal toolkit that aligns with ICCC's mission. They remind us that true church renewal is not simply organizational — it is both **spiritual and practical**, a living testimony of resurrection power in the body of Christ.

**We Want to Hear from You!** Do you have thoughts to share, or would you like to start a book discussion? We invite you to send your comments or express interest in a discussion by emailing us at [iccnw@sbcglobal.net](mailto:iccnw@sbcglobal.net) by the end of the month. Consider sharing: Did the book inspire you to take action, change a behavior, or see things differently? How has it impacted your perspective or daily life? Let us know if we may quote or paraphrase your insights. Your feedback is valuable, and we appreciate the time you take to share it. Thank you and may your month be richly blessed!

# Walking Together: How Our Churches Can Participate with the World Council of Churches

By Rev. Rock Fremont, Jr., Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations, ICCC

One of the great joys—and challenges—of Christian faith is that it never stays put. It calls us outward, toward others. The World Council of Churches (WCC) is one of the most significant ways that churches around the globe live this calling together. What some may not realize is that the International Council of Community Churches (ICCC) itself is a member of the WCC. Through this global fellowship, our movement already stands in communion with more than 350 churches worldwide. We therefore have a real opportunity to join in this wider fellowship of prayer, witness, service, and action.



outspoken in today's political climate, and its work dovetails with WCC priorities.

*Mission and advocacy.* From supporting refugees to caring for creation, many WCC focus areas match ministries already dear to the Council. Choosing a mission project that reflects a WCC priority lets us act locally while sharing in a global witness.

## A Path for the ICCC

Because the WCC's work often overlaps with NCC programs and interfaith dialogues, we can ensure ICCC presence by participating in those spaces and introducing WCC themes in our own clergy and congregational gatherings. The Mission Ministry Team might even consider a conference-wide mission project next year that aligns with one of the WCC's priority concerns—migration, climate justice, or peacemaking, for example.

## Why It Matters

Engaging with the WCC draws us deeper into God's mission. It reminds us that our faith is not only local but part of a worldwide story of reconciliation and justice. It strengthens our voice and enriches our discipleship.

As we continue to pray and work "that they may all be one," may our fellowship be known not only for hospitality at home but also for solidarity with Christians and neighbors across the world.

If you would like to explore these opportunities or have questions about how your congregation can engage, I would be delighted to connect with you. Please reach out to me at [rock@mayallbeone.org](mailto:rock@mayallbeone.org).

## What is the WCC?

The WCC is a global fellowship of more than 350 churches from over 120 countries—Orthodox, Protestant, Anglican, Lutheran, Reformed, United, and independent traditions among them. Rather than functioning as a denomination, it provides a space where Christians of many backgrounds can reflect together, worship together, and collaborate for justice, peace, reconciliation, and care of creation.

Every several years the WCC gathers in a General Assembly, its most visible moment of common prayer and decision-making. Between assemblies, it carries out its commitments through program areas such as Faith and Order, Justice and Peace, and Interreligious Dialogue, as well as campaigns like Thursdays in Black (ending gender-based violence) and the Ecumenical Prayer Cycle.

## Connecting Local Congregations

This global mission may sound far away, but it can be woven into our congregational life:

*Resources for worship and study.* The WCC website offers prayers, Bible studies, and reflections that help us pray with and for Christians across the world.

*Ecumenical and interfaith dialogue.* In the United States, the National Council of Churches (NCC) is the WCC's regional partner. ICCC congregations can engage through NCC-sponsored dialogues or task forces, bringing global concerns into our local gatherings. The NCC is active and

**To learn more about the  
World Council of Churches,  
visit [www.oikoumene.org](http://www.oikoumene.org).**

**For information on the  
National Council of Churches,  
visit [www.nationalcouncilofchurches.us](http://www.nationalcouncilofchurches.us).**

# Grateful Hearts & Giving Hands: A Recap of This Year's WCF Conference

by Winessa Cruchfield, WCF President

Dear Sisters in Christ,

As we reflect on the blessings of this year's Women's Christian Fellowship (WCF) Conference in Lake Forest, Illinois, our hearts overflow with gratitude. Thank you for your continued prayers, presence, and faithful support—you are the heartbeat of this ministry. Truly, *"Let all that you do be done in love"* (1 Corinthians 16:14).



## WCF Conference Highlights: Living the Word Daily

This year, we focused on applying the Bible to daily life and embracing **self-care through the lens of God's Word**. We were reminded that Scripture is not just for Sunday, but for every day—*"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path"* (Psalm 119:105).

Caring for ourselves—body, mind, and spirit—is stewardship that honors God. When we are renewed, we are better able to bless our families, serve our churches, and impact our communities.

## A Spirit of Generosity: Blessing Others in Chicago

Through your compassion and giving hearts, we presented a **large donation of gift cards to Catholic Charities**, directly blessing families and individuals in need. This was faith in action, a true example of living Christ's love, for *"Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and He will repay him for his deed"* (Proverbs 19:17).

## Lifting Our Sisters in Prayer

Please keep our dear sister **Mary Frances Garner** in fervent prayer as she mourns the loss of her daughter and our friend, **Elizabeth Ann Garner Brown**. *"The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit"* (Psalm 34:18). May His comfort and peace surround the Garner family.

We also continue to pray for our sisters who are recovering from illness:

🙏 **Connee Fitch-Blanks**

🙏 **Elaine Dennis**

🙏 **Emma Smith**

## In Closing

Let us continue to live what we learned in Chicago:

- ✨ Apply the Word daily.
- ✨ Care for ourselves as God commands.
- ✨ Serve generously with open hearts.



## Sharing Concerns with:

- **Mary Frances Garner** and her family, as she mourns the passing of her daughter, **Elizabeth Ann Garner Brown**, who passed away on August 16, 2025. Service was held at Park Road Community Church on August 29, 2025.
- **Abraham Wright** as he continues in rehabilitation for health challenges.



The Lake Erie Area Fellowship of Community Churches (Michigan, Ohio, Western PA and Western NY) will hold their Fall 2025 meeting on Saturday, October 11 at Gahanna Community Congregational Church, 470 Havens Corners Road, Gahanna, OH 43230.

For more information or to submit items for the agenda, folks can reach out to me at Michael.r.mahan4.civ@mail.mil.

An agenda for the day will be sent around October 1.



## *"Conference Wrap Up" cont'd. from p. 1*

*by Dr. Linda Abington, VP for Conference Planning*

Anniversary Cross (the new) was made by Dr. Bruce Merton and the Communion chalice and paten (the blue) were crafted by a member of The Center in Palos Park. The Rev. Drs. Rhonda Blevins and Bruce Merton were the co-celebrants.

**Wednesday** called on us to focus on the **I.C.C.C.'s Present**. The day brought us sober reminders of the significant challenges which the I.C.C.C. is facing. It placed before all the prophetic reality that there were two paths before us. The Executive Director's report, and CiCi's puppet dialogue both challenged attendees to choose a path to renewal and rejuvenation or continue to travel a path that would lead to possible demise.

Two workshops were held. Dr. Linda Abington and Rev. Dr. Sharyon Cosey led a session on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. Executive Director, Dr. Bruce Merton, led a session of information, questions and answers concerning the proposed new Constitution.

The evening brought us to worship and to the hearing of a very timely challenge from Rev. Dr. Seretha Pearsall of Park Road Community Church. She reminded us of our need "to be present to the present" as it is the time at hand and the time that demands our immediate response in ministry and service to God, the church, the I.C.C.C. and others.

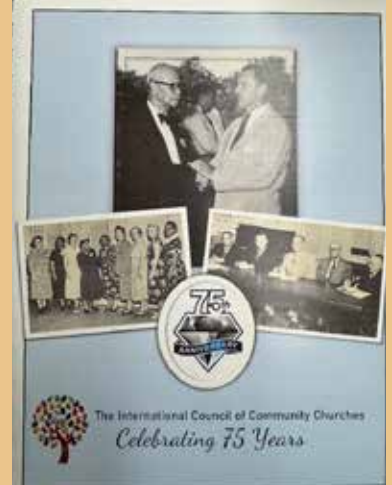
**Thursday**, our final day, brought us to consider the **I.C.C.C.'s Future**. CiCi and our Executive Director presented a dialogue focused on the challenge of shaping the future together. It called for those present to give more of their time, talent and treasure while challenging those not present to join in the work and ministry of creating the I.C.C.C.'s future.

In the afternoon we boarded buses for a journey to Progressive Community Church in South Chicago. Senior Pastor, Tyrone McGowan, working with and through his entire church family and Rev. Dr. Sharyon Cosey, planned an outstanding time of fellowship and worship for our "Grand Finale." We were served a delicious lunner (cross between lunch and dinner). With physical bodies fed, we joined together for celebration and worship.

We celebrated the recognition of thirteen charter and continuing members of the I.C.C.C. Each received a beautiful, framed certificate noting their achievement. The celebration continued with recognition and a gift of thanks presented to outgoing officers. Finally, based on the newly approved Constitution, we installed the new Board of Directors: Janet Millben Burch as President; Dorothy Campbell-Gardner as Vice President; Nick Brame as Treasurer; Abraham Wright as Secretary; Jerry Brown and Rev. Hare Varnon as Members-at-Large

In worship we were fed in heart, soul and spirit. We enjoyed outstanding music from soloist Kristian Cosey and the Voices of Progressive Combined Choirs. We moved to the bright and colorful liturgical dance rhythms of Chosen Generation. Shared in the joy of Holy Communion. A rousing sendoff message from immediate past Executive Director, Rev. Phil Tom challenged us to "co-create with God a new future" as we look forward and not back because if we put our hands to the pow and look back we are not worthy of our call.

## *2025 Annual Conference held in Lake Forest, IL*



## Introducing a Newsletter Series...

### Part One: What Is Biblical Self-Care?

#### Introduction:

In today's fast-paced world, many of us are constantly pouring into others—whether as caregivers, parents, or leaders. But even if you are single with no one directly depending on you, your work schedule, household duties, and other responsibilities may demand so much from you that you feel drained. The truth is, everyone—regardless of life stage—needs rest and renewal. Biblical self-care is not about selfishness, but about balance—honoring the life God has entrusted to us so that we can remain strong and fruitful in His service.

Self-care is often misunderstood in Christian circles. Many assume it's selfish or indulgent. But biblically, self-care is about stewardship—taking care of the life, body, and soul God has entrusted to us so we can continue to live faithfully and serve others.

At its core, biblical self-care begins with God. Spending time in His presence—through prayer, Scripture, and worship—is the foundation. Just as a tree must remain rooted to bear fruit, Christians must stay rooted in Christ to thrive. Jesus Himself modeled this: He regularly withdrew from the crowds to rest and pray (Mark 1:35, Luke 5:16).

"Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it." — Proverbs 4:23

#### Reflection Questions:

- *Do you make intentional time to withdraw with God, like Jesus did?*
- *What drains your heart most, and what renews it?*

**Watch for Part Two of this series in the November issue of the Christian Community.**







## PASTORAL SEARCH COMMITTEE

### *Seeking Pastor*

Seeking a Shepherd for Our Little Church in the Woods.

Bradford Woods Community Church, nestled in the heart of Bradford Woods, PA, (just a stone's throw from Pittsburgh), a vibrant non-denominational congregation, seeks a dynamic pastor who embodies warmth, charisma, and a passion for community. We are looking for someone who can connect with people, inspire growth, and lead our church. We're a close-knit congregation averaging about 30-35 in Sunday attendance, with a rich history dating back to 1915.

Our ideal candidate will embody Christ's love, foster inclusivity, and guide us in spiritual growth and community service. We are also looking for someone who can connect with people to grow the congregation in an intentional and meaningful way. If you are driven to make a difference and eager to engage with our congregation and the broader community, we want to hear from you!

Come help us continue our mission of spreading God's love through worship, education, and outreach in our serene woodland sanctuary. For more details, please contact us at [BWCC2025@gmail.com](mailto:BWCC2025@gmail.com).

**Bradford Woods  
Community Church**  
4836 Wexford Run Road,  
Bradford Woods PA 15015  
724-935-3135

## *Gifts have been received for the following*

### *In Memory of:*

Rev. Carter S.R. Garner  
from Marilyn Stevenson

Rev. Anastasia Wilson  
and Rev. Patricia Wujochocki  
from Rev. Elizabeth Lerch

Jeff Newhall from Jerry O'Sullivan

Leonard Franklin  
from Lynne MacConnell

Mary Summers from Mary L. Garrett

Bette Powers from Todd Lizak - CCCF

### *In Honor of:*

The ICCC Leadership  
from Rev. J. Michael Flynn

The ICCC from The Center

Love of Country  
from Rev. Joseph R. McCool

Donna O'Sullivan  
from Jerry O'Sullivan

Bethany Union Church (Chicago, IL)  
from Elaine V. Dix

