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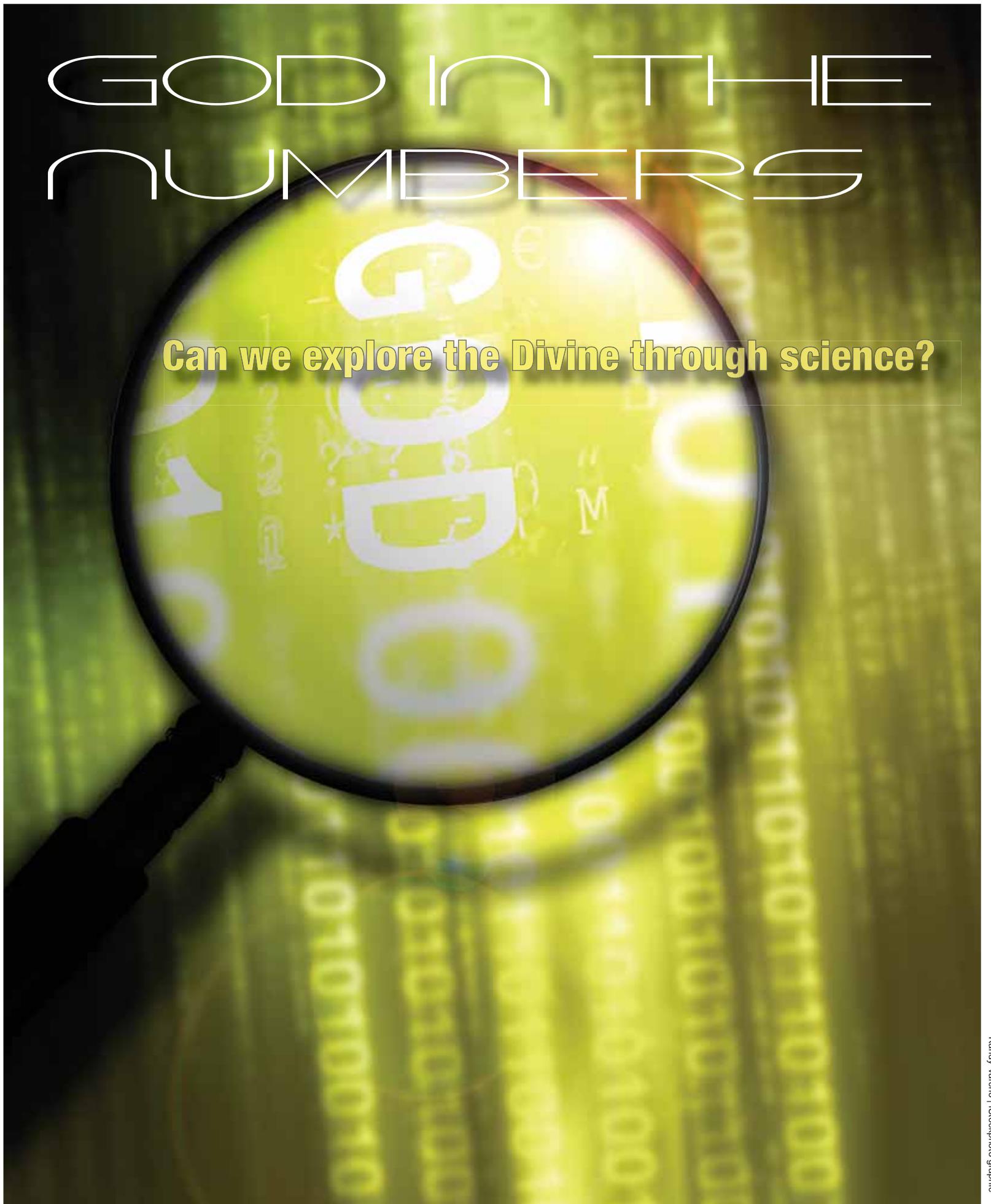
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Randy Varcho | Stockphoto graphic

'I am still called to serve the local church'

FROM THE COLLEGIUM



Steve Sterner

For 32 out of the nearly 37 years I have served in ordained ministry in the UCC, I have been a local church pastor. Being a pastor is what I know, and it is where my heart is.

One time prior to this one, I accepted a call to serve on the denominational staff, but after several years I missed the local church so much that I returned to it.

Congregations that I have been in ministry with will need to make the call about whether or not I have been a good local church pastor.

But I do know that being a local church pastor has been good for me.

So why have I accepted the call to serve as the Acting Executive Minister for Local Church Ministries? It is a question my wife, children, colleagues and friends have all posed in one form or another. Some even questioned my sanity! The question of call is a question I still hold in my heart and spirit. Time will tell if it is indeed the call of the Holy Spirit.

But for now, it feels right. And it feels right for several reasons.

I have served in congregations from both the UCC's Congregational Christian and Evangelical and Reformed traditions. And I have served churches that have only known the UCC.

I have been on a church staff, head of a church staff, and been the church staff. I have served new churches and old churches, suburban churches and urban churches, small town churches and churches in major metropolitan areas.

I have served in Conference and Association leadership and, for a brief time as an Interim Conference Minister, I enjoyed being in the community of Conference Ministers.

My experience does not cover every setting of our local churches in the UCC, but it is broad and diverse. I bring all of this to my call to serve in the national setting, and I bring my experiences to my call to serve Local Church Ministries.

I have come to understand that we are ministering in exciting, challenging and changing times. We must keep our excitement as we confront the challenges and discern the ways we are called to change. Local churches have been engaged in this discernment for many years. The national setting is trying to catch up. For these reasons, this call feels right.

But there is one overarching reason that I have felt called to this ministry. It is about the local church.

My job description has all the usual items for a church executive. Most importantly, however, it includes the call to be a spokesperson and advocate for local churches of the UCC. In this way, I am still called to serve the local church!

I accept this call with honor and humility. I seek your prayers and support, even as I offer mine to you.

The Rev. Stephen L. Sterner was elected Acting Executive Minister of Local Church Ministries in October to fulfill the unexpired term of the Rev. Jose A. Malayang, who retired at the end of the year. At its upcoming April meeting, the UCC's Executive Council will consider his election as a member of the UCC's five-person Collegium of Officers.

“ My experience does not cover every setting of our local churches in the UCC, but it is broad and diverse.”

OUR BEST CHRISTMAS EVER

The UCC's Christmas Fund continues to break records, thanks to increasing churchwide support being given to benefit retired clergy and spouses.

At the close of 2007, the Christmas Fund special mission offering took in \$1,573,000 during the year, according to the Rev. Doug Borko, director for ministerial assistance at The Pension Boards. In 2006, the offering received \$1,435,965. In 2005, the tally stood at \$1,438,492.

"We surpassed our goal in September and kept adding to it," reported Borko to members of the UCC's special offering committee at its meeting in January. "The money is still coming in."

The Christmas Fund — once known as the "Veterans of the Cross" offering — is used annually to supplement pension payments to retired UCC clergy and surviving spouses with low incomes. It also aids those with special emergency needs.

141K FOR PEACE

The "100,000 for Peace" campaign set a Christmas goal of raising \$100,000 to aid Iraqi refugees who have fled their war-torn homeland. As of Jan. 7, more than \$141,000 had been collected from UCC members, says the Rev. John H. Thomas. The total could surpass \$150,000, since donations are still arriving.

"Make us worthy, O Lord, to honor Your birth," prayed Thomas in an Epiphany message that announced the giving totals. "Through our generosity, our prayers and our protest for peace, may Your light shine forth in our souls."

SUPPORT THE STAFF

For 21 years, the UCC's Office Support Staff Network has been bringing together administrative personnel from churches, Associations, Conferences and the national setting to form friendships, share ideas and offer and receive support for one another.

UCCOSSN's 2008 gathering will be held March 28-30 at the Church House in Cleveland. This year's theme is "Tending God's Garden: God Works Where'er We Work." Emphasis will be on themes of spiritual nurture, hospitality and helpfulness.

The gathering also includes time for UCC's support staff to discuss ways to deepen UCC connections in their churches and peruse resources available to UCC congregations.

Registration is \$100, in addition to discount-rate hotel costs at the UCC's Radisson Hotel. Learn more and register online before Feb. 25 at uccossn.org.

'JOY' IS STILL DAWNING

The UCC's Easter TV special "Joy Dawned Again" was recognized in November with the Aurora Award's platinum best of show in the religious service category.



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

SHORTHAND



The Salt Lake City-based Aurora Awards is an international competition that recognizes excellence in the film and video industries, with a special emphasis on programs and commercials that do not normally have the opportunity to compete on a national level.

Also, in November, the program was recognized with a silver Davey Award, a competition that honors the creative excellence of smaller film companies.

Both awards were presented to FilmWorks, the company that co-produced the UCC's TV broadcast with the denomination's Proclamation, Identity and Communication Ministry in Cleveland.

"Joy Dawned Again" — a creative worship experience filmed at **Dover Congregational UCC in Westlake, Ohio** — first aired on ABC network TV stations in April 2007 as part of the UCC's 50th anniversary celebration.

MOVIE TOYS FOR TOTS

The UCC has joined with 19 other advocacy groups to demand that the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) comply with the Federal Trade Commission's marketing guidelines for promoting PG-13 films to younger children.

In a Jan. 16 letter sent to industry executive Dan Glickman, the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood urged the MPAA to develop a policy that would restrict the advertising of PG-13 films on children's television; prohibit restaurant toy giveaways or other food promotions aimed at young children for PG-13 movies; and ensure that any toys released in conjunction with a film carry an age recommendation consistent with the film's rating.

"It is distressing that the industry response to parental concerns about media content is almost always to place the full burden on parents," said Cheryl Lanza of the Office of Communication, Inc., the UCC's media justice agency. "These industry members essentially offer parents a Hobson's choice: either expose your children to content that you find unacceptable, or withdraw your children from popular culture. This serves no one. We all benefit with more mutual communication and understanding, not less."

'MAKING FRIENDS' WITH MONEY

Wanting to update your collection-counting protocols? Looking for a sample policy to guide your endowment fund? Does your new-to-the-church treasurer need a tutorial in UCC polity?

The UCC's Cornerstone Fund has heard your prayers.

"Making Friends with Church Numbers" is a new financial education seminar geared toward relieving financial anxiety for church pastors and lay leaders, says Gordon Gilles, executive director of The Cornerstone Fund.

Cornerstone is the UCC's financial unit that provides loans to UCC churches as well as investment opportunities for members and congregations. It's also accustomed to handling a myriad of questions from UCC entities about how best to deal with their money.

Already, five UCC Conferences, in partnership with Cornerstone, have sponsored the all-day sessions that go over the basics in church finances, such as how to evaluate your church's financials, set up a budget, analyze cash flow, and establish policies and safeguards. Participants also receive a thorough binder that contains best practices and sample forms.

"It's a tool that lifts up all types of financial information," says Gilles. "We provide them with all the materials they need and our website will provide updates."

The workshop is designed for groups of 20 to 25 people. If interested, ask your Conference or Association to invite the Cornerstone Fund to lead a training near you.

Learn more at cornerstonefund.org.

'CENTRO ROMERO' TO ENCOURAGE THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

New national ministry opens on U.S.-Mexico border

By J. Bennett Guess

A new UCC ministry in San Ysidro, Calif. — located just blocks from the high-fence barricade that separates the United States from Tijuana, Mexico — opened its doors on Dec. 15 with a dedication service honoring its namesake.

The Daniel F. Romero Border Ministry Center, or *Centro Romero*, is a border immersion ministry housed in a former UCC church that will provide opportunities for UCC groups to experience life on the border and reflect theologically on immigration issues.

"I consider it a way for the UCC's national setting to be located in a place where justice ministry needs to happen," says the Rev. Linda Jaramillo, executive minister of the UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries, which is coordinating the ministry with the UCC's Southern California-Nevada Conference. "It's right in the heart of the neighborhood. You can actually see the border fences from the church."

Jaramillo compares the new facility to the UCC's longstanding national presence on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., and at the Franklinton Center in eastern North Carolina, where the denomination has lived out historic mandates to advocate for public policies and educate about racial justice.

"This gives us the chance to see how we can be engaged in other critical issues of our day," she says.

Romero, a former general secretary of the United Church Board for World Ministries (now Wider Church Ministries), is retiring this month after 37 years in ministry, in-

cluding 27 years in Southern California — Nevada as a local church pastor, Associate Conference Minister and Conference Minister.

"Dan's uncle was an evangelist on the border," says the Rev. Jane Heckles, who has been Romero's colleague as Conference Minister. "His uncle and his family started three border ministries and, as a child, Dan spent his weekends down on the border. So there is a very poetic coming around to the beginnings of his life."

"You don't have to live on the border these days to be impacted by border realities."

— The Rev. Jane Heckles, Conference Minister

Centro Romero will regularly host church groups — ranging ideally in size from 12 to 20 — that will lodge in a nearby hotel but use the facility for worship, shared meals, seminars, discussions and theological reflection.

"We want to incorporate the whole foundation of theology, using the action-reflection model," insists Jaramillo. "It will have a clear theological focus. It will be faith based."

Heckles says the Conference took on the project because it underscores one of the Conference's top missional priorities: "building community and diversity."

"You don't have to live on the border these days to be impacted by border realities," Heckles says. "And we who live on the border understand that we have something important to offer others across the church."

The Conference is using reserve funds and proceeds from the sale of property to pay for building renovations.

Stillspeaking launches radio campaign, grant opportunities

Two new 60-second radio spots are now available for use by UCC churches, and the UCC's Stillspeaking Ministry is offering grants to make sure the ads make it on the air in multiple communities.

Through the Stillspeaking Ministry's "Media with a Mission" program, clusters of UCC congregations can apply before Feb. 25 for up to \$4,000 to purchase radio air time. Individual churches can apply for as much as \$2,000.

The grants can be used to fund 40 percent of a local or regional radio campaign sometime between March 10 (two weeks before Easter) and May 10 (Mother's Day / Pentecost Sunday).

"Stillspeaking will provide \$2 for every \$3 your church or group of

churches commits to the campaign," says the Rev. Felix Carrion, Stillspeaking Coordinator.

Participating churches can choose from three available 60-second spots. Two new commercials — "Legal Copy" and "Telephone Tree" — have been specifically produced for the most-recent push, but church-

LISTEN TO THE ADS AND LEARN MORE
about applying for grants at
<stillspeaking.com>.

es also can elect to include "Fashion Show," an older spot, in their ad-buying plans, Carrion says.

Both of the new radio ads rely heavily on humor to emphasize the UCC's theme of extravagant welcome.

"We're going to put a quarter of a million dollars into this," she says.

The Conference also is committed to sharing some of the marketing costs for *Centro Romero* and will act as registrar for group events.

Romero, a graduate of UCC-related Pacific School of Religion and Loyola Law School, has long been regarded as a leader in pluralistic ministry, global partnerships and Latino ministry. In retirement, Romero plans to spend more time developing his law practice in service to the immigrant community.

The Rev. Carlos J. Correa Bernier, a member of JWM's staff in Cleveland, has relocated to southern California and will provide program leadership at *Centro Romero*. He will work three-quarter time at the center, in addition to his duties as the UCC's minister for environment justice, which are issues that are so prevalent and obvious in border towns.

JWM is also retaining a full-time intern in Cleveland — Natasha Miller, an attorney and recent seminary graduate — to work with Correa on environmental issues. Both will staff the UCC's EcoJustice Task Force, which was created four years ago in response to a General Synod resolution on the environment.

In late March, JWM's entire staff will participate in a weekend immersion experience at *Centro Romero*.

"They will go through the same weekend immersion that other participants will go through, so they can later serve as faculty for these experiences," Jaramillo says.

Already, *Centro Romero's* first three months of weekends have been booked by church groups.

LEARN MORE
<ucc.org/justice/centro-romero>

Each of the ads includes space for a 15-second tag to customize the ad and localize the message for a particular church or group of churches.

In order to be eligible for grant funding, congregations must "embrace the message of the God is Still Speaking Ministry," Carrion says. That means communicating God's radical acceptance and extravagant welcome, reaching out to "spiritually homeless" persons who may feel alienated from the church, and making a home for all in the life of the congregation, he says.

Churches also must commit to displaying some form of exterior Stillspeaking signage or banner, which can be purchased at <stillspeakingstore.com>.



The Revs. Dan Romeo, Linda Jaramillo and Héctor López (l-r) prepare to cut the ribbon to open *Centro Romero*, a border immersion ministry in San Ysidro, Calif. photo furnished

Deceased mother of shuttle astronaut was UCC

When Rose Tani, 90, died tragically on Dec. 19 after her car was struck by a train in Lombard, Ill., the story attracted international attention.

Tani's youngest son, NASA astronaut Daniel Tani, is aboard the International Space Station, and her death marked the first time in history that a U.S. astronaut has had to cope with an immediate family member's death while on a space mission.

But what most news reports failed to mention was the Tani family's deep connections to the UCC.

Rose Tani's late husband, the Rev. Henry Tani, was a UCC leader. During World War II, both were detained at Utah's Topaz internment camp.

Henry Tani went on to serve as the church's national director of youth

ministries. He died of a heart attack in 1965, leaving the widowed Rose Tani to raise five children alone.

She was a member of **First Church of Lombard (Ill.) UCC**, where — despite her advanced years — she remained an active volunteer and gave generously of her time and money.

"Rose was a remarkable woman of purpose and intention and compassion and faith and love," said the Rev. Rob Hatfield, senior minister, at a funeral service held at the church. More than 600 people attended.

"This isn't because of her famous son," Kathy Bafundo, a church member and friend told the Chicago Tribune. "The church still would be full with people because she was so loved and so respected."

UCC ad to air on Sirius Satellite Radio

During the two weeks before Easter, one of the UCC's newest radio ads — "Telephone Tree" — will air more than 140 times on Sirius Satellite Radio.

Beginning March 10, the 60-second promo spot will air on at least four Sirius channels: CNN, Fox News, Sirius Left and OutQ.

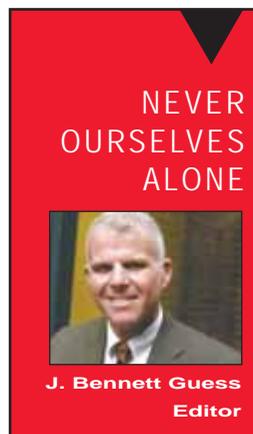
"Satellite radio will allow the UCC to reach targeted audiences on a national scale and to do so in an affordable way," says the Rev. J. Bennett Guess, the UCC's director of communications. "Frankly, this is a new test for us. It will be the first time we've ever tried satellite radio,

so we'll be interested to see what the results will be."

The national radio campaign also will come on the heels of a web-based ad campaign during the month of February on more than 30 top science-related websites. The Stillspeaking-themed web ads will intentionally reach out to persons in the scientific and technological communities and introduce them to the UCC as a place where people of faith can authentically engage and affirm science. (See related stories on pages 10-11).

LEARN MORE
<stillspeaking.com>

'100,000 for Peace' has been UCC-styled 'Christian witness'



NEVER
OURSELVES
ALONE



J. Bennett Guess
Editor

“One of the reasons I joined the UCC was because I began to understand witnessing in a much broader context.”

— Edith Guffey
UCC associate general minister

On Jan. 23, at the close of the national setting's weekly worship service in Cleveland, about 60 people huddled around the Amistad Chapel's oblong altar table where 101 prayer journals awaited final blessing before being shipped to UCC military chaplains serving in Iraq.

The colorful journals offered by local UCC churches included heartfelt prayers, poetic verse, children's artwork, adults' doodles and scrapbook-like photos, stickers and cut-outs. They were gathered as part of the UCC's "100,000 for Peace" initiative.

The Rev. John H. Thomas, general minister and president, asked worshipers to lay their hands on the booklets and pray that they would "ferry" our church's collective prayers to unknown readers in a distant land.

"Bless our prayer journals," Thomas prayed. "May they ferry sustaining comfort and hope to members of the military serving in harm's way. May they assure those who read them that we remember and pray for them in our congregations across the United States."

The effort was just one way that the UCC has been expressing its concern for soldiers in the Middle East. Since November, a user-contributed webpage at ucc.org/100Kforpeace has gathered hundreds of prayers for military personnel and Iraqi refugees. UCC advocates also have been scheduling meetings with elected officials to draw attention to returning soldiers' needs.

However, the diverse collection of prayer journals was an impressive sight to see.

Jordan UCC in Allentown, Pa., and St. Paul's UCC in Trexlertown, Pa., sent thick three-ring binders of prayers; while David's UCC in Canal Winchester, Ohio, and United Church of Hinsdale (Ill.) sent loose-leaf pages bound only by paperclips.

First Parish UCC in Somersworth,



Members of the UCC national staff admire the "100,000 for Peace" prayer journals. J. Bennett Guess photo

N.H., and Church of the Pilgrimage UCC in Plymouth, Mass., were two of many congregations that included cover photos of their churches. Veradale UCC in Spokane Valley, Wash., UCC Congregational in The Dulles, Ore., and St. John's UCC in Mifflinsburg, Pa., sent volumes enhanced by creative artwork and good penmanship.

The journals came from nearby congregations, such as Euclid Ave. Congregational UCC in Cleveland, and those far beyond, such as Lihue Christian UCC in Hawaii.

Edith A. Guffey, associate general minister, preached at the dedication service, where she recalled coming of age — and of faith — in Kansas City, Mo., where, then as a Baptist, she regularly attended Saturday night meetings of "Youth for Christ."

Although she enjoyed and benefited from time with Christian peers, she also felt uncomfortable anytime the subject turned to "witnessing" — which it did often. It always involved "carrying my Bible to school or work, or knocking on doors and asking people if they are saved," she said.

Now, rather than apologizing for having a different understanding, she encourages UCC people to own the authenticity and uniqueness of our Christian witness. She pointed to the "100,000 for Peace" initiative as one concrete example.

"The Collegium's statement about the war in Iraq — that so many signed onto — was and is a form of witness," she stressed. "These prayer journals are testimonies to our belief in the power of prayer."

"One of the reasons I joined the UCC was because I began to understand witnessing in a much broader context. I believe I can witness to a God who has touched and changed my life. ... I can witness by how I live my life, by how I vote," she emphasized.

On their way to Iraq now are more than 100 bound testaments of God's love. And each represents just a fraction of the ways that UCC members and churches witness daily to their Christian faith — authentically.

Don't let others convince you otherwise.



LETTERS

'Proud of Simi Valley UCC'

I live in Brazil as a long-term volunteer mission personnel. I want to congratulate the Simi Valley (Calif.) UCC for giving sanctuary to Liliana and her baby ["Simi Valley UCC offering sanctuary to immigrant facing deportation," Oct.-Nov. 2007]. This church community is truly following Christ. It is hard for me to believe that there would be any objection for this action.

The United States of America was founded by immigrants, developed into the country it is today by immigrants and their descendants. The Statue of Liberty with her hands open wide inviting all who are oppressed, etc., is the symbol of welcoming to the shores of America, the land of the free. The latest issues of whether illegal immigrants can get drivers licenses or their children get schooling or medical attention, is beyond my understanding as a Christian, even considering all the economic and social issues involved. My, how the United States in the modern world has wandered from its original openness.

It is also hard for me to understand that the politicians who make these laws think they are practicing their faith as Christians. It is hard for me, having dealt with immigration myself, to believe these officers know what being a Christian is.

I am proud to be affiliated with a church like the Simi Valley UCC.

The Rev. Barbara de Souza
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

'God has a way'

I have been especially pleased with the Rev. John Thomas' outreach to Iraqis of all stripes not only in their times of terrible travail within their country but also to those who have fled, are fleeing or are now finding it possible to make their way home. The response to the call for prayers and for funds is gratifying indeed.

One Arabic saying reads either as *Rabbana bydabbir* or *Allah yudabbir* and translates as something along the lines of "God has a way of doing it." Perhaps we in the UCC are a present instrument as enablers in this context and in doing so keep faith with the past and the Congregational missionaries who had followed and ministered to "Assyrian" Christians, and presumably to other Iraqis as well, who came down to Mosul from Iran after World War I.

Some of our churches are now in personal relationships with Iraqi refugee families in our own communities, certainly many of whom arrive nearly destitute on our shores, and have the privilege of welcoming them and galvanizing ourselves and our resources as we attempt rapidly to meet some of their manifold needs. And we are indeed blessed.

Jeanne B. Barnett
McLean, Va.

'Injustice is violence'

Peace Bubble needs a hole put in it. Peace is the absence of its opposite (hostility, animosity, warfare, disruption, disorder, etc.). Peace is not 'getting along,' 'avoiding controversy,' 'smiling at your neighbor.' Smiles are overrated and no substitute for peace, unless you equate peace with accommodation and avoiding controversy.

But peace doesn't mean having no enemies. Peace means loving your enemies. Peace is dependent upon justice. No justice, no peace. Check it out. Think about it.

Justice, as Thucydides said, will not come until those who are not injured are as indignant as those who are injured. Justice means absence of injustice, and injustice is easier to define than justice. Injustice is exploitation, the ascendance of greed, power, lust. Injustice is violence, whether in streets, boardrooms, or legislative halls.

Think about it. Check it out.

Richard Ellerbrake
Lebanon, Ill.

Ease up on 'bully'

Thomas Warren's bible study titled "Christmas Ploughshares" [Dec.-Jan.] was indeed timely. No Christian can read our Bible without realizing the destructiveness of human violence. All Christians should pray and work for peace in our world.

Unfortunately, Rev. Warren could not avoid drawing incorrect conclusions. In paragraph six, he refers to "shadow dwelling insurgents." A synonym for insurgents is "rebels." Those who are deliberately targeting women and children should be called what they are — terrorists. These people have no regard for human life and they are not willing to argue their opinions in the court of world opinion. They see to kill only to achieve power.

In the same paragraph, he refers to "an imperial bully with global reach." A bully enjoys oppressing others, usually to achieve some warped goal of false superiority. So I think it's appropriate to ask: Does an imperial bully encourage

and sponsor free elections? Build roads, electric plants schools and hospitals in foreign lands? Come rapidly to the aid of victims of flood, famine and tidal waves? Rev. Warren would have done better to acknowledge that those "insurgents" would gladly murder many more innocents if it were not for the "imperial bully."

The Rev. Jerry S. Clausen
Ludlow, Mass.

'Were I starting now...'

When I retired as a UCC pastor I calculated the annual UCC pension payment would amount to 4 to 6 percent of the amount my account had accrued. The variance depends on whether we requested payment for both my wife and me or just myself.

Since the account had grown historically at a rate higher than that, it appeared the Pension Board would essentially pay back part of the interest and keep the "principle." Inquiries to the Pension Board have not generated a satisfactory response.

My financial planner says this is not an uncommon rate for corporate pensions. Understandably, they must protect the account. As of last Dec. 31, the Pension Board held well over \$280,000 for every member, active and retired.

I suspect churches have no idea they are giving to a fund that will essentially yield interest only to their pastor. Were I starting now, I would request a 401k account.

Larry Winters
Cheney, Wash.

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.

'CHILDREN NEED THE CHURCH'S NURTURE'

Children's ministry has important role for UCC churches



Children's ministry was an unknown field to me when, in the summer of 2002, I became the first director of children's ministry at **United Church of Chapel Hill in North Carolina**. As the mother of two preschoolers and the wife of a university administrator, my primary concern at that time was finding a position in ministry that could be contained within 20 hours per week.

This job matched that need; the fact that it was in the field of children's ministry was secondary to me. I would only be in the job for a year or two at the most anyway, I told myself, until I found something more substantial.

Even as a mother who left full-time pastoral ministry because I valued spending more time with my own young son and daughter, I confess I still held on to a hierarchical view of ministry, in which work with children ranks lower than work with adults. I had internalized the usually unspoken but all-too-commonly held perception that one's value as a pastor is determined by the visibility of the pulpit and the number of adults one serves. In accepting the children's ministry position, I felt I was taking a step down in my career, and I did not want to stay down for long. Surely my education and calling as a Presbyterian minister would soon lead me to a post with higher standing.

Five and a half years later, I continue to serve in children's ministry, and my mind has changed. So have my title — and my hours. I am now the 30-hour-a-week "associate pastor" for children's ministry, because the congregation recognizes my ordination and sees the importance of pastoral ministry to children. Together we have taken Jesus' instruction about welcoming little ones to heart.

'Diverse family structures'

As evangelical churches have known for a long time, when a congregation reaches out to children, it also reaches out to families. Establishing children's ministry as an integral component of congregational life draws new families in, and, if the programs are both creative and theologically sound, families will stay. They will also tell their friends, and soon enough the congregation will grow. In five years, our church has doubled in size, from 400 to 800 members, thanks in part to the viability of our ministry to the youngest members of our church family.

Mainline denominations lost millions of members between 1965 and 1990, and we are still trying to recover. Many strategies have been tried to reach out to new members, from creative promotions like the UCC's "Still Speaking" campaign to inventive, technologically-infused worship and new church starts. Outreach to children needs to be on that list as well.

Yet children's ministry is much more than a proven avenue toward church growth. In this generation of diverse family structures, children need the church's nurture more than ever.

Our congregation, for instance, includes a number of heterosexual and same-sex couples who have adopted children, either internationally or domestically. Some of our families are biracial or binational; a few, from places such as South Korea, Japan or Mexico, speak very little English. Plenty of families are headed by a single parent.

Thirty-five of our children under the age of 10 are being raised by lesbian parents. Some of these children are adopted; some are "donor babies," some have a father and mother who are now divorced.

Yes, we do have our share of heterosexual, Caucasian couples with two children, but the point is that when children come to church they bring a wide range of experiences, and the church needs to offer all of them a clear message that no matter what else they may be labeled, at core they are children of God.

'We have fallen short'

The UCC prides itself on its "extravagant welcome," and on making people feel at home "wherever they are on life's journey." Thus we serve a vital role in speaking God's word to populations that have struggled to find acceptance in other denominations.

"I had internalized the usually unspoken but all-too-commonly held perception that one's value as a pastor is determined by the visibility of the pulpit and the number of adults one serves."

But we have fallen short in terms of preparing for and shaping programs that reflect the depth of children's critical need for faith-centered identity formation.

Resources that address issues such as self-understanding when one has been conceived through in vitro fertilization and is growing up in a lesbian household, or experiencing God's presence in a country — and a church — where the dominant language is not your own, or living an integrated life when your parents live in two different places are hard to come by. These are pastoral matters that the church must be ready to help children discuss freely and without judgment.

The church also needs to help children take the centrality of baptismal identity seriously. It's too difficult to do alone. In our culture that exalts good looks, the accumulation of wealth, and being cool by drinking and substance use, following the way of the Suffering Servant can easily slip to the bottom of one's consciousness.

Children feel other kinds of pressures as well. Parents tend to push their children into multiple extracurricular activities, and all things, including tending to one's inner life, become equal. Being a child of God is just like being a soccer player, an honor student or a piano player. Parents want their children to go to church to be "well-rounded," but not necessarily to learn how to connect their Christianity with the things they do during the week.

If we truly want today's children to develop into mature disciples, we must be prepared to risk challenging them — and their parents — to integrate faith in Christ with whatever other interests they pursue.

Children's ministry is more than ministry to children, however. Today's church-going children are challenging all of us to take Christian education more seriously. Children's ministry matters because when we respond to parents' hunger for an accepting spiritual home and pay attention to children's faith formation, churches grow — both numerically and spiritually. Most significantly, however, children's ministry gives the youngest of God's children a chance to speak, and thus they have the power to transform us all. Jesus would hope for nothing less.

The Rev. Susan Steinberg is associate pastor for children's ministries at United Church of Chapel Hill in North Carolina.



"Tomorrow is, increasingly, today. And whether the day of the Lord Jesus is beyond the mythic Jordan, or on this side of the crossing where our world threatens now to end in fire and flood, the fierce urgency of now is very real."

— The Rev. John H. Thomas, preaching at a Martin Luther King Sunday worship service (Jan. 20), at **First Congregational UCC in Berkeley, Calif.**

"That's what the UCC wants, and that's what we want."

— David Plunkett, a spokesperson for **Cathedral of Hope UCC in Dallas, Texas**, talking to the *Dallas Voice* newspaper about his church's plans to start five churches in five years. Cathedral of Hope UCC leaders say they are actively supporting the denomination's call for 250 new churches by 2011. (See story on page 7.)

"If you feel that gay and lesbian people are loved and created by God, then how can we continue to discriminate against our brothers and sisters?"

— The Rev. Don Portwood, pastor of **Lyndale UCC in Minneapolis**, about his decision and that of several other clergy in the city, to stop signing heterosexual marriage licenses as long as same-sex couples are denied legal marriage opportunities. (Associated Press, Jan. 5)

"Homelessness is not just an urban problem. It doesn't matter where you live; poverty is growing, homelessness is growing."

— The Rev. Chuck Currie, interim pastor at **Parkrose Community UCC in Portland, Ore.**, before he and eight others spent the night outside in cold temperatures to draw attention to the issue of homelessness. At the beginning of the evening, a prayer vigil for the homeless was held at **Cedar Hills UCC, also in Portland**. (Washington County News-Times, Jan. 9)

"No single church can be all things to all people all of the time, but Trinity UCC has been an important presence for a lot of people for a long time, including people of many racial and ethnic groups."

— The Rev. Philip L. Blackwell, senior pastor of Chicago's First United Methodist Church (The Chicago Temple), on the *Chicago Sun-Times* news blog (Jan. 23).



TABULATIONS

140+

= the number of times that the UCC's newest 60-second radio ad — "Telephone Tree" — will air on Sirius Satellite Radio, March 10-24. (see story on page 3)



What's your take on the intersection of SCIENCE AND RELIGION? We'd like to know.

SOAPBOX

Read "Can science deepen your faith?" and related stories on pages 10-11, then send us your concise reaction of no more than 75 words to <newsroom@ucc.org>. Please put "soapbox" in the subject line. As always, we reserve the right to edit submissions for brevity and clarity.



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'FLOATING ICON' IN MIDST OF ATLANTIC FREEDOM TOUR

New Jersey pastor sails sabbatical seas aboard Amistad

By Joanne Griffith Domingue

Christmas day was different this time around for the Rev. Paul Bryant-Smith. Instead of a leisurely day celebrated with his family, he was catching a plane to Sierra Leone, on the western coast of Africa.

There he joined the Freedom Schooner Amistad, where he began a three-month sabbatical on board as a volunteer deckhand and educator.

At Christmas, the ship already was seven months into its 17-month Atlantic Freedom Tour. Bryant-Smith, pastor of **First Congregational UCC in River Edge, N.J.**, is sailing the infamous Middle Passage, the second leg of the old slave route where captives from Africa were brought to the Americas to be sold as slaves. Along the way, the Amistad is stopping in Dakar, Cape Verde and Barbados before Bryant-Smith returns home in time for Easter.

"It's fabulous that he can do this," said the Rev. John Deckenback, the UCC's Central Atlantic Conference Minister. "Amistad is a floating icon for those in this area. It's a beloved symbol. You cannot understand the mission of the UCC without knowing the Amistad influence."

Justice advocacy is mission

Bryant-Smith loves telling the Amistad story. In 1839, 53 Africans — 49 men and four children — were captured in Sierra Leone and brought to Cuba to be sold as slaves. In Havana, the captives were put on the 119-foot, Cuba-based coastal schooner, Amistad. Ironically, the word *amistad* is Spanish for friendship.

During a storm some captives broke free, said Bryant-Smith. They killed the captain and cook and ordered two of the remaining four Spaniards to steer the ship east toward their African homeland, according to "The Amistad Event," a brochure published by the UCC. "But the Spaniards tricked them. By day they sailed east; by night they sailed west by the stars. For two months they zig-zagged," the brochure reads.

The Gulf Stream drew them north to the United States, Bryant-Smith said. They came ashore in New London, Conn., where the 39 remaining adult male Africans were charged with mutiny, arrested and jailed, according to Amistad America's website.

Many New England Congregationalists joined forces with other abolitionists and, within a week of the ship's capture, had formed the Amistad Committee to raise money for the defense of the captives.

Language was a barrier to learning the Africans' story. So Josiah Willard Gibbs, a professor of theology and sacred literature at Yale, visited the captives and learned to count to 10 in Mendi, the language of the Africans. Then he went to New York and walked along the docks repeating the Mendi numbers to find a person who understood Mendi, according to the UCC brochure.

Gibbs did — and brought a native Mendenan back to New Haven, so he could hear the full story of the Amistad. Yale Divinity students tutored the captives; the Committee hired a matron to teach the children.

In 1841, John Quincy Adams argued before the Supreme Court that the Africans were not enslaved, but were people born free who

had been kidnapped and thus had a right to freedom. After two years in prison, the court freed the 35 Africans who had survived. "They were dumped out of jail," Bryant-Smith said, "with no provision to send them home."

The Amistad Committee supported the Africans while raising money for their passage home to Africa. **First Congregational UCC in Farmington, Conn.**, housed the Africans from March to November, 1841. They converted a barn into a dorm for the men and placed the children with families, Bryant-Smith said.

"They lived, worked and worshipped among us," said the Rev. Ned Edwards, the church's pastor. He said he considers the Amistad experience a turning point for his church in the way it considered mission.

On Nov. 27, 1841, 35 survivors, along with five Americans — two black and three white, two of whom were ministers — sailed for Africa, where they arrived in January 1842. The Americans

worked to establish the Mendi Mission.

Five years later, the Amistad Committee helped create the American Missionary Association, the first anti-slavery mission society in America. In 2000, the AMA's name was changed to Justice and Witness Ministries, one of the UCC's four Covenanted Ministries.

Bryant-Smith paused in his narrative. "You know, Steven Spielberg [producer and director of the 1997 movie 'Amistad'] did not establish the connection with the Connecticut Congregational churches. That's our story, a UCC story."

Connecticut's tall freedom ship

Today's Amistad Freedom Schooner was built in Mystic, Conn., in the 1990s and is 10 feet longer than its historic counterpart. The modern ship needed room for diesel engines and life boats. Its home port is New Haven, Conn., and it is one of the official Tall Ships of Connecticut.

For the past four years, Bryant-Smith has donated two of his four weeks of annual vacation each year to live on the ship as a deckhand and educator. When the ship is under sail, he "works the sails, takes a watch at the helm." He helps maintain the vessel, scraping and painting. He helps repair rigging and clean toilets — "heads, as they're called on a ship."

And he teaches. Bryant-Smith especially enjoys sharing the Amistad story with groups of school children who visit the schooner. "I take



"You can see how Amistad's presence makes an impact on Freetown, visually as well as spiritually," says the Rev. Paul Bryant-Smith, a UCC minister who is working aboard the Amistad Freedom Schooner during its cross-Atlantic voyage.

Paul Bryant-Smith photo

the group below deck, in the summer heat, turn off the lights. We're tightly packed, and people start to experience the sensation of what it was like" for the captive Africans. There were 59 on the historic Amistad — 53 captives — as well as six Spaniards: the captain, navigator, cook, the two plantation owners who wanted the captives as slaves, and a cabin boy.

For this year's Atlantic Freedom Tour there are 20 aboard, a crew of 12 and eight college students.

Amistad America planned the tour to begin in 2007 to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the Wilberforce Declaration, which Great Britain passed in 1807, making illegal the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The recent movie, "Amazing Grace," told the story of William Wilberforce and his work getting the declaration passed.

The Amistad began its tour June 21 — the eve of the opening of the UCC's General Synod in Hartford, Conn. — when the ship set sail from its home port of nearby New Haven. Many UCC members from across the nation were on hand, including the Rev. John H. Thomas, the UCC's general minister and president.

'Ambitious trip'

"This is the most ambitious trip we've done," said Greg Belanger, president and CEO of Amistad America. "It's the first time we've gone to West Africa and Sierra Leone. It's a real milestone for us."

A year ago the captain of Amistad, Eliza Garfield, invited Bryant-Smith to go to Africa and sail the Middle Passage. "Whenever he has vacation or can reach us, he volunteers," Garfield said. "After three years of that I offered him this opportunity. It's a very humble position. He'll be teaching, taking part of the watches. Everybody gets to do everything."

Bryant-Smith is the UCC representative in the educational piece of the trip, "the anti-racist work that we do. He's an inspiration to

all of us. I'm really looking forward to having him on board," Garfield said in a telephone interview from Portugal where the ship was in port in early November.

For Bryant-Smith, this is a dream come true. His wife, Kimberly, has been a "wonderful support," he said. "She said, 'Do it now.'"

“You cannot understand the mission of the UCC without knowing the Amistad influence.”

— The Rev. John Deckenback, Central Atlantic Conference Minister

Their son, Ian, 11, is eager to work on Amistad, too. He's looking forward to when he is in high school and might be able to have a crew job.

Upon his return home, Bryant-Smith envisions his Amistad work continuing. He hopes to bring back to his church "a greater understanding of our Congregational ancestors and their justice work. It's an opportunity for this church to be active in the community, making presentations about the work our UCC continues to do."

Bryant-Smith is a member of the board of directors of the Central Atlantic Conference and is chair of its mission committee.

In January 2007 he was invited to bring the Amistad story to **Immanuel UCC in Cambridge, Md.**, as part of that church's annual mission dinner.

"We were delighted with his stories," said the Rev. Joan Evans, pastor of Immanuel UCC. "He knows how to use Amistad for telling the story of freedom. We are working on a dream to have Amistad stop in our community. Racial relations are still an issue in Cambridge."

Deckenback agrees that Bryant-Smith has captured the Amistad experience. The sabbatical on the Amistad "is a marvelous use of his time," Deckenback said. "The social justice culture of the UCC derives from this. Clearly Amistad has had a major impact."



PREMIERE 2008 SEASON INCLUDES THREE PRODUCTIONS

California church gives life to professional 'Stillspeaking Theatre'

By Elsa M. J. Seifert

A gigantic step was taken on Nov. 3 and 4 when a challenging play, "Awaiting Judgment," was presented in a new theater space at the church.

"Awaiting Judgment," written by the Rev. Art Cribbs, the church's pastor, is the story of an imaginary meeting of two leading theologians of the 20th century, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Luther King Jr. The play was first presented at General Synod 2007 in Hartford.

Although the lives of these legendary men never touched in real life, both followed the spiritual wisdom of Jesus Christ. King and Bonhoeffer were devout Christian pastors and advocates for social justice. Both died at the age of 39 while standing up for their beliefs.

In December, Donald Shenk talked about his life-long dream of opening a theater. For Shenk, the UCC's identity theme had become a part of that dream, and that's how San Marino UCC's Stillspeaking Theatre was born.

Shenk, who is the pastoral assistant at the church, is now also the theater's artistic director. The new theater space is housed in the church's original sanctuary built in 1948, which had been used as a fellowship hall since a new sanctuary was built in 1960.

Theatrical branding

When the UCC's "God is Still Speaking" phrase was first conceived, it was immediately picked up by the congregation. The church has been a loyal participant in the UCC's advertising and branding effort. Yet the Stillspeaking campaign also underscored the UCC's new-found emphasis on fostering greater church vitality, something the San Marino congregation took seriously.

Taking note of the strong interest among church members for the advancement of drama and the arts in worship and fellowship, they began to showcase plays using their own amateur talents.

Two early one-act plays began their journey toward "theater as transformation."

The Rev. Marcia Hoffman, the church's former pastor, had included drama in some worship services, often providing the opportunity to involve the youth as well as some adults.

Prior to that, the Rev. Jim Manley had begun to incorporate art and musical theater into part of the church life. A musical play he wrote — "Light on the Table" — included actors and technical personnel from four local churches in the area and was presented in the church sanctuary and also at a Southern California-Nevada Con-

ference annual gathering.

A demographic study of the community at San Marino asked, "What do you want from your church?" The overwhelming response showed a hunger for the arts. Soon Shenk gathered interested people and they collaborated on a grant proposal for funding for a professional theater.



Set design for the play "Awaiting Judgment."

The theater's mission is "to provide a quality, live theatrical experience that challenges, informs, entertains, inspires, and stimulates our audiences." Productions are to "create a vibrant understanding of the human condition and explore ways in which God still speaks to contemporary society." They wish to provide "thought-provoking, edgy, yet accessible productions" and to "strive to bridge gaps and heal human divisions."

According to Shenk, the Stillspeaking Theatre was created as a professional theater because the church believes God is still speaking through the works of poets and playwrights who educate, stimulate, inspire and empower us to embrace pertinent issues in the world today. They encourage us to seek greater understanding of the human condition so that we may become more conscientious and compassionate people.

The theater was formed to support and enhance the mission of the church, said Shenk, to spread the good news of God's love, heal human divisions and seek peace with justice.

The theater, he said, is dedicated to bringing the highest quality theatrical experiences to the West San Gabriel Valley that entertain, enlighten and excite audiences to confront difficult issues and provoke dialogue. A premiere season

An advisory board was formed to decide which productions to choose

to present and to follow the budget. In this way, the whole church owns the theater and is a part of the decision-making process for this theater of realism.

In its 2008 premiere season, the Stillspeaking Theatre will present "To Kill a Mockingbird," based on the novel by Harper Lee and dramatized by Christopher Sergel. The play deals with themes of courage, racial injustice and the death of innocence. It will run from April 11 through May 4.

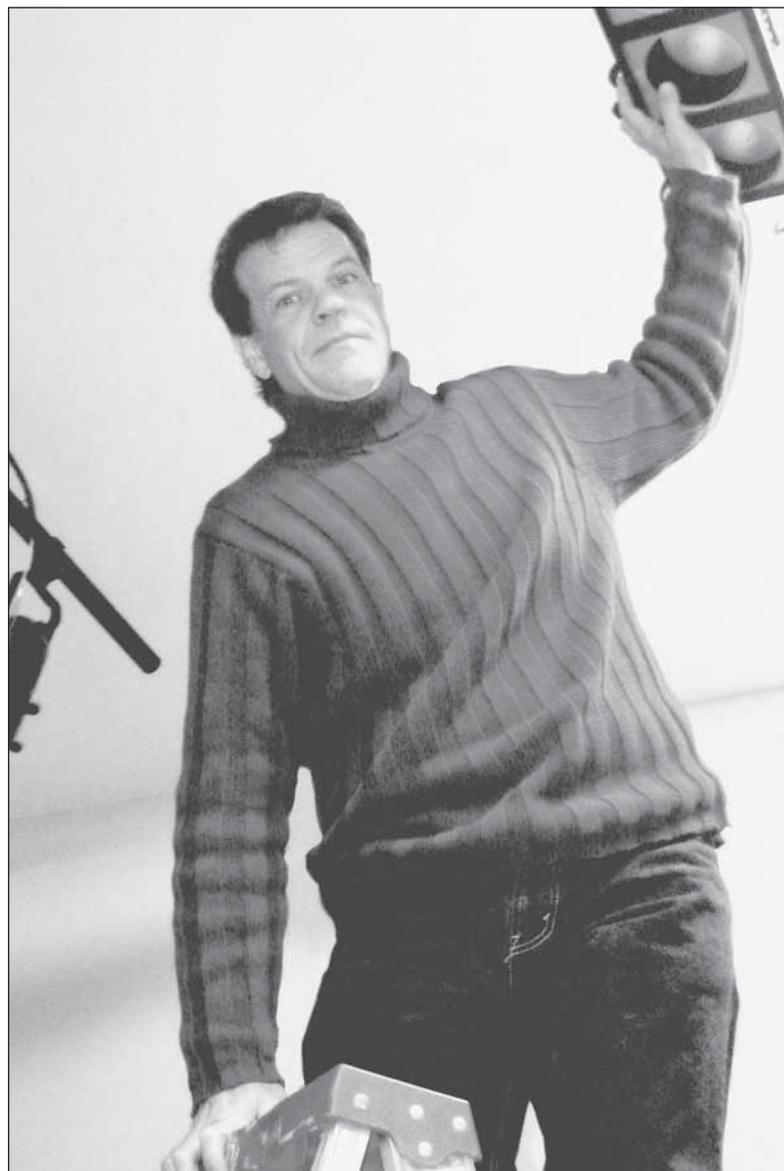
From July 11 to August 3, the Stillspeaking Theatre will present "Facing East," a play by Carol Lynn Pearson about the anguish of a Mormon couple reeling from the suicide of their gay son.

The season's final offering is "The Mystery Plays," which wrestles in a uniquely American way with the complex mysteries of death, afterlife, religion, faith and forgiveness. It will be produced Nov. 1 through Nov. 23.

The Stillspeaking Theatre has been sanctioned by the Actors' Equity Association under their Los Angeles 99-seat plan agreement. Actors' Equity, founded in 1913, represents more than 45,000 Actors and Stage Managers in the United States. Equity seeks to advance, promote and foster the art of live theatre as an essential component of our society.

Elsa M. J. Seifert is editor of the Southern California – Nevada Conference edition of United Church News.

Learn more about San Marino Congregational UCC and the Stillspeaking Theatre at <sanmarinoucc.org> or by calling 626/292-2080.



San Marino UCC Stillspeaking Theatre artistic director Donald Shenk hangs lights in the church theatre space.

San Marino Congregational UCC photos

Q&A: 'Veggie Tales' creator talks turkey — uh, turnips

(RNS) — Phil Vischer, co-creator of the kid-popular "VeggieTales," talks about what makes a movie "Christian" and what kids need to know about being a hero.

Q: Is it hard for a Christian movie to compete with mainstream movies?

A: Eight out of 10 Americans still identify as Christian, even if they haven't gone to church since their parents made them when they were kids. But when they become parents, all of a sudden they look at their own kids and, "What values am I passing onto them?"

Q: As an artist, do you sometimes feel suffocated by the Christian community?

A: Honestly, many do. I know Christian artists who just can't take it; they walk away from the Christian world and get on with their art. I am more a teacher than an artist, which is why I have been so happy making

VeggieTales, where a tomato gets down on his knees and says, "God made you special and loves you very much." At the end of the day, I've got more Mr. Rogers in me than van Gogh.

Q: What makes a movie religious? Is "Finding Nemo" a Christian film?

A: It's not an un-Christian film. There are very strong Judeo-Christian values in most successful family films, though not all. It's hard to tell a compelling story that goes against those values or disregards them. You'd have to be wildly cynical as a filmmaker to craft a kids' movie that throws Judeo-Christian values out the window.

Q: In your newest film, "The Pirates Who Don't Do Anything," what do you hope kids will learn about being a hero?

A: What we don't say is, "Every one of you has such extraordinary capa-

bilities that you can, under your own power, be a hero." What we're really saying is: Regardless of how you view yourself, God has created you to do something really cool. That's why we're here, and it involves helping others, and it has nothing to do with how big and brave and strong you are, and everything to do with trust in God to give you what you need to do what he's asked you to do.

Q: Is your simple message that everyone can be a hero?

A: Yes, and the message is also: Stop being a consumer and be a producer, because our culture is all about consumption. If you reach adulthood under the impression that the world exists to entertain you, you are going to be on the couch your whole life. That's not what God is telling us to do. The world is on fire. God wants us to jump in, grab a bucket, and start putting out fires.

CHICAGO CHURCH IS HOME TO U.S. SENATOR BARACK OBAMA

Thomas denounces smear campaign against UCC's largest congregation

By J. Bennett Guess

A ramped-up smear campaign against the UCC's largest congregation and U.S. Sen. Barack Obama's home church — **Trinity UCC in Chicago** — has raised the ire of the Rev. John H. Thomas, the UCC's general minister and president, who called the e-mail-driven claims "absurd, mean-spirited and politically motivated."

"Our national offices in Cleveland, as well as other settings of the UCC, have been forwarded countless e-mails that obviously derive from a similar source," Thomas said. "They contain misleading statements obviously meant to undermine the integrity of one of our most vibrant, mission-driven congregations."

Thomas said that while it's not his intent to come to the aid of Obama or any presidential candidate, he does feel it's imperative that "absurd, mean-spirited and politically-motivated attacks against one

of our UCC churches be challenged forthrightly."

Obama, who is seeking the Democratic nomination for president, has been a member of Trinity UCC for 20 years.

Since Obama won the Iowa caucuses on Jan. 3, a flurry of e-mail messages with identical language and sentiment has been circulating across the internet, claiming that Trinity UCC was racist because of its long-stated church motto: "Unashamedly Black, Unapologetically Christian."

"Trinity UCC is rooted in and proud of its Afrocentric heritage," Thomas said. "This is no different than the hundreds of UCC churches from the German Evangelical and Reformed stream that continue to own and celebrate their German heritage, insisting on annual sausage and sauerkraut dinners and singing *Stille Nacht* on Christmas Eve. Recognizing and celebrating our distinctive racial-ethnic heritages, cultures,

languages and customs are what make us unique as a united and uniting denomination."

While Trinity UCC is predominately African American, it does include and welcome non-Black mem-

UCC members know Trinity to be one of the most welcoming, hospitable and generous congregations in our denomination."

bers. The Rev. Jane Fisler-Hoffman, former Illinois Conference Minister, who is white, has been a member of the congregation for years.

"Trinity is a destination church for many members of the UCC, a multiracial, multicultural denomination that is largely Caucasian," Thomas pointed out. "When in Chicago, many UCC members flock to Trinity to share in and learn from its vibrant ministries, dynamic worship and justice-minded membership. Contrary to the claims made in these hateful e-mails, UCC

members know Trinity to be one of the most welcoming, hospitable and generous congregations in our denomination."

Trinity UCC was founded in 1961. Ten years later, when the Rev.

Jeremiah A. Wright became its pastor, the church had 87 families. Today, Trinity UCC has more than 8,000 members, 70 ministries and three Sunday worship services.

Trinity UCC is also the largest congregational contributor to Our

Church's Wider Mission, the UCC's common purse for regional, national and international ministries.

The circulating e-mails are written to appear as if they are coming from a groundswell of persons, with different names and e-mail addresses. But each uses nearly identical language, makes similar claims and even manages to make the same mistakes. For example, each makes introductory reference to "Trinity Church of Christ" instead of "Trinity United Church of Christ."

"It's clear that someone is using the internet to give the appearance of widespread concern and, thus, to hopefully create traction for this absurd story," Thomas said.

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A NOT-SO-QUANTUM LEAP

Can science

deepen your faith?

BY J. BENNETT GUESS

Robert Greenberg marvels at the earth's intricate, interconnected ecological systems. He organizes Earth Day events, and he worries about evolving weather patterns and global climate change. He has studied geological time and, by leading field trips, is helping unlock the wonders of science for others.

And he believes in God.

"From my early years, I've always loved nature," says Greenberg, who teaches earth environmental science at Chapel Hill High School in North Carolina. "And I've always seen God as the creator of everything."

Raised Jewish — "I was bar mitzvahed" — in Monmouth County, N.J., Greenberg now describes himself and his faith as "Judeo-Christian." In October, he and his wife, Jerri, who also has a science background, joined **United Church of Chapel Hill (N.C.)**, after attending for about five years.

Greenberg credits his Jewish upbringing as instrumental in helping shape his appreciation for the environment, and he's also grateful that his current community of faith validates his passion for all things science.

"Pretty early on, I understood that there was a scientific plan, and I'm fascinated by discussions about when the universe began and how it began," he says.

Greenberg, who has studied geology at West Virginia University, the University of Vermont and Montana State University, has never seen a contradiction between religion and science.

"Science explains how things work, but not necessarily why. Religion gives you the why to it," he says.

Greenberg says he was particularly inspired by Jimmy Carter's 2005 book, "Our Endangered Values," in which the former president argues there is no conflict between religion and science. Carter, however, does concede the seeming dichotomy is "one of the most ancient and persistent debates, especially in the United States."

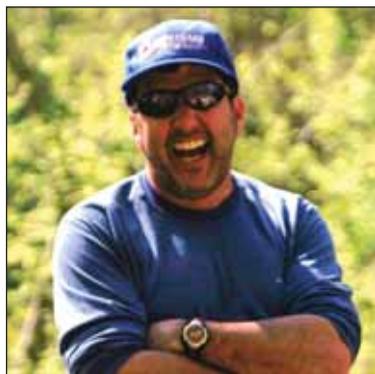
"It seems obvious to me," Carter writes, "that, in its totality, the Bible presented God's spiritual message, but that the ancient authors of the Holy scriptures were not experts on geology, biology, or cosmology, and were not blessed with the use of electron micro-

scopes, carbon-dating techniques, or the Hubble telescope."

Carter, a trained nuclear engineer, is known less for being a scientist and more for being a Southern Baptist Sunday School teacher.

Greenberg says he's constantly recommending Carter's book to others — especially the religion-science chapter — because it succinctly addresses what Greenberg himself believes to be true.

"[Carter] never saw religion and science as incompatible. They both coexist. And that's the way I look at it," Greenberg says. "I don't understand the hostility [between religion and science]. To me it's ridiculous. I really think it's a lot of energy wasted, especially on the



Greenberg

part of the media, because there's no conflict. I believe God gave us brains to use."

Another of Greenberg's heroes is contemporary scientist Stephen Hawking, widely considered one of the greatest minds in physics since Albert Einstein.

"Hawking says scientists now have a common understanding of how the forces were united [to create the Big Bang], but the spark that started it all, that's the miracle," Greenberg says. "I've always been curious about how it happened."

Greenberg says he's equally fascinated with both the "forces" of science and the unknown "spark" behind it — which he calls God.



Randy Varcho | iStockphoto graphic

'Curious creatures'

Olivia Masih White, who retired as a genetics professor at the University of North Texas in Dallas and later served as executive minister of the UCC's Wider Church Ministries in Cleveland, says she's spent a lifetime fielding questions about the intersections of religion and science.

"All during my teaching experience, I have been challenged and

learned everything there is to know. Some people, she says, even assumed — wrongly — that the human genome mapping project, once completed, would teach us everything there was to know about human existence and all our questions would be answered.

"But this is just the beginning!" she exclaims, insisting that each new scientific discovery only leads to bigger questions. "How can we

vides opportunities for science to offer "conversion experiences" for people of faith.

The outcome of scientific inquiry, therefore, is "a greater sacramental understanding of our life together," Thomas says. "It's not where most people would think that a conversation with science would take us, but that's where it takes me."

Honoring scientific vocations

Thomas tells the story of his own father, Walter Thomas, who was both a polymer chemist and a devoted lay leader in the church. But, looking back, John Thomas says he laments that the church never really legitimized or affirmed his father's scientific career as a true Christian calling.

"As I think back on his life and his life in the church, he was honored as a deacon, as a trustee, for being the moderator of the church," Thomas recalls, "but the church never encouraged him to connect those two parts of himself, the person of faith and the scientist."

"They never lifted him up and honored him as a scientist, but rather as a church worker. I felt, 'What a loss.'"

That's why Thomas says that one of his hopes is that the UCC will begin to be intentional about honoring church members who are scientists — engineers, mathematicians, teachers and students — "to help them make that deep connection between their vocation as scientist and their vocation as a Christian."

Greenberg, the science teacher, believes there's a hunger for greater

“ Science explains how things work, but not necessarily why. Religion gives you the why to it.”

— Robert Greenberg, science teacher and UCC member

asked by my students, 'How can you be a Christian and also be a scientist?' — as if they were two very different things," says White, a member of the UCC's Science and Technology Network.

"To me, being a scientist and being a Christian really is more harmonious," she says. "The more I learn about science, the intricacies — how the cells work, how our DNA works — it makes me more excited about this God who created all this, and my faith deepens."

White recalls how she felt in 1983, when the UCC General Synod passed a courageous statement in support of genetic engineering. That same year, White was completing her Ph.D. in genetics.

"For me, that was a turning point, that this church really welcomes science," she remembers.

White says each new scientific discovery leads some to fret that we've "gone too far," that we've

help the public? How can we alleviate suffering? How can we prevent illness?"

The Rev. John H. Thomas, UCC general minister and president, says questions about science should not cause us "to argue about who's right and who's wrong, about what happened or didn't happen." Instead, he says, biology and physics should provoke us to ask, "What does this tell us about God?"

"God is amazingly more complex, more fascinating, more intriguing," he says. "Isn't it exciting that God wants God's creatures to be curious creatures, exploring and imagining?"

Science ultimately welcomes more mystery — not less — into the life of faith, Thomas believes. And that's a strange concept for some. Yet, the sight of seeing dividing cells through the aid of a microscope "encourages singing, not arguments," he says, and pro-

URGING CHRISTIANS TO 'OPEN OUR THEOLOGY'

UCC scientists, theologians pen groundbreaking pastoral letter

Accompanying ad campaign to welcome, reach out to scientists

With hopes of mending a millenniums-old feud between religion and science, UCC theologians and scientists unveiled a meaty pastoral letter on Jan. 29 that calls the church to "open ourselves and our theology to the momentous conceptual changes of our times."

Authored by the Rev. John H. Thomas, the UCC's general minister and president, in conjunction with a nine-member working group, "A New Voice Arising: A Pastoral Letter on Faith Engaging Science and Technology" argues that "our universe has expanded and so has our understanding of God."

"Many today are hungering for an authentic spirituality that is intellectually honest and at home in a scientific era," the pastoral letter states. "They are searching for a new kind of wisdom to live by, one that is scientifically sophisticated, technologically advanced, morally just, ecologically sustainable, and spiritually alive."

Thomas says he hopes the 2,400-word pastoral letter will "begin to move the church to the place where its public image, public witness and public identity is one of a community of faith that is eager to engage science and to welcome and honor scientists."

"A New Voice Arising" is being distributed in February to each of the UCC's 5,700 local churches. Accompanying materials will suggest how churches can host opportunities for further study and group sharing.

The Rev. Ron Cole-Turner, professor of theology and ethics at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and a member of the UCC's science and technology network, says, "It is really extraordinary that we have this church that has gone on record as positioning itself to engage science. We believe we can, indeed, be contemporary Christians — listening to science and learning theological visions, discovering new theological truths."

Olivia Masih White, a geneticist, biologist and UCC lay leader, says she hopes the pastoral letter will help bridge the chasm that too often characterizes two oft-competing realms. "I am a better Christian because I am a scientist," insists White, who says science enables Christians to be better followers of Jesus because it advances the cure of diseases and the alleviation of suffering.

The UCC's pastoral letter has received endorsements from prominent leaders in the scientific community.

Alan I. Leshner, chief executive of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, calls the UCC's effort a "clear support for science."

"In the same way that the UCC states that it cannot ignore the context in which it functions, neither can the scientific community ignore its societal context," Leshner says. "For this reason, we see a dialogue between science and religion as vital."

Charles Townes, a member of **First Congregational UCC in Berkeley, Calif.**, who has received both the Nobel Prize in Physics and the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion, says the pastoral letter is "a thoughtful, knowledgeable and

The UCC's web ads will be seen during the month of February on as many as 30 prominent science-related sites, including <scienceblog.com>, <aboutmyplanet.com>, <lovephysics.com> and <blog.bioethics.net>.

The ad campaign, according to Thomas, is a significant next step for the UCC's Stillspeaking Ministry. The web-based science ads will link to an expanded "faith and science" section on the UCC's website <ucc.org/not-mutually-exclusive>.

A 12-minute video featuring Thomas, Cole-Turner and White introduces viewers to the themes and purpose of the UCC's pastoral letter.

"Through our Stillspeaking Initiative, the United Church of Christ has been intentional about seeking out groups of people that have been marginalized by the church, either intentionally or unintentionally," Thomas says. "And, frankly, when it comes to persons engaged in scientific inquiry — geneticists, mathematicians, chemists, engineers, science teachers and students — the church has a history of communicating disinterest, distrust and even hostility."

The UCC's own blog <united-churchofchrist.blogspot.com> will devote the first week of February to posts and discussions about religion, science and technology.

The UCC also is hosting a sermon-writing contest on science and technology for pastors and seminarians, with two \$500 top prizes, and the denomination is asking local churches to honor persons working in science-related professions during worship services on Sunday, May 18.

“It is really extraordinary that we have this church that has gone on record as positioning itself to engage science.”

— Professor Ron Cole-Turner, science-religion enthusiast

perceptive discussion of science and religion and growth of their helpful interaction.”

Ian G. Barbour, a physicist and theologian who also has won the Templeton Prize, says, "This is a wonderfully clear summary of the serious challenges and exciting opportunities when traditional religious beliefs encounter recent discoveries in a range of sciences — from cosmology to evolution, brain research and genetics. It is truly a 'pastoral' letter in addressing personal questions in the lives of laypersons, today rather than the more abstract debates common among theologians or philosophers."

Ad outreach to scientists

The release of the pastoral letter is being accompanied by an advertising blitz on major science-related blogs, with the hope of introducing the church's pro-science message to a wider audience.

CAN SCIENCE? | cont. understanding of the natural world, especially the earth's ages-old mysteries. He addresses that yearning for discovery by leading periodic field trips for church members and for his high school students.

On Feb. 10, for example, Greenberg will lead his next installment of "Celebration of Earth and Sky,"

an immersion event sponsored by a high school group named "SURGE" (Students United for a Responsible Global Environment), which he serves as faculty advisor.

"Part of living a good life is honoring, respecting and revering God's creation. To observe and enjoy it," Greenberg teaches. "I see life and the earth as a bunch of sys-

tems that interact with each other. As we live our lives, we come to deeper understanding of these connections. Unfortunately, some people stagnate. They're told something and they say, 'This is what I believe and I don't want to hear anything else.' I'm open to learning new things and I always see God in it."



faith engaging
SCIENCE | RELIGION

'A NEW VOICE ARISING'

Here are a few thought-provoking excerpts from the UCC's "Pastoral Letter on Faith, Engaging Science and Technology," released Jan. 29. Read the full text at <ucc.org/not-mutually-exclusive>.

Science shows us a cosmos that gives birth to stars, galaxies, planets, life, mind and self-consciousness, all emerging one after the other, each stage giving birth to what follows, each playing its part in the interactive dance of cosmic self-generation. Through these discoveries, science reveals a new picture of human beings as tiny creatures in a vast cosmic sea.

Are we alone? Does the universe have a purpose? What does it mean to be human? Questions like these are as old as scripture and as new as the latest discoveries of physics and biology. For many people today, old answers to these questions are no longer credible.

Science is sometimes unsettling because it destroys old foundations without providing new ones. Yet because of science, many today are on a new search for meaning. Can our church address the seekers of today?

Precisely because technology is powerful and so often beneficial, we must speak against policies that deny access to health care or that allow such things as a "digital divide." ... If injustice in medicine is any indication of future injustice in the allocation of technology, we can only worry that technology is unwittingly moving us along the wrong path socially and economically.

The transformations of today's scientific vision enrich our faith, and our church honors our members who answer God's calling with careers in medicine, science and engineering.

Gone is the old view of a small, static universe, with fixed species dwelling on a fixed earth. Gone is the old view of a small, static God. We believe that God yearns for us to understand nature more fully and to love it more deeply.

Evolution helps us see our faithful God in a new way. Our creator works patiently, calling forth life through complex processes spanning billions of years and waiting for us to awaken and respond in conscious participation in God's own overarching dream for all living things.

The changes that lie ahead of us can scarcely be imagined. Science and technology are not about to come to a standstill, and neither should we. ... We know that the challenges of science and technology are not easy. We also know they are not optional, as if we could be a faithful church while ignoring our context.

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For too long, science and faith have had a combustible relationship. But even churches evolve. In the United Church of Christ, we explore, celebrate, hypothesize, believe, question and pray. Science and faith are not mutually exclusive.

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UCC CONTRIBUTIONS TO AID REFUGEES COULD EXCEED \$150,000

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In Jordan, Iraqi 'refugees' have rights, but 'guests' don't

By W. Evan Golder

QUESTION: *When are Iraqi refugees not "refugees?"***ANSWER:** *When they are considered "guests" by Jordan, Iraq's neighbor to the west.*

The issue is more than semantic, explains Wafa Goussous.

"Generally speaking, a refugee is a person who is forced to leave his home and his country," she says. "And as he is forced, he will go across his border to seek refuge in another country where security is available."

"On the other hand, the Iraqis who flee the Iraq War are not refugees because they are not forced to leave Iraq. They are allowed to come inside Jordan, and if they have the means they rent houses, start buying land, putting their children in schools, etc.

"That's why we don't call them refugees," she says. "We call them guests. And guests arrive for a temporary period of time until there is a solution for them."

Goussous, a Jordanian Christian, has been director since 2003 of the Middle East Council of Churches office in Amman, Jordan's capital. The MECC is a partner of Global Ministries, the common mission program of the UCC and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Legal distinction has consequences

The distinction between "refugees" and "guests" is also a legal question, Goussous says.

"According to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees," she says, "refugees have rights. They are entitled to medical assistance, daily bread, clean water, etc. Governments are responsible for refugees, to resettle them somewhere.

"But guests? No. They don't have any legal status inside this country. They are allowed here, but our government does not provide work permits for any Iraqis or any residency rights."

"If you are a rich guest, then you have no problem to survive," she adds. "But if you are a poor guest, then you need somebody to support you."

According to the U.N., more than 2 million Iraqis have fled their country. However, the United States admitted only 1,608 Iraqi refugees in fiscal year 2007.

Estimates vary from 200,000 to 800,000 as to how many Iraqi "guests" have taken refuge in Jordan, but increasingly they are poor rather than rich. And the rich are running out of money and rapidly becoming poor.

"Iraqi Christians, especially the poorer ones, first seek aid from their churches," she says. "But the churches don't have all that much money, so they turned to the MECC for help."

The MECC then turned to Action by Churches Together (ACT), which launched a world-wide appeal. In response, the UCC asked members and churches to contribute \$100,000 in emergency aid before Jan. 6 (Christmas Eve for Orthodox Christians and Epiphany for western Christians).

The UCC more than met its goal by raising \$141,594, as of Jan. 7, from Advent through Epiphany. The UCC's funds will be dispersed by ACT to support the Middle East Council of Churches' refugee work.

At press time, donations still were being received at the UCC's Church House in Cleveland and the tally is expected to climb above \$150,000.

Meeting with Iraqi 'guests'

The MECC's 28 member churches represent 14-16 million Christians in the Middle East.

As such, MECC advocates for the rights of displaced Iraqis and coordinates relief efforts on their behalf, working through churches, church agencies and institutions.

On a hot November afternoon, my wife, Deborah, and I met some Iraqi "guests" at Caritas Jordan, a relief agency, and at Italian Hospital, both in Amman.

At Caritas, one 17-year-old mother with an Iraqi husband was seeking milk and diapers for her 7-month-old son. She was Jordanian and therefore ineligible for aid under that program, so her son became the client. Since she had received a heater, blankets and a food package from another agency and 15 JD (Jordanian dinars — approximately \$US22) from a private organization, she was given a chit to take to Italian Hospital for milk and diapers.

As a church volunteer translated, another Iraqi "guest" wanted to tell me her story, complete with passport, family photos, etc.

She said that she and her husband had lived in Baghdad and had four kids. One day when he went out with their 5-year-old daughter to buy bread, shots erupted. American soldiers returned fire. In the exchange her daughter was killed and her husband hit. U.S. soldiers took her husband to a hospital and gave him great care but he lost both legs and now lives in a wheelchair. Later they moved to Amman.

Recognizing a different reality

After the interview, I wasn't quite sure of the spelling of the woman's name, so I went back to talk with her case worker — and her story began to unravel. She had given me her mother-in-law's name, different from the name she gave the case worker.



At Caritas Jordan, a Catholic relief agency in Amman, Jordan, an Iraqi "guest" (name withheld) tells her story to volunteer Zuhair J. Mansour from the Chaldeans Catholic Church.

W. Evan Golder photos

The case worker's story involved an automobile accident, not a shooting.

The journalist in me was ticked off that the facts didn't jibe and the story was unreliable. Gradually, though, the pastor in me took over and I could see how desperate these people are for food and assistance, desperate enough to vary the basic story so the description might elicit more help from the person hearing the story.

Her story also reflected how insecure, confused, and unstable Baghdad really is—the reason her family left in the first place. Shootings and bombings are a reality. While the details of her story were not

accurate, the reality she described is in fact accurate and affects many persons daily.

At first, stories such as these bothered Wafa Goussous (see story below). But gradually she began to carry these people in her heart.

"There was joy in my heart, but at first I didn't feel it," she says. "But now I know we should receive these people with love, with an open heart."

The Rev. W. Evan Golder is editor emeritus of United Church News. In November, he and his wife, Deborah, participated in a media tour of Jordan sponsored by the Jordan Tourism Board.

Stepping out of 'comfort zone' reveals Middle East church exec's call

By Deborah J. Golder

Imagine a fashion-conscious, cosmopolitan, professional young woman visiting a refugee camp for the first time.

"Although I had seen refugee camps on TV, I had no experience with all this," explains Wafa Goussous, recalling her first weeks as director of the UCC-supported Middle East Council of Churches in Jordan. "There were scorpions and snakes and people living in tents with no clean water, no clean food, no clean housing, no clean anything! Children cried. Chaos reigned. I wanted my own bed. I started crying and could not stop. People around me said, 'That's OK. This is your first time. You'll get over it.'"

But she didn't. She cried even more when she left, feeling guilty about leaving those desperate people behind. She said, "Lord, I cannot stand being there." Yet, she returned. She sat inside the tents and talked with refugees. Joy filled her heart. She wanted to jump up and say, "Thank you, thank you, thank you, Lord!"

Two years later, when the Presbyterian Church (USA) honored her as an International Peacemaker, once more Goussous was flushed out of her comfort zone. Flattered, she accepted the award only to find 100 speaking engagements waiting in colleges, schools and churches. Saddled with a

life-long fear of public speaking, she found herself facing audiences from 10 to hundreds of persons.

"Every time I started speaking, I was completely scared," she says. "But, I would open my mouth and words would start com-

“ Although I had seen refugee camps on TV, I had no experience with all this”

— Wafa Goussous



ing out. I was not so much using my brain as letting someone, something speak through me. I was scared because I thought this was the Holy Spirit speaking through me."

By stepping out of one's comfort zone, she says, by experiencing things that are new and different, we learn what God expects of us. And we are ready.

"It's Matthew 25 again, the 10 virgins," she says. "They had extra oil with them. The extra oil that we carry all the time is for when there is darkness. We have some light: of education, of prayer, of caring for others. This is the oil that prepares us to go out of our comfort zones and through the darkness."



HE CAME, HE SAW, HE ORGANIZED

Sabbatical leads to new school in impoverished new nation

By W. Evan Golder

"There was no killing while we were there."
This was the good news the Rev. Jim Moos brought back from his trip to East Timor in July.

"There were still some demonstrations and it was still fairly tense," he adds. "Some houses were burned, but there was no widespread violence."

This was the fifth trip to East Timor for Moos, pastor of Bismarck (N.D.) UCC. His purpose was to take part in last minute preparations for the opening of a new school in the village of Lisa Dila, about four hours south of Dili, the capital.

The school would never have been conceived and constructed without the passion and zeal with which Moos tackled this opportunity, says Jan Aerie of the UCC's Wider Church Ministries.

In 2002, Moos volunteered his sabbatical time to Wider Church Ministries. "Where can I be useful?" he asked. The answer: East Timor, the first new nation of the 21st century and one of the poorest on the globe.

Moos was assigned to work with the Protestant Church in East Timor, a partner church of Global Ministries, the common mission effort of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the UCC. His trip to East Timor was his first Third World experience.

"My first impression was of the poverty," he says. "Immediately upon getting off the plane, it's so 'in your face.' Everywhere I looked, signs of the 1999 cataclysm were still very, very fresh. Rebuilding had barely gotten started."

East Timor's troubles

East Timor is a Connecticut-sized, half-island nation of 1 million people near the eastern end of the

Indonesian archipelago. The country has had a bleak history. It endured more than 400 years as a Portuguese colony and 24 years of Indonesian occupation (1975-1999).

By many accounts, Indonesian soldiers were brutal and undisciplined during the occupation. Up to 200,000 East Timorese died, many from star-



The new school in Lisa Dila, East Timor.

vation, sickness, and disease, as well as from the fighting. During the occupation, many East Timorese took to the hills to hide in safety. Among them was the Rev. Francisco de Vasconcelos, moderator of the Protestant Church in East Timor.

Finally, on Aug. 20, 1999, 98 percent of eligible voters participated in a UN-sponsored referendum, with

78.5 percent voting for independence. But as Indonesian soldiers withdrew, they and the Indonesian-backed militia began systematic raping, looting, burning and killing.

It took more than two weeks for UN peacekeepers to arrive. In that time, some 1,500 East Timorese were murdered, Dili was burned, and its infrastructure destroyed. An estimated 300,000 people fled for safety to West Timor, still part of Indonesia.

Working to earn trust

Most of the three months of Moos's East Timor sabbatical in 2002 was devoted to getting acquainted with the situation and the people and working to earn some trust.

"Only in our last two weeks there were we able to really get down to making some plans," he says. That's when de Vasconcelos took Moos and his wife, Sharon, to Sunday worship in the village of Lisa Dila. "After the service," says Moos, "there was a meeting of the parishioners and the villagers and we got to talking about ways that we might begin to work together, and they asked if we could help with a new school.

"The nearest school was about 40 miles away and there's no transportation. So we agreed to help."

Once back home, Moos worked with the Rev. James Vijayakumar, Global Ministries Area Executive for Southern Asia, to determine how best to help. Since funding was crucial, they established an independent, not-for-profit foundation, the East Timor Education Foundation. This 501(c)(3) foundation is a partner ministry of Global Ministries and independently funds the new school.

Then it was back to East Timor. "One of the things I learned very quickly is that very often the people most affected by development projects are never asked what they think," says Moos. "That's why I keep going down every year, because you can't do business like this with a fax and an e-mail. You do business face-to-



The Rev. Jim Moos (r) next to Global Ministries Area Executive for Southern Asia the Rev. James Vijayakumar, with residents of Lisa Dila outside the new vocational school.

photos furnished

face to build a relationship of trust."

In for the long haul

One of his first questions was, "What kind of a school do you want?" Since the country's main occupation is subsistence farming, the villagers asked for agricultural subjects. Close behind were construction and basic health and nutrition. They also included programs for girls, since, says Moos, "That's a big problem in a patriarchal society."

Once plans were underway, the villagers donated 10 acres of land, cleared it and built a fence around it. Next came the school itself (30 x 90 feet), built of masonry with a sheet metal roof and divided into three classrooms.

Construction costs were about \$42,000. Staff housing claimed another \$22,000. A solar electricity system cost about \$8,000, basic start-up equipment another \$5,000. Moos expects annual operating costs to run about \$15,000.

Moos's congregation in Bismarck, N.D., is a major supporter of

the Foundation, as is the Northern Plains Conference, many Northern Plains individuals and congregations, and several ecumenical churches and individuals.

After five years of Moos' dogged determination and impassioned vision, school opened last year on Aug. 30. Tuition is free for the 40 sixth- through eighth-grade boys and girls.

"This is a long term project," says Moos. "The Timorese are learning to build an institution, because things like by-laws and management principles are absolutely foreign to them.

"Now we're thankful that the children are participating in the learning through the classroom as well."

The Rev. W. Evan Golder is Editor Emeritus of United Church News. He visited East Timor in 2005.

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OVERCOMING THE RELUCTANCE TO TALK ABOUT MONEY

Fundraising training is new, strange frontier for UCC pastors, leaders

By Daniel Burke
Religion News Service

The Rev. Stephen Gray always considered himself one tough S.O.B. — son of a banker.

Still, when it came time for the minister to talk dollars and cents with his former congregation in Nashville, Tenn., he blanched.

“I wanted nothing to do with money,” said Gray, 60, who now leads the UCC’s Indiana-Kentucky Conference.

Gray says he was not alone in his reluctance to discuss finances.

Pastors tackle some of society’s most troublesome topics — sex, death and God — but many turn sheepish around tithing time.

“Let’s just say that for a lot of clergy, when they do their one sermon a year on giving and stewardship, they do so with fear and trepidation,” Gray said.

Now, Gray is spearheading an effort to get UCC leaders — from the denomination’s general minister and president to local church pastors — comfortable with one of the last modern taboos: soliciting donations.

With assistance from the Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University, the UCC has developed three- and four-day courses to help their 1.2 million members deal with the short-term obstacles and sweeping changes biting a chunk out of their budget.

The 20-year-old philanthropy center leads pastors through Bible readings, theological reflections, as well as presentations of sociological and demographic data.

It’s the center’s first program created specifically for a church group, said Tim Seiler, director of the center’s Fund Raising School.

“I think intuitively (pastors) know how to do this work,” he said. “There’s just a pretty high level of reluctance.”

That reluctance will have to be overcome if the UCC is going to continue its myriad social justice and outreach programs, church leaders say.

“There’s a new culture around how we fund mission and ministry in the church,” said the Rev. John H. Thomas, general minister and president. “We can’t simply hope that the way it used to be is going to come back.”

The way it used to be was that religious causes and institutions received nearly half of all philanthropic donations in the United States. In 2006, that percentage fell to less than 33 percent, according to the Center on Philanthropy.

The UCC has seen donations to its national office and regional conferences fall from \$33.5 million to \$28.4 million since 2000. Not a huge dip, leaders say, but enough to illuminate the writing on the wall.

Research demonstrates that the trends cut across denominational lines and affect all faiths, Seiler said.

Reasons for the downturn range from rising energy and health care costs, which means more money stays in the local congregation, to changing attitudes toward large bureaucracies.

While the World War II generation and their immediate successors built large national religious offices, the baby boomers and their offspring are less interested in keeping them

going, researchers say.

In years past, churches and other religious bodies could appeal to members’ sense of identity and loyalty to tug on their purse strings; now people want to hear about “vision and impact,” said Donaldson

said their members were uncomfortable talking or hearing about money in a spiritual context, and feared some might walk out the door as a result, according to a 2001 study by Indiana’s St. Meinrad School of Theology.

“The church is just now picking up on that fundamental change in how people give their money.”

— Donaldson Hill, UCC Financial Development Ministry

Hill, who leads the UCC’s financial development office.

“The church is just now picking up on that fundamental change in how people give their money,” Hill said.

Churches and other religious bodies now turn to nonmembers to kick in large sums for projects with broad ecumenical support, such as relief efforts and social justice advocacy.

But it don’t mean a thing if preachers won’t talk about the green; surveys say they often won’t.

Fifty-four percent of pastors

“It’s probably their least favorite thing to do,” Seiler said. “They don’t like to talk about money at all, and they especially don’t want to talk about it from the pulpit.”

Such talk may seem self-serving, as if the pastor is asking for a raise instead of money to fund the church’s mission, ministers say.

One of the most important parts of the course, Seiler said, is showing ministers that not everyone has the same hang-ups about discussing money as they do.

“We try to buck up our preachers and say: Go forth, you may get into a little trouble, but that’s what you’re supposed to do,” said Gray.

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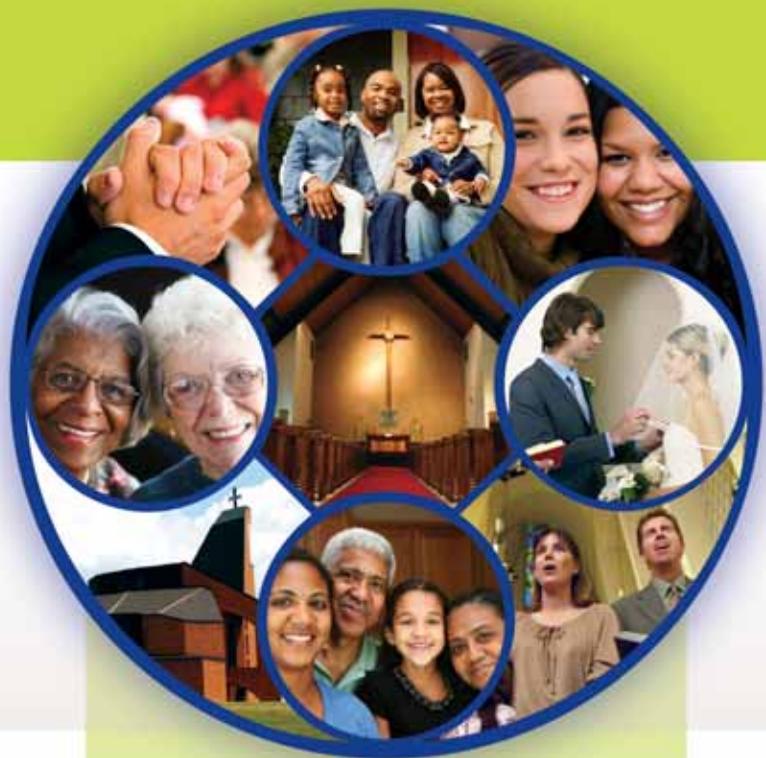
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in the news

NEW CHURCH FORMING IN DALLAS' OAK CLIFF NEIGHBORHOOD

Cathedral of Hope UCC pledges to start five new churches in five years

By J. Bennett Guess

Taking seriously a challenge by the UCC's Local Church Ministries for the denomination to start 250 churches in the next five years, Cathedral of Hope UCC in Dallas is doing its part to make that dream a reality.

"As one of the largest churches in the denomination, the Cathedral of Hope has decided to start five churches in the next five years," says the Rev. Jo Hudson, senior pastor. "Since there is not a UCC south of the Trinity River until you get near Waco, we thought Oak Cliff would be a logical place to begin."

Oak Cliff — touted as "the howdy

capital of Texas" by its tourism commission — is a collection of communities just south of downtown Dallas. The population of Oak Cliff is estimated at nearly 400,000.

"There is a great need for more UCC churches in the South, and we want to plant a strong, vibrant and active one," says the Rev. Michael S. Piazza who, as dean and national pastor of Cathedral of Hope, is heading up the new-church effort.

On the evening of Sunday, Jan. 13, Cathedral of Hope held a worship service and organizational meeting in

the sanctuary at Oak Cliff's Trinity Presbyterian Church.

"After 127 years of ministry, that congregation has made the decision to close," Piazza said. "They have

“There is a great need for more UCC churches in the South, and we want to plant a strong, vibrant and active one.”

— the Rev. Michael S. Piazza, dean and national pastor, Cathedral of Hope

graciously invited us to use their space at a minimal cost until we decide where to permanently locate."

"It was an amazing, Spirit-filled gathering," said Piazza. "Although

we were competing against a very close Dallas Cowboys playoff game, 75 people gathered to share their hopes and dreams for a new open, affirming and diverse church. It was clear that there is a need in the community, and there was a definite excitement among those gathered."

Cathedral of Hope UCC will host Lenten Bible study gatherings at the Oak Cliff location, starting Feb. 10 for six weeks, in preparation for the new church's official launch on Easter Sunday Morning, March 23.

Not afraid of significant

challenges, the new church venture comes just a few months after Cathedral of Hope's "miracle project" offering on July 29.

In order to build an interfaith peace chapel designed by the late world-renowned architect Philip Johnson, church members "prayed, saved, sacrificed and worked hard," according to senior pastor Hudson, to offer more than \$3.1 million in a single offering to build the chapel in commemoration of the church's 37th anniversary.

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Lane C. McGaughy, Atkinson Professor Emeritus of Religious & Ethical Studies at Willamette University in Salem, Oregon
The American Bible
The Bible is like a fester in the American tradition because it has not been allowed to speak for itself. Both fundamentalists and liberals exploit it to support extra-biblical causes.

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RESOURCES

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GUESS TO OVERSEE UCC'S COMMUNICATIONS WORK

The Rev. J. Bennett Guess, 41, was named the UCC's director of communications in December. He succeeds the Rev. Robert Chase, who left to become founding director of Intersections in New York City.

Guess now oversees the UCC's Proclamation, Identity and Communication Ministry, which includes the Stillspeaking Ministry; United Church News; video production; web and emerging media; print design, production and marketing; special events; and the denomination's historic advocacy work in media justice and reform.

After 12 years in parish ministry in Kentucky, Guess served as communications minister for the UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries. In 2003, he was named editor of United Church News and, in 2005, as the UCC's news director. He served as acting



Guess

communications director since August.

"Ben is a gifted and trusted colleague who will bring energy and creativity to his new role," said General Minister and President John. H. Thomas. "Ben's knowledge and love of the church, his experience as a pastor of a vibrant, renewing church, his commitment to justice, and his editorial work with United Church News equip him for this key position."

Guess is chair of the news and media relations committee of the National Council of Churches Communications Commission; a member of the board of governors of the Religion Communicators Council; and a member of Associated Church Press and the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association.

He received a B.A. in journalism from the University of Kentucky, an M.Div. from Vanderbilt University Divinity School, and a D.Min. in preaching from UCC-related Chicago Theological Seminary.

Guess and his partner, Jim Therrien, are members of **Pilgrim Congregational UCC in Cleveland.**

DIED

The Rev. Charles L. Burns, Jr., 84, Florida Conference Minister from 1973 to 1995, died Dec. 12. During his tenure in Florida, Burns oversaw substantial UCC expansion, increasing the number of churches from nearly 70 to more than 100.

"His legacy and impact on the life of the members and congregations in our Conference is enormous," said the Rev. Kent J. Siladi, current Florida Conference Minister. "He served this Conference well and his leadership during his time of service as the Conference Minister is legendary."

During his ministry, Burns also headed the Ohio and Rocky Mountain Conferences and served pastorates in Illinois and California.

A memorial service was held Jan. 24 at **First Congregational UCC in Winter Park, Fla.**

MEMORIALIZED

The Rev. Barbara Warren McCall, 93, a pioneering clergywoman, died Oct. 26 at UCC-related Pilgrim Place in Claremont, Calif.

A special assistant to former UCC President Robert V. Moss, she served as executive for the Task Force on Women in Church and Society. McCall later served as editor of the UCC's former A.D. magazine and as staff for the former UCC Council for Lay Life and Work. She also served pastorates in Montana and Illinois.

McCall and her late husband, the Rev. Clarence Field McCall Jr. — who was Southern California Conference Minister and died in 1967 — were ordained together in 1938 at the Congregational Church of Roundup, Mont., a church they served as co-pastors.

CONFERENCE CHANGES

The Rev. Daniel F. Romero and the Rev. Jane E. Heckles, Southern California — Nevada Conference Co-Ministers, are stepping down at the end of February. Romero is retiring after 37 years in ministry, including 27 years in the SCNV as a local church pastor, Associate Conference Minister and Conference Minister. Heckles, who has served 15 years in the SCNV, including seven years as Conference Minister, says she is leaving to seek other ministry opportunities.

The Rev. Jane Fidler Hoffman, Illinois Conference Minister since 2000, is leaving her position to become Interim Conference Minister in Southern California — Nevada Conference. "Jane will bring a wealth of gifts, skills and experience to our Conference," says David Cavanaugh, board chair.

PASTORAL CHANGES

- Alfeld-Johnson, David W.** Swampscott, MA to St. John's UCC, Mokena, IL
- Allman-Morton, Tadd E.** Newtonville, MA to Cong. UCC, Westhampton, MA
- Avise-Rouse, Kristofer K.** Darlington, WI to St. Paul UCC, Columbia, IL
- Bandy, Connie T.** Champaign, IL to Trinity UCC, Westerville, IL
- Bardon, Bruce** to United Parish, Carver, MA
- Barnum, Elizabeth D.** to Cong. UCC, Barrington, RI
- Castillo-Roman, Ileana** to Faith UCC, Tamarac, FL
- Collins, Linzy** Garner, IA to St. John UCC, Trenton, IL
- Dawson, Gregory E.** to Cong. UCC, Seymour, CT
- Dawson, Jennifer** Sheboygan Falls, WI to Bethel UCC & Church of Peace UCC, Fond du Lac, WI
- Dech, John H.** to St. John's UCC (Fullerton), Whitefall, PA
- Deckert, James A.** to Zion UCC, Dale, WI
- Eastwood, Gail** to First UCC, Springfield, OH
- Goldenbogen, Kevin E.** to United, Underhill, VT
- Gregory, David S.** Rochester, NY to North, Cong. UCC, Middletown, NY
- Hackenberg, Rachel** New Berlin, PA to Grace UCC, Lancaster, PA
- Howland, Deborah J.** Brookfield, WI to interim, First Cong. UCC, Watertown, WI
- Irwin, M. Bruce** to Emmanuel UCC, Allentown, PA
- Keirn, Norris A.** Terre Haute, IN to First Cong. UCC, Marshall, IL
- Kemper, Vicki R.** Washington, DC to First Cong. UCC, Amherst, MA
- Lindsey, David B.** to Lynnhurst Cong. UCC, Minneapolis, MN
- Martin, James** Sheboygan Falls, WI to Bethel UCC & Church of Peace UCC, Fond du Lac, WI
- Matheny, Michael** to Our Saviour's UCC, Germantown, WI
- Martowska, Judith E.** Norwood, MA to Cong. UCC, East Weymouth, MA
- Maxey, Rosemary M.** to interim, Community of Hope UCC, Tulsa, OK
- Mendes, Mark A.** Indian Rocks Beach, FL to First Cong. UCC, Essex Junction, VT
- Noffke, Matthew W.** St. Paul, MN to First Cong. UCC, Waukesha, WI
- Poole, Mary S.** Bellingham, MA to Pilgrim UCC, Southborough, MA
- Pratt-Peckham, Debra** to First Cong. UCC, Farmington, NH
- Proctor, Judy** Topsfield, MA to First UCC, Danvers, MA
- Pych, Virginia** Fond du Lac, WI to interim, St. John's UCC, Slinger, WI
- Stier, Sharon R.** Fond du Lac, WI to interim, Faith UCC, Slinger, WI
- Shoup, Rob** to St. Paul's UCC, New Oxford, PA
- Snow, Victoria M.** Oakham, MA to First Cong. UCC, Sutton, MA
- Wadhams, Kimberly** to Cong. UCC, Morris, CT
- Ward-Diorio, John J.** Freeport, ME to St. Paul's UCC, Mechanicsburg, PA
- Whiteman, Karl K.** to St. John's UCC, Elmore, OH
- Wildman, William R.** Norway, ME to First Cong. UCC, Spencer, MA
- Zedan, Margaret** to interim, Trinity UCC, Brookfield, WI

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

CLERGY DEATHS

- | | |
|---------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| Allard, Virgil D. , 88, 8/29/2007 | Laib, Milton O. , 85, 12/18/2007 |
| Billups, Joseph D. , 81, 8/27/2007 | Leisher, Quentin R. , 89, 11/29/2007 |
| Bonebrake, Boyd , 88, 11/28/2007 | Pollard, Lidabell L. , 69, 12/18/2007 |
| Chapman, George D. , 73, 10/29/2007 | Parsley, Charles J. , 82, 9/7/2007 |
| Colbourn, Arthur P. , 96, 10/29/2007 | Sando, John H. , 98, 11/23/2007 |
| Cooper, Harold C. , 66, 12/23/2007 | Schwarz, Homer A. , 98, 9/4/2007 |
| Deditius, Vermillion , 89, 9/16/2007 | Smart, William E. , 75, 12/13/2007 |
| Ehrhart, Elden E. , 95, 12/23/2007 | Smith, Andrew W. , 68, 9/13/2007 |
| Fleming, William J. , 59, 11/9/2007 | Stanton, Lawrence L. , 89, 9/7/2007 |
| Foster, Donald L. , 82, 11/29/2007 | Summers, Lloyd E. , 77, 12/14/2007 |
| Henderson, Sallirae , 66, 11/21/2007 | Van Hoek, Walter R. , 89, 9/9/2007 |
| Higgins, Arthur E. , 85, 11/18/2007 | Waber, Marlea J. , 65, 9/10/2007 |
| Kratz, Daniel G. , 75, 12/16/2007 | Yeager, Brenda K. , 64, 9/24/2007 |

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

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local church mission and ministry

Written by Carol L. Pavlik

MISSION: MALAWI

Lakeland College brings Malawi students to Wisconsin

Lakeland College in Sheboygan, Wis., a UCC-related liberal arts college, boasts the highest international student body in the state of Wisconsin, at 15 percent, representing students from 30 different countries. At the heart of this statistic, however, lies an even more remarkable story.

The Malawi Teacher Education Initiative was introduced to Lakeland in 1999. The program was developed by Jeff Elzinga, a professor of writing and Lakeland's interim vice president for academic affairs.

In partnership with the U.S. and Malawi governments, Lakeland hosts five students per year for a three-year program of intensive study. At the end of the program, the Malawi students receive a Bachelor's degree in education, then return home to become faculty in Malawi's teacher training colleges.

As teachers of teachers, they are able to introduce new methods and ideas, which are then passed to the children being taught in Malawi's primary and secondary schools.

As of this writing, 30 students have graduated from the Malawi Teacher Education Initiative. Elzinga is pleased with the results of the program, and reports that a few have even gone on for further schooling, either in the United States or by pursuing further education at the University of Malawi.

Upon the students' return to Malawi, Elzinga senses that their greatest challenge lies in presenting new ideas to a system entrenched in old habits.

"These students bring back a lot of fresh ideas and applications, theories, experiences, everything," says Elzinga. "People who have been in positions for many years [in Malawi] may feel a little bit threatened by change."

On top of that, the students have become accustomed to the technology that is readily available in the United States.

"Year round at Lakeland, they've learned to use computers, VCRs, DVDs, TVs, cell phones, and lots of computer software. Then they go back and there are no computers," says Elzinga. "There's maybe no electricity, or no plumbing. It's difficult to imple-

ment the things you want to do, particularly introducing all the information that's on the internet."

During their stay at Lakeland, the Malawi students have served as ambassadors for their homeland, going into neighboring public schools to do speaking engagements, job shadowing and observations. The students' presence on campus and in the community has sparked more interest in Malawi among U.S. students.

Malawi found itself in the media spotlight in 2006 when pop icon Madonna and her husband, Guy Ritchie, made headlines regarding their controversial adoption of a young boy named David Banda.

Lakeland is proud to be home of the first student chapter of Raising Malawi, an organization started by Madonna and bestselling author Michael Berg. The organization provides financial support, volunteers and technology (such as solar power, clean drinking water systems and internet service) to help revitalize hundreds of thousands of underprivileged and at-risk children.

Elzinga says local UCC congregations have been supportive of the Malawi Teacher Education Initiative by "adopting" the students. Church members invite the students into their homes for the holidays and raise funds and collect donations to help combat poverty in the country.

"It is a desperately poor country economically," says Elzinga. "Any help that Malawi can get, either from concerned individuals or groups, really does make a difference."

EXUBERANT EXPRESSIONS



Members of an AIDS youth peer group dance in Malawi.

Religion News Service photo courtesy of Valenda Campbell/CARE.

Peace ambassadors discover joy in Malawian songs, dance

Cynthia Winton-Henry and Phil Porter, both members of **First Congregational UCC in Berkeley, Calif.**, teamed up with their colleague, Masankho Banda, to take 43 travelers from the United States and Australia to visit Masankho's home village of Tukombo, Malawi, as peace ambassadors in the summer of 2007.

Winton-Henry and Porter are co-founders of InterPlay, a system of movement and creative interaction designed to unleash creativity and foster a deeper connectedness between people. InterPlay's headquarters are located in Oakland, Calif.

In their blog, Winton-Henry shares her impressions of her first hours in Malawi:

Tukombo, Malawi — After an 8-hour trip north, we were greeted at [the] cottage in the dark by women dancing with great exuberance. That alone was worth 70 hours of travel. But just behind the cottage before

our vans even arrived were the men singing, dancing and drumming with the spirit that I dream of. Many of us wept with the astounding love given directly to us through song and dance. We had come home to Masankho's village. Many of us felt we really were home.

With a common desire to meet and learn about people and to dance with them, we had three days of dance sessions, learning both men's and women's dances. Our willingness to dance had a profound effect. A guy ... said, "I never thought anyone would come here to learn OUR dances." As I danced alongside one woman I began to focus on the song. Moni Moni Moni (Hello Hello Hello). The women sing so full out. Nothing in their voice is restrained. It's wonderful. They are not worried about their singing and dancing. But the best part was looking into her face while she was teaching me. She was so incredibly open.

'You don't have to be a celebrity to get something done'

The Tabita Project is a grassroots ministry anchored by two sister congregations in Michigan.

First Congregational UCC of Gibraltar, Mich., and First Congregational UCC of Flat Rock, Mich., have reached out together to the village of Ntchewu, Malawi, and have made a huge difference in helping the Malawians move towards self-sufficiency.

Back in 2004, the Rev. Smart Msinkhu, a Methodist pastor who has grown his ministry in Malawi to include 30 congregations, came to the United States and visited the UCC churches in Flat Rock and Gibraltar. After describing the plight of his people, Cynthia Loop, the music director for both Michigan congregations, felt called to do something.

"I contacted Rev. Smart after he left us," Loop remembers. "I said I didn't see how I could help all that much, but I offered to maybe send a few books, to start a library."

At the time, Msinkhu had 400 students and he was in the process of starting a school in the area. What started as "a few books," says

Loop, turned into funds to build toilets, the purchase of Malawi government-required books and learning tools like educational games and flashcards.

Soon, the students' test scores began to rank among the highest in the nation. "The [Malawi] government had an interest in seeing what was going on," says Loop. Shortly thereafter, the school was made an official government subsidized school.

Learn more about the Tabita Project by contacting Cynthia Loop at <cynthia.loop@basf.com>.

"This area now has a school where they didn't have one before," Loop says.

Energized by that success, Loop and her church family began focusing on the next problem at hand: starvation, a situation made worse by recent droughts.

The inception of the Tabita Project's farm fund is built upon the "pay it forward" concept. Farmers receive funds to get them started with

seed and fertilizer, then once they get their crops going, they pay back into the fund so that it can go towards helping another farmer.

"The first year we helped about 50 farmers and their families," Loop says. "After the first year of bumper crops, we successfully beat down the hunger in our area [of Malawi]."

This year the farm fund will expand to fund an "orphan's field," to help Rev. Msinkhu defray the cost of feeding and educating the 40 orphans in his care.

And Loop keeps finding more ways to help Malawi. She and Msinkhu have set up a sewing machine fund, much like the farm fund, to help with the purchase of sewing machines to generate income for families. And her congregations regularly send "joy boxes," containing educational, health and sewing supplies, along with letters written by the children of the church.

"You don't have to be a celebrity to get something done," says Loop. "You can make a difference, even on a smaller scale. It's pretty amazing how God can work through individuals to do wonderful things."

ABOUT MALAWI

Malawi is in Southern Africa, nestled between Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia.

The tiny country has a large population. About 12.5 million people live in a country the size of Pennsylvania. This is larger than Botswana (1.8 million), Rwanda (8.8 million) and Zambia (11.5 million).

The average Malawian lives to only 37 years old because of HIV/AIDS, malaria and malnutrition.

Malawi is one of the 10 poorest countries in the world. Over 55 percent of the population lives on less than \$1 per day.

Source: <usaid.gov>



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