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United Church of Christ members join Planned Parenthood staff for prayer service

Milwaukee gathering underscores denomination's long support for women's reproductive rights and health care providers

MILWAUKEE (June 24, 2019) —Members of the United Church of Christ, in Milwaukee for the denomination's 32nd biennial General Synod, joined staff members of Planned Parenthood of Wisconsin at one of its local clinics Sunday afternoon for a service of blessing and solidarity.

The denomination, which has advocated for reproductive rights for women for nearly 50 years, organized the prayer service in the wake of recent moves by state legislatures and the Trump administration to impose new restrictions on women's reproductive rights and the health care providers that supply the full range of women's health services.

The Rev. Traci Blackmon, a trained nurse and the UCC's associate general minister of Justice and Local Church Ministries, assured the Planned Parenthood staff members that "the UCC stands with you."

Referring to the new restrictions, Blackmon asserted, "This is not about reproductive rights. This is about controlling women. This is not about saving lives. It's about controlling women. It is not about children. It is about controlling women. If it were about children, we would have the same amount of energy at the border right now. If it was about children, we wouldn't have children being hungry at night."

"This is a fight for a woman's right to be," she concluded, "and we will not go back."

On Friday, Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers vetoed four bills passed by the Republican-controlled State Legislature, including one that would have cut off Medicaid funding to Planned Parenthood.

Tanya Atkinson, president and CEO of Planned Parenthood of Wisconsin, said she would not “be able to find the words to express how meaningful it was” to her and her colleagues to have the faith leaders join them on the “sacred ground” of the clinic. She said “that as a person of faith,” it was painful to her to “have faith used against us.”

Blackmon, who previously served on the board of the Planned Parenthood chapter in St. Louis, observed that the words on the Milwaukee clinic’s door, “Care no matter what,” echoed one of the UCC’s “most-endearing themes: “No matter who you are, or where you are on life’s journey, you are welcome here.” She said that seeing that message on the clinic’s door “reminds us that God loves us the way we are.”

The Rev. Linda Jaramillo, chairman of the board of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice and a former national officer of the UCC, said her coalition’s mission boils down to two words: “Trust women.”

The service included a responsive litany, the reading of testimonies from women who had turned to Planned Parenthood for medical services, and a prayer of thanksgiving followed by the spreading of rose “petals of protection” around the perimeter of the clinic.

The Rev. Bernice Powell Jackson closed the gathering with a benediction: “We are reminded that the road to justice is a long road, with many ups and downs. . . . It is not a sprint, but a marathon. . . . We must be vigilant, and we must teach our young people that they must fight.”

To arrange an interview or media opportunity, contact Connie Larkman, larkmanc@ucc.org or 216-496-5540. All press must preregister for General Synod access. Visit <http://www.generalsynod.org/press>. Media members should please have press credentials with them at all times. There will be a designated access area in the Plenary Hall, and reporters are requested to attend news briefings for information/questions on high-profile issues.

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About the United Church of Christ The United Church of Christ is a mainline Protestant denomination comprised of nearly 900,000 members and 5,000 congregations nationwide. Headquartered in Cleveland, Ohio, the UCC is a church of many firsts, including the first mainline denomination to ordain a woman, the first to ordain an openly gay man and the first predominantly white denomination to ordain an African American.

The UCC and its members are tireless advocates for social issues such as immigration reform, racial equality, LGBTQ rights, marriage equality, environmental protection and economic justice.