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Not deterred by the holidays, '100,000 for Peace' campaign enters its next phase.

Randy Varcho photo



'100,000 for peace' campaign lives on

FROM THE COLLEGIUM



John Thomas and Linda Jaramillo

At General Synod, when the Collegium of Officers presented our Pastoral Letter on the Iraq War, little did we know that — within four months — nearly 64,000 UCC members would join us as co-signers. What a remarkable achievement.

Leading up to our visit in Washington on Oct. 10, when we delivered our anti-war petitions to Congressional leaders — and attempted to do the same at the White House — our offices in Cleveland were buzzing with activity.

Each day, we rejoiced over the stacks of petitions arriving in the mail. Some pastors even drove as far as 100 miles to deliver petitions in person, eager that their concerned members not be left out of the final count.

Following World Communion Sunday (Oct. 7), when many congregations circulated last-minute petitions, our fax machines ran non-stop for 48 hours afterward, as churches forwarded their stash of names just in the nick of time.

And online — where this signature-gathering campaign was launched and nurtured — the tally of endorsers increased substantially by the hour.

As promised, we delivered your concerns to the leadership of the U.S. House and Senate. Each of their representatives respectfully received us and our heavy boxes of petitions.

At the White House, we were not afforded a face-to-face meeting with the public liaison office as we had hoped, so we took our place in a no-protest zone where we were arrested after ignoring three police orders to move.

Our public witness was an expression of solidarity with the thousands who had signed the Pastoral Letter and were praying with us for peace.

Our effort in Washington, we realize, was largely symbolic. It alone neither rattled the White House nor convinced the Congress. And even our time in custody was brief. After we each paid a \$100 fine, we were released a few hours later.

But our effort was a wake-up call — not only to our elected officials, but also to each of us. Throughout this war, the U.S. church has been largely complacent and, therefore, complicit. Sadly, the Christian community has not mustered the passion, volume and numbers needed to overcome the misguided leadership of our government. Our "100,000 for peace" campaign is an attempt to speak with new moral clarity.

Together, as our co-signed Pastoral Letter states, we call for an end to this war. We call for the humility and courage to acknowledge failure and error, to accept the futility of our current path, and we cry out for the creativity to seek new paths of peacemaking in the Middle East.

In mid-November, we announced the next chapter for "100,000 for Peace," and we're asking for your renewed commitment.

Together, by Jan. 6, we hope to raise \$100,000 to assist Iraqis displaced by the war. We also want to lift 100,000 prayers and letters for our U.S. service members. And, in order to localize our pro-peace advocacy, we hope to generate 100,000 calls, letters and visits to the in-district offices of our U.S. Senators and Representatives. (see story on p. 8)

Once again we are counting on your spirited participation. There's no end to what 100,000 committed peacemakers can accomplish.

The Rev. John H. Thomas is the UCC's general minister and president. The Rev. Linda Jaramillo is executive minister of the UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries. Both are members of the five-person Collegium of Officers.

Get involved. ucc.org/100Kforpeace

news.ucc.org

ON THE WEB 24-7

HELP HUNDREDS THIS CHRISTMAS

The UCC's Christmas Fund offering is an expression of joy and gratitude for those who serve — and have served — the church.

Gifts provide pension and health premium supplementation to low-income retirees, emergency assistance to the families of clergy and lay employees and Christmas Gift Checks to hundreds of annuitants. Your gifts help a growing number of retirees whose low-income annuities make it difficult to meet increasing living costs.

Administered by the United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance of The Pension Boards, the Christmas Fund is one of four special mission offerings in the UCC.

The offering dates back to 1902, when "a little money was collected and special Christmas gifts were sent to 10 older ministers," according to an early promotional document.

Over the years, the offering has grown. In 1952, churches received \$121,054 for the Christmas Fund. A little more than 50 years later, last year's Christmas Fund offering received \$1,438,000 and nearly 1,500 families were assisted.

A goal of \$1.5 million has been set for the 2007 appeal.

Many churches promote the offering during Advent and receive it on or near Christmas Sunday.

Learn more at christmasfund.org.

OCWM'S GOOD-STRIDE STRETCH

At the beginning of the final quarter of the year, financial reports were showing promising signs for Our Church's Wider Mission, the UCC's shared purse for ministries at the regional, national and international settings of the church.

At the end of September, OCWM National Basic Support stood at \$4,756,553 or an increase of \$491,740 over last year's total at the same point.

Twenty-four of the UCC's 38 Conferences have remitted more money to date this year over last year. Thirteen are reporting less financial support. One Conference is reporting an equal amount.

Since June's report, the positive financial comparison has grown from a \$316,705 net increase to \$491,740, another promising sign.

The Rev. William Green of the UCC's Stewardship Ministry says that, typically, the end of September has represented "the half way point" for the year, since many churches and Conferences hold remittances until later in the year. Entering the year's final quarter in a more-favorable position is an encouraging sign, he says, and something the national setting has not experienced in recent years.

In contrast, at the same point last year, the UCC's national setting was looking at a negative comparison of nearly \$500,000.

OCWM National Basic Support is the amount that ultimately reaches the UCC's national offices in Cleveland. Congregations first submit OCWM contributions to one of 38 Conferences which, in turn, retains an average of 65 percent before passing along the remaining 35 percent to support national and international ministries. Therefore, the national setting's received-to-date \$4.67 million represents just one-third of the amount UCC



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SHORTHAND



congregations have contributed to OCWM basic support so far this year. In addition, OCWM's special mission offerings have raised roughly \$4.4 million thus far for earmarked programs.

Church leaders have long been cautious about year-to-year comparisons, since Conference payments to the denomination's Cleveland offices can fluctuate significantly.

REFORMED COUSINS SHAKE HANDS

(ENI) The World Alliance of Reformed Churches, of which the UCC is a member body, has agreed to unite with the Reformed Ecumenical Council to create a new "global entity" that will group 80 million Reformed Christians.

"This is a truly, truly important moment," said WARC president the Rev. Clifton Kirkpatrick after the alliance's executive committee, meeting in Trinidad, voted unanimously on Oct. 22 to unite with the REC, whose executive committee had agreed to the proposal in March.

REC's president, the Rev. Douwe Visser, a Dutch pastor, said he hoped the decision to unite would lead to Reformed churches around the world having a "stronger voice."

The Geneva-based WARC has 75 million members in 214 church bodies, including the UCC, in 107 countries. The Grand Rapids, Mich.-headquartered REC has 12 million members belonging to 39 churches in 25 countries. Of the REC's member churches, 27 also belong to WARC.

"We will be a stronger community which serves a wider part of the Reformed family," said the Rev. Setri Nyomi, WARC's general secretary.

The members of the two groupings trace their roots back to the 16th-century Reformation led by John Calvin, John Knox, Huldrych Zwingli and others, as well as to earlier church reform movements such as the Waldensians in the Piedmont valleys of Italy, and the followers of Jan Hus in the Czech lands.

ONE THOUSAND E-SAINTS

About 1,000 people simultaneously tuned into ucc.org/50 on All Saints Sunday, Nov. 4, to mark the closing of the UCC's 50th anniversary year. A 17-minute video, hosted by UCC General Minister and President John H. Thomas, provided a look back at the year's celebratory highlights.

"It hardly seems possible that it's been a year since we began our celebration," Thomas said. "In local churches, Conferences and Associations, and at our General Synod, we shared the wonderful stories from the history of the United Church of Christ. We heard how some of our remarkable saints have helped shape our life together. We ate lots of birthday cake and we sang 'This Little Light of Mine' over and over and over again."

During the webstreaming, it was announced that podcasts of 24 General Synod speakers are available on iTunes. For more information on how to listen to the podcasts — either with an iPod or on your computer, visit ucc.org/news/united-church-news-podcast.html.

Watch the webcast at ucc.org/50.

NYE ROCKS!

It may be a little early to start packing, but it's not too soon to start planning — and fund raising. National Youth Event '08 will rock the University of Knoxville in Tennessee, July 24-28.

Held every four years, NYE provides an opportunity for more than 3,000 youth (ages 13 to 18) to gather for worship, worship, faith, fun and fellowship. A registration cost of \$345 per person includes accommodation and meals. Registration will begin in February.

Planned collaboratively by the UCC's national staff and the NYE planning committee, NYE continues to be one of the largest and most popular gatherings of UCC people.

The Rev. Kelly Jean Burd has joined the UCC's Worship and Education Ministry to help coordinate NYE '08. Burd, who attended NYE at age 15 and has remained passionately supportive of it, says she returned home from her first NYE experience and told her parents that her life had been changed. She now credits the experience as playing a pivotal role in her decision to pursue ordained ministry.

An eight-minute promotional video can be viewed online at ucc.org/youth/nye.

GENERAL SYNOD 26 | HARTFORD, CONN.

let it shine

Order celebration DVDs at ucc.org/synod

TASK FORCE, BOARDS TO MEET AGAIN IN APRIL

National boards approve continued work on streamlined governance

By J. Bennett Guess

The boards of directors of the UCC's four national Covenanted Ministries have affirmed some general-direction recommendations for streamlining the denomination's national setting.

Local Church Ministries, the largest of the UCC's four Covenanted Ministries, met Oct. 24-28 in Cleveland, where it voted 25 to 10 to accept "in principle" the recommendations of the UCC's Governance Task Force.

The LCM board also urged that further conversations include broad testing of the proposals across various church settings, and it listed several affirmations, questions and concerns to be forwarded to the inter-ministry working group.

Similarly, Justice and Witness Ministries' board of directors, which met the same weekend at UCC-related Franklinton Center at Bricks in Whitakers, N.C., affirmed the basic direction of the proposals. By a vote of 26 to 3, with one abstention, JWM asked the governance group "to continue its work paying attention to the concerns forwarded by the board," according to the board's stated action.

The Office of General Ministries' board voted unanimously, with one abstention, on Nov. 2 to accept the general direction of the recommendations, as did Wider Church Ministries' board by a unanimous vote with one abstention on Nov. 9. Both boards also responded with a list of affirma-

tions, concerns and questions.

Since its inception two years ago, the Governance Task Force has been exploring how to create one governance board — both legally and ecclesiologically — for the entire national setting, as opposed to the five autonomous bodies that now exist: LCM, JWM, WCM, OGM and the Executive Council.

As the structure is currently configured, the elected members of the five-person Collegium of Officers report to different Covenanted Ministry boards, in addition to the Executive Council, meaning each has different allegiances — making strategic planning and comprehensive budgeting difficult.

Far from concrete at this point, the task force is proposing that the separate legal incorporations of LCM, JWM and WCM be retained and that their mandates be honored. However, the new structure would call for a single yet-to-be-named governing body — numbering perhaps 75 people. Each person elected to this single board would also sit simultaneously on each of the three incorporated boards.

The Office of General Ministries would be dissolved and its ministries would become part of an expanded common services unit.

The General Minister and President's office would be given expanded oversight over the whole of the

national setting, but would still work collegially with the elected heads of each ministry body. An appointed Chief Operating Officer, reporting to the General Minister and President, would manage day-to-day opera-

TASK-FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDE:

- One governing body to replace five national boards
- Current legal incorporations, mandates be retained
- Expanded role for General Minister and President
- Appointment of Chief Operating Officer.

tions.

The Rev. John H. Thomas, the UCC's current general minister and president, is not eligible for re-election in 2009, meaning any new structure would not affect his time in office.

The 90-member Executive Council approved the general direction of the proposals in early October.

The task force is likely to bring more specific proposals for consideration in April 2008 when the four boards and Executive Council will meet jointly in Cleveland.

The UCC's biennial General Synod still would have to approve necessary bylaw changes, and the UCC's Conferences must ratify any such alterations. Therefore, any new structure would not be implemented until 2011 at the earliest.

New LCM head called to 'serve the church, seek the church'

By Andy Lang
For United Church News

The Rev. Stephen L. Sterner was elected acting executive minister of the UCC's Local Church Ministries. LCM's board of directors voted unanimously on Oct. 28 at its meeting in Cleveland.

Sterner will succeed the Rev. José A. Malayang, who is retiring on Dec. 31 after seven years in office. He will serve out Malayang's unexpired term which ends in October 2009, but he also can seek an additional two four-year terms beyond that time.

Sterner, 61, has extensive experience both as a pastor and in church leadership.

From 1986 to 1989, Sterner was secretary for church development in the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries. He spent the next 16 years in pastoral ministry as senior minister at **Central Congregational UCC in Atlanta, Ga.**, and senior minister at the **Church of the Beatitudes in Phoenix, Ariz.** He was Interim Conference Minister for the UCC's Massachusetts Conference in 2005 and 2006, and is

presently interim pastor at **Claremont UCC in Claremont, Calif.**

Sterner earned his Master of Divinity and Doctor of Ministry degrees from UCC-related Lancaster Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania.

"From the beginning, my ministry has been to both serve the church and seek the church," Sterner said during a conversation with the LCM board before his election. "The church I was trained to serve at seminary was already beginning to disappear by the time I was ordained.

"I think the church is at a critical moment in its life," Sterner said. "Many of our churches have become so acculturated that their capacity to proclaim the Gospel has been compromised. So how do we sing the songs of Zion in an alien land?"

But many other congregations, Sterner said, are "ahead of the curve, and the structures of the church have yet to catch up with them.

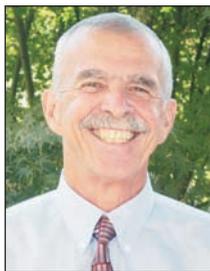
"There are many things happening — especially in small, struggling congregations — that are sparks of light for the future."

Sterner is encouraged by the new generation of spiritual seekers, "who show a real hunger for faith, a fresh openness to biblical stories, and a sincere desire to engage in a deeper spiritual quest."

But seekers also reflect the culture's hostility to organized religion, Sterner said. "As a result, the new seekers are not so much agnostic, as antagonistic" to the church.

"So if you're going to invite seekers into a community, you have to make sure there's space for them — not only physically, but also spiritually, culturally and theologically. It's useless to invite them and their stories into the church if their stories cannot be told."

The church cannot abandon its "historic traditions," but "we must talk about our faith in ways that are not controlling or condemning," he said.



Sterner

Tutu criticizes 'collective punishment' of Palestinians



South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu (c.), a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, is pictured with Massachusetts Conference Minister Jim Antal (l.) and the Rev. Nancy Taylor (r.), senior pastor of Old South UCC in Boston.

Tutu keynoted a two-day conference, held at the church, Oct. 26-27, titled "The Apartheid Paradigm in Palestine-Israel." About 850 people attended, while another 200 protestors gathered outside to furiously denounce the use of the word "apartheid" to describe Israel. The event was sponsored by the Sabeel Center, a Palestinian-Christian organization with partnership ties to the UCC, which rented Old South's sanctuary for the event.

Both Antal and Taylor issued statements expressing support for Israel and opposition to terrorism, while also defending Sabeel's use of the building. "We grieve for Israel's profound experience of insecurity and fear as it is surrounded by a horrific combination of hostile nations, corrupt leadership, and terrorism," Taylor said in the statement. "We also stand firmly in support of Palestinian Christians and grieve for their experience of suffering, fear, and deprivation as an oppressed minority."

photo furnished

'Winter Solstice at ucc.org' to lift music, interfaith prayers for peace

A winter solstice celebration at the UCC's Amistad Chapel in Cleveland will be webstreamed Dec. 21 through Jan. 2 at <ucc.org>.

"It is important that we affirm the interfaith connections that can unite us as a community, especially during this holiday season when so much of the world is in turmoil," says the Rev. Cliff Aerie, the UCC's minister for special events, creativity and the arts. "We will especially hold up prayers for peace to seek an end to war and open up new pathways for cross-cultural understanding."

"The Return of the Light: Winter Solstice Celebration" actually will take place before live audiences on Dec. 14 and 15, as a gift to Cleveland's interfaith community. However, an edited version of the event will enable more to participate — and learn from the experience.

The web-streamed program is being developed by the UCC's Ministry for Imagination, Creativity and the Arts (MICA) as part of a resource template to assist churches in planning ecumenical and interfaith events for their community, says Aerie, who leads the program.

"The mission of MICA is to affirm the role of the arts in ministry by nurturing individuals and congre-

gations as co-creators with the Creator," he says.

Ancient and modern cultures throughout the world have observed winter solstice as the turning point of mid-winter — the day with the shortest daylight hours and the longest night of the year.

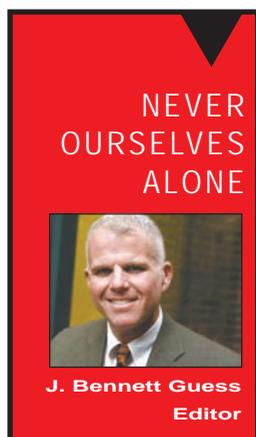
WATCH DEC. 21 TO JAN. 2,
AT <UCC.ORG>.

"Through ritual, prayer and supplication, ancient peoples sought divine assurance that darkness would give way to light and that the warmth of springtime would eventually reappear," Aerie says.

As calendars evolved, the solstice — usually Dec. 21 or 22 in the northern hemisphere — became the astronomical measurement of the first day of winter and religious traditions placed their holy and celebrative feasts on or near this day.

"This will be a wonderful event for families," Aerie says. "Adults, youth and children will be captivated by the stories, symbolism and music. I'm hopeful that this will become a holiday tradition and help our churches learn about the heritage from which our Christmas traditions arise."

United Church News housekeeping: A little bit of this, that



“A whopping 206,000 households now receive United Church News, meaning we’ve become one of the largest mainline denominational newspapers in the country.”

United Church News is always changing. That’s why, from time to time, it’s this editor’s prerogative to point out what’s new and exciting, lest someone miss out. Here’s an end-of-the-year look at what we’re up to — and what we need from you.

1. We’re still growing.

In October, we welcomed 19,000 new subscribers from the Iowa Conference, making it the 32nd Conference to join our news family. Now, folk in Iowa not only receive their Conference news, but they also receive this National section in tandem.

We think this kind of Conference-National partnership enables the church’s news to be delivered in complementary — not competing — fashion. Plus we benefit financially from shared delivery, and both sections arrive at your doorstep in seamless fashion with a familiar look and feel. The message is subtle, but sure: “We’re one church.”

Thanks to Iowa, a whopping 206,000 households now receive United Church News, meaning we’ve become one of the largest mainline denominational newspapers in the country. More than one-third of UCC households now receive it.

By comparison, the United Methodist’s Interpreter Magazine has 200,000 subscribers, Presbyterians Today has 55,000, U.S. Catholic has 35,000, and DisciplesWorld has 10,500.

Add to our subscription list at ucc.org/ucnews/how-to-subscribe.html.

2. We’d like to have your e-mail address.

Thanks to the immediacy of online news — and given that we publish just six times annually — more and more of our headlines appear online at ucc.org/news. While it once could take weeks for denominational news to reach you via print, we’re now informing you within hours.

But we have a problem: Even though we have 206,000 print subscribers, we only have 8,500 e-mail addresses. That’s a sad percentage.

We would like to reach more of you electronically, especially with our twice-monthly rundown of headlines. So will you send us your e-mail address?

By responding with the reply envelope that’s tucked inside this newspaper, our subscription service can sync your e-mail address with the rest of your subscription information. Or, if you’d prefer to do so online: First, become a “log-in” user at ucc.org/login.html, and, second, check “United Church News” from the list.

And we’ll stay in touch — without being a pest.

3. We’re getting prettier.

We’ve never been content with the low quality of our newsprint, but we never could afford the upscale stuff. But, thanks to a new arrangement with our printer, we’re now getting the same higher-quality recycled paper used by their other clients. By purchasing just one kind of newsprint, our printer gets better bulk prices and reduces their storage costs, and we’re able to offer you a much-better product. You’re looking at it.

Because United Church News now has a longer shelf life, we thought we needed paper that ages more gracefully.

4. We entered the 21st century.

Two months ago, United Church News debuted its new blog to lift up stories about UCC churches, members and issues making secular news. The Rev. Chuck Currie — UCC minister and veteran blogger — is typing feverishly and doing a great job, and so far it’s been a big hit. Check it out at unitedchurchofchrist.blogspot.com or link from ucc.org/news.

5. We really need your contribution.

Two months ago, the frequency of United Church News was reduced from 10 to six issues annually. The reason? Money.

Since then, we’ve made a concerted effort to pay our way. We’ve increased our advertising revenue by more than 300 percent, and we’ve been upfront about the absolute necessity of your regular financial contributions.

So far this year, we’ve received \$75,000 from our readers. It’s much appreciated. But that’s only half of the amount we need to meet our contributions budget for the year. We’re hoping that an end-of-the-year surge will push us over the top.

I have faith in our readers. I know people appreciate this newspaper. That’s why there’s no need to beg. Instead, I’ll simply ask: Before year’s end, will you return the reply envelope with your donation enclosed? Or contribute online at ucc.org/make-a-gift.

Thanks in advance.



LETTERS

‘The miracle of peacemaking’

Many thanks to our Collegium of Officers for leading us to stand for peace. We really appreciated the Pastoral Letter on the Iraq War and the opportunity to sign on to a letter for peace.

Before the war in Iraq began, **Ainsworth UCC** voted against it, and we have not wavered in our commitment. It was a great support to know that our denominational leaders stand with us for peace and an end to the wars we perpetuate.

Personally, I have made peace-making a priority of my ministry. I do not want my children or any children to grow up under the shadow of war. Recalling Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s words about war, I do believe that the soul of America is dying; everyday of war is one more step to death. It will only be through the miracle of peace-making that we can resurrect our soul.

The Rev. Lynne Smouse López
Ainsworth United Church of Christ
Portland, Ore.

‘Big-league’ bewilderment

A full page article [Oct.-Nov.] talks of the pastoral transition at **Trinity UCC in Chicago** from Jeremiah Wright to Otis Moss III. This situation raises an interesting paradox I would think for the Chicago Metropolitan Association

church and ministry body.

We clergy have been repeatedly warned to steer clear of search matters when we are leaving. I think what Wright has done makes perfect sense, and maybe should be looked at more, so in changing the pastoral code of ethics we have in the Manual on Ministry. But, as I am aware of clergy who have been sanctioned in a variety of ways around such issues, it raises an interesting question about what rules apply to what bodies and individuals.

Also, it would appear that Trinity did not use the UCC pastoral search process for calling Moss. Again, that makes perfect sense for me. But other churches are castigated for not using this process. I also wonder if Moss received the proper credentials to be considered in the UCC search process as other clergy are expected to do when they desire to be considered for placement in UCC churches.

Does this mean that now we have the “big league” churches and the “minor league” and maybe even “little league” churches when it comes to who is to be accountable to Church and Ministry Committee procedures in this denomination and who is beyond the reach of church and ministry departments and the norms that are practiced among us?

The Rev. David Loar
Akron, Ohio

God’s mission in Coopersburg

How much money do you think a church with an average attendance of 71 and a budget of \$100,000 can raise for mission work to its local community in six years? \$25,000? \$50,000? \$100,000?

Would you believe \$175,000? That’s how

much **St. John’s UCC in Coopersburg, Pa.**, has raised to assist families struggling with medical bills since 2002!

We need to get out of the mindset that mission is something that is done far away by others and to the awareness of need at our door. All too many letters complain about this, that and the other, but at St. John’s UCC we believe if you aren’t part of the solution, you’re part of the problem. We want to be part of the solution.

The Rev. Richard Guhl
St. John’s UCC, Coopersburg, Pa.

Honor historic identities

Reading the original letter regarding using “UCC” in church names and the responses [Soapbox, Oct.-Nov.], I can’t help but find it ironic that, on the one hand, many seem to want to demand that churches drop their historic names by adding UCC while at the same time, the UCC constantly showcases what are called “UCC firsts” — the Pilgrims, early stands against slavery, first ordained African-American, etc. Few of those listed are actually UCC firsts; the UCC didn’t exist when they happened. They belong to the rich history of Congregational, Christian, Reformed and Evangelical churches.

The founders of the UCC wisely guaranteed the right of all churches to their historic identities and ways. We dishonor them when we engage in a cultural imperialism that attempts to wipe away the fact that others, many others, came before. We should celebrate UCC accomplishments in the last 50 years as such but an historical blindness serves no one.

The church I serve is proud to be a Congrega-

tional Church in the UCC. We are also proud to be a member of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches, and we are daily blessed by the fellowship of our brothers and sisters in both families. But we know that where Christ is leading us is far more important than our name or the letters that come after it.

The Rev. James E. Eaton
First Congregational Church UCC
Member, NACCC
Owosso, Mich.

‘Pleased to read’

Please extend my sincere appreciation for the great work of your staff and the various Conference staffs that also place their Conferences newsletter in United Church News.

I am proud to be a member of the UCC, and I am so pleased to read the accomplishments, changes and actions of my church. Consequently, I will continue to support United Church News with two annual donations.

I suggest that you ask readers to bring their issues to their church on Sunday mornings and make an attempt to share it with others who may not yet receive it.

Again, thank you so much for being the most widely distributed denominational newspaper in the United States.

Larry G. Romig Sr.
St. Petersburg, Fla.

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

GROWING UP IN THE GLOBAL VILLAGE

Child of missionaries is 'neither Zulu nor fully American'

COMMENTARY



Thandiwe Gobledale

watch the red earth puff up in little clouds around my pink sneakers as I climb the hill. My friend, Themba, walks beside me pushing my bicycle, and the dust barely shifts as he bounces jauntily from one bare foot to the other.

When we finally reach the hilltop, Themba wheels the bicycle around, pointing it downhill and steadies it as I climb on. He sits behind me, the balls of his feet anchoring us into place.

"Asihambe! Let's go!" My voice pierces the air in childish anticipation.

Themba lifts his feet and the cycle begins to descend. The hill rising to the right blurs as we pick up speed, and I cling to the handlebars, exhilarated by the air whistling around us. The road flattens, and the world begins to take form around us again as Themba guides the bicycle into my front yard and touches down with his feet. We sit, grinning from the speed, the rush of air.

My dad stands waiting for us, armed with a heavy Nikon camera. "Hold that for a minute," he tells us as he adjusts the lens. Click!

I gaze at the framed photograph of me and Themba.

What did it mean to grow up as the child of missionaries in southern Africa? I search our faces for an answer in our eager smiles, equally wide and white but Themba's offset by his chocolate complexion.

In one sense, it meant nothing.

I enjoyed riding my bicycle with Themba, playing dolls with Thembi, his sister and my best friend, flying kites with my dad, walking to the shop to buy milk for Sineke's mum and sweets for us, playing with bubbles in the plastic washbasin I used as a bathtub, being sung to at night before I went to sleep.

Being a missionary kid meant nothing more or less than being a child, going about my everyday life mostly oblivious of the political implications of my white American family living in a black area of KwaZulu Natal during apartheid.

I knew that I looked different from my friends and that my parents were from a different country, yet I was a child preoccupied with the egotisms of childhood. My life was the only reality I knew, and I often lived without analyzing my life.

In another sense, growing up as the child of missionaries meant everything. It meant being visibly different from everyone else in our community. It meant moving between two cultures — that of New England, in the United States, and Zulu and Ndebele communities in South Africa and Zimbabwe.

It meant seeing from a young age that people live and go about life differently, and these ways were simply different, not necessarily better or worse. It meant being exposed to disease and death as natural parts of life in southern Africa while they were foreign, almost antithetical to life in the United States.

I was fortunate to have the support and consistency of my family as I moved back and forth between cultures. Neither Zulu

nor fully American, I could be a Gobledale, finding refuge and acceptance for both the Zulu and the U.S. aspects of my identity.

As an adult working as a missionary in India, I have become aware that my parents' lives in southern Africa did not parallel mine.

While Mfanefile, South Africa, and Plumtree, Zimbabwe, were simply my homes, places I belonged, my parents had to work to establish themselves in these communities, to learn what their role in the church would be and how they were expected to fill it.

As a young adult living in a new culture here in India, I now appreciate the challenges my parents faced living in places where they did not speak the language and did not know the customs. While I grew up bilingual and was free to attend school, play with my friends, and have stories read to me before bed, my parents had to learn the intricacies of the cultural contexts in which they were to live and work as local church pastors. They had to deal with the politics and personalities of the communities in which we lived.

Growing up in southern Africa has instilled in me a great respect for the elderly, an appreciation for community and a longing to help others. Here in India, as I wonder how to navigate a cultural challenge or how to make space for myself and my foreignness while still being culturally sensitive and

appropriate, I often try to remember how my parents lived in South Africa and Zimbabwe. I remember my mother's time away at weekend revivals and have a fresh understanding of the jars of peanuts and raisins she would carry with her, so she would have something to supplement her meals of stringy beef from the cow that was slaughtered for the event and the *sadza* (boiled maize flour) and cabbage that would accompany it. I have a refreshed sense of respect for my father who stopped our car, as we headed home after a long day at a rural church, to see if he could help a man who had passed out drunk on the side of the road. I often look to my parents as examples of people of integrity and courage, as role models for how I can be a missionary.

Working as a missionary myself has given me a newfound appreciation for what it means to be accepted into a community.

Gazing at the photograph of me and Themba grinning from the seat of my bicycle, I realize that I took this acceptance for granted as a child.

A knock interrupts my thoughts. "Thandiwe, akka. Thandiwe, sister. It's time for dinner." I rise and open the door to find eleven-year-old Yuvaraj waiting for me.

He takes my hand, linking his fingers in mine and leads me to the dining hall. My chest swells with the knowledge that he is a child of India who has accepted me as a part of his life. Now I know better than to take this for granted.

Thandiwe Gobledale, born in Durban, South Africa in 1984, is a 2006 graduate of Pomona (Calif.) College. The daughter of the Rev. Tod and Ana Gobledale — UCC/Disciples missionaries now serving in Australia — she was a 2006-2007 Global Ministries mission intern in Vellore, India. She's now working in Nepal as staff for Pitzer College's semester abroad program.

1.	Bill Moyers	834 units sold
2.	Marian Wright Edelman	457 units sold
3.	Barack Obama	442 units sold
4.	Lynn Redgrave	387 units sold

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OVERHEARD

"We are not 'the church of the Pilgrims.' We are contemporary Christians who have owned and continue the pilgrimage toward truth and freedom which the Pilgrims have bequeathed to us as a spiritual legacy."

— A quote from the website of *Pilgrim UCC in Carlsbad, Calif.*, as quoted in a Thanksgiving-themed feature story on the Pilgrims and their UCC descendants. (North County Times, San Diego, Nov. 8).

"He was a beautiful soul, an extraordinary human being and the best friend a person could ever have."

— A tribute on broadwayworld.com to a successful Broadway actor-turned-UCC minister, the Rev. Timothy M. Fauvell, 50, who died on Nov. 7 of cardiac arrest. After appearing on Broadway in *Grease*, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, *State Fair*, 1776 and other shows, Fauvell left his stage career to attend Union Theological Seminary and was ordained in the UCC last year. He was youth pastor at *New York's Briarcliff UCC* and a clinical chaplain at Columbia Presbyterian Hospital.

"Haslanger has always intimidated me because he is one of those men who actually practice what they preach, and now, he is going to preach what he practices."

— A Wisconsin State Journal columnist reflecting on his fellow journalist, the Rev. Phil Haslanger, an editor at the newspaper, who was ordained in the UCC on Oct. 28 at *Lake Edge UCC in Wisconsin*. (Nov. 2)



SOAPBOX

Leave a comment

On All Saints Sunday (Nov. 4), a year-in-review webcast helped draw to a close the UCC's 50th anniversary celebration. United Church News asked for comments from viewers. Here are a few:

I wasn't able to attend General Synod and I still had chills after watching this video. Happy Birthday UCC from a student at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities. I am happy to be a part of this denomination!

Dixie Laube
St. Paul, Minn.

What a terrific presentation. How I wish I could have been at Synod, but we at the UCC in Forest Grove, Ore. loved hearing about it first hand from Ruth and Bob Holznagel and Linda and Dick Kroll. Jerry and I (and our family) love our denomination and what it stands for. Thank you for sharing this webcast!

Laura Frye
Forest Grove, Ore.

Ken Medema's on-the-spot musical response [at Synod] to Marian Wright Edelman that "we will not give up until the job is done" sums up both the celebration and the looking forward.

Dave Pomeroy
First Congregational UCC
Las Vegas, Nev.

This was a superb finale to the 50th year of appreciating the UCC and recognizing our saints from the past and the present. From my home computer, I could feel the excitement, the energy, and the hope for the future—which begins now. Let it continue to shine! Thanks for offering these webcasts throughout the year. It gave many an opportunity to be connected. Well done UCC!

Donna Bristow
Colorado Springs, Colo.

Watch the archived webcast at ucc.org/50.

TABULATIONS



BILLBOARD CHARTS

End-of-October sales reports show General Synod DVDs flying off the shelves. Here's a look at the most popular sellers:

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James A. Autry

Foreword by: **Bill Moyers**

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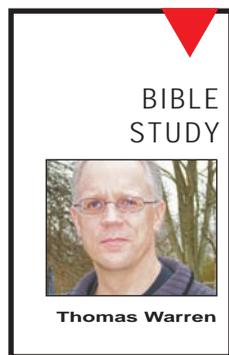
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CHRISTMAS PLOUGHSHARES?

the word | journeys

spirituality

Advent is time to proclaim 'the absurdity of Christ'



Thomas Warren

Advent is a season of expectation and hope. It is also a season of following — a time when we travel along with the holy family as they struggle with the vagaries of peasant life in first-century Palestine. The Christmas story, as we have come to know it, includes much drama and tension.

The drama of Christmas begins in anxiety. An unplanned pregnancy is followed by an imperial summons to Bethlehem. Along the way there are mysterious angelic interventions, improvised accommodations for birth and royal orders of infanticide. Yet, in the midst of such challenging conditions, newness and promise overflow. There is a father's word of prophecy, a mother's song of revolution, gift-toting wise men and praise-filled shepherds. Yes, the long hoped for Messiah will arrive — but not quite as we had expected.

During this season of surprises, each Sunday with the holy family includes some definitive color commentary: prophecy from Isaiah. On Dec. 2 — the First Sunday of Advent — the prophets' inaugural word is a proclamation perfectly apropos

for the season: Peace is coming! Spoken some seven centuries before Christ, Isaiah 2:1-5 points to a promise which, for Christians, arrives in the form of a child. Jesus — God with us — will bring peace to the earth.

The first five verses of Isaiah 2 make up a well-known and deeply loved text. It is a vision that has inspired history's peacemakers for generations. Weapons will be transformed, divine arbitration shall result in peace and war will be learned no more. God will judge between the nations and all God's people will stream into the holy city. It is, indeed, a glorious vision; yet, somehow strangely absurd.

In his commentary on Isaiah, Jesuit priest Daniel Berrigan points out the absurdity of Isaiah's word. It was spoken in "an age of imperial darkness, of wars and rumors of wars, of duplicity and conniving in high places." The prophet had the ear of King Ahaz and his successor, Hezekiah; but their attention was elsewhere. When war with Assyria broke out, it would prove to be only a beginning. Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom Israel, would fall in 722 BCE, followed later by

a siege on Jerusalem. At the mercy of Assyrian power, God's holy city would teeter, only to be crushed a generation later by yet another imperial power, Babylon.

Isaiah's time was, indeed, a time of wars and rumors of wars. It was a time when real leaders spoke only of national defense, homeland security, and God's favoritism. It was a time when only fools spoke of peace. Isaiah was one such fool.

In some ways, not much has changed. Perhaps it's only gotten worse. For ours is a time not of war, but of multiple wars. Ours is a time not simply of rumors, but of overt threats and pre-emptive strikes. Ours is a time of shadow-dwelling insurgents and an imperial bully with global reach. Yet into this time comes a new absurdity; the absurdity of Christ.

In 2007, as we prepare for the coming of the Christ child, may we allow his peace to enter not only our hearts, but our social, economic, and political lives as well. As Isaiah made so clear, kings and generals and presidents do not make for peace. God's people, seeking instruction and revelation, come to Zion. Understanding God's will,

they — *not their God* — destroy the weapons of war. Their acknowledgement of and trust in God's ability to settle international disputes, is the basis for disarmament and global reconciliation (2:4). These are the blessed peacemakers whom Christ calls out.

Advent is when we in the church talk most openly about peace. The peace of Christ, we are told, is the "reason for the season." This year real peace seems farther away than ever. But Isaiah's word, embodied for us in the Christ child, is a direct assault upon the temptation to despair.

This Christmas may we become the peace loving fools our God has called us to be. May we find the courage to follow the Christ child who implores us, in the prophetic spirit of Isaiah, to beat our swords in ploughshares and our spears into pruning hooks.

May we, in our hearts, know the peace of the season. May we, through our lives, see to it that is implemented.

The Rev. Thomas I. Warren, pastor of Pleasant Hill (Tenn.) Community UCC, is United Church News' bible study contributor.

ROADWORK



1. What is the relationship between Isaiah's vision, public proclamation and the role of social imagination in the life of the church?
2. In what ways does the life and ministry of Jesus reinforce the prophetic word found in Isaiah 2:1-5? What blocks us from claiming the hope-filled vision of Isaiah?
3. How can we communicate Isaiah's vision of disarmament to the "powers and principalities" that dominate our world?

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GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST AND ON EARTH PEACE.

Can a Christmas chorus of 100,000 peacemakers make any difference?

By J. Bennett Guess

Taken by the overwhelming churchwide response to its Pastoral Letter on the Iraq War, the UCC's five-person Collegium of Officers is asking that the denomination's anti-war advocacy not be distracted by Christmas, but propelled by it.

They're even proposing that the UCC's '100,000 for Peace' campaign be ramped up to a whole new level.

Will UCC members add "Iraq War" to its long list of Christmastime responsibilities? Church leaders think they will.

Two church officers stood defiantly outside the White House on Oct. 10, representing the concerns of at least 63,797 UCC members who had co-signed a Pastoral Letter on the Iraq War, demanding that the war be ended.

"We will present these petitions and hope that they're received by someone at the White House," the Rev. John H. Thomas told about 50 impromptu supporters who gathered near Washington, D.C.'s Lafayette Park, just before he and the Rev. Linda Jaramillo, executive minister of Justice and Witness Ministries, attempted to deliver the petitions to the White House.

"If that's not the case, we plan to stay until we are arrested as a sign of our commitment and the commitment of all of you," Thomas said. "And we do that as two officers of the church representing many, many across our denomination."

With those words, followed by a prayer, Thomas and Jaramillo stood their ground in a no-protest zone just outside the black wrought iron fence at the White House on Pennsylvania Avenue. While Jaramillo lifted stacks of the petitions into the air, Thomas held a single sign that read, "Support the troops. End the war."

After not responding to three requests from Park Service Police to leave the area, Thomas and Jaramillo were arrested. Both were charged with refusing to obey police orders and taken by van to a Washington police station where they were held for about three hours and released after each paid a \$100 fine.

The White House action came after more-successful meetings held earlier that morning on Capitol Hill where Thomas, Jaramillo and the Rev. William Sinkford, president of the Unitarian Universalist Association, met with representatives from the offices of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.), and House Minority Leader John Boehner (R-Ohio).

After returning to Cleveland

from the Washington, D.C., action, Thomas reflected on the importance of the UCC's "100,000 for Peace" campaign.

"Our effort in Washington, we realize, was largely symbolic," Thomas wrote afterward to supporters of the campaign. "It alone neither rattled the White House nor convinced the Congress. ... Yet, our effort was one powerful witness expressed alongside 63,797 others — faithful UCC members who are have publicly committed to joining protest to prayer to end this war. Our petition-delivery attempt was one step among thousands that will ultimately result in a new day of peace for the people of Iraq."

100K's next phase

Since Oct. 10, Thomas, Jaramillo and other church officers say they have heard from hundreds of UCC members, with most expressing gratitude that the church has taken a leadership role in calling for the war's end. And many have strongly encouraged the church to do even more, Thomas says.

That's why, on Nov. 15, church leaders announced in a blast e-mail to nearly 70,000 people that the UCC's "100,000 for Peace" campaign was gearing up for additional advocacy during Advent and Christmas.

"Christmas is a time to embrace peace, to proclaim it not only in our worship, but to live it through our witness," Thomas told United Church News. "While it might be tempting to take some 'time off' from our advocacy during the holidays, we mustn't. The people most affected by this war — those displaced by the violence and those who serve in the military — certainly don't have that luxury."

Thomas says the next phase of the web-driven campaign will include three new emphases:

► \$100,000 for Iraq refugee aid and resettlement.

"We are asking our members and churches to collectively raise '\$100,000 for peace' before Jan. 6," Thomas says. "This is emergency aid to address the tragic and growing humanitarian crisis in Iraq and surrounding countries — the 4 million people who have been displaced as a result of this war."

A gift of \$40 will feed a family of four for two weeks, according to Peter Makari, the UCC/Disciples' area executive for the Middle East. (See related article.)

Contributions are being received online at ucc.org/100kforpeace, where a thermometer is tracking progress toward the \$100,000 goal.

► 100,000 prayers and letters for U.S. servicemen and servicewomen.

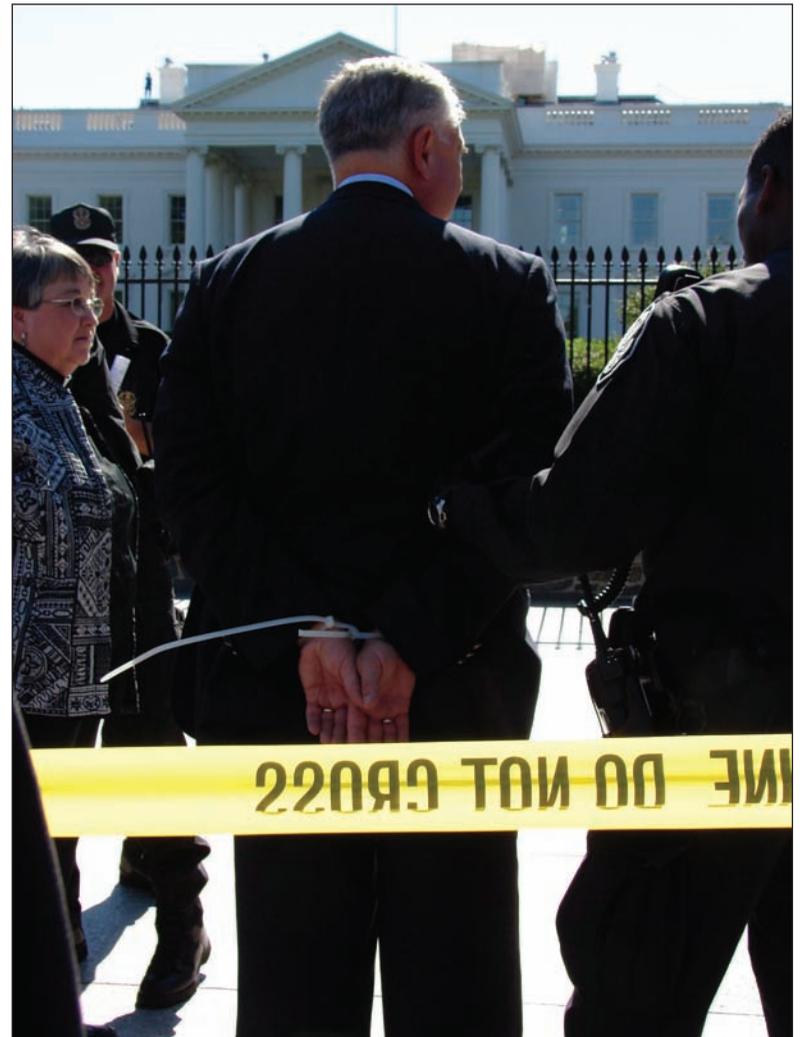
"While we know that churches

"While it might be tempting to take some 'time off' from our advocacy during the holidays, we mustn't. The people most affected by this war — those displaced by the violence and those who serve in the military — certainly don't have that luxury."

— The Rev. John H. Thomas
UCC general minister and president

have been praying for and supporting our U.S. military personnel through a variety of ways, we want there to be a visible increase in our outreach and support over the holidays," Thomas says. "We also hope our advocacy will include concern for those returning from active duty in Iraq, that they are afforded the quality government services, programs and care they deserve."

Resources for individual and communal prayers are available at ucc.org/100Kforpeace, along with



UCC general minister and president the Rev. John Thomas was arrested outside the White House Oct. 10 after trying to deliver an anti-war petition to President Bush.

Sarah More McCann | Religion News Service photo

opportunities to post real-time on-line prayers for U.S. military personnel.

► 100,000 in-district visits to Congressional offices.

"While it was symbolically important that John Thomas and Linda Jaramillo bring our UCC petitions to Washington, the next step is that we must create an undeniable groundswell of letters, calls and visits to the local in-district offices of our senators and representatives," says Sandy Sorensen, director of the UCC's Washington, D.C., office of Justice and Witness Ministries. "The clear concern about ending this war, spoken from a faith perspective, is compelling and must be expressed."

A new calendar ucc.org/100Kforpeace is tracking UCC members' in-district meetings at congressional offices. Once data is entered by UCC members, the date and place of local visits is available for all to see. The hope, said Sorensen, is that others across the church will know of the planned visits and simultaneously join in prayer and solidarity.

Truly 100,000 strong?

Church leaders are also hoping that, by Jan. 6, the campaign finally will live up to its name. They're hoping that, by then, 100,000 people will have endorsed the Pastoral Letter on the Iraq War.

"We know there are easily 100,000 people across this church who are committed to being advocates for peace," Jaramillo says, adding that it's important that the momentum felt during the summer and fall not be slowed simply because the petitions were taken to Washington.

"From the beginning of this advocacy effort, we knew it would be a monumental effort to reach 100,000 endorsing signatures, but we're coming very close to making that actually happen," she says. "We dream of a vital network of 100,000 peacemakers, because there's still so much work to be done and so many ways that we can make a difference."

LEARN MORE
ucc.org/100Kforpeace

DISPLACED IRAQIS NEED FOOD, SHELTER

UCC issues '\$100,000 for peace' emergency appeal for refugees

More than 4 million people have been displaced by the war in Iraq, including two million refugees now seeking safety in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. And tens of thousands — many of them Christian — are fleeing to Beirut, living in temporary housing while awaiting safe passage to yet-unknown places throughout in the world.

So far, the U.S. government has said that only 7,000 will be received into the United States. To date, fewer than 1,000 have been processed.

"There are sometimes 10 people to a room. They sleep in shifts," reports Peter Makari, the UCC/Disciples' area executive for the Middle East, who met with refugees in Beirut during a late October trip with the Rev. Sharon Watkins, general minister and president of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

"They know their situation is temporary, but they don't know how long temporary is," Makari says. "They know that return to Iraq is highly unlikely."

Makari returned to the United States urging UCC leaders and churches to underscore the need for assistance. His report triggered the UCC's Collegium of Officers to ask churches and members to contribute at least \$100,000 in emergency aid before Jan. 6, which is Orthodox Christmas Eve, the night when most Iraqi Christians will celebrate Christ's birth. For westerners, it's the day of Epiphany.

The UCC is working with one of the denomination's Synod-affirmed partners in the region, the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC), which is preparing and distributing aid packages through Action by Churches Together. Church World Service is helping resettle 700 persons in the United States, while simultaneously urging the U.S. government to receive far more refugees.

The MECC includes 28 member churches, representing 14 to 16 million Christians in the Middle East. It has been engaged in relief work for Iraqis since the Gulf War in the early 1990s and the sanctions period that followed.

"Forty dollars will feed a family of four for two weeks," Makari says. "Some of the Muslims who have received [the aid packets with the MECC logo] have said, 'Look at what the church is doing for us.'" Makari says. "There's a sense of appreciation for the church among Muslims."

Given that 15 to 20 percent of Iraq's population has been uprooted, the situation is severe. Money is needed for shelter, food, schooling and health care.

"But the biggest need is to live in dignity, especially after many

had lived a relatively good life and now have nothing," Makari says. "These people left everything they had, just with the clothes they had on their backs."

Forty dollars will feed
a family of four for
two weeks."

— Peter Makari
UCC Executive for the Middle East

While in Beirut, Makari met with three Iraqi women — one who had been in Lebanon for two months, one for three years, and one who was displaced by the Gulf War nearly 10 years ago.

"They are Christian women, and they described the sectarian nature of the conflict in Iraq," Makari says. "They were in tears when they spoke to us about what their futures may hold, because they just don't know. They described how uncertain it is for the Christian refugees who were fleeing Iraq."

"We were told in no uncertain terms, the problems in Iraq were due to the U.S. invasion and not the Muslim community, although sectarian strife has increased dramatically because of the continued U.S. presence," he says.

Out of Iraq's population of 25 million, an estimated 650,000 to 1 million are Christian.

"It's impossible to know the number of Christian in Iraq now," he says, "but we know they have been leaving in staggering numbers."

Makari believes it's especially important for U.S. Christians to respond to the Iraq refugee crisis.

"There was an initial response from the international community to help refugees but that's really lagged," he says. "The U.S. government is the cause of this, and we in the U.S. church certainly care for others in the world. Politics aside, this is what the church is all about."

Contributions to the UCC's "\$100,000 for Peace" Iraq Refugee Appeal will support emergency aid and refugee resettlement. Gifts can be made online at <ucc.org/100Kforpeace>.



Iraqi Christian refugees, living in temporary housing in Beirut, Lebanon, met with UCC/Disciples leaders in late October and spoke about the uncertainty of their lives. The UCC is seeking to raise \$100,000 before Jan. 6 to aid displaced Iraqis.

Peter Makari photo

SOAPBOX

ARRESTING COMMENTS

Online reports of the Oct. 10 arrest of the Rev. John H. Thomas and the Rev. Linda Jaramillo prompted many readers to leave online comments at <ucc.org/news>. Here are a few:

Heartfelt thanks for your powerful witness on behalf of our communion today. It is a part of the Light and Love which no darkness can overcome ... and part of the revolution that is happening on our beloved planet in these complex times.

The Rev. Susan Teegen-Case
Philadelphia, Pa.

I am very moved at this protest-prayer by John Thomas and Linda Jaramillo. Thank you to the UCC for inspiring me once again to work in an even more committed way to witnessing for God's kingdom here "on earth as it is in heaven." May peace come soon.

Obadiah Ballinger
New Haven, Conn.

With the latest petition drive, I fear our denominational leadership is taking us down a self-destructive path. Our unique feature as a denomination is freedom and independence. To try to organize events from the "top" has two horrible consequences: First, if successful, it moves us from being a "least common denomination" to being more like the denominations many of us left. Second, it is sort of a slap in the face to those of us who have already protested or supported

troops, as if what happened without being led is of no consequence.

Our unique witness is that we are a denomination of personal freedom. In this day and age that is a more precious witness that any organized movement.

The Rev. Dan Lozer
Sioux City, Iowa

Thank you for being there in my stead! So few other denomination leaders would take these risks, much less do it themselves. In a time when our culture tends to be hopeless, thank you for conveying my voice.

Karen Eddy
Billings, Mont.

I sit here on the other side of the country, reading this news, with tears of gratitude for your witness. Thank you for doing this on behalf of so many of us. One of the most moving worship services we've had here at Alki UCC was on Sept. 16 when four of our members read aloud the Pastoral Letter on Iraq. We are with you.

The Rev. Diane Darling
Seattle, Wash.

I have never been prouder to be a UCCer! Thank you for doing what I am not able to do because of distance. I see few heroes in the name of Christ in today's society but you two are at the top of my list. I will continue to work to get more signatures on the petition. Your bravery should help.

The Rev. Deanna J. Lewis
Centralia, Kan.

It is unlikely that your courageous witness to Jesus Christ and the gospel of peace will change the heart of the President. But perhaps your witness will stiffen the backbone of members of the House and the Senate. Certainly, your action for peace will give encouragement to hundreds and thousands in local congregations to take their stand against empire and for the rule of God.

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The Rev. Jerry Leggett
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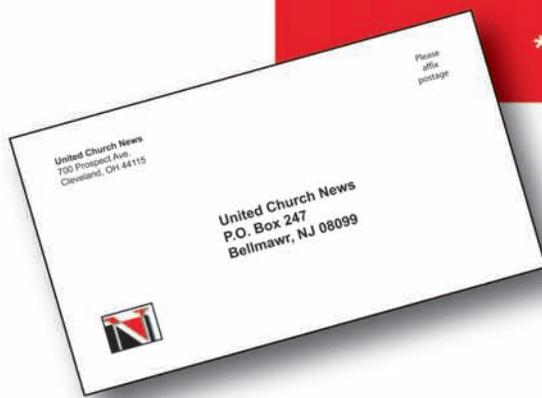
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MOMENTUM BUILDS FOR NEW CHURCHES

Seventy new-church enthusiasts attend 'Nehemiah' training event

By Gregg Brekke
For United Church News

About 70 people, including 30 new-church developers, gathered in Atlanta to talk about how to bolster healthy new churches in the UCC.

The New Church Leadership Initiative, held Aug. 14-17, included Conference and National staff, new church planters and coaches, and a number of seminary students. It was co-sponsored by the Southeast Conference's Nehemiah Initiative and the new church development program of UCC's Local Church Ministries, based in Cleveland. Eighteen of the UCC's 38 Conferences were represented.

"It was exciting to bring together so many amazingly talented people who are unified around church development," says the Rev. Cameron Trimble, who has directed the Nehemiah Initiative since 2005. "There was an electricity and excitement and a feeling that we could really turn to each other for help."

The Nehemiah Initiative began as an effort to support new churches and renewal projects in the Southeast Conference. Initially, the project received grant funding to plant four new churches in two years and to engage in active renewal with six more congregations. Having met these goals in only 18 months the initiative — financed in part by the Carpenter Foundation — has reapplied for funding through 2008.

At the Atlanta training event, courses offered included strategies for evangelism and planting new congregations in a post-modern era, vision and mission planning, multicultural awareness for new churches, fund raising and stewardship, and the importance of discipleship and worship to church planting.

Trimble cites three key tenets of the Nehemiah Initiative's success. First, new church developers, as well as Conference and Association staff, must understand the work involved in planting new congregations. Second, a long-term and active coaching rela-

A grassroots movement of connected new church planters will build momentum."

— The Rev. Cameron Trimble

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tionship between a trained new-church coach and a church-planting team establishes best practices in the planting process. Third, new church planters need to be networked together for mutual support and collective learning.

"A grassroots movement of connected new church planters, in and beyond Conferences, will build momentum among our new church leaders," Trimble says.

The Revs. Todd and Nicole Yonkman, co-pastors of a new-church start in Fishers, Ind., say they are encour-



The Rev. Ozzie Smith Jr., pastor of Covenant UCC in South Holland, Ill., leads a small-group discussion at the Nehemiah training event.

photo furnished

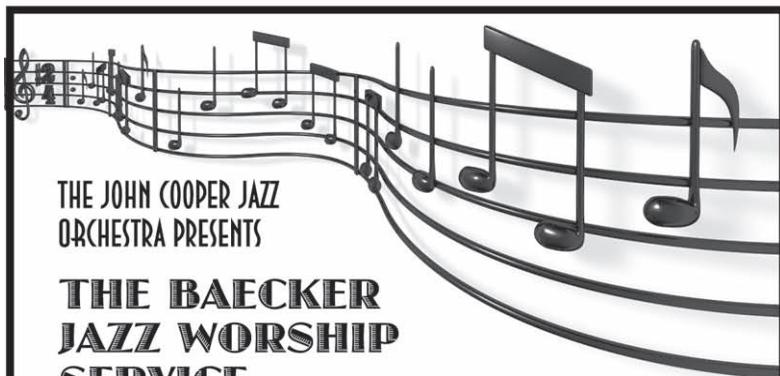
aged by the number of gifted UCC pastors who have a passion for mission and evangelism in their communities.

The biggest challenge for the UCC, says Todd Yonkman, will be "figuring out how to train more people."

"It is one thing to be successful in

a church plant and another to be successful as a denomination," he said. "We are still learning the training piece."

A second installment of the New Church Leadership Initiative is scheduled for Aug. 12-15, 2008.



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'THERE IS EVIDENCE OF A STILLSPEAKING EFFECT'

New report crunches Stillspeaking's numbers, explores impact

By J. Bennett Guess

A quantitative analysis of the impact of the Stillspeaking Initiative says the UCC's media and identity campaign has resulted in "incremental changes" for some churches, but cautions that "dramatic change in three years cannot be expected."

"The Stillspeaking Initiative is the beginning of systemic change, but only the beginning," says the Rev. C. Kirk Hadaway, director of research for the Episcopal Church Center in New York, who was contracted by the UCC to provide a statistical analysis of Stillspeaking's impact. "There is evidence of a 'Stillspeaking effect,' a change in long-standing patterns of decline with committed participation in the Initiative."

Hadaway, who once directed national research for the UCC, has given the denomination its first broad-based look at Stillspeaking's impact. Until now, most of the analysis has been anecdotal. The study was distributed to members of the UCC's 90-member Executive Council in October.

Stillspeaking churches — those who have formally opted into the program — are central to the life of the UCC, especially its present and future health, Hadaway concludes.

"Stillspeaking churches form the committed core of the United Church of Christ," says Hadaway, "and the Initiative has helped create a sense that local churches, Conferences and national setting are in mission together with a common purpose. The more a local church is involved in the Stillspeaking Initiative, the greater is the effect on the church."

Perhaps the most significant positive number in the study is the percentage of UCC churches that are growing. From 2003 to 2006, the number of growing churches inched upward from 17.9 percent to 18.5 percent, something the church hasn't seen for decades.

"Clearly, involvement in the Stillspeaking Initiative positively affected the attendance patterns of many churches, halting the long-standing trend of ever-shrinking proportions of growing congregations in the UCC," Hadaway says.

Even though overall church membership continues to decline (including among Stillspeaking churches), aggregate membership decline is less severe for Stillspeaking churches.

According to Hadaway, non-participating churches are declining at a higher rate (5.7 percent) compared to churches that participated in and contributed to Stillspeaking (4.7 percent).

Stillspeaking's "opt-in" churches still represent less than half of the UCC's 5,700 congregations, but account for a clear majority in terms of attendance, membership and total operating expenses.

Stillspeaking churches also contribute 75 percent of basic support for Our Church's Wider Mission, the denomination's shared

pursue for connectional ministries. Stillspeaking churches have steadily contributed proportionately more to OCWM each year since 1999, but the greatest gains have come since 2003, the year that Stillspeaking was launched.

"Many positive things happened that can be attributed to the Stillspeaking Initiative, but a sea change in the direction of the UCC is not yet apparent."

— Marilyn Dubasak
Former Stillspeaking coordinator

Among the most committed Stillspeaking churches, the numbers are even more striking. For example, financial resources of contributing Stillspeaking churches grew much faster than the rate of inflation.

In an executive summary of Hadaway's study, Marilyn Dubasak, Stillspeaking's former coordinator, says the report shows slow incremental changes and signs of hope.

"Many positive things happened that can be attributed to the Stillspeaking Initiative, but a sea change in the direction of the UCC is not yet apparent," Dubasak underscores. "Many other factors impact giving and going, and although the Stillspeaking Initiative is an agent for positive change, the inertia-producing decline among mainline churches is well entrenched and long standing."

Beyond Stillspeaking's central issues of local church "vitality" and "welcome," UCC congregations are also battling numerical consequences based on other factors. Chiefly, most UCC members are older than the average American and have fewer children.

"Incremental changes requires the addition of new people who reflect the diversity of the country and an improved retention rate among young people," Dubasak says.



Stillspeaking merchandise was a high demand item during last summer's General Synod 26 in Hartford, Conn.

Randy Varcho photo

Dubasak says the report shows that growth in membership, attendance and giving are related. "One cannot expect a turnaround in giving without the beginnings of a turnaround in the number of per-

sons who attend and give to UCC churches."

But, she says, improved relationships between local churches and the UCC's national setting — one result of the Stillspeaking

Initiative — should help stabilize OCWM basic support in the future.

"However, there is much work to be done to continue developing the relationship and helping build stronger churches," she says.

Carrión named new Stillspeaking coordinator

The Rev. Felix Carrión, known widely across the church for his preaching and organizing, has been named coordinator of the UCC's Stillspeaking Initiative. He will begin in Jan. 3.

Carrión will follow in the position most recently held by Marilyn Dubasak, whose leadership ended at the end of August when Stillspeaking ceased to be a stand-alone ministry and was incorporated back into the UCC's Proclamation, Identity and Communication Ministry, where it was first developed.

"Felix has broad experience and connections across the UCC, as well as a demonstrated passion for the Stillspeaking Initiative and for the inclusive 'extravagant welcome' of the church," wrote the Rev. John H. Thomas, general minister and president, in an Oct. 1 e-mail to Stillspeaking churches and supporters.

Carrión, pastor of **Euclid Avenue Congregational UCC in Cleveland** since 2003, is a former member of the UCC's national staff. From 1994 to 2000, he led the implementation of the UCC's multiracial, multicultural church pro-

nouncement while working jointly with the former Office for Church in Society and the Commission for Racial Justice. Before that, he worked for the former Office for Church Life and Leadership in the Middle Atlantic region. He also has served local church pastors in Ohio and Massachusetts.



Carrión

Known for his dynamic speaking, Carrión was a featured preacher at the UCC's 2003 General Synod in Minneapolis.

"Felix is respected for his ability to relate equally well to people in large groups, small audiences and one-on-one conversations," Thomas said. "He comes to us

with a passion for the 'invitation' dimension of the Stillspeaking Campaign. We are excited about his return to national staff, especially in this highly visible and important role."

Since 2006, Carrión has been heavily involved with the progressive clergy networks, "We Believe Ohio" and "We Believe Greater Cleveland."

A 1986 graduate of UCC-related Andover Newton Theological School in Newton Centre, Mass., he received his B.A. from The King's

College in New York.

Carrión said he regards the Stillspeaking campaign as more than a media campaign, but also a significant contributor to the church's ongoing theological conversation — especially around the importance of "invitation."

"I believe that one of the most exciting calls in the United Church of Christ resides in the Stillspeaking Coordinator," Carrión told United Church News. "This call responds to our church's historic commitments and actions to embody Jesus' prayer, 'That all may be one;' a prayer Jesus lifted up 'on behalf of' the very existence of the community of all of his followers.

"In the context of this biblical and ministerial understanding I join with all who are UCC to discern and engage the new and wonderful opportunities the Stillspeaking Campaign will offer us in our common pursuit to render a more excellent service to the gospel of Jesus Christ, on behalf of the whole world," he says.

Gwen Thomas, an experienced administrator, marketer and grants writer, started work in mid-November as Stillspeaking's new assistant coordinator.

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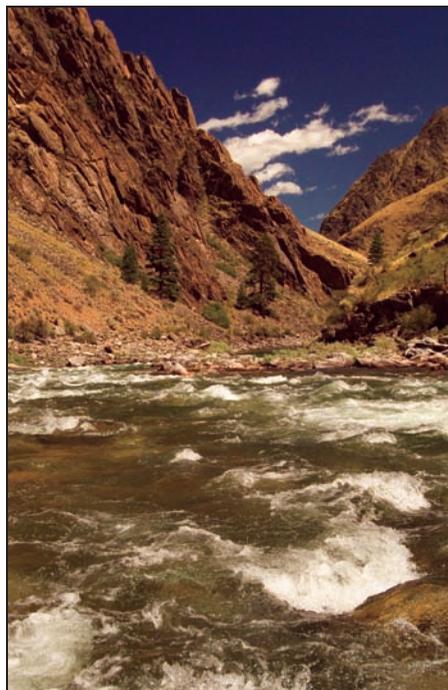
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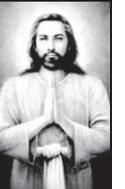
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The new President is expected to be appointed in late winter and to begin to serve in the summer of 2008.

Chicago Theological Seminary



EXTRAVAGANT GRACE, GENEROUS HEARTS, RENEWED WORLD

MINISTER ENDS HIGH-PROFILE FAST FOR DEBT RELIEF

The Rev. David Duncombe, a retired UCC minister from Washington State and a leader in the global debt relief movement, ended a 46-day fast on Oct. 16 by breaking bread on Capitol Hill with other jubilee supporters, including U.S. Rep. Spencer Bachus (R-Ala.), Rep. Donald Payne (D-N.J.), Rep. Maxine Waters (D-Calif.) and Rep. Emmanuel Cleaver (D-Mo.), each of whom participated in a one-day fast.

Duncombe, 79, actively lobbied Congress during the fast although, due to weakness, he was confined to a wheelchair during its final days.

The nationwide "Cancel Debt Fast," led by Duncombe and organized by Jubilee USA Network, resulted in 13 additional House bill sponsors and secured a hearing on the Jubilee Act (H.R. 2634) in the House Financial Services Committee.

The Jubilee Act of 2007 would cancel the debts of up to 25 additional countries not currently eligible for debt cancellation, end harmful economic policy conditionality, and establish an audit of past lending and set more responsible lending practices for the future, according to Jubilee USA. Currently, indebted nations spend an average of \$100 million each day to service their debts — money they cannot spend on food, education, health services and other necessities. Cancellation of these debts is needed to help reach the U.N. Millennium Development Goal of cutting worldwide poverty in half by 2015.

Encouraged by Duncombe's fast, Bachus — the leading Republican sponsor of the legislation — said he is promoting another round of international debt relief because previous loan forgiveness has improved health care, education and security in developing countries.

The Rev. John H. Thomas, UCC general minister and presi-



The Rev. David Duncombe, shown before the U.S. Capitol dome, ended a 46-day fast on Oct. 16. Jubilee USA Network photo

dent, fasted on Sept. 7 in solidarity with Duncombe, as he began his third lengthy fast since 2000. The two, along with others, spent the day meeting with members of Congress, including the offices of Sen. Barack Obama (D-Ill.), Sen. Robert Casey (D-Pa.), Rep. Christopher Shays (R-Conn.), and Rep. Jim Kirk (R-Ill.) to ask for greater support for the debt-forgiveness effort.

"David's courageous witness is helping to draw attention to a pressing issue that keeps getting bumped from the front pages of our newspapers, but remains paramount if the world's impoverished nations and people are ever to enjoy the promise of economic justice," Thomas told United Church News.

and helped us become the church we celebrated at our 50th anniversary celebration in Hartford."

Edmonds, who moved to New Haven in 1959, is credited with helping to build a thriving black middle class there. When the Ford Foundation gave the city \$1 million to pilot anti-poverty and job-training programs, Edmonds was appointed to the original board of the project, called Community Progress, Inc.

Edmonds, who was a pastor and civil rights pioneer in Greensboro, N.C., before moving to Connecticut, met the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1958 at an NAACP convention in Detroit and the two corresponded until King was slain, according to the Hartford Courant.

A native Texan, Edmonds attended Sam Houston College, which was co-founded by his grandfather in 1876. He later received a Bachelor of Sacred Theology from Morehouse College and a doctorate in social ethics from Boston University.

Edmonds and his late wife, Maye, had four daughters, Lynette Johnson, Karen Spellman, Cheryl Edmonds and Connecticut State Rep. Toni Walker (D-New Haven).

A public memorial service was held on Nov. 24 at United Church on the Green in New Haven.

Crabtree called Guptill one of the UCC's 'great Yankee saints.'

Guptill was known for his no-nonsense New England practicality. At annual meetings, he regularly inspired attendees with addresses that usually included "conversations" with the late Rev. Amos Bassett, a founder of the Missionary Society of Connecticut in 1798, whose portrait hung over his desk.

A graduate of UCC-related Andover Newton Theological School, where he later taught, he was ordained in 1943. He served churches in Maine and Massachusetts, and was the first president of the Christian Conference of Connecticut from 1976 to 1979. He also was moderator of the UCC General Synod from 1979 to 1981.

'PREMIERE' CIVIL RIGHTS PIONEER DIES AT AGE 90

The Rev. Edwin R. "Doc" Edmonds, one of the UCC's stalwart justice advocates, died on Nov. 6 of pneumonia-related complications. He was 90.

Edmonds, a former chair of the UCC's Commission for Racial Justice, was the retired pastor of **Dixwell Avenue Congregational UCC in New Haven, Conn.**, where he served for 35 years.

A columnist for the New Haven Register referred to Edmonds as "New Haven's premiere civil-rights figure of the mid-20th century."

A one-time member of New Haven's Board of Education, he led New Haven's Wider City parish and taught sociology at Southern Connecticut State University.

The Rev. John H. Thomas, the UCC's general minister and president, said it was fitting that Edmonds' death would come just after the UCC was concluding its 50th anniversary on All Saints Sunday.

"Few have had such a long and profound influence on the shaping of our church and its vocation of public witness for racial, social and economic justice," Thomas said. "Doc's leadership over the years pushed us urgently toward greater faithfulness

'GREAT YANKEE SAINT,' ONE OF UCC ARCHITECTS, DIES AT 90

The Rev. Nathanael Mann Guptill, who served as co-secretary for the national UCC after its 1957 formation, has died. He was 90.

Guptill went on to serve as Connecticut Conference Minister from 1962 to 1981 and was named Conference Minister Emeritus.

"Dr. Guptill gave himself fully to the creation of this church, and served with distinction in one of its highest offices," said the Rev. Davida Foy Crabtree, Connecticut Conference Minister. "He will forever remain one of those great leaders of the universal Church who has inspired thousands of clergy and laity in their living of the faith."

SORENSEN NAMED TO LEAD UCC'S WASHINGTON OFFICE

A veteran public policy advocate was named to lead the UCC's Washington, D.C., office, effective Oct. 15.

Sandy Sorensen, who has served various capacities during her 17 years with the UCC's national setting, is the new minister and team leader for Justice and Witness Ministries in Washington.

The office is located in the historic Methodist Building, an ecumenical office situated just behind the U.S. Capitol and next door to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Sorensen most recently served as JWM's acting minister for communications, dividing her time between Cleveland and Washington.

"Sandy has solid and diverse advocacy and organizing experience which is based in her faithful understanding of justice," said the Rev. Linda Jaramillo, JWM's executive minister. "She has a strong working knowledge of UCC policy issues and has responsibly communicated that policy vision to a wide and varied audience of UCC members and key policy decision makers. She has a keen ability to understand the intersections

of issues and develop respectful and valuable partnerships in the UCC and beyond to more effectively address these issues."

Sorensen received her B.A. in psychology from UCC-related Grinnell College and her M.Div. from Yale Divinity School. She also completed a certificate program in anti-racism and anti-oppression training at the Women's Theological Center of the Episcopal Divinity School in Boston.

"Sandy's extensive education, training, and experience have prepared her well for this key responsibility in Justice and Witness Ministries serving the whole church," said Jaramillo in an email announcement. "However, more importantly, Sandy's faith in God and Jesus' teachings is evidenced in her daily life and work."



Sorensen

CONFERENCE CHANGES

The Rev. Michael O. Denton was called and elected on Oct. 20 to be the UCC's Pacific Northwest Conference Minister. He will begin on January 3. Since 2003, Denton has served as co-minister of the Illinois Conference's Chicago Metropolitan Association. A graduate of Antioch University in Yellow Springs, Ohio, and UCC-related Chicago Theological Seminary, he has served church in Ohio and Illinois.

PASTORAL CHANGES

Armster, Michelle to St. Andrew UCC, Lancaster, PA
Armstrong, Andrew W. Hamburg, NY to Cong. UCC, Acton, MA
Asman, Donald to Judd Street UCC, Honolulu, HI
Bray, Eddie A. to St. Paul's UCC, St. Marys, OH
Byrne, Brian C. Grand Rapids, Mich., to Howland Community UCC, Warren, OH
Calhoun, Dennis B. Middlebury, CT to First UCC, Marblehead, MA
Cook, Jack D. Houston, TX to First Church of Christ Cong. UCC, New Britain, CT
Cousineau, Scott Worcester, MA to Federated, Norfolk, MA
Findlay-Chamberlain, Anne A. to Manoa Valley UCC, Honolulu, HI
Fox, Vicky Asheboro, NC to St. Paul's UCC, Bowmansville, PA
Gormbley, Robert W. East Longmeadow, MA to Mittineague, West Springfield, MA
Habetz, Jennifer L. to First Church Cong. UCC, Fairfield, CT
Hamilton, William N. North Deighton, MA to Centre Cong. UCC, Northbridge, MA
Hauke, Letha to interim, St. Paul's UCC, Oshkosh, WI
Heagy, Ronald E. York, PA to Emmanuel UCC, Red Lion, PA
Heckman, Allen L. to Zion UCC, Lehigh, PA
Howell, Teresa M. to UCC, Mukwonago, WI
Knobel, Richard F. Houston, TX to interim, First Cong. UCC, Council Bluffs, IA
Kraner, Eleanor Spencer, MA to Cong. UCC, Brookfield, MA
Lasalle, William J. Linfield, PA to St. Paul's UCC, Manheim, PA
Leader, Patricia A. Quentin, PA to Emmanuel UCC, Hanover, PA
Minasian, Susan A. to St. Andrew UCC, Lancaster, PA
Moyer, Elaine C. to UCC, Ickesburg, PA
O'Connor, Peggy Winchester, MA to interim, Cong. UCC, Melrose, MA
Ott, Thomas J. to First Cong., Battle Creek, MI
Raker, Christopher to Central UCC, New Salem, MA
Stirbens, Barry R. to North Canton, OH to Grace UCC, Massillon, OH
Taylor, Sally to interim, First Cong. UCC, Crownwall, VT
Waldron, Christopher S. Medford, MA to Bethel UCC, Beloit, OH

Information for pastoral changes is provided by the UCC's Parish Life and Leadership Ministry.

CLERGY DEATHS

Editor's note: Because of technical problems, the UCC Pension Boards was unable to provide United Church News with a listing of clergy deaths for this issue. We will run the list in its entirety in February.

JUST LIKE THE ADS SAY

Evangelical UCC in St. Louis, Mo., welcomed an array of new members in October. "Diversity so complete you would think it was staged," says the Rev. Katherine Hawker, pastor. "A brilliant moment of kingdom making."

Hawker appeared on MSNBC's "Countdown with Keith Oberman" when the UCC publicly "welcomed" cartoon-character SpongeBob Squarepants after he became the subject of anti-gay fodder by a right-wing religious leader.



Mia Ulmer | Birchtree Studio photo

NEBRASKA CHURCH ADDS JEWISH RABBI TO STAFF

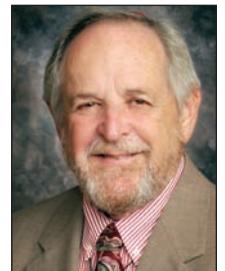
In August, **First-Plymouth Congregational UCC in Lincoln, Neb.**, welcomed a rabbi-in-residence to teach courses at the church for one year.

Rabbi Michael Weisser, who served for 14 years at Lincoln's Congregation B-nai Jeshurun, South Street Temple and, more recently, at Beth Shalom Progressive Synagogue in Auckland, New Zealand, will lead congregational studies in Hebrew scriptures and interfaith respect.

"Believing that it is possible to be an authentic Christian church while displaying respect and curiosity for other religions, First-Plymouth hopes Rabbi Weisser will deepen our appreciation for the Jewish roots of Christianity, as well as open our minds to the different manifestations of truth in other religions," said the Rev. Jim Keck, senior minister.

For 11 years, Weisser co-taught a class called "Christian and Jewish Heritage" at Nebraska Wesleyan University. His commitment to interfaith understanding led to him being recognized with an honorary doctorate from Hebrew Union College.

"When I was asked to teach a few classes at First-Plymouth and to lead a community-wide Seder during Passover, I accepted happily," Weisser said. "After all, rabbis are first and foremost teachers and, additionally, I've always had high regard for First-Plymouth Church because of the many good effects it has had, on the Lincoln community."



Weisser

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firstplymouth.org

Written by Carol L. Pavlik

Preserving and celebrating the Samoan culture



Members of "Voices of the Pacific," a combined choir of Samoan churches from the UCC's Southern California Nevada Conference, stroll the streets of Hartford, Conn., after performing during the "Synod in the City" portion of General Synod 26 in late June.

George Conklin photo

COMMITTED TO HUMAN RIGHTS, JUSTICE

PAAM brings together 231 multi-ethnic churches

The UCC's Pacific Islander and Asian American Ministry (PAAM) was organized in 1974 at a gathering in San Francisco, Calif., of representatives from different regions throughout the United States.

The organization is comprised of 231 multi-ethnic churches across six regions of the United States. These regions include Hawaii, Northern California, Southern California, Pacific Northwest, Midwest and East.

PAAM has initiated, sponsored, supported and participated in many activities at all levels of the UCC, worked for greater PAAM representation on all levels of UCC boards, committees and staff.

PAAM continues to address institutional racism within the church and society, is concerned with issues of human rights and justice, and helps to support and strengthen clergy and

lay leadership at the local level.

Eppie Encabo serves as the national moderator of PAAM.

Last year, Encabo attended the Pacific Conference of Churches' 9th General Assembly in American Samoa. Afterwards, Encabo remained an extra week with some of her colleagues for an immersion into Samoan culture and spirituality.

"The Samoan people love to sing, and they are so hospitable," says Encabo. "It's so much about the welcoming for them."

Encabo was also impressed by the dedication to worship on Sunday in American Samoa. "I learned that they do not have any activities on Sunday, because Sunday is for worship."

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<paamonline.com>

ADVOCATES FOR DIVERSITY

Long Beach church reaches out to its neighbors

Embracing the Samoan culture, the **Second Samoan Congregational UCC (Long Beach, Calif.)** has a strong sense of mission, with arms reaching out well beyond its church walls.

The Rev. Misipouena S. Tagaloa, senior pastor at Second Samoan, is a Samoan himself, who came to the United States in 1985. He and his congregation have taken an active role in serving Pacific Islanders in its surrounding community.

"When you transport a people from 5,000 miles away into a different culture, just to be able to get up and go in the morning requires a lot of resilience," says Tagaloa.

Cultural preservation

Second Samoan UCC was instrumental in forming the group *Tafesilafa'i* (tah-feh-see-lah-fah-ee). *Tafesilafa'i* is a group focused on preserving and celebrating the Samoan culture through dance, language preservation, and an annual festival. Now, *Tafesilafa'i* is its own entity, and has achieved 501 (c)(3) status.

Tagaloa says preserving the Samoan culture is important not only for the Samoan culture, but for American culture as well. "I think the diversity of [the United States] is diminished if we have everyone assimilated.

"When [Samoans] immigrate, they don't have money, they don't have jobs, they don't have the markings of people who have lived here over the years. All they have is their culture, themselves. What *Tafesilafa'i* has done over the years is build on those strengths ... because they do Samoan better than anyone."

Samoan products

Le Manai is another form of mission headed by Second Samoan UCC. This is a for-profit business that imports grocery products from Samoa and helps create a market here in the United States for products like kava, *wahu* (a canned fish), Samoan bread, corned beef, and other food items from the Pacific Islands.

Le Manai's website <lemanai.com> has expanded its business by relying on word of mouth via the internet. Products are purchased directly from manufacturers, farmers and growers to keep prices down and provide consistent island food products.

Second Samoan UCC stays active in its community by advocating for affordable housing for both Samoans and other ethnic communities. The church partners with HUD and lenders to help the dream of owning a home become a reality.

Other ministries include *la Outou Manuia*, a television program aired by local cable programming which includes information about activities in the Samoan community and addresses relevant issues to the Pacific Islander community. All programs are presented in English as well as Samoan.

AMERICAN SAMOA is a group of six Polynesian islands in the South Pacific Ocean. Fourteen degrees below the equator, it is the United States' southern-most territory.

According to the 2000 census, there are 133,000 Samoans in the United States — surpassing the actual population in American Samoa, which is at 60,000.

Western Samoa is a neighboring independent country that shares the same culture. In both countries, most of the people are bilingual, speaking both English and Samoan.



'FOCUS IS THE YOUNG PEOPLE'

Pastor grows church through youth, song

Seven years ago, the Rev. Alatina Saina started **First Samoan UCC in Stockton, Calif.**, with only four families.

"I had finished seminary and had gone back to work to take care of my family," Saina recalls. But that's when some families approached Saina about starting a church from scratch.

Saina accepted the call, and since then, he says, the church has been growing and growing.

"I started out with 10 kids," he explains. "There was so much talent in them. All they needed was for somebody to bring out that talent. I worked with them. There were ten kids, and now there are 60 kids."

The children sing in a choir, and the group performs both English and Samoan music. It receives invitations throughout the year to sing at many other churches and events in the area.

Saina meets regularly with clergy from other denominations in Stockton. He says, "They always ask me, 'How do you get the kids in?'"

Saina says with a laugh. "I tell them, 'That's my secret.'"

But for Saina, the real secret is not giving up, and keeping the faith.

"Sometimes we get weak," he says. "Sometimes when we do something, we give up. We try to do things on our own strength, but God is always waiting for us. God still lives."

First Samoan UCC of Stockton is a faith community with people of all ages but, for Saina, the focus is on the Sunday School.

"The number one focus is the young people," he says. "They are the future of the church. I don't want them to be on the street, like I was. That's why I'm doing this. I'm trying to save a kid a day."

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