



Montana - N. Wyoming Conference United Church of Christ

CONFERENCE NEWS

Together in Spirit - July 9, 2026



Striving for Significance

By Conference Minister, Rev. Dr. Tony Clark

Dear Folks:

This week, I am with Melissa Gilbert and Karen Spencer (Great Falls) and Lynell Kruckeberg (Red Lodge) in Columbus, Ohio, for the UCC Musicians Association biennial meeting. We are singing and ringing bells, hearing presentations on church music, and listening to amazing concerts and recitals.

As a Conference we joined the UCCMA this year to support our professional musicians and to find ways to enhance music in small congregations without musicians. The Conference Board of Directors approved using Congregational Vitality funds from the Strengthen the Church offerings to send the four of us to this meeting. (Thank you for participating in Our Church's Wider Mission!)

Last evening, we heard a beautiful organ recital by Dr. Colin Richardson, who played several pieces spanning the last 4 centuries. A favorite was a 20th century piece called "The Bee" which was played only on the foot pedals. His last piece was a stunning arrangement of "We Shall Overcome" in which the melody was played on the deepest foot pedals and the harmony on the hands, giving a rich deep sound, as if Paul Robison was singing the meaningful anthem. Prior to playing that piece, Dr. Richardson told the audience that he teaches his students to strive not merely for success but to continue striving for significance. As Dr. Richardson spoke, I was thinking about Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr, both assassinated as young men. Their successes were cut short by their untimely deaths, yet their lives and deaths were significant.

The idea of significance beyond success is something that I, as Conference Minister in the Montana-Northern Wyoming Conference, needed to be reminded of. We are significant, even if, in the world's eyes, we may not be so successful. All of our churches are dwarfed by the large-sized 3000-member church where the meeting is being held; even our largest church by membership (Missoula) is considered mid size. The number of congregations in our Conference is fewer than our colleague Conferences, and most of our

churches would fall in the Small Town and Rural (STAR) designation. Yet, our voice speaks, significantly, about how God is present across vast geographic spaces and finding Christ in the prairies and mountains of our states. And so we continue to strive for significance.

This large church has a soaring ceiling, an organ with 4400 pipes ranging from 32 feet to 0.17 inches in length, and lots of light. This morning in worship, as the senior pastor was preaching on I John, "God is love, and anyone who loves knows God," and "perfect love casts out all fear", the sun was shining into the sanctuary. The sliver of bright sun moved across the sanctuary catching each of us in its brightness before moving on to the next person. It bothered some, yet I found it warm and sacred. Karen Spencer remarked that as we were hearing a sermon about passing on the love of Christ, it was like the sun kissed us with its love, and then we passed it on to the next one in the row.

We know that worship is enhanced with music. Even where musicians are scarce and worshippers are few, being together in worship, hearing the word of God, and singing even rudimentary songs is significant. You may not be changed with every sermon or song, yet I believe that our congregating over time does change the world. We may be small, the world may not call us successful, yet I can see that we are significant.

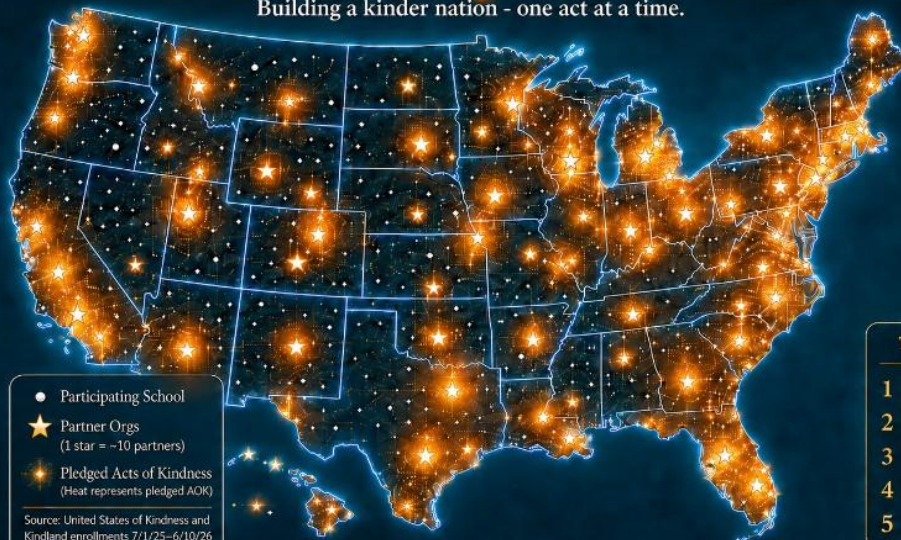
In peace and prayer,

Pastor Tony



National Kindness Impact Map

Building a kinder nation - one act at a time.



1,391
USK Partners



Pledging
347,750
Acts of Kindness



Representing
491,687
Participants



94+
Participating Schools

TOP 5 KINDNESS STATES

Pledged Acts of Kindness

1	California	48,730
2	Texas	42,615
3	Florida	35,980
4	Ohio	28,440
5	New York	24,975

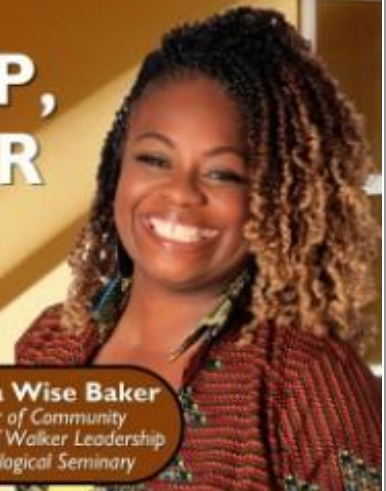


FAITH, LEADERSHIP, & ORGANIZING FOR THIS MOMENT

Thursday, July 16th | 3:30 PM Eastern

Rev. Dr. Dietra Wise Baker

Assistant Professor of Community
Leadership, Director of Walker Leadership
Institute, Eden Theological Seminary





Rev. Dr. Tony Clark - Conference Minister
Jennifer Penfield - Administrator & Registrar
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