

THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

FEBRUARY 2025



International Council of Community Churches

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President's Message

Bob Fread

"Changes are Coming"

Beware! I'm going to use a word you may not like or find comfortable. The word is "change!" You have already seen change in past months as the office moved to Tennessee and we hired a new Administrative Assistant, Pam Kirkpatrick (Welcome, Pam!). But more change is coming.

Soon a draft of a new ICCC Constitution will be landing in your church's mailbox and you will be learning ways that you can be engaged

in the process of revising our Constitution. This new constitution proposes a return to a single governing board which would be smaller and more nimble than our current boards. Much of the ministry and mission of the Council would be done by a group of ministry teams that report to that board. I hope that you will take time to learn about these proposed changes and participate in this revision process.

Another change you will see in the coming months is in our Annual Conference. Because of costly hotel contracts we have experienced losses in excess of \$75,000 for the last three conferences. To address the future

sustainability of the conference, the Board of Directors voted to move conference out of hotels to be hosted by churches starting in 2026. This summer will be a transition year into this new format, with conference being held at Lake Forest College where the Council was formed in 1950. Beginning with this summer's conference, lodging and meetings will be at two separate venues.

The conference will also be shortened from four to three days. The Board understands this will be an uncomfortable change for many, but our other option was to forgo an in-person conference this year for a virtual one, which was an option many of us (myself included) did not favor.

Although many may not like change, please know that your leaders are seeking to be good stewards of our beloved Council and its resources, that the ICCC may continue to be a unique beacon of unity and reconciliation in a changing and divided world.

Grace & Peace,

Bob





Executive Director's Message

Bruce Merton

Straining Ahead and Pressing On: The ICCC in 2025

*"Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved . . . this one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus."
Philippians 3:12-14*



This powerful, poignant and potent verse speaks to us particularly as we enter a new year of ministry and mission together!

First, it encourages us to be future focused. "Straining" implies tension, expenditure of energy, a yearning for and leaning into what the future holds. "Forgetting what is behind" does not mean we lose touch with our history. It means we do not allow that history to be a millstone around the future's possibilities.

Second, when we "press on toward the goal" there is movement forward. We put "hand to the plow and do not look back."

Third, realizing the "call of God" must be our only and ultimate quest in living together and in the world as the ICCC.

With these things in mind and informing our activity and spirit, let us remember that the future is not something we can predict with utmost certainty. However, it is something we can prepare for with the assurance of God's presence, a proactive mindset and "thought-full" actions.

Our future together and as the ICCC is calling us to "creative imagineering." We are "straining forward" as we imagine either a new and fresh approach to what has been OR creating something of new and lasting value that does not have being now. Albert Einstein said, "Imagination is more important than knowledge, for while knowledge

defines all we currently know, imagination points to all we might discover and create."

When we apply "creative imagineering" to the shaping of our future, we will discover God's guidance in our midst and give that guidance expression. We will "press on toward the goal" by being **S.M.A.R.T.** in the setting of goals. We will be **S**pecific in identifying our goals; **M**ission and ministry focused; **A**nticipating success; **R**esponsible in prayer, thought and action; and **T**rusting in God's willingness, desire and ability to do extraordinary things through dedicated ordinary people.

Finally, "Straining ahead and pressing on" demands that we be bold and courageous. We must be willing to risk and fail with the knowledge that God is the God of second, third, and even fourth chances. We should risk being wrong as we struggle to get it right. God is forgiving! Being open to possibility and probing the unknown is not for the faint of mind, the lazy, or the spiritually doubting. We are not those things! We are the ICCC – Jesus has made us his own! We will "strain ahead" and "press on" because "there is nothing in death or life . . . or anything in all creation that will separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord." (Romans 8:38-39)

Bruce

ICCC FEBRUARY 2025

75th Anniversary Theme: Reflecting the Majesty of God (Revelation 4:3 ESV)



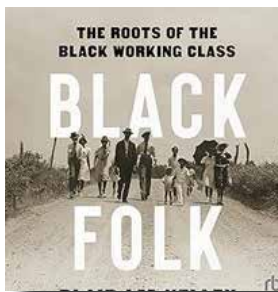
Book REVIEW

By Rev. Kenneth N. Nelson



As the ICCC celebrates 75 years of fostering Christian reconciliation and unity, our book reviews will reflect the intersection of faith, community, and social change. In observance of Black History Month 2025, themed "African Americans and Labor," we recommend three books illuminating African Americans' profound contributions to the labor movement and shaping American society. Here is a **one-minute** brief review. **Blair LM Kelley's *Black Folk: The Roots of the Black Working Class*** traces the resilient history of Black laborers, from laundresses and Pullman porters to essential workers of the COVID-19 pandemic, showcasing their pivotal role in labor movements and civil rights. **Joe William Trotter Jr.'s *Workers on Arrival: Black Labor in the Making of America*** chronicles the enduring impact of African American workers, from the transatlantic slave trade to the modern era, revealing their struggles and achievements in shaping the nation's economic and social fabric. **Jacqueline Jones's *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present*** highlights the overlooked yet vital experiences of Black women in the workforce, detailing their navigation of racism and sexism while balancing labor and family life.

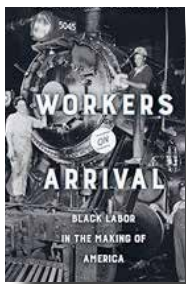
Blair LM Kelley's *Black Folk: The Roots of the Black Working Class*



Authored by historian Blair LM Kelley, this book delves into the history of the Black working class in America. *Kelley observes, "The history of Black labor is a story of resilience and resistance. From the laundresses who organized strikes to demand fair wages to the Pullman porters who laid the groundwork for the civil rights movement, Black workers have always fought for dignity in their labor."* The narrative spans from the era of slavery to the essential workers of the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasizing the resilience and agency of Black laborers throughout American history.

Here is one **Book Discussion Question** for *Black Folk: The Roots of the Black Working Class*: What connections can be drawn between past labor movements and essential workers' challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond?

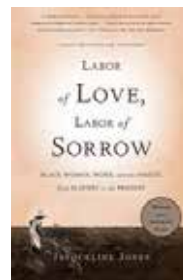
Workers on Arrival: Black Labor in the Making of America by Joe William Trotter Jr.



This book offers a comprehensive account of Black labor's vital role in shaping the United States. Trotter chronicles the journey of African American workers from the transatlantic slave trade to the industrial and post-industrial eras, shedding light on their struggles, achievements, and enduring impact on the nation's economic and social landscape. Trotter explores Black labor from the transatlantic slave trade to the modern era.

Here is one **Book Discussion Question** for *Workers on Arrival: Black Labor in the Making of America*: How does this book inform your understanding of current labor issues and movements?

Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present by Jacqueline Jones



Here is one **Book Discussion Question** for *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present*: How does Jones bring the experiences of Black women workers to light, and why are these contributions often overlooked?

Together, these works provide invaluable insights into the historical and ongoing intersections of race, labor, and justice, offering clergy and community leaders a foundation to foster meaningful dialogue and advocacy for social equity.

We Want to Hear from You! Do you have thoughts to share or want to start a book discussion? We invite you to send your comments or express interest in a discussion by emailing us at iccnw@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 your time. Thank you, and may your month be richly blessed!

Women's Christian Fellowship

By Winessa Crutchfield
ICCC WCF President

2025
HAPPY NEW YEAR

January 2025: A Happy and Blessed New Year!

The Women's Christian Fellowship (WCF) extends warm wishes to the International Council of Community Churches (ICCC) and all your families for a joyful and blessed New Year! As we embark on 2025, may our hearts remain steadfast in faith and love. This year, let us reflect on the words of **Isaiah 43:19**: "See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland." May this scripture inspire us all to embrace new beginnings with hope and confidence in God's providence.

Holiday Zoom Party Reflections

We extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone who joined our holiday Zoom party. It was a heartwarming evening filled with cherished memories of Christmases past. Special gratitude goes to Pastors Bruce Merton, Bob Fread, and William Samuels for their inspirational contributions as our special guests. Your presence enriched our celebration, and we are grateful for your ministry.



Upcoming Women's History Month Celebration

We are excited to announce our second Women's History Month Celebration!

Mark your calendars for **Thursday, March 27, 2025, at 8:00 PM (EST)**. This special event will be held via Zoom and is co-chaired by Mary Louise Woodcock and Sandra Roberts. Join us as we honor the achievements of women of faith throughout history and celebrate their enduring legacy.

Looking Ahead: Our 75th Annual Conference

The Women's Christian Fellowship is thrilled to invite you to our **75th Annual Conference** from **July 22-24, 2025**. This milestone event promises to be a time of spiritual renewal, fellowship, and reflection on the amazing grace journey of the ICCC over the past 75 years. Let this be a time to reconnect, rejuvenate, and rejoice in the Lord's faithfulness. We encourage all members to make plans to attend and be part of this historic occasion.



Closing Message

As we embark on this New Year, let us remain steadfast in our faith, unified in our purpose, and inspired by God's grace. Together, we can make 2025 a year of growth, service, and blessings.

With love and blessings,

The Women's Christian Fellowship Leadership Team

Winessa



PASTORAL
SEARCH
COMMITTEE

Interim Pastor

The Protestant Community Church (also known as the Cathedral of the Woods) of Medford Lakes, NJ, is seeking to fill the position of Interim Pastor. This will be a position beginning January 1 of 2025 and continue for the next 8-12 months. The Protestant Community Church (PCC) is located in a bucolic setting fewer than 20 miles east of Philadelphia. PCC is an interdenominational and congregationally governed church with an average attendance of 90-120 between two services at 8 o'clock and 10 o'clock.

The interim pastor is responsible for providing leadership and administrative oversight of the church's ministries, including worship, music, preaching, teaching, mission service, stewardship, and fellowship. This Individual will work with the church staff to provide opportunities for members to engage in worship, discipleship, and mission. This individual will use their developed interim-specialist skills to assess the congregation's current and long-term needs and provide counsel and leadership to the church. The Interim Pastor will help to prepare the congregation for a new pastoral leadership.

The Interim Pastor is accountable to the PCC congregation and its Board of Trustees. The applicant must hold a degree from an accredited or recognized Seminary or Bible College, be Ordained or Licensed Minister, have experience as a Lead or Senior Pastor, preferably with interim training.

If interested in this position, please submit the following:

- Cover letter that includes salary expectation
- Current resume (including email address and contact telephone numbers)
- Personal Statement of Faith
- Submit three personal and two professional (minister/pastor) letters of reference
- Copy of Ministerial License and/or Certificate of Ordination

Please submit your information to: The Protestant Community Church, c/o Carol R. Vahlstrom, 100 Stokes Road, Medford Lakes, NJ 08055

Relief for California Wildfires



Those ICCC congregations and individuals who wish to help the relief efforts for the California Wildfires are suggested to give to our ICCC Mission Partner, Church World Service (CWS). CWS provides support in the form of CWS Kits and Blankets, technical assistance and information sharing with local partners, as well as offering limited temporary housing for newcomers needing to evacuate.

In collaboration with CWS local offices, CWS' Emergency Preparedness, Response and Recovery team (EPRR) has also assembled and distributed over 200 fire- waterproof "Go Bags" with essential supplies for evacuation for newcomer families.

To donate to this relief effort please send your donation payable to the ICCC, with memo "CWS CA Fires," and send to **ICCC, PO Box 249, Loudon, TN, 37774.** Thank you.



International Council of Community Churches

"As people devoted to following Christ we are committed to community, to treasuring diversity, to living our faith in service and love."

Reminder of New ICCC address P.O. BOX 249 LOUDON, TN 37774



815-464-5690
(SAME)



icccnow@sbcglobal.net
(SAME)



P.O. Box 249
Loudon, TN 37774

New Office Hours as of 1/28/25

(all times U.S. Eastern):

Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays
9:00 AM - 1:00 PM

Tuesdays & Thursdays (hours have changed)
1:00 PM - 5:00 PM.

Pamela Kirkpatrick (Pam) is the new Administrative Assistant. We appreciate your continuing patience during this time of transition.

Sharing Concerns:

- We extend our heartfelt condolences to the loved ones of **Rev. Edward Knight**, ICCC member who was a chaplain for the Coast Guard. He passed away on Dec. 15, 2024.



Please email your Joys and/or Concerns that you would like published in our newsletter to:

icccpk@sbcglobal.net.

You may also call us at 815-464-5690.

Thank you.