

2024 Annual Gathering of the Florida Conference of the United Church of Christ
Wyndham/Wyndham Garden
Lake Buena Vista Disney Springs Resort
October 17-19, 2024

Business Plenary I

Moderator Lynn Jones called the 61st Annual Gathering together at 10:14 AM. A quorum was established with: 49 churches represented, 50 lay delegates, 43 authorized ministers with Florida standing, 12 Board members, 105 voting attendees, and 32 visitors.

Robert's Rules of Order were implemented.

The Agenda was approved.

Mickie Wick and Declan Williams were appointed tellers.

Minutes of the 2023 Annual Gathering were approved.

Special guests were introduced: Stacey Pettice, UCC National Office-Executive, Business Development; Cindy Howell, UCC Insurance Board; Katie Howe, UCC National Office-Minister for Disaster Response & Recovery; Keynote speaker Rev. Vince Amlin, Pastor, Bethany United Church of Christ & Gilead Church (Chicago, Illinois), and visiting musicians.

The Florida Conference Board Members and staff were introduced.

Our new Transitional Conference Minister, Rev. Nayiri Karjian, was introduced.

The Nominating Committee chair, Rev. Karen Curtis-Weakley, gave the initial report on the slate with one position open on the Budget and Finance Committee.

Announcements included space for contemplation, scheduled workshops, and locations for the workshop sessions.

Business Plenary II

The afternoon plenary began at 4:43 PM.

Legacy Funds Report was given by the new chair, Rev. Dr. David Kaiser-Cross. He introduced his committee and gave a shout out to Mike Downs who did this job for many years. We have nine funds totaling over \$9 million, most of which are restricted. They are mostly invested with Raymond James Financial, Inc., and earned 11.5% this quarter and 21.6% the last 12 months.

Budget Presentation was given by Rev. Elizabeth “Lisa” LeSueur. The Florida Conference Office became fully staffed earlier this year which made for a slight increase. The year is projected to be fairly stable with hope and support going forward.

Presentation of Bylaws Amendments

Presentation of Southeast Conference Geographic Boundary Change

Open Nominations

Invitation to Receive Casa de Restauración Cristiana Ebenzer, in Lakeland. Rev. Joel Quiles and his congregation were warmly welcomed.

Announcements about special requests for dinner and invitations to sign up with Lynn for Speak-Outs on Saturday.

Business Plenary III

Moderator's Remarks

Lynn reflected on the chaos in Florida the last few weeks, saying we were strongest together. It has been a different year of transformation and resurrection. We have a new Associate Conference Minister, John Vertigan retired; Dana Ney is back in the office; Rev. Nayiri Karjian has joined us; and new Board and Committee members. We have 70 pastors and 14 members in discernment. We are financially sound with investments, OCWM, reserves and nationally. What's next?

Lynn challenged the gathered community to think about

- Strategic planning and new marketing thorough media for our churches
- Collaboration between churches
- Keeping up the fight to be inclusive for all
- What you would do if you knew that your church was closing in one year?

Thank you for your support, grateful for something bigger, together we can make a just world for all!!

Vote on Nominating Slate

Rev. Karen Curtis-Weakley presented the full slate from the Nominating Committee which was moved, seconded, and passed unanimously.

Nominating Committee Report 2024

Officers – 2 year terms

Moderator: *Rev. Vonshelle Beneby (Hope United Church of Christ, Rockledge)
Vice Moderator: Rev. John Barnette (Fort Myers Congregational UCC)
Immediate Past Moderator: Lynn Jones (First Congregational UCC, Sarasota)
Registrar: *Ms. Dyanne Edds (Lakewood UCC, St. Petersburg)
Treasurer: *Rev. Jessica Derise (Miami Shores Community Church)

Board of Directors – 2 year terms

*Rev. Dr. David Kaiser-Cross (*JupiterFirst Church*)
*Ms. Candy Norland (*Naples United Church of Christ*)
*Rev. Megan Smith (*Coral Gables Congregational UCC*)
Rev. Nayiri Karjian (*Transitional Conference Minister*)
*Ms. Margaret Hayes (Hope United Church of Christ, Rockledge)
*Rev. Shawn Proctor (United Church of Christ of New Smyrna Beach)
*Rev. Geoff Gross (The Community Church, Cocoa Beach)
*Ms. Laurie Hope (First United Church of Christ, Dunedin)
*Rev. Jen Daysa (Good Samaritan Church, Pinellas Park)
*Rev. Dr. Sheila Harvey (Union Congregational Church, West Palm Beach)
*Ms. Kerry Weisner (First Congregational Church, Winter Park)
Mr. Peter Rhoten (*JupiterFirst Church*)
Mr. Declan Williams (Windermere Union Church)
* Rev. Elizabeth “Lisa” LeSueur (*Coral Gables Congregational UCC*)
*Rev. Karen Curtis-Weakley (Hope United Church of Christ, Rockledge)
Rev. Gwen Templeton (First Congregational Church, Ocala)

Nominating Committee – 2-year terms (chair 3-year terms)

Chair: *Rev. Karen Curtis-Weakley (Hope United Church of Christ, Rockledge)
*Rev. Vonshelle Beneby (*Hope United Church of Christ, Rockledge*)
*Rev. Mike Ford (Congregational United Church of Christ, Punta Gorda)
*Rev. Geoff Gross (The Community Church, Cocoa Beach)
*Rev. Marcelino Riviera (Windermere Union Church)
*Rev. Victoria Snow (Community Congregational Church, New Port Richey)
*Dr. Cynthia Clark (Church of the Open Door Congregational, Miami)
*Ms. Kerry Weisner (First Congregational Church, Winter Park)

Committee on Ministry – 3-year terms

Chair: *Rev. Megan Smith (*Coral Gables Congregational UCC*)
*Rev. Vonshelle Beneby (*Hope United Church of Christ, Rockledge*)

Western Region

Chair: Rev. Mike Ford (Congregational United Church of Christ, Punta Gorda)
Ms. Alicia Isaac (Church of the Isles, Indian Rocks Beach)
Ms. Daphne Thomas (First United Church of Tampa)
Ms. Dyanne Edds (Lakewood UCC, St. Petersburg)
*Rev. Joe DiDonato (United Church of Christ at The Villages)
*Rev. Attila Szemesi (North Port Community UCC)

Northeast Region

Chair: *Mr. Dan Lamson (The Community Church, Vero Beach)
Ms. Sammie Hartwell (United Church of Christ of New Smyrna Beach)
Ms. Jennett Baker (New Vision Congregational UCC, Yulee)
Rev. Karen Curtis-Weakley (Hope United Church of Christ, Rockledge)
*Rev. Rob Hunter (Faith Congregational Church, Port St. Lucie)
Rev. David Westcott (First Congregational Church, Orange City)

Southeast Region

Chair: *Rev. Harvey Lockhart (First Church of North Miami, Congregational)
Ms. Joy Young (Faith Congregational Church, Port St. Lucie)
Ms. Joycelyn Patrick (Church of the Palms, Delray Beach)
*Rev. Hollie Schmidt (Plymouth Congregational Church, Miami)
*Rev. Gregorio Marin (Sunset Congregational UCC, Miami)
*Ms. Lynn Hughes (JupiterFirst Church)

Budget and Finance Committee – 2-year terms (chair 3-year terms)

Chair: *Rev. Elizabeth “Lisa” LeSueur (Coral Gables Congregational UCC)
**Rev. Vonshelle Beneby (Hope United Church of Christ, Rockledge)*
**Rev. Jessica Derise (Miami Shores Community Church)*
**Rev. Dr. David Kaiser-Cross (JupiterFirst Church)*
*Ms. Melissa Brown (Congregational United Church of Christ, Punta Gorda)
*Mr. Charlton Copeland (First Church of North Miami)
*Dr. Brian Hodges (Cocoa Beach Community Church)
Mr. Declan Williams (Windermere Union Church)
Rev. Andrew Bachman (United Church of Gainesville)
Mr. Joe Akin (Fort Lauderdale UCC)

*Those being voted on for new terms or who have been appointed to fill uncompleted terms have asterisks by their name

Those in italic type are ex-officio members

Vote on Budget

Rev. Elizabeth “Lisa” LeSueur presented the budget with overages from reserves and increases of market value. Moved, passed and seconded.

Vote on By-Laws Amendments and Other Resolutions

Florida Conference Mission and Vision Statements were moved, seconded and passed as follows:

Our Vision: Uniting in God's love to create a just world for all.

Our Mission: The Florida Conference of the UCC connects and empowers local ministries to live out the inclusive teachings of Jesus Christ, toward a just world for all.

Article IV: Motion for role of Immediate Past Moderator be added to the Florida Conference by-laws for a period of two (2) years following the Moderator's term to serve as ex-officio member, without vote, upon approval of the Board of Directors. Immediate Past Moderator to provide historical and institutional knowledge and act as an advisor to the Moderator and Vice Moderator. The Past Moderator may attend quarterly Board meetings at Moderator's request.

Motion was discussed and defeated. It was the consensus agreement that the issue could be addressed in a policy rather than the Bylaws.

Article V: Resolution regarding Southeast Conference Geography: Motion and discussion regarding the Southeast Conference written resolution to redistrict the western area of the Florida panhandle to return to the Florida Conference. The resolution was rewritten and presented from the Florida Conference perspective as well.

Motion: "Therefore, Be it resolved that the geographic boundaries of the Florida Conference be adjusted with the agreement of the Southeast Conference and subject to the approval of the General Synod, so the boundaries of the Florida Conference would include the Florida Panhandle west of the Apalachicola River."

Motion carried.

Annual Gathering Adjourned