



WORKSHOPS AND PRESENTERS

FRIDAY MORNING WORKSHOPS

Vote for Love! Our Faith Our Vote 2024 (Repeats Friday Afternoon)

Leader: The Rev. Michael Neuroth



Elections matter. Elections determine who represents us in seats of power and set the values for our common life together. As Christians, our civic engagement is how we live out the commandment to love our neighbor (Mark 12:30-31), and “speak up” for those in need (Proverbs 31:8-9). For 20 years, the UCC’s [Our Faith Our Vote \(OFOV\) campaign](#) has encouraged members to engage faithfully in our democracy through voter registration, issue education, and voter empowerment. In 2024, as cynicism, polarization, and extremism all are on the rise, we must dig deeply to find that which unites us — a vision of the common good. This year, voting is not simply our civic duty, but an act of righteous resistance in the face of forces that seek to discourage and disenfranchise voters. Let us strengthen our democracy by exercising our sacred duty to vote and ensure that all are able to vote their values. Let us “Vote for Love!” Come learn about the UCC’s office in Washington, D.C., and the 2024 OFOV campaign, including “Do’s & Don’ts” for churches and ways to be involved.

Michael Neuroth serves as Director of the United Church of Christ’s Office of Public Policy and Advocacy in Washington, D.C. Prior to serving as director, Michael worked for 15 years as the Policy Advocate for International Issues and led the office’s work on international peace, human rights, and economic justice issues. Michael holds master’s degrees in divinity, theology, and social work from Princeton Seminary and Rutgers University. He resides in Washington, D.C., with his wife, Amber, and their two boys.

Fired-Up Fundraising for Your Church

Leader: The Rev. Dr. James Foucher



We’ll explore options for fundraising from the website [classy.org](#), available for Pastors and lay leaders to see now at [32 Fundraising Ideas for You and Your Church](#).

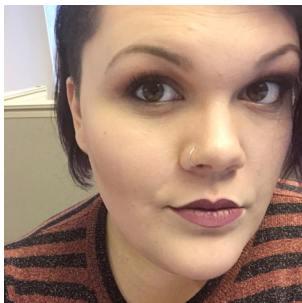
Additionally, the Rev. Dr. James Foucher will be joined by the Rev. David Bahr, who will describe his “Souper Bowl Sunday” fundraiser at Mission Hills Congregational UCC, San Diego, that

raises thousands of dollars each year. Attendees will leave with multiple new ideas and renewed hopes for their fundraising efforts in their churches.

The Rev. Dr. James Foucher is the UCC's Western Regional Generosity Officer. Born and raised in Chicago, he has UCC churches in Miami and Sarasota, Fla., and Denver, Colo. He has served on numerous boards and committees including Ecumenical Ministries, Inc. Denver, Habitat for Humanity Metro Denver, the Denver Health Community Clinics, and the Northeast Denver Housing Center. As a board member, James' leadership has meant better health and housing options for traditionally oppressed, predominantly minority communities in Denver and beyond. He enjoys golf, reading, and is a member of Alpha Phi Alpha, Inc., the fraternity of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. He holds degrees from Illinois Wesleyan University, Chicago Theological Seminary and Eden Theological Seminary in St. Louis. He is married to Angelle Collins Foucher and they are the parents of two daughters, Danielle Aida and Daryn Alexandria Foucher.

Racial Justice and White Privilege — Let's Talk About It!

Leader: Charlie Valentine



Ever had an awkward conversation about race as a white person? Ever see other white folks talk about race and wish you knew how to interrupt them before they do more harm than good? This workshop is for you! We'll discuss ways to deepen your knowledge of how white supremacy shows up in our culture, what assumptions we might be making about each other that can be challenged, and how to have those difficult conversations about race with other white people in our communities. Let's break through the barrier of shying away from the tough stuff and bring our people along towards racial justice. Bring your curiosity and get ready to leave with skills to grow as a white anti-racist!

Charlie Valentine is a white anti-racist activist and organizer from Orange County, Calif., where they were born and raised. After leaving the financial industry for greener, more just pastures, they are now the Recruitment and Retention Organizer at Showing Up For Racial Justice (SURJ), a national organization that organizes white people towards racial and economic justice in their local communities, and member and leader at the local SURJ chapter: White People 4 Black Lives. Through their work with SURJ, they've grown to understand white supremacy as a system and culture we all swim in, and how important it is for white folks to be at the core of dismantling that system. They believe that if we speak up and take part in the fight for racial justice in partnership with leaders of color and their movements, we can build a world that works for all of us — not just the few at the top. When they're not talking to other white people about race, you can find them at the coffee shop, noodling on the guitar, or at a local concert.

Breaking Free: Finding and Cultivating Spiritual Disciplines that Transform and Heal **Leader: The Rev. Ellis Arnold**



Embark on a wonder-filled exploration with stained glass artist the Rev. Ellis Arnold, as they share their personal journey of spiritual discovery through creative expression. In this workshop, Ellis candidly reveals their struggles with conventional spiritual disciplines early in their ministry — and a few of the misadventures that ensued — before eventually finding profound connection and healing through glasswork. Combining story, artwork, dialogue, and an experiment into the session, participants will find themselves encouraged, and perhaps even inspired, to get in touch with their own creativity as a gateway to deeper spiritual connection and self-discovery.

The Rev. Ellis Arnold is, at heart, a renewing church pastor, curriculum writer, community organizer, and all-around church nerd. After working as a chaplain, Ellis served as a local church pastor in Decorah, Iowa, where Ellis and the church found their gifts for creativity, radical hospitality, and innovation and their delight in developing new avenues for spiritual formation. Ellis has served as Associate Conference Minister in various conferences and loves channeling energy into collaboration with Committees on Ministry and congregations who are striving to transform not just the three feet around them, but also their communities and the world into a more just, generous, liberated place.

What Every Church Treasurer and Pastor Should Know **Leader: The Rev. Chad Tanaka Pack**



One of the most difficult positions to fill in a local church or almost any nonprofit organization is the role of treasurer. And when it's filled, almost everyone else feels that they are free of any responsibility for knowing anything about the numbers. While that's not really true, it makes it even more important that the church treasurer be especially knowledgeable about best practices to ensure that the dollars given for mission are cared for with integrity. Bring your questions, your best practices, and your heart for the important ministry of church finances!

The Rev. Chad Tanaka Pack is best known in the Conference for his role as the Conference's Consulting Minister for Racial Justice, Equity and Inclusion. But in his "day job," Chad works as Controller at the Inner City Law Center, a nonprofit poverty-law firm in Skid Row in Downtown Los Angeles. He is a certified public accountant. Part-time, Chad also serves as Assistant Minister at First Congregational Church of Los Angeles UCC. Earlier, he served as Minister for Stewardship and Finance at Middle Collegiate Church in New York City.

Boldly Building Ministries Where Planted

Leader: The Rev. Traci Blackmon



It's been a few years since COVID 19, and churches are starting to stabilize. Online services remain and, according to Gallup polling, in-person church attendance has continued to decline. Current Pew Research studies also share alarming statistics regarding shifting religious trends in the United States. So often, the loudest news is the worst news, but it's important to keep the faith and not become discouraged in a world that is fast changing. This workshop is designed to equip attendees with concrete tools and ideas of ways to convert changing demographics and ministry obstacles into opportunities for church and community growth. We will explore methods of congregational and community assessments; engage new ways of measuring church growth; and engage practical ways to build ministries that extend beyond the church walls, no matter the size of the congregation.

The Rev. Traci Blackmon is the CEO and Founder of HopeBuilds, LLC, a newly-launched consultancy for communities, corporations, and congregations eager to build the just and equitable world they imagine. She also serves as theologian in residence for Eden Theological Seminary and Chaplain for the Central Region of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. As an ordained minister, public theologian, and registered nurse, her life's work focuses on communal resistance to systemic injustice. Traci served as a local church pastor in both the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the United Church of Christ prior to accepting a call to serve as Associate General Minister and Vice-President of the United Church of Christ from 2016 to 2023, where she worked collaboratively to launch several anchor initiatives for the denomination. Upon her resignation from that position, she launched HopeBuilds, LLC to further advance ministry in the public square. [Read the Rev. Traci Blackmon's full bio.](#)

FRIDAY AFTERNOON WORKSHOPS

Vote for Love! Our Faith Our Vote 2024

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The Rev. Michael Neuroth serves as Director of the United Church of Christ’s Office of Public Policy and Advocacy in Washington, D.C. Prior to serving as director, Michael worked for 15 years as the Policy Advocate for International Issues and led the office’s work on international peace, human rights, and economic justice issues. Michael holds master’s degrees in divinity, theology, and social work from Princeton Seminary and Rutgers University. He resides in Washington, D.C., with his wife, Amber, and their two boys.

Bruised Reeds & Smoldering Candles: Restoring the Faith of Ex-vangelicals Leader: The Rev. Kyle Sears



Former evangelical church planter (and current UCC Authorized Minister) the Rev. Kyle Sears discusses the trend of deconstruction and the growing “ex-vangelical” movement. Central to the workshop is how UCC churches can become a place of healing and restoration for those leaving evangelicalism in search of a more holistic and generous expression of Christian faith. Kyle will also talk about his journey as pastor and person of faith, and how the local church can make room for those leaving evangelical churches.

The Rev. Kyle Sears currently serves as the Senior Minister of La Cañada Congregational Church in La Cañada Flintridge, Calif. Before moving to the Los Angeles area, Kyle served as a church planter in Austin and Dallas. He is a passionate advocate for justice and inclusion, engaging in new ministry initiatives to care for those beyond the walls of the church. Kyle and his wife, Erika, have been married for 25 years, and he is the father to three children. Kyle loves to cook for a crowd, especially favorites from his Texas roots.

Reparations Now! Let’s Pass This First-Ever Package of Reparatory Legislation in California in 2024!

Leaders: Kamilah V. Moore, Former Chair of the California Reparations Task Force; Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE)



Former Chair of the California Reparations Task Force Kamilah Moore will discuss the findings of the task force’s 2023 report, and how legislators are attempting to make California the first in the nation to pass historic, comprehensive reparations legislation for descendants of formerly enslaved Americans. The task force report recommended more than 100 pieces of possible legislation to address past and ongoing harm. State legislators in turn have chosen to introduce 19 initial common-

sense bills in 2024, which are working their ways through the state legislature as we speak. States from across the country are watching closely to see if they should do the same.

Kamilah V. Moore is a reparatory justice scholar and an attorney with a specialization in entertainment and intellectual property law. As a law student, Moore contributed to human rights reports related to domestic and international human rights issues, including, but not limited to, racial inequality in Brazil; the human right to sanitation in Lowndes County, Alabama, USA; and the human right to remedy for indigenous Black women affected by racialized gender violence in Papua New Guinea. While studying abroad at the University of Amsterdam, Moore wrote a master's thesis exploring the intersections between international law and reparatory justice for the trans-Atlantic slave trade, chattel slavery, and their legacies. She earned a J.D. degree from Columbia Law School in New York City, a Master of Laws degree in International Criminal Law from the University of Amsterdam, and a Bachelor's degree from UCLA. Kamilah Moore was appointed Chairwoman of the California Reparations Task Force in 2021.



Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice

(CLUE) educates, organizes, and mobilizes the faith community to accompany workers and their families in their struggle for good jobs, dignity, and justice. It is working to organize faith communities across Southern California to support this landmark, life-changing, grossly overdue reparatory legislation. It urges UCC Pastors and Lay Leaders throughout the state to mobilize their congregants to demand that their legislators pass

these crucial bills. To learn more and get involved, sign-up for action alerts at www.cluejustice.org/reparations.

Deepening Relationships One by One

Leader: The Rev. David Bahr



Mission Hills UCC in San Diego spent six weeks between Easter and Pentecost engaged in a One By One program, with the goal of deepening relationships among people who may have known each other for years, and helping new members develop significant relationships. Each week of the program has a focus and a practice that aims to build skills in listening through exchanges with other participants. With intentionality, people are often shocked at how deeply a connection can be made in 14 minutes — a connection that continues to build

afterward. Without small talk, real conversations lead to real connections. This is an opportunity to hear and learn how this program might be helpful in your congregation or context.

The Rev. David Bahr is the pastor of Mission Hills UCC in San Diego. He previously served churches in Denver for 14 years and in Cleveland for 15 years. Earlier, he

worked in the UCC's national setting at the Office for Church in Society in Washington, D.C., and the Hunger Action Office in Cleveland. He grew up on a farm in North Dakota and, at age 20, began serving two UCC congregations in South Dakota as a full-time pastor — preaching every Sunday, marrying, and burying — while finishing his degree at Dakota Wesleyan University. He graduated from United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities and earned his D. Min. degree from Wesley Theological Seminary, where he conducted a research study on “Openly Gay and Lesbian Pastors Serving Predominantly Straight UCC Congregations.” David’s claim to fame is having been named one of Cleveland’s “50 Most Interesting People” for his annual stint as a “hostage” in the church he was serving’s steeple to raise money and collect food for its hunger center. TV coverage every year resulted in David meeting and later marrying one of the reporters assigned to the event. David loves to travel, especially in Southeast Asia, and has a passion for photography.

Becoming Better Partners with the Samoan Community

Leader: Pausa Kaio “P.K.” Thompson



Annual Gathering participants from last year may remember P.K.’s workshop, the choir from his church, as well as his sermon Saturday morning, and wonder why there isn’t more participation from the Samoan community in the life of the Conference. This is an opportunity to hear and learn what it means to build partnerships with our Samoan friends. Exactly what is true partnership and what does it mean to step outside one’s own culture to embrace and fully welcome and accept another.

P.K. Thompson is a Samoan clergy, activist and theologian, which is secondary to his role as a husband to wife Meilyn, and father to their three daughters, Asenati, Fonoa, and A.J. He is an alum of the Kanana Fou Theological Seminary in American Samoa and holds Masters degrees from Union Theological Seminary in New York and Boston (Mass.) University. He currently is a Ph.D. student with an emphasis on comparative theology and philosophy at Claremont (Calif.) School of Theology. He also is senior pastor of the Dominguez Samoan Congregational Christian Church EFKS/UCC in Compton, Calif. P.K.’s scholarly work accentuates the theological discourse, indigenous culture and wisdom, and social justice issues of Samoa, and Samoans in diaspora. His ministry encourages people to be change agents in the world by invoking a more socially conscious ethic of Christian practice. P.K. served on the Conference Minister’s Search Committee.

Providing Spiritual Support in a Post-Roe Context

Leader: The Rev. Jude Johnson, BCC (he/they)



This training is for anyone who is interested in providing spiritual support to people making pregnancy decisions in a post-Roe context. The goal is to provide an introductory level of values clarification around pregnancy, parenting, abortion, and adoption. Providing judgment-free and compassionate spiritual care to people in these decisions starts with exploring our own biases and tendencies around reproductive choices. This is the introductory session of a larger curriculum offered by Faith Aloud

— a national program providing spiritual care to callers on our toll-free Spiritual Care Line.

The Rev. Jude Johnson, BCC serves as the Chair of the Board of Directors of the Southern California Nevada Conference. Jude is a Board Certified Chaplain and is the Faith Aloud Manager of All Options. In this role, Jude recruits, trains, and supports volunteer Spiritual Care Counselors to serve on the Faith Aloud Spiritual Care line. This free and confidential resource provides spiritual care to callers across the United States and Canada. Jude is offering this workshop as part of his four-way covenant with Faith Aloud, the Southern Association and his local church.