

# Ecumenical Connection

A publication of the Illinois Conference of Churches



**May 2018**

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## A Conversation with

### Sandhya Jha: Building the Beloved Community

Sandhya Jha serves as founder and director of the Oakland Peace Center, a collective of 40 organizations creating access, equity and dignity for all in Oakland and the Bay Area.

Raised in an interracial and multi-faith family and witness to the ways that racism and xenophobia show up in our society, Sandhya's career has been marked by work to effect public policy change and to build what Dr. Martin Luther King called Beloved Community (at the Oakland Peace Center).

Sandhya received both a Master of Divinity and Master of Public Policy from the University of Chicago. She is an ordained minister in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Sandhya serves as an anti-racism/anti-oppression trainer with Reconciliation Ministries for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). She is a faith-rooted organizer with Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity and with the Emerging Leaders Program at the Leadership Institute at Allen Temple. She

is the author of *Room at the Table*, the history of people of color in the Disciples of Christ, *Pre-Post-Racial America: Spiritual Stories from the Front Lines* on the subject of race and spirituality in America, and *Transforming Communities: How People Like You are Healing Their Neighborhoods*, that focuses on concrete ways that regular people are creating change community-by-community in an era where positive change can feel impossible.

Format will include presentation followed by time for questions. Hosted by: Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Illinois and Wisconsin (CCIW), The CCIW Pro-Reconciliation Anti-Racism Team. Event cost is \$5

Register by going online <http://cciwdisciples.org>. Sandhya's book, *Transforming Communities*, will be available at the churches for \$10. All are welcome.

### You can all be Ecumenical Partners!

The Illinois Conference of Churches voted to forge a new membership structure. Previously, the governing bodies of denominations, located in Illinois were members – judicatories and they continue to be the foundation of our organization.

But the ICC is broadening this structure. Going forward, individual persons, individual congregations or churches (regardless of its judicatory being a member) and organizations, can become ecumenical partners and attend Annual Assembly where they will have a voice at the table. Voting is done by consensus and will continue to be the responsibility of the judicatory leaders and delegates.

All members and ecumenical partners must agree with the Mission Statement of the ICC:

*"The Illinois Conference of Churches seeks to be an inclusive community of churches that celebrates and makes visible our sacred bonds of unity in Christ. We will do this by: Promoting an honest sharing and understanding of both our common and divergent theological convictions; and Making public, prophetic witness to Christ's love for all people, particularly by addressing poverty and racism. To these ends the members of the Illinois Conference of Churches proclaim our common faith in Jesus Christ. In word and deed, we give expression to Ephesians 4:5 – there is "...one Lord, one faith, one baptism..." – as we unite in cooperative ministries."*

To become an ecumenical partner please fill out and submit the form on the website under "news" electronically, or download and print the form to mail. By submitting or mailing this form you attest that you agree with the mission statement. Thank you for your generous support of the ICC.

**Saturday, July 14 at 1 PM**

**Centennial Christian Church**

**1219 East Grove Street, Bloomington**

**OR**

**Sunday, July 15 at 2 PM**

**United Christian Church**

**4351 W. 180th St., Country Club Hills**

**Rev. Jha will also be preaching at United at 10:15 AM**

# 2018 Illinois Conference of Churches Annual Assembly “Christian Healing in a Fractured World: An Ecumenical Perspective on Polarization in the USA 2018.”

Dinner the evening before at 6:30 at Destihl in downtown Champaign - open to all! Please pay for your own dinner.

**Friday, Sept. 28**

**8 a.m. - 3 p.m.**

Worship 9 a.m.

Forum 10 a.m. - 2 p.m.

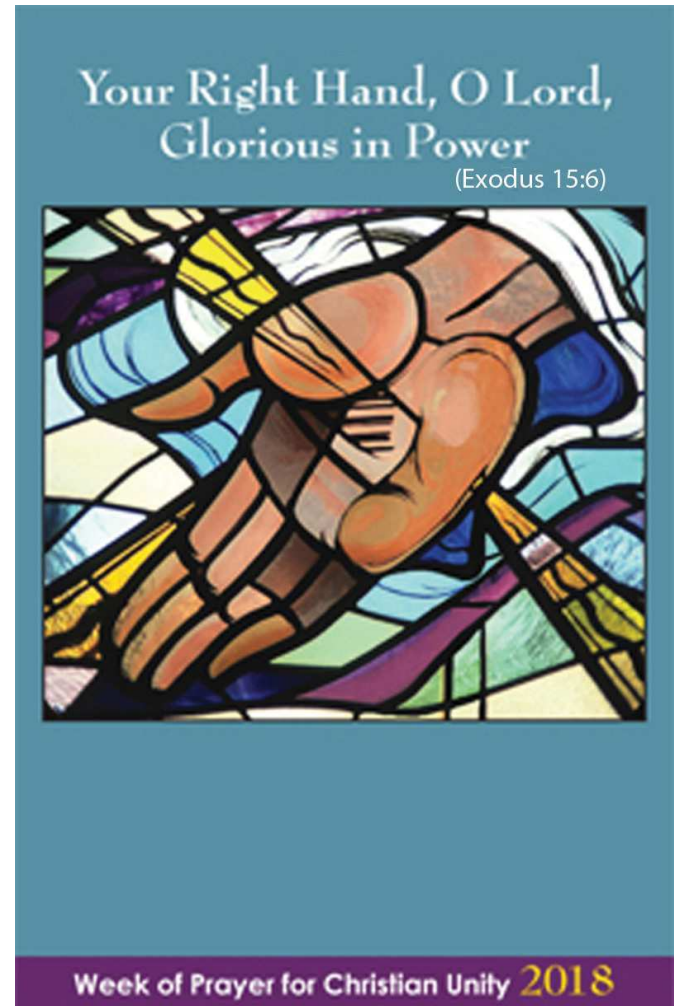
Business meeting 2 p.m.

**St. Peter's UCC Church  
905 S. Russell St.  
Champaign, IL**

Rev. Kevin Kessler, District Executive at Illinois Wisconsin District Church of the Brethren, will deliver the message during morning worship.

**Forum speakers:**

**Fr. Richard Chiola, a retired Catholic priest and Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor and Professor Brian Gaines of the University of Illinois Political Science Department.**



**Bring books you no longer need for a book swap.**

For a copy of any proposed by-law changes go to our website under “events” or request a copy by email, after Sept. 1.

**Register online using the events tab on our website. \$10 for students, \$45 for all others, includes breakfast, lunch and materials. Deadline Sept. 23.**

**Questions? Contact Laurie Vial, Executive Director, at [laurie@illinoisconferenceofchurches.org](mailto:laurie@illinoisconferenceofchurches.org) or at the phone number below.**

**Lodging: Rooms are blocked at Wingate by Wyndham 516 W. Marketview Dr., Champaign at \$80 plus tax. 217-689-4714. Rooms must be booked prior to Sept. 6 to assure the discounted rate.**

**Illinois  
Conference  
of  
Churches**

# ICC unveils “One Voice” concerts

By Fr. Kevin Laughery

Back in December, I reported on the Illinois Conference of Churches, an organization in which we all must feel a certain investment, because seeking Christian unity among the people in our life is a mandate for all Catholics.

On Thursday, May 3, I attended a “joint teams meeting” of the ICC in Champaign. It happens that I am on three teams: the leadership team, the interreligious team (relations between Christians and non-Christians), and anti-racism. I feel myself particularly invested in the anti-racism team, because I am a co-chair with the Rev. Galda McCants of Springfield, who spoke this year at our Lenten Speakers Series, and because I underwent two weeks of training for this role in 2005 and 2006.

Two members of the anti-racism team traveled to Memphis on April 4 for a commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the assassination of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. It moved me to hear how the Rev. Jesse Jackson addressed the gathering from the very balcony where he was standing with King when the civil-rights leader was shot. U.S. Representative John Lewis was also present. One of the two team members, an Episcopal deacon, also attended a service at an Episcopal church. At this church, an adjoining piece of land was re-purposed. There had been a memorial honoring a member of that church, who had been described as a “successful businessman.” It turns out that his business was in running a slave market at this spot. A new plaque describes the real history of this piece of land.

In December, I reported on the precarious finances of the ICC. I heard some very good news at this meeting. More “judicatories” (generic term for what Catholics call dioceses) are returning and paying dues. Meanwhile, sacred ecumenical concerts are being proposed as fundraisers. Plans are just taking shape, and I would be very happy to do such a concert in our parishes — though I haven’t had a chance to discuss this with the staff yet.

In our discussion, some leadership team members noted that they have a hard time talking with people about the ICC’s work, because so many people do not know the meaning of the word “ecumenical.” (It refers to the quest for Christian unity.) If we think about it a bit, a concert is a wonderful illustration and demonstration of the unity Christians must seek. Music comes about through the harmonizing of various voices and instruments. Remembering that unity is not the same as uniformity, we see in the ecumenical effort, as in musical efforts, respect for the individual gifts of Christians’ faith experiences, as we come together into something far greater than the sum of our parts. “Reconciled diversity” is one way to describe this.

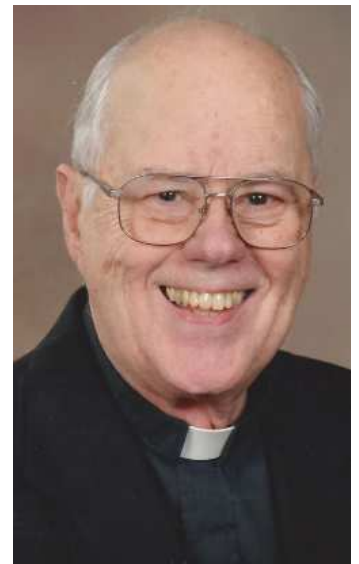
We also heard from a lobbyist of the Friends Committee on National Legislation. You may know that “Quaker” Christians refer to each other as Friends. The FCNL has been very active for 75 years to promote legislation for peace, nuclear disarmament, the abolition of capital punishment, and economic justice. I was especially pleased to learn that they offer youth internships to those would like to get familiar with how things work (or don’t work) in Washington.

Editor’s note: We will call these concerts “One Voice.” I am working on a template on how these concerts would evolve and then we will be seeking host churches, choir directors and choir members and especially you to attend - at locations throughout the state.

## ICC will miss Bob Pearson

The ICC was saddened to learn of the death of the Rev. Robert “Bob” Pearson on Dec. 9, 2017. Bob was ordained into the Lutheran ministry in June, 1962. He was a military chaplain for 28 years, having served in Germany, Vietnam and Thailand, as well as several stateside posts. Bob most recently served at the Rock Island Arsenal before his retirement.

Bob was active in the work of the ICC and served as the voting delegate from the ELCA Lutheran Northern Illinois Synod for many years. Bob was passionate about ecumenism. When there was discussion over a topic, Bob often suggested a wise compromise. Well done thy good and faithful servant.



## Update on observance of Martin Luther King Jr.

April 4, 2018 was the 50th anniversary of the assassination of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. While the ICC buses did not meet the minimum to go to Washington DC; the ICC provided registration and coordination assistance to the United Methodist Northern Illinois Conference who underwrote a Pan Methodist bus. Catiana McKay of our Leadership Team served as bus captain and Megan Dean helped with logistics. Chris Hopkins and Martha Herrin of our anti-racism team attended the observation in Memphis. This anniversary has inspired the ICC and especially our active anti-racism team to renew their efforts to fight systemic racism.

## Our partner in faith and care for the environment - Faith in Place

We urge you to go to their website [faithinplace.org](http://faithinplace.org) and check them out.

Watch for an article next issue on ways churches can turn to solar energy!



## The ICC made this public statement on May 16, 2018

The 2011 abolition of capital punishment in Illinois was a profound achievement. Many groups, including the Illinois Conference of Churches, worked for many years to achieve this abolition. People opposed in principle to capital punishment worked successfully with people who held to the prospect of the death penalty as a deterrent to crime. It became clear to many that the death penalty failed to deter crime. Many people who had been condemned were later exonerated through scientific evidence. Many came to understand that, if capital punishment were to be correctly applied, there would have to be greater certainty about a person's guilt.

The recent proposal of Governor Rauner to restore the death penalty for mass killings and homicide of law enforcement officers ignores the facts which led to a consensus against the death penalty in Illinois. Whenever tragedy is used or evidence is ignored for political gain, justice is not served and our society is the less for it. The Illinois Conference of Churches urges Illinois citizens to reject this proposal.



Nov.1 - 7, 2018

## ***Task Force on End-of-Life Decisions unveils plans***

The Illinois Conference of Churches has taken on a major new project to assist all of our denominations to help their congregations better prepare for and deal with end-of-life issues. We started this program by encouraging churches to participate in the Donor Sabbath to increase awareness of organ and tissue donation. The Donor Sabbath is the second weekend of November each year. We encourage your church to start a discussion and plan to participate from now on. The website is [www.donatelife.net/nds/](http://www.donatelife.net/nds/).

Members of the Task Force will soon meet for two half day sessions to plan a page on our website with materials covering issues such as:

- hospice
- living wills
- wills
- advance planning
- funeral planning
- green funerals
- and much more

While this is a sensitive topic, it's one that our members and friends face through the loss of loved ones, and eventually themselves. As Christians we want to give our members the tools and information to ease these decisions whenever possible.

This was voted on at our November 2016 Leadership Team meeting and was the focus of our Joint Teams meeting in May of 2017. Alicja Lukaszewicz-Southall, one of our Leadership Team members, is chairing the Task Force. She invites you to join her in exploring these topics and rolling them out to our churches. E-mail [laurie@illinoisconferenceofchurches.org](mailto:laurie@illinoisconferenceofchurches.org) to join or ask questions.

God's blessings, Laurie



**This can be observed any time during 2018. For additional information and materials see the website [www.geii.org](http://www.geii.org).**

## **2018 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity**

### **Exodus 15:6 "Your Right Hand, O Lord, Glorious in Power"**

By Rev. Dr. Gerald F. Rafferty, S.T.D.

Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish, Scarsdale, NY

Your Right Hand, O Lord, Glorious in Power (Exodus 15:6) The theme for this year's week of Christian Unity expresses praise and awe of God and specifically of His power. The first thing to note here is that the statement is addressed to the "LORD." This is no vague reference. In most English language bibles, LORD in all capital letters means that the original Hebrew has the personal name of YHWH. The reference then is very specific and calls immediately to mind that the One at work is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God who has been a part of this people's life and who has invited them into an intimate relationship signified by His sharing of His name (cf. Ex 3:13-20).

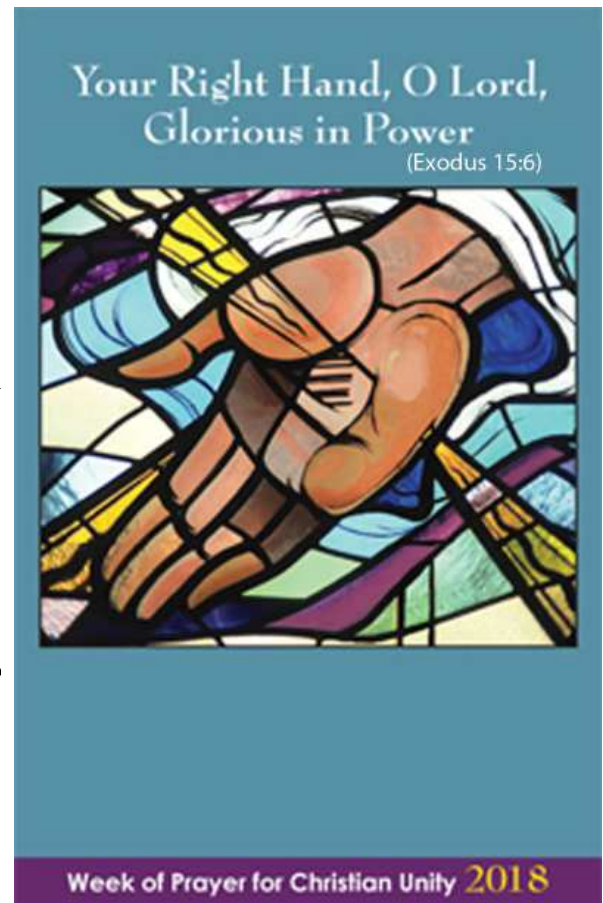
Our theme is a poetic expression. In the Bible, poetry is the form used in order to express an experience. And Israel uses this form frequently in Psalms and prophetic utterances. Where mere narration is unable to capture the depth of Israel's experience with God, they turn to poetry, for, more than just describing their experience, they literally invite the reader to share it. And poetry gives voice to a deeper meaning and understanding than narrative.

Ancient poetry and song go hand in hand. And as such the form is most often used in the context of communal celebrations including liturgical worship. This poetic line, extolling YHWH's might, is part of a larger Hymn of praise in Ex 15:1-21. It appears after the children of Israel have witnessed the miracle of the Red Sea, in which God has caused the destruction of the army of Pharaoh and thus guaranteed that His people are now free from bondage and free to take up their call to worship Him and live as His people, in the land He has promised to their ancestors (see Genesis). With the army defeated, Israel can now fulfill its God-given destiny.

The Hymn is Israel's response to God's saving work. Israel's song of praise to God for victory over the Egyptian army in Ex 15:1-21 is one of the more ancient hymns in the OT. Most believe that parts of the text can indeed be dated early in Israel's life. But as we have it the Hymn has been enhanced.

The context for our thematic statement (Ex 15:6) is definitely in the form of a Hymn of praise, enhanced by the theme of Thanksgiving. This hymn has a narrative introduction in 15:1a and supplement in 15:19-20 which leads to the repetition of the call to praise in v. 21.

The Hymn found in Ex 15:1b-18 follows a pattern of a call to praise followed by a listing of reasons for this praise. In vv 3-10, the specific events at the Red Sea are recounted and extolled. Then, in vv. 11-16, the events of



# **The National Workshop on Christian Unity**

**Silver Spring, Maryland**

**April 16-19, 2018**

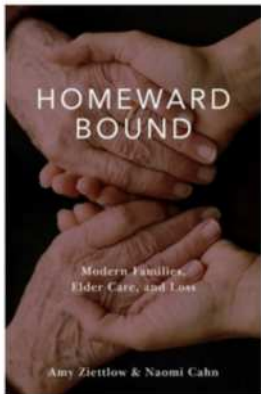
[www.nwcu.org](http://www.nwcu.org)



# Book Corner

Rev. Amy Zietlow is an ELCA Lutheran pastor serving Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Decatur. She is a member of our End-of-Life Decisions Task Force. She co-authored this book, *Homeward Bound: Modern Families, Elder Care, and Loss*, on a related subject and spoke about it at our Annual Assembly.

If you know of a book that has an Illinois tie or is related to the work of the ICC please recommend it for a future Book Corner. Thanks. Laurie



## Homeward Bound

By Amy Zietlow and Naomi Cahn

(Oxford | 2017 | 232 pages | \$29.95 | 9780190261092)



**If you have a book to suggest send a short book review to Laurie by email and we'll get it in future newsletters.**

# News snapshots



## Judicatory visits and major meetings

Laurie Vial, executive director of the Illinois Conference of Churches, is traveling around the state and meeting individually with all Judicatory executives.

Another of Laurie's goals is to attend the major meetings of each denomination and where possible have an information table in the exhibition space. Please help out the ICC by communicating about your major meetings and forwarding registration forms for exhibition space. She could also address these gatherings and bring a brief greeting from the ICC.

## Looking forward

Another goal of the ICC Leadership Team is to be more proactive. And the major focus of the ICC is alleviating racism and poverty. The Leadership Team seeks other ways to become more involved statewide. If you have a suggestion, please contact Laurie.

## Would you like to join an ICC Team?

If you would like to serve on the Public Policy Team, the Illinois Christians Encountering Racism (ICER) Team, or help plan next year's Annual Assembly Forum – e-mail Laurie Vial and let her know. We also have a new Interreligious Team. If you would like to suggest someone to serve on this Team, please contact Laurie.

## Grants

Now that the Illinois Conference of Churches will be seeking grants to supplement denomination donations in our working budget, we need you to be our eyes and ears. If you hear of appropriate grant opportunities from foundations or your own denomination, please notify the executive director. Thank you for helping in this way.

## Donations/Pledges

The Illinois Conference of Churches relies on the generous donations of its 13 member Christian denominations for financial stability. Other generous supporters are affiliated members and individual congregations as well as the generosity of individuals.

Thank you for keeping current with your donations. Please contact the executive director if you need an update on your status.

## Is there a way for Judicatories to share more resources such as training sessions?

The Christian Church Disciples of Christ has led the charge by opening their annual anti-racism training to anyone in our 13 member denominations. Everyone is watching their budget including travel budget and trying to be good stewards of the environment by not driving as much. If your denomination has a training session, a special speaker, an event, a workshop or any other "happening" that you would like to open to your fellow ICC members, please let us know. We will promote these events on our website and in our newsletter. Our Leadership Team would really like to grow this opportunity for more ecumenical encounters. And we'll all meet more brothers and sisters in Christ and have more networking opportunities.



**Like us on**

**Facebook!**

Keep up with the Illinois Conference of Churches and be prepared to

have a little fun along the way.

[www.facebook.com/pages/Illinois-Conference-of-Churches](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Illinois-Conference-of-Churches)



# SAVE-THE-DATE

## 2nd Annual Spiritual Leaders Retreat

(for college and university Spiritual Leaders, Chaplains, Campus Ministers etc. in Illinois. This is an interreligious opportunity)

Thursday, April 11

9 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Eureka College

Cerf Center Terrill Room

300 E. College Ave., Eureka, IL

Free parking east of the Cerf Center in the gravel lot.

9 a.m. Light Breakfast

10 a.m. Program begins



Please share with anyone who would benefit from this experience and have them email Laurie Vial to be added to the database.

## Networking, networking, networking

Spiritual Leaders will have the ability to contact each other throughout the year through a private Facebook page where they can post concerns and receive suggestions.

**Bring books you no longer need for a book swap.**

**Sponsored by Eureka College and the Illinois Conference of Churches**

Register online using the events tab on the ICC website. Registration includes light breakfast, lunch, snacks, materials and facilitators.

**Deadline is April 1.**

Questions? Contact Laurie Vial, Executive Director, at [laurie@illinoisconferenceofchurches.org](mailto:laurie@illinoisconferenceofchurches.org) or at the phone number below.

Lodging: Sleep Inn Washington, IL (309) 481-0450 is the closest lodging.

Illinois  
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1608 W. Church St., Champaign, IL 61821 217-522-7099

[www.illinoisconferenceofchurches.org](http://www.illinoisconferenceofchurches.org)

# Teams of the Illinois Conference of Churches

We welcome new members to our teams. Please contact Laurie Vial, executive director, with questions or to join a team.

## **Leadership Team**

### **Rev. Gary McCants, co-chair**

African Methodist Episcopal Church  
4th Episcopal District  
Springfield

### **Rev. Wally Carlson, co-chair**

United Methodist Church  
Great Rivers Conference  
Peoria Heights

### **Dr. John Charlton, treasurer**

American Baptist Church  
Great Rivers Region  
Chatham

### **Fr. Kevin Laughery**

Catholic Church  
Diocese of Springfield  
Troy

### **Rev. Galda McCants**

African Methodist Episcopal Church  
4th Episcopal District  
Springfield

### **Dr. George Johnston**

Presbyterian Church – USA  
Southeastern Illinois Presbytery  
Monticello

### **Rev. Megan Dean**

United Methodist Church  
Northern Illinois Conference  
Bartlett

### **E. Garnet Fay**

Religious Society of Friends  
Oak Park

### **Rev. Sharon Patton**

Christian Church, Disciples of Christ  
Region of Illinois/Wisconsin  
Charleston

### **Greg Krohm**

Catholic Church  
Archdiocese of Chicago  
Wilmette

### **Fr. George Pyle**

Greek Orthodox Church  
Springfield/Champaign

### **Alicja Lukaszewicz-Southall**

Episcopal Church  
Diocese of Chicago  
Wauconda

### **Rev. Catiana McKay**

United Methodist Church  
Northern Illinois Conference  
Galena

## **Annual Assembly Forum Team**

### **Rev. Wally Carlson, chair**

United Methodist Church  
Great Rivers Conference  
Peoria Heights

### **Rev. Catiana McKay**

United Methodist Church  
Northern Illinois Conference  
Galena

### **Fr. Bob Flannery**

Catholic Church  
Diocese of Belleville  
Carbondale

### **Rev. Robert Sherman**

United Church of Christ  
Illinois Conference  
Kewanee

## **Illinois Christians Encountering Racism (ICER)**

### **Rev. Kevin Laughery, co-chair**

Catholic Church  
Diocese of Springfield  
Troy

### **Rev. Galda McCants, co-chair**

African Methodist Episcopal Church  
Springfield

### **Rev. Dwight Bailey**

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)  
Region of Illinois/Wisconsin  
Aurora

### **Rev. Mark Harkness**

United Methodist Church  
Northern Illinois District  
Walnut

### **Martha Herrin**

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)  
Region of Illinois/Wisconsin  
Stewardson

### **Rev. Christine Hopkins**

Episcopal Church  
Diocese of Springfield  
Champaign

### **Rev. Megan Dean**

United Methodist Church  
Northern Illinois Conference  
Bartlett

### **Rev. Sharon Patton**

Christian Church, Disciples of Christ  
Region of Illinois/Wisconsin  
Charleston

**Continued on next page**

**Interreligious Team**

**Rev. Catiana McKay, chair**

United Methodist Church  
Northern Illinois Conference  
Galena

**Dr. John Charlton**

American Baptist Church  
Great Rivers Region  
Chatham

**Fr. Kevin Laughery**

Catholic Church  
Diocese of Springfield  
Troy

**Hakan Berberoglu**

Niagra Foundation  
Chicago/Peoria

**Alicja Lukaszewicz-Southall**

Episcopal Church  
Diocese of Chicago  
Wauconda

**Greg Krohm**

Catholic Church  
Archdiocese of Chicago  
Wilmette

**Fr. Bob Flannery**

Catholic Church  
Diocese of Belleville  
Carbondale

**Rev. Joel Jackle-Hugh**

Presbyterian Church USA  
and United Church of Christ  
Pana

**Public Policy Team**

**E. Garnet Fay, chair**

Religious Society of Friends  
Oak Park

**Robert Gilligan**

Catholic Church  
Archdiocese of Chicago  
Chicago

**Rev. Gary McCants**

African Methodist Episcopal  
4th Episcopal District  
Springfield

**Rev. Wally Carlson**

United Methodist Church  
Great Rivers Conference  
Peoria Heights

**Rev. Dr. John Rickard**

Presbyterian Church - USA  
Blackhawk Presbytery  
Oregon

**\$\$\$\$\$ Thank you for your generous response to our 2018 pledge drive. If you have not yet filled out and returned your pledge card please do. To see a copy of our current budget or a recap on donations, please email and request a copy. Donations are always welcome - one easy way to donate is to use PayPal on our website. Again, thank you for your generous gifts.**

**Date to remember:**

**Friday, Sept. 28 Annual Assembly St. Peter's UCC, Champaign with dinner the evening before.**

**Illinois Conference of Churches**

**1608 W. Church St.**

**Champaign, IL 61821**

**[illinoisconferenceofchurches.org](http://illinoisconferenceofchurches.org)**

**Laurie Vial, executive director**

**[laurie@illinoisconferenceofchurches.org](mailto:laurie@illinoisconferenceofchurches.org) 217-522-7099**