

## Strengthen the Church seeds

### Wisconsin Conference's

### McFarland UCC Turnaround

“WE DID IT!”

**McFarland United Church of Christ**, in McFarland, WI, is well along the journey from high anxiety and a sense of crisis to a “we’ll do what is needed” spirit fueled by a sense of hope.



“Sundaes on Thursdays” community outreach & mission fundraiser event

McFarland UCC had experienced a decline in membership and resources. But they were blessed by responsive Conference staff, ready to partner. The seeds of hope were planted as Conference and congregation worked collaboratively to help make possible a new future for this congregation. The **Rev. Joanne Thomson**, Associate Conference Minister, engaged the church in a year-long self-assessment and proposed a different kind of pastoral search process to identify a candidate with the right leadership profile for their needs.

Enter the **Rev. Kerri Parker** to begin her ministry at the end of 2010. As a new Chicago Theological Seminary grad, Kerri literally was beginning her ministry, but with a wealth of vocational experience as director of a YWCA voted the most improved agency in their county.

As the church and pastor began to bond, they embarked on a path of change. Their participation in the **Conference’s Turnaround Church Program**, working with the Turnaround Church model, has been critical to the process of transforming the church from an internally-focused to externally-focused congregation. **Strengthen the Church funds** help make this program possible.

Their family-friendly vision led to rocking chairs available for worshipers, nursery renovation, paid nursery care, less “churchy” language in worship and several new songs each month from *Sing Prayer and Praise!* Worship attendance is up 50%, with guests nearly every week – some homecoming, some reactivating, and new folk who found their website. Kerri notes, “McFarland UCC is the only LGBT-friendly church in the community. Folks who share similar progressive values find us.”

They dared to let some activities go to adopt their first “really big” focused project – Mission:1. “Really big” because they set ambitious goals:

- Raise \$1,111 for NIN – *they raised over \$1,300*
- Send 111 letters to Congress – *they sent 130 letters*
- Collect 1,111 food items – *over 1,300 items, 833 pounds, were donated to the community food pantry and Domestic Abuse Intervention Services*

*Plus* they reached out to host a community meal, promoting it with flyers distributed at the community parade.

On Mission:1 celebration Sunday the Spirit was in the room as they rejoiced – “WE DID IT!” Kerri’s message and frequent reminder: “Don’t you ever say you’re just a little church again. With God we can do it.”

Kerri gives great thanks and credit to the church Turnaround Team, Conference partnership, and revitalization coach Paul Nickerson. Every 6-8 weeks the church Turnaround Team joins a Skype call with Paul, who has made a three-year commitment to companion them by offering guidance, moral support, and encouragement.

**McFarland UCC continues to receive support through the Conference’s Turnaround Church Program, which is supported in part by Strengthen the Church gifts.**

All agree that the Turnaround Church program is a wonderful resource that has been critical to what’s happening in McFarland. The Conference eagerly encourages other congregations to come on board!

Kerri cites another gift of the Conference investment in McFarland UCC. “It comes with the expectation we will think strategically and stay open to the Spirit to let it transform us.”

[Visit McFarland UCC’s website](#)  
[Meet the Rev. Joanne Thomson](#)



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