



a publication of the
United Church of Christ
Vol. XXV, No. 1
February | March 2009
Section A



NATIONAL EDITION | UNITED CHURCH NEWS

inside
3^A
SYNOD
PREVIEW

'Immerse Yourself' in all that is Grand (Rapids).

6^A
OFFERING
REFUGE

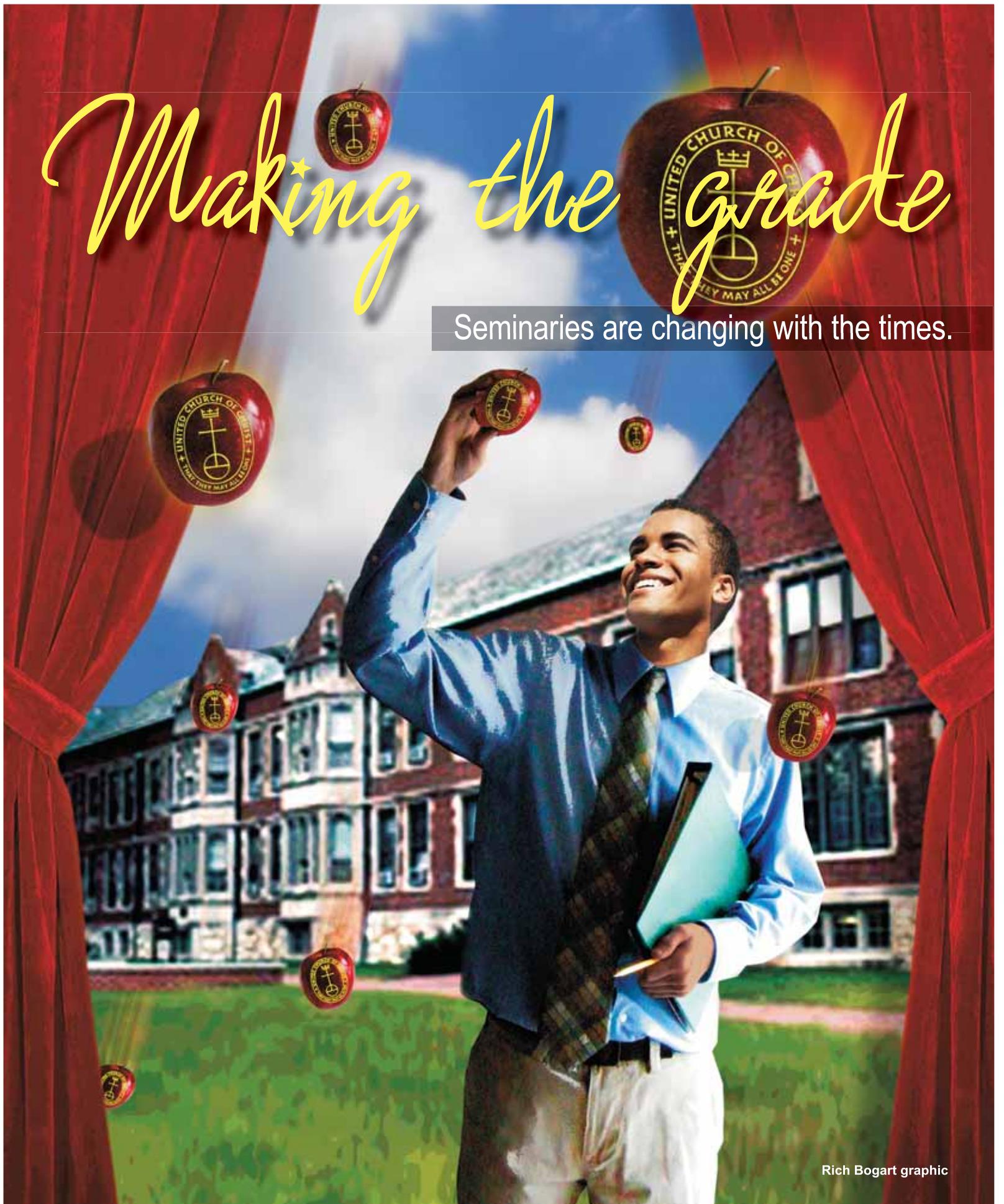
Seattle church hosts homeless encampment.

11^A
MAKE IT
'MY UCC'

Social networking set to debut on ucc.org.

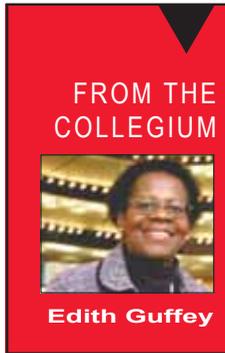
12^A
HOPE
BLOOMING

Hurricane recovery efforts continue in the Big Easy.



Rich Bogart graphic

Change — let's make it for the better this year



During the inevitable “look backs” at 2008, I heard one commentator say that “change” was the predominant theme of the year. If that is true, then 2009 must be the year that the “change” really takes place. Change is always a reality for us, isn't it?

People and perspectives change (thank God), the times change. We change jobs, our families change with births, deaths and all kinds of transitions that are part of the ebb and flow of our lives and our world.

These kinds of changes are inevitable, but there's also something to be said for being proactive about change — making change rather than waiting for change.

I hope in 2009 we make change. In our personal lives, absolutely, I have a whole list of changes that would be in my best interest. You perhaps have a list of your own. But I hope we also make some changes in our corporate lives as well.

Too often churches (and denominations) are passive recipients of change, we sit by the sidelines and are swept away by it, drown in it or bemoan the inevitability of it. But there are other options!

We can be the initiators of change; we can actually seek out new ways of ministry and see change as an exciting time of new possibilities and challenges.

Given the financial markets, most, if not all, of our congregations are being forced into change. We are being forced into new ways of being the Stillspeaking church with fewer resources, but an ever increasing need.

That alone doesn't mean that this can't be a time of rich possibilities. I am suggesting something more than making lemonade out of lemons. I am suggesting using this time to re-evaluate what is necessary and what is actually effective.

Maybe this is the time that we finally get out of the rut of “doing it this way because that's the way we've always done it.” What changes might we intentionally make that will lead us into more effective ministry, even in a time of uncertainty?

Perhaps we might ask what we can do ecumenically and do it better and more effectively than continuing to work alone. Maybe this is a time to ask whether programs and dollars being used in a certain way is really making an impact and resulting in the transformational ministry that we had hoped. Maybe it's time to dust off those dreams that we said were too drastic, and take a look at what might really be an innovative way to use our building or to re-imagine what our particular communities really need and how we might be able to respond in new ways.

I admit that initiating change involves some risk, and to be honest, I'm not all that big of a risk taker. Sometimes I simply have to push myself and move forward in faith and not be afraid to fail.

I often tell myself that I have to take that risk because we simply can't do things the way we've always done them. The reality is that the world has already changed and continues to change. The question for us is, will we continue to run to keep up or will we begin to lead the way?

Associate General Minister Edith Guffey is a member of the UCC's five-person Collegium of Officers.

Given the financial markets, most, if not all, of our congregations are being forced into change.

ELMHURST, LIFELINK OFFER SCHOLARSHIP

Elmhurst College has announced the creation of a scholarship for students. Established this winter with an initial funding gift of \$102,000, the new Lifelink-Katzberg Endowed Scholarship is the result of the generosity of Lifelink Corporation, a Bensenville, Ill.-based human service organization.

The Lifelink-Katzberg Endowed Scholarship will benefit Elmhurst sophomores, juniors and seniors from Protestant denominations who are in financial need. Students must demonstrate a commitment to academic achievement, maintain a minimum 2.5 grade point average, and exhibit willingness to discuss and accept, if appropriate, an internship in the form of community service at Lifelink or a local UCC.

This renewable scholarship is available beginning in the 2009-2010 academic year in the amount of \$4,000. It was established to honor the intentions of William J. and Ida Katzberg, who created a loan fund with Lifelink in 1963 to benefit Protestant students.

Lifelink is a member ministry of the UCC's Council for Health and Human Service Ministries (CHHSM). CHHSM is a self-governed association of 75 UCC-related corporations that operate more than 370 institutions and programs that annually serve more than 1 million children, youth, families, the aging and persons with disabilities.

Founded in 1871 in metropolitan Chicago, Elmhurst College is affiliated with the UCC. For 138 years, it has sought to prepare students for their first jobs as well as lifetimes of personal and professional fulfillment.

For more information, visit <elmhurst.edu> or call 630/617-3033.

ROMERO LECTURES HIGHLIGHT BORDER ACTIVISM

“The Politics of Crossing Borders: Borderlands, Culture and Traditions” is the theme of the first Annual *Romero Lecture Series*, an event examining issues concerning the civic activism role of the church in the United States and in the world.

The Daniel F. Romero Border Ministry Center — commonly known as Centro Romero — is a joint border-immersion ministry of Justice and Witness Ministries and the Southern California Nevada Conference of the UCC. It has secured distinguished and prominent scholars, community leaders, community activists, ministers and educators to deliver the annual lectures.

Areas of interests are in the fields of theology; environment; public health; immigration; worker's rights; exploitation of women; children's rights; border's faith and spirituality; and culture and public ritual. The event provides the opportunity to raise awareness, promote justice and educate.

The keynote speaker is Robert C. Orr, Assistant Secretary General for Strategic Planning and Policy Coordination in the Executive Office of the Secretary General, United Nations. Orr's responsibilities include advising the Secretary General on a full range of strategic issues, running the Secretary General's Policy Committee.



UNITED CHURCH NEWS



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

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

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

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

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



In addition, two awards will be presented: The Daniel F. Romero Community Leadership Award and the Justice Champion Award. The Daniel F. Romero Community Leadership Award honors individuals demonstrating distinguished work and tireless efforts to promote the well-being, rights and dignity of communities and/or individuals on either side of the border.

The Justice Champion Award honors individuals, churches and agencies involved in the promotion and/or establishment of community initiatives in pursuit of justice on either side of the border.

The recipients are nominated by churches, community-based groups and agencies, and community leaders.

Participants will have the opportunity to take part in a border-immersion experience by meeting maquiladora (factory) workers; newly arrived migrants from southern Mexico and Central America; and government immigration-enforcement officials on both sides of the border.

Housed in a former UCC church, Centro Romero provides opportunities for groups to experience life on the border and reflect theologically on immigration issues.

NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND EVENT PLANNED

All are invited to Washington, D.C., to discuss justice in education prior to Ecumenical Advocacy Days in March. The National Council of Churches Committee on Public Education and Literacy will sponsor a pre-Ecumenical Advocacy Days Event, Transforming No Child Left Behind, on Fri., March 13.

The Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, now called the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), was scheduled for its five-year reauthorization in 2007, but that reauthorization has not been completed.

Faithful advocates for education reform can learn how to press President Barack Obama and Congress to uphold high expectations for children and teachers, but at the same time honor their accomplishments; shift the focus from punishing public schools to strengthening them; expand real opportunity for vulnerable children through better funding; and reduce standardized testing.

For more information or to receive information about this event, please e-mail Jan Resseger <ressegerj@ucc.org> or call 216/736-3711. Some scholarship assistance is available; first come, first served.

NCC ECUMENICAL ADVOCACY DAYS

A new Congress and a new administration will be grappling with the toughest issues in decades March 13-16, when more than 700 persons of faith arrive from around the country to press their views on peace, justice, the environment and economic fairness.

The seventh annual Ecumenical Advocacy Days, meeting at the Hilton Alexandria Mark Center under the theme “Enough for All Creation,” will gather religious persons from a wide range of faith groups and traditions to carry their witness to the halls of the 111th Congress.

Founded by the National Council of Churches USA in 2001, Ecumenical Advocacy Days is now supported by 45 communions, religious societies and groups. The conference coordinator for Ecumenical Advocacy Days is Molly Keane.

Speakers and preachers will include the Rev. Michael Kinnamon, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches; the Rev. John McCullough, Executive Director of Church World Service; and Gear ó id Francisco O'Conaire, OFM, Executive Secretary of the JPIC Commission of the Union of Superiors General of men and women religious institutions (IUSC/UISG).

On the final day of the conference, participants will be bused to Capitol Hill where they will meet with their Congressional representatives and staffs to discuss ways of addressing these concerns through legislation or allocations.

The early registration fee is \$160 prior to Feb. 13, and \$175 thereafter. The registration form can be downloaded at <advocacydays.org/registration>. Student scholarships are available.

'RIVER CITY SATURDAY' A HIGHLIGHT FOR FAMILIES, VISITORS

national | breaking news

headlines

'Incredible cast' lining up for General Synod 2009 in Grand Rapids

By J. Bennett Guess

Building upon the record-breaking attendance and celebratory spirit at the 2007 General Synod in Hartford, Conn. — the UCC's 50th anniversary — it appears clear that planning for this year's Synod isn't about to shrink back to its pre-2007 days.

"We know that each Synod raises the bar of expectation a little higher and our experience in Hartford certainly has raised our anticipations to an all-time high," says Associate General Minister Edith Guffey, who is administrator of the biennial national gathering. "But people are going to find Grand Rapids [Mich.] to be the site of one of our best General Synods ever. We have already put together an incredible cast of accomplished speakers, activists and musicians to be presenters."

The 27th General Synod will be held June 26-30 at the DeVos Convention Center in downtown Grand Rapids. The theme, "Immerse Yourself," is fitting, Guffey says, given the host city's water-rich location and theological heritage.

"We will be asking each other to 'immerse yourself' in this Synod experience and then return home energized and refreshed for the work and ministry that awaits us," Guffey says. "And there's no better place to talk about immersion than in Grand Rapids, where water is abundant and our Reformed tradition is such an important part of the city's history."

Grand Rapids (1.3 million, metro population) is Michigan's second largest city. The Grand River flows prominently through a revitalized downtown, which boasts multiple parks, pedestrian trails, 60 multicultural restaurants and the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.

Grand Rapids is home to the UCC's Formula of Agreement partner denomination, the Reformed Church in America, as well as the Christian Reformed Church. In 2010, Grand Rapids will host the uniting General Council of the Reformed Ecumenical Council and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, of which the UCC is an active member.

Those planning to attend General Synod must register. Online registration and hotel information are available at <ucc.org/synod>.

As in Hartford, a day-long public celebration — called "River City Saturday" this year — will be held on June 27. It will showcase dozens of speakers and performances, including an outdoor festival with entertainment, food and kite-flying.

While River City Saturday's 2009 line-up doesn't include any candidates for U.S. President — at least none that have yet declared — the list does include many prominent activists, journalists, scientists, environmentalists, theologians and more, including:

- **Eugene Robinson**, columnist at *The Washington Post* and regular commentator on MSNBC.
- **Jim Wallis**, best-selling author, ac-

Fortune magazine and frequent commentator on Generation Y.

- **Eric Alva**, first American soldier injured in the Iraq War and LGBT rights activist.

- **Da Chen**, classically-trained flutist and best-selling author who chronicles his immigration to the United States from China.

"In addition to the impressive lineup of speaker and presenters, we will also have many workshops and multiple bible study opportunities," Guffey says, "so once again people will be asked to make some hard choices about which wonderful opportunity they want to attend next."

The five-day Synod will include daily worship services, including a Sunday afternoon gala worship service on June 28. (The names of Synod preachers have yet to be announced.) Also on June 28, delegates and visitors will participate in an intentional Sacred Conversation on Race, in keeping with the denomination's race-talk emphasis that first launched in April 2008.

Service projects will once again be available for adults, but this year's Synod will feature an expanded youth-focused service program.

Let it be resolved

Nineteen proposed resolutions have been submitted for consideration, but one of the General Synod's most exciting business items will be the election of a new general minister and president to succeed the Rev. John H. Thomas, who, after 10 years, is completing his final term in office. A celebration of Thomas' ministry and leadership will take place on the evening of Sat., June 27.

Synod delegates also will consider the re-election of the Rev. Stephen L. Sterner as executive minister for the UCC's Local Church Ministries and the Rev. M. Linda Jaramillo as executive minister for the UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries. Both have been nominated by their respective boards for additional four-year terms.

The General Synod could take up oft-debated issues concerning national church governance, including a proposal to form a single United Church Board out of the five autonomous governing bodies that currently oversee the work of the UCC's national setting. That proposal still awaits further consideration by the existing boards at their respective meetings in March.

"General Synod is our family reunion," Guffey says. "It is our semi-annual homecoming, a time to share in great worship, to engage important issues of justice, to participate in community service and to become reacquainted with our brothers and sisters across the church. There's serious deliberation, but also a lot of fun."

REGISTER TODAY

Register for General Synod at <ucc.org/synod>.



The Grand River provides the backdrop for General Synod 27 in Grand Rapids.

Brian Kelly photo

UNCERTAIN TIMES NOT A HINDRANCE**Young clergy braced for challenges**

By Ginny Brown Daniel

Many groups within the UCC are wrestling with change and the challenges faced today and in our future. The UCC 2030 Clergy Network, a group comprising UCC ministers under the age of 40, is approaching these challenges with the ideals of their UCC foreparents in hand and heart, and with the creativity that inspires the UCC.

They formed in 2005 in order to discuss the blessings and needs of the UCC from the perspective of a new generation of clergy. Although in 2006 only 6 percent of all UCC clergy were under the age of 40, members come from all 39 conferences and embody the diversity of the UCC. Theologically they are conservative, liberal and everywhere in between. They represent Philippino, African

American, German, Samoan, Native American, Southern, Western and New England cultures. They serve in hospitals, the military, colleges and churches. They choose to have children and they choose not to have children. They are transgendered, gay, straight, bisexual and lesbian.

Today the UCC 2030 Network provides a collective voice on needs of healthcare, restructuring the denomination, alternative paths to ministry, evangelizing in our post-modern culture and defining what it means to be an open and affirming just peace denomination — all questions with which the UCC is currently wrestling.

The Rev. Amy Sens, a member of the 2030 Clergy Network in the Central Atlantic Conference, says, "I think 2030 clergy take on an important role bridging between the modern and the postmodern shape of the church. We know and appreciate the gifts of the church, but also have the ability to see things from the point of view of our generations."

Among the questions the group hopes to address are the following:

- How can we live into our identity as a United Church of Christ rather than as Congregational, Christian, Evangelical or Reformed first and then UCC?

- Will there be enough clergy to serve all our churches?

- Will the importance of theological education continue to be valued by all branches of the UCC?

- Will the associations and conferences hold their same historic roles and responsibilities or will they adapt to a postmodern culture?

- Will the UCC keep up with technology enough to use social networking and communication tools to reach out to and sustain spiritual nurture of all people?

- Will some UCC churches live off their endowments while others

merely scrape enough money together to pay the quarterly bills?

- Will there be a different burning theological question tearing at the seams of the UCC or will we continue to wrestle with the inclusion or exclusion of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered members?

- Will the historically diverse churches and denominational organizations preserve the ethnicities of our different cultures?

- Will creative seminary scholarships be formed so that clergy don't graduate with massive debt and so smaller churches and conferences can benefit from the giftedness of these clergy?

LEARN MORE

For more information about the 2030 Clergy Network go to <2030clergy.net> or its Facebook page, "UCC 2030 Clergy Network." The 2030 Clergy Network will sponsor a number of events at General Synod 27 in Grand Rapids, Mich.

The Rev. Ginny Brown Daniel is pastor of *Plymouth UCC in Spring, Texas*.

GENERAL SYNOD AT A GLANCE:

WHERE: DeVos Place, Grand Rapids, Mich.

WHEN: June 26-30, 2009

WHO: Up to 5,000 delegates and visitors

THEME: "Immerse Yourself"

HIGHLIGHTS: "River City Saturday," gala Sunday afternoon worship service, celebration of the ministry of the Rev. John Thomas, workshops, service projects and — cookies!

INFO: <ucc.org/synod>
<visitgrandrapids.org>
<devosplace.org>

tivist and leader of the Sojourners Community in Washington, D.C.

- **Barbara Brown Taylor**, best-selling author, professor and pastoral theologian.

|| We will be asking each other to 'immerse yourself' in this Synod experience and then return home energized and refreshed for the work and ministry that awaits us."

— Edith Guffey, Synod administrator

- **Ray Suarez, Jr.**, NPR reporter and senior correspondent for *The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer* on PBS.

- **Krista Tippett**, host of NPR's *Speaking of Faith*.

- **Paul Winter**, Grammy-award-winning saxophonist.

- **Eboo Patel**, founder and executive of director of the Interfaith Youth Corps.

- **Winona LaDuke**, Native American activist, author, Ms. Magazine's 1997 Woman of the Year, and Ralph Nader's vice-presidential running mate in 1996 and 2000.

- **James McLurkin**, roboticist at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, inventor, researcher and teacher.

- **Carolyn Parks-Bani**, HIV/AIDS research fellow at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta.

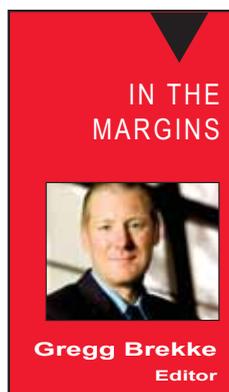
- **Jason and DeMarco**, gay couple and evangelical singing duo who received the 2006 Music Video of the Year award on MTV's LOGO.

- **Anya Kamentz**, Pulitzer-Prize-nominated finance writer of "Generation Debt."

- **Nadira Hira**, staff writer at

SORTING THROUGH THE 'RIGHT STUFF'

Pairing theological education with experiences of faith



Gregg Brekke
Editor

What I discovered through my own overabundance of education was that I could know all the right stuff and still have no clue how to live into the faith I knew so well."

I distinctly remember a conversation 20 years ago with my diesel mechanics instructor in the Navy. The topic of faith had come up while we were on a break from class. He had recently converted to Buddhism from Christianity because, in his estimation, "Christianity required too much study."

His statement stayed with me as I journeyed through theological education, encountering many of the same sticking points that put him off. I learned biblical languages, classic and modern philosophy, world and church history, and theological interpretation — it was a lot of study, but at the end of the day, had I become a better Christ follower?

And then I got it. My Navy instructor believed, or had been taught, that Christianity was about knowing all the right stuff. What I discovered through my own overabundance of education was that I could know all the right stuff and still have no clue how to live into the faith I knew so well. It is the difference between *orthodoxy* (having the right opinion) and *orthopraxy* (having the right actions.)

I hear the same revelation from many life-long Christians — including clergy. Being connected with our faith requires practical experience. Only through venturing into the margins of society where Jesus roamed; finding support, nurture and room for vulnerability in a faith community; and beginning to know "the least, the last and the lost" did I begin to feel that my faith was alive.

No doubt, theological education — whether in a formal college or seminary setting or through church-based curricula — helps us to interpret what we encounter experientially. There is an important reflective role that theological education plays as we view the world through what is known as the Wesleyan Quadrilateral: scripture, tradition, reason and experience.

As I write, the renewed conflict in Gaza has entered its third week. While it is certainly true that the problems in the region are political, there are strong theological underpinnings to the ongoing clash.

A student of history would point out that the land collectively known as Israel has been politically controlled by Jews for a relatively small time over its 4,000 year span. That same student would know that a Jewish remnant has maintained a contiguous presence in Israel over that same period, constantly seeking its sovereignty.

The student of theology would remind us that Jews, Christians and Muslims living in Israel and Palestine all consider themselves "people of the Book" — calling upon the same Hebrew scriptures, counting themselves as sons and daughters of Abraham, to frame a common theological heritage. Yet we are all too aware that differences of expression run deep enough to spill blood to this day.

A student who has contextually lived with or worked alongside marginalized peoples

would seek to understand the systems in place that have led Israelis and Palestinians to such desperation and violence.

There may be no better example of why theological interpretation of political events is important to us as faithful citizens of the world.

And so we have turned our attention this issue to the topic of theological education — especially as it relates to our UCC and related seminaries.

Recent news has been filled with dire projections for the future of seminaries. They are beleaguered by declining enrollment, drained endowments and a shift in religious culture away from M.Div. requirements for pastors.

But statistics don't tell the whole story of what is happening in theological education. Seminaries are well aware of their financial situation and the changes in constituent needs. They are responding to these circumstances with incredible agility and creativity — not diluting their core "product" of theological training, rather finding new ways to structure and deliver it. Most importantly, they are discovering ways to integrate the experiences of faith into their curriculum — providing a solid base of practical knowledge to accompany the academic.

Maybe that is what my Navy instructor missed out on — putting his hands and heart into the active pursuit of doing what Jesus did.



LETTERS

Hope found in courageous stories

The Rev. Bob Molsberry is indeed a courageous person! I read his book "Blindsided by Grace" with great interest and empathy. I know there are many unsung heroes struggling to make a life from a less-than-desirable situation.

One such person is our daughter, Jennifer Solomon of Madison, Wis. At age 45, she was stricken with a rare, aggressive strep infection that resulted in a life-threatening situation.

After spending three months in the University of Wisconsin Hospital, she came home as a bilateral amputee with very crippled hands.

Nearly four years and 15 surgeries later she is now teaching special education in the Madison School District, driving with hand controls and a single parent of two teenage daughters.

Throughout this long journey her small but faithful church family, Plymouth UCC of Madison, along with a host of neighbors, friends and family have helped her over mountains and out of valleys.

Praise be to God!

Delores and the Rev. Bob Hedeman (retired)
Evansville, Ind.

Veterans Day remembrances urged

On the nearest Sunday to Veterans Day, veterans were encouraged to wear a

semblance of their service to our country at church. The hymns selected were appropriate for the occasion.

This is an important holiday that I feel has been totally ignored by the UCC ruling body for the last 20 years. Our troops in harm's way defending our nation, to my knowledge, also have never been recognized.

Your total focus seems to be on what is the latest politically right situation that you can promote. I respectfully suggest you should spend some effort on rebuilding our falling members among the baby boomers and the Sunday School age.

Richard Ash
First Congregational UCC
Harwich, Mass.

[Editor's Note: Please see the December 2008/January 2009 issue for an article on "Holy Joe's Café" — a UCC supported ministry to chaplains serving U.S. troops in the Middle East. A search on "military chaplain" at <UCC.org> will return many other articles and resources regarding spiritual care of military members provided by the UCC.]

Obama speech evokes memories

Watching President-elect Barack Obama deliver his acceptance speech in Grant Park brought back a flood of memories from 1947 and 1948. I was a member of the Greater Chicago-area Congregational-Christian Churches (a UCC predecessor body) High School Pilgrim Fellowship Social Action Committee.

One of our major goals was to work for racial equality and justice. We sponsored exchange meetings between African American and white Pilgrim Fellowship groups. They would gather on an alternative schedule in

each other's churches. On Sundays, they would go to restaurants in downtown Chicago that were known to refuse service to African Americans. On those occasions, however, the interracial groups were served. (We had it much easier than the Lunch Counter Sitters in the 1960s.)

Before we left for colleges in different parts of the country, we had our final show of solidarity event by taking our mothers to a summer concert in Grant Park. The watching of and listening to President-elect Obama accept his election to the presidency in Grant Park brought a deep satisfaction to my heart and tears of joy to my eyes as well as to my friends from 1947 and 1948 whom I called when the speech concluded.

A dream that we held with our mothers, in 1948, in Grant Park, for the transcending of racial barriers in our nation took another giant step forward.

I am grateful and indebted to the ministers and adult leaders in the Congregational-Christian Churches of the Chicago-area who planted the dream of racial equality and justice in our hearts, and who supported us in our efforts to act on our dream, and to continue to in our work for justice throughout our adult lives.

Rev. Nicholas Piediscalzi (retired)
First Congregational UCC
Santa Barbara, Calif.

Letters from Keeping You e-Posted

— A selection of responses from the Christmas edition of our weekly newsletter.

I would like to register my unhappiness about the electronic Christmas card you sent

out. I would have expected recognition of what the day signifies. That card could have been sent by any commercial company.

Have you been so engulfed with the Marcus Borg/John Spong theology that you see Christmas as nothing more than an economic stimulus?

Sorry guys and gals, but I'll be going to church to celebrate the birth of Jesus, while acknowledging that it probably wasn't in December.

Gerald Liddel
Bethesda, Md.

Merry Christmas to all of you! I just love your Greetings — what a wonderful way to reach out to our faith family!

Thank you John [H. Thomas] for being our faithful leader and to the most dedicated Collegium, we wish you all a blessed and triumphant Christmas Season.

The Rev. Norma DeSaegher
Pioneer Ocean View UCC
San Diego, Calif.

I am so bothered by a Christmas greeting from the national office of my denomination that features Santa Claus. Really, what are you thinking?

The Rev. Rosemary Rocha
Morningside Community UCC
Edina, Minn.

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

IN THE HOLY LAND

Encounter the stranger and their stories become your own

COMMENTARY

By Michael Neuroth

Being a pastor's son I remember well the somewhat honored, somewhat humiliating, experience of dressing up in a robe, being given a gift and a crown, and processing down the aisle of our church singing "We Three Kings" as one of the three Magi in our celebration of Epiphany.

Although a fond memory from my childhood, this year the joy and anticipation that usually accompanies Epiphany for me was lost. Having recently returned from a trip to Bethlehem and the Middle East, I watched with horror as news reports after Christmas began showing images of the Israeli incursion into Gaza. Now, over two weeks later, more than 700 hundred Palestinians have been killed and thousands injured.

This reality and all of our emotions surrounding it seem to be the opposite of Epiphany. Report after report of fighting on both sides is not the hope we want to encounter in the Christ child, so we try not to think about it. We turn away. In the face of such extreme, dehumanizing violence we are often moved to numbness, even apathy.

For many in the United States this has become a reflexive response to the seemingly never-ending narrative appearing on our nightly news, which portrays the Middle East as a region dominated by extremists unable to resolve differences except through war. The anti-Arab sentiment in much of our culture and media — and the one-sided coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict — only magnifies these sentiments and often leads to callousness toward the region.

"Those people have always been at war, always will be..." was a direct comment echoed by many as I shared that I had recently returned from the region. While home for the holidays I watched the eyes of family members and friends glaze over from my stories describing the reality that Palestinians face amidst hundreds of checkpoints, restrictions of movement and a "security wall" that slices through villages — separating people from jobs and families from one another.

The sheer otherness and inhumanity of this reality, coupled with constant images of war on the television, can cause any of us — even the faithful UCC and Middle East advocates — to grow somewhat numb to the reality or at least cynical to the prospects for peace and a two-state resolution to the conflict coming anytime soon.

I dealt with this range of emotions daily during our two weeks in Israel and the Occupied Territories. And yet, I left the region not hopeless but hopeful. It is, after all, a land many consider holy. God has, and can again, enact a miracle to bring about hope in a moment and in a place least likely for it to happen.

I found hope not so much through the experience of a holy land but of a holy people. Throughout our trip we met with Israelis and Palestinians, Jews and Muslims

and Christians, men and women and youth all working for peace in their own way. Some were working directly through advocacy or humanitarian assistance on both sides of the wall. Others were resisting in equally courageous, though often overlooked, ways.

Although I could point to several of the youth, advocates and religious leaders we met with as signs of hope, it was our own UCC partner, Jean Zaru, whose stories impacted and inspired me most.

Zaru is the Presiding Clerk of the Friends Meeting House in Ramallah, outside Jerusalem. Jean recounted to us, and I have subsequently read in her new book titled "Occupied with Nonviolence," her story of raising a family and going about life as normally and richly as possible in spite of the challenges of the occupation. It is clear that for Jean, as for many others, this life is itself an act of resistance and Christian witness. Her story and the stories of her community are her ministry.

She says in the introduction to her book, "Storytelling makes the world stronger because stories reveal the complexity of our truth. By telling our stories, we resist the diminishing of the reality of our lives. We resist vague and generalized abstractions and we maintain the urgency and intensity of the concrete."

In today's culture the term "epiphany" is often used void of its religious significance, simply used to describe a realization or moment of sudden knowledge. However, the meaning of epiphany in the Christian context points to a more embodied understanding. Not simply a realization, but an encounter.



Neuroth and Zaru in Ramallah.

Storytelling makes the world stronger because stories reveal the complexity of our truth. By telling our stories, we resist the diminishing of the reality of our lives. We resist vague and generalized abstractions and we maintain the urgency and intensity of the concrete."

— Jean Zaru

The Magi in the biblical text did not encounter Jesus as an idea, but rather came face to face with a real baby. That encounter changed the Magi forever and it continues to bring hope into our world.

Meeting Ms. Zaru was a similar epiphany moment for me, one of many on my trip. Even in the midst of inclinations to lose hope, to become calloused by the realities of our brothers and sisters living in war, let us seek to courageously encounter and embrace them as fully as we can through listening to their stories, their news and extending fellowship to their families that have immigrated to our neighborhoods. When we encounter them, their stories become ours.

When we meet the stranger, whether Palestinian or Israeli — Jew or Muslim or Christian — we encounter the Spirit of God. That Spirit can bring hope and change to this troubled land and our world. I pray that it will.

Michael Neuroth is policy advocate on international issues for Justice and Witness Ministries. He traveled with Churches for Middle East Peace to the Holy Land Dec. 1-12, 2008. The delegation visited Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Ramallah, but was not allowed to visit Gaza.



OVERHEARD

"We cannot deny that the U.S. has a great responsibility for the uprooted lives of literally millions of people — people for whom we and our partner churches are trying to care in a variety of ways."

— Peter Makari, Global Ministries Area Executive for the Middle East and Europe, in a letter on the human cost of U.S. initiated wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"Most people who live here are depressed. If they weren't, there'd be something wrong with them."

— The Rev. Bernice Powell Jackson, interim pastor at Beecher Memorial UCC in New Orleans, regarding the psychological state of those who are rebuilding lives and homes after Hurricane Katrina.

"In a world where folks are daunted by thousands of choices and haunted by temptations towards relativism, the success of an organization's brand (not to mention existence) is contingent on its niche."

— Alex Steed of NetSquared.org in his assessment of the UCC's ability to reach people in their 20s and 30s via online community organizing.

"Every time I sign a license, it's like I'm saying, 'OK' — but it's not OK."

— The Rev. Pam Shepherd on the decision by Congregational UCC of Ashland, Ore., to stop signing marriage licenses until Oregon recognizes same-sex marriage.



TABULATIONS

GOING GREEN

2,156*

*The number of "Go Green" paperless United Church News subscriptions registered as of Jan. 15, 2009.

Go Green at <ucc.org/gogreen>



Seattle congregation hosts controversial homeless encampment

By Ryan Singleton

The Seattle/King County Coalition for the Homeless (SKCCH) is a volunteer organization that hosts an annual One Night Count, when workers tally the number of people affected by homelessness in King County, according to its website. The count contains two main components — a street count, and a shelter and transitional housing survey.

“The 2008 One Night Count documented an increase in how many people are on the streets and without shelter,” SKCCH’s website reported. “Volunteers observed a 15 percent increase in people surviving outside in the same areas counted in 2007.”

In response to this growing problem, the tent community — dubbed “Nickelsville” after Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels — organized to provide shelter, safety and resources for the homeless. This self-governed encampment officially launched Sept. 22, 2008.

Though Nickelsville, which provides shelter for about 100 people per night, has no religious affiliation, it began finding refuge in church park-

ministries, such as developing programs for children’s education and outreach to people with disabilities.

Shortly after Cravens Boyd filled the role, Nickelsville came to University Christian’s parking lot, continuing the postponement of the congregation’s plans for other ministries.

“The church wanted to get started with some of the other things it had been dreaming about for the past two years,” says Cravens Boyd.

University Congregational is asking the city to waive its filing fees while the church studies the permits. Fees could exceed \$2,000, according to a member of the Nickelsville community, who wished to remain anonymous. He also said that the city has posted violation notices around the homeless community and church, warning that it will fine the church for allowing people to camp on its property.

Currently, King County cannot provide adequate shelter for all homeless persons. By one estimate, the county is “at least 2,000 beds

short every night,” according to University Congregational’s website. “In addition, shelters offer little privacy or predictability, and people do not have a place to store their possessions or stay during the day.”

Nickelsville’s long-range goal is to secure a plot of land “where up to 1,000 people could live in temporary structures while the city and county continue to plan for and construct more permanent structures as part of the Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness,” according to the website.

Though University Congregational has a history of supporting

people affected by homelessness, their efforts with Nickelsville are different, Foote said. The congregation considers itself in partnership with the encampment, much like it considers itself in partnership with the city and county in their efforts to end homelessness.

“Our hope is to continue to work with the city and to work with our own vision of love and justice so that people in Seattle don’t have to be homeless,” Foote said.

Ryan Singleton recently graduated from University of Chicago with a M.Div..



Area homeless fill the parking lot of University Congregational UCC in Seattle.

Catherine Foote photo

ing lots after receiving its fourth eviction notice in three weeks. The city of Seattle issued the notices because camping is illegal within city limits.

University Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Seattle’s University District was the first to offer its resources to the homeless community, allowing Nickelsville to occupy its parking lot throughout October and November. When University Christian could no longer support the controversial community, **University Congregational UCC** voted to accommodate the encampment.

“Our congregation was following the Disciples congregation’s lead,” says Catherine Foote, senior minister at University Congregational, of the Dec. 5, 2008, move. “When [University Christian] reached the end of their ability to sponsor Nickelsville, they laid the pack down and Congregational was ready to pick that pack up.”

University Christian found it necessary to amicably end its close relationship with Nickelsville for two major reasons, according to Janetta Cravens Boyd, the church’s recently installed senior minister.

For roughly two years, University Christian had been in a search-and-call process to fill its head pastoral position. During that time, the congregation postponed many of its

Coupling this with the lack of time, University Christian could only provide resources for two months of encampment for Nickelsville, says Cravens Boyd.

Nickelsville has been able to find refuge in churches because of the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000 (RLUIPA). RLUIPA is “a federal statute that [seeks] to provide stronger protection for religious freedom in the land-use and prison contexts,” according to the United States Department of Justice’s website.

Despite legal precedence for this argument, University Christian filed for a short-term permit with the city of Seattle to house Nickelsville. University Congregational is filing for both short- and long-term permits. University Congregational’s goal is to offer its parking lot to Nickelsville through the end of February if the community needs it, according to the church’s website.

Even with RLUIPA, churches believe permits are necessary because Mayor Nickels enabled city officials to force encampments off public and private land. The mayor made this decree while supporting King County’s Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness.

The county’s Committee to End Homelessness introduced a decade-long initiative in March 2005.



More Money For Ministry Outreach

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

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

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

ucfoundation.org
877-806-4989

info@ucfoundation.org

UNITED CHURCH
FOUNDATION

THIRTY-SIX RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS SURVEYED

people | places | things

in the news

Seminaries struggle to prepare clergy in addressing sexuality

A study released by the Religious Institute on Sexual Morality, Justice and Healing and Union Theological Seminary says United States seminaries and rabbinical schools are failing to prepare the next generation of clergy with the training they need to address sexuality issues in ministry.

The study, *Sex and the Seminary: Preparing Ministers for Sexual Health and Justice*, reports that sexuality courses are largely absent from most seminary curricula and degree requirements. At most institutions, students can graduate without studying sexual ethics or taking a single sexuality-based course.

"With so many congregations embroiled in controversy over sexual orientation issues, or struggling to address teenage sexuality, or concerned about sexual abuse, there is an urgent need for ordained clergy who understand the connections between religion and sexuality," said the Rev. Debra W. Haffner, director of the Religious Institute. "Seminaries must do more to prepare students to minister to their congregants and be effective advocates for sexual health and justice."

Sex and the Seminary is based on a survey of 36 leading seminaries and rabbinical schools of diverse size and geographic location, representing a range of Christian, Jewish and Unitarian Universalist traditions.

Each institution was evaluated on criteria for a sexually healthy and responsible seminary. These criteria measure sexuality content in the curriculum; institutional

commitment to sexuality and gender equity; including the existence of anti-discrimination, sexual harassment and full inclusion policies; and advocacy and support for sexuality-related issues.

The survey revealed that more than 90 percent of the seminaries surveyed do not require full-semester, sexuality-based courses for graduation. Two-thirds of the seminaries do not offer a course

in sexuality issues for religious professionals. Three-quarters do not offer a course in lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) studies. Additionally, seminaries offer three times as many courses in women's and feminist studies as

the Religious Institute," says Ann Hanson, UCC minister for sexuality education and justice. "When I work with adults who want to teach Our Whole Lives and other sexuality education resources to children and youth, they realize

for U.S. seminaries, integrate sexuality education into its standards for ministerial formation. It calls on seminaries to strengthen their curricular offerings and inclusion policies; invest in faculty development and continuing education;



Seminaries must do more to prepare students to minister to their congregants and be effective advocates for sexual health and justice.

— Debra Haffner, director of the Religious Institute on Sexual Morality, Justice and Healing

Read it online at <religiousinstitute.org/SeminaryReport.html>.

they do in LGBT studies or other sexuality-related issues.

The study also noted a "stained glass ceiling" in seminaries and a lack of policies on full inclusion of women and gay, lesbian and transgender persons. Two-thirds of the seminaries surveyed have fewer than 40 percent women serving in faculty, senior administrative and trustee positions, in contrast to student populations that are frequently more than 50 percent women.

"In order to stop perpetuating the spirituality/sexuality divide, we need to take seriously this study by

that, in order to do this, they must take a good look at their own sexual attitudes, values, feelings and experiences."

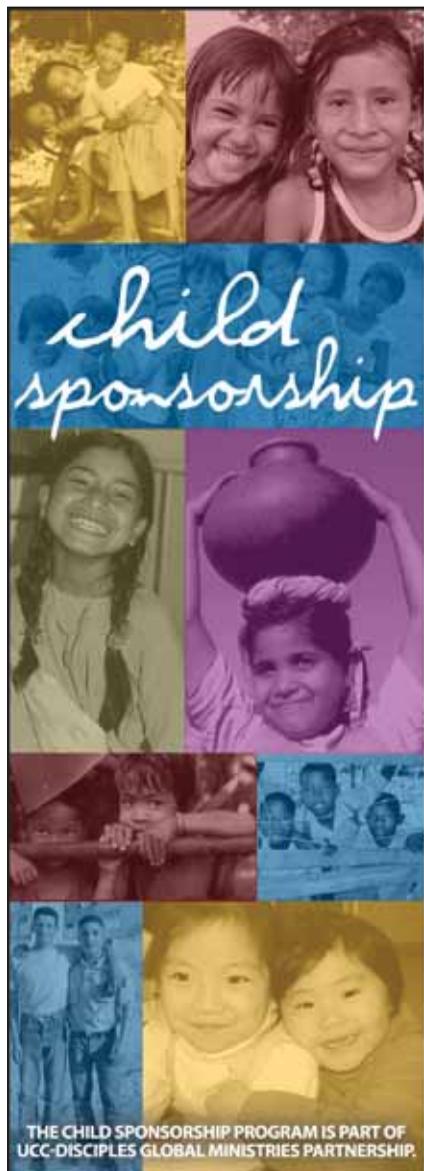
Sex and the Seminary recommends that seminaries and religious denominations develop and require competencies in sexuality for ordination to ministry. Most denominations currently do not require ministerial candidates to be competent in sexual health and education beyond sexual harassment prevention, the study noted.

The study also recommends that the Association of Theological Schools, the accrediting body

and pursue collaboration with other institutions and advocacy groups to expand educational opportunities for seminarians regarding sexuality issues.

"*Sex and the Seminary* lifts up information that indicates that seminaries need to do more to provide future religious leaders a place to not only study human sexuality, but to provide opportunities for safe and healthy self-assessment," says Hanson.

The Religious Institute is sending copies of the *Sex and the Seminary* report to every seminary and rabbinical school in the United States.



The UCC Child Sponsorship Program

The **UCC Child Sponsorship Program**, founded in the 1950s, provides a practical way to extend a hand to a child and works to safeguard the future of children throughout the world.

Your support provides a child with adequate food, clothing, healthcare and, sometimes, housing.

100 percent of sponsorship dollars go to the children.

Sponsor a child today.

Global Ministries Child Sponsorship
216.736.3222 ♦ wcm@ucc.org
www.globalministries.org



Connecting with the world through a *child*



do not neglect
to show
hospitality
to strangers
for by
doing that
some here
have
entertained
angels
without
knowing it
hebrews 13:1-2

THE CHILD SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM IS PART OF
UCC-DISCIPLES GLOBAL MINISTRIES PARTNERSHIP.



Innovation propels seminaries through transitional waters

Academics and practice integrate for relevant ministry

A collective shockwave rippled across the field of theological education when Seabury-Western Theological Seminary announced in February 2008 that it could no longer continue operations. While not closing at that time, the 150-year-old institution located in Evanston, Ill. — one of 11 Episcopal seminaries in the United States — needed to take drastic measures to ensure its current students would graduate.

Reducing courses and degree programs, firing staff and professors, eliminating facilities use and shunting students to other Chicago-area seminaries for courses has given Seabury some breathing room. Still, it has made no commitment to continuing the traditional three-year Masters of Divinity (M.Div.) program required for ordination within the Episcopal Church beyond the graduating class of 2010.

By Gregg Brekke, Editor

Not alone in their predicament, reports of troubled seminaries are regularly in the news. On Jan. 13, trustees of Disciples-related Lexington (Ky.) Theological Seminary declared the school to be in a state of financial emergency. The status allows trustees to end faculty tenure, reduce budgets and decrease course offerings in order to rapidly “reinvent itself by developing a curriculum that stresses effective parish ministry as [our] primary focus.”

Even the third largest seminary in the nation, Southern Baptist Seminary of Louisville, Ky., has not been immune from financial difficulties. In December 2008, due to decreased value of invested endowments and lower than anticipated giving, Southern Baptist began layoffs, cut spending and put capital campaigns and hiring on hold in response to a projected \$3.2 million annual shortfall.

The refrain among seminary administrators is all too common: Decreasing enrollment, overextended endowment funds and an increasingly diversified student body have forced institutions to rethink long-held assumptions regarding the model for graduate theological education established in the late nineteenth century.

That model, a three-year, full-time residential program, no longer accommodates the needs of a majority of today's seminary students. The Association of Theological Schools (ATS), the accrediting body for seminaries, cites a number of trends that are forcing seminaries to rethink their approach to ministry preparation.

While the number of students enrolled in seminaries has increased in the past 10 years, the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) students has decreased. This trend is explained, in part, by an increase in part-time and non-degree students. These students are more apt to seek a geographically close institution, continue family commitments and employment, and be less likely to make use of campus housing. As a result, more flexibility in scheduling — including evening and weekend courses — is required to accommodate these students' needs.

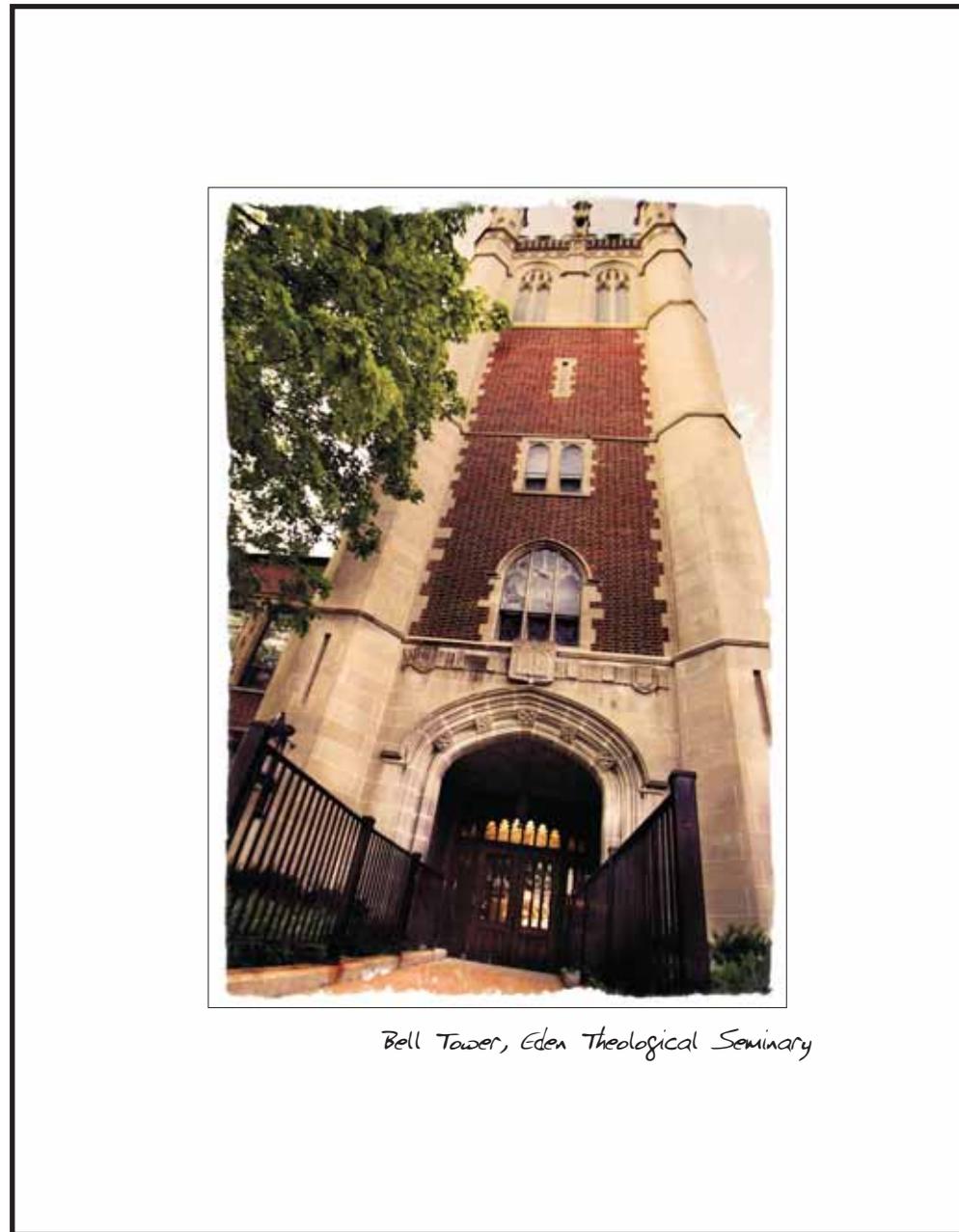
What the ‘customer’ wants

In their book “Contextualizing Theological Education” (Pilgrim Press, 2008), editors Theodore Brelsford and P. Alice Rogers identify the three constituents of seminaries as the academy, students and the church. That is to say, the role of theological education must satisfy a scholastic goal; enrich students professionally and spiritually; and provide the necessary benefits to congregations and ministries, the eventual employers of their graduates.

Brelsford's introduction says, “One reason for the increasing importance of contextual integration is a growing perception in the culture at large of both the academy and the church as marginal or irrelevant to the practical concerns of life in the ‘real world.’”

In suggesting a possible remedy to this perceived irrelevance, Brelsford continues, “If we intend seminary education to matter and make a difference in society, church and the world, then what we do in seminary must be integrally related with significant social and global realities.”

That is no small task, according to the Rev. Dave Schwab, former UCC Ohio Conference Minister and Eden Seminary board member. Purposefully using business terms, Schwab says his role on the board is to represent the customer (congregations) of the seminary's product (M.Div. graduates.) What customers/congregations want are “pastors and leaders who can meet the spiritual and



Bell Tower, Eden Theological Seminary

organizational needs of the church,” he says.

“The local church is an integral partner,” says the Rev. William McKinney, president of the UCC-related Pacific School of Religion, of congregations' role in pastoral formation. “We're doing a better job of listening to them than we did a generation ago.”

|| The local church is an integral partner.”

— The Rev. William McKinney,
President of UCC-related Pacific School of Religion

And this statement represents the clear acknowledgement throughout theological institutions — academic rigor, while an important foundation, is not the sole indicator or training criteria for effective ministry.

Reflecting on the importance of local church involvement in pastoral preparation, the Rev. John H. Thomas, UCC general minister and president, recalled his transition from seminary graduate to pastor, saying, “I

received a wonderful education at Yale Divinity School, but my formation as a minister was continued by my first congregation that understood it had a responsibility to help shape leaders for the church.”

That isn't to say seminaries have historically avoided integrating internships and contextual education into their curriculum. Field work has long been a vital part of seminary programs. But critical reflection on the experience of the context, and incorporating it into the academic sequence, is a relatively new model in theological education.

One such revised curriculum has been in place at the UCC-related United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities for four years. Kita McVay, president of the seminary, says, “The intent of the [curriculum update] is to educate students and send forth graduates who are able to adapt to the changing church.”

With an emphasis on integrating academics, spiritual formation, practical arts of ministry and ethics, United feels they are “providing the essential skills and strengths” required for ministry in a variety of contexts.

UCC-related seminaries find options

UCC-related seminaries are no strangers to the economic realities faced by other institutions.

Bangor Theological Seminary in Maine sold its campus in 2005 and re- | cont.

I received a wonderful education at Yale Divinity School, but my formation as a minister was continued by my first congregation.”

— The Rev. John Thomas, UCC General Minister and President

located students to a rented space at nearby Husson College. At the time of the move, Bangor had only 20 full-time students. The Rev. William Imes, seminary president in 2005, said of the transition, “[We] can’t run a campus that was built primarily for residents for what basically is a commuter population.”

A similar transition is scheduled for Chicago Theological Seminary. Anticipating the need to reduce costs and find appropriate space for their student body, the school will move from its historic Hyde Park home to new facilities nearby on the University of Chicago campus in 2012.

The new facility is being made possible through a multifaceted agreement with the University of Chicago. Under the agreement, the university will purchase the existing CTS buildings and construct and furnish new facilities to the seminary’s specifications. CTS will hold a 100-year lease on the new building at a rental rate of \$1 annually.

Eden Theological Seminary, facing a financial crisis in 2007, received a grant from the UCC-related Deaconess Foundation in

The way forward

Lancaster Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania has joined with other UCC seminaries in rethinking its curriculum.

It has taken strides to increase contextual education within ministry formation curriculum. Lancaster now deploys teams of four students to one congregation. The Rev. Reiss Potterveld, Lancaster’s president, says the team approach helps students learn to work cooperatively by developing community improvement and congregational vitality projects.

Further work in exploring possibilities for UCC and other mainline seminaries is underway. Greenhaw is currently writing a book on the mainline Protestant church in America. He notes that a challenge for these institutions exists in the fact that mainline membership and churches have declined by approximately 40 percent since 1964.

“The programmatic response [to the decline] is profoundly different for these schools,” he says. Because of the reduced number of students and congregations for them to serve, Greenhaw believes mainline seminaries need to find purpose in their historic identity.

Elements of that identity, he says, are fostering the position that faith and critical thinking are bound together; faith that is most effectively represented through responsibility in the social world; and a true love for “the other” — as someone not to be feared, but to be seen as a compliment to the spiritual life of the church.

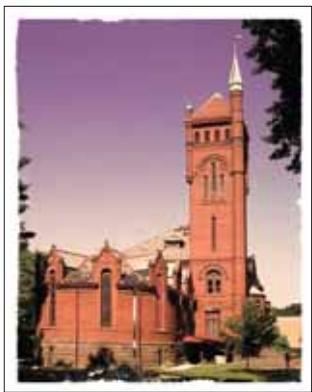
While challenges remain, hopefulness exists in the UCC-related seminaries — no matter their size. “We live in an era of emergence, where ‘congregating’ is undergoing a lot of changes,” says McKinney of PSR. “We need to broaden our understanding of what it means to prepare people for congregational ministry.”

McKinney is optimistic that by focusing PSR’s curriculum on how people congregate, and assuming all churches are in some way “new churches,” they can better prepare students for the needs of future ministry.

Potterveld of Lancaster sees his institution continuing to serve the 80 percent of students who come expecting to be ordained into congregational ministry. Yet, he is cognizant of the many students who come seeking to serve in chaplaincy or specialized ministries. To meet this need, Lancaster has designed programs, including lay formation, capable of serving 2,500 students each semester — a much broader audience than its traditional M.Div. program.

“Seminaries are first and foremost the trainers of pastors and transmitters of our traditions,” says Greenhaw. “But degreed education is only a means to an end, not the end itself.”

Alluding to the future role for seminaries within the UCC, Greenhaw concludes, “Theological education can’t only be about clergy preparation, it should imbibe a depth of understanding in the Christian faith in relation to the world in a variety of situations that are appropriate for all the baptized.”



Lancaster Theological Seminary

St. Louis that could total more than \$18 million. The money, intended to strengthen the school’s long-term financial viability, included \$4.5 million to be disbursed through 2010. It provides additional operating revenue and assists Eden in the repayment of outstanding debt during this term.

Contingent upon Eden’s ability to make financial strides during the initial three-year period, the foundation will provide up to \$13.6 million in additional support, which will be used, in part, to retire all outstanding debt.

The Rev. David M. Greenhaw, Eden’s president, said of the gift, “Deaconess’ support will enable us to concentrate on what matters most — providing our students with an exceptional seminary education so that they become the finest pastors and community leaders they’re capable of being.”

COMMENTARY

Fresh perspectives needed on educating religious leaders into the 21st century

The following is excerpted from the Rev. Serene Jones’ inauguration speech as President of Union Theological Seminary in New York City. Used by permission.

By Serene Jones

What will it take for us to educate that new generation of religious leaders to inhabit the world being remade before our very eyes?

It will require us to rethink some of our education fundamentals in at least the following five significant ways. Since rethinking pedagogical purpose and method was part of Union’s original charter, this is work we are well-equipped to do.

First, we are entering a period in which the most important task is going to be developing new eyes to see what is happening around us — as both what counts as “religion” and how we conceive of “the public” are redefined. In this regard, our students shall lead us as many of them already live in these new spaces carved out by technologies that recraft our minds, imaginations, and our sense of community. Learning — and not just teaching — must stand at the helm of our endeavors.

Second, while we absolutely must maintain a strict division between church and state in our policy lives, we need higher education to see that it takes a village to educate a minister, of any sort. In other words, the secular academy is just as responsible for the task ahead of us as are theological schools. This doesn’t mean holding prayer sessions before science class, far from it. It does mean not turning away from the oddity of the confessional commitments of our students and for whom they are being formed. But rather, in recognizing the full selves our students bring, we can see our educational institutions as places for us to learn more about the deepest impulses that sustain or fracture our collective life together. Union’s relation with its college partners, here and around the world, will continue to need energetic tending.

Third, the way forward for theological education will be deeply interfaith or it will fail. The fact is our lives are now interfaith, in bone deep ways. We live in interfaith families: we eat Middle Eastern food for lunch, kosher for dinner, sugar-laden cereal for breakfast. We have hymns on our iPods, yoga mats in our backpacks, Talmudic meditations by our bedsides, and the smile of Islamic charity on our faces. The fact that these merged and mixing practices are not always recognized as “interfaith” is only proof of how deeply they are ingrained in us. Our educated understanding of religion needs to embrace the diet of insight and imagination that marks our hybrid practices. In this regard, the future will be carried by the presence of our interfaith partners and the extraordinary possibilities for dialogue found here in Morningside Heights.

Fourth, we’ve never needed the classics in our curriculum more than now. We need to master ancient languages — they teach us the mystery of otherness. We need the rigors of systematic theology to spur clear thought. We need the careful analysis of history to keep us

honest about where we’ve been and what we can know. But we also need to give fresh new attention to the questions of formation and practice — to all the performed dimensions of religious life. We need to reclaim the old truth that dogma is at best a stumbling for words to describe a practice that lives in the embodied soul. It’s in the flesh of our daily practices that our lives are formed and that our collective

Part of the point is that we don’t completely know what lies before us.”

— The Rev. Serene Jones



Ron Hester photo

future will be forged. In our poetry and art as much as in our doctrines will reside the power of future conviction.

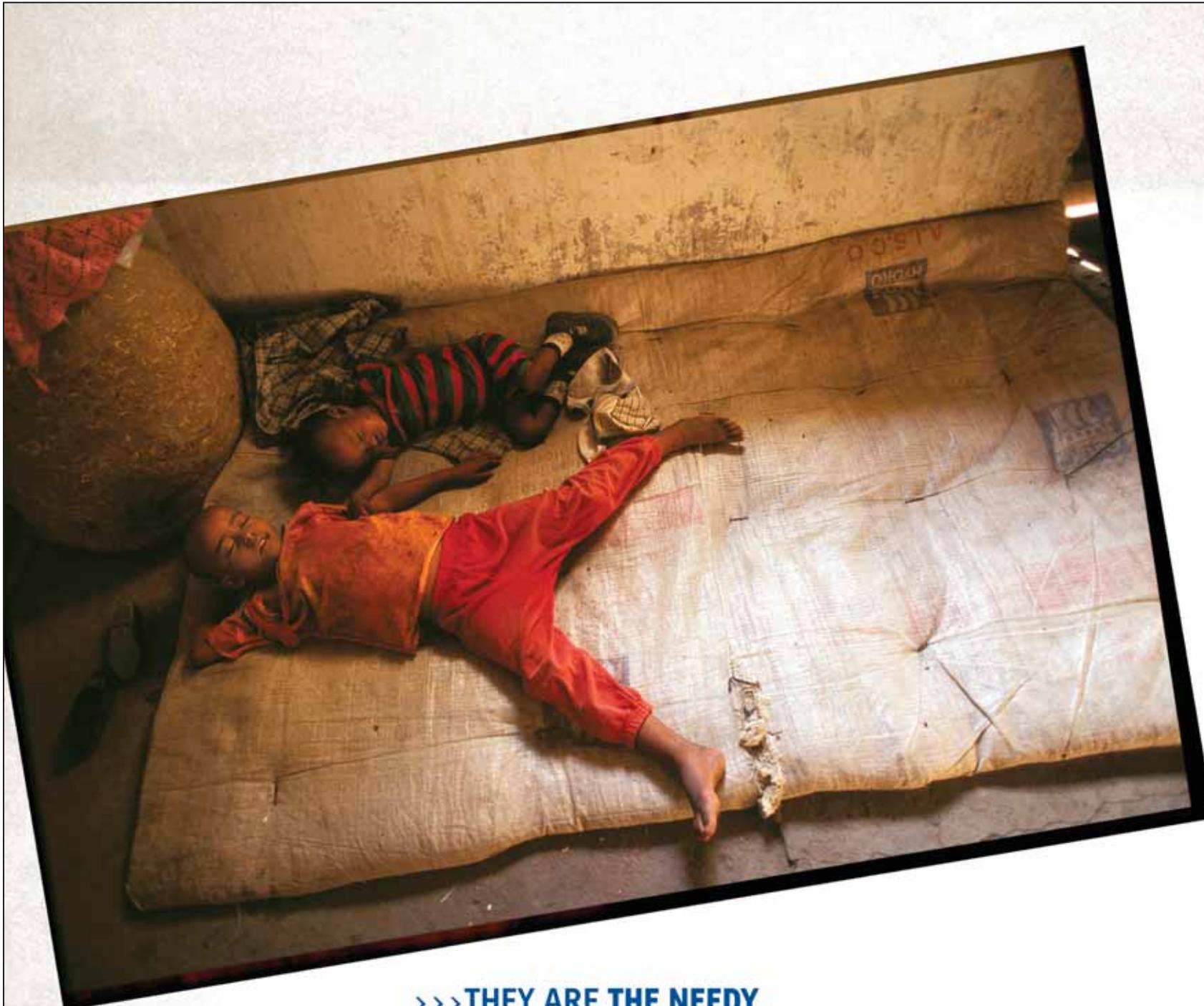
Fifth, we must face the stark economic reality in which we live. This means being prudent and wise in the use of the resources we have; and being fiercely persuasive in conveying our ability to use new resources for the common good beyond our own halls. It means recognizing that new poverty for some always means an exponential increase in suffering for those who have always been on the underside of the stories of prosperity our country loves to tell. And it means seeking more than being with the poor — though that injunction must also remain — but seeking the eradication of poverty globally. To this end, we must continue to support and to grow with such radical initiatives as our very own Poverty Initiative and the sense of social movement and possibility to which it attests.

These five challenges do not encompass all that lies before us. In fact, part of the point is that we don’t completely know what lies before us! But they are a start at what I think is going to be necessary as we live into this unfolding future. They chart a course unique at one level in Union’s history, but old and familiar at another. It is a course that finds faith vitally alive in the space of rift and crisis.

Jones is an ordained minister in both the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ. She was educated at the University of Oklahoma and received her M.Div. and Ph.D. in theology at Yale.

Prior to her appointment as Union’s president, Jones spent 17 years on the Yale Divinity School faculty, most recently as the Titus Street Professor of Theology. She also held faculty appointments at Yale Law School, in the Department of African-American Studies, and served as the chair of Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Yale University.

To learn more about President Jones: <utsnyc.edu/serenejones>.



>>> **THEY ARE THE NEEDY.**
>> **YOU ARE THE BLESSED.**

You've seen the pictures. Heard the stories. But can your church really pull children in the neediest countries from the throes of punishing poverty? Without a doubt, yes. At Compassion, we come alongside you to give each person in your congregation the opportunity to sponsor a desperately needy child. It's a deeply personal way to love children as Jesus did. Compassion sponsorship provides development of the whole child that is our trademark: church-based physical, medical, educational and spiritual care for a child who is eager to get to know you. Picture your congregation ministering to these kids' needs. And introducing them to Jesus. You already have the faith. Let us help you put it into action.

> **WE ARE THE PIPELINE BETWEEN.**



compassiondistinctives.org

'IT'S VERY EGALITARIAN'

MyUCC, new social networking community, set to debut this Spring

From staff reports

“You have a new friend request.”
Soon that message could find its way into your e-mail inbox on a regular basis, if you join MyUCC, a new social networking community coming this Spring to <ucc.org>.

MyUCC will be a grassroots, user-driven community — much like Facebook or MySpace — where registered users will build online profiles, join groups, write blogs, post comments, upload photos and more.

“This is going to revolutionize the way people experience the UCC online and engage one another at <ucc.org> as members of the same denomination,” says the Rev. J. Bennett Guess, the UCC’s director of communications.

The denomination’s Proclamation, Identity and Communication Ministry hopes to launch the interactive site by mid-March, but plans to test it beforehand with several constituency groups, including the UCC’s Facebook group.



theological topics, he also hopes there will be no limit to the scope of the conversations. “We hope it will be a place to talk about religion, but also pop culture, politics, justice, music, books — whatever interests you.”

For many who are not accustomed to social networking, MyUCC will be a new kind of web experience, because MyUCC’s content will be generated from users, not necessarily the church’s national staff.

“It’s very egalitarian,” Guess says. “It’s very bottom-up, and for people who long for a controlled, top-down way of sharing information, it’s going to take some getting used to.”

|| We hope it will be a place to talk about religion, but also pop culture, politics, justice, music, books — whatever interests you.”

Dan Hazard, the UCC’s web manager, emphasizes that the UCC is not abandoning its longstanding commitment to engaging Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Twitter and other popular sites to build relationships

with and among constituents.

“We will still be active on these sites, as much as ever,” Hazard says. “But we’re also integrating that technology into our site so that our users will have a similar experience at <ucc.org>. We think it’s important for people to be able to create their own content that reflects their own personalities and perspectives.”

MyUCC will be policed by its users, and individuals will be asked to flag inappropriate content or photos that will be reviewed and possibly removed by the UCC’s web staff, Hazard says.

Users will be offered an integrated log-in experience, meaning that they will have the same user name and password for the entire website, including MyUCC.

As long promised

MyUCC is a long time in the making. Too long, some feel.

In June 2007, the UCC’s national setting announced that <ucc.org> was migrating to a new web-hosting company, known as Get Active, which offered many new, innovative functionalities. However, within weeks of manually relocating 10,000 pages of its website, Get Active was purchased by its primary competitor, Convio, and much of the planned interactive elements became stalled due to the takeover.

“These community-building tools were anticipated to be part of the website’s relaunch back in 2007,” explains Guess. “But we’re now at the place where Convio is able to offer us what we’d hoped to have available two years ago.”

“We know our people are going to like this,” Guess says, “because UCC people always like places where they can offer their own opinions.”

people | places | things in the news

SHARE SOMETHING GREAT

MyUCC is an online community — similar to Facebook or MySpace — where you’ll be able to ...

- ☐ Build an online profile at <ucc.org> and have your own webpage address.
- ☐ Invite and maintain online friendships.
- ☐ Share status reports.
- ☐ Send messages.
- ☐ Post comments.
- ☐ Create or join groups, both public and private.
- ☐ Upload photos.
- ☐ Add widgets and news feeds.
- ☐ Write your own blog. Read others’ blog entries.
- ☐ Participate in forums.



Online religiously

While Guess says the denomination isn’t under the illusion that it’s going to compete with the wildly popular Facebook, it does hope to offer a companion experience.

“A lot of users of conventional networking sites, such as Facebook, tell us they are wary of appearing ‘too religious’ among their cadre of friends,” explains Guess. “We’ve heard from many youth and young adults that they would love to have a social networking community that allows them to explore their spiritual sides, talk about church and religion, and share thoughts about their faith, without others thinking they are some kind of religious fanatic.”

And while Guess anticipates that many people will want to explore

Two UCC ministers join Day1 advisory board

Two UCC pastors have been appointed to the advisory board for Day1, the award-winning ecumenical radio program broadcast nationally on 150 stations and online at <Day1.org>. The Rev. Lillian Daniel, senior minister, **First Congregational UCC, Glen Ellyn, Ill.**, and the Rev. Ozzie E. Smith, Jr., senior pastor, **Covenant UCC, South Holland, Ill.**, were named to the board in December 2008.

The Day1 advisory board recommends exceptional preachers to staff and trustees for the program from across America. Members also provide feedback on issues regarding the production, distribution, web activities and development efforts of the organization.

Additional new members are the Rev. Kenneth Carter, senior pastor, Providence United Methodist Church, Charlotte, N.C.; the Rev. Anna Carter Florence, Peter Marshall associate professor of homilet-

ics, Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, Ga.; the Rev. Cleophus LaRue, Francis Landey Patton associate professor of homiletics, Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, N.J.; the Rev. Daniel Matthews, Jr., rector, St. Luke’s Episcopal Church, Atlanta, Ga.; and the Rev. Nora Tubbs Tisdale, professor of homiletics, Yale Divinity School, New Haven, Conn.

“We are honored and thrilled that these church and seminary leaders, all of whom are outstanding preachers in their own right, have enthusiastically agreed to join our advisory team,” said Day1 host and producer Peter Wallace. “Their wisdom and insights from the front lines of preaching in today’s culture will certainly strengthen our efforts to serve as the voice of the mainline churches.”

The seven join a roster of 25 other pastors and professors on the Day1 advisory board.

“Some of the best preachers in

the English-speaking world have offered their gifts through Day1,” said the Rev. J. Bennett Guess, UCC director of communications. “I am so proud that the United Church of Christ is committed to this important ecumenical, prophetic ministry and that our UCC pastors have this ongoing venue to proclaim the gospel of our Still-speaking God.”

Formerly known as “The Protestant Hour,” Day1 has been broadcast every week for more than 63 years, winning numerous awards, including the George Foster Peabody Award and the Communicators’ Award for Excellence in inspirational radio.

Day1 is produced by the Alliance for Christian Media in association with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, the Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the United Church of Christ and the United Methodist Church.

THE UCC WOMEN’S MINISTRY FUND
providing women the opportunity to help shape the world

funding the visions of women through
leadership training
scholarship support
outreach ministries
faith development

To contribute or learn more:
800.822.8224, X 3868
ucc.org/women

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

The Bible
and the United Church of Christ

“The living word of God, ready to smack us upside the head with judgment and grace!”

By
Quinn G. Caldwell, Martin B. Copenhaver,
Lillian Daniel, and Anthony B. Robinson

Read excerpts and order at
UnitedChurchPress.com
or call **800-325-7061**

A resource from the Writer’s Group, Local Church Ministries, United Church of Christ.



people | places | things

'Hope Shall Bloom' tour highlights progress of Gulf Coast recovery

By Jeff Woodard

A visit to the Harry Tompson Rebuild Center in New Orleans is an experience rich in sensory multi-tasking — listening to the story behind it, seeing the beauty of the physical facility, and feeling the critically compassionate role it plays in the downtown community more than three years after Hurricane Katrina devastated the region.

"Homeless people rarely go to a nice place that was built just for them," says Center Director Don Thompson, offering an afternoon tour of the \$1.1 million facility to 15 UCC members from eight states.

The group traveled throughout New Orleans and coastal Mississippi Dec. 8-11 on an educational mission trip, learning how One Great Hour of Sharing's "Hope Shall Bloom" program continues to provide much-needed aid. As of December 2008, Hope Shall Bloom had raised more than \$6 million in hurricane relief in Louisiana, Mississippi and Florida.

In a collaborative effort with other faith-based organizations, the seeds of Hope Shall Bloom were planted soon after Katrina hit. Thanks in large part to OGH's annual donation of \$50,000, the center concluded its first full year of operation last fall.

"We have made this trip the past three years, and will again next year," says Florence Coppola, UCC National Executive for Disaster Ministries.

The daytime drop-in center has 11 staff members and offers restroom, shower, laundry, telephone and food-service facilities. Visitors can also see a doctor or a lawyer, get a new state ID, receive mail and obtain help finding housing and jobs.

"Volunteers are very respectful of the people who come here," says Coppola. "They wash their clothing for them; they don't just give them access to the washing machines. They dry their clothing and fold it and

hand it back to them. These are people, they're not treated as numbers."

Visitors enter the front gate and are immediately taken by a wall-sized painting that depicts six Biblical scenes — from Noah's flood to the restful waters of Jesus, the Good Shepherd. "In light of our experience, we knew the mural had to be about the life-giving aspect of water," says Thompson. "You come through that door and it just feels different."

The feel is also different at Back Bay Mission in Biloxi, Miss., a 90-minute drive to the east. "Hope Shall Bloom has been key to giving us the ability to do what we need to do," says Rev. Shari Prestemon, executive director of Back Bay, a community ministry of the UCC. Last year, about 1,400 UCC members came to help. The ministry has rebuilt 46 homes.

Visitors heard stirring stories of hardships endured by Back Bay Mission clients, then traveled to the coastal town of Pass Christian. Twenty-two people died and 90 percent of homes there were destroyed or damaged. The town of 6,500 is one



Natural wood siding and hearty vegetation throughout the Harry Tompson Rebuild Center in New Orleans give the open-air complex a warm, inviting feeling.

Gregg Brekke photo

of many along the 75-mile stretch of Mississippi coastline where 65,000 homes were lost and 67,000 extensively damaged. "They need everything you can imagine, and a lot of things you can't," says Prestemon.

The group met with Pass Christian Mayor Chipper McDermott, who expressed a deep appreciation for the UCC. "This town is not 6 miles long by 1 mile wide," he said of his rebuilding city and the support it receives. "It's 50 states long and 50 states wide. And if not for the faith-based groups, this town would have had a 'for sale' sign on it a long time ago."

Also included in the trip were tours of the hard-hit Lower Ninth Ward, where actor Brad Pitt has commissioned several architects to build affordable "green" homes; the Upper Ninth Ward, where Harry Connick, Jr. and Branford Marsalis have developed 72 single-family homes in Musicians' Village, a cornerstone of the New Orleans Area Habitat for Humanity (NOAHH) effort.

According to the Rev. Alan Coe,

UCC Minister for Disaster Recovery, UCC volunteers have helped in New Orleans to rebuild 28 homes, clean out 847 others and are working on 15-20 homes at any given time.

A half-dozen visits to work sites were made. Property owners — many of whom have lived for more than two years in FEMA trailers parked in front of their lots — warmly greeted and thanked visitors at every turn. Bertha Griffin, a resident of the Broadmoor neighborhood, made sure her guests saw the front-porch screens that volunteers had just installed. "They are still working, and God is still blessing us," she said. "Thanks to people like you."

LEND A HAND

To learn more about volunteer opportunities with UCC National Disaster Ministries, please call Florence Coppola at 866-822-8224 x3211; e-mail <coppolaf@ucc.org> or visit <ucc.org/disaster/gulf-coast-hurricanes.html>.

Jeff Woodard is a regular contributor to United Church News.

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

TERM	RATE	APY
6 mo	3.000%	3.022%
12 mo	3.500%	3.531%
18 mo	3.625%	3.658%
30 mo	3.750%	3.785%
60 mo	4.125%	4.168%



United Church of Christ
CORNERSTONE FUND

cornerstonefund.org • 888-UCC-FUND

This is not an offer to sell our securities, and we are not soliciting you to buy our securities. We will sell our securities only in states where authorized. The offering is made solely by our Offering Circular, which may be obtained by calling us at 888-822-3863. Our securities are not insured by the FDIC or any other state or federally regulated institution. Rates as of December 24, 2008 and may change without notice. *Investments of 12 months or more.



LOANS FOR NEW CONGREGATIONS!

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

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

Then you may qualify for a loan from

Local Church Ministries Church Building & Loan Fund.



For more information:

Call 1-866-822-8224, Ext 3834 Toll Free or contact Sheila Kinzer at kinzers@ucc.org

see our website at www.ucc.org/finance/partners-in-building/

BOOK REVIEW: THE DISCIPLESHIP STUDY BIBLE

New guide aims to foster opportunities for community, spiritual formation

By Gregg Brekke

Westminster John Knox Press has released a new study Bible that fits a unique niche for progressively minded Christians. Its notes and reference aids are aimed at a broad audience interested in exploring the biblical text for contemporary applications of ancient truths.

Study bibles generally fall into one of three categories. First is as an academic reference. These works go to great length in their description of historic context and textual references without giving interpretive guidance.

Second is a study bible produced as running commentary on the biblical text. These guides represent a specific interpretation of scripture, embedding doctrinal or dogmatic assumptions about particular passages into their notes.

The third variation of the contemporary study bible is one aimed at life application for a particular demographic. You'll notice study bibles for women, men, teens, singles and other various groups at your local bookseller. These works attempt to contextualize the biblical message for the life circumstances encountered by their readers.

Each of these study bible genres has its strength — but they also leave much to be desired for those pursuing lifelong learning.

An academic study bible may be helpful for more intense students of the Bible, but the uninitiated will quickly become intimidated by the insider language and obscure references to textual criticism and historic cognates. (Confused yet?)

Commentary-oriented study bibles attempt to leave few questions unanswered. If you believe the Bible is "God's answer book," one of these may fit your needs. Yet, the reader should be warned that the answers offered by the majority of these

works are generally wrapped with a fundamentalist ribbon — assuming the Bible is an inerrant and unalterable transmission of God's will for all people in all times.

Demographic-oriented study bibles tend to segment their commentary as it relates to the intended reader. This is helpful for those finding their identity as moms, dads, students or any of the dozens of targeted audiences. However, they often provide little context for what it is like to live in communities of the faithful — where adapting to the complexities of diversity is an ever-present reality.

And so, in light of the marketplace of available study bibles, "The

Discipleship Study Bible" offers a compelling mix of what makes each of these other genres useful while smartly avoiding their pitfalls.

Book introductions are written in a narrative style that gives the reader a sense of the historic story that was being told as a given book came into formation. Notes on authorship, time, place and thematic overtones are interwoven with the social and political context of those to whom the book was written.

As most study bibles do, "The Discipleship Study Bible" offers verse or passage help where needed. These are particularly useful as a means to clarify statements in the Bible that don't make sense to modern readers. Some of these helps venture into the realm of commentary, yet carefully don't offer the final word on areas in which the Bible is unclear.

Discipleship, the main theme of the title and text, is highlighted in this way and others. Discovery and spiritual practice are encouraged as a means toward reflection and education — not as means unto themselves. "The Discipleship Study Bible" encourages what other study bibles miss: the opportunity for spiritual formation within a worshipping and serving community.

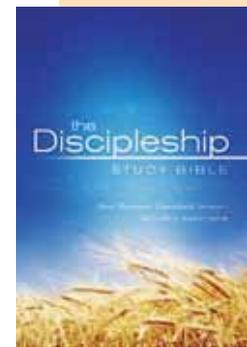
The biblical translation used in "The Discipleship Study Bible" is the New Revised Standard Version, highly regarded for its fidelity to the original languages while introducing idiom where clarity is required. As

the first new NRSV study bible to be published in nearly a decade, it is a welcomed addition to contemporary thought on biblical interpretation and application.

Christians who consider themselves "progressive" will be especially pleased to see that more recent scholarship and interfaith implications have found their way into the commentary and notes. As such, "The Discipleship Study Bible" is a great companion to adult education and confirmation curriculum in encouraging lifelong spiritual learning.

"The Discipleship Study Bible" is edited by and has received contributions from a respected panel of theologians, including several from UCC and UCC-related seminaries. It is currently available in hardcover from bookstores and online retailers.

THE DISCIPLESHIP STUDY BIBLE



By Bruce Birch, Brian K. Blount, Thomas G. Long and Gail R. O'Day
Westminster John Knox Press, 2008
Hardback, \$39.95
ISBN: 978-0-664-22371-7
<wjkbks.com/studybible.asp>

Stillspeaking Media with a Mission grants available for 2009

Need to get the word out about your church in 2009? The Stillspeaking Ministry invites you to consider applying for a Media with a Mission grant.

Begun in 2006, Media with a Mission is a grant program that supports local churches in their TV, radio and print advertising efforts.

Since its inception, the program has awarded nearly \$100,000 to 132 churches in 31 states.

The outreach made possible by these grants has collectively reached more than 5 million people.

In 2009, Stillspeaking will award up to \$40,000 for local churches to conduct TV, radio and print advertising.

Local churches, or groups of churches, who embrace the message of the Stillspeaking Ministry are eligible to apply.

Applications will be accepted on a rolling basis throughout 2009 and will be reviewed and awarded on a monthly basis until funds are expended.

The maximum grant for individual churches is \$2,000 and the maximum grant for groups of churches is \$4,000.

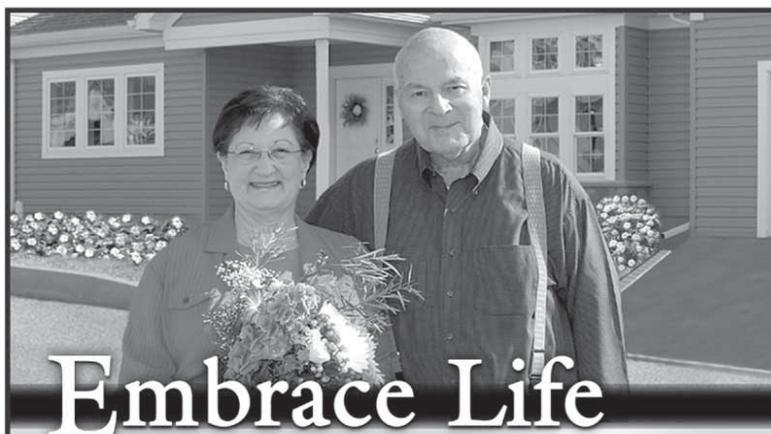
Grants must be matched on

a 60 percent basis by applicants; e.g. Stillspeaking will provide \$2 (40 percent) for every \$3 (60 percent) the applicant church/group of churches commits to the campaign.

Grant recipients will be asked

to report on their campaigns by sharing, showing and measuring their efforts.

To learn more about Media with a Mission and how to apply, please visit <ucc.org/god-is-stillspeaking>.



Embrace Life

Looking for Retirement Living in Pennsylvania that's full of choices?



PHOEBE COMMUNITIES FOR SENIOR LIFE

Look into Phoebe.

Affiliated with the United Church of Christ



www.phoebe.org ♦ 1-800-453-8814

joining

Faith & Fair Trade

THE UCC COFFEE PROJECT

A partnership of UCC Justice & Witness Ministries and Equal Exchange

COCLA Cooperative member sorting coffee, Quillabamba, Peru

Fundraising with Fair Trade

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

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

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



resources | classifieds

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

BULLETIN BOARD

RETREAT

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

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

BOUND FOR BOSTON? Stay at historic Walker Center. Ideal for group accommodations or B&B. Easy commute to downtown/airport. Phone 617/969.3919; e-mail <reservations@walkerctr.org>; web <walkerctr.org>.

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

RESOURCES

NEW BOOK — “You Are Immortal: The Words And Deeds Of Jesus About Eternal Life: A Postmodern Exploration” by Rev. Richard Batzler. PublishAmerica; <Amazon.com>.

IF YOU'RE CURRENTLY STRUGGLING WITH YOUR FINANCES, HEALTH OR PRAYING FOR A BETTER LIFESTYLE, your prayers can be answered by checking out the best home-based business ever. Call Merrily at 402/439-2657.

MENTAL ILLNESS NETWORK — Visit us on the web <min-ucc.org> and <pathways2promise.org>; send an e-mail to <bob.dell@ecunet.org> or <bryancroushore@hotmail.com>; phone: 866/822-8224, ext. 3838 (toll free).

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

GOD IS STILL LAUGHING I, II or III Catechism Joke Books by Chris Anderson, \$8 plus \$2 S&H. 717/846-9146.

CHOIR ROBES — 51 Teal Academic Apparel Sanctus style polyester robes with teal and white reversible stoles, embroidered with the UCC symbol, in

excellent condition. \$70.00 per robe with stole. Call 623/584-1795 or e-mail <office@desertgardenucc.org>.

COMPELLING BOOK ON OBAMA'S VISION — In “Democracy and Self-Organization: The Change of Which

Barack Obama Speaks,” Dr. Robert Aziz draws on conclusions he reached about our cultural crisis of meaning in The Syndetic Paradigm (2007) to provide unparalleled insight into Obama's politics of change. Read more at <robertaziz.com>.

Retirement,
Never place a period where God has placed a comma,
UPLANDS
www.UplandsVillage.com
Not just a place to live, but a way of living!

Worship & Music Conferences Summer 2009
Three unique conferences that will nurture, enlighten, and motivate those who plan and lead worship.
visit www.presbysmusic.org for details

Montreat June 21-27 and June 28-July 4, 2009 Montreat, NC (two identical weeks)
Theme: “Come to the Waters”

Westminster July 12-17, 2009 New Wilmington, PA
Theme: “Take Heart, Take Hope... Let Us Keep the Feasts”

Mo-Ranch/PAM June 21-26, 2009 Hunt, TX
Theme: “A More Profound Alleluia!
Exploring the holy movement from font to table”

Offering leadership in the areas of worship, music, the arts, and professional concerns

Books for a New Humanity

The First Peace Woman
One thousand years before the time of Jesus the Peace Movement was born through the life of Abishag of Shunem.
ISBN: 0-9722835-4-4 • 345 pages • \$15.00 + S&H

Seeing God through the eyes of his child
In the 21st Century after Jesus we will win World Peace on the same path “Yeshua” discovered in his youth.
ISBN: 1-56315-227-4 • 284 pages • \$11.95 + S&H

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

KYP

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

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

KEEPING YOU POSTED

CLERGY MOVE CENTER®
A specialty division of Stevens Van Lines

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

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

For total peace of mind on your next move, call our team of **AMSA Certified Move Counselors**
Aymi Dittenbir, Kristin Lyons, Sunny Sommer, Jean Warnemuende, or Vicki Bierlein
1-800-248-8313

“John, I’m so delighted with my UCC Gift Annuity, I think you should tell everybody to do one!”

(Margaret Thomas, pictured here with her son John, General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ)

Mrs. Thomas received a bequest from a long-time friend, and chose to use it to establish a life-income gift that will ultimately support theological education for our global partners.

If you would like to benefit your church with a living legacy, and benefit yourself with additional income now, please contact:

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
Financial Development Ministry
(800) 846-6822 • giving@ucc.org

Minimum gift amount \$1,000.



UCC COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES AMONG 'U.S. NEWS AND WORLD REPORT'S' BEST

Thirteen UCC and historically UCC-related colleges and universities have received "U.S. News and World Report's" top 100 rankings for 2009.

U.S. News and World Report collects data from more than 1,400 U.S. colleges and universities and is considered one of the most reliable sources of rankings. Each school's rank within its group of peer institutions is based on the same set of measures.

Seventy-five percent of a school's ranking is based on objective measures of academic quality such as graduation rates. The remaining 25 percent is based on a peer assessment survey. Presidents, provosts and deans of admissions at each school are asked to rate the quality of the academic programs for schools in the same ranking category, including their own.

National liberal arts top 100 rankings included Carleton College (Minn.), 8; Grinnell College (Iowa), 14; and Beloit College (Wis.), 60.

Regional top 100 rankings are divided between schools offering masters and baccalaureate degrees:

- West Masters – Westminster College of Salt Lake City (Utah), 19.
- West Baccalaureate – Rocky Mountain College (Mont.), 8.
- Midwest Masters – Drury University (Mo.), 10; Elmhurst College (Ill.), 13; and Heidelberg College (Ohio), 37.

- Midwest Baccalaureate – Defiance College (Ohio), 43.
- South Masters – Elon University (N.C.), 2; and Piedmont College (Ga.), 59.
- South Baccalaureate – Catawba College (N.C.), 16.
- North Masters – Hood College (Md.), 19.

The editors of U.S. News and World Report stress that rankings are only one of many criteria students should consider in choosing a college. A school's top category ranking does not mean it is the top choice for everyone. They add that prospective student's academic

and professional ambitions, personal preferences, financial resources, and scholastic record, as well as a school's size, atmosphere and location, should play major roles in determining a college choice.

Ranking criteria changed in 2009 in response to two criticisms. First, was the assessment that the subjective peer review did not fairly represent schools working toward improvement. In response, peer reviewers were asked "to nominate up to 10 colleges that are making improvements in academics, faculty, students, campus life, diversity and facilities."

The second criteria modification in this year's review is the inclusion of rankings by high school counselors. Of the 1,600 public schools in the nation, 800 received review criteria for liberal arts colleges, the other 800 received review criteria for national universities.



GET IT ONLINE

The full report is available online at <colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/college>.

BOWLING UNITED INDUSTRIES
Manufacturers Lights Baptistries Steeples
www.BUIchurch.com
1-800-446-7400
P.O. Box 2250 • Danville, Virginia 24541

PEW CUSHIONS

Custom made for any style pew. Fine fabrics, excellent colors, competitively priced!

On your next seating project, contact Waggoners, the cushion specialists!

Call today!
TOLL FREE: (800) 396-7555
FAX: (620) 662-0610

Waggoners, Inc.
www.pewcushions.com

WHAT IS GOD'S PERSPECTIVE ON AMERICA'S FINANCIAL MELTDOWN?

Contact Focus Renewal Ministries for details

A Holy Spirit directed renewal ministry in the UCC

firmucc@aol.com
www.focusrenewalministries.org

POB 330, Sassamansville, PA 19472

GoodPreacher.com

**Desmond Tutu
Walter Brueggemann
Otis Moss III
Kenneth Samuel
and many more!**

May 18-22, 2009, Atlanta

Check out **GoodPreacher Awards!**

WYDEN YOUR HORIZONS!

"It's never a lack of money. It's a lack of creativity and faith that limits our potential."

No Pressure Process UCC

Increase Giving Up To 12 Times



Call Toll-Free 888-245-5826

Capital Campaigns for Renovations – New Facilities

VanderWyden Church Financial Consultants, Inc.

Email: Bill@WydenYourHorizons.com

www.WydenYourHorizons.com

AUTHOR, EDUCATOR THROCKMORTON DEAD AT 87

Dr. Burton Throckmorton, who taught at the UCC's Bangor Theological Seminary, died Jan. 3, 2009 at the age of 87. Throckmorton was the Hayes professor of New Testament Language and Literature at BTS for 35 years. He was the author of several books, most notably, "Gospel Parallels," which has been used as a teaching tool in theological schools for more than 50 years.

PASTORAL CHANGES

- Appel, K. Shayna**, to Cong. UCC, Townsend, MA
- Bays, Martha** to Cong. UCC, Killingworth, CT
- Beinema, Ronald** to Highland Lake Cong. UCC, Westbrook, ME
- Bradt, Carra** to Brattleboro Centre UCC, VT
- Braun, Jeffrey D.** to First Cong. UCC, Cheshire, CT
- Chapola, Ezra** to Stevens Ave. Cong. UCC, Portland, ME
- Clark, Lynda** to Faith UCC, Indianapolis, IN
- Cook-Kittredge, Susan E.** to chaplaincy
- Coons, Martha** to interim, St. Pauls UCC, Menomonee Falls, WI
- Cran, Kim** to First Cong. UCC, Boise, ID
- Danneberger, David** to Shiloh UCC, York, PA
- Druckenmiller, Narda** to UCC, Rebersburg, PA
- Ferriss, Gregory S.** to St. John's UCC, Fountain City, WI
- Haines, Franklin** to First Cong. UCC, Onkema, MI
- Harvey, Diane** to Pride's Corner Cong. UCC, Westbrook, ME
- Horgan, Judith** to First Cong. UCC, Lyndonville, VT
- Keefe, Rachael A.** to chaplaincy
- Kleiman, Kristen J.** to First Cong. UCC, Bristol, CT
- Kuhn, Linda** to Emmanuel UCC, Oshkosh, WI
- Laviola, Marisa** to First Cong. UCC, Morrisville, VT
- Lawrence, Catherine** to Zion UCC, Bellevue, OH
- Lepak, Cheryl** to Salem Plank Road UCC, Plymouth, WI
- Macleod, Andrew E.** to Smith Memorial UCC, Hillsboro, NH
- Marshall, Mary B.** to South Cong. UCC, Middletown, CT
- Meade, Fred W.** to Cong. UCC, N. Falmouth, MA
- Modahl, Craig** to First Cong. UCC, Port Washington, WI
- Moore, Douglas** to retirement
- Proudfoot, Elizabeth** to interim, St. Stephen UCC, Sandusky, OH
- Reed, Robin** to Hope UCC, Sturgeon Bay, WI
- Serio, Louis A.** to hospice chaplain
- Shriver, Edwin** to St. John's UCC, Dover, OH
- Steeves, Ian F.** to Cong. UCC, Falmouth, ME
- Tyler, Ross N.** to St. John's UCC, Indianapolis, IN
- Wilson, Ward** to retirement
- White, Derek** to First Cong. UCC, Kennebunkport, ME
- Whiteman, Karl K.** to Union Memorial UCC, Milford, IA
- Youngkin, William C.** to interim, St. Paul UCC, New Bremen, OH

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

CLERGY DEATHS

- Campbell, Alexander**, 83, 11/8/2008
- Canaday, Wilbur D.**, 87, 11/4/2008
- Cudworth, Ava L.**, 65, 10/7/2008
- Dalbeck, Gordon E.**, 85, 11/11/2008
- Davis, James M.**, 94, 10/10/2008
- Dudley, Joseph A.**, 68, 11/8/2008
- Jobe, Robert W.**, 57, 11/3/2008
- King, Harry C.**, 76, 11/18/2008
- Lyman, Joseph B.**, 70, 10/30/2008
- Smith, Rolland C.**, 91, 11/17/2008
- Yarborough, John A.**, 79, 11/13/2008
- Elk, Curtis Allen**, 56, 12/25/2008
- Evans, Billy E.**, 83, 11/27/2008
- Griffin, Arthur D.**, 79, 12/5/2008
- Halstead, George W.**, 96, 12/13/2008
- Johnson, Arden L.**, 81, 11/22/2008
- Mitchell, William D.**, 80, 12/10/2008
- Rivera-Rodriguez, Antonio**, 86, 12/1/2008
- Sadleir, Wilbur B.**, 85, 12/27/2008
- Schlicher, Donald W.**, 96, 12/30/2008
- Wirt, Sherwood E.**, 97, 11/8/2008
- Woods, Clyde B.**, 94, 4/29/2007
- Wulfekuehler, Edward G.**, 80, 11/26/2008

Clergy death information is provided by The Pension Boards.

KEEPING YOU POSTED KYP

All the people.

You loved the old KYP.
You'll love the new KYe-P,
the UCC's weekly e-zine, delivered to your inbox every Tuesday.

Start your free subscription by signing up today at ucc.org/keeping-you-eposted.

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Oikocredit offers hope to start-up businesses in developing world

ROSY OUTLOOK



Saida Caizalitin, a farmer at the Nevado Ecuador rose farm, bundles flowers for sale. Nevado Ecuador is a cooperative initiated with funding from Oikocredit.

photo provided

Kiva microlending targets individual needs

Kiva is an online microlending organization based in San Francisco that has enjoyed a spike in popularity after being featured on "Oprah" and in former President Bill Clinton's 2007 book, "Giving." The website offers a hands-on venue where investors can make small microloans, as little as \$25, to entrepreneurs living in third-world countries.

Lenders choose the recipient after reading through profiles that include a photo of the entrepreneur and a brief description of their business. Kiva investors can narrow their search based on region of the world or type of business. Many of the businesses are agricultural, while others are retail or merchandise based.

Kiva's unique characteristic is that it allows the online lender to choose their own recipient; track the entrepreneur as the loan is received; then track repayment of the loan in monthly increments at no interest.

The idea is a popular one: Just a week after Christmas, Kiva announced on its website that in that week alone, a loan was made every 26 seconds. The result was 14,000 new lenders funding 2,808 entrepreneurs. Total amount lent in just one week: \$968,325.

Stephen Wilmarth, a member of **Westbrook (Conn.) Congregational UCC**, was on the church's Outreach Committee when the congregation chose to make microloans through Kiva. To date, the congregation has

impacted at least 26 businesses.

"We're a small church, and we do a lot of community-based, hands-on projects," says Wilmarth. "I know other churches in the UCC family are faced with similar situations. They want to do good deeds on a community basis. Kiva feels like community, because you can actually see and track the person you are giving to, and have a dialogue with him or her," he says. "The web-based application makes it easy to understand the concept and embrace it."

Wilmarth, a semi-retired educator, has formed a non-profit foundation of his own to build schools and learning communities in northwest China. "My wife and I are pretty hands-on people," says Wilmarth. "We don't stand still when it comes to taking action on things we think are the right things to do."

Wilmarth's experience teaching young people about web-based technology makes him a huge fan of sites such as Kiva, which offers a real-life lesson in responsible investing. In his opinion, Kiva offers a unique experience for Sunday School classes and youth groups. "Young people can play the role of a small venture capitalist [using Kiva]. They can invest in somebody with [as little as] \$25, then can communicate with them, write e-mails, ask how to help on an advisory basis. [Young people] are more naturally inclined to use the tools where they could communicate more directly with the people receiving the loans.

"Lord knows, there are enough good

in many impoverished countries, the logistics of borrowing money poses difficult obstacles. Say, for example, a young farmer from Cambodia walks into a bank and wants to borrow money to buy chickens and materials for a chicken coop. For one thing, he may not have money to start an account; nor does he have collateral to offer. In many cases, he might even be illiterate and unable to read the necessary forms and paperwork. Borrowing from local loan sharks is an option, but only at profit-gouging interest rates.

Microfinance, which provides financial services to low-income clients, is a way that the working poor worldwide can have a chance to improve their lifestyle without just receiving a handout. More than a loan, microloans can break the cycle of poverty, offering low- or no-interest loans to give marginalized workers the means to pave their way to financial independence. At the same time, they can familiarize themselves with the fundamentals of investment, savings, sustainability and insurance.

The UCC is no stranger to the concept of microfinance and its effect on poverty. In 2003 at General Synod 24 in Minneapolis, the UCC adopted a resolution to enter into partnership with Oikocredit USA. Oikocredit is an international, privately owned cooperative society that has become one of the largest financiers of its kind in the microfinance world. It has a 30-year history of offering investors a way to put their money into ethical business opportunities, while earning a modest 2 percent return on their investment.

Oikocredit (from the classical Greek word "*oikos*," meaning "house, community or world" and the Latin "*credere*," meaning "to believe") reaches across the world with regional offices in Latin America, Asia, Africa, Central Europe and Eastern Europe. Oikocredit U.S. offices are in Washington D.C.; its executive director is Terry Provance, who happens to be an ordained UCC minister.

Although Oikocredit is not a faith-based institution, its values and mission appeal to faith-based communities. UCC investors, ranging from conferences and associations to local congregations, or mission-minded individuals, are an important part of the microloan process. Investors can specify a region of the world where they'd like their funds to go. In turn, Oikocredit pools the capital and distributes it through local microloan institutions, which choose loan recipients based on need. In 2007, Oikocredit USA surpassed its goal of raising \$4 million. For 2008, an even higher goal of \$5 million was set. The company's recent launch on MicroPlace, an online platform of eBay, al-

causes to give to; there's no shortage of many organizations willing to take a check as a contribution," says Wilmarth. Making people comfortable with using a credit card online can be challenging (Kiva uses PayPal), but Wilmarth feels confident that the wariness and skepticism of online lending will eventually wear off.

"Of course you've got to be careful, you've got to treat it with a degree of seriousness and critical thinking that's necessary with anything you do," he says. "But what's happened on Wall Street just goes to show, just because somebody's got an MBA and a fancy office, doesn't necessarily mean they're honest."

lows investors to make online payments. The expected result is increased investments.

Many UCC churches, such as **Bellevue (Wash.) First Congregational UCC**, have chosen to devote a sizable portion of their yearly outreach budget to Oikocredit for microloan disbursal. Helen Leuzzi, Bellevue's Outreach Chair, says Oikocredit met her church's requirement to find a global outreach interest that balanced its active local involvement in a homelessness initiative.

Although the Bellevue congregation, like many, has earmarked mission funds for Oikocredit, Leuzzi hopes that the church will soon invest more funds that are otherwise sitting dormant, to better the world. "Say a church is sitting on money set aside for a building project that's five years out," she says. "That money, instead of sitting in our bank, could be earning up to 2 percent interest and helping society; then we get the money back when we need it."

And through the work of Leuzzi and other church and community members, more people are learning about microfinance. Leuzzi sits on the board for Oikocredit Northwest Support Association, a Seattle-based interfaith group whose sole purpose is to educate the public about Oikocredit.

Leuzzi finds that most people have a basic understanding that microloans are to start businesses for people living in third-world countries. "But what they may not know is that Oikocredit has team leaders out in each of these countries who help educate the loan borrower on how to manage their finances and grow their business."

Leuzzi especially embraces the concept behind the cooperatives formed by several borrowers, creating a community of encouragement and fiscal responsibility. "If there's one woman who wants to start a sweater-knitting business, she's encouraged to group up with others, and they all support each other. They become invested in each other's successes.

"This is a way to make our saved money active in the world. That's what got us hooked on Oikocredit."

Kiva's strength lies in the fact that lenders are not only giving the money, but tracking it, recovering it, then reinvesting it.

"It's a cycle that's in and of itself a financial management lesson," says Wilmarth. "And it's truly a lesson that service is its own reward. Giving in the community is sort of a fundamental precept of operating in this new economy."

For more information visit <kiva.org>.

