2026 Annual Conference Workshop Overview

Alphabetical listing of workshop sessions, speakers, room assignments, and presentation days.

Affirming Gender Affirming Care - A call to congregations

Speakers: Rev. T. Michael Rock, Rev. Dr. Rebecca Voelkel, Rev. Derek Terry

Room Assignment: HAB 117

Presentation Day(s): Friday, Saturday

Session Description: Gender Affirming Care is under threat in the MN legislature and in legislative bodies throughout the country. The UCC has long had the stance that access to Gender Affirming Care is both a deeply faithful response and it saves lives. This workshop will explore how each congregation can serve as advocates and supporters for this important ministry.

Diving Deep into Conflict

Speaker: Sarah Lehman: Sarah Lehman Consulting, LLC.

Room Assignment: HAB 102

Presentation Day(s): Friday

Session Description: That is not how we do things here! A new idea brings energy, creativity and growth. It also disrupts established patterns and relationships. What do we do when this happens? Some of us get quiet, some of us talk it out, and some of us turn to others. In this workshop, we'll explore the difference between healthy disagreement and conflict, different communication/conflict styles, and identify potential interventions to move our congregations back towards health.

Diving Deep with Earth as Our Bedrock

Speaker: Rev. Dr. Martha Brunell

Room Assignment: HAB 119

Presentation Day(s): Friday, Saturday

Session Description: I once read a church profile that voiced their desire for someone to help them "understand and reshape their future." Their stated desire resonates for communities of faith in this time when so much is crumbling, uncertain, and quickly changing. That understanding and reshaping are not quick, surface tasks. They require our deep diving together, to go beyond where we have been before. Earth is full of ancient teachers and companions who can be our bedrock as our communal engagement in depth work emerges and grows.

Finding the Words: A Public Narrative Workshop for Church Leaders

Speaker: Jessica Vazquez Torres

Room Assignment: HAB 101

Presentation Day(s): Friday, Saturday

Session Description: We live in a time when information is twisted, and even the stories told by people fighting for justice can end up reinforcing the very ideas they're pushing against. Many church leaders feel stuck — unsure how to talk about race, faith, and justice in a way that actually lands.

This workshop introduces organizer Marshall Ganz's framework of Public Narrative — a practical, proven method for telling stories that move people to act. Leaders will learn how to use it to make the theological case for antiracism, not just as a political position, but as a way of living and leading rooted in faith.

From Disruption to Transformation: Discovering Your Church's Strategic Sweet Spot

Speaker: Meghan Hatcher, Sr. Director of Ministry Strategies

Room Assignment: HAB 121

Presentation Day(s): Friday, Saturday

Session Description: Jesus' calling to the Church is clear: To disrupt the way we've always done things and trust that opportunities for new life and growth are all around us. But who is God calling your church to engage with in your particular ministry context? How do you reach the invisible demographics in your community? And what would transformation in people's lives tangibly look like? This workshop will guide you to discern the unique value propositions your church offers and identify where those values intersect with your community's needs and assets so you can develop transformational ministries.

Inclusive Worship with Neurodivergents: Widening the Welcome

Speaker: Rev. Hannah Campbell Gustafson, Rev. Craig Simenson

Room Assignment: HAB 118

Presentation Day(s): Friday, Saturday

Session Description: How inclusive are our congregations for those whose brains work differently than the "norm"? God is still speaking, and God is still stimming. Come and explore together how your church's worship might more fully welcome our neurodivergent siblings.

Into the Deep: Following Christ's Call; Ready to Be Astounded

Speaker: Rev. Emily Meyer

Room Assignment: HAB 128 B

Presentation Day(s): Friday, Saturday

Session Description: Church work is exhausting. It's been exhausting squishing Christ's Good News of abundance and justice and New Life into empire's oppression and extraction and death. And our catch has dwindled down to just about nothing. The past several months (and years) have revealed just how much the church has colluded with empire. We know we need to head out to deeper waters. The deep may be fearsome, but that is where Jesus is sending us. And the promise of abundance is real. The catch out there is astounding. Try something new. Explore what's possible. Generate courage. Develop resilience. What resources might you find if you throw your net into the deep? How might your community be transformed by abundance? Where might God call you once you have been astounded? Throw out your net and haul in community-transforming spiritual practices, resources, and consultations as we sail Into the Deep: Following Christ's Call; Ready to Be Astounded.

Lectio Divina (Sacred Reading)

Speaker: Linnea Dietrich, Kay Hanzel

Room Assignment: HAB 002/003

Presentation Day(s): Friday, Saturday

Session Description: Lectio Divina means Sacred Reading. It is the slow, repetitive reading of a text that leads one to the ultimate step of resting in God. It is a way to pray that enables one to descend

to the level of the heart and find God. In this breakout session, we will discover the rich history of Lectio Divina through a short lecture followed by instructions on the pattern of the prayer practice of Lectio. Then we will dive in and do the practice as a group.

Lessons on Peacebuilding from Northern Ireland

Speaker: Rev. Dustin Janzen

Room Assignment: HAB 120

Presentation Day(s): Friday, Saturday

Session Description: In this panel discussion, Rev. Kevin Brown and I will invite reflections from participants of the MN Conference UCC-sponsored trip to The Corrymeela Community in Northern Ireland. We intend to draw out the experiences and reflections of participants to elicit learnings about Christian peacebuilding in Northern Ireland, and explore how these lessons might inform how we live out Christ's calling to be peacemakers in our Minnesotan/American context.

Navigating Complex Challenges

Speaker: Sarah Lehman Consulting, LLC.

Room Assignment: HAB 107

Presentation Day(s): Saturday

Session Description: A church wants to grow its outreach ministry, and the church building needs maintenance. A church wants to deepen community partnerships, and care for the elders in the congregation. Priorities can seem at odds with one another creating tension and competition in a congregation. We need strategies to manage multiple core values, build shared understanding, and increase collective buy-in. In this workshop we'll explore adaptive change, and the skills needed to move complex challenges forward.

Slow Nonviolence

Speaker: Isak Tranvik,

Room Assignment: HAB 102

Presentation Day(s): Saturday

Session Description: Many were horrified by the spectacular violence of ICE/DHS in Minnesota this past winter. And many responded with quite powerful acts of nonviolence resistance—including boycotts, mass marches, and civil disobedience. After the armed, masked federal agents stopped snatching people and shooting those who interfered, nonviolence seems to have receded from view. But the project of mass deportation continues, both in Minneapolis and across the rest of the United States. Now, however, it's a bit slower and a bit less spectacular than it was in January. If the violence of ICE/DHS has shifted in speed, can nonviolence shift speeds, too? Or is nonviolence only something for moments of heightened conflict?

The Church's Response to Apartheid and Genocide in our Time.

Speaker: Fred Rogers, Rev. Don Christiansen, Rev. Susie Hayward

Room Assignment: HAB 107

Presentation Day(s): Friday

Session Description: At this workshop we will learn what UCC congregations are doing and can do to confront the Israeli Apartheid regime and a complicit US Government who have been conducting a genocide in Palestine and illegal wars of destruction in Lebanon and Iran. Ending the US support of and collaboration with these illegal actions is our responsibility, as called for in multiple UCC resolutions. As members of the Steering Committee of the UCC Movement for Palestinian Solidarity, we will also discuss the work of some key partners: the American Friends Service Committee's Apartheid Free Communities campaign, Christians for a Free Palestine and Churches for Middle East Peace. We will offer tangible suggestions for ways that Minnesota congregations can become involved in solidarity work with Palestinians, beginning with naming and acknowledging Apartheid and Genocide, as an obligation for action. We will also discuss how Palestinian solidarity work connects to the work of reparative justice in Minnesota, where similar historical and ongoing patterns of land theft and genocide of Indigenous populations were justified by Christian actors and ideas, including the Congregational Church.