

The Prairie Association  
Illinois Conference  
United Church of Christ

### "Mini-Profile"

The Prairie Association is a covenanted community of 42 local churches and about 70 authorized ministers. Our churches are located in the northwestern part of the state of Illinois in a area bounded on the north by the Wisconsin border, on the west by the Mississippi River, on the south by Interstate Highway 80, and on the east by Illinois Route 47. About two thirds of our churches came into the UCC from the Congregational Christian Church, and about one third from the Evangelical and Reformed Church. A handful were founded after the merger forming the UCC, or came from other traditions.

Our part of the state is mostly rich (and mostly flat!) farm land which is principally planted to corn and soybeans. The far northwestern-most part of our association is more hilly, and the agriculture there is more given to dairying and other animal-based agriculture. We do have several historically industrial cities and towns, the largest of which is Rockford. These industrial areas are finding it difficult to thrive in the increasingly global economy. Because fewer and fewer persons are directly engaged in farming, the number of farm families, even in our more rural congregations, is not as great as might be expected. There are several colleges and one large university (Northern Illinois University) in our part of the state. Although the overall population of our area is relatively stable, the Hispanic population in several of our towns has dramatically increased in recent years. None of our churches, unfortunately, has any significant ministry with this burgeoning community. The most eastern part of the association is experiencing the beginning of more general population growth as the suburbs of Chicago continue to creep further and further westward.

The Prairie Association is attempting to be serious and honest about living in covenant -- the supposed "glue" which holds us together in the United Church of Christ. Our Ministry Team for Authorized Ministry works hard at attending to the dual responsibilities of caring for and exercising oversight of our authorized ministers. All full-time pastors new to the association are expected to participate in a colleague group (what we call a SAG group; **S**upport, **A**ccountability, **G**rowth) for their first year in the association, with the hope that participation will continue past that first year (on average about three quarters of our full-time pastors participate in one of these groups). Additionally, authorized ministers are required to obtain training in boundaries appropriate to ministry within three years of coming to the Prairie Association and to participate in Periodic Support Consultations on a triennial basis.

We are also excited about our recently formed a Ministry Team for Church Relations. This body was established with the sole purpose of attending to and strengthening the relationships between and among our local churches themselves and the various settings of the wider church.

We believe there is much to commend about pastoral ministry in the Prairie Association, but there are significant challenges. Many of our churches are small and struggling. Some have lost a sense of specific and distinctly Christian mission. We badly need pastors who are not shy to teach stewardship based in Christian discipleship. We are geographically dispersed, and pastors coming here need to know how to seek and build community in places where ministry can sometimes be lonely and even isolating.

Should you have questions about ministry in the Prairie Association please be in contact with our association office by calling 815-758-3497 or by e-mail at [prairie@prairieucc.org](mailto:prairie@prairieucc.org).

Christ's blessings to you as you seek guidance for your future ministry.

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