



a publication of the  
United Church of Christ  
Vol. XXV, No. 3  
June | July 2009  
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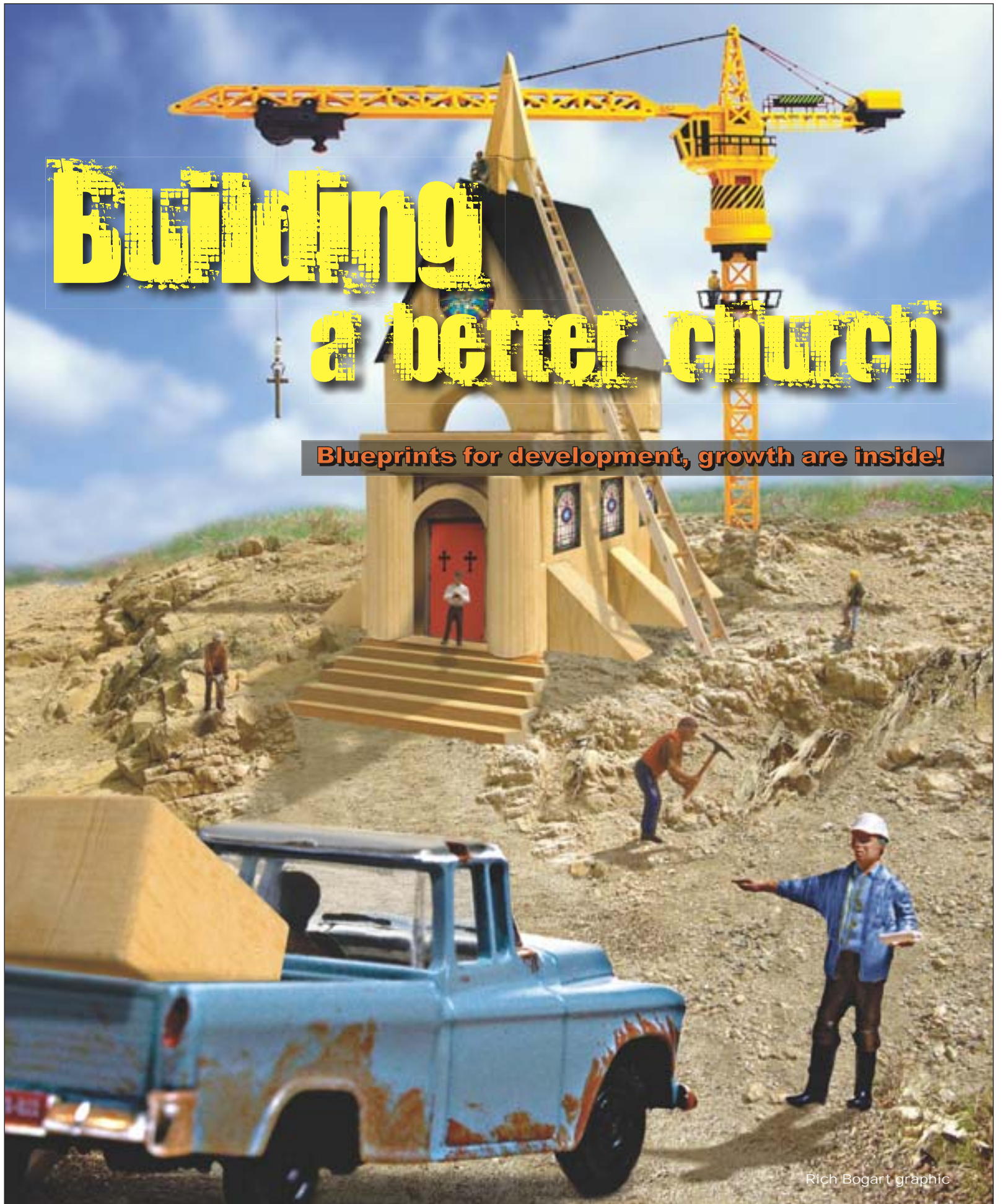
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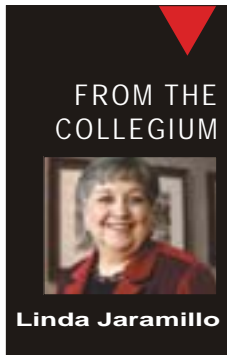
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**Blueprints for development, growth are inside!**

Rich Bogart graphic

## We're never quite ready for something amazing



Linda Jaramillo

Every two years we rush around in a frenzy to get ready for the church's family reunion — General Synod. National staff and boards, Conference delegations and visitors are attending to all the details necessary to make sure everything is organized and in place.

Like any other family reunion, there are a special set of requirements for the host family. We want to clean the house, mow the lawn, plant the flowers, wash the car and

take out the garbage or recycling to make everything just right. Will we remember everything to get ready for company? I can only imagine all that is going on in Grand Rapids this month.

Maybe we worry because we don't want the family to be disappointed, or that they'll talk about us after they've gone. But I don't think so. I think it's more about hospitality. We want everyone who comes to feel welcome and comfortable. That's what I imagine is going on in the Local Arrangements Committee of the Michigan Conference. Are we ready?

To our family in Grand Rapids, we are thrilled to be coming to your house to visit. We are so grateful for all your preparation and generosity. To our family in Grand Rapids and throughout the Michigan Conference, please know that if every single detail is not perfect, we will still feel welcome and comfortable!

Many have a much longer history with General Synod than I, but I remember my first Synod and how wonderful it was to be there with the hundreds and thousands from across the church. Many of those encounters have turned into life-long friendships. I left that Synod with a new and expanded view of the church — the United Church of Christ in action, filled with passion and compassion.

It is not so much about where we met, but about who we met at this fabulous UCC family gathering. We're never quite ready for that amazing experience.

I will be the first to admit that I prefer my family's reunion be harmonious and limited in controversy and drama. But, really, that is not the church and even less the UCC. Considering who we are, we should not expect it to be any other way. We should be ready for the commotion that will be part of our gathering. Commotion can be exciting and invigorating if it is grounded in mutual respect and love.

As I read through the proposed General Synod resolutions on the UCC website, I am encouraged by the depth and breadth of our commitment to justice. Nevertheless, I am overwhelmed by the proposed assignments of work to Justice and Witness Ministries. The challenge is how we, together, consider our readiness to take on these assignments with the understanding that every member of the family must do their part to implement them.

We at Justice and Witness Ministries look forward to sharing the responsibility with the whole church, as family. To get ready to live into our resolutions and make them more than just words, but actions that transform our churches, our communities, our nation and our world. God knows that we are never quite ready, but if we are open and willing, God makes a way out of no way.

We're not quite ready, but do look forward to seeing you in Grand Rapids!

*Executive Minister for Justice and Witness Ministries Linda Jaramillo is a member of the UCC's five-person Collegium of Officers.*

To our family in Grand Rapids, we are thrilled to be coming to your house to visit."

### NRCAT PLANNING PUBLIC WITNESS IN WASHINGTON

The National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT) is holding a significant religious public witness at the White House, Thursday, June 11 at noon. The witness occurs during Torture Awareness Month and organizers hope to influence the President regarding the need for a Commission of Inquiry into U.S. torture practices.

Five heads of faith groups and other senior religious leaders will be present: the Rev. John Thomas, Archbishop Vicken Aykazian (Armenian Church in America), Rabbi Steve Gutow (Executive Director of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs), Ingrid Mattson (President of the Islamic Society of North America), and the Rev. Michael Kinnamon (General Secretary of the National Council of Churches.)

Lay members and local clergy, in clerical dress, are encouraged to attend. For event details and worship resources please visit <nrcat.org> or contact Michael Neuroth, phone 202/543-1517 or <neurothm@ucc.org>.

### CRAIGVILLE COLLOQUY FOCUS ON SPIRITUALITY

The "Spirituality and the Holy Spirit" conference will be held at the Craigville Conference Center, a ministry of the Massachusetts Conference UCC, on Cape Cod, Mass., July 13-17. The five-day event will focus on the restoration of ancient spiritual practices in Protestant and evangelical churches.

A keynote presentation by Mark S. Burrows, professor of the history of Christianity at Andover-Newton Theological School, is on "The 'Immediate Theatre' of the Spirit: The Peril and Promise of Christian Spirituality Today." A second presentation by Andrew Lang, minister for web community at the UCC national office in Cleveland, is titled "Lectio Divina: Breathing Space for the Word of God."

The conference is designed for laypeople as well as clergy. The event will feature two ecumenical celebrations of Holy Eucharist with music, Taizé vespers, daily morning prayer and Bible study, and workshops on ancient and contemporary practices, including centering prayer, art and spirituality, and Celtic Christianity.

Register online at <craigvillecolloquy.com> or call 508/775-1265.

### LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE REGISTRATION NOW OPEN

The 2009 New Church Leadership Institute will be held Aug. 4-7 in Atlanta. Designed for seminary students and UCC authorized ministers working with new and revitalizing churches, the Institute gathers potential and practicing new church developers and church re-developers for one week of intensive training in the latest tools and theories.

Participants will be trained in developing a foundational theological framework for evangelical ministry with social justice values as evidenced by coursework, readings and presentations, understanding and apply a framework for organizational strategic leadership, increasing personal strategic leadership effectiveness in three key areas: thinking strategically, spotting opportunities in alignment with the strategy, and influencing others' commitment to long-range visions



UNITED CHURCH NEWS



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

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

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

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

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## SHORTHAND



and objectives, strengthening personal spiritual practices so as to encourage an articulate, passionate faith experience while deterring long-term burn out, determining how to enhance the learning processes necessary for effective strategy making and strategy implementation within their churches in the future.

The Institute will offer separate tracks for new church developers and church re-developers. Recognizing the unique needs for planting and revitalization, organizers have created curriculum that address the training and tools required for each task.

Registration is \$580, \$880 for seminary students seeking credit. More information is available at <growtheucc.org> or from the Rev. Cameron Trimble at <ctrimble@secucc.org>.

### GLOBAL MINISTRIES SCHEDULES TRAINING SESSIONS

Global Ministries, the joint mission agency of the UCC and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), is offering the following training opportunities for those interested or engaged in global mission.

- June 5, 2009 – United Christian Church in Austin, Texas. Registration and information at 512/218-8110 or <admin-assistant@uccaustin.org>.

- Oct. 9-11, 2009 – UCC/Radisson Gateway hotel, Cleveland, Ohio. Registration and information at 216/736-3209 or <globalministries.org>.

- June 21-23, 2010 – Greensboro, N.C., prior to the Disciples Women's Quadrennial Assembly. Details at <quadrennial.org/Pre\_QA\_Events.html>.

### JWM LEADERSHIP CURRICULUM ANNOUNCED

The Justice LED, a program designed to assist UCC members in developing their leadership while also implementing Justice and Witness Ministries' vision and mission, has begun.

There are four guiding principles within the Justice LED curriculum:

- We have been called to provoke our theological understanding of justice so that we might be better equipped to interpret it.

- We must think beyond our existing approaches and beliefs about justice by grounding ourselves at the foot of the cross of Jesus Christ, where we are both humbled and glorified.

- We respond to the challenge by moving from the foot of the cross into the world together, valuing ourselves and one another as much as God values us.

- We also come here as members of community, yearning for relationships and accompaniment in the struggle.

The goal of the program is to enlarge the pool of justice leaders through training and collegiality. JWM will train 30 trainers throughout the UCC and believes trainer teams can train an additional 250-300 persons, and the circle grows continually.

A multi-day training will be held in October. Registration and information available from Loey Powell, 216/736-3715 or <PowellL@ucc.org>.

### CHILD CARE AVAILABLE AT GENERAL SYNOD

General Synod is offering child care during business sessions and Saturday morning for infants through completion of kindergarten. Children in first through sixth grade will have programming during the business sessions and from 10 a.m. – 3 p.m. on Saturday.

The cost is \$25 per child per day for Friday and Sunday, and \$35 per child per day for Saturday, Monday and Tuesday. Snacks and beverages will be provided during program hours. Parents will pick up their children for the lunch and dinner recesses.

The program will be housed in a secure area of the convention center with care provided by volunteers screened in accordance with Safe Church guidelines. To ensure quality care, appropriate staff-child ratios, and supervision, drop-in care is not available and children must be pre-registered. Please contact Marcia Beer — <marcia@michucc.org> or 517/332-3511 ext. 209 — or download a registration form at <camptalaha.org> under the General Synod link.

## United Church News to cease print publication, move news online

The decision to cease the newsprint edition of United Church News was made on March 20 by the board of directors of the Office of General Ministries (OGM), which has been struggling with skyrocketing costs for the newspaper's production. Postage and printing costs have more than doubled during the past five years, with costs now surpassing \$125,000 per issue.

The National edition will publish one more issue in September. The Conference editions — or “wrap arounds” — ended with the April edition, although Conferences were offered the opportunity to print one additional issue if willing to share the costs equally with the UCC's National setting.

“This was a difficult decision for board members, because it was rooted in significant financial angst,” said the Rev. J. Bennett Guess, the UCC's communications director and a former editor of United Church News. “But it also paves the way for the development of an expanded online news portal and, most likely, a new and different print publication for the United Church of Christ.”

In Spring 2010, the UCC's communication staff hopes to launch a new, magazine-format publication that will be mailed to members' homes twice annually by paid subscription. “We envision an oversized, full-color, coffee-table publication of 80 to 100 pages,” Guess said. “Something that will be as ‘keep-worthy’ and ‘share-worthy’ as it is news-worthy.”

The OGM board decision came after it convened a day-long United Church News consultation on Feb. 23, attended by representatives of the



A successor publication to A.D. Magazine and the United Church Herald, United Church News was founded in 1985 under the leadership of its then-publisher Beverly Chain and its editor, the Rev. W. Evan Golder. The Rev. Robert Chase became its publisher in 1999. The newspaper produced 10 editions per year, until 2005, when that number was reduced to six.

OGM board and Executive Council, four Conference Ministers, a Conference Editor, several national staff and the five-person Collegium of Officers.

“What we heard over and over is that most people said they would mourn the loss of an ‘identity publication’ for the denomination, even if they went online to read the most-recent news headlines,” Guess said.

## Thomas named to CTS senior staff

Chicago Theological Seminary has named the Rev. John H. Thomas as senior advisor to the President and visiting professor in church ministries. Thomas' appointment will take effect Jan. 1, 2010, after he concludes his term as UCC General Minister and President on Sept. 30.

In this newly created position, Thomas will play a strategic role in promoting and enhancing the national and global profile of CTS. Thomas will also cultivate relationships with key constituents and congregations; support strategic fund raising efforts; foster student and faculty recruitment; provide leadership development opportunities for students, alumni/ae, and national religious leaders; and teach courses.

“John's well-recognized accomplishments, his strong relationships throughout the religious community, and his wisdom will further CTS' efforts to provide a vibrant model for the rigorous education of religious leadership as we work toward greater justice and mercy,” said Alice Hunt, president of Chicago Theological Seminary. “I look forward to working with John

to meet the emerging challenges of theological education for our rapidly changing world.”

Elect ed General Minister and President of the UCC in 1999, Thomas served for the next decade as the convener of the Collegium of Officers of the UCC as well as the church's principal spokesperson on theological and public issues and official representative in ecumenical and inter-faith relations.

From 1992 to 1999 he served as assistant to the president of the UCC for Ecumenical Concerns. In that role, he represented



Thomas

“And I have maintained that newsprint is not the best mechanism for accomplishing that particular goal if we're wanting a publication that evokes a sense of belonging and has a shelf life.”

As part of its action, the OGM board expressed deep appreciation for the editors, reporters, photographers, designers, advertisers and readers who have contributed to the quality of the print publication over the years.

Guess said other communication tools will be employed to deliver news to church members, including the weekly “Keeping You e-Posted” e-zine — which now reaches 52,000 readers each Tuesday. “We're receiving tremendous feedback about KYeP and the open-rate numbers indicate success,” Guess said.

In April, the denomination also launched “MyUCC,” its new online social networking community. “MyUCC will encourage unfiltered ‘citizen journalism’ in the UCC since every user can create and maintain a blog to report news and reflections for all to read,” Guess said.

“United Church News remains committed to publishing the news of our churches and the other settings of the UCC,” said the Rev. Gregg Brekke, editor of United Church News since 2008. “The move to our online news portal, coupled with a revamped print publication and citizen journalism, provides a bridge to communicate into the future while meeting our current needs.”

the denomination in theological dialogues and in conciliar bodies including the World and National Councils of Churches.

“I am eager to begin working with the outstanding leadership at CTS to strengthen and expand its institutional relationships and to being part of the positive experience of its students,” said Thomas. “CTS excels at educating men and women of faith by fostering questioning and critical dialogue that promote the understanding and skills necessary for future leadership and ministry.”

Following his 1975 ordination, Thomas served as associate minister of the **First Congregational UCC in Cheshire, Conn.**, through 1981 and as minister of the **First UCC in Easton, Pa.**, until 1991.

Thomas graduated from Gettysburg (Penn.) College in 1972 and Yale University Divinity School in 1975. He studied at the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey, Switzerland, in 1988 and has written numerous articles on ecumenical issues.

## Ecumenical rebuilding effort receives volunteerism award



Church World Service project volunteers Jack Lloyd and Carl Gearhart of **Christ Reformed UCC, Hagerstown, Md.**, and Gary Weddle of Meyersville, Md., work in a New Orleans-area home.

Matt Cackworth | CWS photo

Neighborhood: New Orleans, Rebuilding Homes, Reclaiming Hope, an ecumenical partnership of Church World Service, is the 2009 recipient of National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster's (VOAD) Innovative Program of the Year. The project was honored at an awards banquet during the annual National VOAD conference in Salt Lake City May 15.

More than 500 people from 27 U.S. states and Canada came to New Orleans as volunteers with one of the project partners: American Baptist Churches USA; Brethren Disaster Ministries; Christian Church (Disciples of Christ); Christian Reformed World Relief Committee; Lutheran Disaster Response; Mennonite Disaster Service; Presbyterian Disaster Assistance; Reformed Church in America; United Church of Christ; and the United Methodist Committee on Relief.

Florence Coppola, the UCC's Executive for National Disaster Ministries, conceived of the idea and worked with CWS to promote the project.

CWS brought the agencies together to work with the Crescent Alliance Recovery Effort, the long-term recovery agency in Orleans Parish. A long-time CWS partner in its own right, CARE helped

400 emergency management and disaster response personnel to Salt Lake City during the week of May 18. The conference provided opportunities for continuing education, community service and networking for a wide range of service agencies and professionals.

In addition to recognition of their efforts by Utah government officials, 1,000 hygiene kits and

View a photo gallery of the New Orleans reclamation project, hosted by UCC volunteer the Rev. Barbara Kershner Daniel at <[churchworldservice.org/gallery/neworleans09](http://churchworldservice.org/gallery/neworleans09)>

CWS and the partners select Little Woods as the focus neighborhood, and the homeowners who would be included in the project.

“We visited a number of areas but once we saw Little Woods, it was unanimous,” said Bonnie Vollmering, CWS associate director for domestic emergency response. “We knew we had work to do there.”

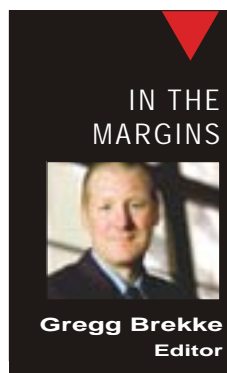
Project organizers recognize that 12 homes are only a fraction of the work to be done in restoring New Orleans, and all along the Gulf Coast. But the expectation of participating groups is that concentrated progress will bring hope to the entire neighborhood.

The 17th annual National VOAD conference brought over

clean-up buckets were assembled during a service project incorporated into the conference to benefit Salt Lake City community-based organizations.

National VOAD is the coordinating body for every major community-based and faith-based disaster response organization, including the American Red Cross, LDS Charities, The Salvation Army and Feeding America. The member organizations of National VOAD focus on all stages of disaster: preparedness, relief, response, recovery and mitigation. Working collaboratively, the members of National VOAD are the driving force behind disaster recovery in the United States.

# Living and breathing in a new era of evangelical courage



Denominations with successful new church programs have, at their core, an evangelical vision for seeking, serving and converting new peoples."

**E**vangelical courage. It isn't a term we use a lot in the United Church of Christ. But in many ways it is, or must become, a driving principle of churches, ministries and individual members if the UCC is to thrive or, at the least, merely survive.

This isn't a casual observation of mainline denominational decline — there are plenty of consultants and critics who have rendered the same prognosis. As a reality check, the UCC statistically led all other reporting denominations in 2008 with a six percent drop in membership. We need to develop a sense of evangelical courage, and we need it now!

But these numbers may be somewhat misleading. Twenty-first century faith communities and their people don't place the same value on counting membership as did churches in previous centuries. Until the UCC finds ways to tally active participants it will not account for the current generation that is often leery of "joining."

I began ordained ministry as a new church planter — one who, like so many others, poured their training, talent and love for the Good News of Jesus into finding new communities and people to share the journey of Christian discipleship. It wasn't always easy or fun, but it was the most rewarding experience of my life.

It took the courage of an Association to assemble a church planting working group and to invest in a year of research and discernment. It took the courage of a Conference to accompany the Association in their financial commitment. It took the dedication of an incredibly talented group of lay leaders and spiritual pioneers who believed in the vision that had been cast.

All of us — through hours of prayer, planning, laughter (and a few tears), financial sacrifice and intense flexibility — built a new faith community. We experimented with worship formats and musical styles. The sound equipment or computer projector didn't always work right. We struggled to create meaningful fellowship, education and mission opportunities. We built lasting friendships and grew in faith. People came — and people went.

Fortunately, more came than went and the church continues to grow and minister.

But the organizational factors that led to the existence of Nexus UCC don't explain its staying power. No, that success can only be attributed to the evangelical courage of each person who came through our virtual doors (we met in homes, briefly in a dance studio and then a YMCA.)

Still, even with good planning, leadership and courage, many new church efforts fail to develop into sustained worshipping communities. One such story is found on page 13. The experience of Prairie Sky UCC is a reminder that each community has a unique character.

It is also an admonition to the UCC at large: New church planting is the mission of all its churches. The experiences of indifference, isolation and, in some cases, open hostility displayed toward Prairie Sky UCC by nearby established UCC churches are all too common.

Denominations with successful new church programs have, at their core, an evangelical vision for seeking, serving and converting new peoples. If the UCC is going to halt its rapid membership decline, it needs to catch that vision. New churches aren't marginal members of the UCC's mission and purpose, they are central to its future as a denomination.

Existing churches must welcome and support new churches just as they would a new member. It's true that new churches need your people and money — but that isn't enough. They need your enthusiastic nurture as well.

The encouraging news is that, according to the UCC's Local Church Ministries, 165 new churches have started since 2006. This number includes congregations that have affiliated with the UCC in the same period which is another exciting trend.

The UCC needs the vitality and creativity of new churches and those committing to renewal. New churches need the prayers, encouragement and yes, resources, of existing churches. And we all need evangelical courage to invite new people into faith-filled relationships so we can be Good News in our communities and around the world.



## LETTERS

Praise for UCNews' online transition  
A word of appreciation for the move to online copy of the UCNews!

**The Rev. Rob Leveridge**  
Minister for Seminary Relations  
Chicago Theological Seminary

I want to thank you for the excellent UCC News Headlines website you recently created. It is a great way for me to get news of the UCC and other religion news. I go to it every day.

**Jeff Johnson**  
Carlinville, Ill.

And on the other hand...

Online means if I want to keep current with organizations I value and support, it requires more isolation. Hear this: I do not choose or plan to spend more time at a computer screen. Is more isolation and less communication an end result you want?

**The Rev. Robert H. Anderson (retired)**  
Guemes Island Community UCC, Anacortes, Wash.

Darwin a scientist not an atheist

Shane Odean is mistaken (Letters Apr/May 2009). Darwin's purpose was not to promote atheism, but to increase scientific knowledge of life's origins.

For years he delayed the publication of his findings out of concern for the sensitivities of orthodox theists, including his beloved wife, Emma. Only when he learned that Alfred

Russell Wallace was about to publish a paper on natural selection did he relent, enriching our knowledge with "The Origin of Species" and laying the groundwork for the discovery of the molecular structure of DNA.

Even then, in the final sentence of his book Darwin wrote of life "having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one." Thus, he acknowledged the mystery of the beginnings of natural selection, even though he probably would have denied the validity of the rationalization known as theistic evolution. After all, he was not a theologian but a scientist.

**Rev. Thomas R Mason (retired)**  
First Cong. UCC, Muskegon, Mich.

Frustration over governance debate

I am deeply disappointed that an agreement was not reached to streamline the governance of the national UCC offices. I understand and appreciate the UCC culture of attempting to bring everyone to the table. However, a mere glance at reality will show that the table is shrinking and may soon disappear altogether.

Rural churches cannot afford such a huge national waste. We must plan for the future and not be handcuffed by the past. Only a leaner and more responsive organization can endure and serve God effectively. I urge those that voted this proposal down to consider how we will operate after the collapse that is inevitable on our current path.

Frankly, I have begun sowing the seeds of planning for how my 100-year-old church will progress in the event that the national organization implodes. Only a radical and rapid change in direction will avert the demise of the current UCC.

**The Rev. Mark D. Arnold**  
Community UCC, Baker, Mont.

It disturbs me that the single governance initiative was blocked by Justice and Witness Ministries Board of Directors and, as a result, won't be coming before General Synod this summer. I am disturbed by what appears to be a very controlling action on the part of JWM's Board. I find it shameful that they chose competition over cooperation on a matter of church governance.

If asked by a local church member what kind of a bang we get for our OCWM buck, I'll have to answer, "An impasse." Where's the nearly quarter-million dollar justice in that?

**The Rev. Jeffrey G. Wartgow**  
First Cong. UCC, DeWitt, Iowa

Shame, shame, shame to the Board of Justice and Witness Ministries on their refusal to allow the proposal for single governance to go to General Synod for its prayerful consideration and discernment.

Is 50 percent representation for women and other historically under-represented group not enough? Your action prevents General Synod from considering the issue.

**The Rev. Reed Baer**  
West Parish of Barnstable (Mass.) UCC

*[EDITOR'S NOTE: These letters represent a small sampling of those expressing disappointment in the single governance proposal's stop. No letters were received voicing a positive view of the halted proceedings.]*

Middle East updates welcomed

Thank you for your comments on the suffering of the Palestinian people and for your reference to the UCC participation in aid for Gaza. I am aware that Jean Zaru has spoken at General Synod, and that there was an urgent call for response on the UCC website during the bombings of Gaza.

I have often, though, wondered at the absence of notice about Palestine on the website. I know that there is not room for comment about all things at all times, but I believe that the occupation of Palestine is so central to many issues in the Middle East that the UCC should be actively and overtly paying attention.

This will be a thankless job that will likely bring criticism, yet I believe that it is essential to our Christian witness.

**Elsa Koenig Weber**  
First United UCC, Oak Park, Ill.

*[EDITOR'S NOTE: Regular updates are posted to the Global Ministries' Middle East and Europe area page <globalministries.org/mee/>.]*

In the April/May letters section, Loberta Staley asked, "Where was Mr. Neuroth when Palestinians, unprovoked, were bombing innocent children and adults in Israel long before this recent invasion?"

The first suicide bombing in Israel was a response to Baruch Goldstein's massacre of 29 worshipers in a mosque in Hebron in 1994. The Second Intifada (uprising) began after Ariel Sharon together with 1000 riot police provocatively walked on Islam's third holiest site in a show of force.

The underlying issue that led to violence was Israel's continuing military occupation of lands on which Palestinians hoped to have a state.

**Esther Riley**  
Fairfax (Calif.) Community UCC

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

## IDENTITY CRISIS

## Meeting God in the unemployment line

C O M M E N T A R Y

By Lea Mathieu



**A**s I write this in May 2009, I face losing my teaching job due to a budget crisis. In 2008 I left a job I loved after years with the same school district and was able to move to the school my

own children attend, with my young daughter in my class. Adjustments are always difficult, but I was getting the hang of the new place when I learned that, as the last teacher hired, I would be the first to go.

Every school in our area is in the same situation, so there are no openings. The range of emotions I have experienced go from bad to worse. There have been crying fits that come on suddenly and last too long. I feel betrayed, unwanted and so, so stupid for ever leaving a secure harbor. I feel invisible when résumés I send go unanswered, and painfully insulted when a colleague asks me with a sneer, "How are you going to get a job? No one's hiring."

I have two master's degrees, am National Board certified, hold multiple endorsements and have 10 years of exceptional teaching experience. And it looks like I'm going on unemployment.

I have been bleeding, kicking and screaming inside because my identity was being taken from me. I am called to teach more strongly than I was to parish ministry many years ago, and who am I without that?

This is where God comes in.

Yesterday was hellish, and today both of my sons were

confirmed in church. The confirmands presented verses that summarized their faith, and my eldest chose Jeremiah 29:11: "For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope."

At one point, our minister said something about the young people being "called to be disciples of Christ."

Though intended for teenagers, both pronouncements spoke deeply to the middle-aged woman in the third row facing an uncertain future.

With shame, I remembered my supportive husband trying to console me just yesterday with what I rudely had dismissed as a worn cliché: "Maybe God is leading you to another calling."

With even more embarrassment, I remembered standing at a guest pulpit not long ago preaching from my favorite epistle: "Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed" (1 John 3:2).

In repentance, I confess to falling into the decidedly American trap of confusing *self* with a job title and paycheck. Faith demands instead an embrace of my soul as the eternal God's disciple and daughter with a future of hope that will be revealed in its own time. I've been toying with writing and publishing for years; could I not turn this grave disappointment into opportunity for growth?

I wish I could say I am now suddenly full of peace and clarity, but I'm too much of a control freak for that. I still grieve losing my students and income.

But I no longer mourn the negation of my self, and I do realize, finally, that I certainly never left my safe harbor; indeed, I am moored for all life to come.

And to anyone else in this painful situation, I give my blessing, empathy, and invitation to rediscover your center within the Truth this world can never take away.

*The Rev. Lea Mathieu, a public school teacher and United Church of Christ minister, is the author of "The Literate Spirit: Suggested Reading for Believers and Seekers." Information available at <dailybreadpress.com>.*

## Little things can make big difference for Earth

C O M M E N T A R Y

By Catherine Rolling

**T**hese days, North Americans are all about green and sustainable and stewardship of Creation. Hallelujah for that! Many of us have waited a long time for the U.S. government to take climate change and its effects seriously.

Bill McKibben, an environmental advocate, offers some very important points for our consideration in "Deep Economy" (2007). He says that, using the writings of economic leaders from the distant past, we have followed a pattern of growth beyond a time when it was a good idea into a time where growth is not necessarily useful.

We have followed this pattern from a time of fairly close-knit community setting into a time of "hyper-individuality" and, in our efforts to get ahead and have more and better, have found ourselves isolated from our families and neighbors. McKibben suggests the pursuit of more is no longer a source of happiness (past a certain point) and lack of meaning has come from paying so much attention to our individual selves.

Sallie McFague, a writer, seminary professor and environmental theologian, has given the other key piece for my commentary. She says, in "The Body of God":

To feel that we belong to the earth and to accept our place within it is the beginning of a natural piety ... It is the sense that we and all others belong together in a cosmos, related in an orderly fashion, one to the other. It is the sense that each and every being is valuable in and for itself, and that the whole forms a unity in which each being, including oneself, has a place. It involves an ethical response, for the sense of belonging, of being at home, only comes when we accept our proper place and live in a fitting, appropriate way with all other beings.

Sounds like God's world. I think we are yearning to recognize our sacred place in the universe. As some of us seek belonging by taking, using, or buying more than our fair share, those who do not have the power to even get a small share suffer most.

As Christians, we are invited to reconsider who is our neighbor and whether we are willing to share. We are offered the chance to turn our thinking from "I" worked hard and "I" deserve everything "I" can get. Some of our neighbors on this planet are not as fortunate or powerful as we are and they deserve our consideration. A lack of opportunity does not make a person less of a child of God. It is counter-cultural to be counter-productive. In this century reasoning that more is better is counter-productive.

We have seen the harm that has come from greed — the current recession is the best example. We have seen the harm that has come from pretending that some of us are not neighbors or are invisible, shunned as the "other" — Hurricane Katrina a poignant example.

Christian discipleship involves turning the world upside down (Acts 17:6). Being counter-cultural, embracing each neighbor, that's what Jesus did. We should, too. This is how we will find our sacred place, our oneness with God, our balance in an unbalanced situation — by acting in solidarity with each inhabitant of this Creation.

Let us actually do the seemingly little things that make a big difference — from changing to compact fluorescent light bulbs, eating local food, and downsizing our stuff-load, to noticing when a toxic dump site is placed in the part of our town or state where our neighbors with less power abide, and speaking out about it.

*The Rev. Catherine Rolling is the environmental justice program assistant at the UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries <ucc.org/environmental-ministries>.*

## OVERHEARD



“ We prayed for this individual on Sunday, and that's the hardest prayer I've done in a long time ... I was really proud. Nobody at church said, 'Oh! We better take that phrase down.' The light will be replaced. The Plexiglas will be replaced and the phrase stays.”

— *The Rev. Curt Miner of Congregational UCC in San Luis Obispo, Calif., after the church was vandalized four times. Police believe the church was targeted because of a sign that bears a rainbow flag and their sign which says, "A family of faith for everyone."*

“ We're not open 24 hours a day, so this is a way to help people connect to the church. If they're feeling bad or upset, this could bring them some comfort.”

— *Rick Moore, president of Salem UCC in Harrisburg, Pa., on their Community Prayer Box, dedicated Feb. 8, that sits outside the church. Each Sunday, the congregation says prayers for the anonymously deposited requests.*

“ Providing temporary, emergency shelter for people in need of a warm, safe place to sleep is one of the ways [the church] has sought to be faithful to Jesus' commandment that we love our neighbors.”

— *The Rev. Bonnie Moore of Shenkel UCC in North Coventry, Pa., after the ACLU filed suit on the church's behalf when the township refused to allow the congregation to house the homeless.*

“ Walking the labyrinth can help people step foot once again on their own paths, helping them to remember their own lives as spiritual journeys as they move on to simplify their life.”

— *The Rev. Elsie Rhodes, pastor of the Trinity United Church (UCC/PCUSA) in Warren, N.J., on its Sunday, May 31, labyrinth walk.*



## TABULATIONS

## ADDING 'EM UP

165

*Number of new and affiliating congregations that have joined the UCC since 2006.*

ucc.org

**opinion matters** commentary | letters | soapbox

**GUEST COMMENTARY**

**Customer service: Can churches get it right?**

By Tom Ehrich (RNS)



I was in a hotel 500 miles from home when my Apple iPhone refused to recharge. I felt strangely stranded, unable to manage my business, to communicate with family or to negotiate the scheduling intricacies of the trip. I went to a nearby AT&T store, the carrier that handles iPhones.

"Can't help," said the clerk. "Try the Apple store." I drove 20 minutes to an outlying mall, found the Apple store. "Can't help," said one clerk. "I'm a trainer. Try the concierge." Can't help, said the concierge. Make an appointment with the "Genius Bar." (Don't ask.)

I drove across the street to another AT&T store, steaming and prepared to abandon Apple technology. "Sure, glad to help," said the clerk. He pushed some buttons and fixed the problem. I immediately felt better about my iPhone and confident about the trip.

Lesson learned: every enterprise ultimately depends on customer service. Good technology can't run faster than poor customer service.

Clever marketing can't erase a bad shopping experience. Customer loyalty won't survive surly clerks, endless telephone trees, unanswered e-mails, and return and warranty procedures that favor the vendor.

Customers have too many other choices. They don't need to endure clueless systems and irritable staff. Just consider the reputation U.S. automakers got for slick sales staff, bait-and-switch "closers" and point-of-sale pressure to tack on unwanted extras.

In my consulting work with churches, time and again I see the cumulative impact of poor customer service:

- Uninterested ushers;
- Parishioners who form tight circles;
- More attention paid to set-

ting the table than to greeting guests;

- Fussy liturgy designed for insiders;
- Facilities with poor signage (or websites);
- Congregants who fight with each other;
- Music that pleases only the trained musician;
- Clergy who don't call — the list is long.

When I ask former congregants why they worship elsewhere or stay home on Sunday, that's the list they recite, detail by detail. Some were hurt, some were offended. Some said, "Who needs this?"

It wasn't doctrine or change that drove them away. In a world of many choices, the quest for faith simply won't tolerate poor customer service. People stay where they

are treated well -- and leave where they aren't.

Pay attention to details, I tell church leaders. Look at how you respond to visitors, for example. Reconsider the maze you impose on anyone asking for care. Watch people's faces sag as they sit through worship. Don't let the prickly long-timer force you to stick with methods that clearly aren't working.

Be customer-driven, not provider-driven, I tell them. Visit a successful church and see lively gathering spaces, helpful signage, friendly greeters, cheerful atmosphere, worship designed to help people worship, leaders who are excited and not dodging bullets — that list is long, too.

This is more than advice for institutional leaders. I think it applies to us as individual believers, as well. It is good to tolerate difficult people and to place ourselves in challenging situations. But we don't have to tolerate institutions that thwart us and clearly are serving only themselves.

Enabling isn't the same as loyalty. No faith community will be motivated to serve effectively as long as its constituents excuse mediocrity.

In order to expect more, of course, we ourselves have to give more.

For we play both parts: "customer" and "provider." We cannot receive what we aren't willing to give.

*The Rev. Tom Ehrich is a writer, church consultant and Episcopal priest based in New York. He is the author of "Just Wondering, Jesus," and the founder of the Church Wellness Project <churchwellness.com>. His website is <morningwalkmedia.com>.*

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## THERE'S STILL TIME TO REGISTER

people | places | things in the news

## Full slate of pre-Synod events promise something for everyone

In addition to a full schedule of General Synod 27 plenary sessions, business meetings and workshops, Grand Rapids, Mich., will also be the site of several pre-Synod events.

"Early birds" arriving in Grand Rapids will have an opportunity to experience one or more of the following events:

► 2030 Clergy Network Event

Authorized ministerial colleagues in their 20s and 30s are invited to attend a day of connection and fellowship on June 25, 10 a.m. — 4 p.m. The group will envision how they, as a network, can advocate for their young clergy colleagues.

Registration begins at 9:30 a.m. at Park UCC in Grand Rapids, 10 E Park Pl NE, <parkchurchgr.org>. The cost of the event is \$15 and includes lunch. Childcare will be provided as needed — if attending, please contact the organizers before the event with the ages of your children.

Please RSVP to <2030clergynetwork@gmail.com> and let organizers know if you have mobility concerns or if you plan to attend only part of the day.

► UCC History, Theology and Polity

How have Congregational, Christian, Evangelical and Reformed traditions helped to shape and maintain the UCC? The Institute will meet for 12 intensive days, beginning at 2:30 p.m. Monday, June 22 and running through noon Friday, July 3. Evening and weekend activities will be included. For more information and for an application, log on to <ucc.org/synod/pdfs/politycourse.pdf>.

► Conference on Environment, Faith

"Holy Water: A Conference on Environment and Faith" will be held from 8 a.m. — 5 p.m. on Thursday, June 25, at **East Congregational UCC in Grand Rapids**. East Congregational is located at 1005 Giddings Ave. SE, Grand Rapids.

Co-sponsored by the UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries, the event will feature several water-related workshops and field trips. Sheila Holt-Orsted will present "Water Woes," the story of one family's fight to obtain non-contaminated drinking water. Worship speaker will be Grand Rapids Mayor George Heartwell.

Scripture contains nearly 1,200 references to water, which is literally and metaphorically a sign of God's care for and sustenance of the earth and its inhabitants.

The cost of \$35 per person includes program, workshops, lunch and afternoon field trip. To register or obtain further details, log on to <act.ucc.org/site/calendar> and navigate to June calendar events.

► NY Conference Bike Challenge

Protesting U.S. auto dependency and oil gluttony, and witnessing environmentally sound alternatives, cyclists from the New York

Conference plan to ride bikes from Syracuse, N.Y., to General Synod 27 in Grand Rapids, Mich. Staying overnight at UCC churches along the way, the group will spread the good news of creation-friendly ways to organize our communities and our transportation needs.

Riders will raise funds to create a New York Conference Fund, designed to help local congregations go green. In addition to New York riders, UCC members from Illinois, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, California and Washington may make the trek as well.

Riders plan to meet in Grand Rapids by the evening of Wednesday, June 24. For more information or to register, visit <ucc.org/environmental-ministries/bike-schedule.html>.

► Coalition's National Gathering

Carrying the theme of "Growing Bold," the UCC Coalition's National Gathering will be held June 22–25 as a celebration of Open and Affirming, exploration of what ONA can be in its fullest expression, worship, fellowship, celebration and engagement.

Keynote Speaker on Tuesday, June 23 will be Hector Lopez, retired Conference Minister for the Central Pacific Conference and the first Latino ordained in the UCC.

For more information the National Gathering or to register, visit <ucccoalition.org/programs/gathering>.

► Family Multicultural Festival

The first Children's and Families Multicultural Festival will be held Thursday, June 25, at St. John's Church, UCC in Grand Rapids, Beginning at 1 p.m., the planned theme is: Immerse Yourself in Friendship. Sponsored by the Congregational Vitality & Discipleship Team through the Ministry for Children and Families, the festival will be held at the church, 1934 Bridge Street, NW in Grand Rapids.

Creative art, face-painting, authentic African-storytelling, line-dancing and jewelry-making will be available for people of all ages, races, cultures and ethnicities.

For more information please contact Lutie Lee at 216/736-3863 or <LeeL@ucc.org>.

► Candle Cloth Project

Every local church represented by a delegate or visitor at General Synod 27 can be involved in a special Covenant of Prayer Partnership opportunity. By preparing a prayer and a quilted fabric candle cloth, the local church

will share them with everyone at Synod and, in particular, with another local UCC church.

Prayer partnerships will occur among the various local church families as the prayers and candle cloths are exchanged before synod adjourns.

Details about the process and instructions for creating the candle cloth will be shared with a local church after the Covenant of Prayer Partnership form, which must be completed by April 1. Forms may be downloaded from <ucc.org/synod/pdfs/candleproject.pdf>, or may be requested from Susan Towner-Larsen, UCC, 700 Prospect Ave., Cleveland, OH 44115.

► Humane Immigration Policies

In 2008, an immigration coordinating committee sponsored by Justice and Witness Ministries formulated a strategy toward shaping immigration. Toward that end, a one-day consultation on immigration will be held from 9 a.m. — 4 p.m. Thursday, June 25 in the Grand Rapids Convention Center.

Invited keynote speakers are Tom Barry, Director of the Transborder Project, and Jorge Bustamante, Special Rapporteur on immigration to the United Nations. Workshops are to focus on: the new Sanctuary Movement; labor and human rights; theology of immigration; understanding border dynamics; and the causes of migration.

Registration is limited; a \$35 registration fee includes lunch and resources. For more information or to purchase tickets, log on to <act.ucc.org/site/calendar> and navigate to June calendar events.

► Christian Preservation Project

In UCC history, many historical resources are available on local congregations and wider church bodies within Congregational, German Reformed and German Evangelical traditions. But very few resources exist regarding the "Christians" who united with the Congregationalists in 1931 to form the General Council of the Congregational and Christian Churches.

Project Coordinator Barbara Brown Zikmund will lead a half-day meeting titled "The Christian Movement in UCC History" on Thursday, June 25. The goal is to refine next steps to preserve and disseminate knowledge about the Christian heritage in the UCC.

For further details, send an e-mail to <Xn-PreservationProject@verizon.net>.

## immerse yourself in General Synod news!

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- blogs at [myUCC.community.ucc.org](http://myUCC.community.ucc.org)
- daily printed news digest
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## General Synod resolutions seek to reshape denomination's mission

**T**he UCC's Executive Council has received 23 proposed resolutions as items of business for the 27th General Synod in Grand Rapids, Mich. Based on criteria established at prior Synods, the Executive Council can make one of several recommendations for the continuation and discernment of a resolution's adoption.

The following 14 resolutions have been referred to committees at the General Synod. Pending the outcome of committee debate, these resolutions may be presented to a plenary session of voting delegates for approval:

**AN ECONOMIC JUSTICE COVENANT**  
*Resolution of Witness* submitted by the **Southern Conference** calling for UCC settings to commit to a covenant of study, witness and action in pursuit of economic justice in our world.

**SACRED CONVERSATIONS ON RACE**  
*Prudential Resolution* submitted by the **Kansas-Oklahoma Conference** calls upon the congregations and associations of the UCC to continue Sacred Conversations on Race.

**OPTIONS TO WAR AGAINST IRAN**  
*Resolution of Witness* submitted by the **Kansas-Oklahoma Conference** opposing unilateral, covert or overt pre-emptive war, against the people of the sovereign nation of Iran.

**A CALL FOR STUDY OF OUR CHURCH'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE EUGENICS MOVEMENT**  
*Prudential Resolution* submitted by the **Kansas-Oklahoma Conference** to determine whether the UCC should apologize for its involvement in the Eugenics movement based on the actions of its predecessor denominations.

**AFFIRMING THE ACCRA CONFESSION: COVENANTING FOR JUSTICE IN THE ECONOMY AND THE EARTH**  
*Resolution of Witness* submitted by Justice and Witness Ministries commending the Accra Confession to the whole church for study, reflection, prayer, and action so that we may live into a more just system of economic globalization.

**ON THE ROLES OF CHURCH AND GOVERNMENT IN ADDRESSING GLOBAL FOOD CRISIS**  
*Resolution of Witness* submitted by Justice and Witness Ministries and Wider Church Ministries calling to reaffirm healthy, nutritional food as a human right and to address the unique dynamics of the present global food crisis in prophetic witness, advocacy for more just food policy, food sovereignty and food security, and to collaborate with like-minded partners in effective actions.

### CALLING FOR COMPREHENSIVE HIV PREVENTION IN CHURCH AND COMMUNITY

*Prudential Resolution* submitted by Wider Church Ministries calling church and community to new and increased levels of attention to stop the spread of HIV by scaling-up best practices in comprehensive HIV prevention.

### A CALL TO BE GLOBAL MISSION CHURCHES IN THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

*Prudential Resolution* submitted by Wider Church Ministries requesting that UCC settings underscore the priority of the church's involvement in mission around the world through faith, justice and advocacy.

### ON RESPONSIBLE MEETING PRACTICE

*Prudential Resolution* submitted by the **Hawaii Conference** encouraging settings of the UCC to plan and hold meetings, events, and programs in such a way that the interconnection and inseparability of creation care and social justice, as appropriate for the venue or location, are modeled.

### AXIS OF FRIENDSHIP WITH IRAN

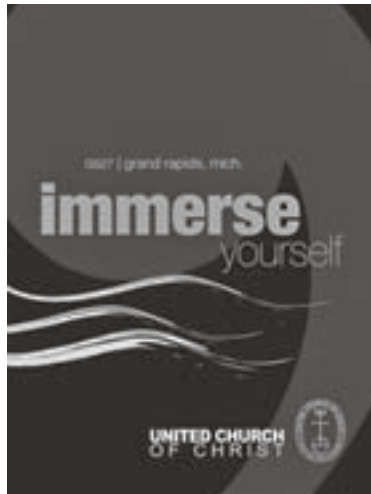
*Resolution of Witness* submitted by **First Congregational (Berkeley) UCC, Calif.**, by the **New York Conference**, and by six other local churches from the **Southern California-Nevada, Connecticut, Missouri Mid-South and New York Conferences** calling upon the UCC to work to break down the walls of hostility between the United States and Iran by engaging in practices of citizen diplomacy.

### CALLING FOR THE SUPPORT OF H.R. 676 - SINGLE PAYER NATIONAL HEALTH CARE REFORM TO ADVANCE HEALTH EQUITY FOR ALL AND TO ELIMINATE HEALTH DISPARITIES

*Resolution of Witness* submitted by the Council for Racial and Ethnic Ministries calling on UCC settings to endorse and support in principle the provision of Single-Payer Universal Health Care Reform through national health insurance that is privately provided and publicly funded.

### A CALL TO AWARENESS AND ACTION TO END THE PRACTICE OF TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

*Resolution of Witness* submitted by Justice and Witness Ministries.



Several thousand visitors and delegates are expected to attend the UCC's 27th General Synod, to be held in Grand Rapids, Mich., June 26-30. River City Saturday, a Synod highlight, will feature nationally recognized speakers and performers.



### CALLING ON PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA TO REVISIT AND RE-NEGOTIATE A MORE HUMANE, DEMOCRATIC, AND ECOLOGICALLY SOUND VERSION OF THE NORTH AMERICAN FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

*Resolution of Witness* submitted by the Rev. Carrie Bail of the **Massachusetts Conference** and 11 other General Synod delegates from the **Massachusetts, Pennsylvania Southeast and Florida Conferences**.

### A JUSTICE TOWN HALL GATHERING

*Prudential Resolution* submitted by Pacific Islander and Asian American Ministries calling for a town hall gathering of justice advocates within the UCC one day before the beginning of each General Synod.

Two resolutions have been directly referred to plenary sessions of the General Synod for vote:

### ON THE SITUATION OF IRAQI REFUGEES AND INTERNALLY DISPLACED

*Resolution of Witness* submitted by the **Central Atlantic and Southern Conferences** drawing attention to the continuing humanitarian crisis faced by Iraqis — both internally displaced and refugees — caused by the 2003 invasion and subsequent occupation, and calls upon the UCC to respond.

### A CALL TO REAFFIRM THE IMPORTANCE OF ECUMENICAL COMMITMENTS AND INITIATIVES IN THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

*Resolution of Witness* submitted by **Heidelberg UCC, York, P.A.**, and six other local churches from the **Massachusetts, Michigan, Penn Central, Pennsylvania Southeast and Wisconsin Conferences**.

Three resolutions have been deemed amendments of or complimentary to previously approved Synod actions. They have been referred to their implementing bodies for further study:

### EARTHWISE CONGREGATION: ON MEDIATING CLIMATE CHANGE

*Prudential Resolution* submitted by the **Minnesota Conference**, to the implementing bodies named in "A Resolution on Climate Change" as voted by the Twenty-Sixth General Synod (07-GS-16).

### IN SUPPORT OF PHYSICIAN ASSISTANCE IN DYING

*Resolution of Witness* submitted by the **Central Atlantic Conference**, to Justice and Witness Ministries, with the recommendation that it be considered in the study process established by the Twenty-Sixth General Synod in the resolution, "Legalization of Physician Aid in Dying" (07-GS-37).

### ON THE URGENCY FOR ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

*Resolution of Witness* submitted by the **Connecticut Conference**, to the implementing bodies named in "A Resolution on Climate Change" as voted by the Twenty-Sixth General Synod (07-GS-16).

Four proposed resolutions — all regarding the continuation of the process that would lead to a single governing board for the UCC's covenanted ministries — were received after the Jan. 1, 2009, deadline. Their disposition will be addressed at an

Executive Council meeting in June.

By approval of their respective bodies, the UCC's **Penn Central, Connecticut and Michigan Conferences and the Catoctin Association of the Central Atlantic Conference** each submitted separate resolutions asking for debate on governance issues and an affirmation by the Synod that a single governing board would be in the best interest of the entire church.

Resolutions of similar nature are often combined into a single document for the General Synod to consider. "In all likelihood the Committee of Reference, who decides on the disposition of resolutions, will act to send these resolutions to one committee and may even recommend that they be combined," said Lee Foley, the UCC's minister for governing body relations. "It is probable that the General Synod will be dealing with one governance resolution, not four."

Foley explained that no action is possible by the General Synod regarding the tabled combined board proposal. Rather, he said the submitted resolutions merely encourage the Covenanted Ministry Boards and Executive Council to again take up their deliberations on continuing the process of defining the constitution and bylaw changes that would lead to the unified board structure.

A complete list of resolutions with full text can be found at [ucc.org/synod/resolutions](http://ucc.org/synod/resolutions).

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## Congregational multiplication: Churches birthing new churches



By David Schoen

**M**y daughter was married at the end of May. It has been an exciting time for my family. As I looked forward to the celebration, I had a certain sense of fulfillment as I thought about how our household brought forth our daughter's own married relationship and home.

One household finds fulfillment in seeing a new home born.

IT'S NOT ALL THAT DIFFERENT in the development of new churches. One household of faith finds purpose and fulfillment in birthing new faith communities. Reproduction is a normal and natural outflow of healthy congregations.

The history of church development is the story of one church starting another church, sometimes several churches. Existing churches gave birth to new churches.

I know of a congregation in Canton, Ohio, that was the first church established in the community in the 1800s. It went on to plant most of the other churches throughout the city and area. A good part of the vision and energy for giving birth to other congregations came from its pastors, who understood that part of their ministry was to spread the gospel and community of Christ by starting new congregations.

Unfortunately most UCC churches, especially Euro-American congregations, have lost that reproducing vitality and DNA — the mission of starting new churches.

But not all congregations. A growing number of UCC congregations have a vision and vitality for birthing new congregations. **Trinity UCC in Chicago** has planted many congregations and is currently supporting three new UCC congregations in Gary, Ind., Milwaukee, Wisc., and Benton Harbor, Mich.

**Cathedral of Hope UCC in Dallas**, having planted one congregation in Oklahoma City, now has the goal of starting five new congregations in five years. Two of these churches are already worshipping.

**City of Refuge UCC in San Francisco** has started several new UCC congregations and works through The Fellowship to connect other congregations who are looking for a welcoming home to the United Church of Christ.

**Iglesia Hispana de la Comunidad UCC in Jamaica Plains, Mass.**, is starting several new Spanish language congregations in the Boston area.

**Mayflower Congregational UCC in Naples, Fla.**, and **Mayflower Congregational UCC in Oklahoma City** are both involved in planting new congregations. Churches of all sizes and backgrounds are catching the new Pentecost movement of birthing new congregations.

FLOWERS SOW SEEDS to start new flowers. Fish spawn new fish. Giraffes give birth to giraffes. Humans give birth to humans. Species exist by giving birth to new generations.

THE DECLINE of mainstream denominations in America is not merely due to the decline of our population's birth rate, but to the decline of our congregations' birth rate — a lack of congregations birthing congregations.

Vital denominations in the United States are filled with congregations giving birth to new congregations at the rate of more than three percent of their total number of congregations each year.

While the recent increase in new church development is encouraging, the UCC is only planting new churches at the rate of less than one percent of our total number of congregations each year. Total congregations decline by an average of more than two percent annually.

The UCC will not be able to respond to all those in our nation seeking the still speaking God's welcome and witness unless our existing congregations get excited and involved in planting new congregations.

There is often resistance, even hostility, to new congregations by

existing congregations. There is a "one parish per town" mentality that sees new churches as a threat to existing churches. This perceived "threat" fails to understand the unchurched nature of our communities, where there are multitude of opportunities and possibilities for outreach for all congregations, new and old.

Studies suggest that the vitality of all congregations is increased in communities where there is new

**The most effective strategy for planting successful new churches is through one vital congregation birthing another."**

church planting activity. New and existing congregations are not in competition, but rather enhance each other.

It is also shown that the most effective strategy for planting successful new churches is through one vital congregation birthing another. And new churches bring vital energy, fresh insight and missional purpose to existing congregations and denominations. Missional churches and pastors know that it is not just about growing "my"

church, but it's all about growing the church, the whole church, as a sign and instrument of the still speaking God's realm.

The risen Christ greeted his disciples in Galilee, and greets his disciples today, with the words, "Go forth into the world and make disciples." Vital congregations go forth into the world and reach whole new communities of disciples by birthing new congregations.

The UCC recently hosted its first Churches Birthing Churches Conference at Cathedral of Hope UCC in Dallas over Pentecost Weekend. This is the beginning of a new Pentecost movement of congregations planting congregations in the UCC. It is an encouraging time to reclaim and rediscover the vital reproducing DNA and mission in UCC congregations.

JUST AS I LOOKED forward to a new household being formed in my family, I also look forward to a day in my still speaking family, the United Church of Christ, when planting new households of faith is the joyful fulfillment of every congregation.

*The Rev. David Schoen is Minister and Team Leader of the UCC's Congregational Vitality and Discipleship Ministries. Additional new church planting and congregation reproduction information and events can be found at <growtheucc.org>.*

## Rediscovering evangelism in the 21st century

By Richard Peace

**T**he United Church of Christ has not been known for its evangelistic fervor, at least not within living memory. But I have come to believe that, as a denomination, we have turned the corner and are now hard at work seeking to recover the ministry of evangelism. One only has to look at the "God is still speaking" campaign to see what I mean. Here is a program that has been a very effective means of outreach.

One aspect of the *Stillspeaking* campaign that caught my attention recently was a series of evangelistic booklets it produces. My favorite is "16 Reasons I Love Jesus." This booklet is real, funny, deeply true and challenging.

I have given away a number of these and, without exception, they have been well received. Now, to be honest, most of these booklets have gone to friends from various churches who, after reading it, express amazement that "16 Reasons I Love Jesus" is being used by, of all denominations, the UCC.

Yes, I know the booklets are meant for those outside the church, but I enjoy the reaction of my church friends and see it as a sign that in the UCC, we are busy getting

on with recovering this lost ministry of evangelism.

What happened to the ministry of evangelism in the UCC? I think that this is a complex question but, apart from anything else, the fundamentalists spooked us. Along with other mainline denominations, we seemed to have made a deal. The fundamentalist would do evangelism and we would get on with social justice.

In post-World War II America, the split between these two ministries was deep and non-negotiable. I remember my own amazement when I moved to Africa in the 1960s to discover that the African church apparently had not heard about this deal: They happily went along caring for the needs of others (like

feeding the hungry and protesting apartheid) while simultaneously calling people to follow the way of Jesus (and so escape the power of evil spirits and find joy in life).

And, of course, the African church got it right. Both ministries are a central part of the church of Jesus Christ. It is a both/and not an either/or.

So in this 21st century climate of openness to the spiritual but suspicion of the religious, how do we recover the ministry of evangelism? How do we engage in outreach in ways that fit who we are as a denomination, as well as touching the real issues of those we seek to reach?

The first challenge in our churches is to deal with the "cringe factor" when we mention evangelism. Perhaps we do have to talk about outreach, faith sharing, being "good news" people, holy conversation or some other combination of words that get across the central idea that evangelism is all about sharing the amazing news about who Jesus is, what Jesus has done for us and our planet, and how we can experience new life (resurrection life) through Jesus. | cont.

## AM I CALLED?

## Discernment and training for church planting and redevelopment

By Cameron Trimble

I was sitting in my office a few years ago when a woman walked in and said, "My name is Susannah, and I think God is calling me to birth a UCC church out of a coffee shop in Atlanta. Can you help me?"

She shared her strategy, told me of her passion for ministry, the reason this church needed to be birthed and why the community was ready for the church right now.

For a person who loves starting new churches almost as much as breathing, I was captivated. With that one question, Susannah, the Southeast Conference and I began the marvelous adventure of planting Kirkwood UCC.

Conversations like this happen a lot these days. God is increasingly calling people to birth new churches — or maybe it is that UCC settings are developing the ears to hear God's call, which has been there all the time. Regardless, church planting is on the rise.

I find this hopeful for many reasons. Practically speaking, the UCC closes more churches than it starts, which does not bode well for its future as a voice of prophetic witness. More fundamentally, however, is the theological conviction that has been the centerpiece for the Christian faith over these thousands of years — we are called to go into the world and make disciples. We are called by God to extend radical invitation to those who are without a place to belong or a voice to speak.

The challenge the UCC faces today is simple — it needs more lead-

ers called, trained and equipped to start new churches. Every setting in the denomination needs to actively identify entrepreneurial people who cast vision, motivate followers and inspire action.

The UCC needs local church leaders and pastors with the ability to recognize potential in others. Who in your church (lay or ordained) likes to start new ministries and create new communities within your church? Maybe, with your encouragement, they could plant a church. Who in your youth ministry has a passionate faith, budding

leadership abilities and inspirational vision of what church could be? Maybe with your encouragement, they could plant a church.

Perhaps you are a member of a Church and Ministry Committee — who of your candidates for ministry has the church planting spirit? Maybe, with your encouragement, they could plant a church. Or maybe you are feeling the call to plant a church — if so, I'm here to recruit you!

Discerning whether you have the gifts and skills to plant a new congregation involves a process of assessment. A couple of years ago, the UCC joined with its ecumenical partners to develop the new church planter Gallup assessment survey, which indicates if a person has the personality traits needed to start new churches. This assessment, as well as a set of interview questions to help leaders discern their calling, is available at <ucc.org/new-church>.

The UCC also has recently developed a Gallup assessment survey for pastors interested in redeveloping congregations, as the skill sets are often complimentary.

In October the UCC's New Church Leadership initiative is embarking on a new way to help people discern their calling to this important ministry. Working collaboratively with the UCC's Local



iStockphoto graphic

Church Ministries, the initiative has trained a team of assessors to lead a series of "discernment events" across the country.

These Friday and Saturday workshops will provide opportunities for anyone interested in the

comforts and predictability of institutional stability.

Church planters gather people in living rooms and coffee shops and community libraries to talk about a "church that is becoming," but not here yet. They network with

The challenge the UCC faces today is simple — it needs more leaders called, trained and equipped to start new churches."

church planting process to take basic assessments like the DISC Profile, TEAM Profile, and Conflict Management Styles. Attendees will receive individualized feedback from on-site assessors and the opportunity for additional training if they qualify as a church planting candidate. Most importantly, they will hear from active church planters about the process of starting a church and begin to imagine what this journey might look like for them.

After good candidates to plant new churches have been identified, training is the next critical step. The New Church Leadership Institute hosted in Atlanta each year focuses entirely on teaching practical "how to" strategies. Participants have the opportunity to learn from church development practitioners while networking with other church leaders from around the country.

This year the Institute is launching a second track focused on training pastors in turnaround churches. It will address issues such as conflict resolution, community networking, leveraging technology, stewardship and fundraising, faith-sharing and forming your leadership teams.

Starting a new church is a courageous ministry. While most pastoral leaders are trained to pastor existing churches complete with buildings, hymnals, parking lots and salaries, church planters have the challenging task of forming community, building traditions and growing disciples all without the

community leaders, local schools, other pastors and business professionals to share their hopes for this new faith community, asking for their support and prayer. They cast a vision far and wide that says, "I do this not because I believe this church could exist, but because it should exist." This church matters.

In the 2008 film "Milk," gay rights activist Harvey Milk would stand on the street corners of San Francisco and yell through his megaphone to the growing crowds in the streets, "My name is Harvey Milk, and I am here to recruit you!" That is a line worth stealing.

My name is Cameron Trimble, and I am here to recruit you. I am asking you to help us find new leaders, start new churches and inspire new visions. I am asking you to strengthen your local church, encourage your teenagers to consider pastoral ministry and make sure your church is making a difference in your community. I am asking you to remember why the United Church of Christ makes a difference in your life and share your story with others. I am asking you to help us grow the Church.

I hope you will join me — and many others — on what promises to be an extraordinary journey.

The Rev. Cameron Trimble is the UCC's Southeast Conference Associate Conference Minister for Church Development and the director of the UCC's New Church Leadership Initiative. Program details and registration information are available at <growtheucc.org>.

REDISCOVERING | cont.

So on one level, evangelism is an invitation into relationship. Relationship stands at the core of Christianity: relationship with God, relationship with Jesus, relationship with the community of those seeking to follow Jesus, relationship with those we are called to love, relationship with ourselves.

The idea behind invitation is that when others connect with our Christian community, they begin to discover what the community is all about and, in particular, what binds the community together. "Belonging before believing" is the phrase often used to capture this perspective.

Invitation to belong is one thing; invitation to believe is another. Evangelism is all about an invitation to believe the gospel. In the UCC, we are pretty good when it comes to discussing God but we need to learn what it means to talk about Jesus.

Conversion is another word that causes some discomfort in the UCC. But let us be clear: conversion is the goal of evangelism. Our longing is that people discover the Way of Jesus; that they decide to turn from their own way to this new Way; and that they start following Jesus by faith.

We do not need to be embar-

rassed by this call to conversion. Conversion to Jesus can and does bring new life out of a destructive lifestyle, even as it brings new purpose out of an aimless lifestyle.

I am convinced that evangelism is not primarily a matter of individual witness. I believe that evangelism is primarily the calling of the community. It takes a community, not only to raise a child, but to reach a person with the gospel. The church is the primary context for conversion.

One thing I have been talking about a lot these days is what I call "contemplative evangelism." The idea is pretty simple. If people are fascinated by spirituality, why not invite them to places and activities where they can explore the spiritual? Perhaps to a small group that is learning the art of spiritual journaling, then journaling together, and then talking about what they are journaling.

This isn't just academic. Main-line churches have declined steadily for the past 40 years, losing 50 percent of their membership (members per capita). And nothing seems to abate this trend. The UCC is doing worse than most other denominations, losing 60 percent of our market share in this same time frame. The math is easy. If this keeps on there will be no such thing at the

United Church of Christ by the year 2100.

Now I do not want to make evangelism into a membership drive. To do so undercuts the whole meaning of the gospel. But I do want to note that without active outreach, we will die as a denomination.

We share the gospel because it is good news and when we do share the gospel — by how we live, by what we say, and by what we do both as individuals and communities — others see new life, come to Jesus, and experience the beginning of transformation.

Conversion is like that. And so they join in our community.

We share not to prevent ourselves from going out of business. We share because this is our business and when we do, we thrive. No, evangelism is not an academic exercise; it is what the church is all about. And the Stillspeaking witness and welcome is what the UCC is all about.

The Rev. Richard Peace is a UCC pastor and the Robert Boyd Munger Professor of Evangelism and Spiritual Formation at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, Calif. This article is excerpted from the upcoming booklet, "Rediscovering Evangelism: Outreach in the United Church of Christ in the Twenty-first Century."



## TOLD FROM THE FRONTLINES

people | places | things

in the news

## Prairie Sky UCC: The short life of a new church plant

By Todd and Nicole Grant Yonkman

*"Jesus invited each, starting where each was, to begin a spiritual adventure in a hitherto-untried way of living."*

— *Adventurous Religion* by Harry Emerson Fosdick, 1926.

It was on our European backpacking honeymoon in 1996 that we began calling ourselves the "Grant Yonkman Adventure Team." A call to ministry and a sense of adventure are two things we've always shared.

When we accepted a call from the Indiana-Kentucky Conference in February 2007 to plant a church in Fishers, Ind., a fast-growing suburb of Indianapolis, we understood it to be another chapter in the Adventure Team story. We drew on the spirit and energy of our adventurous UCC forebears who had the guts and the will to gather around the vision "that they may all be one" 50 years earlier.

Church planting is the process of starting a new church that will, in a relatively short period of time, become a self-sufficient, self-supporting, autonomous congregation. Ultimately, our efforts did not produce a church, but our experience has taught us a lot about what it takes to plant a church and reach young people.

## Plotting the Course

The process of selecting us to be the planters was fairly strenuous. In addition to the normal profile and interview process, we took the Gallup church planters assessment, an interview assessment with the UCC's Local Church Ministries, and a three-day on-site church planters' assessment with Midwest Career Development Ministries.

Though a lot of expense and energy went into the assessment process, we were glad for it because it affirmed our feeling that we had the gifts and calling to be church planters.

The Conference had committed to use the "parachute drop" church planting model. We moved to Fishers without any contacts or a sponsoring church to help us. We did receive some startup funding from the committee that called us. We later learned that the "parachute drop" model is the most risky, most expensive and most difficult kind of church start — with an estimated 85 percent failure rate.

The Conference had hired a consultant to do a feasibility study that showed promising demographics and catalogued several success stories in the area. The population of Fishers is young, well-educated, rapidly growing and upper income.

The study also revealed some red flags, which we chose to see as challenges to overcome. Fishers is in the most Republican congressional district in the United States, nationally known for its social and religious conservatism. It is located just a few miles down the road from the Church of God world head-

quarters in Anderson, Ind.

Although we weren't interested in planting a church for Democrats, some of the UCC's positions on social issues turned out to be a really hard sell in Fishers. Additionally, all of the successful new churches in Fishers had partnered with existing congregations or mission organizations to gather groups of people that made up a critical mass to start the church strong, and largely self-sufficient, right from the start.

## Setting Sail

The actual work of planting the church turned out to be a lot of fun. We threw ourselves into the community — getting involved in every committee, organization, and social and business event we could find. These provided us many opportunities to meet people, share our vision for Prairie Sky Church and demonstrate that we were in Fishers to serve the community in Christ's name.

We quickly developed a large and expanding network of contacts, which translated into a group of about 25 adults and children who met regularly on Sunday evenings at our house for worship, Bible study, Sunday school and supper.

At this point the wind started to go out of our sails. Except for one family, we had gathered a group of "baby Christians," new to Christianity or returning to the faith as adults, who were interested in attending a new UCC, but who didn't yet have the leadership skills to help us expand our group. And we needed people with skills — pronto.

The paradox of church planting is that you need people to get people. This is the point where partnering UCC congregations would have made a difference.

We had one high school student from a local UCC who helped us with childcare. She was fantastic. One church helped us with food. We had others from local UCCs

who would come for a meeting or two.

But the groundwork for partner churches lending their members as missionaries or as "rent-a-members" for a 12- or 24-month period had not been laid. As newcomers to the Conference and relative outsiders, we were unable to garner support from pastors and lay people.

We simply did not have the critical mass or funding to get the church off the ground in the time frame we had been provided. With incredible grief and the help of a consultant, we decided with the Conference to bring the project to an end about one year after beginning.

## Changing Course

We share this story with you in the hope that it might be beneficial as the UCC continues to work toward its church planting goals. The experience, though personally painful, taught us many things. We have space to share just a few.

The "parachute drop" model of church planting was not a good match for the UCC in Fishers. People in Fishers did not understand how two people could just come in and start a church without any people. In fact, it made them suspicious.

Our model assumed that people had an affinity to mainline Christianity, that they trusted denominational church institutions in general, and that they were willing to join a church which, in many ways, was counter-cultural to the rest of the community.

What we found: the majority of people in our plant area were evangelical social conservatives, young (average age 31) and, as a generation, did not trust church institutions. There was no "safe space" in which to create a counter-cultural movement. Because the UCC message was not a "natural fit" for Fishers, there was no way two people working alone could overcome these dynamics.

In church planting, it is never just one thing that leads to success or failure. However, the main failure in this project may have been that we did not recognize that the UCC is no longer a "mainline" church in the traditional sense of the word.

In other words, traditional Protestantism is no longer the dominant mode of religious expression, and that most young people — our target group — are not interested in traditional institutional religion. This is because American "mainstream" culture has evolved and too many of our "mainline" congregations have not.

The parachute drop model op-



The Rev. Nicole Grant Yonkman (second from right) and the people of Prairie Sky UCC at their 2008 Easter event.

Todd Grant Yonkman photo

erates under the assumption that people are out there just waiting to be a part of a UCC. We found that this was not the case.

Yet there was one bright light. We discovered that many people are compelled by the vision, "That they may all be one." The way we put it was, "We are a church that focuses on what unites us instead of fighting over what divides us."

The point of church planting is not simply to re-create the past. It is "to begin a spiritual adventure in a hitherto-untried way of living." We can't make seekers, spiritual but not religious types, fit into our church categories of Sunday worship in a traditional building, going to committee meetings and giving money to support a budget.

The decisive question for the

church is not whether there's some magical program that will make unchurched people fit into its life. The decisive question is whether or not the church is willing to do what it takes to fit into the lives of unchurched people.

As planters, we went to the offices, the soccer games, the classrooms, the parks, the coffee shops, the concerts in order to "be Jesus" to the people we met there. On that account we succeeded. While these efforts didn't produce a church, they did make a difference to the community on behalf of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Revs. Todd and Nicole Grant Yonkman are co-pastors of **Beneficent Congregational UCC in Providence, R.I.**

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## WHAT DOES CHURCH LOOK LIKE IN THE 21ST CENTURY?

## New book explores the formation of faith communities

By Gregg Brekke

**P**aul Nixon is at it again ... thank God. Following his best-selling book, "I Refuse to Lead a Dying Church," he's back with another look at the possibilities for starting and reviving congregations in the 21st century.

"Finding Jesus on the Metro: And Other Surprises Doing Church in a New Day" is the recently released follow-on to "I Refuse" that delves more deeply into new church development ideas rather than the revitalization focus of the previous volume.

Nixon is a hyper-kinetic thinker — full of well-formed ideas. Having experienced him on a personal level and in a seminar setting, it is easy to see how his never-ending stream of suggestions and belief in the possibilities faith communities have for transformation propelled "I Refuse" to its acclaimed status.

But Nixon isn't just a church strategist. True, he does consult with many congregations and denominations on their vitality and development projects, but his advice comes out of real-life experience.

After reading scores of church development books, it's easy to spot those written by theorists and those which evolved from the reflections

of practitioners. "Finding Jesus on the Metro" is the latter, and Nixon doesn't spare his readers the sometimes painful reality of church planting: It is often lonely, thankless, spiritually draining, and frustrating work.

Yet, not to be discouraged, Nixon relays the great rewards of church planting. How small gains, affirmations, revelations and spiritual renewal are coupled with disappointments — all at the same time.

The first half of "Finding Jesus on the Metro" is dedicated to the realities of developing new faith communities in the 21st century. The post-modern era in which we find ourselves is increasingly isolated, non-Christian (or at the very least

## FINDING JESUS ON THE METRO



By PAUL NIXON  
The Pilgrim Press, 2009  
Paperback, \$14.00  
ISBN: 978-0829818543  
<thepilgrimpress.com>

non-institutionally so), diverse, overly busy and consumer driven.

Many before Nixon have made similar observations about our age. What differs is his reflection on these topics in the midst of developing a new faith community within Washington, D.C.'s, center city.

What Nixon does with these details is different. Rather than lament the fact that people no longer seek out our institutional churches and denominations, he asks the church to rethink itself in the context of those who still seek community and a spiritual connection.

Nixon calls upon his experience as a pastor in more established (settler) communities to challenge how he would live and minister among

a non-established (pilgrim) population — finding community in coffee shops, small gatherings and on the rapid transit system.

"The work of the spiritual pioneer is hard," he says. "The work of the missionary is usually painful. The work of the prophet is often deadly. There is no way around it. Anyone who thinks that a project will be easy simply because God is in it has not accounted for the biblical model. From Moses to Elijah to Jesus to the apostles — their work was ridiculously difficult. Why should it be different for us today? Christian ministry is rarely ever a cakewalk."

He claims that the founding spirit of many churches wanes after its first decade of existence. "Many churches eventually get so settled and comfortable that they forget about the world outside their doors almost entirely," he says. "...except as a venue for token acts of mercy and the collection of special offerings."

Only desperation, crisis, rising up a visionary leader or the infusion of new people can alter the slow deceleration that occurs as churches become more concerned with "doing church" than acting on their original evangeli-

cal impulses.

Nixon argues that the church is doomed if it doesn't continually see itself in a desperate place — seeking to expand God's realm; in crisis — of knowing the "lost" and the "other" often don't find a welcome in the church; raising up leaders to carry on the next vision revealed by the Spirit; and intentionally seeking the infusion of new and diverse people.

These aren't impediments for Nixon, though — they are opportunities. He draws inspiration from the Underground Railroad, saying the church can follow its model of prophetic courage to say and do the right thing, and to know when to wait; of cooperation with other denominations and faith movements to achieve the end goal; and of freedom — in offering good news, welcome and justice to wanderers in an uncertain spiritual landscape.

"What matters most in a season such as this is our persistence on the journey: showing up with God, morning by morning, ready to travel another day," says Nixon. "We show up. We keep catching the train. And along the way, we do what we can to be faithful."

## Undercover undergrad finds God where he least expected

By Gregg Brekke

**W**hat do you get when you mix one part tree-hugging Ivy-Leaguer, one part inactive Quaker and one part Christian fundamentalist breeding ground? Surprisingly enough, you get Kevin Roose's entertaining and thoughtful book, "The Unlikely Disciple: A Sinner's Semester at America's Holiest University."

The experiment began when Roose realized he didn't really know anyone who considered themselves part of the Christian "right." He had religious, even evangelical, friends — but nobody in his circle of acquaintances would have considered themselves a fundamentalist.

Roose's religious experience was limited at best. He says the closest he came to a coherent understanding of faith was when he learned about Central and South American liberation theology as a senior in high school. The study left Roose "briefly convinced that God was a left-wing superhero who led the global struggle against imperialism and corporate greed. Sort of a celestial Michael Moore."

His inquiry into Liberty University's culture was fostered when he was interning for A.J. Jacobs, author of "The Year of Living Biblically." Roose encountered a group of Liberty students while doing research at the Rev. Jerry Falwell's Thomas Road Baptist Church and was intrigued.

He knew little of Falwell, but cringed at his accusations against "feminists, homosexuals, abortionists

and the ACLU" as the cause of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. "Like many non-evangelicals, I knew Rev. Falwell only as the arch-conservative televangelist with the least effective brain-to-mouth filter in the English-speaking world," he says.

Still, he was curious about Falwell's university with its 10,000 (mostly) eager students who were committed to the ideals of evangelical education and willing to abide by the all-encompassing Liberty Way ethical code that forbade all but the most banal and safe/sinless activities.

And so Roose begins, with lively dialog and meticulous daily journaling, his exploration of life at Falwell's Liberty University in Lynchburg, Va.

It took some convincing of his parents, the cajoling of his Brown University admissions advisor and extensive tutoring in "evangelical-ese" from his only born-again friend (Laura, the "evangelical Yoda"). But Roose was determined to understand a side of American Christianity that few would get to see — but that many were subjected to in the media nonetheless.

During his spring 2007 semes-

## THE UNLIKELY DISCIPLE



By KEVIN ROOSE  
Grand Central, 2009  
Hardcover, \$24.99  
ISBN: 978-0446178426  
<hachettebookgroup.com>

ter at Liberty, Roose encountered the culture and faith of this fundamentalist epicenter. Disengaging from his libertine Brown University lifestyle took some time. Originally fixated by the quantity of beautiful women at Liberty (once ranked the second-hottest campus by Playboy magazine!), Roose moves his energies to fitting in with evangelical friends and studying.

Bible, Contemporary Issues and History of Life are the sampling of courses that Roose chronicles most closely. The Bible — literal, God breathed, inerrant. Contemporary issues — abortion, socialism/communism and homosexuality — enemies of real Christians and must be fought. History of Life — young earth creationism — none of this wishy-washy intelligent design and definitely no Godless evolutionary studies.

Outside the classroom he begins seeing someone and then breaks it off when she starts to uncover the truth of Roose's project. He is curious as to

the level of grace extended to those who don't comply with Liberty's sexual purity code and, through a series of crossed connections, finds himself in a masturbation support group — then another group for those struggling with homosexual feelings.

He encounters the hostility of a roommate's violent tirades against homosexuals and liberals, the humility of a befriended Liberty student who gets pregnant, and the acceptance of dorm-mates exploring their place as young men while forging their own Christian identity, not necessarily the identity Liberty wants them to adopt.

Roose is never converted to the brand of conservative Christian fundamentalism that Liberty espouses in its recruitment brochures. What he is surprised by, however, are the ways daily prayer, Bible reading, holy conversations and a clear mind (the Liberty Way forbids alcohol) bolstered his spiritual development as a liberal Quaker.

In the end, Roose discovers a group of friends at Liberty who complement his spiritual path and offer their unconditional understanding and continued support once his book project is revealed.

When asked about the contribution his work will make to the cultural God-divide that exists in America, Roose says, "Hopefully it is an invitation to build bridges between people who haven't wanted to understand each other."

Roose is an adept journalist and, not unlike Barbara Ehrenreich in "Nickel and Dimed," gets caught up in the visceral aspects of his experiment. And we, the reader, are better for it. Considering the bulk of the research and writing for "The Unlikely Disciple" occurred when Roose was just 19, we can only hope he gets caught up again.

"The Unlikely Disciple" offers a view behind the curtain of an institution that many on the religious left fear and finds people who are likable and, like Roose, are working out their faith. It should stand as a testimony that religious bigotry can happen whenever one party avoids encounters with the other.

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people | places | things

## Operation Babylift links UCC family with Grand Rapids museum

By Jeff Woodard

**T**housands of miles and a couple of smiles. While the journey was painstaking and time with her first adopted child at a precious premium, Lana Noone has worked faithfully for 34 years to ensure that it hasn't been in vain.

Noone's daughter, Heather Constance Noone — born Mai Ngoc Tranh — left South Vietnam as part of Operation Babylift on April 2, 1975. After stops in Long Beach, Calif., and Denver's Children's Hospital, the tiny, malnourished 2-week-old baby landed in Noone's arms in New York City 23 days later.

Authorized by President Ford as the Vietnam War concluded, Operation Babylift was a three-week airlift of more than 2,500 orphaned babies to the United States. Artifacts from the historical evacuation are on display at the Gerald R. Ford Museum in Grand Rapids, Mich., host city for General Synod 27, June 26-30, 2009.

"The only thing to be done at that time for those children was to evacuate them," says Noone. "Future generations might well consider it to have been the moment when the global family became a reality in communities throughout the United States."

Noone, a 32-year UCC member, chronicles her experience of the times in a book titled "Global Mom."

Following numerous miscarriages, Noone and her husband, Byron, went to their pastor in 1974 to discuss adoption options. The pastor asked them whether they had considered an international adoption. "A light bulb went off," Noone says. "We said, 'Let's do it.' It was just one of those miraculous moments."

The Noones were approved

in March 1975 — but were told it would take six to nine months to adopt a child out of South Vietnam. "Then we were told that babies would never be able to be evacuated," says Noone. They spent the month watching the news, on the phone, trying not to despair. "And then at the end of March came news of this extraordinary event."

Emaciated, with a greyish tint to her complexion, Heather arrived — and the Noones' world became brighter.

"We were teachers, so we were always trying to stimulate her," she says. "You weren't supposed to hang mobiles from IV poles and oxygen tents in the hospital, but we did anyway. Those were the only two times she smiled in her life."

One of the most warming memories Noone recalls about Heather's arrival was the reaction of an EMT in Long Beach who helped transport Heather to the hospital. "She just looked at us and said, 'I'll never forget her. She has a very old soul.'"

On May 17, the Noones received a call that Heather was in full cardiac arrest. They rushed to the hospital to meet their pastor, who



Jen Noone was on the last Operation Babylift flight out of Saigon. She and mother Lana stand near the memorial site for Noone's other adopted Vietnamese daughter, Heather, who died after a brief illness.

Bob Shane photo

baptized her there. "The minute we went to her tent, her heart rate and vitals stabilized," says Noone. The baptism took place, and Heather died of pneumocystis carinii pneumonia a few hours later — 18 days after the fall of Saigon.

"Two days before Heather died, I promised her I'd spend the rest of my life making sure that she would not be forgotten, that her short life was not in vain. We never regretted any of it. We loved her very dearly."

The Noones subsequently adopted their daughter Jennie — the last baby ever placed from Operation Babylift — and a son, Jason, from Korea.

Operation Babylift began on April 2 with an "unauthorized"

flight when World Airways departed Vietnam for Oakland, Calif., with 57 children aboard. The next evening, President Ford — an adoptee himself — appeared on national television to authorize Operation Babylift. But the following day, tragedy struck when an Air Force C-5A Galaxy carrying 328 people, including 155 orphans, crashed shortly after takeoff. Ninety-eight of the 150 people killed were orphans. (President Ford was traveling to San Francisco to meet the plane upon its scheduled arrival.)

By the time Operation Babylift's final flight landed on April 26 — three days before the complete evacuation of U.S. personnel from Vietnam — 2,548 children had been safely lifted on 26 flights.

The Ford Museum collection includes a high-profile photo of President Ford pictured on a tarmac, holding one of the airlifted babies. A painting titled "Welcome Home" includes fragments of the plane and soil from the area where the ill-fated flight crashed.

Noone has been central to the Operation Babylift reunions held to commemorate its 10th, 20th and 25th anniversaries. But the 2005 gathering holds special sentiment: World Airways flew 21 adoptees back to Vietnam for the 30th anniversary. Noone and then-30-year-old Jennie brought along soil from the grave sites of Byron, who died in 2002, and Heather for a memo-

rial service. "We sang 'Amazing Grace' in the middle of Saigon, had a prayer service and sprinkled the soil with their ashes."

In a website posting, Noone sounds a rallying cry to help heal wounds left festering from the divisive war. "Let us come together in a spirit of hope and reconciliation," she writes, "not because we were right and someone else was wrong, but because, at a moment in time, over 2,500 children in harm's way were brought to safety. Efforts failed and a tragic number of lives were lost. However, our spirits remain strong. I welcome you to this web site no matter where or how the Vietnam Era affected your life."

Noone became a member of **Garden City (N.Y.) Community UCC** in 1977. A talented musician throughout her school years, Noone says church was always the priority in her life.

"The only time you reconcile a journey like mine is with faith, which sustains you," she says. "The most important thing I could say about myself is that I'm UCC."

*Jeff Woodard is a regular contributor to United Church News and a member of Pilgrim UCC in Cleveland. For more information on Operation Babylift and the items at the Gerald R. Ford Museum go to <vietnambabylift.org>; send an e-mail to <lananoone@yahoo.com>; or visit the Gerald R. Ford Museum in Grand Rapids, Mich.*



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in the news

Executive minister nominees offer experience, vision to challenges ahead

**T**he Rev. Stephen Sterner, executive minister of Local Church Ministries, and the Rev. Linda Jaramillo, executive minister of Justice and Witness Ministries, have been re-nominated to serve additional four-year terms in their posts. General Synod delegates will vote on their nominations in Grand Rapids.

UCNews spent 10 minutes with each executive to learn a bit more about them and their vision for the UCC. The following conversations are excerpted from the longer interviews.

A chat with Steve Sterner:

*How did you get into ministry?*

Well there were several streams I think that came together that led me to go to seminary. And it was in seminary that I made a decision to seek ordination. I didn't necessarily go to seminary with that in mind.

*What experiences led you to seek ordination?*

The most formative was a trip to an East Harlem protestant parish in about 1966, where we were tutoring in storefront academies for two-week periods.

It was an experience at church I had never had before and that got me interested in church ... to think that church was engaged in this kind of thing. So I went to seminary to see what this was all about. And here I am.



Sterner

*You've served congregations in Detroit, eastern Pennsylvania, Atlanta and Phoenix, and as a new church pastor in Houston. What was it like planting a new church?*

It was the best experience, especially in retrospect. At the time I was frightened that it wasn't go-

ing to make it. It always looked so fragile, but the friendships and relationships we formed and built there have endured over 25, 30 years and it was a wonderful experience.

*How would you describe the current possibilities and challenges for the UCC?*

Well the exciting parts are also the challenging parts. This is a time of real transition and change for religious communities at every setting. Certainly at the denominational level we're in the process of trying to rethink; what does it mean to be a denomination in all its so called post things: post-Christian, post-modern, post-denominational?

*How is the concept of evangelism evolving in the UCC?*

I think for a long time evangelism was just another way of saying getting new members. But we've moved away from a getting new members model. I think or are moving away from it, to a model of transforming individuals who'll transform the settings in which they live and proclaim and practice their faith.

*What are your top priorities if elected to serve Local Church Ministries for another four year term?*

Leadership, leadership, leadership; good pastoral leadership for local congregations. Bringing more and

more people of different generations, younger generations into pastoral leadership, into the life of our congregation. Encouraging, nurturing our lay leaders, men, women, youth and young adults.

We have not been as successful at that in recent years as we need to be. So for local church ministries I see really two streams for us: Working on identifying mentoring, nurturing, training, educating and equipping leaders and increasing vitality of local congregations

*What do you do when you're not working or travelling for the UCC?*

I go to our home in South Carolina and spend time with my wife, usually working outside. I love to garden. We live on a lake but I don't have a boat, yet. I may have to resolve that problem some time soon and learn how to fish or something. The disciples that were fisherman were not very good at it, and so I can probably fit right into that...

*Watch more of the Sterner video interview at <ucc.org/news/sterner10-09.html>.*

A chat with Linda Jaramillo:

*How did you get involved in ministry, especially in justice work?*

I volunteered at every church setting of the church: the local church, the conference, the region, and national church. I served on three national boards including the committee for racial justice, the coordinating center for woman and the executive counsel. And then I

was a co-convenor of COREM and served as counsel for Hispanic Ministries as national president for two terms.

Now the ministry that paid me was some work that I did, first of all, in adult education then went all the way to the foundation base, which was Head Start. And that's really where I recognized ministry.



Jaramillo

*What is the most exciting part of leading the UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries?*

I would have to say the most exciting parts are actually being out in the church. Being with local church members, in pulpits, conferences and annual meetings. Connecting with people who love doing advocacy on the ground. Their passion and their energy around it.

That's what brings me back home, where I came from. And really that's sort of where the circle is closed for me, or where the circle keeps going. I would have to say that is one of those places where I find a great deal of excitement and great deal of commitment.

*What are some of the challenges facing JWM?*

I would have to say that the challenges we face are the expectations of a larger church for how much we can do. I just read through

all the General Synod resolutions that are proposed and three-quarters of them again, or maybe more, are recommended actions for JWM implementation.

That's a big challenge but I also think that we must be about collaboration and partnerships and doing the work that we do. And nothing we do should be outside of that partnership. So I think solidarity [is key], that partnerships strengthen these relationships.

*If re-elected, what do you look forward to in the next four years?*

To continue what we have initiated as our campaign for relationships with conferences ... the launch of our "Leaders and Engaging Developing" curriculum ... and having our professional staff look at how justice issues intersect with all the covenantal ministries.

JWM is the organization in the covenanted ministries that's responsible for naming those issues but it's a whole church issue.

*What things do you enjoy doing outside the church?*

I like movies, I like hanging out with friends and I love to read. And I don't read every book there is about justice. I read some novels that have absolutely no social justice reading value.

And I travel; I give myself one gift a year around my birthday and go somewhere warm.

*Watch more of the Jaramillo video interview at <ucc.org/news/jaramillo10-09.html>.*

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OFFERING OF LETTERS AS THE WORK OF WORSHIP

# Indiana congregation weaves together worship and justice

**F**or Jessica Kramer and her worship team partners at **First Congregational UCC in Indianapolis**, organizing their May 19 contemporary worship service around Bread for the World's Offering of Letters campaign was a natural fit.

First Congregational UCC is a Bread for the World "covenant church" that has participated in the Offering of Letters since 1983. Along with a financial commitment, Bread for the World covenant churches pledge to integrate hunger concerns into the life of their congregation — learning more about hunger, praying for hungry people and advocating for public policy change.

But Kramer believes this is the first time the Offering of Letters has been conducted within the church service.

"The church is pretty used to us incorporating justice themes into worship, so using the Offering of Letters as a worshipful act was a great way to bring advocacy into the service," says Kramer. "Everyone accepted it as a natural part of worship."

The service incorporated prayer, music and Bread for the World visual elements and a video presentation, along with Paul's encouragement from 2 Corinthians 9 for the church "to be generous, to care about the needs of those around them, and to give thanks to God through their

Bread for the World's annual Offering of Letters Campaign invites congregations to collectively sound off on issues of hunger, food justice and sustainability. Over



Seth Rinderknecht writes to congress during the Offering of Letters service at First Congregational UCC, Indianapolis.

Jessica Kramer photo

Even in an economic crisis, we can continue to fight global poverty. Just by doing foreign aid better, we can do more for the poorest of the poor — people who survive on less than \$1.25 a day."

— The Rev. David Beckmann, Bread for the World's president.

gifts to others. He's been boasting about their eagerness to help but now he wants them to act."

"We collected 69 letters," says Kramer. "It was a lot more meaningful to use the entire service to present the campaign — it really resonated with the congregation."

Andrea Clough, also a worship team member, agrees. "For me, doing [the Offering of Letters] in worship, as the body of Christ, brought home how much we are the hands and minds that can do the work of the kingdom, as shown to us in Jesus Christ," she says.

1,400 U.S. congregations across a spectrum of denominations have committed to participate in 2009, with the goal of making U.S. foreign assistance more effective in serving the world's poor and hungry people.

"Even in an economic crisis, we can continue to fight global poverty. Just by doing foreign aid better, we can do more for the poorest of the poor — people who survive on less than \$1.25 a day," says the Rev. David Beckmann, Bread for the World's president. "Congress must ensure that global development is as prominent as defense and diplomacy as instruments of U.S. foreign policy. This will create a better, safer world."

Last year, as part of its campaign to reform the farm bill, Bread for the World's actions helped allocate an additional \$10 billion in food and nutrition funding over

the next 10 years. Past campaigns led to the establishment of the Millennium Challenge Account, a program aimed at reducing poverty in developing countries while fighting corruption.

"Blending advocacy into worship is an evocative way of making connections," says the Rev. Wallace Ryan Kuroiwa, team leader for economic justice at the UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries. "Jesus compels us to care for 'the least of these.' Active justice-filled worship like the Offering of Letters is a real way we can practice Jesus' call to care for 'the least of these.'"

PASTORAL CHANGES

- Ballew, Ronald** to interim, Somers Community UCC, Kenosha, WI
- Bjork, Susan A.** to Bay Shore Cong. UCC, Long Beach, CA
- Burd, James** to retirement
- Cook, Branwen L.** to Cong. UCC, Roslindale, MA
- Dean-Ware, Deborah** to Lake Edge UCC, Madison, WI
- Elrod, Elise** to Christ's Community UCC, Chicopee, MA
- Ferkin, Kris** to Community UCC, Ashburnham, MA
- Hilyard, Stevens** to retirement
- Kuhn, Kathryn O.** to Saron UCC, Sheboygan Falls, WI
- Olmstead, C. Maxwell** to Dover UCC, Dover, MA
- Remick, Donald** to Second Cong. UCC, Winchester, MA
- Soule, Charles** to Cong. UCC, West Yarmouth, MA
- Stevenson, Diane K.** to Cong. UCC, North Stamford, CT
- Wang, Robert** to Plymouth Cong. UCC, Burlington, WI
- Zehring, John W.** to South UCC, Andover, MA

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

CLERGY DEATHS

- Barr, Browne**, 91, 2/1/2009
- Bell, Richard A.**, 74, 3/31/2009
- Bergstraesser, Edward W.**, 73, 2/25/2009
- Burkhardt, William A.**, 78, 2/7/2009
- Clarke, Peter C.**, 80, 3/12/2009
- Feather, Dean R.**, 91, 3/19/2009
- Houshower, Mark H.**, 88, 3/6/2009
- Inkpen, Priscilla G.**, 62, 3/21/2009
- Kasten, John F.**, 85, 3/13/2009
- Kovacs, Paul**, 73, 4/4/2009
- Lausman, Roy E.**, 83, 2/20/2009
- Loveless, Robert C.**, 87, 3/31/2009
- Miller, George F.**, 86, 4/2/2009
- Mehl, Barbara**, 81, 11/5/2007
- Richwine, Leon F.**, 83, 3/17/2009
- Setchko, Edward S.**, 82, 3/25/2009
- Smith, William P.**, 82, 2/9/2009
- Townley, Judson**, 86, 2/10/2009

Clergy death information is provided by The Pension Boards.

## GETTING A GREEN LIGHT

## Sustainable landscaping reduces church's water use

**B**rea (Calif.) Congregational UCC is committed to caring for God's earth, and is showcasing its commitment in the northwest portion of the church grounds.

The church has eliminated all the grass in the corner area, and has begun transforming it into an area of pathways adorned by plants, shrubs and trees that are drought-tolerant and native to California. By planting a water-wise garden, Moderator Dennis Arp estimates the church's yearly water usage will be quelled by 40,000 gallons.



"Water usage to irrigate lawns is becoming a big concern, especially in the southwest," says Arp. "It doesn't make a whole lot of sense anymore."

Arp and the church's green committee did extensive research and employed the assistance of landscape architects to lend their expertise. Arp knew they were doing the right thing when he realized that many of the landscape architects had similar such landscaping at their own homes.

"One of the women who worked at the nursery mentioned her own yard," tells Arp. "She said that last year, she watered only twice during the summer." Since the region gets very little rain between May through September, using gallons and gallons of water just to keep the lawn green doesn't reflect good stewardship of the earth's resources.

To offset the cost of the new landscaping, which includes Western Redbuds, California Live Oak and Manzanita bushes, church members have been given the opportunity to sponsor plants. "People see it as a way to memorialize loved ones," says Arp. "We have nice plaques engraved, and people take ownership and have a deeper connection with the project."

The Rev. Rick Marshall, pastor of Brea Congregational UCC, and his wife, Ann, have already done the same type of sustainable landscaping in their own front yard. Arp says he and several other church members also have plans to follow suit.

While creation-friendly teaching is going on inside the church walls, Arp says the optimal location of the church building affords the perfect opportunity to lead by example in the community.

"We're on a corner, and it's a very visible spot on Imperial Highway," he says. "We want to make this a very visible element of our ministry, and try to give it a showcase. Hopefully, one of the next steps as we go forward is to be a resource for others who want to do their lawns or residences in the same way, in the same spirit."

In keeping with their new, creation-friendly garden, Brea Congregational UCC has made changes inside the building as well.

The recently renovated meeting hall, which hosts a shelter project twice a year, has



More than 30 church members and community service volunteers helped transform the garden at Brea UCC, including (above, left) Claudia Morales and her mother Maria, as well as (above, right) 4-year-old Nikki and Harlen Matlock, 85, who has been a member of the church for almost 50 years.



more efficient fixtures in the bathrooms. Better insulation and the installation of an attic fan make it easier to keep the building cool without having to use air conditioning.

The church's former pew Bibles have been donated to other organizations and replaced

with the Green Bible (HarperCollins), a Bible printed on recycled paper with a soy-based ink and a cotton/linen cover.

The Green Bible uses green print to highlight all passages that pertain to caring for God's creation.

## Church inhabits certifiably green building

**A**fter years of meeting in schools and gymnasiums, Umstead Park UCC in Raleigh, N.C., finally has a place to call its own. Located in an industrial complex, it's not your typical church building, but it has something that most churches don't: a Gold Standard rating from LEED: Leaders in Energy and Environmental Design.

Issued by the U.S. Green Building Council, the LEED certification is awarded on a points-based system that evaluates energy efficiency.

"Many buildings and architectural firms across the country are striving for this," says the Rev. Doug Long, pastor of Umstead Park UCC. "Just to be certified is a big deal. And we are one of the first churches in the country to receive the gold level."

LEED certification is awarded at three levels: silver, gold and platinum.

The Umstead Park UCC building, built in the 1990s as a home healthcare agency, sat dormant for six years before the congregation purchased it for renovation.

"We were able to do [the renovation] at a relatively low price, because of the way we partnered with an architectural design firm," explains Long. "They own half the building, and we renovated it together. We share a common space, a common bathroom, common parking. All of that was helpful in receiving the LEED certification as well."

The renovation project received points for innovative design, building reuse and construction waste management; energy efficient systems for water and heating and cooling also earned the church high marks, along with the use of low-emitting paints and carpets, and use of daylight. Thoughtful planning for vehicle maximization in the parking lot, and designation for bicycle storage and changing rooms, helped earn the gold level certification.

"We're not trying to pat ourselves on the back," emphasizes Long. "But, hopefully, it will provide an opportunity for other churches to see that they can do these things, which are recognized as environmentally helpful."

After all, Long says, he and the congregation are just pleased to be in the first building they can call their own. "A new building

BEFORE



AFTER



Umstead UCC partnered with an architectural firm that shares the now-renovated space with the church. The building formerly housed a home healthcare agency.

provides opportunities for ministries," says Long. "There are a number of people who probably would try you out as a church, but if you're meeting in a school or a gymnasium, it doesn't afford that kind of feel of permanence that they're looking for. So the building actually makes us much more viable."

To learn more about LEED certification, visit <usgbc.org>.

## 'Earth churches' go for the green

**F**or many churches, caring for the earth goes well beyond Earth Day. And changing old habits and learning new ones takes a conscious, daily effort.

Richmond Beach Congregational UCC in Shoreline, Wash., became a green church a few years ago, after completing a greening process with Earth Ministry, an ecumenical and interfaith organization based in Seattle. The Rev. Joy Haertig says Earth Ministry offers education and activities that "helped the church get over that first hump of making [environmentally friendly practices] a very intentional commitment."

Haertig says the church is committed to buying environmentally safe cleaning supplies, and church members regularly work at a nearby beach, pulling out invasive weeds and replanting the area with bushes and trees.

Pilgrim Congregational UCC in Chattanooga, Tenn., has declared itself an Earth Church by making a covenant to incorporate earth-friendly practices in all they do.

Both churches have done recent renovations on their facilities, installing energy efficient windows, lighting and bathroom fixtures. In Chattanooga, energy efficient light bulbs, for sale at cost, are available for purchase after Sunday morning worship. Materials and special speakers are part of both churches' ongoing challenge to learn more about recycling, gardening, food consump-

tion and other earth-friendly practices.

The Rev. Dan Brown of Pilgrim Congregational UCC feels being an Earth Church is just a natural part of God's calling: "From a biblical and theological point of view, we've been set here as stewards of the earth. We're responsible for one another as human beings, but part of our expression of love for one another is our commitment to love the earth on which we all live."

Haertig agrees. "I have such a strong sense that we are all interconnected, from creation to all human beings across the planet," she says. "The way we live makes such a huge difference on whether insects live or whether rivers continue to flow. It seems very much a part of our faith, in our call to be good stewards."