



a publication of the
United Church of Christ
Vol. XXV, No. 2
April | May 2009
Section A



inside
3^A
**CALLED
TO LEAD**

*New York minister up for
UCC exec post.*

6^A
**NOT AN
OUTSIDER**

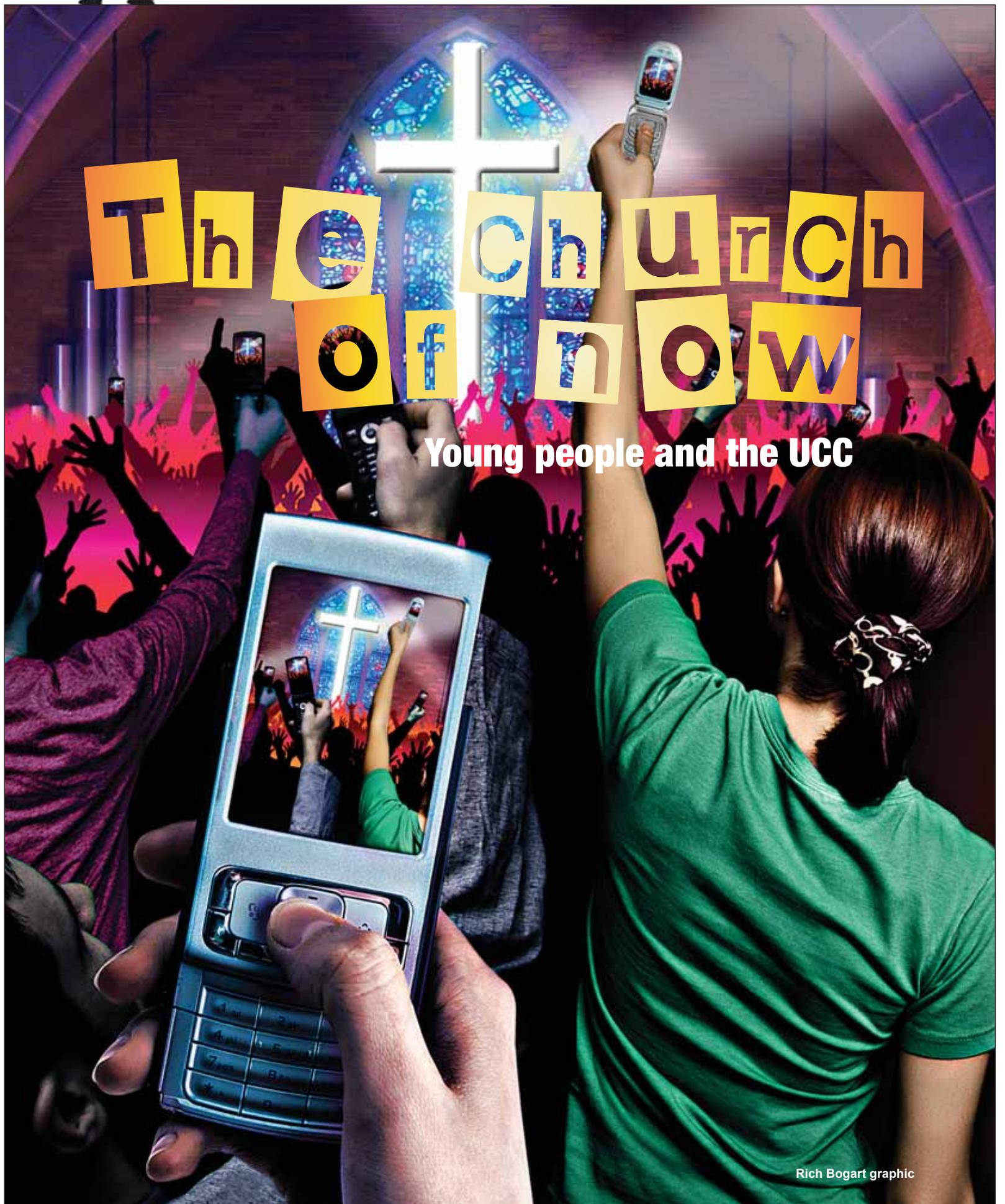
*Why it's important to be
inclusive.*

11^A
**EARLY BIRD
SPECIALS**

*Pre-Synod events promise
full plate of goodies.*

13^A
**THAT YO'
MOMMA?**

*Don't trash-talk these 'Bad
Girls of the Bible.'*



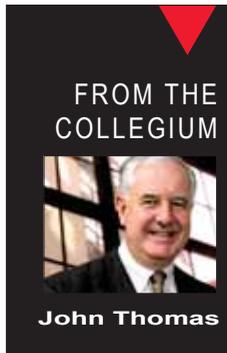
**The Church
of Now**

Young people and the UCC

Rich Bogart graphic



Young people guide us toward a vibrant future



FROM THE COLLEGIUM

John Thomas

My mother's memorial service in February brought me back to my childhood church in Stamford, Conn., the church she had joined in 1928. We sat in the sanctuary where I was baptized, confirmed and ordained, and met friends in the parlor where the church family had watched me grow up.

Here I sang in the children's choir, played in the bell choir, led youth Sunday worship, participated

in the Christmas pageants, helped teach Sunday school, led the leadership team of Pilgrim Fellowship and joined in a ministry to inner city kids.

It was in this church that I watched the congregation debate the merits of the United Church of Christ union in 1957, heard them struggle over participation in civil rights efforts around fair housing initiatives in the 1960s and shared in the difficult debates over the church's response to the Vietnam War in the late '60s and early 1970s.

I have often told people that this congregation cherished its young people, expected us to lead and equipped us for that leadership. Several in my generation were ordained; many others offer leadership in other ways in the church.

Two couples from my early years were at the service for my mother. Ray Shoup, along with his wife, Jan, served during my adolescence as the pastor of this church. He played a large part in my decision to prepare for the ministry and later, during my time at Yale, offered me the opportunity to do my field work with him at this new congregation. He and Jan opened their home to many of us for study, for fellowship, for laughter.

Ralph and Elaine Murray joined the church as a young couple and soon became advisors to the Pilgrim Fellowship. They were such role models and encouragers! Ray and Jan, Ralph and Elaine, and others embodied the extravagant welcome that is at the heart of our church. They courageously prodded me and others to engage the big issues of our day, sometimes in the face of opposition from others. They displayed a deep faith and piety centered in scripture and prayer.

Many of us who lead in various settings of the United Church of Christ can remember with affection and gratitude a Ray or Jan, a Ralph or Elaine. With intentionality they set us on a course toward leadership. They helped us discover and use our gifts. They loved us toward maturity. They were our mentors and they became our friends.

This issue of *United Church News* focuses on the critical issue of leadership development for the United Church of Christ, and on the needs and gifts of youth and young adults in our midst. There is no more important task for us if we are to have a vibrant future.

My visit "home" earlier this year was not just a precious and poignant trip down memory lane. It was a time to be challenged to be the kind of church that nurtured me and others. How do we, today, cherish our young people? How do we communicate our expectation that they will lead? How do we equip them for leadership today, and for tomorrow?

As you read this issue, give thanks for the Ray or Jan, the Elaine or Ralph who shaped your life and gave it direction. Even more, consider how you can become a person like that for young people today.

The Rev. John Thomas is general minister and president of the UCC.

|| How do we, today, cherish our young people?"

YOUNG CLERGY MIDWEST REGION EVENT SET

The Great Lakes Region of UCC Conferences has announced a young clergy and seminarian's conference to be held April 27-30 in Chicago.

"The Midwest Region Young Clergy Event: Imagining Church" offers young clergy and seminarians an opportunity to "see visions and dream dreams" about the future of the UCC.

- The venue for the event is the Canticle Conference and Retreat Center near DePaul University.

- Featured speaker Doug Pagitt is founder of the Solomon's Porch Christian Community in Minneapolis and a central voice in the "emergent" Christian conversation.

- Organizers have invited all young clergy and seminarians to the event, regardless of location or their affiliation with the UCC.

- Cost is \$285 for a single room, \$225 for a double room and \$110 for commuters — scholarships are available. More information and registration materials can be obtained from the Rev. Tisha Brown at 608/836-1455 or <hope@madisonchristiancommunity.org>.

FIRST 'MEDIA WITH A MISSION' GRANTS AWARDED

The Stillspeaking Ministry awarded its first round of 2009 Media with a Mission grants on Feb. 20, totaling \$9,600. Ten congregations in six states received monies to support local ad purchases promoting their UCC identity and Stillspeaking initiatives.

Local Churches or groups of churches who embrace the message of the Stillspeaking Ministry and want to extend their invitation via radio, TV or print advertising are eligible for the grants. Maximum awards will not exceed \$2,000 in a calendar year for individual churches, \$4,000 for groups of churches.

Since 2006, Media with a Mission has awarded more than \$100,000 to 137 churches in 32 states. The outreach made possible by these grants has collectively reached more than 7 million people. Grants totaling \$40,000 are available in 2009. Please visit <ucc.org/god-is-still-speaking> for grant updates and application guidelines.

FRANKLINTON CENTER TO HOST TALK ON RACE

The faith community's work in dealing with issues of justice, race, and racism is always an intense conversation. Today, as perhaps in no other period in U.S. history, this unique time requires us to face our own questions about the necessity, relevance and effectiveness of the faith community's response to individual racism.

Franklinton Center at Bricks, a UCC conference and retreat site in eastern North Carolina, is continuing to host such conversations. The next will be held on April 6-7. This is part of the Center's work with Justice and Witness Ministries of the UCC.

Leading the facilitated conversation will be the Rev. Bernice Powell-Jackson of the World Council of Churches and the Rev. George Reed, Executive Director of the N.C. Council of Churches. They will



UNITED CHURCH NEWS



THE REV. J. BENNETT GUESS Publisher

THE REV. GREGG BREKKE Editor

THE REV. W. EVAN GOLDER Editor Emeritus

RANDY VARCHO Design Editor

CONNIE LARKMAN Advertising Manager

BARB POWELL Business Manager

DAN HAZARD Web Design Editor

UNITED CHURCH NEWS (USPS 0764-070) is published bi-monthly by the Proclamation, Identity and Communication Ministry, Office of General Ministries, United Church of Christ, for members of the United Church of Christ. United Church News is a member of Associated Church Press and the Religion Communicators Council. United Church News encourages the reprint of any non-copyrighted articles. Please credit United Church News and send the editor a copy. Periodicals postage rates paid at Cleveland, Ohio, and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER Send address changes to United Church News, P.O. Box 226625, Dallas, TX 75222-6625.

EDITORIAL OFFICES are located at 700 Prospect Ave., Cleveland, OH 44115-1100. Telephone 1-866-822-8224 ext. 2177; fax 216/736-2223; e-mail <brekke@ucc.org>; web <ucc.org/ucnews>. Editorial opinions are not necessarily those of the official bodies of the United Church of Christ.

SUBSCRIPTIONS are FREE for members, but contributions are encouraged to support this communication ministry. Send checks to United Church News, P.O. Box 226625, Dallas, TX 75222-6625. All issues mailed directly to subscribers' homes. For subscription questions, phone 1-888-READ-UCN (1-888-732-3826). To add/remove names from the mailing list, e-mail ucn@umr.org; fax 214-631-6610; or write to United Church News, P.O. Box 226625, Dallas, TX 75222-6625. Bulk orders available: 1-20 copies, \$1 each; 21-50 copies, \$.75 each; more than 50 copies, \$.50 each; phone 800/537-3394.

ADVERTISING Connie Larkman at <larkmanc@ucc.org> or 866/822-8224 ext. 2196 for display and Marketplace (classified) ads, four-page inserts and web advertising.



SHORTHAND



share their personal and professional experiences and testimonies.

Registration is \$45 for a double occupancy room. Register online at <ucc.org/franklinton-center/events.html> or call 252/437.1723.

UCC COFFEE PROJECT GROWS IN 2008

The UCC Coffee Project sold 76,110 pounds (roughly 38 tons) of fairly traded coffee, tea, and food products in 2008 via 3,297 orders, an increase of more than 10 percent, from 68,825 pounds (34.4 tons) in 2007.

Coffee again made up the bulk of products sold (64,447 pounds), although the UCC Coffee Project sold 6,015 pounds of fairly traded chocolate in 2008. Grand total sales of all fairly traded products by the UCC Coffee Project were \$591,124.32 in 2008.

The UCC Coffee Project offers UCC congregations the opportunity join hands with communities in the developing world. Through the project, small farmers and their families gain control over their lives, earn a fairer share of income, have access to credit and technical support, and gain a trading partner they can trust.

More information and a link to online ordering can be found at <ucc.org/justice/coffee-project>.

SYNOD LIKELY TO TAKE UP BYLAW CHANGES

General Synod 27 is expected to be asked to consider two sets of proposed changes to the UCC's Constitution and Bylaws, pending approval of the 90-member Executive Council at its late March meeting. The Executive Council's meeting was taking place after the press deadline for this issue of *United Church News*.

One set of revisions deals with issues related to preparation and authorization for ministry in the UCC, in keeping with the Multiple Paths for Ministry Pronouncement adopted by General Synod 25 in Atlanta. Another set of changes is related to a governance streamlining proposal — also expected to be considered by delegates in Grand Rapids — that would reduce the number of autonomous governing boards in the UCC's national setting from five to one.

Any recommendations for changes to the Constitution and Bylaws, as approved by the Executive Council, will be available at <ucc.org/synod/bylawschanges> no later than April 26, since revisions must be made available to Synod delegates, Conferences and local churches at least two months before the start of a meeting of the General Synod.

UCC OFFICES ENGAGE SUSTAINABLE PURCHASING

Seeking to live out the General Synod's commitment to justice in purchasing and sourcing of UCC identity or Covenanted Ministry-branded items and apparel, staff in the Covenanted Ministries of the UCC will begin sourcing certified sustainable products to be sold to UCC members and/or distributed at UCC events.

A commitment has been made to carefully screen potential vendors and make sourcing decisions only after thoughtful deliberation.

Items are reasonably determined to be produced under conditions that are fair to workers and environmentally sustainable if they are obtained from sources described by one or more of the following characteristics:

- Production plants and facilities in the global South certified by third parties as "sweat-free" and/or "fair-trade"
- Firms whose production and trade practices have been recognized by third parties as "green" or "environmentally sustainable"
- Firms with a workforce represented by a union that is independent of the firm's management
- Independent artists and artisans
- Firms known by UCC purchasers to be governed by fair labor standards and practices, and/or
- Firms with a missional expression consistent with UCC values

A one-year trial of this purchasing policy with an evaluation scheduled for early 2010 has been approved by the Collegium.

Many producers and suppliers already used by the Covenanted Ministries satisfy these guidelines, others may be found at Sweatfree Communities <sweatfree.org/ShoppingGuide> or Coop America <coopamerica.org/pubs/greenpages>.

immerse yourself

GENERAL SYNOD 27 | GRAND RAPIDS

register now at <ucc.org/synod>

news.ucc.org

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL, GENERAL SYNOD TO CONSIDER CANDIDACY

NY Conference Minister nominated to lead UCC

The Rev. Geoffrey Black, who has led the UCC's New York Conference for nearly a decade, has been nominated to become the UCC's next general minister and president. The nomination is scheduled to be voted on by the UCC's Executive Council at its March meeting.

Black was previously a program staff member in the UCC's Office for Church Life and Leadership. During his career he has served as assistant chaplain at Brown University, associate minister at **St. Albans (N.Y.) Congregational UCC**, pastor of **Congregational UCC of South Hempstead (N.Y.)**, lecturer in the Field Education Department of Union Theological Seminary in New York and protestant chaplain at Adelphi University. Black currently is a member of the board of trustees of Lancaster Theological Seminary.

St. Albans pastor, the Rev. Henry T. Simmons, chair of the GMP search committee, said the search committee is excited about Black's selection and the year-long exploration that led to the nomination. "It was a tough process — the candidates we

interviewed were all very qualified," said Simmons. "In the end, we felt we had interviewed the best possible candidates and found the finest person to lead the UCC at this time."

Prior to his move to Cleveland in 1994, Black ministered in local UCC congregations for over 15 years where involvement in the life of the denomination provided opportunities to participate in association and conference committees and to hold several elected offices.

Ecumenical commitment, concern for equal justice, African-American empowerment and community improvement have shaped Black's



Black

ministry in the church and the communities in which he has lived. He has worked the Nassau Coalition for Safety and Justice, the Long Island Interracial Alliance for a Common Future, and the Amistad Cultural Center of Long Island, which he co-founded, and Caring Communities of Shaker Heights, Ohio.

UCC bylaws require that Black's nomination be affirmed by a two-thirds majority of the Executive Council at their March 22 meeting. If recommended by the Executive Council and elected by delegates at General Synod for the four-year term, Black will succeed the Rev. John H. Thomas, who has served in the post since 1999 and is not eligible for re-election.

Black earned his B.A. from Lincoln University in 1969 and an M.A.R. from Yale Divinity School in 1972. He is the spouse of Patricia Williams-Black and the father of Makeda Black. He and his family reside in Dewitt, N.Y., and Black is a member of **Plymouth Congregational UCC in Syracuse**.

United Theological Seminary elects new president

UCC-related United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities, an ecumenical seminary in New Brighton, Minn., has elected the Rev. Mary E. McNamara as its next president. McNamara has served as executive vice president of Union Theological Seminary in New York since 1998. She grew up in Cambridge, Minn., and is a graduate of Carleton College and Harvard Divinity School.

Sharon Ryan, chair of United's board of trustees, said, "Mary brings a deep understanding of theological education and is known as something of an organizational genius." She played a key role in a strategic planning process that brought Union back from financial difficulties. Union is an interdenominational graduate school of

theology associated with Columbia University.

Prior to joining Union, McNamara served as president and executive director of the Interchurch Center, an interdenominational center in New York that houses the National Council of Churches and offices of several denominations and also offers religious services, concerts and art exhibits. She worked in the administration of New York City mayors Ed Koch and David Dinkins, at the General Assembly Council of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and at St. Peter's Church in New York City. She is an ordained Presbyterian minister and a frequent preacher in the New York area.

United is a seminary founded by the United Church of Christ

and dedicated to an open, inclusive approach to theological education.

McNamara said she looks forward to working with the seminary's trustees, faculty and staff to prepare spiritual leaders ready to engage the problems facing people today. "It is my hope that our graduates will be people who believe the possibilities are great, can inspire others through worship and service, and recognize that the challenge of doing so is critically important!"

She is also looking forward to returning to Minnesota. "I feel like I am coming home," she said.

McNamara succeeds interim president Kita McVay, who was appointed to the position in 2004.

More information on United Theological Seminary can be found at <unitedseminary.edu>.

Justice and Witness Ministries names new minister for racial justice

The Rev. Karen Georgia Thompson began serving as the UCC's minister for racial justice in Justice and Witness Ministries March 2. Thompson previously served on Florida's Conference Staff since 2004.

She was project coordinator for five counties in Florida, responding to the 2004 and 2005 hurricane seasons; then became statewide Minister for Disaster Response and Recovery in 2006. She was responsible for coordination, leadership development and training, volunteer recruitment, advocacy, and grant funds administration.

Thompson also provided leadership in the Florida Conference following the national launching

of the Sacred Conversation on Race, and shares that her personal and professional experiences motivated her to seek this call to engage the church by raising awareness and changing attitudes to address the issues of racism in our society and in the church.

Thompson will be part of the JWM Cleveland-based team leading the Sacred Conversation on Race initiative, but will spend a portion of her time working with JWM's Racial Justice Program at Franklinton Center at Bricks



Thompson

and with public policy staff in the Washington, D.C., office. Key to her responsibilities will be to collaborate with other program staff to demonstrate the intersections of racism with other justice issues.

Thompson was ordained in 1999 at the General Baptist State Convention in North Carolina and was credentialed through Privilege of Call as a UCC minister in 2003 by the New York Metropolitan Association.

Thompson earned a B.A. from Brooklyn College in New York, a Master's in Public Administration from North Carolina Central University in Durham, N.C., and an M. Div. from Union Theological Seminary in New York.

Immigrant Rights Sunday to be observed May 3

Local congregations encouraged to participate

The United Church of Christ will observe its first "Immigrant Rights Sunday" May 3. Although the UCC has been a long-time advocate for just immigration policies that guarantee legal rights entitled to every person living in the United States, this is the first time a Sunday has been designated in the UCC to recognize immigrants.

Welcoming the stranger is an edict from God to the people of God (Deuteronomy 10:17-19.) But justice advocates note that too often strangers are rejected and treated like enemies.

Congregations are encouraged to include stories about immigrants in their worship service on the first Sunday in May.

Organizers, the Rev. Art Cribbs and the Rev. Daniel Romero, write:

One recent story follows the lives of two brothers, Benigno and Ronald, who find themselves caught in a legal limbo as they seek to make it through the maze of immigration bureaucracy.

Brought to the United States from Guatemala by their mother as small children, they are now 24 and 28 years old. When their mother became a legal resident through marriage, she petitioned for her sons to become residents as well. Unfortunately, they sought help from a notario, a notary public posing as a lawyer, who charged them a few thousand dollars to do the paper work.

There are many unscrupulous individuals who engage in the unauthorized practice of immigration law and leave their clients hopeless and helpless. In this case, Benigno and Ronald "think" they may have petitions pending. Even if they do, as unmarried children of a legal resident from Guatemala, it may take up to seven years for visas to become available for them to achieve their dream.

Wishing to marry, Benigno has postponed doing so because he knows the laws are different for married and unmarried children of permanent residents. Both these young men have no experience of living in Guatemala and if forced to leave, they would be fish out of water.

They have been raised in this country, gone through the educational system, and are fully bilingual with very promising futures. Their story is repeated time and again with children who, by no decision of their own, find themselves in legal limbo.

There are millions of immigrants and stories about strangers who reside near our local UCC

churches. Immigrant Rights Sunday is an opportunity to learn their stories and share them.

Immigrant Rights Sunday is intended to help overcome fears about the strangers among us, and to work on their behalf to make life safer in the United States. Promoting draconian policies and militarizing our borders do not protect or serve anyone's best interests. Too many families have been divided and too many lives have been lost because our country has failed to

properly address the needs of immigrants.

It is time for us to honor God's instruction to feed, clothe and love "those who are strangers, because you yourselves were strangers..."

As we learn the stories of others, we can tell our stories also; the stories of our families' journeys to America. We can remember what it felt like to be received or rejected in a new land. Then, we will discover the practical reasons why God instructed us to take care of immigrants, foreigners, and strangers.

Nobody should be left in a legal limbo to fend alone or fall prey to individuals, systems, or institutions that abuse them and deny their human dignity. If we forget our own experiences, we may mistreat others who are going through what we once knew to be a frightening and unwelcoming period in our lives.

We can do better to make God's entire family feel welcome and at home. Hospitality is a hallmark of our faith. Every human life is precious and the "loving image of God."

For more information about Immigrant Rights Sunday, contact Wally Ryan Kuroiwa or Edie Rasell at the UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries, 216/736-3700. Worship resources are available at <ucc.org/justice/immigration>.



LEARN MORE
ucc.org/justice/immigration

FUTURE IS HERE, IN OUR MIDST

More than ever, time for UCC young people is right here, right now



Gregg Brekke
Editor

It is up to us to invite [youth and young adults] out of the margins of the church and into the center."

The phrase "young people are not the church of the future, they are the church of now" has been rumbling around my head and heart for the past few years. I'm not sure where I heard it, or if I've merely morphed what others have said, but the sentiment expressed seems clearer to me with each passing year.

As a church, as a movement of Christ followers, our existence and identity depend upon our young people catching the same spirit that has compelled us in discipleship, prayer, justice and service. It is not too far of a stretch to say that Christianity (or the UCC or any other movement of faith) is only one generation away from extinction if it fails to proliferate.

I see a warning of this possibility in early Church history, where monastic groups separated themselves into communities intent on living out their mission without the compromises demanded by civic society. They excelled at their mission, but did little to propagate the addition of new adherents to their movements.

A few of the more unique communities allowed something called "holy marriage," where couples could remain together for mutual support but vowed to live celibately. You can imagine that this arrangement did little to provide offspring in these isolated communities.

As these bands of dedicated religious di-

minished, some creative communities found new life by rescuing and adopting children left exposed to die because they were the wrong sex, or they had physical deformities or psychological problems.

For a time, these adoptive communities were able to maintain their existence based on their welcome of the unwelcome. But over time, their ability to "replenish" the community with foundlings was outpaced by the natural cycles of life and death, by attrition and through discriminatory practices of those outside the community who found their way of life incompatible with societal norms.

I don't assume there is a direct parallel between these ancient monastic communities and the behavior or composition of the UCC. Still, the example begs the question of what we are doing to foster our children, and those who come to us "adoptively," as agents of evangelism to further our mission.

So in this issue, we've invited youth and young adults from the UCC's Council on Youth and Young Adult Ministries (CYAM) to provide the content you'll find on pages six through 10. I didn't ask them to write articles, per se. I asked them to reflect on questions of leadership, responsibility and opportunity. I asked them to speak their mind and let the church know how it can best meet their needs.

When this theme was first proposed, the general reaction was an apprehension that youth and young adults might write harshly of the UCC's inadequacies in ministering to them

and utilizing their gifts.

I assure you, this fear will not be realized in what you read here — these are young people who love the UCC dearly and have great hopes for its future and their role in it. What I've heard many youth consultants say is borne out: Young people today have a more clearly defined sense of mission, grace, inclusion and relationship than any previous generation.

What you should also recognize is the willingness of our youth and young adults to use, what is to them, a very "old" means of communicating — print media — to communicate their message to the church. They embraced it as a challenge and a necessary technology leap (backwards!) to have their voices heard.

Now it is up to us to hear what they are saying (God is still speaking to youth and young adults...), encourage them on their journey and include them in the conversations that will shape our church. It is up to us to invite them out of the margins of the church and into the center. It is up to us to make the technology leap (forward!) to communicate most effectively with them.

Each generation struggles to pass leadership onto the next. They communicate, act, talk, dress and even think differently. My hope is that we discover and embrace the amazing gifts our young people can, and already are, offering to local churches, Associations, Conferences and the national setting. The future of our church depends on them. The church of now needs them.



LETTERS

Seminaries' efforts are encouraging

Many thanks for the challenging and insightful article on the difficulties facing our UCC seminaries. As former Vice President of Andover Newton Theological Seminary, Don Hill and I struggled with many of the same issues during the last decade.

I am encouraged to hear that some of the schools are making valiant efforts to continually adapt to the changing landscape of theological education and the culture of our congregations.

William R. Cunitz
President/CEO
Pilgrim Place in Claremont, Calif.

Bangor Seminary's work goes on

Thanks for your article regarding innovation and the seminaries, in which you wrote that Bangor Theological Seminary only had 20 full-time students at the time of the selling of our historic campus.

In 2005, our actual enrollment included 45 full-time and 94 part-time students, for a full-time equivalent student body of 70.

For BTS to enter our third century of preparing church leadership with increased endowment and without delayed maintenance and high energy costs is an innovative transition worthy of recognition.

We would not want anyone in the UCC to finish reading your article with the impres-

sion the BTS does not continue to be a true gem of a theological school.

The Rev. Kent Ulery, President
Bangor Theological Seminary

Schools, churches need each other

Thanks for your article "Innovation propels seminaries through the transitional waters" in the February/March issue of *United Church News*. It is encouraging to learn that seminaries are beginning to address the need for experiential education in clergy formation. We in the churches have seen this need for some time, and a number of us have already started trying to do something about it.

For the past three years, my church, Judson Memorial UCC in New York City, has been partnering with several NYC area seminaries (including Union Theological, featured in the commentary) to develop a Training Program in Progressive Ministry from a Congregational Base — exactly this type of education.

As one of our oversight task force members has commented, "Seminaries and seminarians do spend lots of time on social justice issues. What they don't do is help students learn how to be effective, wise, and successful in focusing on these commitments from a parish base."

Theological seminaries need to work with congregations to offer far more such experiential learning programs.

The Rev. Donna Schaper, Senior Pastor
Judson Memorial UCC

Sexual issues require leadership

In Debra Haffner's article about seminaries preparing clergy to address sexuality issues in their ministries (Feb/Mar 2009) she

says, "Seminaries must do more to prepare students to minister to their congregants and be effective advocates for sexual health and justice." While I agree that this would be desirable, I also think adjudicatory should accept responsibility for keeping sexuality issues up front for clergy in their Conferences, Associations and institutions. Furthermore, denominational officials should make certain they are doing their part to promote sexual health and justice within the organization.

Adjudicatory must accept responsibility for promoting sexual justice, including within their own ranks. Seminaries alone cannot do the job.

The Rev. Grant F. Sontag
Mountain View, Calif.

Science, religion can coexist

I consider myself a moderate to liberal Christian, but I feel that celebrating a person like Darwin who through his study tried his best to prove God does not exist or at least the God of Abraham does not exist, is a step too far for even the most liberal Christian. Science and religion can go together when one is not out to disprove the other, this Darwin celebration really upsets me.

Shane Odean
Portage UCC
Kalamazoo, Mich.

Mideast conflict not one-sided

I am saddened by the comments in the Feb/Mar 2009 *United Church News* by Michael Neuroth when he stated that he "watched with horror as news reports after Christmas began showing images of the Israeli incursion into Gaza. Now, over two

weeks later, more than 700 Palestinians have been killed and thousands injured."

I have to ask, where was Mr. Neuroth when Palestinians, unprovoked, were bombing innocent children and adults in Israel long before this recent invasion? Or what about the suicide bombers they have been sending into Israel for years?

Lobera Staley
Thurmont, Md.

Faith needs good grammar

Your use of the simple model of liberation theology of orthopraxy vs. orthodoxy caught my attention.

Jesus often teaches that you can have the right theology but the wrong actions. What Jesus is not teaching is that theology is unimportant. Jesus was harshly critical of the theology of Samaritans (who only had the Torah and the book of Job as their scriptures) when he spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well.

Healthy theology, like good grammar, has a wide range of punctuations: commas, periods, question marks, exclamation points. We in the UCC seem to have one: the comma.

Early on in my life with Christ a Bible study teacher taught me "information without application leads to lethargy." The opposite is also true. Information with application leads to life.

Bruce Farrell
Myerstown (Pa.) UCC

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

SEEK FIRST GOD'S KINGDOM

'We are not helpless; we are making decisions'

C O M M E N T A R Y

By Edith Rasell



In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples not to worry about what they will eat, drink or wear. Just as God cares for the birds and lilies of the field, God will also care for God's people and provide them with all they need (6:25-33).

These are comforting words. Usually. But do they sound a little hollow as our country and nations around the world fall deeper into the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression? Some 22 million people in the United States cannot find work — a 50 percent increase in the past year. One in 10 homeowners is either in foreclosure or behind in their mortgage payments. We certainly have reason to worry. As the saying goes, "if you aren't worried, you haven't been paying attention."

To understand what Jesus is saying we need to read the passage to the end. Don't worry about what you will eat, drink or wear. God knows you need these things. "But strive first for the kingdom of God and God's righteousness [which can be translated as justice], and all these things will be given to you as well."

Jesus is not asking us to be irrationally optimistic. He is telling us that the problem is not scarcity. God is providing all we need. If people have too little, it is because the community is failing to strive for God's kingdom and God's justice. It means that instead of a world based on sharing and helping, we are more focused on hoarding and looking out for number one.

Certainly the activities that sparked the current crisis had more to do with striving for personal wealth and luxury than for God's kingdom. Consumers sought bigger houses, larger vehicles, exotic food and more "stuff" even if they had to buy it with credit and boost their incomes by working long hours that short changed their families, congregations and communities.

In response, Wall Street and the housing industry created

new types of loans and financial instruments called derivatives. These high-risk investments including mortgage-backed securities and credit default swaps initially brought in huge amounts of money. But now they are responsible for most of the enormous losses that threaten our future.

The U.S. government has so far committed \$8.8 trillion in loans, investments and guarantees — the equivalent of two-thirds of our annual gross domestic product. It is very likely that more money will be needed before the banking system regains solvency and full lending capacity.

The financial boom built on debt, credit and high-risk investments is decimating the economy and people's lives. Across the nation, average home prices have fallen by 27 percent in the past three years and in some places the losses are much greater.

The stock market and many workers' retirement accounts have lost over 50 percent of their value since peaking in late 2007. Sixteen banks failed in the first two months of 2009 compared with 25 in all of 2008 and three in 2007. The U.S. Director of National Intelligence told Congress in February that instability caused by the global economic crisis is the biggest security threat facing the United States.

People are hurting and the economic damage will likely grow. But we are not helpless. As a nation, we are making decisions about how to handle the crisis. Will we seek first God's kingdom and share God's resources so everyone will have enough? Or will we primarily take care of ourselves only?

There are indications that we do care about our neighbors. The \$787 billion stimulus package passed by Congress in February may not be large enough. But it will create jobs, expand unemployment insurance and ease access to health insurance. Another \$272 billion plan will help nine million mortgage holders stay in their homes. The President's 2010 budget proposal shifts some taxes to the wealthy and businesses, boosts money for food stamps and affordable housing, moves toward fundamental health care reform and invests in green jobs.

There are no blueprints to follow that will get us through this crisis. But we do not need to worry. God continues to provide all we need. Now it is up to us: to seek first God's kingdom and God's justice, and make sure that everyone gets a fair share of the abundance God provides.

Rasell is the UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries minister for workplace justice. Starting in April, Rasell will blog at <community.ucc.org/Edith/blog>. For more information about the financial crisis, go to <ucc.org/justice/financial-crisis/>

UCC SEMINARIES: Much to celebrate; more work to do

C O M M E N T A R Y

By Alice Hunt



Thank you for your February/March article, "Seminaries struggle to prepare clergy in addressing sexuality," highlighting some of the findings of the Religious Institute / Union Theological Seminary

report, Sex and the Seminary: Preparing Ministers for Sexual Health and Justice.

Ultimately, the crucial issue is whether or not we are adequately preparing religious leaders for their positions in communities of faith. The United Church of Christ has a rich history of standing on the front line of providing just such religious leadership.

Our seminaries have an equally rich history in preparing this kind of transformative religious leadership. The UCC was well represented. Of 253 seminaries and divinity schools in the Association of Theological Schools of the United States and Canada, only 36 schools participated. Of these 36 schools, four were UCC seminaries: Chicago Theological Seminary, Andover Newton Theological Seminary, Pacific

School of Religion and Bangor Theological Seminary.

Out of the 36 schools, the study names 10 institutions as leading institutions when evaluating the criteria for sexually healthy and responsible seminaries. Chicago Theological Seminary and Andover Newton Theological Seminary were two of the 10 leading institutions. The criteria included questions about curricula, institutional environment, and advocacy.

For example, Chicago Theological Seminary was positively evaluated in the following areas: progressive policies concerning sexual harassment, discrimination, and the full inclusion of lesbian/gay bisexual, transgender and/or women; greater than 40 percent of senior leadership, faculty, and/or board of trustees are women; and high evidence of advocacy through worship services, publishing, media appearances and/or on campus events related to sexuality issues.

The report also listed the LGBTQ Religious Studies Center at CTS as one of only nine free-standing centers (among the 36 seminaries) dealing directly with sexuality-related issues in ministry, LGBT/queer studies, and women/feminist studies.

While there remains much work to be done in the area of sexual health and justice as we work toward flourishing of life for all, the United Church of Christ has much to celebrate in our performance with respect to the evaluated criteria.

The Rev. Alice Hunt is President of Chicago Theological Seminary.



OVERHEARD

"I reached up and touched the comma [pin] three times before I recognized what I was to do. I removed it and, as I was leaving, I dropped it into his hand. You'd have thought it was at least a hundred dollar bill or something."

— The Rev. Chris Rankin, of St. John's UCC in Fredericksburg, Pa., on giving his Stillspeaking comma pin to a stranger who asked Rankin what it symbolized.

"I wanted to be a part of something historical. I think rural Lebanon, Pa., might not be the place which people think of as being a center of attention for the inauguration."

— The Rev. Christopher Rodkey, of Zion Goshert's UCC in Lebanon, Pa., on the Library of Congress American Folklife Center's inclusion of his presidential inaugural sermon in their collection.

"If a people were allowed to withhold the civil and inalienable rights of a minority group, and re-enforce their privilege by a simple majority vote, then African Americans would still be under the bondage of chattel slavery and indentured servitude."

— Bishop Yvette Flunder, of City of Refuge UCC in San Francisco, Calif., speaking to opponents of California's Proposition 8 which restricts marriage to one man and one woman. The state's Supreme Court heard oral arguments regarding the proposition's repeal on March 5.

"As a young person, I need a church that welcomes me — a church that can outwardly say that I am accepted for exactly who I am."

— Susan Chadwick, of Dover UCC in Westlake, Ohio, and a junior at Lawrence University in Appleton, Wis.



TABULATIONS

BY THE NUMBERS

76,110

Pounds of fairly traded products sold by the UCC Coffee Project in 2008. Includes 64,447 pounds of coffee and 6,015 pounds of chocolate.

ucc.org/justice/coffee-project

ucc.org



'I NEED A CHURCH THAT WELCOMES ME'

I'm not an outsider: A young adult speaks to her church about inclusion

By Susan Chadwick

The following letter was sent to the board of **Dover Congregational UCC in Westlake, Ohio**, during the congregation's Open and Affirming study:

My name is Susan Chadwick, and I am currently a junior at Lawrence University in Appleton, Wis., but grew up in the community of Dover UCC in Westlake, Ohio. I am sorry to say that I have not been present with the church while the Open and Affirming (ONA) debate has been discussed as I have a fairly strong opinion on the matter. I was extremely involved in the church as a child and a young adult. I sang, acted, read scripture, played music and was extremely involved in the youth group; and I can say that as a young adult I am continually frustrated by the debate over the ONA process.

I understand that people have strong opinions about the current issue of homosexuality. Not everyone is comfortable with the queer community — not everyone thinks it is moral; but my issue is not whether a non-heterosexual orientation is moral or right. My concern is why the church feels so uncomfortable opening its doors in a public arena.



Chadwick

My mom explained to me that members of our church do not see the need for a public ONA statement. That it should be "good enough" to simply welcome people without the public banner that the ONA stamp provides. Well, as a young adult I want you to understand — it is not enough. I have stopped attending a church of any kind because there is no Open and Affirming UCC church near my campus. Maybe you think that sounds a bit extreme, but I feel justified.

I am a double major in psychology and religious studies, and my primary focus here has been on humans' fear of death, and how religion functions as a comfort in the psychological process of being afraid to die. Mostly, I am interested in teen suicide. I know, it sounds like a grim topic, but as a 20-year-old college student, I have already lost too many friends to random causes of death and suicide.

I have constantly questioned why the suicide rate has been increasing so rapidly over the past few decades and why it is currently the second leading cause of death for college students. I work with the student Wellness Committee on campus to organize events for suicide prevention and to raise awareness of mental health is-

After talking to students what I have concluded is that most adolescents are depressed because they feel unloved, alone, and an overall pressure to be or act a certain way.

We are supposed to get good grades in high school, go to college, work jobs and be involved in a diverse selection of clubs and activities. I have to tell you that sometimes it feels like too much to live up to. In a world where I am told how to look and act and sometimes even think, I would hope that religion would be a place where I could find my comfort. I would hope that my church would be the community that I felt welcome in, no matter who I was or what I did.

You say it is not important to put out a public statement saying everyone is welcome in our church. I cannot express through writing how wrong I think you are. I was told during confirmation that there was a fear that the church was not attracting young people, a fear that the church might die out. As members of the congregation argue that numbers of the UCC churches are decreasing since the ONA debate began in the church, I wish someone would take a look at the positive increases as a result of this decision.

I have a friend from high school who attended **Lakewood [Ohio] Congregational UCC**, and now goes to college in Bloomington, Ind. He told me a few days ago that the church he attends at school has tripled in size because of the influx of college students after the church became Open and Affirming. I ask why no one is looking at this change in numbers, instead of focusing on the negative.

As a young person, I need a church that welcomes me — a church that can outwardly say that I am accepted for exactly who I am. It is not my prerogative to decide whether God thinks I am a sinner, and I do not believe that a group of my peers have the right to pass that judgment on me either.

Jesus accepted the lepers and the prostitutes. So why is it our right to decide what is sinful in the eyes of God? You may point to the

Bible, but the Bible was written by humans. I do not mean to say that the Bible is not important, but I am saying that I do not believe that we can hold the Bible up as a testament of exactly what God thinks about an issue such as sexuality.

I realize that my opinion may not matter much, especially coming from so far away. I wish I could be there in person and better express my opinions about the issue, especially from my standpoint as a religious

studies major, but I hope that you at least take the time to consider where I am coming from.

I do not seem controversial at face value: I am young, female, white, straight and educated. On paper I fit into all of the stereotypical boxes — but I am not perfect. There are a lot of things I do not like about myself, and probably some things that God does not look so favorably upon either. Does that mean I am not welcome?

You say that numbers are decreasing in the UCC as these debates go on, and that this decision could split our church — but I believe that God loves me for who I am, and I would hope that my church community would feel the same way, and more importantly, that it would be willing to welcome me without judgment. There are plenty of places in the world where I feel as though I am an outsider, please don't make my church one of them.



More Money For Ministry Education

In these days of tight budgets, funding important ministries can become particularly challenging. And finding money for new projects and initiatives can seem nearly impossible.

The United Church Foundation can help, with proven investment management services offered through a family of funds that put the power of the financial markets to work for you. With over half a billion dollars under management — comprising the UCC's historic legacies, local church endowments, and planned gifts made by today's church members — the United Church Foundation offers a long-term record of solid performance, a commitment to low fees, and an investment strategy grounded in wisdom, experience, and responsibility.

Contact us today to learn how the United Church Foundation can help your church earn more money for the ministries that are important to you.

ucfoundation.org
877-806-4989
info@ucfoundation.org

UNITED CHURCH
FOUNDATION

Youth and young adults assume leadership roles in the UCC

By Obadiah Ballinger,
with help from Kevin Peterson and Kathryn Frazier

Advocates for greater youth and young adult (YYA) participation in the United Church of Christ live by a long-standing maxim: youth and young adults are more than “the future of the church” — they are the present church as well.

In fact, in the past year alone youth and young adults have led national UCC organizations like the Pacific Islander and Asian American Ministries (PAAM), influenced policy decisions as members of churchwide boards, lobbied for comprehensive sexuality education on Capitol Hill, planned ministry activities in conferences across the church, designed ecumenical college student programming, guided mission and service events as volunteer interns, modeled faithful living as camp counselors and collaborated with youth ministry staff to create a National Youth Event for thousands of UCC youth.

By their leadership, youth and young adults shape the UCC's current and future priorities.

As a young adult, Melissa Woo has full-time commitments earning a living and pursuing her college degree. Nevertheless, Woo is also the recently nominated national moderator

of PAAM, an advocacy group within the United Church of Christ. She has been active in national activities since her early teens, but she was surprised to be named PAAM's moderator last year.

Woo feels supported by the organization's members, while recognizing

that “this is the first time PAAM elders are looking at someone 20, 30, or 40 years their junior being their leader.”

The organization's members placed her as a young adult in senior leadership after talking for a number of years about empowering PAAM's youth and young adults. While the position has challenged Woo's time-management and administrative skills, it also affords her an opportunity to demonstrate leadership for other youth and young adults. “The walls and barriers that suggest they can't get involved get broken down.”

Kendra Purscell, another UCC young adult, participates with and chairs a committee for the Wider Church Ministry board of directors. As chair, Purscell regularly addresses the entire board on behalf of her committee.

“While I'm comfortable speaking for myself and representing youth and young adults, Purscell says, “I know I don't speak for all of them.” She has nevertheless found partici-

pating on the Wider Church Ministry board a rewarding experience, and it has brought to her attention other ways to serve in the church.

I believe young people are ready to offer substantive leadership now.”

Last summer Purscell participated as an intern for Faithful Advocates Serving Together, a joint ministry of the UCC and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). She guided groups participating in service projects to discover the “secret” of mission work — “while they were there to help people, they were mostly there to have their eyes opened and see a new perspective of the world.”

Thousands of youth across the country find their first opportunities to lead at church camps and other youth ministry activities within the UCC's 38 conferences. In leading music, teaching activities or directing reflections, youth have the opportunity at camp to guide one another and older adults in listening to new ideas and gaining compassion for God's creation.

Leadership at camp connects youth with other ministry initiatives within and outside of their local church, including those of their conference.

Across the country, teams of youth gather together to plan conference-wide activities — everything from ski trips to weekend-long events. These youth ministry opportunities are further occasions for youth to lead, preparing for events, establishing expectations, and serving as role models for their peers.

As a youth, James Maki became involved in national UCC leadership through just such a conference initiative. He served on the Minnesota Conference's Youth Ministry Team (YMT), designing themes and selecting guest speakers for semi-annual Conference Youth Events.

“The most rewarding part of being on the team was [the] network of people I got to meet,” says Maki. While still a high school student, his service on the YMT caught the attention of conference minister Karen Smith Sellers. She soon named Maki the Minnesota Conference representative to the Executive Council for the national church.

Sellers is “deeply committed” to YYA leadership throughout the UCC, perhaps because she herself

served in church leadership at an early age, saying, “I believe young people are ready to offer substantive leadership now.” Boosted by Sellers' trust, Maki will hold his seat on the Executive Council for six years, determining national priorities of the church and influencing a whole new network of colleagues.

Purscell and Maki also serve on the Council for Youth and Young Adult Ministries (CYAM), a group created by the General Synod to minister and advocate both to and for youth and young adults in the UCC.

CYAM (pronounced “SIGH-yam”) is composed of several dozen representatives from the regions, historically underrepresented minority groups and executive boards of the UCC. Meeting twice a year face-to-face and monthly by conference call, CYAM members work with other church leaders to help make YYA voices heard at General Synod, address issues of justice and peace, and serve as a voice for all UCC youth and young adults.

This leadership has recently taken the form of staffing the UCC's National Youth Event and providing oversight to the church-wide survey on reshaping youth and young adult ministries in the denomination. CYAM seeks new members every General Synod, and those seeking more information are advised to contact national staff member Kelly Burd at <burdk@ucc.org>.

As teenage and 20-something leaders throughout the church, youth and young adults continue to influence the ministry and “evolution” of the UCC.

Minnesota Conference Minister for Children and Youth, the Rev. Wade Zick, hopes to see the UCC adopting a broader use of technology in its communication and ministry. “We also need a fresh and younger perspective on how we work toward our shared goals,” he says, perhaps looking for alternatives to the current culture of committees and bureaucracy.

Woo is mindful that increased funding and opportunities for youth and young adults are necessary, specifically in the form of leadership training, to help YYAs develop their skills. This might include discernment around seminary scholarships, but Purscell hopes that all youth and young adults recognize that they have gifts to offer throughout the church.

“If we can combine our vision, passion, and energy with others' know-how and experience,” says Purscell, “we will be on our way to becoming an even stronger church.”

The authors are members of the Council for Youth and Young Adult Ministries. Obadiah Ballinger is a graduate of Yale Divinity School, Kevin Peterson is a piano performance major at St. Olaf College, and Kathryn Frazier is working toward a degree in human services at Western Washington University.



The market hasn't been terribly friendly lately. But if you still want to earn a competitive return, invest with the Cornerstone Fund. You not only enjoy a solid rate, you help build the church by ensuring funds are always available for loans that qualified UCC churches can use to enhance their facilities and strengthen their ministries. Choose an investment to suit your needs, then call or visit us online to learn how you can help build the church — and your portfolio — with an investment in the Cornerstone Fund.

New lower minimum: \$500

TERM	RATE	APY
6 mo	2.500%	2.516%
12 mo	2.875%	2.896%
18 mo	3.000%	3.022%
30 mo	3.125%	3.149%
60 mo	3.500%	3.531%



United Church of Christ
CORNERSTONE
FUND

cornerstonefund.org • 888-UCC-FUND

This is not an offer to sell our securities, and we are not soliciting you to buy our securities. We will sell our securities only in states where authorized. The offering is made solely by our Offering Circular, which may be obtained by calling us at 888-823-3863. Our securities are not insured by the FDIC or any other state or federally regulated institution. Rates as of February 12, 2009 and may change without notice. ¹ Investments of 18 months or more.





THE FUTURE IS HERE

Youth, young adults and the UCC: Where are we now?

By Thom Chu

Who's reading this story?

While I am confident that some younger people may be reading this article, I am assuming that these persons are in the minority based on general information about the age-makeup of the UCC and the readership of *United Church News*, whether in print or online.

My intention is to present, in a very preliminary way, some of the realities that I have seen and heard through my visits across the United Church of Christ in meetings with younger church leaders, focus groups, phone conferences and reading online survey results, held alongside a few thoughts from 20 years of denominational and ecumenical ministry based in the Episcopal Church.

Consider this an apology in advance if the impression you might have as a reader is “us vs. them” — the reality is “them are us” and our common challenge is to repair the breach in a community that is not as age-comprehensive as the one we seek.

We are about this important work not because of “them” but because of our own yearning for integrity and wholeness. We act out of our gratitude to God for our own creation and that the transformed lives we lead drive us to share the Good News with others.

Who are today's young people?

Some paradoxical thoughts:

They are the first generation born and bred in the digital era — but they are also plugged into relationships rooted in off-line reality: text messaging, instant messaging, MySpace and Facebook are enhancements and continuations of relationships from the non-digital world.

Today's youth and young adults are products of an esteem-driven system of learning that has produced the most self-confident generation ever, but faced with a reality of crumbling institutions: educational, financial, health and religious, and sometimes presented with personal disappointments and failures.

They are shaped by the team experience whether at school, in the playground or at work, but they can also be very alone.

They embrace and expect diversity — of background, opinion and experience, but can sometimes be overly relativistic.

They distrust being marketed to and bombarded with commercial messages, yet they can be loyal to trusted brands.

Youth and young adults are accustomed to having many options all the time — they have been brought up in a multitasking environment, but many are also yearning for simplicity beyond these complexities and yearn for a life unplugged.

Retain and reach out

Twin challenges exist in making the church most hospitable to younger people — nurturing and retaining those who have been brought up in the UCC while creating space for newcomers.

Some have jokingly characterized confirmation preparation in the teenage years as a “journey to membership lapse,” but this humor is grounded in some reality. Those

whose membership did lapse in that period in life describe their drift away as “there was nothing there for me.” For some, the expectation of full membership coming with confirmation was not matched with a status, responsibility or calling that was worthy of it.

Reaching out to younger seekers who come from another Christian tradition, or no religious tradition at all, presents a different challenge that takes both sensitivity and a rootedness in one's own UCC tradition.

The task of reaching out to non-church youth and young adults cannot fall solely to our younger membership — it's far too broad and is a collective responsibility. All of us can map out our daily paths and make opportunities of the intersections and interactions we have with younger people: following is a spiritual typology that might help in understanding how people with different backgrounds might respond differently. A complete treatment of this topic can be downloaded at ucc.org/young-adults.

Four spiritual styles of young adults

As we come into contact with young adults in our daily environments, whether at work, in our casual connections with strangers or in greeting visitors in our congregations, it is useful to acknowledge that there are various spiritual perspectives and experiences that persons bring with them.

Consider the following typology that might be useful for “mapping” your surroundings. (This is intended to be descriptive, not prescriptive):

- **Loyalists** have grown up in or adopted by choice a single religious tradition. Most loyalists think they know a lot about their own tradition, whether they actually do or not, and some have social networks tightly connected around their worshipping community. Belonging matters as much as substance.

- **Seekers** describe themselves on a quest for knowledge, deeper spiritual connection and are experimental. If you encounter a seeker in a congregational setting, this person has most likely stopped at other places along the way, probably picking up charisms and detecting good practices from other traditions, including ones not clearly Christian. Seekers will ask many questions and expect good answers.

- **Lapsed** persons have left a spiritual or religious tradition by active or benign ne-



Randy Varcho photos

glect. Many lapsed people report that multiple signals to their need for attention during life crises were ignored. Few lapsed persons rejoin but some may seek another tradition. Most find themselves with no faith community.

- **Unactualized** persons don't actively acknowledge an interest in God or the sacred. When pressed, they might say that they experience effervescence in mass gatherings such as outdoor concerts or in exhilarating sports.

All doors are open

Understanding the spiritual styles of young adults is a bridge to approaching effective engagement. What remains is the exploration of the venues in which connections and community building can begin. The following set of images may be a helpful way to understand the possibilities of many paths into congregational community, leading us from the most obvious entryway to more varied and promising opportunities.

- **Front Door:** All too often, church leaders fixate on bringing more people through the single “front door” of congregational life. To an outsider, this “front door” would appear to be closed (even if it is unlocked) for most of the week, and open for two or three hours on a Sunday morning, at a time most non-churchgoers aren't around to notice.

While important work needs to continue to improve new member ministry in all congregations, depending on newcomers to be attracted to a Sunday service may be too narrow a door to pass, and too often we hear reports of a “single file” of younger visitors entering and leaving. The greatest majority of newcomers to worship who eventually seek membership are brought by a friend or relative—consider the invitation to worship as one of many options.

- **Side Door:** There may already be possibilities for invitation through the “side door”

of congregational programs during the week or on Sundays, but many may be developed to serve an existing constituency and not easily accessible (schedule, information, signage or attitude.)

“Side door” activities can include less structured opportunities — the idea is to multiply the points of entry and invitation. Smaller congregations may have fewer options but can evaluate their offerings under the lens of inviting younger people: would it be interesting, engaging or suited to them? In the end, the most successful engagements are expressions of the giftedness of the hosts, not solutions packaged to meet perceived needs.

Churchwide online survey

uccyyasurvey.questionpro.com

- **Next Door:** The most exciting venue of all — everywhere! This brings us into daily environments: work, community, family and contact with strangers.

The possibilities are enormous, and can begin with the simplest engagement of authentic concern and interest in another person, but also include structured programs in homes or in the marketplace. If you need help thinking of things to talk about please see “A Spiritual Typology of Young Adults” at ucc.org/young-adults.

What can I do?

The ability to attract and retain active youth and young adult members in our churches is largely dependent upon our receptivity to their gifts and energy, and a willingness to share in a process of discipleship. Here are a few starting points:

Improve your own relationship with God: Be real, refine your own faith practices. Rehearse your own faith story: how has God transformed your life?

- Be invitational: Map out your daily environment and find ways to connect. | cont.



YOUNG ADULT TOP TEN

1. Get to know young adults **personally** and treat them like full members of the community.
2. Have the best **website** you can. Yes, this is important!
3. Provide **spiritual formation** opportunities for all ages.
4. Start a **conversation** about young adults in church with your pastor, a congregant and a young adult.
5. **Invite** young adults to participate as lay leaders in worship.
6. Greet and introduce yourself to newcomers and offer to **be a resource**.
7. Do not recruit young adults for a committee right away. Do find out their **gifts and passions** and point out things at church that may be of interest.
8. Look at your **mission and service** opportunities. Do the time and place really make them open to everyone?
9. Maintain **connections** to high school students after they graduate. Listen to their needs and help them to fulfill them in your church or in their new location.
10. Don't be afraid to **try new things!**

Developed by the young adults of the Massachusetts Conference



YOUTH | cont.

- The invitation need not be “come to my church” but might be asking a deep issue, such as, “tell me about a person you greatly admire.”

- Come up with your own “unique value proposition”: What could someone actually expect from being a member of your faith community for a year?

Consider the reality that coming into relationship might not be as much “showing the ropes” but “learning the ropes together.” As a 42-year-old digital “immigrant,” I depend on my younger “native-born” digital colleagues to help me navigate the contours of digital living.

Encourage youth, young adults and volunteers or compensated staff who work with them in your congregation, association or conference to complete the churchwide online survey: <uccyasurvey.questionpro.com>. It takes about 20 minutes to complete but will yield valuable responses.

What's next?

The online survey, aside from informing a churchwide advisory committee charged with suggesting a strategy for youth and young adult ministries, will:

- Tap into the wisdom and experience that is already among us
- Call out the gifts of our young people

and those who minister with them

- Develop a new infrastructure of relationships by identifying colleagues and leaders
- Provide information to UCC conferences
- Support the launch of myUCC, a Web 2.0 online community

Encouraging work with youth and young adults is underway in the UCC. An online survey launched this spring received over 300 responses in its first two weeks and is filled with field-proven practices as well as aspirations for the future. The focus group discernment process and interviews with key leaders have revealed deep insights about current realities as well as practical strategies and resources to grow this important area of ministry. More details about the year-long assessment and interim findings are available at <ucc.org/youth> and <ucc.org/young-adults>.

Thom Chu is conducting a one-year assessment of the UCC's ministries with youth and young adults. He has assisted the Council of Youth and Young Adult Ministries, the Student Ecumenical Partnership and other youth- and young-adult serving organizations in the UCC to clarify their respective roles, relationships and missions. He previously served on the churchwide staff of the Episcopal Church in congregational development and ministries with young people for over 18 years including ecumenical and interfaith work with youth, young adults and campus ministries.

DEAR CHURCH: An open letter from young people

By Kendra Purscell and Kelly Forbush

Dear Church,

I need you! Like whoa. My life is changing a mile a minute, and I need a spiritual home.

It's a bit nerve-racking to walk into a new church—it took three years for one of my friends to build up the courage to try the local UCC church, even though he knew it was open and welcoming.

The church needs to actively reach out to youth and young adults. This could be as simple as putting your church's name in the list of churches at the local college chaplain's office. Better yet, host an event for the youth or young adults in your area. I've heard about another church that serves a midnight pancake breakfast during finals period, and the whole campus attends this much loved annual event.

You don't need to use that idea, but I am sure homesick college students and young folks new to the area would love a home-cooked meal by loving Christians any time of the year. One church reaches out to young people through their regular social justice programs by advertising the volunteer program to young people in the area.

Whether it is a home-cooked meal, a social justice program, a book group or even a late-night prayer service, I just want a place to make friends with other young Christians.

Youth and young adults are doing all sorts of different things, from starting college to taking their first job. Regardless of where we are or what we are doing, we are new to our environments and need spiritual partners for the journey.

Church, if there is anything you can do to help me build relationships with other Christians, I would be so grateful! My friend Emilia says, “I need a young adult group in my church! Even if it starts out small, if it isn't there to offer young adults when they come to visit a church, then they feel as if there is nothing there specifically for them.”

And Kathryn agrees: “Sometimes, it is just nice to know that the program is there and to have someone to connect with over coffee or something...It's nice to have that support and talk about faith or just life in general.”

Once you've actively reached out, if you ever see a young person you don't recognize in church one Sunday, don't hesitate to say hello! Many of us go church-shopping to find the right church community for us, and most of the time the first step is just making us feel welcome!

So introduce yourself and ask us about our interests and passions. Who knows? You might make a new friend! As LiErin puts it, “For some young people, a church community is one of the few places to cultivate intergenerational relationships. Nurture these relationships! As someone living in student housing, far from my family, I rel-

ish the rare opportunity to share a meal in a church member's home or to play Frisbee in a real backyard, with kids of all ages.”

One of my friends recently moved to a new town and went to a local UCC church. Everyone was really nice, but it was hard to be one of, if not the only, young person in a congregation with already formed families and friend groups.

As my friend Kevin told me, “People need to realize that oftentimes youth and young adults, not feeling part of the already established group, need to be invited in to ministry and community, not expected to integrate themselves by their own accord.”

This does not necessarily mean automatically signing a new member up for the committee in most need of people. Ask me what my interests are and show me all the different options available in the church. Ask me personally!

My friend Roberta says youth and young adults can be the “active asset of bringing new ideas and a new view to situations.”

Youth and young adults have many insights into the church — use us! Listen and take action. We can do so many things like read scripture, design a website, bake for coffee hour, sing in the choir, preach and even write articles. However, you have been in the church longer and know some of the ropes we have not even seen yet. So help us put our ideas into action!

There are many issues that we take very seriously as young Christians. For example, the church is in a unique place to talk about sexuality and faith. Our bodies are changing and the secular world is bombarding us with information about sex and dating. We could use a little guidance. Please don't tell us what to do or what not to do as if the situation is black and white.

But you can give us a place to honestly ask questions and think about how our faith may inform our decisions at this time in our lives. The Our Whole Lives curriculum is a great program to provide such space, and it's a wonderful way to bond with other youth in the church.

Well, here you go church! We love you. We need you. We care. And we know deep down in our hearts that you need us, too. Who else is going to carry on the amazing legacy that is the United Church of Christ?

My friend Meredith sums it up nicely: “Youth and young adults need to be empowered to sustain the church movement and act as Christian leaders seeking a just world.”

So here is our challenge to you: reach out to us; encourage us; invite us to the table; and treat us as whole, vital members of the church. Oh yeah, and could you send me a care package?

*Mad Love,
Young people of the UCC*



Kendra Purscell serves on the Council for Youth and Young Adult Ministries and the Wider Church Ministries Board of Directors. She lives in Des Moines, Iowa, where she is a Choral Music Education major at Drake University.

Kelly Forbush serves on the Council for Youth and Young Adult Ministries. She lives in Northampton, Mass., where she leads the Ecumenical Christian Community at Smith College. Next year she will attend seminary to study to become an ordained UCC minister.



Young people embrace service and connectivity at General Synod 27

By Kelly Burd

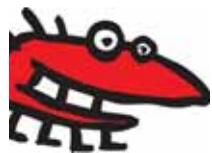
Approximately 400 youth, youth leaders and adult chaperones will participate in "Youth @ General Synod," a week-long program that includes service work and faith conversations as well as the work, worship and fun of General Synod June 26-30, in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Many UCC youth are still riding high on the waves of the 2008 National Youth Event and excited about the chance to experience a similar faith-based adventure and contribute their presence, perspectives and gifts to the church at General Synod.

Designed for high school students, "Youth @ General Synod" will be held June 24-30. It combines General Synod events with service projects, educational programming, social networking and recreational activities.

The program began as an idea of Conference-level youth staff who envisioned General Synod as an opportunity for youth to engage in service and justice work of the church as well as committees and plenaries. It offers a viable option for youth

groups that would otherwise be forced to choose between



a service or mission-based summer trip and a wider church gathering such as General Synod because of budgetary limitations.

Program participants will be housed at nearby Aquinas College, a Catholic Dominican liberal arts college just three miles from downtown.

Service with a smile

Three days during the week have been set aside for service work and building relationships in the wider community. Staff persons from Habitat for Humanity of Grand Rapids are working to both host youth at their sites and to identify other agencies and organizations in the community where our youth will serve.

The Rev. Mary Schaller Blau-

fuss, the UCC's Executive for Volunteer Ministries, has provided helpful resources for participants to reflect on the faith underpinnings of their service work. Blau-fuss emphasizes the importance of having groups prepare for a mission trip or service experience by examining, through scripture and conversation, how service work relates to our desire to follow Christ.

Resources are posted online at <ucc.org/youth> to help youth leaders to facilitate faith conversations before, during and after "Youth @ General Synod" or other mission or service-related trips. Youth groups are encouraged to learn and discern the lessons of advocacy and justice from their experience at General Synod, and explore how they can continue to follow Christ by serving others and seeking justice in their own communities once they return home.

Youth leaders considering bringing a group to General Synod should act quickly; the deadline for online registration with full payment is April 15, 2009. Registration information and forms are available at <ucc.org/youth>.

"Youth @ General Synod" participants are encouraged to bring

their own labeled, refillable water bottles and event bags or backpacks as part of the wider church effort to offer a more environmentally sustainable event than in years

ucc.org/youth

past. They are also invited to bring and decorate an unmarked T-shirt from home to wear as self-made souvenirs. After-hours activities will include films, karaoke, board and card game options and a Saturday night concert featuring Jason & de-Marco.

Youth coming with families, or youth groups that register for General Synod only rather than the "Youth @ General Synod" program, can still attend these events. After-hours recreational activities for youth with parents/chaperones will be available nightly at General Synod.

YAs R invited 2 txt

Several opportunities are also offered for young adults coming to General Synod. An after hours gathering is scheduled and a 2030 Clergy Network gathering will be offered Sunday at 9:30 p.m.

Youth/Young Adult consultant

Thom Chu has established a texting network for young adults 19-30 who wish to be in the loop for impromptu social invitations while at General Synod. Young adults will be able to connect with their peers by sending cell phone text messages inviting others to gather for meals, discussions and recreational opportunities. Participants must be 18 or over to sign up for texting at <ucc.org/youth>.

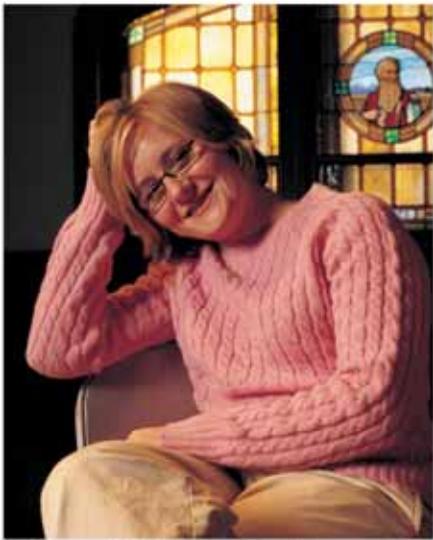
Youth and young adults are invited to participate in the election of the 2009-2011 Council for Youth and Young Adults (CYAM) to be held during General Synod 27. Delegates will vote on candidates for their respective regions and results will be available by the close of business Monday, June 29.

General Synod presents an opportunity for the wider church to benefit from and embrace the gifts and ministries of our youth and young adults — offering unique and valuable perspectives needed in our collective discernment and ministries. They too are called by God to be the Church: to celebrate God's presence, to love and serve others, to seek justice and resist evil, and to proclaim the Good News with their lives.

The Rev. Kelly Burd is the Interim Minister of Youth and Young Adult Ministries on the UCC's Congregational Vitality & Discipleship Team.

10

REASONS WHY ELMHURST IS WHAT COLLEGE OUGHT TO BE






- 1 "At Elmhurst I've met friends who are willing to meet me head-on and talk about the big issues, like religion and politics," says Ashley Greuel. "It's tested me, challenged my beliefs, and enabled me to grow."**
- 2 Elmhurst is a college of the UCC.** The College affirms the spiritual basis for living a meaningful and purposeful life, and encourages students to examine their values and confront moral questions.
- 3 The college guides have spoken: Elmhurst is among the best in the Midwest.** We're "top tier" in *U.S. News*, and *The Princeton Review* calls Elmhurst

"a small college with a big bang."

- 4 Elmhurst offers the most generous UCC scholarship in the United States.** Any admitted student who belongs to a UCC congregation receives a scholarship valued at one-third of tuition cost.
- 5 Elmhurst looks like a college ought to look.** The campus is an arboretum with trees from around the world. It covers 38 acres and has 25 buildings, each designed to support students' academic and personal development.
- 6 The College's Niebuhr Center supports faith motivated students** through course

work and internships as they explore their callings to professions of service or ministry.

- 7 Students choose from more than 50 majors.** From biology to criminal justice to jazz studies, we provide an ideal environment to plan the future.
- 8 Students get the chance to lead.** A vital part of the Elmhurst experience takes place beyond the classroom in over 100 student activities, from the Student Government Association to the award-winning student newspaper and beyond.
- 9 "It's like a big family.** From the moment I set foot on

campus, I felt welcomed," says Kimberly Widmer. "This is the kind of college where you get to experience lots of love, laughter, and challenges."

- 10 An Elmhurst education is intensely practical.** Each of our majors offers both cutting-edge theory and plenty of opportunities to practice how the theory actually works in the real world.



(630) 617-3400
 admit@elmhurst.edu
 www.elmhurst.edu/request/ucc

190 Prospect Avenue
 Elmhurst, Illinois 60126



SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

Pre-Synod events offer wide range of information, activities and gatherings

In addition to a full schedule of General Synod 27 plenary sessions, workshops and business meetings, Grand Rapids, Mich., will also be the site of several pre-Synod events.

“Early birds” arriving in Grand Rapids will have an opportunity to experience one or more of the following events:

► **UCC History, Theology and Polity**

How have Congregational, Christian, Evangelical and Reformed traditions helped to shape and maintain the UCC? The Institute will meet for 12 intensive days, beginning at 2:30 p.m. Monday, June 22, and running through noon Friday, July 3. Evening and weekend activities will be included. For more information and for an application, log on to <ucc.org/synod/pdfs/politycourse.pdf>.

► **Conference on Environment, Faith**

“Holy Water: A Conference on Environment and Faith” will be held from 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. on Thursday, June 25, at **East Congregational UCC in Grand Rapids**. East Congregational is located at 1005 Giddings Ave. SE, Grand Rapids.

Co-sponsored by the UCC’s Justice and Witness Ministries, the event will feature several water-related workshops and field trips. Sheila Holt-Orsted will present “Water Woes,” the story of one family’s fight to ob-

tain non-contaminated drinking water. Worship speaker will be Grand Rapids Mayor George Heartwell.

Scripture contains nearly 1,200 references to water, which is literally and metaphorically a sign of God’s care for and sustenance of the earth and its inhabitants.

The cost of \$35 per person includes program, workshops, lunch and afternoon field trip. To register or obtain further details, log on to <act.ucc.org/site/calendar> and navigate to June calendar events.

► **NY Conference Bike Challenge**

Protesting U.S. auto dependency and oil gluttony, and witnessing environmentally sound alternatives, cyclists from the New York Conference plan to ride bikes from Syracuse, N.Y., to General Synod 27 in Grand Rapids, Mich. Staying overnight at UCC churches along the way, the group will spread the good news of creation-friendly ways to organize our communities and our

transportation needs.

Riders will raise funds to create a New York Conference Fund, designed to help local congregations go green. In addition to New York riders, UCC members from Illinois, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, California and Washington may make the trek as well.

Riders plan to meet in Grand Rapids by the evening of Wednesday, June 24. For more information or to register, visit <ucc.org/environmental-ministries/bike-schedule.html>.

► **Humane Immigration Policies**

In 2008, an immigration coordinating committee sponsored by Justice and Witness Ministries formulated a strategy toward shaping immigration. Toward that end, a one-day consultation on immigration will be held from 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. Thursday, June 25 in the Grand Rapids Convention Center.

Invited keynote speakers are Tom Barry, Director of the Transborder Project, and Jorge Bustamante, Special Rapporteur on immigration to the United Nations. Workshops are to focus on: the New Sanctuary Movement; labor and human rights; theology of immigration; understanding border dynamics; and the causes of migration.

Registration is limited; a \$35 registration fee includes lunch and resources. For more information or to purchase tickets, log on to <act.ucc.org/site/calendar> and navigate to June calendar events.

► **Coalition’s National Gathering**

Carrying the theme of “Growing Bold,” the UCC Coalition’s National Gathering will be held June 22–25 as a celebration of Open and Affirming, exploration of what ONA can be in its fullest expression, worship, fellowship, celebration and engagement.

Keynote Speaker on Tuesday, June 23 will be Hector Lopez, retired Conference Minister for the Central Pacific Conference and the first Latino ordained in the UCC.

For more information the National Gathering or to register, visit <ucccoalition.org/programs/gathering>.

► **Family Multicultural Festival**

The first Children’s and Families Multicultural Festival will be held Thursday, June 25, at **St. John’s UCC in Grand Rapids**, beginning at 1 p.m., the planned theme is: Im-

merse Yourself in Friendship. Sponsored by the Congregational Vitality & Discipleship Team through the Ministry for Children and Families, the festival will be held at the church, 1934 Bridge Street, NW in Grand Rapids.

Creative art, face-painting, authentic African-storytelling, line-dancing and jewelry-making will be available for people of all ages, races, cultures and ethnicities.

For more information, contact St. John’s Church at 616/453-2497.

► **Candle Cloth Project**

Every local church represented by a delegate or visitor at General Synod 27 can be involved in a special Covenant of Prayer Partnership opportunity. By preparing a prayer and a quilted fabric candle cloth, the local church will share them with everyone at Synod and, in particular, with another local UCC church.

Prayer partnerships will occur among the various local church families as the prayers and candle cloths are exchanged before synod adjourns.

Details about the process and instructions for creating the candle cloth will be shared with a local church after the Covenant of Prayer Partnership form, which must be completed by April 1. Forms may be downloaded from <ucc.org/synod/pdfs/candleproject.pdf>, or may be requested from Susan Towner-Larsen, UCC, 700 Prospect Ave., Cleveland, OH 44115.

► **Christian Preservation Project**

In UCC history, many historical resources are available on local congregations and wider church bodies within Congregational, German Reformed and German Evangelical traditions. But very few resources exist regarding the “Christians” who united with the Congregationalists in 1931 to form the General Council of the Congregational and Christian Churches.

Project Coordinator Barbara Brown Zikmund will lead a half-day meeting titled “The Christian Movement in UCC History” on Thursday, June 25. The goal is to refine next steps to preserve and disseminate knowledge about the Christian heritage in the UCC.

For further details, send an e-mail to <XnPreservationProject@verizon.net>.



Register now for the **Twenty-Seventh General Synod** of the United Church of Christ!

Everyone will be there ...

grand rapids, mich.



including Eugene Robinson (Washington Post), Jim Wallace (Soujourners), Krista Tippett (NPR), Ray Suarez (PBS)

ucc.org/synod



immerse
yourself



U.S. Navy selects UCC minister to lead submarine chaplains

By Xander Gamble

Cmdr. Don Troast arrived at Commander, Submarine Force (SUBFOR) in early February to assume duties as the first force chaplain in 15 years.

"Because of my personal experience with the Submarine Force," said Troast, "I think I have a good handle on what religious support requirements for the Submarine Force are."

Troast previously served the Submarine Force as a squadron chaplain from 1994 to 1997. He also served as command chaplain for the USS Harry S. Truman Strike Group and various Marine Corps units deploying to the Far East and Afghanistan.

Troast attended Hope College in Holland, Mich., where he majored in biology and physical education with the intention of being a high school teacher and coach. He then received a call to ministry and went to the theological school at Drew University in Madison, N.J., graduating in 1978. Ordained by the United Church of Christ, he served churches in the Boston area for 13 years and joined the Navy Chaplain Corps in 1991.

"[Chaplains] exist because of the free exercise rights of religion granted by the First Amendment of the Constitution," said Troast, a native of Boston, Mass., "and I would be bold enough to say that if that phrase wasn't in there, we probably would not be in the military."

"Our primary function is to ensure the free exercise of religious rights for sailors, marines, airmen, the military in general, and in my case, the Submarine Force, is met. Our sailors, marines, and coast guardsman go to places where they can't just go to their respective place of worship, so we bring it to them."

Troast, like every Navy chaplain, is required to facilitate the needs of

every member's religious needs, regardless of their faith.

"We aren't called to violate our own beliefs in any way," said Troast, "but by policy, training and professionalism, we make sure that all the faith groups present have their requirements met in some way, shape or form as possible, especially in an operational environment."

The Department of Defense does not endorse any specific religion, but it recognizes more than 900 faith-based non-profit organizations, represented by more than 200 different denominations of chaplains.

"One of my roles as the force chaplain is to do a needs assessment of the force," said Troast. "My own personal philosophy is that I don't want anyone left behind. I don't care if it's just one person or two people. If their religious life or spiritual life is important to them, it's a mission-readiness issue. I think every submariner deserves to be able to practice their faith the best way they can, and the best way we can meet their requirements, especially on deployment."

Although he is the first force chaplain in 15 years, he doesn't feel like he is starting anything new.

"The key thing is the lay leader program," said Troast. "To be honest, I think it is more important in the Submarine Force than anywhere else in the Navy because submarines

never have chaplains on board."

Troast plans to standardize the program throughout the force so that sailors' religious needs are met the best way they can be. "If a chaplain or a religious programs specialist wants to exceed the identified minimum requirements by adding their own flavor or pizzazz, that's great! Good on them," said Troast.

"You don't have to be religious to see the chaplain," said Troast. "If you just need some counseling or some coaching, that's for everybody. I always remind everybody from the commander down to the seaman that they have 'privileged communication,' which means that whatever is discussed privately stays private."

Troast is one of more than 60 UCC clergy serving the U.S. Armed Forces as active duty or reservist chaplains.



Cmdr. Don Troast talks to a crewmember of the Los Angeles-class attack submarine USS Montpelier. Troast recently assumed duties as the first force chaplain of the submarine force in 15 years.

U.S. Navy | Xander Gamble photo

UCC chaplain honored for service in retirement

The Rev. George Rendell Robie has been honored by the Association of Professional Chaplains (APC) with the Retired Chaplain Award at its February "Summit '09 Spiritual Care Collaborative Conference" in Lake Buena Vista, Fla. The award is presented to a retired member who has made significant contributions to the field of chaplaincy and pastoral care, or to the APC during retirement years.

An APC board certified chaplain of Lincoln, Neb., Robie retired from full-time chaplaincy in 2006, when he ended his tenure as staff chaplain at BryanLGH Medical Center in Lincoln. Not one to be idle, he continued to serve that institution as an on-call chaplain until March 2008, when he assumed the

part-time position of spiritual care coordinator at Horisun Hospice of Lincoln, where he presently works.

Robie remains active with the APC in retirement; a service the organization says is "invaluable." He has served as state membership chair for Nebraska and is currently the continuing education chair for that state. In addition, he has volunteered in the areas of Continuing Chaplaincy Education; and annual conference planning, setup and registration. Presently, Robie is involved with other retired chaplains in a project designed to organize retired chaplains as resources to the organization and benefactors for the future of chaplaincy.

Robie joined APC's predecessor organizations, the College of Chaplains and the Association of

Mental Health Clergy, in 1979. He was ordained by the UCC in 1967.

A native of Hooksett, N.H., Robie graduated cum laude with a bachelor's in religion and sociology from Yankton College, Yankton, SD. He holds a master of divinity degree from Drew University, Madison, N.J.; master's in Christian education from Hartford Seminary, Hartford, Conn.; a doctor of ministry degree from United Theological Seminary in the Twin Cities, New Brighton, Minn.; and a master's in guidance counseling from the University of Wisconsin-Stout, Menomonie, Wis. He is married to his college sweetheart, Diane E. Robie, a fellow Drew University graduate and retired nurse. They have two grown daughters and two grandchildren.

Bangor Theological Seminary

Explore the possibilities ...



Training church leaders since 1814, BTS continues to provide opportunities for people to both deepen their faith and find answers to spiritual questions.

- Small class sizes, dedicated faculty, and challenging scholarship
- Opportunities for individualized learning in a supportive atmosphere
- Convenient access to skiing, canoeing, and hiking in the beautiful state of Maine

bts
Bangor
Theological Seminary
BANGOR | PORTLAND

800-287-6781 x126
www.bts.edu

HONORING
MYSTERY ...

EMPHASIZING
SOCIAL JUSTICE ...

TAKING JESUS
SERIOUSLY ...

A NEW RESOURCE FOR AN
EMERGING CHRISTIANITY

LIVING THE QUESTIONS 2.0

Order by April 30, 2009 and receive a 20% Discount

Enter Coupon Code: tq2ucc2

www.livingthequestions.com



art | film | music | books | web

BOOK REVIEW: MORE BAD GIRLS OF THE BIBLE

Biblical characters of 'questionable virtue' afford real-world parallels

By Gregg Brekke

Barbara J. Essex's fascination with the very human side of biblical characters has found its voice in her latest work, "More Bad Girls of the Bible." This book is the most recent expression in her series of books, including the best-selling "Bad Girls of the Bible," that explore the "questionable virtue" of biblical personalities.

As in her other volumes, Essex attempts to give a fuller treatment of both the positive and negative aspects of these characters. She is well aware of traditional interpretations given to these stories. In some cases, the lack of theological attention given to lesser-known women is also telling for her.

Against this backdrop of dogma and exclusion, Essex coaxes out the important social and historic details that open up a deeper understanding of these characters. This is no attempt on Essex's part

at rewriting the biblical narrative; she allows each story to retain its original context.

Essex admits in her introduction that this approach may be challenging for some: "We might be

reluctant to analyze closely the biblical women for fear that we will offend God . . . Critical study should deepen, broaden and expand our faith as we learn more about who these characters were and what they can teach us."

Though clearly looking to "liberate" the included characters from the history of interpretation that is skewed by centuries of patriarchy, it would be unfair to characterize Essex's work as simply feminist or womanist. True, a liberation-based methodology has informed this work, but it would be unfair to label "More Bad Girls of the Bible" as merely a product of this school of thought.

Yet, it would be a grave oversight not to see that the perspective presented by the (presumably all male) writers of the Bible have biases towards telling the stories of men, especially those who were deemed the "winners." What is amazing about the biblical narrative is that the failings of many of its dearest characters are equally exposed for us to see as well. But the history of theology has largely ignored these flaws, leading to an incomplete picture of biblical personalities.

Essex's other books, including "Bad Boys of the Bible" and "Misbehavin' Monarchs," have filled this void by demonstrating a consistent commitment to expanding readers' viewpoints beyond long-entrenched opinions — freeing them to see the

parallels in their spiritual pursuits and real-life struggles.

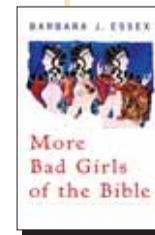
And so when Essex delves into the story of Bathsheba and David, she is not afraid to ask hard questions. Was Bathsheba the victim of rape? Was she powerless to resist the king? Did David's request for her come to him contain an implicit threat against her family if she refused? (As the rest of the story tells, he was certainly capable of killing someone to get his way.)

In opening up the narrative to these possibilities, Essex allows readers to place themselves and their experiences into the story. Rather than seeing Bathsheba as an unrelenting temptress or David as a sex-crazed seducer, these characters are placed into a real-world context where abuses of power are used to gain sexual, political and personal favors.

Her reading of the remaining stories in "More Bad Girls of the Bible" affords similar opportunities for personal and corporate reflection. In addition to Bathsheba, Essex focuses on Hagar; Shiphrah and Puah; Miriam; Zipporah; Rizpah; Huldah; a "crippled" woman; the Syrophenician woman; Mary and Martha; the Samaritan woman at the well; and Mary Magdalene.

Each chapter concludes with a series of individual or group study questions, some scriptural and theological, others more personal. When discussing Miriam's jealousy regarding her brother Moses' power, Essex

MORE BAD GIRLS OF THE BIBLE



By Barbara J. Essex
The Pilgrim Press, 2009
Hardcover, \$16.00
ISBN: 978-0-8298-1824-6
<thepilgrimpress.com>

asks, "Do you ever feel that your gifts and contributions to church and society are undervalued and unrecognized? How do you handle those feelings?" Certainly a struggle we've all encountered.

A list of reference works closes "Bad Girls of the Bible." One quibble: I found myself wishing these references were cited within the text or at least at the end of each chapter. That said, Essex has done her homework and does provide the reader with opportunities for further exploration.

Essex concludes in her introduction, "We are blessed to have sacred texts that give us pictures of real people who were not one-dimensional . . . We see the good, the bad, and the ugly — the Bible does not present perfect people."

The biblical record is filled with the faithful acts of imperfect people. Maybe that is why Essex's books are so popular. They give us hope that something great will be made out of our imperfection.

'Two Minutes for God' offers sips of inspiration

By Gregg Brekke

First Radio Parish Church of America minister, the Rev. Peter B. Panagore, has released a collection of his televised daily devotions in "Two Minutes for God: Quick Fixes for the Spirit."

Shown during the morning news on two NBC affiliates in Maine, the show, called "Daily Devotions," is the televised ministry of First Radio Parish Church of America. Broadcast on radio since 1926, and television since 1954, "Daily Devotions" has now broadened its reach through the Internet and its website <dailydevotions.org>.

Panagore, an ordained UCC minister, took the post at First Radio Parish of America in 2003 after serving churches in Connecticut and Maine for 18 years. His devotional is a collection of stories — all true on some level, he says — that each represents a spiritual value or promise.

"I try not to give answers," says Panagore of the content in his daily message. "I try to give leading questions that nudge people into thinking about how they see themselves through their faith, and why they see themselves that way."

"Two Minutes for God" spent six weeks on the Maine bestseller list and has found success in national distribution. The devotional contains over 350 reflections, with the final sections devoted to special occasions and holidays. A prayer and "Today's Thought" conclude each entry as they do each broadcast.

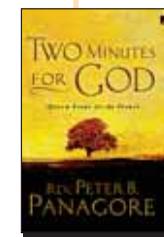
When asked about his inspiration for the entries, Panagore says, "The stories are sometimes about my life, but they're never about me. They're often about my neighbors, but they're never about them either."

"It always aims to the soul and the mind — but the soul primarily — and the idea that God is in the world and we are in the world. And the sacred surrounds us if only we have eyes to see," he says.

This theme — that divine encounters are always near — permeates Panagore's stories. Whether it is an observation of the natural world, a chance encounter with gracious hospitality or the ironies found in daily living, "Two Minutes for God" points readers toward their own discovery of spiritual connections.

"We're uniquely positioned to reach into the homes of 100,000 plus people per day, just in Maine,

TWO MINUTES FOR GOD



By the Rev. Peter Panagore
Simon & Schuster, 2007
Paperback, \$14.95
ISBN: 978-1416538264
<simonandschuster.com>

and to be their church for them," says Panagore. "Whatever their religious stance is, we become their spiritual portal — their connection to God."

First Radio Parish of America is an ecumenical Christian organization, funded in part by foundation support, individual donations and over 30 congregations. Panagore says they are working on expanding their broadcast technology to better embrace Internet capabilities for streaming of audio and video in addition to helping regular listeners "congregate" via a Facebook group.

"I wish I had three minutes," says Panagore of his spot during the morning news. "But we're not going to have it. Two minutes is enough . . . because God is timeless."

joining
Faith & Fair Trade

THE UCC COFFEE PROJECT
A partnership of UCC Justice & Witness Ministries and Equal Exchange



COCLA Cooperative member sorting coffee, Quillabamba, Peru

Fundraising with Fair Trade

Call or email for our Church Fundraising Packet and educational materials to introduce Equal Exchange to your congregation.

When you purchase fairly traded coffee, tea and chocolate through the UCC Coffee Project, you join a growing network of 40 small farmer co-operatives in 20 countries, including the United States, receiving fair prices, affordable credit and a long-term, direct trade relationship through a 100% Fair Trade, worker-owned cooperative, Equal Exchange.



For more information on ordering for your church, fundraiser or alternative gift market:
tel 774.776.7366 www.equalexchange.coop/ucc



resources | classifieds

Contact Connie Larkman at <larkmanc@ucc.org> or 866/822-8224 ext. 2196 for display and Marketplace (classified) advertising.

BULLETIN BOARD

RETREAT

RETIRE TO SCENIC BRISTOL VILLAGE in Southern Ohio. Safe, affordable, friendly, small-town retirement living. Best retirement value in the nation. Enjoy the four seasons in a faith-based community offering a full continuum of care. Check us out at <bristolvillage.org>; e-mail <kjones@ncrccd.org> or <lbower@ncrccd.org>; phone 800/223-9766. Owned and managed by National Church Residences.

BROADWAY UCC, an Open and Affirming Church, welcomes you to New York City and our 5 p.m. Sunday worship at Broadway and 93rd St. <broadwayucc.org>.

BOUND FOR BOSTON? Stay at historic Walker Center. Ideal for Group Accommodations or B&B. Easy commute to

downtown/airport. Phone 617/969-3919; e-mail <reservations@walkerctr.org>; web <walkerctr.org>.

CHRYSALIS INTERFAITH RETREAT CENTER — A place of refuge, rest, and renewal for individuals and small groups near the Blue Ridge Mountains. A ministry of the Church of the Covenant UCC/ Disciples of Christ, Lynchburg, Va. Phone 434/455-5004; web <chrysalis-interfaith-retreat.org>.

RESOURCES

MENTAL ILLNESS NETWORK — visit our websites: <min-ucc.org> and <pathways2promise.org>. E-mail: <bob.dell@ecunet.org> or <bryancrouse@hotmail.com>; phone: 866/822-8224, ext. 3838 (toll free).

TOO FAR FROM A SEMINARY? Earn a 36-credit M.A. in Theology from UCC-relat-

ed Lakeland College. Classes are online, interactive and in real time. Sit at home at your computer with a speakerphone and participate fully in class. Classes offered Fall 2009 (with no pre-requisites): TH530 History of Christian Thought I, TH520 New Testament, TH550 Seminar in Christian Ethics. Visit us online at <lakeland.edu/mat> or e-mail <darlingca@lakeland.edu>.

EGIVE-USA.COM — Good stewardship made easy! Please call 866/303.6623 or e-mail us at <brad@egive-usa.com> for a free brochure.

TWENTY-FIVE FREE CHOIR ROBES — just pay for shipping. Picture and sizes available; e-mail <wdsawyer@cdmucc.org>.

IF YOU'RE CURRENTLY STRUGGLING with your finances, health or praying for a better lifestyle, your prayers can be answered by checking out the best home based business ever. Call Merrily 402/439-2657.

IS YOUR MARRIAGE FIREPROOF?

Contact **Focus Renewal Ministries** for details

A Holy Spirit directed renewal ministry in the UCC

firmucc@aol.com
www.focusrenewalministries.org
 POB 330, Sassamansville, PA 19472

BOWLING UNITED INDUSTRIES

Manufacturers Lights Baptistries Steeples

www.BULchurch.com
 1-800-446-7400
 P.O. Box 2250 • Danville, Virginia 24541

pin a RIBBON on your 2009 CHURCH ANNIVERSARY

An expressive anniversary ribbon/bookmark elegantly honors your church & congregation. Call for a free sample and brochure: **800-208-6804**

www.ribbons4reunions.com
RIBBONS for CHURCHES

HAS THE ECONOMY CRAMPED YOUR STYLE ?

The ministry of the church never goes out of style. We can help you beat the odds!

Increase Giving **Up To 12 Times** No Pressure Process **UCC**

Call Toll-Free **888-245-5826**

Capital Campaigns • Operating Campaigns • Endowments
 VanderWyden Church Financial Consultants, Inc.
 Email: Bill@WydenYourHorizons.com
www.WydenYourHorizons.com

Seeing God Through the Eyes of His Child

YESHUA

Now in the 21st Century the teachings of Jesus will show us the path to World Peace in the same way "Yeshua" learned in his youth. This is a must read for all generations.

Herb Dimock

ISBN: 1-56315-227-4
 284 pages • \$11.95 + S&H

For more information or to purchase copies:
 Eddy Publishing • P.O. Box 1084 • Carnation, WA 98014
eddypublishing.com or amazon.com

KYP

The e-zine of the United Church of Christ, delivered weekly to your e-mail inbox.

YOUR subscription begins next Tuesday ... sign up at ucc.org/keeping-you-eposted.

KEEPING YOU POSTED

UPLANDS

To serve or not to serve? What's the question?

Find out at Uplands

www.UplandsVillage.com
931-277-3518

Not just a place to live, but a way of living!

CLERGY MOVE CENTER®

A specialty division of Stevens Van Lines

Endorsed by ministries that require exceptional service for their relocating clergy, educators, church workers and member families

- Assigned counselor to guide you through the move process
- Family-owned van line, moving families since 1905
- Interstate discounts and other moving program benefits
- No obligation estimate

For total peace of mind on your next move, call our team of **AMSA Certified Move Counselors**

Aymi Dittenbir, Kristin Lyons, Sunny Sommer, Jean Warnemuende, or Vicki Bierlein

1-800-248-8313

Have you remembered the United Church of Christ in your will?

800-846-6822
giving@ucc.org

Church Planter & Redeveloper Basic Training

Aug. 4-7, 2009

The Church Leadership Institute at Emory University, Atlanta

Intensive training event:
Learn about the latest theories
and tools for church planting

General registration: \$580
Seminary credit: \$880

Contact your conference about attending

For more event information, or to
donate to the UCC New and Renewing
Churches Endowment Fund: ucc.org/newchurch



**New Church
Leadership**

**UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST**

A UCC New Church event sponsored by Evangelism Ministry Team, Local Church Ministries; UCC Southeast Conference; Lancaster Theological Seminary; and the Candler School of Theology.



LOANS FOR NEW CONGREGATIONS!

**IS YOUR CONGREGATION LESS
THAN 25 YEARS OLD AND ...**

*Looking to buy a building site?
Buy or build its first house of worship?
Start the first expansion of its facilities?*

Then you may qualify for a loan from

**Local Church Ministries Church Building
& Loan Fund.**



LOCAL CHURCH MINISTRIES
**Church Building
& Loan Fund**

For more information

Call 1-866-822-8224, Ext 3834 Toll Free
or contact Sheila Kinzer at kinzers@ucc.org
see our website at www.ucc.org/finance/partners-in-building/

Habitat for Humanity founder Millard Fuller dies at 74

By Adelle M. Banks (RNS) and
Gregg Brekke

Millard Fuller, the founder of Habitat for Humanity whose name is synonymous with volunteer faith-based efforts to build houses for the poor, died suddenly Feb. 3 after a brief illness.

Fuller, 74, had suffered from a chest cold in recent weeks, said Holly Chapman, vice president of communications and development of the Fuller Center for Housing in Americus, Ga.

"He just took a turn for the worse last night," she said.

Fuller founded Habitat for Humanity in 1976 but parted ways with the worldwide organization in 2005 after philosophical differences with Habitat's board and an allegation of inappropriate conduct that Fuller vehemently denied.

After leaving Habitat, Fuller started the Fuller Center for Housing in Americus, Ga., which sought to continue his mission to provide people across the world with decent housing.

"Millard would not want people to mourn his death," said Linda Fuller, co-founder of both Habitat for Humanity and the Fuller Center, in a statement. "He would be more interested in having people put on a tool belt and build a house for people in need."

Former President Jimmy Carter, a longtime volunteer with Habitat for Hu-

manity who continues to lead a "Jimmy Carter Work Project" with the organization each year, issued a statement calling Millard Fuller "one of the most extraordinary people I have ever known" and commending his roles as founder of both Habitat and the Fuller Center.

"...(H)e was an inspiration to me, other members of our family and an untold number of volunteers who worked side-by-side under his leadership," Carter said.

Fuller became a millionaire by age 29 and developed Habitat for Humanity after giving up all his possessions and moving with his wife to Koinonia Farm, a Christian community near Americus.

The Fullers tested their model of building modest homes with the volunteer labor and "sweat equity" of low-income homeowners in Zaire before creating the organization to construct houses worldwide.



Fuller

Fuller had a long-standing association with the UCC. The United Church Board for World Ministries partnered with Fuller and his wife during their 1973-1976 house building mission in Africa, prior to the founding of Habitat for Humanity.

"Millard loved working with UCC churches and found great encouragement in their passion for his mission," said Ryan Iafigliola, the Fuller Center's director of student builders and youth programs. "He worked right up to the evening of his death, writing letters and making plans for the future of the ministry."

The author of 10 books, Fuller was recognized with numerous honors for his work, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor.

Chapman, the spokeswoman for the Fuller Center, said the organization will work on a succession plan but plans to "continue the mission of Millard."

"His vision was that every person in every country of the world has a simple decent place to live," she said, "and that continues to be our mission."

PASTORAL CHANGES

- Aita, Louis M. to Nuremberg Charge, PA
- Anderson, Jim to interim, First Cong. UCC, Eliot, ME
- Anderson, Paula N. to interim, United Christian UCC, Campbellsport, WI
- Berry, Dawn to Brookside Cong. UCC, Manchester, NH
- Besse-Rankin, Paige to Cong. UCC, Goshen, CT
- Bryant-Smith, Paul to First Cong. UCC, Norwalk, CT
- Buthy, Eva L. to St. Andrew UCC, Mishawaka, IN
- Davis, Janice L. to First Cong. UCC, DePere, WI
- Dunn, Denis J. to N. Cong. UCC, Buxton, ME
- Evans, Anisa to Zion UCC, Henderson, KY
- Foss, Peter to interim, South Freeport UCC, South Freeport, ME
- Goodstal, Care L. to Cong. UCC, North Haven, CT
- Higus, Teresa A. to St. Mark UCC, Terre Haute, IN
- Holland, Robert S. to Pilgrim Christian UCC, Chardon, OH
- Hutch, Dorothy to First Cong. UCC, East Millinocket, ME
- Kolb, Susan to Chaplain, West Bend, WI
- Michaelson, Ted S. to First Cong. UCC, Andover, OH
- Miller, Dale to Salem UCC, Plymouth, WI
- Moeschberger, Karen to St. John's UCC, Allentown, PA
- Murphy, Thomas J. to Cong. UCC, South Dennis, MA
- Pych, Virginia to retirement
- Smith, Gregory K. to Bethel UCC, Eikhart Lake, WI
- Steinhard, John B. to St. John's UCC, Bluffton, OH
- Tokoph, Brian to St. Paul's UCC, Oshkosh, WI
- Tyler, Ross to St. John's (Southport) UCC, Indianapolis, IN
- Western, Julie to First UCC, Clay City, IN

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

CLERGY DEATHS

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Anderson, Albert R., 88, 1/5/2009 | Keller, Jules, 85, 1/17/2009 |
| Andes, William J., 93, 1/26/2009 | Koehler, Roger L., 89, 1/12/2009 |
| Bowler, Arthur W., 90, 12/25/2008 | Kurz, A. Vernon, 87, 1/27/2009 |
| Bozell, Wayne, 87, 12/20/2008 | Larsen, Roland S., 74, 1/27/1990 |
| Brown, James Good, 107, 12/25/2008 | Livingston, Robert J., 92, 1/13/2009 |
| Charlebois, Joseph W., 81, 1/10/2009 | Mardis, Arthur L., 85, 1/19/2009 |
| Colver, Harry J., 98, 1/26/2009 | Marston, Robert E., 90, 1/11/2009 |
| Daniel, R. Berwyn, 88, 2/17/2009 | McLain, Bernard A., 92, 1/3/2009 |
| Dewey, Robert D., 85, 12/29/2008 | Miller, Arthur B., 87, 1/15/2009 |
| Eversman, Reuben D., 77, 1/7/2009 | Pollard, Goldwin S., 88, 12/1/2008 |
| Farmer, Clifford G., 82, 1/21/2009 | Rebmann, Edward A., 95, 1/10/2009 |
| Fray, Harold R., 84, 2/11/2009 | Sather, Richard W., 70, 1/30/2009 |
| Harris, Charles J., 89, 2/4/2009 | Turner, C. R., 86, 12/12/2008 |
| Hartman, Justin J., 91, 2/6/2009 | Weaver-Hudson, John, 50, 1/27/2009 |
| Hiraga, Benjamin M., 94, 1/16/2009 | Westfeldt, George C., 80, 1/12/2009 |
| Hocutt, Aaron Lee, 89, 1/31/2009 | Zeckhausen, Paul W., 77, 2/25/2009 |

Clergy death information is provided by The Pension Boards.

The Best Of The Stillspeaking Daily Devotionals

A collection of 30 of the UCC Writer's Group's best devotionals from 2008.
\$3 each. To order go to www.ucc.org/uccresources or call 800-325-7061.

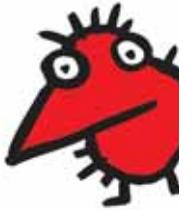
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

JOIN US AT
PILGRIM PLACE IN
CLAREMONT, CA

gathering of
UCC residents

WHERE THOSE SERVING IN
RELIGIOUS OR HUMANITARIAN
ORGANIZATIONS
LIVE, GROW AND SERVE.

VISIT WWW.PILGRIMPLACE.ORG



Puppet ministries put a new face on faith experience



iStockPhoto graphic

Puppets may be associated as “for children,” but ask a puppet ministry leader, and they’ll tell you that puppets are for everyone.

Maybe it’s because puppets are a part of nearly everyone’s childhood: there was Kukla, Fran and Ollie in the ‘50s, and Edgar Bergen and his famous puppet sidekick, Charlie McCarthy. And Jim Henson’s creations of Kermit the Frog and the gang at Sesame Street continue to delight children and adults alike, well beyond Henson’s untimely death in 1990.

Puppets are fun, silly and colorful. They live in a world of pretend, but they can talk about real issues, too. And in the case of puppets who reside in the world of a UCC church, they can talk about things like tolerance, loving your neighbor, and about the promise of Jesus Christ.

“Every time we do something with the puppets at church, everybody goes crazy,” says Jim Somers, from **First Congregational UCC of Rowley, Mass.** He and his wife, Heidi, have led S.T.A.R. (Start Taking A Role) Puppet Ministry for the past five years. “They just swarm the stage afterwards.”

Somers says that their puppet ministry tries to do an all-out production a few times a year, but to keep the puppets active, a character will be brought out occasionally to make a guest appearance at a children’s sermon or even just to help announce an upcoming event.



Jim and Heidi Somers (c.), co-leaders of Start Taking a Role (S.T.A.R.) puppet ministry at First Congregational UCC of Rowley, Mass., pose with the cast and crew of “Born in a Barn.” photo furnished

“They just love it. They just can’t get enough of it. Why is this? It’s probably just because it’s different and it’s entertaining,” says Somers. “Entertaining isn’t usually a word that is associated with a church service, but why not? My theater background says, you’re putting on a show in the sense that you’ve got an audience, and you have to captivate them. The Word is out there, the Word is exciting. So let’s not make it boring, let’s make it exciting. It’s a good excuse to say, ‘Hey, let’s be dramatic here.’”

Cindy McLean, of **Peace UCC in Duluth, Minn.**, leads a troupe of puppeteers from 4th through 6th grade. As much as she sees the puppet ministry benefitting her students, she laughs heartily when she sheepishly admits that she feels it is she who is having the most fun. “[The kids] are so incredibly creative! Sometimes I’m laughing so hard with tears running down my face because they are so clever!”

McLean says the puppets give the kids a place where they can express their faith. “They have a lot of fun with it, and there’s a lot of silliness in it, too,” she says. “Puppets say really funny things, and get it wrong a lot!”

Getting started

Karen Mann, the leader of Good Ship Grace Puppeteers at **Grace UCC in Lebanon, Penn.**, had the fortunate advantage of being in the right place at the right time. “We were blessed by the Rev. Dana Schlegel, a previous puppet ministry person,” explains Mann.

Schlegel, a UCC minister who is noted for his advocacy of the use of sacred dance and the arts in worship, decided it was time to pass along his puppet collection. When Mann first met Schlegel, she knew that he wasn’t going to give his puppets away to be used as playthings. “Just the way he handled the puppets, I knew they were very special to him,” remembers Mann. “They were like his kids.”

Since then, Schlegel, who suffers from MS, continues to be an invaluable teacher and mentor to Mann’s puppet troupe, comprised of eight adults at her church. To honor Schlegel and his important role to the puppet ministry, proceeds from the Good Ship Grace Puppeteer performances go to the MS Society.

Starting a puppet ministry from scratch

can have start-up costs, according to McLean. “You need a couple hundred bucks to start,” she says. “Now that we’re getting established, we’re part of the budget. Every show has costumes and scenery.”

McLean’s troupe had humble beginnings, which required some ingenuity. Instead of purchasing the more costly hand puppets, McLean opted for making “Peeper Puppets,” a technique that involves a set of eyes worn on either a bare hand or a glove.

Through websites like <peeperspuppet.com>, these sets of eyes that hook under the puppeteer’s finger can be purchased for just over \$3.00 each. McLean’s puppeteers would wrap boas and feathery things around their wrists to add color. In fact, even after purchasing the more “high-tech” hand puppets, McLean says the peeper puppets still make appearances in their productions. “They’re just so cute, we can’t bear to let them go,” she says.

What’s my line?

Somers, McLean and Mann all agree that the internet is the first stop for inspiration and resources. One Way Street, Inc., a Colorado-based company, gets high grades

When Mann got called to fill in at the last minute for some entertainment at a Christmas party for a group of electricians, she admits to feeling a bit worried, wondering if the group of adults would take kindly to being entertained by the puppets. “Thank goodness for the internet,” laughs Mann, who hurriedly searched for “electrician humor” so that she could work in a few electrical jokes to the set.

She needn’t have worried. “We left there with two other bookings [for future shows]. People said they thought it was so funny.” Even when playing to a secular crowd, Mann says, “We don’t downplay the religious side of what we do, but we’re not grabbing them by the lapels, either. There are subtle ways to get the message across.”

Finding your niche

A puppet ministry takes a lot of work, but the results bring people close together, sometimes bringing out talents that were never before realized. “This ministry can reach out to kids who maybe don’t have another niche,” says McLean. “One of our kids who had a disability was one of our best puppe-

|| This ministry can reach out to kids who maybe don’t have another niche.”



Puppeteers from Peace Puppets at Peace UCC, Duluth, Minn., share the spotlight with their “Birds of Pray.” photo furnished

from all three puppet group leaders. The website sells instructional DVDs on puppeteering, scripts, puppets and scenery, and sponsors periodic training seminars and performance festivals.

Still, each leader finds what works best for his or her group. Depending on the skit, Somers will turn to different websites that offer free, downloadable scripts. Mann says her troupe writes their own scripts or adapts a pre-written one, and often they’ll center a performance on a song. McLean has also used songs to tell her puppet’s story. But since McLean has yet to find scripts that she feels reflects UCC theology and faith, she has written all of her scripts entirely herself.

Taking the show on the road

Mann’s troupe, the Good Ship Grace Puppeteers, gets bookings from all over the local area, and the 8-person troupe has developed a close working relationship because of it. Performing at events like Relay for Life, Special Olympics or performing and leading a workshop for the local Girl Scouts keeps them on their toes, especially since they like to customize their performance for each particular audience.

teers. She was awesome, just awesome,” she says. “It was just something she could immediately do.”

Somers agrees. “The cool thing about puppets is when someone wants to get involved, but they’re terrified to stand up in front of people ... This way, they can hide. All we see is a puppet! They can have a blast, tell a story, be part of this whole ministry without actually being in front of anybody.”

Mann feels she’s part of something that allows Christians of all ages to go back to the basics. “The puppets teach us about showing Christian love and how to treat people,” she says. “[The Rev.] Dana [Schlegel] told us that a long time ago. People hear from a puppet what they might not hear if a person just stood up and talked.”

Want to start simple?

pepperspuppet.com

ucc.org