

God is still speaking

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**UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST**



February 17, 2016

Ms. Dale Bonds
Chair, United Church of Christ Board

Mr. Frank A. Bolden
Vice-Chair, United Church of Christ Board

The Rev. John C. Dorhauer
General Minister and President, United Church of Christ

Officers of the Church

Rev. John C. Dorhauer
General Minister and President

Rev. Traci D. Blackmon
Justice and Witness Ministries

Rev. J. Bennett Guess
Local Church Ministries

Rev. James A. Moos
Wider Church Ministries

Dear Ms. Bonds, Mr. Bolden and Rev. Dorhauer:

It is with a heavy yet grateful heart that I write to share with you that I have been offered and have accepted a new position as Vice President of the Council for Health and Human Service Ministries of the United Church of Christ. Due to CHHSM's expected start date of April 11, my last day as LCM's Executive Minister will be Friday, April 8, 2016.

After a period of discernment, I had planned to communicate by the upcoming March meeting of the United Church of Christ Board that I would not be seeking re-election next year. My hope was to continue for several more months in my current role after sharing that decision; however, this new opportunity simultaneously presented itself, and considering the interests of my family, my eagerness to pursue new pathways of service, and the needs of CHHSM, I find it necessary to vacate my position with the Covenanted Ministries before my term expires. I do so knowing that Local Church Ministries is strong, both financially and programmatically, and its team leaders and staff are deeply committed, resilient, talented and capable. I pledge my energies toward ensuring the smoothest possible leadership transition, both before and after assuming my new responsibilities with CHHSM, should my help or counsel be necessary.

I always will regard the privilege of serving these past five years as a National Officer of the United Church of Christ and as Local Church Ministries' Executive Minister to be one of the greatest opportunities of my life. The joys and challenges of leading the UCC and serving our local congregations at this critical moment in church history has been a source of deep fulfillment, abiding gratitude and personal growth. My heart will be forever buoyed by the hundreds of vital ministries and amazing leaders I have been able to visit, witness and celebrate firsthand.

I am immensely proud of the ways my Collegium colleagues and I worked collaboratively to usher in a new era of shared financial responsibility and accountability across the whole national setting. At the same time, I could not be more proud of Local Church Ministries' leadership team and staff that have fostered innovation in just about every aspect of LCM's work – in sweeping new thinking and

approaches to ministerial authorization and systems support; by modeling a “culture of assessment” across the church by revitalizing our own research commitment and capabilities; in leveraging new dollars for new churches/ministries; by articulating new approaches to faith formation and by bringing people to those exciting places where promising faith-forming ministry is happening now; by helping hundreds of congregations to make big, bold decisions about their envisioned futures; and by putting financial assets to work for mission and ministry through revitalizing the impact of the UCC’s historic Church Building & Loan Fund for a new day and a new era.

As an ardently proud United Church of Christ member and minister, I will always remain committed to doing everything in my power to support the bright future of our church and its mission. Our distinctive witness to the gospel of radical grace, inclusion and liberation is critically important to inspiring the people’s movement for peace with justice and ushering in God’s envisioned realm. To this end vocationally, at this moment in my ministry, I am very excited about continuing my leadership in the UCC through support of its more than 350 health and human service ministries.

Thank you, both personally and professionally, for your friendship and support across the past 16 years that I have worked for the national setting of the United Church of Christ.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "J. Bennett Guess". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Rev. J. Bennett Guess
Executive Minister, Local Church Ministries

cc: The Rev. Traci D. Blackmon
The Rev. James A. Moos
Ms. Alisa Lewis