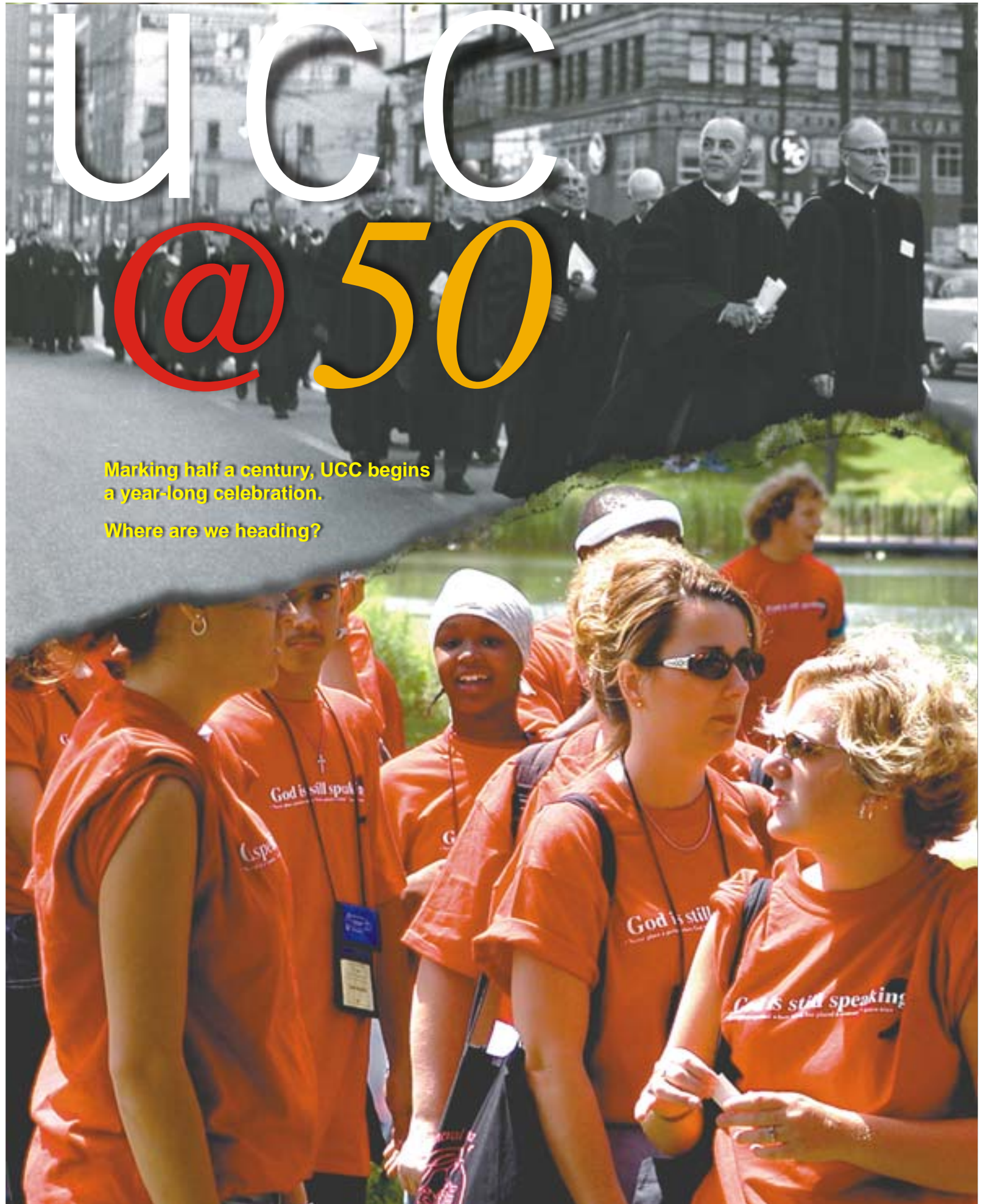




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United Church of Christ
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October | November 2006



UCC @50

Marking half a century, UCC begins
a year-long celebration.

Where are we heading?

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CANDIDATES' ITCH

Can running for political office be
spiritually based?



It's time to go public with our faith

FROM THE COLLEGIUM



Linda Jaramillo

The challenges before our nation and the world are great, and it is as important as ever that we EQUIP OURSELVES and each other to make informed, thoughtful decisions based on our faith values."

Politics is often taken to be a dirty word.

But political processes are simply the way that communities organize their common life. For people of faith, public policy is never merely politics. It is a way of living out the commandments to love our neighbor as ourselves.

It is fitting for local congregations and church structures to develop nonpartisan programs to help the faith community reflect upon the political order. Such a calling was affirmed by General Synod 11 in 1977. A resolution noted that the UCC has, throughout its history, sought to "equip the saints for the task of prophetic ministry within the biblical tradition," and invited various settings of the church to pursue this ministry by providing voter registration, public hearing on policy issues and "encouraging participation in the political process."

Congregations can develop and engage in nonpartisan programs, including sending teams to interview candidates, organizing candidate nights in churches, holding issue education sessions for members and conducting voter registration and participation drives. In all these activities, the goal is to get the concerns of the church into public debate through the media and to elect candidates concerned about promoting justice and the common good.

The UCC's "Our Faith, Our Vote" campaign has been designed to help you discover ways in which you and your congregation can get involved in the legal process. The IRS tax code provides latitude for churches and religious organizations to navigate the waters of political involvement.

The November mid-term elections will shape congressional debate and action around the war in Iraq, health care coverage, hurricane recovery, rising energy costs and "wedge" issues such as just and humane immigration policy and the proposed constitutional amendment on marriage.

The challenges before our nation and the world are great, and it is as important as ever that we equip ourselves and each other to make informed, thoughtful decisions about those who will lead us into the future, based on our faith values.

It is Justice and Witness Ministries' fervent hope that you will connect and reconnect with members of your local church and community this year through the "Our Faith, Our Vote" campaign.

The Rev. Linda Jaramillo is executive minister for the UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries and a member of the UCC's five-person Collegium of Officers.

Related stories on the UCC's "Our Faith, Our Vote" campaign, including more information about IRS tax code guidelines, can be found on pages 16-17. Learn more online at <ourfaithourvote.org>.

news.ucc.org

ON THE WEB 24-7

► Three-hundred-thousand \$1 bills

Asking for only \$1 on one day, America's teens are transforming NFL's Super Bowl weekend into the nation's largest youth-led day of giving. Standing at church doors with soup pots, young people from many denominations in all 50 states receive donations and give their collection to the hunger-related charity of their choice.

In 2006, UCC youth groups raised over \$183,000 through Souper Bowl of Caring to help people who are hungry.

"The Souper Bowl of Caring provides a unique ecumenical opportunity and witness," said John Thomas, UCC general minister and president. "Most of all, Souper Bowl of Caring serves needy people and helps with leadership development among our youth."

The Rev. DaVita McCallister, the UCC's minister for youth and young adults, says the UCC's 2007 goal is for our youth groups to raise \$300,000.

Over 600 UCC youth groups have already registered to participate in the February 4, 2007, event. To be counted in national totals each group is asked to sign up at <souperbowl.org>.

► Reading, writing, Katrina

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Justice and Witness Ministries' 2007 Message on Public Education tells the story of public education in New Orleans.

It is also filled with resources to help congregations advocate for justice in the upcoming reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act.

For printed copies, contact Jan Resseger, the UCC's minister for public education and witness, at <ressegerj@ucc.org>. Otherwise, it's available for download online at <ucc.org/justice/education>.

► Your media-circus ticket

The interfaith Religion Communicators Council has produced the definitive resource to help congregations with media dilemmas and public relations quandaries.

"The RCC's 'Speaking Faith' Handbook for Religion Communicators is essential for someone who has any communications responsibilities as part of their job," says Shirley Struchen, RCC executive director and a former producer for United Methodist Communications. "Sixteen chapters — from crisis communications, to copyrights, from web design and graphic identity to creating newsletters — this handbook will make your task easier."



UNITED CHURCH NEWS



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ADVERTISING Connie Larkman at <larkmanc@ucc.org> or 866/822-8224 ext. 2196 for display and Marketplace (classified) ads, four-page inserts and web advertising.

SHORTHAND



Designed so you can read it, write it and learn it, all worksheets come on a companion CD, "so you don't have to tear your handbook apart," Struchen says.

Order for \$19.95, plus \$6 shipping/handling, by writing RCC Handbook, c/o UMR Communications, 1221 Profit, Dallas, TX 75247. Learn more at <religioncommunicators.org>.

► Clicking to the chapel

<i.UCC> — the UCC's virtual community for seekers and local-church members — has opened a live prayer chapel.

Since September, the chapel has been open for a half-hour services of Evening Prayer every day at 9 p.m. (ET) at <i.ucc.org>. The service, like worship in the local congregation, is interactive.

"After a reading and time for meditation, participants are invited to type in their prayer requests," says the Rev. David Schoen, the UCC's evangelism team leader. "These are then gathered into a prayer by one of our online pastors, followed by a benediction and time for fellowship. This is a great way to meet and pray with other UCC members and with virtual 'visitors' to our church."

Since April, <i.UCC> — pronounced "eye-dot-UCC" — has invited prayer requests from its users on its "Prayer Chapel" forum. But the new daily service, known as "Prayer Chapel Live," adds the intimacy of bringing users together in real time. The chapel creates a sense of sacred space with a flash video of a burning candle accompanied by instrumental music and chant.

"We can't reproduce in cyberspace the physicality of sacramental worship in a local congregation," says Andy Lang, online community developer for the UCC's Local Church Ministries. "Worship in the community of a local church will always be the most important way that Christians encounter God through word and sacrament. But online worship can satisfy a need some of our members have for daily corporate prayer at the end of day, can give seekers a sense of community before they join a congregation, and is potentially a spiritual lifeline for those living in nursing homes, or in prison, or who live miles away from the nearest UCC congregation."

<i.UCC> chose 9 p.m. (ET) as the best time to reach all time zones in the UCC.

"As the <i.UCC> community grows, it's possible we might be able to organize a schedule of services zone-by-zone, so our members in Hawaii, for example, won't be limited to a service at three in the afternoon," Lang said.

<i.UCC> also provides its users with interactive forums for Bible study and spiritual growth, an online inquirer's class, a three-part video on UCC history and identity, and a growing library of music and art for meditation. "Weekly Seeds" — a free weekly opt-in email list written by the Rev. Kate Huey — sends a Bible reading and meditation each week to the subscriber's mailbox.

<i.UCC> is a project of Local Church Ministries' Congregational Vitality Initiative.

► Pew's take on the pews

A Pew Research Center poll, released on Aug. 24, shows 32 percent of Americans think of themselves as "liberal or progressive Christians," while 24 percent self-identify as evangelical Christians.

Yet, when asked to identify religious-political leanings, only 7 percent said they were part of the "religious left," compared to 11 percent who identified as being part of the "religious right."

Evangelicals remain more cohesive, pollsters said, because members "share core religious beliefs as well as crystallized and consistently conservative political attitudes."

'TROUBLED WATERS'**Lynn Redgrave to host UCC-documentary airing on ABC-TV stations**By J. Bennett Guess
Editor

"Water, water everywhere. Not a drop to drink," wrote Samuel Taylor Coleridge in his 1798 poem, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner."

But one doubts that corporate ownership of the world's depleting fresh water sources was the problem he then had in mind.

Nevertheless, today, some United Nations officials, religious leaders and environmental activists are taking increasing notice of who is accumulating ownership of the globe's ever-shrinking sources of drinkable water. Some are even insisting that access to water — not oil — will be the primary cause of wars in the 21st century.

And the UCC is doing its part to raise the pertinent justice issues surrounding the immediate and future availability of life-giving, life-sustaining water.

Set to begin airing Oct. 22 on ABC-TV stations nationally, a new UCC-produced documentary, "Troubled Waters," will remind viewers that safe water's "primary source" is not a 12-ounce plastic bottle. It's the world's rivers, streams and lakes that are being strained by the world's burgeoning population and consumption.

Acclaimed actress Lynn Redgrave, a member of **First Congregational UCC in Kent, Conn.**, is hosting the 60-minute documentary, which was filmed in various locations around the world, including Porto Alegre, Brazil, where UCC justice advocates joined ecumenical partners in February to raise water-availability concerns at the World Council of Churches' 9th international assembly.

While there, global delegates affirmed that "access to freshwater supplies is becoming an urgent matter across the planet."

"The survival of 1.2 billion people is currently in jeopardy due to lack of adequate water and sanitation," the WCC Assembly's resolution states. "Unequal access to water causes conflicts between and among people, communities, regions and nations."

UCC film crews also traveled to the Middle East; Bolivia; Waukesha, Wis.; Washington, D.C.; Boston, Mass., among other locations, to capture stories of water's evaporating availability. Even in Cleveland, Ohio, where the UCC's national offices are located, crews filmed a segment on Lake Erie, due to emerging fresh-water fights brewing along the Great Lakes.

Thomas: Christians, Jews share 'unbreakable covenant'

Christians and Jews remain "inextricably linked" and the bond "cannot be broken," said the Rev. John Thomas, the UCC's general minister and president, on Sept. 19

Speaking at the fall convocation at UCC-related United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities in Minnesota, Thomas used the occasion to give a significant theological address on Christian-Jewish relations.

Thomas recalled how the UCC's General Synod, in 1987, was groundbreaking in its call for more than mere "tolerance" and "friendship" between Christians and Jews, but for "a theological and biblical grounding that placed the relationship within the very faithfulness and providence of God."

The UCC was among the earliest Chris-

Redgrave — nominated for an Academy Award in 1966 for her groundbreaking role in *Georgy Girl* — agreed to take part in the UCC production for two reasons, according to the Rev. Robert Chase, the UCC's communications director and one of the documentary's executive producers. First, Redgrave expressed an abiding love and appreciation for the UCC, which is her church, Chase says. And second, she was impressed with the quality of another UCC-produced justice documentary, "Strong Roots, Fragile Farms," which tackled concerns about globalization's impact on family farms and aired on ABC-TV stations in 2002 and the Hallmark channel in 2004 and 2005. (See related story on page 11.)

"It's easy for some of us to take water for granted," says Jean Robinson, the UCC's video producer who has overseen the church's globe-trotting project, "because it seems like water is always available from our faucet, and we have a wide selection of brands of bottled water to choose from in stores."

"But with continuing increases in the world's population, water resources are being strained as never before," she says. "It's a dwindling natural resource that is turning what should be a basic human right into a commodity to be bought and sold. These forces have threatened the well-being of poor communities across the globe."

Made available for use by local ABC-TV affiliates through the Interfaith Broadcasting Commission, the documentary examines water issues through the stories of people who are struggling daily with the crisis, Robinson said. It also looks at the theological significance of water to Christians, Jews and Muslims.

The Rev. Wally Ryan Kuroiwa of the UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries, also an executive producer and the project's brainchild, says the people most affected by the water crisis are those on the margins, the poor, the powerless.

He cites the plight of villagers in India who have "pleaded" with companies like Coca-Cola (bottler of Desani Water) and Pepsi (bottler of Aquafina) "not to take our water."

"But [these companies] now own the rights to their water," Ryan Kuroiwa said. "There needs to be a voice for them, as Jesus spoke for the marginalized of his day. Or let them speak for themselves, which they now have the opportunity to do through this video."

LEARN MORE @
<troubledwatersdoc.com>

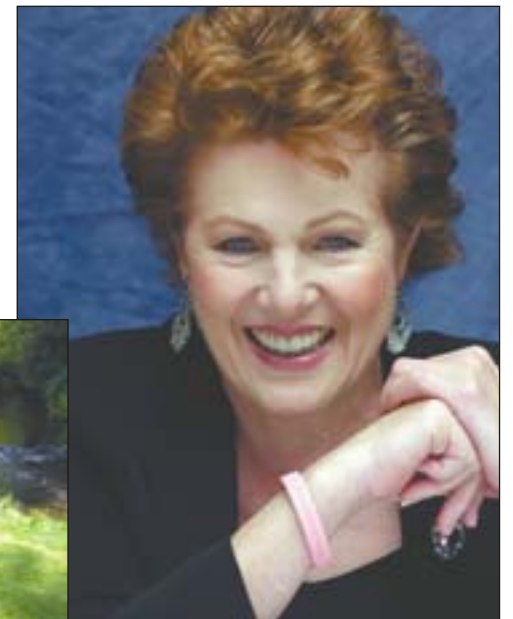
tian denominations to refute the characterization of Christianity as a "superseding" faith to Judaism, he said, adding that the statement remains "the official position of the General Synod and its officers."

In July 2005, General Synod approved a resolution calling for the church's use of "economic leverage" to promote peace in the Middle East, including the possibility of divestment from companies that profit from Israel's occupation of Palestinian lands. A second resolution called on Israel to tear down a massive separation wall built on Palestinian territory that has forced many Palestinians from their homes.

Thomas said a two-state solution remains the only viable option for Israel and Palestine to live together in peace.

The survival of 1.2 billion people is currently IN JEOPARDY due to lack of adequate water and sanitation."

— From "Water for Life," a 2006 statement from the World Council of Churches' 9th international assembly



Shown on location (l.), actress and UCC member Lynn Redgrave will narrate the "Troubled Waters" documentary.

Lynn Redgrave photo by Fotos International/Contributor

GATHERING 'CRITICAL MASS'**Vail, Colorado, to be test site for church-start advertising blitz**

By J. Bennett Guess

For at least five years now, the Stillspeaking Initiative has been the catalyst for helping existing UCC churches to grow, both spiritually and numerically. But now the identity campaign is being tapped to try something altogether different: starting a new congregation from the ground up.

Or, at least exploring whether there's sufficient interest in forming one in a place where none currently exists.

In October and November, the UCC's Cleveland-based national setting, in partnership with the Rocky Mountain Conference, will sink about \$10,000 into a coordinated advertising campaign in the Vail, Colo., area. Using existing TV, radio and print ads, the national Stillspeaking materials will be tweaked to introduce townfolk to the UCC through a coordinated local campaign.

The purpose will be two-fold: to sow some seeds about the UCC's identity and then to invite would-be newcomers to a few specific events. Those who show up will take it from there, with help from the staff of the Rocky Mountain Conference.

What began as a "what if" by the Rev. Bob Kinsey, a retired UCC pastor in Colorado, is emerging into a new, experimental approach to evangelism. Kinsey's "dream" is to take advantage of the UCC's well-tested, ever-familiar marketing materials to invite potential newcomers in a specific area — such as Vail — to church-organizing meetings.

"Since people have responded to the [Stillspeaking] campaign in the past, I thought the use of media would be a good first approach, instead of knocking door to door to see what interest might be out there," Kinsey said. "It seems like an intelligent approach, since we already had materials. It's a better way to go about it."

Kinsey has agreed to coordinate the initial gathering, but he's clear that he's not going to the organizing pastor, just a facilitating presence.

The Rev. Tom Rehling, Rocky Mountain Conference Minister, has vetted the plan with members of his Conference's Growth Ministry Team.

"The Growth Ministry Team is supportive and willing to seek funding for a gathering minister when a critical mass — about 50 or more — are gathered in the area," Rehling said.

Generally speaking, new churches are started by earmarking funds for a specific start-up pastor who then heads out to round up an initial circle of worshippers. The UCC's experimental media approach is not intended to supplant that time-tested method, but it could be a vehicle for church leaders to determine what communities are worth investing ever-shrinking start-up dollars.

In the 1970s, the UCC experimented with the notion of sinking money into new facilities where new churches could form; an idea that didn't bear much fruit.

"In our Stillspeaking meeting [in late September], we acknowledged that, as a church, we need to find ways to move forward in nimble ways, seizing opportunities that present themselves," said the Rev. Robert Chase, the UCC's communications director.

"We will, no doubt, make mistakes," Chase said, "but if we keep our eyes, ears, minds and hearts open to the experience, we will learn a lot about how to respond to the Gospel's call in our day. Let's not be foolish, but let's expect the unexpected."

Considered one of the nation's premiere resort towns, Vail is home to only about 5,000 year-round residents, but that's a misleading population count given the number of seasonal residents who populate the area, both in winter and summer.

DISTINGUISHING 'IMPORTANT' FROM 'URGENT'

What really makes for visible change rarely tops our agendas

“PEOPLE HATE MEETINGS, I think, because so little time is ACTUALLY DEVOTED to driving and dreaming the organization's growth and vitality.”

NEVER
OURSELVES
ALONE



J. Bennett Guess
Editor

How's that Great American Novel coming along, the book you've always planned to write?

Or the 20 pounds you said you're going to lose before the next class reunion? Or the launching of that new career?

Of course, you don't have to take care of it *today* — just *someday* — and therein lies the problem: You don't have time or energy to do it now — at this moment — so it never gets done.

The demands of what's "urgent" always seem to trump what's "important," as those professional development gurus tell us.

It seems that life's biggest dreams or challenges — starting a business, overcoming an addiction, or forming a rock band — most likely wither away while we mow the yard instead. We forget that big steps are merely a series of steady, smaller ones.

Ask any big-time author how they manage to churn out a new book every year, and they'll talk of "three hours at the computer every morning." Ask any late-in-life college grad how they did it, and they'll speak of last semester's "Tuesday-Thursday schedule." Ask any marathoner

about the daunting "26.2," and they'll talk of the four miles they ran this morning.

Setting aside some time for "important," when "urgent" is breathing down your neck, there's the predicament. It's true at a personal level, but it speaks to group life as well, especially the church.

Naively, I once thought the problem was just symptomatic of the small-time circles from whence I hail. I can recall spending endless nights at board meetings where the most constructive thing we accomplished was calendaring who would bring the Pepsi and Oreos to the next month's meeting.

Unfortunately, I've since found a similar psychosis exists within some of the national boards to which I've belonged.

After we spend time perusing last month's minutes, approving financial statements, receiving and giving reports, and then fretting over the organization's most-visible crumbling place, we have little time or energy for advancing what the group says it's there to do, for scheming about ways to move our mission forward.

"What if?" — that's the part we rarely, if ever, get to. And when the agenda finally calls for it, we're generally too exhausted, too spent. It's never the top item.

I've become a firm believer that the world is suffering from too little brainstorming, and too few of us have been mentored in how to do it well.

People hate meetings, I think, not because

they hate the organizations they're charged to serve, but rather because so little time is actually devoted to driving and dreaming the organization's growth and vitality. Instead, "we're gagging on gnats," as one friend describes it.

New ideas often sound like more work, and given the membership losses, budget cutbacks and staff downsizing that mainline churches have experienced, "more work" is the last thing we're looking for.

But perhaps it's because we've become so focused on "urgent" — uh, survival — that we've forgotten "important." Yet "important" is the only thing that will take us to that next big place.

That doesn't mean we can ignore "urgent" — after all, everyone needs clean underwear — but it does mean that we need to rearrange agendas and set aside time for some whacky, creative solutions-driven conversation, even though "urgent" will always try to convince us otherwise.

We've all learned to accommodate "urgent" quite well, but I know fewer that entertain "important" to the same degree. Maybe that's because these kinds of long-term-focused conversations require a base recognition that where we're at (or heading) is not where we'd like to be.

The place to begin is by establishing a level of trust and safety where each can throw out ideas and suggestions — tempered by reality, to be sure, but not doused by it.

I suggest taking off your shoes and getting started.



LETTERS

'Let's do it'

Let us continue to educate our churches what Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM) stands for and its significance, so that our contributions will flow timely through our Conference/Association offices.

If each one of us would commit to sending \$100 or more directly to support OCWM, we could make a huge difference in our ministries. It is by our generous contribution to the UCC that "they may be all one" (John 17:21). Let's do it!

Dory Lingo
Church of the Open Door UCC, Miami, Fla.
Past President, United Black Christians

'Indifference sustains the crucible'

The great Jewish rabbi and biblical scholar, Abraham Joshua Heschel, wrote a few years ago: "A single act of injustice; to us it is slight. To the prophets, it is a disaster."

Recently, there appeared a dramatic photograph of a 12-year-old Palestinian girl, Huda Ghalia, with tears flowing down her cheeks as she wept uncontrollably over the dead body of her father. Huda's father, mother, and five siblings were killed when an Israeli gunboat fired on people picnicking on a beach. Huda survived because she was swimming in the ocean.

For 39 years, the mad struggle between Israelis and Palestinians has been raging in plain sight. There has been terrible violence on both sides as we all know. The state of Israel has a

right to exist. That right must be protected. The Palestinians have a right to a state as well. The illegal occupation of their territories must come to an end in a settlement that is truly just and not the ugly charade currently taking place.

The General Synod has spoken over the years to this tragedy. But indifference in congregational life helps sustain the crucible. Our taxes help pay for it. But most of us keep quiet. Our silence deepens the anguish.

The Rev. Frederick Trost
Middleton, Wis.

Chaplains 'live out faith, commitment'

I was pleased to read about the official recognition and gratitude for military chaplains and armed forces personnel associated with the UCC. (Aug.-Sept).

My twin brother (also UCC clergy) and I were children when our father, the Rev. Russell T. Loesch, served as an Army Air Corps Chaplain in Europe during World War II from 1942-46. As a civilian pastor, he served from 1955-61 as Minister to Chaplains and Armed Forces Personnel of the Congregational Christian Churches and then the newly created UCC.

From my father, and from meeting many chaplains and armed forces men and women throughout my life, I have always respected their work in peacetime and in times of war. They live out their faith — of all religious traditions — and commitment daily that others may live in peace and freedom.

The Rev. Robert Loesch
Zion's UCC
Sand Lake, N.Y.

Chaplain Liteky's most-heroic act

I found it remarkable that eight military chaplains have been awarded our nation's highest honor for bravery, The Congressional Medal of Honor (Aug.-Sept.).

It has been a personal honor to have known one of these chaplains, Charles Liteky, who was decorated for extraordinary bravery on the battle field in Vietnam for saving scores of lives. But Chaplain Liteky demonstrated as much, if not more, by returning his medal in protest over American complicity in the atrocities he witnessed in Central America during the 1980s.

Liteky is the only Medal of Honor winner to have had the courage and the moral fortitude to return his medal as a matter of conscience and thereby forfeit the financial and social benefits accorded this select group.

The Rev. David C. Duncombe
Salmon, Wash.

'Who belongs?'

I noted with interest two commentary articles in the last issue: one by the Rev. Bob Thompson concerning the new movement, "Faithful and Welcoming Churches," and the *ad hominem* "rebuttal" by the Rev. Nancy Taylor ignoring the concerns of those churches and instead launching an attack on FWC's president.

Taylor's closing remark, however, is instructive for the conversation that should be going on among us. She stated that in our "different" denomination, "ordinary and faithful Christians gather together to discern the mind of Christ." Period. There is another view, a Barthian view, long held by the reformers and the universal church: God's will has been revealed to us in the Word.

In our polity, ordinary and faithful Christians gather together to discern and apply the mind of Christ "as it has been given to us in the Word of God." We don't make up religion based on our best ideas. We don't put a comma where God has put a period.

Both views still exist in UCC churches. Taylor assumes the normalcy of her view, and this is the problem. I hold to the second, and I

was born and bred in the UCC from a long line of UCC (Reformed) ancestry, as is Thompson. Who belongs?

The Rev. John Wagner
Andover (N.H.) Congregational UCC

Polling for a pulse

The congregation of St. James UCC of Limerick, Pa., voted to give the UCC congregations an opportunity to express their opinions regarding the marriage equality resolution affirmed by General Synod 25 in Atlanta to see if the results would reflect a similar persuasion to that of the delegates. A questionnaire was mailed to every congregation, inviting their response by Pentecost 2006.

Three hundred and sixty-five useable surveys were returned, with 62 percent of responding churches saying that, if they had one vote, it would be in opposition to this resolution. Thirty percent were in favor of this resolution, and 8 percent would abstain from voting. (Note: Forty-six percent of responses reflected a congregational vote, 28 percent represented a board/council/consistory vote, and 26 percent were the pastor's perception of the representative opinion of his/her congregation.)

Fifty-one percent of these churches believe that the practice of voting on moral issues at General Synod should continue. Forty-three percent believe this practice should be discontinued, and 6 percent had no opinion.

The Rev. James Roth
Pastor, St. James UCC
Limerick, PA

Editor's note: There are 5,633 churches in the UCC.

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

NAFTA'S BLOODSHED

Is 'cheap coffee' worth the welfare of Mexican families?

COMMENTARY



Stan Duncan

When I hear Congress debating putting up walls or sending troops to our southern borders to keep out immigrants, I think of two young people I heard about when I was in Chiapas, Mexico, a couple of months ago.

I never actually met them, but I knew their families. They were kids actually, named Jasmine Diaz and Daniel Hernandez. They were 18-years-old and were engaged to be married. Their parents were wonder-

ful, hard-working people, and their families had been growing corn, beans and coffee in that region for over 100 years.

However, after the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the U.S. began exporting cheap subsidized corn to Mexico, which undercut the price of their local crop. It destroyed corn production for thousands of people.

At the same time, because of global over-production and the West's demand for cheap coffee, the growers' share of income has dropped to a 30-year low. According to the World Bank, the collapse of coffee has caused over 600,000 innocent people to lose their farms, their homes, their livelihoods.

Some of those were from Jasmine's family. Their living conditions had gotten so bad that one day last summer they finally decided they had to do something. Their options weren't good. They could join the rebels, they could migrate to the sweat shops, they could grow cocaine, or they could put together a delegation to make that dangerous and terrifying journey north into the United States to find work.

Typically, if they got in, they'd all rent a room together, take turns sleeping and working, eat as little as possible, and then send money back home. One day's work — picking vegetables in Southern California, at below minimum wage — could feed a family of six in Chiapas for a week.

So, they got six volunteers, all good workers, all young men, who would go north and try to get in. However, one problem was that Daniel was one of those going and he and Jasmine had just gotten engaged and they couldn't stand being apart from each other.

Maybe they both could find jobs; maybe they could afford a place together. Maybe they could finally get married — who knows? So the family agreed and they added Jasmine to the group, and then they all left.

They walked down their high remote mountain and made their way on foot for three weeks up the coast, along the spine of the westward side of the Sierra Madre mountains until, exhausted and broke, and they stopped at the town of Altar, about 60 miles south of the border, where they hired Bolivar Cerbando Morales-Galvez to be their "coyote."

"Coyotes" are unsavory, unscrupulous people who deal in bodies. For a fee they will smuggle people like Jasmine and Daniel and their family across the border into the new world.

There are actually several routes into the U.S. from Altar. The most popular is through the town of Sasabe, because there's less sand and more shade, and the journey is not as brutal. Another one is shorter, but straight up through the Sonora Desert. Jasmine and her family didn't have the \$1,200 to \$1,500 their coyote usually charges, so he took what they had, and then led them through the Sonora.

But it was a mistake. They were too weak, the journey had been too long, and the heat was too evil.

After three days they couldn't go any further. They begged their coyote to call ahead on his satellite mobile phone for help, but he wouldn't do it.

Finally about 100 miles southwest of Tucson, Ariz., on the Tohono O'odham Indian Reservation, most of them collapsed.



Jasmine Diaz and Daniel Hernandez are **not our enemies**. They didn't come here to hurt us, or take our jobs, or soak up our tax dollars. They came here because they were **HUNGRY**, because they were **DESPERATE**, and because **THEY LOVED EACH OTHER.**"



Migrants gather for their nighttime journey across the U.S. border.

Rebecca Bowman Woods photo

"I know that little Jasmine died for our sins."

They couldn't make it, so the coyote abandoned them.

Three of Jasmine's uncles, who were still strong enough, went on ahead and searched for help. They turned themselves in to some border guards in Gila's Bend, and then led the guards back to their friends.

When they arrived they found all of them in critical condition, dying from dehydration. Two of them recovered quickly. Two more were in intensive care for a while. But young Jasmine died.

I don't know how to solve the complex and difficult story of immigration in America. I can't begin to work through all of the legal and historical issues that brought us to where we are today.

But what I do know is that Jasmine Diaz and Daniel Hernandez are not our enemies. They didn't come here to hurt us, or take our jobs, or soak up our tax dollars.

They came here because they were hungry, because they were desperate, and because they loved each other.

And I know that little Jasmine died for our sins.

She died so that we could continue to worship a market system that destroys families and crushes human beings far away so that we can live well here at home — a system that forces down prices so that we can drink cheap coffee, a system that forces up immigration so that our farmers can have cheap labor.

Whatever sentence a judge might have given to that "coyote" who abandoned them in the Sonora desert, at the end of the day, you and I and all of our families are co-conspirators in the crime.

The Rev. Stan Duncan is pastor of **Abingdon UCC in Massachusetts.**



OVERHEARD

"Jews and Christians remain, even in moments of deepest tension, inextricably linked to one another by the God whose covenants with each community have not been and cannot be broken."

— The Rev. John H. Thomas, UCC general minister and president, in a major address of Christian-Jewish relations, given at the Fall Convocation of UCC-related United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities, Sept. 19.

"Certain religious groups have aggressively sought to define their agenda in the public's mind, through publicity and lobbying, as the 'Christian agenda.' On the contrary, there is a growing movement of Christian clergy who reject this agenda, for whom bigotry and exclusion have no place in the church."

— The Rev. Rebecca Voelkel, a UCC minister living in Minneapolis, speaking at a news conference in Dallas, on Sept. 11, 2006, about ways in which the 9/11 tragedy was hijacked by some religious leaders to scapegoat minority groups. (Associated Press)

"We try very hard to convey to churches that this is not something to be undertaken because the church wants to be nice."

— The Rev. Ann B. Day, on why it's important that the UCC's Open and Affirming Churches know and understand the welcoming stance they're taking. At General Synod 2007, Day plans to step down as ONA program coordinator after 20 years. During her tenure, she's helped lead more than 600 churches through the ONA study process. (Boston Globe, Aug. 26)



TABULATIONS

POINT-N-CLICK

Ignoring the typical church-slowdown season, members of the UCC's Justice and Peace Action Network remained busy this summer.

6,343 Responses to an action alert on Aug. 1 about raising the minimum wage, the summer's most-acted-upon e-mail campaign to Congress.

857 New Justice and Peace Action Network members who joined from June to August.

17,574 UCC members and friends now receiving weekly e-mail action alerts from the UCC.

Join the Justice and Peace Action Network at ucctakeaction.org.

Source: Justice and Witness Ministries



SOAPBOX

WE GOT GRATITUDE

Readers share how the UCC has blessed them

In our last issue, 'Soapbox' invited readers to take a break from the UCC's 'culture of critique,' as one national leader has dubbed it, and instead return some thanks for how the UCC has touched your lives in positive ways. As the UCC prepares to embark on its 50th year, here are some of the diverse 'thank you notes' we received:

'Changed my life'

There is much gratitude in my heart for the UCC, especially for the many years of involvement and numerous opportunities I have had with the national setting of our beloved church. This church has changed my life, and is responsible in significant ways for who I am today.

My six years of service on the directorate of the former Office for Church Life and Leadership, for example, gave me an incredible depth of insight into the local church. Now, into my 20th year of ordained ministry, I still recall with fondness the words of an early mentor, the late Reuben Sheares, OCLL's executive director, who reminded me to "love your folks, David, and they'll forgive you for many weaknesses." Like Paul to a younger Timothy, it was sound advice that has guided my ministry.

The Rev. David Charles Smith
Jordan UCC
Allentown, Pa.

'This body stands apart'

In a denomination that is full of acronyms, I would propose one more: "CCC." The UCC embodies conscience, courage, and commitment in its ministry.

While others may sidestep issues because of political correctness or popular opinion, the UCC has consistently challenged the status quo, demanding active justice. This body alone stands apart, in understanding that discipleship requires risks, not complacency. I applaud the UCC for standing up and speaking out.

Karen Lovelace
Church of the Apostles UCC
Lancaster, Pa.

'Democratic principles'

Thirty-three years after first visiting a UCC church, people ask what attracted me to the UCC. My stock reply remains, "The Constitution." Both the Congregational Church constitution and the United States constitution support democratic principles, personal involvement and wide participation in decision-making. Every member has a democratic say in church structures and church ministry. The constitution empowers me to reach out to the world through my church, the First Congregational UCC of Glen Ellyn.

Oliver Lawrence
Wheaton, Ill.

'We found a home'

I am grateful for the welcome and hospitality of the First Congregational UCC of Austin,

Minn., to my husband, Oliver, in the early 70s when he was a foreign exchange student from Cape Town, South Africa. The Stephen and Shirley Wright family hosted him, and Pastor Dwight Snedrud and his family befriended him. Leaving the Apartheid system 20 years ago, we found a common church home in the social activism of the UCC.

Merlyn Lawrence
Moderator, 26th General Synod.
Member, First Congregational UCC of Glen Ellyn, Ill.

'A love relationship'

Born in parsonage of Christian parents, I was brought up to take the gospel seriously. I'm an 84-year-old who enjoys a "love relationship" with the UCC because it dares to take the gospel of Jesus Christ seriously.

A few examples: Historically, it dared to support the abolition of slavery. It dared to defend the Wilmington Ten. It dares to ordain gays and lesbians, and now dares to support the union of couples regardless of gender. It dares to be a peace and justice church.

I do love this church!

The Rev. Paul Olm-Stoelting
Venice (Fla.) UCC

'Our Statement of Faith'

Our Statement of Faith is one of many things I love about being UCC.

A chapel service while I was in seminary used the UCC Statement of Faith. I was impressed! I still am. The Statement of Faith played a part in my becoming UCC.

I currently serve at an Episcopal Church. But, when on pulpit supply at a UCC church, I request that we use our Statement of Faith.

The Rev. Mary Capron
Saint Philip's Episcopal Church
New Hope, Pa.

'Made hope possible'

Many mainstream Christian denominations have announced policies of exclusion. I believed that I would one-day live to experience a church that would welcome me as a gay man, and extend to me the opportunity to seek ordination. The UCC made that hope possible. I waited six months before joining the UCC, needing to know that I was not just joining because they had voted marriage equality for all people. In this denomination I have found hope.

Francesco J Marshall
Riverside UCC
Jacksonville, Fla.

'Embracing differences'

Having served as a missionary in Japan for 12 years, I have been blessed with the opportunity to meet Christians from other denominations throughout the world.

I have come to understand that it is because of my experiences within the UCC that I have been able to embrace differences in the way we practice our faith while, at the same time, celebrate the living Christ within each of us.

The Rev. Diane Weible
Kaneohe, Hawaii

'Hats off' to outdoor ministries

I would like to express my gratitude to the Ohio Conference's Outdoor Ministries and our camps' personnel, along with the summer volunteers who give us campers a wonderful opportunity to experience God's love at two great camps, Temples Hills and Pilgrim Hills.

We're blessed with programming that's inspirational, crafts that are fun, food that is nourishing, and opportunities to gain new friends. We find God in our lives a little differently at camp. Hats off to all of you. I am so proud to share about our UCC camping programs with others.

Charlotte Bell
St. John UCC
Reading, Ohio

'Radically inclusive love'

These are a few of my favorite things about the UCC:

- ▶ Our embodiment of God's radically inclusive love;
- ▶ Our regular — almost consistent — stand for justice;
- ▶ Mentors like the Rev. Gene Ross and the Rev. Paul Forman; and
- ▶ The "God Is Still Speaking" campaign, which is giving me/us a language for evangelism that has integrity.

The Rev. Jeffrey S. Spencer
Niles Congregational UCC
Fremont, Calif.

'Candor and compassion'

When I returned from a year of work in the Middle East, the minister made an appropriate announcement to the congregation. An older woman, whom I barely knew, approached me after the service. With icy blue eyes fixed on me she said, "Good. You're home. I don't have to pray for you any more!"

What denomination, other than UCC, could offer such a strange mixture of candor and compassion?

Herbert Pence
Brookside Congregational UCC
Manchester, N.H.

Serving 'behind the scenes'

Too often, the UCC's national staff goes without recognition for the many ways they serve local churches, directly or indirectly.

I recently sought urgent help for a church that needed help with the media due to a controversial situation in the church's life. When I e-mailed the staff of the UCC's Proclamation, Identity and Communication Ministry Team, as well as the UCC's disaster response coordinator (who also had expertise in the situation), the local church received immediate coaching, guidance and support that was genuinely helpful to them. They went out of their way to be accessible and helpful, and the pastors and local church leaders knew they had excellent resources available to them.

I repent of missing other occasions when I could have written this letter. As a Conference staff person for 14 years, it would be impossible to name all the individuals on national staff who have been responsive and helpful. I hope this letter will serve as a heartfelt thank you. I also hope all UCC members will realize that our national staff serves "behind the scenes" in ways that many will never know, but they make a profound difference in supporting our ministries for Jesus Christ.

The Rev. Jane Fidler Hoffman
Illinois Conference Minister

'Thanks, delegates, for courage'

In the past year, I have been twice honored for my work in writing and encouraging passage of the Open and Affirming Resolution, which was adopted by 1984 Massachusetts Conference and the UCC's 15th General Synod in 1985.

I want to thank the delegates for the courage of your positive votes that opened a path for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender folks to become who they are. I now live in a state where same-sex marriage is legal, go to restaurants where same-sex families are having dinner and people at work include their partners' name when telling about weekend plans.

I grieve the pain of people who do not feel that justice is unfolding. I hope as time and dialogues occur, we can continue to respect each others' viewpoint — even when different — and, at the same time, allow all of us to live as whole people.

Marnie Warner
Dorchester, Mass.

'Comfortable in the body'

As a recent graduate of [UCC-related] Bangor Theological Seminary, I am comfortable in the living body of the UCC. We have grown up together. The denomination is one year older than I am. Even though I have not lived the life my parents (or tradition) might have dreamed for me, I know God is speaking and working in my life and ministry. The same might be said for our denomination. I am blessed to be a part of it.

Gail Holman
Orleans (Mass.) Federated Church

'Always grateful'

I was brought up in St. Paul's Evangelical and Reformed (now UCC) in Keokuk, Iowa, where I was very active. I typed and memographed the church's Sunday programs, was Sunday School secretary, was president of the Young People's League and sang in the choir.

At Cullver-Stockton, a Disciples of Christ college, we had the best religion professors that one could ever hope for. One professor's lectures were so stimulating that he had us girls discussing religion every night in the dorm.

As a poet myself, I was enthralled to read in the last United Church News that our current U.S. Poet Laureate, Donald Hall, is a member of the UCC.

I am 91, no longer drive, so I am no longer a churchgoer, but I will always be grateful for my church making my life feel complete.

Dorothy Wirtz
Professor Emeritus, Arizona State University
Lifelong member, St. Paul UCC, Keokuk, Iowa

P.S. I used to date the minister of the Congregational Church in Keokuk, who was the best dancer I ever danced with. We had some interesting conversations.

'MY STORY PROVIDES HOPE FOR OTHER ORPHANS'

Young adult makes pilgrimage to orphanage in India, her childhood home

My heart feels heavy and pounds so loudly that I'm sure everyone around me can hear it. My palms are clammy and sweaty, and my fingers are gripping the carpet-like material of the bus seat so hard that my knuckles are almost white. I keep my eyes peeled to the window, peering out to see if anything looks familiar.

"Look for a park with beautiful, big, red roses and hedges in the shape of an elephant," I tell my bus companions, as we travel down the dirt-bumpy road.

As we get closer, a smile creeps across my face. I become jittery inside, like the feeling you get when you kiss a boy for the first time.

Suddenly, I see a sign that says "Holy Cross" and I yell, "There it is!" My heart is beating so fast; it feels as if it's going to pop out of my chest.

As I step from the bus, I realize the park is not as alive, plush, green or beautiful as I had remembered it. Instead it looks as if it had been turned into a dump — just brown dirt, paper, plastic bottles and dead trees.

"Was it always like this?" I think to myself. Perhaps. Maybe I had just imagined it to be my own magnificent "Secret Garden." Or, since I had last lived in this place, was it that I had experienced a world far richer than this, where unimaginable parks and gardens really do exist?

Or maybe, to a 6-year-old girl, even a run-down park can be beautiful.

By Rajee Aerie

I'm finally back, 15 years later, at the orphanage in Delhi, India, the place where I once spent my earliest years hoping that a loving family would take me home.

As we enter the building's main room, I look forward to being in the presence of Sister Herman Joseph, who was like a mother for five months of my life. I remember her so well. But she is nowhere to be seen except for a picture on the wall that depicts her beaming smile. So sweet, and with a big heart full of love.

My own heart aches as all the memories come back.

"She passed away not too long ago," says an unfamiliar nun, who now heads the orphanage. "She was a wonderful woman."

I look at the small square brown table before me.

"I remember eating one cookie after another off of this table," I tell the others. They laugh, because they all know I have a sweet tooth.

Everyone's attention remains focused on me, as I talk to this nun about my experiences in this orphanage and where I am now. She glows with happiness for me, knowing I am in a much better place. And my story provides hope for the other orphans.

My companions have joined me in India for a month-long period of study in a country far different from their own. The Catholic sister asks about their experiences thus far, and many say they love it and are learning so much because it's a country far different from theirs.

The nun asks if we would like to go upstairs. And, without any hesitation, the word "yes" leaves my mouth before she could even finish her question.

I found myself remembering how I once spent my time upstairs, as a child, playing hide-and-seek and causing mischief.

I think back to one hot, sticky night in particular. Radika — a friend of mine — and I quietly snuck into the kitchen after everyone was asleep to get

some sugar. I believe our mission was accomplished successfully, although I can't remember exactly.

Now, as a young adult, I climb up the narrow twisting staircase and follow the nun into the baby room. About half of our group is following behind me.

Even before we enter, the sound of crying babies surrounds us, and my heart skips a beat. This isn't a baby's hospital room where mommy and daddy will take them "home" in a day or two. These babies are orphans found in garbage cans and dumpsters; they are the ones left to die on the streets of India, except for intervening police who bring them to this orphanage.

In the back of that room stands a beautiful woman with long, dark hair and a crooked smile. She looks at me and, for a moment, I feel as if I am 6 years old again.

It was here, I remember, that I was an orphan. And she — giving me a long look and a smile — acknowledges, without saying anything, that she remembers me.

She approaches and asks if I remember her. This moment doesn't seem real. I feel as if I am dreaming.

'Please love me'

As each of the visiting adults leans over the babies' beds, itching to reach out and hold them, I want more than anything to take each and every one home with me.

These infants are mentally retarded, we are told, and each has some degree of brain damage due to having been beaten. There is only a slight chance that just one or two may get better, their caretakers tell us.

I cradle 5-month-old Adiana, who has brain damage and shows no hope for improvement. Dressed in a blue-and-white shirt, she looks at me with a smile on her face. She giggles as if to say, "Please love me and take me home."

My vision becomes blurry as salty tears run down my face. I think about my own life experience. I suddenly become full of sadness and anger, recalling the papers my parents had given me just before I left my Cleveland home for



As a child, Rajee Aerie, stricken with polio, was left to the care of an orphanage in Delhi, India. In January, Aerie, now 22, made a return visit to her childhood home to work through old memories.

Photo furnished.

I HAVE A BETTER LIFE NOW, than if my biological mother had not given me up for adoption. I would have probably been thrown out in the street, crawling and begging for food."



Rajee with 5-month-old Adiana

this trip.

How could my real mother have just left me here at this orphanage? Just because I was stricken with polio, did she not want to take care of me? Did she not love me?

Then I thought to myself, "No, she did love me and she wanted the best for me, so she decided to bring me to the orphanage." She knew I would not be treated right in this country because people that are disabled have no chance at life; they are seen as the lowest class. She wanted a loving family to adopt me and give me the best life, because I deserved to have a chance at life.

I plant a soft kiss on Adiana, as I put her delicate body back in her crib. I hope she will be as fortunate

as I have been.

It's feeding time for the babies, so we head back downstairs, where we are greeted by 30 little orphans. Many of them are girls, but a few are boys. It is hard to decipher their genders because they all have bowl haircuts, just like the one I once had, in order to prevent lice.

They all are fascinated by us Americans, although

I look like them so. They try to talk with me, but with no such luck of hearing a response in their own tongue.

They climb all over us — chattering and clinging on — almost as if to say, "Please take me home." This makes it difficult to know we have to leave them all behind.

'A fortunate life'

Our time here is almost over. As we prepare to leave, I sit down to review some records that a nun had found. The page is open to a black-and-white picture of me. I look like a boy — with my bowl haircut. The page also contains information about my biological mother and the reasons why she chose to leave me here. It's similar to the documentation that my adoptive parents had already provided me.

I try to get up, but the little girls just keep piling into my lap, giggling, full of curiosity. I wonder if they think I'm a new orphan, or if they realize that I once had been. At last, we say thank you and good bye.

As I take one last look, I notice the children are pulling out mats and getting ready to watch Sunday cartoons. I smirk, realizing that not

much has changed.

Back on the bus, everyone talks briefly about how they would like to take these children home. But the rest of the ride is mostly silent. I wonder if others are thinking, "Rajee was once an orphan just like the ones we just hugged, held and played with?"

Did this make it a reality for them? I believe it did have an impact, because many tell me how much they admire me for the life I have gone through.

I take one last look at the orphanage, but my eyes rest on the park across the street.

For a brief moment, I can smell the beautiful, big red roses again. I can crawl through the cool, plush, green grass. I glance at the large hedge in the shape of an elephant; it's so green and full of life, almost as if it's real.

For the rest of the ride I think about how lucky I am and how privileged I have been to have such a loving family to adopt me, knowing that I had polio.

Yet, they still wanted me and took care of me; because they made sure I received medical care upon arriving in the United States.

I have a better life now, than if my biological mother had not given me up for adoption. I would have probably been thrown out in the street, crawling and begging for food.

I thank God for giving me such a fortunate life and such a wonderful family.

Rajee Aerie, 22, a member of *Pilgrim Congregational UCC in Cleveland*, is the daughter of the Rev. Cliff and Jan Aerie. She is a senior at UCC-related *Elmhurst College in Illinois*, where she will graduate in January with a degree in communications. She traveled to India with 10 fellow *Elmhurst* students.



PAUL SHERRY: 'FLUNKING RETIREMENT'

Former UCC president leading national effort to raise minimum wage



By W. Evan Golder

In 1999, at age 65, Paul Sherry retired after 10 years as president of the United Church of Christ. So how has he been enjoying retirement, after the pressure-cooker life of a denominational executive? Sunning on a beach? Hiking in the mountains? Sitting on his apartment balcony reading long overlooked books?

"Actually, I keep flunking retirement," he says with a chuckle.

First, he was a consultant for the Center for Community Change, then coordinator of the National Council of Churches' Anti-Poverty Program. Now he serves as coordinator of the national Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign.

All this is to accomplish one goal: to raise the minimum wage.

"I've been concerned about the poverty that affects so many people for my whole life," he says. "It became increasingly clear to me that one of the most viable ways to address poverty was to work toward raising the minimum wage, both at the state level and the federal level."

In 2004, just before the last electoral national campaign, he and others put together a series of events around the country to raise the public consciousness about poverty. Again, this month, for two weekends, Oct. 7-8 and 14-15, they will encourage congregations around the country to hold Living Wage Days services and community events.

"We hope to raise the specter of poverty," he says, "particularly as it is rooted in an inadequate minimum wage. We hope people will commit themselves to address the issue so that we can attain a minimum wage that is more in accord with what decency suggests."

Last January, over the Martin Luther King holiday weekend, Let Justice Roll sponsored hundreds

of Living Wage Days services and events. These led to increases in minimum wages in Arkansas, Massachusetts, Michigan, North Carolina, Pennsylvania and West Virginia. In Ohio, more than 65 Living Wage Days events built support for the ballot initiative this November.

Good for workers, business

Today's federal minimum wage of \$5.15 an hour is lower in value than the minimum wage of 1950, according to the book "A Just Minimum Wage: Good for Workers, Business and Our Future" by Sherry and Holly Sklar. "The minimum wage buys less today than it did when Wal-Mart founder Sam Walton opened his first Walton's 5 and 10 in Bentonville, Ark., in 1951," the book reports.

"Remember the 1963 March on Washington, and Martin Luther King's famous 'I have a dream' speech?" Sherry asks. "One demand of that march, that many people forget, was for 'a national minimum wage act that will give all Americans a decent standard of living.'"

For Sherry, raising the minimum wage is not just an economic issue or a political issue; more than anything else, it's a moral imperative.

"It is a moral outrage," he says, "that we have people in this country working for a minimum wage that is thousands of dollars below

FOR SHERRY, *raising the minimum wage is not just an economic issue or a political issue; more than anything else, it's a moral imperative.*

even the officially designated poverty level. It's a moral outrage, and unless those of us who are people of faith commit ourselves, not only to speak what we see as the truth about people, but indeed to act that truth, we are less than responsible faith-based people, I believe.

"Our bottom line is this," he says, "a job should keep you out of poverty, not keep you in it."

Rooted in early childhood

Sherry's strong feelings about economic justice are rooted in his childhood in Tamaqua, Pa., situated within the Pennsylvania Coal Region section of the Appalachian Mountains, and in his reading of the Bible.

"As I saw people struggling to make ends meet as I grew up, those images have stayed with me through the years and have helped fuel my commitment to doing whatever I can to help people raise that minimum wage and to ease their pain," he says.

"That theme of economic jus-

tice and easing poverty runs all through the Bible," he says. "The theme of our campaign, Let Justice Roll, comes from Amos 5:24."

Then he adds, "Through the years people of faith have sought ways in which we can translate our commitments into effective action on behalf of people who are hurting. Today that action should be to raise the minimum wage."

Next month the minimum wage will be on the ballots in six states: Arizona, Colorado, Missouri, Montana, Nevada and Ohio. In addition, Congress has minimal wage legislation before it, although it has been tied to estate tax roll-backs and undoing labor protection provisions. Both Let Justice Roll and Interfaith Worker Justice are urging citizens to tell Congress to pass a "clean" minimum wage bill.

Congress passed the current federal minimum wage of \$5.15 an hour (amounting to \$10,712 per year) nine years ago. However, in June, Congress voted to raise

its own members' pay to \$165,200 annually, the eighth increase since 1997.

Will it hurt small business?

What about the argument that raising the minimum wage will hurt small businesses?

"Not true," says Sherry. "Study after study after study has shown that raising the minimum wage enhances the business climate. In those states that have raised the minimum wage, for example, their business climate is far better than in states that have not.

"Raising the minimum wage also helps poor communities," he says, "because if people living there are going to get additional income into their pockets, they're not going to save that money because they will need to spend it for their families to survive. So they will pump that money more quickly back into the local economy, thereby helping business and the community as well."

What about those who say that only teenagers will benefit if this happens?

"Studies have shown just the opposite," he says. "Yes, teenagers will benefit, but the largest number of people who will be helped are women working at a minimum wage. That being the case, if we help those women we help their families that the women are trying to support."

For Sherry, working to raise the minimum wage is somewhat similar to being UCC president.

"As president," he says, "I committed myself to help the church reach those people who hurt and to find ways by which we could ease that pain in light of biblical mandates. I think working to raise the minimum wage requires a very similar mandate."

Would it be tougher now to be UCC president than when he was?

"I know it's very difficult now," he says, "given some of the financial issues. But I must say, I am so gratified by the leadership that our current president John Thomas is providing. I believe that he, along with other leaders of the church, is doing a remarkably fine job."

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



Sherry discusses the minimum wage issue with a gathering of retired clergy and spouses in the Cleveland area.

W. Evan Golder photos

LEARN MORE@

<letjusticeroll.org>

"A Just Minimum Wage: Good for Workers, Business and Our Future" is available at <letjusticeroll.org> or for \$5 by calling 800/889-5733.

Organize "Living Wage Days" on Oct. 7-8 and 14-15. Resources available at <letjusticeroll.org>.

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in the news people | places | things

UCC's Parker lecturer calls for 'unfettered, unembedded media'

By J. Bennett Guess

"The media in this country has reached an all-time low."

That's the blunt assessment of journalist Amy Goodman, who delivered the UCC's 24th annual Everett C. Parker Ethics in Telecommunications Lecture at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., on Sept. 12.

"Instead of a media that covers for power, we need a media that covers power," said Goodman, syndicated columnist and host of the Pacifica-network radio and TV program Democracy Now! "... Reporting from the victim's perspective — not being 'spun' — we see it so rarely in this country."

In a hard-hitting address that questioned the motivations of conglomerate-owned, profits-centered media companies, Goodman said that, after Hurricane Katrina, the American people got a short-lived glimpse of what an independent, victims-focused media might look like, despite objections from the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency that insisted that reporters not show images of drowned bodies floating in a flooded, neglected New Orleans.

"This nation saw people suffering and they were horrified," she said. "If only we saw these images from Iraq, [of] the reality of war."

Using the war in Iraq as a persis-

tent example, she said "embedded" journalism relies on what reporters' sources tell them, not on what reporters see, experience and discover for themselves.

"Increasingly, what do we get? ... Static," she said.

In Iraq, unlike the immediate days that followed last year's Katrina disaster, the stories of American soldiers and Iraqi citizens are not given voice. Therefore, most Americans have little reason to identify with the suffering or incentive to demand change.

"When you hear someone speaking from their own experience ... you can not help but identify," Goodman said. "That's my boy, my mother, my aunt."

Moreover, Goldman said, instead of reporting the truth from Iraq, the U.S. government is paying to plant false stories in Iraqi newspapers about alleged successes there — Goldman and others have claimed — in order to bolster the war's image back home. It's a practice that's illegal in the United States, she said, but not in Iraq.

"But if you can plant it over there and it blows back here, it's the next best thing," she said.

The UCC's Parker Lecture, which annually examines the technological disparity that exists between wealthy, white communities and those living in poorer, underserved communities, is co-sponsored with the Washington, D.C.-based Telecommunications

REPORTING from the *victim's perspective* — not being 'spun' — we see it so rarely in this country."

—Amy Goodman

Research and Action Center. It is the only lecture in the country to examine telecommunications and the digital age from an ethical perspective.

Named for the legendary UCC pastor, the Rev. Everett C. Parker, 93, who led the UCC's historic campaign in the 1950s and 1960s to make the Federal Communications Commission hold its license awardees accountable to the communities they serve, the annual event draws about 200 media advocates, telecommunications industry executives, clergy and lay leaders.

Despite living in a digital, high-tech age, Goodman emphasized, we are increasingly seeing the media used as "the force of state" and not as the public's vehicle to "force the state."

"We need an unfettered, unembedded media," she said. "We have to take it back."

Goodman, who is in the midst of an 80-city promotional tour for her new book "Static: Government Liars,



Amy Goodman (r.), the UCC's 2007 Everett C. Parker Ethics in Telecommunications lecturer, speaks with Rima Meroueh of Dearborn, Mich., a staff member with the UCC's Media Empowerment Project, on Sept. 12 at the National Press Club. Goodman is the award-winning host of the radio/TV program, "Democracy Now!," broadcast on 400 stations.

USNewswire photo

Media Cheerleaders and the People who Fight Back," also spoke later on Sept. 12 at **People Congregational UCC in Washington, D.C.**, and on Sept. 14 at **First Congregational UCC in Oakland, Calif.**

Funded entirely through contributions from listeners, viewers, broadcasting stations and foundations, Goodman's "Democracy Now!" describes itself as maintaining "editorial independence, providing a counterweight to media consolidation."

Also, at the Parker Lecture, awards were presented to:

► Katherine Grincewich, Associate General Counsel of the United

States Conference of Catholic Bishops, in recognition of an individual whose work embodies the principles and values of the public interest in telecommunications.

► Randall Pinkston, CBS News, in recognition of special contributions in advancing the roles of women and persons of color in the media.

► Ken McEldowney, Executive Director of Consumer Action, in recognition of efforts to educate and enable consumers to use technology as a toll of empowerment.

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JUST EATING?

Illinois church rediscovers food's primary source — down on the farm

Special to United Church News

Ever wondered where goat cheese comes from? If so, perhaps you're needing to rediscover the real source of what you're eating.

That was the case in June when more than 100 members and friends of **Community UCC in Champaign, Ill.**, were hosted by Prairie Fruits Farm, just north of nearby Urbana, for a "feast fit for a church," as organizers described it.

"One really wonderful thing about the feast was that it put all of us directly in contact with the source of some of what we ate that day," said church member Jeanne Ward. "We know that the cheese we smeared across bread and the cheesecake we ate for dessert

came from the very goats we were petting."

The outing included strawberry picking, tours of the farm, goat petting, and organic and local food from area farms, including Prairie Farm's specialty: goat-cheese cheesecake ala strawberries.

The Rev. Mike Mulberry, one of the church's pastors, said members envisioned the event as more than fellowship, but also as mission and education.

In 2004, Community UCC began buying Community Supported Agriculture "shares" or "CSAs" from Prairieland Community Supported Agriculture in Watseka, Ill., as a way to support local social service agencies.

The congregation also engaged

in a study of the UCC-produced documentary, "Strong Roots, Fragile Farms" and a curriculum called "Just Eating? Practicing Our Faith at the Table."

Pat Syoen, who participated in the church discussions, said the process changed her life.

"The 'Just Eating' curriculum has made me aware of our need to support our local farmers, especially the ones who do organic farming," Syoen said. "It has also changed my own cooking habits like preparing 'slow food' versus using a lot of the prepared foods you find in the grocery stores."

Syoen, along with others, led the congregation through a communion service that included locally and organically grown strawberries, fair-trade chocolate drink and homemade flatbread.

Mulberry said the church is committed to mission with local food systems.

"I think the study and reflection we have done has helped us, it's helped me, to realize that buying organic must be accompanied by buying local," Mulberry said. "Wal-Mart is the largest distributor of organic food in the United States, but their food is bathed

in the oil it takes to get that food to market. So we hope, by little steps, our church is building a just, alternative food system."

Church member Susan Schnuer believes there's a spiritual aspect to eating — and shopping.

"Eating food that is produced locally is the first step in a path that teaches us to appreciate what is grown locally, something that is easy to forget as you push your cart down the aisle of the local grocery store."

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THINKING ON 50

Illinois pastor, born in '57, has found meaning in turning '50'

By J. Bennett Guess
Editor

The Rev. Denise Griebler, born in 1957, will be 50 years old next year. And the United Church of Christ, in which she is now ordained, will mark the same milestone.

"Fifty — it's a really great age," says Griebler, who was ordained in 1993 after serving four years in licensed ministry. "Personally, I'm young enough that I still have lots of energy for what tomorrow brings. But I'm also old enough to honor my experiences and appreciate both my gifts and my deficits."

Griebler is just one of 179 UCC clergy who share their birth year with the denomination they serve.

Yet, for Griebler, her pending 50th comes at an especially poignant, painful time in her family's life.

Last October, when she became pastor of **St. Michael's UCC in West Chicago**, her husband, Curt Koehler, now 56, was diagnosed with an aggressive brain tumor. It's an ordeal that's required some matured perspective on this new, uncertain stage in her life — and in her ministry.

"By the time you're 50 — if you've stayed connected to others and to the world — then you're old enough that you've been through some difficult, challenging times," she says. "And you get some definition from that."

"You can either choose to shut down," she says, "... or you can choose to believe that God's in the midst of it and that it matters."

Just after the diagnosis, Koehler underwent brain surgery — on Nov. 11, 2005 — meaning Griebler has since spent the first year of her ministry at St. Michael's UCC not just caring for her new parishioners, but being cared for herself.

The mutual exchange has made Griebler particularly fond of her "tiny church," as she calls it. St. Michael's UCC is an "incredible community," one as equally committed to being the church in the wider world as it is at home among those they know and love, including her.

"They really know how to act like church," she says, noting how she's had to lay aside her own big-church biases since she has come to experience the level of compassion, sense of justice, and degree of denominational loyalty shared among this 62-member suburban congregation. Despite an average worship attendance of just 40, St. Michael's UCC contributed more than \$10,400 last year in basic and special support of Our Church's Wider Mission.

'I feel more clarity'

On Aug. 30 — the day United Church News talked with Griebler — she had just driven her husband to his first day back on the job as a U.S. history teacher at South High School in nearby Downer's Grove. Together, they remain optimistic about the future.

"The tumor is stable and may be shrinking, hopefully," she says.

But through it all, she has marveled at her husband's determination, saying neither he nor his teaching colleagues doubted for a moment that he would return to the classroom that he loves, even if it meant he needed to teach his students from a wheelchair.

"Integrity is a really core piece of turning

INTEGRITY is a core piece of turning 50. I feel much more **CLARITY** about what I'm **CALLED TO DO, CALLED TO SAY, CALLED TO BE.**"

— The Rev. Denise Griebler

50. I feel freer to have integrity than I've ever had in my life," Griebler says. "I feel much more clarity about what I'm called to do, called to say, called to be. I'm more willing to do that now than ever before."

"I'm not afraid," she continues, before pausing and adding, "... on a good day."

"But there are lots of good days," she says.

During the formative years of a person's life, Griebler believes, "it's easier to say 'yes' to everything that comes along." But the older we become, one's 'yes' and one's 'no' are laced with more meaning, because each is leavened by wisdom and experience.

"The same is true of institutions, I think," she says. "We become more clear of who we are, what our core mission is, what our core identity is, what we want to say 'yes' to."

And that's something she sees happening in the UCC — a gelling of sorts, at age 50, around our founding principles as a "united and uniting" church. She sees the denomination more sure of itself, not only as it more readily owns its rich heritage but also in how it proclaims its emerging identity.

"We've done some very good and clear thinking about what it means to be a church with a wide welcome," she says, "and that puts us in a position to talk with other Christians as well as other religious people. It's a gift that we bring."

In addition, another "core value," she says, is the UCC's testament to a still-speaking God. "And that means we have an attentiveness to being a still-listening people."

"We don't necessarily have the same experiences, but we really can come together

OUR BABIES ARE ALL GROWN UP

While many, if not most, UCC congregations pre-date the denomination's 1957 founding by hundreds of years, 19 churches are uniquely UCC "newbies," having been formed in the same year that this new denomination was being created by the historic union of the Evangelical and Reformed Church and the Congregational Christian Churches in America.

Here's to some true UCC baby churches who will celebrate their own golden anniversaries, alongside the UCC as a whole:

West Congregational UCC
Phoenix, Ariz.

Fremont (Calif.) Congr. UCC

Pilgrim Congregational UCC
Redding, Calif.

First Samoan Congr. UCC
San Francisco, Calif.

Pilgrim UCC
Carlsbad, Calif.

Community Congr. UCC of Pacific Beach
San Diego, Calif.

Christ Congr. UCC
Pueblo, Colo.

Bethesda (Md.) UCC

Waikeola Congr. UCC
Honolulu, Hawaii

Kailua Christian UCC
Kailua, Hawaii

Church of the Good Shepherd
Ann Arbor, Mich.

Plymouth Congr. UCC
Grand Rapids, Mich.

Congregational UCC
Mendota Heights, Minn.

Trinity UCC
Columbus, Ohio

Faith Community UCC
Toledo, Ohio

Mayflower Congr. UCC
Oklahoma City, Okla.

United Church of Christ of Starview, Pa.

United Church of Christ of Warminster, Pa.

Caparra Terrace UCC
Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico

around the idea of being the body of Christ together," she says.

UCC by choice

Griebler spent the first 10 years of her Christian life at **Bethany UCC in Chicago**, where she was baptized as an infant. Occasionally, she looks back and thinks, "Wow, I was one of the first babies baptized in this church."

But throughout childhood, as moving dictated, she and her family found geographic reasons to periodically change churches. She was confirmed in a Lutheran congregation and later became active in a United Methodist youth group. She also attended a Church of the Brethren house church.

"Generic Protestant" is how she describes her religious upbringing. But young adulthood saw Griebler returning to the UCC denomination of her younger years, this time not by accident, but by choice.

As a community organizer in Chicago for the Central American Sanctuary Movement during the 1980s, Griebler talked with many U.S. faith groups about sheltering Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees during the civil wars in their countries. Soon, she became impressed with the responsiveness of UCC congregations, especially **Chicago's Wellington Avenue UCC**, one of the first churches in the city to become active in the Sanctuary Movement. Ultimately, she joined Wellington Avenue UCC and it was the community that helped Griebler discern a call to attend seminary and, ultimately, to ordained ministry.

Today, Griebler is active with the Illinois Maya Ministry of the UCC's Illinois Conference and she serves on the board of SIPAZ, an international project that promotes the peaceful transformation of conflict in Chiapas, Mexico.

'Who I really want to be'

For several reasons, the UCC's 50th observance might feel like an awkward celebra-

tion for some, Griebler contends, because institutions — when compared to individuals — have longer life expectancies. There's not the same sense of urgency to take stock, to do inventory.

She jokes, "But when you look at some of the church's finances, you say, 'We may not have 50 years left.'"

One small obstacle that fans of the UCC's 50-year observance will have to face, she believes, is that a significant percentage of UCC members have already passed — for themselves — the 50-year mark, and the number's allure has tarnished. "They've been there, done that," she says.

"They look at me — at 50 years old — and think, 'our nice, young pastor.'"

And, institutionally speaking, many of our congregations, too, have well surpassed the 50-year point. St. Michael's UCC, for example, will observe its 138th birthday this year. In New England, some UCC churches are eyeing 400-year anniversaries. Fifty can look like small potatoes.

Still, even at mere 50, Griebler sees value in looking back, especially to appreciate how the UCC was founded courageously with an ecumenical and optimistic outlook, across once-staunch denominational lines, and while expressing core commitments to justice, peace and inclusion — values still sorely needed in today's religious landscape.

Despite being baptized early in the UCC, Griebler feels like it's the place she's chosen for herself, because she's ventured and experimented elsewhere, including attending the Presbyterian-related McCormick Seminary.

But she's firmly UCC, and proud of that fact.

"It's fun to be born into the family and then come back and choose it," she says. "It turned out to be the place where I really did get a lot of my core values. It's who I really wanted to be."

Visit St. Michael's UCC online at <stmichaelsucc.org>.

NOT JUST A 'PUFF PIECE'

Anniversary book takes in-depth look at UCC's past, future

By J. Bennett Guess
Editor

The Rev. W. Evan Golder and the Rev. J. Martin Bailey, both retired newspaper editors, knew the reporting assignment would be a hefty one: Sort through 50 years of UCC documents, publications and photographs — and then compile a book that succinctly tells the UCC's diverse history while also critically examining where the church is at and where it's heading.

"I'm really proud to have my name attached to it," Golder admits, "but there were times when I wanted to throw it out the window."

The end result is a 96-page commemorative album of 150 historic photographs and 49 articles that serve to remind the UCC of its visionary founding as a "united and uniting" ecumenical experiment.

And then there's also the always-typical UCC nudge to do it all better.

"There are some big ideas here," Golder says. "People will think this will just be a puff piece — wrong. There is some critical stuff, which is very UCC."

Golder, 68, who first began reporting and writing about the UCC in the 1960s, spent 18 years as editor of United Church News.

Bailey, 77, was Golder's predecessor and has been a religion journalist since graduating from seminary in 1954. He served 19 years as editor of two earlier UCC publications, United Church Herald and A.D. magazine.

"Between Martin and me, we cover the 50 years of the church," Golder says, "and being news sleuths, we cover it [in the commemorative publication] in a way that other people wouldn't."

Bailey says he especially appreciates how the book neither glibly waxes over the UCC's growing edges, nor gets weighed down by heady academic jargon. Instead, he says, it's a personal, analytical look at the UCC from various perspectives.

"I don't think either of us had any idea that it would require so much work. It became a big project," Bailey says. "But I think it will be useful."

Bailey and Golder say they were aided substantially by the Rev. Barbara Brown Zikmund, seven-volume series editor of The Living Theological Heritage of the United Church of Christ, published by The Pilgrim Press.

"She's got all that in her head, plus all the outtakes," Golder says. "Her participation was crucial."

Golder and Bailey both give significant credit for the input of the project's design team. They praised Randy Varcho, the UCC's art director, and designer Robin Nordstrom, for the "look and feel" of the final product.

"People are really going to pick up this book and digest it, because of Randy's insistence that it be something more than just a 'Time Magazine special,'" Golder says. "And Robin has just made this thing gorgeous. It is just really something. 'Stunning' is the word I hear, most often, when people look at it."

Golder knows, however, that some will be critical of what the book doesn't contain or cover, but he thinks that's just the price the project pays for trying to explore 50 years of history, plus the present and future, in one volume.



There are some **BIG IDEAS** here ... some critical stuff, which is **VERY UCC.**"
— W. Evan Golder, co-editor



(Pictured far left) W. Evan Golder checks historical files housed deep in the bowels of the UCC's national offices in Cleveland. (Center) Co-editors J. Martin Bailey and Golder compare notes on hundreds of photos pulled from UCC archives. (Above) The cover and two inside page spreads from "UCC @ 50, Our History, Our Future."

Randy Varcho photos

"But I think a lot of people will pick up this book and be surprised by the ground it covers," Golder said, especially by the honesty of the book's contributors. "[Articles by] Hector Lopez, Dan Romero, Rosemary Maxey — they're not just lining up and saying 'Oh, aren't we glad that we let [racial/ethnic constituencies] into this church.' There's some significant stuff being said here."

Adds Bailey, "The piece on numbers by Bill McKinney is an important one, as are the theological pieces by Karen Lebacque and Fred Trost."

"It's not an academic piece, but it's an easy piece to see the whole picture," Bailey says. "I like the point that we ended up looking at the future as well as the history."

Bailey and Golder spent nearly two years on the project — and did so completely as volunteers. Neither received any pay for the many hours they contributed. Yet, these seasoned reporters are now reporting a measure of satisfaction, especially since the assignment is completed.

Bailey, who has helped provide news coverage at every General Synod since the UCC's 1957 founding, looks at this most-recent project as "a chance to do one more significant thing for the church."

"We ought never to be too proud, but at the same time, I'm awfully glad that, for 50 years, I've had the opportunity to be as much a part of this church as I've had," he says.

One complimentary copy of the UCC's 50th Anniversary Commemorative Publication will be mailed in November to each UCC congregation. Additional copies are 6.95 each, plus shipping and handling, by calling 800/537-3394. Bulk orders are \$6.45 each for 10 copies or more, or \$5.95 for 25 or more, plus shipping and handling. Orders for 50 copies or more will include a free copy of the UCC's 50th anniversary DVD.

COMING TO A COMPUTER NEAR YOU

'UCC at 50' kicks off Nov. 5 — online

The "UCC at 50" will begin its year-long golden anniversary celebration on Nov. 5, All Saints Sunday, with a "real time" web streaming event. The interactive gathering will begin at 6 p.m. (ET).

"The notion is that the whole church — from Maine to Hawaii — will be participating in the same event at the same time, no matter where they live," says the Rev. Robert Chase, the UCC's communication director. It's also a sign of how the church is embracing emerging technology, he says.

Described as a time for "worship, work and play," the web streaming will include interactive applications, including the ability for churches to e-mail digital photos that will be posted immediately for all to see, Chase says.

"They'll be able to see themselves, as

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

The Rev. Cliff Aerie, the UCC's special events producer, says it's a contemporary way for the church to gather nationally to celebrate the launch of the UCC's 50th year — and to do so inexpensively. From any computer, a UCC member will be available to tune in. Some groups, such as youth fellowships, may choose to participate as groups.

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

BIG NAMES ON BOARD FOR SYNOD

Legendary PBS commentator **BILL MOYERS**, civil rights champion **MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN**, and performance artist **KEN MEDEMA** are among those already scheduled to appear at the "UCC at 50" General Synod in 2007. General Synod will take place June 22-26 at the Hartford (Conn.) Convention Center. Every church is being encouraged to send at least four representatives to the 50th Anniversary celebration. Online registration for the "ya'll come" event is set to begin on Dec. 1.

LEARN MORE @ <ucc.org/50>.



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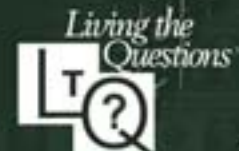
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OUR FAITH, OUR VOTE

Can running for political office be a religious calling?

By J. Bennett Guess

For 14 years, Margaret MacDonald, a member of **First Congregational UCC in Billings, Mont.**, has served as executive director of the Montana Association of Churches, working with diverse faith groups and the Montana legislature on a broad range of justice issues.

To many in the UCC and beyond, MacDonald became quite familiar after a string of hate crimes in 1993 upset residents in Billings, where Ku Klux Klan fliers were distributed, a Jewish cemetery was desecrated, the home of a Native American family was painted with swastikas, and a brick was thrown through the bedroom window of a 6-year-old boy who was displaying a Menorah for Hanukkah.

In response, MacDonald helped form and lead the “Not in Our Town” movement, a grassroots, anti-hate campaign that’s been celebrated and replicated in communities across the country. “Not in Our Town” also became the title of a moving PBS documentary about Billings’ efforts to counter organized hate.

Now, MacDonald, 55, is embarking on a much-different type of campaign: she’s running as the Democratic nominee for a Billings-area seat in the Montana State Senate.

“I have been active and involved with state public policy since lobbying in the 1981 legislature for family farmers and ranchers on clean air and water, mine reclamation and industrial impacts,” MacDonald says. “During the ensuing years, I have always thought that I had something to offer from the other side of the table — as a lawmaker — and not someone calling to advocate for a particular issue.”

And, her family life now seems more accommodating to the idea.

“My personal life was never at a place where I could see running for office and serving 200 miles from home, 90 days every other year, without negatively impacting my family,” she says. “Now they are practically grown and I am in a place where I can run.”

So how does a family-oriented, committed church worker find the chutzpa to run for public office?

“I explain that there is so much at stake in state legislatures this year, now more than ever, with our federal government having forsaken such basic considerations as sane fiscal policy,” MacDonald says. “States are having to be on their toes, unless we want to completely abandon our most vulnerable neighbors and friends to poverty and despair.”

Moreover, MacDonald says, many justice issues need her passion, conviction and support.

“I will vote differently from my opponent on almost everything I care about,” she says.

‘Winning’ redefined

On the other side of the proverbial party aisle is the Rev. Scott MacLean, the Republican nominee for U.S. Congress in Connecticut’s first district. A UCC minister, MacLean, 51, went to UCC-related Bangor Theological Seminary and has served UCC congregations in Maine, Massachusetts, New York and Pennsylvania.

He’s running for Congress, in part, because he’s concerned about the federal government’s fiscal mismanagement.

“It’s irresponsibility on the part of both parties,” he says. “Republicans promise tax cuts and Democrats promise more programs. It’s all about vote mongering. No one takes a long view of what’s best for our children and grandchildren.”

He’s also raising issues about the need for universal health care vouchers (“An idea that appeals to both Republicans and Democrats,” he says), Medicare reform, and his own approach to campaign finance reform: uncapping the current limit of 435 House seats in order to reduce the size of each congressional district. That way, he argues, instead of having 650,000 constituents, candidates would be speaking to smaller-size districts, thus enabling more common folk to be able to afford to run.

MacLean believes the decision to toss a hat into the political arena can be difficult. In his case, it took 25 years of pondering a run for Congress before he actually decided to take the leap from the electoral sidelines.

“When you come out of a religious background, you have a certain way of understanding the way things work with regard to the human soul, and a part of that — to use an old Congregationalist term — has to do with one’s ‘sense of call.’ If you are atune to that, you are looking to the clues that God might be dropping.”

He’s not saying he’s certain that God “wants” him to be a Congressman, but he’s listening for where God is leading, calling.

“It’s very theologically based,” he explains. “I love the journey aspect to it.”

On Aug. 9, when he bested his opponent for the GOP nomination, his greatest joy was watching his two young girls — one in second-grade, the other in third-grade — run back and forth from the TV and computer to track the polling returns.

“One of the main reasons I decided to do this is that I want to be a good example to my daughters. ... so that when they’re 35 years old and looking back, thinking ‘maybe I should run for

office.’ They can say, ‘My dad did it.’ ... That’s a win.”

“I can win in many different ways,” MacLean says. “Sure, getting more votes than the other guy is one of them. But there are many a number of ways that I can win.”

Raising important issues, helping frame the policy debate, letting your voice be heard, or even gaining campaign experience for a future race, MacLean says, each can be viewed as a “win.”

He points out that, in the now-classic movie “Rocky,” the rookie boxer’s stated goal was “to go the distance with Apollo Creed — and he did,” MacLean points out. “So winning is just how you define it.”

Impacting human lives

Also, on Nov. 7, the Rev. Phil Hoy, a UCC minister in Evansville, Ind., will vie for a third term as a Democratic member of the Indiana House of Representatives, where he represents a district that includes downtown Evansville and some suburban neighborhoods. Prior to that, Hoy served 12 years on the Vanderburgh County (Ind.) Council, including two terms as a Republican, before completing his third term as a Democrat.

“If there’s any reason I’m involved [in politics], this is the reason: I don’t

One of the main reasons I decided to do this is that I want to be a good example to my daughters.

— Scott MacLean



want to see the public schools wrecked and the middle class dismantled, which means the poor are totally left behind,” Hoy says. “Those are moral issues that really get me moving. Because, whether you’re talking about highways, prisons, schools or anything else, they’re all moral issues, because they impact the lives of human beings.”

But public service has never interrupted his ministry in the church. For 13 years, he was the full-time director of the UCC-supported Tri-State Food Bank, a large-scale food distribution ministry co-founded by his first wife, Barbara, who died in 1987. He’s also served several pastorates in the Evansville/Tri-State Association, including **Zion UCC in Henderson, Ky.**, where he’s now the interim pastor.

“I’ve always felt that people with Christian convictions should apply those to politics without crossing the church-state line,” Hoy says. “Let’s try to be fair with taxes, be reasonable with how we approach things, use some wisdom, honesty and integrity. I try to do so without hiding my convictions.”

Because Hoy is an ordained min-



Margaret McDonald (l.), a member of First Congregational UCC in Billings, Mont., and a Democratic candidate for Montana State Senate, with Montana Governor Brian Schweitzer.

Photo furnished.

ister who often wears a clergy collar, some have naively misinterpreted where he might stand on social issues. But these folks probably don’t know him well.

For instance, Hoy recently fought to keep religious groups from profiting from the sale of Indiana’s “In God We Trust” specialty license plates. (“I didn’t want to see this as a fundraiser for any religious group, and it won’t be.”) He spoke out passionately against Indiana’s anti-gay marriage ban. (“I know my history. I know where the first pink triangles came from — it was Hitler’s hatred of gays.”) And he has been critical, at times, when invocations before legislative sessions have turned into evangelistic worship services.

“Everybody has a right to bring their moral agenda, even if I disagree with it, and they do. All of us do,” Hoy said. “For me, the [church-state] line has to do with establishment, anything that moves toward the establishment of religion.”

‘God calls to service’

The Rev. Marvin Silver, while on sabbatical earlier this year from his work as a UCC public policy advocate in Washington, D.C., attended a “Wellstone Camp,” organized by the family of the late U.S. Senator Paul Wellstone of Minnesota, to help young leaders become more active in the political process.

At “camp,” Silver was empowered to take the political plunge, deciding ultimately to seek a Democratic nomination for a seat on the Prince George’s County (Md.) Council.

“I was really struggling with the calling to serve in public office,” Silver says. “I was concerned with what was happening in my community. I thought [the incumbent] was non-responsive to the challenges our

community was facing. ... And I was feeling torn that I do this [advocacy] work everyday and still I live in a community that needed something that I had to offer.”

During the campaign, Silver was surprised by those occasions when people asked, “Why are you running for office? You’re a minister!”

“I sometimes had to explain the role of minister — that, yes, ministers had a role to play within their congregations, but that sometimes God can even call those same ministers to public service. I gave the example of Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.”

Powell (1908-1972), a Baptist minister who once led the legendary Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, is considered one of the most prominent African Americans to serve in the U.S. Congress.

Silver’s primary election was held on Sept. 12, and although he didn’t win the vote count, he gained valuable experience, and he was buoyed by how many people expressed encouragement for his progressive values, for his voiced concerns about the need for responsive governments, neighborhood safety, better schools and community development.

Out-spent by his well-financed opponents, Silver wasn’t able to buy hundreds of highway signs, purchase television time or pay campaign staff. Instead, unlike opponents who campaigned full time, Silver had to continue working his full-time church job.

But he didn’t end the campaign feeling discouraged. He won some key endorsements, and garnered the respect of community leaders and organizations, including some of his opponents’ supporters.

“When I really needed something,” Silver says, “I really felt like God delivered.”

'OUR FAITH, OUR VOTE'

As mid-term elections approach, churches, members engaged in raising key issues

By Sandy Sorenson
For United Church News

Even a quick glance at the major issues affecting the world could easily cause a case of political and spiritual indigestion.

Where does one begin to address the challenges of global peace and security, sustainable energy, affordable and accessible health care, poverty, environmental stewardship and human rights?

Many UCC members and congregations have decided to face these challenges head-on — beginning with the electoral process — in order to find ways to make their voices heard.

"Our Faith, Our Vote" (OFOV), a project of the UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries, is helping people of faith by giving their values a voice in public policy debates and the decision-making process. By registering new voters, engaging in education, promoting dialogue, getting to the polls and organizing for advocacy with newly-elected officeholders.

"For so long, we have seen a one-sided values debate in the political process," says the Rev. Ron Stief, director of the Justice and Witness Ministries' Washington, D.C., office. "But it is more than a one-sided debate now. More than ever, people are receptive to hearing progressive religious voices speaking about global peace, civil rights, ending poverty and making health care accessible and affordable for all."

In the Nov. 7 midterm election cycle, UCC members and congregations have found important ways to engage their values with the political process, Stief says. They are building on the interest and energy generated during the 2004 election campaign and laying important groundwork for the 2008 presidential campaign.

The UCC's OFOV joined collaboratively with the Rev. Romal Tune and Clergy Strategic Alliances to conduct a series of trainings with African-American congregations in Cleveland, Philadelphia and Detroit. In all, more than 60 churches participated, comprising a diverse denominational spectrum including African Methodist Episcopal, Baptist, Church of God in Christ, and UCC congregations. The trainings helped participants understand what kinds of activities that churches can and cannot engage in, when participating in the political process.

UCC participants included the Rev. Wendell Anthony of **Fellowship Chapel UCC in Detroit**, the Rev. James Luckey of **Woodcrest**

UCC in Philadelphia, the Rev. Paul Sadler of **Mount Zion UCC in Cleveland**, and the Rev. Susan Smith of Columbus, Ohio, among others.

In connection with "Let Justice Roll," a national coalition headed by former UCC President Paul Sherry (see related story on page 8), OFOV is working with UCC members in pivotal states where voters are being asked to provide more-livable economic conditions for hourly-wage workers.

In November, voters in Arizona, Colorado, Missouri, Montana, Nevada and Ohio will be asked to raise the minimum wage to between \$6.15 to \$6.85 an hour, well over the current federal law of \$5.15. In most states, it appears voters stand ready to approve the measures, thanks in part to religious organizing.

More than ever, people are receptive to hearing progressive religious voices speaking about global peace, civil rights, ending poverty and making health care accessible and affordable for all."

— The Rev. Ron Stief

In July, the Rev. Vern Wright and his wife, Kat, from **Plymouth UCC in Helena, Mont.**, launched a new regional organizing effort to support the state's minimum wage initiative: Montana Progressive Clergy Alliance. And Robyn Morrison, one of the UCC's OFOV summer interns and a student at UCC-related Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, Calif., helped lay foundations for the effort.

In Missoula, the Rev. Amy Carter and members of **Missoula University Congregational UCC, Missoula, Mont.**, helped to organize an October city-wide rally in support of raising the minimum wage.

The same is true in Ohio where UCC members and congregations have partnered with interfaith and secular groups to support a minimum wage increase. In Michigan, UCC congregations are helping to defeat Proposal 2, the state's anti-affirmative action ballot measure, deceptively-named the "Michigan Civil Rights Initiative."

In St. Louis, Mo., people of diverse faith traditions are coming together to discuss how participa-

CASTING BALLOTS

In nation and church, every vote counts

COMMENTARY



Lillian Daniel

gregational meetings exist, and b) I get to go to one.

Since I was not raised in our UCC tradition, I do not take it for granted that the congregation gets to make its own decisions about the local church. I am still amazed that we get to vote on budgets and key issues that in some other traditions would be decided by a mysterious hierarchy, top down.

In this year's Da Vinci Code media frenzy over bizarre religious practices, secret societies and wacky conspiracies, our tradition of the congregational meeting stands out in its clarity and simplicity. At the local church, we're like a household, and the congregational meeting is where we gather around the kitchen table to look at our vision, our finances, and hear from one another about what God is doing among us.

Ideally, there should be no self-flagellation, secret codes, proclamations from on high or, heaven forbid, dramatic chase scenes. Just one vote for each church member and the chance to show the world what Christian community looks like when the members lead their local church together, as the body of Christ.

To me, the congregational meeting is like our nation's election day — something that reminds me that my vote is precious, and that not every Christian has the opportunity to participate in this way. But sadly, congregational meetings have something else in common with our nation's election day — low voter turnout.

I wonder if, in both cases, we are suffering from a lack of gratitude.

When you look at all the countries of the world,

still get a little thrill every time I read a notice about a congregational meeting.

Perhaps you do not generally associate the words "thrill" and "congregational meeting." But at the risk of sounding like someone who doesn't have much excitement in her life, let me confess that I always get a thrill at the idea that a) con-

gregational meetings exist, and b) I get to go to one. You can see that it is an enormous privilege to be able to vote for your national leaders. Even when we are disappointed in our leaders, we still have the opportunity to address that by voting, or at least the chance to widen the debate in the public square by our engagement.

GENERATIONS of faithful people fought long and hard so that I could have those votes, in my church and in my nation."

The old New England meeting houses loved their large clear windows. The light of the gospel could shine out into the world, but the concerns of the world would always be visible to the worshippers. Some historians say that Congregationalist polity was the foundation of the democracy movement in this country. The church vote and the national election vote share a common root in those old meeting houses.

Not that those Congregationalist forebears were perfect. Early on, you could only vote if you were a white, landowning male member of the church. But that is yet another reminder to me that my vote, either in my congregation or in a national election, is precious. Generations of faithful people fought long and hard so that I could have those votes, in my church and in my nation. I believe God calls me to bring all my faith and discernment to that task whenever I have the chance.

This November 7, let's do more than simply show up. As you stand in those long lines at the polling places, don't just let that little "I voted" sticker be your reward.

Instead, as we take the time out of a busy day to cast our ballot, let's engage in the spiritual practice of gratitude. And even recover the thrill.

The Rev. Lillian Daniel is senior minister of **First Congregational UCC in Glen Ellyn, Ill.**, and author of "Tell It Like It Is: Reclaiming the Practice of Testimony." (Alban Institute, 2006). In addition to being "thrilled" by congregational meetings, she's often giddy when studying medieval mystical nuns.

tion in the political process can forge lasting partnerships across interfaith lines. With the strong involvement of the Rev. Michael Kinammon, a professor at Eden, the "All God's People" interfaith curriculum was launched at a July interfaith event, hosted by the UCC seminary.

The Rev. John Dorhauer, the UCC's Missouri/Mid-South Associate Conference Minister, and Danielle Bartz, a student at UCC-related Eden Theological Seminary, have helped promote and facilitate use of the curriculum.

The "All God's People" coalition also organized a forum for Missouri's candidates running for a U.S. Senate seat.

"Our aim is not to support a party or a candidate, but to get all parties and candidates to pay attention to the issues that impact our people," the group's mission

reads. "Our partisanship is on behalf of the poor, the vulnerable and the needy — those often forgotten Americans."

Stief sees a steady increase of progressive faith perspectives in the political process, and he's encouraged.

"In passing through a bookstore recently, I noticed no less than five books on the topic of progressive faith and the electoral process," Stief says. "Our UCC congregations are the legs for those ideas."

And the stakes are high, Stief believes.

"We are at a major policy impasse in our political process, with regard to the war in Iraq, global peace and security, the federal budget, health care and many other issues that impact all of our lives," he says. "The November 2006 elections must restore bipartisanship to

the public policy process in Washington. We need decision makers who will work for ways around the impasse. We need a higher level of dialogue."

Sandy Sorenson is the UCC's associate for communications and media advocacy in Washington, D.C.

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'I'M TYLER'

Raising 'ability awareness,' UCC youth produces educational documentary

By Dee Brauningner
For United Church News

A perfect back flop knocked the wind out of Tyler Greene. "Then," remembers his pastor, "he let out this jubilant scream."

Even though Tyler had already gone horseback riding and water rafting, the Rev. Tim Ensworth of **First Congregational UCC in Waterloo, Iowa**, assumed Tyler would not jump off the rock into the water below.

Wrong.

"Cerebral palsy and all, he climbs the back of the rock and takes off," Ensworth recalls.

Surprised? Don't be. This is Tyler.

This fall, Waterloo School Superintendent Dewitt R. Jones replaced his opening address to the district's 1,700 employees with a screening of a new DVD produced by one of Waterloo's own.

"I'm Tyler: Don't Be Surprised," a 15-minute disability awareness tool, was created by 16-year-old Tyler Greene as his Eagle Scout project, with the help of his father, Paul.

"I know the world needs to hear what it says," Tyler says, speaking to Tiffany Clarno, who serves as the UCC Disabilities Ministries representative to the UCC Youth and

Young Adult Board. "My dream is to do good things that are right and of value."

"I want to work on equal rights," he says. "I'm not sure where that will take me."

Church member Dee Vandeventer and her staff at ME&V, an Iowa-based marketing, communications and fundraising company, donated time to assist Tyler with the video project. Tyler's cousin, Max Lind, with the help of a photographer friend, designed the DVD's cover art and a promotional website <imtyler.org>.

"We had an incredible produc-

tion team," Paul Greene said.

In the video, viewers are introduced to significant persons in Tyler's life, all who see Tyler for what he can do, not what we can't. They are practicing "ability awareness," Tyler teaches.

Through promoting 'ability awareness,' says Paul Greene, Tyler is determined to change the disempowering way the world interacts with people with disabilities.

The "ability awareness" phrase came to Tyler from a Scout merit badge program called "disability awareness" that his dad teaches. "Except," Tyler explains, "my dad takes out the 'dis-.'"

David Clark, clerk of the church council at **Boston's Old South UCC** and a member of the UCC Disabilities Ministries board, describes Tyler's DVD as "an exceptional job for a person in his stage of psycho-emotional development."

Clark, who also has severe cerebral palsy, is fully integrated in the world. A web designer and computer troubleshooter since college graduation, Clark was on the

original technology team that developed the web accessibility tool, known as "Bobby."

"I don't want people to be amazed that I get up every morning and have a job," Clark says. "Having a job to me is ordinary. When anything is viewed as extraordinary, expectations are not the same."

Tyler shares Clark's view, saying that, once people get to know him or once he gets to talking with his friends, any initial preoccupation with his disability quickly fades away.

"It really does not take long," Tyler says. "Like a minute and it is gone."

Reality over perception

The Rev. Jeanne Tyler, co-pastor of **Saint Paul UCC in Keokuk, Iowa**, who also manages cerebral palsy, has said she views the realities of people with disabilities as being similar to those "living on the margins."

"It is being an outsider, someone to fear or humiliate," she said in 2004, speaking at the UCC-related Leaven Center in Troy, Mich.

"Humiliation is about disempowering someone."

That's why Tyler's church, **First Congregational UCC in Waterloo**, focuses on empowerment.

More than 12 years ago, when Ensworth became its pastor, the church's 150-year-old building already had been adapted architecturally for inclusion, including the addition of an all-floors elevator, covered entry way, ramp approach and automatic door.

"Attitudinal inclusion started with the attitudes of Tyler and his own family," Ensworth recalls. "They are comfortable with him and he is comfortable with himself, so the church echoes that."

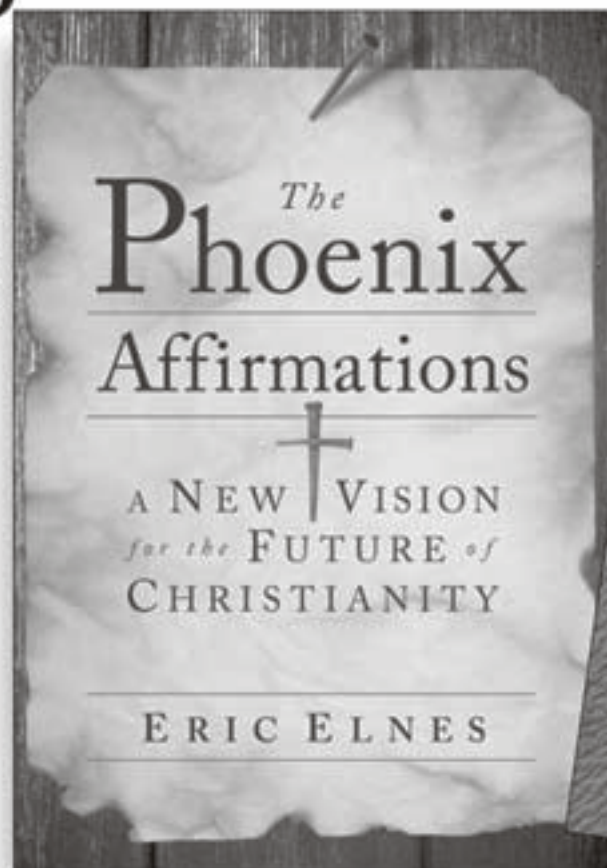
Tyler was born in 1990 as the third child of Gina and Paul, and the brother of Lucas and Molly. The family has been deeply connected with their church for five generations.

"Everything about Tyler is about perception rather than reality," says Tony Lorsung, Tyler's Boy Scout leader, who has known Tyler since his pre-Cub Scout days.

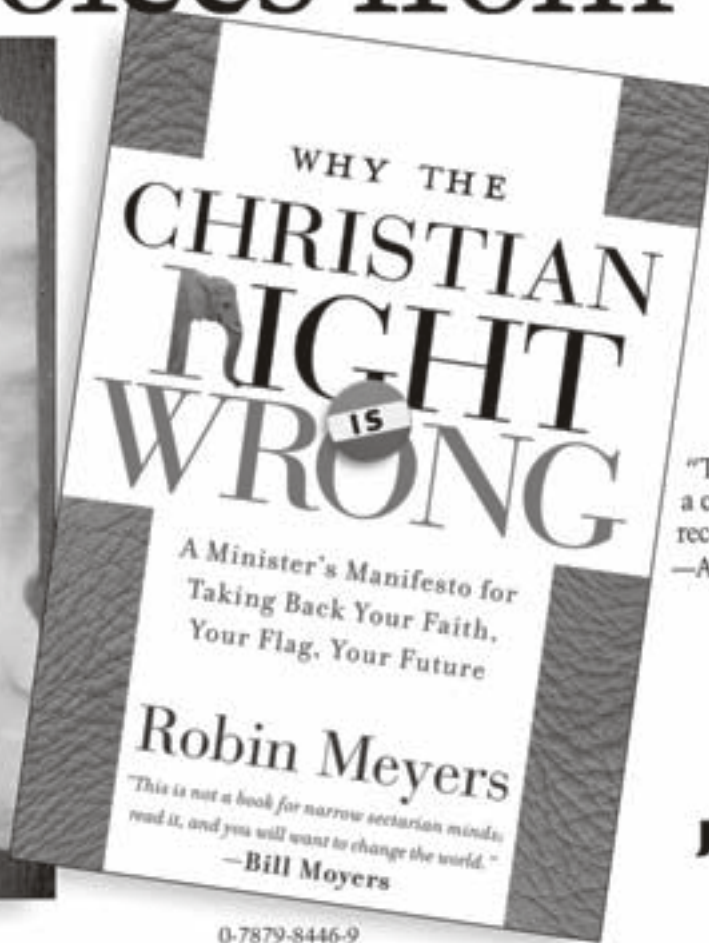
"At first, I felt sorry," Lorsung

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says. "When Tyler joined Cubs, I realized, why should I feel sorry about him if he does not feel sorry for himself?"

"Tyler is an outgoing person about who he is and about his vision of his future," Lorsung says. "Why should he be separated and not do the things he wants to do? To me, he does not have a disability any more."

Tyler, an active teenager who has earned Karate's yellow belt with a blue stripe, plays softball and enjoys the internet. But he's also direct. His activism speaks to what many disabilities awareness advocates are saying: "Will you be able to see past my wheelchair and my speech challenges to appreciate my abilities?"

Tyler's confirmation co-teacher, Hannah Carse, remembers Tyler's frank response when some spoke to him about "a cure."

"If I were constantly waiting for a cure," Carse remembers Tyler saying, "I would think that I am not okay or whole now. I don't ever feel like I am waiting to be whole. This is who I am."

The Rev. Bob Molsberry, pastor of **St. Paul UCC in Belleville, Ill.**, and vice-chair of UCC Disabilities Ministries, acknowledges that disabilities are a part of a person's

identity.

"Human beings are not perfectible," Molsberry said in a nationally-televised interview that aired in August. "Disability is not the defining aspect of any life. It is part of our human diversity. What we need is inclusion so everyone can be at the table. Fix the steps, bathrooms, doors — whatever needs accommodation."

Tyler is a national member of the Kids as Self Advocates' speak-out task force. He wants to see young people with disabilities and those with special health-care needs have control over their own lives and futures.

"KASA has been a huge factor in my realizing the rights I actually have," Tyler says.

Tyler's 'theology of hope'

It was theologian Paul Tillich who once said, "We have learned how hard it is to preserve genuine hope. We know that one has to go ever again through the narrows of a painful and courageous 'in-spite-of.'"

And, UCC minister Dosia Carlson, whom polio paralyzed as a youth, once said, "There has to be a balance between the things that we accept and those we fight."

So Tyler knows that 'hope' is a

big factor in his life.

"If you have hope you have a reason for doing things instead of aimlessly wandering around," he says. "We, as a family, ruled out 'can't' a long time ago. I think if we [used] that word, we wouldn't be very far. For us it's always not a matter of whether 'I can,' but just a matter of 'how.'"

Tyler says he hears competing messages in our society: "You can do anything" and "You can't do anything."

"It is really hard, when you hear all the messages to figure out, who should I listen to?" Tyler says. "Dad helps with that."

"You cannot go through life not questioning anything," Tyler believes. "If you really, really want to do what is right, you may have to take a few risks."

For Tyler, God is "like your father, your best friend, the one who created everyone. God watches over us and will always be there to love and protect us no matter what."

"I kind of believe that God has a plan for us," he says. "I think God believes that the world needed some help. I think what God has planned for me is to help people understand, to educate people about ability awareness. It is life-long."

Surprised? You shouldn't be.



IF YOU HAVE HOPE you have a reason for doing things instead of aimlessly wandering around."

— Tyler Greene, age 16



LEARN MORE@

For information on "I'm Tyler" DVD, visit imtyler.org. Learn more about UCC Disabilities Ministries at uccdm.org. For more about computer accessibility issues, visit davidaccess.org. Kids as Self Advocates' website is self-advocate.org or phone 773/338-5541.

The Rev. Dee Brauning, pastor of **First Congregational UCC in Burwell, Neb.**, is editor of "That All May Worship and Serve" and an executive committee member of the UCC Disabilities Ministries.



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UCC leaders endorse 'The Ground Truth,' an Iraq War documentary

In early October, a handful of UCC congregations will be among the dozens of churches nationally hosting preview screenings of "The Ground Truth," a new documentary that reflects on the Iraq War from soldiers' perspectives.

Now, UCC leaders — including the denomination's chief military liaison — are hoping more UCC churches will sign up to show the film, which is scheduled to be released by mid-month on DVD, shortly after its major theatrical release.

"The Ground Truth' in no way

dishonors service members or veterans," says the Rev. John F. Gundlach, a retired Navy chaplain who now serves as the UCC's minister for government chaplaincies. "To the contrary, it lifts up the true nature of their service and sacrifices in a way that we rarely, if ever, see in the popular media."

Director/producer Patricia Foulkroad says her film is not about the right or the left, or about blue or red states.

"It is about the hundreds of thousands of U.S. soldiers who

have been released by the military after serving in Iraq, and the truth they hope to share with their fellow citizens," she said in June. "I produced and directed 'The Ground Truth' because I felt it was time to stop hiding behind the politics. ... It became clear, while filming, that the broken hearts and shattered lives that I was seeing were profound and pervasive, whether the soldiers and their families were for or against the Iraq War."

Gundlach, who was asked to preview the film before it was recommended to UCC audiences, told United Church News, "I found this to be an accurate representation of military recruiting and training practices and an honest portrayal of the lasting effects of combat on those who have experienced it."

Church of the Savior UCC in Knoxville, Tenn., Pilgrim UCC in Carlsbad, Calif., Plymouth Congregational UCC in Milwaukee, Wis., and New York City's Riverside Church (UCC/American Baptist) are among those churches scheduled to host pre-release screenings, according to the Rev. Ron Stief, who directs the UCC's Justice and Ministries office in Washington, D.C.

Focus Films is the documentary's distributor, the same company that oversaw distribution of Brokeback Mountain, says Stief. The movie already is receiving widespread attention, he says.

Stief and the Rev. Loey Powell, along with other JWM staff, are working to promote the film's use, especially because they say it's a balanced tool that can inform church

members' conversations about the Iraq and the war's effects on those who are actually fighting on the ground.

"This is a perspective from the veterans," Stief said. "We want the veterans to be able to speak for themselves, whether we should get out [of Iraq] or not."

To learn more or to order the DVD, visit <thegroundtruth.org>.

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Have you kept your promise?

By the Rev. Mike Schuenemeyer

When Dorothy attended a recent UCAN workshop, she said she would go home and make sure the next church bulletin had something about HIV and AIDS in it. A few weeks later a Sunday bulletin arrived in my mail box. In the announcements was the phone number of the local AIDS Service Center and an invitation to volunteer. It wasn't much, but Dorothy kept her promise to do something, an important first step in building our response to this pandemic.

"Have you kept your promise?" is a way asking each of us about our own promises to follow Jesus, the great healer, in ministries of health and wholeness responding to HIV and AIDS. Governments, churches and organizations around the world have made promises to help stop HIV and AIDS. How are we doing at holding them accountable for these promises? At the same time, we must realize that it's not just up to them; it is up to us, all of us, to do our part.

Throughout the UCC there is a great range of ministry happening in response to HIV, from simple actions like Dorothy's, to very comprehensive programs for education, prevention, treatment, care and advocacy. As persons of faith, we each have a very important role to play and UCAN exists to help us discover what that role may be and to do it.

This year's theme for World AIDS Day carries a stronger emphasis on accountability: "Keep the Promise, Take Action to Help Stop HIV and AIDS." Take some time to think on what you can do and what your church can do, large or small. And be sure to let us know how UCAN can help.

The Rev. Mike Schuenemeyer is Executive for Health and Wholeness Advocacy and Minister for HIV and AIDS in Wider Church Ministries, a covenanted ministry of the United Church of Christ.

The United Church of Christ HIV and AIDS Network (UCAN) is made up of committed UCC members and friends helping each other to stop HIV and AIDS worldwide.

Website: www.ucc.org/hivaids

E-mail: UCAN@ucc.org

Helpline: 216-736-2284

**33-46 million people are living with HIV or AIDS.
Are you one of them?
Know your HIV status: 1-866-344-KNOW**

"Although our attention has recently been turned to war and fear of 'terrorists,' the AIDS pandemic continues to tear husbands, wives, partners, sons and daughters from our lives. Our people are still dying from the lack of access to treatment and presence of denial and shame. We must continue to work, pray and fight until there is a cure."

— The Rev. Dr. Yvette Flunder, City of Refuge UCC, San Francisco

Get Ready for World AIDS Day

Date: Dec. 1, 2006

Theme: Keep the Promise, Take Action to Help Stop HIV and AIDS

Resources from UCAN

World AIDS Day Folder

A collection of HIV and AIDS resources for education, worship and World AIDS Day activities, available for free download from <http://www.ucc.org/hivaids/> or call UCC Resources and order Item# WCMWAF (\$7.00).

UCAN Newsletter

A new occasional publication from UCAN containing news and information about HIV and AIDS, as well as, ideas and resources for your HIV and AIDS ministries. Available for free download from www.ucc.org/hivaids/.

HIV and AIDS Ministries Consultation, Workshops and Trainings

UCAN is available to consult with local church leadership about your HIV and AIDS ministry. We also offer workshops and trainings to help you along the way. Contact our UCAN National Hotline to discuss what types of HIV and AIDS technical assistance we can offer your local church ministry. UCAN Help Line: 216-736-2284.

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A comprehensive HIV and AIDS awareness and prevention program for people of all ages designed for Christian education settings. Available for the cost of shipping (about \$12) from UCC Resources. To order call, toll free, 800-537-3394.

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A variety of HIV and AIDS informational brochures, including basic HIV information, abstinence and safer practices. Available from UCC Resources: 800-537-3394, Item WCMHIS (Free)

Our Global Response to the Pandemic

Information about the HIV and AIDS projects and programs of our Global Ministries' HIV and AIDS partners is available from the Global Ministries web site: <http://www.globalministries.org/>

Poverty does not drive this pandemic. Unprotected sex drives this pandemic. ... I think that churches and their leaders in all parts of the world need to learn to talk in a neutral way about human sexualities, without condemning anyone who does anything that we think is against our morals or our Bible or whatever. We are not going to get anywhere stopping further transmission of HIV if we continue to condemn people.

— Calle Almedal, UNAIDS Special Adviser



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a special new year's retreat, *Praying From the Heart ~ Praying With the Body*, led by Susan Rush, coordinator of contemplative outreach of New Mexico, hospital chaplain and spiritual director, and Jim Reale, teacher of contemplative practice, prayerful movement, and devotional chant, Dec. 28, 2006 - Jan. 1, 2007. Call 505/278 3002 or visit our website at <www.mandalacenter.org> for more information.

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CALLED

The Rev. Bernice Powell Jackson, to assist **Beecher Congregational UCC in New Orleans** in its hurricane recovery efforts. She started in mid-September.

Jackson, currently one of the eight presidents of the World Council of Churches, was once a member of the UCC's five-person Collegium of Officers, serving as executive of Justice and Witness Ministries for six years. During the 1980s, she was director of the Bishop Tutu Scholarship Fund in the United States.

Jackson is now traveling to New Orleans from her home in Tampa, Fla., for two weeks each month until the end of the year. As Beecher's minister for mission and pastoral care, she will share in leading worship with the Rev. Don Morgan of Back Bay Mission in Biloxi, Miss., and help the congregation envision what it may want to do and assess how best to do it.

During the hurricanes and flooding of August-September 2005, Beecher UCC was submerged in four feet of water for many weeks and is now completely gutted. For many months, church members shared worship twice a month with **Good Shepherd UCC in Metairie, La.** In September members moved back to their own neighborhood, where they now worship in a large tent erected for that purpose.

Beecher Memorial UCC celebrated the centennial of its founding two years ago. "They have a lot of spirit and are eager to get going again," says Jackson. "It's important right now, and I'd like to do what I can to help them."



Jackson

RESIGNING

The Rev. Ann B. Day, a friend to hundreds of UCC "Open and Affirming Churches," as the program's coordinator. Day and her partner, Donna Enberg, the program's Administrative Assistant, will complete their work at close of the 2007 General Synod. They will have served the grassroots movement for 20 years and led more than 600 churches through the "ONA" study process.

"Quite frankly, there would not be an Open and Affirming movement were it not for the commitment, vision and tireless work of the Rev. Ann B. Day," said the Rev. William R. Johnson, who in 1972 became the first openly gay man ordained in the United States.

DIED

Erston M. Butterfield, 87, on July 31, in Pleasant Hill, Tenn. After pastoring churches in Michigan and Ohio, Butterfield served 30 years in Conference ministry — as superintendent of the Southeast Convention of the Congregational Christian Church, president of the Ohio Conference, as Illinois Conference Minister and Florida's Associate Conference Minister. Memorials may be sent to the Wharton Care Center Fund, c/o Uplands Retirement Village, PO Box 168, Pleasant Hill, TN 38578.

RETIRED

The Rev. James A. Forbes Jr., as pastor of New York's famed **Riverside Church (UCC/American Baptist)** in June 2007. Forbes, 71, pastor since 1989, is one of only five senior ministers in the church's 76-year history. He is considered one of the most prominent, vocal preachers on the religious left.

HIRED

Cheryl A. Leanza, a public interest attorney and veteran First Amendment advocate, as managing director of the UCC's Office of Communication, Inc., the church's historic media justice agency that first insisted that those holding Federal Communications Commission licenses must act on behalf of the public interest.

Leanza, a former deputy director of the Media Access Project, has served as principal legislative counsel for telecommunications at the National League of Cities since mid-2005. She will succeed Gloria Tristani, a former FCC commissioner who left earlier this year to become president of the Benton Foundation.

"Having such a high profile person join our staff sends a message that the UCC is serious about its continued role in the fight for media justice," said the Rev. Robert Chase, the UCC's communications director.

HIRED

The Rev. Rebecca Voelkel, a UCC minister in Minneapolis, Minn., as program director for The Institute for Welcoming Resources, an umbrella organization for leading Protestant lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) welcoming church programs. IWR is an ecumenical initiative of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force to support and resource Open and Affirming congregations in the UCC and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), as well as Welcoming and Affirming Baptists, More Light Presbyterians, Reconciling in Christ Lutherans, Reconciling Ministries — United Methodists, and the Community of Christ's Welcoming Communities Network.

Voelkel formerly served as interim national coordinator of the UCC's Coalition for LGBT concerns.

CONFERENCE CHANGES

The Rev. Douglas Anders, pastor of Calvary UCC in St. Louis, Mo., was elected South Central Conference Ministry on Sept. 9. We will begin his new ministry on Jan. 1, 2007.

The Rev. Gary Schulte began serving as New Hampshire Conference Minister on Aug. 21. He was elected in April.

PASTORAL CHANGES

Arnold, Mark St. Louis, MO to Community UCC, Baker, MT

Artt, Susan E. Webster Groves, MO to St. Paul UCC, Nashville, IL

Bailey, Dennis C. Billerica, MA to Centre Congregational UCC, Lynnfield, MA

Baker, F. Russell to Community UCC, Bountiful, UT

Blocker, Darlene to St. Luke's UCC, Nazareth, PA

Bocher, Luke E. New London, WI to Congregational UCC, Evansville, WI

Boda-Mercer, Edit Haworth, N.J. to Salem UCC, Plymouth, WI

Branford, John R. Nyack, NY to First UCC, Hollywood, FL

Carlson, Catherine A. Kiel, WI to First Cong. UCC/Mount Zion UCC, Platteville, WI

Coffman, Anne W. to Olivet Congregational UCC, Bridgeport, CT

Currie, Charles to interim, Parkrose Community UCC, Portland, OR

Downs, Denise White Salmon, WA to chaplain, Royal Oak, MI

Duebber, Robert E. to First UCC, Westminster, MA

Dummer, William Milwaukee, WI to retirement

Hafner, Laurinda M. Cleveland, OH to Cong. UCC, Coral Gables, FL

Keeckt, John D. to Cong. UCC, Ridgefield, CT

Kettell, Mairaine to St. John's UCC, Emmaus, PA

Hulse, Sandra S. Palo Alto, CA to United, Tallahassee, FL

Jewell, John Dubuque, IA to interim, Union Cong. UCC, Waupun, WI

Lawrence, Lansford Owensville, MO to Bethel UCC, Florissant, MO

Liberatore, Alexander J. Buffalo, NY to St. Paul's UCC, Attica, NY

Moon, Dennis P. Glastonbury, CT to South Congregational UCC, Granby, CT

Myers, Bret to interim, Faith UCC, Milwaukee, WI

Olsen, Kevin L. Kiowa, KS to Zion UCC, Kansas City, KS

Reed, Catherine R. Black Creek, WI to interim, First Cong. UCC, New London, WI

Reed, Mitchell D. New Knoxville, OH to Immanuel UCC, Zanesville, OH

Rinear, Kathleen Barnevald, WI to interim, Union Cong. UCC, Waupun, WI

Snyder, Robert P. Hales Corners, WI to retirement

Spencer-Smith, Lynne M. Belmont, IA to Cong. UCC, Neenah, WI

Taube, Christie A. Muncie, IL to Park Street Cong. UCC, Mazon, IL

Wynn, Tammy E. to Samaritan House, Fort Worth, TX

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

CLERGY DEATHS

Adams, Robert T., 82, 7/23/2006

Bamforth, Charles L., 51, 7/22/2006

Berry, Edward A., 83, 8/22/2006

Boone, Joseph E., 83, 7/14/2006

Butterfield, Erston M., 87, 7/31/2006

Conover, Stanley H., 95, 7/4/2006

Detweller, Leonard A., 83, 11/29/2001

Fischer, Philip, 84, 5/18/2006

Fix, Charles E., 81, 7/15/2006

Freeman, Frances S., 89, 7/30/2006

Gelenian, Ara A., 71, 5/6/2006

Glaser, Donald R., 73, 6/23/2006

Greene, Robert W., 85, 8/11/2006

Harmon, Bradford D., 61, 6/14/2006

Johnson, Lanning L., 65, 5/2/2006

Kading, Milton, 90, 7/24/2006

Kelly, Claude W., 87, 5/18/2006

Krebs, Walter, 79, 6/29/2006

Langtry, Robert C., 75, 5/17/2006

Lee, Hugh S., 94, 7/14/2006

Lenda, Jon T., 58, 7/1/2006

Miller, Blaine L., 78, 7/31/2006

Mosley, Neil A., 69, 8/15/2006

Musser, Thomas B., 88, 6/23/2006

Perry, Constance B., 59, 6/8/2006

Quigley, John L., 64, 8/25/2006

Reinwald, Henry L., 81, 5/1/2006

Rice, Dexter B., 84, 8/8/2006

Smith, Toney C., 47, 6/6/2006

Strasburg, Frederick R., 80, 8/10/2006

Tymeson, Gale E., 77, 11/24/2005

Unglesbee, Bruce D., 80, 5/27/2006

Van Leeuwen, Cornelius, 97, 5/11/2006

Vernon, Walter J., 80, 7/5/2006

Weltge, Edwin H.P., 85, 8/19/2006

Whitman, Winslow, 77, 8/20/2006

Wingenroth, Vernon C., 79, 7/7/2006

Information on clergy deaths is provided by The Pension Boards.



Written by Carol L. Pavlik

At South Dakota Reservation, volunteers learn to live, love Lakota culture

The Pine Ridge Reservation in Pine Ridge, S.D., is home to a proud nation of Oglala Lakota Indians. But throughout Pine Ridge's sprawling 2 million acres, the estimated 30,000 inhabitants live in conditions akin to third world countries [see sidebar].

The Rev. Keith Titus, formerly the pastor of **Lakeshore Community UCC of West Olive, Mich.**, first came to the reservation in 1997. Titus is the executive director of RE-MEMBER, a nonprofit, UCC-supported organization located on the reservation devoted to recalling the treatment of the Indian people by the U.S. government and repairing that relationship.

Titus and his wife, Ginny, spend most of their time living on the reservation in a pole barn that has been remodeled to house them and some 1,000 volunteers who come to the reservation, one week at a time, each year.

RE-MEMBER coordinates visitors from adult mission groups, youth groups, corporations and schools who come to Pine Ridge for "work vacations," with an emphasis on cultural exchange. Through this relationship-building effort, volunteers become advocates in solidarity with the Lakota people.

The most IMPORTANT thing we do is to form relationships with the Lakota people."

— Keith Titus

for everyone to sleep on the reservation, and has designed a practical, sturdy and economical bunk bed. About half of the beds are built in RE-MEMBER's workshop; the other half are cut, sanded and stained at "Bunk Bed Blitzes" held offsite (sometimes several states away), then shipped to Pine Ridge to be assembled and distributed.

"If you count every bunk bed as two beds," says Titus, "we've put up 3,700 beds. And there are still more to be built."

The need for beds has begun to

kota people. He says RE-MEMBER wants to be helpful, not intrusive, to the lifestyle of the Lakota people.

RE-MEMBER programming cultivates the cultural immersion that goes on during the week-long work camps. Most work camps are for teens and adults, but one session of "Family Week" is offered each summer to include children ages 6-12. Each day, the families come together for "Wisdom of the Elders," sharing indigenous quotations from all over the world.

At the end of the day, the families gather again to "unpack" their observations and experiences from that day.

Next summer, Ginny Titus will also offer two week-long programs for returning volunteers to further examine the Lakota spirituality, drawing parallels between their spirituality and Christian spirituality, and marking the differences.

"I have great admiration for the Lakota spirituality," Keith Titus says. "In the Lakota culture, and I suspect in many of the indigenous cultures, they have no word for religion or spirituality or art or music because it is such an integrated part of their lives. They don't think of it as something separate."

Ambassador-at-large

Titus will be handing over the reigns of Executive Director soon, so that he can spend more time visiting regional and national church meetings, as well as local parishes.

For him, this means missing his friends at Pine Ridge while he takes on the necessary task of spreading the word about RE-MEMBER.

"We haven't come up with a [new] title for me yet," says Titus, smiling.

"Maybe it should be something like 'Ambassador-at-large.'"

While Titus is traveling, Tom McCann, a self-described "recovering lawyer" and longtime member of **Plymouth UCC in Des Moines, Iowa**, will be taking over as Executive Director.

McCann came to Pine Ridge two years ago and says it changed his life. He returned as an intern and now looks forward to taking a more active part in the organization.

"Our greatest mission is what we do with volunteers," McCann says. "It helps put the folks out here back on people's radar screen."

As McCann meets more friends through RE-MEMBER, he becomes more connected to the experience of the Lakota people.

"They talk about 'walking in two worlds,'" says McCann. "Here, you really get a sense of that."

The Rev. Keith Titus is coming to your area in 2007. He'll be traveling in the Southeast in Jan.-Feb., the Northeast in April and May, and the Northwest and West in the fall. Contact RE-MEMBER at 877/205-2105 or <remember@gwcc.net> if you'd like him to speak to your church or group.



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Titus said that from his very first trip to Pine Ridge, he knew that housing renovation and construction was most needed.

"Often there are 20 to 30 people living in homes that are 400-800 square feet," says Titus.

But RE-MEMBER was just getting off the ground in 1997, and Titus and his team of volunteers realized that they did not have the expertise or the cash flow to take on building houses.

Instead, they focused on the next greatest physical need: beds.

'Bunk Bed Blitzes'

"When you have that many people living in a small space, you need vertical bedding," says Titus.

RE-MEMBER has focused on providing a warm, comfortable place

taper off, but Titus is realistic. "Half the population here is 18 and younger," he says. "We're not going to run out of clients."

Building, maintaining trust

Volunteers who come to Pine Ridge are put to work building beds and renovating homes, but Titus says that is only part of the reason why they come.

"The most important thing we do is to form relationships with the Lakota people," he says. "Over the nine years we've been operating, we feel we've established a certain level of trust with the people."

Maintaining that trust is important to Titus, who says volunteers are not allowed to explore the reservation on their own, and must exercise restraint when taking pictures of the La-

QUICKFACTS: Who broke the treaty?

The Oglala Lakota Indians are a nation with a beautiful culture and a rich spiritual heritage, but they are also a people who must live, every day, faced with these conditions:

- ▶ The lowest life expectancy in the U.S. and the second lowest in the western hemisphere.
- ▶ The poorest of United States' 3,143 counties in 1980, 1990 census counts. (Third from bottom in 2000, because of worsening conditions at two other S.D. reservations.)
- ▶ Sixty percent live below the poverty level
- ▶ Over 80 percent unemployment.
- ▶ \$4,000 in per capita income.
- ▶ Single parents in 52 percent of households.
- ▶ Climate ranging from 40-degrees below zero to 120-degrees above.
- ▶ Eight times the U.S. rate of diabetes.
- ▶ Five times the rate of cervical cancer.
- ▶ Twice the rate of heart disease.
- ▶ Eight times the rate of tuberculosis.
- ▶ Suicide rate more than twice the national rate.
- ▶ Teen suicide four times the national rate.
- ▶ Three times the infant mortality rate.
- ▶ Sixty-eight percent school dropout rate.
- ▶ Often 20 or more people living in houses as small as 400 square feet.
- ▶ One-third of houses without electricity.
- ▶ One-third of houses without running water or sewer lines.
- ▶ Separate and unequal funding of education.
- ▶ Murder rate more than two-and-one-half times the national rate.
- ▶ One-half the number of police officers per capita as the rest of U.S.
- ▶ No public transportation, no banks, no movie theaters, no bowling alleys, no recreation centers, no furniture stores, no clothing stores, no nursing homes.

Source: <re-member.org>