



HEARTLAND CONFERENCE

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
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The Heartland Conference Board of Directors Nominates

Rev. David Long-Higgins

To be Called as Conference Minister to the Heartland Conference, United Church of Christ

May 21, 2021

Nomination Recommendation from the Heartland Conference Board of Directors

At its May 21, 2021, meeting the Heartland Conference Board of Directors voted unanimously to nominate Rev. David Long-Higgins to be called as the Conference Minister to the Heartland Conference pending an affirmative vote of conference delegates at the Annual Gathering of the Heartland Conference on September 24-25, 2021.

Background

In 2018, a decision was made to conduct a national search for a Transitional Conference Minister. After reviewing numerous profiles, interviewing a diverse set of candidates, and evaluating each candidate based on the skill sets and experience needed to shepherd the recommendations of the 2018 Conference Vision Proposal, a candidate was presented to the Board of Directors. Rev. David Long-Higgins was contracted for a period of up to three years for the position. A potential longer-term position description was left open-ended for there to be flexibility related to the identified needs and emerging ministry directions of the Conference that would likely surface during the transitional period. In keeping with standard practice, the Transitional Conference Minister agreement allowed for the individual in this role, in this case, Rev. Long-Higgins, to be eligible to apply for whatever the future configuration of staffing might become. The end of August will mark the completion of the three-year arrangement with Rev. Long-Higgins.

Evolutionary Learnings

In the time since this initial arrangement was engaged there has been much accomplished related to the 2018 Vision Proposal though evolving in some different directions of form than were initially considered. At the March Board meeting the Board reviewed the path the Heartland Conference has been journeying together, noting the important discoveries, the vital work of healing, and emerging trajectories for ministry that are surfacing. Especially we have noted and have come to celebrate the unique character of each of our associations along with the conference, and the gifts which each of these settings brings to the whole.

We have identified the importance of the Leadership Roundtable (Association Ministers and Conference Minister) working in a deliberate peer relationship that aids in the call to be a nimble covenant ever responsive to the changing realities of the world in which we live. Especially we have come to realize the call to ever greater collaboration, often expressed in networks that help connect wisdom, passion, and need across our whole life.



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These realizations have been newly framed in our “Why, Calling, and Covenant” document which has now been affirmed by the governing bodies of each setting of our life. In recent conversations of the gathered executive teams of the associations and conference, a review of the journey we are sharing led to an affirmation of the road we are on. It seems we are ready to live even more robustly into the covenantal collaborations which are emerging, celebrating the varying gifts of the body and building on the reframed understanding of how we engage each other.

The configuration of leadership as described above confirms the ongoing need and desire for the role of a conference minister in our life together, defined in ways that continue the growth of the emerging model of ministry God has been urging in our life. A revised Conference Minister position description outlining the responsibilities of this calling in our shared life and its connecting role to the wider church nationally, globally, and ecumenically are included in this email.

Process for Identifying a Called Conference Minister

The annual evaluation of Rev. David Long-Higgins was completed under direction of the chair of the Conference Human Resources Committee together with members from each association that interact with David Long-Higgins in various roles. The evaluation team included: Rev. Dr. Cheryl Lindsay, Rev. Patricia Battle, Ms. Pam Linderson, Rev. David Plant and Mr. Tom Hathaway. Based on the positive outcome of the evaluation, noting that the contract with the Transitional Conference Minister was coming to a conclusion, it was recommended by the Evaluation Team to the Executive Committee of Conference Board of Directors that Rev. Long-Higgins be nominated to be called to the position of Conference Minister.

Upon receiving the recommendation, the Executive Committee met with Rev. Lee Albertson, national staff for conference minister searches. Lee was a partner with the conference in the formation of the Transitional Conference Minister (TCM) job description. He shared about best practices in the situation of a TCM where the relationship is healthy and strong. Lee also reminded the committee that the drafting of the TCM position was designed to allow for the consideration of the TCM to become the candidate for the settled Conference Minister position.

The Executive Committee then continued with a discussion about the value of either entering a new search process or affirming the recommendation of the evaluation team. The Executive Committee voted unanimously to recommended to the Conference Board of Directors that Rev. Long-Higgins be nominated for the call to the position of Conference Minister.



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The Board of Directors, at its May 21, 2021, meeting, entertained the Executive Committee's recommendation that Rev. David Long-Higgins be nominated and presented to the September Annual Gathering for affirmation as the called Heartland Conference Minister. In its deliberations, the Board considered the following:

- The Board affirmed the need of the position of settled conference minister.
- The original search process was national in scope reflecting a diverse pool of applicants and skill sets which brought David Long-Higgins to us as an outstanding candidate.
- This process afforded us the opportunity to consider David Long-Higgins for a called position was offered as a possibility in the original contract at its completion.
- The Board noted David's exceptional performance in the transitional role, and the desire to continue with a ministry defined by accomplishment and excellence.
- The nomination would allow the continuation of the progress that has been made and continue the breadth of relationships already built across the conference and in the wider church.
- David's strong commitment to diversity and inclusion recognized by all who have worked with him, is an important component of the job description.
- David's temperament has been valued by all who work with him, including his ability to adapt and reframe expectations as new understandings of our shared life emerge.

Given these considerations, the Heartland Conference Board of Directors voted unanimously to nominate Rev. David Long-Higgins to be called as the Conference Minister to the Heartland Conference pending an affirmative vote of conference delegates at the Annual Gathering of the Heartland Conference on September 24-25, 2021. Biographical information about Rev. David Long-Higgins is included in this mailing.

Questions of clarification may be directed to Rev. David Plant, Heartland Conference Moderator, by emailing him at revdplant@yahoo.com or calling him at 419-782-4580.



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Conference Minister Heartland Conference, United Church of Christ Calling and Job Description

For a time, such as this: Celebrating the ever-evolving nature of the life of the Heartland Conference and honoring the shared life which God's Spirit is calling forth, we envision a spiritual, theological, and administrative leader for our Conference Minister position.

As Pastoral Leader to the Conference

- **Communicate and engage the newly formed Heartland Conference "Why, Calling, and Covenant" in collaboration with the Conference Board of Directors, the Leadership Roundtable, Association and Local settings stakeholders in as many ways as possible, building a sense of community and partnership.**
- **Honor, promote and facilitate the commitment of the UCC to social justice, peace, diversity, inclusion, equity, access, and extravagant welcome within and among our congregations and as a public voice.**
- **Host the Leadership Roundtable, engaging with the Association Ministers in a peer relationship for mutual support, shared ministry network development and strengthening of each ministry setting of the Heartland Conference.**
- **Work with Leadership Roundtable, Board of Directors, and Executive Teams to clarify consensus about the organic evolution of our shared work around at least these key commitments:**
 - Affirm that the model of shared life we are now engaging is the nimble form we need and to which God is calling us and make adjustments as necessary.
 - Continue to listen to our covenant partners so that our shared ministry can be ever more faithful to our "Why, Calling, and Covenant".
- **Shepherd Network Development** – Working with others, identify the partners who can help respond to the interests/needs/passions for ministry which arise through spirit-filled discernment.
- **Provide leadership and direction for the Faith Formation program development.**



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- **Foster and inspire stewardship growth across the Heartland Conference.**
- **Maintain covenantal relationships throughout the Conference, Associations, and local churches through:**
 - Worship leadership – Reaching out through preaching and other presentations about the shape and form of the ministry across the conference
 - Association Meetings – Offering interpretation about the Conference by sharing at association meetings
 - Theological Writing and other Communication
 - Effectively manage and resolve conflict, facilitate healing as needed.
- **Influence, support, and resource policy development and program initiatives of the national setting and global partnerships of the United Church of Christ.**

As Chief Executive:

- **Coordinate and direct the work of the Conference ministry staff. Oversee all Conference staff, paid and volunteer.**
 - Offer counsel and oversight to the Executive Director of Outdoor Ministries.
- **Oversee administrative and financial accountability for the operations of the Conference.**

As Chief Liaison with Regional, National, and Global Settings of the United Church of Christ:

- **Represent the Heartland Conference to the wider church and foster relationships in a way that empowers congregations for vital, effective ministry both on a local and shared basis.**
- **Interpret the needs and concerns of the national and regional settings to the Conference with the help of the Leadership Roundtable, staff, and volunteers who serve in such settings and/or are knowledgeable about it.**
- **Participate in the Council of Conference Ministers and in the gatherings of the Great Lakes Regional staff.**
- **Serve as the leader of the Heartland Conference General Synod delegation.**

As Chief Ecumenical Officer:

- **Represent the Conference in settings of the Ohio, West Virginia, and Kentucky Council of Churches.**



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Biographical Information for Rev. David Long-Higgins, Conference Minister Candidate Heartland Conference, United Church of Christ



Rev. Dave Long-Higgins currently serves as the Transitional Conference Minister for the Heartland Conference of the United Church of Christ. In that role, Dave has been called to facilitate a process to strengthen our covenantal collaboration between congregations, associations, institutions of higher education, health and human service ministries, ecumenical and interfaith engagements, as well as partnerships local and global. Dave's passion is to see individuals and churches grow in their sense of the alive presence of God and all that this calls forth to be signs of good news in the world, so that all may flourish.

It is out of this commitment toward the full flourishing of every human being and the whole creation, that Pastor Dave comes to the work of weaving personal commitments with public engagements. Toward that end he believes God calls us as followers of Jesus Christ to a movement toward the margins so that those normally overlooked or discounted can find themselves welcomed, placed at the center, and given space to thrive.

Dave has served in a wide variety of capacities throughout the United Church of Christ including serving on the Wider Church Ministries Board, the Common Global Ministries Board of the United Church of Christ and Christian Church, Disciples of Christ, and on the former UCC Executive Council.

Dave is a graduate of Heidelberg University with a Bachelor of Arts in psychology and music (violin performance). His Master of Divinity was earned at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities in New Brighton, Minnesota. He is also a graduate of the Wellstreams Spiritual Direction Program of the Spirituality Network of Columbus (Ohio). Prior to beginning his role with the Conference, Dave was a parish pastor for over 30 years. Together with his wife, Beth, who is also an ordained UCC clergy person Dave has served two congregations, Bethany UCC, in Louisville, Kentucky, and David's United Church of Christ in Canal Winchester, Ohio.

Dave and Beth have two adult children, Andrew and Hannah. When not on the ministry trail Dave enjoys movies, playing violin and guitar, bicycling, travel, writing poetry/prayers, and photography.