

SPEAKERS, SESSIONS, AND WORKSHOPS

71ST NACCC ANNUAL MEETING AND CONFERENCE
ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI
JUNE 21-24, 2025

Rev. Dr. Dietra Wise Baker - Getting Started in Grassroots Organizing in Your Community

Saturday from 9:15-10:15 am

Dietra Wise Baker is an assistant professor at Eden Theological Seminary, the organizing director of Eden's Gamaliel Race and Power Institute, and the faculty director of Eden's Center for Lived Faith and Organizing. Her expertise in anti-racism, youth ministry, prison ministry, chaplaincy, and faith-based community organizing makes her a uniquely valuable organizer, preacher, trainer, teacher, and consultant.

Do you want to start a social justice ministry in your community? Are you aware of the problems in your community, but unsure of where to start? Are you worried about being too political? This workshop will root you in your faith and the beauty of the Bible and theology. You will practice proven organizing skills and leave the workshop with a plan of action.

Rev. Dr. Stu Merkel - Spiritual Formations for Everyday Life

Saturday from 9:15-10:15 am; Sunday from 3:30-4:30 pm

Stu Merkel has served as pastor of Faith Community Church in Franklin, Wisconsin, since 2009, and previously pastored churches in San Diego, California, Hartford, Connecticut, and Gurnee, Illinois. An MDiv and DMin graduate of Fuller Theological Seminary, Stu is a lifelong Congregationalist, a creative preacher, and a spiritual leader. He teaches Spiritual Formation for the NACCC Lay Ministry Training Program.

This workshop will provide an introduction to spiritual formations and the practice of spiritual disciplines common and useful for everyday life. Using daily practices, participants will be guided to a greater understanding of essential pathways to experiencing God. Spiritual disciplines deepen your source of hope in a time of radical change.

Rev. Dr. Lonnie Richardson - Building a Culture of Discipleship

Saturday from 10:30-11:30 am

Lonnie Richardson is the founding pastor of Fox River Congregational Church and has experience serving rural, urban, and university congregations. Committed to providing relevant ministry and leadership driven by the transformational possibilities of the Christian faith in people's lives, Lonnie's passion is to help people connect with God and realize their full potential as followers of Christ.

Building a Culture of Discipleship is a practical, hands-on workshop designed to help leaders, pastors, and ministry teams cultivate an environment where spiritual growth and disciple-making are the norm, not the exception. Rather than relying on programs or one-off events, this workshop focuses on embedding discipleship into the everyday life of your church through intentional relationships, clear vision, and consistent action. Participants will leave equipped with tools to assess their current culture, identify barriers, and create a sustainable path forward where discipleship becomes who you are, not just what you do.

Rev. Dr. Patrick Hunt - God's Will for Your Church

Saturday from 3:00-4:00 pm

Patrick Hunt has served as the pastor of Heritage Congregational Church since April 2007 and as a chaplain for the Berea Police Department since 2016. Additionally, he has served in the Ohio Association of Congregational Christian Churches and has been an active leader within the NACCC. Patrick began his ministry in Chicago in 1969 and has served in many pastoral ministries since.

In the NACCC, our churches tend to see themselves as small, aging congregations, and trending smaller. That sentiment raises a question as to whether these churches are in a precarious position or a position poised for growth. Through the question that God asked Moses in calling him to go to Egypt, "What do you have in your hand?", this session will encourage us to assess where we are and allow God to use our current resources toward our future growth.

Rev. Dr. Beth Bingham - Back to the Future

Saturday from 3:00-4:00 pm

Beth Bingham is a senior minister at the Congregational Church of the Chimes in Los Angeles. A graduate of Cornell College, Yale Divinity School, and Garrett Seminary, Beth's ministry has included roles in Christian education, hospital chaplaincy, and numerous leadership positions within the NACCC, including on the association's Executive Committee and Board of Directors.

Simply put, Beth believes the past that we Congregationalists cherish holds our future. In this session, we will consider how, as churches gathered around covenant, we are uniquely poised to invite those who are searching for faith and community in our complicated and chaotic world into our fellowship.

Rev. Dr. Lisa W. Davison - More than a Wom(b)man; Prophetic and Liberating Women; Wise and "Witchy" Women

Saturday from 4:15-5:15 pm and 7:30-8:30 pm; Sunday from 6:30-7:30 pm

Lisa W. Davison is Vice President of Academic Affairs and Dean at Phillips Theological Seminary. An ordained minister and author, Lisa has served congregations in Texas and Kentucky and published multiple books and essays with a focus on Hebrew Bible studies and women in the Bible. She has a BA from Lynchburg College, an MDiv from Brite Divinity School, and an MA and PhD from Vanderbilt.

The Hebrew Bible contains confusing and often contradictory messages about many different issues (e.g., sacrifice, war, the nature of God, and so forth), but there seems to be one message that is perfectly clear: a woman's main purpose in life is to bear children, specifically to birth sons. Through the session, *More than a Wom(b)man*, we will explore the question: Can we find another understanding of a woman's worth, besides motherhood, in the Hebrew Bible?

In the session *Prophetic and Liberating Women*, we will begin our search for childfree women by considering the biblical stories of female prophetic characters Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, and Esther, who are never described as mothers nor as "barren" within the texts. What roles did these female characters hold in the story that give them importance beyond their reproductive capabilities? Have we missed some of these other positions because of our own limited perspectives in reading the biblical texts? How can these stories empower all of us to be "Agents of the Divine?"

Finally, in *Wise and Witchy Women*, we will look at some lesser-known female characters of the Hebrew Bible and explore how they are examples of female roles not based on the ability to produce offspring. We will consider what we've learned about the Hebrew Bible, its socio-historical contexts, female biblical characters, and understanding of womanhood, both ancient and contemporary. How can this new knowledge challenge us to break free of preconceived notions and limitations on how the Holy calls us to be agents for change?

Tim Uthmann - Come to the Table: Healing Hearts, Bridging Divides

Sunday from 3:30-5:00 pm

Tim Uthmann is the executive director of the Pilgrim Center for Reconciliation, where he strives to bring hope and healing to those in need. From his early days studying the Bible and theology to opportunities to pastor churches in crisis to his work supporting global missions with the International Association for Refugees, Tim has long been drawn to helping people grow into who God created them to be.

Throughout Scripture, imagery of "the table" inspires a picture of connection and hope. It is both an invitation to healing as God does deep work in our souls and a place to invite others as we reflect that healing into the world around us. During this workshop, we will consider how truths gleaned from reconciliation ministry around the world over the past 30 years may be particularly helpful in our own churches and communities today. Come to our table (er, um...conference room!) for an interactive, practical conversation about the work of Shalom in our world.

Rev. Dr. Gerry Krupp - What's Happening in the NACCC

Monday from 7:15-8:30 am

Gerry Krupp is the executive director of the NACCC. He holds a degree in Political Science and Christian Ministries from Indiana Wesleyan University, an MDiv from Fuller Theological Seminary, and a DMin in Preaching from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. With 30 years as a minister and 11 years in church and nonprofit transition work, he strives to help NACCC churches grow and thrive.

Join us for the breakfast session, *What's Happening in the NACCC*. This informative gathering, led by the NACCC's executive director, will provide insights into the current state of the NACCC, recent organizational changes, and the executive director's vision for the future. Emphasizing the vital role of member churches, this session invites attendees to share their needs and aspirations. As a member-driven association, the NACCC's future direction will be shaped by the voices and priorities of the churches it exists to serve.

Rev. Dr. Karen Robu - One Small Step Panel Discussion

Monday from 11:00 am - 12:00 pm

Karen Robu is the senior minister of Plymouth Congregational Church in Wichita, Kansas, where she has served since 2011. She holds an MDiv and a DMin degree from Phillips Theological Seminary. Drawn to the "thin places" between the performing arts and the sacred, she makes connections between theatre and theology in her ministry.

Attend our One Small Step Panel Discussion to hear from some of your fellow NACCC affiliates who participated in the One Small Step opportunity this spring. One Small Step brings people with different views together to record a conversation - not to debate - but to get to know each other as people. As our country becomes increasingly divided, it is vital that the church be a leader in generating and fostering unity. "Come and See" how we can take One Small Step in that direction.

Bishop Larry Jones - Reigniting the Fire: Relevant Considerations for Effective Church New Starts, Renewal, and Revitalization

Monday from 11:00 am - 12:00 pm and 3:30-4:30 pm

Larry Jones, a St. Louis native, is the diocesan bishop of the 12th Episcopal District of the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, Inc. He studied at the Rehoboth Bible Institute and was ordained in 1979. Since then, Larry has served in a variety of ministerial roles, always striving to help people live successful lives through biblical principles.

In this thought-provoking workshop, you'll gain practical insights and spiritual wisdom on how churches can ignite fresh passion, navigate renewal, and embrace revitalization. Whether launching a new ministry, breathing life into an established congregation, or leading through change, this workshop offers relevant strategies and biblical principles to help leaders and churches thrive in today's evolving landscape.

Rev. Robb Tarr - Vitality Ministry Grantee Progress Reports and Panel Discussion **Monday from 3:30-4:30 pm**

Robb Tarr has served as the pastor of Gahanna Community Congregational Church in Columbus, Ohio, since 2019. He is a graduate of Florida State University and Fuller Theological Seminary. Robb has a passion for ministry at the connection point of churches and the broader community, which he has put into practice as a parish pastor and through his work with faith-based nonprofits.

This year, the Vitality Ministry Council extended grants to 10 NACCC member churches and ministry programs to support compelling and relatable efforts to cultivate vitality in their ministry and communities. Our goal is not just to fund a few projects but to build on the inspiring efforts of faithfulness happening across the NA to create more opportunities for mutual learning and collaboration on common circumstances we face. This workshop will feature a panel of VMC members and 2025 grantees discussing the grantees' projects and learnings and connecting those points to your ideas, interests, questions, and challenges. Join us in inspiring each other to live out our ideas in our own contexts.

First-Time Attendees Welcome Orientation

Saturday 10:30-11:30 am

If this is your first Annual Meeting & Conference, don't miss the First-Time Attendees Welcome Orientation! NACCC Moderator Jodee Lord, Vice Moderator Rev. Dr. Marty Hall, and Congregational Foundation President Laura Hamby will introduce you to the NACCC, explain its structure, and highlight key happenings across the association. You'll also learn how to make the most of your AMC experience, including opportunities for connection, learning, and engagement. This welcoming session is designed to help you feel informed, included, and ready to participate fully in all the conference has to offer.

Business Sessions 1-4

Saturday from 1:00-2:30 pm; Monday from 9:00-10:30 am and 1:30-3:00 pm; Tuesday from 9:00 am - 12:00 pm

The four Business Sessions are a vital part of the Annual Meeting & Conference, providing member church delegates the opportunity to conduct the essential business of the NACCC. During these sessions, delegates will approve this year's meeting agenda, vote on the installation of new member churches, elect new leadership, and ratify actions taken by the Leadership Council and Board of Directors over the past year. Additionally, the proposed budget will be presented for approval, and awards granted by the NACCC's ministry councils will be announced. These sessions ensure the association remains member-led and mission-focused.

Town Hall

Sunday from 2:30-3:15 pm

New to this year's Annual Meeting & Conference, the Town Hall offers a dedicated opportunity for member church congregants to engage directly with NACCC CFO Cheryl Milnes. During this session, Cheryl will provide valuable insight into the financial priorities and planning behind our shared work. Attendees are encouraged to bring questions and participate in an open Q&A. This is your chance to better understand the financial landscape of the NACCC and have your voice heard in a collaborative, informative setting.