

**Penn Central Conference
United Church of Christ
61st Annual Meeting Minutes
June 9 and 10, 2023**

The 61st Annual Meeting of Penn Central Conference of the United Church of Christ meeting was held at the DoubleTree Lancaster Resort in Willow Street, PA, as a hybrid meeting with in-person participants and remote online participants via ZOOM on Friday, June 9, 2023, and Saturday, June 10, 2023.

Welcome and Opening Worship

Rev. Dr. Carrie Call, Conference Minister, opened the meeting at 1:36 pm on June 9, 2023 with a welcome message and introduction of the conference ministers from the three other Pennsylvania conferences. Rev. Bill Worley, Conference Minister for Pennsylvania Southeast Conference, gave a brief in-person welcome message and recorded welcome messages from Rev. Dr. Bonnie Bates, Conference Minister for Penn Northeast Conference, and Rev. David Ackerman, Conference Minister for Penn West Conference were played.

The welcome was followed by the opening worship service. Rev. Bill Worley delivered the sermon.

Call to Order

Rev. Dwight Hein, Moderator, called the business meeting to order at 2:46 pm on June 9, 2023.

Dwight introduced key participants and leaders for the meeting and special guests.

June 9, 2023 – Business Session #1 Notes

1. Report on Quorum – Mr. Dale Mease, Secretary, reported that a quorum of 155 was met with the combination of 107 in-person delegates and 48 on-line delegates in the ZOOM meeting.
2. Standing Rules – Rev. Dwight Hein, Moderator, reviewed the standing rules of order that would be used for the meeting. The standing rules were also posted and available on the conference web site. The adoption of minutes and reports through the use of common consent was also covered.
3. The Consent Agenda was approved by common consent.
4. The minutes of the 2022 Annual Meeting were approved by common consent.
5. Nominations Commission Report – Rev. Dr. Galen Russell, Chair, delivered the report from the Commission of the candidates for the open positions on the Penn Central Conference Board of Directors and the 2023 delegates from Penn Central Conference to the United Church of Christ General Synod. There were still some vacancies for openings in these positions, and interested parties were asked to contact Galen so they could be included in the final Nominating Commission report that would be approved during one of the business sessions on June 10, 2023.
6. Test Vote – Rev. Dr. Nora Foust, Associate Conference Minister, reviewed the voting process for in-person delegates and voting process for remote delegates who were participating via a ZOOM meeting. A test vote was conducted with the in-person and remote delegates.
- 7. Official Business – Bylaws Change - Creation of the Church Futures Commission**
 - a. Mr. Michael Gibbs shared background and insights on the creation of the Church Futures Commission of Penn Central Conference.
 - i. Mike shared that the roots of the proposed commission are in the Congregational Empowerment Team that was formed in 2019.

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- ii. Mike also shared background on the changes that have surfaced in the needs of the church following the COVID pandemic.
 - iii. Mike noted that establishing this commission through the proposed changes to the bylaws places this commission under the Board of Directors and also having future candidates to serve on the commission provided by the Nominations Commission. Grants for funding the work of the commission will also be added.
 - iv. Dialog including questions answers were taken from in-person and on-line delegates.
 - v. The Board of Directors approved proposing a change to the conference bylaws to establish the creation of the Church Futures Commission at its meeting on January 22, 2023.
 - b. The proposed change to the bylaws of Penn Central Conference to establish the Church Futures Commission that was presented for approval as a motion from the Board of Directors was:
 - i. **The motion from the Board of Directors is to update the bylaws of Penn Central Conference of the United Church of Christ to establish the Church Futures Commission as an official commission.**
 - ii. This motion to change the bylaws was approved.
 - 1. This change was unanimously approved by the in-person delegates.
 - 2. This change was approved by 45 of the on-line delegates.
 - 3. Three (3) of the on-line delegates voted against this change.
- 8. Outdoor Ministries Report – Rev. Dr. Nora Foust, Associate Conference Minister, provided updates on Outdoor Ministries. Highlights included:
 - a. Over 100 people have registered for the Hartman Center Reunion Week in 2023.
 - b. Grants are available to help fund outdoor ministries.
 - c. \$60,000 in grants for outdoor ministries are available each year.
 - d. Grant applications will be reviewed and approved twice per year.
 - e. Nora introduced Michael Youse, Executive Director of the Lutheran Camping Corporation of Central Pennsylvania, who shared his remarks on outdoor ministry and the positive partnership between Lutheran Camping Corporation and Penn Central Conference.
- 9. Members in Discernment – Rev. Dr. Nora Foust, Associate Conference Minister, shared an introduction of the Members in Discernment and the roles that they are already serving with churches. There was a total of 18 Members in Discernment presented.
- 10. New Pastors - Rev. Dr. Nora Foust, Associate Conference Minister, introduced the new pastors that are serving in churches within the conference. There was a total of 30 new pastors presented.
 - a. Nora noted that there are approximately 40 churches within the conference that are in some state of pastoral transition.
- 11. Thank You to Our Chaplains – Rev. Dr. Carrie Call, Conference Minister, extended deepest thanks to all of the chaplains who are serving through our associations within the conference to help support our pastors and their families.

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12. State of the Conference – Rev. Dr. Carrie Call, Conference Minister, delivered the State of the Conference message. Key notes from her message included:
 - a. Images of Jesus and the disciples being in a boat together were used to present the journey that they shared through the challenging waters together.
 - i. She noted that the state of Penn Central Conference is strong, afloat, and generally airtight in comparison to these images.
 - b. Three key areas were highlighted in her message:
 - i. The good news of increased shared ministry
 1. Examples included sharing of pastors by churches, sharing of church buildings, and revisiting the model of the union churches that were formed by joint Reformed and Lutheran congregations.
 - ii. The challenging news of finding clergy to fill pastoral positions
 1. Our conference churches are primarily served by pastors who have grown and served within our conference.
 2. A lot of people are being called upon to serve as bridge or interim pastors without training as intentional interim ministers.
 3. New individuals who are being called to ministry are seeking churches in setting that we don't have within our conference. They are looking for churches in metropolitan areas that are looking for a full-time pastor near urban cities and churches that are Open and Affirming.
 4. Each church should be able to lead itself by having lay leaders who can lead worship services, when needed.
 - iii. The role of a conference
 1. Perspective on the covenant that the conference has in supporting congregations and pastors in the service of Jesus Christ were shared.
13. SpeakOuts – Rev. DiAnn Baxley facilitated the SpeakOut session that concluded Business Session #1.
14. This business Session recessed at 4:28 pm on June 9, 2023.

June 10, 2023 – Business Session #2 Notes

1. The business session was resumed at 8:45 am on June 10, 2023.
2. SpeakOuts – Rev. DiAnn Baxley facilitated the SpeakOut session that occurred at the start of Business Session #2.
3. Report on Quorum – Mr. Dale Mease, Secretary, reported that a quorum continued with 155 delegates.
4. Treasurer's Report – Rev. Michael Price, Treasurer, shared his report which included the following highlights:
 - a. The conference is managing its finances well by taking actions to lower costs and by living within its means.
 - b. The conference has completed the investment of the proceeds of the sale of the former St. John's United Church of Christ building in Lebanon, and the sale of Hartman Center by the end of March, 2023.

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- c. The conference currently has \$1.7 million in investments.
 - i. This includes \$1 million in funds designated for Outdoor Ministries.
 - 1. The conference has adopted a plan to withdraw 6% of the funds designated for Outdoor Ministries each year to be used for outdoor ministry programs. \$60,000 is the amount of the withdrawal for 2023.
- d. Michael explained that the fiscal audit for 2022 has not been completed yet.

i. Official Business – Motion to Empower the Board of Directors to Accept the Final Audit Report

- 1. A motion was made by Julie Holm and seconded by Amelia Price to empower the Board of Directors to accept the final audit document, when they arrive, on behalf of the annual meeting delegates.
 - a. The motion was unanimously approved.

5. Official Business – Bylaws Change – Addition of Annual PCC Fall Budget Meeting

- a. Michael Price presented the background on a change to the conference bylaws to add an annual fall budget meeting.
 - i. The conference is working on a fiscal year that runs from January 1 through December 31.
 - ii. Preparing the conference budget and approving the budget in the fall will allow the budget to be more accurate and is similar to the budget planning processes done by most of our churches.
 - b. The proposed change to the bylaws of Penn Central Conference to establish the addition of an annual fall conference budget meeting that was presented for approval as a motion from the Board of Directors was:
 - i. Motion to accept Bylaws Change: Amend Section VI. Finance, sub section 5. from: “The Board of Directors shall prepare the conference budget for approval by the Conference at the Annual Meeting.” To “The Board of Directors shall prepare the conference budget for approval by the Conference at a meeting of the Conference each fall held no later than November 15.”
 - c. Discussion
 - i. The plan that has been developed will be to host the fall budget meeting as a virtual meeting via ZOOM in the fall.
 - ii. Some group sites will be prepared to allow delegates in areas of the conference with poor or no internet access to meet and vote on the same day.
 - d. Approval
 - i. This proposed change to the bylaws was approved unanimously by the in-person and on-line delegates.
6. Nominations Commission – Rev. Dr. Galen Russell, Chair, presented the final report for the Commission.
- a. Board of Directors – Class of 2026 – Final List of Candidates
 - i. Rev. DiAnn Baxley Central Association (Clergy – 2nd Term)
 - ii. Rev. Heather Kurtz Gettysburg Association (Clergy – 1st Term)
 - iii. Mr. Josef Carlson Lancaster Association (Lay – 1st Term)

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- iv. Rev. Caroline Saxton Mercersburg Association (Clergy – 1st Term)
- v. Dr. Janis Taylor York Association (2nd Term)
- vi. There are currently no candidates for the Board of Directors from Harrisburg Association. They will be asked to nominate and supply possible candidates and these candidates will be considered and approved by the Board of Directors.

b. General Synod Delegates – 2025

- i. Brooke Bensinger (1) Lancaster
- ii. Andrew Boyer (2) York
- iii. Kathy Brown (2) Mercersburg
- iv. Brenda Eckert (1) Harrisburg
- v. Rev. Tony Fields (2) Lebanon
- vi. Riley Hoey, youth (1) Central
- vii. Mark Holm (2) Northern
- viii. Rev. Jes Kast (2) Northern
- ix. JoAnn Kreeger (1) York
- x. Julia Lambert (1) Lancaster
- xi. Gail Landers (2) Central
- xii. Lee Nocheck (1) Lancaster
- xiii. Rev. Libby Nocheck (1) Lancaster
- xiv. Rev. Alice Rauch (2) Central
- xv. Susan Rudy (1) Northern
- xvi. Rev. Caroline Saxton (1) Mercersburg
- xvii. Rev. Kelly Shiflett (2) York
- xviii. Rev. Judy Strayer (1) Harrisburg
- xix. Kristin Vines (1) Lebanon
- xx. Zach Worley (1) Lebanon
- xxi. Rev. Fred Young (1) Gettysburg
- xxii. Glenn Young (1) York

c. Official Business – Motion to Approve the Candidates to serve on the Board of Directors and the Candidates to serve as General Synod Delegates

- i. The motion was made from the Nominations Commission and seconded by Alyssa Boyer to approve the candidates identified to serve on the Board of Directors and the candidates identified to serve as General Synod delegates.
 - 1. The motion was unanimously approved.

7. The Keystone Project Report – Rev. Dr. Carrie Call, Conference Minister, and Rev. Bill Worley, Conference Minister for Pennsylvania Southeast Conference, delivered this report. The Keystone Project is a combined initiative of clergy and lay leaders from each of the four Pennsylvania Conferences of the United Church of Christ to vision and plan for a possible combined conference that would represent and support all of the United Church of Christ churches in Pennsylvania.

a. Summary of Remarks by Rev. Dr. Carrie Call

- i. The genesis for this initiative comes from several key statistics

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1. In 1962, there were over 1,000 UCC churches in Pennsylvania.
 2. In 2023, there are approximately 500 UCC churches in Pennsylvania.
 3. In 1962, there were approximately 2.2 million UCC members nationwide.
 4. In 2023, there are approximately 740,000 UCC members nationwide.
 - ii. Mergers within the church are only successful if we share the mission.
 - iii. There is great care being focused on how we care for our congregations and clergy at the heart of this initiative.
 - iv. "Together, we are stronger!"
 - v. Pennsylvania UCC churches have a distinctive voice within the United Church of Christ.
 - vi. The Keystone Project has received a \$90,000 grant from the Council of Conference Ministers to fund the work that is being performed.
 - vii. The Keystone Project has hired Rev. Bill Metzger from Penn Northeast Conference as a consultant to help with this project.
 - viii. The team working on the Keystone Project has figured out the answers to the "why" question and are now working on the answers to the "what" question.
 - ix. Changes to the conference boundaries within the United Church of Christ need to go to General Synod for approval.
 - x. The four Pennsylvania conferences will need to approve the proposed merger of the conferences into one in 2024 so that it can be presented to General Synod in 2025 for approval.
 - xi. The possibility of having a 4-way annual meeting of all of the Pennsylvania conferences in 2024 is being considered.
 1. The map of the Pennsylvania UCC churches shows that most of the churches are located in eastern Pennsylvania (east of the Susquehanna River) which will be considered in the planning for the 4-way meeting in 2024.
- b. Summary of Remarks by Rev. Bill Worley
- i. The four Conference ministers are working together so well that they have created their own Community of Practice.
 - ii. The mission of the church is to make disciples.
 - iii. Focus areas that have been agreed upon in the Keystone Project workgroup
 1. Youth ministry and education
 2. Leadership development
 3. Clarity about mission, value, and identity
 4. Attention to the local church
 5. Ecumenical relationships
 6. Cross fertilization – leveraging the conference staff appropriately
 7. The need for attention to rural and urban ministry needs
 8. Justice and witness ministries.

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- iv. The history of the previous failed attempt to merge Pennsylvania Southeast (PSEC) and Penn Northeast (PNEC) Conferences was shared. The key factors that led to the failure of this attempted merger in 2018 were:
 1. The financials were not tight enough.
 2. PNEC has no associations, and PSEC has five associations
 3. Identifying a location for the combined conference office
 4. The model for the combined conference staff
 5. The conferences had never met together.
 6. The work of the merger fell upon very few people.
8. This business session was recessed at 11:00 am on June 10, 2023.

June 10, 2023 – Business Session #3 Notes

1. The business session was resumed at 1:45 pm on June 10, 2023.
2. The commissioning of the new members of the Board of Directors and the 2023 General Synod delegates took place.
3. Recognition of “5 for 5 Churches” – Rev. Dr. Carrie Call, Conference Minister, delivered key notes which included:
 - a. The commitment and contributions to the “5 for 5” offerings change lives.
 - b. 48 churches in the conference are “5 for 5 Churches”.
4. Recognition of OCWM Giving – Rev. Dr. Carrie Call, Conference Minister, delivered key notes which included:
 - a. Penn Central Conference relies on gifts from our churches and individuals through Our Church’s Wider Mission (OCWM) to fund the work of the conference.
 - b. Our gifts to OCWM are a mark of our covenantal life.
 - c. 28 churches, unfortunately, choose to give nothing to OCWM, however, we are hoping to get to 100% of our churches contributing to OCWM.
 - d. Per capita giving to OCWM by congregations is a way of looking at the gifts and commitments to OCWM. Four churches were recognized as having the highest per capita contributions to OCWM. These churches are:
 - i. Emmanuel, York which has 18 members and the highest per capita giving.
 - ii. Quentin
 - iii. Penbrook
 - iv. Dover
5. Motion to adjourn was made by Tim Dugan and seconded by Amelia Price.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 2:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Dale H. Mease, Secretary