

making a way **TOGETHER**



**SCNC ANNUAL
GATHERING 2025**

SCHEDULE AT-A-GLANCE

CLERGY RETREAT

**THURSDAY, MAY 29
SHERATON FAIRPLEX POMONA**

4 p.m.
Check-in & Social Hour for Clergy
Retreat begins at hotel

6 p.m.
Clergy Dinner & Retreat Program

FRIDAY, MAY 30 CLAREMONT UCC

*Optional morning clergy workshops
begin at 9am for registered participants*

10 a.m.
Registration Opens

Workshops Block 1

10:30 - 11:30 a.m.
Sound Bath Immersive Experience in
the Sanctuary

11:30 - 12:30 p.m.
Hybrid and In-person workshops

12 - 12:45 p.m.
Light Refreshments in the Refectory

12:15 - 12:45 p.m.
Book Signing with Cole Arthur Riley

1 p.m.
Opening Worship & Plenary

3 p.m.
Worship Transition

3:30 - 5 p.m.
Featured Speaker Cole Arthur Riley in
Sanctuary

Immersive Experience: Claremont Affordable
Housing Developments

FRIDAY, MAY 30 SHERATON FAIRPLEX POMONA

4 - 6 p.m.
• Exhibit Tabling open in Lobby
• Octavia's Pop-Up Bookstore
• Church World Service Disaster Kit
packing in Syrah Room

4:30 - 5:30 p.m.
Workshops Block 2

5 - 6 p.m.
PSR Reconnect: Alumnx Meet & Greet
on the Side Lawn

6 p.m.
Dinner & Stewardship Program in
Main Ballroom

7:30 p.m.
Music and Connecting on the Patio
with Brother James

8:30 p.m.
Entertainment and Karaoke Night with
Jude Johnson in Vineyard Ballroom 1

SATURDAY, MAY 31 SHERATON FAIRPLEX POMONA

7 - 8:30 a.m.
Drop-In Continental Breakfast
Available in Vineyard Ballroom 1

8:30 a.m.
Opening Devotion & Ministry
Milestone Recognition in Main
Ballroom

9:20 a.m.
Workshop Block 3

Drop In Church World Service Disaster
Kit packing in Syrah Room

10:30 a.m.
Plenary and Keynote from
Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson

11:30 a.m.
Lunch and Affinity Conversations

12:30 p.m.
Final Plenary

1:30 p.m.
Closing Worship with Guest Preacher
Rev. Dr. David Vasquez-Levy

*Workshops at Claremont UCC and
Sheraton Fairplex Pomona staggered to
accommodate travel & hotel check-in*

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WORKSHOPS

FRIDAY, MAY 30

WORKSHOPS BLOCK 1 AT CLAREMONT UCC

10:30 - 11:30 a.m.

IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE: SONA·VELA SOUND BATH WITH CARA KINKEL

Begin the day with a grounding refuge of sound. This one-hour experience offers spacious rest through the calming tones of crystal and Himalayan singing bowls, gongs, and chimes. You are invited to step into a peaceful sanctuary of sound designed to calm the nervous system, quiet the mind, and open the heart. Come as you are, and let the sound gently guide you inward.

Location: Claremont Sanctuary

11:30 - 12:30 p.m.

CHURCH WORLD SERVICE: BEFORE DISASTER STRIKES: LET'S BE READY TO SERVE, NOT JUST SURVIVE. JOIN THE CWS TEAM IN LEARNING HOW TO BE PREPARED FOR THE NEXT DISASTER.

In uncertain times, being prepared is one of the most powerful ways we can care for ourselves, our families, and our community. Join us for a short, practical workshop designed to equip you and your congregation with the essentials of disaster preparedness.

Facilitators: **Zachary Wolgemuth & Melissa Reece**

Location: Robert's Room and Online

I WROTE A CHILDREN'S BOOK: CRAFTING NARRATIVES FOR A YOUNG AUDIENCE

Explore storytelling for children and how we can use it to reach audiences in (and outside of) the sanctuary with writer and actor **Josh Banday**, author of Rain, Rain. We'll also have an opportunity to learn about the publishing process in children's lit. Josh Banday is a former educator for middle and high school and an accomplished actor, known for his roles on ABC's Not Dead Yet and Amazon's Upload. When he is not dreaming up new tales, Josh enjoys dancing, painting, and baking with his kids. He's a member of one of our SCNC congregations and his grandfather was a UCC pastor in Los Angeles.

Location: Sumner Room

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**SCNC ANNUAL
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WORKSHOPS

FRIDAY, MAY 30

WORKSHOPS BLOCK 2 AT CLAREMONT UCC

3:30 p.m.

HOW DOES THE DISCIPLINE OF WONDER KEEP US FROM DESPAIR? FEATURED SPEAKER COLE ARTHUR RILEY

Explore the practice of engaging in “rituals of beauty” as we wrestle with emotions of fear and anger, and a longing for action, in the face of a new wave of harm, oppression, and racialized violence impacting our nation and our communities. After Cole’s address, we’ll move into an introduction to letter writing as liturgical act (as in Black Liturgies) and an invitation for participants to engage in their own practice of letter writing.

Location: Claremont Sanctuary and online

IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE: CLAREMONT AFFORDABLE HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS

Hit the road with retired community organizer and UCC minister, Rev. Gene Boutilier. Together, we’ll caravan over to Larkin Place less than a mile away, and view an in-progress affordable housing build supported by Pilgrim Place. After a site visit and brief encounter with the developer, we’ll move two blocks to St. Ambrose Episcopal Church, to learn how the congregation committed to partner in developing affordable senior housing on their church property. We will meet in the church with time for Q&A. Inland Abundant Housing, a chapter of Abundant Housing Los Angeles, is a source of advocacy and guidance in missional use of faith group-owned property for affordable housing or services for homeless people. Participants will depart from Claremont UCC at about 3:15 p.m. The workshop will end before 5 pm and participants will then travel three miles to the Sheraton Fairplex.

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WORKSHOPS

FRIDAY, MAY 30

WORKSHOPS BLOCK 2 AT SHERATON FAIRPLEX POMONA

4:30 - 5:30 p.m.

MORE ROOM FOR RENTALS? MAXIMIZING CHURCH PROPERTY POTENTIAL

Church buildings are more than places of worship—they're vital community assets. Yet many of them sit mostly empty throughout the week. What if your unused space could support your mission, strengthen community ties, and generate sustainable income?

In this breakout session, you'll discover how thoughtful facility rentals can become a powerful ministry tool. With minor adjustments and the right rental partners, churches can transform underused spaces into hubs of activity and service without compromising their values.

Join **Eric Knowles**, Senior Vice President at Kidder Mathews and leader of the firm's Religious and Educational Facilities Group, along with colleagues **Robert Fletcher** and **Riley Rohde**, for an eye-opening look at the church rental landscape in our region. This session will:

- Highlight real opportunities that other churches are already tapping into
- Explore how rentals can align with your mission, not distract from it
- Help you understand the rental rate pricing matrix
- Introduce practical services to help you manage rentals with confidence and integrity

Whether your church is just beginning to explore rentals or looking to expand an existing program, this session offers the vision and tools to steward your space wisely—and impactfully.

Location: Chardonnay Room

A RIGHT-SIZED RESOURCE FOR LAY LEADERSHIP

This hybrid workshop will be hosted virtually by **Leslie Robb LeSieur** (she/her) of Phillips Theological Seminary's Center for Ministry and Lay Training. Our participants will gather in person and on Zoom as we learn about an affordable and approachable way to help encourage and support local church leaders who have gifts for ministry but may not (yet) be thinking about ordination. Many of our clergy are familiar with CMLT's UCC Polity offering, but there are additional courses for a wide range of interests. Come and find out how this online program can be a source of foundational learning for new leaders, or a path to discernment for those considering a more comprehensive call to ministry.

Location: Vineyard Ballroom 1 and Online

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**SCNC ANNUAL
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WORKSHOPS

SATURDAY, MAY 31

WORKSHOPS BLOCK 3 AT SHERATON FAIRPLEX POMONA

9:20 - 10:20 a.m.

FAITHFULNESS BEYOND BOUNDARIES: BIBLE STUDY WITH REV. DR. DAVID VASQUEZ-LEVY

The book of Ruth is a book of reversals that starts in famine and ends in harvest, begins in death and ends in birth. Driven by the faithfulness of an outsider, a people in crisis find a way to hope. Join us as we read portions of this text with the voices of migrants and people on the move.

Location: Chardonnay Room

OPEN AND AFFIRMING 2.0 HYBRID

Do you want to continue the work of living into your Open and Affirming status as a congregation? Are you interested in understanding the role churches can play in creating safe and welcoming spaces for transgender, nonbinary, and gender-expansive people? Developed by a team of queer and trans facilitators from Juniper Formation UCC (Rocky Mountain Conference), this workshop is designed to help congregations and our Conference continue the ongoing work of truly living into being Open and Affirming. Led by facilitators **Theo Isoz** (they/them) and **Rev. Candace Woods** (she/her), who each have long histories in faith formation, LGBTQ+ inclusion, and sexuality education.

Location: Vineyard Ballroom 1

SPIRITUAL RESILIENCE IN TIMES OF CRISIS: LESSONS FROM A RED STATE

Join **Rev. Dr. Mandy Todd** (she/her), UCC pastor and Director of Engagement and Development for [Kansas Interfaith Action](#), to explore ways to practice hope and pursue justice when the obstacles feel overwhelming. Many of us know the basics of advocacy, but how do we nurture and sustain communities to continue seeking liberation for the long haul? Learn from the experience of progressive faith communities working in theologically and politically diverse conditions, and begin to build partnerships for moving forward with your SCNC neighbors. Mandy has a Masters degree in Theological Studies from Iliff School of Theology in Denver, CO, and a Doctor of Ministry in Public Theology from Drew University in Madison, NJ, where her research focused on the intersection of social justice, spirituality, and the arts.

Location: Merlot Room

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WORKSHOPS

SATURDAY, MAY 31

WORKSHOPS BLOCK 3 AT SHERATON FAIRPLEX POMONA

9:20 - 10:20 a.m. (cont'd)

PARTNERS IN VISION: EXPLORING AFFORDABLE HOUSING WITH CB&LF

Meet with the **Rev. Dr. Patrick Duggan**, Executive Director of the Church Building & Loan Fund (a financial ministry of the UCC), and learn about the ways we can partner in supporting local churches on the journey to building Affordable Housing. From the earliest brainstorming conversations to the detailed decisions about architects and contractors, CB&LF works with expert partners to provide guidance rooted in UCC identity and core values, and tailored to the needs and challenges of congregational leadership and decision-making. Patrick brings more than 30 years experience in bi-vocational ministry, serving the local church while working in the public sector, including education, government, nonprofit organizations and economic and community development. Prior to coming to CB&LF, he led community development initiatives that generated \$600 million in investment in the poorest communities on Long Island.

Location: Pinot Noir Room

DISASTER PACK ASSEMBLY WITH CHURCH WORLD SERVICE

Join Church World Service in packing specialized kits that include items such as a fire-proof and water-proof documents bag, a crank-operated transistor radio, and more. CWS is a partner of the national and the Global Ministries settings of the United Church of Christ, and are expert leaders in disaster response. Well known for their "Response Kits" programs that provide churches with hands-on ways to respond in times of crises while also learning more about communities and partners around the world. CWS will share these kits with families who have already lost their homes in the fires as we enter another fire season and, as always, the prospect of further evacuations. CWS has identified a goal of 1,500 kits by the end of the summer, with 300 being packed this weekend.

Location: Syrah Room

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KEYNOTE SPEAKERS



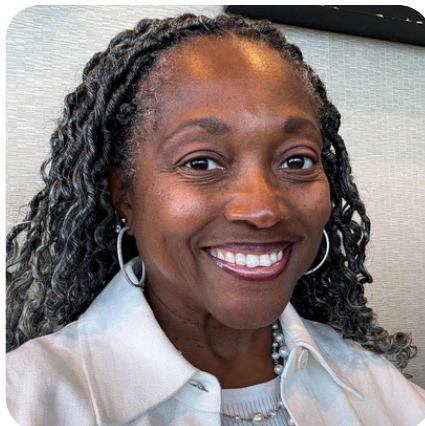
COLE ARTHUR RILEY

Cole Arthur Riley is a writer and poet. She is the NYT bestselling author of *This Here Flesh* and *Black Liturgies*. Her writing has been featured in *The Atlantic*, *Guernica*, *The Boston Globe*, and *The Washington Post*. Cole is also the creator of *Black Liturgies*, a space that integrates spiritual practice with Black emotion, Black literature, and the Black body.



REV. DR. DAVID VÁSQUEZ-LEVY

Rev. Dr. David Vásquez-Levy serves as President of Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California –a progressive, multid denominational seminary and center for social justice that prepares spiritually rooted leaders to create a world where all can thrive. A nationally recognized leader and a sought after speaker, he leads at the intersection of faith, higher education, and social change.



REV. DR. KAREN GEORGIA A. THOMPSON

The Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia A. Thompson is the newly elected General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ. Rev. Thompson is the first woman and first woman of African descent to serve as leader of the denomination. She is a writer, poet and theologian who has contributed to numerous publications. Her book of poetry *Drums in Our Veins*, was published in 2022.

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THEOLOGICAL REFLECTORS

FRIDAY AFTERNOON



Rev. Dr. Jen Strickland holds degrees from Miami University (Bachelors of Creative Writing and Mass Communications), Chapman University (dual Master of Fine Arts in English Literature and Creative Writing), Princeton Theological Seminary (Master of Divinity), and Duke University (Doctor of Ministry). Pastor Jen grew up in a UCC church, was ordained in the Presbyterian (USA) Church, and now has dual standing in both denominations. Having previously served at churches in Philadelphia, PA, Liberty, OH, Prairie Village, KS, and Lincoln, NE, she is passionate about incorporating creativity, art, and fresh liturgy in worship, connecting people of faith in fellowship, and teaching the rich stories of the Christian faith to disciples of all ages. When she isn't writing a sermon or dreaming about the Church, Jen can be found playing with her daughter Clementine, walking her rescue dog, cuddling her 2 potbelly pigs, reading fiction, drinking lattes, cooking vegetarian food, watching movies, or sitting on the beach. She and her husband love to travel and find out what God is up to in other parts of the world.

FRIDAY EVENING



The **Rev. Petra Malleis-Sternberg** has been ordained as a Minister in the United Church of Christ since 2001, serving two other UCC congregations in Southern California before moving to First Congregational Church of Long Beach as the Senior Minister in 2023. Before ordination, she also worked as lay staff for youth and Christian education with several congregations for six years. She is a graduate of the University of Arizona and the United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities, and has been a leader in the wider UCC and in community and interfaith groups. Petra has lived in six different US states, but now has been a resident of California for 22 years. She is married to David, and they have four teen and young adult children. They are enjoying putting down roots in Long Beach and becoming a part of the beloved community at First Church. Petra has deep love for the intergenerational beauty of church that brings together a widely diverse group of people to work for justice with the wider community. She celebrates creative worship, spiritual growth for all ages, and the power of inclusive community to bring support in both challenging and joyous times, in love.

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THEOLOGICAL REFLECTORS

SATURDAY MORNING



Rev. Michael Schiefelbein served as pastor for 16 years at College Avenue UCC in Modesto, California, following a career as an English professor. Upon Michael's retirement in 2022, he and his husband, Steve Klinkerman, moved to Palm Springs, California. Michael is in training with the Enneagram Prison Project to teach the Enneagram in California prisons. He is a member of First Congregational Church, Los Angeles.

SATURDAY AFTERNOON



Cheryl Farrell is a corporate communications consultant and performance storyteller. Her eclectic career includes roles as vice president of HR communications for a major U.S. bank as well as a recurring television personality on the popular quiz show Jeopardy! Raised in the Baptist church as a child, she joined the United Church of Christ in 1985. She currently attends Pasadena UCC and serves as a liturgist and singer. Cheryl previously served as a board member of the Southern California Nevada Conference. Cheryl has a master's degree in communications from USC and bachelor's degree in economics from UCLA. She earned the BSBC Certificate of Non-Profit Governance from Arizona State University. Cheryl is married with two adult children. Cheryl finds God in all things and believes her calling is to use diverse skills and talents to spread the good news.