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 United Church of Christ
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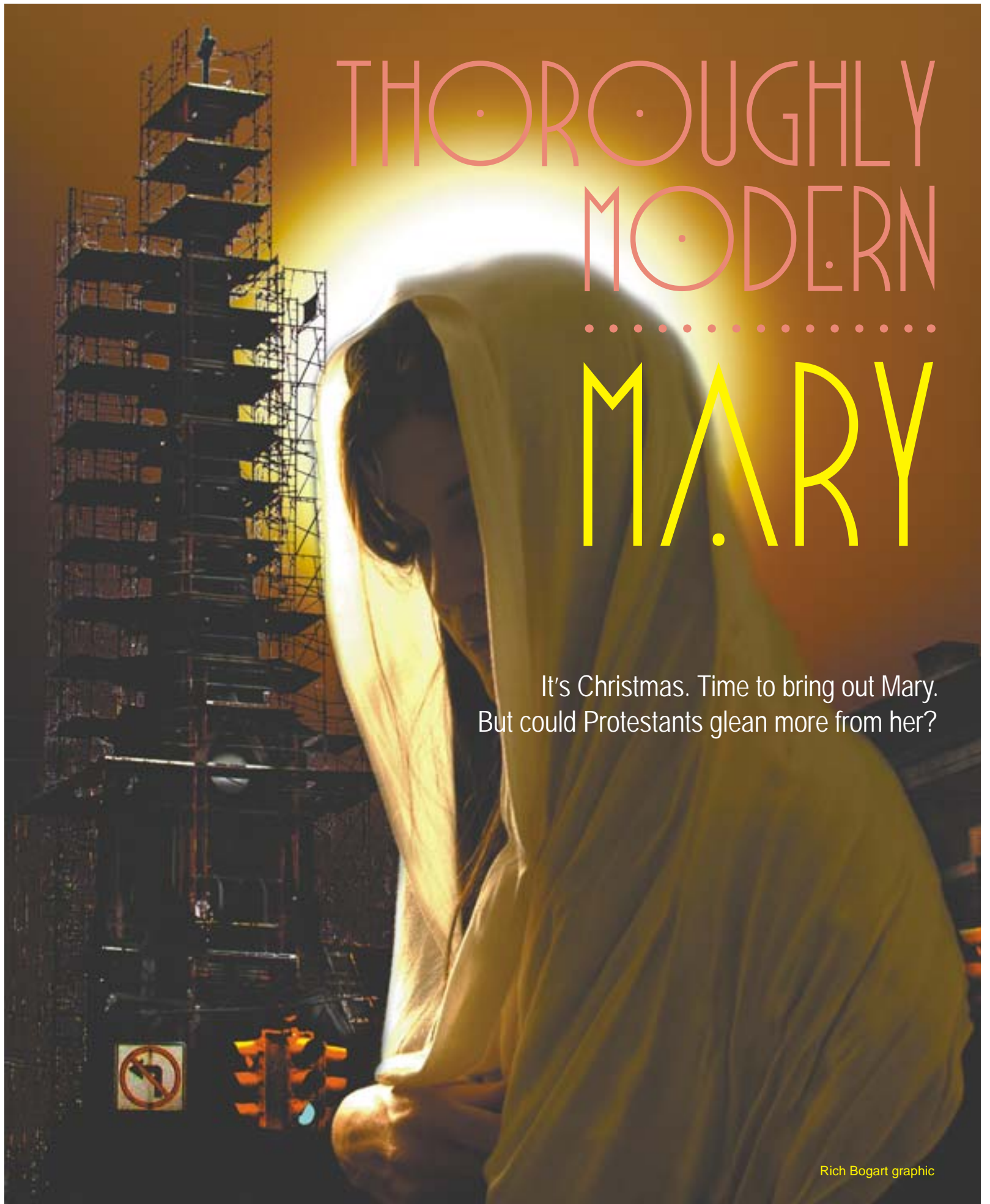
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*Readers pen their New Year's
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NATIONAL EDITION | UNITED CHURCH NEWS



THOROUGHLY
 MODERN

.....
 MARY

It's Christmas. Time to bring out Mary.
 But could Protestants glean more from her?

Rich Bogart graphic

'God is good, all the time'

FROM THE
COLLEGIUM



Cally Rogers-Witte

Fear not. How vulnerable we sometimes feel, wondering how long our job is secure or our retirement savings will last.

Fear not. How anxious we get, reading about unexpected health scares, terrorist threats, tornados, or automobile accidents. It could happen to us!

Fear not. How frightened we can be, worried about the safety of our sons and daughters (One of my daughters is doing relief and development work in southern Sudan and another daughter drives all over two states introducing educational materials to school systems.

So I do confess to worrying.)

Fear not. Mary must have felt incredibly vulnerable upon learning that she was pregnant. "Mary, you have nothing to fear; God has a surprise for you!"

Fear not. Think how anxious Mary and Joseph must have been when they were turned away at the inn — temporarily homeless, just when she was about to give birth.

Fear not. Joseph and Mary must have been terrified as they fled for safety in Egypt to save their new baby boy from murder by the hands of power.

Fear not. Parents around the world fear for their children's safety when hit by natural disaster, war or famine. Many flee their homes, just as the Holy Family fled, and spend an average of 10 years in refugee camps, often in terrible conditions. Fear not.

My old concordance tells me that the word "afraid" appears in the Bible more than 150 times. I looked further, and found the words "hate/hatred/hates/hated" used almost as often.

But, good news, the word "joy" appears in the Bible more than 150 times and the words "love/loved/loves" are found more than 600 times. God is good, all the time!

To the shepherds: "Do not be afraid. I am here to announce a great and joyful event that is meant for everyone, worldwide."

To Peter: "Have courage, it's me; do not be afraid." To the disciples: "There is nothing to fear. From now on you'll be fishing for men and for women."

To those today who teach children and encourage our youth: "Do not be afraid. Let the children come unto me. Do not give up. In as much as you have done it unto the least of these ..."

To the early missionaries in far off lands, as well as our 136 global missionaries today and our mission partners in more than 80 countries: "Do not be afraid. I have given you meaningful work. Fear not, trust, open your Bibles and your minds. Start a school or church. Reach out, help others, support one another. Share the healing love of Christ. Build a new world."

To those who love the UCC: "Fear not, God has a surprise for you. God is calling you into a new future, very different from the comforts of today, and God will provide the resources for the journey."

To those who work for peace with justice, to those yearning for true global community: "Do not be afraid. I am here to announce a great and joyful event for everyone, everywhere." "Good news of great joy!" "For God so loves the world!" And, finally, "Jesus Christ is risen today, Alleluia!"

Fear not. God is still speaking,

The Rev. Cally Rogers-Witte is executive minister of Wider Church Ministries and a member of the UCC's five-person Collegium of Officers.

“MY OLD CONCORDANCE tells me that the word 'afraid' appears in the Bible more than 150 TIMES ... but 'love' is found more than 600 TIMES.”

Living to tell about it

An Akron, Ohio, writer is compiling a book of inspirational stories about UCC members. That's why Stephen Hopson, a member of **First Grace UCC in Akron**, is anxious to hear your stories of overcoming adversity, making a difference or creating a better world. Everyone's got a story, he says, and his church is looking to tell a few.

Hopson is looking for stories that elicit tears, evoke laughter or send shivers, and he's looking for those that cut across human boundaries and divisions. Submissions are due by March 31, 2007.

For more information, visit First Grace UCC's website at <firstgraceucc.org>. Look for the book's working title, "Winds Under Wings."

Giving something back

Across the UCC in December, churches will receive the UCC's annual Christmas Fund Offering to help provide emergency assistance and pension supplementation for low-income retirees. It's one of the concrete opportunities that church members have to support those who have given their lives to full-time Christian service — as pastors, church educators, missionaries, and more.

Your gifts help a growing number of retirees whose low-income annuities make it difficult for them to meet increasing living costs.

Administered by the United Church Board of Ministerial Assistance of the UCC's Pension Boards, your offerings translate into genuine "Christmas Gift Checks" given to hundreds of annuitants, based on need.

Promotional resources available at <christmasfund.org>.

Appalachian accomplishments

In 1965, the UCC joined with ecumenical partners of all stripes to form CORA — the Commission on Religion in Appalachia — to create multi-faceted ministries to help the region's impoverished communities. At the end of December 2007, even though the work is far from finished, CORA will close its doors — due to shrinking financial support from denominational bodies.

CORA, known as Appalachia's standard bearer for justice, organized residents to overcome poverty, environmental classism and institutional racism.

"The UCC expresses sincere appreciation and gratitude for the leadership of CORA which, for the past 40 years, has been a beacon of hope for the men, women and children of



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Randy Varcho Design Editor
Connie Larkman Advertising Manager
Lee Foley Business Manager
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SHORTHAND



Appalachia," the UCC's Executive Council proclaimed in a resolution passed on Oct. 14.

Barbara Baylor of the UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries shared the Executive Council's resolution with CORA supporters and volunteers at a celebration commemorating CORA's ministry.

A CALL TO GENERAL SYNOD

Collegium extends invitation to UCC's golden celebration



Hartford, Conn., is the site of the UCC's General Synod 26.

iStockPhoto

The 26th General Synod of the United Church of Christ will convene Friday, June 22, 2007, at the Hartford Civic Center in Connecticut. General Synod 26 serves as the centerpiece of the UCC's year-long 50th anniversary celebration.

Joining 900 delegates will be thousands of ecumenical guests, as well as invited visitors from each and every UCC congregation. In addition, a youth-oriented "50-4-50" campaign hopes to draw at least 1,000 young people, with 50 youth making the journey from each Conference.

With a convention facility large enough to accommodate 14,000 participants, there's room to make this the biggest and best Synod ever.

To mark the anniversary, the five-day meeting will be a combination of celebration and business, with Saturday, June 23, and Sunday, June 24, specifically set aside for celebrating the church's first 50 years and looking forward to its future.

On Saturday, "Synod in the City" will spill out into every park and venue in downtown Hartford, with UCC members welcoming the wider Hartford community to join us in celebration. Entertainment, community meals, workshops, a huge worship service and addresses by prominent nationally-known speakers will highlight the weekend schedule.

Speakers and workshops will not only examine the church as a social and religious institution, but also explore the world and time in which the church exists.

General Synod 26 will adjourn with the conclusion of business on Tuesday evening, June 26.

Guest registration for the 26th General Synod opens Dec. 1, 2006. Given the Civic Center's security restrictions, all who plan to attend must register in advance.

Complete information — including registration, lodging, transportation, daycare and event schedule — is available at <ucc.org/synod>.

Come join us in Hartford in June as the UCC steps into its second half-century. We're 50 years bold!



The Rev. John H. Thomas
General Minister and President

Edith A. Guffey
Associate General Minister

The Rev. Linda Jaramillo
Executive Minister, Justice and Witness Ministries

The Rev. Jose A. Malayang
Executive Minister, Local Church Ministries

The Rev. Cally Rogers-Witte
Executive Minister, Wider Church Ministries



<ucc.org/synod>

news.ucc.org

ON THE WEB 24-7

'ALL THE PEOPLE'

Advent ad launch debuts 'God is still speaking 2.0'

UCC advertisements will take to cyberspace this month — not the airwaves — as the denomination launches its most ambitious online advertising campaign to date.

In October, the Executive Council approved a \$50,000 web-based ad buy for December and early January, with the hope that additional gifts from churches and individuals will enable an even larger ad buy, perhaps as much as \$85,000.

By comparison, the church saw impressive returns on its web-ad investment last year, when it purchased only \$10,000 in internet ads in March 2005. It upped that amount to \$20,000 when internet ads accompanied the "Ejector" TV spots in April 2006.

This month's campaign debut represents the largest investment by the church in internet advertising. Church leaders say it's a good use of resources, since it provides new uses for existing ads and promotes them in a cost-effective way to new audiences.

Young people now spend more time in front of computer screens than TV screens, research indicates.

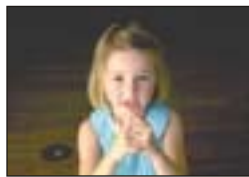
Dubbed the "All the People" campaign, the Advent run will prominently feature the warm-and-touching "All the People" (or "Steeple") ad which, until now, has aired only briefly during a limited run on TV in March 2005.

The internet campaign also will incorporate use of the edgier "Bouncer," "Ejector," and the Spanish-version "Ejector" ads, especially in reaching out to targeted audiences.

The UCC ads will be placed on various internet sites and blogs, with the hope of reaching general audiences in addition to targeted groups, such as youth, young families with

The most common expression will be the 'Steeple' ad."

— Robert Chase



children, gays and lesbians, social justice advocates, and the Spanish-speaking community.

"The most common expression will be the 'Steeple' ad," says the Rev. Robert Chase, the UCC's communications director. "It will be an interactive, web-based campaign that will tie in nicely with the Advent and Christmas seasons. It's intended to be spiritual, worship-related and include social action."

Chase refers to the web-based effort as "God is still speaking 2.0," because it is designed to be "a series of engagements" where people are invited to "participate in the campaign, not just watch it."

For example, viewers will be asked to click through and sign a pledge promising to pray for "all the people" during Advent. In return, e-mail invitations will be sent, asking participants to attend a UCC Christmas Eve service. And, spiritually-enriching "gifts" will be offered. "It's a way to up the level of engagement," he says.

Marilyn Dubasak, coordinator of the Stillspeaking Initiative, says one of the greatest learnings throughout the Stillspeaking campaign has been the benefit of raising the level of engagement for current members, in addition to reaching out to potential members.

LEARN MORE @

<ucc.org> or <stillspeaking.com>

'Streamlining' gets mixed reactions from national boards

A proposal by the UCC's five-person Collegium of Officers calling for a "streamlined" national structure was greeted with mixed reaction from the five autonomous boards that would be asked to consolidate into one governing body, if the proposal moves forward.

During fall meetings, the Executive Council and boards of Wider Church Ministries and Office of General Ministries gave support for the proposal. The boards of Local Church Ministries and Justice and Witness Ministries voted non-support for the plan.

A meeting is scheduled for early January when leaders of the boards will meet with the Collegium to discuss concerns and explore possible next steps, if any.

Ultimately, the necessary constitutional changes would require support from all Covenanted Ministry boards; affirmation of two-thirds of delegates attending next summer's General Synod 26 in Hartford, Conn.; and ratification by two-thirds of the UCC's 39 Conferences. Any "streamlined" governance structure could not be implemented until 2009, at the earliest.

Opponents have expressed fears that streamlining would consolidate power into too few hands and that some of the church's historic mandates might get lost or given low priority in the new configuration. Some are concerned that diversity in representation will suffer if the total number of board members is significantly reduced. Currently, about 350 people sit on one of the five boards, while

the new structure calls for a single governing body of about 90.

Supporters argue it is nearly impossible for the denomination's national setting to act strategically or respond "nimble" when policy is set by five sometimes-competing interests. Some say there are more-potent ways to invest resources than by having large numbers of people travel to participate in governance. Instead, some say, more money should be allocated to bring more people into the life of the national setting through bridge-building events or mission interpreter training, for example.

Members of the Collegium, which now report to two separate boards — the Executive Council as well as their respective Covenanted Ministry board — have said those dual allegiances create multiple challenges, especially when the two bodies are not in agreement.

Despite disagreement within and among the boards, the Collegium met on Nov. 2 and released a statement indicating it remained committed to the "process and timeline" established by the Executive Council.

"The Collegium began developing plans for a gathering of representatives of the Executive Council, the boards of the Covenanted Ministries, the Associated and Affiliated Ministries, and the Council of Conference Ministers in early January to assess the response and consider possible way to move forward," the Collegium statement reads.

Reports on each of the boards' decisions are available at <news.ucc.org>.



Webcast hosts Paul Sadler and Megan Holle greeted those gathered in the UCC's Amistad Chapel moments before the event went live before a national viewing audience. Randy Varcho photo

Online gathering attracts thousands, creates 'buzz'

By J. Bennett Guess

An estimated 26,802 viewers — give or take a few — from across the UCC joined together simultaneously on Nov. 5, for the church's first-ever, multi-site, interactive webstreaming event in order to help launch the denomination's year-long 50th anniversary celebration.

"It makes it the largest gathering in the history of the denomination. But, of course it's a different kind of gathering," remarked the Rev. Robert Chase, the UCC's communications director.

Hosted by the Rev. Paul Sadler, pastor of **Mt. Zion UCC in Cleveland**, and Megan Holle, a member of **Lake Oswego UCC in Oregon**, the 40-minute webcast included personal greetings, video clips, music, dancing and brief interviews. It originated from the Amistad Chapel at the UCC's Church House in Cleveland, where several hundred from across the Ohio Conference were gathered, and included teleconferencing feeds from **Redeemer UCC in Sussex, Wis.**; **Heritage UCC in Baltimore, Md.**; and **Cathedral of Hope UCC in Dallas, Texas.**

Hans Holznagel, the UCC's minister for community life at the Church House in Cleveland, says he cannot recall a similar experience where the Amistad Chapel was "so alive" as it was that day. "An electric kind of feeling" is how he described it.

Participants gathered from 3,744

unique sites, according to IP data reports. Many attended regional or church-based parties that included worship and fellowship dinners. The average size of each "viewing group" was seven, based on sign-in data each participant was asked to provide.

Remarkably, most sites reported few, if any, technical problems with the experimental webcast.

In Hawaii, members of the UCC's Kauai Association celebrated the UCC's 50th anniversary by creating a 50-foot spam *musubi* and sharing 50 containers of kalua pork and poi. They topped it off with 50 scoops of ice cream. Entertainment was provided by 50 people singing with ukulele accompaniment.

The top five states, in terms of viewer participation, were Illinois, Connecticut, Ohio, California and Minnesota. Among those with five or fewer gathered at a single computer, Ohio and New York had the most involvement.

"The best feedback I've found is that whenever people talk about this, they do so with a smile on their face," Chase said. "We accomplished what we set out to do — to create a buzz, to create a sense of connection as we began our 50th celebration. It was a new way to use emerging technology that was energizing and forward-looking."

Download a video of the webcast at <ucc.org>.

Guffey nominated for final four-year term

The UCC's 90-member Executive Council unanimously affirmed the report of its Associate General Minister Nominating Committee on Oct. 14 in recommending that Edith A. Guffey be nominated for a third and final four-year term in the position.

The decision was followed by a standing ovation for Guffey as she reentered the meeting room at the Church House in Cleveland, where the Executive Council was gathered for its fall meeting. Delegates to General Synod 26 in Hartford, Conn., must now vote to affirm Guffey's re-election in June 2007.

Guffey, 53, has served as a member of the five-person Collegium of Officers since the denomination's national restructure was launched in 1999. Prior to that, she was the elected secretary of the church's national setting. As Associate General Minister, Guffey is the administrator of the UCC's biennial General Synod and the Office of General Ministries, one of the UCC's four Covenanted Ministries.

Guffey is a member of **Federated UCC in Chagrin Falls, Ohio**. Her husband, Jerry, is the administrator at **Pilgrim Congregational UCC in Cleveland**. They have two adult sons.

THANK YOU, READERS

'Connectivity' is central to United Church News identity, purpose

FROM
THE
PUBLISHER



Robert Chase

As we prepared for the UCC's web streaming event on All Saint Sunday, a key word used in rehearsals was "connectivity," as we wrestled with the technology necessary to link — via an internet bridge — our three remote sites in Maryland, Wisconsin and Texas to our central control room in the Amistad Chapel in Cleveland.

Connectivity is a vital concept for us in the UCC: it unites our communities, it represents a network of care to those who are shut in or shut out and it ties us to our Creator through the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

As the "to do" page in my calendar turned from the technological intricacies of web streaming to the seemingly quaint task of putting pen to paper — actually, fingertips to keyboard — to write this column for United Church News, the concept of connectivity leapt again to mind. I considered what role a newspaper plays in this era of "podcasting" and "blast e-mails."

Why do we go through this exercise every other month, with its drain on resources, its challenge to an overburdened staff and its seemingly outdated method of distribution. Why do we do this?

The answer, I believe, lies in the same word: connectivity. And our stakeholders in this ministry seem to agree. The proof, as they say, lies in the data.

And who are our stakeholders?

First, it is you, our readers. Editor Ben Guess recently returned from a meeting of denominational editors, to report that, despite having the smallest staff of any of our ecumenical partners, United Church News has more than twice the circulation — 180,000 — of our closest sister publication. Most denominational periodicals have a small fraction of our readership.

And each year, voluntary support from our readers continues to increase. So far in 2006, we have received more than \$90,000 from individuals (and a few churches). We expect to exceed our goal of \$110,000 for 2006 — the highest amount ever.

Second, there are our advertisers. Advertising is a largely untold story in our news and editorial pages, and that's as it should be. There is an important line between payment for space and newsworthiness; one should never influence the other. But organizations don't advertise in places that have no promotional importance.

Today's secular headlines frequently cite how ad revenues have plummeted in the newspaper business. Yet, advertising in United Church News has increased dramatically, this year generating more than \$325,000, a four-fold increase in six years.

Then, third, there are our Conferences and local-church stakeholders. We are frequent recipients of comments telling us how important this communication conduit is for Conferences to get the word out to local churches.

In 2001, we had just 15 Conference editions; now there are 30. Because the national setting pays for printing, collating and mailing the Conference editions, in partnership with the national section, our Conferences collectively save more than a quarter of a million dollars

to strengthen the connectivity with their local churches. This partnership between different settings of the church offers a successful model as to how we do ministry together.

Then, finally, there are our critics (the loving ones, of course), who fall into two categories.

First, there are those who say that a newspaper is passé, that all communication should be electronic. This raises serious inclusivity concerns. Many of our constituents are not web users, and getting all your information on-line can color the experience. Case in point: A recent story in The New York Times about the UCC's Stillspeaking marketing efforts was interesting enough — if you read it online — but if you saw the print version, you noticed a large image from our "bouncer" TV commercial on the front page of the Sunday business section — a much more gratifying experience for UCC members!

There is value to experiencing the paper as a whole — savoring its look and feel, and seeing Randy Varcho's innovative design. And it's portable. You can take the paper along with you or give it to a friend.

Then there are those who, legitimately, raise the question about affordability. It costs almost \$80,000 for each issue. But, if you do the math, you will see that we are within shouting distance of matching our income to our out-of-pocket expenses, something beyond imagining just three years ago when our deficit for this ministry totaled more than \$300,000.

This turnaround has been made possible because you, our readers, understand the centrality of connectivity to the health of our church. You have risen to the occasion, supporting this ministry with a chorus of "amens" — and cold, hard cash.

OUR READERS UNDERSTAND the centrality of connectivity to the health of our church. You have risen to the occasion, SUPPORTING THIS MINISTRY WITH a chorus of "AMENS" — and cold, hard cash."

LETTERS



Remembering migrants' deaths

Thank you for Stan Duncan's moving piece, "NAFTA's Bloodshed" (Oct.-Nov.). Recently here at my seminary, the social action committee held a migrant awareness week, which included a memorial service for migrants who died last year crossing the desert in Arizona, as depicted by Rev. Duncan. I wonder if Jasmine's name was on one of the more than 300 stakes we planted on the front lawn as a memorial.

Mr. Duncan clearly draws the connections which go unheard in the public "debate" over immigration: our policies, and our personal choices, have consequences, and sometimes those consequences mean death for others.

Sometimes, death is even the desired consequence, as is the case with our southern border enforcement policy, which specifically aims to push migrants into the desert where they will die, hoping that the deaths will deter further migration — a distinctly inhuman and failed policy.

Jasmine and over 3,000 others since this policy was implemented in the mid 1990s have died because of our sins. God forgive us.

Anne Dunlap

Bridgeport UCC, Portland, Ore.

Chair, Iliff School of Theology's social action committee
In-care seminarian, Central Pacific Conference

The old debate continues

The Executive Council's plan for a "streamlined" UCC national structure and the reaction of the Justice and Witness Ministries Board revives a question that reaches back to at least the time of Israel's prophets and that clearly in-

formed Jesus' mission: Can a priestly-oriented religious body effectively protest social injustices that may be practiced or tolerated by its members and leaders?

This question received considerable debate among Congregational-Christians prior to the union as well as among the CC and Evangelical and Reformed architects of the UCC. Proponents of structural separation between church and mission carried the day in 1957, but the debate has continued over the past 50 years. While it can be argued that too strict an adherence to this principle contributed to its partial demise in 1999, one must ask, are there any reasons other than financial stress to completely abandon it now?

We love to quote Emil Brunner's declaration that "the church is to mission as fire is to burning." The reality is, however, that supporting a flourishing church and mounting an effective mission requires sustaining a dialectical relationship between the two. Any "streamlined" UCC structure must embody this dialectic; otherwise today's mission advocates, like their predecessors in the 1830s, will have to invent new structures for prophetic witness.

The Rev. Ted Erickson

Calvary UCC

Turtle Creek, Pa.

Ads build on 'historic foundations'

I am writing in response to a recent letter writer's comment that the UCC's "whimsical" approach to advertising was turning people away from our Congregational roots.

I'm a 76-year-old grandmother whose

Congregational roots extend back to the Mayflower. My own church in Campbell, Calif., is growing in part through the TV ads, with lots of children plus young adults. The daughter of one of our longtime UCC members is about to start seminary.

I believe we are currently building on the foundation laid by our antecedents. The TV ads, which the letter writer maligned, reflects a current application of Congregationalism's willingness to take less than popular stands and act upon them.

Faith B. King

San Jose, Calif.

Restoring old ties

In our immediate neighborhood, there are quite a few Congregational churches which didn't join the UCC [in 1957]. One of our UCC Yearbooks states that, overall, there were 1,600 which did not. Many of these now belong to the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches.

Our 50th celebration, in some manner, should observe these historic congregations. One suggestion is that every UCC Conference can prepare and distribute a list of such churches, and perhaps some fellowship and communication can be restored.

Theodore M. Atkinson

Williamstown, MA

Keeping our living-wage jobs

In the Oct.-Nov. '06 issue, the Rev. Paul Sherry, former UCC president, addresses many of the questions that arise during a "raise the minimum wage" debate. I have one more to add that wasn't discussed.

How do we keep corporations to stay in the United States that pay a living wage? The United States has sent more jobs overseas in the last 15 years than all of the previous years combined. Although small businesses make up a large percentage of U.S. companies, they don't make up the largest percentage of the working population. The figures that have been provided to show that it is good economically haven't been given to (or possibly understood by) large corporations.

Moreover, how do we convince the population that buying products (usually less expensive) from companies that manufacture overseas is hurting their own pocketbook?

I believe these questions need to be answered, not just asked.

The Rev. Del Neumeister
Scotland, S.D.

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.

LIFE ALWAYS FINDS A WAY

Church, like backyard tree, is 'weird creation of living and dying'

COMMENTARY



Bill Peterson

In our back yard in Whittier, California is a tree that for 15 years has provided us with juicy limes and early-spring blossoms for the bees and hummingbirds. We have had more limes than we could use, sharing them with family, friends, and neighbors.

Then, two years ago, Lime started to die, branch-by-branch, until she bore only one branch with leaves, and her fruit fell off before it matured. We did all we could to bring her back.

I'm always the one who says, "Let's give it another season," but even I was losing hope. So I got out my trusty saw, preparing to transform Lime into kindling; thinking of the story "The Giving Tree," where the tree finally gives all she has away.

As I leaned down to cut the trunk, I noticed a small green shoot growing right next to it — too close to let me remove the dead tree. So Gail and I waited. She hung feeders in the dead branches to nurture her beloved birds who loved the safety of the perches, and splashed in a new birdbath below.

Gradually, the new shoot began to grow into a growing tree within a dying tree. Growing Lime depended on Dying Lime's roots for sustenance and meager vegetation to protect it from summer's heat, and Dying Lime held the birds until new branches came.

'STRAW BY STRAW'

New York still births Christmas hope, five years later

COMMENTARY



Donna Schaper

On September 11, 2001, New York City may have taken the hit, but the whole country took the hurt.

Now, with Iraq and its casualties and its bills, with no gels on the airplanes, with a politically manipulated national epidemic of fear, fear and more fear, these things cost everyone and everywhere, not just New Yorkers.

Some aspects of New York are actually better than before we became internationally famous "victims." Real estate and college admissions are up. Spirits have improved. And the rest of the nation no longer thinks it has the right to make fun of our accents or our meanness. We have the silver lining; the nation is stuck with the cloud.

Do things really get better if we win the victim race?

At Christmas, I wonder: does Jesus get the candles and the carols because he was a global innocent or a global victim?

One of my favorite Christmas exercises with children is to build a manger, straw by straw. Likewise, adults can also play the game. We can imagine the slow coming of the Messiah as straw upon straw. We can take our time getting to the great Christmas message of "Fear Not." That message means ever so much more now than it did before the towers fell.

"World" and "Trade" and "Center" tried to collapse, but the human spirit survived. Pearls in the safe deposit box at the Chase bank combusted and turned to dust, so heated was the fire, but human treasure remained.

These catastrophes became evidence for the size of the human spirit — and became this side of the equation that permits us to fear not. Victimized, we did not become victims.

The other side is that manger-born boy.

What was God thinking about, sending a child to save an old world? Just how foolish can divinity get! That very foolishness is the source of the Messianic hope some of us maintain in Jesus: Small manages large, heaven mixes it up with earth, divinity sneaks in on humanity, eternity thickens time; innocence amuses evil. All these incarnations flesh-out the spirit in Jesus.

Now Lime is this weird creation of living and dying, both depending on the other.

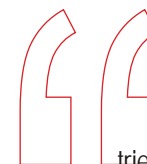
So it is with our kind of church these days, it seems. The declining and dying roots and branches nurture and hold things steady for the new growth to mature. Neither can survive without the other.



The declining and DYING ROOTS AND BRANCHES nurture and hold things steady for the new growth to mature. Neither can survive without the other."

And the winged visitors keep their vigil, and the bees once again anticipate the blossoms, and the fruit, different than before, is somehow just as sweet. For everything there is a season.

The Rev. Bill Peterson is interim pastor of **Neighborhood Congregational UCC in Laguna Beach, Calif.** His wife, the Rev. Gail Ann Benson, is interim executive director of Pilgrim Pines UCC Camp in Yucaipa, Calif.



'WORLD' AND 'TRADE' AND 'CENTER' tried to collapse, but the human spirit survived. Pearls combusted and turned to dust, but human treasure remained."

Ordinary people think they are the bed — even the body — of Jesus. That was God's foolish idea in the first place, to trick us into imagining that our matter mattered.

So instead of 9-11 being the last straw, or the straw that breaks the camel's back, it is another piece of the manager, that bed and body that takes the good with the bad and the bad with the good — and persists.

Sure, there are some flaws in the straw. The terrorists haven't stopped just because we fear them not. But, and nevertheless, the light still shines in the darkness.

And guess what? The darkness has not overcome it.

We take God's spirit and God takes our flesh and together we incarnate hope in the middle of fear, straw by straw.

The Rev. Donna Schaper is the senior minister of **Judson Memorial Church (UCC/American Baptist) in New York City** and author of 28 books including the forthcoming, "Living Well and Doing Good."



OVERHEARD

"It was sort of fun being the one representing orthodoxy."

— The Rev. John H. Thomas, in his report on Nov. 10 to the Office of General Ministries, speaking about his dual presentation on Oct. 25 with Unitarian Universalist President William G. Sinkford at UCC-related Andover Newton Theological School on the 200th anniversary of the so-called "Unitarian controversy" within Congregationalism.

"We like each other so much more after the divorce."

— Professor Elizabeth Nordbeck of UCC-related Andover Newton Theological School, using the punch line of a joke, to answer questions about whether or not the UCC and the Unitarian Universalist Association would consider merger. (UU World magazine)

"It is neither just nor compassionate."

— The Rev. Marc Stewart, a UCC minister in Rapid City, S.D., and spokesperson for Pastors for Moral Choices, speaking before a Nov. 6 referendum that would have outlawed all abortions in the state. The measure was defeated, as the group of pastors had hoped. The UCC's General Synod, as well as most mainline Protestant church bodies, has long voiced support for keeping abortion legal and safe. (The Rapid City Journal)

"Racism is racial prejudice plus power. It is more than just a personal attitude. It is the institutional form of that attitude. It is both overt and covert."

— from "Building a Bridge Toward a Racism Free 21st Century Church" (Justice and Witness Ministries, Fall 2006)



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- 58% Percentage of total UCC membership belonging to a Stillspeaking church.
- 72% Basic financial support for Our Church's Wider Mission coming from Stillspeaking churches.

Source: UCC Stewardship Ministry

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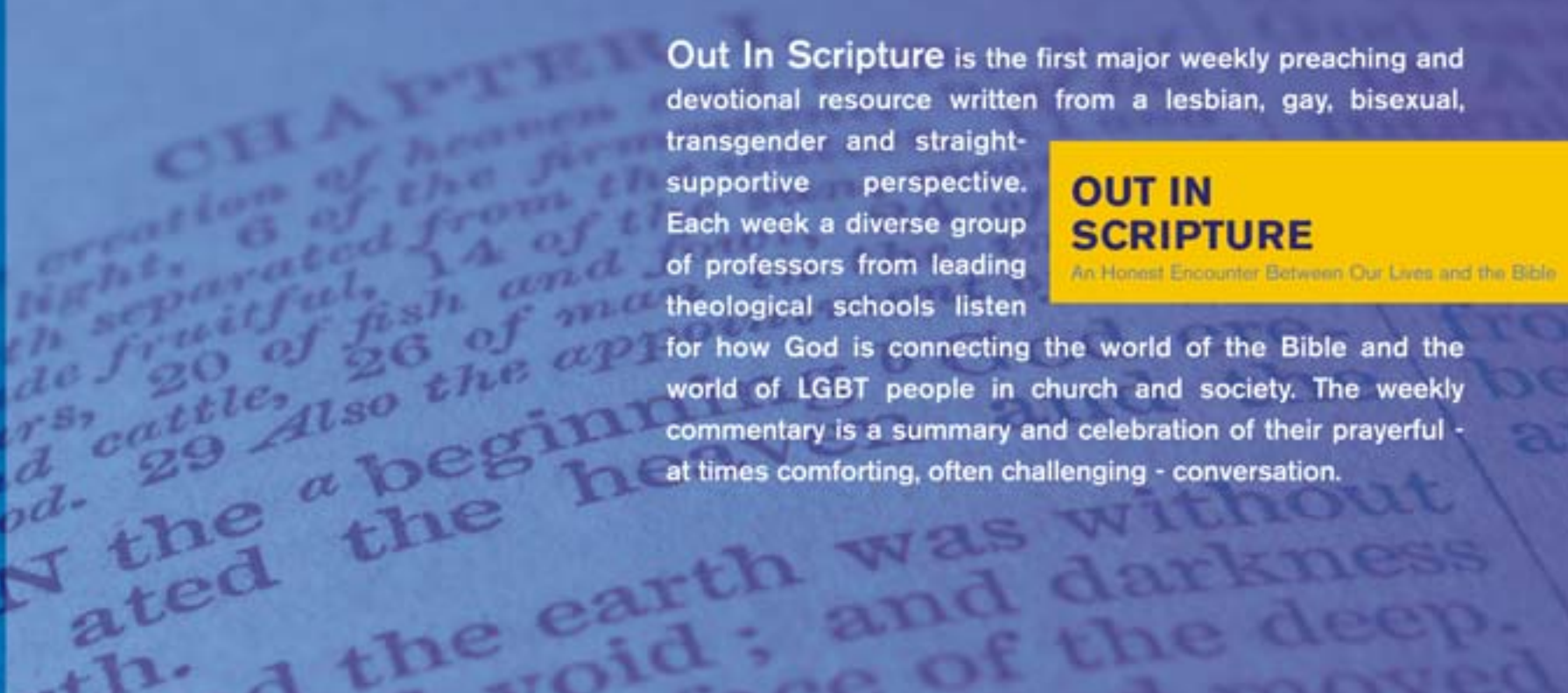
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HISTORIC KALAHIKIOLA UCC IS SEVERELY DAMAGED

people | places | things

in the news

UCC's Hawaii Conference responds to Big Island earthquake

By Gregg Brekke
For United Church News

In the wake of the magnitude-6.7 earthquake that left Hawaii residents rattled in the early morning hours on Oct. 15, the UCC's Hawaii Conference has responded by taking a special offering and providing assistance to churches and families affected by the quake.

The earthquake was the largest to hit the Hawaiian Islands in 23 years. As of Oct. 21, state and federal emergency agencies had compiled figures that show nearly \$100 million in reported damage on the Big Island of Hawaii alone.

Kalahikiola Congregational UCC in Kohala on the Big Island of Hawaii was the church most affected by the earthquake. Images shared on national news broadcasts and in papers around the country showed the entire front of the church reduced to rubble and a gaping hole left in one side of the building between window casings.

The rear of the church, including the historic bell tower, was left standing. At press time, a complete structural assessment had yet to be conducted to ascertain the extent of the damage and formulate a plan for reconstruction.

Other UCC churches on the Big Island also suffered damage. At **Imi-**

ola UCC in Waimea, one wall of the sanctuary buckled, and there was minor damage to other buildings. New and large wall cracks are evident at **Hokuloa UCC in Puako** and at **Mokuaikaua UCC in Kailua-Kona**. And at **Helani UCC in Kealahou**, the rock wall fronting the road collapsed.

Kalahikiola UCC's interim minister, the Rev. George Baybrook, reported repair estimates for the church at anywhere between \$800,000 and \$3 million. The Federal Emergency Management Association placed the repair estimate for the building at nearly \$2 million.

The congregation's 100 members are prepared to oversee repairing the church and the adjacent parsonage which sustained an additional estimated \$30,000 worth of damage.

While no deaths and few injuries were reported, one member of the Helani UCC suffered a head wound during the earthquake and was taken to the hospital for treatment.

One family from the Kalahikiola UCC was forced to evacuate their home due to extensive structural damage.

The Rev. Charles Buck, Hawaii Conference Minister, commented that the overall damage was "not as bad as we originally thought. There were no major injuries and no deaths. Of all the things we were concerned

about this good news is most important."

Busk said roads were blocked due to rock slides and crumbling buildings into the remote area where Kalahikiola Congregational UCC is located, which inhibited immediate assistance and delayed communications.

On Oct. 18, Buck sent a letter to all Hawaiian UCC congregations detailing the damage as well as community cleanup efforts. He noted that the UCC Disaster Response Ministries had advanced an initial \$5,000 in Emergency USA solidarity grant funds from the UCC's One Great Hour of Sharing special mission offering to assist churches with repairs. Additional money is being collected through a UCC churchwide appeal through its Emergency USA fund.

The Hawaii Conference received a Conference-wide special offering on Oct. 22 to support relief efforts. UCC Disaster Response is requesting support through online contributions at ucc.org/disaster.

The UCC Cornerstone Fund also will be available to assist churches that will need loans to complete their repairs or rebuilding.

A structural engineer has also been deployed by the Hawaii Conference Foundation to assess damage. After examining the Mokuaikaua UCC, the engineer certified it safe for use on the following Sunday.



Kalahikiola Congregational UCC in Kohala, Hawaii, sustained severe damage during the Oct. 15 earthquake.

furnished photo

"Our churches were going to be helped through various aid agencies but we were afraid individuals would fall through the cracks," Buck said, referring to President Bush's declaration on Oct. 23 that FEMA funds would be available for recovery. "Before this declaration there was no assistance for families, many who are low and middle income. This declaration gives these residents a little more hope."

The Rev. Don Shelton, Pacific Southwest Regional Minister of

the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), reported that no Disciples churches had sustained damage.

The history of the UCC in Hawaii is closely linked to the spread of Christianity on the islands, when New England Congregationalists sent missionaries to Hawaii in the mid-1800s.

LEARN MORE and contribute at

ucc.org/disaster

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the
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Martin Luther King, Jr.'s
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HAK JOON LEE
Foreword by Peter J. Paris

Martin Luther King, Jr.'s
Communal-Political
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THE
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in the news people | places | things

Pakistan's quake victims facing harsh winter, says church aid worker

By Anto Akkara
Ecumenical News International

More than a year has passed since the devastating earthquake in Pakistan, but a church aid group working is warning that most of the 3 million quake victims are still without proper shelter and face an encroaching harsh winter.

"There is only a small window of time before winter hits. We are faced with a ticking time bomb,"

cautioned Mervan Pervez, director of the UCC-supported Church World Service's Afghanistan/Pakistan relief work. Pervez, who made an urgent appeal for additional support on Oct. 10, is working in Pakistan on behalf of the Geneva-based ACT International, of which the UCC is an active member.

More than 75,000 people were killed and more than 3 million were left homeless when the powerful 7.6 earthquake hit the mountainous region on October 8, 2005.

The church aid group noted that only 20 percent of quake-affected families had been able to start work on permanent shelters while others live in partially-built houses and temporary tent shelters erected last year that have worn out and been damaged by rain and the elements.

"The situation will be awful this year as the pace of relief work in this difficult region is slowing down," Usman Adam, CWS spokesperson in Pakistan told Ec-

umenical News International on Oct. 13 from Islamabad.

Adam said that at least 200,000 families have hardly any shelter while others will struggle to keep themselves warm in the freezing Kashmir region where meteorologists are predicting a harsh winter.

Coinciding with the quake anniversary, hundreds of survivors and activists marched on Pakistan's Parliament in Islamabad bearing placards with messages like "stop taking bribes" and "build our

homes before snowfall."

Many survivors accuse government agencies such as Pakistan's Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority, which is coordinating rebuilding efforts, of being corrupt and say they have dragged their feet in reconstructing devastated towns.

LEARN MORE and contribute at

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THE INVISIBLE PROTESTANT MARY

THE REV. MARY LUTI WASN'T SUPPOSED TO BE NAMED "MARY" at all. Her parents' initial plan was to call her "Janice," after her grandmother Janetta. But Luti's difficult, painful birth — "I have very broad shoulders," she explains — left Luti's mother bargaining with God. According to family lore, Luti's mother was heard screaming: "Okay, just get me out of this and I'll name her Mary!"

By J. Bennett Guess

iStockPhoto graphics



Raised and educated a staunch Roman Catholic, Luti went on to spend 19 years as a Roman Catholic sister in religious community. She loves the story about her birth, she says, because it underscores the central role that Mary, the mother of Jesus, plays in the daily lives of most Roman Catholics.

"She really is, truly, the mother of the holy family," says Luti. "We prayed the rosary everyday, we had May processions, we stood before Mary statues and offered our lives."

In 1990, when Luti — then on the faculty at UCC-related Andover Newton Theological School in Massachusetts — joined the UCC and was granted ministerial standing, she was curious by the silence that surrounds Mary, not just within the UCC but among Protestants in general.

"People don't even think about Mary, much less have misconceptions" says Luti, who became pastor of **First Congregational UCC in Cambridge, Mass.**, in 2000. "In many ways, she's just invisible."

Marian misunderstandings

The Rev. Kate Huey, a former Roman Catholic, is an unabashed UCC cheerleader — to put it mildly — but, although she works with the UCC's stewardship ministry in Cleveland and serves as part-time interim pastor of **New Vision UCC in Canton, Ohio**, she still describes herself as a "cellular Catholic."

"For Protestants, Mary is just an idea, a concept," Huey finds. "To Catholics, she's much more of a real person. I can't begin to tell you how many different statues of Mary I had when I was growing up."

Huey says she spent her childhood singing "Mary songs" in ways not-so-dissimilar to Protestant kids

who memorized "camp songs." And those kinds of formative religious practices, she believes, have a significant, lifelong impact on a person's spiritual DNA. It's something one can't just walk away from, just because you have changed church traditions.

"Mary is an emotional center for Catholics," says Huey, who has led a quarterly "bridging group" at **Pilgrim Congregational UCC in Cleveland** for Catholics entering the UCC. "Mary provides an emotional outlet. If God was viewed as distant or wrathful, then Mary was viewed as accessible."

"I was never taught that I could talk directly to God; I had to talk to a priest first," Huey recalls, indicating she's just old enough to have grown up before some significant reforms of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) helped to alter Catholics' theological understandings and devotional practices. "But Mary was someone I could talk to. There was this unconditional love from Mary, the mother."

The Rev. Mark Suriano, pastor of **Old South UCC in Kirtland, Ohio**, and a former Roman Catholic priest, says there's a great deal of misunderstanding about Mary — among most Protestants and even among some Catholics.

Suriano — schooled at Cleveland's St. Mary Seminary, nonetheless — explains that Mary is not an object of "worship" in Roman Catholicism; she is an object of "devotion." A hero, one might say.

The degree and depth of Marian devotion varies throughout Catholicism, Suriano says, especially since Vatican II. Today, he says, Mary is a predominant "sub-culture" for those who grew up in the church prior to the 1960s. For many younger Catholics, she doesn't attract the same type of attention.

For members of the UCC, Suriano

no says, Mary raises questions about our devotional life — or, as sometimes is revealed, our lack of one.

Luti agrees. She believes the idea of "devotion" is a foreign concept for many born-and-raised Protestants — but shouldn't be.

"There seems to be this fear of elevating certain persons *above*, yet at the same time we are desperately yearning for examples of discipleship and heroic Christian life," Luti says. "We need a revived sense of edification. Why not look to certain bright lights?"

Often referred to as a "mediator," Mary is basically just an "influential" voice, Luti says. Just as others on earth or in heaven offer intercessory prayers to God, so does Mary.

Many Protestants, for example, wouldn't hesitate to ask a beloved pastor to pray for them — perhaps even with the belief that pastors somehow carry greater weight with God. So, too, do some request the same of Mary.

"For someone to ask for intercession from a saint, such as Mary, it's no different than asking a friend or family member to pray for you," Luti says. "In this way, the same argument could be applied. We don't *need* our friends to pray for us — because our prayers reach God directly just as their prayers do — but we find comfort in knowing that others are praying on our behalf."

The bigger issue, says Luti, is an "impoverished notion of the communion of saints, in general" which has affected the way we look at prayerful intercession.

Some of UCC members' discontent with Marian devotion, Luti believes, is more deeply rooted in a general discomfort with devotional practices across the board. We're uneasy with intercessory prayer and displays of devotion or piety, because we don't understand "how it works."

"Just do it. Just pray," Luti tells



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her parishioners. We gain insight from doing something, she says, not just by talking about it.

Poor one-dimensional Mary

Among the UCC's 5,700 local churches, there are hundreds named for Jesus' more-prominent male disciples — such as Peter, Paul, James and John. But only two churches are named for Mary — **St. Mary's UCC in Westminster, Md.**, and **St. Mary's UCC in Abbeville, La.**

That doesn't surprise Professor Mark Burrows, a UCC minister and scholar who teaches about Mary in his course on medieval theology at Andover Newton Theological School.

If anything, Burrows is shocked to learn there are *any* UCC churches named for St. Mary — given the traditional Protestant fear for things that appear “too Catholic.”

Anti-Mary sentiment, he says, has kept many Protestants wary of embracing the very-Catholic-looking Mary. When they do and where they have, he says, Protestants have largely caricatured Mary as a one-dimensional Christmas figure — as the mother of the baby Jesus only.

There is little talk of Mary throughout the church year as the much-present mother of the adult Jesus and, especially, as the mother of the suffering Jesus.

“If you think about the death of Jesus, for Protestants, Mary is almost completely invisible,” Burrows says. “But there is this dramatic story of her watching her son suffer and die. Is there anything more powerful? What more dramatic way is there to connect with the story of human loss and sorrow than through the sorrow of a parent who has lost a child?”

It's ironic given that Protestant theology has been shaped significantly by the importance ascribed to personal experience.

“Mary was there,” Burrows says. In Mary's pain, we are exposed to the depth of Jesus' passion — from birth to death to resurrection. Mary is the one eyewitness who was there for all of it.

'Middle-Aged' Mary

During the Middle Ages, Mary's role as “mediator” proved extremely popular, Burrows says. It was even understandable given the era's negative portrayal of God as angry and wrathful. Jesus, too, was perceived to be much more harsh than today.

Mary, therefore, was regarded as the approachable one. “Truly our sister” — that was

her persona.

In addition, during medieval times, saints played a more-significant role in the everyday lives of Christians than they do today. Allegiance to saints was akin to superstition.

“There were patron saints for everything — from hangnails to crises of faith,” Burrows says. “And Mary is portrayed beautifully as being at the center of this communion of saints.”

“The Middle Ages also were a period when everything about church structure was patriarchal, but the church was very much matriarchal in its piety and devotion,” Burrows says, noting how nearly every Gothic church was built to honor *Notre Dame*, “Our Lady.”

“What a lot of students don't understand is Mary is not the ‘mediator of salvation,’ but she is the ‘mediator of access,’ in the medieval understanding of God,” Burrows says. “There's something very practical about getting the ‘mom’ involved. Mary becomes, in a way, the constant companion.”

All the priests and bishops were male, and the church ruled with a heavy hand. But the gospel's imperatives to love, to care, to serve

“PEOPLE DON'T EVEN THINK ABOUT MARY, much less have misconceptions. In many ways, she's just invisible.”

— The Rev. Mary Luti

were “overwhelmingly shaped by the maternal images of Mary,” he says.

But, with the rise of the Protestant Reformation, which triggered counter reformations in the Roman Catholic Church, the image of Jesus is transformed; his edges softened. Jesus becomes approachable again. He, not Mary, is the mediator, and the Christian's need for “access” becomes confusing, if not heretical.

“For the most part, she disappears from Protestantism,” Burrows says. “It's her role as mediator that people now can't understand. They see it as blasphemy. They can find no biblical justification for this.”

Mary, the feminist?

The public face of Mary has evolved over the years, and Catholics and Protestants alike have altered their views of her.

For some, Mary — like Jesus — has been

portrayed as overly perfect, and therefore dismissed as irrelevant.

Huey says that, in her mid-30s, she began to realize how Mary was portrayed unfairly as the unattainable “anti-Eve.”

“Eve was the bad girl, and Mary was the pure one,” Huey explains. “But Catholic girls were always taught two competing values about Mary — virginity and motherhood — but it wasn't possible for us to do both, like Mary did. It was out of reach.”

In early feminist writings, Luti says, Mary gets battered around quite a lot. She is rejected by many feminists for her lowly-servant reputation.

Despite the feminist significance of Mary's “bring-the-mighty-down-from-their-thrones” *Magnificat* in Luke, Mary was often criticized for being defined only by her relationship roles to men: wife of Joseph, mother of Jesus, or vessel of a male God.

“For Catholic feminists, Mary's image cuts both ways; there's the feminine image and there's the feminist image,” Luti says. “There's Mary as the subservient, humble handmaiden and then she's the Queen of Heaven, the ‘power behind the throne.’”

“In later feminist theology, there's a fairly positive portrayal of Mary,” Luti says. “Vatican II was really a breakthrough in Marian theology in that way, when she became identified as the mother of the church and first among the disciples.”

For some feminists, Mary is lifted up as somewhat of a Goddess figure. But, at the least, she has helped to temper the male dominance of Christian imagery.

“She embodies feminine characteristics of Christianity,” Luti says, “and may have helped us to open up the talk about the Holy Spirit as feminine.”

Susan A. Blain, who spent 11 years as a Roman Catholic nun, is the UCC's minister for worship, liturgy and spiritual formation in Cleveland. Her office and home are filled with Mary statues, and she acknowledges bringing a fair amount of Marian devotion with her into the UCC.

“Our family prayer was pretty much the Rosary. It was our mantra of protection,” says Blain, who likes the tactile feel of the Rosary beads in her hand, the prayer's call-response design, the calming effect of repetition.

In 1983, Blain — at the urging of her Catholic religious community — began attending Union Theological Seminary in

TIMELINE: MARY



25-20 BCE

Mary, the eventual mother of Jesus, was most likely born in Nazareth and the year is speculative. The name “Mary” was a common form of “Miriam,” the sister of Moses, and was a popular name among Jewish women.

7-4 BCE

Mary gives birth to Jesus. Mary also had other children, since the gospel of Matthew mentions four brothers — James, Joseph, Simon and Judas. Mary also had daughters, but Jesus' sisters are not named nor numbered. Disputes have arisen in church history about Mary's ever-virgin status. Roman Catholic tradition maintains that not only was Mary a virgin when she gave birth to Jesus, but she remained a virgin forever.



Little is known about Mary's own death. Some believe she never experienced an earthly death.

40

Stories of Marian apparitions date back to the earliest days of Christianity.



270

St. Gregory Thaumaturgus refers to Mary as the “vessel and tabernacle containing all mysteries,” who knew “what the patriarchs never knew,” who “experienced what was never revealed to the angels,” who “heard what the prophets never heard.”

300

By the fourth century, liturgical texts and prayers reverencing Mary and other saints were well-established. Early versions of the “Hail Mary” prayer, based on Luke's account of the Angel Gabriel's annunciation to Mary, were common.

431

The Council of Ephesus officially declares Mary to be the “mother of God.”

1054

The “Great Schism” between the Eastern Orthodox Church and Roman Catholic Church, resulting from disagreements over papal authority, led to different doctrinal traditions surrounding Mary. Among Orthodox Christians, Mary became known as the “Theotokos,” an affirmation of the divinity of the one to whom Mary gave birth. According to Orthodox belief, Mary was chosen by God and freely cooperated in that choice. Mary, however, did not give birth to Jesus' divinity, but his two natures were united at his miraculous virgin conception. Because of Mary's unique place in salvation history, she is honored by the Orthodox above all other saints.

1521

Protestant Reformer Martin Luther, sequestered in Wartburg, prepared his to-be-published commentary on the *Magnificat*. Mary, he wrote, is the embodiment of God's unmerited grace.



1540s

Marian devotion lost favor among many Protestants during the 16th-century Reformation, despite the fact that many of the major reformers held Mary in high devotion.

1563

The Heidelberg Catechism is published, referring to the Virgin Mary as “a truly human nature.”

1854

The Roman Catholic Church promulgates the doctrine of the “Immaculate Conception of Mary,” the concept that Mary was born without original sin. Unique to Catholicism, the doctrine holds that Mary was conceived free from the inherited guilt of the first sin committed by Adam and Eve. Among many Protestants, the Pope's infallible declaration drew a strong reaction against Marian piety and devotion, leading many theologians — both Catholic and Protestant — to dub the doctrine “the church's most misunderstood article of faith.”



1917

The apparition of Mary at Fatima includes a strong anti-communist message. “If you really knew your stuff, you could probably trace it throughout history, that people were using the apparitions to make political points as well as moral ones,” says Michael S. Durham, author of “Miracles

26-29

Mary is one of the women present at Jesus' crucifixion.

New York, where she studied liturgy and preaching. After graduating in 1986, she stayed on at Union, helping to coordinate the school's worship services and became active at the **UCC's Riverside Church**.

"For many years, as a Catholic, I was coordinating this Protestant seminary's daily worship," she says, noting the irony.

While at Union, however, she began to look critically at the strengths and weaknesses of both traditions. And while she appreciates Protestantism's pro-female position on clergy leadership, she is struck by how "male" its worship can be.

"The shock to me is how truly male it all was [in Protestantism]," Blain says. "In the Catholic tradition, it's important to realize that, although Mary can be co-opted by the patriarchy, she also helps to mitigate the patriarchy."

Modern-day Mary

Although Mary's image and reputation have evolved, she remains one of the Gospel's central characters. She not only gives birth to Jesus, but she's present throughout the story, even mentioned among the disciples in Acts.

"I haven't really raised the Mary issue [in my church], says Luti, who acknowledges a "lingering affection" for her. "But I do allude to her from time to time."

Luti says she would be interested in "a gentle exploration" of Mary's role for UCC Christians. "If not to be emulated, then at least to be pondered," she says.

She attributes Protestants' lingering anti-Mary sentiment with unresolved anti-Catholic residue. In addition, she says, some of us aren't quite yet comfortable talking about Jesus, much less Mary.

"A lot of this is just unfamiliarity," Luti says. "It's through experience that a lot of people soften up."

Burrows sees a makeover in Mary's future, especially as denominational divisions blur between Protestant and Roman Catholic households.

"In modern times, there's been a marvelous resurrection of interest in Mary," he says, expecting interest to only increase in the UCC, es-

of Mary: Apparitions, Legends and Miraculous Works of the Blessed Virgin Mary."

1950

The Roman Catholic doctrine of the "Assumption of Mary" was promulgated by Pope Pius XII. The formal dogma stated that "after the completion of her earthly life," Mary "was assumed body and soul in the glory of heaven," just as Enoch and Elijah. The church never formally declared whether or not Mary actually died, leaving that question unanswered.



1957

Even as the newly created UCC affirms the tenets of the historic creeds, it adopts a statement of faith in 1959 that does not mention Mary.

1960s

The Roman Catholic Church's Second Vatican Council attempts to temper Marian devotion by portraying Mary not as an independent force but as a way of leading people to Christ. Rather than portraying Mary as all that stands between sinful humankind and a wrathful God, the Vatican teaches that Mary derives her compassion from Jesus. "First among the disciples" becomes her more-modern identity.

IN THE UCC, LIFELONG PROTESTANTS ASK of Catholics, 'Why do you pray to Mary if she's not God.' And Catholics [who join the UCC] tend to think, 'Where did Mary go?'"

— The Rev. Kate Huey

pecially in New England. He estimates that, in Massachusetts, about 80 percent of new UCC members are former Roman Catholics and he notes a significant increase among UCC seminarians who are former Catholics as well.

But while Burrows doesn't see the UCC's worship life being significantly altered by an influx of Catholics, it is important to remember that many carry with them a "cellular memory" of Mary that differs from that of cradle Protestants.

Huey agrees, saying that the UCC's usual references to the denomination's "four streams" — Evangelical, Reformed, Congregational and Christian — should give way to added conversations about the theological contributions in more recent years by former Roman Catholics in the North and former Southern Baptists in the South.

Luti believes talk of Mary and other saints is an opportunity to strengthen our prayer life and devotional practices.

"There is a real need to deplastify [the saints]," she says. "There is the opportunity to open ourselves to the riches of those traditions that the Reformation put aside. It's time to move beyond our super-hyped fears of all things supernatural, to return to what's more sensual, more sacramental about Christian life."

MORE ONLINE

The Rev. Barbara Brown Zikmund writes about the history of UCC-Roman Catholic relations in her column — Past as Prologue — published this month in the "opinion matters" section at <news.ucc.org>.

1970s

Among many feminist theologians, Mary is being reclaimed as strong and assertive, rather than only regarded as God's submissive handmaiden. "The image of Mary that most of us have been given has been shaped to men's specifications to convince us that we are incapable of independent thought and action," says Patricia Lynn Reilly, author of "A God Who Looks Like Me: Discovering a Woman-Affirming Spirituality."

1981

"Mary of Medjugorje," whose apparitions are proclaimed in war-torn Bosnia-Herzegovina, is interpreted by many faithful as a force for reconciliation and peace.

2005

The worldwide Anglican (Episcopal) communion begins its first international bilateral dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church about the role of Mary in the church. While Mary has held an important place in the life and liturgy of Anglicans, Marian dogmas and Marian devotion within the Catholic Church have been seen as points which have separated Anglican and Catholic Churches.

Sources: Religion News Service, Christianity Today, Catholic Answers, Catholic Bridge and Wikipedia

'MORE THAN THE SUM OF HER PARTS'

UCC — meet Mary

COMMENTARY



Susan A. Blain

As I was making my crossing from Roman Catholicism to the UCC, one of the things that kept me for so long on that Catholic shore was Mary.

Something about Mary captured my attention in my childhood,

and has kept me fascinated throughout my life.

It seemed to me that if I was coming into this new Christian tradition, Mary would have to come with me. And not just as a stow-away, but as a first class passenger in my life's s journey.

One of Mary's main roles in the Christian tradition is to be the "God bearer." In fact, that is her main title in the Orthodox churches. *Theotokos* — God bearer — that is what she has been for me in my prayer life, and my imagination.

So, from time to time, when Mary makes an appearance in the lectionary, I take the opportunity to introduce her to my new friends. And of course, Advent and Christmas are full of stories about Mary.

So, Mary, meet the UCC. And UCC, meet Mary!

Growing up with two pious, Irish grandmothers, I learned the "Hail Mary" very young. I learned the Rosary, and enjoyed its comforting weight in my hands — it is a very tactile prayer. I relaxed into the Rosary's soothing repetitions, and most important, I learned the great stories of Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection as we cycled through the Rosary's "mysteries." All Jesus' stories filtered through Mary's experience.

Beautiful reproduction images of Medieval and baroque art were my "starter" images of Mary: gilt-edged haloes, gorgeous robes, lovely blond hair — so rare in the holy land!

Mary was beautiful. And her prayers were beautiful. Her litany was a long list of wonderful images: Queen of Heaven, Tower of Ivory, Star of the Sea, Mystical Rose, Arc of the Covenant, all drawing from scripture and pious legend. Her prayers inspired — required — confidence: "Never was it known that any one who fled to thy protection... was left unaided..."

Her face appears throughout the scriptures, captivating attention. She is the young women in Luke who sings in the Magnificat of the justice of God, dawning in her life, about to be born in the world, through her. She sings of God coming to meet people in their experience of poverty and deep need: God incarnate with them in their life experience — beginning with Mary.

Later, she is the mother who ponders and worries about this mysterious child. She is the sorrowing mother at the cross

in John. And, according to traditional Roman Catholic interpretation, she is the triumphal figure of the woman clothed with the sun in Revelation, giving birth to the new creation.

Feminists have critiqued Mary's subservient reputation: She is too silent, too passive, too traditionally submissive. But then, we contend with this image of the woman clothed with the sun — power. Mary is always more than the sum of her parts.

IN OUR UCC PARLANCE, I think there is "yet more light" to be shed on MARY, GOD AND WOMEN."

When examining the Middle Ages, Protestants have often critiqued, vociferously: Mary was getting more attention than Jesus. Yet, as I understand it, in late medieval Catholicism, Jesus was often cast as distant, a judge, an angry figure. He, himself, was in need of a mediator — hence, Mary's role.

But, as the Reformers insisted: Mary wasn't God, or God's Christ or God's Spirit.

She was just a woman, a human being, a servant of God. Not deserving of reverence, perhaps not even attention.

Yes, the Protestant Reformation successfully restored the focus to Jesus — a very good thing to do — but Protestants also did away with Mary, did away with most feminine elements in ritual and iconography. And that is a great loss.

Protestants, who rightly have been credited with empowering female inclusion and leadership, have rid their churches and traditions of feminine elements. But Protestantism has become even more male — very rational, no symbolism, little mystery.

In our UCC parlance, I think there is "yet more light" to be shed on Mary, God and women.

Until we can recognize dimensions of God which are female, we need someone in this male-dominated Trinitarian system to look to, who offers that possibility. Until then, some of us, from some Christian traditions, have Mary.

Susan A. Blain, who spent 11 years as a Roman Catholic nun, is the UCC's minister for worship, liturgy and spiritual formation in Cleveland. A graduate of Union Theological Seminary, she is pursuing ordination and is in-care with the Metro Association of the UCC's New York Conference. This column is adapted from a sermon she preached at Broad Bay (Maine) Congregational UCC in 2003.



New movie examines Mary's spiritual, iconic allure

MOVIE REVIEW

By Nancy Haught
Religion News Service

For Hollywood screenwriters, it's all about character. Even when you're writing about the mother of Jesus.

"Character drives the story," says Mike Rich, the Portland, Ore., screenwriter whose films include "Finding Forrester," "The Rookie" and "Radio."

"All my movies follow ordinary people doing extraordinary things."

His latest, "The Nativity Story," recounts the circumstances of Jesus' birth, mostly through the eyes of his mother, Mary, played by 16-year-old Keisha Castle-Hughes, the radiant heroine of "Whale Rider."

Mary is extraordinary enough, according to the New Testament, that God chose her to bear his son. She also is ordinary enough, according to many Christians, that she is the shining example of how to live a life of faith.

As Rich worked on his screenplay, he says he thought about Mary's youth, her place in culture, her personal courage and her faith. She trusted in God, in Joseph and in the child she carried, he says.

Elaine Park, a professor of biblical studies at Mount Angel Seminary in St. Benedict, Ore., sees a resurgence of interest in Mary, the mother of Jesus.

In part, she says, it's because of Pope John Paul II and his habit of openly sharing his devotion to Mary and to the rosary, a traditional set of prayers dedicated to her. His experiences appealed to a younger generation, hungry for the mystical comfort that he had found in her.

Older Catholics remember hymns and devotions that honored Mary as the Queen of Heaven, Queen of Peace or Our Lady of Sorrows. They have been reluctant to let go of their devotions even as, they say, the larger church has seemed to move away from Mary.

Pilgrims continue to visit Marian shrines in staggering numbers. In 1999, more than 5 million people traveled to Lourdes in France and at least that many to Fatima in Portugal, according to a 2000 study.

And Mary, who is revered in Islam as the mother of the prophet Jesus, has been finding her way into Protestant churches, too. In recent years, many non-Catholic Christians have reclaimed parts of her tradition that had once seemed too Catholic to consider. They remember her as a witness of Jesus' crucifixion, perhaps as one of the women who found the tomb empty on Easter morning. Many who saw the film "The Passion of the Christ" were touched by scenes of Mary remembering her son as a child.

Now Rich hopes that Mary will

be the lens of faith through which families will see and appreciate the story of Jesus' birth.

"Over time, Mary has become an iconic figure," Rich says. "I followed a kind of reverse process: taking Mary the icon and stepping back to Mary the woman and stepping back again to Mary the child."

That is similar to what the Catholic Church has done since the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, Park said. The council's decision not to devote an entire document to Mary, but to include her in a broader document on the church, meant that for many Catholics, the church "lost" Mary, she says.

Charlene Spretnak is a Catholic writer who agrees with all the decisions of Vatican II, "except the ones that radically de-emphasized the meaning and presence of the Virgin Mary."

Spretnak, who teaches at the California Institute of Integral Studies, wrote "Missing Mary: The Queen of Heaven and her Re-Emergence in the Modern Church." She laments the loss of Marian statues from prominent places in churches and the disappearance of hymns and prayers from many modern liturgies. The result, she says, is "a sadly reduced female presence in Catholic worship."

"Most importantly," she adds, "allowing only the historical, literal understanding of Mary, while denying the symbolic, cosmological, mystical sense of her full spiritual presence known to traditional Catholicism, reduces the range of our spiritual lives."

The loss of Mary's larger spiritual significance "has made the Catholic Church more rational and more modern but has left Catholicism less spiritually rich," she said.

Park disagrees, arguing that an emphasis on the real flesh-and-blood Mary makes her more accessible to flesh-and-blood Christians.

"In my own experience, I dropped my devotion to her for a time," she says. Mary seemed too perfect, too idealized for her to connect with. "But it has been renewed in recent years by coming to see her as a real person, a real woman who lived in concrete, historical circumstances, rather than looking at the art and glory that made her look so different and so beyond us."

After months of research, writing and filming "The Nativity Story," Rich, from his Protestant perspective, sees Mary no longer as an icon but as an ordinary human being of extraordinary character.

"Not much anymore in our lives is black and white," he says. "But this is a young woman who made a black-and-white decision: She was willing to have the faith to follow the most remarkable of directives."

Nancy Haught writes for *The Oregonian* in Portland, Ore.

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in the news

Grassroots effort to mobilize 1,000 youth to attend Synod is gaining steam

A grassroots campaign to attract at least 1,000 youth to the UCC's General Synod 26 is gaining ground — and enthusiasm.

Gerardo Serna, 31, a member of **First Spanish UCC in Chicago**, first conceived of the idea about a year ago, because he feels that churches, in general, give lip service to youth involvement, but offer little incentive for real participation.

Serna's hope is that at least 50 young people from each of the UCC's 39 Conferences will make the journey to the UCC's 50th anniversary celebration, June 22-26, in Hartford, Conn.

Serna first shared his dream with members of the Illinois Conference Youth Initiative, saying he didn't just want young people to "experience" General Synod but he wanted UCC youth to make a real impact on General Synod's proceedings and decisions.

"In a brainstorming session, when General Synod came up, I said it would be a really good idea to get as many young people together and just drive from Illinois to Hartford [Conn.] and pick up as many UCC

young people as we can get on the way," Serna told United Church News. "It's an idea that's grown from here in Illinois to being a full-fledged idea that's gotten everyone involved."

Affordable dormitory rooms at the University of Hartford have been reserved at \$38 per night, and the Rev. Da Vita McCallister, the UCC's minister for youth and young adults, is helping to promote and coordinate the campaign.

"Fifty for 50 years of service. One thousand strong. That's our goal," McCallister said. "We've started spreading the word, and

young people are getting excited about this effort. We've got a lot of firm commitments and a lot of churches are coming forward with questions."

McCallister points to the startling fact that less than four percent of UCC clergy are under the age of 40. "So, statistically, our chances of making it to our 100th anniversary year are relatively low," McCallister said. That is, unless something drastic occurs.

"We're saying that the voices of youth and young adults are not being heard, and there are a lot of young

people who are interested in the future of this church," McCallister said.

McCallister is sweetening the pot a little, she says, by offering to cut a UCC-stylish comma into her hairline — which she will color red — if at least 1,000 youth take up the invitation to attend Synod.

Interested young people or youth ministers should contact McCallister by March 1 at 216/736-3871 or <mc-callid@ucc.org>.

A flyer promoting the campaign can be downloaded at: <ucc.org/youth/50_4_50.pdf>.



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Ed Brown's quest for racial justice tells UCC's story in the South

Just two years after the UCC's formation in 1957, Edward M. Brown left ecumenical youth work in Europe to help bring about nonviolent solutions to racial problems in the southern United States.

The UCC employed Brown, beginning in 1959, as a full-time "consultant on race relations," under the direction of Galen Weaver, then part of the UCC's national staff.

While the names and faces of some civil rights leaders became familiar to an entire nation in the early 1960s, Brown gained no fame. Yet, he worked quietly within the UCC and in the South to create a climate of peace and acceptance.

His lifelong commitment to racial reconciliation is a common thread throughout his ministry.

By Robert H. Boyte

After graduating from Duke University and Yale Divinity School, Brown was ordained in 1944, the same year he began a two-year term as an intern in race relations serving with the former American Missionary Association at UCC-related Fisk University in Nashville, Tenn. The UCC recognized Brown's southern roots, his previous experience at Fisk, and his rapport with church leaders — both black and white — would lend credibility to the church's efforts.

He followed that experience with a three-year term with the Student Christian Association on the campus of the University of Texas in Austin, where he brought together students from two black denominational colleges and the all-white university.

A full 10 years before the now-famous Montgomery, Ala., bus boycott, Brown was organizing integrated rides on Austin's public buses, with black students and white students sharing seats. When this arrangement was challenged by bus drivers, students asked other passengers if they objected. Most of the time, there were no objections and the rides continued, but sometimes the students were asked to leave.

Brown monitored voter registration procedures in Canton, Miss., a community described as "one of Mississippi's toughest towns" by Taylor Branch, a civil rights historian. There Brown recruited and organized potential black voters, while simultaneously helping white pastors to prepare their congregations for a new era. At the court house, African Americans lined up — for over half a city block — to register to vote. The National Guard was on hand, standing 50 feet apart, with bayonets fixed.

Brown's experience at the UCC-related Talladega College, the historically black UCC school in Alabama, was even more challenging.

One night, an integrated group

of UCC pastors was meeting at the college when Brown was informed that a station wagon full of "Klan-type whites" was driving around the campus, flashing lights into students' faces and making insulting remarks. Unflinching, Brown walked over to the parked car and introduced himself as a national staff member of the church which founded the college.

"When I asked the driver's name, he said gruffly, 'You don't need to know my name, Rev,'" Brown recounted. "When I began taking down the car license he became hostile and said, 'You better leave our license number out of this.'"

"I answered with my best non-violent tone that, 'We just like to know who visits our campus,'" Brown said. A few minutes later, the car drove off.

"That was my closest confrontation with the Klan," he said.

UCC's southern bridge-builder Starting in 1959, as the UCC's southern race-relations coordinator, Brown often introduced denominational leaders to key figures in the South, such as Ralph McGill of the Atlanta Constitution and Clarence Jordan of Koinonia Farms.

With his work being administered by the UCC's former Office of Church Extension and Evangelism, Brown received orientation in this work from the legendary preacher-storyteller Will D. Campbell. Both shared Baptist roots which resonated with one another. Throughout the Civil Rights Movement, Brown and Campbell supported each other, though their assignments differed.

Brown was present at significant moments in the struggle for racial integration. He was one of three white persons to attend the organizing meeting of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, where the Rev. James Lawson chaired the gathering and the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. was present with a few staff members of the Southern Christian Leadership



Council.

U.S. Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.), then a young seminarian, attended one of Brown's meetings of the Institute on Race Relations at Fisk. And the Rev. Andrew Young, a UCC minister who would later serve as mayor of Atlanta, was often present with Brown, since both were active in the Movement. Brown remembers how Young struggled to make the transition between his work with the National Council of Churches and the Southern Christian Leadership Council, as a member of King's staff.

While the names and faces of some civil rights leaders became familiar to an entire nation, Brown worked quietly to create a climate of peace and acceptance.

Brown also advised the YWCA in Atlanta in how to desegregate the Y's downtown cafeteria. When the effort was successful, some of the cafeteria's first customers were leaders of SNCC, as well as King and Ralph Abernathy, whose offices were nearby.

Eyewitness to history

In 1965, when King was honored in Atlanta after receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, Brown was seated behind King's father. When the honoree walked toward the podium, Brown recalls "Daddy King" saying, "Keep it simple, son. Keep it simple."

The same year, the UCC's "Southeast Convention" voted to receive the African-American churches of the Congregational Christian Convention of the South, in partnership with the southern



Ed Brown (r), pictured with his wife Joyce.

consultant, but he remained in Atlanta where he assisted busy pastors with family counseling assignments.

Ed's wife, Freda, died in 1986. But, the following year, he married his first wife's long-time friend, Joyce Myers. Ironically, Freda Brown had been instrumental in arranging for Myers, who had served as a UCC missionary in Angola, to move to Atlanta as regional executive of the former UCC Office for Church Life and Leadership.

Together, Brown and his wife — both members of **Central Congregational UCC in Atlanta** — remain committed to working for racial justice.

Robert H. Boyte, in observance of the UCC's 50th anniversary, wrote this biographical sketch on the ministry of Ed Brown, a UCC hero. Boyte, like Brown, is a member of **Central Congregational UCC in Atlanta**.

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in the news

Cathedral of Hope granted congregational standing by North Texas Association

The 4,300-member **Cathedral of Hope in Dallas** became the UCC's largest church in the South Central Conference and the fourth largest in the denomination when it was granted congregational standing on Oct. 28 by the North

Texas Association. The vote was an "overwhelming majority," an observer said.

"This is an historic day in the life of the Cathedral of Hope," said the Rev. Jo Hudson, senior pastor and rector. "We are blessed to be a full

partner in ministry with the North Texas Association and the UCC. We celebrate that our values of compassion, inclusion, tolerance and hope in service to the world by following Jesus are consistent with those of the UCC. We are proud to be a part of

such a diverse body of churches and people."

The Rev. John H. Thomas, UCC general minister and president, welcomed the decision.

"We will be enriched by the vitality of Cathedral of Hope's ministry even as we hope that incorporation into our 50 year history will be a gift to them," Thomas said.

Cathedral of Hope touts itself as "the world's largest liberal Christian

churches to join the UCC in recent years.

Four years ago, the 5,500-member **Victory Church in Stone Mountain, Ga.**, became the UCC's second largest church when it was received into the UCC's Southeast Conference. At the same time, the inclusive **Virginia Highland Church in Atlanta** joined the UCC, after being "dis-fellowshipped" by the Georgia Baptist Convention.

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Cathedral of Hope requested congregational standing one year ago, after church members voted overwhelmingly to pursue UCC affiliation.

Cathedral of Hope becomes another in a series of sizeable southern

On Sept. 30, the Missouri/Mid-South Conference received the 300-member **Holy Trinity Church in Memphis**. And, earlier this year, the 300-member **Garden of Grace Church** in Columbia, S.C., the 250-member **Holy Trinity Church in Nashville, Tenn.**, and a new African-American church start, **Unity Worship Center, in Montgomery, Ala.**, became part of the Southeast Conference.

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CONFLICT

Dealing with grumbling, division is focus of church-help titles by The Pilgrim Press

By J. Bennett Guess

The Rev. Douglas J. Bixby was just out of seminary and in his first few months of pastoral ministry when the “stove issue” hit.

A member of the church had unilaterally decided to replace the electric stove in the church’s kitchen with a gas stove. “Little did he realize this could create a major rift within our congregation,” Bixby said.

Bixby used the “stove issue” as the backdrop of a book on church conflict published by the UCC’s Pilgrim Press, to illumine the “anxiety monster,” as he calls it, that affects so many churches — conflict.

“Imagine if you were to take all the time and energy wasted on conflicts in your church and use it for mission and ministry,” Bixby writes. “God does not want us to waste our time and energy feeding the ‘anxiety monster.’ Neither do our people.”

In his book, “Challenging the Church Monster: From Conflict to Community,” he offers several suggestions: downsizing and centralizing church decision making; honoring how decisions are made, not just the outcome of the decisions;

and fewer meetings, thus allowing for more trust-building occasions. One of Bixby’s core beliefs is that people would rather participate in church ministry than church administration.

“Too much BUREAUCRACY or too many administrative boards end up isolating people into particular areas of involvement.”

— author Douglas Bixby

“Too much bureaucracy or too many administrative boards end up isolating people into particular areas of involvement,” Bixby writes. “People end up narrowing their focus to a single area of concern. Not only are people split up and divided between different areas of responsibility, but also competing agendas develop, and they fight over resources.”

George B. Thompson, Jr., in his book “How to Get Along With

Your Pastor,” uses the metaphor of “swamp” to explore church life.

“If we only glance quickly at the swamp, we might conclude that it has only two layers — the shore and the water,” Thompson writes. “It is easy to overlook the third layer, the deepest layer beneath.”

The stuff on the shore, Thompson says, is obvious — worship services, educational programs, fellowship activities. The stuff in the water are sayings the church uses to describe itself — “the world’s friendliest church,” “an open and affirming church,” “a family church.”

In the “mud,” however, are the “submerged beliefs” of the congregation that are learned over time, perhaps even rooted in a congregation’s lived experience, over many generations. Sometimes a church’s “submerged beliefs” don’t reflect what it actually claims to be about.

“You might think that what ‘makes’ your church is something like its beautiful sanctuary, its preaching, the quality of the music,” Thompson writes. “However, unless you identify the connections between that stuff and what is in your mud, you will mislead yourself and others.”

CONFLICTED READING

Learn more about dealing with church conflict with these titles.

CHALLENGING THE CHURCH MONSTER:
FROM CONFLICT TO COMMUNITY
By Douglas J. Bixby
128 pages, paperback (2002)
\$16

HOW TO GET ALONG WITH YOUR PASTOR:
CREATIVE PARTNERSHIPS FOR DOING MINISTRY
By George B. Thompson, Jr.
128 pages, paperback (2001)
\$17


HOW TO GET ALONG WITH YOUR CHURCH:
CREATING CULTURAL CAPITAL FOR DOING MINISTRY
By George B. Thompson, Jr.
151 pages, paperback (2001)
\$17

A SPIRITUAL COMPANION TO ‘HOW TO GET ALONG WITH YOUR CHURCH’
By Beverly Thompson
144 pages, paperback (2006)
\$17

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9 You know why I love my church? Because for one hour every week I get reminded that life is more than getting up and going to work, dealing with problems, and worrying about everything under the sun.

1 I love the United Church of Christ because we're giraffes not turtles; we aren't afraid to stick our necks out. We ordained the first African-American in the 18th century, the first woman in the 19th century, and the first gay man in the 20th century! That helps me stick my neck out and take a risk every now and then.

9

God is still speaking,

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST



CHRIST-CENTERED COMPROMISE TO CONFLICT

'That they may all be one' is still a powerful prayer

WE DON'T ALWAYS GET what we want. And let's be honest, we *don't always get* what JESUS wants either. "

COMMENTARY



Lillian Daniel

I have a number of friends who are turning 50 these days, and so is my church. Since I can't go out and buy the UCC a nifty little sports car, I thought I would re-visit our core theological beliefs instead. After all, there's more than one way to have a midlife

crisis.

"That they may all be one," (John 17:21) is the motto of the UCC but its context is worthy of unpacking by reading the full chapter from the Bible. Around those words are sweeter words still about how God dwells in Christ, and therefore that love dwells within us as well. As people who believe in the incarnation, it is fitting that our motto comes out of the messy relationship between fallible human beings and an all-powerful loving God.

The truest test of the values of an organization is not how good they look on paper, or how profound they sound when read out loud. The real test is how the members live them out. We hear a lot about the heroics of people of faith who do dramatic things that get their names in the newspaper, but we also live out our beliefs in church committees and ministry teams, where we take actions that may only get our names in the minutes, but

matter nonetheless.

Every church seems to have conversations that it keeps coming back to. In our church, we talk a lot about our finances. We have a lot of business people in the congregation, who have strong opinions about financial issues, as well as a lot of expertise. Unfortunately, that does not lead to widespread agreement.

The risk-adverse fiscal conservatives debate with the risk-taking entrepreneurs. As in any group of capable people, we can come up with a number of impressive, albeit opposite, plans. It is in conversations like these that I most appreciate the words from St Augustine that we have adopted as a core UCC belief, "In essentials unity, in non-essentials diversity, in all things charity."

In a Christ-centered church, we don't always get what we want. And let's be honest, we don't always get what Jesus wants either; there is much room for human error. But we can try to walk that path of unity, diversity and charity with the understanding that it's a goal, not a guarantee.

In our competitive culture, we like to talk about "deal breakers" and "ultimatums." Sometimes, that can creep into the church, when one person's "non-essential" turns out to be another person's "essential." But when we view those conflicts through the lens of unity, diversity and charity, it gets us closer to heaven than the world's language of contracts and winning.

As much as I have on occasion wanted

a lengthy or difficult committee meeting to end (and who hasn't?) I seldom remember the endings of meetings. As I look back, the most inspiring moments in church leadership have not been times of resolution. Instead, they have been those messier moments that have to occur before things get wrapped up. I think back to the 20 minutes before the meeting ended, or to the week before the issue was decided, and I realize that God was moving in the key moments of compromise.

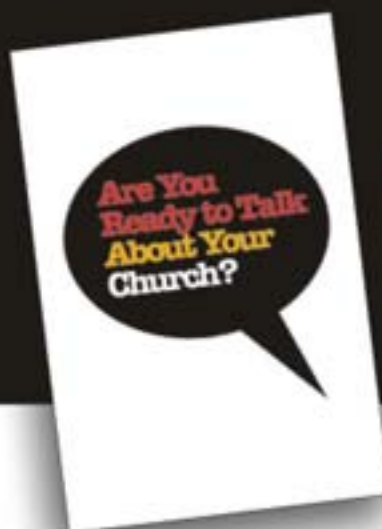
In a moment of compromise, in a priesthood of all believers, one person gracefully acknowledges to another that while they do feel strongly about a course of action, they are willing to consider that the Holy Spirit could also be moving through another plan.

In the world, we often think that the person who comes up with the brilliant solution is the most valuable person in the room. But if you follow Christ who prays for the day when all would be one, you may notice that the disciple God was relying upon most was the one who was called to say, "Ok, we'll try it your way." When compromise is offered as a blessing, we are indeed reminded of another core belief that "the unity of the church is not of its own making." It comes from some place bigger.

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).



TELL IT LIKE IT IS:
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"Really, what's your church like?"

A. "Yeah, moving stinks."
B. "Yes, I know how hard that is. I'd be glad to steer you toward a few places. And we attend a wonderful church that really helped us get settled when we moved here ourselves. I'd be glad to tell you about it."
C. "I can recommend an outstanding dry cleaner."

A. "Well, just like any other, I guess. We have our share of problems."
B. "Really welcoming, and full of all kinds of great people. I leave worship ready and inspired for the week."
C. "Well, to be honest, I don't get there all that often, so it's hard to say."



EMPLOYMENT

ST. MARTIN'S UCC IN DITTMER, MO., is seeking an individual to serve as youth ministry director of an active youth program. Must be able to reach others, have fun together, learn about our faith, serve with love and praise God. Full time with benefits. For further information please call 636/285-4797 or visit our website at <stmartinsucc.com>.

HISTORIC WESTERN PA. CONGREGATION SEEKS PASTOR whose calling is church re-growth and revitalization. Must possess skills, passion and resolve to succeed. The position is paramount to the church's future. UCC church is blessed with resources and facilities to develop community outreach and stewardship programs. Offer includes incentives and housing. Contact Michael Bono at 724/845-1236; e-mail <mtbono@comcast.net>.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE UCC DISABILITIES MINISTRIES (quarter-time). The UCCDM is looking for a person to become the first executive director of this 29-year-old ministry. Relocation is not necessary; some travel is involved. Persons with disabilities are encouraged to apply. For full position description please see "News Link" at <uccdm.org> or call 866-822-8224.

DO YOU HAVE A PASSION FOR YOUTH MINISTRY? Mayflower UCC, a dynamic and thriving community, seeks a non-ordained or ordained individual to lead and grow our youth ministry program. Mayflower has over 800 members and a rich heritage. It is located in award winning Grand Rapids in beautiful West Michigan. If interested, please visit our website <mayflowerchurch.org> for more information and an application.

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ORGANIST/CHOIR DIRECTOR POSITION AVAILABLE — Old Steeple Community UCC, 656 Main Road, PO Box 154, Aquebogue, Long Island, NY 11931. Organist/Choir Director, Part-time (10 hours per week). Salary negotiable under A.G.O. guidelines. One Sunday service at 10:00 AM, one Thursday choir rehearsal from 7-8:30PM. Other services such as Christmas Eve, two services during Lent, 9/11 service. Extra remuneration for weddings and funerals. Two manual 1947 Moller pipe organ, rebuilt by Elsener Organ works in 2002. Excellent condition. Four weeks paid vacation, continuing education available. Contact Fay Young at (631)722-4941 or the church office at (631)722-3070.

NEED TO PLACE AN AD? Phone Connie Larkman toll-free at 866/822-8224, ext. 2196.

BULLETIN BOARD

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BROADWAY UCC, an Open and Affirming Church, welcomes you to New York City and our 5 p.m. Sunday worship at Broadway and 93rd St. <bwayucc.org>.

RESOURCES
IF YOU'RE CURRENTLY STRUGGLING with your finances, health or praying for a better lifestyle, your prayers can be answered by checking out the best home based business ever. Call Merrily 402/439-2657.

MENTAL ILLNESS NETWORK: Visit our websites <min-ucc.org> and <pathways2promise.org>. E-mail <bob.dell@ecunet.org> or <bryancrouse@hotmail.com>; phone: 866/822-8224, ext. 3838 (toll free).

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MYSTERY DINNER FUNDRAISERS — Raise funds, have fun, share fellowship; Wesleyan Thespian Mystery Dinner Kits. Contact 781/837-6457 for more information.

UCC DISABILITIES MINISTRIES AWARD NOMINATIONS DUE FEB. 28. Person with disability making notable contributions to church/society; person without disability contributing significantly to lives of persons with disabilities, or church making outstanding inclusion achievement. Send to Peg Slater, 700 Prospect, Cleveland OH 44115; e-mail <slaterm@ucc.org>.

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For conference profile and application materials, contact W. Mark Clark, Chair, Conference Minister Search Committee: uccswsearch@cox.net

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For additional information or to request a copy of the Conference Profile and application form, contact:
the Rev. Nancy Livingston, Chair
618-277-1273
<revnancy@hotmail.com>.

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<wayne.chasney@verizon.net>.

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DENOMINATIONAL BRANDING
The UCC — 'It's something I'm proud of'

Aaron Christopherson knew he wanted another tattoo — his second — but he wanted something worth keeping around on his body for the rest of his life.

"I wanted a tattoo on my forearm and I wanted one that had some meaning," said Christopherson, 20, a member of **Webster UCC in Dexter, Mich.** "I knew I didn't want a cartoon character or something like that."

So he decided to go with a public and permanent reminder of his UCC connection.

Christopherson downloaded an image of the UCC's orb, cross and crown emblem from the UCC's website, complete with the church's motto, "That they may all be one."

A tattoo artist then used the drawing as a template before inking the emblem and logo forever into Christopherson's right forearm.

"I grew up in the church and it's something I'm proud of."

Obviously.

"That's why I chose it," he said. "I knew it couldn't go out of fashion."

Christopherson is the son of the Rev. Diane Christopherson, interim pastor of **Beneficent Congregational UCC in Providence, R.I.**

Randy Varcho photo

VICTORIOUS

The Rev. Paul Sherry, former UCC president, is successfully leading a national campaign to boost the minimum wage. On Nov. 7, "Let Justice Roll," a coalition of 80 groups working to increase pay for low-wage workers, celebrated ballot initiative victories in Ohio, Colorado, Montana, Missouri, Arizona and Nevada.

"Across the country, churches played a key role in getting the initiatives on the ballot, getting people to know about the seriousness of the issue and getting people out to the polls," said Sherry, who began full-time anti-poverty organizing after retiring from the UCC presidency in 1999.

The Rev. John H. Thomas, Sherry's UCC successor, said politicians heard a clear message that overcoming poverty is a bipartisan issue.

"I'm thrilled that Republicans and Democrats joined together to say that the minimum

wage should be a living wage," Thomas said, "and I'm very proud that the UCC's own Paul Sherry played such a key role in getting these initiatives passed."

Sherry and his wife, Mary, are members of **Euclid Ave. Congregational UCC in Cleveland.**

Learn more at <letjusticeroll.org>.

LEAVING

The Rev. Robert Edgar, general secretary of the National Council of Churches (NCC), announced on Oct. 3 that he will not seek a third term as head of the nation's largest ecumenical body and will leave in December 2007.

Edgar's leadership is widely credited with stabilizing and improving the NCC's finances. He inherited an agency with a \$6 million deficit. The NCC now reportedly has a reserve of \$8 million.

"The council has been returned to financial stability and has reclaimed its place as a

prophetic ecumenical voice heeding Christ's call to serve the least among us," said Edgar, 63, a United Methodist minister, who was a member of the U.S. House of Representatives from 1974 to 1987.

PASTORING

Dale Bishop, a former executive minister of the UCC's Wider Church Ministries and an original member of the UCC's Collegium of Officers in 1999, has become a licensed pastor and is serving **First Congregational UCC in Rhinelander, Wis.** Bishop, 60, who served the national church as a lay leader throughout most of his career, is now pursuing ordination.

Bishop's wife, the Rev. Patricia Tucker, former president of the Division of Overseas Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), is a full-time pastor at **First Congregational UCC in Eagle River, Wis.** The two churches are only 20 miles apart.

CLERGY DEATHS

- Alling, Robert E.**, 76, 2/1/2006
- Bartlett, Harry A.**, 71, 9/18/2006
- Bennett, Russell L.**, 69, 8/27/2006
- Brumbaugh, Leroy C.**, 96, 9/13/2006
- Crowe, Richard**, 88, 9/4/2006
- Gilliland-Mallo, Gay**, 53, 9/8/2006
- Greth, Gary F.**, 73, 8/31/2006
- Hall, John R.**, 76, 8/30/2006
- Lindsay, George W.**, 88, 8/7/2006
- Rogers, William F.**, 96, 8/14/2006
- Steiner, Stephen J.**, 60, 9/4/2006
- Thomen, Willard E.**, 97, 9/16/2006
- Waeckerle, Walter H.**, 88, 9/18/2006

Information on clergy deaths is provided by The Pension Boards.

PASTORAL CHANGES

- Bauleke, Cindy** to Cong. UCC, Lummi Island, WA
- Neynon, Michael W.** Harrisburg, PA to Shared Ministry, Harrisburg, PA
- Bixby, Wesley** Hillsborough, NH to First Cong. UCC, Janesville, WI
- Carter, Douglas** Greenland, NH to Danville, VT
- Coupe, Evelyn** to United, Barton, VT
- Del Piero, Christine** to interim, First Cong. UCC, South Hadley, MA
- Denk, Greg** Newburgh, IN to Pleasant Run UCC, Indianapolis, IN
- Fitzgerald, Matt** Chicago, IL to Cong. UCC, Wellesley Hills, MA
- Flad, Bridget** to Plymouth UCC, Milwaukee, WI
- Fredriksen, Dennis F.** Dover, OH to St. Paul's UCC, St. Marys, OH
- Friend, Gary R.** to St. John UCC, Strasburg, OH
- Gingras, Jennifer** to Cong. UCC, Monroe, CT
- Groggett, Frank** Lake Worth, FL to First UCC, Ludlow, MA
- Hammett, David M.** New London, CT to Pilgrim UCC, New Bedford, MA
- Hazel, Elizabeth** Rockford, IL to Immanuel UCC, Walworth, WI
- Hazen, Eldonna** New Brighton, MN to First Cong. UCC, Madison, WI
- Huber, Donald** Norfolk, NE to St. Matthew's Episcopal, Alliance, NE
- Hulseay-Mazur, Jonathon** to St. Luke's Living Faith UCC, St. Louis, MO
- Johnson, Peggy A.** Monee, IL to St. Paul's UCC, Monee, IL
- Keller, Sue E.** Brayton, IA to UCC, Buckland, OH
- Kostulias, Ray** Park Ridge, NJ to United, Walpole, MA
- Lowry, Michael W.** Scarborough, ME to St. John's UCC, Dover, OH
- McFarlane, W. Norman** to Westmore, VT
- Mericle, Andrea** to Peace UCC, Elkader, IA
- Mier, Joan** Hammond, IN to Peace UCC, Merrillville, IN
- Moore, Daniel J.** Fort Madison, IA to St. John UCC in Creston, IA and Cong. UCC in Cromwell, IA
- Roy, Deborah** to Cong. UCC, Shoreham, VT
- Schultz, Daniel T.** Lancaster, PA to interim, Salem UCC, Campbellsport, WI
- Sherrod, Betty S.** Jacksonville, IL to Cong. UCC, Santa Barbara, CA
- Smallwood-Garcia, A. Bryn** Orinda, CA to Cong. UCC, Brookfield, CT

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

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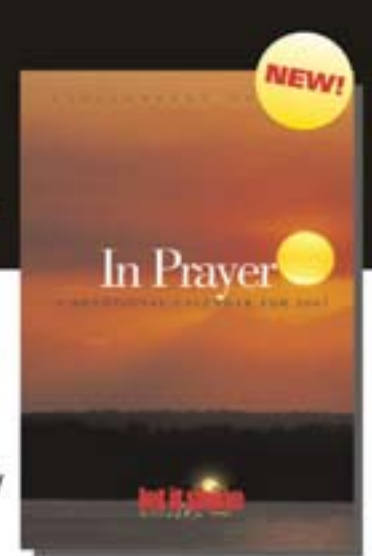
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UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Edited by Carol L. Pavlik

Let it, therefore, be resolved...

Across the UCC, members offer denominationally-specific New Year's Resolutions for 2007



SOAPBOX

Add your submission to the UCC's expectantly-diverse New Year's Resolutions for 2007. We'll post even more online as the big ball drops in Times Square.

Complete the following sentence: "In 2007, let us, the members of the United Church of Christ, resolve to ..."

Before Wed., Dec. 13, send by e-mail to <newsroom@ucc.org> with "Soapbox" in the subject line. As always, United Church News reserves the right to edit your submission for clarity and brevity.



➔ To be open, accepting, and affirming to the conservative-fundamental members and churches of the United Church of Christ.

Jeff Wallace, pastor

**Union Congregational UCC, Gregory, S.D.
Hope Congregational UCC, Fairfax, S.D.
First Congregational UCC, Naper, Neb.**

➔ To invite 50 people to visit our local UCC congregation. To reach out to 50 people who are estranged from our local UCC congregation. To pray earnestly for at least to 50 people who we consider to be enemies.

**The Rev. Kirk Moore
St. Matthew UCC
Wheaton, Ill.**

➔ To study the scriptures — not what others are saying about the scriptures, but study the scripture texts themselves! — in order to discern God's guidance and direction.

**The Rev. Jeffrey Wagner
Lykens Valley Charge, UCC
Berrysburg, Pa.**

➔ To keep focused on our commitment to unity within the Body of Christ. In these highly divisive political times, it is easy for us to forget that despite our differences, we are — not "can be," not "should be" — but are the Body of Christ. Let us remember that and act like it.

**The Rev. Dianne Rood Kiesz
St. Paul's UCC
Eureka, S.D.**

➔ To first prayerfully listen, in all that we do, to the God who is still speaking.

**The Rev. Rebecca Delzell
Sharon Congregational UCC
South Royalton, Vt.**

➔ To work diligently on behalf of the Prince of Peace — working for peace in our households, our neighborhoods, our states and throughout the world.

**The Rev. John C Binkley
Palmyra, Pa.**

➔ To greet each person as my teacher, each person as my friend.

**The Rev. Linda White
Brookmeade UCC
Nashville, Tenn.**

➔ To get those persons in the national office of the UCC responsible for distribution of "time sensitive materials" be enabled to get the materials out in such a manner that they be "time sensitive" and not "late on arrival."

**The Rev. Dale Marshall
Fairfield Glade (Tenn.) Community UCC**

➔ To stop passing resolutions that create so much alienation. (I was at Atlanta and I voted for the same-sex marriage resolution, but now I wish I hadn't. Not because of the issue, but because of the process. Maybe we need to move toward a process of consensus rather than majority vote.)

**The Rev. David Quinn
Christ Little Moore UCC
Danielsville, Pa.**

➔ To share, teach and forgive. When difficult questions arise, ask "what would Christ do?" — and then do it.

**Dean M. Mosemann
First Reformed UCC
Lancaster, Pa.**

➔ To love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind and strength. Love our neighbor as ourselves. Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Pick up our cross daily and follow Jesus. Hide God's Word in our hearts that we might not sin against Him.

**The Rev. Bryan E. Moore
Shepherd of the Hills UCC
Bechtelsville, Pa.**

➔ To be one with God!

**Richard Robbins
St. John UCC
Bellevue, Ky.**

➔ To welcome everyone to the table where Christ has welcomed us, and see our diversity not as divisions but rather as expressions of the strength of love.

**The Rev. Keith M. Haithcock
St. John UCC
Bellevue, Ky.**

➔ To see a sea of bright red commas, from sea to shining sea, proclaiming that "God is still speaking."

**Susan Spiller Frindt
The Church in the Wildwood UCC
Green Mountain Falls, Colo.**

➔ To remind our brothers and sisters in Christ, as well as the community, the teaching of Christ is to "love thy neighbor" and, therefore, the church's mission should reflect that point through stewardship and acts of kindness and charity, and not about all the "rules and regulations" of old testament living.

**David L. Hiser
St. John UCC
Bellevue, Ky.**

➔ To support reforms to put people before profits, end racism, gender discrimination and homophobia, and seek to guarantee justice, economic security and basic needs for all. To end all wars and corporate greed, and to build God's true and just democracy of cooperation, fairness and peace, here, on earth.

**Michael Adam Reale
New Hope UCC
Owensboro, Ky.**

➔ To do justice, love kindness and walk humbly in the presence of our Creator. To boldly live out the prophetic call to be peacemakers and justice-seekers, modeling the inclusive love of Jesus Christ in all that we do, offering healing and challenge, comfort and disruption, in the name of the One we seek to love, serve and follow.

**The Rev. Mary E. Westfall
Durham (N.H.) Community UCC**

➔ To proclaim the welcoming love of God as we share who we are, and as we share who we are, may we celebrate the UCC by making sure it flourishes for generations.

**The Rev. Lynne Smouse López
Ainsworth UCC
Portland, Ore.**

➔ To be the tears in the eyes of even more of God's children who have found, at last, a church that welcomes them with open arms and unconditional love.

**Lois Beberniss
Shadow Rock UCC
Phoenix, Ariz.**

➔ To respect and appreciate what others do, not what we "think" or "expect" them to do. To strengthen our outreach ministries by reaching out — to each other, to our community, to our world, enabling the sun to shine in brighter each and every day.

**Toni L. Tice, treasurer
First Reformed UCC
Lancaster, Pa.**

➔ To walk the walk and talk the talk. "No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here!"

**The Donald C. Wetzel
St. Thomas UCC
Linglestown, Pa.**

➔ That, as a progressive Christian, to not let the fundamentalists steal all of the good biblical words and I will not let the high liturgical churches hoard all of the good, historical liturgical practices. I resolve to redeem them for use in the 21st-century church.

**The Rev. Phil Hoy
Zion UCC
Henderson, Ky.**

➔ To be tolerant of the feelings of others. We may disagree on some issues, but we must learn how to agree to disagree without malice toward those who don't agree with us. To make room at the table for everyone regardless of our theological differences, and let there be peace and love toward all who carry the banner of the UCC.

**The Rev. Joe Venable
Community Christian Fellowship UCC
Greensboro, N.C.**

➔ To stop pushing our own personal agendas and start considering the whole body of Jesus Christ."

**The Rev. George Heckard
Grace UCC
Shippensburg, Pa.**

➔ To re-enchant the world with hope by sharing the good news of Jesus the Messiah.

**The Rev. Drew Willard
Holiday (Fla.) UCC**

➔ To solicit and listen to the spiritual journeys of 12 members (one per month) of our congregations.

**The Rev. Dan Hatch
Community UCC of Honolulu**

➔ To use no acronyms, including "UCC." Newcomers will feel more informed and every time we say our name we will be a clear witness to who we are and whose we are.

**The David Slater
First Parish Church, UCC
Dover, N.H.**

➔ To resolve to love God with all our heart, mind, and muscle, and to love our neighbors as much as we love ourselves. To remember that peacemaking is quiet negotiation and/or appropriate confrontation and/or a risk to our own lives. To understand that the Way of Jesus is now as politically risky in the United States as it ever was in Latin America. To find bridges of loving and understanding between Marcus Borg's believers and transformers. To grasp that bridges between left and right will be built with listening empathy, justice and peacemaking.

**The Rev. Marv Wiseman
Temple Congregational Church UCC
Marion, Ind.**

➔ To "never place a period where God has placed a comma!"

**The Rev. Rick Huleatt
First Church UCC
Windsor, Conn.**

➔ To make every effort to evangelize the world through local and global outreach.

**Sheila Crump
Word of Life UCC
Moncure, N.C.**

➔ To remember that many of us do social justice 6 days a week and need some spiritual refreshment on Sunday!

**Rosann Hickey
Greensboro (N.C.) UCC**

➔ To offer a place of nurturing for people who have been wounded by life, a place of hospitality for the many lonely and marginalized of our world, a place of understanding for those who are cut off, a place of nourishment for people who are starving for love, a place of thanksgiving where God is praised for a multitude of blessings.

To offer a place of exploration — of new ideas, new people, new cultures, a place of challenge, where we are encouraged to live God's Gospel of grace, a place of reconciliation for people divided, a place of forgiveness so that we may live in God's amazing grace.

To offer a place where God's word is spoken, lived, shared, and celebrated, a place of welcome so all will know — no matter who you are, or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here.

**The Rev. Susan J. Foster
East Woodstock (Conn.) Congregational UCC**

➔ To prayerfully and ceaselessly work toward restoring the unity upon which we were founded and through which we are one.

**The Rev. Robert C. Dievendorf
Friedens UCC
Farina, Ill.**

➔ To be resolute in our stand for justice, educated in our approach to scripture, service-oriented in our stewardship of resources, open to new words of the Spirit, liberal in praise of others, conservative in criticism of others, virtuous in our living, exuberant in our welcome, extravagant in our love.

**The Rev. Peggy Clark
Zwingli UCC
Souderton, Pa.**

➔ To take positive action to make a difference for the poor and "downsized" unemployed in our churches and community. To replace debates, resolutions and speak-outs at the General Synod with sing-out groups sharing their favorite song of faith, hope and love. To take five minutes each day to listen to the God who is Still Speaking.

**The Rev. Paul Ashby
Fellowship Congregational UCC
Tulsa, Okla.**

