THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

NOVEMBER 2026

International Council of Community Churches

Volume 76 | *A Voice for Ecumenical Congregations and Christians Around the World* | Number 2

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Executive Director's Message

Bruce Merton

The celebration of Thanksgiving will soon be upon us. There will be a huge amount of food and football! There will be family gatherings that will be rich in harmony. Some will be rife with conflict rooted in something as simple as football rivalry to those steeped in the potential animosity found in conflicting opinions and feelings related to politics, religion, and social mores.

Thanksgiving as a holiday is really a mixed bag! The holiday's name can be what it is all about – thanksgiving. The holiday can end up being anything but thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving for the people of God is not a holiday. Thanksgiving for the people of God is a constant activity and act of faith done in good times and bad, in times of harmony and conflict, in times calm and filled with turbulence.

Thanksgiving to God is very easy when "the good times roll." It is easy when "the corn is as high as an elephant's eye and it looks like its climbing right up to the sky." It is easy when life "is coming up roses."

Thanksgiving to God is much harder when a 20 month old little girl dies from virulent cancer. It is tough when you wake up one morning and find you have gone blind in one eye for no apparent reason. It doesn't seem like the right thing to do when as a person of faith you must endure the suffering of multiple sclerosis, repeated bouts of cancer, and debilitating blood disease. How do you give thanks when your beloved mother or father dies? It is unbelievably hard when the call to live the message and lifestyle of Jesus to love as he loved us is co-opted by a "Christian nationalism" that is very long on self service and very short on sacrificial love.

Yet thanksgiving is what the people of God are called to give and live!

I am reminded of the story of Job. Job lives a faithful life at the pinnacle of affluence for his day and time. Quickly, as a test of faith, in a series of tragedies, he loses everything that he believes God had blessed him with. His wealth taken. His possessions are destroyed. His family is obliterated. If ever a person had the "right" to blame God and become embittered. It was Job. The Scripture says, "In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrongdoing." Instead, Job speaks, "…the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

On a very personal note, I share with you that I want to own Job's words and faith. The Lord has given to me and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. What has been given and what has been taken don't hold a candle to Job's experience but I own and echo his faith.

What has been given? Ever since I became involved with the I.C.C.C. I have longed to see us do something extraordinary for others. We live and have lived on the financial edge for so long that our attention and budgets have been focused on our survival. This year, under the leadership of Myrtis Brame and the Mission Ministry Team, we have given almost $35,000 to fulfill Jesus' mandate to feed the hungry and give to those in need. The amount will continue to rise as, hopefully, all of our member churches will contribute to the "Global Farm Mission. The spirit of the Lord has moved and is moving among us in a mighty way! **The Lord gave…**

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Churches Uniting in Christ: Honoring the Past, Discerning the Future

By Rev. Rock Fremont Jr, Moderator, Ministry Team for Ecumenical, Interfaith, and Partner Relationships
President, Churches United in Christ

In September, representatives of the ten member communions of Churches Uniting in Christ gathered in Memphis, Tennessee, to mark twenty-five years of CUIC and to discern together what God may be calling this ecumenical partnership to become in the years ahead. The International Council of Community Churches was well represented by our Executive Director, the Rev. Dr. Bruce Merton; the Rev. John Woodcock; and me.

Memphis was a fitting place for the gathering. CUIC was inaugurated there twenty-five years ago with a commitment not only to Christian unity, but also to confronting racism and working toward the Beloved Community. Our time together included a heritage tour through Memphis that brought that history into the present. We visited Calvary Episcopal Church, where the congregation has been reckoning with the discovery that the site on which its altar stands was once connected to the sale of enslaved people. We also visited the National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel, where the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, and concluded our day with worship at Mt. Olive Christian Methodist Episcopal Church.

The anniversary was a time for celebration, but it was also a moment of significant discernment. Over the preceding months, the CUIC Coordinating Council had been asking a central question: What is the next faithful step for CUIC to demonstrate its calling to unity in a way that is sustainable and true to its deepest purpose?

That process included prayer, reflection on CUIC's history, conversations with church leaders and other stakeholders, attention to Scripture and tradition, and a variety of communal discernment practices. What emerged was a strong sense that CUIC's present organizational structure cannot simply continue unchanged. At the same time, there was equally strong affirmation that the relationships, commitments, and ministries nurtured through CUIC should not simply disappear. Particular attention was given to CUIC's commitment to racial justice, its Eight Marks of Commitment, and its work forming a new generation of young adult ecumenical leaders.

The Coordinating Council adopted the discernment team's recommendation and commissioned a representative group from CUIC's ten member communions to develop a concrete proposal for the future. The proposal team has been asked to work within six months, exploring possibilities that might include finding a new organizational home or partnership for CUIC and determining how its most important commitments can be faithfully carried forward. The larger process will continue over the coming year, allowing the member communions time to receive and consider the proposal before returning for a final decision.

One of the images that emerged during our discernment was "sacred relinquishment." Another was the image of a dandelion scattering its seeds so that new life can take root somewhere else. Rather than asking simply, "How do we preserve CUIC?" we are learning to ask, "What has God entrusted to us, and where might those gifts bear the most fruit in the future?" The discernment report puts the question another way: Where can we best be leaven?

This next chapter is especially meaningful for me personally. During the Memphis meeting, I was elected President of Churches Uniting in Christ. I am deeply grateful for the trust placed in me and aware that I am assuming this role at an important moment in CUIC's life. My task will not be simply to help preserve an organization, but to help our ten communions listen carefully for how twenty-five years of relationships, commitments, and ecumenical witness can be faithfully stewarded into whatever comes next.

For the ICCC, this work should feel familiar. Our own history reminds us that Christian unity does not require uniformity and that relationships across denominational boundaries can become a powerful witness to the Gospel. As CUIC enters this season of transition, I look forward to keeping the ICCC informed and to ensuring that our voice is part of the discernment.

Twenty-five years after CUIC was born in Memphis, we returned not simply to remember what God has done, but to ask what God may be doing next. The structure may change. The call to Christian unity, racial justice, reconciliation, and common witness does not.

Churches Uniting in Christ's newly elected officers in Memphis. From left: the Rev. Grayson Hicks Dye, Treasurer; the Rev. Dr. Amariah H. McIntosh, Secretary; Dr. Pene' Woods, Vice President; and the Rev. Rock R. Fremont, Jr., OCC, President. Together, they represent The United Methodist Church, the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, and the International Council of Community Churches.

Join the ICCC 2026 Global Farm Challenge for Thanksgiving and Christmas Giving!!!

Praise God, the source of all blessings! On behalf of The Ministry of Mission Outreach, I sincerely thank you—our congregations, families, and friends—for supporting the ICCC 2026 mission initiatives. Your generosity has provided shelter and food relief in Jamaica following Hurricane Melissa. It has also funded $500 food pantry grants for each of four ICCC congregation food service programs, strengthening their ongoing efforts to feed unhoused residents in their communities.

At the Annual Conference, we launched the first ICCC Global Farm Challenge in partnership with the Church World Service (CWS) Best Gift Program. By providing livestock, this initiative supports sustainable farming and helps communities feed themselves today and in the future.

With joy and gratitude, we thank you for your donations through the CWS Best Gift Program. Your gifts will help build farms and provide food for families and communities in Haiti, Honduras, and Kenya. These gifts include whole farms, cows, pigs, goats, sheep, beehives, chickens, and other resources. Your generosity puts faith into action by serving and extending hospitality to our brothers and sisters. As Matthew 25:35 reminds us, "For I was hungry and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in."

Although we have exceeded our original goals, hunger persists and the need for food continues to grow. The ICCC Global Farm Challenge remains open through December 31, 2026, giving us an opportunity to provide more farms for families who need reliable sources of food.

As Thanksgiving and Christmas approach, we invite every ICCC congregation, individual, and family to consider donating livestock or another needed resource through the CWS website or Best Gift catalog. Every gift matters. Together, we can reduce food insecurity and help communities develop lasting sources of nourishment. Here's how to participate:

- Explore gift options and resources for giving at https://bestgiftshop.org/gifts/
  a. Consider hosting a Best Gift Event or collecting a mission offering at your church or with your family during Thanksgiving or Christmas.
- Choose livestock or other gifts from the website or catalog.
- For online orders, complete your gift selection and payment. In the congregation or group line, please include **"ICCC" and the name of your church.**
- For individual, congregation offerings, group donations and orders, please provide gift details, and make checks payable to ICCC. All information should be mailed to: ICCC Office, PO Box 50195, Brooklyn, New York 11205.

For questions, please contact Myrtis Brame, Chairperson: Ministry Mission Outreach Team at myrtisjb@aol.com.

Thank you for your gifts and for helping this campaign grow. May your Best Gifts bring nourishment and hope to the communities we serve. Happy Holidays!

Executive Director's Message

cont'd. from page 1

What has been taken? I have had a very up and down time with my eyes and the vision they provide. I was born with a non-malignant tumor in my right eye. It required 5 surgeries by the time I was 16. In 1976 I was diagnosed with malignant melanoma in my left eye. Removing a portion of my eye cured the problem, but compromised my vision. On June 30, 2026 I put my head on the pillow, closed my seeing eyes and went to sleep. On July 1, 2026 I awoke with only my right eye seeing the world around me. Unexplained blindness had seized my left eye. I now know that I have non-arteritic anterior ischemic optic neuropathy. It is a long name, but it means my sight will not return. **And the Lord has taken away…**

BLESSED BE THE NAME OF THE LORD!

I bless the name of the Lord and give THANKSGIVING to God for God is love. Love, present in and through all things ;here today, tomorrow and forever is our greatest need. That love, God's love, is our strength, our comfort, our refuge and salvation

The magnanimous love of God – a love in which we live, move and have our being – has been captured and proclaimed by the Apostle Paul. He wrote in his letter to the Romans::

"What then are we to say about these things (trials and tribulations). If God is for us, who is against us?...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 angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Because of that love I, and I hope and pray you can join me, will live and give thanksgiving for "the Lord has given and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

Grace and Peace,

Bruce

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2027

Each January, Christians around the world are invited to pray together for the unity of the Church during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. In the northern hemisphere, the traditional observance is January 18–25, dates first proposed in 1908 by the Rev. Paul Wattson to span the feasts of St. Peter and St. Paul. The international resources also note that the material may be adapted and used throughout the year, but for congregations in the United States, January 18–25 is the principal time to observe the Week.

The theme for 2027 is drawn from Luke 12:32: "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." The prayers and reflections were prepared by Christians in Ireland, where the churches continue to live with both the memory of deep division and the ongoing work of peace and reconciliation. The 2027 materials invite Christians to consider how fear, competition, and anxiety can give way to trust, shared witness, and deeper unity in Christ. EN 2027 WPCU

That theme feels relevant for churches today. The 2027 reflections speak directly to congregations facing declining resources, social polarization, and uncertainty about the future. Rather than seeing one another as rivals, churches are invited to share gifts, collaborate in worship and service, and trust that Christian unity is not about uniformity, but about walking together in faith, humility, and mutual care.

The Week of Prayer can be observed in many ways. Congregations may gather with neighboring churches for a single ecumenical service, incorporate prayers and readings into Sunday worship, use the daily reflections for Bible study or personal prayer, or organize shared service projects in the community. The official international material includes an ecumenical worship service, Scripture readings and reflections for all eight days, prayer resources, and suggested music.

For congregations in the United States, the easiest place to begin is the Graymoor Ecumenical & Interreligious Institute, which adapts and publishes Week of Prayer resources for use in the U.S. Their materials provide practical support for planning worship, prayer, study, and local ecumenical gatherings.

ICCC congregations are encouraged to begin planning now to invite neighboring churches into prayer during January 18–25, 2027. The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity offers a natural opportunity to make visible the call to Christian unity through shared prayer, service, listening, and witness.

Resources for U.S. congregations:
Graymoor Ecumenical & Interreligious Institute
https://geii.org/week-of-prayer-for-christian-unity/

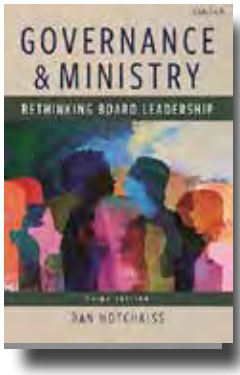
ICCC NOVEMBER 2026

Celebrating 75+ years

"OUR FUTURE: Rediscovering the Values of Jesus" Colossians 2:6-7

Book REVIEW

By Rev. Kenneth N. Nelson



Governance and Ministry: Rethinking Board Leadership, 3rd ed., by Dan Hotchkiss. T&T Clark/Bloomsbury, 2026. 296 pages. Paperback $25.95. ISBN 979-8-88180-415-2.

Our November book review examines how boards provide leadership, protect the church's mission, and work with others to strengthen ministry. Whether you serve as a lay or clergy leader, trustee, officer, or board member, this book invites us to reconsider how we govern and why it matters.

Lay and Clergy Church boards decide on budgets, buildings, personnel, and programs. These responsibilities matter. Yet an important question remains: Are our boards helping congregations accomplish God's mission, or are they primarily maintaining institutions?

Dan Hotchkiss argues that congregations need governance structures that provide stability while allowing faith and ministry to flourish. Religious organizations must sustain faith across generations while remaining flexible enough to respond to changing circumstances (p. 1).

One of the book's most useful contributions is distinguishing governance from ministry. Governance concerns mission, direction, policies, and accountability. Ministry involves worship, education, pastoral care, community service, and congregational life. Hotchkiss organizes the governing board's responsibilities around three principles: partnership, planning, and policy (p. 4).

This distinction challenges boards that devote considerable attention to operational details but insufficient time to mission and long-term priorities. The board establishes direction and delegates responsibility; clergy, staff, and ministry teams carry out the work within established policies.

A key consideration is the responsibility entrusted to individual board members. Hotchkiss describes a fiduciary as someone obligated to act in another's interest, even at personal cost (p. 52). BoardSource and the National Council of Nonprofits identify three fundamental duties of nonprofit board members: care, loyalty, and obedience.

The duty of care requires members to exercise sound judgment, review information, ask questions, and participate responsibly in decisions. The duty of loyalty requires members to place the organization's interests above personal preferences or competing interests. The duty of obedience requires members to uphold the organization's mission, governing documents, and applicable laws.

These are not merely administrative expectations. Some individuals accept board positions without fully understanding these obligations. Others may resist when fellow board members ask difficult questions, request financial information, examine policies, or insist upon accountability.

When exercised appropriately and through established procedures, these actions should not be viewed as interference. They are part of responsible governance. Lay and Clergy Board members must understand their responsibilities, and organizations must respect their faithful exercise. Healthy boards welcome informed questions and constructive disagreement.

Hotchkiss also challenges congregations to rethink their relationships with surrounding communities. Rather than focusing exclusively on attracting new members, he encourages churches to become better neighbors by developing meaningful relationships across community boundaries (p. xiv).

This insight is particularly relevant to the International Council of Community Churches. Our commitment to Christian community invites us to consider not only what happens within our congregations but also how we serve alongside others.

The book's strength is its practical framework for clarifying responsibilities. Smaller congregations, however, may need to adapt its recommendations. Policies alone cannot create trust, spiritual maturity, or healthy relationships.

I recommend Hotchkiss's book to pastors, trustees, board chairs, and congregational leaders seeking to strengthen governance and ministry. At your next board meeting, ask: Who might we work with to strengthen our ministry and better serve our community as we participate in God's mission? Then identify one person or organization to contact.

Good governance requires people who understand their responsibilities, respect others' responsibilities, and work together to protect organizational integrity and advance the mission. Effective board leadership is measured not by the decisions recorded in meeting minutes, but by the ministry those decisions make possible.

We Want to Hear from You! Did this review inspire you to reconsider board responsibilities or explore new community partnerships? Share your thoughts or interest in a book discussion at icccnow@sbcglobal.net by the end of the month. Please indicate whether we may quote or paraphrase your comments.

Giving Thanks for Blessings Seen and Unseen
A Women's Christian Fellowship Reflection

As we enter the beautiful season of Thanksgiving, the Women's Christian Fellowship Executive Board extends heartfelt greetings to our sisters and brothers throughout the International Council of Community Churches. November invites us to reflect on God's goodness, celebrate His faithfulness, and give thanks for the many blessings He continues to pour into our lives.

Some blessings are easy to recognize: family, friendships, good health, answered prayers, and opportunities to serve. Others are not so easily seen. They are the prayers God answered without our knowing, the dangers He protected us from, the strength He provided during difficult moments, and the doors He opened or closed for our good.

James 1:17 reminds us, **"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above."** Even when life does not unfold as we expect, we can remain thankful, knowing that God is working in ways we may not always understand.

As 1 Thessalonians 5:18 encourages us, **"In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."**

A Season of Gratitude, Compassion, and Giving

Thanksgiving is more than a holiday or a dinner-table gathering. It is an opportunity to demonstrate our gratitude through acts of kindness, generosity, and Christian service.

As we celebrate God's abundant provisions during this harvest season, let us remember those whose tables may not be as full and whose hearts may carry unseen burdens.

Matthew 25:35 reminds us, **"For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink."**

The WCF Executive Board encourages each of us to continue finding meaningful ways to bless others. Whether through grocery gift cards, food donations, supporting a local food pantry, visiting someone who is homebound, or simply offering an encouraging word, every act of kindness reflects the love of Christ.

We also recognize that the holiday season can bring tender moments for those remembering loved ones who are no longer physically present. As we celebrate, may we extend extra love, understanding, and fellowship to those who may need it most. Sometimes the greatest gift we can offer is our presence, a listening ear, or the reassurance that someone is remembered and loved.

WCF Holiday Zoom Fellowship — December 10, 2026

As we look ahead to December, the Women's Christian Fellowship invites you to our **Holiday Zoom Fellowship and Ugly Sweater Celebration on Thursday, December 10, 2026, at 8:00 PM Eastern Time.**

This special gathering is a chance to reconnect, share laughter, celebrate the season, and enjoy the fellowship that makes our WCF family so special.

Put on your favorite festive or ugly Christmas sweater, bring your holiday spirit, and join us for an evening of Christian fellowship and joy!

Zoom Meeting ID: 953 7034 5616

A Grateful Heart Is a Giving Heart

As we gather with family and friends this Thanksgiving, may we remember that our greatest blessings are not always the things we possess, but the love we share, the lives we touch, and the opportunities God gives us to serve.

On behalf of the WCF Executive Board, we wish you and your families a blessed Thanksgiving filled with peace, gratitude, love, and the assurance of God's continued faithfulness.

In Christian Service,
Winessa R. Crutchfield, President
Women's Christian Fellowship
On behalf of the WCF Executive Board

International Council of Community Churches 2026 Budget as of September 30, 2026

INCOME				
	2026 BUDGET		ACTUAL	
Churches & Centers (N1)	$ 84,100.00		$	58,157.35
Individuals (N2)	$ 50,000.00		$	20,405.02
Individuals - Clergy Membership (N2m)	$ 10,000.00		$	8,264.67
Areas, regions Zones (N3)	$ 2,500.00		$	500.00
Christian Community (N5)	$ 200.00		$	12.00
Endowment Earnings Distribution	$ 14,643.00	**	$	14,646.18
Miscelleaneous Income (N11)	$ 200.00			
TOTAL INCOME	**$ 161,643.00**		**$**	**101,985.22**
EXPENDITURES				
	2026 BUDGET		ACTUAL	
STAFF				
Executive Director, Interim (D1)	$ 46,000.00		$	30,666.64
Executive Expenses (D2)	$ 4,000.00			
Associate for Administration (E1)	$ 40,000.00		$	18,020.84
Health Benefits (E3)	$ -			
Retirement (E7)	$ -			
Admin Assistance Contracted (F1)	$ -		$	16,021.49
Payroll Liabilities (F1)	$ 3,000.00		$	(383.71)
TOTAL STAFF	**$ 93,000.00**		**$**	**64,325.26**
OPERATIONS				
Office Space (A1)	$ -		$	550.03
Utilities & Services (A2)	$ 5,000.00		$	3,640.63
Telephone (A3)	$ 3,000.00		$	878.85
Supplies (A5)	$ 2,000.00		$	700.60
Equipment (A6)	$ 9,000.00		$	3,914.86
Property Insurance (A7)	$ 1,000.00			
D&O Insurance/Other Insurance (A8)	$ 2,800.00		$	449.00
Printing (A9)	$ 1,000.00		$	763.15
Postage (A10)	$ 2,500.00		$	673.79
Office Maintenance (A12)	$ -			
Professional Services (A13)	$ 1,000.00		$	2,024.00
Board of Trustees (C4)	$ 500.00			
Executive Field Services (C10)	$ 12,000.00		$	5,563.32
Miscellaneous (A14)	$ 300.00		$	17,501.74
Credit Card Merchant Fees (16)	$ 1,700.00		$	1,159.91
TOTAL OPERATIONS	**$ 41,800.00**		**$**	**37,819.88**
PROGRAM				
Ecumenics (B)	$ 6,000.00		$	5,561.00
Christian Community (C8)	$ 1,500.00		$	1,180.00
Missions (ICCC Missions N28)	$ 9,000.00		$	5,790.00
TOTAL PROGRAM	**$ 16,500.00**		**$**	**12,531.00**
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	**$ 151,300.00**		**$**	**114,676.14**
**estimate adjusted to actual				

FRANKLY on FINANCES

By Bruce Merton, Executive Director

This year is drawing to a close. Soon the budget for 2027, approved by delegates at our annual conference, will be the working financial document within which we will fulfill obligations required for our ministry and mission to succeed and move forward.

Of particular note and consequence is the fact that the 2027 budget will require an additional $2,333,33 each month in order to meet obligations to compensate our current staff and offer reasonable assurance that a new Executive Director can be called and properly compensated.

A review of our budget (posted to the right) through September shows that we are now showing a deficit of $19,247.03 to date when compared to the approved 2026 budget.

When comparing actual receipts to expenditures to date, we have a deficit of $12,690.92.

Those figures do not present a very good picture of our present and they certainly do not bode well for fulfilling 2027's budget.

The good news is that there are still 3 months left in our budget year and, with concerted effort, churches and individuals can bring the budget current and, yes, even supersede it.

These are tough times and tough times require tough people and churches to step up and "meet the moment."

Let us ask and answer some critical questions.

- *Can I/my church make a sacrificial gift?*
- *Are the gifts I/my church do offer truly expressive of our desire to be fully participating in the mission and ministry of the I.C.C.C.?*
- *Do I/my church truly want to see a future for the I.C.C.C.?*

How you and I, joined by our member churches, answer these questions will determine whether we end our year well. In an even more important issue, our answers will go a long way in determining the path forward for the Council we love!

No water today. Just priming the pump!