

# United Church of Christ

## CONFERENCE NEWS

Together in Spirit - November 14, 2024



## EMERGING FROM EXILE

*Rev. Dr. Tony Clark, Conference Minister*

Dear Folks:

I am intrigued that the president-elect is compared to King Cyrus of Persia.

I turned to my textbooks on the history of the Babylonian Exile and found this: "...history has remembered Cyrus as a great liberator of captured peoples...an image which he and his officials sought to foster and the historical conditions of the time facilitated." 1 Cyrus capitalized on being a liberator through propaganda. King Cyrus ruled from 559-530 BCE, and he captured Babylon in 539 BCE. Finding many thousand Jews in Babylon, he declared a return of certain workers to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem, a policy that he had undertaken in other places he had captured.

The Babylonian Exile came after more than 100 years of shifting loyalties in the region. The two kingdoms of Judah and Israel, at the strategic crossroads between Egypt to the southwest, Syria to the north, Assyria to the northeast, and Babylonia to the east, were tossed back and forth among these nations. The northern kingdom of Israel was captured in 722 BCE by the Assyrians, and the southern kingdom of Judah became a fealty state to Assyria, which rose to great prominence until around 630 BCE, when all the loyal states began to revolt and gain independence. Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar, starting in 604, violently subsumed all of Assyria and subdued Jerusalem in 597, taking the ruling class into exile. Following Judah's revolt in 589, another Babylonia invasion led to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jerusalem Temple in 586, which led to more of the elite classes being exiled to Babylon. Forty-five years later, King Cyrus of Persia captured Babylon and decreed a rebuild of the Jerusalem Temple. The rebuild was halted for a few decades and completed under the reign of Cyrus' grandson, Darius.

One of the things I am hearing people say about our next president is that he is areligious like Cyrus was, and yet Cyrus was called by God to liberate people from exile. Cyrus was certainly important in the exilic and post-exilic literature: Isaiah 45, Ezra 1 and 4, II Chronicles 36, and others name him as called by God. Cyrus, however, was religious; he was a practitioner of the ancient faith of Zoroastrianism, which calls followers to good thoughts, good words, and good deeds, doing charity, spiritual egalitarianism between men and women, and doing good for goodness' sake. The magi that visited Jesus at his birth are thought to be Zoroastrian priests.

One of the things to remember is that only the elite classes were taken in exile; the remnant who were left behind were the working class, poor, and underprivileged, and their daily life may not have changed much. The Exile was traumatic, and it was during that time that Jewish theologians solidified ideas of monotheism and a God who lives beyond the Jerusalem Temple. My wonderings lead me to ask how we in today's church feel like we are in exile, and who can lead us home.

As we face into Thanksgiving and Advent, I wish you blessings, I offer gratitude for each of you, and I pray that Christ is our guide in emerging from what may feel like exile.

Peace,

Pastor Tony

*1 Miller, J. Maxwell, and Hayes, John H., A History of Ancient Israel and Judah, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986), p 440.*

## NOVEMBER

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## DECEMBER

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## “How Long, O Lord?”

Prayer, Witness and Support for  
UCC Clergy/in Solidarity for Justice  
in Palestine and the Middle East



Wednesday, November 20  
at 6 pm ET/3 pm PT

**How Long, O Lord?” - UCC Clergy Stand in Solidarity for Justice in  
Palestine and the Middle East in a Virtual Gathering**

Join us on Wednesday, November 20th at 6 pm (Eastern) / 3 pm (Pacific)

Duration: 90 minutes on Zoom

In response to the ongoing and heartbreaking violence affecting Palestine and the broader Middle East, the United Church of Christ Palestine Israel Network (UCCPIN) invites UCC clergy to come together in a powerful event

of prayer, reflection, and solidarity. Hosted by the Clergy Resource and Training Team, this virtual gathering offers a sacred space to grieve, support each other, and strategize for peace and justice in the face of war, genocide, and deep-seated injustice.

**What to Expect:** The event will begin with a time of shared prayer and lament, allowing clergy to express and process collective grief and hope. Following this, participants can join breakout rooms for tailored discussions, including:

1. **Congregational Action and Witness:** For those seeking ideas and strategies to promote justice within their congregations.
2. **Sharing Experiences:** For clergy who wish to discuss feelings of fatigue, experiences of conflict, or challenges faced in local settings.
3. **Support and Solidarity:** For clergy looking for general support or alternative resources to strengthen their ministries.

**Why Attend?** In the aftermath of the U.S. election and amid intensifying violence in the Middle East, UCCPIN recognizes the urgent need for prophetic voices in ministry. This event is a call to unite and reinforce our commitment to justice and peace, supporting each other as we work toward these shared goals.

**Registration Information:**

- **Date:** November 20, 6 pm (Eastern) / 3 pm (Pacific)
- **Platform:** Zoom
- **Registration Link:** To register, copy and paste this link into your browser

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZYrcumrqTwtEtZBUMeRLD->

[2WWNGETBNLG9Y#/registration](https://2WWNGETBNLG9Y#/registration)

For questions, please contact Rev. Dave Grishaw-Jones at [DavidGJ@CCDurham.org](mailto:DavidGJ@CCDurham.org). Join us in this vital time of prayer, reflection, and community support as we stand together for justice and peace in Palestine and beyond.



**Breaking the Chains**  
2-day Virtual Summit | Nov 13th & Nov. 20th  
1:00-2:30 PM EST

Towards a world without rape and violence  
**THURSDAYS IN BLACK**

**Day 1:** Deconstructing the Narrative  
**Day 2:** Faith in Action

Register Today & Share with Community!

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST  
1141 W. 10TH ST. ST. LOUIS, MO 63103

CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST)  
1141 W. 10TH ST. ST. LOUIS, MO 63103



STAR (Small Town and Rural) Ministries  
UCC Coalition for Rural Churches

Register ahead with zoom by clicking here.  
Documents are posted under the “events” tab at:  
[www.mnwcucc.org](http://www.mnwcucc.org)

Zoom Meeting to Adopt the Resolution  
December 8, 2024 @ 1:00 pm

We need to reach a quorum to take our vote...register today!



## CONFERENCE STAFF

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Registrar

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