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Two Sections — Section A



 inside

3 

PEACE  
BUBBLE

*All year, minister sings out daily at noon.*

7 

CAMP  
KATRINA

*UCC crews making a difference in New Orleans.*

13 

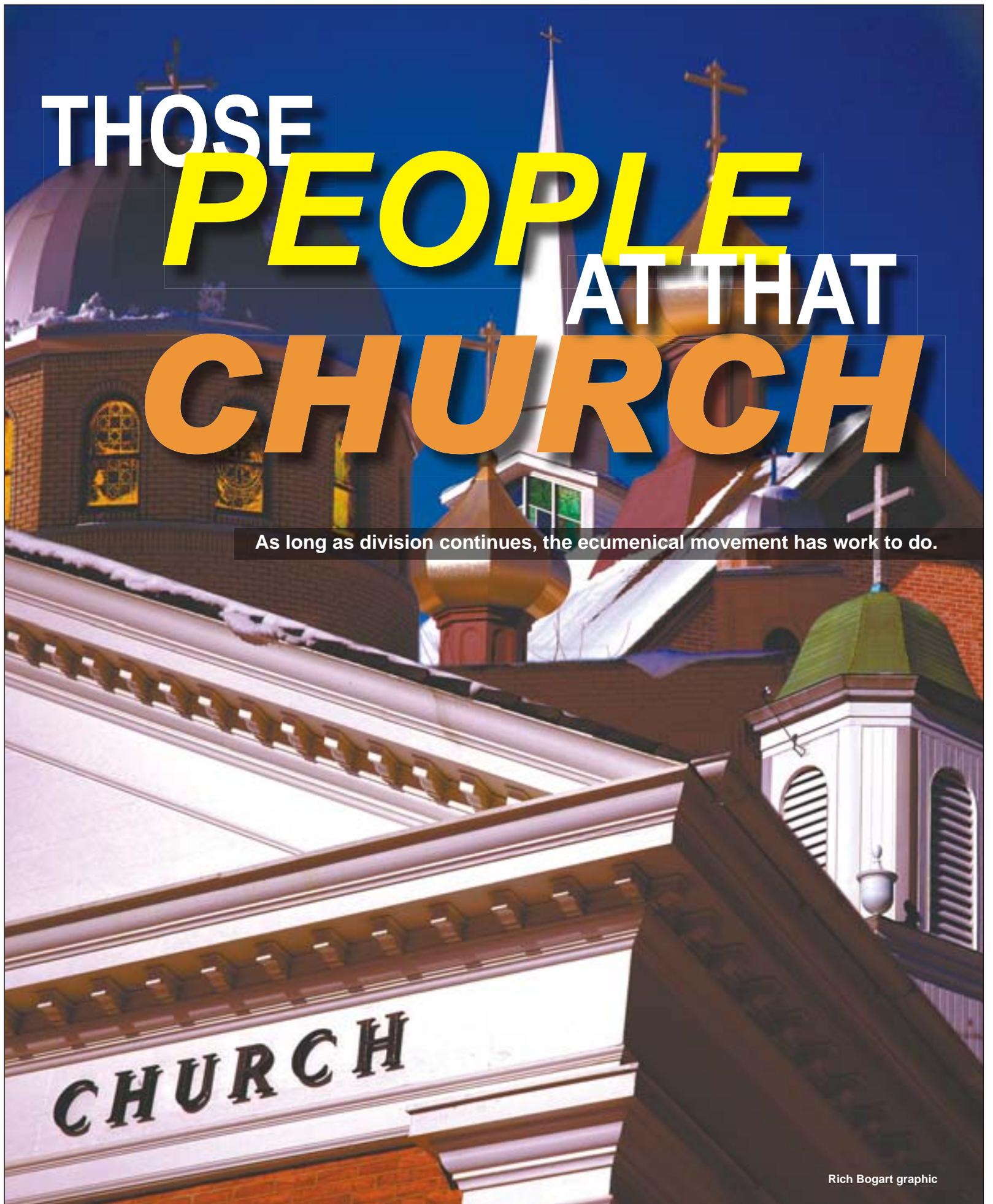
REDEEMER  
LIVES

*Wisconsin church comes back strong after fire.*

20 

HARTFORD  
INSURANCE

*Host city making sure Synod goes smoothly.*



Rich Bogart graphic

## 'What God called me to do'

FROM THE  
COLLEGIUM

José A. Malayang

**I**t's all about the local church — “the basic unit of the life and organization of the United Church of Christ” — declares the UCC's constitution.

Serving the church of Jesus Christ to enable the local church and its members to become God's communal instrument and personal agents of mission, this conviction is the essence of the call to Christian ministry.

Marking in 2007 my 45th year in ordained ministry, I am truly and humbly thankful to God and to my parents whose idea it originally was, or so they or I thought, for the call.

The United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP), my ordaining denomination, assigned me to my first parish, a small-town church and part of a circuit of seven even-smaller mountain churches. Other calls would follow: as staff to a university church and as senior pastor of a large city church. Immigrating to the United States in 1970, I served on the staff of a Presbyterian congregation in a suburb, followed by 14 years of pastoring a yoked charge of UCC churches in rural Michigan.

And then, somewhat unexpectedly, came the call to be on a UCC Conference staff, followed by 12 years in the UCC's national setting, serving three different entities including Local Church Ministries (LCM), one of the UCC's four covenanted ministries in the new structure of July 2000.

Throughout the years and in every setting of ministry, the joy that beats in my heart and the passion that drives my efforts was the well-being and wellness of local churches. Indeed, my ministry was and is all about the local church.

The anxiety and reluctance I felt when called to the Southern California Conference staff — I didn't want to leave a local church pastorate — vanished in my excitement to do church development: starting and revitalizing churches. And the UCC's Office for Church Life and Leadership, one of the national instrumentalities I served, was mostly about supporting the all-important task of providing good leadership in our churches.

Briefly working with staff colleagues at the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries' evangelism and local church development was also about programmatic efforts at birthing or renewing churches.

The peak of self-fulfillment in these calls was being “called by election” by the General Synod and LCM to my present ministry. It was — is — the height, because in the 2000 new structure of doing mission, it created four program foci, of which one is LCM and its primary mission is to support, strengthen and celebrate local churches.

As a child of “foreign” mission, I would have loved being part of Wider Church Ministries. And with my years of social activism, including efforts to bring down a U.S.-supported dictatorship in my home country, I would have liked the work of Justice and Witness Ministries.

But LCM was and is where my heart beats ardently, where my passion is stimulated continually — not for LCM's sake, but for the good of the whole church and the church of Jesus Christ.

God always knew what God called me to do. Thanks be to God.

*The Rev. José A. Malayang, executive minister for Local Church Ministries, is a member of the UCC's five-person Collegium of Officers. Celebrating his 45th ordination anniversary this year, Malayang has actually spent 47 years in continuous service to the church.*

INDEED, MY MINISTRY was  
and is all about the  
**local church.**

## ► Making any difference?

The UCC's Wider Church Ministries is seeking grant applications for the “Make a Difference!” Genesis Fund, which provides seed money for innovative, experimental, faith-based projects that represent a new initiative in Christian mission.

Grants can support either domestic or international projects. The next application deadline is March 15. More information and application forms are available online at <ucc.org/wcm>.

## ► Generous partners

The UCC's Central Atlantic Conference presented a second-mile check for nearly \$167,000 to Our Church's Wider Mission in late November. The money comes from the sale of property once owned by **First Congregational UCC of Closter, N.J.**, a small congregation near the New York State line. The church closed two years ago, holding its last service at Easter in 2005.

“[The church] turned the property over to the CAC asking that we help **Gillbott Korean UCC**, their tenant of 13 years, [as well as] assist new church development and help undergird the financial health of the Conference,” said the Rev. John Deckenback, CAC Minister.

The Conference board also voted to tithe 10 percent of the sale's net proceeds to national OCWM.

The Rev. William C. Green, who heads the UCC's stewardship and church finances ministry, accepted the check for \$166,821.99, and he praised CAC leadership for its “great example,” by using its money to strengthen local churches, the Conference and the UCC's wider mission.

## ► New church fever

The E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation has granted \$50,000 to support the UCC's church development network, especially in the Southeastern United States.

The grant will be used to fund the first year of the UCC's Nehemiah Leadership Institute for New Church Development, says the Rev. David Schoen of the UCC's evangelism ministry.

“This funding will support a cooperative program between the Southeast Conference, [UCC-related] Lancaster Theological Seminary, Candler School of Theology [at Emory University in Atlanta] and Local Church Ministries (LCM) to train new church developers and coaches, as well as support the growing new church development network in Conferences and National Ministries,” Schoen says.



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## SHORTHAND



The first New Church Planter and Coach Training Institute is being planned for the week of Aug. 12 at Candler School of Theology.

Last April, LCM's board of directors — affirming that “now is the time for new church development” — voted to endorse an ambitious strategy for planting and welcoming 250 new churches into the UCC by 2011 and as many as 1,600 new congregations by 2021. The plan has also been affirmed by the UCC's Council of Conference Ministers.

LCM also has earmarked \$200,000 for the Nehemiah Project.

## ► Amistad oath

Incoming Governor Deval Patrick (D-Mass.), an African American, took the oath of office on Jan. 4 by placing his hand on a Bible given to John Quincy Adams by Africans held captive aboard the Amistad cargo ship.

The Bible was borrowed from the Adams National Historic Park in Quincy, Mass.

The Amistad story is significant history in the UCC, since many black and white Congregationalists in New England formed the Amistad Support Committee that aided the illegally captured and traded Africans.

Adams, a Congregationalist and former U.S. President, argued on behalf of the Africans in front of the U.S. Supreme Court and secured their freedom in 1841. The Amistad Support Committee went on to continue its anti-racism work as the UCC-related American Missionary Association. That organization became part of the UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries in 2000.

## ► Bipartisan church

The 110th U.S. Congress includes nine UCC members — five Republicans and four Democrats.

Five out of 100 U.S. Senators are UCC — Daniel Akaka (D-Hawaii), Max Baucus (D-Mont.), Judd Gregg (R-N.H.), Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.) and Barack Obama (D-Ill.).

Only four of 435 House seats are occupied by UCC members, and all are Republicans: Thelma Drake (R-Va.), Mark Kirk (R-Ill.), Jim Ramstad (R-Minn.) and Fred Upton (R-Mich.).

The UCC's presence in the Senate reached a high of six two years ago, before Jon Corzine (D-N.J.), who is UCC, left to become New Jersey's governor.

Ohio Sen. Sherrod Brown (D), who is Lutheran, worships on occasion at his wife's church. Pulitzer-prize-winning columnist Connie Schultz, Brown's spouse, is UCC.

## ► Vieques inaction

Actor Edward James Olmos is criticizing the U.S. and Puerto Rican governments for not moving faster to clean up the site of a former bombing range on Puerto Rico's Vieques Island.

Olmos, who stars in the TV series “Battlestar Galactica” and was an Oscar nominee in 1988 for “Stand and Deliver,” says officials “have done nothing” to clean up the area tainted by dangerous pollutants nearly four years after the departure of the U.S. Navy. The actor held a press conference to draw more public attention to the government's inaction.

The UCC General Synod voiced early opposition to the Navy's bombing in Vieques.

**'NEW PAGE, NOT SAME PAGE'****Hope for more-unified national structure espoused; specifics yet to be ironed out**By **J. Bennett Guess**  
Editor

A commitment to building a more-unified UCC national setting was affirmed — in principle — at the close of a difficult and sometimes contentious meeting of elected denominational leaders on Jan. 5-6. However, the exact form and function of that more-cooperative structure, as well as a timeline for implementing it, were left open for future conversation and negotiation.

"We're not on the same page, but we are on a new page," is how one participant described the meeting in Cleveland. Over two days, about 40 representatives of the UCC's Executive Council and the church's four national Covenanted Ministries, as well as Affiliated and Associated Ministries and the Council of Conference Ministers, gathered to present and discuss the five autonomous boards' divergent reactions to a "streamlining" governance proposal first introduced by the five-person Collegium of Officers last fall.

Justice and Witness Ministries and Local Church Ministries voted last fall not to support the plan. Wider Church Ministries, the Office of General Ministries and the Executive Council voted to support it.

While it appeared that the Collegium's initial proposal was now dead, the meeting's second day did coalesce around an apparent commitment to exploring different potential models of governance that might allow for enhanced communication, financial development, human resources and the articulation of shared national mission priorities and programs.

Still, throughout the meeting, some participants expressed deeply-held concerns, despite the need to cooperate around mending some obvious and necessary structural flaws, that certain national ministries not be stripped of their historic mandates, lest some commitments be lost to centralization.

"Those on the margins are never helped by centralization," said the Rev. John Gregory-Davis, co-pastor of **Meriden Congregational UCC in New Hampshire** and vice chair of Justice and Witness Ministries.

The Rev. José A. Malayang, executive minister of Local Church Ministries, described the meeting as "vintage UCC" with "a good mixture of honest and open disagreement and discussion."

While Malayang noted the authentic love for the UCC held by all participants, he also felt the meeting lacked adequate conversation about the history and legacy of UCC forebears, who had "consistently resisted creating singular or centralized structure for our national ministries."

The meeting ended with most apparently agreeing that the Collegium's initially stated timeline — which included approval by General Synod delegates in June 2007 — seemed unlikely; however, all held out hope that some consensus might emerge and be discussed at this summer's national gathering.

The group also explicitly named and affirmed its commitment to maintaining diversity and inclusivity as broadly shared concerns for governance of the national church. "Any further work on structure will

be explicit about guaranteeing diversity and building on those guarantees," the Rev. John H. Thomas, general minister and president, said, summarizing the group's sentiment, to nodding heads.

"We need to honor the process of what happened here," said the Rev. Yvette Flunder, pastor of **City of Refuge UCC in San Francisco** and board chair of Justice and Witness Ministries, "and we can say that we have regained some momentum for addressing some critical issues."

**WE NEED TO ACKNOWLEDGE** that there were difficult and even painful points of the **CONVERSATION.**

— Iowa Conference Minister Richard Pleva

Early in the meeting, Flunder said she and others needed to claim the meeting as "safe space" where concerns could be shared openly without feeling that a need for group agreement would trump individual honesty and conviction.

Legitimate concerns were being expressed, Flunder and others stressed repeatedly.

"We need to acknowledge that there were difficult and even painful points of the conversation," said Iowa Conference Minister Richard Pleva, during the meeting's wrap-up session.

The Rev. Barbara Kershner Daniel, pastor of **Evangelical Reformed UCC in Frederick, Md.**, and a member of the Office of General Ministries board, said she sensed, from the beginning, a need among participants to clear the air of past misconceptions, inaccuracies and hurt feelings.

"The group, as a whole, felt that the way we are currently structured may not be the best," Kershner Daniel said. "But we also knew we had to be honest and keep with the conversation and not just give up."

Richard Fluechtling, a member of **First Congregational UCC in Madison, Wis.**, and LCM's board chair, told United Church News, "The process is going to move forward with some new insight and it's clear the Holy Spirit is going to have to be in that process."

As the meeting adjourned, participants named specific outcomes, including "listening with care and respect," "being guided by new insights," "a rediscovered love for the UCC," and the identification of "some potential models to explore with intentionality."

On the morning of Jan. 6, three potential structural models were presented by individual participants and then vetted by the larger group, with each idea receiving some level of support. The proposals, while not set in stone, seemed to emerge as hopeful fuel for future conversation.

At press time, the Collegium and board chairs planned to appoint a joint task force that will continue working on structural adjustment issues.

**SING OUT FOR PEACE**

The Rev. Jerry Leggett signs and sings for peace by his stage-camper "Peace Bubble." (Photo furnished)

**'Peace Bubble' coming to a setting near you**

Singer-Songwriter Jerry Leggett, a UCC minister, believes there are at least six billion "bubbles" for peace on this planet, but they just need to be called forth and released into the atmosphere. That's where you — one of the earth's 6 billion human beings — come into the picture.

On Jan. 12, Leggett began a yearlong, nationwide peace mission that will take him to communities across the nation, including 50 UCC churches in observance of the denomination's 50th anniversary celebration.

Along the way, wherever he happens to be on any given day, he's stopping at noon and singing about peace. Leggett's rousing, live music will take place on an intimate sound stage — a converted, tear-shaped, vintage RV that has been newly christened as "The Peace Bubble."

Leggett started his cross-country musical trek for peace on Martin Luther King Sunday at the **Church of the Beatitudes UCC in Phoenix, Ariz.**, but his mission will ultimately take him to UCC settings across the country, including stops in Biloxi, Miss.; Manhattan, N.Y.; and Wounded Knee, S.D. He will wind up his travels in December at Bellevue, Wash. The tour will travel a southern route during the winter months, before heading north.

"The tour will include stops at 50 congregations to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the United Church of Christ," says the Rev. Loey Powell of the UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries, a sponsor of the national tour. "We are making plans for Jerry and The Peace Bubble to appear at congregations along the route and a variety of UCC venues including the General Synod in Hartford, Conn., in June."

In addition to stops at UCC churches, the tour will include regular noon-time sing-outs where people in communities across the country will be asked to envision

a more-peaceful world and share that vision in videotaped interviews. Leggett says he wants to ask "children, grandparents, friends and neighbors to answer the simple question: 'What would a more peaceful world be like?'"

The tour is "a nonsectarian, nonpartisan effort to celebrate the ideals that make for peace in the heart and peace in the world," says Leggett. "What if we all paused for a moment of peace at noontime and pondered another world? What if the world we imagine is possible?"

**WE ARE MAKING PLANS** for Jerry and The Peace Bubble to appear at congregations **along the route.**

— the Rev. Loey Powell  
Justice and Witness Ministries

Leggett's musical menu will include classic peace standards by the Beatles, Bob Dylan and Tracy Chapman, plus a mix of his own soul-stirring Leggett originals. Other musicians, poets, writers and peacemakers will join the tour as it meanders across the U.S. to public parks, schools, churches, synagogues, mosques, military bases and city halls, Leggett says.

"We hope the tour will give voice to those ordinary folks across our land whose dreams for a better world are not always heard or understood — or as it is said in the UCC, that 'another world is possible,'" says the Rev. Art Cribbs, one of the tour's co-organizers and pastor of **Christian Fellowship Community Congregational UCC in San Diego, Calif.**

To inquire about a booking at your church, see a tour itinerary, or listen to free audio samples of Leggett's music, visit [peacebubble.org](http://peacebubble.org).

## OUR 50TH ANNIVERSARY PRAYER?

## 'Lord, create in my life and in my church a miracle'


 NEVER  
OURSELVES  
ALONE

**J. Bennett Guess**  
Editor

As a child, about this time every year, I would play under the legs of a large wingback chair in our living room. That chair was located — for most of the year — in the exact spot where our Christmas tree stood during the holidays.

There, I would carefully run my hands over the then-fashionable green shag carpeting, looking — hopefully — for a stray pine needle, some sign that the magic of Christmas, now long past by a child's calendar, had not been a figment of my imagination.

It wasn't always easy to unearth a trace of the tree's prior existence, due to my mother's proclivity to vacuuming just for fun. But when I did spy something, the find was a gem. It was a symbol that Christmastime, with all its mystery and excitement, was real indeed and would someday return — even if its trappings were now tucked away in stored boxes of decorations.

Even in the dreariness of post-Christmas winter, cast dimmer by the removal of holiday lights, hope can stay alive, thanks to a stubborn brown pine needle.

But it's always been that way. For children

and adults alike, hope sustains itself on very little. Hope requires no linear thought, few certainties and not much hard evidence.

Hope transforms past failures into new plans, crisis into opportunity, and life's uncertainties into experiments in trust. That "new you" — the one born with January's resolutions or last night's prayer — is kept alive by the hopes that buoy your dreams.

These days, I'm much too big to play under my parents' wingback chair, but I will come clean and admit that my faith life has been in "search mode" lately. I've been looking for something. For an ordained pastor, that's not always an easy thing to acknowledge.

Perhaps, as a church journalist, it's the routine church fights I too often witness. Or maybe it's the negative tone and pessimism so often expressed about the church — and its leaders — in the dozens of letters my office receives each week.

My faith crisis is likely rooted, at least in part, in the national setting's ever-uncertain financial realities and the now-routine practice of saying goodbye to good colleagues — more than 100 during the past three years — who have left our budget-strapped organization behind.

Or, it could be how religion, in general, is used culturally and politically as a weapon, a tool and a trophy. Mistrust of "the other" spreads and festers, while chapter and verse are quoted to justify the division. It gets old.

Whatever it is, I do find myself moving my hand over that proverbial green shag of my

youth, looking for *something* — a sign, a symbol, a project, a task to inspire a measure of new hope about the future of the institution to which I've given my life's service. And, just recently, I found something.

In early January, my good friend, the Rev. Jo Hudson, pastor of **Cathedral of Hope UCC in Dallas, Texas**, issued a heartfelt challenge to her congregation to experiment communally with a prayer. Since hearing her idea, it has stayed with me.

Jo is asking her 4,300 parishioners, during Lent, to begin and end each day with a single, short and sincere prayer: "Lord, I offer my life to you. I ask that you create in my life and in the life of our church a miracle. Amen."

As she says, "If each of us did that, wouldn't we make God's dream come true?"

In Jo's challenge, I found in the fringe what, I think, needs to be centerpiece during the UCC's 50th anniversary year — a sense of shared urgency to discover a new day, a new us. We need the prayerful imagination to discover again the "united and uniting" spirit that swirled about our predecessors during the 1950s.

The beauty of Jo's prayer is that it's a posture, not a prescription. It is not a definitive plan, but it is an openness to expecting and receiving one. What is God's dream for me, for you, and for the UCC? I really don't know, but I'd sure like to find out.

"Lord, I offer my life to you. I ask that you create in my life and in my church a miracle."

Will you join me in that prayer this year?



THE BEAUTY OF THE PRAYER is that it's a posture, not a prescription. It is not a definitive plan, but it is an OPENNESS to expecting and receiving one."

## LETTERS



Behold, Mary

I celebrated your recent articles highlighting the Virgin Mary in the life of the United Church of Christ and the Protestant tradition. [Dec/Jan 2007].

While it may be surprising that there are two UCC congregations bearing the name St. Mary, it should be pointed out that the Reformed tradition of the UCC (from which those two congregations hailed) viewed the Church as our "mother" through which we are fed and nurtured in our faith. We would not be too far off to take the next step and state that the figure of Mary represents the Church as our mother.

Many members of the UCC would no doubt be shocked to learn that Ulrich Zwingli, a founder of the Reformed tradition, kept the *Ave Maria* or "Hail Mary" in his original Zurich liturgy of the Word, and that Zwingli himself defended her perpetual virginity, joining Luther and other Reformers who lifted up her place in the life of the faithful.

Perhaps it is now time that we in the UCC and the larger Protestant tradition, recognize that when Jesus looks down from the cross and utters to Mary, "Woman, here is your son,"

and then to the beloved disciple, "Here is your mother," he was metaphorically speaking of the relationship that would exist between the members of the Church, represented by the beloved disciple and Jesus' mother Mary, now seen as our Mother as well (John 19:26-27).

Scripture tells us, "From that hour the disciple took her into his own home." And our Roman and Orthodox brothers and sisters have welcomed her into their houses of worship ever since.

**The Rev. Raymond J. Jachowski**  
St. Paul's UCC, Robesonia, Pa.

The other Mary

The poignant stories found in the feature article "The Invisible Protestant Mary" [Dec.-Jan.] that long for a more "Catholic" vision for the virgin mother of Jesus as a saint to whom prayers of intercession and devotion could be offered, also notes another perception of her as the "first among the disciples."

An interesting dichotomy can be developed concerning "the invisible Protestant Mary" by noting that, whereas the Bible refers to Mary, the mother of Jesus, only in motherly roles (asking her son to provide more wine at a wedding and puzzled when, at times, he rejects familial obligations), the early Gnostic gospels point to another "Mary" — Mary Magdalene — as the follower (disciple?) who knew Jesus' heart.

**Wilbur R. Morton**  
Palo Alto, Calif.

Know us when you join us

I joined the UCC in the 60s after marrying an entrenched Congregationalist and have come to love our church with its covenant re-

lationships that keep us theologically honest and socially aware and involved in the work of our still-speaking God.

In the articles about Mary, I was somewhat frightened by the conclusions and suggestions of those former Catholic clergy. Did they spend enough time with Tillich, the Niehurs and the others who have helped us clarify our convictions before they signed on with the UCC?

While reading, I felt as if my beloved church was under attack. Our polity is confusing to outsiders but should be embraced by those on the inside.

**Betty Wentworth**  
Union Congregational UCC, St. Louis Park, Minn.  
Minnetonka, Minn.

When Christian meant inclusive

"Megachurch joins liberal denomination" was the interesting headline in our local newspaper describing the admittance of the Cathedral of Hope in Dallas into the UCC.

I don't mind being labeled "liberal." But it's interesting that the article described the UCC as going after the "very liberal who have a particular religious vision that includes inclusiveness."

Once upon a time it seems that people of faith who were inclusive, welcoming all people at the table, including the most oppressed minorities, were just called Christians.

**The Rev. Larry Reimer**  
United Church of Gainesville, Fla.

UCC's 'persistent infidelity'

The 293-year-old First Congregational Church in Hamilton, Mass., has left the UCC. When one sees a church with a long history like

this feeling the necessity to part with churches of long held ancestral connections, it is akin to the escape of refugees who leave their beloved homeland because life is intolerable there.

It brings to mind the days of the Pilgrims who left the shore of their English homeland to reclaim their freedom to worship God according to scriptural ways.

Like persistent infidelity, the total loss of covenantal ties were ignored in the UCC, and sacred long-cherished ties abandoned for new lovers.

**The Rev. Albert W. Kovacs**  
Hungarian Reformed UCC  
Woodbridge, N.J.

'A brain, a heart, a home — the nerve'

Kudos to the person(s) who came up with the Dorothy/Wizard of Oz (brain/heart/courage) ad I saw on the UCC website. It brilliantly captures why many of us are members of the UCC. I hope this very clever ad will be used extensively, especially in the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community where it will truly resonate. Thanks for this energy boost.

**Rick Carson**  
St. Petersburg, Fla.  
Member, Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC

*EDITOR'S NOTE: The piece is part of a Stillspeaking brochure and poster series, "16 reasons why UCC members love their church." Both can be ordered at the Stillspeaking Store at <stillspeaking.com>.*

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

RECOGNIZING OPPRESSION AS A FIRST STEP

'Women and children first' must be more than sea cruise rhetoric

COMMENTARY



Sharon Ellis Davis

Three years ago, my husband and I were celebrating our honeymoon by taking a seven-day cruise. Although both well-traveled, a cruise was something neither of us had experienced before.

Boarding the ship in New Orleans, we checked into our beautiful quarters for "just married couples." And, soon, we were called to the ship's lower level where all guests were asked to review safety and rescue operations in case of emergency.

We lined up on the outside deck of the ship in several rows. The orientation leader then asked all the women and children to take a step forward and exclaimed, "These are the people who will be rescued first in case the ship begins to sink."

I had several reactions. First, taking advantage of comic relief, I smiled and waved back at my husband, saying "Bye-bye." Then, second, I began to think how nice it was that this boat should have a "women and children first" policy, a place that values and cares for women and children most, especially when I compared that value to the broader culture in which we live.

When I seriously reflect on the persistent violence against women and children — rape, incest, emotional and physical abuse, unfair economic wages, and lack of health care for single, female-headed families — I ask, "Are we producing legislation, attitudes and people who care enough about women and children to ensure they have equal treatment and protection under the law?"

Last October, during Domestic Violence Awareness Month, I led a workshop entitled "Not in My Church" for 50 clergy, laypersons and denominational representatives. The goal was to increase awareness that violence against women and children, and how it occurs in all our communities of faith.

During our final session, a 60-year-old male made a profound confession. He admitted that, as educated and intelligent as he was (a former college dean, pastor and community activist), he would not have been able to interpret violence-laden scriptures (such as those relating to the rapes of Dinah and

Tamar and the story of David and Bathsheba) from a feminist, womanist or abused woman's perspective. He also acknowledged that, beforehand, his mind was not attuned to recognizing the needs of abused women within his congregation. His skills and competency were lacking.



Are we PRODUCING LEGISLATION, attitudes and people who care enough about women and children to ensure they have EQUAL TREATMENT and protection under the law?"

I appreciated his boldness and willingness to confess his inadequacies, because I believe he is not alone. His situation reflects that of many males who are leading faith institutions and denominations.

We cannot begin to put "women and children first" until we become sensitized to their needs and circumstances. We cannot put "women and children first" until we see them as valued contributors to the survival of our society. "Women and children first" must be more than rhetoric.

As church leaders, we must facilitate societal transformation that deconstructs any theology, doctrine or values system — be it religious or otherwise — that oppresses women and children, making them vulnerable to abuse and violence.

Luke 6:45 states, "The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good." As clergy, denominational leaders, legislators and leaders in our society, we will ultimately be judged by the fruit we produce, not the words we say. If that fruit comes from the heart, it will produce liberation, freedom, justice and value for all of God's creation.

*The Rev. Sharon Ellis Davis is a UCC pastor and adjunct professor at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago. A Chicago police officer for 28 years and a full-time police chaplain, she is a trainer for FaithTrust Institute.*

MEETING OF MINDS

God's kingdom is comparable to the 'surprise of recognition'

COMMENTARY



Kathleen Kopitsky

I most often find the Kingdom of God in the surprise of recognition.

In my work as program manager at a group home where eight men with mental retardation live, one man with Down Syndrome developed Alzheimer's disease. His name was Carl, and his decline was rapid.

As Carl reached the point where he no longer understood our words, I advised the staff that how we approached Carl was now very important.

He might not be able to understand our words, but he would be keenly sensitive to our affect — our mood, tone and pace. I asked us to be gentle and to remember to always smile.

At the end of each day, Carl would arrive back home from "Day Habilitation" by mid-afternoon. We would greet him warmly, give him a snack and something to drink and then help him out of his wheelchair and into a recliner. There, he could put his feet up and rest before the fuss of dinner with nine other people. It was there, in that reclined position, that Carl taught me about living in the Kingdom of God.

I was nearing the end of a frustrating day when I noticed Carl alone in the living room with his feet up in the recliner, and I sat in the chair next to him.

At first he did not notice me. I poked Carl gently on the thigh. He did not respond. I poked him again. He moved to push my hand away. I poked him again. He looked at me, finally — a bit irritated. I smiled at him and said, "Hi Carl." Yet still he said nothing. It was as if he did not see me. Clearly

he did not know who I was. I continued to hold his gaze with mine, smiling.

All of a sudden, it was as if the fog lifted and Carl recognized me.

He probably did not remember my name nor why I was poking at him, but I believe he recognized me as someone he trusted. His look was one of great surprise, as if he had just opened a fabulous gift — one both unexpected and perfect. His surprise at seeing me also surprised me greatly.



I BELIEVE he recognized me as someone he trusted."

We sat there, gleaming at each other with the surprise of recognition, and then we both laughed. Carl then reached out for a hug, and I was happy to oblige.

There is much delight in the surprise of recognition. Where do we find the Kingdom of God in our lives? How do we bring the Kingdom of God closer into being? It is not in bombing other countries into democracy. It is not in denying citizens all of the rights of citizenship. It is not in finding new ways to divide people against each other.

We find the Kingdom of God when we are open to the surprise of recognizing the presence of God not only in ourselves, but also in the unsuspecting others among us.

*Kathleen Kopitsky, a graduate of UCC-related Andover Newton Theological School in Massachusetts, is a residential program manager for Minute Man Arc in Concord, Mass.*



OVERHEARD

**"The growing violence in Iraq, the enormous suffering being experienced by the citizens of Iraq and the anguish of countless American families who have lost beloved sons and daughters to death and horrific injury calls for profound lament and repentance, not for stubborn commitment to the unilateralism and militarism that has been the hallmark of our failed policy in Iraq."**

— The Rev. John H. Thomas, in a statement following President Bush's national address calling for more U.S. troops in Iraq. (Jan. 17)

**"Because this is an unjust war, the church must urge political leaders of our country to disengage from this war with the least possible harm."**

— From a joint statement signed by 43 UCC pastors from southwestern Wisconsin in *The Capital Times*. (Jan. 18)

**"Most churches are homogenous and they're comfortable with that. We felt God was calling us to do a new thing."**

— The Rev. Angela Ying, senior pastor at *Bethany UCC in Seattle*, in the *Seattle Times* story, "A few churches cross the racial divide." (Jan. 15)

**"We ask that the emotion that we most feel is that we be reinvigorated in your spirit."**

— A prayer offered by the Rev. Doug Patterson, pastor of *Smithfield UCC in Pittsburgh*, in a worship service after a fire caused significant damage to the historic church. (*Post-Gazette*, Jan. 10)



TABULATIONS

COST OF (REAL) LIVING

Plymouth UCC in Milwaukee, Wis., has seen an increase in both church expenses and mission giving. During the past 11 years, average worship attendance has grown from 130 to 200 weekly, but the budget has grown too. Here's a breakdown.

BUILDING COSTS	24%	▲
STAFFING COSTS	89%	▲
*OCWM SUPPORT	65%	▲
SPECIAL OFFERINGS	70%	▲

"Part of our story is implementing energy saving measures that have kept our facility costs down, embodied our environmental values and freed up money for mission and outreach," reports the Rev. Andrew Warner, pastor.

*\*Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM) is the UCC's shared purse for ministry and mission that supports work in the Association, Conference, national and international settings of the church.*

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Source: Andrew Warner

Jesus wandered alone for 40 days.

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ROMANS 10:8

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## 'HOPE IS BLOOMING IN NEW ORLEANS'

people | places | things in the news

## UCC work crews making a difference, one house at a time

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Dennis Murphy is a member of Mt. Sinai Congregational UCC in New York. He and others from the church have participated in several work camps in New Orleans. Below is an account of his crew's experiences. On Jan. 13-14, Murphy attended "Resurrection Weekend" at Good Shepherd UCC in Metairie, La., celebrating the church's much-anticipated return to its sanctuary.

By Dennis Murphy

When Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf States in August 2005, the UCC, along with dozens of other agencies, launched efforts to aid the victims of this disaster.

The UCC hurricane-response motto — "Hope Shall Bloom" — became the slogan for individuals and groups who traveled south to be part of the recovery. Our church — Mt. Sinai Congregational UCC in New York — was one of them.

In February of last year, 20 of us traveled to New Orleans for a week to rebuild. This meant gutting houses and transporting a family's ruined possessions and placing them into 6-foot piles on the sidewalk. Then, added to the pile, were mold-covered wallboard, crumbling insulation, and leaking freezers, refrigerators and washing machines.

Finally, after leaving the house with bare-wooden studs and rafters with nails neatly removed, the actual rebuilding would be done by a future group.

In October 2006, 18 of us returned to New Orleans for our second rebuilding effort. We met a number of individuals who once had been evacuated from the city and, after months of being separated from their homes and scattered throughout the country, they had returned and decided to stay and rebuild their lives.

One of those we met was Charles, a 72-year-old Honduran-born man, who became our "poster man," our personal symbol of hope. A 35-year resident of Pleasure Street in the Gentilly area of New Orleans, Charles first approached our group while we were taking a break from gutting a house in his neighborhood. It was then we first learned his story.

On Aug. 29, 2005, the waters of the Mississippi River swept up the 9th ward Industrial Canal, broke over the levees and sent waves through his house. He and his wife were rescued by the National Guard.

After the disaster, they were sent to Georgia where a church took them in, arranging for them to live in a fully-furnished parsonage. In March, six months later, they finally returned and Charles began gutting his own house. His FEMA trailer sat aside his two-story, wood-frame house.

With a sweep of his hand against a wall in his living room, Charles showed how high the water had risen.

Now, Charles' wall is new and neatly painted and he has begun to rebuild and restore all the walls, moldings, floors, and electrical wiring. Light pours into the living room through the windows he was able to

purchase from a nearby Lowe's.

He's clearly motivated by his personal motto — "rubbing two pennies together hard enough, you may get another."

He showed us the long list of things yet to do with whatever money he would have left after his social security check was used for living expenses. It appears that he will need to be rubbing lots of pennies together to try to fund his own rebuilding effort.

On Nov. 11, 2006, The New York Times reported that nearly 79,000 New Orleans families have applied for the federally-funded "Road Home" assistance program, but only 1,721 have been told how much grant money they will receive. And just 22 have actually received access to the cash.

We learned important things from people like Charles. His penny-on-penny philosophy stayed with us, even after we returned from New Orleans.

On our last day, we returned to East New Orleans to view the house that 10 of us had gutted on our last trip. It sits only 100 feet from another canal that overflowed after Katrina. This small, single-level, brick-front house is located in a middle-class community and is owned by a special education teacher, Cassie, and her two children.

Cassie's house was flooded by six feet of water and sat abandoned for six months before our UCC work group arrived — opening the front door and gutting the entire house. We left it after one week — as we did with the house on Pleasure Street — with bare rafters and studs, awaiting actual rebuilding.

Upon our return, we peered through the new door and windows. There were the beginnings of electrical wiring, a new bathtub and fresh tiling on the floors.

Outside, the roof had been repaired, and a new fence enclosed the property. In this middle-class community, there were also signs of life.

Nine months ago, this community was eerily silent. There were no dogs barking, birds singing or construction sounds. Now there are more FEMA trailers, along with sounds of hammers, generators and saws. Together, contractors and homeowners are working to restore the city's houses.

Our group also helped to renovate the second floor of a small church that will provide space for bunk beds and showers for 50 volunteers.

Hundreds of houses still require work, and more will need a place to stay when they come to help.

"We will be here forever," says the Rev. Alan Coe, the UCC's Disaster Recovery Coordinator in New Orleans.

Hope does and will bloom in New Orleans. We saw it with our own eyes.



Wider Church Ministries' Health and Wholeness Advocacy intern the Rev. Lori Tisher photographs the progress of the National Staff Disaster Recovery Work Group as the team guts a flood-damaged home in New Orleans.

Damrias Vélez photo

## Become a 'glimpse of heaven' to those in troubled water

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Lucas Moeller, a member of Germany's Evangelical Church and a yearlong intern with the UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries in Cleveland, joined a group of national UCC staff that traveled to New Orleans in December — at their own expense — to form a work camp and assist with rebuilding of homes there. The following is Moeller's reflections on the experience.

By Lucas Moeller

Sleeping on the ground, with snakes and spiders moving about, little privacy and hard physical work doesn't sound like an experience most people would like to have.

Why would anyone desire to leave a secure office space or the benefits of living in a nice house to swing a sledge hammer?

But, for a part of the body, the community, conditions have changed. And how can I move into new regions of social work with confidence while I know a part of my own community is suffering?

When Hurricane Katrina hit, many of my brothers and sisters lost their shelter, their homes — places of joy and memory that gave them security. And the very moment the U.S. government decided it was more important to spend most of its efforts and money on war, and when insur-

ance companies decided to make it complicated for families to get funds and rebuild houses, the people in New Orleans lost something even more important: they lost their hope.

Years ago, an internationally recognized institute discovered that the only way humanity might unite would be under a threat so enormous that people would forget about the personal advantages and ideological reasons which separate them, and instead work together as a community to defeat the threat.

Unfortunately, in New Orleans, it is not an imagined threat any more — it is reality. And, for too many in New Orleans, what fails to be a reality is the presence of a community to stand side by side, helping rebuild the neighborhood.

The rabid individualism of our nation connects with materialism and selfishness and breeds fear for future outcomes of catastrophes. Somebody has to make the first step to break the cycle and to help the most vulnerable who have lost all their hope.

God is great, but God won't get down to earth, to the people in New Orleans, to fix their broken houses and hopes. God acts through our hearts and hands and gives us the strength to accept this mission.

What is one week of our comfortable lives compared to the rich

experiences that we, the body of Christ, can carry home? Together we move away from being organizers, information providers or connection makers, to doing something first hand. We can see great need, but we also can feel a hammer in our hands, and make progress in the effort to assist.

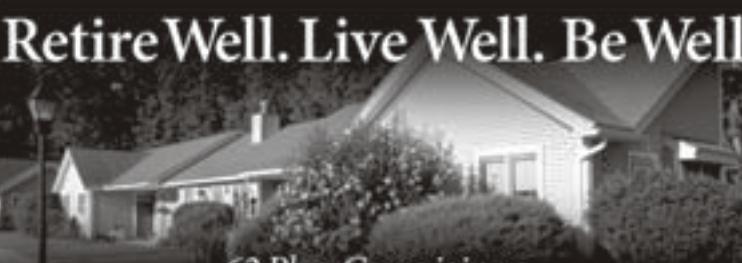
According to thankful people I met, this is the only help they can depend on — the efforts of ordinary people like you and me. These memories have refilled my spirit, and I know again what my social work and ministry is for. We, as the UCC, encourage people to experience change every single day, simply by making steps in a progressive and different, more justice-oriented future.

How can we be truly honest to those who suffer, and live in balance with ourselves, if we are not willing to take the lead and risk the change by bringing the justice we believe in to the people who really need it?

If we accept this challenge we can pass this God-given strength and passion onto our family members, so it can become a glimpse of heaven to people who may only know troubled water.

Learn more about participating in a UCC-sponsored hurricane recovery work camp at [ucc.org/ministries/volunteer/hurricane](http://ucc.org/ministries/volunteer/hurricane).

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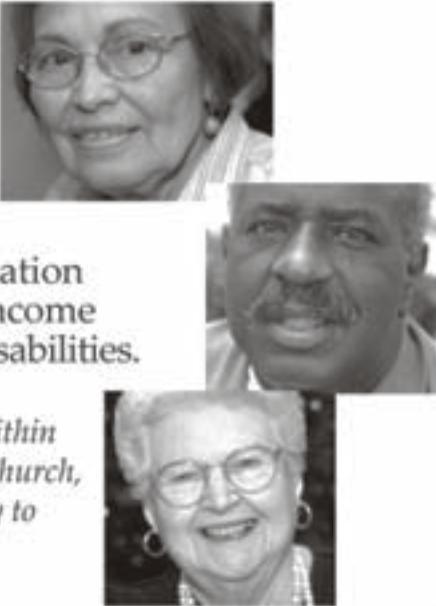
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**John H. Thomas**  
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CONFRONT 'UBIQUITOUS POWER'

# Lent's scripture themes expose, taunt 'imperial darkness'

By Thomas I. Warren  
Bible study contributor

For those who follow the lectionary, Lent in 2007 will be a journey through the stormy seas of Luke. This journey will take us through Jerusalem tears, the call to repentance, prodigal forgiveness, anointing and betrayal and the triumphal entry, culminating in ultimate victory over the death-dealing powers and principalities of first-century Palestine.

The first Sunday in Lent (Feb. 25) finds Jesus face-to-face with temptation (Luke 4:1-13), forced to choose between demonic, earthly alliances and his allegiance to the God of justice and Torah-based righteousness. While in the end victory is assured, the gift of Easter begins in the uncertainty of wilderness. Like his ancient ancestors, Jesus will spend 40 days fasting before the demon-sponsored seductions of empire.

The first challenge to the fam-

ished "Son of God" is to turn stone into bread. The title "Son of God" provides some context. In first-century Palestine there was only one "son of god," namely Caesar. When the gospels rename Jesus as such, it is not simply a theological claim, but a direct challenge to the sovereignty of the Roman Empire. The devil does the bidding for Rome, seeking to separate Jesus from his allegiance to the God of Israel. The true "Son of God" could do such bread-making magic, but Jesus cites scripture

instead (Deut. 8:1-3), insisting that God will define his mission and use of power.

Although he fails to tempt by bread, the devil ups the ante. The kingdoms of the world are now on the table. These kingdoms and their power are in possession of the demonic one (vs. 6). The offer is now made concrete: "If you will worship me, it will all be yours." The proposal made here is not one of generic power, but of worldly power — the social, economic, political, and religious power which permeates everyday life in every age, perhaps historically and most powerfully embodied by Rome. The term used here for "kingdoms" is the Greek *basileias*. When Herod is introduced in the first chapter, the same noun for king (*basileus*) is used. Thus, according to Luke, Herod is an ally and agent of Satan. His kingship, derived from the devil and allied with Rome, contrasts with Jesus who is king by God's calling. Again citing his God revealed in the "second law," Jesus affirms his steadfast fidelity to the "Lord your God" (Deut. 6:13; Luke 4:8).

The third leg of the trinitarian temptation comes in the form of the Jerusalem Temple. Jerusalem, the center of first-century secular and religious power, is the locale which permeates the gospels in particular and Jewish life in general. Here, the devil — perhaps in frustration — mimics Jesus by quoting scripture, attempting to show that the command to "throw yourself down" is all under God's control (Ps 11a, 12). Pulling out the Torah for a third time (Deut. 6:16), Jesus declares that he will not demand any display from God, but will trust and act at God's direction only. Al-

ROADWORK



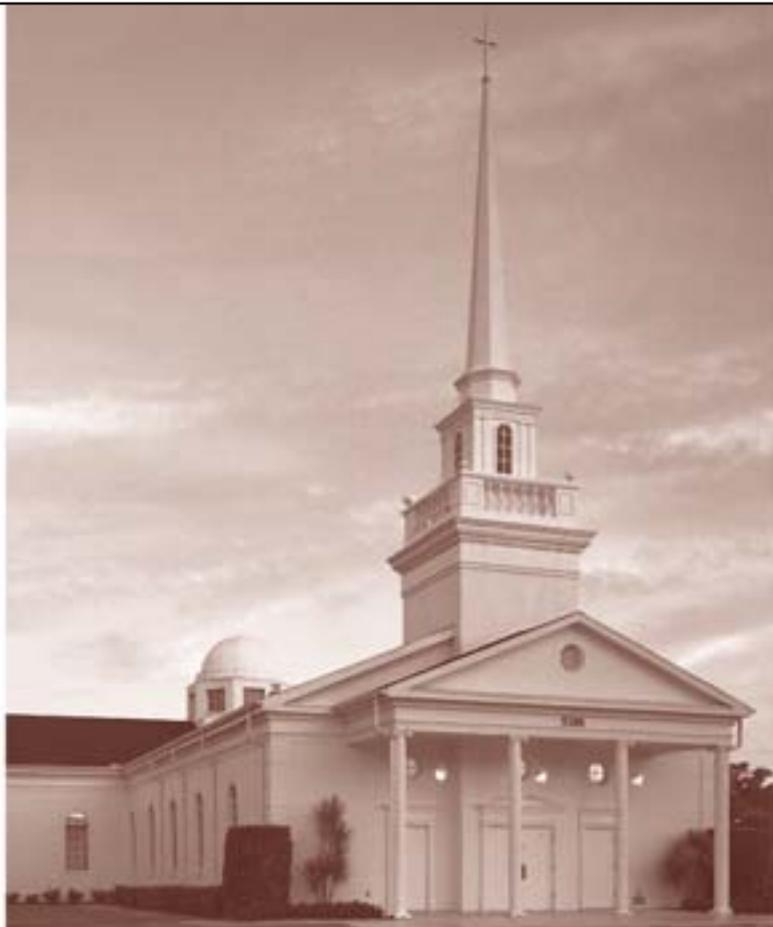
- ▶ What are the "seductions of empire" which confront the church and its ministry today?
- ▶ In what ways are our holy Scriptures used to legitimize worldly temptations and the agendas of the powerful?
- ▶ What are the gifts of the wilderness — for Israel, Jesus and us?

though the scene ends with yet another demonic challenge successfully met, Luke promises — with the shadow of Jerusalem looming — that the devil will be back at "an opportune time."

Lent is a season of confession, repentance and spiritual cleansing; indeed, an opportune time for personal renewal. Yet, in our historical moment, as in Jesus' moment, many of our individual temptations and failings are directly related to the impersonal powers and principalities under which we live. The Gospel of Luke challenges the faithful to recognize and confront the ubiquitous power of empire and its social, economic, religious and military manifestations.

May this Lenten season be one in which we are all strengthened to confront the seductions of the imperial darkness that surrounds us. As it was two centuries ago, we are called today to follow the true Son of God, living out our lives in deep conversation with the Lord of life.

*The Rev. Thomas I. Warren is pastor of Pleasant Hill Community UCC in Tennessee. His bible study series will appear in each issue on the spirituality page.*



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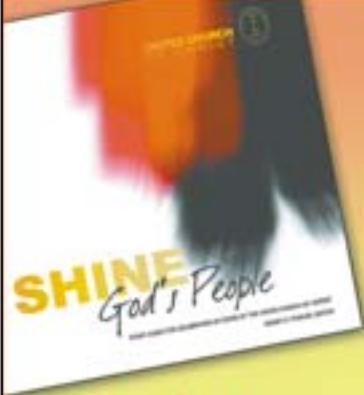
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# Those people at that church

SOME SAY we are living through an 'ecumenical winter.' **But I say that depends** on where you live as to what the weather looks like."

— UCC minister Diane Kessler

"Such ecumenical collaboration was celebrated as a 'truly national and comprehensive foreign mission society,'" Zikmund says. "Unfortunately it did not last."

Various groups, she says, pulled out of ABCFM in 1837, 1839 and 1846 as theological arguments and conflicting attitudes erupted around slavery.

"Nevertheless, the memory of 'unity in mission' remained a vision," Zikmund says.

As denominational identities and loyalties became more and more entrenched, ecumenism — much like the Civil Rights Movement of decades later — found its energy among young people.

Organizations such as the Student Christian Movement, the Sunday School Association, the YMCA and YWCA, Church Women United, and various Bible societies were the early forerunners to the National Council of Churches (NCC) and World Council of Churches (WCC), says the Rev. Michael Kinnamon, a Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) minister and professor at UCC-related Eden Theological Seminary in St. Louis.

Among many Protestant Christians, ecumenism began as a lay movement in the mission fields, Kinnamon says.

The concept of "movement," however, soon gave way to "structure."

And the NCC (founded in 1950) and WCC (conceived in 1937 but delayed by World War II until 1948), as well as multiple state church councils, quickly emerged as powerful symbols of church unity and shared witness, propelled by generous support from participating denominations.

The UCC, born in 1957, owes its conception and found its early nurturing in this unprecedented era of ecumenical hopefulness.

## Movements 'move'

Ecumenism, however, is changing.

All ecumenical organizations endured significant financial and organizational struggles in the late 1990s, as declining local church support for denominational bodies translated into reduced contributions to national and global church-coordinating groups.

As a result, both the NCC and

WCC have had to redefine and rearticulate their visions, given significantly reduced staffs, budgets, morale and influence.

"One of the things about movements is that they move," says Kinnamon, speaking in October on the "hopes and discouragements" of ecumenism.

"We may lament some of the changes," Kinnamon says, "but that doesn't necessarily mean the movement is losing steam."

Today, ecumenism's 1950s-styled approach is being challenged by changing patterns of giving within denominations as well as the rise of independent megachurches.

"One of the realities of ecumenical work is that we are at the end of the funding chain," says the Rev. Nancy Jo Kemper, a UCC/Disciples minister who is executive director of the Kentucky Council of Churches. "We are the last to be funded and the first to be cut."

Kemper says once-thriving main-line churches dreamed of a common witness, joint planning and mutual support.

"Now everybody is going it alone, in order to carve out some kind of identity that will stand out in a consumerist religious marketplace," she says.

Even the Rev. John H. Thomas, the UCC's general minister and president, made note of the UCC's declining financial support for ecumenical organizations at a recent meeting of the UCC's 90-member Executive Council.

Thomas, who served as the UCC's ecumenical officer before becoming GMP in 1999, pointed out that UCC contributions to the WCC, NCC, Churches Uniting in Christ and World Alliance of Reformed Churches were nearly half the amounts contributed just 10 years ago.

The decrease is not based on declining interest, he insists, but on declining support for Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM), of which a set percentage is earmarked for ecumenical bodies. Still, he laments the numerical drop.

"There's never been anyone saying 'let's give less,'" Thomas says. "There's never been a shrinking of commitment, but there's just less money in the pot."

Kemper identifies with former

**DESPITE THE FACT** that 'they will know us by our love,' followers of Jesus have not amassed the best track record when it comes to getting along with each other, much less those outside the Christian faith.

It turns out that 'loving your neighbor' is a little harder than earlier thought, especially when we don't agree.

Since its formation in 1957 as a 'united and uniting' church, the UCC has claimed 'ecumenism' — the ministry of repairing once-burned bridges with other Christian churches — as one of its most important preoccupations.

Fifty years later, we ask: Is ecumenism still alive and well in 2007?

By **J. Bennett Guess**

Randy Varcho | iStockPhoto graphic

"As long as there are divisions among Christians and there are people and places in the world that need to be reconciled, we will need the ecumenical movement," says the Rev. Diane Kessler, a UCC minister and member of **Wellesley Congregational UCC in Massachusetts**.

Kessler, who has spent 32 years working for the Massachusetts Council of Churches, the last 19 as its executive director, believes the "reconciling impulse" is the heart of the gospel.

"At least that's the theory," she jests, recognizing that other demands and agendas too often compete for churches' time, attention and resources.

"[Ecumenism] has always been a minority movement in the life of the churches because we tend to be complacent with what we know," Kessler concedes. "And we're not necessarily very curious about what we don't know."

Yet, Kessler finds that when people do encounter "the other" through ecumenical dialogue and partnership — "and get through the kind of normal anxiety that sometimes attends those encounters" — the experience can be spiritually enlivening and intellectually invigorating.

## Early ecumenism

Among UCC forebears, the ecumenical vision often grew out of necessity, as much as theological conversation.

"In the early 1700s when many German immigrants settled in Pennsylvania, it was common for Lutheran and Reformed congregations to share resources," says the Rev. Barbara Brown Zikmund, a UCC historian. "One pastor might serve several congregations, and Lutheran and Reformed congregations often established 'union churches.'"

In the late 1700s and early 1800s, patriotic enthusiasm surrounding U.S. political independence produced analogous movements promoting religious liberty, Zikmund adds.

"Born in frontier revivalism, these movements rejected all denominational labels — simply calling themselves 'Christians' — and proclaimed a vision of Christian unity beyond sectarian factions," she says.

In 1826, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) — founded by Congregationalists in 1810 — invited the United Foreign Missionary Society (a Presbyterian and Dutch Reformed body) to merge with the ABCFM, Zikmund says.

United Nations Ambassador Madeleine Albright, who says the U.N. has been weakened organizationally by the refusal of nations, such as the United States, to pay their full dues.

"She could just as easily be talking about our churches, who are abandoning all the structures they created," Kemper says.

Ironically, she says, while ecumenism — in theory — emphasizes that Christians should be more committed to the wider church and not just its individual parts, the decline of denominational loyalty — in practice — has crippled cooperative organizations, since funding comes from denominational sources.

"What congregations are in danger of losing as they become less and less loyal to their denominations is the larger network that will provide the resources, the curriculums, the certification of clergy, and the maximized use of time, energy and money in its mission work," Kemper says.

#### Cooperating globally, locally

The Rev. Lydia Veliko, the UCC's ecumenical officer, concedes that ecumenism is changing, but not necessarily for the worst.

"I've seen a marked upswing in ecumenical understanding, which is very heartening, especially in local communities," Veliko says. "So many [UCC] people, when talking about ecumenism, just say, 'This is who we are.'"

The UCC has been party to several landmark agreements in recent years. Since 1989, an historic partnership with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has led to multiple shared ministries, including the mutual recognition of ministerial credentials and a common board for Global Ministries. In 1999, the UCC and Disciples approved partnership talks with the Alliance of Baptists.

The 1997 Formula of Agreement among the UCC, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Reformed Church in America was 32 years in the making and declared "doctrinal consensus" between Lutheran-Reformed bodies in the United States, helping bridge a theological divide that reached back to the mid-1500s.

The UCC and Roman Catholic Church are expected to soon announce a shared recognition of baptism, another major step, Veliko says.

While some at the local level may think "we've been doing that for years," formal ecumenical agreements encourage local conversations.

"Despite the number of other disagreements we might have, formal agreements give permission for [personal] relationships to flourish," Veliko says. "Cooperation is not just a bizarre anomaly."

Adds Thomas, "Formal ecumenical agreements really matter, but personal relationships really matter more. But formal ecumenical relations can enhance those personal relationships."

#### Infusing younger voices

Veliko has been working with about 30 UCC members under age 30 who are engaged in ecumenical dialogue. That's significant, she says, because the presence of younger voices within ecumenical circles is not common.

That's why Veliko and Thomas were proud the UCC sponsored a contingent of 15 youth and young adults to attend the WCC's 9th international assembly in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in February 2006.

"These were not just people interested in an exotic trip," Thomas says, "but they have a

real commitment to living out the full unity of the church."

Sara Critchfield, now 26, who works for the UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries in Washington, D.C., attended the global assembly.

As a young adult, she says ecumenical meetings in the U.S. are a bit easier for her to maneuver but, at the WCC, she found it especially difficult to have voice, due to cultural differences toward younger people. She and others formed an affinity group to caucus about their concerns and how best to voice them.

"There was a lot of pageantry around 'all the young people here' but the power structures were dismissive of youth participation, especially from young women," she says.

Critchfield believes the WCC, especially, needs to embrace the contributions of young people for the sake of its own organizational future.

"If they shrivel up and die, it's because their structure is caving in on them," Critchfield says. "When I've been a young person showing up at these meetings, people sort of look at you saying, 'You're young, so what do we do.' But the key decision-making is held by people who are not going to give up power."

Still, she felt empowered by Veliko and other UCC/Disciples delegates who encouraged their younger counterparts to speak up and not back down.

"Here, in the UCC, I do feel very empowered," Critchfield says. "The UCC is really dedicated to engaging young people. We put a lot of money into that and are definitely leading in that way."

Critchfield hopes the ecumenical movement will be infused with new momentum by returning to the days when it was student led and young-people powered.

Encouraging the commitment of a new generation of ecumenical leaders is the reason why Thomas and Veliko, along with Professor Mark Burrows, regularly co-teach a course on "pastoral ecumenics" at UCC-related Andover Newton Theological School in Massachusetts.

"There's a real heart-felt commitment [among these students] to help deal with the church-dividing issues that divide families, as well as churches," Thomas says.

#### Continued vigilance

Kessler says the need for ecumenical dialogue isn't always that apparent to the average Christian. But, at some of life's most-stressful moments, divisions become apparent.

"Where Christians in the U.S. are most inclined to encounter problems are in ecumenical or interfaith family situations, in time of marriage, baptism, funeral services," Kessler says. "Then they bump up with the still-unresolved issues facing the churches. ... Interfaith families can't afford to be so complacent."

"Some say we are living through an 'ecumenical winter,'" says Kessler. "But I say that depends on where you live as to what the weather looks like."

For Christians in the Middle East, for example, ecumenism is necessity.

"Where [Christians] are a minority in a majority of people of other faiths, they are very aware of how much they need each other in a way that Americans in a culture that is predominately Christian are not," she says. "They know how much they need the care, support and concern of other Christians."

And, in the United States, the church must continue to be vigilant on issues of race and class, Kessler says.



## RELATIONSHIP RULES

### Tips for talking across the great religious divide

When it comes to ecumenical and interfaith dialogue, there are some rules to remember. So, should you find yourself 'talking turkey' with birds of another feather, UCC General Minister and President John H. Thomas and UCC Ecumenical Officer Lydia Veliko offer these helpful suggestions to keep neither of you from crying 'fowl.'

1. **Never speak for others in dialogue.** "Come to the table as who you are," Veliko says, "and allow them to do the same."
2. **Don't compare the best of who you are with the worst of who they are.** "We get nowhere if we only live with caricatures of one another," Thomas says.
3. **Speak as honestly as possible about your faith tradition.** "Reflect on your tradition as it is, not as you wish it to be," Veliko advises.
4. **Recognize what your partner needs in order to be in dialogue with you.** For example, a Southern Baptist might approach the conversation seeking a particular emphasis on Scripture, while a Roman Catholic might enter with a greater lens on church tradition.
5. **Enter each dialogue with 'bold humility.'** "Remember you have significant gifts to offer — and receive," Thomas says. "Don't enter in with a sense that 'I have no where to grow.'"
6. **Yet, never acquiesce from truth.** "There are times when you have to set your corporate ego aside, but one never sets aside a commitment to truth," Thomas says. "People [with whom you may disagree] respond better to clarity of conviction than a lack of clarity."
7. **Allow yourself permission to listen.** "You may change," Veliko says. "Just 'saying your piece' — that's not ecumenical dialogue."
8. **Expect to be surprised.** "Some in the ecumenical community — which have had sharp differences [on some issues] — have taken on other issues, such as poverty and the environment, and there has been a readiness to partner on these concerns," Thomas says.
9. **Don't go looking to dialogue with those most like you.** Are you talking to liberal Episcopalians or conservative Presbyterians only? Are you getting a skewed perspective of the other's tradition, heritage and polity? "There is a tendency to go hunting around for comfortable partners," Thomas acknowledges.
10. **Approach ecumenism as a spiritual discipline.** "Any spiritual discipline calls for an inner strength," Veliko says. "You may feel like bolting from the conversation, but remember, it's not a 'program' or a 'project.' For the church, it's a spiritual vocation."

"If we are talking about what it means to be the whole church for the whole world, then the racial and economic divides in our society are often most visible in our worship," she says.

Thomas, too, says racism — like the generations-old church fights over baptism and eucharist — remains the church's most-pressing and divisive issues. On Martin Luther King Day, Thomas joined leaders from Churches Uniting in Christ, calling for refocused attention on racial justice.

#### A new ecumenism?

Even across the much-discussed liberal-conservative divide — which has emerged as the new, great challenge to ecumenical dialogue — the Rev. Mike Castle, pastor of **Cross Creek Community UCC in Dayton, Ohio**, still sees possibilities for conversation.

Castle, who represents the UCC on the Alliance of Baptists board, believes the church not only spans the Left-Right continuum, but is also torn between "conventional" and "intentional" methods.

"Conventional" churches are best described as those that approach church in old, tired ways. "Conventional churches have the same order of worship and the same unchallenged assump-

tions about life and faith, whether or not they are considered liberal or conservative," he says.

But, "intentional" congregations — be they on the Left or Right — are looking for newer models of worship, service and outreach.

"Whether or not we're conservative or liberal, we're all moving toward the conventional side or moving toward the intentional side," says Castle. "It's not the old Left and Right fight anymore, and I find there's a willingness, on both sides, to listen to very conservative and very liberal people."

Castle calls it the "new ecumenism" — reaching across theological differences to discuss church vitality and discover how best to engage the culture and reach new people.

"It's the post-modern way, not to be afraid to wonder and see where it might lead," he says, "and not be afraid that we might change our minds."

## LEARN MORE

A timeline of UCC-related ecumenical milestones, compiled by the Rev. Barbara Brown Zikmund, is available at [ucc.org/ucnews](http://ucc.org/ucnews).

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

# Thomas urges American Samoa inclusion in wage-hike legislation

**I**n his first letter to incoming U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), the Rev. John H. Thomas, general minister and president, expressed concern about news reports that American Samoa, a U.S. territory, was excluded from federal minimum wage legislation.

"The United Church of Christ has been deeply involved in the efforts to pass an increase in the Federal Minimum Wage," Thomas wrote on Jan. 12. "... It has always been our conviction that the minimum wage needs to be raised for all who are citizens of

**IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN OUR CONVICTION** that the minimum wage needs to be raised **for all who are citizens** of the United States or its territories."

of the United States or its territories."

Republican members of the U.S. House of Representatives claimed that Pelosi knowingly excluded American Samoa — the only U.S. state or territory not covered by the recently passed legislation — because the Del Monte Corporation is located in Pelosi's congressional district. Del Monte owns

StarKist Tuna, which employs a majority of Samoan islanders. An estimated 80 percent of American Samoa's economy is dependent on StarKist's cannery operations, according to news reports.

After the omission became public, Pelosi disputed the Republicans' charge and said she would work to right the wrong. On Jan. 14, Democrats said the

minimum wage bill would be changed to include all U.S. territories before it reaches President Bush's desk.

The Samoan community in the United States is one of the UCC's largest and fastest-growing racial/ethnic constituencies.

In recent years, nearly 100 Samoan congregations have joined the UCC, thanks in part to the size and strength of the Congregational Christian Church in American Samoa, the UCC's partner church.

Thomas wrote, "I myself have visited American Samoa and am well

acquainted with the challenging economic realities facing the majority of the island's residents. I urge you and the Congress to immediately reconsider this exemption and extend the benefits of a raise in the minimum wage to all."

Thomas also noted that his predecessor, the Rev. Paul Sherry, was a key leader in the "Let Justice Roll" campaign that helped to galvanize public support for the wage-increase legislation.

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## REBIRTH AMID 'ANXIETY AND LOSS'

## Completely destroyed by fire in 2004, Redeemer UCC reclaims its 'alleluia'

**T**wo-and-a-half years in the making, the first alleluias in a "season of dedication" were raised on Nov. 5 at Redeemer UCC in Sussex, Wis.

"It proved to be a real high for me," said the Rev. Robert Ullman, whose congregation weathered an extreme test of faith. The church was destroyed by fire on March 12, 2004 — just 11 days after Ullman and his wife began a planned three-month sabbatical in Hawaii.

"I think the idea of having a season of dedication rather than just a day has been important," said Ullman a week before the dedication. "With every event — worship, weddings, memorial services, concerts, anti-racism training, dances of universal peace — the building is absorbing more of the memories of our life together and thereby is being set apart and consecrated for things holy. I find that a profound blessing."

The cause of the fire is officially "of undetermined origin." Investigators suspect electrical malfunction, but never pinpointed the exact source. Demonstrating an enduring sense of humor, Ullman noted, "The good thing is, they didn't call it an act of God."

By Jeff Woodard

Upon learning of the fire, Ullman instinctively wanted to return home. Lay leaders, however, encouraged him to stay in Hawaii for a while, so he did. "The leadership of the church stepped up to the plate during the crisis and carried the thing when I wasn't there," said Ullman, pastor for more than 24 years.

"Right now I'd say we're exhausted but tenacious. I've just been astounded. The lay leaders are all volunteers. They don't have to do any of it, and they've done it with grace and dedication," he said.

'How can we help?'

In a seemingly surreal scenario, lay leaders had planned to meet on March 13, 2004, to discuss procedures during the pastor's absence. Instead, on March 13 — with smoke still rising from the ashes of the destroyed building — they met at the public library. A meeting initially expected to draw 20 to 25 people swelled to three times that size.

"There were other clergy from the community, the fire chief who led the fight against the fire, and the town chairman," said Ullman. "They were all asking, 'What can we do for you? How can we help?' Our leaders didn't realize the level of support they had until the crisis. An [Evangelical Lutheran Church in America] church offered their space, and we received all this support from the wider church, from the community. We were really moved by that."

During the ensuing summer months, services and fellowship hours were held under a large canopy in the church parking lot. "We talked about the things our people really liked about the old building, and what could have been better," said Ullman. "We had a chance to start fresh. That proved helpful in terms of the architectural things that were important to us."

While Ullman and parishioners appreciated the ELCA church's

hosting offer, such a setup would have entailed noontime services. Instead, Redeemer worked out an agreement to make Hamilton High School its temporary home. Worship was initially held in the school's theater, but later moved to the gymnasium and, finally, to the cafeteria.

"A theater is a place where the lights are dim, and gymnasiums are for people to jump up and down and scream," said Ullman. "Neither is conducive to leading a service. We had enough space in the cafeteria, although the chairs had to be set up near the makeshift altar up front, and tables were set up in the back. Kids would bring their coloring books, and it was sort of a free-for-all with people milling around."

A long, winding road

The psychological setback of Redeemer's immeasurable loss was compounded by unexpected economic fallout.

"We had roughly half the insurance coverage we needed," said Kim Olson, building committee chairman for the new church. "It put us in a real bad spot."

Olson said terms of the insurance policy called for the property owner — not the insurance company — to set the policy value. "Even though we had replacement insurance, we were blindsided by the fact that we didn't know our value," she said.

A portion of the policy cited "increased cost of instruction" — for example, stricter changes in code that weren't in place when the previous building had been constructed.

"The architect and general contractor had to gather facts and do extra work on the code changes, and the insurance company wouldn't pay out anything until the entire project was done," Olson said.

Insurance claims took more than two years to settle, and the church needed every bit of the



The new structure at Redeemer UCC in Sussex, Wis., is a testament to a determined congregation. The church's old building was destroyed by fire in 2004.

(Photos furnished)

WHEN YOU EXPERIENCE this kind of **disruption**, you realize that **GOD IS STILL SPEAKING**, whether you have a roof over your head or not."

— The Rev. Robert Ullman, pastor



\$500,000 pledged by parishioners to rebuild the church.

"It forced us to take many leaps of faith — assuming that people would honor their pledges and assuming growth of membership," said Olson, "not just to meet current congregational needs, but big-picture needs as well."

Consensus amid crisis

A key in providing focus was Linda Graebner-Smith, who at the time of the fire served in the consensus-building role of congregation moderator at the time of the fire.

"We had nine teams in place to take care of outreach," said Graebner-Smith, alluding to initial disaster response. "We recruited leaders for each team and for the strategic board. I have a background in design, architecture and real estate. By the grace of God, we not only networked as a community without a building, we also had a wide, deep network of contract builders, architects and consultants available."

A crisis consultant was hired to help reorganize and prioritize. "We had to optimize the work of ministry teams to address our nomadic lifestyle," said Graebner-Smith. An ad hoc leadership team developed a list of architects and builders, and "Requests for Proposals" (RFPs) were sought. Additional teams were quickly formed: an executive building committee; "process people" to

deal with the long-term responsibility of overseeing the RFP process and the building; a fund-raising team; and a construction plan and review committee.

At the same time, the effort to keep morale on solid ground proved as crucial as the physical foundation of the new church.

"This was all happening in the midst of intense anxiety and loss," said Graebner-Smith. "After the leaders met and established priorities, there was a spiraling down to low energy and anxiety. It was quite a challenge to make sure our leaders were taken care of so they could be walking ahead of everyone and those tasks — to pull those who experienced such loss and sadness along with us, even though some of them may not have agreed with the decisions being made."

Graebner-Smith singled out autumn 2004 as a particularly trying time, after architects and builders had been chosen.

"I felt that the church could have been torn apart at that time," Graebner-Smith said. "We lost some people then because they couldn't handle the process without having a sense of place. As soon as we opened the doors again, many of them came back."

Focused anew on outreach

At the time of the fire, Redeemer membership exceeded 400, with a weekly average attendance of about 200, said Ullman. During the lowest points in the rebuilding, attendance dipped to about 125. "Now we're back up to 175 or so at weekly services. Now we're not focused on a building, but on ministry and outreach."

Graebner-Smith likened church members' sense of emptiness to being in "that kind of desert place where you have the freedom to develop the most creative ideas. We'd been in the desert, and now instead of doing things the way we'd always done them, we have another way to look at it."

The new facility contains stone reclaimed from the old building, and the light-filled, 400-seat sanctuary is flanked on either side by classrooms and storage. A functional design allows for a prospective "phase 2" — an expansion that would provide a 600-seat sanctuary, additional classrooms and a commercial kitchen.

Throughout all the heartache and headaches, the Stillspeaking Initiative served as a reliable rock for Redeemer.

"When you experience this kind of disruption, you realize that God is still speaking, whether you have a roof over your head or not," said Ullman. "I preach from the lectionary almost always, and that whole year following the fire, the number of scriptures referring to fire was almost uncanny. People finally said to me, 'Could you stop talking about fire?' Talk about a Stillspeaking God!"

Jeff Woodard, a freelance writer and United Church News contributor, is a member of Pilgrim Congregational UCC in Cleveland.

## UCC and Conference of Catholic Bishops co-sponsor major forum on religion, media

An array of faith groups, including Roman Catholics, Orthodox and Protestant Christians, Jews and Muslims participated in major forum on Jan. 9 in New York calling for more religion access to broadcast media outlets.

"Despite what the media portrays, it is a myth to assume that there is a monolithic national religious message," said the Rev. Robert Chase, the UCC's director of communications.

The event, attended by dozens of religious leaders and two Federal Communications Commission members, Jonathan Adelstein and Michael Copps, was co-sponsored by the UCC's Office of Communication, Inc. and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Several speakers voiced frustration that mainstream religious communities often have difficulty accessing media markets dominated by conglomerates that own multiple stations and make programming decisions based on economic efficiency, not community need.

Mainstream faith is often excluded or displaced by more-strident and extremist religious views, many speakers said.

"We are not saying that marketplace values, which so dominate the debate today, are invalid. Rather, we claim they are insufficient for the pub-

lic good," said Chase, who also chairs the National Council of Churches' communication commission. "We call upon the FCC to exercise its congressionally mandated authority and set policies based not on economic efficiencies, but on the public interest, and restore the airwaves to the people."

The forum was held at the Manhattan studios of WNET Public Television.

"I have a fear that someday soon we may see Paris Hilton asked to comment on moral issues," said Kermit Netteberg from the Seventh Day Adventist Church and a member of the NCC's communication commission.

The Most Rev. Gerald F. Kicanas, bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Tucson, said, "We represent a vast number of people in this country and it is that voice that needs to be heard."

FCC Commissioner Adelstein said he shared the speakers' views.

"There was a bargain struck that in exchange for the free use of the airwaves; they [broadcast stations] would serve the public interest," Adelstein said. "But today, half that bargain — the public interest obligation — is gone."

Added Commissioner Copps, "I am a worried citizen. I am concerned that this nation's media so seldom reflect and so seldom appeal to the bet-

ter angels of our nature."

The Rev. Bob Edgar, the NCC's general secretary, said, "The voice of middle church, middle mosque and middle synagogue is not being heard."

The Muslim community, according to Imam Izak-el Pasha of the Masjid Malcolm Shabazz in New York's Harlem neighborhood, "has virtually no access to present the clear picture of the billion people on this planet who are faithfully and peacefully practicing their faith."

Chase also spoke about how the

UCC's TV commercial was excluded by major networks in 2005 and 2006.

"One [network] executive claimed the ad promotes gay marriage and since the current administration is opposed to gay marriage, it would be inappropriate to air the commercial."

The FCC has yet to respond to a

January 2005 complaint filed by the UCC against two network-owned Miami stations that refused to air the ads.

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## DEMONSTRATORS NUMBER INTO TENS OF THOUSANDS

## Movement to close School of the Americas grows, smells success

**S**eventeen years ago, Maryknoll priest Roy Bourgeois organized a demonstration at the gates of Fort Benning, Ga., home of the School of the Americas. His goal was to call attention to that training base for Latin American military leaders, and to close it down.

The occasion was the first anniversary of the murder in El Salvador of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her teen-age daughter by military personnel trained at the school.

Ten persons took part.

Seventeen years later, 22,000 demonstrators marched and chanted at Fort Benning's main gate in November 2006, while simultaneous demonstrations were taking place in seven South American countries.

Text and photos by W. Evan Golder

In the years in between, the U.S. government changed the name of the school to the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC), three Latin American countries (Venezuela, Uruguay and Argentina) stopped sending soldiers to the school, and Congress came within 15 votes of denying funds to run the school.

Why has this movement grown so dramatically?

"I think people are looking for hope, especially today with what we're doing in Latin America, and with this war in Iraq," says Bourgeois. "People are really seeking hope."

"This is where the peace movement resides," says the Rev. Jon Moody, a UCC minister and Hiram (Ohio) College ethics professor. "I come every year because this is the peace movement that I joined in the '60s, the annual party where we gather to remind ourselves of our commitment to peace."

Others come because the school's activities still continue, and because there is the real possibility of "winning" and getting the school closed.

"It breaks my heart to know about the continual murders and disappearances of countless people in Latin America," says Cathy Webster, a grey-haired activist from Chico, Calif. Webster was one of 16 persons arrested for crossing onto the army base itself.

## Feeling of solidarity

The nature of the experience itself has brought Jane Hare from Chapel Hill, N.C., to the demonstration nine times. As names and ages are read aloud of each person murdered by SOA graduates or those under their command, the crowd chants, "Presente."

"Lifting up the crosses is a very moving experience," she says. "When we lift the crosses and sing, 'Presente,' it means they are here with us."

Cathy Webster organized "1,000 Grandmothers" to march in the Sunday morning processional. Each one wore a white kerchief, symbolizing their solidarity with the mothers and grandmothers in

Buenos Aires, who still demonstrate weekly, seeking news of their children and grandchildren who "disappeared" during Argentina's so-called "dirty war" from 1976 to 1983.

"As a grandmother, I feel deep compassion and an urge for protection for the vulnerable, the young, and families," she said.

Bourgeois, who went to Vietnam as a naval officer and returned to become a missionary to Bolivia, feels this solidarity strongly.

"Our movement is continuing to grow because of connections to our sisters and brothers in Latin America," he says. "We are here in solidarity with the movement for justice in Latin America and we are inspired by them."

He adds, "This school is really an obstacle to democracy. It has caused untold suffering and death, and we're connected to that."

## Check the numbers

"I'm bothered that the activities of the School of the Americas in Latin America continue," says the Rev. Roger Knight, a former UCC conference minister who traveled by bus to Fort Benning with a group from Tennessee.

Moody agrees.

"This particular demonstration keeps growing because the school is still here, because the violence that is learned here doesn't cease, and because the administration of our nation keeps making stupid mistakes that strengthen our resolve to change things," he says.

In 1993, a U.N. Truth Commission Report on El Salvador put numbers to what many suspected.

When Roman Catholic Archbishop Oscar Romero was gunned down on March 24, 1980, in El Salvador while serving communion, the man who planned it and two of the three who actually killed him had attended the School of the Americas.

When the four female church workers were raped and murdered in December 1980, three of the five accused were SOA graduates.

When the Salvadoran army butchered more than 900 men, women and children at El Mozote,



School of Americas demonstrators participate in a 'die-in' during a mock funeral procession outside Fort Benning, Ga. Below, the Rev. Roger Knight, a UCC minister, holds his cross high.



El Salvador, in December 1981, 10 of the 12 officers responsible came through the SOA.

And when the six Jesuit priests and their housekeeper and her daughter were killed in El Salvador in November 1989 — the event that these annual demonstrations at Fort Benning commemorate — of the 26 Salvadoran soldiers cited for this atrocity, 19 were SOA-trained.

## Victory is in sight

Students, many bused in from Catholic schools, comprised a large percentage of the demonstrators.

"These students are being mobilized and it gives them a cause beyond themselves," says Knight. "They're learning to make the connections between this demonstration and other peace and justice efforts."

"Look," says Bourgeois, "when we gather, we gather in the name of peace, and we're young and old, and there's a lot of college students, a lot of seniors, military veterans, and parents with their children. This is where we find hope. This is

This particular demonstration **KEEPS GROWING** because the school is still here, because the **violence** that is learned here **doesn't cease.**"

— The Rev. Jon Moody

where we meet kindred spirits. This is where we find this joy that we're all looking for."

Addressing the rally later, Bourgeois opined that this might be the last rally needed to close down the school.

Congressman Jim McGovern (D-Mass.) agrees. In 2006, he sponsored

the amendment to deny funding to the school.

"Now is the time for us to close the School of the Americas," he says. "I will reintroduce the bill to do that early in 2007, and I am hopeful — more hopeful than I've been in a long time — that a new majority in Congress will result in a new policy."

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

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## UCC pastor arrested at demonstration

**T**he Rev. Don Coleman, 69, was one of 16 protesters arrested at the Nov. 19 demonstration at Fort Benning, Ga., to close the School of the Americas. Coleman is co-pastor of **University Church (UCC/Disciples) in Chicago** with his wife, the Rev. Ann-Marie Coleman, a long-time social activist.

University Church sent a delegation of a dozen to the demonstration, including a Guatemalan family that originally took sanctuary with the congregation in the 1980s.

"Every year when they go," says Don Coleman, "the crosses that they put up against the fence have their mother's and father's name on them.

It becomes really personal when someone that close to us has been affected so intensely by this issue. That was a major influence on my decision."

Those arrested for trespassing posted bail and will have a three-day trial, beginning Jan. 29. In 2003, the Rev. Cliff Frasier, a UCC minister in New York, served a six-month prison sentence for "trespassing" at Ft. Benning.

"We are anticipating that our efforts will continue to add to the pressure to close the school," Coleman says, "and that the court case will be a significant educational process for the members of University Church."



## M&M, ONA, A2A?

# New book invites church to examine history, meaning behind UCC identities

**Y**ou've heard the phrases. Perhaps you even use the lingo yourself. But, if you're a UCC newcomer, you may wonder what all those descriptive initials are all about — M&M, ONA, A2A and so forth.

So what *does* it mean exactly when the UCC says it is a "united and uniting," "multiracial and multicultural," "open and affirming," "accessible to all," "peace with justice" church?

Out of breath yet?

Exploring those oft-used monikers — and the history behind them — is the purpose behind a new church-wide study book being mailed to every congregation this month, as a way to invite denomination-wide conversation about the UCC's 50th anniversary year. The book will be included in the next all-church mailing, scheduled to arrive by early February.

"Shine, God's People," edited by the Rev. Sidney D. Fowler, is a 40-page study guide for lifting up UCC history, including some of the most noteworthy, identity-enriching milestones along the way.

Designed for use in group settings — church schools, board meetings, Lenten gatherings or at retreats — each of five sessions is organized around exploring a particular commitment of the UCC that has emerged since its founding in 1957. Each is denominationally significant and culturally shifting within the church's life and witness: united and uniting, multiracial and multicultural, open and affirming, accessible to all, and peace with justice.

But, most importantly, the book is designed to be a vehicle for lifting up and honoring the ways these phrases have "shined" in the mission and ministries of local congregations.

"[These identities] are a living reality among us, not just what a denomination says about itself," says the Rev. David Schoen of the UCC's Evangelism Ministry and one of the leaders of Local Church Ministries' Congregational Vitality Initiative (CVI), which co-produced the book with the UCC's Proclamation, Identity and Communication Ministry.

Schoen says the UCC's Collegium of Officers first envisioned the book as a way to encourage conversation about some of the most momentous themes that have emerged from past General Synods and how these identities are still shaping the church's present and future. In addition, he says, the project dovetailed nicely with CVI's commitment to produce materials that ask and assist churches to "shine" through renewed vitality.

"It's really inviting congregations to 'shine' and tell us, in their own words, how they 'shine' in their own communities," Schoen says. "We hope to spur some healthy dialogue about these very real issues and provoke some discussion among us."

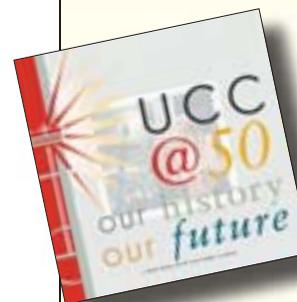
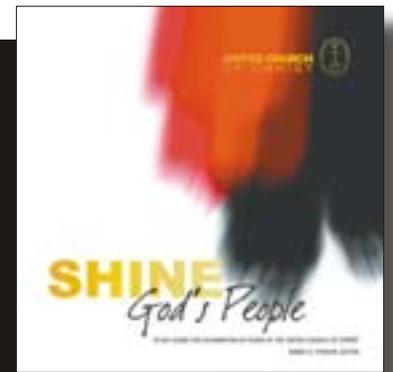
Schoen says the discussion guide, along with the responses provided by congregations this winter and spring, will be used at General Synod.

"This will be the focus of the discussion of the community groups [at General Synod] on Sunday morning [June 24]," Schoen says.

## RESPONSE REQUESTED

As an important part of the "Shine" conversation, every UCC church is invited and encouraged to complete an online survey, sharing examples of how your local church "shines" through mission and ministry. Responses will be shared in community groups on June 24 at General Synod 26 in Hartford, Conn. Complete your church questionnaire at [ucc.org/50/questions/](http://ucc.org/50/questions/).

Additional copies of "Shine, God's People" are available for \$5 each, plus shipping/handling by calling 800/537-3394. Or download for free at [ucc.org/50/studyguide50.pdf](http://ucc.org/50/studyguide50.pdf).



## ALSO AVAILABLE

**UCC@50 — Our History, Our Future**, the 96-page commemorative 50th anniversary publication. \$6.95 each, 10 or more at \$6.45 each, 25 or more at \$5.95 each. Order by calling 800/537-3394 or online at [unitedchurchpress.com](http://unitedchurchpress.com).

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## ADVANCING CANCER MOVES UP 50TH ORDINATION OBSERVANCE

## Young Massachusetts store clerk was one of UCC's first ordained pastors

By Joanne Griffith Domingue

The Rev. James Chapman was a little boy during the Great Depression, and it was desperation that drove his parents to consider parceling out family members to survive.

But while considering this heart-wrenching option, they heard the Rev. Harry Emerson Fosdick preaching on the radio, urging people to “hang on a little longer.”

The Chapmans did. Not long after Fosdick's sermon, a check for \$2,000 arrived in the mail “out of the blue,” Chapman says. It was an unexpected inheritance.

The family used it to buy a neighborhood variety store in Haverhill, Mass. The parents and three children, Florence, 9, Jim, 5, and Ralph, 1, moved into the three rooms behind the store.

The Chapmans didn't have a car. But Riverside Memorial Church — then Congregational, now UCC — was just across the street. Young Jim spent many hours there — singing in the choir, attending youth group. For 10 years, he never missed Sunday School.

“I jingled like a Russian general with all those bars” earned for perfect attendance, he recalls.

And it was there — on June 30, 1957, just five days after the formation of the UCC — Chapman was ordained to Christian ministry, making him one of the first to be ordained in the new denomination.

On Nov. 26, 2006, Chapman's family and former parishioners celebrated his 50th ordination anniversary during a service at **Bath UCC in Ohio**.

A party had been planned for this coming June, but Chapman's advancing prostate cancer moved up the event.

“Who knows what shape I'll be in on June 30?” Chapman says. His cancer was first diagnosed in 1999. He had surgery and treatment and thought it was licked. But the cancer returned. It is now “Stage 5 and a little bit everywhere,” he says.

The Rev. Mark Frey, the current minister at Bath UCC where Chapman served as pastor for 16 years, says, “We wanted to do the celebration while Jim is able to be with us in full form and fashion.”

And he was. Four of his six adult children attended, “grandchildren by the dozens” came (he has 18 grandchildren and one great grandchild); his sister from California and his brother from Texas also were there.

His daughter Cynthia Chapman, a professor of Jewish and Christian scriptures at Oberlin College, read the Bible lesson.

In one of those grace notes of life, it was her predecessor, Herbert G. May, professor of Old Testament, who taught her father when he was a student at Oberlin's Graduate School of Theology.

And it was May who preached 50 years ago at Chapman's ordination. (In 1966, UCC-related Oberlin School of Theology merged with Vanderbilt University Divinity School in Nashville, Tenn.)

Jim Chapman considered May his mentor, and it was May who persuaded him to attend seminary instead of pursuing a music degree, Cynthia Chapman says.

Her father said he'd planned all along to go to seminary. But he chose Oberlin because it also had a conservatory of music. After all, his undergraduate degree from the University of Massachusetts was in fine arts, and he figured if seminary didn't work out, he could always turn to music.

“I fell in love with the whole Bible thing,” Chapman says. He won a preaching award and since then, “I've been speaking to anyone who would listen.”



‘He toasts us, teaches us’

Frey describes Chapman as a “very engaging preacher, a real wordsmith. He toasts us, touches us, teaches us... The church really took off under Jim's leadership.”

Bath UCC hired Frey in 1991 to be associate minister while Chapman was senior minister. “Jim was my mentor, supporter, teacher and guide. Jim really has a charisma, a great sense of humor and a caring spirit.”

Frey went on to become Bath UCC's senior minister and helped organize the ordination celebration.

Chapman's caring spirit shines through in his music. Chapman, known as a great baritone singer, sang in the Bath choir, and occasionally he ended his sermons with a solo.

A few years ago his wife, Carolyn, encouraged him to record a CD for his family. He did. It was so popular, they sold copies and used the proceeds to set up a scholarship fund for low-income students in the Akron, Ohio, area, enabling them to rent an instrument and take music lessons. The fund is administered by the local association of churches.

Another of Chapman's daughters, the Rev. Laurel Tenhave-Chapman, a UCC minister serving the **First Congregational UCC of Rockford, Mich.**, spoke at the anniversary celebration.

The seeds of her father's ministry, she says, were sown early in his life, while he was growing up in the family store, which was open 365 days a year. “How may I help you? What do you need? How can I help you find it?” Chapman would have heard those questions — and asked them himself — every single day, his daughter says.

Chapman's boyhood friend, Lloyd Smith, a 60-year member of **Riverside Memorial UCC in Haverhill, Mass.**, remembers the Chapmans' store.

“It was very small,” Smith says, recalling how he delivered newspapers while

I FELL IN LOVE with the whole Bible thing.”

— James Chapman



The Rev. James Chapman addresses the congregation of Bath (Ohio) UCC during a service celebrating his 50 years of ordination.

Michael K. Dakota photo

Chapman worked the store.

“The living room was really the store,” Chapman says. “People came to visit us in the store... The store shaped us all. When you live where your living room is public domain, that shapes you.”

‘Chaplain’ Chapman

While in seminary, he met his first wife, Katharine, an undergraduate at Oberlin. They married June 30, 1956. A year later, on their anniversary, he was ordained.

In college, Chapman was in the Air Force ROTC program. After graduation, he had a four-year deferment to attend seminary. Two months after his ordination, he entered the Air Force as a chaplain.

During his 23 years as a chaplain, the family lived in Texas, Colorado, Nebraska, England, and Washington, D.C. He and Katharine had six children: Cheryl, Laurie, Lisa, Cynthia Michelle and Jim.

“Being a PK [preacher's kid] is supposed to be a hard thing,” Cynthia Chapman says. And they were military brats as well. “But there are no horror stories, not for us.”

Their home was not militaristic, Laurie Tenhave-Chapman says. There were youth group kids who came over, then the Air Force cadets. She remembers her father saying how much he loved his work.

“Isn't it crazy I get paid for this? I love ministry,” she remembers her dad would say. She never thought she would be a pastor. But “Dad nourished me.” And now she says the same thing about her ministry.

Chapman retired from military chaplaincy in 1980, and from there, he was called to serve Bath UCC until his retirement in 1996.

In January 1998, after 14 years of remission, breast cancer returned to his beloved wife, Katie. She died that November. “That changed my life,” Chapman says.

Yet, in 2000, Chapman was a guest preacher at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, in the Akron area.

There he met Carolyn, a life-long Episcopalian. They fell in love and were married that year.

But last fall, Chapman's prostate cancer returned, and he received a bleak verdict from his oncologist. Yet, as always, he is committed to living his life to its fullest.

“If there's something we want to do, we book it,” Chapman says.

Adds daughter Carolyn, “We enjoy each day, each bit of grace.”

Joanne Griffith Domingue, a freelance journalist and United Church News contributor, is a member of **First Congregational UCC in San Jose, Calif.**

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**'HOLY JOE'**

**Congregation supports soldiers' coffee café in Baghdad**

Last Pentecost, when Tom Jastermsky, a member and deacon at **First Congregational UCC in Wallingford, Conn.**, heard a church announcement by the fiancé of an Air Force Reservist stationed in Baghdad saying troops there needed more coffee, tea and hot chocolate, something spiritual began to stir.

"He just made a general announcement, like 'Hey, can anyone drop off any coffee?'" recalls Jastermsky, who is, himself, a coffee lover. "And the Holy Spirit sort of grabbed me and said, 'Hey, this is you.'"

So, with the support of his church, Jastermsky began raising money locally and seeking regional corporate support for the "Oasis Café" — or "Holy Joe's Café" as it's more commonly known at Baghdad's Camp Sather.

The gathering spot in Baghdad is a project operated by the military chaplain's office and began as a 100-cup-per-day makeshift ministry — a mechanism for getting soldiers acquainted with the on-base chapel. But Holy Joe's has grown into the base's social town square and is now serving more than

3,000 cups per week.

"It's really become the social place, but also the centerpiece of the base," Jastermsky says. "It's a good place to relax, to get spiritual and emotional counseling and unwind before and after their mission out there."

Far from Starbuck's, the crux of the operation is "eight-to-10 industrial-size coffee urns going full-time, non-stop," he explains.

"New England Coffee made a huge donation when I first started this up, and Celestial Tea just sent us a huge shipment of tea," Jastermsky says, noting additional support Tetley Tea and Green Mountain Coffee, as well as local coffee shops.

Some Jastermsky has approached have said they don't support the war, but they are supporting the coffee effort anyway.

"You don't have to support the war," Jastermsky replies. "It's not about the war. It's about the need to support our neighbors,



Wallingford, Conn., volunteers celebrate collections destined for the Oasis Café in Baghdad. (Photo furnished)

the American and British soldiers, those who are there."

In addition, the church is sending cards and letters to encourage soldiers who gather at Holy Joe's, as well as toys for soldiers to give to Iraqi children. "They love Slinkys," Jastermsky says. "The kids there have never seen Slinkys."

To support the "Holy Joe's" Coffee Campaign, contact First Congregational UCC in Wallingford, Conn., at 203/697-1042.

**INTRIGUING**

The Rev. Ginny Brown-Daniel was named by the Copperfield (Texas) Sun as one of the top 10 personalities in northwest **Houston, Texas**, in 2006. She was recognized for being the "spiritual leader of the innovative and culturally progressive" **Plymouth UCC**, which made headlines in June "when congregation members voted to embrace the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender communities," said the newspaper. "The doors of the sanctuary are not only open to the community as members, but all are welcome to serve in the churches hierarchy as leaders."

**PROMOTED**

U.S. Air Force Chaplain Colonel Jeffrey A. Dull, a UCC minister, has been named staff chaplain of the U.S. Central Command and now serves as senior religious advisor to the U.S. Commanding General, covering a region of 27 countries, including Iraq, Afghanistan, the Arabian Peninsula and the Horn of Africa. Dull oversees 900 Air Force, Army, Navy and Marine chaplains and chaplain assistants who minister to more than 200,000 troops and embassy staff. Dull, who holds UCC ministerial standing in the Mercersburg Association of Penn Central Conference, also serves as a liaison for interfaith dialogue with Muslim clergy and government officials in the region.

**ON BOARD**

David Nelson of Westlake, Ohio, has been named Vice President for Insurance Operations for the UCC Insurance Board. He will manage delivery of service to UCCIB's member churches in the UCC and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). A graduate of

the University of Michigan, Nelson previously worked for Willis Brokerage which worked closely with UCCIB to obtain program coverages.

**STEPPING DOWN**

The Rev. Susan Thistlethwaite, president of UCC-related Chicago Theological Seminary, told the school's board of trustees on Dec. 4 that she plans to return to full-time teaching and will not seek an extension in her contract that ends in June 2008. By then, she will have served as CTS president for 10 years.

**REMEMBERED**

The Rev. Wesley A. Hotchkiss, 88, died on January 7. For more than 35 years, he served the UCC as the general secretary for higher education and as director of the former American Missionary Association, most notably during the Civil Rights era. He was a founder of the Amistad Research Center, now housed at Tulane University in New Orleans.

"Wes was one of the giants of the United Church of Christ," said the Rev. John H. Thomas, general minister and president. "While with the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries, he played a key role in the work of Andy Young and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which was supported by UCBHM."

A graduate of UCC-related Chicago Theological Seminary, Hotchkiss received a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago. He served as a military chaplain during World War II. His wife, Mary Ellen, died in 2003.

Expressions of sympathy can be made to Hospice and Palliative Care, 111 Founders Plaza, East Hartford, CT 06108.

**CLERGY DEATHS**

- Bailey, Richard K., 82, 12/10/2006
- Beer, Howard W., 82, 1/1/2007
- Begg, A. James, 77, 10/31/2006
- Bobtail Bear, Lelie, 70, 11/3/2006
- Brallier, Virgil V., 91, 11/1/2006
- Byer, Paul H., 74, 11/9/2006
- Campbell, E.A., 84, 1/3/2007
- Enstrom, Walter G., 75, 10/31/2006
- Ford, Marie, 61, 12/21/2006
- Frasier, Richard E., 72, 11/1/2006
- Ganglfinger, George, 69, 11/4/2006
- Griffin, Dale F., 92, 1/2/2007
- Keller, Ronald J., 79, 10/7/2006

- Koch, Arthur R., 83, 12/31/2006
- Martin, Harriett N., 83, 11/1/2006
- Mehl, Paul F., 78, 12/9/2006
- Morita, Isamu, 82, 11/8/2006
- Rowley, Stewart K., 76, 10/29/2006
- Russell, Galen E., 75, 12/27/2006
- Sansoucie, Robert W., 83, 1/4/2007
- Schreiner, Charles F., 85, 11/25/2006
- Schroedel, Carl R., 71, 11/10/2006
- West, Anne M., 82, 12/21/2006
- Winter, Lewis S., 83, 10/20/2006
- Wood, Jerome H., 73, 11/13/2006

Information on clergy deaths is provided by the UCC's Pension Boards.

**PASTORAL CHANGES**

- Ayup, Fe E. to Topside Molokai UCC, Kaunakakai, HI
- Cain, Casey M. Oskaloosa, IA to First Cong. UCC, Cedar Rapids, IA
- Clark, David Pembroke, MA to Community UCC, West Dennis, MA
- Clark, Teresa L. Washington, MO to Faith UCC, Muscatine, IA
- Eilts, Mitzi N. Clinton, CT to First Cong. UCC, Essex, CT
- Flad, Bridget Oconomowoc, WI to Plymouth UCC, Milwaukee, WI
- Garrison, Phillip to St. Andrew UCC, Sarasota, FL
- Giesmann, Donald Fostoria, OH to Salem UCC, Huntingburg, IN
- Girdley, Paul to Cong. Christian UCC, Hagerstown, IN
- Godich, Sandra to St. Luke's Medical Center, Milwaukee, WI
- Hallstein, Ann East Hampton, MA to First UCC, Deerfield, MA
- Hammonds, Donald to interim, First Cong. UCC, Boise, ID
- James, Jesse to First Cong. UCC, Kokomo, IN
- Kosko, James to Cong. UCC, Elk Grove, CA
- Magyar, Linda Nashville, TN to Cong. UCC, East Granby, CT
- Mark, Richard Welcome, MN to Zoar/St. John's UCC, Chaska/Norwood, MN
- Quinn, David to Dryland UCC, Nazareth, PA
- Sattizahn, Daniel T. Lancaster, PA to interim, Salem UCC, Campbellsport, WI
- Schwab, Christopher R. to First Hawaiian UCC, Kaapa, Kauai, HI
- Shoobridge, David to Cong. UCC, Medford, MN
- Slessor, Rodney to St. Paul's UCC, Welcome, MN
- Smith, Gregory K. Humboldt, IA to St. Paul's UCC, Oshkosh, WI
- Speece, Grant G. to interim, First Cong. UCC, Sherburne, MN
- Stifter, Vickie to Riverside Community UCC, Hood River, OR
- Titusdahl, Gary to interim, UCC, Cottage Grove, MN
- Wills, Donald A. to Alliance for Community Justice, Gunnison, CO

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

"I think these days we're having a bit of a culture war and Jesus happens to be one of the weapons that gets tossed about, in fact, by both sides."  
- Amy-Jill Levine

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**Saving Jesus from the Religious Right and the Secular Left**



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Hartford, Conn., is host to the UCC's 50th anniversary General Synod; 10,000 people are expected to attend the celebrations.

## Storied Hartford church rooted in urban ministry

**I**mmanuel UCC, known for its grand architecture and urban ministry, is the descendant of Hartford's North Congregational Church.

"That's important," emphasizes the Rev. Ed Horstmann, "because [in the mid-19th century] Horace Bushnell was the pastor of North Church, and he's been described as the father of American Liberal Christianity. Our pulpit is dedicated to him."

Horstmann says General Synod visitors will be interested in Immanuel's "extraordinarily glorious sanctuary," designed by architect Earnest Flagg, who also designed the United States Naval Academy Chapel in Annapolis, Md. "It's a domed structure, and does not look anything like a traditional New England church because it's made out of brick."

Just across the street from the church building are two other buildings of note, the Mark Twain House and the Harriett Beecher Stowe Center.

Aside from its aesthetic qualities, though, Horstmann describes his church as "deeply committed to urban ministry."

Horstmann is especially proud of Immanuel's involvement with two urban schools, Hartford Public High School, and Noah Webster Elementary School. Immanuel maintains ongoing involvement with both schools including mentoring, tutoring, and family resources. Each year, the church sponsors one grade and provides each student with a new backpack filled with school supplies.

"This is a congregation who cares very deeply about the welfare

of our region," says Horstmann. "And I use the word region, not only city."

Immanuel hopes to be a strong presence at General Synod this year.

"We'll have a table in our fellowship hall every single Sunday, recruiting people to attend, to volunteer, and to bake cookies."

Horstmann, of course, is referring to a long-standing Synod tradition: local churches provide homemade cookies for all the guests over the five-day event.

The Rev. Davida Foy Crabtree, Connecticut Conference Minister, estimates that they will need a staggering 16,000 dozen cookies to fulfill this requirement.

"We're very excited to be part of the hosting process," says Horstmann.

## Connection to U.S. Constitution hallmark of centuries-old church

**F**irst Church of Christ UCC in Hartford, also known as Center Church, is proud to be turning 375 years old this year, just as the UCC celebrates its 50th.

The congregation organized itself in 1632, and four years later, its members founded the actual town of Hartford.

"[The church] has always been on Main Street," says the Rev. Dick Sherlock. "It still is."

Thomas Hooker, the first called minister of the congregation, is fa-

mous for having preached a sermon on The Fundamental Orders of a Democratic Society.

"Many points in that sermon were explicitly made part of the first written constitution," Sherlock says. "Parts of it are in our Constitution of the United States now."

Being in close physical proximity to the Civic Center will mean that Center Church will be a location for off-site Synod events, such as breakfasts for certain caucuses, and a musical event or two. That's just fine with Sherlock, who looks forward to the special events in addition to the church's own year-long anniversary events.

Despite its rich history as a main-

stay in downtown Hartford, Sherlock says that the congregation works hard to stay vital in its urban setting, while managing to maintain its two old buildings.

"We are very heavily involved in community and social justice and anti-racism ministries, and we are Open and Affirming," says Sherlock. "We aren't very big, and 70 percent of our members do not live within the geographical boundaries of Hartford."

But Center Church has a diverse congregation in many ways: race, ethnicity, economics, age, gender and sexual orientation.

"We have good worship, and lots of opportunities to serve in the city," Sherlock says.

# SUMMER GETAWAY

## Hartford churches gearing up for 50th anniversary General Synod

**H**artford, Conn., is gearing up for the UCC's 26th General Synod this summer, June 22-26.

Synod, held every two years, is especially noteworthy this year, as the UCC celebrates its 50th anniversary.

The Rev. Davida Foy Crabtree, Connecticut Conference Minister, says the Conference is already working hard to make this year's Synod a memorable one.

"The preparations for Synod are Conference-wide," she says. "When you've got 10,000 to 12,000 people coming, we're not just looking at a few hundred volunteers. We're imagining we're going to need over a thousand volunteers for this."

Because most Synod events will take place in the Hartford Civic Center, a venue used mainly for sporting events, Crabtree says, "no matter where you are sitting, you will be able to see what is happening."

On Saturday, June 23, "Synod in the City" will be an all-day festival of worship, Bible study, workshops, lectures, and concerts that will branch out from the Civic Center to other events held throughout the city.

Crabtree says capable staff members and volunteers are already charting out street hospitality, making sure visitors have no question where to go and how to get there.

Crabtree says all the ancillary venues are within a 10-minute walk from the Civic Center, "but there will be vans that are handicapped accessible available to those who need them."

Crabtree is proud that so many visitors will see historic Hartford and its many vibrant, diverse UCC churches within the city.

"Not only do we have Synod in the City all day on Saturday and this glorious birthday event on Sat-

WE'RE IMAGINING we're going to need over a thousand volunteers for this."

— The Rev. Davida Foy Crabtree



Downtown Hartford will be the main staging area for "Synod in the City," an all-day festival of worship, lectures, Bible study and concerts.

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Online registration for General Synod is available at

<UCC.ORG/SYNOD>

urday night," she says, "but also Sunday afternoon worship is going to be fabulous. People will want to stay for that. It'll be quite an experience."

## Historic African-American church offers rich blend of old and new

**F**aith Congregational UCC in Hartford is an historic African-American church that formed in 1819. Its founding members no longer wanted to be assigned seats in the galleries at white churches.

The church has been an active part of the Hartford African-American community for over 188 years.

"Worship at Faith Congregational Church is a blend of the rich tradition of the African-American church and the emerging forms of

worship of today's church," says Ann Jennings, lay leader. "Our worship experience is one of celebration, praise, affirmation and service to God."

For those attending General Synod, Faith Congregational UCC is conveniently located near the downtown Hartford Civic Center.

"We're anxious to be part of General Synod, because we're one of the oldest black congregational churches in the country," says Jennings.