



UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST

NORTHERN PLAINS CONFERENCE



Conference Minister Profile

2025

OUR CONFERENCE

Our Vision

Grounded in God's presence, the [Northern Plains Conference](#) serves as a catalyst for God's love in action.

Our Covenant

We, the members of the Northern Plains Conference of the United Church of Christ, do hereby covenant together in the presence of God to be a nurturing and prophetic community of Christ, to walk together in deep commitment to God and each other, to offer God's extravagant welcome in the world, and to do God's will as it is revealed to us through the Spirit and the Word.

Our People

The Northern Plains Conference of the United Church of Christ is multi-racial, multi-cultural, multi-lingual, and multi-national. Two nations (United States and Canada) and the Three Affiliated Tribes (Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara – MHA Nation) are served by the Conference. There are 30 local churches located in North Dakota; East Grand Forks, Minnesota; and Winnipeg, Manitoba. We are rural and urban, Prairie and Badlands, lay ministers and preachers. We are theologically diverse and of Native American, Southeast Asian, and Euro-American heritage.

Our Outlook

The Northern Plains Conference is committed to justice, compassion, and the radical welcome at the heart of the Gospel. Across our rural and urban congregations, many of our churches actively work to protect and uplift marginalized communities. Several congregations proudly proclaim an Open and Affirming welcome to LGBTQ+ people and create spaces where all are truly seen and loved. Our pastors and members have spoken boldly at legislative sessions in support of respecting the diversity and dignity of all people. This is a Conference where proclaiming God's love means standing with those who are most vulnerable.

One of the strengths of our Conference is the breadth of theological perspectives found across our congregations. Some of our churches lean progressive, while others hold more traditional expressions of faith. What binds us together is a shared commitment to covenantal relationship, mutual respect, and the work of Christ in the world. We listen deeply to one another, honor our differences, and seek unity without demanding uniformity. In this spirit, we strive to be a conference where thoughtful conversation, grace-filled leadership, and genuine collaboration are not only possible but practiced.

We invite you to learn more about the Northern Plains Conference as you review this profile and visit our [website](http://npcucc.org) (npcucc.org).

OUR FIVE KEY PRIORITIES

The Northern Plains Conference focuses on five key priorities: Leadership, Relationships, Outreach, Communication, and Development. These goals aim to align the Conference and support churches in their ministries and missions.

Leadership

- **Development and a Culture of Call:** assisting in the development of a new school for ministry and offering training and support to local church and Conference leaders.

Relationships

- **Connect and Resource Churches:** building strong connections within and among churches, fostering a sense of community and belonging and a spirit of sharing.

Outreach

- **UCC Identity/Be a Beacon in a Changing World:** bridging the local and national church and increasing awareness of the UCC in North Dakota through service to the broader community.

Communication

- **Shema, Shema, Listen to Hear and Respond:** effectively listen to the needs of our internal and external communities and respond with resources that meet those needs, using clear and diverse communication methods.

Development

- **Expansive Stewardship:** responsibly and effectively securing and using resources, including finances, time, and talents to advance our mission.

OUR OPPORTUNITIES

Because the Northern Plains Conference encompasses a wide variety of geographical regions, cultures, and theology, our Conference Minister needs to have the ability to navigate and build relationships and dialogues around these differences. Traveling to and participating in worship and events in the various congregations will give our Conference Minister opportunities to experience our diversity.

As the churches of the Northern Plains Conference move forward with the challenges of the pandemic aftermath, particularly transitions to increased online participation and decreased financial commitment, our Conference Minister can serve as a beacon of hope and offer guidance to those churches, clergy, and communities to provide ministry to people of all ages.

Another aspect of our Conference is our long history of welcoming creative solutions (developing a training program for lay ministers when local churches couldn't find pastors, starting CATCH to support immigrants in rural communities, trying out different structures for our Conference to better serve churches across a large geographic area, etc.). Our Conference Minister will need to be open to listening and responding thoughtfully and effectively to foster trust and compassion. We have members, pastors, and lay leaders who are ready to step up and lead with the Conference Minister.

We are currently developing a program called Sanctuary Medicine, which includes church disaster preparedness, church wellness, and training on medical emergencies.

Our School of Ministry will soon be relaunched for the 21st Century to provide training and support for lay people seeking to minister among us. The Northern Plains Conference has a long history of training lay ministers to serve our churches, and we are excited to renew and deepen that commitment, fostering a Culture of Call among all our people.

In 2024, our Conference sent 13 youth to the Regional Youth Event in Illinois. We were among the larger delegations. Our youth had a wonderful time, and there is more potential for gathering them and supporting their faith journeys. We now have a Youth Coordinator and the commitment to develop this exciting ministry further.

There are currently 5 Native American congregations among us, and we recently hosted a delegation led by our General Minister and President, Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson, to visit the Council of American Indian Ministries (CAIM) churches in North Dakota, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. There is an important opportunity to work with our local churches, other Conferences, and our National Ministries to strengthen our relationships with our Native congregations and create new mutual, vital ministries that help churches address challenges in Native communities. Our Mission and Outreach Committee is leading this effort for our Conference.

Our Conference is currently sustainable, with an endowment of approximately \$1,100,000. It is clear, however, that significant effort is needed to raise funds for long-term sustainability. Our expenses will exceed our income. We are reasonably confident that additional funding can be generated from our own members and grant funds, but new funding streams are also required to balance the budget. We are creating a Stewardship Committee to undertake this effort.

Our Churches: Helping Us Thrive

Local churches have identified the following areas of desired support from the Conference.

1. Enhanced Communication and Relationships

- Desire for more consistent and personal communication with the Conference Minister (e.g., regular visits, shared discussions, fellowship).
- Improved communication and connection between churches in the Conference.
- Requests for more contact with and visits from Conference leadership, beyond formal invitations.

2. Resourcing and Practical Support

- Help with finding pastors, pulpit supply, and worship resources for lay leaders.
- Sharing of information such as available grants, policy updates, and practical tools for church leadership and administration.

3. Strategic Visioning and Discernment

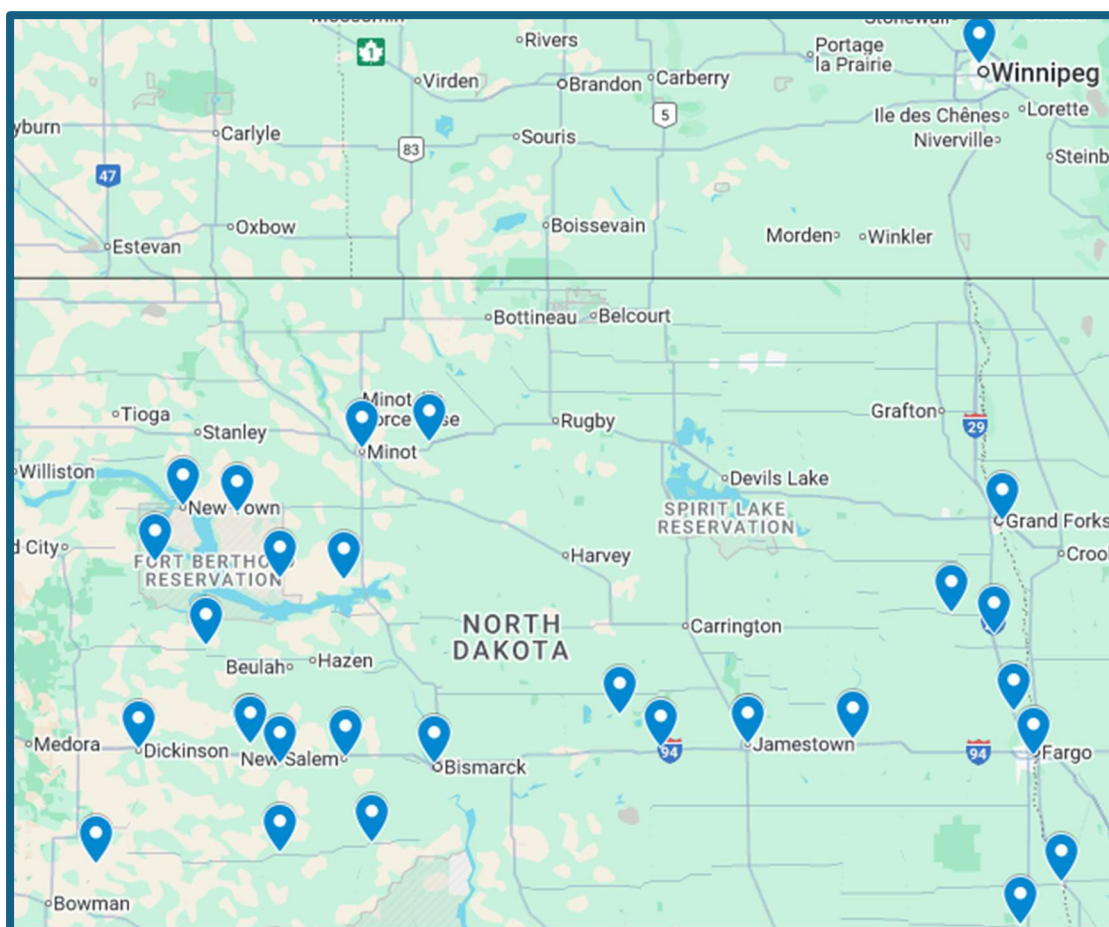
- Support in strategic planning, vision setting, and discernment about a congregation's future for growth or potential closure.
- Guidance and external facilitation in shaping a sustainable and mission-driven path forward.

4. Connection to the Wider Church and Community

- Stronger links between local churches and the national United Church of Christ.
- Building partnerships with community organizations and other churches to strengthen outreach.
- Support for "yoked" congregations to maintain UCC identity alongside other denominations.

5. Advocacy and Support

- Promotion of the UCC's welcoming values and openness as a source of identity and outreach.
- Prayerful support and emotional encouragement from Conference leadership.



OUR ORGANIZATION

Conference Office

All records are digital, and the office location is flexible—including remote work. Our support staff operate remotely. During listening sessions, Bismarck emerged as the preferred central “home base” due to its proximity to the State Capitol and its accessibility to congregations statewide.

Council

The NPC Council, the governing body of the Conference between annual or special meetings, is comprised of one person from each committee, two at-large members, moderator, secretary, treasurer, and chair. Meetings are typically attended by the Conference Minister. The Council is responsible for the business of the Conference, including strategic planning, finances, and supporting the work of our committees and the Conference Minister.

Committee on Ministry

The Committee on Ministry is responsible for church standing and the authorization of ministry in the Conference. It supports Conference ministers, local churches, and specialized ministries. The Committee encourages and assists ministers’ participation in programs of continuing education, conducts periodic retreats and workshops, and prepares recommended guidelines for ministerial covenants. The Committee is also responsible for training Lay Ministers and fostering a Culture of Call within our Conference.

Faith and Nurture Committee

The Faith and Nurture Committee creates spaces of spiritual connection, relationship building, and faith depth. Its goals are to connect local churches with the Conference and national church. The Committee also helps provide resources for the education and nurture of local churches, as well as coordinating Conference participation in regional and ecumenical education and youth events. Additionally, Faith and Nurture promotes the growth of faith in local churches and encourages the use of UCC resources and leadership.

Mission and Outreach Committee

The Mission and Outreach Committee works collaboratively with UCC churches in communities across the Conference in a variety of local, national, and international mission efforts. Grants are awarded and mission trips have been sponsored. International partnerships include East Timor and Costa Rica. The Committee receives its funding from the Pilgrim Park Memorial Fund.

Local Churches

The 30 churches across our Conference, from extremely small rural congregations to urban churches in our largest cities, engage in a diverse range of ministry and programs in their local communities, such as:

- Actively supporting nonprofit missions, including soup kitchens and sober living houses.
- Engaging a Call to Care team to ensure that the needs of the community are met effectively.
- Holding Harvest Suppers to support local growers.
- Hosting Head Start.
- Offering indoor church space for community needs and outdoor labyrinth and playgrounds.
- Raising financial support for local community needs.
- Supporting youth attendance at denominational rallies.

OUR TURNING POINTS

Legacy of Pilgrim Park

Pilgrim Park, a youth camp on Lake Metigoshe in north central North Dakota, opened in 1935 and became a significant ministry in our Conference. In addition to youth camps, Pilgrim Park was the site of women's fellowship retreats and men's annual work weekends, as well as an annual summer convocation of about 100 people of all ages for coordinating and planning the work of the Conference. A brave and difficult decision was made in 1998 to sell the beloved Pilgrim Park, but it has continued to support our mission and educational ministries through an endowment fund developed in 1999. We celebrate the past ministry of Pilgrim Park and we continue to grieve its loss; however, we also recognize that its sale enabled our Conference to be resilient and sustainable through challenging times. We are blessed that the legacy of Pilgrim Park continues to feed our ongoing ministry.

Development of Alternative Pathways to Ministry

The Northern Plains Conference has a long history of creative problem solving and innovation. We highly value our people and take seriously the gifts of ministry. When our rural churches struggled to attract traditionally trained ordained ministers, our Conference developed alternative pathways to ministry starting in the 1990s and led the United Church of Christ in expanding the training of authorized and licensed lay ministers. Our programming was academically and spiritually grounded with regular cohort gatherings and ongoing study.

Formation of CATCH

CATCH (Communities Acting Together for Hope and Change) was initially envisioned by the late Rev. Keith Mills, former Conference Minister of the North Plains Conference. A meeting in April 2022 led to its formal incorporation, and it has since gained 501(c)(3) status. CATCH's mission is to prepare rural communities to welcome foreign-born families as permanent residents. By encouraging and resourcing our rural communities to resettle immigrants, it enhances cultural diversity in those communities while providing economic benefits. The people of the Northern Plains Conference continue to provide active leadership in CATCH, working alongside other faith and community leaders and agencies.

An Ode to Our Northern Plains



When people think of the Northern Plains, the picture that often pops into their heads is flat land covered by wheat, yellow canola, and of course, more wheat. By mid-summer the corn is high, and the sunflowers begin to bloom. The sunsets are spectacular, and the stars shine in the night sky. In the winter, the northern lights put on a show. While domestic agriculture is significant, there are animals that populate the prairie. Buffalo are being reintroduced, and, in the west, you can travel to “where the deer and the antelope play.” Wild horses abound in Theodore Roosevelt National Park, part of the beautiful Badlands.

Yes, there is cold and snowy weather, although the truly bitter cold is usually a week in duration and snowfall depends on the year. The four seasons, including the spring growing time, the bright hot summer days, and the fall harvest, are blessings to be experienced.

We, as a conference, acknowledge that we live, work, and worship on land that is ancient, and that people lived here long before settlers arrived. Our Native kin cared for the land and all its inhabitants. Our white ancestors were sometimes not as respectful; and we are seeking ways to be better ancestors for future generations. These and other First Peoples inhabited the land for thousands of years.

The ministry of Charles Hall with the Three Affiliated Tribes (Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara) led to the establishment of Congregational churches in New Town, Parshall, Twin Buttes, and White Shield, which remain members of our Conference. There are four additional federally recognized tribal nations in the Conference.

In the mid-1800s, immigrants from Scandinavia, particularly Norway, made their way to the northern third of North Dakota. Their traditions remain in those areas. From the south, Germans from Russia began to arrive. Agriculture was the driving economic force from statehood until the 2000s.

Today, energy and agriculture are the top two industries. North Dakota’s population is growing. There is a population shift from rural areas to the cities. The region has strong healthcare and education systems, along with U.S. Air Force bases in Minot and Grand Forks.

A couple of fun facts about North Dakota...the state produces the most honey of all 50 states and boasts the most wildlife refuges of any state in the country. We hope this introduction gives a fuller picture of a state and region that is often misrepresented in popular culture. We know that there is a home for you, and you will be welcomed by friendly and faith-filled people.



Position Title: Conference Minister

Reports To: Northern Plains Conference Council

FLSA Status: Exempt

Position Type: Full-Time – 3-Year Termed Settled Conference Minister

Location: Northern Plains Conference of the United Church of Christ
(Region includes North Dakota, Manitoba, and the Fort Berthold Reservation)

Position Summary

The **Conference Minister (CM)** is the spiritual leader, chief executive, and strategic partner to the churches and leaders of the **Northern Plains Conference of the United Church of Christ (UCC)**. Rooted in covenant and guided by the Gospel, the CM nurtures congregational vitality, supports clergy and lay leadership, and helps shape the Church's future across rural, urban, and indigenous contexts.

This hands-on, relational, and mission-centered role is ideal for a **visionary, strategic, and spiritually grounded generalist** who is passionate about community presence, social justice, and empowering innovation in ministry. A successful CM will be a **strong communicator, a good listener, and a unifying presence**—comfortable working across a spectrum of theological, cultural, and political differences with humility and authenticity.

Key Responsibilities

1. Spiritual & Moral Leadership

- Serve as pastor to pastors and congregations, offering calm, grounded, and compassionate care.
- Lead courageously in times of crisis, transition, or conflict.
- Model spiritual maturity and a commitment to justice, advocacy, and inclusivity.
- Engage congregations with openness to diverse identities, theological traditions, and cultural contexts.
- Encourage spiritual renewal and theological exploration that is deeply rooted and forward-thinking.

2. Visionary & Strategic Leadership

- Serve as a creative and visionary leader—open to “outside the box” thinking in ministry.
- Support churches in discerning and articulating strategic vision and purpose.
- Embrace and champion emerging models of church for today's changing realities.
- Work collaboratively with the Committees and congregations to implement long-term planning and innovation.

3. Conference Administration & Organizational Leadership

- Supervise and support Conference staff and volunteer teams, ensuring a healthy and responsive organizational culture.
- Oversee administrative systems, workflows, and communications to support Conference goals.
- Provide skilled leadership in budgeting, stewardship, and financial management; promote sustainability and growth through outreach and fundraising.
- Serve as a resource to congregations for governance, strategic planning, and denominational connections.
- Participate actively in the wider UCC, ecumenical, and interfaith networks.
- Promote the ministries of the Conference through effective communication, marketing, and outreach.

4. School of Ministry Leadership

- Co-lead the North Dakota School of Ministry alongside the Committee on Ministry, with a focus on preparing clergy and lay leaders for contemporary challenges.
- Explore contextual and innovative models of theological education and formation.
- Inspire a culture of learning and empowerment among new and emerging leaders.

5. Relationship Building & Community Presence

- Build deep and sustaining relationships across theological, political, geographic, and cultural divides.
- Devote focused attention on our Native American churches with the goal of deepening and broadening non-colonial relationships and collaborative ministry.
- Foster enthusiasm and unity within and among congregations through open, friendly, and accessible leadership.
- Prioritize presence—physically and relationally—in communities across the Conference, with a strong preference for residence within the region (e.g., Bismarck suggested).
- Serve as a visible and trusted leader who respects local traditions while connecting churches to national initiatives and broader denominational resources.

6. Congregational Wellness & Engagement

- Promote wellness—spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical—among clergy and congregations.
- Help churches become safe, inclusive, and hopeful spaces of healing and connection.
- Support community-based ministry, including disaster preparedness and public witness.
- Encourage congregational responsiveness to local challenges, demographics, and opportunities.

7. Conference Gatherings & Events

- Plan and lead the Annual Meeting and up to three regional events annually, in coordination with relevant teams.
- Create gatherings that foster connection, growth, and theological depth across the Conference.

Ideal Candidate Will Have

- Ordained ministerial standing in the United Church of Christ (or eligibility for standing).
- Deep spiritual maturity, a grounded prayer life, and theological openness.
- Passion and experience in rural, small-town, indigenous, and urban ministry contexts.
- Strong interpersonal, listening, and communication skills—friendly, approachable, and collaborative.
- Demonstrated commitment to justice, diversity, and advocacy for the marginalized.
- Strategic thinking and innovation capacity, with skills in visioning and organizational development.
- Organizational and financial acumen, including budgeting, stewardship, and fundraising.
- Comfort with long-distance travel and a love for the people and landscapes of the Dakotas and Canada.
- Willingness to reside in the region to support relational and geographic presence.

Core Competencies

- **Relational Leadership** – Builds trust, fosters enthusiasm, and engages across diverse contexts with empathy.
- **Visionary Ministry** – Supports renewal, emerging church models, and creative problem-solving.
- **Pastoral Presence** – Offers grounded, wise, and steady care in varied settings.
- **Cultural Humility & Competence** – Practices deep listening, continuous learning, and inclusive engagement.
- **Organizational Agility** – Capable of managing complex tasks with grace and clarity.
- **Financial & Outreach Skills** – Understands and supports stewardship, fundraising, and marketing for ministry growth.

Compensation & Benefits

- **Salary & Housing Allowance Range:** \$85,000–\$100,000 annually, commensurate with experience and UCC national guidelines.
- **Benefits Include:**
 - Health, life, and disability insurance
 - Pension contributions
 - Paid vacation and sabbatical leave
 - Professional development allowance
 - Mileage and travel reimbursement

Application Process

Interested candidates must submit a **UCC Ministerial Profile** and a **letter of interest** via the [UCC Ministry Opportunities website](#).