WHAT’S NEXT for Women in the UCC?
We Are Wise, But They Are Smart:
MAKING ROOM FOR THE NEXT GENERATION OF WOMEN

Leaving “Busyness” Behind through Spiritual Direction
The Women’s As Yet Cleverly Unnamed Literary Society
Four Ways to Show Support for Roman Catholic Sisters

Also ... Does the Holy Spirit Use Social Media? Can You Plan a Retreat? How Do You Discern God’s Work in the World?
Invest in women...

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Loey Powell, Editor
poweld@ucc.org
www.ucc.org/women

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Local Church Ministries
United Church of Christ
700 Prospect Avenue
Cleveland, Ohio 44115
(866)822-8224, ext. 3876
Email: velezd@ucc.org

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Greetings and welcome to this issue of Common Lot, the United Church of Christ’s publication designed especially for women.

You will see lots of changes in this issue, thanks to the expertise of our in-house Publishing, Identity and Communication Team. There will be changes in the year ahead as well as we move away from a subscription-based publication to multiple ways of communicating with and resourcing UCC women. Stay tuned!

In this issue...
Last year, we conducted a church-wide survey on women’s ministries. This issue reflects many of the responses we received. We found, for example, that women often turn to spiritual directors for support—see the article on spiritual direction by Sally Purvis. There is a need to engage younger women as leaders in the church, so we’re highlighting the Wider Church Ministries young adult opportunity for learning and serving (see Mary Blaufuss’ article). And it is very exciting to include a piece by Connie Schultz, Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist and UCC member, on passing the movement on to the next generation.

We know that women value gathering together and are doing so in many different ways, so there are reflections by Debbie Hoogesteger on a Wisconsin Conference women’s retreat and by Kate Huey on a unique gathering called the “Women’s As Yet Cleverly Unnamed Literary Society.” Women care about advocacy for social justice, and Lizette Merchán Pinilla describes how she uses social media to do this. Social media also connect women in
new ways, and Rachel Hackenberg talks about how she uses her blog—RevGalBlogPals—to create community.

There is no more crucial moment than now . . .

. . . to encourage and strengthen the voices of women of all ages in the public arena. It is being called a “War on Women”—the debates about contraception . . .

the push-back on pay disparities (women still earn $.77 on the dollar that men earn) . . . the increasingly restrictive laws in states on access to abortion care . . .

the Catholic hierarchy’s attacks on progressive nuns . . .

the struggle to get the Violence Against Women Act reauthorized.

Everything has become political—but we as women have always understood that “the personal is political.”

We just won’t stand, however, for selling women down the river for political capital.

We as women have always understood that “the personal is political.”

It is curious, isn’t it, that in the context of assistance to other countries, many recognize that when women are supported—given educational opportunities, micro-loans to start their own businesses, and health care—these investments make the whole village healthier and more sustainable. But when it comes to women in the U.S., the same evidence is ignored.

We are taking away support for women’s health care, for childcare, for educational opportunities, for economic advancement. These have become items on the political chopping block of election politics.

And it’s time we say—no you don’t!

What can you do?

• You can join the Justice and Peace Action Network and let your voice be heard—go to ucc.org/justice/join-the-network.

• You can be more effective during this election season with the resources of Our Faith Our Vote—ucc.org/ourfaithourvote—to engage church and community.

Silence in these times is not golden. Our villages are also important.

Loey Powell, Editor

Loey Powell is Executive for Administration and Women’s Justice in Justice & Witness Ministries of the United Church of Christ. She has been co-staffing, along with David Schoen, the assessment of women’s ministries.
We are Wise, But They are Smart

Making Room for the Next Generation of Women

Connie Schultz
Young women have shared stories of their good intentions bumping up against my generation’s reluctance to cede turf.

Common complaints:

“They don’t want to hear my ideas.”
“They tell me I’m too young/too inexperienced/too eager.”

Heartbreaking.

Last March, I joined MSNBC host Rachel Maddow for an on-air discussion about the recent assault on women’s reproductive rights. This was soon after Rush Limbaugh had made appalling remarks about Sandra Fluke, a 31-year-old law student who testified before a Congressional panel about the need for affordable birth control.

Toward the end of my interview with Dr. Maddow, I looked straight into the camera and addressed America’s young women. This is your fight now, I told them. We need your voices in this national debate over women’s health.

Soon after the show, I started receiving messages—via email, Facebook and Twitter—from hundreds of young women around the country. For a little while there, I felt like the adoptive mother of thousands. They were so eager to assure me they heard what I had to say, and they were ready to engage.

Here we are, in 2012, back to advocating for a woman’s right to make her own decisions for her own body.

I was heartened by their response, but something else gnawed at me. Too often in recent years, young women have shared stories of their good intentions bumping up against my generation’s reluctance to cede turf. Common complaints: “They don’t want to hear my ideas.” “They tell me I’m too young/too inexperienced/too eager.” Heartbreaking.

We say we want more young women to be involved, but are we reaching back and carrying as we climb? More to the point, are we willing to mentor and make room? Much of older women’s reluctance, I think, comes from a sense of humility. It never occurs to them that they have gifts to share, or that young women would welcome their advice.
Sometimes, envy plays a role, too. As I often tell women my age when discussing the need for us to mentor, we don’t have their midriffs, they don’t have our wisdom. I’m not thrilled with the trade-off, but I would never want to be 30-year-old me again. At 54, every line on my face is evidence of a life lived with as much joy as endeavor, and even the hardest times made me better in the end. I’m not perfect, not ever, but I sure am grateful to be alive and still in the thick of things.

We can be protective of our careers, our conquests. We can sometimes feel that we had it hard, so why should it be easier for the next generation of women? However, if our only legacy is our personal success, then our impact dies with us.

So often, I think of Alice Paul and the 81 other suffragists who went to prison with her because they dared to picket Woodrow Wilson’s White House for the right to vote. Prison guards beat them and force-fed them with tubes until they vomited, but they refused to give up. In 1920, women finally got the right to vote in America.

Recently, a young activist sent me a pewter pendant in the shape of a jail door. It is a replica of the pin Alice Paul commissioned to honor the brave women who suffered alongside her in prison. I can’t look at this pin without thinking about the girls and young women of today. I never imagined that they’d be fighting the same fight of my youth, but here we are, in 2012, back to advocating for a woman’s right to make her own decisions for her own body.

It is tempting, I know, for women my age and older to say this is no longer our cause. After all, I can’t still have children. Birth control isn’t my issue. I’ve lost count of the number of columns and speeches I’ve given for reproductive rights. When is enough enough?

Then I think of our three daughters, and our blessed daughter-in-law. They are all of reproductive age, and they, along with our son, are the center of my life. Just the thought of them is a jarring reminder of what’s at stake.

I could never turn to them and say, “Sorry, kids, I did my part. It’s up to you, now. See ya.” It’s not just that I love my children. I love this country, too, and I want it to keep its promises.

Lately, I’ve been thinking of Alice Paul, too, and those 81 women who risked their lives so that women like us—women they would never live to know—could take the right to vote for granted. Sometimes, when I’m giving a speech, it’s almost as if their ghosts are standing around me, whispering a single plea to all the women in the room: Remember.

To remember is to mobilize. Those of us who’ve lived long enough to recall worse times for women also know how swiftly progress erodes in the wake of complacency. Many of us remember what it was like to be young, full of hope and sometimes fear, but always looking forward, arms locked with our sisters in the cause.

Our young women need us, and we need them. We are wise, but they are smart. Let us link arms, and let them lead the way.

**We say we want more young women to be involved, but are we reaching back and carrying as we climb?**
WHAT’S NEXT FOR WOMEN IN THE UCC?

Insights from the Women’s Ministries Survey

Loey Powell
What did we learn?

A group looked over the results of the survey and began discussions about what we learned, what we didn’t learn, and what the data might be telling us about how to shape and resource women’s ministries. We asked if the term “women’s ministries” is in and of itself a signal that might indicate to some women, especially younger women, that what is being talked about is for a certain generation of women or for those who gather in women’s fellowship groups or women’s circles. How do we extend outreach to all ages of women?

What is the unique capacity of the national setting of the UCC to educate, inform, network, sustain and ignite activism among women in the UCC? Who is providing the leadership and resources that women are asking for? How do we bring this all together? How do we hold all this together?

When you want to know something, the saying goes,

ASK THOSE WHO HAVE THE INFORMATION.

OK, I may have made that saying up but the wisdom in it rings true.

Far too often when we want to know something, we end up asking people who really don’t have the info but who might have lots of opinions and are all too eager to express them!

So in 2011, we asked women in the UCC some questions in focus groups and an online church-wide survey. We received more than 1,100 responses to questions ranging from which issues are most important in their lives and the world to where do they seek help and what kinds of things offer the best support.

If we are going to have an effective ministry to and with all the women in the UCC, from all age groups, from all of our racial, ethnic, orientation and gender identity diversities, with women with disabilities and those temporarily able bodied, with clergy and laywomen, high school and college-aged and young adult women—we better listen! So we worked with consultants who helped us shape the questions and compile the data to create a roadmap for the journey ahead for women in the UCC.

We were mindful that the respondents reflect the demographics of our aging denomination: the vast majority were Euro-American and over the age of 55. However, responses from women of color were greater than overall people of color membership in the UCC and quite a few young adult women responded.

You can see some of what we found in this article, and there are considerably more questions in the complete survey as well as narrative responses. [See complete survey results at www.ucc.org/women.]

What did we learn?

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WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU RIGHT NOW?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advancing my spiritual health</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding time for myself</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing competing priorities</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paying off debt</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

WHERE DO YOU GENERALLY GO FOR SUPPORT?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastor</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

WHAT BRINGS YOU THE GREATEST SENSE OF BELONGING AND SELF-WORTH?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religion/faith</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends or marriage/relationship</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

WHAT ISSUES OF JUSTICE FOR WOMEN ARE YOU PARTICULARLY INTERESTED IN?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Violence against women</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women living in poverty</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job discrimination/pay disparities</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reproductive rights and health for women</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racism and women</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

WHAT ISSUES FACING YOUR COMMUNITY DO YOU FEEL AN URGENCY TO ADDRESS?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access to affordable health care</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homelessness, public education, jobs</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We better listen!
We learned that high school-aged girls, and post-teen and young adult women are engaged in making this world a better place and are especially committed to environmental justice. Not only are they the “future of the UCC,” they are leaders now with gifts to offer the whole body of Christ.

Another insight is that women yearn for spiritual health and wholeness, and we know that the UCC can be a source of living waters and healing. Caring for oneself is too readily subsumed in caring for others: children who cannot find jobs in today’s shaky economy, parents who are living longer with increasing needs for care, grandchildren under the primary care of grandparents. Our survey indicated that more women are getting spiritual support from places other than their local churches. How can we make every congregation a place of healing and encouragement? What training for pastors and lay leaders is needed so that the real life issues women face are actually talked about, prayed over, and addressed in a spiritual community?

What lies ahead?

We are excited about the possibilities that lie ahead. The UCC is and will remain committed to justice for women within church and society. We are committed to being an intercultural and multi-racial church that seeks to lift up and utilize the gifts and leadership of all women. We are a church committed to leadership development and recognize that women must be encouraged, mentored and supported in developing the leadership skills and experience needed to excel at local church, conference and national settings of our denomination. We know we have to be intentional about this.

In the coming months, we will be trying some things—developing networks of “like-minded” women who can encourage each other to act powerfully and offer helpful resources to each other; creating new modes of communication using social media and the UCC website; collaborating with efforts in all parts of the church to develop leadership training and mentoring for women.

Talk to us!

We are open to your thoughts and ideas. As you gather in regional meetings, or in your fellowship groups, or in youth groups, or as young adult clergy, take a moment to think about what kind of identity would excite you as someone who is both a girl/woman and member of the United Church of Christ. And let us know some of the people you know who are doing the kind of exciting, spirit-sustaining, soul-renewing work that keeps you going and pulls you into the stillspeaking God’s future.

Thank you!

Send your thoughts to Loey at powelll@ucc.org.

Some highlights:

- 70% of the respondents were laywomen
- 30% were authorized ministers
- 80% said faith guides their day-to-day lives
- 92% said they have the opportunity to lead in their local churches
- 54% believe there are still barriers to women’s leadership (both of lay and clergywomen)

When asked what is needed to remove barriers to women’s leadership, just over half named three things:

- Ministers who encourage women to lead and training of search committees to encourage consideration of women as pastors
- Conference/association leadership that encourage women into leadership
- Seeing more diversity in leadership throughout the UCC
More than anything else, the story of the Women’s As Yet Cleverly Unnamed Literary Society (WAYCULS) is a story of abundance, hospitality and blessing. A year ago, my partner Jackie and I, along with our friend Kate and our niece Erin, dreamed of gathering a different kind of women’s group: not a book club, because we were well-acquainted with the pitfalls of book clubs, but a literary society of women who love to read. We were inspired by Mary Ann Shaffer and Annie Barrows’ enchanting novel, The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society, about a community of folks who gather under the nose of the Nazis during the World War II occupation of the Isle of Guernsey. Instead of everyone talking about the same book, they take turns sharing what they’ve read. This sounded like a good idea to us, because we knew how difficult it is to choose a book that everyone will not only read, but enjoy.

“We all know it takes a village to raise a child. It takes several villages to expand the mind of an adult. The Women’s As Yet Cleverly Unnamed Literary Society is the village I really enjoy visiting to find new interests, share viewpoints, and to just spend a couple of hours in the company of women of substance. I come away enriched after each visit.” (Esther).

The Women’s As Yet Cleverly Unnamed Literary Society

Kate Huey

Common Lot 11
Abundance: we easily compiled a long list of reader-friends from the various areas of our lives—church, neighborhood, family, friends, work, school and our local community theatre. Because people’s lives are busy, we offer our friends this opportunity to gather with nothing required of them but a love for reading. Jackie and I organize the gatherings and provide the setting and a brunch on one Saturday morning each month. We offer this gift to our friends because of the great gift they are in our lives, and we want their participation never to be a burden, so we ask them to attend when they can, and not to worry when they can’t. Our large group of fifty women (with more added each month) always provides enough people for a rich and full discussion, with a fairly constant attendance between fourteen and eighteen people. Just like church, folks bring food to supplement the delicious main dishes that Jackie whips up in the kitchen, and volunteers record the book titles we discuss for later sharing on our Facebook page. (This is very helpful when we find ourselves in the bookstore afterward.) Kate, our skilled moderator, makes sure everyone has a chance to talk.

Because people’s lives are busy, we offer our friends this opportunity to gather with nothing required of them but a love for reading.

From the first meeting in March 2011, our WAYCULS gatherings have been full of enthusiastic, lively conversation. But something more is going on here, underneath. I believe the Spirit of God works in amazing ways and in unexpected places, so I’m inclined to call it the work of the Spirit when I watch the friendships being formed, and the responses and reactions of participants to new ideas and to fresh perspectives on old, familiar stories. We hear that one woman has become involved in the political campaign another one is coordinating, and we planted yard signs for one of our members who ran for a judicial seat. When another woman brings her mother, who has Alzheimer’s, there is room for her to have lunch and nap in a recliner while her daughter enjoys the company of friends. Myra, one of our Jewish members, writes: “WAYCULS to me is first of all, community. It is hard for me to fully articulate how much I value this—and all of you. It is also an incentive to read just a bit more and a bit differently knowing that I will want to share what I have read; thus I am more mindful in my reading habits . . . Perhaps share is the key word in this sentence. For me it is also a singular opportunity to listen to thoughts of faith and spirituality, topics I have spent many decades pretty much avoiding. One is never too old to have one’s margins stretched out a bit, although I should perhaps emphasize the bit rather than the stretching.”
The spirited conversation that follows the lighting of the WAYCULS candle is full of a grace that accepts each person’s perspective and experience. It’s intriguing that our interests often return to books on several topics: the Holocaust, racism and slavery, and questions of spirituality. Last summer, we decided to see the movie, “The Help,” and to invite additional women for a discussion about it afterward.

We’re especially delighted by the insights of our younger members, who have introduced writers and titles the rest of us would probably never encounter. Erin, our youngest member (who’s preparing to teach junior high), was an early discoverer, for example, of The Hunger Games. She posted on our WAYCULS Facebook page: “Every time I leave, I am inspired to crack open the next tome and get down to business. A lot of people say they like to read. This, however, is a group of Readers.”

From the beginning, we’ve hoped to gather an increasingly diverse group of women, with different backgrounds and life stories. It reminds me a lot of church in that way, too. We have discovered that we have been blessed with an abundance of friends and the grace of their generous sharing: the way they share their stories, their time, and their company.

Perhaps the great writer Anne Lamott captures the spirit of WAYCULS best: “For some of us, books are as important as almost anything else on earth. What a miracle it is that out of these small, flat, rigid squares of paper unfolds world after world after world, worlds that sing to you, comfort and quiet or excite you. Books help us understand who we are and how we are to behave. They show us what community and friendship mean; they show us how to live and die.”

Anne Lamott

New from The Pilgrim Press

It’s Your Time to Shine: Weekly Spiritual Reflections for Women
by Nicole Roberts Jones

This book is designed to help women define their own way toward their very own “For Such a Time” moments in life. “For such a time as this” is a quote from the story of Esther in the Bible. “The story of Esther reads like a Cinderella story,” says author Nicole Roberts Jones. “Born in poverty and obscurity she becomes queen.”

“The greatest lesson that we learn from Esther is what can happen when preparation meets opportunity and how when we move past our fear and allow faith to be our guide, all things are possible.” Throughout the book, what the author calls “Maximize Moments” focus on six target areas: “Keep Your Eyes on the Prize,” “Don’t Stay Stuck,” “Focus on Faith,” “Reorganizing Your Team,” “Give to Others,” and “Let Your Light Shine.”

(Available in November from UCC Resources (800)325-7061, uccresouces.com)
I came into the United Church of Christ from the Roman Catholic tradition. In fact, I was a member of a religious order, the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur (SNDs), for 11 years. In the discernment about taking final vows, I came to the reluctant conclusion that this way of life was not my call. It was in the course of another 11 years in ecumenical ministries that I slowly identified a call to membership, and then to ordained leadership, in the United Church of Christ.

It has been a long, slow journey that continues even now — a kind of immigrant’s journey from one spiritual culture into another. It has been filled with all the elements that spiritual and cultural sojourners must come to expect: hard choices, griefs observed, unexpected possibilities, surprising joys. I look back on the years with the SNDs as the most formative of my life, rooting me in a gospel...
worldview of justice and solidarity, and challenging me to ever more confidence in the power and the leading of the Good God.

From this “bi-cultural” place, I witness what is happening now between the Roman Catholic sisters represented by the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) and the Vatican. It is painful to witness all that is transpiring; I applaud the courage of the leadership of LCWR who are going to Rome to address the situation, and I pray for their wisdom, eloquence and continued confidence in working toward the change which must come. But if I am pained, I often find my Protestant sisters and brothers quite bewildered at how to respond. So here are some suggestions that may help...

Stickers

Susan Blain

Four ways to support the Roman Catholic sisters...
Avoid generalizing about "The Nuns" you don't know; instead, engage the sisters you do know!

You probably have encountered Roman Catholic sisters in ecumenical ministries and witnesses. You may value them as well educated, socially concerned, committed colleagues, but you may not know much about the traditions that they come from.

This is an opportunity to get to know the sisters in your city or town — ask about their history, when and how they came to work in your neighborhood, how their ministries have evolved through the years. Enjoy some wonderful stories of creative faithfulness, as you learn of sisters who shared the lot of immigrants to America in the 19th and 20th centuries. It is a fascinating cycle of grassroots beginnings growing into large educational and healthcare institutions, now often returning to smaller, community-based centers of education and social service.

Ask the sisters about changes in community life and governance since Vatican II. Don't be surprised if you learn a useful thing or two about the practices of authority in faith communities. Most of the orders represented in the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) have spent the last 50 years examining how authority may be faithfully exercised in their contexts. From almost entirely hierarchical structures, sisters have experimented with democratic and consensus building models of governance — all in the effort to make a space for the Spirit’s leading to be discerned in their midst. (Note to UCC self — sisters who have succeeded in this have generally not gotten stuck on Robert’s Rules.)

Ask the sisters to share something about their vowed life — how the “Evangelical Counsels” shape their lives. Let stereotypes fade away as you listen to interpretations of traditional promises which sound radically countercultural to American values: Poverty — a simple life sharing resources in common, striving for solidarity with, care and justice for the materially poor; Chastity — a life of love undergirding friendship and service; Obedience — life response to the call of God rooted in personal prayer, mutual discernment and accountability, and attention to the movement of God— “signs of the times” — in the world.

Offer solidarity where it counts!

In the midst of all the controversy, most of which we cannot influence from the outside, it is important to focus on where we can be of help. Supporting the commitment of sisters to the materially poor is one such area. Historically, sisters have lived among, cared for, given voice to and fought for justice for those people whom social systems and “safety nets” leave behind. Their concerted anti-poverty commitment is one that members of the United Church of Christ can support wholeheartedly. We can strengthen ecumenical work already begun with sisters in ministries that address the needs of poor people. We can write letters of support and thanks for this work to the sisters themselves, to their governance groups, to LCWR, and Network (the DC social justice lobby founded by sisters), to the local dioceses, and to the local newspapers — all of these may help call attention to this vital work.
Recognize the complexity of this moment.

Catholic sisters are part of ecclesial institutions that are very old — they have been around for generations and have distinctive histories in relationship to the Roman Catholic hierarchy. The history and relationship is very complicated. Many religious orders do not answer directly to bishops, while others are diocesan institutions. Sisters are capable of taking the long — very long — view, in light of their histories and practices of discernment. Media attention, which may depict the sisters as hapless victims of church authority, doesn’t do the sisters justice; they are moral agents who are responding with wisdom and courage to this latest challenge.

One passionate voice which gives expression to some of the complexity of this situation comes from Ivone Gebara, a Brazilian sister, whose scholarly work has, in the past, been silenced by the Vatican.

Speaking in very general terms, Protestants and Catholics often have significantly different impulses when it comes to dealing with ecclesial conflict. Protestants may come to impasse and respond by splitting off from the old structure, starting over to “get it right this time”— a metaphor often heard is “city on a hill.” Roman Catholics may come to impasse and make every effort to stay, to go deeper into the tradition to find another way to stay in communion and effect transformation however long it takes — metaphors dear to this endeavor are seed planting and leaven. Both impulses are responses to the Spirit, each has its own challenges, possibilities and temptations. Our American Protestant popular-democracy-steeped responses to a deep Catholic conflict may not be the most helpful.

Read the theological work of the sisters.

If you want your own theological thinking clarified, challenged, deepened, read the work of sisters who have recently been censured, reprimanded or even silenced by the Vatican (and whose religious orders continue to support them): Margaret Farley, RSM, Professor Emerita of Christian Ethics at Yale University: Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics; Elizabeth A. Johnson, CSJ, Fordham University: She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse and Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God; Ivone Gebara, a Sister of Our Lady from Recife, Brazil: Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation and Out of the Depths: Women’s Experience of Evil and Salvation. Quote them in your sermons; include them on your adult education programs.

And read the work of those who have not experienced the “Vatican Bump” in publicity and sales, including: Barbara Fiand, SNDde Namur: Awe-Filled Wonder: the Interface of Science and Spirituality; Mary C. Boys, SNJM: Has God Only One Blessing? Judaism as a Source of Christian Self-Understanding; Janet R. Walton, SNJM: Feminist Liturgy, A Matter of Justice; Art and Worship: A Vital Connection; and Joan Chittister, OSB — anything! There are other voices, far too many to list.

In the United Church of Christ, we have a tradition of stepping out in faith and trusting that ”There is yet more light and truth to break forth from God’s holy Word.” Let us pray with and for the sisters of LCWR that more light and truth may break forth in this dialogue on the lives of women in the Roman Catholic Church.

The Rev. Susan A. Blain, a UCC minister and a former Roman Catholic sister, is the UCC’s Minister for Worship, Liturgy and Spiritual Formation.
Embrace Your Identity...

Mary Schaller Blaufuss
These were centuries when the world and the church were changing. Technological developments facilitated greater global connections and a social gospel theology took seriously the setting of the church in the world. Women rarely wrote formal mission theologies at the time, but through their actions recorded in journals, letters, and photographs, they broke through boundaries of a church-contained mission theology to embrace the whole of society.

Women missionaries in these periods were not allowed to serve as pastors of churches – but they preached through their teaching. Women’s emphases on mission as education and healing engaged them in the transformation of society and, during the 20th century, in liberation movements. “Woman’s Work for Woman” became a rallying cry for a holistic approach to the mission action of women related specifically to the most vulnerable persons in many societies, other women and children.

By 1910, the peak of the movement, women led their own mission societies that identified, funded and sent women to change the world. Through fund-raising techniques that encouraged each woman to set aside pennies from the weekly grocery money for which she could make decisions, these women’s mission societies built hospitals, created travelling clinics, founded colleges and medical schools for women, and supported grassroots Bible studies for women. By embracing their identity as women, and in response to a changing world and a changing church, women in mission redefined mission and re-invigorated the church in the world.

As a Global Ministries appointed mission personnel a decade ago, I taught at the United Theological College in Bangalore, India. Future leaders of church and society from all over India study, worship, eat, and fellowship together at this ecumenical seminary. I was a missionary teaching mission history and theology! My favorite subject? The women’s missionary movement of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
It is this same spirit of embracing identity in order to discern God’s work in the world that excites me about my current—and related—passion: the new Young Adult Service Communities in the United Church of Christ and the UCC/Alliance of Baptists’ Summer Communities of Service. The 21st century also is an era when the world and the church are changing. Technological developments and increased interaction among parts of the world accelerate and intensify the impact of that change. Theologies and church bodies seem to lose pace. The Young Adult Service Communities are a sacred setting through which people in their 20s can embody a church commitment to God’s mission in the world through intentional community, service and advocacy, leadership development and faith conversations.

In these programs, a local church hosts a community of four or five young adults. The participants serve four-fifths of their time in a community agency engaged in direct service or justice advocacy actions. They are given the opportunity for leadership development with the congregation. A Spiritual Sojourner from the host congregation encourages faith conversations and vocational discernment. The group forms intentional community with each other and embraces relationships with the community around it locally and globally. People who want to “change the world” explore vocation, not as an individualized journey, but as part of a diverse community. Young adults are encouraged to dialogue with each other about God’s mission in the world and the shape and role of the church in the 21st century.

The Young Adult Service Communities play a role in shaping women’s lives as well. Melanie Fox, a participant in both the summer and year-long programs, had lost faith in the church, but this experience showed her what the church in the world could be. She now works full-time in social justice ministries with Quakers in Washington DC. Sarah Adamson’s life direction was altered through the experience as her life goal shifted from training as a medical specialist to preparing as a primary and preventative health care physician.

In turn, these changed lives break through boundaries to help transform the church and the world for the abundant life of all. Susie Tharyan, a participant from UCC/Disciples’ partner church in India reflected, “This experience has changed my own perspective of the world and issues around the globe. I believe that each of us can make a difference. This experience has only reinforced my own belief that we can be change-makers.”

Women in mission and young adults in community: identity matters, and when embraced and acted upon can break boundaries, vision newness and help us to join with God in transforming the world.

The Rev. Dr. Mary Schaller Blaufuss currently serves as Executive for Volunteer Ministries in the national UCC setting. She served as a Global Ministries missionary at the United Theological College in Bangalore, India during the years 2000-2004 and as a local church pastor in northwest Iowa and southeast Pennsylvania.
5:00 a.m. My radio alarm goes off, startling me (in an unpleasant sort of way) with Taylor Swift’s newest song and motivating me to quickly switch off the music and clear my eyes. I turn on the bedside lamp and pick up my smartphone to read the Washington Post. A quick skim, then on to Twitter, where NPR’s headlines are interspersed with local traffic reports and colleagues’ tweeted morning greetings. The little blue birds tell me that an Anglican priest across the pond is already robing for a morning funeral, a New Jersey Presbyterian is fighting her coffee machine, and an early rising Methodist clergywoman in the Midwest is putting me to shame with her 5-mile run. I tour Facebook before getting out of bed, checking in on the latest joys, strains and goings-on of friends and congregants.

Online Community in One Clergywoman’s Life

Does the Holy Spirit Use Social Media?
There's plenty of reason to approach social media cautiously and skeptically, to be sure. Too many people lack a self-editing sensibility when sharing their life details. Ease of access to online information arguably decreases privacy and increases identity theft. I still think long and hard when a Facebook "friend request" pops up from someone I’ve never met, and it simply makes me chuckle that CNN reports on tweets as though 140 characters of opinion have the same substance as international negotiations or an analysis of world poverty.

Yet social media is like any other tool invented throughout history: it can be used for good or for ill. All critiques considered, my experiences with social media consistently provide a source of hope and encouragement for the possibilities for human community. For in the non-tangible space of airwaves and electronic signals, friendships are formed, resources shared, understanding fostered, and the fear that we are ultimately alone in this world is held at bay.

Online communities form primarily around commonalities. Clergywomen gather on Facebook and community blogs to brainstorm sermons and commiserate over the daily juggling of tasks. New moms compare postpartum stories in blog circles and share product suggestions on Pinterest. Attendees at denominational conference meetings offer running commentary in a series of Twitter hashtags. In each online community, layers of social media begin to overlap as fellowship and familiarity grow: a blogger becomes a Facebook friend; a follower on Twitter becomes a liturgy collaborator on Google Plus.

Occasionally, amazingly, a Facebook face becomes a real face, met over a cup of coffee. A sister blogger becomes a colleague in a town nearby. Women start to tweet to one another, “Let’s get together around an event, a topic, a common need for support.” Even when online friends do not meet in person, the bonding of community—the exchange of Spirit and friendship—is discovered to transcend geography, denomination, time zone, browser capability, and wireless carrier. An online network has all the potential of becoming community, whether electronically or in person. The Holy Spirit has all the potential of stirring fellowship across air waves as across dinner tables.

The lives and events conveyed virtually through social media are not themselves virtual: these are incarnate lives and events, real people finding perspective and support through intangible sources with tangible impact.
Truth be told, I’ve been behind the curve on social media, despite falling into the 30-something age bracket. I didn’t start blogging until 2008, and I didn’t network my blog until late 2010 (Christian Century Blogs) and early 2011 (RevGalBlogPals). I only entered the world of Twitter several months ago. I’m slow in acclimating to the new timeline on Facebook. I’ve put my foot down—for what it's worth—in refusing to join Pinterest and LinkedIn. I think too much social media is definitely possible, at least for my life.

Yet I’m continually enriched and encouraged by online community. With a quick mouse scroll or the opening of an app, clergy collegiality and education tidbits and theological touchstones are available to me. The RevGalBlogPals’ “11th Hour Preacher Party” brings much-needed camaraderie and inspiration to Saturday night sermon-writing; some of us in the U.S. are reporting “All done!” to the community late at night just as our fellow clergywomen in Australia are posting Sunday morning greetings. Through the CCblogs Network, I keep my ear attuned to new movements and common questions shared across mainline Protestant denominations. Twitter provides virtual space to “listen” beyond my daily routines: to the perspective of an ecumenically-minded Muslim organization, to the issues of concern for anti-poverty activists and environmentalists, to the daily news of a former hometown, to world events through the lens of scientists and journalists, and—of course—to the joys and work and reflections of many sisters in ministry.

The lives and events conveyed virtually through social media are not themselves virtual: these are incarnate lives and events, real people finding perspective and support through intangible sources with tangible impact. A YouTube video (of Sesame Street’s Ernie and Bert on a fishing trip) shared in a blogging network becomes my children’s sermon for worship . . . which appeals to new visitors that particular Sunday . . . who become members with the confidence that spiritual playfulness is welcomed in the church. The tangible challenge in one woman’s ministry is shared on a confidential Facebook group . . . where support and suggestions abound . . . and another clergywoman who couldn’t name her similar struggle finds concrete ideas to apply in her own work context.

With every layer of virtual connection, fellowship increases and Spirit renews. The layers of connection among RevGals, for example—across blogs, Facebook, and Twitter—have led to an annual real-life event each January, a week of in-person continuing education at a getaway destination. In a surprise twist of “Never doubt that the Spirit can make use of social media,” I will be leading the RevGals’ 2013 annual event. The topic for our conversation and study? The original “social media,” that is, the Intangible Eternal Word that makes connections and shapes community, the Word Made Flesh that nurtures community-in-action, and the words that we say and type and blog and tweet and preach as clergywomen serving the Living Word.

Rachel G. Hackenberg is an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ, currently pastoring a congregation in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. She is the author of Writing to God and Writing to God: Kids’ Edition, both from Paraclete Press. She blogs at faithandwater.blogspot.com and you can follow her on Twitter @RHackenberg.
Using Social Media to Change the World for Good
As a technologically savvy minister, I am becoming increasingly comfortable with the role of the Internet in my everyday life for pastoral care, advocacy, and activism in addition to good old entertainment. I have realized that social media is a venue for me in my professional life to spread the love of God and to increase awareness of what really matters in a world in desperate need of access to knowledge. For most of us, this access to knowledge means having basic access to a computer, an Internet connection, and knowing how to read and type. For some, access means having the ability to get to a place where information is readily available to the public (library, local school, church, community center, etc.).

As the saying goes, knowledge is power.

Today we live in a society where a vast amount of information reaches us in a matter of seconds. But information is not the same as knowledge because one needs to know what to do with the information. There are real benefits when trusted organizations use the Internet and social media to engage in advocacy. But in order for it to be effective, people need to have the access to it and knowledge to know how to sort through the information.

So, I confess: I live a life of relative privilege in which I own a computer and have Internet access. I can also drive my own a car to the closest library or business with a wi-fi connection, and I can access resources to communicate with the world around me. (However, if my Internet service or computer crashes, I do not have all the necessary books on my home library shelves . . . even after seminary!)

Media is no longer a one-way street where the information comes to us and we consume it, complain about it, or agree with it . . . end of story. Now, because of the Internet and social media, there are many forums, platforms and places where people convene and engage and even attempt the unbelievable: to change the world, one issue at a time.

How can such change come about? For starters, I have a Facebook account and administer other Facebook pages for social groups (for the UCC’s Kansas-Oklahoma Conference for example, and for
an association that networks with local residents to help them navigate the various social services available to diverse communities). I also co-administer an Internet-based social-service group managed by my father. My Facebook account has empowered me to connect with people from my homeland (in South America), from my new adopted country (the United States), my denomination (UCC), my local settings, colleagues, friends, neighbors, and the world around me.

Why do I use Facebook? Because it has helped me connect with the world’s people—people who are or become friends, or with whom I share an interest or a common thread who I might not otherwise have known because of time, distance, career paths, geographical location or other obstacles. This tool, this communication venue, is a new way to help me increase my own personal consciousness level and that of my “friends” on Facebook. We discuss issues that are relevant to me and others outside the margins of society. We share thoughts on issues that I as a woman, a clergyperson, a social-service provider, an aunt, and an inhabitant of the world must deal with on a daily basis to contribute to the common good. These are issues of which I previously had little knowledge because of the limitations of my own social context, or because of where I lived and how I perceived the world. It is having access to learning about and from others which can influence change.

Facebook’s mission is to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected. Millions of people use Facebook every day to keep up with friends, upload an unlimited number of photos, share links and videos, and learn more about the people they meet.

The last time I checked, I had more than 700 Facebook “friends,” most of whom I remember, some not. Each one of my newest 700-plus “friends” shares a common thread with me, obviously. Such connections may include our past, our present, our denominational affiliation, our efforts toward justice and truth, our local circles in which we interact, the social causes we are passionate about, etc. All of these many threads then become the intersection, the meeting place where Facebook postings give “life” to issues that as a Hispanic/Latina woman, I did not know about until I stepped out of my comfort zone. I continue to learn how I can be the change I want to see in the world.

Because of these Internet paths and opportunities, I am reminded that empowering anyone to change the world can be accomplished, one posting at a time. Facebook’s model may be one with the belief that everyone has the power to have an outsized impact on the world by banding together with other like-minded individuals, taking direct action, and inspiring their friends and their friends’ friends to join in. In short, Facebook provides the grassroots with organizing tools for creating large-scale collective action.

"What does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?" - Micah 6:8

**Rev. Lizette Merchán Pinilla** was born in Bogotá, Colombia. She serves as the Justice and Witness Organizer with the Justice and Witness Commission of the UCC Kansas-Oklahoma Conference. Rev. Merchán is West Central partner with UCC Women’s Regional Ministry Partners and is a member of the leadership team with UCAN UCC HIV/AIDS Network, and a Justice LED trainer with the Justice and Witness Ministry of the UCC. She is the director of the Tulsa Hispanic Resource Association (a social-service networking group).
Our Simplest Best Selves

Sally Purvis

Leaving “Busyness” Behind through Spiritual Direction
Spiritual direction has been part of Christian practice since the disciples asked Jesus how they should pray. However, the Reformation’s emphasis on the priesthood of all believers, and its diminishment if not removal of the power of the clergy to offer salvation led to centuries of Protestants who considered the formal practice “too Catholic,” in a negative sense. We could say that the practice never really went away; people have always consulted their clergy and other faithful wise ones on a range of personal and spiritual issues. However, our Catholic brothers and sisters kept both the title and the practice of “spiritual direction” alive and well and vibrant.

Then in the 1970’s there was a rediscovery of spiritual direction among Protestants. A wave of institutes and individuals began offering training, and Protestant clergy and lay people began calling themselves spiritual directors. It would take a much closer reading of the religious history of North America in the mid-to-late 20th century than I have done even to try to explain the phenomenon and its timing. Guesses are fun—a new ecumenical spirit among Christians, the increasing influence of Eastern religious practices, especially Zen Buddhist meditation, the rise of feminism in North American Christianity that recaptured roles of authority for women . . . but they are guesses. What is clear is that sometime in the 1960’s and 1970’s Protestants “discovered” spiritual direction on a wide scale, and it continues to be an increasingly familiar and common practice in the UCC and other Protestant groups.

So what is spiritual direction? I had the joy and privilege of being trained by the Catholic priest Fr. Henri Nouwen when I was a student at Yale Divinity School in the early 1980’s. Henri taught us, over and over in various ways, that busyness was the outward and visible sign of spiritual emptiness. (I’m paraphrasing, but that was the message.) If we don’t want to talk about original sin, and I don’t, then we can surely say that there’s a kink in our spiritual constitution that tends to lead us away from our truest, simplest, best selves, beloved children/creatures of God, loved unconditionally, and toward whatever characters we think we need to create to be okay: competitive, acquisitive, aggressive. So in its simplest but most difficult form, spiritual direction helps a person return home to his or her truest self, which includes greater and greater openness to God. The goal is the same for everyone, and the path is different for everyone.

Busyness of all kinds is how we distract ourselves from our core. So what is spiritual direction? I had the joy and privilege of being trained by the Catholic priest Fr. Henri Nouwen when I was a student at Yale Divinity School in the early 1980’s. Henri taught us, over and over in various ways, that busyness was the outward and visible sign of spiritual emptiness. (I’m paraphrasing, but that was the message.) If we don’t want to talk about original sin, and I don’t, then we can surely say that there’s a kink in our spiritual constitution that tends to lead us away from our truest, simplest, best selves, beloved children/creatures of God, loved unconditionally, and toward whatever characters we think we need to create to be okay: competitive, acquisitive, aggressive. So in its simplest but most difficult form, spiritual direction helps a person return home to his or her truest self, which includes greater and greater openness to God. The goal is the same for everyone, and the path is different for everyone.

Busyness of all kinds is how we distract ourselves from our core. If the world seemed busy in 1981, surely it is much more so now. So a central goal of spiritual direction is to help people achieve stillness and focus, even the busiest among us. I’ve had more than one spiritual directee say to me that they can’t sit still and meditate so don’t ask them to. And I’ve said fine, take a walk in a pretty place. Then take that same walk again. And again. And without fail, the details of the landscape start to emerge, trees look different from each other, changes in light create new visions, etc. From there, meditation just might be possible!

Then what? Then begins the difficult and painful process of peeling away illusions. These illusions are beautiful and valuable. Most of us have spent years and years creating them. They
are the spiritual equivalent of Jesus’ parable of the barns filled with riches that kept the farmer feeling safe and secure (Luke 12:13-21). They include a false sense of security and our power to keep ourselves and those we love safe. They include a distorted sense of our own worth. They include unrealistic expectations of human relationships and institutions. And they may very well be reactions against church teachings and experiences from the past. I’ve counseled several people with deep wounds from their childhood exposure to Christianity who have created an impressive suit of armor against God.

It’s in the process of letting go of illusions that a spiritual director can be most helpful. We function sort of as walking sticks, to be leaned on when necessary and simply there as a reassuring presence at other times. And as a person starts to let go of an illusion, we can often help articulate the new reality, the beauty and joy, that emerge in its place.

Finally, as a spiritual director I experience over and over again the mystery of grace. If I am to listen, really listen, then I, too, have to try to remain radically open to the work of the Holy Spirit and be willing to be surprised and instructed by our still speaking God. Spiritual direction is an exercise in humility, as least as I experience it!

So how might one go about finding a spiritual director? A quick Google search will turn up lots of options, but I prefer word of mouth. I’m hoping that local church pastors and UCC Conference Ministers would have a list of spiritual directors in their area. And I know from experience that we don’t need to stay within our denominational bounds to get good spiritual direction. So my best advice is to ask around.

A far trickier question is how to evaluate spiritual directors. There is virtually no oversight or accountability in general. Anyone can call themselves a spiritual director and meet with clients. It’s always good to check credentials. Has the person attended an institute or received other kinds of formal training? Is there a church or denomination or some group to whom this person is accountable? Do you know anyone who has had a good experience with the person?

But ultimately, as with all human relationships, there is an inarticulate but powerful sense that you can trust this person, that you are safe and cared for. There will be an emotional and spiritual connection that will be an important part of the process. Someone might function really well for some people and not for others, and the prospective spiritual director must also be comfortable that the pair can work well together. From the beginning, we trust what the Spirit is telling us.

Rev. Sally B. Purvis, Ph.D. is Minister-in-Covenant, Decatur United Church of Christ. Sally does spiritual direction and has a prison ministry.
Women’s Retreat 101

My Journey with Women
Gathered at the Well  Deborah Hoogesteger
The retreat leader hit the play button and music filled the chapel. It was soft and intoxicating. I sighed heavily when the lyrics to “The Living Proof” started and I felt my body relax. As I listened to Mary J. Blige sing, I cried because I knew she was singing my truth:

I’m so glad the worst is over (‘cause it almost took me down)
I can start living now
I feel like I can do anything, yeah

And finally I’m not afraid to breathe. These long-journey lyrics were powerful and overwhelming. I had been on a long journey of my own: care-giving for my mother, which ended when she died almost a year prior. The retreat-music moment held me in a safe, sacred place. There, surrounded by God, I felt the shift of my spirit’s movement from grief to hope.
Over a beautiful fall weekend on the shores of Green Lake in Ripon, Wisconsin, 47 women gathered for a United Church of Christ Wisconsin Conference Women’s Event. We sought and found respite from our busy lives and had sacred conversations at the Conference’s Pilgrim Center. We were Women Gathered at the Well—thirsty for God’s presence to refresh our spirits and eager to swim in new-life waters.

Rev. Deborah Payden of South Milwaukee was our retreat leader. She introduced us to the life and work of the feminist artist Judy Chicago. Using Chicago’s provocative art installation known as “The Dinner Party,” Rev. Payden guided our retreat to honor the women in our lives, as well as the women that we are and that we are becoming.

Our assignment was to make a dinner plate that honored the women in our lives who have mentored us or continue to guide us, shape us, and make us better women. These women could be family, friends, fictional, historical, alive or dead . . . a sister of any age, race, ethnicity, culture or religion.

My plate held snapshots of my mom, daughter and granddaughter. They are a strong part of my foundation so underneath their photos I placed a picture of river rocks. I wrapped a pretty bow around the plate as a reminder of God’s gift for new life and of love’s binding tie to heal a broken world.

In the evening, with our plates in hand, we chanted our way to Ley Chapel to find the setting of our “Dinner Party”—candlelight, tables arranged in one big triangle, wine glasses, woman-shaped loaves of Pan de los Muertos, and the Christ candle at our center, all sitting on a labyrinth woven into the carpet.

One by one, we Women Gathered at the Well told our plate stories and lifted up the women they symbolized. In the end, we toasted them all and gave thanks to God in prayer. It was a powerful, emotional experience. Together, we sat in a sacred, thin place. We were sitting at the table next to God.
After worship the next morning, we shared our “Invitation List”: if we could invite any women for dinner, a cocktail party, a garden party, a tea party, a potluck, . . . who would these women be? Eleanor Roosevelt was one of the most popular guests. Eve, Mary—mother of Jesus, and Mary Magdalene were often mentioned. Of course, our mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and daughters made many lists. My favorite invitees? Lucy Ricardo and Ethel Mertz! . . . for their friendship, humor, and wonder.

When I reflected back on this event, I wondered, much like Lucy and Ethel, how did we leaders pull it off?! What were the main elements that made and enhanced this retreat? Three things: Building a Village, Discernment and Trust. These are not stand-alone processes. Their beauty and strength come from their interconnectedness and the tapestry they weave together.

**Build Your Village—It’s about God and Relationships!** It had been at least five years since the Wisconsin Conference sponsored a women’s event. As a UCC Women’s Ministry Partner for the Great Lakes Region I wondered how I might bring the tradition back. I also wondered what women were looking for . . . and, well, were they even looking for a Conference gathering? I talked to women throughout the Conference. I talked with God. My faith gave me the courage and the confidence to make a leap into the unknown. Because I knew it would take a village to bring a women’s retreat together, I began creating one by looking at the relationships I had come to know in the UCC. I reached out to Associate Conference Minister Rev. Gail O’Neal (now retired) and Rev. Deborah Payden (Christian Educator and Program Director). Somewhere during our conversations, we brought another person into our village—the Wisconsin Conference’s Pilgrim Center Director at the time, Jeff Puhlmann-Becker.

**Discern—It’s about God and Gifts!** In building your village, you need to consider the gifts of its members.

Jeff was director of a wonderful camp facility. Its settings have a nurturing presence. The buildings and grounds are accessible to all. Indoor and outdoor labyrinths provide contemplative journeys. Green Lake shows off its beauty throughout the camp. The accommodations are modern and the food is very good. Bringing Jeff into the village brought the camp, too. In addition, because of Jeff’s experience as director he had valuable awareness of what has worked (and what has not!) in prior retreats at the camp. Jeff arranged to promote the retreat on the Wisconsin Conference Camps’ website (www.ucci.org) and in its brochure. The camp staff took care of our registration process. Jeff prepared an evaluation form for participants to complete at the end of the retreat. The availability and accessibility of the Conference’s outdoor ministries were blessings!

Rev. O’Neal was a long-time staff member of the Conference. She has great insight about past women’s retreats and knows the history of retreats sponsored by the Conference women’s committee (which no longer exists).

Rev. Payden is a knowledgeable retreat leader and Christian educator. She is a vibrant speaker and her programming is intentional and God-centered. Her retreats may include activities such as yoga, a chair massage, a hike in the woods, wine-and-chocolates, or some free-style dancing. However, all her retreats
Because I knew it would take a village to bring a women’s retreat together, I began creating one by looking at the relationships I had come to know in the UCC.

and talked to women throughout the Conference. With Rev. O’Neal’s help, the event was posted on the Conference website and in its e-newsletter. I also prepared welcome bags full of resources and chocolates.

Our village’s creation began about one and one-half years before the event and we kept connected through telephone conferences and emails. Rev. Payden created the program to include a good balance of group and free times. Because she was intentional with the music choices, God spoke and danced in the chapel, the dining room, the dorms, and the woods. From the beginning, we villagers discerned what God was calling us to do, and that defined our purpose and created our goals. Reflecting back, I realized we had, essentially, discerned the core values of the United Church of Christ.

The retreat was to be about “God’s Continuing Testament in the World” by opening each day with prayer and providing time for Bible study and worship. The retreat was to be about “Extravagant Welcome” by opening doors to everyone, using a facility accessible to all, and creating space for both hospitality and God’s nurturing presence. The retreat was to be about “Changing Lives” by opening a window into a sacred, safe place—a place to see clearly and intimately our common bond as God-created women and then to rejoice in and embrace our diversity.

Trust—It’s about God and the Process! God speaks to us through Isaiah 30:15, “In quietness and trust is your strength.” I did plenty of praying in the quiet about the Women Gathered at the Well retreat. I have no doubt that my co-villagers did, too. What is most important when putting together a women’s retreat? Trust God. Trust yourself. Trust your villagers. A friend once told me to trust the process. She was telling me to trust God’s movement in my life.

Putting together a women’s retreat is transforming, challenging and fun! To begin, imagine what is possible with God and Build a Village. Second, Discern God’s gifts in the village and imagine what you can do together. Third, Trust God and imagine the ways God can move in your life.

Remember: It does help to have good food and spirit-moving music. Oh, and like Lucy and Ethel—let your sense of humor shine through!

Deborah Hoogesteger is a member of First Congregational United Church of Christ of Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin. She is a graduate of the Wisconsin Conference Lay Academy Program, volunteers as a UCC Women’s Ministries Partner, loves her role as a grandmother and spends her summers on Lake Michigan fishing with her husband, Jim. You can reach her at djhooge@gmail.com.
Support your Regional Women’s Ministry Partners program with your gift to the Strengthen the Church Offering.

Ask your church to promote the offering on Pentecost, the UCC’s anniversary (June 25), your church anniversary, or Thanksgiving. Give through your church or meet your Partner and give online at www.ucc.org/stc.

Your generosity today ensures our vibrant life today and tomorrow.

Spread the Love. 💖 Strengthen the Church. God is Still Speaking,
According to a 2010 Amnesty International report, African American women are four times more likely to die of pregnancy-related complications than their white counterparts who themselves have a significantly higher maternal mortality rate than women in 24 other industrialized countries.

“The fact that we continue to see such vast disparities in maternal health along racial lines is deeply troubling,” says the Rev. Ann Tiemeyer, Program Director of the NCC’s Women’s Ministries. “We are living in the wealthiest country in the world in the twenty-first century. Pregnancies should be healthy and safe, regardless of the mother’s race.”

Through Justice & Witness Ministries, the UCC is participating in this project. “Due Season: A Faith-Filled Roadmap Toward Eliminating Racial Disparities in Maternal Health,” will develop congregational materials on this issue as well as advocacy tools to work for change.

For the past three years, the Regional Women’s Ministry Partners of the United Church of Christ have been kept busy planning women’s retreats in Conferences, leading workshops on women’s issues, and constructing displays on women’s resources at Association and Conference meetings. The Partners have also written articles for Common Lot, planned and lead the Honored Lay Women’s Luncheon at General Synod, and helped to promote participation in the National Listening Campaign and Survey on Women’s Ministry.

Currently, Elaine Blanchard and and Lizette Merchán are the Middle West Region Partners, Brenda Burney and Debbie Hoogesteger are the Great Lakes Region Partners; Deborah Dee Brayton is the Mid-Atlantic Region Partner; Rachel Chapman is the Western Region Partner, and Donna Cooney and Willie Mae Hawkins are the Southern Region Partners. Deborah Tate Breault has been the New England Region Partner, but is no longer serving as such. Sadly, Kathleen Ann Youde, a Regional Partner in the Pacific Northwest Conference died in 2010. Watch for more information about the Women’s Ministry Partners this fall. Thank you to our Partners for your good work!

If you would like more information about the Regional Women’s Ministry Partners, go to the Women’s Page on the UCC website: www.ucc.org/women/
Calendar of Coming Events

GREAT LAKES REGION:
September 28-29, 2012
Annual Retreat: The Ladies in the Indiana-Kentucky Conference
Contact: Dianne Snowa snowa.d@insightbb.com

September 28-30, 2012
Stitch in Time Quilting Retreat
Pilgrim Center, Ripon, WI

October 18-21, 2012
Stitch in Time Quilting Retreat
Moon Beach Camp, St. Germaine, WI

November 2-4, 2012
Women Gathered at the Well
Pilgrim Center, Ripon, WI

November 10, 2012
Prayer Breakfast
God Can Ministries, UCC, Ford Heights, IL
Contact: Juanita Bradley godcan@ameritech.net

SOUTHERN REGION:
September 22-23, 2012
Single Mothers’ Conference
Union UCC; Norfolk, VA

October 6, 2012
Western NC Association Gathering (WNCA)
Location: TBA

October 11-13, 2012
African-American Women-in-Ministry Conference
Franklinton Center at Bricks, NC

October 13, 2012
Eastern NC Association Gathering (ENCA)

October 19-20, 2012
Women’s Conference
Church of the Open Door UCC, Miami, FL

October 20, 2012
Eastern Virginia Association (EVA)
Location: TBA
For more information:
Email wmhawkins@spring-inc.org;
Website: www.soc-uccwomen.weebly.com;
Phone: 252-445-5258

FLORIDA CONFERENCE:
October 6, 2012
In the Company of Women Retreat
The Church by the Sea, Bal Harbour, FL
(Miami Area)

March 8-10, 2013
86th Annual Conference
International Palms Resort & Conference Center, Cocoa Beach, FL

October 18-20, 2013
Southern Regional Conference, hosted by Florida UCC Women
Cerveny Conference Center/Camp Weed, Live Oak, FL

FLORIDA CONFERENCE REGIONAL ANNUAL MEETINGS:
January 19, 2013
Gold Coast Region
First Congregational Church of Lake Worth
Regional Representative: Carol Lewis, 561-737-0572, clewismft@aol.com

January 26, 2013
Southwest Region; Fort Myers
Congregational Church; Fort Myers, Florida; Regional Representative: Pat Wanta, 941-918-1548, Patdw30@yahoo.com

January 26, 2013
St. Johns Region
Location: TBA
Regional Representative: Bert Perry, 386-736-1201, Genesis514@aol.com
February 2, 2013
Miami-Dade/Monroe Counties
The Church by the Sea, Bal Harbour, FL
(Miami Area)
Regional Representative: Patsy McDowell,
786-543-2075, Peawe19@hotmail.com

February 9, 2013
Central West Coast Region
Trinity United Church of Christ, St. Petersburg, FL
Regional Representative: Nancy Bassett,
863-226-2290, Nancee667@aol.com

February 16, 2013
Central East Coast Region
Hope United Church of Christ, Rockledge, FL
Regional Representative: Dyanne Edds,
321-392-3011, Dae1105@aol.com
For additional information: Bunny Gruntler,
305-302-4305, bgruntler@aol.com,
www.uccwomen.org

Western Region:
October 5-7, 2012
Disciples of Christ & United Church of Christ
Women’s Spiritual Growth Retreat 2012
UCC & DOC Women in Sisterhood
Loch Leven Camp & Conference Center
For more information call: DOC—Andi Sanders,
760-724-5477
UCC—Rachel Chapman,
619-216-3222
Registration information is available at www.pswdw.com
and www.scncucc.org

UCC and DOC Women’s Spiritual Growth Retreat 2012

The upcoming UCC and DOC (Disciples of Christ)
Women’s Spiritual Growth Retreat, October 5-7, 2012,
will be the first UCC Southern California Nevada
Conference and DOC Pacific Southwest Region-wide
collaboration on a women’s event.

Elaine Blanchard, a self-described “storyteller, counselor,
teacher, preacher, performer and writer” will be the
keynote speaker as we learn and grow by sharing our
“sister stories.”

The retreat, “Behold, A New Thing,” will present
opportunities for building new relationships between
DOC and UCC women to strengthen women’s ministry
in our area. It will also offer occasions for self-reflection,
community, music, creativity and especially spiritual
growth.

Loch Leven Christian Retreat Center, in the foothills of
the San Bernardino Mountains will be the location of
the Retreat. The registration fee of $135 - $145 includes
meals from Friday to Sunday and materials. Partial
scholarships are available. Registration forms and
scholarship applications will be available in June. Space
is limited to the first 130 women. For more information
contact Andi Sanders (DOC) at (760) 724-5477 or
Rachel Chapman (UCC) at (619) 216-3222.

Western Region:
October 11-13, 2012
African American Women in Ministry
2012 Conference

STAGES, PHASES AND PLACES
Franklinton Center at Bricks, Whitakers, NC
Hear inspired preaching by Rev. Dr. Delores H. Carpenter,
Rev. Dr. Susan K. Smith, and Rev. Neichelle Guidry Jones!
Be supported by other sisters in ministry and with those
discerning their calls as together you explore your own
stages, phases and places of ministry.

Information, registration, and a scholarship
request form can be found online at:
ucc.org/franklinton-center
Knitters of the UCC Unite!

The Scarf Project is a grassroots, Facebook-based movement in the UCC with a goal of sending 3,000 rainbow colored scarves to the 2013 General Synod of the UCC meeting in Long Beach, CA. Begun by the Rev. Marja Coons-Torn and other UCC knitters, the focus of the scarves is to highlight persons who are victims of violence – bullying, domestic violence, etc. – and to offer the opportunity to those who are given a scarf to commit themselves to an action in support of stopping such violence. Scarves are knit from the same yarn with a similar pattern, all of which can be found on Facebook.

Scan this code for the Scarf Project’s Facebook page.

UCC & DOC WOMEN IN SISTERHOOD:
Sharing Our Stories in a Safe Place as We Learn & Grow Together.

Come Meet:
Elaine Blanchard
Master Storyteller

FRIDAY—SUNDAY
OCTOBER 5-7, 2012

Early Registration: $135
Deadline: September 14, 2012
Late Registration: $145
Deadline: September 21, 2012

For more information call:
DOC - Andi Sanders:
(760) 724-5477
UCC - Rachel Chapman:
(619) 216-3222

All Registration information is available at:
www.pswdw.com
and
www.scncucc.org
Too busy?
Maybe you need some spiritual direction.

How are you making room for the next generation of women?

Does your book club channel the Holy Spirit?

WHAT’S NEXT FOR WOMEN IN THE UCC?

CommonLot
United Church of Christ
700 Prospect Avenue E #507
Cleveland, Ohio 44115-1100