

Leaders in Koinonia
Partnership in the Gospel, Partnership in the UCC, Partnership in Ministry

Two weeks ago I attended a three day conference in Cleveland with clergy who had come to the UCC from other faith traditions. This was a **fantastic** opportunity for me. Travel, housing, and meal costs were paid for by the Thomas E. Dipko Scholarship Fund for Clergy & Lay Leadership Development, so everyone could afford to attend. Participants came from the Great Lakes, Middle Atlantic, New England, and West Central regions of the UCC.

Beginning Wednesday evening, around thirty-five of us had the opportunity to experience tours of the church offices and attend meetings with national staff members. We enjoyed time to discuss common issues and concerns with other ministers from around the regions, and we shared morning and evening worship in the Amistad Chapel. John Thomas spoke to us about his experience as a young pastor being surrounded by other ministers who came from the same Congregational background. He used the example of his recently attending the 300th anniversary celebration of the church where he was baptized, which was also the service of ordination for this churches' new minister. The celebration began with members bringing up picture after picture of the white male clergy who had led this historic congregation. At the end of the line was the African American woman whom they had just called to ordination. He spoke about how the idea of the four traditional denominations that make up the UCC needs to expand to represent the diverse strains that we, and many congregational members, represent. He reassured us that rather than being an anomaly, we actually **are** the face of the United Church of Christ.

Two pastors representing previously Baptist and nondenominational churches spoke about their congregational decisions to join the United Church of Christ. An ordained couple from the African American Progressive Baptist Church also shared how their church was discerning that call, and about to vote on becoming UCC in the following week. This entire conference was an excellent opportunity to network, learn from clergy around the United States, and experience many aspects of our national church setting. I am very grateful for this opportunity, and I appreciate representing one of the strands of the many diverse faith experiences in the United Church of Christ.

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