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NATIONAL EDITION | UNITED CHURCH NEWS

 inside

3 

RETOOLING RESTRUCTURE

More changes coming for national structure.

5 

MILITARY MINISTRY

Chaplains equip soldiers with trust, faith and hope.

7 

ENDING THE DECLINE

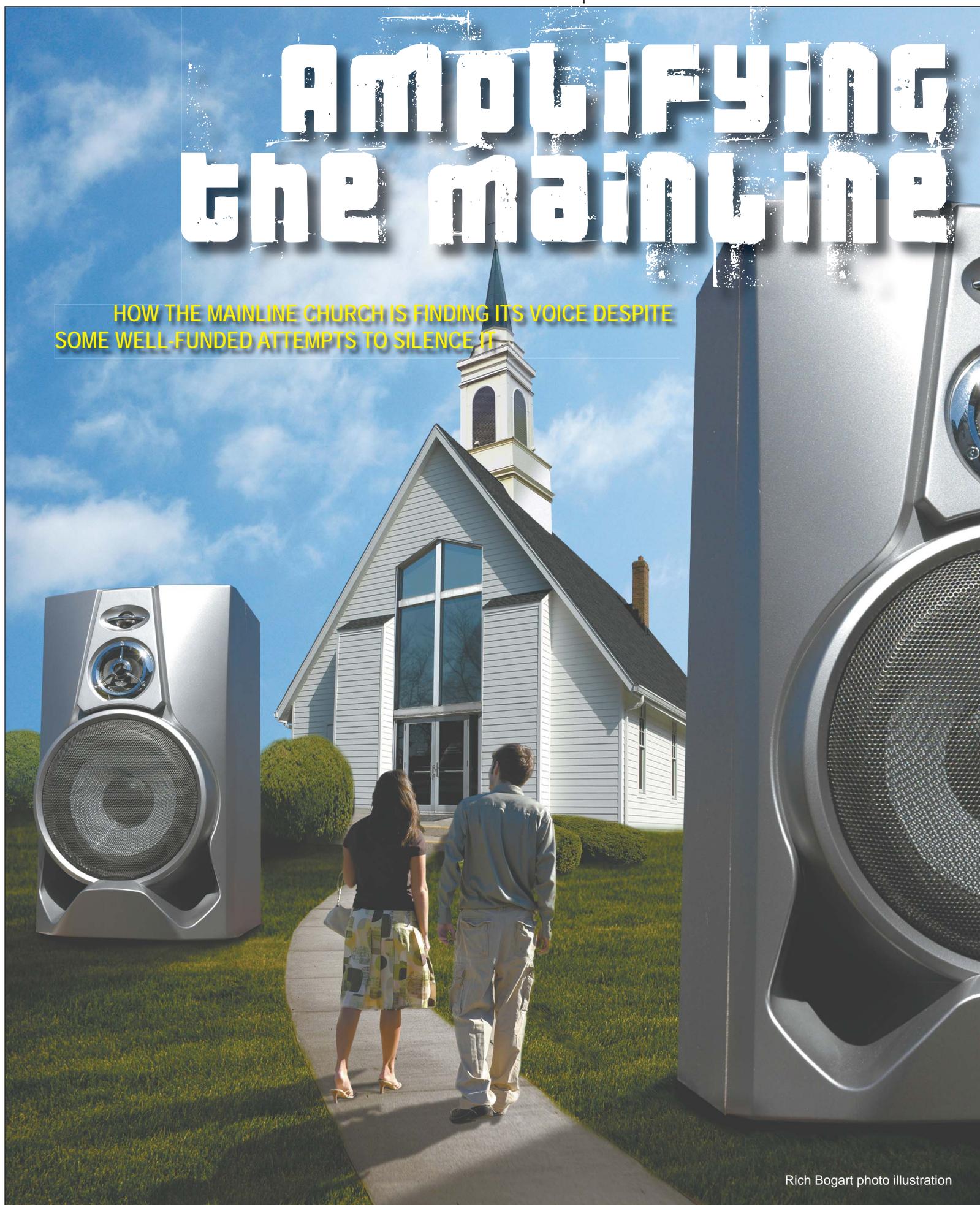
Plan calls for 250 new churches in five years.

13 

DA VINCI'S ALLURE

A best-selling book, a blockbuster movie. Why?

ucc.org 



HOW THE MAINLINE CHURCH IS FINDING ITS VOICE DESPITE SOME WELL-FUNDED ATTEMPTS TO SILENCE IT

Rich Bogart photo illustration

Exploring urgent questions about national structure

FROM THE COLLEGIUM



Edith Guffey

“Part of the work of any organization is to continually assess how the work is being done as well as the effectiveness of the work itself.”

Sometimes I lament being an administrator and wish I were more gifted in something much more exciting or jazzy than a person who primarily attends to the internal life of an organization. We all have our particular gifts and “the grass is always greener on the other side.” I’m sure there are times (maybe not many, but surely some!) that others wish they dealt with more concrete parts of life and ministry than they do on a daily basis.

I say that as I write this column because I would love to write about the great annual meeting I just attended or to tell you about some of the exciting plans for the 50th Anniversary or talk about my personal commitment to a particular justice concern, something that would be more glamorous and engaging.

But what I think you really need to hear from me is what’s on the horizon for us as a church as we take another look at how we are doing the work that we are called to in the national setting.

Part of the work of any organization is to continually assess how the work is being done as well as the effectiveness of the work itself. We do that on an ongoing basis, but at times it is important to do so in a more intentional way.

At the request of the Collegium, the Executive Council agreed that we take another intentional look at how our current structure either supports or inhibits the work we are called to do in the financial context within we live. In short, what it means is that we are grateful for the hard work that so many have done over the years that has moved us organizationally to a new place. And in many ways that process has worked well.

We also have learned the challenges of how we are structured. We agree that now is the time to ask some additional and difficult questions that have been core to how we have organized ourselves and have been among us for a very long time. Questions that were there even in 2000, but we were not in a position to address. These are questions that we would be asking even if the dollars were plentiful. The financial context makes the questions more urgent.

Those questions are detailed in the report of the Collegium to the Covenanted Ministries’ boards of directors and to the Executive Council and is found at <ucc.org>. I encourage you to read it carefully. [Read related news story on page 3.]

We are not interested in another 10-year restructuring process. Instead, we are very interested in exploring how to build on what we have done and how to continually assure that the work of the national setting is using the resources we have been given — both financial and human — in the most effective and faithful way.

Nothing glamorous, nothing jazzy, but so important to our life and witness as the church. Please keep us in your prayers as we begin this important work.

Edith A. Guffey is associate general minister and a member of the UCC’s five-person Collegium of Officers.

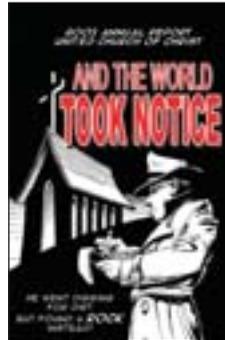
► A reporter’s worst nightmare?

The unveiling of the UCC’s new, unconventional 2005 Annual Report was a smash hit at the Covenanted Ministries’ joint board meeting in April, as a professional actor portrayed a suspicious reporter who wasn’t all that jazzed about writing 2,000 words on a “struggling” mainline church.

The light-hearted drama helped bring to life the cartoonish genre of the Annual Report. This year, it comes in the form of a graphic novel, as the illustrated tale of a not-so-enthused reporter sent to cover the UCC. What he finds surprises him.

Written by United Church News’ Will Matthews and featuring illustrations by professional artist Steve Ross, the annual report is unlike any you’ve seen before. Warning: you might just want to read it.

Copies have been mailed to each church, but view it online at <ucc.org/ocwm/ucc2005.htm>.



► 2009 Synod heading to Michigan, then Hawaii

After gathering next year in Hartford, Conn., for the church’s 50th anniversary celebration in 2007, the UCC’s biennial General Synod will head to Grand Rapids, Mich., for its 2009 installment. Then, in 2011, delegates are off to Honolulu.

The site location decisions were made by the UCC’s 90-member Executive Council at its April 23-25 meeting in Hartford.

“Grand Rapids has everything any big city has, and it is so much more welcoming,” said the Rev. Bill Lyons, **pastor of St. John’s UCC in Grand Rapids**, speaking to The Grand Rapids Press.

For decades, the UCC’s Hawaii Conference has asked that General Synod be held in the Pacific Islands. In fact, Hawaii originally bid for the 2009 gathering, but will have to settle for the later date.

“After a great deal of discussion, the Executive Council voted to accept that invitation, but to delay going to Hawaii until 2011,” according to post-decision memo from the UCC’s five-person Collegium of Officers. “This will allow Conferences and others a longer period of time to

raise the additional dollars needed to host the Synod there.”

The delay also diminishes any appearance that the Executive Council was simply voting itself an exotic Hawaiian vacation, because existing EC members will have rotated off the Council before 2011 gets here.

The UCC will also ask the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to consider hosting a joint General Synod/Assembly in 2013. The two full-communication churches have met together twice previously — Kansas City in 2001 and St. Louis in 1993.

► At least 98 churches have parted company

Ninety eight churches have voted to leave the UCC during the 10-month period that has followed General Synod 25, July 1-5, 2005, in Atlanta. Sixty-six of the churches specifically cited the General Synod-approved resolution supporting same-gender marriage equality as their reason for leaving.

During the same time, at least 26 churches have joined the UCC, with an additional 40 churches expressing a “firm interest” in affiliating.

Research Director Destiny Shellhammer says that, while the number of departing churches is regrettable, the number of proposed congregations is “much higher” than the UCC has experienced in recent years.

“We have seen a significant increase in the number of churches pursuing affiliation,” she says.

Although some critics have alleged the UCC’s national setting has been slow to report departures, Shellhammer says her office does not operate on speculation or hearsay, but relies on direct reporting. Many departing congregations did not communicate their decisions in a timely way, and many Conferences waited to use customary year-end reporting methods to communicate withdrawals and/or additions.

► They really like us

United Church News received 14 awards from the Religion Communicators Council and Associated Church Press for its work in 2005, including prizes for the year’s best news stories, feature stories and editorial.

In separate competitions, both RCC and ACP named “Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Price” (Oct.-Nov.), by Editor J. Bennett Guess, with its first-place awards for best news story. RCC also named “Innocence lost: UCC heads to federal court to save FCC’s TV guidelines” (Dec.-Jan.), also by Guess, as its co-winner in the news category.

RCC honored Guess with first-place honors for best editorial for his post-Katrina commentary, “Global Wal-Martization is sign, symbol of poverty-trending economy” (Oct.-Nov.) and best feature story for “Talking the walk: Why is it so hard for UCC members to speak convincingly about their faith?” (April-May) ACP selected “The sturdy, reliant, self-destructing pastor” (January), written by Guess, as the year’s best feature story.

ACP judged United Church News’ “opinion matters” section as its second-place recipient for best department, and the newspaper tied with Episcopal Life for third place for overall best national newspaper, following after the Mennonite Weekly Review and United Methodist Reporter. ACP also recognized United Church News for its in-depth coverage of General Synod 25 in Atlanta.

The UCC received a first-place award from ACP for Best Annual Report (2004), a piece featuring art direction by Randy Varcho, text by Cliff Aerie and graphic design by Ron Toelke Associates. The Stillspeaking Initiative’s print ad campaign won first place for best ancillary product.

Archived editions of United Church News are available online at <ucc.org/ucnews>.



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ON THE WEB 24-7

DECISION FOLLOWS NEWS OF MONEY WOES FOR NATIONAL SETTING

Executive Council gives green light to possible structural changes

By Will Matthews
For United Church News

At its April 23-25 meeting, the UCC's 90-member Executive Council authorized the church's five-member Collegium of Officers to draft recommendations for what likely could be a significant overhaul of the national setting's management and governance structures.

The hope is to develop ways to streamline the church's Cleveland-based national offices in the face of a hardening financial situation at the UCC's national setting.

"The mood was somber, but I think both somber and grateful," the Rev. Sharon MacArthur, chairwoman of the Executive Council and pastor of **Sycamore Congregational UCC in El Cerrito, Calif.**, said of the Executive Council's meeting in Hartford, Conn. "I think that there was a sense of relief at people finally naming the elephant in the room."

The Executive Council's meeting came on the heels of a gathering of the joint boards of the UCC's four national Covenanted Ministries, during which the Collegium discussed publicly for the first time a report it drafted last month detailing the national setting's bleak financial picture and calling for measures to solidify its economic standing.

"I think that after reading the report there was a sense among the Executive Council that we have a fairly cumbersome governing structure and that we need some clear lines of governance," MacArthur said. "That is something that we need to do something about."

According to the Collegium report, funding in 2005 for National Basic Support, the main source of funding for the work of the Covenanted Ministries, was just \$10 million, \$500,000 less than projections and down from \$12.5 million in 1995, 1999 and 2000, and down from \$13.1 million in 1985.

The Collegium also projects a 2006 short-fall of as much as \$1 million.

Having now received authorization from the Executive Council, the Collegium will move forward with recommendations it outlined in its report, including examining the size, number and role of the Covenanted Ministry boards and the Executive Council, the size and design of the Collegium of Officers, the assignment of national work and staffing patterns and the role of the general minister and president.

The Collegium also is authorized to enact a hiring freeze on most vacant positions, develop a new shared-staffing model across the four Covenanted Ministries, and undergo a complete review of the church's approach to fund raising.

"The Collegium took this to the Executive Council because we wanted the formal encouragement to go ahead with some of this work that we felt needs to be done," said the Rev. John H. Thomas, the UCC's general minister and president. "We didn't want to embark on the amount of work that will be required unless there was support for some of the broad strokes that we have outlined."

At the crux of the financial woes plaguing the national church is the fact that as giving at the local levels of the church have increased steadily over the past 20 years, the percentage

“Any restructure of any setting of the church is important and is significant in order to allow us to be as effective and faithful as possible.”

— The Rev. John Thomas

of those dollars retained locally has increased as well.

In 1985, about \$471 million was given to local churches and, of that amount, more than \$28 million, or 5.9 percent, was forwarded to Our Church's Wider Mission as basic support for Conference, national and international work.

In 2004, giving to local churches was almost double the 1985 amount — with nearly \$899 million being placed in Sunday morning offering plates. But only \$30 million of that was forwarded to OCWM in 2004, a mere 3.5 percent.

Additionally, the percentage of total basic support dollars retained by Conferences has increased as well, from less than 49 percent in 1975 to almost 68 percent in 2005, according to denominational leaders.

In an effort to better respond to those shifting financial realities and to increase the ability of denominational leaders to raise dollars for ministry, the Executive Council also authorized the Collegium to hire outside consultants to review fundraising efforts, including Our Church's Wider Mission, major gifts, planned giving and sources outside of the UCC such as foundation funding. Thomas said that work will begin immediately to identify consultants.

"Any restructure of any setting of the church is important and is significant in order to allow us to be as effective and faithful as possible," Thomas said. "But the ministry of the UCC is far larger than any one setting and any one structure. So I hope that this all will have a positive impact on an important part of the church as well as encourage the kinds of discussions that need to take place around the whole life of the church. Ultimately, though, the mission of the church depends on God and is not our structure."

Real-time web event will kick-off UCC 50th anniversary year

The "UCC at 50" will begin its year-long golden anniversary celebration on Nov. 5, All Saints Sunday, with a "real time" web streaming event.

"The notion is that the whole church will be participating in a real-time, online event," says the Rev. Robert Chase, the UCC's communication director. "It will take place at the same time from Maine to Hawaii."

It's tentatively set to begin at 6 p.m. (ET).

Described as a time for "worship, work and play," the web streaming will include interactive

"I don't know how all of this will play out, but I do hope it gets resolved."

— Edith A. Guffey, associate general minister

Labor dispute in Hartford leaves General Synod planning in a lurch



Connecticut Convention Center, site of the UCC's 2007 General Synod

photo courtesy of Greater Hartford Convention and Visitors Bureau

By Will Matthews

Owners of the newly constructed Connecticut Convention Center in Hartford, as well as an adjacent Marriott Hotel — site of the UCC's 2007 General Synod — are refusing to enter into a labor peace agreement that would allow the workers at both facilities to decide whether to unionize, according to UCC officials.

The General Synod, one of the first major conventions to be hosted by the new city facility, is finding itself drawn into the middle of a complicated, ever-protracted labor dispute. The UCC's Connecticut Conference also is scheduled to have its 2006 Annual Meeting at the convention center this fall.

In keeping with the church's longstanding support of workers' right to organize, Associate General Minister Edith A. Guffey said UCC leaders have sent letters to the owners and operators of the hotel and the convention center, urging them to enter into a labor peace agreement with their workers.

"The UCC has long been on the record with its support of the right of workers to organize if they choose without fear of retaliation or intimidation," said Guffey, who also serves as administrator of the General Synod. "This is a clear issue of justice, and the kind of issue that the UCC has long been committed to."

Church officials are hoping the dispute

will be resolved soon; however, alternative venues in Hartford, and perhaps even beyond, are being considered.

"I don't know how all of this will play out, but I do hope it gets resolved," Guffey said.

On April 22, while in Hartford for joint board meetings of the UCC's four Covenanted Ministries, dozens of UCC members joined hundreds of local union members and advocates outside the convention center to advocate for a just resolution to the dispute.

UCC General Minister and President John H. Thomas pledged that the denomination will consider alternative locations for the next General Synod — which also marks the church's 50th anniversary celebration — if labor peace is not achieved.

"The UCC has stood with farm workers in California and with workers in Ohio and Michigan and other parts of the country," Thomas said. "Now it is time to stand with convention workers and hotel workers in Hartford."

"Jesus grew up in a working-class family," Thomas continued. "He knew what it was like to earn a living with his hands. And he knew what it was to understand the dignity and the respect of all people."

The Rev. Davida Foy Crabtree, Connecticut Conference Minister, promised that unless workers are given the right to decide whether they want to form a union, the Connecticut Conference will hold its annual meeting elsewhere.

applications, including the ability for churches to e-mail digital photos that will be posted immediately for all to see, Chase says.

"They'll be able to see themselves, as well as others across the nation, as the event unfolds," he says. "It will be a fun, exciting opportunity for us to get a sense of our national ministry, even as we gather in our local settings."

The Rev. Cliff Aerie, the UCC's special events producer, says it's a contemporary way for the church to gather nationally to celebrate the launch of the UCC's 50th year — and to do so inexpen-

sively. From any computer, a UCC member will be available to tune in, but the hope is that UCC members will gather to participate in groups.

Other 50th anniversary highlights include a commemorative publication and historical DVD, local and regional events, a national TV worship broadcast on Easter Sunday 2007, General Synod in Hartford, Conn., and a closing 2007 All Saints celebration.

ALL MAINLINE DENOMINATIONS FACING MEMBERSHIP, MONEY STRUGGLES

Easy analysis never captures full story of church's challenge



When one compares membership and giving trends, the UCC and the ultra-orthodox Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod are in the same boat.”


 NEVER OURSELVES ALONE


J. Bennett Guess
Editor

An incensed reader from the Penn Central Conference wrote in early April to make his point that giving to the UCC has declined — and will continue to do so — specifically because of General Synod's affirmation of gay and lesbian persons.

It's not the first time that sentiment has been expressed and likely not the last. Echoes of that refrain are evident in at least two letters below, and more such letters will arrive in the mail soon — I'm certain of that.

But, before some rejoice prematurely in the UCC's gay-inspired “defeat,” let's take a closer look at the numbers.

#1. Yes, there has been financial fallout from General Synod's support for marriage equality. To suggest otherwise is laughable. As General Minister and President John H. Thomas has said, “We have to face that as a reality. There are a lot of factors, but I don't want to pretend that marriage equality has nothing to do with it.”

Nearly 100 of the UCC's 5,725 churches have elected to leave since July 4, 2005, and several more have decided to withhold contributions to Our Church's Wider Mission. More than merely making the UCC smaller, the withdrawals diminish us — in capacity, in history, in diversity, in fellowship. We can't lament this reality enough.

Yet, even without the marriage equality resolution, the UCC would be facing financial and membership challenges.

#2. Giving to mainline denominations not supportive of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender inclusion has also declined significantly. Perhaps misery loves company, but the UCC is not alone when it comes to fewer dollars for connectional ministries and, while gay-acceptance is often cited as the reason, it's simply not true.

Take the United Methodist Church, for example, where U.S. membership and financial dollars for its national agencies have fallen dramatically. Unlike the UCC, however, the UMC's General Synod has passed resolutions barring gay and lesbian persons from ordination, preventing any spending that promotes gay/lesbian acceptance and prohibiting any local church or clergy person from participating in same-sex holy unions, much less marriages. Its Supreme Judicial Council ruled last year that UMC clergy could refuse to admit gay or lesbian persons as members.

Likewise, practically every other mainline denomination has suffered from fewer dollars flowing to the top and, with the possible exception of the Episcopal Church, you can't blame gay acceptance as the reason, because the churches' policies aren't there to back up the claim.

Here's the truth: When one compares membership and giving trends, the UCC and the ultra-orthodox Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod are in the same boat.

“In addition to dealing with our specific issues, we're also caught up in a negative trend,” Thomas has said correctly.

#3. Giving to the UCC is up, despite what some secular reporters have written in recent weeks. Total church support reached \$911 million in 2005, up from \$898 million in 2004 and \$882 million in 2003.

True, more churches are electing to spend this money on local mission, but the numbers don't lie: The UCC is not poor; our members contributed nearly \$1 billion last year.

#4. Special giving to UCC's national setting is growing. Combined support for OCWM's four special mission offerings grew by 3 percent last year. On top of that, more than \$1.5 million was given to support the Stillspeaking Initiative. Most impressive, UCC members contributed a record-shattering \$9 million for disaster relief and recovery, up nearly four-fold from members' response after September 11. Even individual gifts to United Church News have quadrupled during the past two years.

While this makes the case that members will still contribute generously to connectional ministries important to them, it also reveals that confidence in the UCC's national setting remains strong. Givers still trust the connectional church to use its dollars wisely and efficiently.

#5. Conference retention rates are the confusing, often-unspoken factor. Here's how it works: Members give to churches, churches give to Conferences, Conferences give to national. But increasingly, higher costs for our 39 Conference offices have meant that more than two-thirds of OCWM gifts are now staying at the regional level. Last year, 68 percent of OCWM dollars were retained by Conferences, a jump of 1.2 percent in one year and up 19 percent since 1975.

Overall giving to basic support did fall from \$30.3 million in 2004 to \$29.6 million in 2005. However, that 1.2 percent increase in retention contributed significantly to the national setting's \$647,709 revenue decline (from \$10,605,163 in 2004 to \$9,957,454 in 2005).

The public perception, even if incorrect, is that UCC members gave significantly less to its national offices in 2005, when the reality is that the UCC's national setting received significantly less from its Conferences, a trend that has continued uninterrupted for 49 years.

#6. It ain't pretty, but a single issue is not to blame. True, OCWM support is not only declining but any growth has fallen well short of inflation. New patterns for funding connectional ministries must be found.

However, the church's woes have as much to do with birthrate/population changes and evolving approaches to philanthropy as anything else. People no longer blindly give to support an institution, no matter its liberal-conservative leanings; they give to specific causes they care about.

For decades, our UCC publications have been full of members' letters laying the blame for the church's alleged demise on racial integration, civil rights, women's ordination, sexuality education or “supporting communism.” Single issue analysis never captures the full story — but we'll keep running your letters anyway.



LETTERS

Understanding 'God's Word'

Balaam's Courier and I agree on working to understand God's Word. The problem is — why are we looking for more light and truth? Is it because we want to obey more fully? Or is it to find an excuse to do our own will?

God's Word does not say freeing slaves or using the gifts of women or racial equality is an abomination. Therefore the church was in accord with the Holy Spirit when promoting these ideals. God does say homosexual behavior is an abomination. Therefore, we are not under the guidance of the Holy Spirit when affirming this lifestyle.

The first one to ask, “Did God really say ...?” was the serpent in Eden. His motivation was not to obey, but to distort God's Word in

order to empower himself against God. What is the motivation of the “progressive” wing of the UCC?

Carolyn Toth
Kissimmee, Fla.

Correlation speculation

United Church News' headlines in April-May read, “Springing Loose ‘The Ejector’” and “OCWM woes continue; National Basic Support down \$500,000.” Hmm, could there be a correlation here, perhaps cause and effect?

James M. Berry
Deerfield, Ill.

Churches 'struggling,' others 'flourish'

It is amazing to read that your budget falls short by some \$1.6 million dollars. All this and you steadfastly move ahead on issues that are dividing our church. I find it hard to believe that you willingly move into the political arena leaving the basics for our religion in the dust heap.

The churches that have stayed with the UCC are all struggling to meet budgets and membership targets. The churches that have left are all doing fine, meeting budgets and mem-

bership flourishing. I do not believe you are capable of returning to our founding principles of our oneness in Christ and our witness to him, as taught in the Bible.

John R. Kennedy
Kennebunk, Maine

'To care is to do'

God may be “still speaking” but does God's people have the courage to “do”?

The UCC is no different from any other church in its desire to share the love of God. The UCC is spending hundreds of thousands of dollars to invite those who are disillusioned with their present church home and those seeking to find a spiritual home.

Is it worth it? Is all the talk just “talk”? What happened to pastoral care, the “bread and butter” of making the Gospel real?

I am going through a divorce. I have spoken with the minister of the congregation but little has come of it. She has made no effort to contact me. No e-mails, no phone calls, no “Hey, can we get together for coffee?” None of that. I wrote two letters to the board of deacons. Silence.

Spend your money, but if this is what is going on in the UCC then we are nothing but a “noisy gong” as St. Paul so aptly put it.

William Louie
Massachusetts (city not disclosed)

'Go-for-broke' ad campaign

I have listened with much interest to the UCC ads on several TV cable stations. In view of the serious financial condition of Our Church's Wider Mission, I can't help but think that this somewhat whimsical ad series represents a go-for-broke program to add membership to the UCC.

My question at this time is what is being done to hold the children and grandchildren of long-time members who Congregational roots go back to the mid-17th century?

Peter W. Fairbairn
Houston, Texas

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.

PROVIDING FOR OUR SOLDIERS

Why chaplaincy? 'People are the reason we serve'

COMMENTARY



Lilton Marks

I am not someone special, nor from some special or extraordinary ministry. Instead, I'm a committed servant of God's people in the real world.

One might ask, "Why serve as a chaplain in the military?" I would say only that the Good News is for everyone and should not be denied to persons serving in the military. They are the same young men and women who, as children, we taught to believe in a higher being, a Creator, a gracious and merciful God. For that reason, one can serve his or her

ministerial calling in the military.

As a chaplain in the U.S. Army, my primary purpose is to insure that all military members can practice their religious beliefs, what ever that may be.

Providing for faith practice and performing sacred rites are the easy part. Chaplains enter the military already equipped to perform ministry in their own or similar traditions — preaching, teaching, praying, evangelizing, baptizing, sharing communion. This is easy.

The challenge comes in providing for ministry when it conflicts with who you are and what you believe. Chaplains must seek out other religious leaders or materials to accommodate individuals' diverse beliefs.

To be a good shepherd/pastor in the military, as well as other public ministries, chaplains must "second class" their change-agent mentality. You do not have to believe as they do, but you do have to provide for others' beliefs. I am not talking about compromising your faith. I am talking about insuring that others are able to practice their faith.

Ministry in combat is an added challenge to an already challenging ministry. You are constantly confronted with the reality of human destruction, human guilt, human fear and other human needs.

The Iraq and Afghanistan war is a family deployment. This truly is the first time in our nations history or, at least since the Mexican war, where we find children and parents, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, sisters and sisters, brothers and brothers, mothers and daughters, fathers and sons, cousins, aunts, uncles — all deployed and fighting in a war at the same time.

Young people are dying and or afraid to die. The chaplain/pas-

tor must be available to listen and comfort both the leaders and the followers.

Recently, a young female soldier — a Roman Catholic — came to my office seeking counseling. She had been in an IED (improvised explosive device) explosion that had seriously damaged the vehicle in which she was riding. With still two months left before redeploying home, she had been on the road for 10 months and had experienced at least seven IEDs. The mother of an 8-year-old girl and a 6-year-old boy, her husband had abandoned the family and divorced her. So, as an Army reservist, she volunteered to come to Iraq in order to pay off bills, get a decent house and return to college. Now, since she's been in Iraq, her ex-husband has sought a court order for temporary custody, preventing her from leaving the children with her parents. On top of that, she must pay him child support until she returns.

How do I as a Protestant minister respond to a young, angry and afraid Roman Catholic mother who is blaming herself for not being with her children? You listen very intentionally. You talk about believing in yourself and trusting in God who has brought her safe this far. You help her reclaim trust and hope, so she can be better focused, more alert. But the hardest thing is that there are no guarantees.

In another situation, a team of soldiers who have lived together, fought together, protected each other and witnessed others' deaths are now confronted with the loss of two of their own members. At the request of the commander, the chaplain comes and stands beside him as he tells the soldiers about the deaths. The soldiers are angry and want to hear nothing of God. But it becomes clear: It's this young captain, at this moment, who needs the chaplain more than his men.

Christ's intent for all persons is a life of union with God and a sense of hope and faith. And when chaplains cry out for God's mercy for people in the military, they are heard and given wisdom and compassion just as their counterparts in civilian life.

What a wonderful truth we have: Good News is for everyone! What a wonderful relationship we have: Access to God in boldness and confidence! People are the reason we serve.

U.S. Army Chaplain (Col.) Lilton Marks, a UCC minister, is Command Chaplain for the multinational forces serving in Iraq. This column is an abridged version of an address he gave on April 26 at the 2006 Ministerial Institute at UCC-related Chicago Theological Seminary, his alma mater.

'IS WARFARE EVER JUSTIFIED?'

How earnestly are we teaching love, non-violence?

COMMENTARY

William H. Daniels

Day after day, we are depressed by the news of more death and destruction in Iraq, plus reports of conflict and death in Afghanistan, Israel, Palestine and other nations. Is there a way of ending the conflicts and building a world where justice and peace prevail? A perfect society is out of the question, but certainly a more just and peaceful world community is a goal for which we must strive.

We need to begin, I believe, by reflecting seriously on the predominant thought-forms, attitudes and actions which are widespread in our world today. For centuries, people have made warfare an acceptable and appropriate form of action. If a group or nation appears to be your enemy, then invade or destroy it before it brings harm to you and your people. If an ethnic group is different, get rid of it or exploit it for your own gain.

Religious bodies — Christian, Jewish, Muslim and others — have generally been quick to bless warfare and violence. How much attention, for example, have we who are Christian paid to Jesus' teachings: "Blessed are the peacemakers," "Turn the other cheek," "Walk the second mile," "Love God, love neighbor" and even "Love your enemies"? Have we really listened to prophets like Micah who said, "Do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God?"

I am impressed by what the American Friends Service Committee describes as "bedrock principles:"

- ▶ Live simply and be straightforward in your dealings with others.
- ▶ Work for justice and peace, even when it is unpopular.
- ▶ See that of God in every person.
- ▶ Know that each man, woman and child merits respect and our compassion.

Is warfare ever justified? Developed by Christian theologians in the fourth and fifth centuries, the just-war tradition argued that a war was justified only if fought in self defense, had peaceful intent, was conducted by legitimate rulers, if victory was certain, if civilians would not be harmed, if benefits exceeded harm and if it was the last resort.

Personally, I do not regard the Iraq war as a just war. Invasion was not our last resort and some other conditions of a just war were not met.

As we continue to seek peace and order in Iraq and, along with other nations, seek a non-nuclear Iran, we must also engage in long-range planning about the kind of world our children and grandchildren might inhabit.

What are the values we are sharing? How earnestly are we, as pastors and congregations, teaching non-violence and love for all people?

We need to express these values in our daily living as we seek, with God's help, to build a world community in which all persons are valued and given opportunities for life at its fullest.

The Rev. William H. Daniels of Lancaster, Pa., is a retired pastor, Conference staff member and former missionary in China and Australia.



OVERHEARD

"Local churches, ministers and laity alike need to be prodded, for we domesticate God's word too soon. Lacking the vigor to deal with big problems, we allow ourselves to become mesmerized by little ones."

— The Rev. William Sloane Coffin, legendary UCC pastor, prophet and poet, who died April 12 at age 81. (From "Credo," Westminster John Knox Press, 2004)

"We need to differentiate between loving critics and critics who are looking to divide and destroy."

— The Rev. John Thomas, speaking to *The New York Times* (April 7).

"Make no mistake, the objectives of the Institute on Religion and Democracy are the exact opposite of what its name appears to stand for. The purpose of its leaders is to demoralize the mainline denominations and to turn them away from the pursuit of social and economic justice."

— The Rev. Avery Post, former UCC president (1977-1989), writing to pastors and congregations in 1982. (See "Amplifying the Mainline" on page 8.)

"In rejecting the [UCC's] ad, the major broadcast outlets have been met with only murmurs of protest for what should be a boycotting offense."

— Columnist Adele M. Stan of *The American Prospect* in her May 8 column, "Divine Denial," appearing, of all places, at <pbsnews.com>.

"Everybody's been very disturbed about the situation and struggling with how can an individual or congregation make a difference in Darfur."

— The Rev. Julie Peebles, pastor of *Congregational UCC in Greensboro, N.C.*, speaking about the genocide in Sudan's Darfur region and her church's decision to join the "Dear Sudan" campaign (*Greensboro News-Record*, May 8). Learn how to get your church involved at <dearsudan.org>.



TABULATIONS

A LOCATION NEAR ME?

The number of 'find a church' searches at UCC websites more than doubled during April's 'ejector' ad run. Here's the number of unique website visitors who actually entered a city/state or zip code to locate a UCC church near them:

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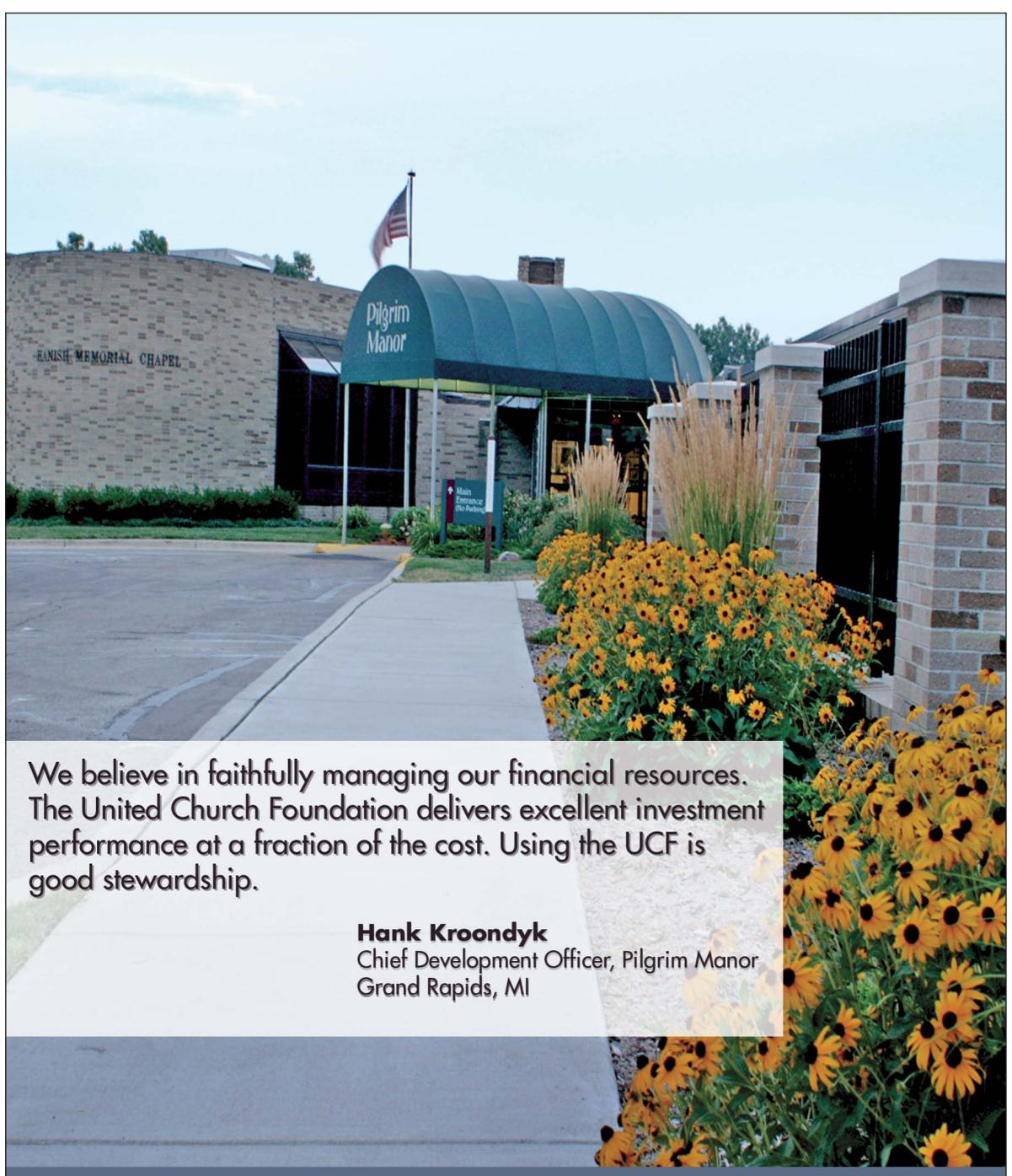
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FORMER U.S. PRESIDENT BEFRIENDED HAWAIIAN QUEEN, OPPOSED OVERTHROW

UCC members from Hawaii pay tribute at Grover Cleveland's New Jersey grave

By Anne Levin
Special to United Church News

The grave of 19th-century President Grover Cleveland blends with others at New Jersey's Princeton Cemetery. But on Sunday, April 23, the modest monument was adorned with colorful leis, beads and leaves, placed there by a delegation of native Hawaiians who came to honor the New Jersey native's memory.

It was Cleveland who defended the rights of Hawaiians during his second term as president in the 1890s, when sugar plantation owners were overthrowing their queen and seeking annexation to the United States.

Cleveland befriended Hawaiian Queen Lili'uokalani, a Congregationalist, and advocated her "speedy return to the throne" in an 1894 declaration. But he was overruled. Hawaii was annexed in 1898 and became a state 61 years later.

"We don't know if this is the first visit of native Hawaiians to this gravesite, but may it not be the last," said the Rev. Kaleo Patterson of Honolulu before leading prayers yesterday. A steady drizzle evaporated as 13 people gathered at the gravesite and the sun burst through the clouds.

The group stood in a circle with Patterson, a UCC minister and the president of the Honolulu-based Pacific Justice and Reconciliation Center.

Joining them were members of **Christ Congregation UCC of Princeton, N.J.**, who earlier hosted the Hawaiians at a worship service. The Rev. Charles McCollough, wearing a Hawaiian shirt and beads under his tweed blazer, also participated in the graveside ceremony.

Many native Hawaiians have never accepted the U.S. armed invasion of their sovereign nation and feel it has contributed to significant economic and social problems which continue to this day. They are leading an educational effort, which includes learning about such historical figures as Cleveland, in hopes of changing their government to better represent their culture and traditions.

"We just wanted to come and visit and get a firsthand knowledge of the person and history of Cleveland," said Patterson. The delegation also spent time in Caldwell, Cleveland's birthplace.

The trip was among several events that led up to an April 30 national day of prayer for Hawaiian natives that groups on the islands have been putting together. The aim is to raise support for efforts to reduce poverty and crime among Hawaiian natives, as well as granting some form of self-government and self-determination.

"We have the shortest life expectancy, the highest rate for major diseases, suicide, homelessness and incarceration," said Patterson of the native Hawaiians, or "Kanaka Maoli." Patterson was citing a resolution of the National Council of Churches, adopted in 1993.

By 1880, Hawaii had one of the highest literacy rates in the world and a traditional land use system that allowed natives free and unrestricted use of land and ocean resources, provided they paid taxes to local managers and the local monarchy.

In 1894, then-President Cleveland established a national day of prayer and repentance over the U.S. role in the monarch's overthrow. Almost a century later in 1993, President Bill Clinton signed a Joint Resolution by Con-



The Rev. Kaleo Patterson, left, leads fellow Hawaiians, Coochie Caya, center left, and Ha'aheo Guanson, center right, and Rev. Jeffrey Mays, right, pastor of Christ Congregation UCC in Princeton, in prayer around the tombstone of former President Grover Cleveland in Princeton, N.J. on April 23. Patterson and the other Hawaiians traveled to New Jersey to honor Cleveland in his home state for championing Hawaiian rights and national sovereignty in the 1890s, even as sugar plantation owners were overthrowing Hawaiian Queen Lili'uokalani and seeking annexation to the United States.

AP | Mike Derer photo

gress to apologize for the injustices done to the native Hawaiians.

The visit to Princeton and Caldwell was organized as an educational mission.

"We've all wrestled with how to do good educating on the Hawaiian issues, to reach the mainstream," said Patterson. "We began to see that educating people about Cleveland would be a good way to better explain the

struggle. We will probably develop an educational project on his life."

The purpose is to pray for "true justice and true reconciliation," Patterson added, "and it's more than just a political recognition. It's to educate and bring hope."

Reprinted with permission from the Trenton (N.J.) Times. Associated Press also contributed to this report.

Plan calls for 250 new churches in five years, 1,600 by 2021

By J. Bennett Guess

Affirming that "now is the time for new church development," Local Church Ministries' board of directors voted April 22 to endorse an ambitious strategy for planting and welcoming 250 new churches into the UCC by 2011 and as many as 1,600 new congregations by 2021.

The strategy, as detailed in an evangelism document called "Now is the Kairos Time," has also been affirmed by the UCC's Council of Conference Ministers.

"Kairos" calls the church to embrace a four-fold strategy: 1) nurturing a church culture that embraces and engages in new church development; 2) creating systems that recognize, recruit, assess, train and coach new church planters; 3) encouraging and empowering congregational multiplication [churches starting churches]; and 4) preparing for increased outreach and welcome of affiliating [already-existing] congregations.

LCM also voted to give \$200,000 to the Southeast Conference's Nehemiah Project, which calls for intensive church planting and outreach by the UCC in the southeastern United States. The grant will be used to support new and renewing churches in the burgeoning region over the next two years.

"The Nehemiah Initiative is very big, not only for us, but for the whole UCC," says Southeast Conference Minister Timothy C. Downs.

“We’re planning to move ahead with assessing and planning for new churches.”

— The Rev. David Schoen

Thanks to the UCC's Stillspeaking Initiative, the UCC has seen a burst of interest from those living in the Southeast. Affirming inquiries in response to the denomination's four-year advertising campaign have come disproportionately from those living in southern states, places where the UCC's presence has been the weakest numerically.

"We're going to move ahead with assessing and planning for new churches," says the Rev. David Schoen, who heads the UCC's Evangelism Ministry Team in Cleveland. The influx of new churches is expected to include newly planted congregations as well as existing congregations that will seek affiliation with the UCC. Currently, about 40 existing churches have expressed a "firm interest" in joining the UCC.

A "leadership training camp" for new church planters is being planned for 2007 in order to "identify, coach, train, mentor and inspire" those who feel called to plant new UCC congregations, Schoen says. But it's a special calling.

UCC grants \$1 million to New Orleans' Dillard University

A \$1 million grant to UCC-related Dillard University in New Orleans has been approved by the Local Church Ministries' board of directors.

During its April 20-22 meeting in Hartford, the board heard from Dillard President Marvalene Hughes, who spoke about the devastation of Katrina and about plans to return to their historic campus in New Orleans.

The \$1 million gift comes from the LCM's Daniel Hand Fund, an historic endowment restricted to support for the church's educational work among African Americans.

In addition, grants of \$500,000 each were made to UCC-related Talladega College in eastern Alabama and UCC-related LeMoyne Owen College in Memphis, Tenn., to strengthen their financial positions as they look toward re-accreditation.

Dillard, Talladega and LeMoyne Owen are three of six historic UCC-related African-American colleges and universities.

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<dillard.edu>

"A lot might think they have the skills for new church planting and they *might*, but leadership is crucial," Schoen says. "A 'church planter' is one who actually has what it takes to do it."

Schoen says church planters are gifted with motivational, relational and visionary abilities, plus the practical skills necessary to put vision into practice, to pass on the vision to others and to train newcomers for ministry and leadership.

In 2006, the Southeast Conference has welcomed three new churches into the UCC.

On April 22, the Alabama-Tennessee Association granted standing to **Holy Trinity Community UCC in Nashville**, and **Unity Worship Center, UCC in Montgomery, Ala.**

In **Columbia, S.C.**, the 300-member **Garden of Grace UCC** was granted congregational standing on April 29 in the Georgia-South Carolina Association. Ironically, leaders of Garden of Grace first expressed an interest in the UCC in December 2004 during the UCC's first national ad run. Then, in March 2005, during the UCC's second ad run, the church formally voted to seek affiliation. Finally, it was during the church's third ad run that Garden of Grace received congregational standing.

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Over the past nine years, prominent Religious Right leaders have appeared more than 40 times on the major Sunday morning new talk programs. But the principal leaders of the UCC, United Methodist Church, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A), Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), American Baptist Churches, African Methodist Episcopal Church, Reformed Church in America, among others, haven't appeared once. Why?

By J. Bennett Guess
Editor

On Easter Sunday, April 16, NBC's "Meet the Press" hosted its annual installment of "Faith in America," where seven religious commentators spent an hour discussing the state of religious life in this country. Representing the "Christian perspective" were a conservative Roman Catholic priest, a liberal Roman Catholic nun and a charismatic Pentecostal pastor. Not a mainline Protestant leader among them.

It was at least the second consecutive year that "Meet the Press" had snubbed the 35-member-body National Council of Churches by excluding any representation of its mainline communions. A year earlier, NBC had invited the president of the Southern Baptist Convention, a charismatic evangelical and a Roman Catholic priest to discuss the same topic. Again, no Episcopalians, no Presbyterians, no Lutherans. And certainly no one from the UCC.

Meanwhile this year, over at CNN, Wolf Blitzer's "Late Edition" spent about 10 minutes on Easter Sunday talking about Christian voters. Blitzer's guest? Jerry Falwell.

If you've noticed lately that a news interview with a United Methodist bishop is just about as likely as a UCC commercial on network television, then you're starting to get the point.

Media Matters, a media research organization, has crunched the numbers and what they've found isn't heartening: Mainline, main-stream denominations — even though they account for more than one-quarter of church-going Americans — are rarely, if ever, visible on national news programs.

"Despite the fact that mainline churches are at the heart of the American landscape," says the Rev. Robert Chase, the UCC's communication director, "they continue to be silenced, or perhaps just ignored, when it comes to media conversations about religion in America."

"At the beginning of the 'Meet the Press' show, host Tim Russert asked the panelists, 'Were people more religious at the founding of our country and were we more divided on moral issues back then than we are now?'" Chase recalls. "Ironically, there was no one present to represent those historic, mainline Protestant traditions that have been so prominently at the center of American life since its earliest days."

No news is no news

Unfortunately, the lack of "mainline" coverage has become routine.

Last December, when 115 mainline religious leaders were arrested in Washington, D.C., during a last-ditch effort to draw attention to federal budget cuts affecting millions of low-income Americans, the major news networks didn't cover the story.

In February, during the World Council of Churches' 9th international assembly in Brazil, many prominent mainline leaders, including UCC General Minister and President John H. Thomas, issued a strongly worded apology to Christians around the world for not doing more to prevent the U.S. war in Iraq. In March, mainline clergy gathered in Washington, D.C., to demand an end to government curtailment of church-oriented travel to Cuba. And, in April, Church World Service, a broadly ecumenical relief organization, called on the U.S. Senate to adopt a "compassionate" immigration reform policy. In each instance, the major news organizations ignored the stories altogether.

However, in March, when Falwell chided a Minnesota city for allegedly evicting the Easter Bunny from a public venue, Associated Press covered it. And, about the same time, when Pat Robertson referred to Muslims as "satanic," Newsweek ran a story. And, in New Orleans, despite the millions of relief dollars raised by mainline denominations and the thousands of deployed volunteers now working there, it was Franklin Graham who landed an appearance on CNN's "Larry King Live" to talk about his



[The Institute for Religion and Democracy] is using church members, and even outside groups, to disrupt and ultimately control the mainline to promote its own political agenda."

— UCC General Minister and President the Rev. John H. Thomas, in a March 2006 speech at Gettysburg College in Pennsylvania

ministry there, along with Campus Crusades for Christ, which was profiled by CNN's Anderson Cooper.

When and if mainline Protestantism attracts media attention, it usually centers on declining membership or squabbles over homosexuality, says Robert Wuthnow, a sociology professor at Princeton University and author of "The Quiet Hand of God: Faith-Based Activism and the Public Role of Mainline Protestantism" (University of California Press, 2002). On April 3, he gave a lecture in Indianapolis on the role of mainline Protestantism today.

The unreported reality, Wuthnow believes, is that mainline churches still wield quiet influence on American public policy. But in the late 1980s and early 1990s, he says, evangelicals found their voice and journalists, in turn, began flocking to cover their every move.

Wuthnow says he and others have been left wondering, "What about mainline Protestants?"

Even in recent years, Wuthnow says, mainline church advocacy has played a favorable role in several public policy decisions, including successes in environmental justice, international debt relief and corporate responsibility. But credit for these victories often goes to evangelical or Roman Catholic leaders, he says.

Jubilee 2000 is cited by Wuthnow as an example. The debt relief campaign resulted in \$34 billion in debt forgiveness for developing nations. "Mainline churches were hardly noticed in this effort by the media," he says.

Why the snubbing?

While some suggest the pervasive public silence is linked to decades of mainline decline, others suggest a more-sinister plot.

The Rev. Peter Laarman, former pastor of Judson Memorial Church (UCC/American Baptist) in New York and now director of the national Progressive Religious Partnership, believes the silencing is the direct result of a coordinated, decades-old strategy by so-called "neo-con" organizations, most notably the Washington, D.C.-based Institute for Religion and Democracy (IRD), to disrupt mainline churches, discredit their national agencies and "decapitate" mainline leaders.

The rise of the Religious Right not only depended on its ability to attract more political power, Laarman says, but its growth in influence also required a squelching of mainliners' long-standing clout. Because these more-moderate churches stood at the literal center of America's heartland and held significant sway on public opinion, their Christian credentials needed to be undermined. (More than 50 percent of members of Congress still belong to mainline Protestant churches.)

Articulating a thesis once put forward by theologian John B. Cobb, a United Methodist, Laarman says the mainline church enjoyed remarkable success through the 1970s: The Vietnam War, long opposed publicly by mainline leaders such as the UCC's William Sloane Coffin, had been ended. The sin of racial segregation had been exposed through the help of more-courageous mainline clergy. Civil

rights legislation, advocated by mainline church agencies, was being enacted. The ordination of women was growing in practice and acceptance, and a "liberationist" reading of the Bible — not biblical fundamentalism — was gaining prominence.

"These were not only significant cultural milestones but certain moral victories for the mainline church, and the mainline church became a victim of its own success," Laarman believes. "After the 1970s, a significant part of the mainline church went to sleep."

"But then it was torpedoed by this offensive [from the IRD] that it didn't see coming," Laarman says. "Unbeknownst to most people, there was a huge counter thrust that was well-funded and well-organized. Of all the vehicles of the Right in the last 40 years, its success at dividing the mainlines is its best and least known success. These [divisions] are not indigenous reactions within these communions. These are being orchestrated by the IRD."

IRD: 'Looking to divide and destroy'

Founded 25 years ago, IRD works through a three-pronged programmatic strategy referred to as "United Methodist Action," "Presbyterian Action" and "Episcopal Action," whereby it routinely hounds mainline leaders as "bureaucrats and elites" and portrays elected heads of mainline communions as rejecters of true Christianity.

According to Laarman, IRD's goal is a simple one: Portray mainline church leaders as anti-Christian, anti-American fools, and by so doing, cripple any mantle of respect or credibility their words or actions may have, either within their own denominations or within the public at large.

IRD's website <ird-renew.org> reveals how its attacks are most often personal, and how its stated commitment to "promoting democracy and religious freedom" often fails to include any respect for the democratic processes that are hallmarks of mainline Protestantism.

Randall Balmer, an evangelical Christian and professor of American religious history at Columbia University, is writing about IRD in his newest book — which he describes as "an evangelical's lament" — called "Thy Kingdom Come: How the Religious Right Distorts the Faith and Destroys America" (Basic Books, 2006).

Balmer, who attended last year's annual meeting of the IRD's Association for Church Renewal — which includes the UCC's Biblical Witness Fellowship — says there's a noticeable air of "triumphalism" among IRD enthusiasts.

"They feel confident that these issues of sexuality will be the means for retaking control of these [mainline] denominations," says Balmer, the son of an Evangelical Free Church minister. "I don't think it's overstated to say it's a conspiracy. They have this huge degree of support. What has really impressed me in the course of writing this book is the kind of infrastructure that the neo-cons have built over the past decades."

The Rev. Robert Edgar, general secretary of the National Council of Churches, says there

is a growing body of evidence that groups like the IRD are working to “deliberately divide and undermine institutional churches.”

“This is a concerted effort, not just against the National Council but the mainline churches themselves, to erode the confidence in leadership of these churches,” Edgar says.

The NCC and the World Council of Churches were early targets of IRD and became the subject of an IRD-inspired segment on CBS’ “60 Minutes” in 1983, when it reported IRD’s allegations that both the NCC and WCC were using mainline members’ offerings to “promote communism.” However, in December 2002, when “60 Minutes” Executive Producer Don Hewitt was asked on CNN’s “Larry King Live” to name any show he regretted during his 36-year career, Hewitt named just one: the story berating the ecumenical church bodies, calling the allegations “a lot of nonsense.”

“In the mainline churches, we are genetically nice and we tend to be pleasant people, so we have tended to overlook the IRD, which is spending secular money to destroy the fabric of mainline institutional churches,” says Edgar, a United Methodist minister. “A lot of us wanted to pretend that wasn’t happening, but these false prophets have been working diligently to spoil the well.”

Increasingly, the UCC — once outside the public spotlight and therefore able to avoid much of the IRD’s attention or resources — has found itself receiving more of IRD’s scorn.

About nine months ago, when clergy and lay leaders from the UCC’s Missouri/Mid-South Conference met in a St. Louis church basement to discuss how IRD might be in-

“We need to be more active in protecting our churches from this kind of behavior,” Thomas told *The New York Times*. “We need to differentiate between loving critics and critics who are looking to divide and destroy.”

Edgar describes IRD as purposefully “unfair and unbalanced.”

“They send people to every one of our governing board meetings,” Edgar says. “They only pick up on negative comments and nothing in the positive sense. I do think it’s time for those of us who have been the brunt of IRD attacks to not be silent.”

“I’m very proud of what John Thomas has done,” says Edgar. “It would be more helpful if more of our mainline leaders would do the same. There really is a need for other leaders to stand up and point out these conspiratorial organizations, like the IRD, that are intentionally corroding the integrity of faithful people and faithful churches.”

‘Reframing complex issues’

Edgar, whose new book “Middle Church: Reclaiming the Moral Values of the Faithful Majority from the Religious Right” (Simon and Shuster, 2006) will be available in late September, suggests four reasons why mainline churches find it difficult to get their messages picked up by the media and heard by the masses.

First, he says, we’re genetically long winded.

“In the mainline church, a lot of our leaders are not comfortable reframing complex issues with short, snappy answers, so we tend to allow the far Religious Right to give the short slogans while we give the 20-minute long an-

line leaders have focused more on internal management and less on external communication.

“It’s time for mainline church leaders to spend less time trying to hold their organizations together, and speak instead about those issues that God cares about — that God cares about the poor, God cares about justice, God cares about the stewardship of the earth,” Edgar says.

‘We need fresh approaches’

Chase says that UCC members — incensed by TV networks’ decisions to refuse to air UCC advertising — need to see the bigger picture.

“We now know that it’s not just the about the TV commercials,” Chase says. “It’s about the need for religious freedom and diversity of voice in the marketplace of ideas.”

That’s why Chase is utilizing a specialized UCC website <accessibleairwaves.org> to draw attention to how mainline churches are being overlooked in the media. Many within and beyond the UCC have been using the site to contact TV network executives about the need for more-balanced religion coverage.

The issue resonates with many mainline Christians, Chase says, because it transcends traditional Left and Right fault lines. Mainline church leaders — be they liberal, conservative or moderate — are being left out across the board, he says.

The Rev. Michael Livingston, a Presbyterian who is serving a two-year term as NCC president, is urging mainline church leaders to “tell our story, by any means necessary.”

Speaking in Cleveland on March 27 to members of the NCC’s Communications Commission, Livingston lamented the media attraction to Religious Right organizations, saying the work of CWS, Lutheran World Relief and Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, among others, largely goes unnoticed.

“Mainline Protestant and Orthodox churches have been pounded into irrelevancy by the media machine of a false religion,” says Livingston, who is executive director of the International Council of Community Churches.

Livingston challenged communicators not to mimic the Religious Right, but to devise new strategies for increasing visibility.

“We need fresh approaches to telling our story,” he says.

However, Livingston recognizes that seeking publicity is not necessarily the job of a mission worker, nor should congregations undertake ministry only to gain the spotlight.

“But it is the job of some of us to tell the story,” he says, “so that the noise we hear so persistently and loudly; the noise that divides, that blames, that ridicules, that labels — is not the only reality, is not the thing that comes to mind when one thinks of ‘church’ or ‘Christian.’”

Congresswoman Lois Capps (D-Calif.), whose father was a Lutheran minister, says diverse religious expression helps society to craft common priorities — and the mainline perspective needs to be heard.

“The mainline church respects the goal of promoting and protecting common values shared among many faiths while still respecting the separation of church and state,” Capps says. “This is why it is so vitally important that the mainline church remain engaged in public conversation about the role of religion in American life.”

Rebecca Bowman Woods, news editor for DisciplesWorld magazine, contributed to this story.



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tionally working with so-called “renewal groups” to sow discord and ultimately take churches out of the denomination, an IRD staffer flew from Washington, D.C., to listen in on the conversation. In March, when Thomas gave a lecture at Gettysburg College in Pennsylvania, his alma mater, that included comments about IRD’s attacks on mainline churches, an IRD representative again traveled from Washington, D.C., to attend, tape and transcribe the speech, unbeknownst to Thomas (even though he had provided a copy to United Church News for posting on its website.)

“IRD is using church members, and even outside groups, to disrupt and ultimately control the mainline to promote its own political agenda,” Thomas said at Gettysburg.

In response, IRD’s Steve Rempé describes Thomas as having “an advanced case of paranoia,” according to an April 7 article in *The New York Times*, which wrote about Thomas’ increasing efforts to shed light on the IRD.

Thomas says its time for mainline churches to question IRD’s motivations and, ultimately, to defend our churches from attacks.

swers,” Edgar says. “And that doesn’t play to radio and television.”

Second, elected mainline leaders are accountable to larger, cumbersome church bodies in ways that many Religious Right leaders are not, so mainline leaders are often more cautious when they speak.

“When you are so independent that you have no hierarchy or constituency, or any defined body like a General Conference that meets every few years, you can say whatever you want, no matter how outrageous it is,” Edgar says. “Mainline positions are rational and generally moderate in their sway and that often is not newsworthy, but still we have a responsibility to confront misinformation and outrageous statements.”

Third, mainline leaders have been shy to seek the spotlight.

“Mainline leaders typically don’t have big egos,” Edgar says, “but we need to get good leaders like John Thomas, [Presbyterian Stated Clerk] Clifton Kirkpatrick or [ELCA Presiding Bishop] Mark Hanson on these shows.”

Fourth, in response to IRD attacks, main-

MEDIA LESSONS FOR SAVVY MAINLINERS

► **IF YOU’RE NOT ON TV OR THE INTERNET, YOU DON’T EXIST.** If the UCC’s Stillspeaking Initiative has taught us one thing, it’s this: To be culturally relevant, you’ve got to be culturally engaged. In doubt, just ask Martin Luther, who creatively used the just-emerging printing press to usher in the Protestant Reformation. But that was 1539, not 2006.

► **TALK ABOUT THE FAITH, NOT JUST ISSUES.** “Nearly all public expressions of Christianity in America today bear little or no relation to what Jesus of Nazareth said and did. Reclaiming Jesus is a central concern,” writes the Rev. Peter Laarman, a UCC minister and editor of “Getting on Message: Challenging the Christian Right from the Heart of the Gospel” (Beacon Press, 2006).

► **LEARN HOW TO BE ‘THE GOOD GUEST.’** Become the most reliable interviewee a reporter could hope for. Build a track record. Be available. Return phone calls promptly. Say ‘yes’ to requests. Have a sense of humor — and timing. Speak in short, simple sentences, not soliloquies. Above all, get some media training; it’s invaluable.

► **THINK AND ACT IN HOURS,** not days or weeks. Learn how the news cycle works. Anticipate tomorrow’s issues. Your excellent op-ed or “letter to the editor” on last week’s headline won’t get much play; instead, write it today and send by email. Remember, the early verb gets the squirm.

► **HARNESS YOUR EGO FOR GOOD.** Let’s face it: The notion that you — and not someone else — should be speaking about important issues of faith and public policy requires some degree of ego. But that’s okay. “We need to be a little more aggressive and a little more nose-to-nose if we’re going to be heard,” says the Rev. Robert Edgar, general secretary of the National Council of Churches.

► **RETOOL CHURCH COMMUNICATIONS** for broadcasting, not print. “We’re much more comfortable with the written word, so most of our communications staff is less inclined to know the producers of television shows or talk radio,” says Edgar. “We need to change that.”

► **INVEST IN TOOLS OF THE TV TRADE.** “When Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson or James Dobson is asked to appear on one of these programs, they simply go to their basements, turn a few knobs in their studios and they’re on the air,” Edgar says. “If a mainline Protestant leader would get an invitation, they would have to go to the [network] studio. Our people are simply less available.”

► **REACH OUT TO BROADCASTERS.** “Even if you don’t expect to be heard, make a phone call, send an email. That way you become familiar and they get to know you,” says Connie Larkman, a UCC communicator and a former executive producer in TV news. “At least you’re waving the flag, ‘Our church is out here.’”

► **DON’T BURN BRIDGES.** No matter how irked you may find yourself, maintain composure and build collegiality, even when a reporter woefully misses the mark. Point out inaccuracies, if appropriate, but resist the urge to take all complaints directly to editors or producers. The reporter isn’t likely to forget — or disappear. Respect the relationship. Next time around, you’ll be glad you did.

► **FEAR NOT. DON’T BE A WIMP.** “We sideline ourselves,” says the Rev. Robert Chase, the UCC’s communication director. “There are times when you have to stand up and speak boldly, especially when there are those that would question our faith in God or our belief in the Bible. Don’t be afraid to say, ‘Enough!’”



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Faithful and Welcoming Churches National Gathering

The national gathering of Faithful and Welcoming Churches (FWC) has been rescheduled for August 4-6 at Shepherd of the Hills in Bechtelsville, PA.

This gathering is for FWC congregations and clergy, but we also welcome those who are considering the possibility of joining FWC or of leaving the UCC or both. National and regional UCC staff and others who are interested are invited to help us reflect on the future of the church.

We in FWC want to give churches a reason to stay as we seek to reclaim the founding vision of the UCC. Too many have left. Too many feel unwelcome who consider themselves traditional, moderate, evangelical, orthodox or conservative.

What is our place in the future of the UCC as a new national structure emerges? Does the extravagant welcome include us? Are we heard and valued? What are our options? We plan to ask these questions of UCC leaders, of FWC members, and of all who attend this open gathering.

To register or for more information on FWC, e-mail office@faithfulandwelcoming.org or write to FWC, P.O. Box 5382, Hickory, NC 28603.

www.faithfulandwelcoming.org



NOT-SO-STUFFY AFTER ALL

Frontier Christians urged fun, inspiring worship

COMMENTARY



Barbara Brown Zikmund

"Sermons should be so delivered as to attract, interest, instruct, please, rest and refresh the hearer. . . . Long hymns, long prayers, long sermons, long sighs, long faces, are not the natural accompaniment of piety."

These are the 150-year-old words of a frontier Christian pastor concerned about making Christianity more attractive to "unchurched" or "turned off" Americans. His 1866 article about effective preaching appeared in *The Herald of Gospel Liberty*, a newspaper founded in 1808 that is generally considered the first religious periodical in the country.

The "Christian movement" was a grass roots reaction against traditional religion. It emerged after the

American Revolution "when political liberty had been won, when churches were readjusting themselves to meet the needs of the time, when denominational rivalries were high and earnest souls sought the realities of the Christian life."

Christians affirmed the right of the individual to interpret God's truth. They insisted that Christian character, not creedal or doctrinal statements should be the test of fellowship. They called themselves "Christians" because it was a label that was "undivisive, unsectarian and expressive." They looked to the Bible to guide their faith and practice. They asserted that Christ was the only head of the church — not popes or bishops. And finally, they promoted Christian unity, rather than perpetuating denominational conflicts.

Christians made religion attractive and even fun. When long-standing denominations settled for stuffy and dense preaching, Christian preachers in small congregations and revivals met people where they were. They welcomed everyone. They ridiculed preaching in established denominations, insisting that "the minister who intends to drag out his days in long preaching, would better go to fighting steam, electricity, and

civilization." That preacher would never win.

"Long dry sermons! It makes one sigh to think about them, but the thought is paradise compared with the hearing. Long sermons, brethren nodding, sisters dozing, boys snoring, babies crying, Satan laughing — magnificent specimen of Christian worship! . . . Sermons must interest, and not disgust; rest the hearer not weary him [her]. The benediction should be pronounced upon smiling hearers, and not upon frowning ones. The audience should leave the house desiring to return again rather than preferring ever to stay away."

The Christians were a small group, and after they united with the Congregationalists in the 1930s, many people lost track of them. Yet in UCC history the Christians remain an inspiration. They would be delighted with the current "Still Speaking Initiative," because the Christians knew how to critique with satire and offer anyone who was put off by traditional religion an appealing alternative. May we do the same?

The Rev. Barbara Brown Zikmund, editor of The UCC's Living Theological Heritage, writes a monthly online column on UCC history. Read her commentaries regularly at <news.ucc.org>.

OURS IS A MULTICULTURAL COMMUNION

'In scripture, so many of our great heroes are immigrants'

COMMENTARY



Lillian Daniel

Economic, pragmatic and spiritual motivations run throughout the immigration stories of scripture, as they run through the stories of our global community today.

Lately, demonstrations have been taking place across the country as immigrants stand up to show what a force they are in this country. I am reminded that my own ancestors were at one time immigrants, which is the case for almost all of us.

I am named after my great grandmother, whose people moved from Ireland to Texas to make a new life. On that same maternal side of the family are my Scottish ancestors who came to South Carolina much earlier, and had acquired some wealth by the time my father's side of the family made their way across the ocean to Georgia, to barely eke out a living working on other people's farms. In reading that history it was a noteworthy event when, after a couple of generations, they were finally able to purchase a mule. My husband's last name tells another story of immigration. His family was called "Weeks," because that was the name given to Welsh migrant workers who moved from one place to another, week by week, in search of work.

These stories of immigration are a vital piece of our nation's social fabric, and yet they are not to be romanticized. As we recall the horror of slavery, or the terror of being forced to leave one's land due to political or religious oppression, we must take a moment to stand awestruck at the courage required to begin a new life here.

In scripture, so many of our great heroes are immigrants. From Moses leading his people out of slavery and into economic freedom in the promised land, to the nativity story, in which Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus take off for Egypt, as refugees, on the run from political forces that were beyond their control. Economic, pragmatic and spiritual motivations run throughout the immigration stories of scripture, as they run through the stories of our global community today.

So bear all this in mind as you hear some of the loud talk about immigration legislation these days. Remember that our Bible would have few interesting characters at

all if we excluded the immigrants. And doesn't talk of "documented" and "undocumented" seem rather arbitrary in light of the extreme circumstances people faced? Paul himself was a migrant worker for God, spreading the gospel tirelessly in one land and then another, without the sanction of governments, but clearly with the blessing of God.

Laws that would seek to make someone like me, a clergy person, report undocumented immigrants are laws that would place me in conflict with my own faith. They would call upon me to renounce my Christian commitment to welcoming the stranger, showing hospitality to the traveler, and would ask me to betray people who are very much like the people I lift up as heroes in my Sunday sermons. And since I believe that we are all related to one another as children of God, here are two things I know: I will not act as an agent for the state over and against the gospel, and I will never refer to another human being as an "alien." For my faith teaches me that my citizenship in God's realm is more important than the shifting national borders of human struggles.

Our denomination is made up of immigrant stories, of pilgrims and reformers who left their homelands to come here, in search of religious freedom and new life. Those immigration stories continue to this day, as congregations grow more diverse, and we in the body of Christ are blessed by new traditions, customs and the gifts of many nations.

Look around your worshipping congregation, and imagine the wealth of immigration stories that are knit together in that holy place. Let's share these wonderful stories with one another, not just because they are interesting, but because they draw us closer to our biblical family, and remind us that there are always new people God is leading from one land to another.

The Rev. Lillian Daniel is the senior minister of First Congregational UCC in Glen Ellyn, Ill., and the author of "Tell It Like It Is: Reclaiming the Practice of Testimony" (Alban Institute, 2006).

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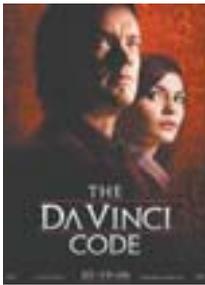
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“We all respond when somebody — a writer, an artist, a filmmaker — expresses symbolically what we feel but have not been able to put into words for ourselves.”

COMMENTARY

By Eugene Cullen Kennedy
 Religion News Service

Republican senators have now withdrawn their modified Tooth Fairy Plan to leave \$100 gasoline tax rebate under every American's pillow. That leaves some in organized religion — eager to ban, burn, or bankrupt the soon-to-open movie of “The Da Vinci Code” — in sole possession of the dumbest idea of the season.

The book's plot falls into the you-can't-make-up category: that Jesus fathered a child with Mary Magdalene and that the Holy Grail is not a chalice but their bloodline. Their descendants now live — where else? — in France and the church has covered all this up, along with the female role in the origins of Christianity.

But, of course, novelist Dan Brown did make all this up. That is what fiction writer Andrew Greeley knows better than most reviewers. He writes that the Code is “fast-paced, intricately plotted,” deserves to be a best-seller and “practically all of it is fantasy.”

Conservative religious groups, ever the avant garde in defending the concrete and literal meaning of the Scriptures, have published books, launched websites, and deployed designated heavy theological hitters to decry the “errors” in Dan Brown's novel and criticize Brown himself as if he were an assistant to the anti-Christ.

Now that the movie is opening, sonorous Catholic voices are being raised, the loudest of which may be that of Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone of Genoa, who claims “The Da Vinci Code” is part of a plot to build “a castle of lies” to negate the spiritual benefits of the Vatican's Jubilee Year 2000 celebrations.

“Don't read it,” the Cardinal urges, “and don't buy it.”

Vatican-based Cardinal Francis Arinze urges people to sue those responsible for the book's attacks on Catholicism. Bertone's timing is bad since 25 million copies of the book have already been published in 42 languages. Before filing a suit, Arinze should remember that the last people who took Dan Brown to court lost and must now pay \$2.4 million of the publisher's legal bill.

Even though this frenzy of

self-righteousness will sell more books and movie tickets, it will not discourage other church officials from condemning first and asking questions later. Thoughtful bishops, however, will worry less about the novel's inaccuracies and more about why the book has touched a resonant chord among so many readers.

Great mythic themes cannot be fully disguised or blunted no matter how they are appropriated or stretched to serve the imaginative needs of any author. It's the same with a song whose words may be trite but whose melody transmits a message about love or loss that touches people deeply and sticks with them for life.

That's why this book can be “beach reading” on the surface level and a story for all seasons on another. Indeed, Brown, throwing everything into a boiling plot, may not have realized how some of his motifs would affect readers. We all respond when somebody — a writer, an artist, a filmmaker — expresses symbolically what we feel but have not been able to put into words for ourselves.

Perhaps “The Da Vinci Code,” like the songs of medieval troubadours that made people aware of romantic love, expresses out-loud subjects that have roiled in the unconscious of good Christians for a long time.

One of these is the subjugation that women have experienced in the practical order of authority and power in the bureaucracy of the Catholic Church. That this bureaucracy supposedly covered up the love relationship of Jesus and Mary Magdalene is nonsense. Nonetheless, it is a powerful device that expresses the control that church officials have exercised over sexuality, making millions feel guilty just for being normal, healthy human beings.

Good Christians can be trusted to sift the gold from the sand in this much maligned book/movie. “The Da Vinci Code” reminds good Catholics that the Vatican bureaucracy is to the church — the people of God — what the crumpled architect's drawings are to the glories of the Chartres Cathedral.

Eugene Cullen Kennedy, a cultural commentator for Religion News Service, is emeritus professor of psychology at Loyola University of Chicago.

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PEOPLE WHO NEED 'PEOPLE'

► What does the UCC's Stillspeaking Initiative have in common with Katie Holmes, Britney Spears, Heather Locklear and Gwyneth Paltrow? Not much. Except that it shared space with them in the April 24 issue of "People" magazine, thanks to a full-page ad for the UCC.

Similar to ads that have appeared for the past two years in United Church News, as well as other publications, the red-and-black ad's text read: "If you think getting up on Sunday morning is hard, try rising from the dead." The fine print then added, "Come as you are. No admission. No dress code. No judging. Bring your doubts, questions and noisy kids. God doesn't reject people. Neither do we. So no matter who you are, or where you are on life's journey, you're welcome here. God is still speaking."

Ron Buford, director of the Stillspeaking Initiative, says the UCC's campaign has been intentional about reaching out to people who are not affiliated with any church.

"The Stillspeaking Initiative is committed to taking the gospel to the people where they are, and surprising them with its freshness and relevance," Buford says. "Where better than 'People' magazine, a modern cathedral to pop culture?"



SERVING

► **Chaplain Major William C. Harding**, one of four UCC military chaplains in Iraq. Pictured here, Harding visits children at an Iraqi orphanage in March. Harding and other chaplains pay twice-monthly



visits to the orphanage. "Providing for the orphanage is a way to let the Iraqi people see American soldiers in a different light," Harding says. In addition, Harding helps lead two Sunday worship services, a mid-week gospel service, twice weekly Bible studies and choir practices. Harding also regularly sees soldiers for counseling (Photo: Sgt. Ariel Castillo, assistant chaplain).

REMEMBERED

► **The Rev. William Sloane Coffin**, 81, legendary UCC pastor, prophet and poet, who died on April 12 in Stafford, Vt. Ordained in 1956, he served as chaplain of Yale University, senior minister of **Riverside Church (UCC/American Baptist) in New York** and director of the anti-nuclear SANE/Freeze campaign. "Bill was an exuberant prophet who had the unique capacity to love us toward our better selves," said the Rev. John H. Thomas, UCC general minister and president. "His prophetic vision brought the imagination of the Biblical prophets and of Jesus to life in our time. He was urgent and clear, but never stern. His love for life in the world that is never blinded him to a yearning for life in the world that ought to be."

REMEMBERED

► **The Rev. Norma Koinig**, 84, a Christian educator who edited the JED Share magazine and authored more than 30 books, who died on April 9. A member of **St. James UCC in Havertown, Pa.**, and active with various mission teams of the UCC's Pennsylvania Southeast Conference, she also attended World Council of Churches' assemblies in Australia and Zimbabwe. She is survived by her husband of 62 years, the Rev. Robert E. Koinig.

REMEMBERED

► **The Rev. Chalmers Coe**, 83, a leader of the UCC's Commission on Worship during the 1960s, who died on March 26. He served 23 years as pastor of **First Congregational UCC in Columbus, Ohio**, in addition to settled pastorates in Connecticut and Massachusetts. Once an associate professor of practical theology at UCC-related Hartford (Conn.) Seminary, he also lectured in homiletics at Yale Divinity School, the Pontifical College Josephinum and Trinity Lutheran Seminary, both in Columbus, and Phillips Graduate Seminary in Enid, Okla.

INSTALLED

► **The Rev. Cally Rogers-Witte**, executive minister of UCC's Wider Church Ministries, and **the Rev. Linda Jaramillo**, executive minister of UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries, on April 22 at **Center Congregational UCC in Hartford, Conn.**, at the close of Covenanted Ministries' joint board meetings. Called by election at General Synod 25 in Atlanta, the two members of the five-person Collegium of Officers have been working in the posts since October 2005.

RETIRED

► **The Rev. Carl A. Zimmerman**, 62, after eight years as president and CEO of UCC-related Lifelink, a 111-year-old human service provider with numerous programs and facilities — Head Start, foster care, international adoption, affordable housing, home care, in- and out-patient nursing and rehabilitation care — in Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin, Missouri, Ohio and Florida. Under Zimmerman's leadership, Lifelink acquired nine Advocate housing facilities and doubled its international adoption program. He also helped create Caring Communities Insurance Company, an insurance captive organized for health and human services providers. Based in Bensonville, Ill., Lifelink is one of 77-member agencies of the UCC's Council for Health and Human Service Ministries.

CLERGY DEATHS

- Aldrich, Robert D.**, 83, 3/10/2006
- Allen, Leslie C.**, 80, 3/22/2006
- Anderson, Laurence E.**, 92, 4/14/2006
- Barber, Raymond O.**, 92, 3/18/2006
- Booker, Leland E.**, 79, 4/18/2006
- Dohanian, Zaven**, 76, 4/2/2006
- Gillies, Juanita D.**, 67, 4/7/2006
- Heil, George H.**, 80, 3/11/2006
- Hubner, David W.**, 58, 3/16/2006
- Jenkins, Frank E.**, 92, 4/3/2006
- Libbey, Scott S.**, 76, 3/12/2006
- Metzler, Rodney A.**, 71, 3/12/2006
- Morse, Kenneth J.**, 73, 3/2/2006
- Rowe, Russell S.**, 50, 3/17/2006
- Stem, Charles H.**, 92, 4/15/2006
- Stinson, Melvin H.**, 84, 4/16/2006
- Tolley, William P.**, 79, 3/3/2006
- Washburn, Malcolm E.**, 72, 4/7/2006

Information on clergy deaths is provided by The Pension Boards.

PASTORAL CHANGES

- Allen Walsh, Dana L.** Princeton, NJ to Hancock UCC, Lexington, MA
- Briney, James W.** Medford, WI to Oro Valley UCC, Tucson, AZ
- Brown, David E.** to interim, Hampton Park Christian, Toledo, OH
- Cassiday-Maloney, Kevin** to First Cong. UCC, Fargo, ND
- Cooper, Richard** to retirement
- Denney, Michael R.** to Seafarer's Friend, Portsmouth, NH
- Duda, Michael** Rockport, MA to First UCC, Wenham, MA
- Dunlap, William K.** Bradford, MA to First Cong. UCC, Norwich, CT
- Elliott, James** Evansville, IN to Community UCC, Russellville, IN
- Elliott, Kathryn** Evansville, IN to Community UCC, Russellville, IN
- Elliott, Scott O.** St. Louis, MO to Riviera UCC, Palm Bay, FL
- Feyen, Richard D.** Algonquin, IL to Community UCC, St. Germain, WI
- Frost, Karla J.** Bucyrus, OH to St. John UCC, Granite City, IL
- Girash, Rebecca K.** to Pleasant St. UCC, Arlington, MA
- Grzelkowski, Margaret C.** Portland, OR to UCC, Spearfish, SD
- Herron, James D.** Abilene, KS to First Cong. UCC, Billings, MT
- Hinchliff, Mary J.** Meriden, CT to First Church of Christ Cong. UCC, East Haddam, CT
- Howell, Teresa** Atlanta, GA to Plymouth UCC, Milwaukee, WI
- Kinsley, Rona** to First Cong. UCC, Morrisville, VT
- Kurtz, Heather N.** Dublin, OH to Cong. UCC, Dover-Foxcroft, ME
- Lovett, Peter A.** Westwood, MA to Christ UCC, Lowell, MA
- Martz, Ruth A.** West Hartford, CT to First Church of Christ Cong., Glastonbury, CT
- McSherry, Michael** to Central Cong. UCC, Jamaica Plain, MA
- Merkel, Frances M.** to Christ UCC, Bath, PA
- Rice, Deris L.** Palo Alto, CA to Sparta, WI
- Shaver, Ruth E.** Attleboro, MA to UCC, Schellsburg, PA
- Sollo, Nancy K** Fort Collins, CO to Community Cong. UCC, Absarokee, MT
- Stackhouse, Rochelle** Bethlehem, PA to Church of the Redeemer UCC in New Haven, CT
- Strang, David** Palos Park, IL to First Cong. UCC, Lake Geneva, WI
- Tarwater, Bonnie** Del Mar, CA to UCC of Paradise Hills, San Diego, CA
- Tellstrom, Paul** Los Angeles to United Cong. UCC, Irvine, CA
- Treece, Larry E.** Evansville, WI to Peace UCC, Schofield, WI
- Tychkin, I. Alexander** Powhatan Point, OH to Hope UCC, Fremont, WI
- Wilson, Ward** to First Cong. UCC, Newbury, VT
- Woodward, Timothy H.** Middletown, NY to UCC, Sebastian, FL

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

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Edited by Carol L. Pavlik

Churches partner with UCC's human service ministries to work for good

THE UCC'S COUNCIL FOR HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICE MINISTRIES (CHHSM) IS COMPRISED OF 80 CORPORATE MEMBERS, ALL AFFILIATED WITH THE UCC, THAT OPERATE 357 FACILITIES AND PROGRAMS PROVIDING HEALTH CARE, SERVICES TO CHILDREN, SERVICES TO PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES, AND SERVICES TO THE AGING. TO FIND A CHHSM MINISTRY NEAR YOU, VISIT <CHHSM.ORG>.



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Ohio church provides comfort, hospitality for the homeless

Beth and Chris Karr, members of **Plymouth UCC in Shaker Heights, Ohio**, are co-coordinators for the Interfaith Hospitality Network of Greater Cleveland. The husband and wife team got involved in 1998 when the Cleveland chapter of IHN was started, and have watched it grow from eight participating congregations to 60 congregations and 3,000 active and trained volunteers.

IHN Greater Cleveland is funded by Cleveland's Deaconess Foundation, a member of the UCC's Council for Health and Human Service Ministries. It serves homeless people, specifically families: couples, mothers or fathers, with at least one child.

Beth Karr points out that allowing families to stay together makes IHN unique. "In a lot of shelters," she explains, "men or boys who are over the age of 13 have to stay in a men's shelter. If you're a single Mom with a 13 year-old son, [you'd be separated]," she says.

Plymouth UCC acts as a host church for IHN three or four weeks every year. Families who are homeless stay at the church from evening until morning for a week. "We feed them dinner, provide activity in the evening, provide as home-like an experience as we can," says Karr. At 7 each morning, a van picks them up and takes them to a nearby

day center, where families have resources available to them to help get back on their feet. The day center is equipped with showers and laundry facilities and staffed with a full-time social worker to assist with employment, housing or other services.

Plymouth UCC converts Sunday School classrooms into bedrooms for the families, and a large classroom becomes a dining and entertainment room where there is a TV, snacks and activities. During a host week, the Karrs oversee a total of 55 volunteers who help with meals, set up, clean up and hosting responsibilities.

"The thing that makes our program special is the emphasis on hospitality," says Karr. "There is training for the volunteers, but it simply boils down to being a caring person, wanting these people who are going through a stressful period in their life to feel comfortable and welcome."

Karr believes being a host church for IHN is one of the best things the church has ever done. "I think it's really helped people in the congregation to realize that homeless people are just like you and me. They just don't have a home. They're deserving of our care and concern."


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Vital church at center of Tennessee's Uplands Retirement Village

The picturesque Cumberland Plateau is home to UCC-related Uplands Retirement Village in **Pleasant Hill, Tenn.**, a 500-acre campus that offers a wide variety of living accommodations for its residents: homes, condominiums, rental apartments, assisted living facilities and a nursing home. And in the middle of the Uplands community is **Pleasant Hill Community UCC**.

Although the retirement village and the church are separate entities, their histories are undeniably intermeshed. The church, founded in 1885, was started by a Congregational minister who also started the Pleasant Hill Academy, a school for Appalachian children. The church and the school grew together.

When the Rev. Ed Wharton, a subsequent principal of the Academy, died in 1920, his wife, May Wharton, M.D., remained, becoming the doctor for the families living in the area. Chronicled in her autobiography, "Doctor Woman of the Cumberlands," [published by Uplands Retirement Village], Wharton doctored to families tirelessly, often traveling on foot or on horseback to care for the sick at all hours of day and night.

Although the school no longer exists, Dr. Wharton's commitment to care resulted in the development of first a hospital, then the Uplands Retirement Village.

The Rev. Tom Warren, pastor of Pleasant Hill UCC, says of its 244 members, about 80 percent of



This place is filled with church members who know what church is, who love church, who never miss."

— The Rev. Tom Warren, pastor, Pleasant Hill Community UCC in Tennessee

them are Uplands residents. That, he says, creates a "synergism between the two."

"[Uplands] was originally started as a place for retiring missionaries to come after they came back from overseas," explains Warren. "Now, we have all kinds of people who live here, but we have a majority who are deeply church-related folk."

Warren says many retired clergy and retired missionaries come to live at Uplands, and many of them attend worship at Warren's church. The result is a church that is very committed to mission and outreach.

"Our church members have their fingers in almost everything, in terms of community service to the county," says Warren.

The church offers guest speakers, book studies, musical offerings, and simulcasts worship services to the Assisted Living House and the nursing home at Uplands.

Warren serves as chaplain for Uplands and holds weekly services in Wharton Nursing Home.

This spring, Pleasant Hill UCC was awarded the 2006 Congregational Stewardship Award by the UCC's Council for Health and Hu-

man Service Ministries, recognizing the church for its longstanding relationship with the Uplands Retirement Village.

Warren says that Pleasant Hill Community UCC has the "pleasant dilemma" of having outgrown its current facilities. But with congregants that are so mission and justice oriented, raising funds for a new building takes a backseat to the more pressing issues around them.

"Appalachian poverty is very real here," notes Warren. "So many of our members feel we need to focus on doing more to reach out to the locals."

In the meantime, Pleasant Hill UCC will continue to thrive. "On Sunday morning, our sanctuary is literally packed to the gills," says Warren, noting that chairs had to be set up in the aisles even on the Sunday following Christmas, a week notorious for low church attendance.

"This place is filled with church members who know what church is, who love church, who never miss," he says.


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<uplandsvillage.com>

Southern California – Nevada Conference enjoys close ties to CHHSM ministries

Peppermint Ridge in **Corona, Calif.**, is a CHHSM-affiliated program for people with developmental needs. Mary Jeffery, member of Corona's **First Congregational UCC**, remembers when she and her husband, Robert, built a home for their family of two daughters and a son with developmental needs.

When the Jefferys began caring for six additional boys with developmental disabilities, they realized that their type of residential care was a sought-after service —not to replace family, but to extend it with warmth, energy and compassion.

Today, the Peppermint Ridge community has expanded to five homes at its main campus in Corona with an additional six-resident home and one 12-resident home elsewhere in the town of Corona. The program provides training and support for over 100 people.

Mary Jeffery looks back fondly

on the support she felt from the UCC. "They had a big part in getting Peppermint Ridge off the ground," Jeffery says of the UCC's Southern California – Nevada Conference. "Practically all the churches contributed toward the construction costs."

Since then, says Jeffery, the SCNC has continued to contribute annually to Peppermint Ridge's operating budget.

"Peppermint Ridge has always been connected relationally with many of our congregations," says the Rev. Jane Heckles, Conference Co-Minister. The Rejoicers, a singing group of Peppermint Ridge residents, often perform at local church services or at annual gatherings. And at SCNC's camp, Pilgrim Pines in Yucaipa, Calif., the Peppermint Ridge residents are a perennial part of the summer camping programming.

But besides Peppermint Ridge,

Heckles adds that her Conference is committed to supporting other CHHSM ministries. SCNC enjoys longstanding relationships with Pilgrim Place, a retirement community for Christian professionals in Claremont, Calif., where many former clergy, missionaries and church workers have retired. And the Retirement Housing Foundation (RHF), which Heckles refers to as a "powerhouse of an organization," has helped to build and manage several housing efforts in association with local UCC churches.

Based in Long Beach, Calif., RHF is one of the nation's largest non-profit providers of housing and services for older adults, persons with disabilities and economically disadvantaged families.


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