



a publication of the
United Church of Christ
Vol. XXIV, No. 3
June | July 2008
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INQUIRY**

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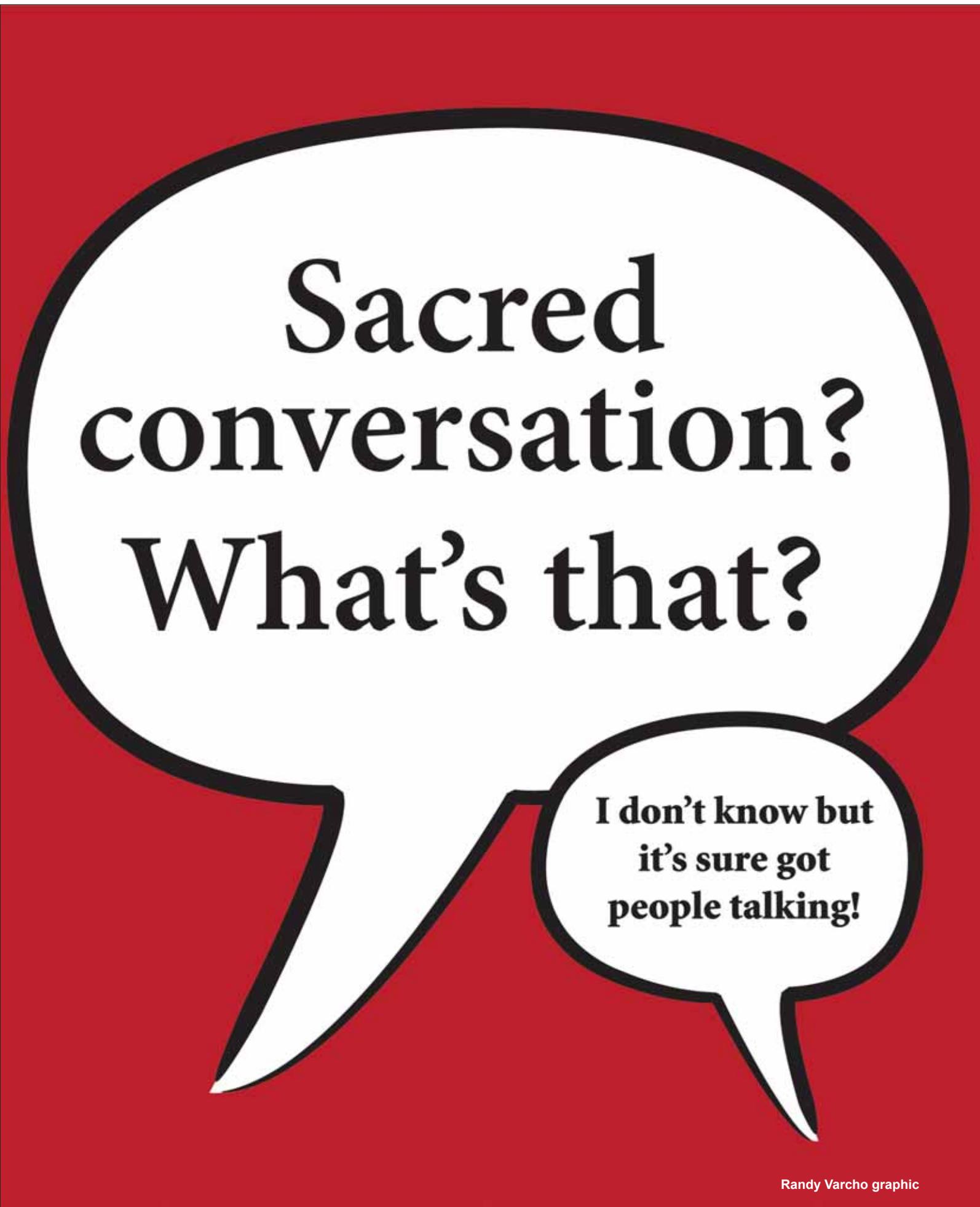
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THIS AD**

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Committed members say 'yes' to full-time volunteerism.



Sacred
conversation?
What's that?

I don't know but
it's sure got
people talking!

Randy Varcho graphic



'Memorial Day ought to be a day of lament'

FROM THE COLLEGIUM



John Thomas

The Memorial Day parade of my childhood ended at the town cemetery amid the veterans' graves. Gold and silver star mothers featured prominently and there was usually a speaker from one of the military branches along with music from the high school band.

Toward the end of my teenage years the event became more and more politicized as the speeches were used to defend the increasingly unpopular war in Vietnam. I don't recall protesters, but I do remember how the angry national

debate altered the character of the somber ceremonies, intruding upon our remembrance of those who had suffered and died in previous wars with shrill partisanship.

These childhood memories returned this Memorial Day for me, due in large part to the fact that my son, David, is serving in Afghanistan with the Pennsylvania National Guard. Many have noted the irony in this. They wonder how David and his comrades feel about his father being arrested outside the

White House carrying petitions against their Commander in Chief's war policies though, in truth, David's politics are not all that different from my own.

His decision to join the National Guard did surprise us, another reminder to parents that our children will make thoughtful and good decisions that diverge significantly from the path we imagine or desire for them.

I was proud of David before he left for Afghanistan, and I am still proud of him. But I confess that it was difficult to watch him assemble with a thousand other troops in full battle gear for his "send off" ceremony in February. Would that his unit was off to a place like Myanmar to deliver humanitarian relief rather than to a war zone where the objectives remain unclear and the likelihood of creating a lasting improvement of life for Afghan citizens seems uncertain at best.

As I thought of David this Memorial Day, I also remembered Steve, my inseparable companion in the church youth group. After high school we saw each other rarely; I left for college while he headed off to the Marines and a harrowing tour of duty in Vietnam in 1969. I heard this winter that Steve had died. The official cause of death was a heart attack. But I also learned that this talented friend had struggled increasingly with alcoholism, a product in part of post traumatic stress that had haunted him since the war.

I suppose Memorial Day will always be about patriotic ceremonies and the protests that gather around the edges. But ultimately it's about the children we send off to places of physical danger and, often, even greater moral peril.

David assures us he is in a relatively "quiet" part of Afghanistan. But that doesn't stop me from worrying about him, or mourning my friend Steve and his long struggle with hidden wounds.

And it makes me wonder whether, at the very least, Memorial Day ought to be a day of lament for a world so morally unimaginative that the violence of war can seem more justifiable than regrettable.

The Rev. John H. Thomas, general minister and president, is a member of the UCC's five-person Collegium of Officers.

I was proud of David before he left for Afghanistan, and I am still proud of him.

CTS ON THE MOVE, LITERALLY

UCC-related Chicago Theological Seminary is planning a 2012 move from its historic Hyde Park home to new facilities nearby on the University of Chicago campus.

The new facility is being made possible through a multifaceted agreement with the University of Chicago. Under the agreement, the university will purchase the existing CTS buildings and construct and furnish new facilities to the seminary's specifications.

The total cost of the purchase and construction, including contingencies, moving costs, furniture and incidentals will be as much as \$44 million. CTS will hold a 100-year lease on the new building at a rental rate of \$1 annually.

"After nearly 100 years, we have a tremendous sense of history at our existing campus," said Donald Clark Jr., chair of the CTS board of trustees. "Our new home will provide an ideal setting where we can translate that history into fresh vitality."

The new building is being planned for the southeast corner of South Dorchester Avenue and East 60th Street.

Overlooking the Midway Plaisance, the planned facility will feature a LEED-compatible "green" design. Plans call for a four-story, 75,000-square-foot structure capped by a green roof. A semi-circular, glass-enclosed chapel and meeting space will provide settings for worship and gatherings. The lower level will accommodate future expansion.

"This mutually beneficial transaction reflects the creativity and cooperation of two longtime institutional neighbors," Clark added. "Much prayerful consideration went into this process, along with tireless efforts by our negotiating team, and leadership by the seminary's president, Susan Thistlethwaite."

ISRAEL CELEBRATES 60

Amid global celebrations marking the 60th anniversary of Israel's statehood, two UCC leaders issued a 1,000-word statement on May 14 that reiterated the UCC's "affirmation of Israel's right to exist within secure and internationally recognized boundaries."

The Rev. John H. Thomas, general minister and president, and the Rev. Cally Rogers-Witte, executive minister for Wider Church Ministries, used the occasion to underscore the need for peacemaking between Israel and Palestine, naming it the "highest priority" that should emerge from Israel's anniversary commemoration.

"As Israel observes its 60th anniversary, it is appropriate to acknowledge the joy of Jews around the world even amid the enduring security concerns Israelis experience," Thomas and Rogers-Witte wrote. "It is also appropriate to honor the determination of Palestinians to endure and to achieve statehood and security



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beyond the anguish of 40 years of Occupation. But a true occasion for celebration will only come when Israelis and Palestinians both enjoy rights of security, sovereignty and self-determination without interference, imposition or fear.

"More than anything else, today's anniversary should be an urgent call to peacemaking, and a challenge to leaders in the region and their partners around the world to make peace with justice for Israelis and Palestinians alike their highest priority," the letter concluded.

Read the full text at <ucc.org/news>.

GETTIN' MARRIED IN THE MORNIN'?

Both pastors and brides know that June is marrying month. So does The Pilgrim Press.

The UCC's publishing company is offering a 20 percent discount through July 31 on its resources for weddings, marriages and commitments.

Titles include "Weddings with Today's Families in Mind: A Handbook for Pastors," a guide of traditional and non-tradition marriages; "How to Succeed in Marriage," an ideal booklet for couples contemplating a lifelong commitment; "First Comes Love?" a portrait of marriage through the ages, suitable for adult study; among others.

Order online at <thepilgrimpress.com> or by calling 800/537-3394.

SONG IN YOUR HEART? PLAN UP YOUR SLEEVE?

Join the UCC Musicians National Network for its annual gathering event, Aug. 14-18, at **The Bath Church, UCC, in Akron, Ohio**. It's a worshipful, musical event for musicians, pastors, worship planners and liturgical artists. Recharge and, at the same time, come away with new, good ideas for worship.

The keynote speaker will be James Abbingtion, associate professor of music and worship at Candler School of Theology at Emory University. Abbingtion is executive editor of the African-American Church Music Series of GIA publications in Chicago and co-director of music for the Hampton University Ministries' Conference and Choir Directors' Organists' Guild Workshop.

Registration and more information is available at <ucc-mnn2008.com>

'GATHER ROUND' FOR NEW CURRICULUM

Beginning this fall, UCC churches have a new series option for their Christian education programs. The UCC has become a cooperative user and distributor of "Gather 'Round: Hearing and Sharing God's Good News," a new church school curriculum from Brethren Press and the Mennonite Publishing Network.

"In 2005, when we learned that Bible Quest would no longer be in the market [after this program year]," says the Rev. R. Kenneth Ostermiller, the UCC's minister for curriculum development, "we invited a representative group for all the regions of the United Church of Christ to look at several curricula which might fill the need for a Bible story approach to learning for UCC congregations."

Ostermiller says the series has good foundational goals, a comfortable look, user-friendly appearance, companion online resources and peace and justice themes.

Learn more and order from United Church Press at <united-churchpress.com> or 800/537-3394.

GENERAL SYNOD 26 | HARTFORD, CONN.

let it shine

Order celebration DVDs at <ucc.org/synod>

'VERY GOOD NEWS'

Concluding its UCC inquiry, IRS offers complete vindication

By J. Bennett Guess

The Internal Revenue Service has concluded that the UCC did not violate tax laws when U.S. Sen. Barack Obama addressed the denomination's 50th anniversary General Synod in Hartford, Conn., in June 2007.

"Based on your response to the inquiry, we have determined that the activity about which we had concern did not constitute an intervention or participation in a political campaign ... and that the United Church of Christ continues to qualify as an organization described in section 501(c)(3)," according to a May 13 letter from the IRS.

The IRS determination outlined several steps taken by the UCC that indicated compliance with the law. The letter said the UCC's invitation to Obama came "well before he announced his candidacy and that [he] was invited to speak ... in a non-candidate capacity, on how his personal faith intersected with his public life."

"You further established that the United Church of Christ had verbally communicated to those in attendance that Senator Obama was there as a member of the church and not as a candidate for office, that the audience should not attempt to engage in any political activities, and that the church's legal counsel had advised Senator Obama's campaign on the ground rules for the speech," the IRS determined.

The letter also concluded that

the UCC did not authorize campaign volunteers to set up tables near the entrance of the Hartford Civic Center. "The activity was conducted on public property outside the control of the Synod and therefore was not attributable to the church," the IRS said.

The online version of this story includes a link to the IRS letter. Read it at <ucc.org/news>.

The IRS also noted that the UCC's website provided a link to the IRS fact sheet on prohibited campaign-related activities by non-profit groups and that the church's legal counsel had properly advised UCC leaders of these rules.

"We are pleased that the IRS reviewed the complaint quickly

and determined, as we expected, that the church took every necessary precaution and proactive step to ensure that Senator Obama's appearance at General Synod was proper and legal," said the Rev. John H. Thomas, UCC general minister and president. "This is very good news."

Donald C. Clark, the UCC's Nationwide Special Counsel, called the IRS' specific affirmation of UCC planning and action "gratifying."

"A faith community should not, and by following these now established best practices need not, be timid in asking any member to share her or his faith journey," Clark said.

William J. Wilkins, an attorney with WilmerHale, the Washington, D.C.-based firm that represented the UCC before the IRS, said, "The denomination simply did not conduct any political activity in this case. The conduct of Synod events and the nature and timing of the speaking invitation made that clear."

"Reviewers at the IRS gave our submission prompt review and consideration," added Brian J. Menkes, also an attorney with WilmerHale. "We appreciate their bringing this inquiry to conclusion once they learned there was no basis to proceed."

Evans, UCC's third president, dies at 92

The Rev. Joseph H. Evans, the UCC's third president, died on April 12 at his Sarasota, Fla., home. He was 92.

Evans, the first and only African American to serve as UCC president, spent 17 years as an elected officer of the denomination. First elected in 1967 as national secretary, he was elected president of the UCC in 1976 upon the sudden death of President Robert Moss. In 1977, he returned to his position as secretary, a post he held until his retirement in 1983.

"Joe was a leading figure in the middle years of our denomination's life," said the Rev. John H. Thomas, UCC general minister and president, in a memo to national staff. "... Our work rests on the legacy of great leaders like him."

Evans' death came on the same day that nearly 300 members and staff of the UCC's Executive Council and four Covenanted Ministries boards of directors were gathered for joint meetings in Cleveland. Thomas and Associate General Minister Edith A. Guffey led the assembly in

a time of reflection and prayer after sharing news of Evans' passing.

Though Evans' health had been in decline, he was able to attend the UCC's 50th anniversary General Synod in Hartford last June.

Born in Kalamazoo, Mich., Evans grew up in Chicago. He was a graduate of Western Michigan University, Yale University Divinity School and UCC-related Chicago Theological Seminary. He was ordained in 1942.

Following a brief period as the leader of a church mission serving immigrants from Barbados in Brooklyn, N.Y., Evans served as the pastor of Grace Congregational Church in Harlem, where he met and married his wife, Harriette. The two were married for 63 years and had three daughters.

Early in his ministry, Evans served as associate general secretary for the Connecticut Council of

Churches, where he ministered to migrant farm workers and youth.

He went on to lead **Mount Zion Congregational UCC in Cleveland** before returning to pastor his home church, **Church of the Good Shepherd UCC in Chicago**, where he also served a four-year term as president of the Chicago Urban League. Upon retirement, he continued to serve as interim pastor at several churches in Ohio, Illinois, Maine, New Hampshire and Massachusetts.

A memorial service was held on April 19 at **First Congregational UCC in Sarasota**.

Memorial contributions can be sent to the First Congregational UCC, 1031 S. Euclid Ave., Sarasota, FL 34237; or the Resurrection House Inc., 507 Kumquat Court, Sarasota, FL 34236; or the United Black Christians, c/o Carol Brown, 700 Prospect Ave., Cleveland, OH 44115.



Evans

'IMMERSE YOURSELF'

Theme, logo unveiled for 2009 General Synod

Believe it or not, it's been a full year since more than 9,000 UCC members crowded into downtown Hartford, Conn., to celebrate the UCC's 50th anniversary General Synod.

And now plans are already shaping up for next summer's UCC romp in Grand Rapids, Mich., set for June 26-30, 2009.

In keeping with Grand Rapids' water-rich environment, "Immerse Yourself" has been announced as the 2009 theme.

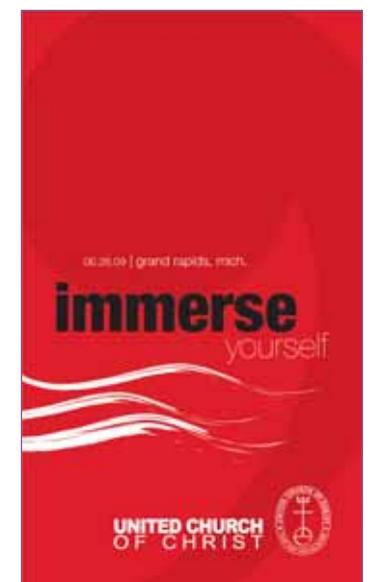
In February, the General Synod Program and Planning Committee traveled to Grand Rapids — touted for its "seemingly endless water" — where committee members saw firsthand that a water-themed Synod offered many interpretive opportunities.

located adjacent to the Amway Grand Hotel and the new, green Grand Rapids Museum of Art, is built as a tribute to water in its three forms."

Edith A. Guffey, the UCC's associate general minister and General Synod administrator, believes UCC members will be

Il 'Immerse yourself' not only evokes sacramental imagery of baptism, but it also speaks to the need for all of us to more fully invest our time, talent and treasure in God's mission."

— Planning committee



"As a historical center of Reformed tradition, we wanted to emphasize our baptismal covenant with each other and the larger Christian community," says the Rev. Susan A. Blain, the UCC's minister for worship, liturgy and spiritual formation. "And 'Immerse yourself' not only evokes sacramental imagery of baptism, but it also speaks to the need for all of us to more fully invest our time, talent and treasure in God's mission."

"Grand Rapids, as its name conveys, is a water town," the committee said in a post-visit report. "The stirring waters of the Grand River flow prominently through the downtown area with pedestrian bridges crisscrossing at multiple places. The city's glass-walled Convention Center and hotels, which we will be using, are all situated adjacent or near the river, with spectacular views and park recreation areas. The Rosa Parks Memorial Park,

impressed with Grand Rapids.

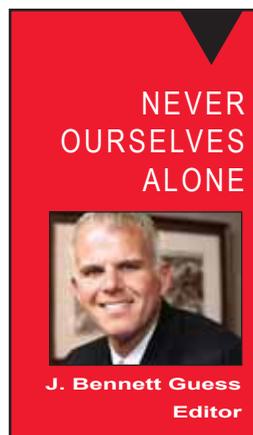
"When our committee first visited there, they were blown away by the vibrancy of the city, how new and clean the downtown is, and what a wonderful convention center they have," Guffey said.

In deciding on a theme, Guffey said, the committee wanted a playful phrase that could be used not only for General Synod, but also throughout the year.

"At a time when UCC members are preparing to immerse themselves in sacred conversations on race, this is a theme that lends itself to many insightful interpretations," Guffey said. "What does it mean to 'immerse yourself' in something larger than you are? To what degree are we willing to respond to God's call?"

LEARN MORE ABOUT GRAND RAPIDS
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EXTENDING A HAND, MAKING CONNECTIONS

Our church responds daily to disasters — even unpopular, forgotten ones

“By working closely alongside other faith communions, we work smarter and have potential to make lasting change, not just feel-good moments.”

When terrible disaster strikes — as it did recently by cyclone in Myanmar, earthquake in China, and tornadoes in Oklahoma and Missouri — it's only natural to want to give our money where we feel it will have the most impact.

Many of us, subconsciously perhaps, have come to associate disaster relief with the Red Cross or Salvation Army — worthwhile organizations to be sure — but, despite an abiding love and respect for our church, some of us forget, or are unaware of, our own denomination's global capacity to respond.

In early May, when CNN and other news agencies were reporting widely that international aid groups were being denied access to Myanmar, UCC leaders knew this was not the whole story.

While not skirting the difficulties there, church leaders, by May 5, had already established contact with the Myanmar Council of Churches and a relief worker from Church World Service was on the scene by May 7 to coordinate the ecumenical community's common effort.

“One of the gifts of being part of the wider church, and committed to ecumenicity, is that we are able to work with and through partners around the world when disasters strike,” says Susan Sanders of the UCC's Wider Church Ministries. “The UCC — as a member of Church World Service; and Action by Churches Together, International; and the World Council of Churches — is working with our partners to assess the

situation and make plans for what we can do together to support the Myanmar Council of Churches and other local organizations in providing early relief and long-term rehabilitation.”

Church World Service has a license from the U.S. Treasury which permits the transfer of funds and relief items to Myanmar, Sanders says. The UCC's partner church, The Christian Conference of Asia, is also able to transmit funds to Myanmar.

And so it is around the world.

GIVE — AND LEARN — ONLINE AT
[<ucc.org/disaster>](http://ucc.org/disaster)

In China, the UCC — again in concert with its global partners — went to work immediately with the Amity Foundation to provide funds for the purchase and provision of drinking water and food for heavily damaged regions. Relief operations are expanding to include housing repairs, blanket distribution, and protection from the weather. Moreover, there are long term plans for rehabilitating 600 homes, 10 schools, five hospitals or clinics, and five drinking wells.

At the same time, back in the U.S., the UCC was seeking \$50,000 to assist with long-term recovery after deadly tornadoes destroyed hundreds of homes.

As Sanders often reminds me, the UCC is not just some stand-aside financial supporter of Church World Service or ACT In-

ternational. “They are us,” she emphasizes. The UCC not only played a prominent role in their founding and continuing work, but these ecumenical mechanisms are the UCC at work.

We respond in cooperation with others, because that's our style. And by working closely alongside other faith communions, we work smarter and have potential to make lasting change, not just feel-good moments.

It's also important to remember: When you give to a UCC-issued disaster appeal, 100 percent of your gift supports direct relief, recovery and rehabilitation. No administrative dollars are taken off the top, thanks to our churches' basic support for Our Church's Wider Mission which undergirds the denomination's staffing infrastructure.

The UCC has long been proud of the fact that, in times of disaster, our niche is not fleeting, short-lived relief, but longer-term accompaniment. Most often, real recovery is just getting started when the TV crews are packing up and moving on to cover the next calamity.

Every day, UCC dollars continue to rebuild damaged homes and restore broken lives in New Orleans, northern Maine, southeastern Virginia, and elsewhere, as well as in the Sudan, Iraq, Bangladesh and other countries around the globe. Every day, the dollars we contribute to UCC disaster response and recovery are making a difference in places that others have long forgotten.

Next time disaster strikes, remember that your church is responding.

**LETTERS****'Ageist and erroneous'**

I work with a national group, Old Lesbians Organizing for Change, established in 1989. Our priority has been the issue of pervasive ageism in our culture. We proudly claim that “old” is not a four letter word.

My comment is prompted by the article in the February-March issue, “Deceased mother of shuttle astronaut was UCC.”

You write, “Despite her advanced years, she remained an active volunteer ...” I would ask what the message is behind “despite her advanced years.” Is the implication that old people do not volunteer? Or are incompetent volunteers? Have you been to a church lately?

Old people have lives in common with everyone else — some healthy, some not; some volunteer, some do not; some sharp as a tack, some not. Let us honor the lives of old people and refrain from using words like “still” or “despite.” The implication is that old people are over the hill, out of it, sitting at home doing nothing. This assumption is ageist and erroneous.

Ageism is subtle and probably a legacy of the fact that folks died much earlier 50 years ago. But if we are serious about valuing old people, who often make up the majority of our congregations, we need to stop the ageist jokes. We need to reach out to lonely old people and not only be obsessed

about finding “young families” or young pastors who can bring in the youth. We need to have discussion groups openly talking about the joys of being old and also the challenges. And even options for choosing the time of our death. We need to get active in changing the “medical industry,” a term I prefer rather than “health care” which we really do not have.

We need not collude in pretending we are all young, want to be young, act young, think young, look young. Personally I've been there and done that and am now proud to be age 65.

The Rev. Jan Griesinger
Athens, Ohio

Watch your language

I think those UCC folk writing in the April/May United Church News and on the UCC webpage are missing the point. What outrages me, as well as the general public, is the inflammatory language the Rev. Jeremiah A. Wright Jr. used. You can challenge America, speak truth to power (as did Jesus) and raise issues people don't want raised but you don't use that sort of language.

It is very difficult for me to imagine Gandhi, Martin Luther King, the Dalai Lama and others who have taken unpopular stands and challenged the status quo, speaking like this.

Marguerite Foxon
United Church of Tallahassee (Fla.)

'Mainstream media never covers'

One of the many things I like about United Church News is that it tells of people doing wonder-

ful things that are never covered in the mainstream media. The most recent example is the account of Tim Rose, our missionary in Paris, and his work in helping resettle refugees whose lives would be in danger in their own countries. We do indeed live in a “global village.”

Margaret Saunders
Pilgrim Congregational UCC, Cleveland, Ohio
and Naples (Fla.) UCC

Don't repeat 'futile attempts'

What is the mission of Christ's church? To feed the hungry; love the unloved; to expend hundreds of thousands of dollars in the media in a futile attempts to explain to a disinterested population “who we are” as the United Church of Christ? [See article on page 10.] I am so appalled and ashamed of this latest attempt of the UCC to solve their so-called identity crisis.

As a semi-retired minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ, I have spent over 50 years of my life in an attempt to fulfill our Lord's commission to “feed my sheep.” Nowhere in this gospel have I read there the Lord suggests that his followers should use their God-given dedication and talents in such selfish and wasteful pursuits. I pray that our denomination will not repeat such endeavors.

The Rev. James E. Kennedy
Elkhorn, Wis.

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

**SOAPBOX****IT'S 'SACRED' SOAPBOX TIME.**

On May 18, many pastors preached on the UCC's invitation for a national 'sacred conversation on race.' Perhaps more importantly, in the months ahead, churches and community groups will follow up with honest and sometimes difficult dialogues.

In just 75 words or less, tell us briefly about your church's participation in this 'sacred conversation' and share a moment of learning you've experienced. We're not looking for dissertations, just snapshots. What transformational moments can we glean and share from across our church?

Send by email by July 1 to:

<newsroom@ucc.org>

Be sure to include “soapbox” in the subject line.

AFFIRMATION OF UCC YOUTH

NYE: Something about the experience changed me



At age fifteen, I was a churchgoer and youth group member, silently struggling with how to be both faithful and popular as a rising sophomore in high school. Drugs and alcohol were served at parties. Opportunities for dating brought pressure for sex. The question of colleges implied the question of what I was going to “be” as an adult, and I had no answer.

While I experienced God’s presence and love in church, the teen years raised new faith questions I couldn’t answer and was afraid to

ask out loud.

It was in the midst of this silent faith quandary that I stumbled upon the National Youth Event (NYE) the way a weary traveler might stumble upon a restaurant on a long stretch of deserted highway — unexpectedly and with delight, relief and gratitude.

A friend from church had called me after school one day and told me about NYE. She knew only three details: There was going to be a UCC youth event next summer. Thousands of teenagers would be there. Participants would get to stay in dorms on a college campus. Those three details enticed me, and a few months later we were in a college arena surrounded by heart-pounding music and a screaming crowd of over two thousand teenagers.

Opening night at NYE began with the adrenaline rush of a rock concert and eventually moved into a spirit of worship. Something about the experience of communing with God among thousands of other teenagers that night changed me. It changed my idea of what church looked like. It expanded my feeling of identity and belonging. That gathering of strangers, people of unfamiliar faces and different places, in that moment, became a congregation.

In workshops and worship throughout the event, the realities of

teenage life were acknowledged with sensitivity and honesty. We were informed about situations of suffering and injustice in the world and empowered with the news that Christ calls and equips us to respond to the world’s brokenness. When our church bus returned home, I burst into tears and told my mother, “My life will never be the same.” Today I believe that my “yes” to ministry as an adult was the response to a call I first heard at NYE.

In a society (and sometimes, a church) that assumes teenagers are too young to make any real difference in the world, my ex-

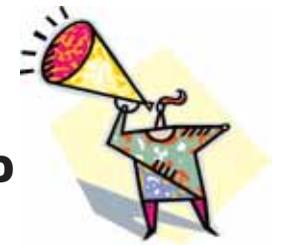
THE UCC NATIONAL YOUTH EVENT WILL BE HELD JULY 24-28 at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. As of the April early-registration deadline, 2,349 registrations were processed. The final deadline is June 27. Learn more at <ucc.org/youth>.

perience at NYE affirmed that teenagers are some of God’s most gifted, powerful agents of change. Not despite their youth, but because of it.

The journey through adolescence is filled with self-discovery, budding talents and big dreams. NYE offers youth an opportunity to discern how God might use those talents and dreams in their lives and in the world. It also offers them much-needed reassurance of God’s abiding presence and unwavering love as they leap and stumble on life’s path.

The NYE Planning Team, along with national staff and the University of Tennessee conference staff have worked long and hard to provide great speakers, musicians and workshops. We’ve created plenty of opportunities for education, recreation and fun. But I also believe that we will have created a space in which the sacredness of common life will be tangible, and all who gather will perceive God’s presence in moments of comfort and challenge, affirmation and call.

The Rev. Kelly Burd, coordinator of the 2008 National Youth Event, has worked in parish and youth ministry for nine years.



OVERHEARD

“Why was the rabbi at an altar and under a cross? Who was the pastor alongside the Torah in the Temple? They weren’t lost.”

— *The lead paragraph of a feature story in The Denver Post on the Rev. David Bahr, pastor of Park Hill Congregational UCC in Denver, and Rabbi Adam Morris of Temple Micah. The two congregations have shared a building for 30 years, and the two clergyman recently presented dialogue sermons at the congregations’ respective services.*

“There is no question that even now I can feel the aches and bruises that come from working around old, gutted houses. There is no question that working in the heat and humidity of New Orleans was draining. And there is no question that the 1,600-mile drive home is not designed to refresh. But I feel refreshed.”

— *The Rev. Doug Moore of Norwich Congregational UCC in Norwich, Vt., in sermon in May after returning as a month-long volunteer for post-Katrina recovery. Moore and his wife, Judy, spent two months in New Orleans last year.*

“To some degree, the UCC’s problems with dissension and defections can be found in most mainline Protestant churches today. But the UCC, by dint of its history, its system of governance, and its leadership, has become an even more intense arena of theological controversy.”

— *U.S. News & World Report’s May 9 feature story on the UCC, “Wright controversy draws attention to United Church of Christ.”*

“The United Church of Christ is in no position to offer leadership on this subject ... We call on the United Church of Christ to live our Christ-given unity in repentance and humility rather than presume to dialogue about race.”

— *The Rev. David Runnion-Bareford of the Biblical Witness Fellowship, on May 14, calling for the UCC to suspend its call for a sacred conversation on race.*

“I often start sermons in United Church of Christ churches by reminding our faithful that we are the people who do not believe you have to ‘check your brains at the door’ when you enter church.”

— *The Rev. Susan Thistlethwaite, president of UCC-related Chicago theological Seminary, in a Washington Post op-ed on April 15.*



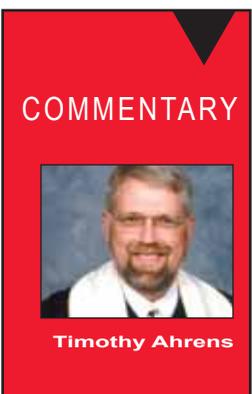
TABULATIONS

200*

*Number of ecumenical participants, including General Minister and President John H. Thomas and Ecumenical Officer Lydia Veliko, invited to greet Pope Benedict XVI on April 18 at a prayer service at St. Joseph’s Catholic Church in Manhattan. Some UCC members caught a glimpse of Thomas on Fox News, since Thomas was seated directly behind Pat Robertson, the TV evangelist.

‘EVERLASTING TREASURE’

Former pro football trailblazer loved his UCC church



When Bill Willis spoke, people listened.

“Whenever I heard him talk, I hung on every word he said,” said Archie Griffin, former Ohio State All-American running back and two-time Heisman Trophy winner. “He was that type of person, so very encouraging and motivational.”

A legendary football trailblazer, Bill, who died last November, was also a beloved UCC member.

Born in 1921, Bill was a pioneer in the sports world.

He became Ohio State’s first African-American All-American in 1943 and 1944, playing on both the offensive and defensive lines. He also was a member of OSU’s 1942 national championship team.

After graduating from college, Bill became one of the first African-American professional football players in 1946, enduring blatant racism from fans and other players. As a star middle guard (a position that would evolve into middle linebacker), he played on championship teams for the Cleveland Browns during an eight-year career. He is considered to be professional football’s first African-American starting player.

Among the honors he was to earn for his gridiron feats was induction into the Ohio high school, Ohio State, college and professional halls of fame. In November, the No. 99 that he wore at OSU was retired. He became only the seventh player in the university’s history to be so honored.

When Bill’s number was retired, Gene Smith, OSU athletic director, said, “Bill Willis is the ultimate Buckeye. His record of accomplishment on the field and the class he exudes exemplifies the qualities of Ohio State. He is the consummate gentleman.”



OSU head coach Jim Tressel said Bill may have been “the finest player who ever played here.”

After his playing career, Bill turned his attention to another passion — kids. He and his wife, Odessa, who died in 2003, raised three sons. He also had a long career as director of the Ohio Youth Commission, where he worked diligently to help provide better opportunities for kids.

Bill was humble about his pioneering contribution to football. “I’m proud of the role I played, but it was a very small part,” he said. “I’m appreciative of the people who permitted me to play that role. I still get nice, thoughtful letters, saying that I had a part in how the entire fabric of professional football — management, players, every-

thing — has moved ahead. “Looking back on it, who thought this day would ever come?” Bill considered **First Congregational UCC in Columbus** “my church” and was a member for 43 years. He was a fixture at Sunday worship and made countless friends among the congregation. Bill had a great love

for the music of the church, and served on the search committee several years ago when a new music minister was hired.

Bob Hunter, sports columnist for the Columbus Dispatch, wrote the day after Bill’s death that he was a man who could be appreciated in many ways.

“It doesn’t matter which memory of Willis you pick, there are plenty of beautiful ones from which to choose,” Hunter wrote. “Whether he’s viewed as the forerunner of the middle linebacker, a racial pioneer or the possibly the best Ohio State football player ever, Willis deserves to be remembered.

“In life and death, Willis will be one of football’s everlasting treasures.”

The Rev. Timothy Ahrens is senior minister of First Congregational UCC in Columbus, Ohio.

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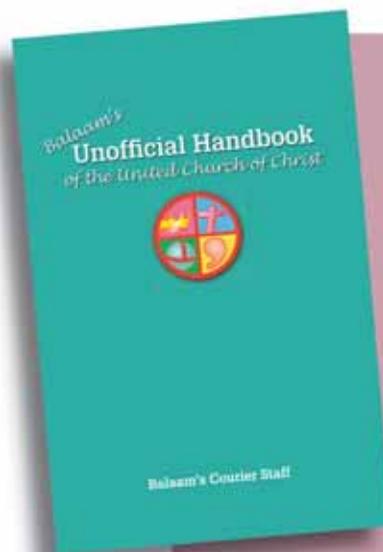
Case is a licensed minister with the United Church of Christ, as director of youth ministries at Windermere Union United Church of Christ in Windermere, Florida. He has been a speaker at numerous GROUP Youthworkers Conventions and Youth Specialties National Youthworker Conventions. He is the author of eleven books and numerous articles in youth ministry periodicals.



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- Organization of the UCC • The Future of the UCC

TED BRAUN, a retired United Church of Christ pastor from Pleasant Hill, Tennessee, has been the longtime editor of *Balaam's Courier*.

people | places | things **in the news**

BALANCED APPROACH TO CONTROVERSIAL ISSUE

New death penalty curriculum 'poses good questions' for group study

A "Death Penalty Curriculum" — a two-disk set of lesson plans and multi-media components for use in local churches — has been published by the Rev. Jeffrey Spencer, pastor of **Niles Congregational UCC in Fremont, Calif.**

Spencer began compiling materials for the curriculum while a member of the UCC's Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty. Even so, he writes, he has attempted to create a curriculum that is balanced, and that recognizes that people of good will and moral conscience may disagree about the death penalty.

One disk contains lesson plans, permissions, a reader and resources. The lesson plans have instructions for preparing either nine 90-minute

sessions or 16-18 50-minute sessions.

The reader includes 16 essays on such topics as why the death penalty is more expensive than life imprisonment, whether the death penalty is a deterrent, the human experience of capital punishment, and the death penalty and restorative justice.

The reader comes in both a regular print and a large print version. By purchasing the curriculum, the

leader has permission to copy and bind enough copies for everyone in the class.

Also included are several pages of resources, among them statements on the death penalty from 29 different religious churches and denominations, a death penalty true/false quiz, and charts and graphs about race and the death penalty.

The second disk contains two videos, one by an innocent man who spent 10 years on death row before being exonerated and released, and one by a warden who presided over two executions.

"Jeff has to be commended for pulling all this material together," says the Rev. Sala W.J. Nolan, the

TO ORDER:

Send a check for \$51 (\$45 plus \$6 s/h) to Spencer Curricula, P.O. Box 2611, Fremont, CA 94536. Please include name, address and local church.



UCC's minister for criminal justice and human rights. "It poses good questions in a way that invites Christians in."

"I'm very favorably impressed with this curriculum," says Eugene Wanger of the Michigan Commission Against Capital Punishment.

"It is very worthwhile."

Spencer suggests that each class session always begin and end with prayer. It is important, he says, that each class be "grounded in the loving presence of God so that all may truly hear what each person has to say."

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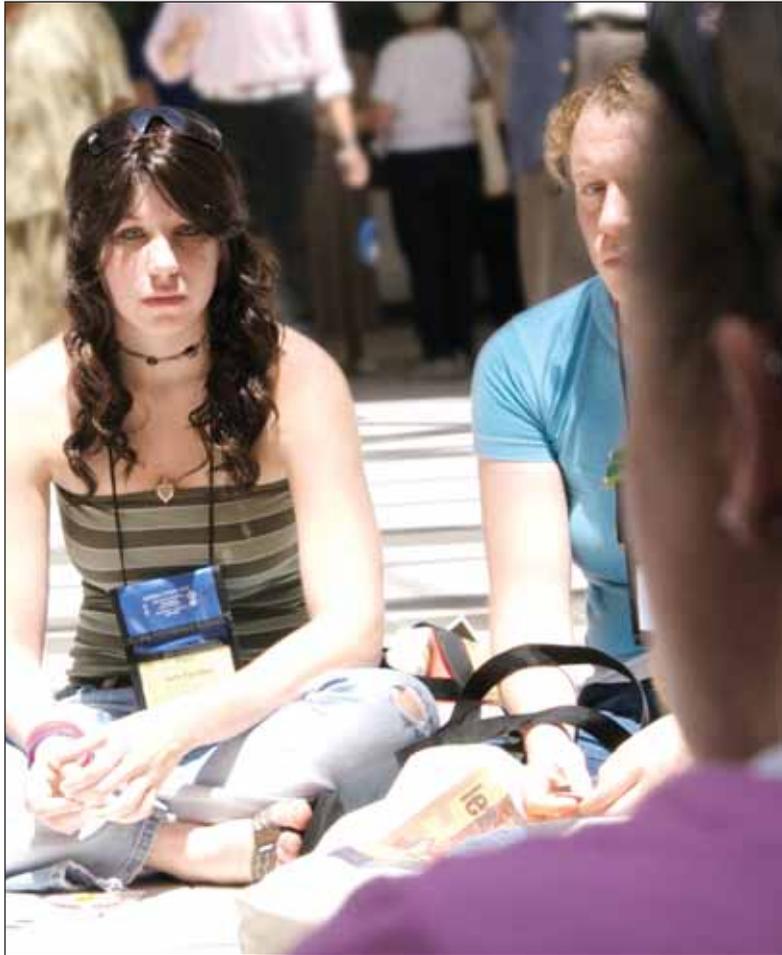



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EXPERTS, PASTORS WEIGH IN

What makes a conversation 'sacred'?



Randy Varcho photo

On Sunday, May 18, many UCC pastors and congregations responded to the call of UCC General Minister and President John H. Thomas to begin a "sacred conversation" about race.

"Sacred conversations are never easy conversations," Thomas said at a press conference held on April 3 at **Trinity UCC in Chicago** to announce the call. He spoke on the 40th anniversary of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s last sermon, preached the night before his assassination in Memphis, Tenn.

"This is especially true when honest talk about race confronts us with a painful past and won't let us ignore the troubles of our present day," Thomas said. "That's why sacred conversations require a readiness to see one another as sacred in spite of our differences, and why the sacred places where these conversations take place need to be respected."

But what makes a conversation "sacred"?

God must be present

"A sacred conversation is one where the presence of God is acknowledged," says the Rev. Susan Blain, the UCC's minister for worship, liturgy and spiritual formation.

"It helps a lot if you have an expectation about God's presence," says the Rev. Ruth Garwood, executive director of the UCC Coalition for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Concerns. "God shows up otherwise, but when we're noticing, I find that very helpful."

"I use sacred when God is involved, for sure," says the Rev. Christine Smith, professor of preaching at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities in New Brighton, Minn. "But sacred is different than normal kinds of conversations, because it implies an unusually blessed time. It's holy, so special, unique, respectful, and just that you come away with the sense, 'Gosh, that was a sacred moment.'"

"Does it mean that these conversations are blessed by God?" she asks. "I hope so, if things go well. But what if they don't? Sacred doesn't mean no conflict, or no challenging, but that we agree to enter into this dialogue in a respectful, holy way."

Created in God's image

"What would a conversation look like if we took seriously the belief that we are all created in God's image?" Smith asks. "What would it mean for us to have this as a fundamental starting place?"

"What makes a conversation sacred is that some intentional effort is involved, that we make the effort to be incredibly aware of the presence of God, and the conversation is held within God's presence," says the Rev. Sidney Fowler, pastor of **Hope UCC in Alexandria, Va.** "And when that conversation is about race, that reminds me more about who that God is, that God created a diversity of people, all of whom are created in God's image."

"A theological question underlies the idea of having a sacred conversation," he says, "that God is the creator of all races. Any violation of that premise — for example, to look on the other with hatred or bias — is an affront not only to that person but also to God, who created us all."

At a recent board meeting at UCC-related Chicago Theological Seminary, Lee Butler, professor of pastoral care, said that what makes a conversation sacred is that we are all created in the image of God, says the Rev. Susan Thistlethwaite, CTS president.

"I totally agree," Thistlethwaite says. "But I also think that the sacred is a realm where we behave confessionally. Each conversational partner — in terms of us as individuals but also as churches — needs to think through from a confessional perspective where we have failed one another in our responsibility to be the body of Christ."

"We need to recognize that," she says, "because love of God is connected to love of neighbor. It's connected by Jesus, when he was asked, 'Which commandment in the law is the greatest?' and he answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

"We have to anchor the sacred conversation not only in the God-given worth of every person," she continues, "but also that we are in the most fundamental sense, that is, being the body of Christ, we are part of one another."

"The real strength of calling this a sacred conversation is that we must deal with this theologically," she says. "We have doctrine of God issues, Christological issues, and

ecclesiological issues. But in the UCC we tend to do it sociologically. Instead, we will be doing well if we talk with one another as to what our responsibility is toward one another as the body of Christ."

Being intentional about it

"What makes a conversation sacred is when the people in the conversation are open to the work and the power of the Holy Spirit," says the Rev. Lynne Smouse López, pastor of **Ainsworth UCC in Portland, Ore.**

"If we are being intentional about it, we would pray at the beginning of the conversation, and pray at the end of it, and maybe during it. And we would maintain a prayerful attitude during the conversation."

She cites Ainsworth's Open and Affirming (ONA) process as an ex-

Sacred is different than normal kinds of conversations, because it implies an unusually blessed time. It's holy, so special, unique, respectful, and just that you come away with the sense, 'Gosh, that was a sacred moment.'

— The Rev. Christine Smith

ample, when the congregation decided to welcome and affirm LGBT persons into its life and leadership.

"We decided to seek consensus rather than voting," she says. "We took time for silence and prayer and for people to speak. People were encouraged to speak from their hearts. At least one person talked about his struggles with the church being labeled an ONA church. He had problems with it, but felt that God was calling the church to do it."

Ruth Garwood has helped many congregations through their ONA processes.

"I don't think sacred moments can be planned," she says, "but I think the opportunities can be created. Some of it is about having enough trust that people can feel vulnerable. Some of it is about being open to experience something unpredictable."

"Whether a conversation is sacred depends on the intentionality and goal of the conversation,"

By W. Evan Golder

When God called out to Moses from the midst of the burning bush on Mount Sinai and Moses responded, was that a sacred conversation?

How about when Nathan came to David after he had had Uriah killed and married his wife, Bathsheba? Was that conversation sacred?

What about when Jesus confronted the Samaritan woman at the well, or when Paul explained to Agrippa how he had been changed from persecuting Christians to becoming a believer himself. Were those sacred conversations?

says the Rev. Mary Luti of **First Church UCC in Cambridge, Mass.** “It also needs subject matter that is important and human, and it must be conducted in some way that can be animated by the Spirit.”

For the Rev. Dale Bishop, though, pastor of **First Congregational UCC in Rhinelander, Wis.**, the most genuine sacred conversations are the ones that “just happen,” ones “where people share deeply.”

“We have lots of sacred conversations,” he says. “As a pastor, just about every conversation that doesn’t have to do with repaving the parking lot is a sacred conversation.” How can one tell? “I guess maybe if your heart is touched,” he says.

“Sometimes we discover in the midst, or even after the fact, that a conversation has been ‘sacred,’” says Susan Blain. “God has been present, transforming and surprising, doing more working in us than we can ask or imagine.”

Integrity is key

“When I think of a sacred conversation, the word that comes to mind first is integrity,” says the Rev. Arthur Cribbs, pastor of **San Marino (Calif.) Congregational UCC.** “Integrity speaks to our most authentic voice. It really has to do with a covenant that we make not only to speak our truth but also to listen to the truth of others, to covenant together to speak without fear and to listen without judgment.”

“When race is the topic, the invitation to the conversation must include some invitation to be vulnerable,” he says, “to take a risk in order to seek solutions to a problem that has been with us so long that it almost defines us as a society. Especially it challenges the church, with 11 o’clock on Sunday being the most segregated hour in America.”

“John Thomas’ invitation calls us to recognize that we are about to engage an unholy topic in a holy place,” he says.

And, says Christine Smith, in the midst of such a conversation, “people need to have the courage to include an analysis of power and privilege. European Americans especially need to be critically clear about their own power and privilege. White persons walk into the room with an ‘invisible backpack’ of privilege that makes the conversation fundamentally unbalanced from the start.”

“We need to listen more and talk less,” she says.

“Listening is crucial for any authentic conversation,” says Sid-

ney Fowler. “Sacred conversations invite us into the prayers of others, the stories, the worship, as much as each of us stating our position. It’s where we hear the longings of

sacred

consecrated to or belonging to a god or deity; dedicated or appropriated to religious use; made holy; as a sacred place; a sacred day;

— Webster’s New Universal Dictionary

the other as much as we hear the position.

“I have what I believe and what I think,” he says, “but I have to set that aside for a moment to be open to whatever God may want me to hear or to do to change me. Change is critical. We may be called to repentance or forgiveness or to take a new step. It’s a threatening hope. But if we’re really open to the other, then something is going to happen.”

Sacred equals different?

“If you think about sacred, the opposite is profane,” says Dale Bishop. “We’ve had lots of profane conversations in the public arena, but very few sacred ones. For example, most of cable news is profane conversation.”

“I have a bit of a problem with setting out to have a sacred conversation,” says Bishop, a former member of the UCC’s five-member Collegium of Officers. “When I was in the building (the UCC’s Church House in Cleveland), we had many conversations about race. And many sacred ones.”

But if he were in the Collegium now, he says he’d “want a little clarity about what is expected” when we call congregations to have sacred conversations.

William McKinney, president of UCC-related Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, Calif., also questions the effort to structure sacred conversations.

“I resist the effort to dichotomize sacred and profane,” he says. “That’s an artificial distinction. It neglects a deeper theological understanding that doesn’t reduce itself to soundbites very well. If God is incarnate, then God is present everywhere and everything is sacred. Otherwise, God somehow isn’t here until God is invoked.”

Another way of looking at it, he says, is that there are times in life that we set aside to deal in an intense way with conversations that are no less sacred day to day. “Anthropologists call this ‘rites of intensification,’” he says, “where we intensify our energy or intention.”

“It’s the same paradox about Sunday worship,” he explains. “It is not as though God is listening any more attentively at 11 o’clock

on Sunday morning than at the rest of the week, but that we come together in a more structured way, a more disciplined way, and in a more communal way.

“Intensification means discipline, structure, self-consciousness about who is in the conversation, about intentionality,” he says. “At the same time, we’re more open to spontaneity, serendipity and surprise.”

The bottom line?

So what about all the “sacred conversations” that were begun on May 18 and will continue through the summer and into the fall?

“One of the results of this experience,” McKinney says, “is that people may become more aware of the possibility of sacred conversation at any different times in their lives, in the office, in the home, or in the school.”

Any conversation at any time is capable of having a sacred quality. It’s there. If God is God of all of life, then God is present anywhere.”

The Rev. W. Evan Golder is editor emeritus of *United Church News*.

LEARN MORE

<ucc.org/sacred-conversation>



QUALITIES OF A SACRED CONVERSATION

Conversations on race will be sacred if we ...

INVOKE GOD’S PRESENCE AND WISDOM when we gather, reserving time for prayer at opening and closing and whenever anyone in the group feels a need for it.

ESTABLISH SAFE SPACE with a commitment to mutual respect and Christian love.

LISTEN DEEPLY TO, AND HONOR, the feelings of anger, pain and joy in those who have been the targets of racism.

LISTEN DEEPLY TO, AND HONOR, the feelings of shame, fear, and grief in those who are waking up to the reality of racism in our churches, neighborhoods and nation.

CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION beyond an exploration of individual feelings, attitudes and behaviors but continue on to examine the realities of cultural and institutional racism.

RECOGNIZE that our deepest common humanity is not grounded in race, religious creed, or national origin but in the extravagantly inclusive love of God.

REALIZE that within our common God-given humanity resides a glorious array of colors, cultures, sexualities and beliefs.

END EACH CONVERSATION WITH at least one tangible and specific commitment to action on behalf of racial justice in our communities.

UNDERSTAND that this conversation is not a one-time event, but a continuing journey.

— from “A Pastoral Letter on Racism” by the UCC’s Collegium of Officers

Thomas sermon: ‘Justice must be defended, won in each generation’

By J. Bennett Guess

Many white people are “lured away” from a sacred conversation on race for two reasons, according to the Rev. John H. Thomas, the UCC’s general minister and president.

First, they think it’s no longer necessary.

“We don’t see pictures of Bull Connor’s police dogs snapping at the feet of black men and women anymore; we don’t see fire hoses scattering protesters like limp dolls in the street,” Thomas said in a May 18 sermon. “‘Colored only’ signs are never seen at lunch counters today, but only in civil rights museums where racism is portrayed as historical artifact rather than living reality.”

Second, our tendency to lead parochial lives keeps us separated from much of the evidence that points to the urgent need for a national dialogue on race.

“Most of us don’t ride the bus through the black and Hispanic neighborhoods of Cleveland or Oakland where foreclosure signs tell an evil story of poverty and predatory lending,” Thomas said. “We don’t usually compare the schools of our suburban communities with those of the urban core to see first hand how unlevel the playing field really is for our youth.

We don’t often have to sit for hours in the emergency room with our screaming child waiting for a doctor to prescribe antibiotics for her raging ear infection. We don’t live every day in fear that our sons will be sucked into what Marion Wright Edelman chillingly describes as ‘the cradle to prison pipeline’ for African American boys.”

Thomas, who preached on race on May 18 at **Danville [Calif.] Congregational UCC near San Francisco**, quoted Martin Luther King Jr., who wrote in 1963 from a Birmingham jail of the “fierce urgency of now.”

“We must come to see that human progress never rolls in on the wheels of inevitability,” said Thomas, quoting King.

“[Justice] must we won and defended in each generation,” Thomas said. “There is a fierce urgency today. Friends, we need a sacred conversation on race.”

On April 3, speaking at a press conference at **Trinity UCC in Chicago** on the 40th anniversary of King’s last sermon in Memphis, Thomas called for the UCC’s 10,000 active and retired clergy to preach on race on Trinity Sunday.

“We’ve seen how ugly a conversation on race can be,” Thomas told United Church News at the time. “This

is why we need a sacred dialogue.”

Speaking in Danville, Thomas urged a crowded sanctuary of worshippers to resist the lure of denial, but also to reject the hopelessness of despair.

“Fearful of saying the wrong thing,

|| We must come to see that human progress never rolls in on the wheels of inevitability,

— Thomas, quoting Martin Luther King

we say nothing. Fearful of doing the wrong thing, we do nothing,” Thomas said. “... Many of us feel a paralyzing sense of collective guilt for a history of racial oppression that comes to us as an unwelcome but persistent legacy, something we didn’t ask for but can’t divest ourselves of either.”

At the close of his sermon, Thomas conceded that such a weighty conversation on race is “daunting, indeed.”

“But we do so in the knowledge that by grace, we have been made, not for futility, but rather little less than God, crowned with glory and honor, and given responsibility for the serving, the stewarding of all the works of God’s hands.”

Read the full sermon at <ucc.org/news/significant-speeches>.



MESSAGE FINDS GROUNDSWELL OF SUPPORT

Full-page New York Times ad finds it way into papers nationwide

By J. Bennett Guess

It's the ad that keeps on running.

On April 2, thanks to a one-week flood of contributions from UCC members nationwide, the denomination placed a full-page ad in The New York Times at a cost of nearly \$120,000.

It was an expensive-yet-prominent attempt to proclaim the UCC's fuller story at the height of the media flurry surrounding the Rev. Jeremiah A. Wright Jr., the retiring senior pastor of Trinity UCC in Chicago.

"We are a church of open ideas, extravagant welcome and evangelical courage," the ad proclaimed in part. "We support liberty in our pulpits, just as we affirm the individual conscience of our 1.2 million members to agree, disagree and wrestle with the biggest questions in a spirit of love."

Thankfully, the ad wasn't a one-day throwaway. It continues to have a life of its own.

In April and May, the ad appeared in no less than 30 newspapers nationwide, with the text often being adapted to lift the profile of local UCC churches.

"Thanks to the incredible generosity of one individual in our congregation, the New York Times UCC ad has been placed in the Redlands Facts, the San Bernardino Sun and the Riverside Press Enterprise," reported the Rev. Sharon R. Graff, pastor of Redlands UCC in California, on May 9. "It was amended to include the names and contact information of our four area UCC congregations in Mentone, Redlands, Riverside and San Bernardino.

Similarly, churches nationwide

have been eager to see the ad find a spot in their local papers.

First Congregational UCC in Colorado Springs placed the ad in two different newspapers, while the Congregational UCC of Valley City in North Dakota ran it in the Valley City Times-Record. Grace UCC in Taneytown, Md., bought space in its hometown newspaper, The Taneytown Record.

Inspired by the Times' ad, UCC churches in Madison, Wis., raised money to place their own full-page message in The Capital Times.

Conferences, too, have jumped on the ad-running bandwagon.

In the Penn Central Conference, churches raised money to place the ad in the Gettysburg Times and the York Daily Record. The Maine Conference purchased ad space in the Portland Press Herald, and the Northern Plains Conference placed the ad in three prominent North Dakota newspapers — the Bismarck Tribune, the Fargo Forum and the

THOUSANDS OF THANKS!

In less than two weeks, UCC members raised more than enough money to place full-page ads in both The New York Times on April 2 and USA Today on April 11.

An impressive 2,918 donors contributed \$238,612 to the UCC's "Tell Our Story Fund" in late March and early April, with nearly three-fourths of the donations coming through online giving.

The two ads cost about \$213,000. Excess contributions will be held for future ad buys.

In a thank you message to donors, the Rev. John H. Thomas, general minister and president, wrote, "No single newspaper ad will ever fully capture our denomination's diverse story or our justice legacy, but as the media spotlight continues to focus on the UCC like never before, it is imperative that we be proactive in sharing who we are and what we're about, lest others continue to define us in narrow and distorted ways."

Minot Daily News.

The Falls Church News-Press in northern Virginia was the first newspaper to reprint the ad on April 3 — the day after it appeared in The New York Times — thanks to the generosity of owner-editor Nicholas F. Benton, a member of First Congregational UCC in Washington, D.C.

Benton also wrote a column that day that explained his reason for choosing to run the ad in his own newspaper.

"The UCC is unapologetic in affirming its role as a church whose founders came over on the May-

flower 'of open ideas, extravagant welcome, and evangelical courage,'" Benton wrote. "I've been a member of the UCC since I was in college and chose to enter a UCC seminary. Once again, in the heat of controversy, they've made me proud."

On April 11, with \$93,000 in contributions from UCC members, the denomination also placed a full-page ad in USA Today calling for a nationwide "sacred conversation on race" on May 18.

If your church is running the ad in a local newspaper, let us know at <newsroom@ucc.org>.



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'HOSPICE IS ABOUT LIVING, NOT DYING'

Chaplain: hospice care offers sacred passage of hope and healing

By Janet M. White

Frequently, as a hospice chaplain, I am asked, "Why not a different ministry? Why that one?"

It is a complicated question with a simple answer. My soul is passionate about hospice. It is a privilege to partner with patients and families during this tender time of sacred discovery.

As an interfaith hospice chaplain, I have the opportunity to work with the full breadth of our world's religions: Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Taoism, including many major and subtle variations. I also work with agnostic people and atheists (who are spiritual in their own right, since they have invested extraordinary thought into "not being religious.")

When people make the hospice decision, and qualify for it, they are choosing to live out the rest of their lives with dignity. People are freed from enduring further medical procedures that are not arresting the disease. Medical intervention for symptom management takes the front seat. The renewed focus is on acceptance, care, comfort, dignity and a sense of peacefulness that stems from the very core of their being — their soul.

I often tell patients that our body is the "apartment" for our soul. Although our physical body is failing, our soul may thrive. The language of our soul is meaning. We may re-discover our soul when a poor medical prognosis awakens a need for deeper meaning in us. Spirituality, or life meaning-making, becomes front and center at perhaps a deeper level than before.

In hospice, the patient is back in charge with the support of loved ones and the hospice interdisciplinary team: physicians, RNs, home health aids, social workers and chaplains. Team members travel to the patients' homes, wherever "home" may be: private residence, assisted living, skilled nursing facility or hospital.

Hospice is about living, not dying. We focus on the distinction between curing and healing. While curing eliminates disease, healing focuses on wholeness and peacefulness as we journey toward the end of life. Curative measures may see death as failure. Healing includes death as one of the sacred, natural outcomes of life.

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We connect with our vulnerability when we identify our needs for wholeness. Our journey may include releasing old hurts through forgiveness of ourselves and others. We recognize that forgiveness is a gift to ourselves. It does not suggest that we are compromising our dignity or our sense of right or wrong. Rather, we are claiming peacefulness for ourselves — setting our soul free from spiritual unrest.

Re-claiming wellness includes embracing freedom from our devastating medical diagnoses. We own our terminal diagnosis, while at the same time, we

claim healing as we work toward our sense of peacefulness. In this process we may begin to deepen and transform our understanding of hope.

Hospice engages hope. It does not let go of hope. I believe God is our infinite, self-renewing source of hope. Our hope may transform as our healing deepens. Our hope may be to have time alone with each of our loved ones. It may be to reconcile a relationship that fell off the track somewhere along the way in our lives. We may have come to realize that it is a relationship we hope to rekindle as part of healing.

Our journey toward peacefulness may involve anger along the way. But is it really anger. It certainly sounds like anger! It may be anger. Anger is easier for us to access than our sadness. It may be profound sadness.

I often sit with patients or

family members in silence. I think of it as "relational silence" because there is an awful lot going on. It isn't being articulated, but it is voiced through sacred silence. "Be still and know that I am God!" (Psalm 46: 10a).

When we release our loved one to go, it is an expression of wellness or healing. As a loved one, we face anticipatory grief during this time. It is profoundly sad to be left behind. Perhaps the deepest expression of love is to give our loved one "permission" to go when she or he is ready.

Life is forever altered when a loved one passes on. We learn



WHAT IS HOSPICE?

Considered to be the model for quality, compassionate care for people facing a life-limiting illness or injury, hospice provides expert medical care, pain management, and emotional and spiritual support expressly tailored to meet a patient's needs and wishes.

Hospice focuses on caring, not curing. In most cases, care is provided in the patient's home.

WHAT SERVICES ARE TYPICALLY OFFERED?

An interdisciplinary care team works in concert to:

- Manage the patient's pain and symptoms;
- Assist the patient with the emotional and psychosocial and spiritual aspects of dying;
- Provide needed drugs, medical supplies, and equipment;
- Coach the family on how to care for the patient;
- Deliver special services like speech and physical therapy when needed.
- Make short-term inpatient care available when pain or symptoms become too difficult to manage at home, or the caregiver needs respite time.
- Provides bereavement care and counseling to surviving family and friends.

Source: National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization
istockphoto graphic

to carry our grief as part of who we are. We cherish the beautiful gifts that our departed loved ones have given us — gifts of who they were and how they loved us. As people who have been left behind, we own those beloved, intangible gifts forever. In recognition of this trying time, hospice follows patients, families and loved ones for 13 months following death. Support groups may be available indefinitely.

I understand hospice as a gift we give ourselves once medi-

cal treatment modalities are no longer helpful. A peaceful passing with the hospice patient is a drawing in and eventual surrender to God. It is natural. It is sacred. What a deep privilege it is to serve in this resilient ministry of life.

The Rev. Janet M. White, affiliated clergy with **Trinitarian Congregational UCC in Concord, Mass.**, is a staff hospice chaplain for All Care Hospice, a subsidiary of Health Management Services, Inc., in Lynn, Mass.

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LITTLE NOTICE, BIG WELCOME

Connecticut church helps resettle Iraqi family

By W. Evan Golder

Two weeks.

That's all the time Iraqi refugees Hisham Ahmed Kadhim and his wife, Maysaa Lelo, both in their 20s, had to prepare for a life-changing move with their 2-year-old son from Amman, Jordan, to a new life in the United States.

Two weeks. That's all the time Chris George, executive director of Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services (IRIS) in New Haven, Conn., had to find a host group to help resettle this Iraqi refugee family.

Two weeks. That's all the time the informal refugee resettlement committee at **Spring Glen UCC in Hamden, Conn.**, had to locate a vacant apartment near a bus line, come up with the first month's rent and security deposit, and completely furnish this new home by the time the refugee family stepped off the plane.

Two weeks was all anyone had.

But as the airport limo sped east from the Newark, N.J., airport to Connecticut, church volunteers were collecting their buckets and brooms and heading out the door of the upstairs apartment. Waiting inside were pictures on the walls, food in the fridge, furniture in each room, and a warm, home-cooked Arabic meal prepared by another recent refugee family.

Two weeks was all it took.

No way to stay

Back in Baghdad, Hisham Ahmed Kadhim and his pregnant wife lived with his extended family. Despite his Master's degree in chemical engineering and his training in water purification, professional jobs were scarce in war-torn Iraq, so he worked for his father in his veterinary supply business.

Another problem was that they were Sunni Muslims in a Shiite Muslim neighborhood. Gunmen stopped him on the street. His cousin and his uncle were killed. The family home was confiscated.

"Even today," he says, "I do not know who lives in it."

But they did know they couldn't stay in Iraq, so shortly after their son was born in early 2006, they fled to Jordan. Since Iraqi refugees have no legal status in Jordan, they knew they couldn't stay there either, so they applied with the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to emigrate to a third country.

After rigorous screening to determine that they were neither a public health risk nor a national security danger, the three of them were granted refugee status.

Two weeks later, they were on a plane to Newark and their new life in suburban New Haven, Conn.

Feel right at home

In New Haven, responsibility for helping the Kadhim family resettle had landed with Chris George, an Arabic-speaking former Peace Corps volunteer in Oman, who has visited refugee

camps in Africa and the Middle East.

"Our goal is to help refugees feel at home in a new, strange land," he says. "They are highly motivated survivors, tough, resourceful people who really want to contribute and stand on their own two feet."

On average, IRIS resettles between 100 and 200 refugees per year — and with few resources. The agency receives \$850 per refugee from the federal government, half for administrative costs and half for the family's expenses.

"Refugees are invited to come to this country," George explains, "but they don't get a free ride. They even pay their own air fare to get here — and they take out loans to repay these fares and build good credit at the same time."

One of IRIS's goals is to raise money from other sources and to get volunteer help. The UCC assists with

|| Our goal is to help refugees feel at home in a new, strange land."

— Chris George

funds from the annual One Great Hour of Sharing offering and local churches assist with volunteers and with donations of furniture and other household items.

When he received the Kadhim family's folder, George thought immediately of Spring Glen UCC. Twice he had been invited to speak at the church. If any group could get their act together in only two weeks, he thought, this was it.

Smart, restrained approach

"They are smart!" George says of the Spring Glen UCC committee.

"When refugees arrive," he says, "they need everything. They need clothing from the moment they get off the bus. They need food, they need housing, they need their kids enrolled in school, they need arrangements for health care, they need jobs and they need to learn English."

Too many times, George explains,



Hisham Ahmed Kadhim, his wife Maysaa Lelo and their 2-year-old son Mohammed relax in their suburban New Haven home, made completely ready for them by volunteers from Spring Glen UCC in Hamden, Conn.

W. Evan Golder photo

the needs seem so great that the resettlement committee wants to do everything for the refugee family and solve every problem immediately.

Not this group, he says. "They're taking a smart and restrained approach to refugee resettlement. They

than 30 persons signed up to help. Lynn phoned everyone on the list and catalogued their interests and available time. Then, using a resource book provided by IRIS, she typed out a list of items and tasks needed and distributed the list.

People volunteered as they could — and everyone was ready when George phoned that a family was coming in two weeks.

"We really had to scramble," says Lynn.

On Sunday, they had only three days left and still didn't have an apartment. Then Schowalter found one and signed the lease and Lynn made the deposit with her own funds. They got the keys at 5 p.m. on Tuesday and the family was due on Wednesday evening.

"Those last two days were so much fun!" says Lynn.

Watching church happen

The pastor, the Rev. Andrew Nagy-Benson, was away at a conference when all of this broke.

"This was a pastor's dream," he says. "It was generated by the people of the church and carried out by the people of the church. I was receiving e-mails hourly as Amy was trying to keep me in the loop. I felt as though I was watching church happen from 1,000 miles away."

Once the Iraqi family arrived, the activities continued.

Nancy Beals taught Kadhim how to work the bus system. Ellen Schowalter took him to Sears to buy clothes for his employment interviews. Amy Lynn posted a monthly sign-up schedule. Different persons took them to the supermarket, the aquarium, the natural science museum, to job interviews, to an Arabic restaurant, to the mosque on Fridays, and to English classes.

Why did they bother?

"We made such a mess out of that country that if we could do anything that would help even the score — like lighting even one little candle — it would help make a brighter world," says Schowalter.

"For years we have heard our pastors preach that this kind of thing is what Jesus calls us to do," says Bernadette Welsh, "to be open to others, to welcome the stranger. My grandparents came off the boat at Ellis Island. It's not so far removed from us."

MORE@

Learn how your congregation can help resettle a refugee family by contacting Mary Kuenning Gross, the UCC's executive for refugee and immigration ministries, at 700 Prospect Ave., Cleveland OH 44115-1100; phone 216/736-3212; e-mail <grossm@ucc.org>.

The Rev. W. Evan Golder is editor emeritus of United Church News.

THE CHURCH AND THE MAOISTS

New alliances, strange bedfellows emerging in new Nepal

By W. Evan Golder

If pre-election promises made in the Himalayan kingdom of Nepal hold true, we can put away those mental images of Maoists as the bad guys inciting violence in that country.

On April 10, Nepal held elections for a new constituent assembly and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) won at least a plurality of the 601 seats. And who was its key ally? The National Council of Churches of Nepal. The NCCN is a new partner church of Global Ministries, the combined witness of the UCC and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Just a dozen years ago, such a partnership would have been unthinkable.

Last year, the Rev. Cally Rogers-Witte, executive minister of the UCC's Wider Church Ministries, and the Rev. James Vijayakumar, Global Ministries' Southern Asia executive, spoke to a Nepalis audience of 350 local church leaders. They said that God created the whole world, that all persons are God's children, and that the Christian faith calls Christians to work for peace and justice and democracy.

One Maoist leader in a similar church gathering responded that 11 years ago he personally had

ordered that a church be burned. At that time, he said, the Maoists were fighting capitalism, feudalism and imperialism — and he saw the church as a visible symbol

“The election is seen as a very positive thing by the church, as part of a growing awareness that the church needs to participate in the life of a new Nepal.”

— the Rev. James Vijayakumar, Global Ministries executive

of western imperialism. So he ordered it burned.

But now, he said, I see that the church is interested in human rights, poverty, human dignity and freedom of speech. These are our fundamental values, too.

Decades of widespread human rights violations and poverty had led to the rise of Maoism. The Maoists took up the cause of farmers and the rural

poor and took arms against the national army.

Their 10-year insurgency cost 14,000 lives.

Besides targeting the 239-year-old royal dynasty, the Maoists also took aim at the church, which they saw only as other-worldly and uncaring about the country's social, political and economical issues. Many in the church did hold negative attitudes toward people of other faiths, and refused to cooperate on common issues.

But another group of Christians was beginning to plan for a peaceful future for Nepal. The NCCN had been formed in 1999, but only became fully operation-

al in 2003 when Dr. K.B. Rokaya became General Secretary.

In 2006, under a UN-brokered peace deal, the Maoists surrendered their arms and entered the political realm, effectively ending the civil war. Among other things, they agreed to the election of a constituent assembly to rewrite the constitution and create a parliamentary republic, thereby ending the monarchy.



Maoist leader Prachanda (front row wearing garland) with Nepalis church leaders.

Photo furnished

After the cease fire, the NCCN played a major role in bringing all faith groups into the process of “building a new Nepal.”

The Maoists' alliance with the church came about as they learned that the NCCN was concerned about working to alleviate poverty and defending human rights when abuses occur.

Will the peaceful efforts that led to the elections carry through to the rewriting of the constitution and the establishment of a new government?

Vijayakumar thinks they will.

“This is a big revolution,” he says. “The election is seen as a very positive thing by the church, as part of a growing awareness that the church needs to participate in the life of a new Nepal.”

Critics note that although the Maoists say they do not want to go back to war, neither have they renounced armed struggle.

However, the former insurgent leader Prachanda, whose name means “the fierce one” in Nepali, has pledged that the Maoists will be faithful to their mandate from the people “to consolidate lasting peace.”

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is grounded in faith in the triune God and recognizes Jesus Christ as the head of the church; possesses a lively faith in God; is responsive to the movement of the Holy Spirit; understands what it means to be a multiracial, multicultural, open and affirming, accessible to all peace with justice church; is sensitive to present realities and committed to the future of the UCC; understands systems and the institutional church; can gently guide the transforming evolution of the UCC; is flexible and comfortable with transition; has broad UCC leadership experience; can delegate; inspires trust; is willing and able to travel extensively.

Applications are available at <ucc.org/gmp> or by contacting the Rev. Lynne Simcox at <GMPSEARCH@aol.com>.

Applications accepted from **June 1, 2008 to September 2, 2008.**

Nominee will be presented to the UCC General Synod in June 2009 for call by election. Position begins October 1, 2009.



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United Church News named third-best religion newspaper

United Church News has been recognized by Associated Church Press as one of the best national or international religion newspapers in North America.

At its award ceremony on April 22 in Dallas, Associated Church Press presented its top newspaper honors for 2007 to the Mennonite Weekly Review, followed by The Anglican Journal in Canada. United Church News and The Christian Chronicle tied for third place.

In comments about United Church News, the judges said, "The design takes risks and is fresh, current and urban. ... Center-spread

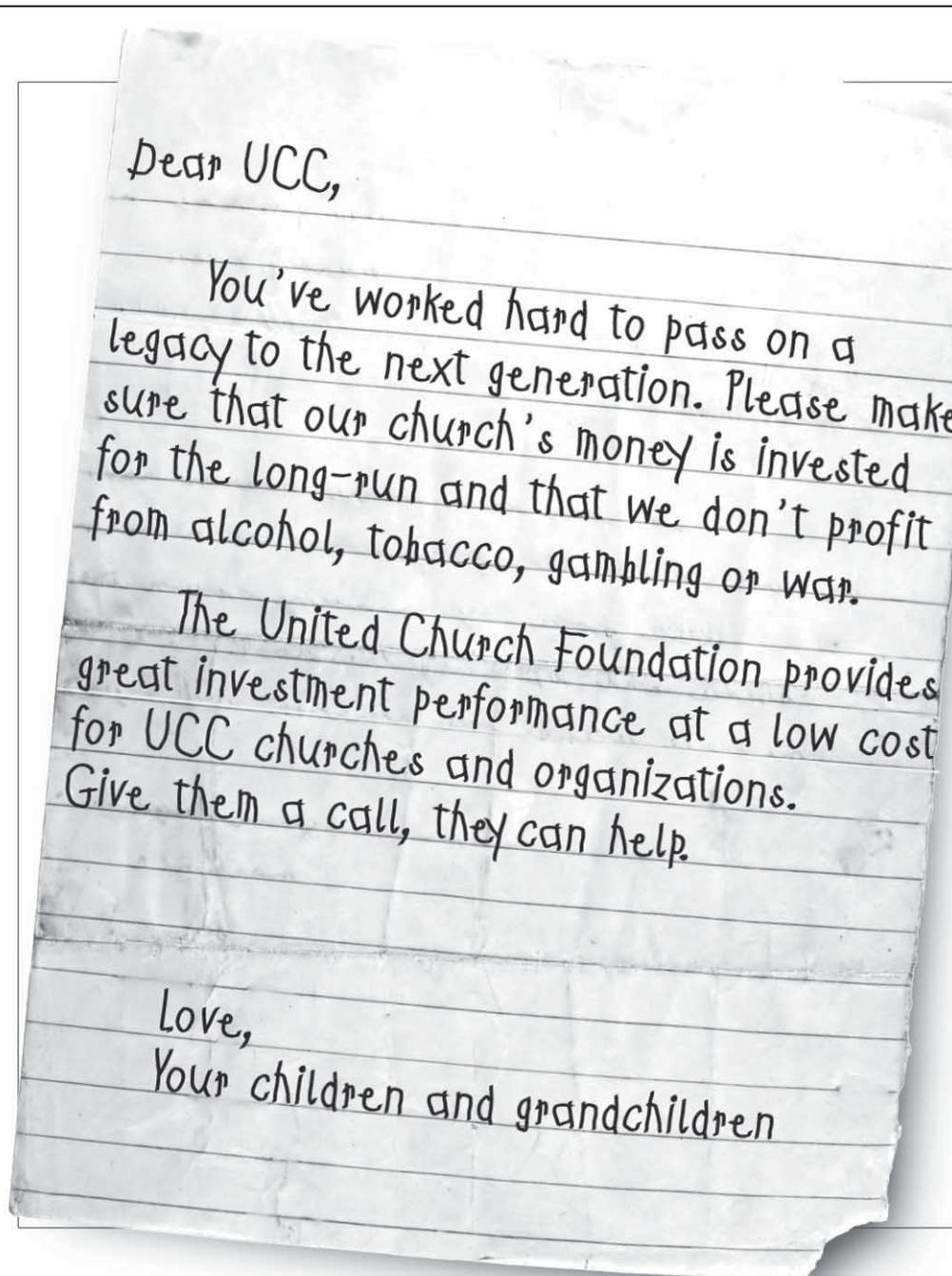
features take on challenging issues of significance."

United Church News also received a second-place award for best personal first-person account for "The Porpoise-Driven Church" by the Rev. July Ruth Harley; a third-place award for best feature article for "New Jersey church installs solar electric, leads by example" by the Rev. J. Martin Bailey; and a third-place prize for best convention coverage for "Ayes on Hartford."

On April 3 in Washington, D.C., the interfaith Religion Communicators Council presented two

second-place awards to the Rev. J. Bennett Guess, publisher-editor, for "Those people at that church: Talking across the great religion divide" (best feature story) and "Lord, create in my life and in my church a miracle" (best editorial). Last year, United Church News was named by RCC as its top pick for best religion newspaper.

With a circulation of 206,000, United Church News is the nation's largest denominational newspaper. In addition to Guess, staff members include Randy Varcho, design editor, and Connie Larkman, advertising manager.



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SEMINARY APPOINTMENTS

The Rev. Kent J. Ulery will assume the presidency of Bangor Theological Seminary on July 1. He will succeed the Rev. William C. Imes, who is retiring after serving as president since 2001. Ulery, the UCC's Michigan Conference Minister for the past 12 years, has also served local churches in Indiana, Illinois and Michigan.

The Rev. Alice Hunt, associated dean at Vanderbilt University Divinity School, has been named president of Chicago Theological Seminary, effective this fall. Hunt holds a Ph.D. in religion, with an emphasis on the Hebrew Bible and early Judaism, from Vanderbilt University. Her published work includes "Missing Priests: The Zadokites in Tradition and History" (2006) and essays in works such as "Approaching Yehud: New Approaches to the Study of the Persian Period" (2007), "Israel's Prophets and Israel's Past" (2006) and "Methods of Biblical Interpretation" (2004).

PASTORAL CHANGES

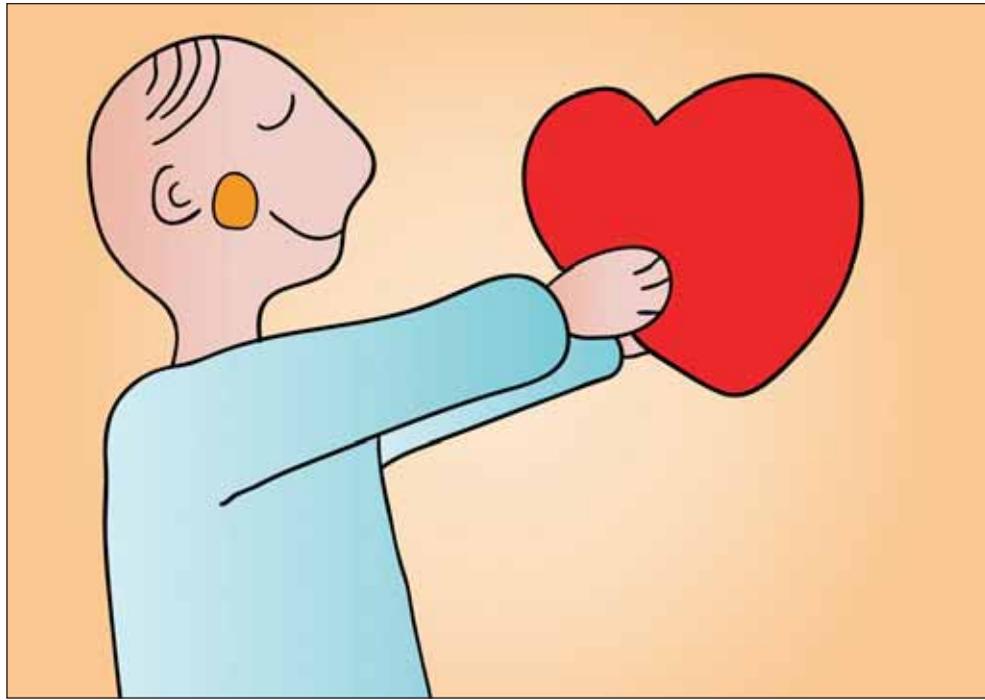
- Arbisi, Mark L.** Waubasha, MN to Union Cong. UCC, Waupun, WI
- Bean, Tood W.** to Peace Memorial UCC, Palos Park, IL
- Dodds, Patricia A.** Ephrata, PA to St. Luke's UCC, Lock Haven, PA
- Estepp, Larry M.** Collegeville, PA to St. Paul's (Dubs) UCC, Hanover, PA
- Eyer, Paul K.** to St. Luke's UCC, Lancaster, PA
- Forwalter, Craig A.** to Immanuel's UCC, Papineau, IL
- Fredriksen, Dennis R.** St. Marys, OH to interim, St. Stephen UCC, Sandusky, OH
- Haines, Stephanie L.** to interim, UCC, Spencerville, OH
- Johnson, Dennis G.** Stockton, CA to St. John's UCC, Tillamook, OR
- Johnson, Shana G.** to Peace Memorial UCC, Palos Park, IL
- Lingelbach, Jacquelyn M.** to UCC, Quentin, PA
- McCaffrey, Leigh G.** Norwalk, CT to Church by the Sea UCC, Bal Harbour, FL
- Moyer, Jamie L.** to St. Peter's, Allentown, PA
- Pattee, David E.** South Bend, IN to UCC, Kent, OH
- Patton, Sharon D.** Smith Center, KS to UCC, Gaylord, KS
- Rock, Donald A.** to interim, St. John's UCC, Bluffton, OH
- Shiels, Joan** Sturgeon Bay, WI to retired
- Souder, Lori J.** Phoenix, AZ to First Cong. UCC, South Hadley, MA
- Tokoph, Brian** to St. Paul's UCC, Oshkosh, WI
- Zorn Micke, Nancy K.** Ely Memorial UCC and Cong. UCC, Land O'Lakes and Phelps, WI

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

CLERGY DEATHS

- | | |
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| Alderfer, Merle C. , 60, 3/19/2008 | MacLaughlin, James D. , 67, 3/1/2008 |
| Asamoah, Douglas O. , 66, 2/26/2008 | McAlister, Eugene B. , 96, 2/15/2008 |
| Barz, Raymond , 95, 3/27/2008 | Meyer, Norman E. , 74, 4/1/2008 |
| Botley, Robert D. , 84, 3/28/2008 | Michaelsen, Einar P. , 93, 2/10/2008 |
| Britton, Thomas H. , 85, 2/9/2008 | Milne, George M. , 92, 4/8/2008 |
| Chong, Frank A. , 63, 3/9/2008 | Parry, Maldwyn V. , 95, 3/10/2008 |
| Cobb, Gerald R. , 89, 3/16/2008 | Potter, Lyman G. , 85, 2/11/2008 |
| Councill, Herbert G. , 93, 3/11/2008 | Rayson, Delwyn R. , 89, 4/22/2008 |
| Dandar, Alex E. , 89, 3/28/2008 | Read, John S. , 89, 1/31/2008 |
| Evans, Ernest W. , 60, 3/24/2008 | Schumacher, Verle C. , 83, 4/8/2008 |
| Forsberg, Nancy E. , 85, 4/4/2008 | Shively, Vencil L. , 69, 3/30/2008 |
| Getz, Suzanne C. , 61, 12/29/2007 | Smith, Duane W. , 76, 4/23/2008 |
| Gibbons, Ray , 105, 3/18/2008 | Smith, Edward Walter , 93, 4/19/2008 |
| Guthmiller, Albert M. , 78, 3/30/2008 | Snodgrass, Stuart C. , 97, 4/7/2008 |
| Haldeman, Eilus F. , 89, 3/12/2008 | Strickler, Gayle V. , 95, 3/6/2008 |
| Jones, John H. , 85, 11/5/2008 | Tate, Gordon P. , 89, 3/17/2008 |
| Laurie, William K. , 83, 4/17/2008 | Tornallyay, Martin , 76, 2/17/2008 |
| Link, Charles G. , 97, 3/19/2008 | Wagner, E. Reginald , 71, 4/3/2008 |
| Lund, Richard W. , 85, 4/20/2008 | |

Clergy death information is provided by The Pension Boards.



iStockPhoto graphic

Volunteer: 'It's our turn to give back'

I have been wanting to volunteer ever since I was in junior high," says Maegen Anderson, a recent college grad and member of **First Congregational UCC in Bakersfield, Calif.**

Anderson, along with longtime friend, Christopher Charney, volunteered through the UCC's Partners in Service program at Overlook Farm's Heifer Learning Center in Rutland, Mass. She and Charney were trained as education volunteers to welcome the many church and school groups of all ages who come to Overlook Farm.

"We give them a tour of the farm where we talk about our 3 acres of organic gardens, plus the benefits we get from all kinds of livestock," says Anderson. "[The farm has] a camel, llamas, alpacas, cattle ... just about any kind of animal that Heifer gives, we have here."

The five-month-long assignment was a natural answer to Anderson's yearning to make a difference in the world. "I, like so many people in the U.S. have been so privileged. ... It's our turn to give back to the

rest of the world."

Besides falling in love with the animals she helps care for each day, Anderson says the best part of her volunteer assignment is being there for what she calls "a-ha moments."

"We have a lot of middle school age groups that come, a lot of them from pretty nice, privileged areas," she says. "When they learn that the U.S. has 5 percent of the world's population, but is consuming over 30 percent of the world's resources, their eyes ... you really can notice that they are coming to realizations that they have never thought of before."

When guests at the ranch stay overnight in the farm's Global Village, more realizations occur.

"[Guests] might be staying in the Guatemala house, which is water-proof, but they are still sleeping on a dirt floor. They wake up and realize that this is not just a fun camping experience, but this is how other people are living every day," Anderson says. "And that is why it is important to be helping them."

Beyond retired, volunteers are 'refired'

Mary and Bill Ruth began their volunteer work through the UCC's Partners in Service program back in 2003, doing long-term service stints of nine months or more. They are currently on their sixth assignment, volunteering with Wider Church Ministries in Cleveland.

The Ruths still consider **Elon, N.C.**, home, where they are members of **Elon Community UCC**, but their various assignments have taken them all over the country working for non-profit agencies.

Bill says being flexible is the name of the game.

Living in various types of housing, some of it community living, is different than having your own home. And the job itself requires flexibility. "We've done a variety of things," says Bill. "Office work in business and development offices. We've painted for nine months at Heifer. We've given Global Village tours. You have to be willing to leave

your comforts of home, what you had, and do something a little different."

Mary says they have received many gifts from volunteering — friends, lots of emails, and doses of enthusiasm. "We try to lift staff morale because we are energetic and positive people," she says.

The couple meets each new assignment with anticipation. "We've discovered the great networking group out in the world of volunteers," says Mary. "It's so fun to hear about a new assignment from our friends of all faiths."

The Ruths call themselves "retired but refired" and find that the lifestyle of a volunteer suits them quite well. "We like being in a program like Partners in Service," says Mary. "We've met independent volunteers, and that's fine. In our experience, we are so glad to have an organization behind us."

Learn more at <ucc.org/volunteer>.

Lend a hand. Lend your heart.

Church offers D.C.-area volunteer opportunities

Westmoreland Congregational UCC in Bethesda, Md., has a vested interest in social justice that goes beyond sending money or supplies to local service agencies.

For the past 23 years, the congregation has been changing lives by sending carefully chosen volunteers through their Westmoreland Volunteer Corps, the only domestic volunteer service of its kind in the UCC.

Each year, five volunteers are chosen to live in the church's parsonage, where they live in an intentional community on a limited income. Based on their interests and skills, each individual is placed to work in a social service agency in the Washington, D.C., area for a year-long commitment.

Since the program is linked to AmeriCorps, the WVC program accepts volunteers regardless of religious beliefs, and there are no religious objectives in the program. Volunteers are provided with health insurance, transportation, a monthly food allowance and a small personal expense stipend. However, what sets the WVC program apart from others is the community of care provided by the Westmoreland congregation.

John Pielemeier, an active church member who serves on the WVC board, says that when the five volunteers arrive each Labor Day, the group is introduced to the church family. Shortly thereafter, there is a "Pound Party," where it is tradition that visitors stop by the parsonage, welcome the volunteers, and bring a pound of food or bulk supplies to line the group's pantry shelves.

As the volunteers get comfortable in their new postings, they will later be invited to speak during a "Mission Moment" during a Sunday worship service. What results, says Pielemeier, is an easygoing, informal relationship between the volunteer group and the congregation.

Once a week, someone from the congregation hosts the volunteers for dinner at their house. "Members get to know them on their own," says Pielemeier. "They'll give [the vol-

unteers] a call when they need a housesitter or a dogsitter. One of our members invites them out on the Chesapeake Bay in his sailboat. Maybe someone has season tickets to the theatre, or some cultural event, and they'll share those tickets [with the volunteers]."

Pielemeier, a Peace Corps veteran, says his past experiences, as well as other board members' experiences, helps them to counsel volunteers as they face various on-the-job realities. "We know

there are ups and downs," says Pielemeier.

Pielemeier says three or four months into the volunteer posting can be discouraging at times. "You begin to think, 'Am I having any impact here?'"

That's why Pielemeier and other board members regularly check in with volunteers.

However, by the end of the program, in May or June, Pielemeier notices changes among the volunteers.

"As you might imagine," he says, "when they arrive they are very energetic and idealistic."

Many volunteers leave the program with renewed focus. For many, that includes more education, oftentimes in a service-related area, such as divinity school, medical school or law school. Some continue working for the same agency as a full-time employee.

LEARN MORE
<westmorelanducc.org>

Volunteer Ministries introduces 'Companion Communities'

Inspired by the 23-year success of the Westmoreland Volunteer Corps, the UCC is now recruiting host churches for a new volunteer opportunity called "Companion Communities."

"Congregations can think of this as part of their young adult ministry," says the Rev. Mary Schaller Blaufuss, the UCC's executive for volunteer ministries.

"The host church will provide housing, maybe an apartment or a parsonage, then recruit four or five young adults under 30 to participate in this," explains Blaufuss. "The host church would have a spiritual sojourner who would help the community do some reflection on their service."

Volunteers will serve in local agencies, advocacies or direct social service agencies identified by the UCC. Blaufuss says the program will focus on relationship building, culminating in shared experiences that become part of a spiritual reflection.

"Part of that can be negotiating daily life

space, deciding what to cook," Blaufuss says. "We're hoping it even provides some conversation about environmental issues."

In keeping with UCC polity, Blaufuss says the local church will be the centerpiece for Companion Communities.

"The national setting will facilitate recruitment and network the organizations with each other, and bring everyone together for a training event once a year," says Blaufuss. "We'll have that cross-country sharing of experiences. Hopefully, Companion Communities will become a hands-on piece for involved congregations."

Applications for volunteers will be accepted in early 2009. For more information, contact the Rev. Mary Schaller Blaufuss at 216/736-3214 or <blaufusm@ucc.org>.

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