



a publication of the
United Church of Christ
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God's community needs gifts of clergy, laity

FROM THE COLLEGIUM



Linda Jaramillo

God willing, by the time you read this, I will be an ordained minister in the UCC. Those who have been on this journey with me will agree that I resisted this call for many years. I believed then, and still do, that the ministry of the laity is essential for a thriving church. Having said that, one would question why I decided to enter seminary and seek ordination.

Having grown up in Roman Catholic Church, I accepted Catholic teachings and continue to appreciate many of the rituals that shaped my faith life. However, as I grew older, I began to question the gender restrictions regarding ordained ministry. I was not involved in the church as a Catholic laywoman for many reasons but primarily because I disagreed with so many of the church's policies.

It was not until I took a leap of faith, left the Catholic Church and joined the UCC that I began to discover that the priesthood was for all believers. I joined the UCC 23 years ago because I discovered that — as a laywoman — I could be involved and offer my gifts to the church regardless of my ecclesiastical standing. I have served this church as a laywoman for over 20 years. I believe it is a highly respected and deeply appreciated role in most settings of the church.

But, after more than two decades of committed and faithful service to the church as a laywoman, I could no longer ignore God's call to ordained ministry. While I still highly respect and believe in the priesthood of all believers, I realized that it was irresponsible of me to ignore my calling. God has blessed me with gifts that I must explore and share.

I entered seminary at the Northwest House of Theological Studies in Salem, Ore., in the fall of 2001, transferred to and graduated from UCC-related Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, Calif., in May 2005.

The process of spiritual liberation has been a challenging one, but very healing. Although, what I've discovered is that laypersons do not have the same set of restrictions or expectations as ordained persons. For one thing, they are far more able to freely express theological opinions and perspectives with a lower risk of institutional rejection. Regardless, I am now even more convinced that I am called to be a member and minister of the UCC.

I continue to be grateful for our efforts to be the beloved community that is in love with God and all of God's creation — making it real through its prophetic witness. Generally, the UCC demonstrates a spirit of re-creation and re-formation evidenced in our willingness to be in the community and respond theologically to the context and culture of our times.

It will be a privilege and honor to serve as an ordained minister in this beloved church.

The Rev. Linda Jaramillo — the first Hispanic to serve as a member of the UCC's five-person Collegium of Officers — began a four-year term as executive minister of Justice and Witness Ministries on Oct. 1. She was ordained to Christian ministry in the UCC on Nov. 13 during the closing worship service at a racial justice convocation in Portland, Ore., honoring the retirement of the Rev. Héctor E. López.

“While I still highly respect and believe in the priesthood of all believers, I realized that it was irresponsible of me to ignore my calling.”

► When we turn 50

While some UCC congregations can easily trace their origins back as early as 1620, the UCC in its present form emerged in 1957. That unique history enables our church to make claim to being both the oldest and the youngest Protestant body in North America.

With an eye on its most-recent denominational incarnation, planning for the UCC's 50th anniversary is well underway. The golden anniversary theme, “Let it Shine” — unveiled at the 2005 General Synod in Atlanta — speaks to the biblical imperative to witness boldly to our faith.

Beginning with All Saints Day 2006, the year-long observance will include a central celebration at the next General Synod, June 22-26, 2007, in Hartford, Conn., where planners hope each of the UCC's 5,750 congregations will send at least four representatives.

The 50th Anniversary Committee's already announced plans include church-wide celebrations on All Saints Sundays in 2006 and 2007; resources, graphics, templates and a website/blog to help local churches interpret and celebrate the anniversary year; promotional materials for Conference Annual Meetings, beginning in spring 2006; a new filmed documentary and a commemorative publication that look back over the past half century and survey future possibilities; and a national NBC-TV special to air on Easter Sunday 2007.

Learn more at ucc.org/50/index.

► Blessing 'Blue Christmas'

Recognizing that natural disasters have been particularly intense during the past year, the UCC's Worship and Education Ministry Team has developed a series of holiday worship liturgies, prayers and hymns that allow room for lament, as well as praise, this Christmas.

“In our worshiping communities are people who have lost loved ones, who themselves have suffered through disaster and those whose lives have been filled with grief,” reads an introductory page at the UCC's website. “... For all of us in the UCC as we approach the holiday season, it is certainly a time to consider these special circumstances as we prepare our worship services.”

Resources include a “Christmas Service of Remembrance” and new hymn texts, such as “Homes That Once Held Joy and Laughter,” “The Dove Once Free of Ark and Cage” and “When the Winds Rage All Around Us.”

Learn more at ucc.org/worship/disaster.



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SHORTHAND



► You look mahvelous!

This Christmas, if too much pumpkin pie leads you to consider some “weighty” resolutions, the UCC's Pension Boards offers some assistance.

A new healthy-living website helps UCC employees, spouses/partners and family members to learn more about health and well-being, identify potential risks, inventory current practices and set a few goals.

Users begin their cyber-based wellness journey with an online assessment that asks questions about personal and family health history, physical activity, food choices, stress management, medication use and more. Operated by a third-party vendor, the secured site enables your cholesterol count to stay confidential — even from the Pension Boards — and a password-protected user name enables input to stay secret, yet stored for your return visits.

The purpose is to help you track, improve and inspire your journey toward a better you. But, if that's not incentive enough, accumulated “wellness credits” — just for using the site — can result in cash at year's end. Check it out at ucc.healthstewards.org.

► Books galore, and up to 80 percent off!

The UCC's Pilgrim Press — the oldest book publisher in North America — has been hoarding more books than a musty literature professor. And now they're trying to unload several thousand or so before Jan. 31.

“Some of our most popular books remain overstocked, and we've got them marked way, way, way down,” says Michael E. Lawrence, Pilgrim's marketing manager. “And most of these are living, breathing, active titles.”

In early November, a price-slashing catalogue — with savings marked at 40-to-80 percent — was mailed to 275,000 existing or potential customers, including all UCC clergy and congregations. It marks the first time that The Pilgrim Press has mounted its own direct-mail marketing campaign, since Pilgrim traditionally has been a behind-the-scenes book wholesaler.

“Instead of giving the discount to [retail] stores to carry our titles, we'll be giving the discount directly to the customers,” Lawrence says.

The new initiative comes at a time when the UCC's book publisher needs a revenue boost. The Pilgrim Press and the financially-sluggish Augsburg/Fortress Company, which had been Pilgrim's contracted sales organization since 2001, parted ways at the end of October, due to less-than-stellar representation. “We're a half-million [dollars] behind in our sales budget,” Lawrence acknowledges.

As of Nov. 1, Pilgrim returned to Westminster/John Knox Press, which once represented The Pilgrim Press' books “and did so far more aggressively,” Lawrence says.

The price-cutting promotion lasts only until Jan. 31, but it's an especially good opportunity to stock up on confirmation and education-related titles. A free copy of the special catalogue is available by calling 800/537-3394.

► 'More like ministry'

The UCC Office Support Staff Network is sponsoring its 19th annual national conference, “Many Paths, One Goal,” April 27-30, 2006, at the UCC's Church House in Cleveland. The Rev. Benjamin Griffin, a former president of UCC-related Andover-Newton Theological School and UCC-related United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities, will be the keynote speaker.

“[UCCOSSN] is for anyone who does office support for the church, including volunteers,” says Patty Gerboc, church secretary at Old South UCC in Kirtland, Ohio, and a member of the conference planning committee. “For me, my job is much more like ministry than it is work.”

Learn more at uccossn.org.

Stillspeaking's television ad buy postponed until March

By J. Bennett Guess

Despite a last-minute surge in contributions from churches and individuals — along with some hefty financial leverage from national ministries — the UCC's plan for a \$2 million national advertising buy in Advent has been put on hold until March 1, the beginning of the Lenten/Easter season.

The decision was characterized as “disappointing” by General Minister and President John H. Thomas during an evening conference call on Nov. 2 with leaders of the UCC's five distinct governing boards. Thomas said the UCC's five-person Collegium of Officers had met earlier that day and agreed it better to postpone the extensive ad buy for three months rather than push ahead despite some unanswered financial questions.

In short, the church ran out of time. Complicated financing issues were butting against deadlines for completing the ad buy for December. And, to make matters even more nerve-wracking, the new 30-second ad itself was still in production on Nov. 2, even as UCC groups were anticipating a glimpse of the new commercial at Stillspeaking's All Saints Celebrations held Nov. 6-7.

Church leaders felt more time is needed for the UCC's 80-member Executive Council to wrestle with how “loans” from various church settings to the Stillspeaking Initiative — many made during the program's infancy — would eventually be repaid.

Collegium members said accepting the latest financial packages went beyond their decision-making purview, because some of the money came attached with quite-specific repayment terms — agreements that could have tied the Executive Council's hands to a 10-year financial commitment.

Despite the delay, significant fundraising progress was made toward reaching the \$2.5 million needed to produce the new commercial and to purchase a comprehensive package of television air time. Thomas said “creative minds” would be working to keep the momentum of the UCC's identity campaign alive through Advent — perhaps with a renewed emphasis on radio and web advertising, as well as grassroots initiatives — and that a Lenten television run looked likely, since more time is now available to resolve governance issues.

Announced by the Stillspeaking Initiative at General Synod 25 in July, the campaign had hoped to raise \$1.5 million from churches and individuals by mid-October. That goal, however, became impacted by the church's widespread financial response to Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma, when church leaders announced a \$3 million “Hope Shall Bloom” disaster relief initiative in September.

Stillspeaking Coordinator Ron Buford, who has praised the church's generous outpouring for hurricane recovery, believed it was “inappropriate” to raise money for Stillspeaking in September — despite congrega-

tions' widespread commitment to the identity campaign — because the church's attention was rightly focused on responding to basic human needs.

In October, however, churches and individuals began contributing more earnestly to the UCC's next national advertising buy. By Nov. 1, approximately \$730,000 had been gathered toward reaching a downsized \$1 million goal needed to satisfy a matching \$1 million grant from the UCC's Local Church Ministries, the largest of the UCC's four national Covenanted Ministries.

Meanwhile, despite the apparent fundraising shortfall, Justice and Witness Ministries agreed in late October to contribute up to \$280,000 to help push the \$730,000 grassroots total over the \$1 million mark. And to help the campaign reach the \$2.5 million needed, Wider Church Ministries' Executive Committee consented to a \$750,000 line of credit to match any in-hand contributions.

Yet, both LCM's grant and WCM's loan came with provisions requiring that previous loans from the two national entities be repaid, beginning in 2008, over a 10-year span. Therefore, the Collegium of Officers felt it inappropriate for them to accept the money, much less consent to specific terms, when it was the Executive Council that would be assuming the indebtedness. The Collegium also recognized that the repayment issue went beyond concerns voiced by LCM and WCM, since other entities — such as Conferences — had also made loans to Stillspeaking.

“Repayment,” while yet to be specified, basically amounts to a future plan to alter allocation amounts from Our Church's Wider Mission, the UCC's common purse for mission and ministry. At the outset of the Stillspeaking Initiative, loans were to be repaid out of increased contributions to OCWM, which church leaders are hoping will be generated by the UCC's enhanced identity and evangelism effort.

When eventually launched, the UCC's \$2 million national television run — the church's third and largest to date — will air in English and Spanish and is expected to reach 60 to 65 percent of the U.S. population through a combination of broadcast and cable network ads.

► ‘BOUNCER’ WINS BIG

The UCC's “bouncer” television commercial, which aired nationally in December 2004 and March 2005, has received one of the advertising industry's most significant honors.

The Association of National Advertisers awarded the UCC with its 2005 Multicultural Excellence Award. The church bested fellow finalists MasterCard and Microsoft to receive the honor, presented Nov. 8 at ANA's multicultural advertising conference in Miami, Fla.

Read the full story at news.ucc.org.

‘We needed something to bring back our focus’

Once-struggling church ‘inspired’ by its Hurricane Katrina response

On Sept. 4, the Sunday after Hurricane Katrina's landfall, Ohio's Andover UCC was eager to respond.

Preaching to his rural, 80-member congregation, the Rev. Scott Ressler said he felt “a real urging from God to challenge the congregation to do something extraordinary.”

At the close of worship, the church's offering plates were filled with \$1,266 in gifts designated for the UCC's Hope Shall Bloom hurricane recovery fund. But that was just the beginning.

“Our congregation received help from the Western Reserve Association's Mission Priorities Working Group many years ago at a time when [the church] was struggling to survive,” Ressler said. “I spoke with [the trustees and church council] and suggested to them that it was time that we gave back in gratitude by helping others in need.”

Although he didn't suggest a specific monetary goal, the trustees met and suggested the church's members raise \$7,500, an amount that would be matched dollar for dollar from the church's reserves. Later that night, however, the church council decided to up the goal to \$10,000 — with the same matching formula — making it possible that this small church could contribute a big \$20,000 check.

“While there was excitement, there was also a sense that the goal, while impressive, was a bit out of reach,” Ressler said. But by Oct. 9, the campaign's official ending date, members had contributed \$7,500 — before the match.

“However, during the next week an individual from the church approached me saying that she wanted to make up the difference,” Ressler said, “saying she felt called and inspired by God to help the church

reach the goal, insisting though that the gift be anonymous.”

On the next Sunday, the ceremonial \$15,000 check — which had been celebrated the Sunday prior — was torn into pieces, making way for the new, larger \$20,000 goal-reaching check to be commissioned for hurricane recovery.

“What was the driving force in the campaign?” the pastor reflected. “An urgent need for our sisters and brothers in the Gulf Coast, and because Hope Shall Bloom guaranteed that 100 percent of the donations would go to the affected area.”

As of Oct. 26, Andover UCC's gift was the largest contribution of any church in Ohio, an impressive stat for a church that averages only 50 in attendance each Sunday.

“I believe that we were inspired to give by each other,” the pastor said. “It's improved our self-esteem significantly, and it has showed us what can be done when God calls us to be courageous and bold.”

Organized in 1832, the church had reached a membership peak of 200 in the 1960s, but it nearly closed its doors due to decline in the 1990s. But today, the church is stronger, has attracted younger, more-diverse members, and has great hope for the future. The pastor says part of the credit is due to its strengthened denominational ties during the past five years.

“We lost more than a few families and individuals following the equality-in-marriage proposal approved at the last General Synod,” Ressler said. “We needed something to bring back our focus, to help us realize that our mission is to proclaim a radical Gospel as we help others, whether they live in our neighborhood or thousands of miles away. The congregation has never given so unselfishly.”

SIXTEEN CHURCHES WITHDRAW SINCE JULY

Dallas' Cathedral of Hope, amid others, seeks UCC affiliation

The 4,300-member Cathedral of Hope in Dallas, Texas, has voted overwhelmingly to seek denominational affiliation with the UCC.

On Oct. 30, during a congregational vote, 94 percent of voting members expressed support for UCC affiliation. The church's decision now awaits response from the UCC's North Texas Association, which is the denomination's setting charged with taking up a request for “congregational standing.”

“The UCC has long been at the forefront of societal change, most recently, of course, by becoming the first mainstream denomination to support equal marriage rights for same-gender couples,” said the Rev. Jo Hudson, an ordained UCC minister who serves as senior pastor and rector of the Cathedral. “Their values are our values, and we look forward to joining in partnership and continuing the work for which God has called us together.”

Ironically, at a time when UCC leaders are conceding that an estimated 20 congregations are likely to leave the denomination in response

to the General Synod's equal-marriage decision in July, the church also is attracting interest from existing congregations in unprecedented numbers. In October, as many as five churches officially joined the UCC, and at least 12 more congregations are actively pursuing affiliation, according to the UCC's Evangelism Ministry Team.

Meanwhile, United Church News has confirmed that, as of Nov. 4, at least 16 congregations, representing nine of the UCC's 39 Conferences, have officially voted to withdraw from the denomination since July.

Cathedral of Hope's decision comes amid speculation that two other large-membership churches will consider joining the UCC in 2006. In Minneapolis, the 2,000-member Plymouth Congregational Church has planned forums about the UCC in anticipation of a May 2006 congregational vote. And, in Tulsa, Okla., the Higher Dimensions Family Church — a charismatic, racially-integrated mega-church founded 25 years ago by Oral Roberts Evangelistic Ministries — has made

known its interest in UCC affiliation. The church's founding pastor, Bishop Carlton D. Pearson, has indicated his enthusiasm for the UCC at recent gatherings of the Northern California-Nevada Conference and the Kansas-Oklahoma Conference.

If Dallas' Cathedral of Hope receives congregational standing, it would become the UCC's third-largest congregation, just ahead of **First Community UCC in Columbus, Ohio**, with 4,124 members. The 9,000-member **Trinity UCC in Chicago** is the UCC's largest, followed by the 5,500-member **Victory UCC in Stone Mountain, Ga.**

The Cathedral of Hope also would become the largest in the UCC's South Central Conference, which currently has 13,600 members in 85 congregations.

Touted as “the world's largest liberal Christian church with a primary outreach to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people,” the Cathedral of Hope, which left the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches in 2002, first voted to begin exploring UCC affiliation in 1997.

A 'QUITE-ESSENTIAL MISSION' FOR THE CHURCH

Sticking with UCC Insurance Board is one more way to help with disaster relief

“I found it encouraging that a congregation's determination to remain fully devoted to the church's insurance program could actually be an additional, loving response to the Gulf Coast hurricanes — and one more way that we can remain committed to each other.”


 NEVER
OURSELVES
ALONE


J. Bennett Guess
Editor

In my native Kentucky, both during and after seminary, I served as pastor in several tiny, rural places over a four-year period — first, in Smith's Grove, then in Smithland, followed lastly by Smith Mills.

How by chance, I still wonder, did a young preacher get that kind of quirky, coincidental luck? God called me to “smithereens,” literally.

In Smithland, my four-point charge included a wood-frame church remotely nestled more than four miles down a dead-end, gravel-turned-dirt road. No one had a key to the building, because the doors were never locked. In the winter, it was heated by a pot-belly stove complete with crude wires holding up rusty ventilation pipes. Incidentally, there was no fire hydrant — much less a fire station — within 20 miles of the premises.

I recently found myself thinking about that old country church, when I heard Cathy Green, on behalf of the UCC Insurance Board, speaking about the difficulties that many churches have when obtaining — and trying to hold onto — adequate property and liability insurance. It was for this very reason that UCCIB was born in the early 1980s, because a

group of UCC churches believed it should be a basic, nitty-gritty aspect of denominational life: No church should be left behind.

Without the likes of UCCIB, “red lining” by secular insurance companies still renders many congregations effectively “uninsurable,” because their buildings are located in rural areas, inner cities or along a coastline. Even a church's distance away from a fire station or hydrant, Green points out, can cause difficulties.

Moreover, in the aftermath of the clergy sexual abuse scandal, it's become nearly impossible — as well as cost prohibitive — for many churches to obtain adequate liability coverage for pastors, lay leaders and volunteers. Thankfully, UCCIB not only covers on-site liability issues, it provides a blanket policy that extends to off-site church activities as well.

During the past two years, however, UCCIB has found itself financially “pummeled” by natural disasters, explains the Rev. Bennie E. Whiten Jr., the board's new interim director. Hurricane-related losses, due largely to 108 disaster-related claims totaling more than \$4 million in 2004 alone, have left UCCIB with less-than-desired cash reserves.

Even worse, claims related to this year's devastating hurricanes, as well as an upward trend for damage-related claims in general, are expected to cause further financial headaches.

That's why, after two years without premium increases, UCCIB is finding it necessary to raise its rates in 2006. During this time of hefty energy costs coupled with a somewhat-

sluggish economy, UCCIB's hike is likely to be unwelcome budgetary news for local church trustees.

Unfortunately, even if understandably, some better-positioned churches may find it enticing to chase after smaller premiums offered by secular providers, leaving UCCIB's remaining churches with a greater share of the disaster-laden difficulties.

Until I heard Green's presentation at the UCC's Executive Council meeting in October, I had never before considered the notion that rather-boring “insurance” could actually be viewed as quite-essential “mission.” I found it encouraging that a congregation's determination to remain fully devoted to the church's insurance program could actually be an additional, loving response to the Gulf Coast hurricanes — and one more way that we can remain committed to each other. Not a very glamorous way, to be sure, but a significant way none the less.

There are at least 100 reasons why churches insist they can go it better alone. In the beginning, at least, each could find a couple of budget lines to cut, a few savings here and there. “I have no need of you,” so jests St. Paul in his biblical soliloquy on Christian unity.

But why run the race with perseverance if you're the only one to complete it?

Instead, upon Christ's rock we will build our church. It's the more excellent way, I choose to believe. And, together, not even the gates of the insurance industry shall prevail against it. Not even in Smithland.



LETTERS

“Our oneness in Christ as a denomination (clearly!) is not from a uniformity of belief, but from a unity in redemption by our loving Savior. This unity requires us to accept each other as siblings and to attempt to understand each other.”

CPE learning is ‘transformative’

Thank you for the articles about Clinical Pastoral Education [Across the UCC, Oct./Nov.]. I became a CPE supervisor in 1991 because I experienced the learning process as so transformative. I now supervise a community- and congregation-based program that enables pastors of various ages or stages to use CPE for continuing education. It can be helpful to have a peer group and supervisor for support when going through a pastoral transition, church conflict or building a new building. Thanks for supporting our programs by writing about them.

The Rev. Pam Roberts
Samaritan Counseling and Education Center
Colorado Springs, Colo.

‘Division breaks my heart’

Our local UCC church has been a constant blessing in our lives for about 12 years now. So, it breaks my heart to read of the division in the UCC over the issue of gay marriage.

Personally, one of UCC's traits that first won my heart and continues to hold my loyalty for so many years is not only the UCC's integrity and decency, but its shared commitment to inclusiveness.

At a time when so many are making a joint effort not only to exclude those unlike themselves, but also to force their religious beliefs on a whole nation through legislation and tampering with

the constitution, our church is making a stand!

As Jesus said, love others as you love yourself. This is the teaching of scripture in a nutshell. I am sure if he did not mean all, he would have said so.

Juli Kring
Gethsemane UCC
Houston, Texas

‘Attempt to understand’

I am grateful to The Valleys UCC in Halifax, Pa., for sharing its position on “the institution of traditional marriage.” General Synod has invited us to this dialogue and this congregation is being faithful to its covenant relationships with the churches in its Association and the entire denomination by making clear its understanding of the role of scripture and its testimony on this issue.

I would respectfully suggest, however, that the letter writer's choice of the term “indisputable disagreement” is unfortunate. I accept the term to be a tool of literary emphasis, rather than an indication of an unwillingness to discuss. The nature of the dialogue requires all of us to listen to each other with a sincere ear; this is at least as important as speaking with a sincere voice.

Our oneness in Christ as a denomination (clearly!) is not from a uniformity of belief, but from a unity in redemption by our loving Savior. This unity requires us to accept each other as siblings and to attempt to understand each other.

Ted Goodfleisch
Archwood UCC
Cleveland, Ohio

‘For the like of me...’

We have been married for 51 years and, for the like of me, I can not see how same-sex marriage would affect me or the community at large.

Of course, any faith can make up rules for their congregation. Many faiths have ceremonies to celebrate marriage; but you are not married until the state issues a marriage license. Only the state can issue marriage licenses.

The U.S. Constitution states “All men are created equal.” There is no sex discrimination in this statement. I can find nothing in the law outlawing same-sex marriages. But since marriage is the function of the state; faith can not be used to define marriage as this would break state-religion separation. United States is agnostic but not atheistic.

Charles Wilkins
Fremont (Calif.) Congregational UCC

DNA molecule is work of creator

I was distressed by the angry letter attacking intelligent design as scientifically bogus [Oct./Nov.]. I take strong exception to the assertion that the basic premise of intelligent design is, “We can't explain it, so it's supernatural.”

This is a caricature of the intelligent design movement. It arose among prominent biochemists who were frustrated by the inability of Darwinian theory to explain the rise of the enormously complex structures of the cell, including the three billion digital codes in the DNA molecule. The most reasonable explanation is that the cell did not arise by chance, but is the work of a transcendent designer.

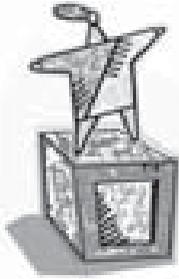
The Rev. James D. Edwards
Stow (Ohio) Community UCC

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

SOAPBOX

Wrangling over Wal-Mart

Readers responded in large numbers to October-November's centerstage article, "Justice and Witness Ministries endorses Wal-Mart Week of Action" and the editor's related column, "Global 'Wal-Martization' is sign, symbol of poverty-trending economy." Here's just a small sample of your comments:



Too urban, too late

Rural communities have been negatively affected by Wal-Mart's policies for decades, with nary a peep from UCC leadership. But apparently, this issue has now come to the attention of the national church when Wal-Mart moved into urban communities like Cleveland and Chicago. In the decades it took for the national church to become aware of Wal-Mart's policies, many rural communities have sacrificed their downtowns to Wal-Mart's undercutting of local businesses.

I suppose I should be glad that the UCC is concerned about the cost of Wal-Mart to communities, but much of the damage has been done and, for many rural communities, it's too late to undo it.

The UCC's reticence to speak out about corporate agriculture and other problems (because we love our cheap meat!) is disappointing at best. I pray for the day when UCC leaders will be as concerned for the people of Eagle Grove, Iowa, as it is for Chicago or Cleveland.

The Rev. Lisa A. Hadler
Ottawa, Ill.

'Wal-Mart deserves praise'

While I am no fan of corporate greed, I was a bit disappointed with the "party line" as I understood it towards Wal-Mart. Is it fair to compare a discount retailer to General Motors, a manufacturer? The problems with our economy run a lot deeper than your article suggests.

Furthermore, I think Wal-Mart deserves praise for its actions during the early days of the crisis in New Orleans. Wal-Mart trucks were on the scene days before the federal government or the non-profits. They alleviated a lot of suffering and potentially even saved lives (I am thinking of the diabetics who needed ice for their insulin.)

I hope the picture of Wal-Mart presented during "Wal-Mart Week of Action" will be more balanced.

Jean Graves
Phillipus UCC
Cincinnati, Ohio

Seekonk, Take 1: 'I'll raise the issue'

Thanks so much for the great article on Wal-Mart and the constructive approach to working for change. I am co-chair of our church's mission and social action committee. At our next meeting I will raise the issue of hosting a screening of "The Wal-Mart Movie." Great work!

Bonnie DeBlois
Seekonk (Mass.) Congregational UCC

Seekonk, Take 2: 'Scrap the bashing'

You should have heeded that moment of indecision and scrapped the Wal-Mart bashing article and editorial comment. Why not be thankful that Wal-Mart donated \$17 million to the Katrina relief? The fact that the CEO of Wal-Mart makes that much money is irrelevant. There are hundreds of CEOs who make that much, plus.

Wal-Mart provides jobs for mostly unskilled labor. Granted, they are not the best paying jobs, but it is better than no job at all. No one is forced to work there or shop there, but obviously thousands do both.

Please spend your time, space and money promoting the UCC, not demeaning the largest corporation in the world.

Michael Dunn
Seekonk (Mass.) Congregational UCC

UCC's actions 'timely, appropriate'

Our actions to confront the repressive labor tactics and policies of the Wal-Mart corporation are both timely and appropriate. I hope that the Wal-Mart management has been paying attention to our actions against Taco Bell. Admittedly, Wal-Mart is a much larger — indeed the largest — target that we could choose.

I am pleased that our Justice and Witness Ministries has taken a position in this matter. The broader implications of the Wal-Mart policies are that other businesses, whether large or small, will take comfort (and perhaps refuge) in following the Wal-Mart example. Should we wait any longer, the problem will only become more deeply entrenched, and thus harder to reverse. It is also tactically smarter to engage the larger entity, for when we succeed in this matter, the lesser followers will come along.

Roger Dart
Member, Congregational UCC
Deerfield, Ill.

Go after 'big companies'

As a UCC member, I am sorry to see you attacking Wal-Mart. We live in a rural community and have a Wal-Mart near us. As I read the article in United Church News, I got the feeling you are being promoters and frontmen for unions. Yes, at one time unions played an important place for workers, but they have now become so powerful, they are driving companies to say "the heck with it" and either fold up or move to third-world countries. The area we live in is a good example of the many industries that have disappeared and the demands of unions have played a part in that.

As far as the communities Wal-Mart moves into, it does employ many times over what was offered in the areas before, plus shopping at lower prices. Those employees and their families are also able to shop with a discount. Actually, it provides employment for those untrained individuals that otherwise may not have a job opportunity. Wal-Mart also contributes greatly to the tax base of these communities. What the political leaders in those communities do with that is another story, as is evidently a big part of the problem in the New Orleans area.

If the UCC wants to go after big companies, they should focus on the oil companies, pharmaceuticals, insurance companies and clout that unions have on Congress and the economy of our country. These powers have a lot to do with the management of companies and their bottom lines. There is a pecking order here and I think you should begin at the top.

I'm not saying I know the answers to poverty in our country or that Wal-Mart is perfect. There are many parts of what makes up the mess our country is in. I really don't think attacking a successful company is where you should begin.

Janet Brangenberg
Fieldon (Ill.) UCC

'Not one company's fault'

My wife has worked for Wal-Mart for 20 years. She has been a department manager, co-manager, and is currently an assistant manager. Your article is unfair to the many hard working people that continue to work with pride at Wal-Mart.

It is easy to attack and blame a particular corporation, but to say a "union" is the only answer hardly represents balanced logic. It has been documented that unions have kept small businesses from working their way into the world.

Unions still do things the way they did in the early days, through strikes and intimidation. If you are not with them, you are an enemy to be conquered, especially if you are representing potentially large income to the union enterprise.

It is one thing to champion the fight for fair treatment of all people, but it is dirty politics to accuse, try, convict and sentence a single company. Why not go after the oil companies' profits? What about Sears and K-Mart? No, it is not any one company's fault. It is just easy to pick on whoever is the easy target at the moment.

Robert A. Callaway
Hutchinson, Kan.

OVERHEARD



"It's the first time in Ridgefield that there's been such a generous and extensive ecumenical exchange."

— Rabbi Jon Haddon of Temple Shearith Israel, which will be sharing space with **First Congregational UCC in Ridgefield, Conn.**, while the temple undergoes major renovations. (*The News-Times, Danbury, Conn.*)

"If the congregation — whether it's 50 or 250 [members] — can't answer why it's here and what its purpose is, then it's just as dysfunctional as a church that has dwindled to 12."

— The Rev. Barbara G.S. Swartzel Anderson, interim pastor at **Zion UCC in Mount Clemens, Mich.** (*The Saginaw News*)

"It looked like they were trying to furnish a house."

— The Rev. Robert Thompson, pastor of **Corinth Reformed UCC in Hickory, N.C.**, which has been hit repeatedly by thieves who have stolen a sofa, chairs, microwave, TV and other items. A security guard, hired by the congregation, was attacked on Nov. 7 by someone attempting to break into the church. (*WCNC-TV, Charlotte, N.C.*)

"To be a good system, a democracy requires active participation by well-informed citizens."

— Greg Cook, a member of **Plymouth Congregational UCC in Des Moines, Iowa**, in an article about churches involvement in *A Metropolitan Organizing Strategy (AMOS)*, an organization receiving accolades for its grassroots community-organizing successes. (*Des Moines Register*)

"The spirit just kept calling me to live out my life in a different way. It still does, it is a continuous journey."

— The Rev. Collette Jones, associate pastor at **Salem UCC and California UCC in Missouri**, speaking to the California (Mo.) Democrat about her decision to leave a 10-year career as an attorney in the 1990s to go to seminary. She was ordained in 2001.



TABULATIONS

46

The number of UCC work camps since Hurricanes Katrina and Rita that have been scheduled to assist rebuilding in Florida after last year's four hurricanes — Charlie, Francis, Ivan and Jeanne — devastated the state.

Although some churches specialize in immediate, short-term disaster response, the UCC's niche is long-term recovery. Even after the public attention's has diverted to more-recent calamities, the UCC still remembers — and still responds.

During Advent, keep your eyes open and search the sky

“When the paper cranes dropped down in southern Thailand, the wretched came to believe that someone, if not God herself, was on their side.”

COMMENTARY



Kathryn Timpany

Last December, in Thailand, after a surge of violence in the country's Muslim south, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra decided to try something new and novel.

He ordered more than 50 warplanes and C-130 transports filled with soldiers to take to the air — at enormous cost — and drop 120 million folded-paper cranes upon the upturned faces of the hope-drained people who lived there.

One hundred and twenty million Origami cranes. Symbols of peace. Anti-bombs. Folded during the previous two weeks under the encouraging eye of the government by Cabinet ministers, office workers, school children and convicts. Dropped by government-funded troops from government-funded planes. It boggles the imagination.

“Are you the one we have been waiting for, or shall we wait for another?” asked John the Baptizer from prison about Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

John, who had leapt in his mother's womb when

Jesus' birth was announced. John, who watched the dove descend on Jesus when he baptized him. John, who spent most of his ministry preparing the way for God's new ideas for peacemaking. John, who had irritated the sitting governor so much he had found himself dumped in the dungeon.

John wants to know if his first instincts were right. And if so, then when would the world be put right?

Jesus, instead, answers with paper cranes. “Go tell John what's going on: The blind see. The lame walk. Lepers are cleansed. The deaf hear. The dead are raised. The wretched of the earth learn that God is on their side.”

When the paper cranes dropped down in southern Thailand, the wretched came to believe that someone, if not God herself, was on their side. That was the whole point of the mission, after all; the Prime Minister deemed it a success.

“It's hard to remember,” said Stanley Hauerwas, “that Jesus did not come to make us safe, but rather to make us disciples, citizens of God's new age, a kingdom of surprise.”

Go on. Go outside sometime today. Look up. Imagine the sound of airplane engines off in the distance. Imagine their crescendo as they come near



Getty Images | AFP photo

you. Recall the images of the past year: the world's ravaged landscapes, sweet-faced children, anxious women, earnest men. Recall the rancor that suffuses governments. Imagine stagnant wages and rising oil prices and evaporating pensions. Think about whatever scares you the most. Keep your eyes open, and search the skies.

Now go back inside and fold a paper crane.

The Rev. Kathryn Timpany is senior minister at **First Congregational UCC in Sioux Falls, S.D.**

‘Maya would have been proud’ knowing she helped others

“What remains of you on earth should go to be with other living people who desperately need what you no longer need — your body.”

COMMENTARY



Dwight Lee Wolter (with Maya)

On Feb. 18, 2005, my six-year-old daughter, Maya, was killed in a car crash. Her ten-year-old brother Casey was badly injured and evacuated by helicopter to Tampa, where they were better able to treat his injuries.

At the hospital, I was led to an examination room in which the lights had been lowered. I tried, instinctively, to crawl up on the gurney and cuddle Maya but was stopped by a doctor who said, “You must be with your son. She is dead. He is alive. Go.”

At the hospital the next morning, before I told my son about his little sister, I received a phone call from an organization called LifeLink of Florida. They asked that I consider donating Maya's eyes

and heart valves.

I had never dreamed of donating my little girl's organs or tissue. Prior to that day, I don't think I could have even coped well with her banging her head on playground equipment. Now they wanted to take her beautiful blue eyes — the only part of her that seemed unharmed in the car crash.

Little Maya's generous gift was given without her knowledge or permission. But I am thoroughly convinced, nine months later, that Maya would have been proud to know that she was helping other children.

One child is now blessed with sight because of Maya. Meanwhile, two other children have received her heart valves.

Maya was never selfish; never in life and not in death. I am confident that Maya would want you to know that even when the unthinkable happens, it is very important to have decided — hopefully, in advance — that, before you go to be with God, what remains of you on earth should go to be with other living people who desperately need what you

no longer need — your body.

Please notify your congregation that there is a great need for donors to be matched with grateful donation recipients.

For more information on organ and tissue donation, please call the United Network for Organ Sharing at 804/782-4800.

I am also willing to speak to you about your church's participation in organ donation. Call me at 352/683-4870.

The Rev. Dwight Lee Wolter is pastor of **Spring Hill UCC in Florida.**

CONSIDER:

► In the United States, there are 90,000 persons awaiting transplants, but less than 15,000 donors.

► Hepatitis C, cancer, diabetes — or even being advanced in age — do not necessarily mean that you cannot be an organ or tissue donor.

► African-Americans top the lists of those awaiting kidney, heart, liver, lung and pancreas transplants.

Miracle of community requires more than ‘spiritual magic’

“We flirt with irrelevance, I think, if we shut Jesus up in church and read his story as a kind of saintly biography.”

COMMENTARY



Scott Thomas

Do you believe in the virgin birth?”

It was an odd question in the middle of August. My questioner had held back until the post-service handshaking was over. She was a visitor — someone who had grown up in our church, but moved away decades ago.

The virgin birth. This, after a worship service devoted to Jesus' feeding of the five thousand. I gave her my most concise honest answer: that the stories about the Savior's birth testify to his specialness, and so in that sense are deeply true, but that the biology of it seems to me beside the point.

“You don't believe, then,” she summarized, and she proceeded to tell me how she was disturbed by my children's message. I had told the kids that some scholars believe the miracle of the loaves and fishes was not the old Sunday school

version — Jesus conjuring up a bounteous dinner with a wave of his magic hand — but instead was a miracle of community. Jesus' charismatic power to build a generous and grace-filled community out of this ragged band of pilgrims, as the theory goes, inspired them to dig into their pockets for that pita they weren't intending to share at all. *Voila!* Dinner is served.

I assured my questioner that she and her opinions were most welcome; diversity of belief is one way to get at truth. And certainly, I told her, the traditional supernatural explanations of Jesus' miracles are still entirely possible. Surely the power of God is beyond our imagination.

But as I wrestled with her comments later, I realized why the miracle of community has such resonance. With all the things that wall human beings off from each other — all those divisions of race, gender, orientation, economics, politics and belief — the chance to be part of a group of people struggling past our differences toward a common center is deeply rewarding.

We flirt with irrelevance, I think, if we shut Jesus up in church and read his story as a kind of

saintly biography. Sure, he's a wonderful model for living, and as best we can wade through the otherness of ancient near East language and culture, we find in the Gospels a useful blueprint for behavior. But if we fixate on the old, old story at the expense of God's continuing story, we have nothing to say to those who ask, “Why does this matter to me this week?”

It's one thing to worship a god-man who did great magic tricks two millennia ago; it's another and far richer thing to live alongside the Spirit of the living Christ, the Spirit that enables and catalyzes simply amazing occasions of the presence of God in our lives, right here, right now.

The gift of the living Christ is hope — hope that we are not adrift but rather living into God's future. Could it be magic? The living Christ is a miracle that keeps on giving. In the beloved community — the surprising, contentious, messy association we call church — we gather around that miracle, and take, and eat.

The Rev. Scott Thomas is senior minister of **Amherst Community Church (UCC/Disciples of Christ) in Snyder, N.Y.**

COMMENTARY Know when to act and when to wait, seek contentment

“The opposite of sloth is not hyperactivity. Its redeemed form is contentment.”

VIRTUE IN THE VICE



Robin Meyers

A monthly feature about spirituality

This is my last installment in a series of spirituality columns for United Church News called “The Virtue in the Vice,” drawn from the title of my most-recent book. I have sought to uncover a lively virtue in each of the seven deadly sins. The last sin, “sloth,” may be the most misunderstood of all.

Sloth sounds archaic, and its true meaning is lost on the modern ear. Fred Craddock said once that sloth sounds like a big furry creature hiding under a rock, or describes it as being sluggish or lazy — “like lying too long in the bath-water or sleeping through breakfast.”

Compared to the other deadly sins, being a couch potato sounds rather harmless. But the church had something much more deadly in mind when they warned us about *acedia* and *tristitia*. The former is a lack of caring and an aimless indifference toward one’s responsibility to God, while the

latter is a sadness or sorrow that settles into a kind of permanent stupor. Sloth really means: I don’t care.

When we define it this way, we are all too familiar with sloth. The government’s response to hurricane Katrina was about as “slothful” as it gets. What’s more, the hyper-individualism of American culture causes us to withdraw from collective responsibility, lest we “burn out.”

But there is actually a virtue buried in the deadly sin of sloth. While some seem paralyzed by sloth, others seem to think that they can never do enough. They are the mad prophets decrying the hypocrisies of our time, the busybodies who are perpetually cranky and full of angst, the naysayers and town-criers of doom who never seem to notice the sky, pick flowers, or enjoy a good joke.

The opposite of sloth is not hyperactivity. Its redeemed form is contentment. We call it “the peace that passes all understanding.”

As opposed to sloth, contentment is not a pretext for laziness, but a way of being in the world that knows when to act and when to wait. The contented person knows that there are times to expend energy and times to rest. Time to plant, and then, as in Mark’s parable of the growing seed, time to let the seed grow (he does not know how). After all, no-

body stands over a seed and shouts, “Come on now, grow!” A seed has its own future in its bosom.

One of the great secrets of life is to know when to *do*, and when to *wait*. But we can take our cue from the biblical ethic, because the order is not unimportant: first we do, and then we wait.

While the slothful does nothing but wait, and the hyper-vigilant feels guilty when not “multitasking,” there is something in between: the contented. She is neither frozen by despair, nor unable to take a nap for fear that the world might fall apart as she sleeps. He is not lazy, but neither does he think for one minute that rest and pleasure are inappropriate responses to creation.

The contented among us can take off our watches, and not go back to the office at night. After all, the purpose and end of human existence is captured in the shorter Westminster catechism: “To love God, and enjoy God forever.”

You can’t do it all. Do what you can, and then be content.

The Rev. Robin Meyers is senior minister at Mayflower UCC in Oklahoma City. In the February/March issue, the Rev. Lillian Daniel, pastor of First Congregational UCC in Glen Ellyn, Ill., and a frequent contributor to The Christian Century, will begin a six-issue guest column.

COMMENTARY Message of inclusion not just ‘disputed’ — it’s ‘urgent’

“That same exclusionary propensity that violates both ‘the American dream’ and the gospel is now alive and well in the U.S. church, albeit with a kind of moral ferociousness that is not matched in the civic community.”

BIBLE STUDY



Walter Brueggemann

In its television ads, the UCC bears witness to a deep evangelical impulse that is already rooted in the commandment of Sinai: “Love your neighbor.”

Of course there are, in the Bible and beyond the Bible, endless wonderments about the identity of our neighbor. There is no doubt, however, that the deepest impulse of the Bible is toward inclusion, that all of God’s creatures be accorded dignity, respect, safety and a sense of belonging. That deep biblical impulse gives the church its primal mandate, a summons reflected in these ads.

The issue of inclusion is not only disputed among us; it also is urgent. It is urgent because we U.S. Christians live in a society that is profoundly exclusionary in ways that debilitate. While we popularly celebrate the large vision of democracy among us, it is the case that the reality of socio-economic-political power works primarily to divide and exclude, to distinguish between “haves” and “have-nots” so that the “haves” always have more and more and the “have-nots” have less and less.

The same exclusionary propensity in our society is evident in the fear of “immigrants,” even if we maintain our ambiguous response because the fear of new immigrants is curbed by the usefulness of cheap labor. On issues of race, ethnicity and class, there works among us a vision of a safe society that consists only in people “like us,” a phrase that most often refers to the ruling class of white Euro-Americans.

That same exclusionary propensity that violates both “the American dream” and the gospel is now alive and well in the U.S. church, albeit with a kind of moral ferociousness that is not matched in the civic community. The fear of “the other” in the realm of U.S. religion now pertains not only to race, class and ethnicity, but also to sexual identity; as the church practices God’s holiness, it finds that sexuality is in odd and deep ways linked to holiness.

In the face of such an exclusionary inclination rooted in fear and in inchoate anxiety, a church faithful to the gospel is summoned by the Lord of the church to challenge such exclusion and to practice an inclusiveness that is as broad as humanity and as deep as God’s generosity. In the current “battle for the Bible,” biblical texts and themes that witness to God’s generous inclusiveness are not much known or cited among us:

► In Isaiah 56, the prophetic poem reflects an argument about inclusion and exclusion. The prophet witnesses to inclusion by insisting that foreigners and eunuchs — “others” in an ordered Jewish community — are to be welcomed precisely because the community gathered around God is “for all peoples.”

Do not let the foreigner joined to the Lord say;

“The Lord will surely separate me from his people;”

and do not let the eunuch say,

“I am just a dry tree.”

For thus says the Lord:

To the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths,

who choose the things that please me

and hold fast my covenant,

I will give, in my house and within my walls,

a monument and a name

better than sons and daughters;

I will give them an everlasting name

that shall not be cut off. (Isa 56:3-5)

► The New Testament church early faced the same issue as it moved beyond its Jewish origins to include all those loved by God, even Gentiles who were for some the abhorrent “other.” Thus it is reported in Acts 10 that Peter — that great stalwart of the proper church — was visited by God in a dream and urged to accept what his community had regarded as “unclean.” We may imagine that the dream from God was deeply upsetting and that Peter found the mandate shocking: *The voice said to him again, a second time, “What God has made clean, you must not call profane.”* (Acts 10:15)

But Peter obeyed! And since the time of Peter, the church in its faithfulness has refused fearful, societal categories and has been open to this practice of God’s graciousness.

► Alongside Peter, Paul became the great missionary for evangelical openness, recognizing — against his own fearful tradition — that none can be ejected from the church because they threaten us and are unlike us. Paul draws the conclusion: *For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him.* (Rom 10:12)

The Jewish church had to make room for the very Gentiles it recognized it had categorized as “impure.” So in our day, conservatives must make room for liberals and, in a harder challenge for our church, liberals must make room for conservatives. And all must make room together for those whom society dismisses as “impure.”

► Out of Paul’s new awareness there came an inclusionary trajectory in the church, not uncontested but eventually accepted. We are offered, in the letter to the Ephesians, a new characterization of holiness that is not related to race, ethnicity or any other category of uncleanness, but rather to participation in a community of grace, tenderness, forgiveness and generosity:

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. (Eph 4:30-5:1)

Such a practice, in an exclusionary religious scene amid an exclusionary society that is fearful of the other, is an enormous challenge to the church. A bent toward inclusion runs great risks, but they are risks faithful to the gospel. In the long run such risks serve the kingdom. In the short run, they are the requirements of fidelity among us. Such fidelity will every time override fear and every time subvert anxiety. In doing so we remember that he said, “I tell you, do not be anxious.”

The Rev. Walter Brueggemann, a UCC minister and scholar who authored more than 25 books on the Bible, is a professor emeritus at Columbia Theological Seminary in Atlanta.

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I was not and you looked after me... I was in prison and you came to visit me... what ever you did for me of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.
 Matthew 25:30-40

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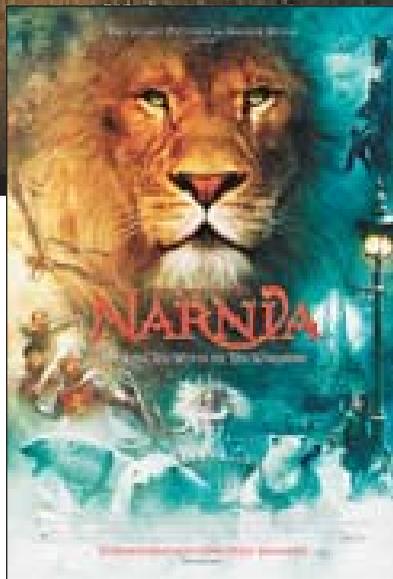
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FILM, DOCUDRAMA HIGHLIGHT AUTHOR'S WORK

'Narnia' fuels public's fascination with Christian author C.S. Lewis



THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA: THE LION, THE WITCH AND THE WARDROBE

Theatrical Release Date: Dec. 9, 2005

Starring: Tilda Swinton, James McAvoy, Rupert Everett, James Cosmo

Directed By: Andrew Adamson

Released By: Buena Vista

Genre: Family and Children, Fantasy, Action and Adventure

Rating: PG



When 8-year-old Douglas Gresham met C.S. Lewis, the man who would become his stepfather, he was disappointed.

The American boy had expected the British author of "The Chronicles of Narnia" fantasy books "to be wearing silver armor and carrying a sword with a jeweled pommel."

Instead, Lewis "was a stooped, balding, professorial-looking gentleman in shabby clothes, with long, nicotine-stained fingers," said Gresham, now 59, speaking on the phone from his home in Ireland.

More than 40 years after Lewis' death, people still have their own ideas about him. Depending on whom you ask, Lewis was a scholar, fantasy writer, Christian saint — or all that and more.

As Disney prepares to release its much-anticipated movie "The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe" on Dec. 9, more people than ever are asking: Who was C.S. Lewis? And what is his legacy?

**By Sarah Price Brown
Religion News Service**

To many, Lewis is an icon of orthodox Christianity. Despite growing up believing that there was no God, Lewis turned to Christianity as an adult. He then dedicated himself to promoting the faith and did so, his admirers say, using simple language and logical reasoning that anyone could understand.

“If you want to remember [C.S. Lewis], remember him as a man with all the foibles and difficulties and dark times in his life that men have, not as some kind of plaster saint.”

— Douglas Gresham, C.S. Lewis' stepson

Lewis' Christian devotees find meaning in his religious works such as "Mere Christianity," a collection of radio addresses Lewis gave in the early 1940s that explains the common beliefs among Christians of different denominations.

Christians also see symbolism in Lewis' children's books. Aslan, the great lion in "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe," who sacrifices himself for a human sinner and ultimately is resurrected, becomes a representation of Jesus Christ, for instance.

In some evangelical circles, Lewis is revered. On the 100th anniversary of Lewis' birth, the evangelical magazine Christianity Today published a piece calling Lewis "our patron saint" and citing a poll in which the magazine's readers chose Lewis as the most influential writer in their lives.

"It is a bit of a paradox that C.S. Lewis, an Anglican, has emerged as a virtual 'saint' among American evangelicals," said Mark

Sargent, provost of Gordon College in Wenham, Mass. "But it was Lewis, more than any other author, who rekindled the life of the imagination within the evangelical community."

Gresham, who became Lewis' stepson when his mother, Joy Davidman, married the man, cautioned against any such interpretation of his stepfather.

"If you want to remember him," Gresham said, "remember him as a man with all the foibles and difficulties and dark times in his life that men have ... , not as some kind of plaster saint."

"He wasn't like that at all," said Gresham, whose book about Lewis, "Jack's Life," was released Oct. 1. "He was a man of great humor, great warmth. He was a fun bloke to be around."

Nobody is saying Lewis was perfect, said Bruce Edwards, evangelical author of the new book "Further Up & Further In" about the spiritual messages in "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe."

"Is there hero-worship involved in how people admire Lewis?" Edwards asked. "Sure."

But Edwards warned against linking evangelicals' admiration for Lewis to a naivete about the world. Besides, Lewis remains popular in other circles as well.

"He's very popular among people who keep the old faith, and not so popular among the modernists," said Richard Purthill, Catholic author of the book "C.S. Lewis' Case for the Christian Faith." Purthill praised Lewis as a Christian "apologist," one who gave people a rational basis for believing in Christianity.

Stan Mattson, president of the C.S. Lewis Foundation in Redlands, Calif., which encourages Christians to openly participate in scholarship and the arts, said the group chose Lewis as its mentor, because Lewis was a respected scholar who "was not prepared to check his faith at the door." Describing himself as a "mere Christian," Mattson said he, like Lewis, belonged to the wider world of Christianity.

Lewis "wouldn't be comfortable, really, being co-opted by any one group," said Mark Tauber, vice president and deputy publisher of HarperSanFrancisco, the division of HarperCollins that publishes Lewis' non-fiction books.

Tauber said he was continually surprised by the broad appeal of Lewis, who wrote more than 30 books. Recently, Tauber received a call from a Mormon leader who mentioned that religious school teachers were using "Mere Christianity" in the classroom.

Cont'd next page

“We had no idea that the Mormons were into Lewis,” Tauber said.

While many see Lewis as a Christian hero, others remember him as an academic who taught literature at Oxford and Cambridge universities.

“C.S. Lewis was primarily an excellent Renaissance and Medieval scholar of the old-fashioned breed,” A.N. Wilson, Lewis’ British biographer, said in an e-mail.

Wilson, who renounced his own Christian faith, described Lewis’ religious works as “unworthy” of the scholar. “They peddle

false arguments which, when unraveled, would lead to the collapse of faith, not its strengthening,” he said.

As for Lewis’ children’s books, Wilson called them “crude and derivative.”

Yet many readers know and love Lewis through these stories about the magical, snowy world of Narnia, ruled by the evil White Witch. The books in the seven-volume series have sold more than 85 million copies worldwide since “The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe” first appeared in 1950.

Kristi Simonson, who runs

the fan Web site Virtual Narnia, has been captivated by Lewis’ make-believe world since seeing a cartoon version of “The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe” as a child. The books “make you long for something better, something more, deeper than our present reality,” Simonson wrote in an e-mail.

For Gresham, all this talk about his stepfather and his legacy is misplaced. “People should not be trying to remember C.S. Lewis at all,” Gresham said. “They should be trying to remember the Jesus Christ whom he represented and whom he preached.”



BIORELATABLE: C.S. LEWIS

Born: Nov. 29, 1898, in Belfast, Ireland.

Called: “Jack”

Favorite childhood books: “Treasure Island” by Robert Louis Stevenson and “The Secret Garden” by Frances Hodgson Burnett.

Painful loss: His mother died in 1908. One month after her death, at age 10, he was sent to boarding school in England.

Educated: University College at Oxford.

Military: Volunteered for British Army during World War I.

Career: Professor of Literature at Magdalen College at Oxford, then Magdalene College at Cambridge.

Languages: Fluent in English, French, German and Italian.

Good friend: J.R.R. Tolkien, author of the children’s classic, “The Hobbit.” Despite their friendship, Tolkien didn’t care for Lewis’ “The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe.”

The Lewis library: His first major work, “The Pilgrim’s Regress” (1933), shares his spiritual journey to Christian faith. His academic works also won acclaim, including “The Allegory of Love” (1936), still considered a classic, is a history of love literature from the Middle Ages to Shakespeare’s time. “Out of the Silent Planet” (1938) was the first of a trilogy of science fiction novels. His first children’s book, “The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe” was published in 1950, followed by six more Narnia books. The series finale, “The Last Battle” came out in 1956. “Mere Christianity” (1952) remains an ever-popular defense of orthodox Christianity, especially among Christian evangelicals.

Married: Joy Gresham, an American fan, in 1956. She died of cancer four years later. “Shadowlands” — a major 1993 film starring Anthony Hopkins and Debra Winger — chronicles their love affair. “Why love, if losing hurts so much?” Lewis asks.

Died: Nov. 22, 1963 — the same day John F. Kennedy was assassinated — at age 64.

Sources: <factmonster.com>, <amazon.com>

C.S. Lewis photo courtesy of John Chillingworth/Hulton Deutsch Collection

BEYOND NARNIA

Docudrama explores inspiration behind C.S. Lewis’ books

A one-hour docudrama, “C.S. Lewis: Beyond Narnia” — filmed in England and Northern Ireland where C.S. Lewis studied, lived and worked — will air at 8 p.m. (ET) on Friday, Dec. 9, on the Hallmark Channel.

The biography examines the life of the eclectic author who is the literary force behind Disney’s newest blockbuster film, “The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe,” which opens the same day in theatres worldwide.

“C.S. Lewis: Beyond Narnia” explores the life of one of the greatest religious thinkers of the 20th century,” says Betsy N. Brown of Faith and Values Media. “The program will delight fans of all ages of ‘The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe,’ both the novel and the feature film, and offers viewers unfamiliar with C.S. Lewis an introduction to [his] immense influence on contem-

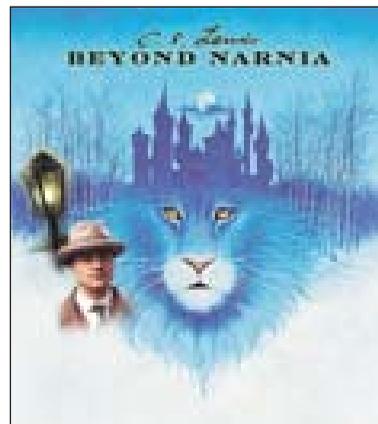
porary Christian thought.”

Written and directed by Emmy-winner Norman Stone, “Beyond Narnia” premiered in July at the C.S. Lewis Summer Institute in Oxford and Cambridge, England.

The film is produced by Lightworks Producing Group in association with Windborne Productions for Faith & Values Media.

“C.S. Lewis has long been considered an important and slightly unusual figure in contemporary Christian thought and contemporary world literature,” says Edward J. Murray of Faith & Values Media.

Faith & Values Media is a coalition of Jewish and Christian faith groups — including the UCC — that is dedicated to media production, distribution and promotion. Faith & Values’ programming is available largely on the Hallmark Channel or online at <faithstreams.com>.



C.S. LEWIS: BEYOND NARNIA

Starring: Anton Rodgers

Director: Norman Stone

TV Premiere: Dec. 9 on Hallmark Channel

Produced by: Lightworks Producing Group in association with Windborne Productions for Faith & Values Media.



“The Chronicles of Narnia” graphics courtesy of Disney Pictures | Walden Media

ABOUT THE FILM

C.S. Lewis’ timeless adventure follows the exploits of the four Pevensie siblings — Lucy, Edmund, Susan and Peter — in World War II England who enter the world of Narnia through a magical wardrobe while playing a game of hide-and-seek at the rural estate of a mysterious professor.

Once in Narnia, the children discover a charming, once peaceful land inhabited by talking beasts, dwarfs, fauns, centaurs and giants that has become a world cursed to eternal winter by the evil White Witch, Jadis. Under the guidance of a noble and mystical ruler, the magnificent lion Aslan, the children fight to overcome Jadis’ powerful hold over Narnia in a spectacular, climactic battle that will free Narnia from her icy spell forever.

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THE BATTLE OVER CHILDREN'S PROGRAMMING

UCC heads to federal court to save FCC's television guidelines

STANDING UP FOR KIDS:

“Many in the high reaches of the media industry have fired their guns at the FCC's children's educational rules.”

— Gloria Tristani

Getty Images | Punchstock | United Church News graphic

By J. Bennett Guess

Peggy Charren knows a thing or two about children's television. In 1968, as the doting mother of two young daughters, she was busy coordinating children's book fairs “up and down New England,” when an idea came to her.

“Why don't I get television to be as delicious for children as a good book?” she thought.

Charren, then 40, had grown irritated with TV's lack of quality choices for kids, and, especially, how the already-limited programming was constantly being interrupted “to tell children to buy things they didn't need.”

A staunch free-speech advocate — “Censorship is worse than any junk on television” — Charren insisted that more-diverse choices and approaches, better-informed parents, and guidelines on “commercial speech” (advertising) were the best paths to pursue.

So, what began as “volunteer work” quickly evolved into an industry-altering organization known as Action for Children's Television, a grassroots campaign that went to bat for kids when very few were. Soon, the ever-affable Charren — who didn't mind addressing a Federal Communications Commissioner as “pumpkin” or a U.S. Senator as “sweetheart” — was challenging government's highest decision makers to “make sure that vulnerable populations weren't being lied to.”

In 1971, for example, she led a successful fight before the FCC and the Federal Trade Commission to stop pharmaceutical companies from marketing “cutesy vitamins” directly to kids, especially since the sugar-coated pills were clearly labeled “Keep out of the reach of children” and were known to induce comas if taken in excess. She also made an

issue out of the fact that children were being bombarded with nearly double the amount of television advertising time, in spite of research that shows that children under the age of 10 can't distinguish the difference between editorial and commercial speech.

It didn't take long for Charren to become regarded as the nation's most-influential and respected advocate for children in the television industry. Her persistence is widely credited for fueling the eventual passage of the Children's Television Act of 1990, which led to the first-ever FCC rules requiring children's educational programming. After retiring in 1992, Charren was honored by the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences and with a prestigious Peabody Award.

'Because of the UCC'

Ironically, Charren, now 77 — who is

Jewish — largely credits the United Church of Christ for her accomplishments.

In the late 1960s, when she was just starting out, Charren had lots of passion but little experience with FCC politics, much less the money needed to hire specialized attorneys to prepare complicated legal briefs on behalf of kids.

So Charren approached the Rev. Everett C. Parker, then director of the UCC's Office of Communication. At the time, the church had recently pursued and won a monumental FCC challenge, and Charren was interested in getting some advice.

"The United Church of Christ is famous in broadcast circles," Charren said, recalling the UCC's historic legal challenge in the early 1960s against WLBT-TV in Jackson, Miss., for "failing to serve the public interest" of its African-American viewers.

After Charren's meeting with Parker, he agreed not only to help her make contact with the best attorney available, but said the UCC would arrange for *pro bono* legal services.

"That just might be the most important thing that happened for us," she said. "The church helped ACT to get off its back, and [the attorney] didn't even charge us."

Charren also was buoyed by how the UCC helped established the premise that, as owners of the airwaves, the people — not just corporations — were entitled to "standing" before the FCC. The church's breakthrough paved the way for Charren and other public-interest advocates to have their voices heard.

"That to me was the most important thing that happened in all of this, because of everything the United Church of Christ did and what the church's filings [with the FCC] have done since."

Successes 'under attack'

In more recent years, however, as television networks have undertaken a technological shift from broadcast to digital-delivery modes, the fight over children's programming has revved up considerably. In short, the television industry wants the children's rules halted.

That's led to some rather-intense legal wrangling during the past two months, and the UCC now finds itself at the center of a new, significant fight — preserving the basic tenets of the Children's Television Act enacted 15 years ago.

In so doing, the UCC is now involved in two parallel court cases that effectively pit the church against two of the world's largest media conglomerates, and the outcome could prove historic.

In October, CBS/Viacom and ABC/Disney came out swinging against newer FCC guidelines, set to take effect on January 1, 2006. The two corporations announced that they would ask the U.S. Court of Appeals' D.C. Circuit to put the children's guidelines on hold, despite the fact that the rules were adopted unanimously by FCC Commissioners in September 2004.

As enacted, the FCC's new guidelines would make it more difficult for broadcasters to preempt children's educational TV shows, especially those that typically air on Saturday mornings. In addition, the new requirements will require three hours of educational or informational programming each week on



The television industry would always say, 'We don't know what a children's educational program is' and I'd answer, 'If *you* don't know what a children's educational program is, then you should be in the shoe business.'

— Peggy Charren, children's programming advocate

broadcaster's primary and digital channels, as well as limitations on non-educational promotions.

The UCC's Office of Communication, Inc. (OC, Inc.), in keeping with its long history of media advocacy on behalf of the public interest, initiated its own legal action — asking the U.S. Court of Appeal's Sixth Circuit (which includes Ohio, where the UCC is headquartered) to require the FCC to preserve and further strengthen the new rules.

"Many in the high reaches of the media industry have fired their guns at the FCC's children's educational rules," said the UCC's Gloria Tristani, a former FCC Commissioner and OC, Inc.'s managing director, speaking at a Capital Hill press conference on Oct. 25.

"The industry's recent battery of lawsuits and filings before the FCC and the federal courts seeking to dismantle the children's educational rules, and even the Children's Television Act, signal an abandonment of their obligation to serve the special needs of children," said Tristani, speaking alongside U.S. Rep. Edward J. Markey (D-Mass.), an original sponsor of the Children's Television Act, and U.S. Senator Tom Harkin (D-Iowa). "It also signals industry's plans and desire to have a free hand in how and how much they advertise to children over the digital spectrum."

The federal cases are still pending but, because the UCC filed its action first, the U.S. Court of Appeals has agreed to hear arguments in the Sixth Circuit, instead of the corporations' much-preferred D.C. Circuit.

What if guidelines discarded?

The Rev. Robert Chase, OC, Inc.'s executive director, believes the networks' preoccupation with profits is driving the networks' legal challenge, despite the best interests of kids.

In late September, Chase's assumption seemed underscored when broadcasters began arguing that the children's programming guidelines make it tough for them to air live sports telecasts on Saturdays, because the FCC's newest rules require children's programming to be scheduled and aired at consistent times, such as Saturday mornings, and interruptions could occur no more than 10 percent of the time.

"The cost of children's programming is a further loss," said CBS Executive Vice President Martin Franks, as reported in USA Today.

Chase believes the battle for children is shaping up to be the most significant media challenge mounted by the church in decades, perhaps since the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. urged the UCC to take up the Jackson, Miss., civil rights case in 1959.

The UCC's current court battle has received coverage in the Los Angeles Times, the Washington Post and the Hollywood Reporter, among others.

"The current pressure on the FCC and the litigation in appellate federal courts from Disney, Viacom and others to reduce or eliminate provisions for children's educational programming is unabashedly profit-driven," Chase said. "If these guidelines — which have such widespread public support — are ignored or summarily dismissed, what will be next?"

Children still matter

Charren, now a grandmother to four "delicious" grandchildren, still believes it's paramount that the FCC continue to safeguard the interests of children. She hopes that the UCC will continue to hold the networks' feet to the fire of the common good — especially since some of the industry's arguments never change.

For more than 35 years, Charren said, television executives have been complaining that children's programming is either too prevalent already, too costly, or too difficult to develop.

"The television industry would always say, 'We don't know what a children's educational program is' and I'd answer, 'If *you* don't know what a children's educational program is, then you should be in the shoe business.'"

Charren says she's grateful that the UCC continues to advocate for kids, and she believes it's something that UCC members can point to with pride.

"Any church should be helping improve the quality of life, not just for its members but for all human beings," she said. "Otherwise they're just talking to themselves."

In the past year alone, OC, Inc. has filed FCC license renewal challenges against four television stations (including a Spanish-language station) for failing to comply with existing children's television guidelines. Such actions, Chase said, send a strong message to broadcasters across the country that the UCC still cares about children's educational programming and that FCC guidelines must be taken seriously.

"The goal of business often interferes with choice and diversity, especially in broadcasting," Charren said. "I think it's important for a federal agency, like the FCC, to make sure that it's working right."

The Rev. J. Bennett Guess, at age 5, was the birthday guest on "The Peggy Mitchell Show," a local children's program — developed in response to the FCC's community-of-license guidelines — that aired daily on WEHT-TV in Evansville, Ind. When the station mistakenly aired the wrong show on Guess' birthday, it made up for the error with a special broadcast. Times have changed

THE UCC'S OC, INC.

THE ISSUES

The UCC's Office of Communication, Inc., founded in 1959, fights for media reform, corporate responsibility and public accountability. In the 1960s, when OC, Inc. was fighting to combat racism among Southern broadcasters, failures in the media to reflect viewers' needs and interests were blatant — wholesale news blackouts were frequent and faces of color were rarely seen.

Four decades later — after gaining an array of safeguards to protect the public's interest in media, and then largely losing these protections to the deregulatory biases of the 1980s and 90s — the pendulum has returned to where it began, with a renewed need to fight for media policies and practices that reflect the ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity of America.

From loosened ownership restrictions, weakened Equal Employment Opportunity rules, elimination of the minority tax certificate (which provided incentives for increasing minority- and woman-owned stations), delocalized news that relies on less community-based reporting, and brazenly commercialized children's programming, the challenge is daunting.

Increasingly, media speaks not to the public interest, but to the financial interests of its owners and advertisers.

THE WORK

Enforcing corporate character. Public interest value, such as justice, equal opportunity and media access, are central in evaluating the public character of those who use public airwaves and provide telecommunications services.

Resisting media consolidation. The increasing number of media outlets owned by a single entity strikes a blow at diversity and localism.

Strengthening the grassroots. Participation is essential to maintaining the "public" in "public interest."

THE RECORD

Since 1959, the UCC's OC, Inc. has:

- ▶ Advocated for those historically excluded from the media, especially women and people of color;
- ▶ Sought to guarantee minimum hours of children's programming;
- ▶ Defended the equal time rule for political candidates;
- ▶ Supported efforts to establish low-power, community-based FM radio;
- ▶ Advocated for community-based programming and fair rates from cable providers;
- ▶ Protected affordable access to emerging technologies and data transmission; and
- ▶ Urged corporate character requirements for those who profit from the public's airwaves.

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The UCC's Everett C. Parker Ethics in Telecommunications Lecture, held each year in mid-September in Washington, D.C., is attended by hundreds of media advocates and executives alike. Visit <ucc.org/ocinc/parker> for more information.

A special four-page reprint of this article, "Innocence lost: The battle over children's programming" is available in 50-count bulk quantities for \$25 per bundle. Order from UCC Resources at 800/325-7061.

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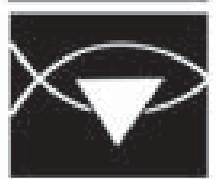
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ONE CHURCH, ONE WAR

Nevada church deals with the anxiety and tragedy of combat



The Rev. William Chrystal and his son Phillip greeted members of First Congregational UCC in Reno, Nev., after a Sunday service during Phillip's leave from Iraq in March.

Dennis Myers photo

By Dennis Myers
Special to United Church News

The recitation usually comes at the end of the pastoral prayer. The Rev. William Chrystal reads off the 16 names. Those 16 names belong to members of the congregation who are in military service.

Congregants probably don't need the reminder, but something about the recitation is comforting, so long as it is just a reading. If there is an interruption in the reading for comment, it can mean bad news, as when Ruth Hart's cousin Dean Lockhart was singled out after he was seriously injured in Iraq in the same incident that killed another Reno-area native.

The 16 are also remembered with wood plaques in the shape of yellow ribbons over the doorway that leads into the earth-toned, triangular sanctuary at Reno's First Congregational UCC. Not all of the 16 are at war. They are just the servicepeople who are actually members of the church. And the 16 aren't the congregation's only links to the war.



Soldiers are sent to war by politicians. ... I think it's unconscionable to send people to war and then don't even show up for the funeral."

— The Rev. William Chrystal

There is, for instance, church member JoAnn Dunnican. Years ago, she helped raise Russel and Bud Minto after their mother's death.

"Both of them are in Iraq," she says in her living room, surrounded by framed photos. "Buddy has been a lieutenant's driver, and then he's also been driving around other large equipment. He's always been the kind of kid that loved his trucks; even as a baby, [he] was pushing his trucks around, so that was just a natural for him."

"[We] just really encourage ROTC, in a way, for the kids to have a step, a safe step out into a much larger community. And this way, when they went into the service, there was food, a uniform, a bed, somebody kind of telling them what to do. Because for many of them, it was really difficult to leave Gerlach [Nev.] ... So we really encouraged a lot of kids to go into the service. Actually, Buddy's class, the class of 2001, I'd say that probably at least 75 percent of the kids went into the military that year."

This is a nation of 300 million people fighting a war with only 114,000 troops serving in Iraq (or 311,000, depending on whose figures one believes) and yet this one UCC church has more than a dozen links to soldiers in the Iraq-Afghan theaters of war.

Rooted in military service

Founded in 1871 at a meeting in a Reno schoolhouse, First Congregational UCC is deeply rooted in its community. In the 1920s, its board president was Prince Hawkins, a banker and lawyer whose succeeding family generations became known for local philanthropy.

First Congregational UCC's members are also deeply rooted in the military. On March 4, the congregation lost one of its older members, James Inman, a veteran who had been injured by a sniper's bullet during the Battle of the Bulge in World War II and received the Bronze Star.

Church member Liz Knott's son, John, is 22 and in the Army. He, like the church, is steeped in things military.

"His father was in Vietnam," she says. "Both of his grandfathers were Army people. My brother was a lieutenant in the Army; his father

was a lieutenant in the Army. ... He's been surrounded by patriotism his entire life."

John Knott is now a medic at Fort Irwin near Barstow, Calif. Medics are always needed in a war zone.

"I don't think he'll be going over into Iraq or Afghanistan," his mother says. Then, after a pause, "However, I don't know."

She has reservations about the Iraq War but worries constantly about those reservations being taken for opposition to the troops themselves, sometimes turning on a verbal dime in her effort to digress and reassure her listener that her first loyalty is to the troops. Her body language suggests discomfort with the tension between the two stances.

She is a teacher at Reed High School. So far, three former Reed students have been killed in Iraq.

Church member Jerry Thompson is part of his son Tony's military ancestry. Jerry served in Vietnam and was injured there. His son is serving in Iraq, near the Syrian border. It is a very dangerous spot, and access to cell phones and e-mail is considerably less than in other areas of Iraq. Jerry is stoic and supportive.

"You never want your children to go into harm's way, but it was his choice. He made the decision."

Honor bound for Iraq

Some church members marvel at the way Chrystal is able to read the list smoothly, not usually pausing in any way when he reads his own son's name. Phillip Chrystal is serving north of Kirkuk in Iraq.

The younger Chrystal went in spite of his opposition to the war and, of all things, out of a sense of embarrassment. He was working in a Reno guard unit doing anti-drug education activities, speaking in schools and to community groups. But so many of his fellow guard members had gone to Iraq.

"I kind of felt embarrassed because I was wearing the uniform every day, and I hadn't gone over yet, while everyone else had gone over at least once," he says, shifting his shoulders in a kind of shrug. "I just didn't like that. I kind of felt embarrassed, so I pursued it. I figured, you know, even though I

didn't agree with this war whatsoever, I figured it doesn't matter. You still have an obligation ... to go, to do what the soldiers do."

Given the tricks and machinations being used to get soldiers to Iraq and then keep them there, it wouldn't seem to take much to get sent. But Chrystal had to get out of the Nevada Guard to get there.

"I first went over in December, but I've been gone [from Reno] since June [2004]," the slender, soft-spoken soldier says. "I was in the Nevada Guard here. I was with the armor unit, and they were getting ready to mobilize to Fort Irwin for a year to train people that were going over. And I'd been trying to go overseas for about a year, so I hooked up with the Oregon Guard in May ... and then we got mobilized in June."

Phil Chrystal and John Knott are friends, and Liz Knott says of her son, "He set up a huge trunk to send to Phil because he knew what Phil would need." Other members of the church have also pitched in, sending goods and prayers Phil's way. He turned 21 in Kuwait on his way to Iraq.

Phil's brother, John, is a television photographer and satellite-truck operator who has been in Iraq for news coverage, but those trips have not yet taken him to his brother's area.

Mary Chrystal, Phil's mother, says when he came home on leave in the spring, it wasn't all he would have wanted it to be.

"What he found out was that none of his former friends understood or cared, that he had nothing in common with them. Most of our young people are not involved in that. Life goes on normally. And for him to have had such a major experience and to have no one know or care — they'd say things like, 'Oh, how is it?' And he'd start to talk and they'd change the subject. You know, they just weren't interested. So he felt very alone."

The games played with soldiers' and sailors' tours of duty make it difficult to know when Phil Chrystal will get home. There were recent rumors that his whole unit's deployment would be extended, but that is considered less likely now.

"They honestly haven't told us when we're

Cont'd | A16



people | places | things

Cont'd from | A15 supposed to come back, but I'm guessing we'll come back after the [Iraqi] election [scheduled for December]," Phil says.

Phil's father, mother and brother, and some other members of the congregation, have supported him by protesting the war every chance they get. Phil is grateful.

"I'm all for it. If I were here, I'd probably be protesting also. I've never been in favor of this war from day one. I think we need to get out."

Inspired congregation

As the months have passed, the members of the congregation have worked concern and support for their servicepeople — sons, nephews, cousins, and so on — into their church routines. A list of items to send to service people is posted on an easel with names and military addresses. At Christmas, a list of prayer requests had items like, "In honor of Marine PVT Zachary Withrow, our grandson, and all in military service from Bruce and June Thomas."

Zachary Withrow is not in Iraq, and June Thomas doesn't expect him to go, but as with Liz Knott, nothing about Iraq is certain. The shortage of military forces is a constant threat. At Easter, Bruce and June Thomas added guardsman Shane Papp to their prayer request.

Church member Ruth Hart, whose cousin Dean Lockhart went to Iraq, was already troubled by the war. What happened to Lockhart deepened those feelings. He was riding behind Josh Byers in a Hum-vee on July 23, 2003, when a mine was detonated underneath. Byers was killed, and Lockhart suffered terrible injuries. The middle of his body — colon, testicles — was torn to shreds. His wife was flown to his side because "death is imminent."

He recovered, though, and Bush administration officials and allies began using him as an example to sell the war. In a speech at Washington's Ritz Carlton, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz said, "[Lockhart's] wounds were so severe they thought he wouldn't survive and, accordingly, he was medically retired for the prospective benefit of his family. I first met Sgt. Lockhart a few weeks ago at Walter Reed. ... All he could talk about was how he wanted to get back on active duty. He was full of the fighting spirit that has made our victory in Iraq possible, and I am pleased to report that Sgt. Lockhart is now back with the Army."

U.S. Sen. Wayne Allard of Colorado said on June 1, 2004, "[Lockhart] still wants to spend seven more years in the Army and he still believes in the U.S. mission in Iraq."

Lockhart is certainly dedicated to the military. Hart says he fought when the Army tried to discharge him (what Wolfowitz claimed was a beneficial retirement), has undergone repeated surgeries — some successful, others not — in an effort to become a more productive soldier, and now trains recruits at Fort Stewart, Ga., while still wearing the accoutrements of his terrible wounds.

Lockhart's valiant fight has inspired other members of the congregation.

"We pray for him all the time," says Liz Knott.



I'd probably be protesting also. I've never been in favor of this war from day one. I think we need to get out."

— Phillip Chrystal, soldier, pastor's son

Jerry Thompson, the Vietnam vet whose son Tony is now in Iraq, once went to Fort Collins to visit Tony. He and Tony went to visit Lockhart, then at the Fort Collins hospital.

"I was humbled by him," Jerry, who is wheelchair-bound himself, told congregation members.

Hart's husband, Loren, also has someone in the military — his grandson Steven Johns on the USS Roosevelt, an aircraft carrier. The

Sea from Yemen), Mike Evans in Afghanistan, Anthony Rovetti in Korea, and, stateside, Lucas and Marta Jung at Norfolk Naval Station, and Justin Neal at Fort Bragg, all of whom could find themselves "going."

One Sunday in September, the church prayed for "the wife of an Iraqi servicemember whose home was broken into, and she was raped."

Minister of peace

At the head of the congregation is Chrystal. The sandy-haired minister is a former military chaplain,

who is deaf in his left ear — "not a surprise for someone who spent so much of his career in the noisy part of the military," he says.

But his personal history may make him just the person to guide the congregation through a war like Iraq.

During worship, when the children's service is going on or the gospel reader is speaking, Chrystal is seated, often catching the eye of congregants and offering smiles or



Sgt. Dean Lockhart, shown here with his father, Arthur, has been remembered at Reno's First Congregational UCC every week for many months.

Courtesy Of Ruth Hart

Roosevelt is scheduled for deployment in September — but no one knows to where. Johns served in the first Iraq war on the Ranger. Loren and Ruth Hart's faces are impassive, but their voices convey deep emotion when they talk of the men.

So it goes. This one UCC congregation prays for Rick Hendrid in Iraq, Chris Cosota in Kosovo, Dene Leonard in Iraq, Tom Rowell on the sub Providence, Ray Johnson in Djibouti (across the Red

rolling eyes. When he is at the pulpit, he sometimes throws his arms up to indicate amusement.

Standing beneath the tall, red cross behind the altar, he sometimes makes reference to the war in his sermons or in comments after the reading of the list. Those sermons usually start with jokes ("If you get to thinking you're a person of influence, try ordering someone else's dog around") then go into theology, usually tied to a particular scripture.



Jerry Thompson, injured in Vietnam, holds a photo of his son Tony, injured in Iraq.

David Robert photo

But the war is often in the thoughts of congregants, and Chrystal is sensitive to that. Sometimes his comments are practical. On March 20, he said, "It's a different kind of war, you know — they have the e-mail and cell phones, but the little comfort items that are few and far between remain needed."

His prayers embrace U.S. servicepeople and the Iraqis and Afghans — and, on Aug. 21, during the removal of settlers from the Gaza strip, the Israelis and Palestinians.

"We think of those in harm's way, either because they are in the service or because they live there. ... Life is by definition a difficult and precarious balance sometimes."

Chrystal leads the congregation in prayers for "those who make laws and rule countries" but also sometimes expresses exasperation with those who are "waging war but always claiming God is on their side."

At Christmas, he spoke of the worship service providing "a reminder, though there isn't much sign of it in the world, of peace on Earth and goodwill toward people."

On July 24, Chrystal told the congregation, "We've added Chris Bucknell to our list of people we are praying for and remembering." Bucknell is a soldier home on leave from Iraq who befriended a member of First Congregational UCC in an airport.

At times the normally mild-mannered Chrystal is angry, and not just at the Bush Administration. With his own son in Iraq, one can only imagine what went through Chrystal's mind when he was asked to preside at the funeral of Eric Morris, another area student killed in Iraq. The Sunday after the funeral, on May 8, Chrystal told his congregation, "Now I'm going to get, not political, but I'm going to put an edge on what I say."

At the funeral, he said, not a single Nevada politician, state or federal, was on hand nor sent a representative.

"Soldiers are sent to war by politicians. ... I think it's unconscionable to send people to war and then don't even show up for the funeral."

Eric Morris, he said, did "more than his fair share" for the nation.

Cont'd next page

“

American soldiers will be fighting and dying and killing
— for the rest of my life!”

— The Rev. William Chrystal

“Sorry to make this such a serious service today, but, my golly — unconscionable! ... I think the social compact is broken, and I think we should do everything we can to let them know this is unacceptable.”

Then he tore into the Reno Gazette-Journal, which he said had charged Eric Morris' widow more than \$300 for an obituary. (Chrystal told the newspaper to send the bill to him.)

There is no doubt that Chrystal feels great sorrow over the war. On July 3, he became tearful while making an appeal for peace at all levels in everyone's lives, “hoping and praying that peace on Earth might somehow follow.” The congregants may not have known what caused the tears, but he explained to individuals during the week and then to the congregation the next Sunday.

“My tears ... were occasioned by some things that Phil has under-

gone lately, but also because it hit me at that moment that for the rest of my life, American soldiers will be fighting and dying and killing — for the rest of my life!”

One particularly poignant moment came at Christmas when candles were being lit. Chrystal said it had taken so long because “my candle lighter ... is in Iraq.”

Paradoxically, Chrystal, the pastor, has been trying to get back into the service himself — as a military chaplain.

“Yes, he's actually been trying to get over here,” Chrystal's son, Phil, says. “He retired out of the guard but he's trying to get called back up so he can go. ... There are units without ministerial support, and he's probably the best chaplain I've ever encountered, even though he is my father. ... He would be doing his job, and he'd be doing it very well.”

The Chrystals are easily able to stay in touch with Phil in this day



Ruth and Loren Hart and Mary Chrystal, center, stand outside First Congregational UCC in Reno, Nev. All three have connections to the Iraq war.

David Robert photo

of rapid communications. They've also learned danger signs. The military controls the access of servicepeople to the Internet. “When

something happens, they take the Internet, down so no one can write home,” Chrystal says, presumably until the next of kin of the latest casualties are notified. So suddenly not being able to reach Phil can be a heart-stopping moment.

First Congregational UCC's experience with the war is not unusual. While many may not realize it, the same kind of intersections with soldiers in Iraq likely affects

many churches and service organizations. The war's tentacles reach everywhere.

Members of First Congregational UCC, like so many, live with a daily vulnerability to impending tears. And sometimes they must count their fears, 16 names at a time.

“One church, one war” first appeared in the Reno [Nev.] News and Review. It is reprinted with permission.

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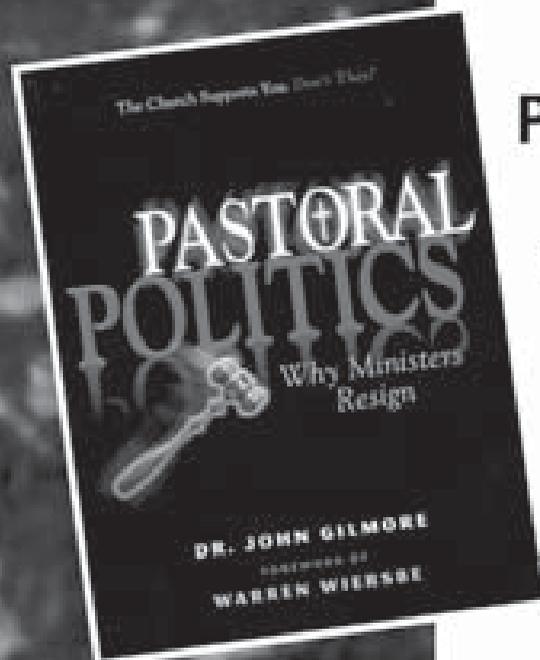
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NEARLY \$8 MILLION COLLECTED IN PAST 10 MONTHS FOR UCC'S DISASTER RESPONSE

people | places | things

in the news

Major disasters in 2005 translate into unprecedented giving

By J. Bennett Guess

Tsunamis, drought, famine, war, locusts, hurricanes, earthquakes, tornados, flooding — no matter where you live, it's been a disastrous year.

Beginning with the unimaginable devastation and death toll from the Dec. 26, 2004, tsunami in southern Asia and eastern Africa, stunning TV images opened the hearts and wallets of millions. The UCC alone collected an unprecedented \$4 million to support long-term rehabilitation programs.

Then, the deadly hurricanes struck Florida and the Gulf Coast just eight months later, offering horrific reminders of water's destructive power and even prompting the general secretary of the Church of South India — a church struggling with its own disaster response — to send prayerful words of solidarity for its partner churches in the United States.

"It is with utmost grief and unspeakable shock that we in India read about the waves of Katrina that have left thousands of our dear American brothers and sisters either dead or devastated and rendered homeless," wrote Pauline Sathiamurthy.

Yet, in the time that fell between

“It's how the media drives it. Those [disasters] that get the media attention are those that attract the dollars.”

the tsunami and the hurricanes — and even since — there were dozens of other natural and human-caused calamities that claimed the lives and livelihoods of millions. In large measure, however, whether or not individuals, churches or even nations offered monetary assistance depended not so much on the scope of the destruction, but with media exposure.

"It's how the media drives it," says Susan Sanders, the UCC's minister for the global sharing of resources. "Those [disasters] that get the media attention are those that attract the dollars."

As of Oct. 31, the UCC had collected nearly \$8 million in disaster-relief donations during 2005, and that figure doesn't account for contributions forwarded directly to affected institutions, such as the UCC's Back Bay Mission in Biloxi, Miss., UCC-related Dillard University in New Orleans or the UCC's South Central Conference, among others.

"It has certainly been a difficult disaster year, and we're truly grateful

for all the gifts," Sanders says. "This [outpouring] shows that we are a church with resources and we do share those resources."

However, more than \$8 million of the impressive \$8 million total has all been earmarked for tsunami and hurricane relief specifically, largely proving Sanders' assumptions about the media's impact.

"Our UCC folks are generous people, so when they hear about a disaster they respond," Sanders emphasizes. "But they're not seeing Sudan, they're not seeing Pakistan, they're seeing very little about Niger. Our challenge is how we do we get these hidden disasters before our people."

In the summer of 2004, for example, a church-wide special appeal called upon UCC members and churches to support relief in Sudan, especially the Darfur region where genocide and famine have claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands, especially women and children. To date, despite a General Synod resolution in July 2005 asking for a greater church response, the UCC has gathered only \$100,000 to fund its assistance in Darfur. It's a rather-tiny response to a protracted and complex disaster, especially coming from a 1.3-million-member church with a long history of justice and peace advocacy.

Sanders doesn't give any credence to the notion that churches or individual UCC members are suffering from so-called "compassion fatigue," the idea that emotional numbness sets in after experiencing



A young man in Balakot, Pakistan, has two bags of food and clothing, nothing else.

ACT | Marianne Preus Jacobsen photo

too much bad news. Instead, she lays blame squarely on the media for whole-hog reporting on certain devastating events while practically ignoring the majority of the planet's disasters altogether.

"The top number-one factor that drives giving is media exposure, and this is where our challenge is: How do we let our people know when it's not in the media?"

Thankfully, the \$8 million given thus far does not include the annual outpouring of support for the UCC's One Great Hour of Sharing [OGHS] special mission offering, received each March, which allows the UCC's national and international disaster-recovery offices to respond immediately to "hidden disasters," those that the general public may never be made aware. Unfortunately, in 2005, financial support for OGHS dipped from the previous year's totals.

"Right now, we're running \$260,000 behind last year's [OGHS] totals, and it remains to be seen wheth-

er or not we'll break the budgeted \$3 million mark," Sanders says.

"When locusts ate up the crop in Madagascar, no one heard about it but we were able to respond," Sanders says. "When there was flooding in New Hampshire in late October, it was just a blip on the screen, but we were able to respond."

Sanders says OGHS enables the UCC to respond to a disaster, on average, once every 2.5 days. "And, in most of these cases, folks never hear about them," she says.

UCC members can take pride, Sanders believes, in the fact that the UCC's disaster-recovery niche is long-term, as opposed to short-term, recovery. Evidence of this, she says, is the UCC's ongoing efforts related to September 11, 2001, and the denomination's 46 still-to-occur work camps in Florida in response to the state's four major hurricanes in 2004.

"There's a whole lot of push to be there when the cameras are there, but for us, it's to be there for the long haul," she says.

Pakistan/Kashmir situation begs for stepped-up response

In its bid to boost U.S. response to the Oct. 8 earthquake that rocked Pakistan/Kashmir, the UCC's Wider Church Ministries is appealing for stepped-up support from congregations and individuals.

Described as the region's most catastrophic earthquake ever, the death toll continues to escalate, with an estimated 90,000 people now dead and at least 3 million injured, homeless or abandoned in winter-weather conditions.

According to Debra Frantz, Global Ministries' program associate for southern Asia, there are at least five times more people left homeless by the Pakistan/Kashmir earthquake than were left homeless by the tsunami last December.

Massive rescue and relief operations are underway. However, bad weather and aftershocks have created hazardous conditions, including landslides. Worse, global response has been far from adequate, prompt-

ing the United Nations to appeal urgently for more international aid.

Susan Sanders, the UCC's minister for the global sharing of resources, reports the situation is critical for those without shelter, food, water and other basic supplies. Because of the harsh conditions, there is a real risk that people will freeze to death for lack of adequate shelter, she says.

"We plan that, as part of Church World Service, we'll work with 20,000 families to provide immediate shelter and longer-term house construction," says Sanders, who estimates the UCC will be involved in Pakistan/Kashmir's recovery for 5-to-8 years.

Gifts to the UCC's One Great Hour of Sharing special mission offering are being used to support relief efforts orchestrated by Church World Service/Pakistan, the National Council of Churches of Pakistan and the Church's Auxiliary for Social Action.

The UCC's dollars are being utilized by partners to rush aid to survi-

vors, including tents and blankets for those in snow-covered regions.

Sanders understands that the request for Pakistan/Kashmir comes at a time when churches and members are responding generously to other disasters, especially those affected by hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma. However, the need in Pakistan/Kashmir is also urgent and critical, she says.

"I know we all get many requests to contribute to so many good causes and organizations, but we've learned how to make our choices," she says. "And when I look at what I'm asked to contribute to, giving to and through the church is at the top of my list."

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ARMENIANS AND TURKS: Can they reconcile?



What will bring about an apology is a change in Turkey's willingness to examine all aspects of its own history openly and honestly, for the Armenians to be willing to put this history into a context, and for both sides to look at this history as a long continuum of events.

— Alison Stendahl, a UCC/Disciples of Christ missionary



We understand the trauma of those who work for an apology, but we have the wish to overcome this trauma. If an apology ever comes, it will come through dialogue with the Turks, not from political pressure.

— Hrant Dink, owner/editor of Agos, a newspaper in Istanbul

By W. Evan Golder

In 1915, in the turmoil and chaos of the dying Ottoman Empire, the Ottoman authorities decided to move the entire Armenian population from the interior of Turkey to the deserts of northern Syria.

Many Armenians say it was genocide — a systematic, planned effort by the government to exterminate the 4,000-year-old Armenian people. Many Turks say genocide never happened, but admit that deaths did occur, although in the context of war.

Even so, early this year, internationally known Turkish author Orhan Pamuk (“Snow,” “My Name is Red”) made worldwide headlines by referring to the Armenian “genocide.”

Most Americans, unfortunately, know nothing about this issue.

Alison Stendahl, a UCC/Disciples of Christ missionary who has taught in Global Ministries-related schools in Turkey since 1980, has developed a special interest in Armenian-Turkish reconciliation. Her interest in archives and her growing friendships with Armenian persons in Turkey got her interested in the issue. Among her close associates, there is no doubt as to what happened in 1915.

“We are not denying our own history, and we know what has happened,” says Hrant Dink, owner and editor-in-chief of Agos, an international, bilingual (Turkish-Armenian) newspaper in Istanbul. “Up to now, most Turkish people have not known much about the events of 1915. Now we have more freedom of expression and freedom of information.”

Minds do change

This freedom of information does lead to changed minds. For example, one 16-year-old Turkish student did a lot of research in order to represent Armenia in a model U.N. meeting at The Hague in The Netherlands.

“Turkish people don’t accept that there was a massacre,” he says. “But when you read people’s personal stories, where they say, ‘I lost an uncle’ or ‘I lost a sister,’ you are more likely to think that it could have happened.”

“My grandmother and grandfather were

children of the massacre,” says one Armenian woman who does not want her name used. “When people debate whether or not there was a massacre, we don’t have to debate because we have the truth, we live the truth.”

But both the newspaper editor and the Armenian woman emphasize that the real problem for Armenians in Turkey today is not the past, but the present.

Officially, the Istanbul head of the government’s department of religious affairs says that “so-called minorities in Turkey” are considered independent. Turkey is 99 percent Muslim, but, he says, “churches and synagogues are recognized as being autonomous, according to a 1924 treaty.”

“I haven’t seen any discrimination,” he adds.

Many Armenians paint a different picture.

“It’s true that today Armenians are like Turks in Turkey,” says the woman. “As persons, we don’t have any problems. We can live like normal persons or families. We can have jobs — up to a point. Our young men have to do military service just like any young Turkish man, but they cannot have any critical jobs in the military or on a police force.

“If you start talking about our rights in society, that’s when the problems start,” she says. For example, she explains, Armenians can’t inherit income-producing properties; rules and regulations do not permit a higher education section (beyond high school) for Armenians, so there are no trained Armenian teachers; and there are no opportunities for Armenians to train religious leadership for the 40 Armenian churches in Turkey.

“Of course it hurts when people talk about the deaths in 1915,” she adds, “but still we have these problems today.”

Should Turkey apologize?

So what about the efforts of Armenians overseas to get the Turkish government to apologize for what happened in 1915?

“Armenians living abroad are angry at Armenians in Turkey because in dealing with today’s issues we don’t talk about the past,” says the woman. “I cannot blame the Armenians in diaspora because they have not



The Bosphorus divides the city of Istanbul and the country of Turkey between two continents, Europe and Asia. Global Ministries and its predecessor bodies have had missionaries in Turkey on both sides of the Bosphorus since 1820.

W. Evan Golder photos

learned to handle friendship with Turks. We Armenians who live in Turkey have learned how to do this. Armenians in diaspora have not. They remember their last memory of Turkey, and they visit this upon their children.”

“The present has its own problems,” says Hrant Dink. “Efforts to get France or the U.S. Congress to try to pressure Turkey to apologize do not facilitate our own work. We understand the trauma of those who work for an apology, but we have the wish to overcome this trauma. If an apology ever comes, it will come through dialogue with the Turks, not from political pressure.

“Armenians around the world should focus on the security and prosperity of the people of Armenia in their own state,” he says. “After all, this country is a reality now. Turkey and Armenia are neighboring countries, and we have to learn how to live together. One day, when we succeed in living together, then we will have peace.

“I do not expect anyone else to apologize,” he says. “I am the owner of this great suffering and I can carry this burden of suffering by myself, even as Christ was willing to carry his own cross. Armenian churches have a spiritual role to play in this, in helping people to follow the teachings of Christ and not to be concerned about taking revenge.”

Stendahl says the Armenians in Turkey have learned to live and work with the Turkish descendants of 90 years ago.

“They have lives to live and would like to do so,” she says. “They would be the first ones to declare the need for reconciliation and resolution to the past. Yet they are also concerned with living in the present and know that the apology everyone would want is not close at hand, but the discussions have started, as controversial as they are.

“What will bring about an apology,” she says, “is a change in Turkey’s willingness to examine all aspects of its own history openly and honestly, for the Armenians to be willing to put this history into a context, and for both sides to look at this history as a long continuum of events.”

The Rev. W. Evan Golder is editor emeritus of United Church News. He visited Istanbul earlier this year.



ARMENIA

Full Name	Republic of Armenia
Capital City	Yerevan
Area	11,506 square miles
Population	3,020,000
Time Zone	GMT/UTC +4
Languages	Armenian (official), Russian
Religion	Armenian Orthodox (94%)
Currency	Dram



TURKEY

Full name	Republic of Turkey
Capital City	Ankara
Area	300,946 square miles
Population	68,100,000
Time Zone	GMT/UTC +2
Religion	Muslim (Sunni)
Currency	New Turkish Lira

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FROZEN CHOSEN — The Rev. William Ziegler, a UCC minister from the Northern Plains Conference who serves as statewide headquarters chaplain for the North Dakota Air National Guard, completed a three-month assignment at the Antarctica's McMurdo Station on Dec. 1. Ziegler, along with a Roman Catholic chaplain, led worship services at the station's Chapel of the Snows, in addition to ministering to civilian and military personnel who live and work in one of the most hostile natural environments on the planet. Temperatures frequently dip to 60 degrees below zero, with wind chills reaching 110 degrees below zero.

Photo furnished

REMEMBERED

► **Emiko Abe**, 93, of Honolulu, whose crocheted-cross "bookmark ministry" reached thousands of missionaries and those they touched. Abe's last batch of bookmarks were reportedly heading to 100 girls at Inanda Seminary in South Africa, within days of her Oct. 12 death.



Abe

RETIRED

► **The Rev. Héctor E. López**, Central Pacific Conference Co-Minister, who — in lieu of Bundt cakes or floral bouquets — preferred a less-schmaltzy, more-substantive farewell. Instead, a four-day national convocation was held in Portland, Ore., in mid-November to lift up racial justice issues, including much work still to do — despite Lopez' years of faithful diligence.

► **The Rev. Gayle Engle**, a mainstay within the UCC's Conference Ministry system for more than 30 years, who retired as Missouri/Mid-South Conference Minister. He was honored at the Conference's annual meeting, Oct. 21-23, with tributes by General Minister and President John H. Thomas and Associate General Minister Edith A. Guffey, among others. Longtime friend Maneo Kataguri called Engle a "because-of Christian," one whom others come to the faith "because of." Engle's son, Michael, meanwhile, asked forgiveness for the sermons that he and his siblings had slept through, even "as they forgave him for preaching them."

HONORED

► **The Rev. Arthur B. Keys, Jr.**, founder and president of International Relief and Development headquartered in Arlington, Va., with the 2005 William Sloane Coffin Peace and Justice Award by the Yale University Divinity School on Oct. 11. "[Keys] is a gifted builder of institutions that minister to the world's most vulnerable populations. He excels at theory and practice, with both his head and heart," said the Rev. Susan Klein, who presented the award.

► **The Rev. Joy Skeel**, professor at the Medical University of Ohio, and **The Rev. Frank E. Reynolds**, retired faculty from the University of Chicago and a member of **Plainfield (Mass.) Congregational UCC**, as two of five distinguished alumni recognized in October by Yale Divinity School.

► **The UCC**, by the GLOBE (Gays and Lesbian Organized for Betterment and Equality) of Alameda County, Calif., with its "Community Leadership Award." The Rev. John Wichman, pastor of Westminster Hills Presbyterian in Hayward, Calif., presented the tribute. "[It] was one of those nights that make the various challenges of prophetic ministry worth it," said the Rev. Kathryn Schreiber of United Church of Hayward, who attended the ceremony.

CALLED | ELECTED

► **The Rev. Karen Smith Sellers** as Minnesota Conference Minister.

SELECTED

► **The Rev. Hapke** as Interim Southwest Conference Minister.

► **The Rev. Char Burch** as Interim Missouri/Mid-South Conference Minister.

► **The Rev. Susan Henderson** as Interim Vermont Conference Minister.

► **The Rev. John Gantt** as Interim Central Pacific Conference Minister.

APPOINTED

► **The Rev. Delle McCormick**, a UCC minister, as the new executive director for BorderLinks, a binational organization dedicated to experiential education on border issues. She most recently served as an interim minister at **Bar-rington (R.I.) Congregational UCC**, after spending eight years in Mexico as a pastor, community organizer and UCC/Disciples' missionary.

► **The Rev. Bennie E. Whiten Jr.** as acting president and CEO of the UCC Insurance Board, following the resignation of Tim White as the UCCIB's top executive. The sudden leadership change was described as "an act of faith recognizing that the organization is at a place where new and different leadership gifts can help move the UCCIB program forward," according to an Oct. 21 letter from board chair Terry Davis, an attorney in Montgomery, Ala. Whiten, who was UCCIB's board president from 1996-1999, most recently served as acting executive minister of the UCC's Wider Church Ministries in Cleveland.

UCCIB officials are acknowledging difficulty for the 24-year-old provider of property and liability insurance for 4,600 UCC and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) congregations and related institutions. Hurricane-related losses, due largely to 108 disaster-related claims totaling more than \$4 million in 2004 alone, left UCCIB with less-than-desired cash reserves. In addition, claims related to hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma are expected to cause further financial headaches. As a short-term response to UCCIB's woes, the UCC's four Covenanted Ministries have been asked to issue letters of credit, in the case that additional cash should be needed.

"People" submissions should be sent by e-mail to <newsroom@ucc.org>, with "people" clearly noted in the subject heading. Content will be edited for brevity and clarity. Due to space considerations, we regret that not all submissions will be suitable for publication.

CLERGY DEATHS

Bloom, Gustav E., 76, 10/11/2005
Boston, Arthur A., 82, 9/3/2005
Chace, William A., 76, 9/8/2005
Coombs, Raymond C., 61, 9/10/2005
Crook, Thomas W., 84, 10/24/2005
Fisk, Glen C., 80, 9/12/2005
Heineman, Charles P., 91, 9/10/2005
Koch, Ralph C., 89, 9/12/2005
Madren, Weldon T., 83, 9/4/2005
Marcus, M. Edward, 67, 9/6/2005
Meagher, Phillip A., 57, 9/17/2005
Northcott, Oliver C., 92, 9/6/2005
Pettis, Edward E., 67, 9/9/2005
Pitman, Alison J., 95, 10/4/2005
Stickey, William D., 75, 9/3/2005
Woodruff, Herbert R., 84, 9/23/2005
White, Herbert E., 85, 10/4/2005
York, Gladys D., 94, 9/13/2005

Information on clergy deaths is provided by The Pension Boards.

PASTORAL CHANGES

Ashby, Paul to Fellowship UCC, Tulsa, OK
Askew, Reuben S. to UCC, Partridge, KS
Bagby Allen, Michele to UCC, Northampton, NH
Bagley-Bonner, Brian Newbury, OH to Hospice of Western Reserve, Westlake, OH
Behrendt, James Sulpher Springs, IN to Eden UCC, Muncie, IN
Bishop, Linda Clinton, MO to Emmanuel UCC, Valley City, OH
Borchetta, Theresa to First Cong. UCC, Brandford, CT
Brown, Roger to Cong. UCC, Townshend/Grafton, VT
Burch, Charlene B. Tiffin, OH to Interim Missouri/Mid-South Conference Minister
Busch, Daniel L. Herndon, PA to Northeast Ohio Association, Tiffin, OH
Claassen, Alan to interim, Lake Oswego, OR
Cleaver-Bartholomew, David Chelsea, MI to Eastern Ohio Association Minister
Daly, Roger Seattle, WA to First Cong. UCC, Essex Junction, VT
Daly, Sandra to First Cong. UCC, Essex Junction, VT
Denham, Priscilla Penacook, NH to Federated Church, Ayer, MA
Douglas, Kathryn J. Wisconsin Rapids, WI to United Christian, Miles City, MT
Drueck, Wayne Plymouth, WI to Grace UCC, Wausau, WI
Gabbard, Susan to St. John's UCC, Mifflinburg, PA
Katzmar, Kurt to UCC, Medford, OR
Kennedy, James E. Walworth, WI to retirement
Leonard-Osterwalder, Christine to United Community Church, HI
Macneill, Marjorie to Cong. UCC, Mallets Bay, VT
Mills-Knutson, Jennifer N. Boston, MA to St. Luke's UCC, Jefferson, IN
Moody, Heather to Church of Pilgrimage UCC, Plymouth, MA
Myers, Bret Wauwatosa, WI to interim, First Cong. UCC, Lake Geneva, WI
Nachtigall, Karen to First Cong. UCC, Union City, MI
Noordmans, Phil Traverse City, MI to Chinese Community UCC, San Diego, CA
Osburn, Richard to interim, Hillsdale, OR
Plummer, Cathyann to Bethany UCC, Hiawatha, KS
Raggia, Mario to Cong. UCC, Drummond, OK
Ratmeyer, Thomas to Cong. UCC, Mystic, CT
Ross, Randall Bloomville, OH to Friendens Peace UCC, New Melle, MO
Sander, Joshua to First Cong. UCC, Stratford, CT
Segedy, Ronald M. to interim, Immanuel UCC, Walworth, WI
Shapiro, Betty A. to Cong. UCC, Wells River, VT
Shelly, Edgar to interim, Cong. UCC, Wakeman, OH
Shepherd, Pamela to UCC, Ashland, OR
Smith, Robert to UCC, Midland, KS
Spacek, Daniel E. Randolph, MA to First UCC, Sandwich, MA
Stoneback, Cheryl Quakertown, PA to Friedens UCC, Sumneytown, PA
Utke, William G. Milwaukee, WI to interim, Calvary Memorial UCC, Wauwatosa, WI
Walters, Harold D. South Deerfield, MA to Sunderland, MA
Wu, Michael to First UCC, Winsted, CT

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



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Edited by Carol L. Pavlik

'MAGI PROJECT' HOPES TO DOUBLE DONATIONS WITHIN THREE YEARS

UCC's Christmas Fund benefits church's retired workers



The UCC's Pension Boards is launching the Magi Project, a three-year initiative striving to double donations to the Christmas Fund, one of the denomination's four special mission offerings.

For decades, the Christmas Fund — formerly known as "Veterans of the Cross" — has helped provide supplemental monies for pension and health insurance premiums to low-income retirees. At Christmas, the offering provides gift checks to hundreds of annuitants, but it also provides emergency assistance to clergy and lay employees and their families throughout the year.

The Rev. M. Douglas Borko, director of ministerial assistance at the Pension Boards, says that in the wake of Hurricane Katrina and the subsequent rising cost of energy, now is a good time for churches to think about upping their annual giving to the Christmas Fund.

After Katrina pounded the Gulf Coast, the Christmas Fund was able to allocate funds to completely pay two quarters worth of insurance premiums for 10 retired clergy who were displaced in the FEMA-declared zip codes. An additional \$5,000 went towards premiums of active clergy in those same affected zip codes.

Borko says the Christmas Fund is also sponsoring an energy grant, which will be distributed after the first of January 2006. All retired lay employees and clergy who have accounts with the Pension Boards will receive a one-time gift of \$50 towards the cost of energy this winter. Those receiving ministerial assistance will receive \$75.

"We're recognizing that the impact of Katrina was far beyond New Orleans," Borko says. "Everyone is going to be affected by the energy crisis that came out of it."

He notes that all retired clergy with existing accounts with the Pen-

“I try to reassure them that they've worked their whole lives for the church. ... Now it's time for them to be cared for in their hour of need.”

— Douglas Borko, The Pension Boards

sion Boards will automatically receive the grant; retired UCC clergy without accounts may apply to receive it.

Of course, Christmas is not the only time a church can remember the Christmas Fund. While most churches find Christmastime to be an opportune time to lift up the special offering as a seasonal emphasis on mission giving, other churches opt for the Christmas in July Offering.

Posters, PowerPoint presentations and worship materials for both December and July options are available through the Pension Boards' office.

The legacy of giving

Legacy Gifts, in the form of bequests or other planned gifts, are another way that churches and individuals are supporting the Christmas Fund.

This summer, **Chicago's St. Philip's UCC**, located on the south side of Chicago, voted to close its doors. The proceeds from the sale of the building and assets were divided among five different ministries, among them the Christmas Fund. This fall, Borko gratefully accepted a check for \$120,000 on behalf of the Christmas Fund.

"The income from the investment will be used to enhance the annual giving to the Christmas Fund each year," he says.

'Preserving dignity'

Back in the 1800s, when the program was established, the lives of clergy were different, acknowledges Borko. Right now, the Christmas Fund is looking at two major trends that are affecting clergy and

their finances.

"We are looking at the impact of second-career clergy who have shorter careers," Borko says. "Our pension program is built on the assumption of paying 14 percent of your dues over a 30-year span to provide adequate retirement income. Length of ministry now is far below 30 years."

In addition, the climbing divorce rate has touched the lives of clergy just as it has the rest of the population.

"The number of divorces in clergy households is higher than most people would guess," he says. "That has dramatic impacts on both the spouse who is non-clergy and the clergy spouse. We are evaluating how our program of benefiting through the Christmas Fund applies in those situations."

No matter how much money is in the Christmas Fund, says Borko, it's paramount that clergy, spouses/partners and lay employees know that it is there to help them.

"We want to provide the highest quality of life possible for the people we work with, while preserving their dignity," he says.

Borko has seen families overwhelmed by the sudden financial strain brought on by illness, an automobile accident or a fire. In the business of caring for others, Borko says many clergy feel uneasy asking for help for themselves.

"I try to reassure them that they've worked their whole lives for the church," he says. "The church is an institution that cares for its people, and they've been doing that through their whole ministry. Now it's time for them to be cared for in their hour of need."

IOWA CHURCH GETS PERSONAL, BOOSTS OFFERING

'My father, a UCC minister, had a very small pension'

Urbandale UCC in Iowa has taken a significant step toward increasing the church's support for the Christmas Fund, the denomination's special mission offering that assists retired church workers in need.

During last year's Advent season, Richard Boyer, the son of a UCC minister and Urbandale's mission chair, shared his family's story with the congregation.

"[My father] had a very small

pension," says Boyer. "After he died, my mother called to ask me what the 'second check from the Pension Boards' was for." Boyer explained to her that it was probably a Veterans of the Cross (Christmas Fund) gift.

By sharing how the offering had helped his own family and explaining how the Christmas Fund is used to help UCC retirees and their families, people opened their hearts — and their wallets.

The previous year, Urbandale UCC had allocated about \$250 in support of the Christmas Fund. But, after Boyer and his committee made special appeals (including asking all retired ministers and all children of ministers in the congregation to stand), giving increased by over \$3,000 in 2004.

Afterwards, Boyer excitedly reported the results to the Pension Boards. "Next year," he wrote, "we'll try even harder."

★
2005 CHRISTMAS FUND

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► The Christmas Fund website
<cf2005.magiproject.org>

► For promotional materials, contact UCC Resources at 800/537-3394 or 800/325-7061

► Contact the Rev. M. Douglas Borko, at
<dborko@pbucc.org> or 800/642-6543 x2716

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