



# The Witness

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**VOL. XXVII, NO. 1**      **a journal for renewal of the United Church of Christ**      **Winter 2006**

## UCC ROCKS AND ROILS IN WAKE OF SYNOD

### BWF EXEC CALLS FOR RECONCILIATION

In response to the deepening crisis in the United Church of Christ, Biblical Witness Executive Director Rev. David Runnion-Bareford has publicly renewed his 2003 invitation to the Conference Ministers to meet with representatives of the Evangelical minority in the UCC to reaffirm an authentic diversity. (see Letter on page 10)

Rev. Runnion-Bareford's 2003 invitation followed the Synod defeat of the resolution "INTEGRITY IN DIVERSITY" by which Synod sent a harsh message of rejection to those whose Christian convictions contrasted with the ideology of the UCC leadership. That letter to the Conference Ministers received no response.

Now, Runnion-Bareford sees a new opportunity for conversation in the Synod passage of the landmark resolution *Reaffirming Jesus Christ as Our Lord and Savior and Reaffirming Our Historic UCC Cross, Crown, & Orb with Motto Symbol*. (Text of Resolution on page 11) "The will of Synod to reaffirm the foundation of our common faith and covenant is a hopeful sign that the truth which unites us can supercede the diversions into cultural conformity that have unfortu-



*General Synod's vote for same-gender marriage was high on numerous lists of the top news stories of 2005. The wedding cake on this display in the center of the Justice and Witness Com,unity exhibit space was eaten as part of the UCC Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transgender Coalition's celebration of the landmark Marriage Equality decision.*

### UCC TALKING MERGER WITH LGBT DENOMINATION?

A long-planned meeting in December in Cleveland with the leadership of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC), a GLBT denomination, fueled speculation that UCC leaders are abandoning mainstream Christianity for a future as a niche denomination catering to a socially liberal constituency. MCC Moderator Nancy

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### UCC LEADERS OVER THE EDGE?

It would have been reasonable to expect that UCC President John Thomas and the Conference Ministers of the UCC, anticipating a very divisive Synod, might have been prepared to provide strong reconciling leadership. Instead, Thomas and several Conference Ministers are lashing out at those who dissent and proposing conspiracy theories with a loss of common sense and civility that has left even liberal members and churches stunned.

An angry John Thomas addressing the UCC Executive Council in October, attacked Biblical Witness Fellowship as being "intent on disrupting and destroying our life together" and of "being exposed" saying "their relationship to the right wing Institute of Democracy and its long term agenda of silencing a progressive religious voice while enlisting the churches in an unholy alliance with right wing politics is no longer deniable. They are clearly using marriage equality and our commitments to Palestinian people as a wedge to divide unsuspecting UCC folks and churches. They distribute manuals laying out strategies for leaving the UCC. They disseminate deliberately deceptive information about our life and commitments."

While Thomas offered no evidence for

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### CONFERENCE MINISTER CALLS FOR END OF UCC COUP, Hijacking of Local Churches

In a strongly worded letter distributed to all UCC churches, Bishop Rt. Rev. Koloman Ludwig, Conference Minister of the UCC's Calvin Synod, called upon the local churches, "not to be run out of your own church by those who have performed a 'coup' and hijacked the UCC. The heritage of the Congregational, Christian, Evangelical and Reformed Churches is in no way represented by those who now 'claim as their own' this heritage." In the context of his letter the Hijackers were clearly those in positions of power at the national and conference level in the UCC.

Speaking specifically to last summer's Synod resolution, the Bishop wrote, "There are two very serious problems with the resolution. First, it does not reflect the thinking or

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### CHURCHES LEAVING

At press time, over 80 congregations have voted out of the UCC since General Synod 2005. A list of "Lost Churches" can be found on the website: [www.faithfulandwelcoming.org](http://www.faithfulandwelcoming.org)

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## ALL CHURCH IS LOCAL

**T**he crisis in the United Church of Christ is real. It is truly a crisis of identity at our deepest core and no comma will cure it. We are on a collision course with reality that will only lead to further disintegration and dissolution unless the Holy Spirit brings authentic repentance, revival and renewal through what remains of our historic congregations. Our only hope is that God is still speaking.

The covenant under which we came together very nearly 50 years ago was as Godly as it was explicit. It is the only tie that continues to bind us together, and our crisis is driven by leaders intent on its abandonment. Our founding covenant has been broken in many pieces, but this is an editorial and not a book, so here we will look at just one of the most basic.

We came together because of a desire that "all may be one." Our deep desire was the unity of all believers, envisioned in the passionate prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ just before his death, as recorded in John 17. Tragically today we are being driven at the denominational level to becoming a separatist niche church, isolated by our own arrogance and action from the growing global ecumenism that is uniting catholic, and orthodox, pentecostal, mainline and evangelical in common commitment and faith.

This deviance from our identity became evident several synods ago when we appended caveats to our ecumenical agreements such as the "Formula of Agreement" with the Lutherans, Presbyterians and Reformed Church in America, and "Churches Uniting in Christ." These said we would aggressively pursue conversion of other denominations to join us in the religious sanction of sexual license. The UCC statement was clear. We will be "one" on our terms and you, our partners, are wrong and must change. Sabotaged in this fashion, neither the Formula of Agreement or CUIC has subsequently resulted in anything substantive or relevant.

In the meantime the intentional effort by Conference personnel, intentional interims, and UCC-trained clergy to create "Open and Affirming Congregations," only served to separate many UCC congregations from

other churches in their community. In fact this "we are different" mentality gradually was encouraged as a badge of pride. Many UCC congregations use separatist anti-ecumenical themes in their advertising with denominational blessing.

Now the denomination has with equally great pride run a national advertising campaign to proclaim that the UCC is different, set apart from the ecumenical Christian church. When I met with a number of leading United Methodist and Episcopal Bishops in Washington last May, they were outspokenly angry about the campaign. Its insult to other churches was not missed. On December 2, 2004, UCC spokesperson Bernice Jackson Powell, who has since gone to the World Council of Churches, made this intent clear in an interview with Chris Matthews on "Hardball."

Matthews began, "Let me ask you, Reverend Jackson, then, about this controversy. Do you think that the networks are smart not to engage in competitive religious advertising? Like some TV products, they dump—they knock the other products and they can sell their product more successfully. Do you think religion should say, those churches are no good; ours is good? Is that a good policy for a Christian religion to follow?"

JACKSON: Well, I don't think we are trying to point fingers at any one church.

MATTHEWS: Well, sure you are.

JACKSON: No. We're not trying to...

MATTHEWS: Oh, come on. You're showing a church with a bunch of brownshirts. You're showing people in crew cuts and they look like bouncers at a nightclub.

JACKSON: Right.

MATTHEWS: Shoving people away who happen to be African-American or apparently gay, gay couples. And you're saying you're not pointing a finger?

JACKSON: No. We are not pointing a finger at any one church, I said.

MATTHEWS: Yes.

JACKSON: I think we are pointing a finger at all churches."

Now this crisis of founding identity has been acerbated by the decision of Synod to

assume an authority it did not possess by attempting to redefine marriage. This is a folly for which John Thomas and other leaders aggressively proselytized. Its impact is to force local churches to face further alienation from fellow Christians in their community.

This crisis for every local congregation in the UCC is all too real. Some time ago I was asked to spend a quiet weeknight with a dozen or more key lay leaders in a UCC church in Massachusetts. It is a large active church that would generally fit somewhere in the "liberal" to "moderate" spectrum among our churches. They had obviously invited me to hear "the other side," but as the night went on our conversation was warm and far reaching. Their crisis was this. They were the oldest and one of the largest churches in their city. They had been at the center of numerous successful ecumenical ministries. Now they faced a request for a "same sex marriage ceremony." If they said yes, they would immediately be isolated from all of the other churches in town. If they said no, they would be on the path of separation from their denomination. One or the other would inevitably take place. This crisis is now immediate for every UCC congregation.

Along the way, several efforts have been made by the UCC leadership to alert churches that there were "a lot of changes coming down." One was to keep adding to a string of adjectives like "just, peace, multicultural, open and affirming, etc., etc." at successive Synods. The other was to "restructure" the polity of the UCC into something with more centralized control and authority. Leaders at the national and conference level seem perplexed that somehow the bumpkins at the local church level didn't get the message about the brave new world in the UCC.

The problem is that none of those decisions were made with the one covenantal partner that matters the most -- the local church. No local congregations got to vote on restructuring. No local congregations got to vote on all that Synod stuff. The "rules" for influencing the denomination were all rigged in favor of the bureaucrats and groupies. Now of course with 2/3 of the Synod votes being "company people" whose votes "are in

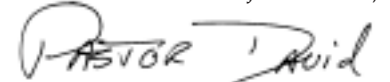
the bag" before the meeting begins, it's a moot point. The notion that any votes at Synod in the summer of 2005 authentically represented local churches is simply false.

Meanwhile in the same way that many pastors have been putting all the controversial UCC publications into the waste basket before their congregations ever got a peek, Conference ministers have been busy telling local congregations the bedtime story of autonomy in which nothing that happens at Synod or National has anything to do with them. The result is that we here in the local church are still holding you accountable to THE COVENANT. The one we agreed to in 1957-1961. End of story. Our original deal is the deal. And in the end all church is local.

Each local church, faced with a decision either to abandon its historic local community identity and our common commitment "that all may be one" or to join a separatist sect appealing to a "niche market," will have an identity crisis. The flippant "win some, lose some" headlined in a recent *UCNews* doesn't cover it.

In the moment, "loyalists" will be organized to try to force those who dissent out and keep churches in the denomination. Those who hold fast to the covenant with God under which we were founded will be pictured as troublemakers. Publicity will be focused on the anomaly of "exciting," "new," "progressive" organizations joining the UCC from non-UCC traditions. But in the end, The 100 or so churches that leave between July 2005 and July 2006 will be just an ongoing, widening stream unless God speaks.

In the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,



Rev. David Runnion-Bareford  
Senior Pastor

The Congregational Church, Candia, NH

*Heartbroken for our denomination - we must speak the truth in love.*



The Biblical Witness Fellowship is a confessing church movement in the United Church of Christ. This news journal is published periodically as time and resources allow and is sent to BWF members and others who request it. Every church in the UCC also receives one complimentary copy. Additional copies are available by request to 1-800-494-9172. To join BWF, read and affirm the Dubuque Declaration on page 5 and use one of the application forms on page 24.

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## From the President

# ARE WE ENTERTAINING SERPENTS?

Reverend Horace Pedrick believed the Bible erred when it said of itself, "All Scripture is inspired of God..." (2 Tim. 3:16) The Reverend believed the Bible was a human book and only a human book. Also Pedrick believed Jesus never claimed to be God. Pedrick willingly wagered his soul and those of his hearers that the Bible was wrong about the identity of Jesus. He believed he knew God better than Holy Scripture. If Pedrick was wrong and the Bible is right, there will be hell to pay for both the preacher and his hearers.

To my knowledge, Horace Pedrick was in good standing in the United Church of Christ. Pedrick was never called disruptive or destructive. Never was he publicly denounced as a deceiver, a serpent incarnate. By contrast, the Biblical Witness Fellowship believes the Bible when it teaches about itself and Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, UCC President John Thomas charges us with disrupting, destroying, and deceiving unsuspecting members. In his October 14<sup>th</sup> report to the UCC Executive Council he identified us as serpents that imperil the denomination.

President Thomas said, "...We are increasingly aware of the challenge of groups within and beyond the United Church of Christ that claim to represent the call to honor theological diversity in the United Church of Christ, that encourage the voice of more conservative sisters and brothers among us, but which are in fact intent on disrupting and destroying our life together." Also he said, "Groups like the Evangelical Association of Reformed, Christian, and Congregational Churches, and the Biblical Witness Fellowship ... distribute manuals laying out strategies for leaving the UCC. They disseminate deliberately deceptive information about our life and our commitments." Finally the President said, "United Church of Christ folk like to be 'nice,' to be hospitable. But, to play with a verse of Scripture just a bit, we doves innocently entertain these serpents in our midst at our own peril."

Does President Thomas suggest that those who believe like me slithered into the denomination? When Dr. Thomas uses the word "entertain" he insinuates that we are merely being tolerated. Are we intruders? Reverend Fredrick C. Wilson baptized me in the First and South Congregational Church of Ipswich, Massachusetts in 1940. My ancestors go back ten generations in the Ipswich Church. Except for the room now on display at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, the 1640 Hart House still stands in Ipswich. Thomas Hart, who built the house, was on my mother's side. In church with Thomas Hart was Thomas Harris who is on my father's side. These two families take me back to the original Puritan migration. In 1969 I was ordained in the first independent Congrega-

tional Church in America. The Byfield Parish Church played a vital role by using Congregational principles to help form the American Way. In Byfield in 1984 the Biblical Witness Fellowship began. We are not intruders and we do not see the need to be "entertained" by denominational officers in Cleveland.

What would motivate the BWF to distribute "manuals laying our strategies for leaving the UCC?" We publish reasons for staying in the denomination to work for theological renewal. The Essex Association urges congregations to stay in the denomination. A prosecutor to win a case seeks to prove motive, means, and opportunity. Although BWF has the opportunity and means to dissuade congregations, we lack a motive. Why would a renewal group work to destroy the very denomination they pray and work to renew? "Manuals laying out strategies for leaving the UCC" would mean failure for the BWF.

Is the BWF a serpent poisoning an otherwise "nice" and "innocent" United Church of Christ? Thomas Oden in his book *The Rebirth of Orthodoxy* has a very different understanding of the UCC. He writes, "Among the most beleaguered denominations burdened with faltering and diluted theological leadership and the fastest rates of membership decline, are the United Church of Christ..." Does President Thomas imagine that if BWF would quit its fight for the Bible that we would stop losing members and churches, that our children would return to Sunday school, and that our national budgets would be supported? If we are not the "serpents," who is?

Reverend Horace Pedrick, not his real name, was my pastor. Unquestioning acceptance of the Bible offended the Reverend. He said Bible believers would eventually grow up. John Updike worshipped at my home church from the late 1950's. Updike wrote, "Reverend Horace Pedrick was a skeletal ignorant man of sixty. His delusions centered about money. In the pulpit, his white hair standing erect as the water on it dried, he held himself braced against imagined mockery, and his sermons, with contortions that now and then bent his body double, sought to transpose the desiccated forms of Christianity into financial terms. 'The man Jesus' - one of his favorite phrases - 'the man Jesus does not ask us to play a long shot. He does not come to us and say, 'Here is a stock for speculation. Buy at eight and one eighth, and in the Promised Land you can sell at one hundred.' No, he offers us *present security*, four and a half percent compounded every quarter! Now I realize I am speaking to hard-headed men, businessmen whose decisions are far-ranging in the unsentimental world beyond this sanctuary..."

Updike found fame by finding exactly the right word to describe what he saw and heard. He heard Horace Pedrick and con-

cluded that his sermons were drawn from a dry well. He saw in Pedrick a "desiccated Christianity." Jesus affirmed the written word of God. Christ fought the Devil with the words, "It is written." (Matt. 4:4,7,10) The serpent, on the other hand, ruined our first parents by inspiring doubt that the Word of God could be believed. He hissed, "Did God Say?" (Gen. 3:1) The enemy still tempts us to believe that he looks behind the word of Scripture and sees a different God. This is the evil of evils. It

is the belief that we creatures have the right to judge God's Word rather than obey it. If the Bible is true, then Reverend Horace Pedrick was one of the serpent's spokesmen. Unlike Pedrick and others, the BWF believes the Bible is the actual Word of God. Like Christ we rely on the fact that "it is written." Are we wrong to suspect that those who know better than the Bible are the real serpents in our midst?

*Bill Boylan, Senior Pastor*

*Byfield Parish, Georgetown, MA*

## PROPHETIC VOICES

### Spiritual Rebirth Needed

"The churches and denominations are crying out for new leadership. The assumptions of the past are no longer relevant; the old formulas are not longer working; countless ministers - by their own admission - are simply unprepared for the complexities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Dramatic, speedy, and lasting change has become a critical need. Without these changes the vast majority of our graduates will run the risk of being nothing more than institutional hospice workers to terminally ill churches." . . . "Call me crazy, but I think Andover Newton is long overdue for a rebirth of our spiritual life."

*- Rev. Dr. Nick Carter in a speech shortly after his inauguration as President of UCC-related Andover Newton Theological School*

### Answers on Christianity

Question 14: "Many people are quite unable to understand the theological differences which have caused divisions in the Christian Church. Do you consider that these differences are fundamental, and is the time now ripe for re-union?"

C.S. LEWIS: The time is always ripe for re-union. Divisions between Christians are a sin and a scandal, and Christians ought at all time to be making contributions towards re-union, if it is only by their prayers. I am only a layman and a recent Christian, and I do not know much about these things, but in all the things which I have written and thought I have always stuck to traditional, dogmatic positions. The result is that letters of agreement reach me from what are ordinarily regarded as the most different kinds of Christians; for instance, I get letters from Jesuits, monks, nuns, and also from Quakers and Welsh Dissenters, and so on. So it seems to me that the 'extremist' elements in every Church are nearest one another and the liberal and 'broad-minded' people in each Body could never be united at all. The world of dogmatic Christianity is a place in which thousands of people of quite different types keep on saying the same thing,

and the world of 'broad-mindedness' and watered-down 'religion' is a world where a small number of people (all of the same type) say totally different things and change their minds every few minutes. We shall never get re-union from them." [circa 1944]

*- Chap. 4 of GOD ON THE DOCK, copyright 1970 by the Trustees of the C.S. Lewis estate*

### Strong Church Survives

"While the denomination has abandoned its confessional heritage in all but name, Calvin Synod stands firmly upon its Reformation heritage. During the years of Counter-Reformation, Habsburg persecution, Nazi terror and Communist oppression, the Hungarian Reformed Church throughout Europe drew upon this bastion of strength as a source of solace, unity and God's grace. While other walls collapsed, the Church stood strong - and survived the years of chaos. Calvin Synod is unwilling to give up this powerful faith for the whims and fads of the day it sees in the UCC. Calvin Synod rues the usurpation of power in the UCC by political forces alien to its roots in Reformation theology. Luther and Zwingli, Calvin and Melancthon, Robinson and Edwards would cry out for UCC reformation today!"

*- Rev Albert W. Kovacs - Hungarian Reformed Church - Woodbridge, NJ from an email explaining the history and present stance of the Hungarians in the UCC*

### Train Wreck Coming?

"I want to trust the Holy Spirit, but it feels like there is a train wreck coming and I am just watching it happen. Am I alone in this? If we are leaders in the church, what should we be doing? I have used the talking points. I have explained the General Synod process. I have reminded folks of our heritage of prophetic witness. However, I think the wreck is still coming."

*- a pre-Synod comment by Rev. Stephen L. Sterner, Interim Minister and President of the Massachusetts Conference*



## Alarm Clock Ringing?

"It's almost like a great awakening, I would say"

- The Rev. Jay Johnson, programming and development director of the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in Religion and Ministry at the UCC-related Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, CA. He was comparing the decision of the United Church of Christ to support same-sex marriage to the "Great Awakening" spiritual revivals of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries.

(Outrageous quote of the week - www.ird-renew.org)

## Virgin Mary was Pro-Choice?

"Mary of Nazareth was unmarried when she chose to have her child, Jesus. She dedicated her choice and her child to a radical overthrowing of the conventional order."

- Rev. Nancy Rockwell, a United Church of Christ minister, writing in the National Coalition for Reproductive Choice pamphlet, "How Good Women Make Wise Choices." The article later declares that "[her] moral and sexual decisions were not clearly right or wrong." (Outrageous quote of the week - www.ird-renew.org)

## Rare or Well-Done?

"God incarnates in everybody - in every body. The wolf, too, eats the reindeer, and so God incarnates in the wolf - and in the bee, which drinks from the flower that springs from the soil, which is infused with the nutrients from the wolf's decaying body, which is made of reindeer meat, which is God incarnated. When I drip golden honey in my morning tea, I drink the Divine."

Jaimie Meyer, Vice President of Institutional Advancement at UCC's United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities, in a 2005 Christmas meditation in the Minneapolis Star Tribune, who has characterized his writing as "...enormously seductive. . . . It's like metaphysical cartoons on speed."

**BWF has published a number of booklets on various issues of concern in the UCC. To order, call 1-800-494-9172:**

*Affirming Our Faith, What Does the Bible Say About Human Sexuality, Uncloseting the Goddess, Resources for Faithful & Loving Reflection, The New Century Hymnal: Is It Right for Your Church?, and Mission Renewal Network*  
New is Facts Vs. Fiction, a historic review of the impact of BWF on the UCC.



## Painful Reality

I am one of the many ministers who resigned from the UCC parish ministry back in the early '80s. I was given no choice. A mandate came down from the UCC national Office for Church Life and Leadership which indicated that from that point on all UCC clergy would be required to officiate at same-sex marriage ceremonies. My standing was with the Washington North Idaho Conference and one of the leading advocates of the gay agenda at the time was Jay Lintner, who was with the Office For Church in Society when Yvonne V. Delk was Executive Director and W. James Halfaker was Washington North Idaho Conference Minister.

I permanently severed my relationship with the UCC in 1983 and never looked back. I could no longer be supportive of the UCC gay agenda than I could of NAMBLA. My perspective then and now is that the UCC is no longer a Christian church but rather a political hostage of the gay agenda and its strategically placed representatives within the UCC. The history of gay politics is replete with blatant misinformation, hypocrisy and racism as it attempts to exploit the civil rights movement in ramming its agenda down our collective throats. I regard the UCC as nothing but a gay footsoldier, an enemy of Christianity. Gay activists such as Jay Lintner have cost hundreds of UCC ministers years of graduate training and professional service and I expect to see more and more of this socially reckless, self-centered, myopic madness coming from UCC leadership in the future.

My father was a very popular Conservative Baptist Evangelical Fundamentalist minister. He was also a brutal sexually/physically/spiritually abusive homosexual who slept with the evangelists who came to his church to save sinners. I grew up with the selfish, toxic, morally bankrupt and socially dangerous gays who postured as servants of God while doing untold damage to their countless victims. And now the UCC seeks to dress this evil in clerical garb and call it God's will. I can't think of any more schizophrenic sociopathic behavior!

Rev. Lee Taylor, Ex-UCC Minister

**We welcome your letters and email and print them as space allows. Some may be edited for clarity and length. Thanks for understanding that we are unable to answer all correspondence personally.**

## Disavow the Narrow-Minded Cants

In this day when religious fundamentalism is causing people the world over to hack other people to bits and citing various passages from the bible, you are doing a huge disservice to humanity by not clearly disavowing this narrow minded cant. RELIGION IS NOT POLITICS!!

Morgan Bulkeley, Mt. Washington, MA

## Hope You Don't Give Up

I am a former United Church of Christ member and have read your newspapers and really appreciate the work you are doing in the UCC. I think it's noble, and if God has called you to this ministry then I hope you never give up. I have to give up on this denomination unfortunately because the liberal ministers have brainwashed the congregation I was a part of that "everyone goes to heaven." I have included in this letter information I found on the Internet that really disturbed me but now I can see why the ministers at our church never really gave Jesus the honor and glory he deserved. I knew there was something not right in our church, but could never pinpoint what it was. Everyone had faith in God. So I could not understand what the change was. I grew up in this church and was confirmed in 1972 so I thought I really knew what the beliefs were in the church.

I was wrong. The teachings at the pulpit were just a watered down Christian message. They mention Jesus enough to make you think your worshipping Him in Spirit and In Truth, but they definitely are not. Ministers even make sure they chose music that say very little about Jesus. Being that I spent most Sundays with the children's Sunday school it took me years to figure this out. Most of the new belief system came out over four years of bible study, which again I thought was individual's diverse opinions. Then reality hit and I was overwhelmed to find out that most people in our congregation do not believe the Bible is the Word of God and neither do any of the ministers that have come through our little church. This is more than just a gay issue now. I believe the God Is Still Speaking program was just a ploy to get more churches to become Open and Affirming and now a UCC pastor told the congregation that he believes to seek truth **God speaks in alternative voices.** I'm trying to warn you that this organization is a false church.

Your efforts are noble, but if you really want to take a stand for Jesus you should split away from the UCC and start a new church order called Biblical Witness Fellowship. And take as many believers with you. Our little church has considered breaking way from the UCC but have no place to go. If they become independent, they cannot find ministers at all is their fear. And now I'm afraid the UCC has ruined their outlook on the Word of God so they cannot become apart of denomination that takes the Bible literally either.

The congregation does not realize that their beliefs now are more in line with the Unitarian Universalists. I have tried to show

this church the truth about what lies behind this liberal teaching and was told to keep my opinions to myself. Jesus said, "If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town. (Matthew 10:14) I hope you pray for the salvation of all UCC members because it is a false church and your efforts are noble, but you really need to separate yourselves from the false Christian denomination. All this is going on behind Christ's name and it is appalling to financially or physically in anyway support what is happening.

-Janice Guenther, Lancaster, NY

## Thanks for the Free Advertizing

As pastor at Wellspring UCC, Centreville, VA, I write to thank you for citing our website and quoting from it on page 16 of the Winter 2005 issue of The Witness.

About half the visitors we've had of late have found Wellspring as part of making an initial step toward exploring progressive Christianity. They've come from expressions of the church they've experienced as restrictively defined and defining and express deep appreciation for the openness they experience in this progressive community of faith. They've found their way to Wellspring from our website and you've helped promote our URL among an audience similar to these folks.

Though I doubt you intended to do so, you may have helped some folks find their way to progressive churches in which their hearts, minds, and spirits, can be refreshed by the Spirit of God in Christ.

Peace and Joy! Rev. Jeremy McLeod

## Thanks

Thanks for all your hard labor for the Kingdom of God. I appreciate your e-mails and have printed them to distribute to our leadership. We voted in June to pursue dual affiliation with the 4-C's. Some will have difficulty coming up with reasons to remain in the UCC after the Synod. God bless you.

Rich Weisenbach First Parish Church, Wakefield, MA

## Post Office Readership

Would you please put my parents and grandparents on the mailing list for THE WITNESS? I grew up in a liberal UCC Church (which my parents still attend) where I never heard the Gospel preached. God graciously brought the Gospel to me by other means and I have been following Jesus for many years now! I am concerned about my parents and grandparents and have been praying for their salvation. I am a mailman and recently saw a copy of THE WITNESS in the mail. I was delighted to know that an organization such as yours exists and I think your publications could help my relatives come to the truth. I have witnessed to them but I live in South Carolina and rarely see them. I am praying that God might be pleased to use your ministry to reach them and my parents. Thank You.

In Christ, Dan Stoddard (via email)

## How Do You Stay?

I have been on your mailing list for many years, and appreciate what you are doing. While I agree with you and pray for your success, it seems the UCC is bound to destroy itself.

How do you oppose their agenda and still remain a member church, without giving money to a cause that you disagree with?

It seems to me, that several years ago, I read an article in "The Witness" that states that Rev. John Thomas and several other protestant pastors had met privately with President Clinton asking him to veto a bill that would end partial - birth abortion.

If that is correct would you be kind enough to verify it for me, if that is possible. Thank you for your effort.

PS - I have been a member of UCC for as long as it has existed. I am 78 years old and was baptized and raised in the old Congregational Church.

God bless you all.

Chuck Holmes - Dows, IA

ED: UCC President Paul Sherry was one of over 2 dozen religious leaders to sign a letter of support for Clinton's veto of legislation banning partial-birth abortion. According to an April 30, 1996 *Washington Post* article reporting the event, other UCC signers included Rev. Tom Dipko, head of the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries, Dr. Allison Phillips, General Secretary of the American Missionary Society division of the Homeland Board, and Rev. Jay Lintner, director of the UCC Washington lobby office.

## My God Loves You

God accepts all people AS THE UCC STATES - and since you obviously have decided negatively about many people, why are you even associated with the UCC? - and to say that the UCC does not honor the autonomy of local churches is a big lie - How dare you even use the symbol of the crown, cross and orb!!! I feel very sorry for all of you! But my God loves you all

M. Giles (via email)

**CAN YOU SEE HUNDREDS  
OF UCC CHURCHES  
MOBILIZED FOR MISSION?**

**MAKE THAT VISION A  
REALITY!**

**Support the MISSION  
RENEWAL NETWORK**

*Daily we connect missionaries with local churches, enable new mission committees to get started, encourage mission growth, and short term opportunities. Help us renew the heart of the church with the love of Jesus for a lost world. TAX-DEDUCTIBLE contributions can be sent to:*

Missions Renewal Network  
P.O. Box 102, Candia, NH 03034

## UCC TALKS MERGER

**Continued from page 1**

Wilson met with UCC President John Thomas, *UCNews* Editor Ben Guess, and Rev. Michael Schuenemeyer, UCC's Executive for Health and Wholeness Advocacy, LGBT Ministries, and HIV/AIDS programs.

After taking a tour of UCC headquarters with her cousin Rev. Robert Chase, head of the Proclamation, Identity and Communication Ministry Team, Rev. Wilson described her conversations as cordial and productive discussions about specific issues of mutual interest including protocols for dual clergy credentials and dual affiliation of congregations. In communication with her own denomination about the meeting, Wilson indicated that acceptance of a denominational merger was not imminent. She noted that merger would require a general conference vote, due diligence, and bringing polity and by-laws into conformity.

Rev. Jim Mitulski, a regional elder for the MCC, noted that a relationship between the MCC and the UCC is mutually beneficial. Estimating that there are now about a dozen MCC clergy seeking dual credentialing, Mitulski feels this is a trend for the future, noting that salaries for UCC clergy are 30 - 40% higher than in the MCC. UCC-related Pacific School of Religion has graduated approximately 40 MCC clergy and offers special MCC-related programs and courses. MCC-San Jose Sr. Pastor Rev. Michael Ellard feels as though there is sufficient compatibility with the UCC that an "absorbed UFMCC could preserve its queer identity intact."

There is currently one church, New Spirit Community Church in Berkeley, CA which has multiple affiliation with the MCC, UCC and Disciples of Christ. A second church, Dallas' Cathedral of Hope, once the MCC's largest church, left the fellowship in the wake of ethics charges against the church founder and has recently voted to join the UCC. Two MCC churches are listed among the new UCC churches celebrated at General Synod 2005. The City of Refuge Church in San Francisco, pastored by MCC friend Yvette Flunder eventually joined the UCC, after the UCC extended a 1998 loan for City of Refuge to buy its South of Market property. "Bishop" Flunder was a featured speaker at the UCC's 2003 Synod Meeting.

The *Bay Area Reporter* has speculated that moves toward greater cooperation is based in part on financial necessity. The MCC was forced to cut \$400,000 from its \$3.3 million operating budget for 2005 and *Bay Area Reporter* Kevin Davis wonders whether "budget cuts at an LGBT-focused religious denomination might correlate with greater collaboration with its more financially healthy cousin." Financial strains, according to Rev. Wilson, have been caused by the loss of Cathedral of Hope and that post 9/11, "homophobic oppression in nations not as hospitable to U. S. born, especially LGBT clergy, made church planting overseas slower, so tithing income from overseas expansion fell."

**Continued on page 6**

## THE WITNESS

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BWF holds to the testimony of faith printed below:

### THE DUBUQUE DECLARATION

We declare our continuing commitment to the truths set forth in the Basis of Union and the Constitution of the United Church of Christ.

We perceive an erosion and denial of these truths in our church. Because of our concern for the people of our churches and the well-being of our denomination as a member of the body of Christ, we are called by God to make this confession:

1. We confess our faith in the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
2. We confess that Jesus Christ is truly God and truly man. Because of our sin and estrangement from God, at the Father's bidding the Son of God took on flesh. Conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, He became like us in all things apart from sin. He died on the cross to atone for our sin and reconcile us to God and on the third day rose bodily from the dead. He is the sole head of the church, the Lord and Savior of us all, and will one day return in glory, power, and judgment to usher in the kingdom of God in its fullness.
3. We hold that the Bible is the written Word of God, the infallible rule of faith and practice for the church of Jesus Christ. The Scriptures have binding authority on all people. All other sources of knowing stand under the judgment of the Word of God.
4. We affirm that the central content of the Scriptures is the gospel of reconciliation and redemption through the atoning sacrifice of Christ and His glorious resurrection from the grave. The good news is that we are saved by the grace of God alone, the grace revealed and fulfilled in the life and death of Jesus Christ, which is received only by faith. Yet this faith does not remain alone but gives rise to works of piety, mercy, and justice. The Holy Spirit, who spoke through the prophets and apostles, calls us today, as in the past, to seek justice and peace for all races, tongues and nations.
5. We confess as our own the faith embodied in the great ecumenical and Reformation creeds and confessions, finding them in basic conformity with the teaching of the Holy Scriptures.
6. We confess that the mission of the church is to bear witness to God's law and gospel in our words and deeds. We are sent into the world as disciples of Christ to glorify God in every area of life and to bring all peoples into submission to the Lordship of Christ, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. We seek to obey this commission in the full assurance that our Lord and Savior is with us always, even to the end of the age.

# UCC IN THE NEWS

## Communist Organization Distributes Hate Handouts at Synod

Last summer as delegates and visitors filed into plenary and worship sessions of General Synod, among the sea of paper being distributed was a series of handouts from an organization called "The World Can't Wait." Political hate speech by any reasonable standard, the angry pieces generally titled "The World Can't Wait - Drive Out the Bush Regime" offered a diatribe of hateful accusations including:

➤ *Your government is openly torturing people and justifying it.*

➤ *Your government is moving each day closer to a theocracy where a narrow and hateful brand of Christian fundamentalism will rule*

➤ *Your government enforces a culture of greed, bigotry, intolerance and ignorance, people look at all this and think of Hitler and they are right to do so. The Bush regime is setting out to radically remake society very quickly in a fascist way.*

No connection was identified in the literature to the United Church of Christ and it was never clear in efforts to dialogue with the distributors what, if any, legitimacy they had at the Synod. The website for the organization, however, states that "Supporters of the Revolutionary Communist Party helped initiate it. They have said they're in it because they think it's absolutely urgent to get rid of this regime, that it would both lift a huge burden from the world and would also give people a sense of their own potential power, and they think all that would open up avenues to get to the society they want."

Communist regimes are responsible for the mass murder of over 100 million innocent people during the 20<sup>th</sup> century when they controlled numerous governments around the world. The liberation of the world to experience democracy has been a major effort toward peace and justice in our time. "The World Can't Wait" called for a national strike on November 2, and nationwide demonstrations following the January 2006 State of the Union Address, neither of which materialized. *Source: www.worldcantwait.net*

## Confusion Arises Around God Is Still Speaking Initiative

There is growing confusion in the UCC about what it means to join the God Is Still Speaking Initiative (GISS). For most congregations who have become a Still Speaking Church, there is affirmation that God IS still speaking through His revelation in Scripture in this day and time and that vitality of faith means making a difference in world locally and beyond. There is excitement about intentional welcoming and making the church accessible to people of various abilities and socio-economic-cultural backgrounds.

Recently, however, a different message is being received. An email inquiry to the Still Speaking "Web Deacon" about the connection with ONA received this response:

Q: "I would like to know if, by supporting the God is Still Speaking campaign, are we saying that we all believe in being open and affirming?"

A: "By supporting the God is Still Speaking campaign, individuals are saying that they believe in being open and affirming and wish to support this effort. . . . Those who support this campaign may wish that it could be affirmed by all the members of the UCC as well as all others, but that is beyond the realm of possibility. Our denomination does affirm the freedom of conscience and encourages us to strive to stay in conversation and communion with each other even though we disagree. It is hard to be respectful, compassionate and loving when we disagree about hot issues of faith and practice, but that is just as important as being 'right' theologically, I believe. Hard to do, however."

A pastor in Pennsylvania phoned the national GISS office to clarify the expectations of a Still Speaking church and was told that in integrity to the program, traditional teaching about what the Bible says about homosexual behavior would not be appropriate.

## It's a Winner!

Even though the 2004 controversial "Bouncer" ad was banned by the major television networks, caused much distress in local congregations, and alienated many of our wider church partners, the UCC's 30-second spot keeps winning awards. All have cited its inclusiveness of homosexuals as a key to its selection despite our denominational officials' continued claim that the campaign was not targeting that particular demographic.

Campaign director Ron Buford accepted the most recent accolade from the Association of National Advertisers for "Multicultural Excellence for the gay and minority-inclusive 'Bouncers' ad and The Initiative campaign." 2004 was the first year the ANA included a gay and lesbian category in its prestigious honors.

Earlier the ad received the regional New York Silver ADDY Award in the consumer services/advocacy category. It missed recognition in the national competition.

In June, Rev. Toni Dunbar from City of Refuge United Church of Christ in San Francisco accepted the award for Outstanding Electronic Advertising for "Bouncer" at the 16th Annual GLAAD Media Awards. GLAAD is the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation. The ad also received top honors in May as the "Outstanding Commercial of 2004" at the Commercial Closet Association's first-ever Images in Advertising Awards. It won for its "bold embrace of diversity" and "positive portrayal of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people." The organization was founded to improve public opinion of gays and lesbians through advertising images.

Additionally, the ad and the Still Speaking Initiative helped the UCC take home the Hero of Hope award from Cathedral of Hope in Dallas. According to Rev. Jo Hudson, Cathedral of Hope's senior pastor and rector, the UCC was chosen in appreciation for its "extravagant welcome" of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people as exemplified by the denomination's "Stillspeaking" advertising campaign. Hudson holds UCC standing and the congregation recently voted to affiliate with our denomination. (See story on page 7)

John Thomas collected the Disciples of Christ's Gay, Lesbian and Affirming Disciples (GLAD) Alliance award of appreciation while at the DOC's General Assembly this summer. GLAD also presented a \$500 gift to the UCC's Stillspeaking Initiative.

Unfortunately, a new commercial described as "edgy" and "whimsical" hit snags on its way to similar honors for 2005. A lack of grassroots financial support meant cancelling a 2005 Advent buy, even though national UCC ministries dug into their reserves for an extra million plus dollars and fund-raising goals were lowered. According to two on-line gay news sources reporting in October, the new ad was rejected by the major networks before the ad went into production.

United Church News reported that financial concerns were high at the mid-October Executive Council meeting. Discussion divided on concern for losing momentum if no ads aired until Lent 2006 and concern that lackluster giving showed non-support by local churches and individual members. Describing the decision as "the 500-pound gorilla in the room," Jennifer Craig, chair of the Council's financial development committee, said that, if the UCC was truly banking on the Stillspeaking Initiative as the denomination's primary vehicle for new growth and vitality after decades of decline and invisibility, the gravity of the decision must be named. Craig noted that private companies – if forced to choose between a golden opportunity and the likely forfeiture of a watershed moment – would likely "go to a bank and borrow the money" in order to make the ad campaign happen.

Several, including Craig, spoke about feeling internally conflicted by the decision. "I feel like I need to leave the room so I can pull my two selves back together," said the newly-elected Executive Minister of Wider Church Ministries Rev. Cally Rogers-Witte before the vote to postpone to a Lenten timeframe.

The Autumn shortfall in donations was explained by saying churches were giving to Hurricane relief efforts instead of a controversial media blitz. Churches gave \$9 million to that effort.

A 2006 ad buy for Lent is now planned, but a campaign to find \$1 million to extend it



United Church of Christ was featured on the cover of *The Institute on Religion and Democracy (IRD) Summer 2005 issue of their "Faith & Freedom" magazine. "The Church of SpongeBob" article concluded that at Synod it was particularly fitting that one skit featured "pretend bouncers, escorting an animated children's cartoon character to increasingly empty 'inclusive' UCC local churches." Source: www.ird-renew.org*

to Mother's Day seems to be lagging in spite of claims of "an extraordinary outpouring of grassroots generosity" to support it.

Sources: <http://www.ebar.com/news/article.php?sec=news&article=222>  
[www.Stillspeaking.com](http://www.Stillspeaking.com)

## UCC TALKS MERGER

Continued from page 5

The Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC) was founded in 1968, and now has 250 congregations in 23 countries. In 1991 it was given "observer" status by the World Council of Churches but in 1992 was denied membership in the National Council of Churches as a recognized Christian denomination. The MCC, however, unlike the UCC, is creedal, requiring clergy and leaders to adhere to the Apostles and Nicene Creeds. They have also been in the forefront of the development of "queer theology." Founder Troy Perry performed the "first same sex marriage" in 1970. The MCC performs approximately 6000 same-sex "marriages" per year and the Rev. Brent Hawke, of the MCC Toronto, played a key role in legalizing same sex "marriage" in Canada.

Sources: [www.ebar.com](http://www.ebar.com) (Bay Area Reporter) and [www.goodhopemcc.org](http://www.goodhopemcc.org)

**PRAY for BWF & Renewal in the UCC Mondays, 6-9 a.m.**

# New Churches

## Who are the New UCC Churches?

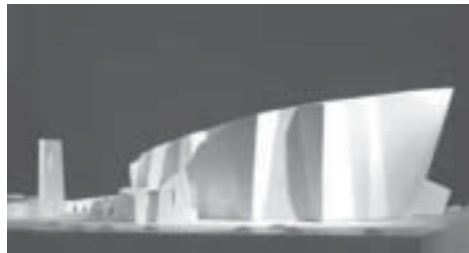
Ninety-two new churches were welcomed at General Synod this past summer. The UCC proudly announces that new churches have approached for affiliation since the Atlanta meeting in July. Who are these congregations?

First, the fine print. Compared to a net loss of 54 churches in 2004, 92 new congregations sounds like progress. However, the celebratory report is misleading in that many of the congregations parading at Synod are not yet official UCC churches and twelve were repeats from General Synod 2003. The new church list distributed at Synod includes congregations who are "in formation or discussion" as well as those with UCC standing. Also, the accounting was from General Synod 2003 to General Synod 2005, thus not corresponding to the UCC annual directory which reports a net loss of 100 churches in the 2003-2004 two year period. Progress into official UCCdom must be slow. Of the 75 churches on the 2003 list, 48% had not joined by the end of 2004 to be listed in the 2005 directory, most of these were the immigrant churches.

Here's some background on what is termed as a "living future and present witness of the still-speaking God among us today." According to the UCC, more than 35% are open and affirming. Almost 40% are ethnic. Most non-immigrant churches are coming from other denominations in a time when UCC leaders are accusing others of "church stealing" when congregations vote to leave.

**Cathedral of Hope - Dallas, TX.** With 4,300 members, the church is described by the *United Church News* as "the world's largest progressive Christian church with a primary outreach to lesbian gay, bisexual and transgender people." If accepted into the North Texas Association, it will become the third largest UCC church nationwide. Says their UCC-ordained senior pastor and rector, Rev. Jo Hudson, "The Cathedral of Hope and the United Church of Christ seem like a natural fit. The United Church of Christ has long been at the forefront of societal change, most recently, of course, by becoming the first mainstream denomination to support equal marriage rights for same-gender couples. Their values are our values, and we look forward to joining in partnership and continuing the work for which God has called us together."

There are questions about the



*Cathedral of Hope's new building, designed by renowned architect Philip Johnson, "rises, like an iceberg emerging from the sea, and soars to a crowning peak over the altar. . . The design stems from the firm's exploration of a new architectural direction, one where conventional geometry is rejected in favor of a more expressive and free form."*

Cathedral's motives and timing, however. In 2003, the church left the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches, the only GLBT denomination in the USA, when its charismatic leader of 15 years dropped his MCC credentials days prior to the release of an investigative report about his alleged misuse of church funds. As a result, the findings could not be made public. Rev. Michael Piazza is still on staff as dean and president. He is head of the church's advocacy program Hope and Peace for Justice and author of "Rainbow Family Values." In a 1996 interview with *Whosoever*, an online magazine for GLBT Christians, Piazza commented about the premise of his book saying, "the current idea of the nuclear family is one of the most dysfunctional concepts to come along. It doesn't work for heterosexuals so it is a mistake for gays and lesbians to try to emulate a failed model. What we really need to do is to claim some more ancient and basic models of family. The idea of tribes, of clans, of extended families and communities is what we really need to be working on, not finding a mate and settling down to live in a suburb."

According to Cathedral Affiliation and Expansion Committee chair Dennis Bolin, affiliation discussions have been on-going since 1997. Hudson, who was previously pastor at Friends UCC in College Station, TX, arrived in 2004, a move that was thought by her area colleagues to be part of the UCC's courtship of this congregation.

**Plymouth Congregational - St. Paul, MN.** Not on the list distributed at Synod, but recently reported by the UCC as one of the large churches attracted to us because of the vote affirming gay marriage. This congregation voted not to join the UCC at the time of the 1957 merger (Schedule 2) and is affiliated with the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches. The church was in the news in 2005 when they hired Malcolm Himschoot, UCC-ordained transgender minister and the subject of the UCC's film *Call Me Malcolm* (see story p. 15). He joins an impressively inclusive ministerial staff (straight, gay, and lesbian), all with UCC standing. Bios on their website did not indicate anyone self-identifying as "bi."

The church is also theologically inclusive. An upcoming women's retreat "Living from the Goddess" explores "how can we as contemporary women access and live from the energy of the Divine Feminine." Maryam Yusefzadeh, Certified in Reiki Tibetan Medicine, will be doing a 3-part seminary on "a Spiritual Journey into Healing Sounds" that teaches "sound as a healing modality in the Shamanic, Buddhist and Near East traditions." Other classes are entitled "The New Universe Story" and "Our Need for Cosmology."

Senior minister, Rev. Gertmenian is a hymn-writer, with several of his works in *The New Century Hymnal*. He is currently on the Board of UCC-related United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities, where he chairs the Academic Affairs Committee. He shares his faith in an on-line Lenten sermon series. "First, and foremost, I can't get home by the road that suggests that Jesus is the only way or Christianity the only true religion. For me, at least, that road is blocked, closed off forever. Even if I wanted to - and I don't - I could not make my heart, my mind, my soul accept that God could be so foolishly exclusive and so arbitrarily mean as to confine revelation, or salvation, to one religious tribe." He describes his "New Rugged Cross" by saying, "Progressive Christians do not seek to ignore the cross; to the contrary, their hope is to reclaim it from the thrall of dried-up dogma. . . If there is anything about Jesus that 'saves' us, it isn't that he died on the cross for our sins. It's that he showed a way of living that breaks down barriers, that offers freedom, that punctures old certainties and puts in their place the glorious and exhilarating dance steps of faith."

Some dissenters in the congregation objected to joining because the UCC was seen as too conservative.

**Higher Dimensions Family Church-Tulsa, OK.** The website of this progressive pentecostal church has a picture of founder and pastor Bishop Carleton Pearson on every page. While his bio touts his past extensive national and international music and evangelism ministry including 6 years with Oral Roberts, his shift to universalism ended his connections with mainstream evangelical leaders. His interest in having his 5000 member church join the UCC was influenced by Yvette Flunder of the City of Refuge UCC in San Francisco and the welcome he received during his visit to the 2005 California North-

ern Nevada Conference annual meeting as keynote speaker.

Pearson's "Gospel of Inclusion" distinguishes Christocentric Universalism from humanistic or Unitarian Universalism emphasizing that "Jesus is not just the Savior FOR the world - He's the Savior OF the world" meaning the human race is already saved, reconciled and redeemed, but not aware of it. His new book *God is Not a Christian* claims to be not "anti-Christian" and does not undermine "the powerful work of the cross, the deity of Christ and his substitutionary death, or the shedding of His precious blood for the remission of sins." "To believe that such a God could or would permit a single soul He created, to be destroyed, or even eternally separated from Him is a contradiction in terms. It would also be an inadmissible defeat for God. . . Moreover, a God, who deliberately allows the uninterrupted existence of endless or eternal torments, is not God at all, but more like what we describe as the devil. If the atonement means the reconciliation of God and man or man to God, (and that is the only thing it can mean), then it must end in universal salvation or redemption to humankind."

**Metropolitan Community Church of Columbia, SC** - The Southeast Conference has welcomed churches from the open and affirming Alliance of Baptists, now it is welcoming churches from the gay denomination Metropolitan Community Churches. As highlighted in a recent Southeast Conference newsletter, MCC of Columbia, SC is "in conversation" about changing denominational affiliations. Their website says they are looking forward to becoming Garden of Grace UCC with a new 3600 square foot "celebration center." Their Garden of Radical Love includes a "beautiful outdoor permanent labyrinth created with rainbow-colored concrete" and a nature trail with "intimate seating areas . . . reflecting our understanding of the spiritual life as a beautiful garden that flourishes by the inspiration of the Spirit."

### YOU CAN PLACE GODLY PASTORS IN UCC PULPITS

With your support, Godly pastors can be referred to churches anxiously seeking qualified leadership in this time of serious shortage. New young pastors can be recruited from evangelical seminaries, and evangelical seminarians can be supported in UCC seminaries. We need your help. Send your support to:

Pastor Referral Network  
P.O. Box 102  
Candia, NH 03034

**Or send your scholarship support  
directly designated to:**

BWF Scholarship Fund  
4150 Belden Village St. NW  
Suite 601  
Canton, OH 44718

"In the midst of these hopeful opportunities, they [UCC] also face the possible loss of hundreds of churches who disagree with the UCC's more inclusive stand for LGBT people of faith. They are prepared for this eventuality and they also take hope in the number of progressive churches that are inquiring about joining."

- Internal MCC report on visit of newly installed Metropolitan Community Church moderator Rev. Nancy Wilson to UCC headquarters in early December 2005. The MCC is a predominantly gay denomination with more than 200 congregations globally.

Source: [www.goodhopemcc.org](http://www.goodhopemcc.org)

# UCC IN THE NEWS

## OCWM = COVENANT?

As conferences make budget cuts in the face of shrinking donations and churches wrap up one fiscal year and plan for the next, the newest denominational campaign for money has arrived in church mailboxes.

The OCWM (Our Churches Wider Mission) letter from UCC President John Thomas asks churches to be "Covenant Keepers" either by giving 10% of their operating expenses to OCWM or by increasing giving toward that goal. Using member church statistics from 2001, Thomas states that 988 of 5,888 churches contribute 46% of OCWM and are the ones "pulling the UCC wagon." BWF's calculations, based on 2005 Yearbook reports, reveal that 1180 churches (20.5%) give nothing to OCWM and another 11% give only a token amount of their budget. Of the 5750 churches, only 909 (15.8%) gave \$10,000 or more to OCWM Basic Support in 2004.

While the letter states clearly "In keeping with UCC polity, our members and congregations are not 'required' to give any particular percentage or amount," the packet includes "an invitation" that looks like a bill.

Ironically, right after he talks about sharing "the increasing costs of being church together, particularly the high cost of fuel and increases in insurance costs," Thomas quotes Conference Minister Russ Mitman using the financially-challenged UCC Insurance Board as an example of how "we join our brothers and sisters throughout the UCC and the Disciples of Christ in sharing risks of disasters that could come to any of us. All of us are there for each other when the need arises." Concerns over the stability of the Insurance Board, in spite of multiple changes in top management, have caused several conferences, including Kansas-Oklahoma and New Hampshire, to drop their UCCIB coverage.

"This is the moment in this generation to grow and renew our United Church of Christ - and we must seize it," writes Thomas in bold type.

Another notice to from Cleveland says effective January 1, 2006, all orders for materials from the UCC must now be prepaid.

## JOHN THOMAS, BARMEN AND BONHOEFFER???

Invited to the Southern Conference to address the deepening divide between the conference and local churches, President John Thomas made a very general appeal to strengthening the ties that connect us, but went to some length to compare the times in which we live with the life and writing of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the dissenting pastors who signed the Barmen Confession, opposing Nazism. Several of those who listened to that presentation had the impression that Thomas somehow identified himself and the leadership of the UCC with this historic move-

ment. This raised a number of questions since usually the heritage of Bonhoeffer and Barmen are perceived as more appropriately embodied in the confessing renewal movements within the UCC and the other mainline denominations. In response to the questions raised by President Thomas' presentation, Rev. Gerald Sanders, former Executive Director of BWF who is a scholar on this topic, offered the following very cogent response.

*I think his interpretation of Bonhoeffer can be demonstrated to be incorrect. Thomas is obviously grounded in the positivist theological movement which places man at the center and interprets all religious language from an anthropological base therefore all of their assertions are reflections of human need and values. Bonhoeffer, Barth and others in the confessing movement were clearly "dialectical theologians" which is in marked contrast to the positivist. Dialectical theology presses the "Holy Otherness" of God in contrast to the thoughts of men. This perspective alone would make Bonhoeffer a poor candidate for UCC theology. Secondly, the Confessing Church did not see the problem with the German Church situation as primarily a socio/political problem, although they did see these issues as problematic, but the primary problem was the cultural captivity of the church by a secular ideology. Barth's work on the Confessing Church makes it clear that the issues were theological in character.*

*Finally, the theme of building bridges used by Thomas is entirely out of character with the Confessing Church's understanding of the situation. They were in the process of breaking bridges with the culturally captive state church. Bonhoeffer said, "he who separates himself from the Confessing Church separates himself from salvation." This is our situation...any who follow the UCC Synod position are following a faith that is culturally based and captive to 20th Century materialism and hedonism. WE ARE IN A CONFESSIONAL SITUATION!!! The UCC including JT will find their methodology and outlook will have little in common with Bonhoeffer and the Confessing Church movement of the 1930's.*

## BALAAM'S ASS COMES OUT OF THE CLOSET

Those who wondered at the vicious and clumsy attack mounted by "Balaam's Courier" on BWF last July can wonder no longer. The once "objective" edgy, satiric voice of Synod meetings is coming out of the closet. In the April edition of *UCNews* they are running a full page advertisement opposing marriage, supporting the July UCC resolution and openly criticizing those who stand for the authentic identity and faith once at the core of the United Church of Christ. They have openly solicited members of the GLBT Coalition to financially support the \$4700 it will cost to run this ad. This appears to be the death knell of "Balaam's Courier" unless it intends to continue as a company mouthpiece in appropriate alternative attire.

## OTHER VOICES RISE IN UCC

### UCCunity

[www.uccunity.com](http://www.uccunity.com)

"There is always another place at the Table," declares a new voice of reform in the UCC. Primarily a website presence, UCCunity.com came on-line prior to Synod calling the United Church of Christ to return to its founding ecumenical spirit of cooperation that welcomes divergent views and brings people into reconciliation. It offers a place to dialogue and discuss how to return to unity.

The solution, suggests website vision statements, is to concentrate on what we can agree on - our oneness in Christ Jesus and taking care of a suffering world - rather than voting upon divisive issues that antagonize and polarize. "We see a United Church of Christ in which embodied unity is ever a priority, in which the compassionate hospitality of the Gospel is manifested as we work to make others feel welcome, even and especially when they challenge our most deeply held judgments," say founders Jamie Orr, Rev. Steve Swope, Rev. Don Niederfrank and Rev. Carly Stucklen Sather, UCC pastors and laypeople from 4 different conferences. "We believe it is time for us to listen, to have the courage of silence - a silence born not of fear but of faith, a silence that sets aside the preoccupation with self in compassionate regard for one's neighbor." They further feel that the "larger settings of the Church should seek to ensure that it be possible for any local UCC congregation to be proud of and feel accurately represented by resources, statements, and actions issued under the name United Church of Christ."

### UCCtruths

[www.UCCtruths.com](http://www.UCCtruths.com)

Since its inception in 2003, the web news site UCCTruths.com has become a primary alternative source of news and commentary about the actions of United Church of Christ national and conference leadership. The site has reported that since it went on-line it has had more hits than members of the UCC. In one week in mid-January, there were over 2800 unique browsers viewing 10,221 pages. "Hits" or pageviews now total close to 1.5 million with nearly 500,000 different visitors.

Founder James Hutchinson is more concerned about polity, hypocrisy and inconsistency between UCC policies and statements than theological issues. News stories are well-researched and linked to on-line source documents. Several hundred people are part of its on-line Yahoo.com discussion group. UCCtruths reported nearly 9800 message board comments by 310 current members as of January 18.

"The Point" as expressed on the website: "Generally speaking, the local churches of the United Church of Christ do a tremendous and faithful job of ministering to their members and community. However, over the last few decades, the national offices of the United Church of Christ have shifted away from the needs of the local church and have set on a course of *dishonest* political activism that few in the local church are aware of and, often unknowingly, contribute to.

"The purpose of this site is to discern what is truthful and factual and to challenge those in the national office to be honest in their pronouncements. . . . This website is also intended to be a central resource for links to current news items about the UCC. This site does not represent any particular theological or political belief - and is not affiliated in any way with any interest group within the UCC."

### ColleagueOnline

[www.colleagueonline.org](http://www.colleagueonline.org)

ColleagueOnline is "A Journal of Theological Reflection by Pastors of the United Church of Christ" which, according to the website, continues the print version's long tradition of considering for publication articles from any UCC pastor - "a tradition of opinion and humor." Executive Editor Mike Bennett, senior pastor of First Church of Christ in Longmeadow, Massachusetts, says in his on-line intro, "While we occasionally have a lover's quarrel with the United Church of Christ, we do our quarreling from within and with ideas. . . . My hope is that your pastoral work may be both challenged and supported by these on-line reflections." The Colleagues' most frequent authors claim labels like "post-liberal" or "generously orthodox." While the intended audience may be clergy colleagues, the articles' perspectives and humor is enjoyable and helpful to laity as well.

Recent articles include: "The Capacity to Terminate is A Specific Grace", by Lorain Giles, "The Preference-Driven Church?" by Verlee A. Copeland, "The Next Still Speaking Campaign" by John McFadden, "United Church of Christ to Benefit from Nigerian Financial Windfall: An email message from Nigeria may be the solution to the UCC budget shortfall" by Lillian Daniels, "The Resolution to End All Resolutions?" by Dale Rosenberger, and "Matzoball: Baseball is a metaphor, perhaps instructive for evaluating any system" by Steve Crabtree.

### Confessing Christ

[www.confessingchrist.org](http://www.confessingchrist.org)

Confessing Christ is a "centrist" organization focused on theological discussion and debate where Christ is at the center, "working from within to encourage the denomination to give greater recognition to the importance of Scripture and past confessions in forming the life and mission of the church." It was established in 1983 out of "concern that the social-action agenda of the UCC was driving the denomination's theology rather than the theology driving the social action," says co-convenor Dr. Gabriel Fackre, professor emeritus at Andover Newton Theological Seminary in an article written for the group's tenth anniversary. Confessing Christ members were key writers of the successful 2005 General Synod substitute resolution affirming Jesus as Lord and the Crown-Cross-Orb as the UCC symbol.

**SEEN OUR WEBSITE?**  
[www.biblicalwitness.org](http://www.biblicalwitness.org)

## Why not have one large organization?

This is a question BWF hears with increasing frequency. In response, BWF Executive Director David Runnion-Bareford says, "We rejoice that the Holy Spirit is continuing to work within our churches by raising up new and different voices that call for faithfulness in our local churches and denominational structures. BWF knows that working together in strategic alliance with all those who seek the same end works far better than trying to bring everyone into one organizational structure. We can do many things to enable others and they benefit from our experience and organization."

## NEW RENEWAL EMERGES Continued from page 1

As they evolved into a fellowship, the common expressions among those involved were that they were "people of the preamble," and "keepers of the covenant" adhering to those covenants to which local churches have actually covenanted rather than any post-restructuring, artificial, bureaucratically-imposed notion of "covenant" that local churches had never ratified. Their goal is to enhance the opportunity for local congregations conflicted by UCC leadership and Synod decisions to express authentic diversity within the UCC rather than voting to leave.

The Faithful and Welcoming Churches fellowship warmly seeks unity with all local congregations and members of the UCC who share a common commitment to the historic Christian faith. Their statement is:

*Faithful and Welcoming congregations in the UCC seek to be...*

◆ **Faithful...** to God our Father and Creator, to Jesus Christ, our Lord and only Savior, and to the Holy Spirit

◆ **Faithful...** to the Bible as our ultimate authority for faith and practice

◆ **Faithful...** to the apostolic faith declared by the Church across the years and around the world and reaffirmed in our historic traditions

◆ **Faithful...** to the preservation of the family, and to the practice and proclamation of human sexuality as God's gift for marriage between a man and a woman

◆ **Welcoming...** to all, as we seek through repentance and faith to do the will of God

◆ **Welcoming...** to fresh insight from the Scriptures that is consistent with our commitment to biblical authority

◆ **Welcoming...** to new ideas of how our congregations may experience health and growth to transform our world through the gospel of Jesus Christ

Recently the Faithful and Welcoming movement ran a full page and quarter page sequential ads in the *UCNews*. The Fellowship plans regional meetings with interested UCC folks over the next several months leading to a national meeting on July 2-4 near Columbus, OH. For more information check the web: [www.faithfulandwelcoming.org](http://www.faithfulandwelcoming.org)

## BWF Exec Calls Andrew Weaver to Account

In a late November update to email subscribers, Andrew Weaver recommended his latest updated "research" on the "IRD/Good News: How the Right Wing Targets United Methodist Women." In this article, Weaver makes the outrageous statement that "IRD's constant gay bashing recently earned the endorsement and encouragement of a terrorist group, the American White Knights of the Klu Klux Klan."

Following up on this assertion, BWF found that the references led to a website totally unrelated in any way to the IRD, where a publication by the IRD was briefly quoted. This website then also quoted from another source which if you followed the source of that

quote led you to a Klu Klux Klan related site. Weaver's intentional distortion of this reference to slander the IRD prompted BWF Executive Director, David Runnion-Bareford to call him to account by writing the following:

*Dear Andrew, your vendetta against renewal in the Methodist church and other 'mainline' denominations veers increasingly into the absurd. Unfortunately your "research" with its inaccurate picture of "conspiracy" based on misassembled "facts" is being used by denominational officials to their own embarrassment and discredit.*

*I would make two suggestions: One, adjust your "research" technique. Suppose we were to take your bizarre reference to the KKK site in your recent piece and use your approach in reverse. UCC President John Thomas and Public Relations Director Ron Buford were recently named to*

*the "top 100" list by the homosexual publication "OUT" magazine. Using the "Weaver research" technique wouldn't we be validated in connecting Thomas and Buford to every advertiser, website connection, and organization which appears in or is referenced by "OUT" magazine???? What kinds of outlandish things could we say about Thomas and Buford then?*

*Secondly, adjust your world. There are four major branches of the protestant church in the U.S. - Fundamentalist, Evangelical, Charismatic and Liberal (self named 'progressive'). Whether you use Barna, Hartford, or one of the other research centers, the consensus is that 90-92% of worshippers on a Sunday are in one of the first three branches. The 8%-10% of Protestants who are still in a church associated with one of the nine 'mainline' denominations include a large percentage of evangelicals. Even in the most liberal denomination of the lot, our own UCC, Hartford indicates that 26% are evangelical. This means that fewer than 5% of worshipping Protestants identify sympathetically with "progressive" religion. Calling 95% of the protestant church the "far right wing" is silly. It would be far more realistic to recognize that a publication like Christianity Today is at the dead center of mainstream Christianity in the U.S. Use some bench mark like that as your centerline for "right" and "left" and you will be far closer to reality. In his grace, David Weaver has yet to make a response.*

## Tooley and Thomas on TV's "Book of Daniel"

Only half of eight episodes had aired when NBC cancelled its new weekly drama *The Book of Daniel*. The program featuring a "mainline" clergy family stirred much controversy because of the extent of the family's dysfunction and its "disrespectful" treatment of Jesus. The title character Daniel was an Episcopal priest who was addicted to pain killers and had an alcoholic wife, an adulterous bishop and father, a homosexual son, a drug-dealing daughter, a promiscuous teenage son, a brother-in-law embezzling from the church and lesbian sister-in-law engaging in group sex. Jesus appears periodically and offers non-judgmental comments.

**THOMAS:** Commenting about the show in an article in the *United Church News* after the first episode, UCC President Rev. John Thomas admitted *The Book of Daniel* was "far from conventional" saying it "displays the power of grace to sustain imperfect people striving to be faithful and always coming up short."

The article went on to say that Thomas "believes the mounting 'controversy' surrounding the farcical TV series is actually another clear sign of how mainstream culture, including many religious institutions, 'resists religion that is relevant'."

"I've never met an Episcopal priest with the kind of family, or the amount of money, Daniel has," Thomas told *United Church News*. "But I do know many Christians, including many, if not most ministers, struggling with grief, ambition, disappointment, guilt, doubt, temptation or even addictions in their lives."

Thomas, who watched the series' premiere episode on Jan. 6, said television is rarely the place where one finds "interpretations of the faith cherished by Christians across the ages," but unconventional storytelling — such as the kind used by creators of *The Book of Daniel* — still can help viewers explore important theological themes.

Thomas, however, said it should not come as a shock, for example, that a pastor — either on *The Book of Daniel* or in real life — could accept and affirm his gay child, have a daughter with legal troubles, or be married to someone with depression or alcoholism.

"The 'Daniel' controversy reveals how religion can sometimes be shallowly interpreted as irrelevant when it comes to life's somewhat-messy realities — and how difficult it can be to grasp the radical nature of grace," Thomas said. "It's always surprising to discover how controversial grace can be. But then, even in Jesus' time, unmerited, undeserved grace left many religious authorities furious."

**TOOLEY:** Commenting on the controversial show after it was cancelled, Mark Tooley of the Institute on Religion and Democracy said, "*The Book of Daniel* seemed determined to fulfill every conceivable negative stereotype about wealthy, liberal Episcopalians. But the most curious thing is that the program's producers apparently intended its depiction of moral confusion as a compliment to the Episcopal Church. And some Episcopal leaders evidently took it as a compliment. That fact tells you more about the state of the denomination than all the dubious stereotypes portrayed on the program."

"One would have thought," Tooley remarked, "that the Episcopal Church would be a bit defensive about its reputation. The denomination in recent years has been racked by controversy and membership losses over the ordination of an openly homosexual bishop, the debates over same-sex 'marriage,' the theft of millions of dollars by the national church's treasurer, and a drug and sex-trafficking ring run by a New York priest."

"Most absurdly in the program, the Aidan Quinn [Daniel] character is portrayed as a courageous priest challenging a conservative church hierarchy," observed Tooley. "In real life, the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut has a liberal bishop who is cracking down on dissenting conservative priests. The national Episcopal hierarchy is overwhelmingly liberal, and orthodox Episcopalians are increasingly looking to overseas Anglican primates for leadership and protection."

"NBC hyped *Book of Daniel* as 'edgy' because it addressed supposedly provocative sexual and religious issues," Tooley concluded. "But a truly provocative program would have portrayed orthodox Episcopalians trying to survive under a culturally compromised liberal Episcopal Church leadership."

## HOLY HARDBALL BOOK REVIEW Continued from page 22

funding proposal, IRD officials claim that liberal theology has failed the mainline churches resulting in the loss of millions of members. During 2001-2004, they claim there will be 'rare opportunity to redirect these churches away from their reflexive alliance with the political left and back towards classical Christianity.' — Thom White Wolf Fassett (p. 41)

→ "The IRD... repeatedly use the 'Big Lie' propaganda method to justify their assault on the United Methodist Church. It goes like this: The decline in membership in the UMC and other mainline churches is the fault of 'liberals' who got the church involved in social action." *Good News* magazine published an article claiming that United Methodism "is in the midst of a 100-year decline. The years of the decline correspond exactly to the years that liberalism and institutionalism have dominated Methodism". — Andrew Weaver, Nicole Siebert (p. 28)

And what exactly is the "lie" *Good News* told? Weaver and Siebert go on in one of the truly funniest passages in the book to tell us what IS happening. "Demographic research shows that the reason for decline in membership in mainline churches and the growth of conservative churches like the Southern Baptist Convention, the Assemblies of God, and smaller Pentecostal and Holiness churches has little to do with ideology and much to do with biology. Conservative church members have more children."

Wow! Given the UCC issues with abortion, sex and marriage is it really safe to go there?

Review by David Runnion-Bareford

## UCC LEADERS OVER THE EDGE?

Continued from page 1

the existence of this "manual," the connection of grassroot renewalists in the UCC with right wing political organizations, or any illustration of "deception," others have repeated this theme. Interim Conference Minister Jack Seville recently wrote to BWF, "I now see your organization for what it is: an agency of the political right, not theological right or orthodox, committed to destabilizing the United Church of Christ and other mainline Protestant denominations to the point of absolute weakness and ineffectiveness in the politics of the United States of America. Yes, I see your organization as nothing more than a political action group."

Conference Ministers John Dorhauer of Missouri-MidSouth and Gene Kraus of Illinois South sponsored a conference called "Is it time to play hardball?" featuring a contributor to *Hardball on Holy Ground* (see review on page 22) in which they, too, advocated the conspiracy theories. Kraus has reiterated his claim made in April that "within Illinois South, some individuals and organizations have used tactics of fear and intimidation to capitalize on our diversity and attempt to turn it into division."

Dorhauer has created an attack blog attempting to vilify those who have left the UCC and those still seeking reform. With the absurd tone of a sinister whisper

his blog claimed recently that BWF had a "private list of clergy that is kept secret from the wider church" that are "shopped around by whomever it is that executes these maneuvers (no one has admitted it)." The Dorhauer rants can be read at [www.talk2action.org](http://www.talk2action.org)

Veteran Conference Minister Russell Mitman of Southeast Pennsylvania sent an "alert," in which he claims, "There are outside organizations at work, some of which may be aligned and even funded by ultra-right wing political lobbies, seeking to lure churches away from their historic denominational families.

These church stealers are known to prey on people's fears and anger at times when controversies over political and cultural issues divide and polarize denominations."

Seeming to forget entirely the congregational polity of the body he serves, Mitman writes, "All denominations are targets for church stealing, but the polity of the UCC makes us par-

ticularly vulnerable. United Methodists, Episcopalians, and Presbyterians have legal safeguards against such takeovers of church property and assets." His fear is palpable when he claims, "Agents both clergy and lay have been planted in targeted congregations to sow discontent and to urge congregations to vote themselves out of the UCC. The public rhetoric is generally about sex-related issues, but the real agenda is to foment schism."

In the Southern Conference where a concerted effort has been made by aggrieved churches to work within the Conference system for redress, Conference Minister Steve Camp appears to be in the midst of a full personal melt down. Blasting those who dissent, in ironically what reads like a projection of how the liberal leadership and special interest groups

of the UCC have long operated, Camp writes, "These pastors and lay leaders fail to see the hurt and pain they are causing by their actions and hurtful rhetoric. They wash their hands as churches withhold dollars and support from the Conference . . . It's not about being conservative, moderate or liberal, never has been. It is about power and control. For some it seems like the center of their theology."

He goes on, "The only reason for such action, it appears, is to plot separation from the UCC. Despite those

among their number who argue against churches leaving the UCC, they cannot deny they have let this cat out of the bag in the first place by their own rhetoric and actions. Rather than see and understand that the vote taken at General Synod last summer was not binding on any of us or any of our churches, they continue to add fuel to keep this fire of discontent burning . . . they openly bash staff. They call our national media campaign a 'glitzy media campaign,' and call our denomination

Continued on page 18

The fact that life is filled with challenges doesn't mean that we are in crisis. Negative messages reveal, I believe, more about the persons spreading them than they do about reality. The apostle Paul urges us to keep this perspective of false prophets: *Keep an eye on those who cause dissensions and offenses, in opposition to the teaching that you have learned. Avoid them. For such people do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the simple-minded. . . . I want you to be wise in what is good and guileless in what is evil.* (Romans 16:17-19)

- Hawaii Conference Minister Charles Buck, *The Friend*, March 2006



## BWF EXEC CALLS FOR RECONCILIATION

Continued from page 1

nately been the public face of the UCC in recent times. This may well be a key to rededication that can unite our churches at a deeper level than that which divides. The key will be the Conference Ministers and whether they can have an authentic ministry which equally affirms those who hold the convictions of the ecumenical church on the sacredness of human life and sexuality as well as those revisionists who wish to redefine these core beliefs," says the BWF Executive Director.

Criticized by some for making his invitation public this time, Runnion-Bareford responded by saying, "We gave this prayerful consideration and thought. Appealing to the whole church had two purposes. It sent a clear message that the crisis could not be ignored and that action was imperative. The whole UCC is watching. Secondly, the evangelically inclined churches who are alienated need a clear message that their concerns were being represented in a proactive and reconciling manner that gives them hope to stay in the UCC."

Runnion-Bareford is looking forward to their response.

## END OF COUP URGED

Continued from page 1

theological convictions of the local congregations of the United Church of Christ. . . . Second, this is a serious theological issue in the universal church - it is not an issue of 'policy' or 'procedure' to be decided by one church body. The definition of marriage in Christianity and in the Biblical context has a specific meaning."

In an almost poetic form he called the leadership from arrogance to reality by writing, "Our current UCC leadership has decided in the past 30 years that they understand the meaning of God's scriptures better than Jesus himself, better than all the authors in the New Testament, better than the early Christian Fathers, better than the leadership of the Catholic Church for 2000 years, better than the Orthodox Church for 1200 years, better than the Reformers and all our Reformed and Protestant ancestors for the past 500 years, better than their own parents. Our current UCC leadership has decided that all who came before them were wrong."

The Bishop's letter has received wide public attention, however, primarily because it also called for the churches to stop giving financially to the national UCC structure until there were clear indications of repentance and reformation.

### To Conference Ministers

November 18, 2005

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

We are living together in a tumultuous time for our congregations in the United Church of Christ. Conflict, confusion and uncertainty have become our reality. Yet our confidence in our Lord Jesus Christ remains certain, and we share with you the conviction that God is still speaking. We know beyond all doubt that, "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation." (II Corinthians 5:17, 18)

Therefore we are calling today for us to come together in a summit of reconciliation and healing. We believe that you as Conference Ministers are the key to renewed leadership, and we are therefore once again, as we did in 2003, asking to meet with you to consider prayerfully and mutually the future of our church.

It is our sincere desire and hope that we could find a mutual voice with which to reassure our churches that all of them have an empowered place in fellowship. The decisions and directions taken by the leadership and power structures of the UCC have deeply divided sincere members and pastors throughout our fellowship. We have been saddened by the defensive and reactive communications that have mistakenly attempted to transfer blame to those in dissent. While we understand with some sympathy the nature of your guilt and an-

ger, these are not the messages and actions of authentic leadership.

Therefore, let us come, reason together and seek the face of God. It is our urgent hope that we could work toward unity by finding means to mutually promote integrity in diversity. We would for instance, like to work with you to create means by which evangelical seminarians and pastors received the same support and affirmation as progressives in order to end the present incentive to take churches out of the denomination or the need for churches to seek such leadership outside of the conference process.

While we understand that our differences on some deeply held convictions are not going to be resolved by simply seeking ground for reconciliation, nor do we seek to revisit these historic debates, we believe there are core values which we could clarify together, and actions of mutual benefit which could bring some healing to the church. We believe that a publicly announced meeting in the next several months would be helpful to those churches uncertain about their future. It is our prayer that together we might have the humility and holy boldness to risk life together, "being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 1:6)

Yours in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
David Runnion-Bareford  
Executive Director, BWF

# Reaffirming Jesus Christ as Our Lord and Savior and Reaffirming Our Historic UCC Cross, Crown, & Orb with Motto Symbol

## Summary:

This resolution reaffirms (1) that the United Church of Christ continues to claim as our own the ecumenical faith that Jesus Christ is both human and divine, our Lord, Sovereign and Savior, and (2) that the "Historic UCC Cross, Crown, & Orb, with Motto" continues to be the official symbol of our Church.

## Background:

The Constitution of the United Church of Christ affirms that we stand in the great tradition of the universal Church, the Body of Christ. The Preamble includes the words that the UCC, "claims as its own the faith of the historic Church expressed in the ancient creeds and reclaimed in the basic insights of the Protestant Reformers. It [the UCC] affirms the responsibility of the Church in each generation to make this faith its own in reality of worship, in honesty of thought and expression, and in purity of heart before God."

## Biblical, Theological and Ethical Rationale:

While the United Church of Christ has always been a theologically diverse community, our diversity has a center - Jesus Christ, in whom God became a human being, who lived and died and rose again from the dead, who is both human and divine. This center is not merely a theological opinion or standpoint, but is inherent in the UCC's identity as a part of the Body of Christ, Holy Scripture, the ancient testimonies of faith, our constitutional texts, our Statement of Faith, our inclusive-language liturgies and hymnals, our ecumenical commitments, and our Christ-centered witness for justice and peace all testify that this faith is still foundational for our Church.

### 1. The Witness of Holy Scripture

"Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.'" *Matthew 28:16-18*

"Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord' and do not do what I tell you?" *Luke 6:46*

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth." *John 1:1,14*

"Thomas answered Jesus, 'My Lord and my God!' [These signs] are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name." *John 20:28; 30-31*

"Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." *Philippians 2:9-11*

### 2. The Witness of the Ecumenical Tradition

"I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord." Apostles' Creed (ca. 200-300)

"I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true human, born of the virgin Mary, is my Lord..." Martin Luther's Small Catechism (1529)

"The eternal Son of God, who is and remains true and eternal God, took to himself, through the working of the Holy Spirit, from the flesh and blood of the virgin Mary, a truly human nature." Heidelberg Catechism (1563)

### 3. The Witness of the United Church of Christ

"The United Church of Christ acknowledges as its sole head, Jesus Christ, Son of God and Savior. It acknowledges as kindred in Christ all who share in this confession." *Preamble to the Constitution of the United Church of Christ (1957)*

"A Local Church is composed of persons who, believing in God as heavenly Father, and accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and depending on the guidance of the Holy Spirit, are organized for Christian worship, for the furtherance of Christian fellowship, and for the ongoing work of Christian witness." *Article V.10, Constitution of the United Church of Christ (1957)*

"In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth, our crucified and risen Lord, God has come to us and shared our common lot, conquering sin and death and reconciling the whole creation to its Creator." *Statement of Faith of the United Church of Christ, adapted by Robert V. Moss (1959)*

"Praise God from whom all blessing flow; Praise Christ the Word in flesh born low; Praise Holy Spirit evermore; One God, Triune, whom we adore." *Book of Worship of the United Church of Christ (1986)*

Question: "Do you profess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior?" Answer: "I do." *Orders for Baptism, Confirmation and Reception of Members, Book of Worship of the United Church of Christ (1986)*

"The new hymnal of the United Church of Christ enables praise of the One Sovereign, Triune God, who in infinite majesty is always more than doctrine can describe and whose being calls forth awe, worship, love, faith, and service." *Theological Guidelines for The New Century Hymnal (1991)*

"O risen Christ, ascended now, to your blessed name all knees shall bow; You are, while endless ages run, in Triune Godhead ever One." *Hymn 259, New Century Hymnal (1995)*

### 4. The Witness of our Ecumenical Commitments

"The National Council of Churches is a community of Christian communions, which, in response to the gospel as revealed in the Scriptures, confess Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God, as Savior and Lord." *Statement of Faith of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.*

"The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior according to the scriptures, and therefore seek to fulfill together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit." *Constitution of the World Council of Churches*

"The one foundation of the Church is Jesus Christ, the Lord; in whom God's Word became flesh and to whom the Scriptures bear witness, and the church on earth, though composed of many members, is one Body in the communion of the Holy Spirit, under the leadership of the Lord Jesus Christ." *Constitution of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches*

### 5. The Witness of Our Commitment to Justice and peace

"In Jesus Christ God entered the arena of human history, grappled with the principalities and powers of evil, won a victory over those powers, and made manifest his love and gracious purpose toward all [people]." *Call to Christian Action in Society, UCC Council for Christian Social Action, adopted by General Synod II (1959)*

## Resolution:

WHEREAS the United Church of Christ, in its Constitution, "acknowledges as its sole head, Jesus Christ, Son of God and Savior;" and

WHEREAS the Constitution of the United Church of Christ declares that our Church "claims as its own the faith of the historic Church expressed in the ancient creeds and reclaimed in the basic insights of the Protestant Reformers;" and

WHEREAS these testimonies of our mothers and fathers in the faith all confess in conformity to Holy Scripture that Jesus Christ is truly human and truly divine; and

WHEREAS our membership in ecumenical councils and our relationships of full communion have renewed our commitment to the ecumenical faith in the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ; and

WHEREAS the Orders for Baptism, Confirmation and Reception of Members published in the Book of Worship and New Century Hymnal invite candidates or their sponsors, in accordance with Article V.10 of the UCC Constitution, to profess faith in Jesus Christ as Lord or Sovereign; and

WHEREAS the historic registered trade-mark of the UCC, includes the Cross, Crown & Orb with Motto and

WHEREAS the liturgies and hymnals published by the UCC—including the Book of Worship and the New Century Hymnal - affirm that Jesus Christ is our Sovereign, both human and divine; and

WHEREAS our Church's witness to justice and peace is grounded in the authority of Jesus Christ who is the Word of God;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Twenty-fifth General Synod of the United Church of Christ, meeting in Atlanta, Georgia, celebrates and reaffirms our Church's faith in Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, whose true humanity and divinity are declared in our Constitution, our liturgies, our hymnals, and our ecumenical commitments; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Twenty-Fifth General Synod reaffirms the historic UCC Cross, Crown, Orb and Motto symbol, and strongly commends its continued use in publications, periodicals, letterheads, websites, videos, display advertising and other visual means of communication produced by all settings of the Church; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Twenty-Fifth General Synod commends to the congregations of the United Church of Christ the Orders for Baptism, Confirmation and Reception of Members published in the Book of Worship and New Century Hymnal.

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the Twenty-fifth General Synod encourages all who proclaim the Sovereignty of Jesus in their words to discern the implications of that proclamation for the way they live their lives.

Funding for the implementation of this resolution will be made in accordance with the overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

# SYNOD CAUSES DEEP HURT, PAIN AND

## AROUND THE UCC LOCAL CHURCHES REACT TO THE PAIN CAUSED BY JOHN THOMAS, SYNOD AND THE UCC LEADERSHIP.

The 'hornets nest' has been whacked. We have some long time members of our local church that just flat want out of the UCC. Problem here is that they may 'bail out' as individuals and couples and dilute the ability of realizing a local body 'confession' of where we really stand - which at this point I don't know. But we are working to create a 'process' by which that can happen.

*Dave Mikkelsen, St. John UCC, Cumberland, IN (August 2005)*

St. John is a complete mess. About 25-35 folks are visiting other churches now. My family is one of those. We sent a petition to the Consistory President asking for a vote of confidence in the pastors at a congregational meeting, 48 members signed it. The consistory is stalling and the pastors act shocked. Not sure what will happen, but things are very somber.

*Carol Ann Bucksot, St. John UCC, Cumberland, IN (January 2006)*

The consistory and congregation of St. John's E&RUCC of Bedford (PA) have been disturbed and appalled by the General Synod 25 "Equal Marriage Rights for All Regardless of Gender" resolution. General Synod's posture does not reflect our thoughts or theological convictions and at no point was our congregation consulted as to our opinion on such a weighty issue. The UCC is now confirming a social not a spiritual orientation. We realize that our congregation does not have to follow the lead of the National Church. But if decisions of this magnitude are not expected to be implemented by our local congregation, then why should we contribute funds to a conference or denomination which implements issues to which we are directly opposed?

We believe this policy runs counter to God's will and His commandments. On Dec. 4<sup>th</sup>, 2005, at a special congregational meeting St. John's voted unanimously to withhold all financial contributions to the association and the conference until such time the same abandons and opposes General Synod "Equal Marriage Rights for All Regardless of Gender" resolution. We will continue to support designated missions.

We realize many congregations are leaving the UCC and that option has been considered. But at this time we refuse to be run out of our church by those who now claim "our rich & wonderful heritage" as their own.

*Letter sent to UCC National President, and leaders in Juanita Association and Penn West Conference as well as area churches by St. John's E & R UCC in Bedford, PA*

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Recently many of you have expressed your concern regarding the actions taken at the UCC General Synod this year, particularly its endorsement of support for same-sex marriage. As your church council,

we, too, are deeply troubled by this action and the "implication by reputation" it may have on our congregation. Not only has this resolution of support for same-sex marriage caused deep concern and grief among members of our church, it also hinders our evangelism efforts. The good news is that no pronouncement or proclamation made by any person or instrumentality within the United Church of Christ is bidding on the local church. Therefore we believe it is necessary to clearly state our beliefs on this issue. This is no way is meant to demean homosexuals or anyone else for that matter. This is simply a clarification of Christ United Church's position on marriage.

We believe marriage is a holy commitment between one man and one woman. Evidence of God's idea and plan for the union of a man to be joined in sacred covenant with a woman can be found as far back as Genesis 2:24 where the Word of God states, "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife and they become one flesh." . . . Anything other than this is contrary to the will and word of God. . . . Be assured that there will be no same-sex marriages or union ceremonies performed in our church, or in its name or by our minister.

*Letter to congregation from the Church Council of Christ United Church in Cypress, TX*

This is a tragic moment in Christian History, and I will remember to pray more regularly for the UCC. *Marc Axelrod - Potter WI*

In a world of ever changing systems and values, we believe the church must maintain a consistent and solidified obligation to the values of Christianity. Recently, the synod has compromised those values in order to advocate the goals of a specific controversial and political group. As such, the Word of God has been misrepresented to suit the latest trend, "Same-sex marriage." . . . We are still trying to grasp the concept of how one group of people were presented with this controversial topic to discuss, then, allowed the exclusive right to vote on and pass a resolution and endorse it on behalf of all UCC churches. This biased conduct represents a disconnected leadership and misrepresentation of the UCC members. As one member put it, "I want to know who cast a vote for me. No one asked me for my opinion."

We are aware of the motivation and calculated efforts backing this vote, it is the intention of groups advocating gay rights to get a church denomination to vote in favor of "same sex marriage." . . . We will not be pawns for political groups that wish to use our good name to promote their agenda.

God's word cannot be compromised in favor of political agenda.

. . . In order to preserve our church and keep our members, we are asking that a new vote take place on the subject of "same sex marriage." It must represent all UCC churches, in which every UCC member will have the opportunity to vote on this issue. Furthermore, if it is found that the majority does not favor same-sex marriage," it will be immediately rescinded and the outcome made public.

*Letter sent to "Rev. John Thomas and other associates of the UCC" by St. Paul's UCC in New Oxford, PA*

I am chairman of a denomination study committee at our church, St. Luke UCC, Decatur, IN. In light of the recent declaration of support for same gender marriages by the general synod, our congregation is on the verge of leaving the UCC. We've struggled with some of their stances in the past, but this seems to be the "straw that broke the camel's back".

*Sally Reynolds (via email)*

By the end of August we'll begin to see the fruit of these decisions by GS25. What a sad legacy. The big problem is that they are teaching this crap to our teenagers at camps and youth events - read that "brainwashing."

Now isn't the time to pull back. Now is the time to advance the real kingdom of God, not the make-believe house of cards the UCC is pushing. "Onward Christian Soldiers!"

*Ed Briggeman - New Bavaria, OH*

Time to pull out completely out of the UCC. The apostasy in it can only be remedied by God's judgment. *Bob Silling (via email)*

"This is truly Independence Day for the UCC — we have declared ourselves independent from the teachings of Jesus and the clear teachings of Scripture."

- Rev. Brett Becker, pastor of St. Paul's UCC of Cibolo, TX, the sponsoring church of the defeated resolution holding that marriage should be between one man and one woman. The vote against traditional marriage was held on July 4, 2005.

God is still speaking! But let us not presume that the General Synod of the United Church of Christ is the only place listening. I wish, before we had undertaken a radical new interpretation of Scripture, that we in this room would've listened more to what God is speaking to the Church outside these walls.

I wish we had listened more to what

God is speaking through our own congregations of the United Church of Christ, 90% of whom are not Open and Affirming, and do not support same sex marriage.

I wish we had listened more to what God is speaking through the wider church. My partners in ministry in the Church of God, the American Baptist, the Assembly of God, the Missionary Baptists, and the Roman Catholic Church find it incomprehensible that we would rush headlong into turning 2000 years of Christian interpretation and understanding on its head.

I wish we had listened more to what God is speaking to the church around the world, as a guard against our own cultural bias. The vast majority of Christians today live in Africa, in Latin America, and in Asia; as we have already observed from the Anglican Communion going through a similar issue, they are appalled at our redefinition of God's design for human sexuality, and see it as yet another example of US and Western arrogance.

Let us not isolate ourselves from the great majority of the Body of Christ! We need them to be whole, and they need us. Let us not presume to think that God only speaks to General Synod delegates. May God grant us the humility to listen to how these others have heard the still-speaking God.

*Steve Gettinger - Anderson, IN (written to be read at Synod Plenary before the vote.)*

OPEN LETTER TO THE BOYERTOWN / POTTSWON COMMUNITY FROM SHEPHERD OF THE HILLS CHURCH UCC

On July 4, in Atlanta Georgia at its biennial meeting, the United Church of Christ (UCC) may have crossed a line of no return by

promoting a redefinition of marriage that is in contradiction to what God has already defined it to be. In doing so she has further alienated a large segment of her membership and the larger Christian community and effectively ended any meaningful dialogue on the issue. Unless she withdraws

this proposal there can be no return to the ecumenical spirit that once crowned her head.

The General Synod of the UCC passed a resolution in support of "Equal Marriage Rights for All," or in favor of same sex marriages and is encouraging all its member churches to do the same. Shepherd of the Hills United Church of Christ is not in agreement with this resolution and will not sup-

# CONFLICT IN LOCAL CONGREGATIONS

## THIS SAMPLING OF LETTERS AND COMMENTS REPRESENTS THE VOICES OF MANY CONGREGATIONS AROUND THE UCC.

port it in any way. While society at large may have the legal right to put laws into effect that promote same sex marriages the church has no business redefining what God has revealed marriage to be.

We want to be very clear about our stand in this community. We stand with the historic Christian church which has always loved sinners but never called sin right. We are to love and protect those we disagree with but we must not fall into the trap of condoning and affirming that which we believe is clearly wrong.

We believe the leadership of the UCC has, by passing this resolution, diminished our once vital denomination even further by continuing to make it a voice for those who no longer will tolerate Biblical values. In doing so it has alienated itself from historic Christianity and the average man or woman in the pews.

We, along with many other churches and church members in the UCC at large, are deeply saddened. We want our friends in the Boyertown/Pottstown community to know that we stand with you and the values that are sacred to you. We would love to hear from you concerning these matters. You may reach us at pastorsoth1@aol.com, and thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

*Reverend Doctor Bryan Moore, Sr. Pastor, Shepherd of the Hills UCC – Bechtelsville, PA for the Elders and the Congregation*

**S**hiloh Church in Faith, NC voted 189-9 to disassociate with the UCC on July 31, 2005. After the last two years of turmoil in the church there was no way to keep our congregation in the UCC. Since pulling out, we were identified on the UCC website and since then we have had calls from churches in Ohio and Pennsylvania asking our help as their churches were considering pulling out and wanted to know the process that we followed.

*Joe Harrell, Consistory President*

**T**he news of the GS resolution hit our church very hard. Immediately there was negative reaction. Our deacons took quick action to reassure the congregation that they were not only aware of the controversy but that they would be taking action. That action came in the form of a Called Church Conference on August 22 to determine our church's response to the GS resolution on same-sex marriage.

At the end of the conference, one of our church members rose to move that Suffolk Christian Church withdraw from the UCC. After a second, it was immediately tabled for a period of 90 days (as required by our Church

Constitution) and there will be a vote on Sunday, November 20, following worship service. It requires a 2/3 majority vote to pass.

To me as a pastor in the Southern Conference, the most disappointing thing in this whole controversy has not been the passage of that resolution on same-sex marriage but the failure of our conference leadership at every level to be a pastor to us pastors. The threats, both veiled and overt, the misinformation (I am trying to avoid the use of the term "lies"), and the rigid unwillingness to listen to anyone not adhering to the "party line" are all most disappointing and probably will make our possible exit from the UCC easier to accomplish.

*Michael Halley, Pastor, Suffolk Christian Church, Suffolk, VA*

**L**ast Sunday the Church voted unanimously to send two resolutions to the Southwest Association (Wisconsin) affirming that marriage be only that between a man and a woman and that the Southwest Association affirm this and state clearly that no U.C.C. Church in the Southwest Association would marry anything other than a man and a woman. The Association meeting is on the 25th September and we don't expect to win, but we do intend to be heard. As a result of the resolutions having been sent to the Association, the Association minister Rev. Bob Mutton has asked to see our Church council this Saturday.

We will keep you posted. At the meeting we also voted unanimously to endorse the Lexington Confession and would like know how we can become more involved!!!!!!

We also plan to invite "Dave" Moyer to meet with us. It will be an offer he can't refuse for if he does we intend to go to the media. We also voted to stay in the U.C.C. for the moment but are looking at ways to decrease our contributions.

*God bless. Pastor Ray Sowersby  
Peace Church Browntown WI*

"On this July fourth, the General Synod of the United Church of Christ has acted courageously to declare freedom, affirming marriage equality, affirming the civil right of same gender couples to have their relationships recognized as marriages by the state, and encouraging our local churches to celebrate and bless those marriages."

- Rev. John Thomas, UCC President and General Minister in a press statement after the vote to affirm same sex marriage.

**A**t Emanuel Reformed UCC we have been actively discussing the General Synod and how it affects us as a local church. We have overwhelmingly voted to include our name on The Lexington Confession, so that we may publicly make it known that Emanuel Reformed UCC does not agree with what took place at the General Synod. In addition, on August 14th we held a Town Hall Meeting that allowed the membership of Emanuel the opportunity to ask questions, as well as speak their mind concerning the happenings, direction, and future of the UCC and how it affected us as a local church. I was very excited that five out of our six Confirmands who had joined the church on Easter Sunday were at this meeting and asked good and thoughtful questions. Right now the church is willing to stay the course for a while and I believe it is because we have had an open dialogue, as well as open discussion concerning our future. Emanuel has set up a committee, by recommendation of the Consistory, to monitor what is happening in the Association, Conference, and National Church and to seek out alternative denominations if the time comes that they feel the need to vote to leave the UCC. I feel if a vote was taken right now the congregation would vote to pull out. I continue and will continue to ask them to remain in the denomination and to stand firm in our beliefs while remaining a part of the

UCC. *Pastor Rickey Payne, Thomasville, NC*

**I**n Honolulu, the M a k i k i C h r i s t i a n Church's pastors are very disillusioned with the Synod, and on Maui, Pastor Dexter Teruya of Kahului Union Church (openly Biblical Witness church) have challenged the Conference Minister, Charles Buck on the Synod's arrogant action. Buck wasted no time getting a letter out after the Synod, giving his spin on the resolution. Come to find out, he was "Bible study leader for the committee of delegates that prepared the resolution for the entire ple-

nary..." to quote him.

*Stan Harbour, Pastor, Central Kona Union Church, Kealahou, HI*

**I** am a member (and Elder) of a UCC congregation in the Penn SE Conference. We had an informal meeting to discuss the ramifications of the General Synod's support for same-sex marriages. Thankfully, most of the members of our church are against the resolution, and the meeting was very orderly.

Unfortunately, our pastor supports the resolution. I'm not sure what he is planning

on doing (as far as staying or leaving the church), and I'm not sure how many members know what his stance is. However, there were many vocal participants at the meeting yesterday, and I must say I was proud to be a part of my congregation. After many sleepless nights, and many days of praying, studying, and searching, it seems most of my congregation feels as I do. It was a great relief!

A committee is being formed within our church to come up with a response to the General Synod's actions, which will be voted on at the annual congregational meeting in December. *(name withheld by request)*

**O**ur deacons will recommend to our Church Council and our Quarterly Church Conference several things. Continue endorsement for The Lexington Confession and Faithful and Welcoming. Continue affiliation with UCC. OCWM spending will be determined on a quarterly basis and not necessarily to the SOC-UCC, but may fund other historic UCC institutions and mission.

Propose changing the name of the church to Monticello Community Church. This would take place gradually as we change the name on the front outdoor sign and stationery. We would retain affiliation with the UCC. We would recommend not supporting or funding open and affirming projects or the God is still speaking campaign. We would notify the churches in the Northeast Guilford Ministerial Association and the community throughout Guilford County that we dissent with the GS positions through The Lexington Confession and Faithful and Welcoming. We would continue to work with the Renewal in WNCA Committee and work for change in WNCA and hoped for change in the SOC and beyond. *Gary Owens, Browns Summit, NC*

**I** am the council president for Zion UCC in Metropolis, IL. During our first council meeting following General Synod 25, 28 member of our congregation showed up demanding that the council take immediate action in response to the marriage equality resolution. We decided to take the lead in the Illinois South Conference and developed the Southern Illinois Statement of Confession on Same Gender Marriage Equality. *Kelly Stratemeyer*

**A**t our August meeting Council came to a consensus agreement that the resolutions of the UCC General Synod can potentially impair our ability to effectively deliver our mission and wider ministry. In light of that, council approved a motion to seek information on alternative affiliations to evaluate whether our mission and ministry might be more effectively served in a denomination or association outside of the United Church of Christ. . . Council is gathering information in preparation for congregational focus groups to be held during the month of October where we

**Continued on page 14**

## UCC CAUSES DEEP HURT

Continued from page 13

can openly discuss the resolutions, their significance to our mission and ministry, and explore responses our church might choose to make. *Christ UCC – Kulpville, PA*

The congregation of the Hemingford Congregational United Church of Christ unanimously rejects the General Synod resolution embracing same-gender marriage. We stand united in our shock and dismay regarding the manner in which this delicate issue was addressed. We grieve the impact of that action in our local church and the church body across Nebraska and the entire country. We grieve the loss of members and friends who have left and are leaving. *Pastor Jim, Hemingford, NE*

With all due respect I fail to see how one more affirmation/declaration will do any good. According to Scripture there comes a time when you must shake the dust from your feet. My feet are shaking and the dust of the unbiblical, heretical UCC is being cast from them. It is my full intention to lead my congregation out of the UCC. May God have mercy on their souls.

*Mark A. Hampton, Louisville, KY*

Our family left the UCC over two years ago for the very reasons that BWF is fighting. That is, UCC's departure from Christ, the Bible, Christ's teachings, etc. The painful news of these blasphemies opens family wounds that only Christ has been able to heal.

We reject the heresies committed by the denomination with its social agenda that so clearly goes against scripture. We have personally witnessed and battled the evil that has crept into the church in the name of social justice and its insidious, secular humanistic message. We have seen Christ followers led astray by these messages.

Though we fought the same fight for years that you now pursue, we have had to give over to God what is His. For only He will judge. When Satan was invited into our previous UCC church and allowed to reign over its flock such that the Word was so twisted or no longer preached, God revealed to us how this abomination and our fight against it was destroying our family. We asked and I believe, received His blessing to carry Christ's message to others who were lost, turn this particular battle over to Him, and save our family.

We will continue to fervently pray for you in your efforts to reinstate Christ as the head of the church. We know that this is a heavenly battle and we know in the end, who wins. We commend you for your convictions in Christ and we pray for the mighty and powerful Holy Spirit to burn in your hearts as you wage this battle. Though we now carry God's message in other venues and another denomination, we will never stop praying for our brothers and sisters who have united as BWF to win back the church and seek the flock's reunion with Christ the Good Shep-

herd. Blessings to you in the precious and powerful name of Christ Jesus, our Lord and Savior. *Mark (via email)*

I'm not sure I will stay in my church. I know that I will not support the UCC any longer, I will not give one cent to them for any reason because I do not trust them. They lie. If my church will not move OCWM from their budget I will not support my church and that makes me very sad. The people in my church are my church family and I would miss them very much if I was to leave. The UCC has sinned in what they have done I believe they do not care for us common folks in the pew only for their social political agenda.

I feel the only way to send a clear and concise message is to stop all funds to the UCC at both national and state levels, we can use the funds for people in our communities who also need help. I will keep on praying, I feel God is moving me to take stand against this evil that has infected the UCC. And I believe it is terminal. The people who have done this I thought were educated, they call themselves wise, but have become fools in their thinking. *Dave (via email)*

How do we, as a congregation of 800 members who are probably 90% thinking the "right" way, do this, when we have an interim minister from UCC whose sole purpose and agenda is to bring us into UCC thinking?? In the past 15 years or so, we have functioned as the First Congregational Church, and had nothing to do with UCC. We never heard a report, or news, but now we are in search of a new pastor, and have a UCC interim who sent the UCC newsletter to all members recently. This was the first we heard of the left wing, anti-Bible actions of UCC. I am 54 years old and was raised in this church. My parents were very involved, and believe me — this is NOT the church I was raised in (UCC). Many - many members are very upset. What do we do now? Obviously we cannot get our interim pastor to agree to the Lexington Confession, although, I know that most of our congregation would. This is such a delicate situation. The interim minister has been told to knock off the liberal UCC stuff, in sermons, but he hasn't. Isn't an interim minister supposed to HELP us? He is far from helping us. We lost members because of the hurt the previous minister caused; we lost members because he left; and now we will lose members because of WHAT the UCC has done. My parents — now gone — would be turning over in their graves over this.

Any guidance you can give, would be helpful. This whole UCC thing will divide, and possibly kill this church. WE have been in the same location, since 1842. Yes... 1842. Long before UCC ever existed.

Please help. We need to get back to the teachings of Jesus Christ, and not some interpretation of some modern "whatever's"....

We pray every day for this. *Jan (via email)*

## PUERTO RICO DELEGATION 100% FOR TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE

The following is the statement distributed at General Synod by the Puerto Rico Conference delegation. They were part of the 20% of delegates voting against the Marriage Equality resolution, an unusually high dissent rate for issues passed at Synod.

July 2, 2005

From: Rev. Luis A. Rosario, Conference Minister and The Puerto Rico Conference

To: General Synod Delegates

The Grace of God and the love of our Lord Jesus Christ are with all you.

The United Church of Christ PR Conference (Iglesia Evangelica Unida de Puerto Rico) is opposed to all kind of same sex marriage proposal, by the following reasons:

The United Church of Christ PR Conference (Iglesia Evangelica Unida de Puerto Rico) affirms that all persons were created by God as sexual beings. Sex is the biological expression of the gender, this refers to the physiological and biological aspect of being a man or a woman. Sexuality is the conjunction of biological, emotional, spiritual, social, and cultural factors are related to the condition of been a man or woman and the influence of those factors in their behavior. A sexual relationship should be the expression of the love and the unity of a couple inside the marriage, in addition to the pleasure experience and the procreation function.

The biblical tradition is consistent with

the rejection of the homosexuality, lesbianism, bisexualism, and other practices classifying them as abomination against God. This tradition is clear and unmistakable when was established the union between man and woman as a part of God's plan for the world. The UCC PR Conference pronounces that they are against not of the person but of the practice of homosexuality because we believe and understand that this alters the social order established by God.

*Marriage Definition:*

God establishes marriage in the love that a man and a woman declare to each other. This relationship it is established by a fidelity covenant, where both persons are responsible and made a compromise before God and society. Matrimony is love relationships where both parts grow together as a couple and as persons within it.

The United Church of Christ PR Conference (Iglesia Evangelica Unida de Puerto Rico) celebrates weddings for couples (as established man and a woman) that demonstrate a solid preparation for the beginning and the continuity of a healthy and stable matrimony relation based on the definition of marriage.

## UCC USES SYNOD RESOLUTION TO POLITIC AGAINST MARRIAGE

The idea that the local churches of the UCC would not be used politically in the fight against God-ordained marriage in the aftermath of the Synod resolution of last July has been quickly dispelled. Political advocates seeking to force states to 'redefine' marriage in their statutes are using the United Church of Christ to "prove" that the Christian Church does not stand in unanimity on marriage.

In New Hampshire, Interim Conference Minister William McConnell issued a letter to the Governor and legislative leaders on Feb. 7 on behalf of the Conference Council, calling on them to reject a majority report that reaffirmed the sanctity of marriage between one man and one woman. McConnell stated, "this past July, when the General Synod of the United Church of Christ passed overwhelmingly a resolution "In support of Equal Marriage Rights for All" it did not speak for all UCC church members. Nevertheless we believe that there is near unanimity among our 25,000 New Hampshire members in support of the precepts and principles, from Scripture and from our lives in community, which underlie the resolution and this letter."

In response, Rev. David Runnion-Bareford communicated to the Governor and Legislative leaders that McConnell's letter was incorrect. That a significant number of UCC members faithfully support the sanctity of marriage and that the Synod was a non-representative body in which the vast majority of

delegates did not represent local churches. He reassured the legislature that this was an issue on which Christians of all denominations stood in solidarity with the witness of our Lord Jesus Christ and the unanimous consensus of Christian faith through the ages.

In Maryland, Conference Minister John Deckenbeck of the Central Atlantic Conference joined with the implied consent of the local churches in his conference a "Friend of the Court Brief" on behalf of a lawsuit brought by the ACLU and "Equality Maryland," the state's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender advocacy organization opposing the sanctity of marriage in that state.

## CHURCH EXIT SURVEY

Rev. Vernon Stoop, Executive Director of Focus Renewal Ministries, recently conducted an informal survey of the more than 80 churches who have voted out the UCC since General Synod. He reports that in all but one case it was the congregation that initiated the study and decision-making process that led to the decision to leave, not the pastor.

For 30 years, Focus Renewal Ministries has worked with local UCC congregations to build Christian discipleship and develop spiritual gifts for ministry among lay members and leadership. To subscribe to their periodic newsletters, email: frmucc@aol.com

## Ex-Gays "Disappointed" in UCC Marriage Vote Applaud BWF Stance

Following the General Synod vote for equality in marriage for same gender couples, Exodus International president Alan Chambers said that the UCC's resolution lacked a "truly compassionate" approach to the issue and affirmation of homosexual behavior is not the answer for churches who want to reach out to those who feel alienated and excluded. "Embracing homosexual unions, but abandoning the very truth that could change lives may be politically correct, but it is not true compassion," said Chambers, a former homosexual who is now happily married. "Homosexuals need to know they are welcome at their local church, but they also need to know that hundreds of thousands of us have found freedom from the isolation and emptiness we experienced in gay life through the power of Jesus Christ."

James Hartline, the well-known ex-gay, ex-drug addict, living-with-HIV Christian activist in San Diego, California, personally called the Biblical Witness Fellowship office to thank BWF for its stand for against same sex marriage. A similar thank you came from Greg Quinlan, former homosexual and director of the Ohio-based Pro-Family Network.

## UCC Churches Celebrate "Evolution Sunday"

Instead of highlighting Racial Justice Sunday or Abraham Lincoln's birthday, a number of UCC churches were among nearly 450 Christian churches around the country planning to commemorate the 197th birthday on Charles Darwin on Sunday, February 12. "Evolution Sunday" began in 2004 and has drawn participation from a variety of denominational and non-denominational churches, including Methodist, Lutheran, Episcopal, Presbyterian, Unitarian, United Church of Christ, Baptist, and community churches. Rev. Mike Southcombe, pastor of St. John's UCC in Brighton, IL and moderator of the Illinois South Conference, joined the celebration, saying, "I find deep spirituality in the truths of evolution." Rev. Hal Chorpenning, pastor of Plymouth Congregational UCC in Fort Collins, CO asked congregants in his sermon, "Are you willing to allow your faith to be influenced not just by the biblical record but also by physics and biology, by history and archaeology, by art and music?" Patrick Bentrott, a seminary student and member of Sixth Avenue UCC in Denver commented to his local Colorado newspaper on how evolution discussions can reconcile scientific discoveries and faith, saying, "I think it's necessary in a post-modern society where you have to address science and not just be restricted to a text that was written between 2,000 or 3,000 years ago."

Source: *Chicago Tribune and Denver Post*  
EDITOR'S NOTE: Here are some websites on the Evolution vs. Creation vs. Intelligent Design debates with both theological and scientific arguments: [www.AnswersInGenesis.org](http://www.AnswersInGenesis.org) [www.discovery.org](http://www.discovery.org), [www.reasons.org](http://www.reasons.org)

## UCC Recruits Protestors for Ex-Gay Conference

On February 25th, A "LOVE WON OUT" Conference reaching out to those involved in alternative sexual relationships and their families attracted a record attendance of over 1750, the largest and most successful event of its kind yet. Meanwhile, the Southern Illinois and Missouri Conferences of the UCC helped recruit participants for demonstration held across the street from the Free Evangelical Church that hosted the event. In contrast to acts of vandalism against the church when the event was first publicized and the riot conditions which prevailed at a recent protest of a "Love Won Out" Conference at Tremont Temple in Boston, the demonstrators in St. Louis were largely peaceful. The Conference sponsored by ministries to those engaged in homosexual and bi-sexual behavior, is a new development in the effort of the mainstream church to reach out openly with the love of Christ.

## Call Me Malcolm

The UCC has produced a new film called *Call Me Malcolm*. It is a 90-minute feature-length documentary that follows seminarian Malcolm Himschoot's "journey of faith," his bodily transformation from woman to man, and his search for support and acceptance. In March 2005, it debuted at international film festivals in Riverside, CA and Cleveland, OH. It showed at General Synod in Atlanta and is currently circulating at other film festivals in the United States as well as being seen on college campuses and open and affirming churches in several denominations.

Says Filmmaker-Director Joseph Parlagareco, "Imagine a church producing a feature documentary for film festivals - about a transgender minister. People are always amazed when I mention that the UCC is our partner in this film."

According to Rev. Michael D. Schuenemeyer, the UCC's Executive for Health and Wholeness Advocacy and Minister for LGBT Concerns, as part of Wider Church Ministries, "*Call Me Malcolm* is part of UCC's effort to provide resources for churches and other organizations to explore and nurture God's extravagant welcome that includes lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender persons." Schuenemeyer says the film is unique in this topic and genre "because it focuses on gender identity as it relates to matters of faith, spirituality, vocation, and human personhood."

"What's most notable about *Call Me Malcolm*," says a review in Planned Parenthood's "Choice!" Magazine website, "is the positive light it casts on the transgender experience, without glossing over the dif-

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## NEWS FROM OUR UCC SEMINARIES

*Rising costs and shrinking enrollments have impacted the UCC related seminaries causing reductions and changes in staff, downsizing and renting out facilities, and changing curriculum to attract more students.*

### CTS Expands Curriculum

Chicago Theological Seminary has developed 2 new courses. A six-week on-line class called "Biblical and Theological Self-Defense for the United Church of Christ" will begin March 27. CTS President Susan Thistlewaite, an editor of *The New Testament and Psalms: Inclusive Language Version*, is teaching the class to equip lay people to engage a theological debate and respond to criticism of the UCC progressive stances. "I often attend Conference and Association events, and, all around the country, I hear people saying that they feel as if they are under attack," she states, "and they feel ill-equipped when someone says 'Why do you go that gay church?' or claims that the UCC's social and theological positions are 'against the Bible.'"

Also added is a "first of its kind" course on the theological perspectives of abortion rights. This class entitled "Theology and Reproductive Choice" is sponsored in conjunction with the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC) and its Seminar-ians for Choice and Clergy for Choice projects as a way of "developing and preparing the next generation of pro-choice clergy." The course syllabus includes feminist theological perspectives, pastoral care and reproductive decision-making in the context of world religions, and the philosophy and ethics of being pro-abortion and is being marketed to seminaries and universities across the country.

In January 2006 Chicago Theological Seminary launched its new Lesbian and Gay Religious Studies Center. Its mission is "to generate and propagate the intellectual capital in religion that provides the depth of analysis needed not only to counter distorted religion, but actually to offer sound religious arguments for equal rights for LGBT people from a religious perspective." The first research being done by CTS Assistant Professor of Worship Dr. Scott Haldeman is "examining broad questions arising from the 25th General Synod of the United Church of

### Bangor Moves



September 7 Convocation ceremonies at UCC's Bangor Theological Seminary included a march from BTS's historic campus on Union Street to its new home across town in Bell Hall on the campus of Nasson College. Increasing expenses and declining student enrollments forced vacating the multi-acre northern Maine facilities. The seminary still seeks a buyer.

Christ's resolution 'In Support of Equal Marriage Rights for All' and has posed the research question 'Are we sure about this? Three questions to ask about marriage.'" Research results will include materials that bring "the realities of queer lives into dialogue with the tradition" and recognize "the real opportunity presented to the church 'as same-gender' weddings are sanctioned and celebrated widely." Says Haldeman, "Perhaps we can together imagine ways to marry that 'wed well', that last, that foster life and hope and joy. What a gift to all people that would be."

Source: [www.ctschicago.edu](http://www.ctschicago.edu)

### Eden Rents Out Space, Cuts Staff

With the new year, Eden Theological Seminary began sharing its campus with the Institute for Peace and Justice, an independent anti-violence advocacy group with close ties to Roman Catholicism. IPJ moved from its offices across town into the UCC seminary's Webster Groves facility. "Both institutions care deeply about the promotion of peace and justice in our common life," says Eden President and Professor of Preaching and Worship Dr. David M. Greenhaw. "The location of IPJ at Eden is a nice sharing of space and program with will certainly lead to new partnerships." IPJ executive director is also excited about the possibilities, "We feel like it stretches our contacts and puts us in close connection with colleagues at Eden - both faculty and students - and with the many others who come to the campus to study and learn."

Eden began the 2005-06 school year without a half dozen key administrative staff positions. There is concern among students and faculty about the Justice issues this presents because the workload being added to remaining employees is without an equitable increase in compensation. [www.eden.edu](http://www.eden.edu)

### Twin Cities United Gets New Leadership

United Seminary of the Twin Cities president R. Scott Colglazier resigned on Dec. 13 after less than three months in the post. His replacement, Kita McVay, was chosen for her management skills as well as her theology background. Said Ron Vantine, chair of the seminary's board of trustees, "After examining a number of options, it became obvious that Kita's skills as a business executive, combined with her degree in theology, make her an excellent choice for this leadership position." There were no allegations of wrongdoing or any disagreement or negative incident. "It became clear almost from the beginning that what the school needed and what I consider my best gifts was just not a good match," Colglazier told *DisciplesWorld*.

Source: [www.unitedseminary-mn.org](http://www.unitedseminary-mn.org)

# TIME-LINE FOR UCC ANTI-ISRAEL ISSUES

**1959-2000** – 33 resolutions and statements by General Synod and Instrumentalities of the UCC on Middle East affairs.

**2002** - UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries endorses the World Council of Churches Decade to Overcome Violence focus on Israel/Palestine. DOV's poster proclaims, "End the Illegal Occupation of Palestine."

**July 2003** – Rev. Naim Ateek, a Palestinian Anglican priest and head of Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center is a plenary speaker at General Synod 2003 in Minneapolis. The *UCNews* reports, "He began his keynote address with appreciation for the long support that the United Church of Christ has given his work in Jerusalem. Two mission workers have been assigned to the liberation theology center and the Wider Ministries board presented him with an award "for such a time as this" in 1999 for his leadership of Sabeel. . . . At the conclusion of his address, Ateek was greeted with a prolonged standing ovation and a promise from General Minister and President John H. Thomas that the UCC will continue its commitment to the search, prayers and efforts for a just peace in Israel and Palestine."

**July 19-25, 2003** – UCC delegation travels to Middle East with UCC President Thomas, retiring Executive Minister of Wider Church Ministries Dale Bishop, Global Ministries Secretary for Middle East and Europe Peter Makari, and UCC ecumenical officer Lydia Veliko. Their itinerary includes a visit to Sabeel and a meeting with Palestinian President Yassar Arafat in Ramallah.

**July 2004** - Presbyterians Church (USA) General Assembly votes in favor of several measures opposing the Israeli "occupation" of Palestine and calling for the denomination to begin the process of "selective divestment" of stocks and other holdings in multinational corporations doing business with Israel. The delegates also condemn Israel's security wall and denounce Christian Zionism as a legitimate theological stance.

The Rev. Victor Makari, the PC(USA)'s liaison to the Middle East and the father of UCC/DOC Common Global Mission Board's Middle East secretary Peter Makari, supported the divestment strategy, saying, "I think the issue of divestment is a very sensitive one with Israel. . . . If nothing else seems to have changed the policy of Israel toward Palestinians, we need to send a clear and strong message."

**February 2005** - World Council of Churches endorses the PC(USA) plan for divestment from Israel, urging its 347 member denominations to give "serious consideration" to pulling investments out of Israel in protest of what it sees as mistreatment of Palestinians.

**February 2005** – The Jewish Anti-Defamation League issues a letter questioning why the churches are not considering constructive alternatives to divestment, and charging that a new UCC/DOC resource guide written by Peter Makari misrepresents facts about the struggle between Palestinians and Israelis since 1947. Makari's resource paper is entitled "The Palestinians, Israel,

and the Churches' Economic Leverage: A Resource for the United Church of Christ and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)."

**June 2005** – The Simon Wiesenthal Center, one of the largest international Jewish human rights organizations with over 400,000 member families in the USA, begins a petition drive to oppose the proposed UCC resolutions calling for divestment in Israel and to tear down the security barrier.

**July 1, 2005** - Simon Wiesenthal Center holds a press conference before Synod urging delegates to defeat the proposed resolutions "hostile to the State of Israel." "If these ill-conceived resolutions are passed, they will prove devastating to relations between the UCC and the Jewish Community and do irreparable damage to the fragile Mid-East peace process," said Rabbi Abraham Cooper, Associate Dean of the Center. He was joined on stage by UCC Synod delegates and visitors BWF Executive Director David Runnion-Bareford, Calvin Synod Bishop Emeritus Louis Medgyesi, UCCUnity.com founder Don Niederfrank, and Dexter Van Zile, lay UCC member and Director of the David Project's Christian Outreach Program.

**July 5, 2005** - UCC approves the resolution "Tear Down the Wall" and a resolution calling for financial sanctions including divestment of companies doing business with Israel. The process at Synod was as controversial as the "economic leverage" resolution itself. After the Committee labored late into the night to rewrite the measure so as to reflect the complexity of the situation and culpability for violence on many sides and to eliminate divestment language on recommendation from UCC financial heads, UCC officials including John Thomas, Bennie Whiten, Lydia Veliko and Peter Makari, but not Pension Board representatives, write an alternative measure that restores divestment language. This is presented as a substitute resolution and passed.

**July 5** - Jewish leaders condemn the UCC resolutions that call for Israel to dismantle its "anti-terror security fence" without asking Palestinians to stop the terror attacks and for companies to use "economic leverage" to promote peace in the Middle East, calling them "functionally Antisemitic." (see box on this page)

**July 6** - BWF issues apology to Jewish people for actions of Synod. (see box page 17)

**July 7** - Letter of protest from Pension Boards head Michael Downs about the process at Synod. "We will carefully consider the language and respond as we are able within the constraints of our fiduciary responsibilities. We assume that there will be thorough review of the process leading to the action taken by parliamentary experts to determine if this is a legal resolution." . . . "Finally, the point of this letter has . . . everything to do with the precedent setting implications of voted actions, integrity of process and trust. What will the process be next week, next month or next Synod when an important matter with similar complexities must be considered for action?"

"Our members are protected by court directives that are very clear on the roll and responsibilities of a fiduciary. I am thankful for the "polity wisdom" of past church leaders that understood and appreciated the necessity of discrete decision making oversight. The Pension Boards will adhere to a strict interpretation of our fiduciary responsibility, and UCC polity."

**July 8** –Neil B. Goldstein, Executive Director of the American Jewish Congress writes to John Thomas urging him to disavow the "Economic Leverage" and "Tear Down the Wall" resolutions. "These resolutions are destructive and do nothing to help settle the conflict in Middle East, which is a moral, religious and human tragedy for all affected. On political and humanitarian levels they will do nothing whatsoever to help relieve the suffering of Israelis and Palestinians, but they have already created much justified frustration and anger throughout the Jewish community," says Goldstein. "I cannot overstate the negative consequences of these resolutions within the Jewish community, and the need for repair and healing. The Jewish community's cooperative work with the United Church of Christ on the important issues of peace and justice have been compromised by these resolutions."

**July 9** –More than 170 Palestinian groups inside and beyond the "Occupied Territories" call for a widespread boycott and divestment campaign. It is unclear if this received encouragement from the UCC decisions. *Source: www.warresisters.org*

**July 27, 2005** – Disciples of Christ at their General Assembly do not call for divestment but do vote in favor of a revised "Breaking Down the Dividing Wall" similar to the UCC's resolution "Tear down the Wall." Peter Makari, again defends the measure, saying: "Even if it is temporary, the wall has unmistakable characteristics of permanence. And it is having devastating effects on daily lives of Palestinians." The DOC proceedings blocked testimony by a suicide bombing survivor. The UCC and DOC are united in missions through the Common Global Ministries Board. Makari heads up the Middle East division for both denominations.

**August 2005** – The Evangelical Lutheran Church of America at their National Assembly reject divestment and accept the recommendation of their Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Jewish Relations to focus on "positive investment" as a better way to foster peace in the region. "There's a world of difference between these and those who would use economic bludgeons against the state of Israel," says Rabbi Gary Bretton-Granatoor, interfaith director of the Anti-Defamation League. The ELCA also criticized Israel's security barrier, but vowed to call attention to the suffering of Christians in Lebanon, Egypt and Jordan. Consequently, the ELCA is the only mainline church to acknowledge the suffering of Christians who do not blame Israel for their suffering.

**October 2005** -Sabeel "road show" travels to Chicago, Denver, Iowa and San Fran-

## Wiesenthal Center Calls UCC Resolutions "Functionally Antisemitic"

*The following statement by Rabbi Abraham Cooper, Associate Dean of the Wiesenthal Center, was issued on July 5:*

"There is a genocide in Darfur, an occupied people in Tibet, persecutions of religious leaders in China, the disappearing of Christians into the North Korean Gulag, but the UCC leadership has passed a divestment resolution against only one nation, the nation of Israel. The UCC also voted to **demand that** Israel lay her citizens defenseless before Palestinian suicide terror.

"By treating Israel within a different moral yardstick that the rest of the world, these moves are functionally antisemitic, undercut the forces of peace and moderation, and embolden the forces of terrorism.

"Finally, these resolutions make a mockery of a previous commitment by the UCC to combat antisemitism. The concerns, hopes and aspirations of world Jewry have been swept aside and relations with the Jewish community have been severely damaged.

"By virtue of these actions, the UCC has disqualified itself as a legitimate partner for a just and equitable peace in the Holy Land."

*The Simon Wiesenthal Center is one of the largest international Jewish human rights organizations with over 400,000 member families in the United States.*

cisco before headlining a World Council of Churches convocation in Toronto, co-sponsored by the UCC on Oct. 26-29. At "A Call for Morally Responsible Investment: A Non-Violent Response to the Israeli Occupation" organizers refuse admittance to UCC member Dexter VanZile from the David Project Center for Jewish Leadership and member of the Coalition for Responsible Peace in the Middle East. He was barred because he offered a differing perspective.

**October 2005** – The Episcopal Church executive council approves a report by the Social Responsibility in Investments Committee that rejects the proposal to divest in favor of "positive investment" among Palestinians and "corporate engagement" with Israel. Says the report, "The goal is for selected companies to change behavior resulting in a more hopeful climate for peace. If the church simply divests, nothing positive has happened."

**November 4-9, 2005** - UCC delegation again visits Israel and Middle East. Reports on the UCC website from John Thomas, Lydia Veliko, Central Atlantic Conf. Min. John Deckenback, and Peter Makari condone Ateek's use of deicide (killing Jesus) language in speak-

## BWF OFFERS APOLOGY TO OUR JEWISH FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS

FOR THE ACTION OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

July 6 - CANDIA, NH — On behalf of the many thousands of United Church of Christ members who opposed any action by the United Church of Christ against Israel at the 25th General Synod in Atlanta, we apologize to our Jewish friends and neighbors both here and in Israel for the action of our Synod and leaders.

We recognize that the two resolutions passed by the Synod, one calling for divestment and the other for Israel to "Tear Down the Wall," create a deepened liability to the safety of our Jewish friends. The resolutions as they were proposed and debated openly equated the only democracy in the mid-east region with the apartheid regime in South Africa and the murderous, enslaving tyranny of Soviet communism. Such comparisons can only serve to encourage anti-semitism and give comfort to those terrorists who have criminally murdered over 1000 Israeli citizens and maimed over 7000 using teenagers and women as homicide bombers.

We recognize with sorrow and deep concern that these misguided actions by the United Church of Christ in General Synod 25 violate our commitment to peace and justice. Indeed they seriously threaten the relationship between Christians and Jews that has evolved since the horror of the holocaust. We must never forget that some of our theological as well as historic roots are in the liberal church of Germany that abdicated responsibility when faced with history once before.

### Thanks for Moral Clarity

While I have communicated with you since the UCC Synod by email, I wanted to take this opportunity to write directly and personally to thank you on behalf of the 400,000 constituent families of the Simon Wiesenthal Center and the Jewish community for your solidarity and moral clarity in opposing the onerous anti-Israel resolutions that were adopted in Atlanta.

*G-d bless you and yours,  
Rabbi Abraham Cooper  
Simon Wiesenthal Center*

### Appreciate Your Courage

As a Jew with a deep professional and personal interest in the Jewish-Christian relationship both in the past and in the present, I am writing to express my profound appreciation for your courageous and profoundly moral "apology" for the action of the UCC regarding Israel.

I cannot tell you how gratifying it is to see a statement so clear and so forceful denouncing the inversion of morality that is tragically overtaking significant segments of what is seen as mainstream Protestantism.

*David Berger, Broeklundian Professor of History, Brooklyn College and the Graduate Center, City University of New York*

ing of Israel's treatment of the Palestinians.

**December 2005** — Richard Toll of Friends of Sabeel North America issues a statement denying that Sabeel ever explicitly called for divestment from Israel, but instead targeted the "occupation."

**January 2006** - Palestinian elections put Hamas, the terrorist network most responsible for suicide bombings of Israeli civilians, into power. Concerns about the peace efforts are raised when Hamas says it intends to employ Islamic Sharia law, which would make Jews and Christians second class citizens.

**February 8, 2006** - BWF calls on the UCC to break its silence and denounce Hamas.

**February 10, 2006** - UCC President John Thomas issues comments dated Feb. 3 on Palestinian election results voicing optimism that Hamas would stop its violence, alter its anti-Israel rhetoric, and work toward a two-state peaceful existence.

**February 2006** — UCC President and General Minister John Thomas and Peter Makari, Executive for Europe and the Middle East, Common Global Ministries Board of the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) call for construc-

tive engagement with the Palestinian Authority after its voters put Hamas in control of the Palestinian parliament. Hamas continues its stance that denies Israel's right to exist.

Dexter Van Zile from the David Project Center for Jewish Leadership points out that "Divestment for Israel and constructive engagement for Hamas is emblematic of the UCC's stand on the Arab/Israeli conflict. We hold Israel to a utopian standard of conduct and the Palestinians to no standard at all."

**February 2006** — Sabeel founder, Rev. Naim Ateek encourages church leaders at the World Council of Churches meeting in Brazil that a boycott against Israel "would be a wonderful thing."

*Sources: Religion News Service, www.ucc.org*

*The opinions expressed in the editorials on the pages of "The Witness" are the personal views of the respective writers and may or may not reflect the opinion of the Biblical Witness Fellowship, its supporters and member congregations.*

## THE FEAR THAT DARE NOT SPEAK ITS NAME

By Dexter Van Zile

On Sunday, Sept. 4, Muslim extremists set more than a dozen Christian homes on fire in Taybeh, a town under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority. The arson was part of an anti-Christian riot provoked, in part, by an investigation into the death of a Muslim woman who was allegedly poisoned by family members after they discovered she was romantically involved with a Christian man from Taybeh.

Reports about the riots offer images of Molotov cocktails thrown at houses and of families being beaten in the streets as they run from their burning homes. Israel was blamed for not responding soon enough despite the fact the town is under PA control. Blaming Israel draws attention away from problems in Palestinian society that undermine confidence in a two-state solution, which has long been the stated goal of Israel's critics in the U.S., who kept mum about the riots.

One group which has remained curiously silent about the attacks is the leaders of mainline Protestant churches in the U.S. who have criticized Israel for the suffering of Palestinians, Christians especially, and for the construction of a security fence they assert undermines the viability of a future Palestinian state. To be fair, the leaders of the Presbyterian Church (USA), the United Church of Christ, the Disciples of Christ and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America have focused a lot of their recent attention on the undeniable suffering in New Orleans caused by hurricane Katrina, but in light of their relentless criticism of Israel, their silence about the violence in Taybeh is disconcerting.

All these churches have been generous in their support for the cause of Palestinian nationalism and have never passed up an opportunity to condemn Israel. The PC(USA)

for example, passed a resolution that portrayed Israeli occupation of the disputed territories "at the root of evil acts committed against innocent people on both sides of the conflict." The United Church of Christ and the Disciples of Christ recently demanded that Israel take down a security fence without asking the Palestinians to stop the attacks that made it necessary. And the ELCA's Churchwide Assembly recently approved a "Peace Not Walls" campaign that authorizes the use of church resources in the campaign to force Israel to take down the security fence, without asking for any concrete concessions from the Palestinians.

Why did these churches remain silent about the Taybeh riot after issuing a steady diet of anti-Israel resolutions? The answer is simple. By remaining silent about the riot in Taybeh, Protestant leaders are able to avoid answering difficult questions about their relationship with prominent Palestinian Christians who have encouraged churches in the U.S. to pass resolutions condemning Israel. As the riot in Taybeh demonstrates, Christians in areas under the control of the PA are subject to Muslim violence, but neither their leaders, nor Protestants in the U.S. who purport to speak for them have offered a word of condemnation of this violence. Criticizing Israel is safe, condemning Muslim violence potentially lethal.

Until Protestants in the U.S. start speaking publicly about Muslim attacks, Christians in the disputed territories will continue to suffer from the fear that dare not speak its name.

*Dexter Van Zile is Christian Outreach Director for the David Project - Center for Jewish Leadership. He is also a member of Allin Congregational Church (UCC) in Dedham, Mass.*

### Theological Perspective

*by Rabbi Eugene Korn, Rabbi Eugene Korn is director of Jewish affairs at the American Jewish Congress and adjunct professor of Christian-Jewish studies at Seton Hall University.*

Much of Palestinian liberation theology emanates from Sabeel and the Rev. Naim Ateek, its director. Ateek's writings and speeches are saturated with crucifixion language. The Palestinians, he maintains, are being "crucified" daily. This is not merely an account of Palestinian suffering, but more pointedly a relentless accusation of Israeli (i.e. Jewish) sin. He consistently describes Israeli Jews as modern-day "Pharisees" and "Herods." "Jesus is on the cross again with thousands of crucified Palestinians around him...The Israeli government crucifixion machine is operating daily," writes Ateek in his 2001 Easter message. In Christianity's name, he is teaching people to see Jews as baby killers and murderers who block humanity's salvation. During recent [October 2005] Sabeel conferences in Chicago and Iowa, Ateek and others repeatedly described

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### Historical Perspective

*by Messianic Rabbi Henry M. Morse of Congregation Sha'ar Hashamayim in Stoughton, MA.*

The accepted premise among many is that the Palestinians should have the right to govern themselves in the land that they have occupied for centuries. They present themselves as the ancient people who have been in the land from the beginning and are now under occupation by the Zionist oppressors. Very few know this but there are no such people historically, ethnically or otherwise known as Palestinians. The word Palestine came into existence when in 132 AD, after putting down the second Jewish revolt, the Emperor Hadrian rebuilt Jerusalem into a Roman city naming it after his family name, *Aelia Capitolonia*. He also changed the name of Judea, Samaria and Galilee to "Syria Palestina". This ascribed to the land a name connected to Israel's archenemies the Philistines. Both of these acts were done to erase the connection of Israel and Jerusalem from the Jewish people. This name has stuck with the land from that time hence. It has since been anglicized into

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## HISTORY OF ISRAEL

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the name Palestine. The Philistines no longer exist as a people. I dare any Arab to trace his ancestry back to the Philistines. I was under the impression that they traced their line back to Abraham through Ishmael. They can't have it both ways. They are either children of Abraham or Philistines. . . .

Concerning the issue of there being an ancient people named Palestinians who have occupied the land for centuries, this is not true. All one must do is look at the historical record of the region by various writers and historians. . . . The report of the Palestine Royal Commission quotes an account of the Coastal Plain 1913: "The road leading from Gaza to the north was only a summer track suitable for transport by camels and carts. No orange groves, orchards or vineyards were to be seen until one reaches Yavne village. Houses were all of mud. Schools did not exist. The western part, towards the sea was almost a desert. The villages in this area were few and thinly populated. Many villages were deserted by their inhabitants." . . .

The period of time between 1516 and 1917 was under the rule of the Moslems. This was known as the Turkish rule. During this 400 year rule the land was sparsely populated, poorly cultivated, and widely neglected. This was the case because when the Jews were thrown out of Israel under Hadrian's rule the land was neglected for the next 2000 years until 1918 when under British rule Lord Balfour declared that Israel should be a home land for the Jews. It was at that time when Jews returned to the land they made the desert bloom. (Isa 51:3)

It wasn't until the Jews came back to their homeland and made it habitable, cultivated the land and brought industry and infrastructure to Israel that the so called "an-

cient Palestinians" wanted anything to do with this land. The word "Palestinian" that we use to describe these people today before 1919 referred to any one who lived in the land at that time, this was Jews and Arabs. After 1919 "Palestine" was considered that portion of land in the Middle East that was designated for the Jewish people as a homeland. This homeland included what we know today as Jordan east of the river and Israel west of the river. The Jewish presence in Israel has been for 3000 years. Islam has only been in existence since approximately 600 AD. The Palestinian Arabs as we know them today have only been around since the time Jews started coming back to their land.

When Jews started moving back to the Land in the 1880s they purchased land from absentee Arab landlords who lived in Cairo, Damascus and Beirut. The price paid for this land was at an exorbitant rate of \$1000.00 an acre. The land at the time was either malaria infested swamps or barren deserts. In contrast rich black soil in Iowa was selling for \$110.00 an acre that same year, as stated by the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture.

What we need to keep in mind is that the entire Near East was carved up by the nations that were in control at various and sundry times. Countries were made and dissolved as a result of the political needs of the ruling powers. This certainly was the case when in 1948 the land that was promised to Israel was whittled down to 17.5 % of the original land promised to them when "Palestine" was designated as their homeland. In 1946 Jordan was created and the land known as Palestine was now artificially reassigned to mean the land west of the Jordan River.

Where was world outcry then when the poor Palestinian Jews were loosing their land to the imperialistic Arab Muslims?

On May 14th 1948, when Israel was declared a nation by the UN, it shrunk even

more when the West bank and Gaza Strip were declared a separate Palestinian State. Each time Israel was being carved up, the Jews accepted the land that was given them. Each time the Arabs got more land they demanded more. In 1949 King Hussein, who is a Saudi Arabian, ignored the UN partition and annexed the west bank to Jordan. May I remind you that Jordan was in the original boundaries of land that was promised to Israel as a homeland in 1919 under the British mandate. Why is it that promises to Israel mean nothing and can be broken at a whim without world outcry? Why is it that Muslim/Arabs can make demands that are not reasonable and get away with it while committing terrorist activities all in the name of the Palestinian cause, a cause that they have invented?

I find it rather odd that the "Palestinians" continue to make demands that are not reasonable, practical, Biblical or historically defended. Yet, the world and some in the church continue, in their ignorance, to respond to them. This is all done in the name of the poor oppressed people who just want to have their own land, a land that does not belong to them, but nonetheless their own land. I find it also odd that when they were offered the very same land they are demanding now during the UN partition in 1948 they refused it. My question to them would be, what is their motivation? Do they really want the land or are they more interested in the destruction of the Jews?

The world still wants to do everything in their power to keep them from that small little strip of land about the size of New Jersey. The Muslims have enough land collectively to make up a country the size of the USA including Alaska and Hawaii and 1/3 of Canada. Don't they have enough land to absorb these "Palestinians"?

Since its modern inception Israel has had to fight for its very existence. During WWII 1/3 of all Jews were wiped off the face of this planet. They have constantly been on the defensive for their very survival as a people. The day after Israel's independence, May 14th 1948, every bordering Arab nation sent troops to join with the Jordanian forces in a war of aggression against this fledgling state. They descended upon the "Zionist imperialists" to "Push them into the sea" They were outnumbered by 100 to 1. Israel, which had virtually no heavy artillery, no tanks, and only four decrepit airplanes, had to defend itself against Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Iraq! That's 600,000 Jews against 45 million Arabs, while the United Nations did nothing. After a series of attacks, counter-attacks, and truces, the war ended on January 7, 1949. In 1967 and again in 1973, the same aggressive coalition waged war against Israel to end its existence.

It just does not make sense for this nation, fighting for its existence, to wage a war of aggression against the entire Arab world. Just 3 years prior, WWII ended with, as I said above, 1/3 of all world Jewry destroyed. This would have been a suicide wish. . . .

The quote following should reveal to you of the sentiment of the Jews at the time of their independence: "Accordingly we, the members of the National Council met together in solemn assembly today and by virtue of the natural and historic right of the Jewish people and with the

support of the resolution of the General of the United Nations, hereby proclaim the establishment of the Jewish state in Palestine to be called Israel. . . We offer peace and amity to all neighboring states and their peoples and invite them to cooperate with the independent Jewish nation for the common good of all. . . With trust in the Rock of Israel, we set our hands to this declaration at this session of the Provisional State Council in the city of Tel Aviv on Sabbath Eve, 5th Iyar 5708, 14th day of May 1948." . . .

The nation of Israel as we know it was created by God. Before Abraham there were no Jews. He is the father of the nation. The children of Israel are not a race they are a family. They are the children of Abraham. These children were promised a land and a special job description. This is found in Genesis 12:1-3. . .

More theological and historical background is on Messianic Rabbi Henry Morse's blog at: [www.shaarhashamayim.org](http://www.shaarhashamayim.org)

## ISRAEL AND THEOLOGY

Continued from page 17

Israelis as immoral, power-hungry, and demonic. By resurrecting deicide images and age-old anti-Semitic caricatures, Ateek plays to extremists and anti-Semites everywhere.

Liberation theology also assaults Judaism and Jewish identity by erasing the Jewish people from the Bible: "If the Exodus is the story of any people, it is actually the story of us Palestinians," writes Mitri Raheb, a Palestinian Lutheran minister. The biblical covenant is no longer between God and the Jewish people, but a general pact between God and any oppressed people. Judaism is superseded and Jews replaced by Palestinians in this tendentious political reading of Scripture. One presenter at the Chicago conference defamed Judaism by superimposing a picture of an attack helicopter on the image of Judaism's holiest object, the Torah scroll. Judaism and the Jewish people have no positive value in this old-new theology. Worse, they are again the Antichrist.

Of course, when Jews are erased from the Bible, Jews forfeit any right to their historic homeland. Ateek says this explicitly in his books: "I accept the establishment of the state of Israel — although not its right to exist." During a discussion I had with Ateek in Jerusalem last month, he repeatedly denied Israel's right to exist, claiming that Jews should set up a homeland in Europe. Ateek accepts Israel tactically "for now," until the Jewish state can be liquidated by a one-state solution. Palestinian Authority legal adviser Michael Tarazi, yet another speaker in Chicago, insisted that "the time for a two-state solution has passed, so the obvious solution is one state."

The denial of Israel's right to exist is familiar: It is the position of the terrorist organizations Hamas and Islamic Jihad, and it echoes the tired position of Arab rejectionists who have perpetuated the conflict since 1948.

Relying on old teachings that fostered hatred of Jews and Judaism, Ateek and his colleagues are 50 years behind the Christian theological developments that have done so much to promote healing and mutual respect.

From: A 'Liberation Theology' Enslaved to Anti-Israel Fantasies - [www.njjewishnews.com](http://www.njjewishnews.com)

## UCC LEADERS OVER THE EDGE?

Continued from page 10

'calcified'. . . They have meetings . . . that are anti-UCC . . . and they invite people to lead them that suggest that anyone who doesn't agree with them is participating in what amounts to the spread of a holy virus."

Connecticut's Conference Minister Davida Foy Crabtree began her October annual meeting address with a very dark view of the world. While whom she intends to demonize is somewhat ambiguous, some interpreted her remarks as a bizarre allusion to her critics when she claimed, "people who are led by fear need absolute answers to control their lives. They want to be only with people who think like they do, or believe like they do, or vote like they do. It's a human impulse. Pastorally, we are called to understand it and to minister to it. We are not, however, called to feed it, because at its root it is faithless and atheistic. When a people allow their lives to be led by fear, they are not responding to the God of faith. Instead, they are controlled by the principalities and powers of this world, those who would capitalize on their fears and exploit their vulnerability. Those principalities and powers will

always lean in the direction of lockstep adherence to a single way of thinking. For it is in their very nature to control. That's what makes them the demonic forces they are."

More recently, she has more explicitly joined in with the conspiracy chorus, writing, "turmoil is being stirred intentionally through misinformation spread over the internet. We have made multiple efforts to address these distortions, exaggerations and lies, but have found it difficult since so much is being done surreptitiously."

In Illinois, Conference Minister Jane Fisler Hoffman alleged in a letter circulated to several churches that a recent letter sent to UCC Congregations by the Calvin Synod Bishop calling the UCC back to Biblical principles was in fact sent by Biblical Witness Fellowship. Challenged by one Sr. Pastor about the error of her allegation, Hoffman responded that she intended to let the misinformation stand. Sources: [www.ucc.org](http://www.ucc.org), [www.psec.org](http://www.psec.org), [www.soc-ucc.org/soc-ucc/ConfMinLtrs.html](http://www.soc-ucc.org/soc-ucc/ConfMinLtrs.html), [www.ctucc.org/news/20051022\\_confminaddress.html](http://www.ctucc.org/news/20051022_confminaddress.html)

# BWF - REMEMBERING 2005

## Welcome

Biblical Witness Fellowship welcomes its newest member churches:

Congregational Church in Wentworth, NH  
 Garfield Park UCC in Indianapolis, IN  
 Zion UCC in Lawrenceburg, IN  
 Christ Church in Leck Kill, PA  
 Salem Church in Klingerstown, PA

## Saying Good-Bye

### BWF LOSES VP

On July 31, 2005 Ernest "Pastah Karl" Schrader said "Howdy" to the Lord after battling cancer for many months.

His smile, stories, humor, faith, and wisdom will be much missed by his family,

his friends, and the many lives touched by his ministry. At his funeral, it was noted that his love of light-houses reflected his life of faith dedicated to being a beacon for Jesus Christ has made a difference for the Kingdom of God. His servant's heart put others' needs ahead of his own. He had a strong commitment to church renewal and the UCC. During his three years in Bryan, TX, Karl's ministry went beyond the walls of Faith UCC and included weekly services at the area nursing home, extra help for underprivileged Hispanic grade school students, neighborhood evangelism, college ministry, Crop Walks, leadership in the local ecumenical ministerial association, discipling teen girls at Genesis House, among many others. A fundraiser to cover medical bills drew hundreds of non-church members from around town and raised over \$10,000. The Governor made him an honorary Texan.



Ordnained in 2002 in the United Church of Christ, Karl was a graduate of Bangor Theological Seminary. While in seminary, he ministered in Sebec, ME. In 2004 he joined the Board of Directors of BWF and served as Vice President. He was a participant and then on the leadership team of the Summer Institute for Renewing the Historic Church.

"Our faith will be tested," he wrote in an article for the FAITHFUL & LOVING JOURNAL while he was sick, "but we need to stand firm to the belief that a church needs to have the Word preached; the Sacraments rightly administered; and, most important, the Holy Spirit as work within the body." We say, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

In tribute to him, BWF has named a scholarship in his honor. It will be given annually to a seminary student with a call and dedication to renewing churches in the UCC.

## BWF Founder Defends Terri Schiavo

Barbara Weller, founder of BWF and currently an attorney with the Christian Law Association, was on the legal team for Terri Schiavo, fighting to keep the disabled but alert woman alive. Read her account of Terri's last days at <http://www.cogforlife.org/schiavoweller.htm>

### DIANE KNIPPERS

In the Spring of 2005, we lost Diane Knippers to glory when she died of cancer at age 53. Diane, the President of the IRD for 12 years, was an extraordinary Christian leader in the life of our times. Named just before her death by *Time Magazine* as one of the 25 most influential Christian leaders in America, Diane was a dynamic force for renewal in the Episcopal Church. She brought the renewal movements of all the mainline denominations together in unity and forged important ecumenical ties between the mainline churches and the evangelical mainstream. Beyond her accomplishments, however, Diane was a personal friend whose love for Jesus Christ shaped all she did. Personally she became one of the most important people in my life, teaching by model a spiritual focus, graciousness, discipline and integrity that changed my life.

— David (Runnion-Bareford)

### HANK YORDON

One of the great losses of 2005, was the passing to glory of Rev. Hank Yordon, a great voice in the UCC, leader for Civil Rights, and a great pastor. He was until his retirement, pastor of First Congregational Church in Norwalk, CT. In response to his death, BWF Executive Director writes:

*It is a holy privilege to have been touched by the Spirit-filled life of Hank Yordon. God's presence in and through him was a powerful encouragement to faith. Since I was a relatively young pastor in Connecticut, Hank has been a mentor as well as an inspiration. We shared a deep faith in Jesus Christ and a life commitment to racial justice. By letter, telephone, and sometimes by sending back something I had written well marked up, Hank encouraged, defended, affirmed, challenged and critiqued my ministry over the years with a discernment that tempered and matured me. I am deeply grateful and praise God for Hank's faithfulness and model. His strong simple admonitions often colorfully but lovingly expressed have guided my work. His affirmations were timely encouragements from God that my heart needed sorely at that moment. It has been remarkable to share a life possessed of God that cared about so many, and to have been one of them. Thank you, Hank.*



FAITHFUL & LOVING JOURNAL began in the Spring of 2005. It is a new BWF publication highlighting principles and examples of local church renewal. The first two issues covered *Praying Your Church to Life and Church Identity and Call*. The next issue will be on the importance of preaching the Word of God. For a subscription or back issues, call 1-800-494-9172, email [uccrenew@aol.com](mailto:uccrenew@aol.com) or check the website: [www.uccfaithfulandloving.org](http://www.uccfaithfulandloving.org)



At the 2005 SUMMER INSTITUTE for Renewing the Historic Church, Rev. John Rankin shared his expertise on engaging our culture with love and truth. Rankin's apologetics ministries Theological Education Institute (TEI) and Mars Hill Society can be found at [www.teinetwork.com](http://www.teinetwork.com) The 2006 Institute for pastors and seminarians will be August 14-18, in Candia, NH Call 1-800-494-9172 for flyer and application.



"The UCC? Yes, Mr. President, I am doing all I can."

Last Spring, President George W. Bush invited 15 representatives of the mainline Protestant denominations to a private meeting to discuss areas of mutual concern. BWF Executive Director David Runnion-Bareford represented the United Church of Christ.

## Summer Institute for Renewing the Historic Church

AUGUST 14-18, 2006 ~ CANDIA, NH

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Standing for Biblical Truth and Marriage at GENERAL SYNOD. Above, BWF President Bill Boylan fields questions from the press after the marriage vote. Below, Executive Director David Runnion-Bareford prepares to defend the resolution affirming Jesus is Lord and the Cross-Crown-Orb logo during the plenary debate.



BWF Associate Executive Director Liz Claver and husband Bob, members of the UCC church in Candia, NH receive an "extravagant welcome" at UCC's 700 Prospect Avenue headquarters. The photographer was really moved.

## HELP US TELL IT LIKE IT IS!

Support the Voice of Biblical Truth to a Denomination in Confusion

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# Friends for Life NEWS

**"Open your mouth for the  
speechless, in the cause of  
all appointed to die."  
Proverbs 31:8**

## Skin Cells May Produce Embryonic Stem Cells

A team from Harvard's Stem Cell Institute claims that they've utilized adult skin cells in company with an existing embryonic stem cell line to produce new embryonic stem cells (ESCs). ESCs could be procured without destroying human embryos should this procedure prove to work.

Other sources of embryonic stem cells are available, and may yet prove to be more effective, among them stem cells taken from umbilical cord blood and adult fat cells.

This new technique, if workable, would provide embryonic stem cells that are basically new versions of a person's skin cells. The DNA in the stem cells would match that in the original skin cells, making it possible to use tissue grown from the new stem cells to treat disease in the donor without fear of rejection.

Meanwhile a number of researchers point out that adult stem cells have already proven effective with dozens of human diseases. All such treatments, of course, completely sidestep the ethical concerns involved with stem cells derived from embryos destroyed through the harvesting process. *Source: National Right to Life News*

## Planned Parenthood Targets African American Communities

Susan Enouen, in an article in the Life Issues *CONNECTOR*, writes that African Americans are targeted disproportionately by Planned Parenthood abortion facilities.

Margaret Sanger, founder of Planned Parenthood, initiated the "Negro Project" in 1939 as one aspect of her advocacy of birth control. Blacks belonged to one of the population groups Sanger considered "unfit" to reproduce, in large part because of the higher incidence of poverty in the black community at that time.

Though Planned Parenthood would no longer sanction such a blatant approach, there is a growing body of evidence that suggests that PP has deliberately established abortion facilities in areas where "surrounding black populations were measurably higher than either the city or state average." This was true of over half of PP's abortion facilities nation-wide.

African American women have accounted for over 14 million abortions since 1973, over 36% of all abortions done in the USA since that time, and this despite the fact that blacks constitute only 12.3% of the American population.

*Source: October 2005 issue of Life Issues*

*CONNECTOR*. Anyone wishing to pursue the issue further should read the new book by Angela Franks, *Margaret Sanger's Eugenic Legacy: the Control of Female Fertility*.

## Fetal Pain Controversy

The controversy over fetal pain took an up-tick recently with the publication of an article published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. The authors of the article, following a review of existing medical literature, asserted that fetal pain is non-existent before the 29th or 30th week of gestation.

Response from the pro-life community was swift and detailed. In a memo authorized by the National Right to Life Community, Douglas Johnson offered several objections:

◇ The JAMA article reviewed existing literature. No new laboratory research was reported

◇ The article was written by advocates of abortion

◇ A number of researchers are on record as stating that unborn children are capable of feeling pain as early as 20 weeks

◇ Neonatologists working with prematurely born infants (some as early as 23 or 24 weeks) routinely observe them responding "negatively to painful stimuli—e.g., grimacing, withdrawing and crying."

The U.S District for New York's Southern District, as part of a legal challenge to the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban in 2004, among several formal "findings of fact" established that partial-birth abortion was a gruesome and painful procedure.

The issue of fetal pain is the subject of a new bill now before Congress, the Unborn Child Pain Awareness Act (S.51, H.R. 356). Abortion providers, should the bill pass, would be forced to provide information about fetal pain to women seeking abortion, as well as methodologies available to reduce or eliminate pain during the abortion. *Source: National Right to Life News, Sept 2005*

## Peter Singer Predicts Collapse of "Sanctity of Life" Ethic

Peter Singer, a professor of bioethics at Princeton University, predicts that the traditional Sanctity of Life ethic will collapse by the year 2040.

The driving force will be science and technology, and the increasing numbers of men and women who will then be over 75 years of age, and who will insist on choosing the time and means of their death. "The politi-

cal pressure for allowing terminally or chronically ill patients to choose when to die will be irresistible." [Singer, "The Sanctity of Life, Foreign Policy, Sept/Oct 2005)

Singer has been a consistent advocate of euthanasia and abortion. He has suggested that the law be changed so as to allow parents of disabled newborns a period of time following their birth to ponder whether to keep their child, or to have them (legally) put to death.

Opposition to Singer's views are widespread, and he is perhaps "the most internationally protested philosopher alive."

*Source: Update: International Task Force on Euthanasia & Assisted Suicide, 2005, Vol 19, No 3. For more information on Peter Singer, see: www.notdeadyet.org*

## Cloning Debate Goes On

A new report on cloning by the Genetics and Public Policy Center observes that state laws regarding cloning for human reproduction vary widely. A few states have banned cloning, a few others research, while California will actively support stem cell research, having voted several billion dollars for research in a referendum in the November 2004 elections, and which will include the possibility of cloning. The variety of public policies reflects the rapidity of change in scientific research, the fact that many attempts at cloning animals fail, and the fact that a substantial number of American citizens fear a "Brave New World-like civilization in which people intentionally are designed for the use and control of those more powerful."

However, the report makes clear that the wording used in polls makes a great deal of difference. When a recent Gallup poll asked whether embryos should be cloned just for research, only 38% of respondents were supportive. Another survey which avoided the use of the word "cloning," substituted the phrase "somatic-cell nuclear transfer" (which is exactly what cloning is) and stressed its medical value, 72% were supportive.

The US House of Representatives passed the Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act during the last week of May, 238 to 194. This act would permit researchers funded by the government to use stem cells obtained from embryos leftover or rejected following in vitro fertilization efforts. Private research firms already have developed hundreds of stem cell lines with such embryos. The US Senate has yet to vote on the bill, and President Bush has vowed to veto it should they do so.

One of the unfortunate aspects of cloning, with its emphasis on the use of embryonic stem cells, is that proponents ignore the growing success of adult stem cell research. Embryonic stem cell research, though its ad-

vocates have promised much, has to date proved ineffective in producing actual medical benefits. Further, Embryonic stem cells can trigger rejection responses in recipients, and cannot be properly targeted or controlled with regard to the growth that is desired. In animal studies, the result has often been uncontrolled tumor growth. The most serious ethical objection is that the use of these stem cells results invariably in the destruction of the embryos from which they are taken.

Adult stem cells, in contrast, are not ethically objectionable, for they do not involve the destruction of innocent human life. Moreover, there is no rejection factor for the recipient of these cells can be the donor of his or her own stem cells as well. Thus far, successful cells includes repairing skull bone damage, liver repair, regenerating heart muscle, Parkinson's disease, sickle cell anemia, and rheumatoid arthritis.

*Source: Medical News Today; DateLife*

## U.N. Rejects Cloning

The United Nations General Assembly, in a move which surprised many, voted March 8, 2005, to adopt a U.N. Declaration which called on all members "to prohibit all forms of human cloning inasmuch as they are incompatible with the protection of human life."

The United States, Honduras, Costa Rica and Italy were some of the strongest supporters. The vote was 84 to 34, with 37 abstentions. Six other nations who missed the vote have stated that they would like their votes to be counted as part of the UN's official record, as supporting the declaration, bringing the total supporting nations to 90.

Jeanne E. Head, the U.N. representative for the National Right to Life Committee, states that "The Declaration is an important and significant step toward recognizing the dignity of all members of our human family and protecting all human life."

*Source: National Right to Life Committee*

## Mother Sues Hospital for Failure to Abort Twins

The absurdities connected with abortion continue. One of the latest occurred in Scotland when Stacy Dow, a 20 year old Scottish woman, after giving birth to a healthy baby girl, sued her hospital for 250,000 pounds because her baby girl was not effectively aborted along with her brother.

Dow discovered she was pregnant with twins while a nursing student, and sought an abortion for them. Assured it was successful, she continued her studies. But having gained weight, visited her doctor only to learn that only one of the twins had been aborted. Being

33 weeks along, she continued the pregnancy and gave birth to her daughter, Jayde, now three years old. Dow's logic is that since the abortion of her second child failed, the hospital should be responsible to help pay for her daughter's education. The hospital claims that they were convinced the abortions had been completed.

Jim Hughes, National President of Campaign Life Coalition, commented: "You can have your children taken away by the state for abuse, but if you want them dead, as long as it's before birth, it's OK and you can sue if a hospital fails to kill them. How far does this have to go before we wake up to the insane evil of abortion."

Source: *Life Date*, Summer 2005

## Friends for Life

Send correspondence and tax deductible contributions to:

**Friends for Life**  
c/o Rev. John Brown  
Shepherd of the Hills UCC  
527 Hoffmansville Rd.  
Bechtelsville, PA 19505  
Tel: 610-754-6446  
sothJBrown1@aol.com

## Spiritual Renewal and Cultural Responsibility

Commentary by Rev. Dr. John Brown

Concern for renewal and the life issues go hand in hand. Spiritual renewal, as I understand it, is about helping individuals and churches regain the historic and biblical perspective of the Gospel. It is a perspective with a practical bent, for it is a way of life meant to be lived out, and shared with others, through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Gospel is unique in that it provides a basis for reconciling sinful human beings to God through the atoning death of Jesus Christ. At the same time, in that God's love and concern extend to every person, it provides a basis for reconciling human beings to one another, and emphasizes the importance of treating others with respect and compassion.

The Christian worldview has led Christians through the centuries to oppose infanticide, slavery, racism, unjust wars, and child labor practices. It has, moreover, contributed in many other ways to building a culture of life, through the establishment of schools, universities, hospitals and nursing clinics. A number of scholars have also argued that modern science arose and was nurtured within the framework of the Christian worldview. There have been numerous failures, of course, when the Church deviated from the principles and purposes given by her Lord, Jesus Christ. In such instances repentance and renewal have been, and remain, the only proper response.

We rightly honor the Barmen Declaration, those who signed it, and its principal author, Karl Barth. The Barmen Declaration was written and adopted by the Confessing Church in Germany in 1934, in response to the idolatrous programs of Hitler's Third Reich, and in defense of Jesus Christ, and the Christian Church of which he was and is the Lord. But as Karl Barth was later to acknowledge, the Barmen Declaration failed utterly to address the Jewish question. The Christian Church and the Gospel of Jesus Christ was indeed under attack, but so too was the Jewish community of Germany, and all of Europe. The failure of the Christian Church to speak up for them, despite the courageous example of a few, forms a sad chapter in the history of the Church.

The responsibility of the Christian

churches today is to stand for the truth of the Gospel, while at the same time responding to threats against human life and dignity. Today in the early years of the 21st century we face new and unprecedented challenges to life and human dignity, and to the integrity of the Christian Gospel. They include abortion, eugenics, and genetic engineering. Part of the challenge is to discern what is to be accepted and what must be opposed. Abortion and euthanasia, and the attitude of the eugenicist which discriminates against certain classes of people (e.g., the mentally and physically handicapped), must be opposed forthrightly and persistently. Genetic engineering takes greater discernment in that numerous techniques have, and undoubtedly will, prove to be ethically acceptable and medically beneficial.

Other developments, however, such as embryonic stem cell research and cloning, though they may promise certain health benefits, are ethically unsound insofar as such techniques dehumanize or destroy human life.

These battles are both cultural and theological. Those of us involved in spiritual renewal within the United Church of Christ must be concerned for speaking to both concerns in order to regain the theological perspective that the Gospel gives to understanding the purposes of God and the dignity of human life, while being salt and light in the wider culture. It is a venture we must share with all Christians who hold to the truth of the historic faith, for the scope of the battle is far beyond the resources of any one denominational or renewal group.



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# UCC IN THE NEWS

## RCA SEMINARY PRESIDENT DISMISSED

The Reformed Church in America (RCA), is no longer one of the few mainline denominations seemingly untouched by the controversies over the acceptance of sexual vices. At the RCA's General Synod in June 2005, Dr. Norman Kansfield, President of New Brunswick Theological Seminary, was forced to retire, found guilty of heresy and stripped of his title of prof. of theology and his ministerial ordination after officiating at his daughter's wedding to another woman in the summer of 2004 in Northampton, MA. Trustees of the seminary reprimanded Kansfield "for taking a controversial public action while President... without prior Board discussion or approval." "It could have hurt the school if it divided people in our student body, if it divided our faculty, if it divided other people who support us," said the Rev. Larry Williams Sr., a member speaking on the board's behalf. At the same time, the board expressed its commitment to ongoing discussions as to the presence and participation of homosexuals in the church. While reasons for his dismissal focused on his role at the wedding, colleagues at the seminary suggest that other issues of leadership were also of consideration.

Kansfield's dismissal and censure has become a rallying point for RCA progressive leaders. A group of supporters called Friends of Norm presented a proclamation "Engage in Dialogue or Hold Us Accountable, Too" at the RCA General Synod suggesting that the denomination has been inconsistent in its stance. They state, "We feel that it is not only the actions of Rev. Dr. Kansfield that are on trial, but a set of convictions as well. . . . We believe that the Reformed Church in America ought to confess its sinfulness in adhering for too long to an oppressive position on homosexuality and ought to seek the forgiveness of its Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual and Transgendered brothers and sisters." This includes placing gays in leadership and blessing committed same-sex relationships. In October, the denomination approved a three-year dialogue.

Kansfield's daughter Ann, whose wedding precipitated the controversy, has completed seminary and seeks ordination in the RCA. She is currently the pastor of Greenpoint Reformed Church in Brooklyn and was a financial writer and editor for the UCC-related United Church Foundation in New York.

Dr. Kansfield joined his daughter on the speaker circuit recently as part of a Holy Relationships Conference on Theology and Sexuality held in October at his former school, New Brunswick Theological Seminary. Other notables at the 3-day event included Soul Force founder Mel White, Re-Imagining speaker and former UCC/DOC Common Global Missions Board chair Rita Nakashima Brock, Hartford's Amistad UCC pastor John Selders, and the authors of *What God Has Joined Together? A Christian Case for Gay Mar-*

*riage* David Myers and Letha Dawson Scanzoni. The event was partially sponsored by the UCC Coalition for LGBT Concerns.

In past years there have been overtures within the RCA advocating severing ties with the UCC because of our affirmations of homosexuality.

Sources: [www.FriendsofNorm.com](http://www.FriendsofNorm.com), [www.holyrelationships.org](http://www.holyrelationships.org), [www.RCA.org](http://www.RCA.org)

## CALL ME MALCOLM

Continued from page 15

facilities and challenges."

Executive Producers for the film include Robert Chase, UCC Director of Communication; Rev. Michael Schuenemeyer, who also served as consultant and spiritual advisor; and UCC minister Rev. William Johnson, founder of the UCC Coalition for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Concerns. Ordained in 1972 as the first openly gay minister in a mainline protestant denomination, Johnson was recognized by the UCC in 1999 with an endowed scholarship in his name for LGBT seminarians.

The real-life subject of the documentary *Call Me Malcolm* has become the newest openly transgender ordained clergy in the United Church of Christ. Rev. Malcolm Himschoot began a two-year appointment as outreach minister at Plymouth Congregational Church in Minneapolis, a liberal church seeking affiliation with the UCC (see story on page 7). He and his wife, a United Methodist minister, moved to the Twin Cities in August.

Rev. Pat Conover, a transgendered UCC clergy, told the Minneapolis *Star Tribune* that there are four openly transgendered ministers and a few seminarians in the UCC. He is author of UCC-published *Transgender Good News*, and one of the showcased dress-clad male speakers at the 2003 General Synod urging affirmation of "transgender" as an acceptable orientation. Conover also shared with the newspaper his own research and experience that suggest that congregations have been led by closeted transgendered ministers for years. He himself wasn't open as a transgender person when he ministered in local churches in the 1980s. He recently retired as director of the UCC's Washington DC legislative lobbying office after almost twenty years in that position.

Sources: [www.ucc.org](http://www.ucc.org), *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, *Planned Parenthood*

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## RESOURCES & REVIEWS

### HARDBALL ON HOLY GROUND

#### *The Religious Right vs. The Mainline for the Church's Soul*

Stephen Swecker, Editor

BookSurge Publishing, 2005, 128 pp.

Reading *Hardball on Holy Ground* brought back memories. Some years ago a dear friend going through a period of personal crisis became an ardent follower of Democratic presidential candidate Lyndon Larouche. Desirous that I share in his enlightenment, I was inundated with publications proving everything from the imminent peril of global economic collapse to the irrefutable "truth" that the Royal Family of England dealt in drugs.

Like *Hardball*, it was all plausibly stated as documented fact and well footnoted. Fortunately, my friend came to Christ, marriage, and restored sanity in that order and has gone on to enjoy a more balanced and trusting worldview, as well as producing a large, delightfully joyful family. In a very familiar manner, faced with a crisis, the leaders of the United Church of Christ seem thoroughly infatuated with *Hardball's* world of woven schemes as an explanation for their troubles. But, like the Larouche material, this polemic tract uses fragment and innuendo to create a distorted collage that is anything but a true picture of the state of renewal in the mainline denominations.

To its credit, *Hardball* offers three opportunities for those it attacks to respond, and these are the most articulate and coherent passages in the book. Diane Knippers, who before her untimely death, directed the Institute on Religion and Democracy; Jim Heidinger, head of Methodist's *Good News*, and Mark Tooley of IRD's UMAction, come across with a balanced grace and undefensive integrity that stands in Godly contrast to the rest of the book.

The book is filled with a lot of colorful connotation like comparing the present conflict in the mainlines to the conflict over slavery, and uses language like "lie," "demeans women," "mantra," "embedded," "right wing," "extreme," "advocates for schism," "takeover," "attack," "smear campaign," "blew his cover," "stealth operator," "desperate measures," "sedition," and such, without substance. It may be more exciting to cast your opposition as a pseudo-Mafia or foreign spy organization rather than people of principle and substance, but in church renewal nothing could be further from the reality.

Much of *Hardball's* smoke-and-mirrors attack focuses on the sinister connection between "extreme right wing" foundations that supposedly fund the renewal movements of the mainline denominations and their supposed puppeteer the evil Institute on Religion and Democracy. While few of these funds have in fact granted anything of significance to the movements themselves, *Hardball's* characterization of these funds is specious as well. A quick on-line view of three most prominent

funds the book attacks, illustrates how far-fetched their allegations are. The Bradley Foundation, self-described as "committed to preserving and defending the tradition of free representative government and private enterprise that has enabled the American nation and, in a larger sense, the entire Western world to flourish intellectually and economically." It most recently funded such extremist organizations as the Milwaukee Public Library, the "Building Excellent Schools" program of the city of Boston, The Black Alliance for Educational Options, the Hispanic Council for Reform in Education, and the University of Washington.

The arch-villainous Scaife Foundation's most recent grants included the American Red Cross, Accuracy in Media, Inc. (quoted in *Hardball* as a reliable source), the American Academy for Liberal Education, Boston University, The Salvation Army, and Tufts University. Its largest recipient in 2004 was that bastion of the radical right, Stanford University.

The Castle Rock Foundation, funded by the Coors Family of beer fame, whose purpose is to "promote a better understanding of the free enterprise system, preserve the principles upon which our democracy was founded to help ensure a limited role for government and the protection of individual rights as provided for in the Constitution, encourage personal responsibility and leadership and uphold traditional American values" has most recently funded the American Battle Monuments Commission, the John Wayne Cancer Institute, the Joseph Riding Hospice, and those ardent members of the religious right, the President and Fellows of Harvard College.

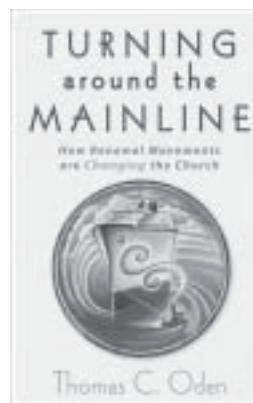
Painting their dramatically dark picture with innuendo, the authors, "uncover" such deeply hidden and startling facts as these:

→ Mark Tooley, United Methodist staff reporter for the Institute on Religion and Democracy "called the bishops en masse fatuous and pompous." And is quoted saying, "statements from United Methodist Bishops are often inarticulate and sometimes downright nonsensical," (p. 10).

→ Diane Knippers claimed that the National Council of Churches had "exaggerated the church burning phenomena to promote a radical agenda" and that its officials "jaw-boned the church burning issue into a national crisis, absent evidence that black churches burn more frequently than white churches to raise money for its leftist political agenda," (p.14). *Hardball* fails to mention that it is well documented scandal that the NCC used funds raised with this dramatization to support unrelated programs.

→ "In a document, which is written as a

**Continued on page 9**



### TURNING AROUND THE MAINLINE *How Renewal Movements are Changing the Church* by Thomas C. Oden

Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2006, 270 pp.

Reviewed by Serena Sargent, UCC Member, Age 18

*Turning Around the Mainline* by Thomas C. Oden which is intended for a laity and church officials alike, advocates renewing movements within the modern Protestant Churches instead of splitting or leaving them. An overview of major renewal movements reads like a guidebook to the modern church.

Oden's overriding thesis deals with "describing and interpreting the renewing and confessing movements within the mainline," (11). The mainline is the American church in a crisis of faith. The problem Oden cites is coming "from within the church. Powerful voice within the denominational leadership grossly diminishes Christian teaching," (21). Buckling and surrendering to the teaching of modernity, even or maybe especially in the seminaries, has led to weak teachers and teachings within the church.

Repeatedly Oden states that laypersons are key to the recovery of orthodox beliefs by new Confessing Christians, which have a backbone of young standouts, as intrinsic to the health of the church. The difficulties and errors that have occurred within the church are the result of "modernized and liberated faith" which stresses inclusivism that ultimately results in "willful exclusion of orthodox and evangelical Christians," (26).

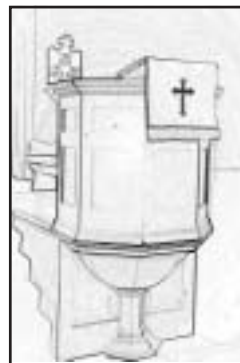
He pushes discipline not separation, and advocacy of repentance. Unity and promotion of the classic Christian beliefs should be central to all renewal movements. The reality check is "the whole truth may cost everything in the earthly sense," (188). Oden believes the Confessing Church is a necessary example to the mainline because "the church lacks confessional discipline," (197).

Christian books often meet a tragic downfall in talking down and sugarcoating the truth, especially when they are written for the laity. Not so with Oden's book, which is so in depth and laden with theological principles. Oden has numerous extras in his book that aid its cohesive flow and often help with understanding of details that may be over some readers' heads. These include a section of abbreviations, an introduction, a conclusion, brief appendix and notes. Comprehensive research is obvious in his exceptional use of primary resources to support the theme of *Turning Around the Mainline*.

The overriding picture he suggests in the introduction is carried throughout. Incidentally it is also the cover to the book, a large cruise style ship being pulled by a tiny tugboat. This is juxtaposed to the idea of renewal movements that can turn around the struggling churches of the United States. Think *The Little Engine That Could*; could make it up the mountain. Oden is suggesting that renewal and confessing movements in the church are the "Little Tugboat That Can."

If you are interested in the renewing movements of the church, this book is a prime read. Spanning denominations it gives more than just blurbs on what each movement is about, but also includes examples of what they have done and includes resolutions each has made on subjects such as the veracity of the triune, aspects of God in history, Jesus Christ's role in salvation and the Holy Spirit. His use of the statements from each movement does two things: Firstly to show what they believe to be within his definition of a renewing or confessing church and secondly to give the reader a sample of what resolutions of confessing movements should be saying.

*Turning Around the Mainline* will be an important book amongst church leaders and laity alike involved or interested in the regeneration of the American Church. The advocacy he has for staying within the large denominational structures of the American Church system is obvious and soundly argued. Well presented and well written, Oden's book gives a wealth of information and leaves most of the interpretation to the reader.



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## IMPACT ON THE WORLD

### GOOD NEWS IN IRAQ

The following is a December 2005 report on what God is doing in Iraq through one of our Mission Renewal Network projects - Sisters in Service. Candia (NH) Congregational Church is partners with this Iraqi Christian couple that is ministering in amazing ways to their nation.

Thank you for permitting us to interrupt your holiday schedule with a telephone update from Yousif and Alia Matty. They were pleased to receive such a warm welcome on so short a notice.

As you heard from Yousif, although the media paints a grim picture of Iraq today, God's people there have a different and very hopeful view. Yousif sees the day when the relative peace in Kurdistan will extend all the way south through Baghdad to Basra. The strong turnout for the recent parliamentary election is a hopeful sign.

While listening to Yousif and Alia over the past three days we experienced something we had not encountered in 30 years of international ministry. We realized that their plans for schools, churches, bookstores, women's centers, and youth programs amount to a nation blessing agenda. We've seen big plans before, but this one has the scope and potential to influence a nation.

I've never seen anything like it, and I'm pretty sure it's got God's finger prints all over it. What's more, it's achievable.

The plan is to establish women's centers, schools, churches, bookstores, radio broadcasts, and youth programs in the major cities of Kurdish Iraq. As these are established, Yousif says, the Evangelical Church of Iraq (ECI) will grow southward one city at a time.

It's achievable because God is in it, it's already happening, the programs are sustainable, and the people are ready to build a better future. It's a kairos moment, a window of opportunity reminiscent of Mordecai's words to Esther, "Who knows but that you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

For our part and with your help we will trust God to build the women's centers. Can you imagine sharing the love of Christ with Iraqi families from Irbil to Basra? We can and by God's grace we'll start with a new center in Irbil.

It's an opportunity we shouldn't pass up. With a center like this, the profound impact on each Iraqi woman and her family is relatively inexpensive. Once the initial investment is made it will continue to have an impact on families year after year.

"This is something new in Iraq," Alia says, "for a woman to be away from home for a few hours without her husband or brother for spiritual and personal life change." A women's center is a safe place for women to meet, build relationships, receive counseling, learn new skills, and discover the love of Christ. It's a liberating experience that women

are clamoring to enjoy.

That's because the ECI women's center is designed with Iraqi women in mind. The building is on three levels. Level one is a fitness center offering wellness programs and physical therapy. The second floor accommodates classrooms for a variety of training programs, a computer lab, and library. Level three doubles as a cafeteria/coffee shop and conference room for large gatherings. Each level offers unique opportunities for building relationships.

Alia estimates that in one year 200 women will frequent the center, not counting periodic visitors. Some 260 children will have access to the center, particularly educational programs and family entertainment. And to some extent 200 husbands will be influenced by the changes in their wives and children. "Already," Yousif says, "most men have responded positively to events hosted for them by the center."

According to Yousif, the center has another unspoken benefit. "It makes a statement about the human rights of women." At the center women are treated with dignity and afforded opportunity to learn, grow and come to know their inestimable worth. This is an agenda Yousif and Alia will press in a more public way in coming months.

We'll let you know how it's going or you can come and see for yourself. The women's center affords a variety of opportunities for involvement by American women. I'll tell you more about that as it develops.

In the meantime, we're asking God for the funds to build the three-story women's center in Irbil. The total amount is \$343,200, just over \$100,000 per floor, including equipment. Likely no one person or church will fund the whole amount, but if we join together in faith floor-by-floor, the Lord will bring this center to reality.

Once the capital investment is provided, it will continue to impact families as long as the center is in operation. That's why we believe it's an opportunity we shouldn't pass up. If God so leads, we'd love to have your partnership in this center, taking hold of this kairos opportunity for blessing the people of Iraq.

For His glory, Daniel Rickett, Ph.D.  
Vice President, Sisters In Service

For more information on how your church can partner with this and other projects reaching out to women and children in the most challenging places in the world, contact Sisters In Service, Box 987, #253, 1485 N. Valley Forge Road, Valley Forge, PA 19482, 484-928-4013 fax: 610-935-5560 [www.SistersInService.org](http://www.SistersInService.org)

#### HELP COMPLETE THE GREAT COMMISSION!

For info on partnering with these and other UCC related people and projects, call the Mission Renewal Network Coordinator, Liz Claver at 1-800-494-9172

### CHRISTMAS REACHES ORPHANS IN RUSSIA

What God is doing in Russia these days is absolutely amazing! And let me tell you what has been happening there lately.

While all the secularists and politicians here in the United States are debating about the political correctness of the word Christmas, many thousands of Russian orphan children and their teachers are participating in the Russian National Christmas art contest called Fantasies to Faith.

The results are astonishing! Out of 89 regions, 66 regions (or three quarters of the country), containing eleven time zones, participated in the art contest this year. Imagine this: there are 50 states in the U.S. If we added 16 more states to the union that would equal to the number of regions who participated in the contest. Wow! Isn't our Lord Jesus great!?

Tens of thousands of children, between the ages of 10 through 14, had an opportunity not only to showcase their painting skills, but to answer very specific questions about the real reason for Christmas. The motto of this years art contest was: The Star of Love and Goodness is Shining Above You, too. Every child had to answer the following questions:

1. What is the true story of Christmas?
2. What kind of national traditions of this celebration do you know about?
3. What does the Bethlehem Star mean?
4. How do you understand the words of this Motto?
5. How long have you been participating in this art contest?

It brings tears into my eyes every time I look back and remember how not long ago it was prohibited to even think about the Christ of Christmas. I also remember a time when I was a little boy and teachers would put me in front of the class to make fun of me for being a Christian. The school administration purposely lowered my grades to show the others how stupid I was, because I am a CHRISTIAN.

But today, the same government organization that was striving hard to take God from schools and the hearts of children is now helping TEAR to promote the Christmas art contest throughout the entire nation. Our Christmas art contest was featured in their largest national publication (50,000 copies monthly), the Messenger of Russian Education magazine with all the rules, regulations, motto and all the questions that you read above. This publication is a mandatory subscription for every school, college, university and orphanage directors in Russia, and it is supposed to be read from front to back by every one of them. Glory to God that now all of these directors of educational establishments have at least read about Christmas!

All of us Christians know that when Jesus is smiling Satan is angry. But, what we don't know is how much longer this art contest will go on. It could be stopped any time and I urge you today to join our hands together to reach more precious orphans and the adults who work with them, with the name of the new born Jesus. We thank all of you who helped us to make this happen and we would like to hear from you more.

Have a Very Merry CHRISTmas,  
Leo Semenov, President of TEAR  
The Evangelical Association of Russia  
4705 Pinecrest Drive, Acworth, GA 30101  
email: [leo@tear.org](mailto:leo@tear.org) [www.tear.org](http://www.tear.org)

#### Areas where you could get involved:

1. Become a Rock Partnering church and adopt an orphanage in Russia;
2. Go with our teams on a mission trip to one of the orphanages;
3. Come to our TEAR annual banquet (March 27th 2006 - see web for details);
4. Become a prayer/financial partner.

### HAYSTACK06.ORG

On an August Saturday in 1806, several Williams College students gathered in a field to pray about the spiritual condition of people living in Asian nations. When a thunderstorm arose the students took refuge in the lee of a large haystack. Summer of 2006 marks the 200th anniversary of this "Haystack Prayer Meeting" that began the modern Protestant mission movement. Six years later the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (mostly Congregationalists) sent forth its first missionaries overseas. "My hope is that many small groups of people will gather around the world to commemorate that prayer meeting and to use it to motivate them to pray for the fulfillment of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20) in our life time," says Phil Corr, pastor of First Congregational Church UCC in Charles City, Iowa, who is spearheading the Haystack 06 initiative. He notes that in Matthew 24:14 Jesus also says, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."

For more info, visit the Haystack06 website <[www.Haystack06.org](http://www.Haystack06.org)> provided by Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship's Urbana.org

### New Members of the Mission Renewal Network

A.C.T.S. (Aboriginal Christian Training Services, Inc.) seeks to evangelize the entire Australian continent through a ministry amongst Australian Aboriginal communities. This vision includes mobilizing prayer warriors around the United States, developing micro-enterprise opportunities, providing health care, building family relationships, and sharing the hope of Jesus Christ. The work is accomplished through numerous volunteer and Aboriginal paid staff. Australia registered itself as a non-Christian nation with the United Nations. The 7,000 Aboriginal communities are among least touched in the world. For more information, check their website: [www.Pray4ACTS.org](http://www.Pray4ACTS.org) or email: [frs@pray4acts.org](mailto:frs@pray4acts.org)

Faithful & Welcoming Churches of the UCC  
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## HERE I STAND!

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[www.evangelicalassociation.org](http://www.evangelicalassociation.org)

## HOW DO I JOIN THE BIBLICAL WITNESS FELLOWSHIP?

You can join the BWF by individual membership or by becoming a member if and when your congregation joins as a body. In either case, you should read The Dubuque Declaration found in the right hand column of page five in this newsletter. If you are comfortable with this statement of faith and can call it your own, you are invited to fill in one of the Application Forms below and send it to: BWF, 4150 Belden Village St. NW, Suite 601, Canton, Ohio 44718.

There is no membership fee or dues required. However, we believe those who join BWF will feel it is important enough to support prayerfully and financially. Our biggest asset is knowing that each month you and/or your congregation will be sending BWF a contribution because it is in your budget.

So, pray about it and join us in a ministry of renewal within the UCC.

### CONGREGATIONAL MEMBERSHIP

By a vote of the (council/congregation) on \_\_\_\_\_,  
(circle one) (date)

Church Name \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ hereby declares its membership in the Biblical Witness Fellowship, a confessing movement within the United Church of Christ. We affirm the testimony of Christian faith found in The Dubuque Declaration and pledge our prayer support and financial support of at least \$ \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_ (year).

We understand that this membership enables the members of our congregation to participate as they desire in the Biblical Witness Fellowship and also entitles our congregation to use the name and logo of BWF as it desires for identification purposes within the UCC. We understand that we may terminate our membership by vote at any time.

Pastor \_\_\_\_\_ Church President \_\_\_\_\_

Association \_\_\_\_\_ Conference \_\_\_\_\_

### INDIVIDUAL MEMBERSHIP

I affirm the testimony of Christian faith found in The Dubuque Declaration. I wish to be a member of the Biblical Witness Fellowship, a confessing movement within the United Church of Christ. I pledge my prayer support and my financial support of at least \$ \_\_\_\_\_ during \_\_\_\_\_ (year).

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email (for periodic prayer needs) \_\_\_\_\_

Local Church \_\_\_\_\_

Church Address \_\_\_\_\_

Association \_\_\_\_\_

Conference \_\_\_\_\_