THE **CHRISTIAN**



International Council of Community Churches

Volume 76

A Voice for Ecumenical Congregations and Christians Around the World

Number 3

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President's Message

Janet Millben Burch



As we gather to celebrate the wondrous season, we send our warmest and most heartfelt greetings and Christmas blessings to the International Council of Community Church members, their families and their friends. This sacred time invites us all to pause and reflect on the profound significance of the miraculous birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. His arrival brought hope to the world and continues to inspire faith and love in our hearts. Let us enjoy the gift of salvation and embrace the peace that only Christ can provide.

Christmas is a season of love and giving. As we open our hearts and share generously, let us also remember, Jesus is the reason for this season.

The following are a few personal activities you may wish to engage in to enhance your Christmas season experience.

- · Spend time in prayer and ask for blessing to cover others.
- Reach out to those in need with acts of kindness.
- Gather with family and friends to celebrate the birth of Jesus.
- Include someone who may not have a place to go for the holidays.
- Invite someone to attend worship service with you.
- · Volunteer in your community.
- Share the message of love, hope, peace and joy with others.
- Make a special financial contribution to your place of worship and to the ICCC to enhance their missions of service and provide a blessing to those in need.

May this season bring you lasting peace, love, abundant joy, prosperity, good health and a renewed spirit. Welcome the blessings of Christ's birth and carry them with you into the new year.



Practice Jesus

If we practiced Jesus every way, It'd be like Christmas every day; If we, like Him, were meek and mild And loved each woman, man, and child. If we read our bible, it'd remind us, So that every single day would find us More and more in sweet accord With our sweet Jesus-Master, Lord. Then every day that we are alive Would be like December 25. By Joanna Fuchs





Executive Director's Message

Bruce Merton

Advent is Upon Us!

Dear Friends and Loved Ones,

Advent is upon us! We begin the new church year waiting, anticipating, and expecting the coming of Jesus into our world.

We celebrate that coming as a past experience – history! We anticipate that coming in a future time – glad and eternal reunion! The struggle that I have, and perhaps you have it also, is finding Jesus in the present! Where is Jesus "born" today in my world and yours?

We live in a time of profound conflict, division, doubt and, for many, deep despair. Our nation and the world seem gripped by an everdeepening darkness characterized by evil and sin. It is hard for me to find Jesus amid the news, voices and activities that thrust graft, corruption, falsehood, genocide, antisemitism, and amoral behaviors at us from every conceivable angle. Still, I am buoyed by the promise of God's word: "...the light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it."

What I want most is the Light – the light of Jesus' presence. I want to see and know that the light of Jesus' presence is here today and not just a past coming and a hoped-for future. I am reminded of a story that I revisit every year at the Advent/ Christmas season. Perhaps you have read the story called "Papa Panov's Special Christmas" by Leo Tolstoy.

The story follows an elderly shoemaker, Papa Panov, who is told in a dream that Jesus would come to him the next day. He lives the next day in anxious anticipation of seeing and meeting Jesus.

The next day brings encounters with a lowly street sweeper, a needy mother with an infant, and several other down-on-their-luck folk. He invites each of them into his home for coffee, and food. He warms the cold child and delivers to each a pair of his best shoes. But the day draws to a close and he doesn't see or meet Jesus. Panov is bitterly disappointed, but then hears a faint voice, "I was hungry and you fed me. I was thirsty and you gave me to drink...I was

a stranger, and you welcomed me." Panov comes to realize that by serving those in need, he has served, seen and been visited by Jesus.

Instead of the lights on trees and streets I would invite you to join me in seeing the Light as it glows through the presence of the least, lost, last and lonely around us.

I would invite you to join me in finding Jesus, not in a manger, but in the ghettos, the forest homes of the disenfranchised, the alleyed cardboard boxes of the mentally ill and on the sleeping pallets of the poor.

Let's see Jesus in the smiles of the needy that receive a bowl of soup, a cup of coffee, or a cold bottle of water from our hands.

Let's fill the empty stomachs of infants, children and adults and hear in the place of growling hunger the still small voice "I was hungry and you gave me food."

To the 'strangers' in our land, let's offer hearts and hands of hospitality instead

of the horrors of misplaced hostility.

Enter hospital rooms, nursing homes, congregant living facilities, facilities for the mentally ill or developmentally impaired and discover that Jesus is present in rich and varied ways.

Oh, yes! The Light shines in the darkness from the most unlikely places and unlikely faces. I have a hunch! If I will reach across the aisle – journey to the other side of the tracksand offer, as Papa Panov did, my best to serve the needs of others I will know that I don't need to look for Jesus. Jesus is ALWAYS coming and looking for me! My hunch holds for you, too!

Jesus comes to you and me in the least, the last, the lost and the lonely. As often as we do for the least of these our sisters and brothers, we do it for Jesus!

May Christmas bring you a genuine visit from One whose birth we celebrate!



ICCC NOVEMBER 2025

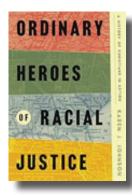
Celebrating 75+ Years

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





Revival in any generation begins with God's grace (Ezra 9:8). It is sustained by the transformation of hearts and minds (Romans 12:2). This month, we explore two books that offer a historical perspective, and calls to action that explore cultural and organizational change.



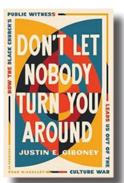
Historian Karen J. Johnson's *Ordinary Heroes of Racial Justice* offers a compelling reading by recovering the stories of everyday Christians—pastors, laypeople, and congregations—whose quiet perseverance advanced racial equity across the twentieth century. These "ordinary heroes," Johnson writes, remind us that transformative justice often begins not with promi-

nence but with prayer, proximity, and humility. Her narrative bridges church history and social ethics, revealing how faith communities practiced reconciliation before it became a slogan.

Johnson observes, "understanding what happened in the past is essential if we are to move forward in the present." Johnson challenges our notions of history by asking us to reconsider our assumptions. Johnson contends that one reason "you should read this book is that we will do history, which can help us become more faithful disciples. This book is an uncommon history book. Most books on history are written so they hide the tangled web of evidence and the complex decisions historians make to determine what happened and what it means. Most books share the final product. But I will not just describe the history of race in America. I want something more. I want us to think together about how we have come to know what we think we know."

Ordinary Heroes contains four thematic parts and twenty-one chapters. Part One, Telling True Stories, contains chapters one through four and explores the stories of Catherine de Hueck and Friendship House. Part Two, Context Matters, chapters five to nine, discusses John Perkins and the Good News in Mississippi. Part Three, Humility, contains chapters ten to fifteen, about Clarence Jordan and the Cotton Patch Gospel. Part Four, Seek First to Understand, contains chapters sixteen to twenty-one, about the Rock of Our Salvation Evangelical Free Church and Circle Urban

Ministries. Johnson shows that faithful love in action has long been the church's most credible testimony.



Don't Let Nobody Turn You Around, Justin Giboney—attorney, minister, and cofounder of the AND Campaign—calls the church to resist culture-war tribalism by rooting public engagement in the Black church's historic blend of spiritual depth and social responsibility. His central claim: followers of Christ must pursue both righteousness and justice, refusing the false choices of

political polarization. Through historical reflection and moral imagination, Giboney re-centers faith as the foundation for civic integrity and collective good. In the foreword, Esau McCaulley, Professor of New Testament and Public Theology at Wheaton College, observes that the book, "... is bursting with historical knowledge, astute political insight, and deeply Christian reasoning." Giboney challenges believers to speak truth without surrendering to cynicism.

Both authors insist that Christian witness must be public yet pastoral, prophetic yet peace-seeking.

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 icccnow@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!

Reflections from the 75th Anniversary Christian Unity Gathering

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

Earlier this month I had the privilege of representing the International Council of Community Churches at the National Council of Churches 75th Anniversary Christian Unity Gathering and Governing Board meetings in Boston. For four days, Christians from many traditions came together to pray, learn, lament, celebrate, and imagine what unity looks like in a world that is increasingly divided. Being there felt like reconnecting with a wider Christian family that is still seeking to embody the hope of the gospel in meaningful ways.

What stayed with me throughout the gathering was the strong sense that unity is something we do. It is not the absence of conflict. It is not agreement for its own sake. Unity is a way of living with intention. It shows up in how we listen across differences, how we refuse to be silent in the face of injustice, and how we offer a shared witness for the healing of the world. The NCC's advocacy work reminded us of this as we heard updates on efforts around poverty, immigration, gun violence, global conflict, and care for vulnerable communities. The Mosaic storytelling project also reflected this active unity by lifting up the voices of those serving on the front lines of ministry.

One of the most powerful reflections came during a keynote address on the resurrection. The speaker reminded us that the proof of resurrection is not found in arguments but in the lives of those shaped by it. If the church is truly the Body of Christ, then our unity must be a sign of new life in a weary and wounded world. This theme echoed through several presentations, especially as we marked the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea. Christians have wrestled with deep questions together for centuries, and this shared journey still invites us into deeper communion today.

The city of Boston itself became part of our learning. We prayed in St. Paul's Episcopal Cathedral, visited the

Embrace Boston Memorial that honors Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Coretta Scott King, and joined in worship at the historic African Meeting House, the oldest Black owned church building in the United States. These places reminded us that Christian unity is always connected to justice, memory, and the lived experiences of communities that have carried the gospel with courage.

Our time with the Armenian Orthodox

community at Holy Trinity Armenian Church

offered another lens on unity. Members of the congregation spoke with great depth about why their tradition is a source of resilience and identity. Their stories highlighted the beauty and diversity of the wider Body of Christ and the importance of honoring each

wider Body of Christ and the importance of honoring each expression within it.

As your Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Moderator, I returned home with a renewed sense that the work of the ICCC is deeply important. In a season marked by fragmentation, fear, and growing polarization, our long-standing commitment to being a church of churches is not simply valuable. It is urgently needed. Our willingness to gather across traditions, to learn from one another, and to work with interfaith partners for the common good places us right at the center of the broader movement for Christian unity today.

This anniversary gathering reminded me that unity is not a destination. It is a way of life. It invites us to show up, to remain in relationship, to work for justice, and to witness to the love of Christ that breaks down barriers. I left Boston grateful for the ICCC and for our unique role we play in this larger story. May we continue walking together with humility, courage, and hope, trusting that the Spirit is still drawing the whole church toward the unity for which Jesus prayed in John 17, that all may be one.





Is the ICCC Having an Annual Conference in 2026? YES... YES WE ARE!

RC Fleeman, Planning Committee Chairman

When? July 21 through 23, 2026

Plan to arrive on the afternoon or evening of July 20th because the conference will begin the very next morning.

Where? The Planning Committee is working to identify an affordable location in the Washington, DC metro area.

What's the Theme? Our Future: Rediscovering the Values of Jesus.

More details will follow in the January and February editions of The Christian Community. Until then, please pray for the conference and those who are involved in planning it.



INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF COMMUNITY CHURCHES 2026 BUDGET

INCOME

	2026 BUDGET
Churches & Centers (N1)	84,100
Individuals (N2)	50,000
Individuals - Clergy Membership (N2m)	10,000
Areas, regions Zones (N3)	2,500
Christian Community (N5	200
Endowment Earnings Distribution	11,000
Miscelleaneous Income (N11)	200
TOTAL INCOME	158,000

EXPENDITURES	
	2026 BUDGET
STAFF	
Executive Director, Interim (D1)	46,000
Executive Expenses (D2)	4,000
Associate for Administration (E1)	40,000
Health Benefits (E3)	-
Retirement (E7)	-
Assistant Administrator (F1)	-
Payroll Liabilities (F1)	3,000
TOTAL STAFF	93,000
OPERATIONS	
Office Space (A1)	-
Utilities & Services (A2)	5,000
Telephone (A3)	3,000
Supplies (A5)	2,000
Equipment (A6)	9,000
Property Insurance (A7)	1,000
D&O Insurance/Other Insurance (A8)	2,800
Printing (A9)	1,000
Postage (A10)	2,500
Office Maintenance (A12)	-
Professional Services (A13)	1,000
Board of Trustees (C4)	500
Executive Field Services (C10)	12,000
Miscellaneous (A14)	300
Credit Card Merchant Fees (16)	1,700
TOTAL OPERATIONS	41,800
PROGRAM	
Ecumenics (B)	6,000
Christian Community (C8)	1,500
Missions	9,000
TOTAL PROGRAM	16,500
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	151,300

Frankly on Finances

You have undoubtedly noticed that the 2026 Annual Budget for the I.C.C.C. is printed at the left. The budget was approved at the 2025 Annual Conference. It is being shared in this issue of the Christian Community in the fervent hope that pastors, churches and individuals will do all that can be done to meet the budget in 2026.

Of particular importance is the budgeted amounts for part-time Executive Director and Administrative Assistant. We are in critical need of filling these two positions. A search is underway for the Administrative Assistant. While the Executive Director's position is currently staffed on a non-salaried basis, it is our profound hope that we can move to a more permanently staffed and salaried position for the future.

To meet next year's budget we need monthly income of \$13,166,67.

This year we asked our churches and centers for an "estimate" not a pledge of their giving for 2026. Only one-third of our members responded!

How would your church's budget look if only one-third of your contributors would offer and 'estimate' or 'pledge'?

The Ministry Team for Stewardship and Financial Development, Executive Director, Bruce Merton, or Treasurer, Nick Brame can answer questions, field comments OR offer assistance in helping your church or center raise additional funds for the I.C.C.C. as well as your local missions.

Let's pitch in and together we will

Accomplish much! Thank you!



Introducing a Newsletter Series...

Part Three: Practical Christian Self-Care?

Self-care is not one-size-fits-all. It looks different for each of us, but it should always point us back to God.

Physical Renewal:

- Rest: Sleep is not laziness—it's obedience. God rested on the seventh day (Genesis 2:2–3) and established rest as holy.
- Nutrition: Eating well honors the body God created. Just as Daniel chose healthy foods to honor God (Daniel 1:12–16), we too can nourish wisely.
- Exercise: Movement is a gift. Walking, stretching, or gardening can be an act of gratitude for a body that works.

Emotional Renewal:

- Relationships: God said, "It is not good for man to be alone" (Genesis 2:18). Surround yourself with life-giving friendships.
- Hobbies: Enjoying creativity—whether through art, music, or gardening—brings joy and reflects the Creator who made us in His image.
- Counseling: Seeking wise counsel is biblical (Proverbs 11:14). It is not a lack of faith to seek therapy—it is wisdom.

Spiritual Renewal:

- Prayer: Honest conversations with God bring peace beyond understanding (Philippians 4:6–7).
- Meditation on Scripture: Psalm 1 reminds us that the blessed person meditates on God's Word day and night. Scripture
 roots us in truth.
- Worship: Singing, journaling, or silent adoration reconnects us with the heart of God.

Balance Matters:

Self-care must never become self-indulgence. It should restore and reconnect us with God, not distract us from Him. When self-care becomes an escape or obsession, it shifts from stewardship to idolatry.

Reflection Questions:

- Which area—physical, emotional, or spiritual—do I most often neglect?
- How can I incorporate one new habit this week to honor God through self-care?
- What spiritual practice can I add to my week to strengthen my walk with God?
- How can I invite accountability into my self-care rhythms?

Scriptures for Reflection:

- 1 Peter 3:3–4 True beauty comes from within.
- Genesis 2:2-3 God Himself rested.
- Mark 6:31 Jesus invited His disciples to rest.
- Ephesians 5:29 Care for your body.
- Psalm 119:105 God's Word lights our path.



Christian self-care is not escape—it is restoration, reflection, and obedience. By caring for ourselves, we honor God, bless others, and remain faithful to our calling.

Leading by Preaching

Submitted by Rev. Bill Ireland
Moderator for the ICCC Ministry Team for Leadership Development

Our role as a leader of a congregation is most visible when we stand up to preach. Whenever we step into the pulpit we are quite literally "out in front"—thus fulfilling the shorthand definition of a leader. On any given Sunday, we strive to bring the truth of the gospel to bear on the lives of our people. Quite often we speak to their grief, fear, despair, and other needs. Other times, we ask questions without easy answers, thus inviting our people to reflect on where they are in their faith and what needs to change. On still other occasions, we attempt to speak to specific issues facing the congregation: raising funds for a project, responding to a trauma in the larger community, or painting a picture of the future of the church and mobilizing it to fulfill its

mission. Moreover, in these troubled times, we have a responsibility to speak to larger issues affecting our country. How do we help our people to live as faithful disciples in the midst of a contentious and troubled culture? No matter the occasion, whenever we take to the pulpit, we are leading by preaching.

Learning to lead well through preaching is a lifelong task. Parts of this role may come easily to us. We may possess an innate "feel" for how to proceed. At other times we may feel that we're in over our heads. The task is too big, and we are too small. Given the fissures in our culture, bringing the gospel to bear on real world stuff is a daunting task to say the least. We thus may step into the pulpit with dry mouths and sweaty hands. Putting ourselves out there is risky business.

Nevertheless, leading by preaching is not optional. Here are a few words of caution and encouragement.

Before we preach let's be sure the issue is one that truly matters to the congregation. Catching our listeners off-guard short-circuits our message. Instead of turning on the light, we leave our people in the dark. Why did she preach on that? Is there something going on? Where did that come from? Although we have to raise awareness, springing an issue on our people without some advance preparation will likely result in confusion rather than clarity. Frustration will be the order of the day, and we will raise the level of anxiety instead of lowering it.

With regard to the above, we must be careful of those who seek to make their issues our issues. Just because someone is highly invested in a cause or project doesn't mean that I have to be in the same place. This is an instance where we have to keep the larger congregation in view. The cause may indeed have merit. Nevertheless, we have to ask ourselves if our people are as aware or as passionate about this or that as its advocates. Let us remember that our pulpit is our pulpit, and we must follow the leading of the Spirit to set the agenda for our people.

Being truthful is also essential. This requirement should be obvious and go without saying. Sadly, however, we are living in a moment when truth is up for grabs. Pilate's question to Jesus, "What is truth?" is the watchword of our day. Too many imagine the truth is fungible, and as a result, many are liable to shop for the version of the "truth" that aligns with what they already think. Complicating matters is the hair trigger response many offer when what we say doesn't match up with what they believe. As a result, Sunday's sermon may lead to



Monday's griping and complaining. To avoid catching this kind of flak, we may be tempted to shade the truth to spare ourselves some grief and heartache. Since truth is in such short supply today, we must speak the truth as best we understand it from scripture and to the best of our ability.

Some issues may spark some righteous indignation and anger on our part. Seeing or learning of an injustice may inflame our passions and inspire us to speak. In such cases, we are right to be angry, but carrying all that anger into the pulpit can prove detrimental. In this respect, putting Paul's adage, "Be angry but do not sin" in our sermon preparation and delivery is a healthy guideline. After all, we want people to remember what we

said, not how angry or passionate we were. We don't want the sound of our thunder to drown out the gospel. Too much anger can sabotage the best of sermons.

Obviously, preaching on some topics is "high risk" event. Speaking the truth as best we can to the issues of the day is not without consequence. Pushback is inevitable, and in some cases, we may find our jobs on the line. We can expect some leaders within the church to advise us to cool it and move on to something else. This hard reality of congregational life suggests that if we know a sermon is going to generate some heat, we would be well served to have in place some opportunities for conversation, feedback, and constructive criticism beforehand. An open door makes for an open pulpit, one in which we can be free to speak the truth as best we understand it.

In light of the observations above, let us recognize that we also lead by preaching when we're willing to admit we were wrong. Despite our best efforts to get things right and speak the truth, we can and do fall short. A lack of information, a delayed recognition of our personal biases, or an unconscious (or conscious!) twisting of a text to serve our own ends—all these things and more can result in us reaching the wrong conclusion. I recall an old John Wayne movie in which his character said, "Never apologize! It's a sign of weakness!" I disagree! When we get it wrong, the best thing we can say, "I missed it. I spoke too soon. I said the wrong thing." Being in front of a crowd and preaching a message that captures our hearers is a heady thing. Standing before our people and admitting we got off track won't give us the same buzz. Such an act gives them yet another reason to trust us with the gospel and to keep listening.

Let me hem these suggestions with hope. Preaching in a worship service is the one time during the week when we have an opportunity to speak to the entire system. When we discharge our calling in thoughtful and generous ways, we open the doors for the Holy Spirit to take what we've said and what they've heard and turn it into life-changing gospel. In the final analysis, this is likely the reason we got into this business in the first place. When we enter the pulpit and put ourselves out front, we are inviting our church to go with us as we seek God's kingdom. When someone follows, that makes leading by preaching all the more worthwhile.

I.C.C.C. MEMBERSHIP POLICY RELATED TO ECCLESIASTICAL UMBRELLA ORGANIZATIONS (EUO) AND THEIR SUBORDINATE CHURCHES, CENTERS AND ORGANIZATIONS

Approved at the 2025 Annual Conference

Rationale

The I.C.C.C. no longer requires a \$1000 annual contribution for membership. Said contribution had prevented small subordinate congregations of Ecclesiastical Umbrella Organizations (EUO) from individual membership.

The I.C.C.C., as a courtesy, allowed the churches, centers and organizations of member EUOs which could not afford the mandated \$1000 annual membership contribution to identify as related to the I.C.C.C.

New membership requirements for the I.C.C.C. have removed the principle barrier of a burdensome annual financial contribution. The new requirement to "make an annual financial contribution to sustain the I.C.C.C.'s ministry" without specifying the amount of the contribution means even the smallest of churches, centers and/or organizations can meet I.C.C.C. membership requirements.

The I.C.C.C. urgently needs to identify and welcome the individual churches, centers and organizations of member EUOs for the purpose of properly determining the actual strength, breadth and depth of all organizations having and embracing the ministry and service goals of the I.C.C.C.

Therefore:

Ecclesiastical Umbrella Organizations (EUO) are encouraged to be members of the I.C.C.C. Any and all EUOs that meet the membership requirements of the I.C.C.C. will be accorded all rights and privileges of membership. Only the EUO as an organization and not its subordinate churches, centers and/or organizations will be recognized as a member.

If desired, any and all EUO subordinate churches, centers and organizations may seek individual membership in the I.C.C.C.. Upon application and meeting membership requirements, subordinate EUO churches, centers and/or organizations will be recognized as individual I.C.C.C. church or center members in good standing.

Ecclesiastical standing and/or endorsements from the I.C.C.C. will be provided to or considered for individual subordinate EUO churches, centers and/o organizations. The I.C.C.C. will not provide statements of standing or endorsement through a member EUO.

This policy will take effect on January 1, 2026.



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.

Bradford Woods Community Church

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