

THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY



MARCH 2025

International Council of Community Churches

Volume 75 |

A Voice for Ecumenical Congregations and Christians Around the World

| Number 5

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*Please join us this year
as we celebrate!*



July 22-24, 2025
Lake Forest, Illinois
See inside for more info!

President's Message



I live in Iowa. Two years ago, the Iowa Board of Regents who govern our three state universities (Iowa, Iowa State and Northern Iowa) followed the lead of some other states and the urging of the governor, and voted to close the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) offices at all our state universities and to eliminate the DEI Director at all three schools. Now in recent months similar actions are being taken by the federal government and in many national businesses and corporations. This is not just an outrage, but a pure attempt to erase the wondrous acts of God.

The diversity of humanity, as well as the diversity of the whole created order, is a wonderful, joyful, glorious, extravagant, spectacular act of a loving God. Colors, races, ethnicities, languages, genders, etc., show the unimaginable, unfathomable love and creativity of God. To see and experience diversity is truly a WOW moment! And for diversity to be lived to its fullest, all people must be treated as equals and included in the structures which shape, lead, and imagine the future of our society and all creation. To somehow deny diversity, equality and inclusion is to deny the very image of the Divine in us.

The church has not always done well in the areas of diversity, equity and inclusion. Truthfully, the church's

record has been abominable at times. Yet lest we forget, the Christian Scriptures tell us:

"I truly understand that God shows no partiality."

Acts 10:34 NRSVUE

"There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."

Galatians 3:28 NRSVUE

"My [siblings], do not claim the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ of glory while showing partiality."

James 2:1 NRSVUE (altered)

"For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him."

Romans 10:12 NRSVUE

"After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb."

Revelation 7:9 NRSVUE

With Scriptures like this, how could the church have gotten it so wrong at times?

Dear siblings in Christ and in the ICCC, recognizing the value of diversity, equity and inclusion caused the birth of our Community Churches Movement. Overcoming divisive theologies, denominational power structures, ecclesiastical male domination, clerical superiority, and racial separation is all part of why our movement exists and why it is still seeking reconciliation and unity by celebrating the gifts of God's diversity.

**Celebrate God
by celebrating diversity!**

Bob





Executive Director's Message

Bruce Merton

This Lent: Let us Give Instead of Giving Up

On Wednesday, March 5, many in the Christian world will begin the journey to Resurrection Sunday as we move through Lent. Lent is the 40 day period, excluding Sundays, preceding the highest of Christian holy days, Easter.

Many will approach Ash Wednesday and the Lenten journey by asking the question, "What am I going to give up?" Lent is often seen as a time to reflect on the sacrifice that Jesus made in giving his life on the cross for the redemption of all. In turn, we have come to focus on "sacrificing" or "giving up" something for the season of Lent. I often hear from people that they are giving up a favorite food (chocolate, pizza or steak), favorite drink (soda, alcoholic beverages, orange juice), or a favorite activity (movie going, golf playing, card games). The reality for many is that what we "sacrifice" or "give up" is easy to do especially because Sundays are Feast Days in Lent and we can binge on what we faithfully gave up for the six previous days.

Is it possible to "reframe" Lent? Instead of focusing on Jesus "giving up" his life as a "sacrifice," would we be willing to focus on Jesus willingly "giving" his life for the world? **The seemingly small shift in focus results in a Lenten journey in which we choose consciously to GIVE instead of "giving up."**

This year Lent will be a time in which I give instead of giving up. I invite and encourage you to join me.

Our world is crying out for relief in a multitude of ways. People, individually and together, are hurting – emotionally, physically and spiritually. They are longing for proactive, positive and life-changing help in word and deed from people who want to GIVE of themselves so others may simply live a little better.

This Lent, let us **GIVE INSTEAD OF GIVING UP!**

I will give some examples by sharing things I am going to give during Lent. I invite you to join me in some of the presented activities and encourage you to share with me the way you choose to **GIVE INSTEAD OF GIVING UP.**

You can **GIVE** blood, plasma or platelets. A single donation can literally save the life of a person!

You can go through your closet and **GIVE** good, unneeded clothes to organizations that clothe people in help programs such as drug and alcohol rehabilitation or abuse shelters.

You can **GIVE** a day of your time to read to or lead an activity for senior citizens in an assisted living facility.

You can **GIVE** a day of your time to volunteer in the local soup kitchen for the purpose of preparing and serving meals to those in need.

You can **GIVE** a day of respite care for a homebound person so their daily caregiver can have some free time and a breath of fresh air.

You can **GIVE** a monetary gift to one of the agencies/organizations that are doing the ministry of feeding and healing the needy in our world despite our government's constantly expanding selfishness.

This Lent, **GIVE INSTEAD OF GIVING UP!** Lives will be changed; Jesus will be emulated; God will be blessed, and you and I will learn more fully the joy that comes in giving rather than receiving.

Bruce

ICCC MARCH 2025 Women's History Month

Women of Faith and Resilience: Honoring the Past, Inspiring the Future

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

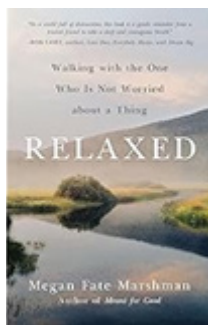


Book REVIEW

By Rev. Kenneth N. Nelson



As the ICCC continues to celebrate 75 years of fostering Christian unity and reconciliation, we recognize the decisive role of women of faith in shaping history, strengthening communities, and inspiring future generations. In observance of Women's History Month 2025, we recommend three books selected from *Publisher's Weekly* that highlight the resilience, spiritual growth, and leadership of women navigating faith, purpose, and renewal. **One-Minute Brief Review:** *Relaxed: Walking with the One Who Is Not Worried About a Thing* invites women to embrace faith-driven peace amid life's uncertainties, drawing on Proverbs 3:5-6 to encourage trust in God's plan. *Born Royal: Overcoming Insecurity to Become the Woman God Says You Are* by **Oneka McClellan** uplifts women by exploring biblical role models like Mary, Esther, and Deborah, calling readers to step into their God-given identity. In *Face Forward: Reclaiming Hope When Everything Falls Apart*, **Bethny Ricks** shares her journey through adversity, career challenges, and faith, encouraging women to embrace setbacks as part of God's more excellent plan for their lives.



Relaxed: Walking with the One Who Is Not Worried About a Thing

In *Relaxed*, Women's ministry leaders and Teaching Pastor Megan Fate Marshman invite readers to embrace spiritual rest and trust in God's timing, even when life feels chaotic. Through personal storytelling and biblical wisdom, she reflects on women's burdens — financial stress, guilt, and exhaustion — and provides a path toward a faith-filled

life that prioritizes spiritual peace over anxiety.

Each chapter examines Proverbs 3:5-6 (KJV) — “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” — and makes a case for a slower, more intentional spiritual life. Marshman asserts, “Rather than asking, ‘God, what would You have me do?’ ask, ‘God, what are You already doing?’ Follow that up with ‘And how can I join You?’” (p. 197).

Book Discussion Question: How can Proverbs 3:5-6 help women navigate moments of uncertainty and transition in their lives?

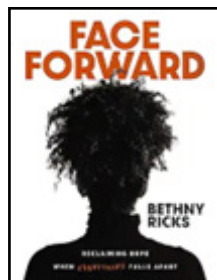


Born Royal: Overcoming Insecurity to Become the Woman God Says You Are

In this book, Pastor Oneka McClellan encourages women to embrace their divine calling and overcome insecurities that hinder spiritual and personal growth. McClellan draws inspiration from biblical women who

demonstrated courage and faith in times of uncertainty. She calls readers to claim their identity as daughters of the King and live boldly in God's purpose. McClellan maintains, “First, we need to allow Jesus to build us up personally so we can build one another up corporately” (p. 15).

Book Discussion Question: How can the stories of biblical women like Esther and Deborah inspire confidence and leadership among women today?



Face Forward: Reclaiming Hope When Everything Falls Apart

Bethny Ricks provides an honest and inspiring account of overcoming professional and personal hardships while holding onto faith. She shares her struggles with workplace challenges, self-doubt, and discrimination, offering a powerful testimony of resilience. Her story encourages women to

embrace difficulties as opportunities for spiritual growth and transformation.

Ricks observes, “When our hope and trust become bound to how people feel about us, we are left exposed in ways we cannot fathom. Psalm 118:8 tells us, ‘It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in humans’” (p. 7).

Book Discussion Question: How does faith help women turn life's disappointments into stepping stones for growth and purpose?

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 a book encourage you to take action or change your perspective? How did the stories or biblical insights impact your faith journey? May we quote or paraphrase your insights in a future review?

Your thoughts enrich our community, and we appreciate your time and engagement. May this Women's History Month be filled with faith, strength, and renewal!

Leading by Preaching

by Rev. Dr. Bill Ireland

Our role as a leader of a congregation is most visible when we stand up to preach. Whenever we step into the pulpit we are quite literally “out in front”—thus fulfilling the shorthand definition of a leader. On any given Sunday, we strive to bring the truth of the gospel to bear on the lives of our people. Quite often we speak to their grief, fear, despair, and other needs. Other times, we ask questions without easy answers, thus inviting our people to reflect on where they are in their faith and what needs to change. On still other occasions, we attempt to speak to specific issues facing the congregation: raising funds for a project, responding to a trauma in the larger community, or painting a picture of the future of the church and mobilizing it to fulfill its mission. Moreover, in these troubled times, we have a responsibility to speak to larger issues affecting our country. How do we help our people to live as faithful disciples in the midst of a contentious and troubled culture? No matter the occasion, whenever we take to the pulpit, we are leading by preaching.

Learning to lead well through preaching is a lifelong task. Parts of this role may come easily to us. We may possess an innate “feel” for how to proceed. At other times we may feel that we’re in over our heads. The task is too big, and we are too small. Given the fissures in our culture, bringing the gospel to bear on real-world stuff is a daunting task, to say the least. We thus may step into the pulpit with dry mouths and sweaty hands. Putting ourselves out there is risky business.

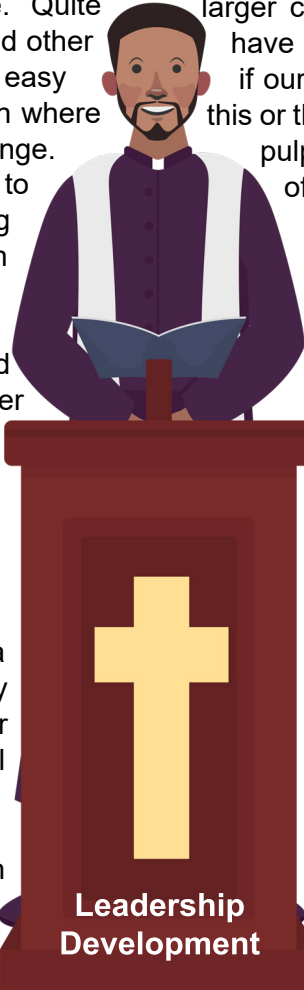
Nevertheless, leading by preaching is not optional. Here are a few words of caution and encouragement.

Before we preach let’s be sure the issue is one that truly matters to the congregation. Catching our listeners off-guard short-circuits our message. Instead of turning on the light, we leave our people in the dark. *Why did she preach on that? Is there something going on? Where did that come from?* Although we have to raise awareness, springing an issue on our people without some advance preparation will likely result in confusion rather than clarity. Frustration will be the order of the day, and we will raise the level of anxiety instead of lowering it.

With regard to the above, we must be careful of those who seek to make their issues our issues. Just because someone is highly invested in a cause or project doesn’t mean that I have to be in the same place. This is an instance where we must keep the larger congregation in view. The cause may indeed have merit. Nevertheless, we must ask ourselves if our people are as aware or as passionate about this or that as its advocates. Let us remember that our pulpit is our pulpit, and we must follow the leading of the Spirit to set the agenda for our people.

Being truthful is also essential. This requirement should be obvious and go without saying. Sadly, however, we are living in a moment when truth is up for grabs. Pilate’s question to Jesus, “What is truth?” is the watchword of our day. Too many imagine the truth is fungible, and as a result, many are liable to shop for the version of the “truth” that aligns with what they already think. Complicating matters is the hair trigger response many offer when what we say doesn’t match up with what they believe. As a result, Sunday’s sermon may lead to Monday’s griping and complaining. To avoid catching this kind of flak, we may be tempted to shade the truth to spare ourselves some grief and heartache. Since truth is in such short supply today, we must speak the truth as best we understand it from scripture and to the best of our ability.

Some issues may spark some righteous indignation and anger on our part. Seeing or learning of an injustice may inflame our passions and inspire us to speak. In such cases, we are right to be angry, but carrying all that anger into the pulpit can prove detrimental. In this respect, putting Paul’s adage, “Be angry but do not sin” in our sermon preparation and delivery is a healthy guideline. After all, we want people to remember what we said, not how angry or passionate we were. We don’t want the sound of our thunder to drown out the gospel. Too much anger can sabotage the best of sermons.



Leading by Preaching

cont'd. from page 5

Obviously, preaching on some topics is a “high risk” event. Speaking the truth as best we can to the issues of the day is not without consequence. Pushback is inevitable, and in some cases, we may find our jobs on the line. We can expect some leaders within the church to advise us to cool it and move on to something else. This hard reality of congregational life suggests that if we know a sermon is going to generate some heat, we would be well served to have in place some opportunities for conversation, feedback, and constructive criticism beforehand. An open door makes for an open pulpit, one in which we can be free to speak the truth as best we understand it.

In light of the observations above, let us recognize that we also lead by preaching when we’re willing to admit we were wrong.

Despite our best efforts to get things right and speak the truth, we can and do fall short. A lack of information, a delayed recognition of our personal biases, or an unconscious (or conscious!) twisting of a text to serve our own ends—all these things and more can result in us reaching the wrong conclusion. I recall an old John Wayne movie in which his character said, “Never apologize! It’s a sign of weakness!” I disagree! When we get it wrong, the best thing we can say is, “I missed it. I spoke too soon. I said the wrong thing.” Being in front of a crowd and preaching a message that captures our hearers is a heady thing. Standing before our people and admitting we got off track won’t give us the same buzz. Such an act gives them yet another reason to trust us with the gospel and to keep listening.

Let me hem these suggestions with hope.

Preaching in a worship service is the one time during the week when we have an opportunity to speak to the entire system. When we discharge our calling in thoughtful and generous ways, we open the doors for the Holy Spirit to take what we’ve said and what they’ve heard and turn it into life-changing gospel. In the final analysis, this is likely the reason we got into this business in the first place. When we enter the pulpit and put ourselves out front, we are inviting our church to go with us as we seek God’s kingdom. When someone follows, that makes leading by preaching all the more worthwhile.

WCF Meeting Update

By Winessa Crutchfield
ICCC WCF President

We are excited to share updates from our most recent meeting!

- **Annual Women’s History Gathering:** Mark your calendars! Our annual Women’s History Zoom gathering will take place on **March 27**. This special event will be co-chaired by **Sandra Roberts** and **Mary Louise Woodcock**, and we look forward to celebrating together.



- **Assistant Treasurer:** We are pleased to welcome **Marion Bright** as our assistant treasurer. Thank you, Marion!



Winessa

Conference Volunteers Needed for Children

With the annual conference coming up, we are searching for caring, enthusiastic volunteers to help with the children's program. This is a great opportunity to invest in our youngest attendees, creating a fun and meaningful experience for them while their families participate in the conference.

The time commitment is about eight hours total, spread over the three-day conference. If we get enough volunteers, we can rotate shifts so that everyone gets a break.

If you're interested or have questions, please reach out to Rev. Amanda Alvarado at amanda.alvarado@uprisingaustin.org. Thank you for helping us make this a welcoming and engaging space for all!





International Council of Community Churches

TO: ICCC MEMBER CHURCHES

FROM: Pastor R.C. Fleeman, Peace Community Church, Ft. Myers Beach, Florida

Dear ICCC Church Families:

I have been tasked with creating a commemorative booklet for the ICCC's 75th Anniversary. The conference planning committee wishes to include congratulatory ads in the booklet. Hopefully, every member church will participate by purchasing an ad.

Here's how it will work:

- Ad prices are below. Despite inflation, the prices have not increased in several years.
- Choose the size of the ad you want to have included in the booklet.
- Create your ad copy / layout and send it to me.
- Hopefully your ad will highlight your church and offer congratulations to the ICCC on its 75th anniversary. You might also wish to include the number of years your church has been a member of the ICCC.

Please send the ad copy to me at: icccbooklet2025@gmail.com . I can accept ads in JPEG, pdf, and MS Word, PowerPoint and Publisher formats.

I am willing to help you with the layout for an ad if you wish. If you prefer, you may also mail the ad copy to me at:

Rev. R.C. Fleeman
c/o Peace Community Church
P.O. Box 60958
Fort Myers, FL 33906

Please send funds to cover the cost of the ad to the ICCC office by mail and indicate that the payment is for an ad in the booklet. Payment by check should be mailed to:

**ICCC
P.O. Box 249
Loudon, TN 37774**

DEADLINE: April 30, 2025

AD PRICES:

- 8" width x 11" height (Full Page): \$200.00
- 8" width x 5" height (Half Page): \$110.00
- 4" width x 5" height (Quarter Page): \$60.00

Thanks,
Rev. R.C. Fleeman



**PASTORAL
SEARCH
COMMITTEE**

Seeking Pastor

Seeking a Shepherd for Our Little Church in the Woods

Bradford Woods Community Church, nestled in the heart of Bradford Woods, PA, (just a stone's throw from Pittsburgh), a vibrant non-denominational congregation, seeks a dynamic pastor who embodies warmth, charisma, and a passion for community. We are looking for someone who can connect with people, inspire growth, and lead our church. We're a close-knit congregation averaging about 30-35 in Sunday attendance, with a rich history dating back to 1915.

Our ideal candidate will embody Christ's love, foster inclusivity, and guide us in spiritual growth and community service. We are also looking for someone who can connect with people to grow the congregation in an intentional and meaningful way. If you are driven to make a difference and eager to engage with our congregation and the broader community, we want to hear from you!

Come help us continue our mission of spreading God's love through worship, education, and outreach in our serene woodland sanctuary. For more details, please contact us at BWCC2025@gmail.com

Bradford Woods Community Church
4836 Wexford Run Road,
Bradford Woods PA 15015
724-935-3135

75th Annual Conference

July 22-24, 2025 – Lake Forest, IL

Conference Lodging Information

The ICCC recommends using the Hilton Garden Inn in Lake Forest, IL, for those attending the 2025 Annual Conference.

The hotel address is:
26225 North Riverwoods Boulevard
Lake Forest, IL 60045.

This hotel is about 5 miles from the Lake Forest College campus and is the closest hotel to the college.

The ICCC has a courtesy block of rooms at the special rate of:

- \$159 plus tax for a king room or
- \$169 plus tax for a double queen room.

These rates are good from Sunday, July 20 to Friday, July 25. The deadline to receive this rate is Sunday, June 15, or until the hotel sells out of rooms, whichever is first.

We encourage people to make reservations EARLY. Reservations may be made by:

- clicking the link below OR

<https://na01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.hilton.com%2Fen%2Fbook%2Freservation%2Fdeeplink%2F%3Fctyhocn%3DORDLFGI%26groupCode%3DICCC25%26arrivaldate%3D2025-07-20%26departuredate%3D2025-07-25%26ci-d%3DOM%2CWW%2CHILTONLINK%2CEN%2CDirectLink%26fromId%3DHILTONLINKDIRECT>

- **calling 847-735-8374** and using the code **ICCC25** OR
- making your reservation online through www.hilton.com and entering the code **ICCC25** in the **Group Code** field. It should automatically give you the ICCC rate IF your reservation is for the dates included (between July 20 and July 25).

PLEASE NOTE: Due to the new conference format, no conference programming will be held at this hotel. Most conference programming will be held on the Lake Forest College campus, 555 North Sheridan Road, Lake Forest, Illinois 60045. Individuals will be responsible for transportation between the hotel and the college.

Other Lodging Options (5 to 10 miles from college)

Sleep Inn, 3250 Bittersweet Ave, Lake Bluff, IL 60044, (224) 303-4592

Comfort Inn and Suites, 517 E. Highway 83, Mundelein, IL 60060, (224) 245-5077





International Council of Community Churches
ICCC Registration Form – 2025 Annual Conference: July 22-24
75th Anniversary Conference
"Seeking God's Vision: Remembering the Past, Dreaming a Future"
Lake Forest, IL

Name (as you would like it on badge) _____

Full Address _____

Telephone (_____) _____ E-mail Address: _____

Emergency Contact Name _____ Phone _____

Church (member of) _____

First Conference: Yes No Status: Clergy Laity

➤ ➤ ➤ **FOR THE ELEMENTARY AND YOUTH PROGRAMS ONLY!** ⬅ ⬅ ⬅

■ Age (on 7-1-2025) _____ Grade completed by (7-1-2025) _____

■ If **under 18**, an adult who is registered for the Conference and who will serve as a sponsor and assume responsibility for said young person must sign below:

_____ Sponsor Signature _____ Print Sponsor Name

CONFERENCE FEES

Fill in Dollar Amount for this
Registration

Infants/Small Child (birth to not entering kindergarten)	\$ 0.00	\$
Elementary Child (entering kindergarten - entering 6th grade)	\$ 100.00	\$
Youth (completed 6th grade - entering 12th grade)	\$ 150.00	\$
Young Adult (completed 12th grade - age 29)	\$ 175.00	\$
Adult Register by May 31, 2025 - Early Bird Special \$195.00	\$ 220.00	\$
Tuesday Daily Registrant (non-buffet registration is \$40)	\$ 100.00	\$
Wednesday Daily Registrant	\$ 60.00	\$
Thursday Daily Registrant	\$ 60.00	\$
TOTAL ENCLOSED		\$

A **75th Anniversary Buffet** will be served on Tuesday, July 22, and is included in the registration fee. Tickets for the Buffet are limited to 120 people, on a first come, first served basis. Buffet tickets are only sold as part of a registration. No buffet tickets will be sold after June 30. (Registrations without a buffet ticket will be reduced by \$60)

Please return this form with payment to: ICCC, PO Box 249, Loudon, TN 37774

Check or Money Order made payable to ICCC VISA MASTERCARD AMEX DISCOVER

Acct. #: _____ Exp. Date: _____ CVV: _____

Print name as it appears on card: _____ Signature _____

One form per person. Early Bird registration must be **received in the office by May 31st**. Registrations after June 30, 2025 will be accepted at Conference only and will not include a buffet ticket. **CANCELLATIONS:** A cancellation received in the office by July 11 will be refunded the registration fee less \$25 administration fee per person. Cancellations received in the office on or after July 12 will be refunded the registration fee less \$ 75 administration fee per person.

ANNUAL CONFERENCE SESSIONS MAY BE VIDEOTAPED OR LIVE STREAMED. By registering for conference, you agree the ICCC may use or broadcast your image, name, voice and story in any medium or format, throughout the world forever, free-of-charge, and for any reasonable purpose in furtherance of its mission.