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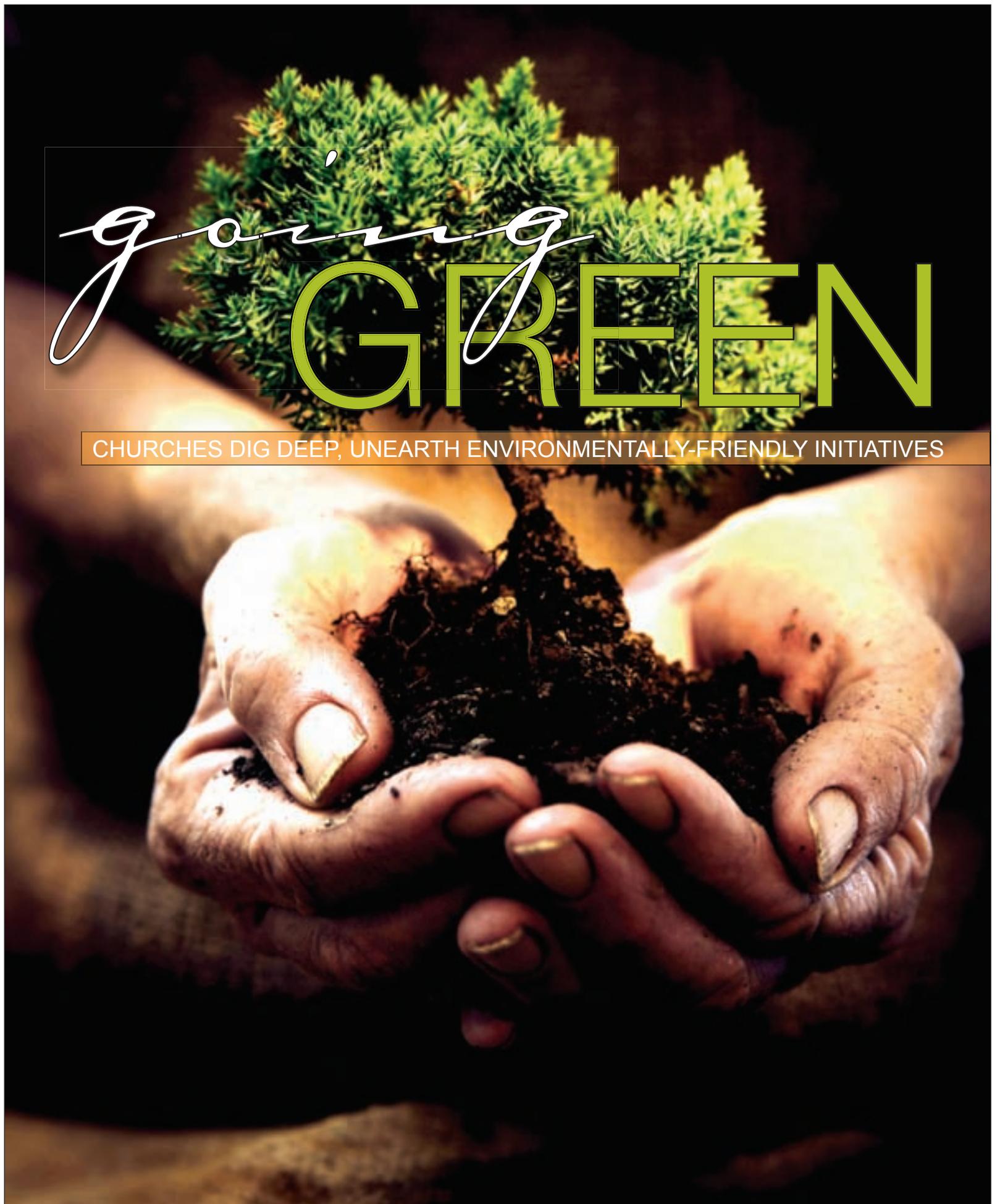
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iStockPhoto graphic

Church must have honest conversation about race

FROM THE COLLEGIUM



Edith Guffey

This is not a column about politics, but it is about something that has become a huge issue in the political arena: race.

At General Synod, I called for and committed myself to helping us to have a conversation about race in the church. That starts now and the commentary about race I have heard recently in the political arena has only illuminated the pressing need.

Let's not fool ourselves: the same thoughts, beliefs, misunderstandings about race that we see in the news are present in the church.

The primary difference is that most of our churches have little diversity so encounters with people of different races are not as prevalent as they are in our day-to-day lives. (That's a commentary in and of itself).

Still, I can't count the number of times I have experienced comments that in some way touch on race ending up in a firestorm of misunderstanding, hurt feelings and anger.

Often I have known all of the persons involved, and knew them personally not to be uninformed, callous or uncaring people. They were even people who passionately embrace the UCC and our commitment to being a multicultural and multiracial church.

But the reality is that we live in a country with a shameful history of racial oppression and that history, even subconsciously, has in some way touched and shaped us all. And it continues to do so.

The result is that statements that some may not see or experience as hurtful turn out to be exactly that to others. It is clearly a matter of intent versus impact, but often the impact is so significant that we find ourselves paralyzed, and we feed the unhealthy and unhelpful divisions among us.

Recently, I heard one commentator say he could not believe that race had become such a factor in the political process. I wanted to say, "How could anyone think that it wouldn't?" Race is too much a part of our history — a history that we have not adequately attended to.

But I still have hope, and I believe the church has a particular opportunity here. While concerns about race are perhaps no different than the ones in the broader society, the foundation for the conversation certainly is. As sisters and brothers in Christ, we know that our unity is in Christ, not in a political party or even agreements on issues. Our mandate to be welcoming and to embrace "the stranger" is from the gospel, not from the perspective of political correctness.

I hope that that reality gives us courage to take the risk and engage in a challenging but, in the end, helpful, honest and respectful conversation about race.

Linda Jaramillo and I have started thinking about models we might offer to Conferences and local churches that support and encourage these conversations. I know that many of you are just as interested in engaging this important conversation as I am and you may have ideas and ways to do it that could inform our work.

Drop me a note, but — more importantly — start on your own conversations with a good friend or colleague. Don't be complacent and wait for another misunderstanding to prod you along. Let's talk honestly and with care, not about each other, but with each other.

There's no better time to start than now.

Edith Guffey is associate general minister and a member of the UCC's five-person Collegium of Officers.

“The reality is that we live in a country with a shameful history of racial oppression and that history, even subconsciously, has in some way touched and shaped us all.”

NO JUSTICE, NO SHOPPING

Members of **Circle of Mercy (UCC/Alliance of Baptists) in Asheville, N.C.**, have voted to give away their anticipated economic-stimulus rebate checks.

On Feb. 24, members approved an open letter to President Bush and leaders of Congress, stating their intentions to "give away all or part" of the rebate "to organizations that foster justice."

The letter begins by thanking President Bush and Congressional leaders for their bipartisan work to address the nation's economic crisis, but goes on to speak of the "frightening, and escalating, pattern of economic disparity" both within the U.S. and between nations. "In the language of our faith, this disparity is a sin and the evidence of spiritual distress," it says.

In criticizing the rebate goal of boosting consumer spending, the statement says, "We do not believe that shopping is an appropriate response to our trauma."

The church estimates that its 33 households will collectively receive at least \$25,000 from the tax rebate checks.

"That's a significant influx of cash — and an exciting opportunity for us to consider extravagant missions funding," said the Rev. Ken Sehested, co-pastor.

EXCEEDINGLY MISSION MINDED

The United Black Christians' South Florida chapter at **Church of The Open Door UCC in Miami** has exceeded its goal of raising \$30,000 to restore the Elende Mission Home that the church's founding pastor and wife, the Rev. and Mrs. Henry Curtis McDowell, built while serving as missionaries in Africa, says church member Dory Lingo.

In 1919, the McDowells served in the former nation of Angola in western Africa, under the auspices of the former American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. They spent more than 40 years there.

Traveling on foot, McDowell was a part of a three-man team that selected the site of the Bunjei Mission in Galangue, Angola, to build a school, hospital and a domestic training school for girls. However, during the civil war in Angola, much of what they built was destroyed.

In 2004, some of the Angolan converts to Christianity under McDowell's ministry visited Church of the Open Door UCC in celebration of the McDowells' 80th missionary anniversary and the continuing impact of the UCC/Disciples' Global Ministries.

During this visit, UBC members learned of how the mission house had been damaged and became committed to restoring it.

Global Ministries is overseeing the UBC's gift and the restoration effort.



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16 REASONS TO LOVE JESUS

Reason #9? Because Jesus is willing to leave the safety of 99 and seek the salvation of one.

In a sequel to its popular "16 Reasons I Love God" tract — a bestseller according to the Berea, Ohio-based United Church of Christ Resources (UCCR) — the UCC has published two companion pieces, "16 reasons I love Jesus" and "16 reasons I love the Holy Spirit." Both are produced by the Congregational Vitality Initiative and written by the Stillspeaking Writers' Group.

The Trinitarian-complete set is perfect for witnessing to one's UCC faith, but in a theological bent that's likely to be different from the kind of evangelism resources you'll probably find at a Christian bookstore. For starters, they use inclusive language and images.

Other reasons to love Jesus? #14: Because his ideas about who and what matter never stop challenging my own. #10: Because his crucifixion and resurrection show me that death does not get the last word. #3: He ate with sinners and outcasts, the poor and the sick, which means there is room at his table for us. #1: Jesus shows me what God is like in ways I can understand.

The pocket-sized, red-and-black booklets are available in lots of 50 for \$6.50. Order from UCCR at 800/537-3394.

A DIFFERENT KIND OF 'BASIC TRAINING'

Feeling called to a different kind of ministry? Tired of the fact that there's no UCC church in your immediate community? Then maybe you're ready for some "basic training."

The UCC's "New Church Planters Basic Training" will be held Aug. 12-15 at Emory University in Atlanta. It's billed as an intensive training event where you'll learn about the latest theories and tools for planting new churches.

Registration is \$550, housing is \$450 and if you're wanting seminary credit for attending, that cost is \$850. Inquiries about attending should be directed to your appropriate Conference office.

The event is co-sponsored by the evangelism ministry team of Local Church Ministries, the Southeast Conference, UCC-related Lancaster Theological Seminary, and Emory University's Candler School of Theology.

A LITTLE MINI-SYNOD

The boards of the UCC's four Covenanted Ministries, as well as the 90-member Executive Council, will meet jointly April 9-15 in Cleveland.

As has now become customary during non-Synod years, the 300-some directors of Local Church Ministries, Wider Church Ministries, Justice and Witness Ministries, Office of General Ministries, and Executive Council will meet together and, at times, separately over the course of six days. The diversity of participants, intertwined meetings, worship services and shared meals make for a mini-Synod feel, some say.

Because of the large number of participants, the joint meetings are being held at Cleveland's Crowne Plaza hotel instead of the UCC-owned Radisson Hotel that sits adjacent to the UCC's national offices.

At this meeting, the five boards will each consider a much-discussed proposal to streamline the UCC's governance structure. In brief, the plan calls for a single group, instead of five distinct ones, to oversee the denomination's work. Although each of the five bodies must approve the same version of the plan in order for it to move forward, any agreed-upon proposal still would require adoption by General Synod and ratification of UCC Conferences.

Read about proposed governance changes and board decisions at <ucc.org/news>.

news.ucc.org

ON THE WEB 24-7

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'ENCOURAGING SIGN' SAYS THOMAS

UCC sees \$1.2 million increase in basic giving to national, regional ministries

By J. Bennett Guess

Gifts to the connectional ministries of the UCC increased by more than \$1.2 million dollars in 2007.

Voluntary contributions to Our Church's Wider Mission, the denomination's shared fund for connectional ministries, totaled \$29,637,048 in 2007, up from \$28,409,202 during the previous year, according to year-end financial reports.

Twenty-five of the UCC's 38 regional Conferences posted increased giving to the national church in 2007.

In addition, three of the UCC's four national special mission offerings — which support special ministry projects — posted gains during 2007.

The increased support is viewed as a significantly positive sign for the church's national setting, after experiencing several years of declining financial contributions.

"The gains we realized in 2007 are not a cure all, but this is a promising, encouraging sign for many, especially after the somewhat rocky year we experienced in 2006," said the Rev. John H. Thomas, general minister and president.

In 2005, the UCC's General Synod passed a controversial resolution supporting same-gender marriage

equality, a decision that was followed by the loss of more than 200 of its 5,900 congregations.

"This good news represents the work of many pastors and lay leaders who have spoken up about the importance of our shared ministries as the United Church of Christ," Thomas said. "It's also proof that our best years, indeed, can be before us."

In the UCC, congregations are not forced to pay apportionments or dues to the national church, but instead remit contributions voluntarily to a regional Conference office. Each Conference retains a portion to support its own ministries before passing along the rest to the UCC's national setting, which oversees the

church's national and international efforts.

During the past year, the UCC's Conferences — which retained an average of 67.8 percent — netted \$19,996,075 for their ministries, an increase of \$873,576 over the previous year. The national offices, in turn, received \$9,640,973 or an increase of \$354,270.

While members' overall giving to UCC churches has increased each year since the denomination's founding in 1957, local churches — on average — have been retaining more and remitting less, a trend that has been observed by many denominations across the theological spectrum.

"Our members and churches have always been generous," Thomas said. "In communities across this country, the impact of UCC giving is impressive, and we give thanks for that. But we also appreciate the fact that UCC members and churches are increasingly paying attention to the covenantal nature of our faith. When we give locally, it should also reach beyond our own community to touch the lives of those in New Orleans, or in Sudan, or wherever there is need."

Church leaders defend Jeremiah Wright against 'character assassination'

From staff and wire reports

Trinity UCC in Chicago and several prominent national UCC leaders are strongly defending the Rev. Jeremiah Wright, whose fiery sermons have sparked controversy.

On March 16, preaching before a packed house on Palm Sunday, the church's incoming pastor, the Rev. Otis Moss III, said Wright's 36 years of ministry have been reduced to a "15- or 30-second sound bite" by the media.

"Nearly three weeks before the 40th commemoration of the anniversary of the assassination of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.," said Moss, Wright's "character is being assassinated in the public sphere because he has preached a social gospel on behalf of oppressed women, children and men in America and around the globe."

Moss said Wright's sermons must be understood within the "crucible of slavery and the legacy of prophetic African-American preachers since slavery."

A longtime fixture on Chicago's South Side, Wright built Trinity UCC from a congregation of 87 to 8,000, the UCC's largest. Trinity's health care, prison and educational ministries have helped thousands, the

church says.

The Rev. John H. Thomas, the UCC's general minister and president, said "it has saddened me to see news stories reporting such a caricature of a congregation that has been such a blessing."

The Rev. Bennie Whiten, retired Massachusetts Conference Minister who prior served for 15 years as associate director of Chicago's Community Renewal Society, says, "Trinity was one church that we could always rely on to respond almost immediately. They have been very, very involved in the community in so many meaningful ways."

The Rev. Steve Gray, the UCC's Indiana-Kentucky Conference Minister, said he was inspired by Wright's graciousness and cooperation in helping to start as many as 20 new congregations in recent years.

"It's everything a Christian community is supposed to be," says Gray, who has been working with Trinity UCC for the past three years to develop a new UCC congregation in Gary, Ind. "Trinity has given well over \$100,000 in support of its partnership with us, and in 15 months of regular meetings with Jeremiah Wright, we always found him to be a man of gracious hospitality, humor, generosity, who paid attention to detail but also a man who does not call

attention to himself."

The Rev. Kenneth L. Samuel, pastor of the UCC's second largest congregation, **Victory UCC in Stone Mountain, Ga.**, says it was Trinity UCC that inspired him to want to affiliate with the UCC.

"My church was originally National Baptist and Southern Baptist, but it was the critical-thinking that [Trinity] brought to this work, the justice work, that helped me to want to become a part of the denomination," Samuel said. "I have no regrets about that."

Samuel says that, during Wright's ministry, Wright has not been afraid to tackle difficult topics, while staying equally committed to preaching "Jesus and justice."

"There have been two major sins in the Black church that many Black churches will not address — homophobia is one and sexism is another," Samuel says, "and Jeremiah Wright has been one of the articulate, courageous voices that has not been afraid to address these critical issues. If he can do that and still maintain his close connectivity to the Black community, and stay grounded in the Black ethos, that's what has inspired me."

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OBAMA SPEECH TO GENERAL SYNOD AT CENTER OF INQUIRY

Top U.S. attorney to represent UCC in IRS tax status probe

One of the nation's top law firms is representing the UCC in wake of an Internal Revenue Service investigation of the church's tax-exempt status.

WilmerHale, a prestigious Washington, D.C.-based firm, was retained on March 3 to represent the church, according to Donald C. Clark, UCC Nationwide Special Counsel.

Seth P. Waxman, former Solicitor General of the United States (1997-2001), will lead WilmerHale's team of attorneys working on the UCC's behalf. Waxman, considered one of the nation's top appellate-level attorneys, has won 9 of 9 cases he has argued before the U.S. Supreme Court.

"I am confident that, when the IRS learns all the relevant facts, it will conclude that the General Synod of the United Church of Christ did

could jeopardize its tax-exempt status." Although the letter stated that the church had 15 days to respond to the IRS claim, the UCC was granted an extension until March 27. At press time, information about the response was not available.

The Rev. John H. Thomas, the UCC's general minister and president, called the investigation "disturbing" but said the investigation would reveal that the church did



OP EDS WEIGH IN — In addition to this Hartford Courant editorial cartoon (above), several newspapers have questioned the rationale for the IRS inquiry. "The IRS is out of line," the Courant said on its Feb. 29 op-ed page. "Tax laws bar nonprofits from supporting candidates, but not from listening to them." On March 20, U.S. Sen. Joe Lieberman released a letter he sent to the IRS, in which he cites the "chilling effect" of the investigation.

Bob Englehart | Hartford Courant

not come close to conducting political campaign activity at its 2007 gathering," Waxman said.

On Feb. 26, the UCC's Cleveland-based national offices announced that it had been notified that the IRS was looking into U.S. Sen. Barack Obama's speech at General Synod as potentially unlawful.

Obama, an active member of the United Church of Christ for more than 20 years, addressed the UCC's 50th anniversary General Synod in Hartford, Conn., on June 23, 2007, as one of 60 diverse speakers representing the arts, media, academia, science, technology, business and government. Each was asked to reflect on the intersection of their faith and their respective vocations or fields of expertise. The invitation to Obama was extended a year before he became a Democratic presidential candidate.

In its Feb. 20 letter, the IRS said it was initiating a church tax inquiry "because reasonable belief exists that the United Church of Christ has engaged in political activities that

nothing improper or illegal.

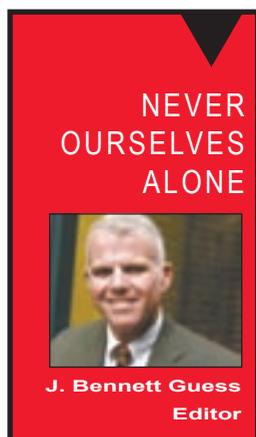
"The United Church of Christ took great care to ensure that Sen. Obama's appearance before the 50th anniversary General Synod met appropriate legal and moral standards," Thomas told United Church News. "We are confident that the IRS investigation will confirm that no laws were violated."

WilmerHale also said it will not charge the denomination for its attorneys' time, prompting church leaders to halt further appeals for a "UCC Legal Fund," an online effort initiated in late February that raised \$59,564 in less than a week.

"While we know there will be other significant expenses associated with our defense, we are profoundly grateful to WilmerHale for offering its attorney time without the customary hourly fee," Thomas said. "Thanks to the immediate and generous outpouring from our members and supporters, we now believe we will have sufficient resources to cover other related legal costs."

ANTI-GAY BULLYING

Lawrence King's death touches home, yet so few know his story



“Two of my most-feared harassers were part of my church youth group, which meant that, even at church, I didn't feel safe.”

At 8:15 a.m. on Feb. 12, 15-year-old Lawrence King was shot twice in the head while sitting in the computer lab at his junior high school in Oxnard, Calif.

The reason? He was gay. But, more so, he refused to be ashamed of himself.

The heinous crime was committed by a fellow student, 14-year-old Brandon McInterney, whom King had confessed to liking. Homophobia, once again, was claiming and ruining two lives — and impacting countless more.

King's murder received quite a bit of attention in the gay media, thanks to persistent activists who refused to let King's story be buried with him. Yet, there was barely a mention in the mainstream press.

It's another pointed example of the chronic problem of youth-on-youth anti-gay violence. In addition to verbal and physical assaults, homicide is also on the increase. As many as 59 young people have been murdered since 1995 because of gender-nonconformity, one count shows.

And yet, because so many school systems are afraid or restricted from addressing so-called “gay issues,” students are often forced to take the hallway harassment, the lunchroom abuse, the after-class beatings — with no one to turn to. Several states have given lip service to bullying — including my home state of Kentucky earlier this year — but have excluded lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students from proposed legislation to address the problem.

It's no wonder that LGBT students are five times more likely to skip school out of fear for their personal safety, according to a study by the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN).

According to the 2006-released report — the first time the pervasive problem had ever been studied in any depth — more than 75 percent of students reported hearing strong,

LEARN MORE about Lawrence King and the vigils being organized to honor his memory at rememberinglawrence.org.

derogatory, anti-gay remarks, such as “faggot” or “dyke,” on a daily or frequent basis. Over a third of students had experienced physical harassment based on their perceived or actual sexual orientation or gender expression, and one out of five students reported being physically assaulted because of it.

If you don't believe the frequency, just ask your children or grandchildren how the gay kids at their schools are treated.

I speak from personal experience, because my childhood and teenage years were filled with daily anti-gay ridicule from a half-dozen neighborhood bullies. To make matters worse, two of my most-feared harassers were part of my church youth group, which meant that, even at church, I didn't feel safe.

I didn't handle it well, and the fright I felt inside was often clearly visible for others to see, which only made the harassment more

frequent — and more enjoyable to the ones inflicting the pain.

Sometimes, I must admit, I fantasized about revealing my taunters' identities to others, even telling their well-to-do parents about how rotten — and violent — their children really were. But to do so — among adults — meant to call attention to my perceived (and actual) gayness, something I'd been taught to hate, even in myself. I was ashamed to be the one singled out as the school's “faggot” and, more so, I was angry at myself for not having the ability to pass more effectively, to live more invisibly.

The older I got, the more I realized that school-yard violence is actually the symptomatic extension of carefully-taught hatreds and biases passed down through generations.

On Feb. 22, more than 500 mourners attended a public memorial service for little Larry King. They remembered his beautiful singing voice, his vivacious personality and his flamboyant personality. In reading and hearing about him, I found the courage to tell a piece of my own experience.

Even at age 41, I still carry within me the emotional baggage of that laughed-at gay child who still feels strangely awkward, at times, when I feel like I am the only non-straight person in the room. And yet I also claim those negative experiences as a fundamentally shaping force in my own call to Christian ministry. We each learn empathy in our own difficult ways.



LETTERS

‘A far-reaching home’

I was so delighted when my church, Church of the Savior UCC in Roswell, Ga., moved affiliation to the UCC so many years ago. I was proud of what that tradition represented. Little did I know what blessings would come from that move.

In December, my husband and I lost his only son in Maryland. For the service, we found the Rockville [Md.] UCC on the denomination's website. When I called the minister, the Rev. Duncan Newcomer, and asked if he could help us, there was no hesitation. The church welcomed us as if we were long-time friends. The minister was brand new to the congregation, but he radiated such a comfort and love of the community, I can't describe how at-home he made us feel.

The next time I give thanks for our relatively new tradition, I shall remember to expand it beyond our doors. The stranger in need of help finds welcome here, with no qualifications or questions asked. This is truly at the heart of “welcome and affirming.” We tend to apply that term too tightly. We all need to feel welcomed and affirmed. What a blessing to have such a far-reaching home.

Melanie Rilling
Church of the Savior UCC
Roswell, Ga.

SEND LETTERS of fewer than 150 words to United Church News, 700 Prospect Ave., Cleveland, OH 44115; e-mail guessb@ucc.org. Please note that letters may be edited for brevity and clarity.



What's your take on the intersection of SCIENCE AND RELIGION?

SOAPBOX

In the Feb-March issue, United Church News invited readers to respond to our centerstage story on the ‘A New Voice Arising,’ a UCC pastoral letter on faith engaging science and technology. Here are some of your responses:

I was delighted to read the pastoral letter on faith engaging science and technology. What a welcome and welcoming initiative. As a person of faith on a computer science faculty, I used to feel like a bit of a misfit. Now, as a scientist in a seminary, I still do. I appreciate the affirmation that these things belong together: the scientific quest is an expression of the impulse to hear what the still-speaking God is saying.

Dr. Adam Webber, in-care seminarian
Open Prairie UCC
Princeton, Ill.

I believe science and religion conflict because lesser lights dominate the discussion. Some scientists act as if science has no philosophical presuppositions. Some religionists are selectively literal — for instance, literal on tithing but not on sin, or literal on sin but not on forgiveness.

The Rev. Dan Lozer
Mayflower UCC
Sioux City, Iowa

It was good to learn of the UCC initiative concerning science and religion. Since 1972, a number of theologians, pastors and scientists have been doing research and writing about the relation of religion to science, espe-

cially the science of parapsychology through the Academy of Spirituality and Paranormal Studies, Inc. I have served as president and the Rev. Harry Serio, who is UCC, is the current president. For more information, visit aspsi.org.

The Rev. Richard Batzler, Ph.D.
Via e-mail

UCC's “New Voice” is a whimper. Scientists aren't concerned with “a new search for meaning” or answers to why we exist. That is religion's work — nurturing belief. Science strives to understand the natural world through empirical study — facts, not faith. Scientists recognize the arrogance of trying to answer “why.” Christians can choose to let their faith be informed by scientific understanding, just as scientists can let their lives and work be informed by the teachings of Jesus. To be inclusive of science, the UCC must embrace the belief that God is still speaking through scientists, many of whom do not believe in one.

Susanne Mason, Ph.D.
Columbia, Md.

This is not news. For 70 years I have believed that faith and science are two sides of the same coin. God made everything. Sci-

ence helps us understand the complex interrelationships of what He has done. God authored scripture. By faith we understand His wisdom and purpose. Creation and scripture both show us His love. The more we discover scientifically, the more we glorify God. The better we understand scripture, the more we glorify God.

Carolyn Toth
Kissimmee, Fla.

As I returned home from work to find my copies of United Church News and Science News in my mailbox, I was thrilled to read the UCC article about science and faith. As a life-long scientist and UCC member, I have always been fascinated by science while I have also maintained my Christian faith.

The more I learn from science, the more I believe in God, the master Creator, Planner, and Director for everything on our planet and in our universe — from the composition of an atom to the diversity and beauty of all forms of life. Following my Coast Guard career, I look forward to embarking on my second career teaching science. Your article has inspired me in this journey.

Denise Matthews
Alexandria, Virginia

'IN THE LAST ROW, ON THE AISLE, SAT RACHEL'

Amid hectic schedule, pastor offers reminder: 'You are loved'

COMMENTARY

Rebecca
Kemper Poos

It was the Thursday before Christmas. The secretary gave me that familiar pleading look as she put a caller on hold. "Someone wants to know about our church and homosexuality."

With trepidation I took the call, my mind spinning over a packed day, hoping this would be a quick conversation. The shaking voice of a young woman spoke. "I need to talk to someone about homosexuality." Instead of the challenge I had expected, I heard desperation. Quickly changing gears, I told her to come right away.

Rachel, as I will call her here, walked into my office visibly nervous. I tried to put her at ease and she opened up immediately about why she was there. Married, with three young children, she thought she might be a lesbian and was in great turmoil. She was "trying to be good," by faithfully attending an ex-gay ministry at her church and striving to continue a life that felt like a farce.

She had found us through an internet search for "gay churches." Rachel had never been told it was possible to be gay and Christian. She gazed with eyes wide as I talked about our congregation and some of our gay and lesbian members. We talked about scripture and her struggle to do the right thing by her children and her own soul. When she left, I asked permission to give her name and number to some women who would willingly offer support. She lit up with the thought of meeting lesbians who are Christian!

Meanwhile, the next Sunday, Cheryl and Kandis had their daughter, Jaida, dedicated. Our church, comprised of three denominations with differing politics, is not officially "open and affirming." We are a mix of folks from all over the spectrum

socially and politically. We are not of one voice on many issues, but we do walk together as a community of faith, allowing each other the space to be different and yet together. We have walked an arduous journey with these mothers as they ached for a child, offering much prayer. Jaida is, without question, a child of this congregation, and the spirit of celebration as she was dedicated to God was palpable.

Kandis and Cheryl stood before us with Jaida in their arms. The line of supportive grandparents and friends stretched the sanctuary. If ever there was proof that all God's children are loved and welcomed in this place, it was then. My heart raced as I beheld the site. There could be no question of who we are and what we believe.

I carried the rosy-cheeked and very curious bundle up and down the aisle as Kandis, through her tears, sang a love song she'd written, giving thanks for this long-awaited gift. There was not a dry eye in the house and a powerful spirit in the air.

In the last row, on the aisle, sat a young woman. Crouched over, almost wanting to disappear, obviously amazed that she might belong there witnessing this joyful scene, was Rachel.

I knew, without a doubt in that moment, why I serve God's church. I knew why we need to give a loud, clear and courageous voice to who we are. Why we need to believe God continues to speak. Why we drop everything on a busy day when someone desperately needs to know they are loved by God and welcome — no matter who, no matter where, no matter what.

The Rev. Rebecca Kemper Poos is associate pastor of congregational life at Columbine United Church in Littleton, Colo.

“ Rachel had never been told it was possible to be gay and Christian.”

OVERHEARD



“ There's a danger in judging someone based on snippets. ... Preachers, politicians and columnists can only hope to be judged on the body of their work, not the snippets.”

— Editorial writer Barb Shelly of the Kansas City Star (March 16)

“ [Jeremiah] Wright attracted a congregation that colleagues herald as the most diverse of any black church in the United States. Obama, Oprah Winfrey, gangsters, bankers, destitute women in ratty sweatshirts — all cram into Trinity's pews, and Wright demanded that they all hold hands.”

— a description of Chicago's Trinity UCC in a lengthy feature story in *The Washington Post* (March 18).

“ It's about the least scary place on the planet.”

— Melissa Harris-Lacewell, a professor at Princeton University who previously worshiped at Chicago's Trinity UCC, speaking of the congregation, as quoted in a column at washingtonpost.com. (March 18)

“ [Jeremiah] Wright loves America. That's why he's so angry. Angry because the nation does not deliver on its promises and its possibility.”

— Dwight Hopkins, a University of Chicago theologian, speaking to *USA Today* (March 19)

“ Jesus says my mission is to eradicate poverty and to bring about freedom and liberation for the oppressed. And most Christian pastors in America skip over that part of the book.”

— Hopkins, speaking again, on NPR's *Morning Edition*. (March 19)

“ I have heard from dozens of pastors over the past five or six days, and they just laugh out loud that people would think their parishioners agree with every word.”

— The Rev. Jim Antal, Massachusetts Conference Minister, speaking to the Wright controversy. (*Boston Globe*, March 19)

Let's reflect on what really makes for excellent public schools

COMMENTARY



Jan Resseger

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), the latest version of the federal education law, has pressured low-scoring schools to raise scores at emergency speed and any cost, thereby prescribing for our poorest children a regimen of relentless test prep. NCLB sets the narrowest standards, basic skills in two subjects only: reading and math.

Now that Congress has delayed the five-year reauthorization of this law, and now that NCLB won't likely be reauthorized until 2009, under a new President and a new Congress,

we have an opportunity to reflect on what really creates school excellence.

Last November, I visited an extraordinary elementary school that incorporates a truly different educational vision than our federal education law, though it surely seeks to leave no child behind.

Chicago's Harold Washington Elementary School is a neighborhood school serving all of the children in its attendance area, all African American and Hispanic, 93 percent poor, with a family mobility rate of 30 percent. Harold Washington is driven by a mission to form the whole child through scholarship, citizenship, personal integrity, psychological safety and physical skill. This school definitely is not about test-and-punish.

Many schools are clean, neat, and decorated with a few posters and the goals prescribed by the state. The difference here is apparent inside the front door, with African wood carvings and a picture gallery of well-known Black men, past and present. The building itself is Principal Sandra Lewis's canvas for painting high expectations.

Some hallways display artist collections of prints and lithographs. Primary wing hallways feature murals of a town — police station, fire station, and a marquee announcing the entrance to the Margaret Burroughs Performing Arts Theatre, the school auditorium. This old-fashioned two-story auditorium, filled with

the original 1915 black varnished wood seats screwed to the floor, is painted pink, with life-size painted panels of famous Black performers lining the walls. The school's band, orchestra, vocal and dance groups perform here.

Lewis calls the third floor, grades 6-8, "College Town," because each classroom is named for one of the historically Black colleges or universities. "Many of these children don't have college as part of their environment," says Lewis, "so we surround them with college all the time."

The building itself shouts affirmation and high expectations. How could a child be prevented from dreaming?

Lewis has also been attentive to building community by affirming teachers. Ongoing staff team collaboration and development are a central focus.

"We work hard here and we have fun," she proclaims.

Nurturing the connection between family and school is a priority. Lewis brings in a photographer and invites all families, whatever their makeup, for portraits. Framed family photos line an entire stairwell, each family also receiving a copy to keep.

NCLB threatens low-scoring schools with "change" if they don't improve (transfers out, reconstitution of staff, charterization). By contrast, Harold Washington's stability is perhaps its most distinguishing feature.

Lewis has served as principal at Harold Washington for 20 years, and teacher and counselor here for a dozen years before that. She reports that she is now working with the third generation in some families.

While NCLB culminates America's growing computerized capacity to quantify, education's value is primarily qualitative — authentic enjoyment of children — trust between teacher and child — development of community within and beyond the school.

Janice Resseger is the UCC's minister for public education and witness.

“ Chicago's Harold Washington Elementary School shouts affirmation and high expectations.”



TABULATIONS

TRINITY'S TESTAMENT

\$3,755,599*

*The amount that Trinity UCC in Chicago, the denomination's largest congregation, has contributed to Our Church's Wider Mission during the past five years. OCWM is the UCC's shared fund for connective ministries at home and around the world.

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HOLY OBEDIENCE

Christian's civil disobedience hopes to hasten Guantánamo prison closure

By Ken Sehested
For United Church News

Unfortunately, it's too easy to write off the decision of UCC member Tim Nolan to commit civil disobedience in January at the U.S. Supreme Court, while calling for the closure of the Guantánamo prison for the suspects in the U.S. "war on terror," as political looney-tune.

But no less a public figure than former Secretary of State Colin Powell has spoken to the "problem" of Guantánamo.

"Guantánamo has become a major, major problem . . . in the way the world perceives America and if it were up to me I would close Guantánamo not tomorrow but this afternoon," Powell told NBC's "Meet the Press" in June. "Essentially, we have shaken the belief the world had in America's justice system by keeping a place like Guantánamo open and creating things like the military commission. We don't need it and it is causing us far more damage than any good we get for it."

Powell is no pacifist. Nor is Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, who tried early in his tenure to close the facility.

Nolan, a member of Circle of **Mercy Congregation** (UCC/Alliance of Baptists), a nurse practitioner, the spouse to Amy and father of three young children in **Asheville, N.C.**, didn't undertake the action lightly, even though he's done this before, including last year's "Witness Against Torture" action on the fifth anniversary of the opening of Gitmo.

While speaking with him in February, Nolan outlined the substantial case against the prison based on U.S. and international law.

"The legal charade of this Administration's justification is astounding," Nolan said. "The invention of terms like 'unlawful combatants;' the suspension of habeas corpus, which is the foundation of our jurisprudence; and the systematic use of 'enhanced interrogation techniques,' formerly known simply as torture."

'An outgrowth from prayer'

Nolan, whose medical work is focused on low-income people living with HIV/AIDS, does not base his conviction merely on legal or political grounds.

"Actually, this action is an outgrowth of prayer." As it was for the majority of the 200 who paraded from the National Mall in Washington, D.C., to the steps of the Court — each in the distinctive orange jump-suit of Guantánamo prisoners and wearing the black hoods made famous from a similar prison, *Abu Ghraib*, in Baghdad. Most in the action are rooted in, or inspired by, the faith-based Catholic Worker Movement.

"I think of prayer as the portal to seeing the world in a new way, through God's eyes," Nolan commented. "Prayer isn't an escape hatch from the agonies of history, but a means of confronting history in redemptive ways."

The day — Friday, Jan. 11 — began with a rally on the National Mall, co-sponsored by Amnesty International and more than 100 other human rights organization. Shortly after noon, some 400 persons embarked with legal permits and a police escort on the 45-minute silent walk, two abreast and in pouring rain, to the Supreme Court. After arriving, the 200 in the theatrical-orange garb kneeled on the sidewalk in front of the Court. During discussions the previous day, 36 had volunteered to risk arrest by mounting the Court stairs toward the entrance.

As this unfolded, another 45 volunteers in plain dress passed through security and assembled inside the Court, where they planned to read a statement and unfurl a banner. With no attempt to resist police orders, those on the steps were arrested and charged with violat-

“I felt free and calm, with a sense that — in the face of this massive injustice — I was exactly where I wanted to be and needed to be.”

— Tim Nolan

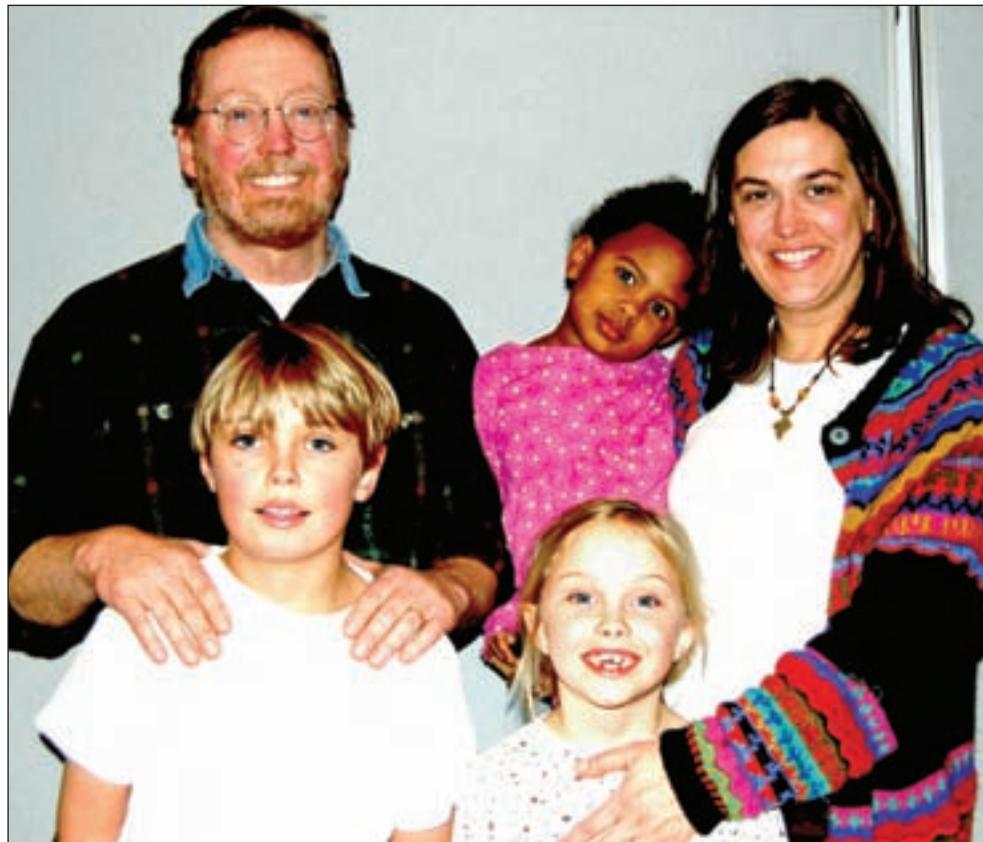
ing an ordinance prohibiting demonstrations on court grounds. Those inside were charged under a provision that makes it a crime to give "a harangue or oration" in the Court.

"During the drive to D.C., during the strategy sessions the night before, all during the morning on the Mall, but most especially as we walked to the Court, I have to admit I was anxious, nervous, wondering if I was crazy," Nolan said. "But all that melted away as we began climbing the steps. And as we were handcuffed, facing those massive courthouse pillars, I felt free and calm, with a sense that — in the face of this massive injustice — I was exactly where I wanted to be and needed to be."

Under arrest

All of the 75 persons arrested were handcuffed and taken to a trailer at the side of the building for processing by Court police. Instead of offering their own names, each instead gave the name of a Guantánamo prisoner. Four hours later they were escorted into the Court basement and processed again, and pictured, then seated along a hallway. At midnight, in groups of four, they were transported by D.C. police to disperse precincts; and then moved again, at 3 a.m., to the central prison.

By 9 a.m. the entire group was reassembled, hands still cuffed and now legs shackled, at the Superior Court holding cell in preparation for their arraignment. Again, in groups of four, they appeared before a judge, who provided two options: to accept or reject a "stint" — a "cease or desist" order — pledging to not



Tim Nolan with his wife and family.

photo furnished

IN THE AIR

What's being said about torture

- After The New York Times reported the abuses at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, the paper also said the CIA had, in 2002, issued its own report that most of the prisoners held at Guantánamo did not deserve to be there.
- In February 2006, in a study of Department of Defense records, lawyers representing Guantánamo detainees reported that only 8 percent were labeled as "al Qaeda fighters" and just 11 percent had been captured "on the battlefield" by coalition forces.
- General Pervez Musharraf boasted in his 2006 memoir, "We have played cat and mouse with [al Qaeda]. We have captured 689 and handed over 369 to the United States. We have earned bounties totaling millions of dollars."
- In a February 2008 interview on BBC Radio, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia said it was "extraordinary" to assume that the ban on cruel and unusual punishment — the Constitution's Eighth Amendment — also applied to waterboarding. "You can't come in smugly and with great self satisfaction and say 'Oh it's torture, and therefore it's no good.'"

be arrested again for at least six months.

Some chose to agree to this restriction. Others, like Nolan, who was finally released under bond at 5 p.m., refused and now face a maximum penalty of 60 days in jail, a fine, or both. A court date, as of March 15, was still pending.

"The most significant thing that happened in this 29-hour incarceration was the fact that, in my appearance before the judge, I initially gave the name of 'Fazaldad' and have it officially recorded in a court document," Nolan said.

Fazaldad ("no first name known," accord-

ing to Guantánamo records) is among the approximately 275 prisoners still being held, some for over six years, in legal limbo and without recourse to legal action of any kind. Each of the "witness" activists appearing before the judge that afternoon did the same thing, just for this purpose, before finally stating their real names.

"Just yesterday," Nolan said as we wrapped up our conversation, "I heard an interview with one of the first lunch-counter sit-in participants [in Greensboro, N.C.] He talked about the fear he felt, as a black man approaching the taboo of a segregated lunch counter, as he first entered Woolworths with the intention of breaking the law. But then he said something like, 'When I did finally sit down, I knew it was right. And I knew I'd stay there come what may. It might mean a long stay in a hostile prison. Or it might even mean I'd be shipped home in a pine box. But I knew this was right. I knew I was where I wanted to be, where I needed to be.'"

"I immediately recognized that feeling," Nolan said, smiling.

Earlier I told Nolan about the experience of others from our Circle of Mercy congregation, on a visit to our "sister" church in Cuba. I told him how his story was shared at a special "service of prayers for peace" the very night of his arrest. As you might imagine, the narrative had quite an impact on the gathered Cuban Christians, against whom our country maintains an illegal embargo.

Such bonds, across borders and boundaries of every kind, are at the heart of our calling. And, sometimes, civil disobedience is a form of holy obedience.

The Rev. Ken Sehested is co-pastor of Circle of Mercy Congregation and a stonemason in Asheville, N.C. Circle of Mercy is dually-affiliated with the United Church of Christ and the Alliance of Baptists.

'LORD, SAVE US FROM YOUR FOLLOWERS'

art | film | music | books | web **culture**

Independent film explores America's bumper-sticker theology

By Annie Martin
Religion News Service

Nestled in a tiny office above a video rental store just south of Portland, Ore., filmmakers Dan Merchant and Jeff Martin are preparing to launch their first movie together.

The two members of Lightning Strikes Entertainment have spent about three years investigating a nationwide disconnect between Christians and their fellow Americans for their documentary "Lord, Save Us From Your Followers." The movie is due in theaters June 13, and a companion book came out on March 11.

The movie explores what Merchant calls America's "bumper-sticker culture" — people tell others what they think but aren't willing to con-

sider conflicting views.

"Clearly we've decided to have the national debate ... on our cars,"

Merchant said. "We won't talk to each other about these issues, but we'll stick the 'God said Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve' or 'Who would Jesus bomb?' on our cars."

The film is named after a bumper sticker Merchant saw in the parking lot of his church, Southlake Four-square in West Linn, Ore.

"I remember seeing that bumper sticker and laughing and kind of going, 'Yeah, I hate those judgmental so-and-sos, too; they make (Christians) look bad,'" Merchant said. "And I got about one more step toward the sanctuary when I realized that ... I'm one of those followers, too."

He and Martin, who attends Beaverton Foursquare Church, decided

to create a film that would represent people of different faiths. Merchant interviewed public figures with various political and religious views, including Al Franken, the radio host and a Democratic candidate for the U.S. Senate; Michael Reagan, son of President Reagan and a radio host; and Rick Santorum, a former Republican U.S. senator from Pennsylvania.

Merchant also did person-on-the-street interviews while wearing a body suit covered with bumper stickers representing a range of political and religious views. He asked passersby questions that included their perceptions of Christians and Jesus. To Merchant's surprise, many people did not have a very

"Clearly we've decided to have the national debate on our cars."

— Dan Merchant, filmmaker



Thomas Nelson | RNS photo

Oregon filmmakers Jeff Martin (pictured) and Dan Merchant interviewed passersby to explore America's "bumper-sticker culture."

favorable opinion of Christians.

"It's fascinating that, by and large, people understood Jesus and not Christians," Merchant said. "It just shows that we haven't done the job of representing him that we are

supposed to do."

Wanting to discuss the "culture war" from different perspectives created some challenges for the filmmakers, especially financially.

Because the movie isn't told entirely from a Christian perspective, it was hard to gain support from Christian organizations, Martin said.

Likewise, many secular groups wouldn't back the film because of the Christian influence.

People had to believe in the idea or in me and Dan personally," Martin said.

The movie will be released in 10 to 20 cities.

The film also will probably be available to churches that want to show it to their congregations.

"I wanted this film to be welcome in an art house and a church," Merchant said. "I didn't make a movie for church people, and I didn't make a movie to beat up Christians. I wanted everybody to be able to have this conversation."

The filmmakers are hopeful it will be well received. "The thing that happens after you see the movie is people stand around and talk for an hour," Merchant said. "And the whole thing starts to feel more like a movement than just a movie release."

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in the news people | places | things

Accompaniment CDs now available for The New Century Hymnal

If you're a member of a church with a big-time pipe organ with a full-time musician, consider yourself lucky. Not all congregations are so fortunate.

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That's why The Pilgrim Press, in cooperation with the UCC's Worship and Education Ministry, has spent the past year developing a set of pipe-organ accompaniment CDs for creative use in congregational worship services. The series of in-

cludes an accompaniment for each hymn in The New Century Hymnal, the UCC's hymnal published in 1995.

"The purpose is not to put any organist out of work," says the Rev. Timothy Staveteig, publisher. "The purpose is to give music options to congregations that may need help in strengthening their music offerings, especially in smaller congregations that may have limited opportunities for musicians."

Recording high-quality accompaniments for each of the hymnal's 617 hymns has been no small task,

and the bulk of that responsibility has fallen to the Rev. Scott Ressler, the UCC's minister for worship, music and liturgical arts.

Ressler invited and brought together many of the UCC's finest organists, who volunteered to assist with the project. The recordings took place at several Cleveland-area UCC churches known for their high-quality organs. And the sound quality is superior, Ressler said.

"Great care has been taken to present each hymn in The New Century Hymnal with stylistic integrity," he said.

In addition to use in worship, the CDs also can be helpful for worship planning, choir warm-ups, hymn sings or other occasions when an organist may not be available, such as weddings and funerals.

Because of the high-costs associated with producing and packaging the musical CDs, orders received before shipment will take place in various stages. Orders received before September 2008 will be shipped in part. The first volume is expected in April, the second volume in May and the remaining volumes in June and September.



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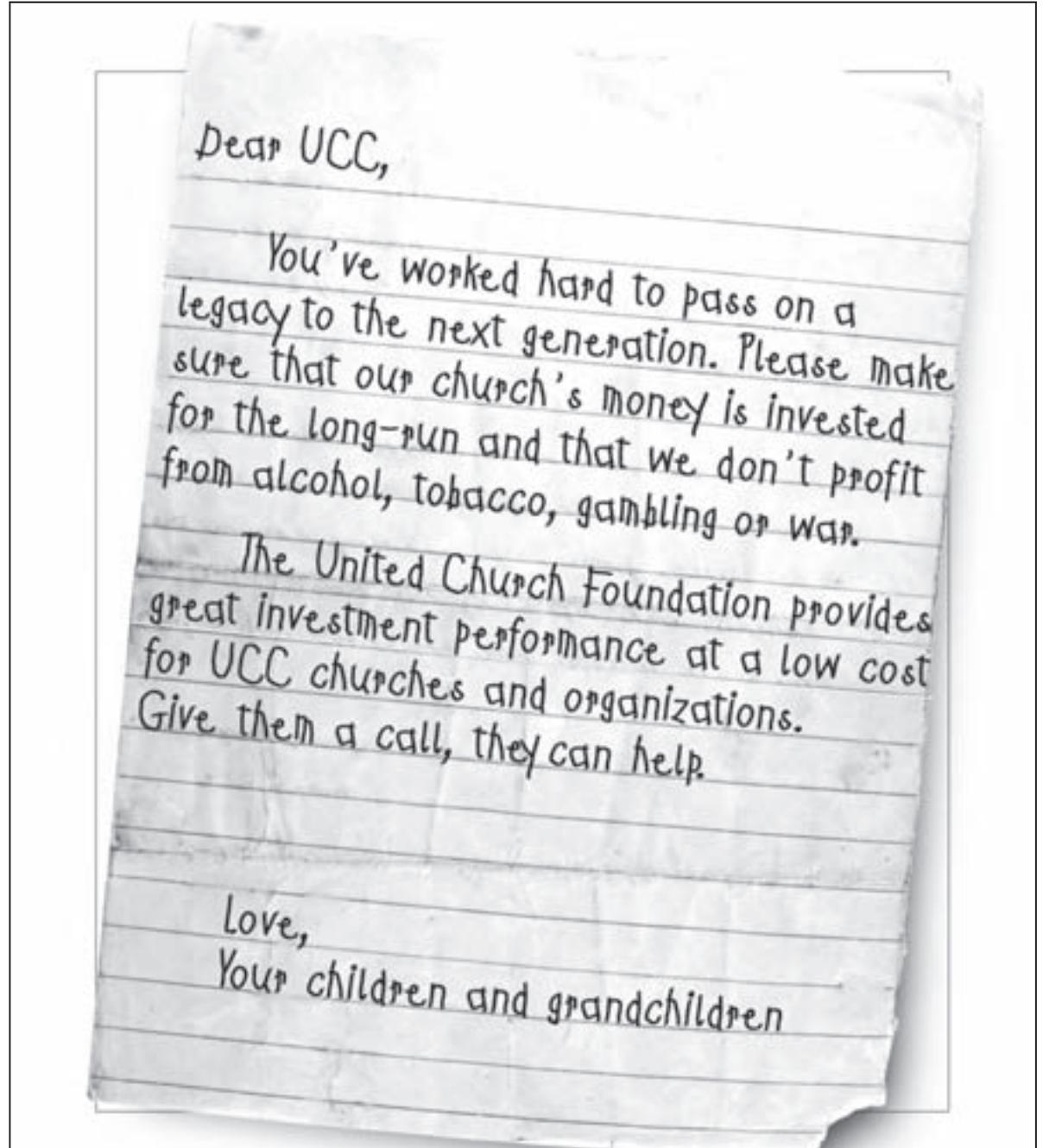
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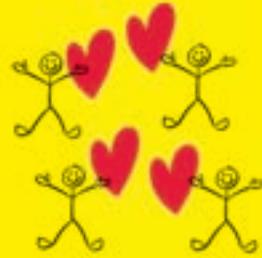
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BEYOND ALUMINUM CANS

Churches are learning, living the complexity of 'going green'

By Joanne Griffith Domingue

The Rev. Lindsay Fulmer and her congregation at **First Church of Christ (UCC) in Mansfield, Conn.**, did not set out to become a green church. They just wanted to be better stewards of creation. In 2004 they created environmental stewardship guidelines for the church and began doing one simple thing at a time.

Momentum grew. By 2006 they reviewed their guidelines and realized all they had done. "Hey, maybe we'd qualify as a green church," Fulmer says. In March 2006, in a special service, the Connecticut Conference recognized Fulmer's congregation as a Green Church, the first in a Conference of 248 churches.

"The Mansfield church really meets anything we would ask of a church to be a green church," says the Rev. Gordon Bates, chair of the UCC's national Environment and Energy Task Force, and a retired member of the Connecticut Conference staff. "They'd be *dark green*."

A ground swell of grass-roots concern for the care of creation is growing throughout the UCC, from New England to Hawaii.

"The church needs to join together to address the environment, especially climate change and global warming," says the Rev. John Thomas, the UCC's general minister and president. "There is also growing consensus across religious traditions."

On March 10, Southern Baptist leaders spoke out against global warming. Last September, Pope Benedict XVI challenged 500,000 worshippers to say "yes" to care for creation."

Thomas sees this is an opportunity for different faiths "to begin to come together around a shared concern, to develop partnerships and build bridges."

On April 8, the UCC is publishing "And Indeed it is Very Good," a pastoral letter on faith and the environment. It calls the UCC to "robust advocacy ... to become good stewards in God's ever evolving creation."

The pastoral letter, written by Thomas, as well as the other four members of the UCC's Collegium of Officers and members of the Environment and Energy Task Force, asks the church to respond with "its gifts of faith and nurture."

The document says some may want "to decrease our use of energy and fossil fuels." Others, the letter suggests, "may have a passion to address the placement of hazardous waste sites in the communities of people of color and/or poverty ... One thing is certain: for the love of the earth and one another, we may not remain indifferent ... Our faith is bold to respond."

A church goes green

Those who were at worship in the UCC church in Mansfield, Conn., on Feb. 24, already know about the four-minute shower. That was the "Green Tip" of the week in the church bulletin. "Unless you've been sprayed with a skunk and need a tomato juice bath, you can get mighty clean with a four-minute shower," advises the tip.

Green Tips, an educational tool that has been used for about two and a half years, has proven so popular that the church is considering gathering the ideas together and publishing a book.

Instead of paper products for coffee hour, the church bought mugs with the church's logo on them. That became a fund-raiser as people bought the mugs and gave them back to the church.

"The most effective thing we did was attend a series of six classes called 'This Old House of Worship,'" Fulmer says. The

“Being faith-filled and responsive stewards of God's creation, we are committed, through education and action, to the environmental well being of our planet.”

— church's green mission statement

classes, taught by Wilson Education Services based in Cheshire, Conn., offer an energy management program specifically for churches. A small team from Mansfield participated, joined by several other faith communities in the area. Each class was held in a different sanctuary allowing special needs of the different churches to be addressed.

"We found out there some very simple changes that were effective," Fulmer said. Put a fan in the sanctuary over the thermostat and keep it running at a low speed to circulate the hot air that rises. The savings is about \$400 per year on the heating costs versus the \$2 per month to keep the fan running at a low speed.

But some changes come with a big price tag, like insulating the ceilings or changing the furnace. So Mansfield is prioritizing its lists.

There's concern about the cost, Fulmer acknowledges. "But we recognize that we're a green church ... Those needs — to be more green — are a top priority. Down the road, to implement some of these things, we'd need a capital campaign. In the long run it will save money. But it will help the environment."

As Mansfield grew more green, church



Randy Varcho | iStockPhoto graphic

members began advocating for environmental issues and working to change public policy. A member of the congregation facilitated meetings on diesel-emission retrofitting of school buses with a state representative, Denise Merrill, chair of the house appropriations committee. Merrill later told the church that it was this small group of concerned citizens that compelled her to find the funds in the budget to buy the filters necessary to solve the problem, Fulmer says.

After being designated a green church, Mansfield adopted a Green Church Mission Statement.

"Being faith-filled and responsive stewards of God's creation," the statement reads, "we are committed, through education and action, to the environmental well being of our planet."

"God is not only still speaking," Fulmer says, "but earnestly calling us a people of faith to 'grow green.'"

The Rev. Davida Foy Crabtree, Connecticut Conference Minister, calls Mansfield "truly an extraordinary church."

Bates, the chair of the national task force, says, "Mansfield is a model for all of us, in Connecticut and across the UCC."

'LEED' by example

Sometimes this "old house of worship" cannot be saved. That was the case with **First Congregational UCC of Washington, D.C.** In planning their new building, members said this must be a green building, says Meg Maguire, a church member and chair of the site development task force.

So the church has worked to meet "LEED's standards." Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, a green building rating system, developed by the U.S. Green Building Council provides a set of standards for environmentally sustainable construction.

Instead of one big system, furnace and/or air conditioning, LEED advocates many small systems around a building. That allows for minimal loss from long ducts. "But it creates interesting architectural challenges," Maguire said.

LEED requires the use of natural light. So there will be lots of glass in the new church. And LEED mandates that materials in the new structure come from within a 500-mile radius of the construction. The church has a few exceptions, Maguire said. They are using some "exquisite double-glazed blue bricks

from California and a bronze screen from China as a window adornment.”

LEED also has demolition criteria. The church set a goal of recycling 90-95 percent of the material from the old church. All the metal, concrete and brick were recycled.

“We even recycled eight mature crape myrtle trees. They were dug up and balled and eight new owners were found,” Maguire says.

The Green Recycling Network made sure, as the old building was demolished, that anything with potential use would be used.

Community Forklift, a recovered building-material store in the Washington, D.C. area, salvaged all sorts of things from the building. “They took the pews,” Maguire says, “and the wood batten paneling.”

The church moved out of its building at the end of January 2007. It took a year to get the permits “to do the kind of demolition we wanted to do,” says the Rev. Barbara Brown Zikmund, a church member and retired president of Hartford Seminary. “We are doing a ‘green demolition.’”

“The organ is in storage for our new building. The windows are in storage to be sold... Our steel girders, copper pipes, aluminum railings, wood pews, exterior bricks and flagstone walkways are all being recycled. The building has been dying over the past 13 months...”

“It will live again, however, not only in our new building, but as recycled elements in many buildings. In essence this ‘body of Christ’ is donating its ‘organs’ for other buildings.”

“Now we have an orientation. What is the environmental impact, when we consider purchasing appliances, hiring contractors or buying things for coffee hour?”

— The Rev. Nancy Taylor, Sonoma, Calif.

An earth-care covenant

Those who ride their bikes to worship at **First Congregational UCC of Sonoma, Calif.**, located in the Napa Valley, are in for a treat.

The church school “kids leave notes on the bicycles,” says the Rev. Nancy Taylor, pastor. A note might say, “We know who you are, and you’re a rock star.”

Through its Earth Care Committee, the Sonoma church is encouraging people to drive less.

The church voted an Earth Care Covenant in December. Before formally adopting the covenant, the church was concerned for the environment, but in a more ad hoc way, Taylor says. “The intentions needed to be named and embraced.”

The covenant passed unanimously. Taylor was delighted by the ease of it. It’s as though people thought, “It’s a different way of doing things, but we like it.”

The covenant now provides a lens through which all decisions of the church will be made. Before, if a refrigerator was broken,

the problem was not necessarily evaluated with the environment in mind.

“Now we have an orientation. What is the environmental impact, when we consider purchasing appliances, hiring contractors or buying things for coffee hour? That has not happened before,” Taylor says.

The new covenant, it says, “will help the

EXCERPTS: ‘AND INDEED IT IS VERY GOOD,’ A UCC PASTORAL LETTER

“Our theological sense of place and the natural sciences reveal in startling, magnificent ways a profound relationship among living beings, the elements, and all matter of the universe.”

“The ecological order of living things demonstrates a beauty that inspires moral courage to respond to God still speaking through the processes of life in a mutually co-existing community.”

“We possess a reservoir of resources and creativity to respond with healing practices: socially, economically, environmentally, culturally, and in our ecumenical and interfaith partnerships.”

“The church must respond with its gifts of faith and nurture to work against recklessly negligent, greedy

or prejudicial use of the natural resources within our community.”

“We must, in this new moment of need, respond in the many ways we are called as individuals, churches and communities, to move forward as good stewards, worshipping God with our efforts.”

“For the love of the earth and one another, we may not remain indifferent. We are called to face the challenges, engage deeply and with hopeful attention that promises a time of deepening in all our communities.”

“God is still speaking, calling the earth from the rising sun to its setting. Indeed, we make bold to affirm that God is singing to creation, blessing each part to arise as it shines, and blessing the beauty of the earth.”

“AND INDEED IT IS VERY GOOD,” a UCC pastoral letter on faith and the environment, is available for personal use and congregational study. Download a copy and learn more about how your church can ‘go green’ at <ucc.org/earthcare>.



iStockPhoto graphic

church adopt sustainable living practices: making sure we are recycling all we can; developing landscaping that does not use water; lighting; how the church cleans; minimizing the use of air conditioning.”

In her personal life, Taylor finds it easier to make changes. She walks to church; she wears used clothing and buys local food. She tries not to be in the stream of commerce that travels a long way to market. These are major life changes for Taylor, who, before attending Harvard Divinity School, was a practicing attorney.

At the church, change is more difficult. Parts of the building are rented; a preschool is on site. “There are so many people to educate in a way that is not scolding. How slow the process needs to be to have it become a part of people’s hearts, to convey God’s love.”

The congregation is trying to go solar.

“The church wants to do it. Period,” Tay-

lor says. “We’re investigating it. There are grants out there. One member is talking to banks about a loan. We may get people to sponsor a solar panel.”

“Another Protestant church in town is also going solar. That’s a good incentive for us,” she says, before pausing. “Because we’d like to be first.”

Robust advocacy

Charles “Chuck” Burrows believes in putting the concepts of stewardship of creation and care for the earth into practice. He has been working for years on the restoration of the 1,000-acre Kawainui Marsh, the largest remaining wetland in Hawaii, which provides habitat for four of Hawaii’s endangered and endemic water birds. In 2006 Kawainui Marsh was named a “Wetland of International Importance.”

Burrows is a member of **Church of the Crossroads UCC in Honolulu** and also a member of the national UCC Environment and Energy Task Force.

In 1994, he founded a group to care for the balance of the earth, Hawaiians for Conservation of Native Eco-Systems. Today there are 2,000 members. Burrows, a retired science teacher with a masters degree in earth science, works with groups who come out to the marsh to help out and learn.

Volunteers remove non-native plants, replacing them with native plants. They pull weeds and spread mulch.

There is also historical significance to the marsh. Hundreds of years ago, Burrows says, this was the “breadbasket” of Oahu, with fields of taro and a huge aquaculture fishpond.

One day, 80 fourth graders came for service and learning. The next day, high school and college students arrived. An at-risk group of students visited, and women inmates also help.

Early in March, he met with a Buddhist principal who wants his students involved in the restoration. But the principal doesn’t want the students just to come out and work one day. The principal wants to make the work part of the curriculum.

Burrows also involves church groups in the marsh restoration. “It’s not just talking about it but doing something,” he says.

“Chuck is a wonderful presence in our church,” says his pastor, the Rev. Neal MacPherson. The church has a task force on energy and global warming as well as a mission team focused on the stewardship of creation. Every year, his church has an Earth Sabbath sermon.

MacPherson says his church has studied the theology of stewardship and care of creation for years. The church recently renovated some restrooms and installed lights that use sunlight, like a skylight, so that they do not need to use electricity during the day.

The church has had an energy audit and is working on the recommendations, “so we don’t leave such a fossil fuel imprint,” MacPherson says.

MacPherson believes in being proactive with legislative issues at both the state and federal level. “We need to look at the state consumption of energy, encourage solar and wind energy. We (the church) show up at demonstrations, and we write letters,” he says.

The church is making environmental changes step by step. “Once people get it into their outlook, it flows naturally. But it takes awhile.”

Joanne Griffith Domingue, a freelance journalist from San Jose, Calif., is a frequent contributor to United Church News.

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United Church Homes and Services (UCHS) is a not for profit organization affiliated with the Southern Conference of the United Church of Christ.

Even in Paris, refugees seek assistance and asylum

By W. Evan Golder

In February, when Tim Rose read the headlines, “Violence in Chad Intensifies,” and saw the bloody scenes from Chad on his television in a Paris suburb, he knew what he could expect in about six months.

Most of us can't even locate the French-speaking country of Chad on a world map, let alone pinpoint it as a land-locked, poverty-stricken country, nearly twice the size of Texas, just south of Libya and west of Sudan.

But Rose knows.

As a UCC missionary with Global Ministries, the combined overseas ministry of the UCC and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Rose is assigned to the Reformed Church of France to work in its program for refugees, primarily from French-speaking Africa.

From six years experience helping refugees from Cameroon, Togo, Zaire and Ivory Coast in the resettlement process, he knows that it takes about half a year before refugees from France's former African colonies can make their way across water and land to seek a new home in France, away from the death and destruction he's witnessing on TV.

“Those with means, who work for the government or for large corporations, will arrive here immediately, practically on the next plane,” he says. “They won't have any problem finding a place to stay or work to do.”

“But many of the rest, especially those with Protestant connections, probably will find their way to the Foyer in Aubervilliers.”

Vital Protestant ministry

A suburb of Paris, Aubervilliers is a depressed city of 70,000 located just north of the “City of Lights.” Although Aubervilliers once was a middle-class textile town, today, according to Rose, 80 percent of the people live in government-subsidized low income housing. More than half the population is made up of immigrants, mostly of African and Arab descent.

In 1929, the Foyer Protestant started as a small wooden church. Today its 30-year-old building sits in downtown Aubervilliers, a vital Protestant parish nearby to a centuries-old Catholic church and a communist City Hall. From a tiny office he shares tucked in the back of the church, Rose engages in parish ministry, prison ministry, youth ministry and refugee ministry.

“About a quarter of the persons I deal with have no papers,” he

says. “Many of these people aren't assimilating well, and I deal with many second-generation immigration problems: drugs, school drop-outs, petty crime, big crime, and so forth.”

Technically, it is very difficult to immigrate to France, he explains. “There are no national quotas, no lottery systems for letting people into the country,” he says. Even so, some 25- to 30,000 persons each year seek political asylum. Others arrive via student visas or marriage to French citizens or work visas if a corporation brings them in.

Diplomatic passport worthless

Some arrive legitimately, then suddenly find themselves stateless and without papers.

For example, 10 years ago Israel Komi Amageshie arrived in Paris on a diplomatic passport, in charge of protocol at the Togo embassy. Suddenly, a mini-civil war in Togo made him a man without a country. Aligned with Togo's prime minister, Amageshie lost his job when Togo's president won the power struggle. He was threatened with imprisonment if he returned to Togo.

His diplomatic passport worthless, he sought help from Tim Rose and the Foyer for himself, his wife and their two children. Twice over a three-and-a-half-year period Rose helped him apply for political asy-

lum — and twice they failed. In the meantime, he became a worship leader at the Foyer and active on the parish council. He prayed daily in the church.

When he couldn't work legally, he and his wife took what work they could get. He worked first as a security guard, then in a gas station; on the side he videotaped weddings and special occasions. His wife cleaned houses then worked as a home



Israel Komi Amageshie (l.), a refugee from Togo, with missionary Tim Rose

W. Evan Golder photo

health aid. When her client went into a nursing home, she became unemployed again.

Finally, with Rose's help Amageshie received a renewable one-year permit. Once he renews this, the next step is a 10-year permit, even though he would like to return to Togo.

During his absence, he has missed the funerals of his mother and his father and his wife has missed visiting her aging mother. Confirmation is a big event in Togo, but both his children were confirmed at the Foyer in France.

“I thank God every day that I'm here,” Amageshie says through an interpreter. “Faith makes your head strong. Faith is what got me through all this.”

Despite the language difference, he wants to make it clear that Tim Rose helped him a lot, physically, morally and financially.

'For us, this is normal'

Rose trained to be a teacher, but first served as a Global Ministries intern in Geneva and in Beirut and the Middle East. While interning in Beirut, one afternoon he was sitting with a Lebanese friend during the war between Israel and Hezbollah. Despite the sounds of explosions and gunfire punctuating their conversation, his friend seemed very relaxed. Rose was anything but.

“How can you be so calm?” Rose asked him.

“For us, this is normal,” his

friend replied.

“That sentence changed my life,” Rose explains. “For me, ‘normal’ was anything but what I was experiencing. I realized how privileged I had been as I was growing up. I knew then that I just couldn't go back to my old life, but that I wanted to do my little part in the world to try to make things better.”

When his internship ended and he decided to become a missionary, he was given a choice of serving in Nairobi, Fiji or Beirut. How glamorous, he thought, to be working in Fiji, on an island in the South Pacific.

Then he had second thoughts. “I felt as though God had led me to Lebanon, to experience this so that I could clearly hear God calling,” he says. So he stayed put in the Middle East.

Local churches and camps

Later this year, Rose will spend time speaking to UCC and Disciples churches and summer camps, telling of his years of experience assisting refugees. Worldwide, according to the 2007 World Refugee Survey, some 13.4 million refugees are homeless and seek asylum. Of these, only 69.4 thousand persons have been resettled.

Back in the United States, Rose will learn only from afar the fate of refugees from Chad arriving in

France. Next, wherever he is assigned, he is not worried.

His ministry in France has taught him that he, “a missionary from North Carolina, can feel right at home with

“I have learned that there are many different ways to look at the world, at Christianity, and at God,” Rose says, “and that other cultures' ways of seeing things may be just as valid as my own.”

Moroccans and Congolese, Algerians and Portuguese, Togolese and Spanish, Zairois and Italians — and oh, I almost forgot,” he laughs, “with French, as well.”

“I have learned that there are many different ways to look at the world, at Christianity, and at God,” he says, “and that other cultures' ways of seeing things may be just as valid as my own.”

LEARN MORE

To learn how your congregation can help resettle a refugee family, contact Mary Kuenning Gross, UCC executive for refugee and immigration ministries, 700 Prospect Ave., Cleveland, OH 44115; phone: 216/736-3212; email: <grossm@ucc.org>.

The Rev. W. Evan Golder is editor emeritus of United Church News. He visited France in February.

in the news people | places | things

CAPE COD CONVERSATIONS

This July, Craigville Colloquy to mark 25th year of theological exploration

By Andy Lang
For United Church News

The Craigville Colloquy, the UCC's only annual theological conference, will gather July 14-18 for a week-long exploration of the topic, "God's Shalom: Confronting the Many Faces of Violence." It is the colloquy's 25th anniversary.

Open to clergy and lay people of the UCC as well as other denominations, the colloquy format includes a

keynote presentation and invited papers, but most of the conversations take place small-groups, allowing each participant more freedom to contribute.

The first colloquy took place in 1984 to mark the 50th anniversary of the Barmen Declaration, a theological protest drafted by Karl Barth against Nazi encroachment on the German churches during the Third Reich.

Since then, the colloquy has explored the authority of the Bible,

Christology, the Trinity, sacraments, salvation, resurrection and Christian burial, and eschatology and the Christian Right. Challenged to relate theology to a world that urgently confronts the church with exploitation and war, the colloquy has also explored themes like justification and justice, Christian ethics and genetic technology, and the conflicted relationship between Islam and Christianity.

UCC presidents Avery Post, Paul Sherry and John H. Thomas have

spoken at past colloquies.

This year's presenters include the Rev. Lee C. Barrett III, professor of systematic theology at UCC-related Lancaster (Pa.) Theological Seminary; the Rev. Dayl Hufford, a licensed pastoral psychotherapist; the Rev. Rodney L. Peterson, executive director of the Boston Theological Institute; the Rev. William Herzog II, vice president for academic affairs and dean of the faculty for UCC-related Andover Newton Theological School

in Massachusetts; the Rev. Roberta Barr; and the Rev. Diane Kessler, former executive director of the Massachusetts Council of Churches.

The colloquy's location in an historic village near Craigville Beach is one of the attractions for participants.

The Craigville Conference Center is a ministry of the UCC's Massachusetts Conference.

Information about this year's program, including registration, is at <craigvillecolloquy.com>.



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FWC is an organization for ECOT members of the UCC – those who consider themselves Evangelical, Conservative, Orthodox, or Traditional.

GRANTS SUPPORT AD CAMPAIGN

Media with a Mission: Stillspeaking's radio ads airing in local markets

Seventeen UCC congregations have launched local radio advertising campaigns this spring, thanks in part to the Stillspeaking Ministry's most-recent round of "Media with a Mission" grants.

Grants totaling \$12,242 have been distributed to 13 grantees, representing 17 local churches. Each grant supports a plan by a local church or cluster or churches to purchase local radio advertising time sometime between March 10 (two weeks before Easter) and May 10 (Mother's Day).

The national ministry is providing a \$2 match for every \$3 that local entities commit to spend on Stillspeaking advertising.

"The combined purchases will reach more than 2 million listeners/viewers in regions from Maine to Montana, South Carolina to Oregon," says Gwen Thomas, assistant coordinator for the Stillspeaking Ministry in Cleveland. "We are thrilled to be partnering with our

local churches in order to more widely share the story of the UCC's extravagant welcome."

Two new 60-second radio ads — "Telephone Tree" and "Legal Copy" — were produced for the newest ad blitz. The spots have space at the end for local cus-

tomization.

Nationally, the UCC purchased 165 ad spots on Sirius Satellite Radio during a two-week, pre-Easter advertising blitz.

A second grant cycle deadline was set for March 31, after which more grants were expected to be approved. In all, the Stillspeaking Ministry plans to award \$30,000 in Media with a Mission grants this year. This is the third time that the national UCC ministry has offered ad-buying grants to local churches.

So far, grants have been awarded to Cathedral of Hope UCC in Dallas, Texas; Church of the Redeemer UCC in Hershey, Pa.; Colonial Park UCC in Harrisburg, Pa.; Edgewood United Church in East Lansing, Mich.; First and

St. Stephen's UCC in Baltimore, Md.; Peace Congregational UCC

coln, Neb.; UCC Congregational in Plainfield, N.J.; United Christian Church in Miles City, Mont.; United Church of Paducah in Kentucky; University Congregational, UCC in Missoula, Mont.; and Williston-West Church UCC in Portland, Maine.

"The more we work in partnership, the more we strengthen the name recognition and message of the entire UCC, as well as our respective local churches."

— Gwen Thomas

"Our hope is to make it more feasible for local churches to purchase airtime that further lifts up our shared belief in a Stillspeaking God," Thomas says. "The more we work in partnership, the more we strengthen the name recognition and message of the entire UCC, as well as our respective local churches."

in Clemson, S.C.; Penbrook UCC in Harrisburg, Pa.; Pleasant Hill Community UCC in Tennessee; St. Paul's UCC in Mechanicsburg, Pa.; St. Paul UCC in Lin-

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'Tents of Hope' raise awareness, connect churches to crisis in Darfur

Raising awareness, advocacy and money for the crisis in Darfur, Sudan — that's what the Tents of Hope are all about.

More than five years ago, in February 2003, two rebel groups in the Darfur region of Sudan launched an uprising against the government. Darfur, about the size of Texas, is in northeastern Africa and the people were frustrated by poverty and neglect.

Sudan's central government in Khartoum responded with a "scorched-earth campaign," according to the website <genocideindarfur.org>, killing not only rebel militias but also more than 200,000 innocent civilians. Another 2.5 million people have been displaced from their homes, most living in tents in the desert.

"A small peacekeeping force run by the African Union is in place," adds the website, "but it is largely unsupported by the rest of the world."

Enter the churches and Tents of Hope.

Begun by Tim Nonn, a member of **Petaluma (Calif.) UCC**, Tents of Hope is supported by the UCC and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). One Great Hour of Sharing is one of the agencies Tents of Hope uses to contribute to Sudan relief.

Tents of Hope has taken hold in more than 100 U.S. communities. Coalitions of students, inter-faith groups, and retired persons, for example, have come together to buy

tents for \$500 each, paint them with symbols of hope and display them prominently before taking them to Washington, D.C., for a national event on the Mall in November.

"These tents ... symbolize hope, connecting us with displaced persons in Darfur, and reminding us that we are all one human family and responsible for one another's safety and well being."

— Susan Sanders
One Great Hour of Sharing

In **Bakersfield, Calif.**, **First Congregational UCC** held a day-long "Ode to Africa" educational fundraiser for humanitarian aid for Darfur. The event featured painting a tent, a "fair trade" bazaar, food, dancing, and a discussion of the book, "A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier."

In **Waterloo, Ill.**, members of

St. Paul UCC had letters to their Members of Congress available for signatures alongside their Tent of Hope display. They also served a refugee style meal of millet porridge and raised \$1,700 for Darfur refugee humanitarian efforts.

At the UCC's Church House in downtown Cleveland, UCC staff members took part of their lunch hour to paint a Tent of Hope.

"It was an act of solidarity with others who are displaced due to war and violence," says the Rev. Craig Hoffman of the UCC's Financial Development Ministry. "Painting helped us express our feelings through the beauty of art."

"These tents are important symbols," says Susan Sanders, who administers the UCC's One Great Hour of Sharing offering. "They symbolize loss of their homes by millions of people in Darfur. But they also symbolize hope, connecting us with displaced persons in Darfur, and reminding us that we are all one human family and responsible for one another's safety and well being."



National UCC staff members Mary Kuenning Gross (l.), Diane Dicken and Craig Hoffman paint a Tent of Hope during their lunch hour.

W. Evan Golder photo

LEARN MORE

Go to <globalministries.org>, <tentsofhope.org>, <savedarfur.org> or <standnow.org>.

Contact: Derek Duncan, United Church of Christ, 700 Prospect Ave., Cleveland, OH 44115; phone: 216-736-3220; e-mail: <duncand@ucc.org>; or Susan Sanders, 216-736-3210; <sanderss@ucc.org>.

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Lane C. McGaughy, Atkinson Professor Emeritus of Religious & Ethical Studies at Willamette University in Salem, Oregon
The American Bible
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THOMAS' TERM TO END IN 2009

Search process begins for next UCC General Minister and President

By Jeffrey Woodard
For United Church News

Although 20 months remain in John Thomas' second term as the UCC's general minister and president, the official search for his successor has begun.

"It's an exciting time for our denomination to be engaged in this search process," said the Rev. Henry Simmons, search committee chair and pastor of **St. Albans UCC in Queens, N.Y.** "We see a great immediate future not without its challenges but an opportunity for a new era for mission and ministry."

Due to term limits set forth in the UCC Constitution and Bylaws, Thomas' service as GMP will end in October 2009 after his successor is named four months earlier at General Synod 27 in Grand Rapids, Mich.

First elected in 1999 to serve a partial two-year term, Thomas has gone on to serve two full four-year terms in office.

The 14-member committee — comprising a widely diverse range across lines of age, gender, race and sexual orientation — held its first meeting Feb. 20 in Cleveland. The group reviewed the GMP position description and looked at ways to streamline it slightly, said the Rev. Lynne Simcox,

staff to the Search Committee. "They looked at terms of the constitution of the UCC, and at the General Minister and President's office and the way it fits into the structure of the church."

The committee considered materials used in previous searches and brainstormed about the experience, characteristics and abilities required for the position, said Simcox. To qualify, candidates must hold ordained ministerial status in the UCC or have ordained ministerial partner standing.

“One never knows who the Spirit will call. If you feel called, apply.”

— The Rev. Lynne Simcox

Other initial actions by the committee included discussion of advertising options for the position; the nature of the application form; development of a timeline for the search process; and setting up dates for the next meetings. In addition, Simcox said, the committee began to formulate a checklist, or grid, of qualities and characteristics that will help to facilitate identification of viable candidates. "The process is a way to sift through, on paper, what the committee is looking for."

Even though application forms

likely won't be ready for distribution until late April or early May, Simcox encouraged interested applicants to begin updating their ministerial profiles. However, the application process will request additional information and attachments. "We would welcome applications beginning the first of June," she said.

If persons have questions, or would like to suggest names of potential candidates (their contact information is also requested and appreciated), send to <gmpsearch@aol.com>.

Applications will be accepted June 1 to Sept. 1. The committee will then review the diversity of the pool and, if necessary, said Simcox, the search process will be extended to ensure greater diversity. "Hopefully, they will have been proactive enough in the invitation and encouragement process that they'll have a good pool by Sept. 2."

At that point, the committee will decide which candidates it would like to interview by phone. "Those interviews should be completed in November," said Simcox, "and hopefully, in February, they will have final interviews with candidates and present their impressions to the governing boards of UCC in June 2009."

"One never knows who the Spirit will call," said Simcox. "If you feel called, apply."



The Rev. John Thomas (r.) is shown with former UCC president the Rev. Paul Sherry in this 1995 photo. Thomas then served as the UCC's ecumenical officer.

W. Evan Golder photo

THE SEARCH COMMITTEE IS COMPRISED OF the Rev. Phyllis Baum, pastor of **Hayshire UCC in York, Pa.**; Andrea Cano, exploration minister, Latino Ministries/Central Pacific Conference and member of **Ainsworth UCC in Portland, Ore.**; Courtney Clayton (scribe), student at Princeton Theological Seminary and member of **Mt. Zion Congregational UCC in Cleveland**; Sachi Fujita, placement coordinator/Hawaii Conference and member of **Waipahu UCC in Honolulu**; Michael Goze of **All Nations Indian UCC in Minneapolis** and chairperson, Council for American Indian Ministry; the Rev. Linda Jaramillo, executive minister for Justice and Witness Ministries and member of **Archwood UCC in Cleveland**; Gayle Klopp, co-executive of Charles Hall Youth Services, an agency of the UCC Council for Health and Human Service Ministries, and a member of **Bismark (N.D.) UCC**; the Rev. Ron Parker, retired Central Rocky Mountain Regional Minister of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and a member of Central Christian Church (DOC) in Denver; Kathleen Plumb of Minneapolis and member of **Robbinsdale (Minn.) UCC**; Phil Porter of Oakland, Calif., and member and minister of art and communication at **First Congregational UCC in Berkeley, Calif.**; the Rev. Riess Potterveld, president of UCC-related Lancaster Theological Seminary and member of **First Reformed UCC in Lancaster, Pa.**; the Rev. David Ruhe, senior minister of **Plymouth Congregational UCC in Des Moines, Iowa**; the Rev. Gary Schulte, New Hampshire Conference Minister and member of **First Congregational UCC in Pembroke, N.H.**; and the Rev. Henry T. Simmons (chairperson), pastor of **St. Albans UCC in New York**.

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Western Springs, a bedroom community located 17 miles west of Chicago, was recently ranked by *Business Week* second in a list of 50 best places to raise children.

Send resumes to Brian Clarke at brianclarke@kionline.com. www.wscongo.org

Kobia, leader of World Council of Churches, to step down

[ENI] — The general secretary of the World Council of Churches, the Rev. Samuel Kobia, has decided he will not seek a second term as head of the world's biggest Christian grouping.

"Kobia made his intentions known ... stating personal reasons for his decision not to seek a second term," the WCC announced on Feb. 18 after almost nine hours of deliberations behind closed doors by its main governing body, the central committee.

"The central committee received this news with regret but accepts the decision of the general secretary," said WCC moderator, the Rev. Walter Altmann, in a statement.

The WCC committee was to consider an extension to his current term which ends on Dec. 31, 2008.

The WCC said the central committee had approved the appointment of a search committee for a new general secretary. Election of a new general secretary will come at the next central committee meeting in Sept. 2009, it stated.

Kobia was elected in August 2003 to lead the Geneva-based WCC, which now has 349 member churches, representing 560 million Christians worldwide, including the UCC. The Roman Catholic Church is not a member but has representatives on some WCC bodies.

Before the Feb. 13-20 central committee meeting, Bishop Martin Hein, a member of the WCC governing body from the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), said the council was failing to make

its presence felt sufficiently in the world. He suggested in an interview with the German Protestant news agency that the WCC had been unable to develop "visions and perspectives that are able to be communicated," and he said that Kobia was traveling too much outside Geneva.

The news agency also reported that the WCC had removed from its website details of a doctorate Kobia had received from a non-accredited institution, Fairfax University in the United States.

Born in Kenya in 1947, Kobia is an ordained minister in the Methodist Church in Kenya. Before becoming WCC general secretary, he was director and special representative for Africa on the staff of the WCC. From 1999 to 2002, he was director of WCC programs dealing with theological and social issues.

Kobia formerly served as WCC executive secretary for Urban Rural Mission, and as general secretary of the National Council of Churches of Kenya, and helped reorganize the Zimbabwe Christian Council after independence. He chaired peace



Kobia

talks for Sudan in 1991, and in 1992 headed Kenya's National Election Monitoring Unit. He returned to Geneva in 1993 to become executive director of the WCC's unit on justice, peace and creation.

When he took the helm of the WCC in January 2004, Kobia was the first African elected to serve in the post.

Kobia is the sixth WCC general secretary, and the second Methodist to hold the position. Previous general secretaries were: W. A. Visser't Hooft, from the Netherlands (1948-1966); Eugene Carson Blake, from the United States (1966-1972); Philip Potter, from Dominica, West Indies (1972-1984); Emilio Castro, from Uruguay (1985-1992); and Konrad Raiser, from Germany (1993 to 2003).

REMEMBERED

The Rev. Ray Gibbons, who served for 25 years as director of the UCC's Council for Christian Social Action and its predecessor agency in the Congregation Christian Churches in America, died on March 18. He was 105 and was the oldest-ever resident to live at UCC-related Pilgrim Place in Claremont, Calif.

Gibbons, considered a pioneer in fostering social action by Christian congregations, is credited for developing and leading programs for racial, economic and social justice in the UCC. A passionate advocate for the poor, he worked to develop non-profit housing opportunities for low- to middle-income households. He also served as a leader in the National Council of Churches, serving on its general board and chairing multiple committees and departments, including the Committee on Civic and Political Life. He retired in 1969.

"Since every important public issue is exceedingly controversial, the question is whether the church is going to deal with important issues or not. But that's what God deals with," Gibbons said in a 1964 press release in support of federal civil rights legislation.

A graduate of Oberlin College in Ohio and Union Theological Seminary in New York, Gibbons also held a masters degree from Columbia University's Teacher's College. He served congregations in Maine and Massachusetts before beginning denominational work.

RESIGNED

South Dakota Conference Minister Gene Miller resigned his position on March 8, following a fitness review in which his ministerial standing was suspended for two years and pending successful completion of a "growth plan."

"This action was taken with regret and with thanks for Gene's years of ministry among us," wrote Charles R. Frieberg, chair of the Conference's board of directors, in a letter to churches dated March 10.

In January, Miller was asked to take a leave of absence while the Conference looked into an alleged non-criminal complaint against Miller. At the request of the South Dakota Conference, the Western Association of the Missouri Mid-South Conference conducted Miller's fitness-for-ministry review.

The Rev. Lynne Simcox has been appointed Acting Conference Minister. However, the board has appointed a search committee to begin searching for an Interim Conference Minister, who will serve for a minimum of 18 months, Frieberg said.

APPOINTED

Susan Sanders, minister and team leader for the UCC's global sharing of resources ministry, has joined the board of directors of Heifer International, representing the UCC.

Founded in 1944, Heifer International — supported by many local UCC churches — works to end world hunger and protect the earth. Through use of livestock and training, Heifer has helped seven million families in more than 125 countries improve their quality of life and move toward greater self-reliance.

Sanders, who is the UCC's administrator of the One Great Hour of Sharing offering, also represents the denomination on the boards of Church World Service and the Foods Resource Bank. She is a member of Pilgrim Congregational UCC in Cleveland

PASTORAL CHANGES

Abbott, Mary N. to Malletts Bay Cong. UCC, Colchester, VT.
Bartlett, Harvey Bradford, VT to Cong./United Brownington/Irasburg, VT.
Caldwell, C. Michael to Cong. UCC, East Corinth, VT.
Coy, Walter A. Canfield, OH, to First UCC, Warren, OH.
Dollar, Penny to Emmanuel UCC, Mountaintop, PA.
Elnes, Eric E. Scottsdale, AZ to Countryside Community UCC, Omaha, NE.
Frische-Mouri, Linda L. Indianapolis, IN to Evangelical UCC, Shelbyville, IN.
Hackenberg, Rachel G. New Berlin, PA to Grace UCC, Lancaster, PA.
Hinckley, Charlene D. to Lower Saucon UCC, Hellertown, PA.
Kone, Donna K. to Clague Road UCC, North Olmsted, OH.
Kuhn, Kathryn L. Lancaster, PA to Church of Apostles UCC, Lancaster, PA.
Porter, Thomas J. Hartland, WI to interim, Plymouth Cong. UCC, Burlington, WI.
Rinear, Kathleen L. Waupun, WI to interim, Saron UCC, Sheboygan Falls, WI.
Schenk, Leslie M. Cong. UCC, Conrath/Ladysmith, WI.
Schlieter, David L. Mineral Point, WI to New Horizon UCC, Farmington, WI.
Smith, Gregory K. to interim, First Cong., UCC, DePere, WI.
Steward, Lorri A. Plymouth, WI to Ebenezer UCC, Sheboygan, WI.
Sudemeyer, Paul A. Sterling, IL to Faith UCC, Milwaukee, WI.
Dutoit, Francois J. Montrose, CO to First Cong. UCC, Des Plaines, IL.
Grim, Larry W. Hacienda Heights, CA to First Cong. UCC, Santa Ana, CA.
Heil, Marcia J. Mendon, IL to St. Paul & St. Luke/Hope UCC, Alma/Cochrane, WI.
Hoover, Matthew S. to Trinity UCC, Mercersburg, PA.
Jarrett, Laura R. Jamaica Plain, MA to First UCC, Somerville, MA.
Jewell, John P. to interim, Cong. UCC, Brookfield, WI.
Kuhn, Linda J. to interim, Union Cong. UCC, Waupun, WI.
Landin, Kenneth C. East Falmouth, MA to Original UCC, Wrentham, MA.
Miller, Gail L. Maynard, MA to Union UCC, Groton, MA.
Peck, James C. to Cong. UCC, Chico, CA.
Seater, Robert P. Farmington, WI to retirement.
Werley, David to Christ (Little Moore) UCC, Danielson, PA.

Pastoral changes are provided by the UCC's Parish Life and Leadership Ministry.

CLERGY DEATHS

Arnold, William J., 83, 1/12/2008	Irish, William A., 82, 2/15/2008
Bench, Robert E., 90, 2/9/2008	Kriete, Bruce G., 76, 1/17/2008
Beyer, Fred, 94, 2/24/2008	Rudy, Walter L., 77, 1/29/2008
Bremer, Calvin H., 84, 1/30/2008	Slater, Arnold, 102, 1/31/2008
Fitzpatrick, Thomas M., 90, 2/3/2008	Solly, William H., 93, 2/26/2008
Gabler, Karl A., 74, 2/11/2008	Zillig, Leo D., 81, 2/20/2008
Heckendorn, Ray J., 78, 1/20/2008	Zink, J.W., 85, 12/22/2007

Information on clergy deaths is provided by the UCC's Pension Boards.

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Care circles energize members' experience of God

The "care circles" at **Garden of Grace UCC in Columbia, S.C.**, are small groups that meet twice-monthly on weeknights.

Originally, the groups — led either by lay leaders or Associate Pastor Candace Chellew-Hodge — followed a common curriculum. But as each Circle gelled as a group, their unique needs and visions began to take form.

While one circle is geared towards families with children, another group might choose a book to study and discuss. For Chellew-Hodge, what

“ I have the privilege of sitting in rooms with incredible people, hearing incredible stories about God.”

— The Rev. Candace Chellew-Hodge

started as an innocent book discussion quickly transformed into discussing some issues that really got a few of the members squirming uncomfortably in their seats.

“I guess I still miss seminary, where you can sit around and talk about your beliefs and nobody says, ‘That means you’re not a Christian!’ You were trying to seek that understanding and ask those hard questions and not get kicked out of the faith!”

Some in Chellew-Hodge’s care circle fell away, and she saw a new need emerging in the group that remained. Chellew-Hodge says the group good-naturedly referred to themselves as “The Heretic Group.”

“But we figured we couldn’t be the only ones who were struggling with these questions about our faith,” Chellew-Hodge says. So she introduced the “Living the Questions” series, a 21-week series of video and discussion developed by two United Methodist ministers in

Phoenix, Ariz.

“It’s been an amazing experience,” says Chellew-Hodge. “It gives a place where people can come and express their doubts or questions and not feel some judgment will be made against them for the place in their faith where they are. We’re all on that path somewhere.”

Chellew-Hodge says the care circles are gradually changing the dynamic of the congregation. “[Parishioners] come to church on Sunday morning and want to hear the Word of God from the preacher. As a pastor, I want to know what the Word from the Lord is from you! Because God isn’t just talking to me.”

At a recent Care Circle meeting, Chellew-Hodge and the group tackled the questions about the Bible, and she prepared herself for some thought-provoking discussion.

“Sometimes we give the Bible to people and say, ‘Read it,’ without any further instructions. Or we preach from it without context. So you get people sitting around the table saying, ‘What do you mean the disciples maybe didn’t write the gospels? What do you mean perhaps the crucifixion accounts aren’t eyewitnesses?’” says Chellew-Hodge. “What do you make of all the years of councils and theologies laid on top of the Bible? How do you sort through it, and what does it mean to you after that?”

“We have a very conservative fellow in our class. We’re saying things about this book he’s held dear that he’s never heard before. This is rocking his world! Much to his credit, he’s hanging in there.”

Chellew-Hodge is energized by hearing the stories, hearing the ways God is working in people’s lives.

“I have the privilege of sitting in rooms with incredible people, hearing incredible stories about God,” she says. “[Care circles] are a way people can feel that their experience of God matters. And their experience of God is important ... and worthy of sharing.”

‘Lay Academy’ builds capacity, energy for ministry

The Wisconsin Conference’s successful Lay Academy, currently in its 14th year, has hit a chord among faithful Christians in the UCC who are searching for more meaning and understanding to round out their faith journeys.

The central course of study, “Faith Foundations,” is a two-year program consisting of five weekends per year, and has proven to be the popular and consistently attended.

“I think there is a deep hunger,” says the Rev. Gail O’Neal, Associate Conference Minister. “All Christians are hungry to grow deeper in faith and to study the Bible. I think the UCC has a particular willingness to learn and to discuss, to bring their doubts to the table and to explore together what it means to be the body of Christ.”

The Lay Academy courses are held at the Conference Center in DeForest, and attendance is growing steadily. What makes the courses unique, says O’Neal, is that many of them are taught by professors from seminaries, such as UCC-related Chicago, United, and Eden, as well as UCC-related Pacific School of Religion.

“People are amazed to have this kind of access,” says O’Neal. “It’s a little intimidating to think a seminary professor who is a scholar in the New Testament is going to be teaching these things.”

O’Neal says most students are surprised to find out that the professors are humorous, knowledgeable and approachable. By bringing in professors, or ministers who are dynamic teachers in their area of expertise, the Confer-

ence is able to offer something that would be hard to duplicate in a Adult Education hour at a local church.

Besides Faith Foundations, the Lay Academy delves into further topics for those who want even more. There is a one-year study called Lay Leadership Skills, for those who are interested in being a church moderator, or Sunday School Superintendent; another year of study is called Lay Ministry Skills, covering preaching and teaching, pastoral care, administration and worship.

The Rev. Chris Myers, pastor of **First Congregational UCC in River Falls, Wis.** has had 13 church members attend the Lay Academy, and he says his whole congregation reaps the benefits. “They come back and they understand the Christian story in a deeper way than before they participated. They understand the United Church of Christ in a much better capacity.

“It’s hard being the solo pastor in a congregation of 550,” says Myers. “But when you’ve got these Lay Academy people, they are like missionaries. They lead Bible studies, they do Habitat for Humanity projects, and small group faith formation ministries. They’re more excited about church life and their faith.”

O’Neal sees the contagious spirit of the Lay Academy spreading even further. “Some pastors are sending teams of people to build energy and excitement locally. They bring that back and then they get things done! Or at least they understand a little bit about what the pastor’s doing, and how to talk about stewardship and evangelism. They see a bigger picture,” she says. “And they see a wider church.”

Lay ministries empower church members

Edwards Congregational UCC, located in Davenport, Iowa, draws on the five different communities that make up the Quad Cities flanking the banks of the Mississippi River. It’s because of these geographics, explains the Rev. Katherine Mulhern, that the Edwards congregation has to intentionally build community from the inside out. “We have no built-in basis community here,” she says of the Quad Cities metropolitan area, with a population upwards of 250,000 people. “Our kids don’t all go to the same schools. There aren’t as many places of overlap in the community.”

Two lay-led care ministries at Edwards has played an integral part of keeping the congregation connected. Lyle Stratton, a National Certified Counselor, serves on staff as the church’s Care Giving Coordinator. He primarily leads two groups at Edwards: Caregivers and CareNet.

“Caregivers is a group of 15 volunteers,” Stratton explains. “Those 15 individuals do hospital and homebound visits, and also visit nursing homes. They help out with funeral luncheons, and they meet once a month to discuss an in-touch list: people to follow up on a regular basis.”

The second group, CareNet, divides the congregation into families, each with a CareNet coordinator. That coordinator is responsible for calling those families every six weeks or so, just to keep in touch.

“People who may not be involved directly in church activities still feel a connection because of the CareNet volunteer,” says Stratton. “If the families or the individuals they contact

are experiencing any life transition difficulties, then the CareNet volunteer can be involved in coordinating support type of assistance to those individuals, like providing a meal, transportation, or referral to social service resources.”

Stratton says the CareNet and Caregiving Ministries have helped over the past few years, since the God is Still Speaking advertising campaign infused some significant growth into the church.

As the church grew, so did the Caregiving Ministry. Stratton says that the Caregiving is a cross-generational focus, including the Christian education children in making get-well cards, and knitters who have started a successful Prayer Shawl ministry.

“[The ministry] helps in terms of reducing the statistical loss, the people who gradually fall away from the church, for whatever reason,” says Stratton. “And it spreads the responsibility for caring, so that the staff doesn’t get burned out trying to keep up with everything.”

“The best part? I think what it does is empowers the lay members of the congregation to really get involved in pastoral care and the joy of pastoral care,” says Mulhern. “It makes them much more of a partnership between me and the congregation.”

“Everybody’s on board,” says Stratton. “Everybody’s involved in spreading the blessings around.”