

# COMMAntary: an e-newsletter of the Minnesota Conference - United Church of Christ

God is still speaking,

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Volume 5, Number 30

29 July 2009

## News of the Conference

### Message from the Conference Minister

I left the office with a briefcase full of work this weekend, so you can imagine my frustration upon learning that the "remote desktop" was not functioning, which left me without home access to many of the materials I needed. Seeking opportunity in the midst of this challenge, I spent Saturday afternoon setting up my Google page, watching myself introduce Krista Tippett (*Speaking of Faith*) at General Synod and listening again to her entire, excellent presentation. (I commend it to you, along with all the other videos in the gallery at [www.ucc.org/synod](http://www.ucc.org/synod).) I also took time to catch up on nearly a month's worth of UCC "Google alerts" unopened in my inbox, which led to an interesting effort at "meaning making."

It's hard to know what to make of the list of news articles Google identifies as mentioning the United Church of Christ, but here's what I found:

- There were a cluster of entries having to do with personal or institutional death. Obituaries of individuals with UCC membership appear, as do notices of the closings of UCC congregations - from New York to Nebraska and places in between. There was also a [US News and World Report](#) about the decline of the mainline in general and various denominational responses.
- There were about a half-dozen entries for Minnesota Congregations: a report that following a devastating fire this Spring, our St. Charles congregation is learning that the church is much more than a building and that in the past couple months attendance has increased and the sense of community has grown; a story about the Farmers' Market that takes place in the parking lot of our Cottage Grove UCC; and a piece about a peace garden grown by one of our members from St. Paul Park.
- There were articles about the remarks of Rev. Jeremiah Wright and a handful about the Obamas search for a church in Washington, DC.
- There were three postings about UCC church camps - the AP report cited recently in COMMAntary, another reporting on the recommendation of the Board of Directors of the Maine Conference to sell its Rockcraft Retreat Center ([article linked here](#)) and one more discussing the "dynamics that denominational camps face: 1) a declining pool of

potential campers in aging congregations; 2) fewer parents sending children out of denominational loyalty; and 3) a malaise among youth toward church" ([article linked here](#)).

- There were surprisingly few articles about the election of our new General Minister and President for the UCC, Rev. Geoffrey Black, further reflecting the decline in the interest in and assessment of the importance of the activities of mainline denominations.

What struck me most was that there were few stories reporting on vital and critical ministries in which the United Church of Christ and its member Conferences, Associations, and local churches are engaged. There were several reports on "[Bringing Betty Broadband](#)", the ecumenical and interfaith effort, spearheaded by the UCC, to bring broadband access and affordability to all Americans. And there were a couple of essays on the partnership of the Pennsylvania Southeast Conference with the Fellowship of Baptist Churches of Cuba. But that was pretty much "it."

So I find myself asking: What does this say? Does it simply reflect a media bias toward "bad news?" Or, are we so focused on maintenance and survival that we are not involved in serving God's people and healing/transforming God's world? Or is it simply that we are doing a poor job of "telling our story" through the news media? A new UCC slogan says: "Changing Lives: That's Our Church's Wider Mission." But how do folks know - particularly those who are not members of the United Church of Christ - what we are doing to change lives? What meaning do you make of my summary of two months' worth of UCC Google alerts?

One conclusion I draw is that all of us need to do a much better job of telling each other and the wider community and world about the ministries in which our settings of the UCC are engaged. I invite you to share your stories with your local media outlets, with each other, and with us in the Conference office. And, of course, I look forward to having Rev. J. Bennett Guess, Communications Director for the UCC with us this fall to help us communicate "across the generations."

I love the bumper sticker of the Illinois Conference UCC that says: "For God's sake, do something!" Let's commit ourselves not only to doing something for God's sake, but to telling others about it and inviting them to join us.

Karen Smith Sellers  
Conference Minister

### Joys and Concerns

1. We welcome Pastor Lora Sturm to St. John's UCC in Faribault, which is yoked with Nerstrand United Methodist.

Pastor Stern is a United Methodist minister and began July 1st.

2. Pilgrim Congregational Church in Duluth is sending a delegation of ten members and friends on a mission trip to Guatemala. They will be volunteering at Common Hope, a community development agency located in Antigua, Guatemala. Team members include Claire and Nan Hillmeyer, Morgan and Deb Mitchell, Stacey Achterhoff, Sarah Beaster, Bridget Stenaas, Joanie Fachtelkotter, Alex and Charlotte Frantz. In addition to volunteering, Charlotte and Alex will spend a day in Escuintla with Alex's birth family whom they found last summer during Charlotte's sabbatical.

3. We offer thanksgiving and Godspeed to Rev. Lev Reynolds who ended his interim ministry at First Congregational UCC, Austin, on Sunday, July 26, 2009.

4. We offer thanksgiving for Rev. Sandy Johnson, First UCC, Northfield, who on Thursday, July 23 ended her service as Chair of the Committee on Ministry. We are grateful also to Rev. Bridget Haefner, Peace UCC, Eden Valley and St. Matthew's UCC, Forest City, who has agreed to chair the Committee and to Rev. Jennifer Jaimez, St. Mark's UCC, Bloomington, who will be Vice-Chair.

5. We rejoice with Emerson UCC, Richfield, celebrating its 60th anniversary on Sunday, August 2nd. Past confirmands, members, family and friends are cordially invited to join Emerson Congregational, UCC in the celebration with a special worship service.

### Children and Youth Formation News

#### **Youth Ministry Leader Training & Retreat for Clergy & Lay Leaders (18 and older) August 28-30, 2009 | Pilgrim Point Camp in Alexandria, MN**

#### **Workshops offered:**

- Amazing Resources for Youth Ministry (Lori Heutmaker, Wayzata Community Church)
- Incorporating the Arts into Your Youth Ministry (Rev. Josh Blakesley, Penn Conference)
- Thriving and Surviving in Associate & Staff Ministry (Rev. Tom Ewald, Mac-Plymouth, St. Paul)
- How to Form a Youth Ministry with Few Youth, a Small Budget and Get Big Results (Rev. Lynn Shiery, First Cong., Mankato)

#### **Weekend retreat and training also includes:**

Awesome worship and time for spiritual self-care, DISC Leadership inventory for individuals and youth ministry teams, "Boundaries in Youth Ministry" discussion, networking with others in Youth Ministry, resource sharing,

time to plan upcoming year with your Youth Ministry team, and more!

\$100 for the first person/church,  
\$75 for additional team members

Registrations are **due by August 1, 2009**,  
so get them in now! (But we'll take them till we're full)  
[Find Registration forms by clicking here.](#)

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the Minnesota Conference presents the Fall 2009 CYE:

## **Pluralism: Putting God in More than One Box**

**October 9-11 or 16-18 | Pilgrim Point, Alexandria, MN**

**Early Registration: \$75/youth, \$50/adult**

Registration after September 14 - \$85/youth, \$60/adult

Deadline for all registrations is October 2, 2009

[Youth registration form is available by clicking here.](#)

[Adult registration form is available by clicking here.](#)

### **2009-10 Conference Directory**

Alison Bents will be working on updates, corrections and changes to the Conference Directory this summer. Please check the contact information for your church and yourself, and get changes to [alisonb@uccmn.org](mailto:alisonb@uccmn.org) **before August 1, 2009.**

### **UCC Warehouse Moving Sale**

The UCC Warehouse is making a move, and you can benefit from it now! **Shop online from July 13-August 15 to save 30-80% on over 200 titles.** [Click right here](#) to do some shopping, or call 1-800-537-3394.

All sales are final; no returns on purchases!

### **Have you returned your form?**

Your help in keeping clergy files up-to-date is greatly appreciated. All clergy with Standing in the Minnesota Conference should have received the **2009 Information Review forms** in May (by email or by post). To date, many forms have not been returned, and they need to come back to the office to keep our files up to date.

**Return your Information Review form as soon as possible to Marita in the Conference Office**

([maritak@uccmn.org](mailto:maritak@uccmn.org) or 122 W. Franklin Rm. 323, Minneapolis, MN 55404).

***If you have deleted the email, mislaid the form, or are having trouble filling out the form, contact Marita by email or at (612) 230-3371.***

### **Disaster Response Database**

We are looking to create a database for quick and easy access in times of disaster.

*If you are interested in lending a hand and helping in disasters (i.e. sandbagging near the Red River, assisting with tornado clean-up, etc.) email Alison Bents at [alisonb@uccmn.org](mailto:alisonb@uccmn.org) in the Conference office with your contact information.*

Our volunteer disaster coordinator, Rev. Bob Broeder will then have this information at his fingertips when a disaster occurs. Thank you!

## Upcoming Events

### Classical Guitar & Spirituality

**Tonight** David Malmberg will be at St. Paul's UCC on Summit Ave, St. Paul for an evening of Classical Guitar and Spirituality - for Fellowship and the Arts

*Wednesday, July 29, 6:30-7:30pm*

*St. Paul's UCC, 900 Summit Ave, St. Paul, MN 651-224-5809 - **This is a free event!***

**Please join us!**

David will play for us, and will also reflect on questions of music and the spirit. [David Malmberg](#) is a classical guitarist, vocalist, and composer. He is a disciple of Dona America Martinez Serrano, doctor of guitar at the Conservatory of Music, Seville, Spain.

### Attention All UCC 20 & 30 Somethings!

UCC 20/30 somethings are getting together for **kickball and fellowship** at Bryant Square Park Thursdays, **July 16th-30th**. The evening will begin with a picnic potluck at 7:00 pm followed by kickball at 8:00. Fellowship will continue after the game at Bryant Lake Bowl, 9:00ish. Come when you can. Bryant Square Park is located in S Minneapolis on 31st and Bryant just past Uptown. If it rains we'll meet at Bryant Lake Bowl.

### Justice LED

The National Setting of the UCC is delighted to announce that they will launch the **Justice Leaders Engaging and Developing - Justice LED training of trainers on October 9-11 in Cleveland!**

If you are interested in applying to be one of the 30 National Certified Trainers, please go to our new website at <http://www.ucc.org/justice/training> for information and application forms. **Application deadline is August 5.** Please contact Aisha Howard at [howarda@ucc.org](mailto:howarda@ucc.org) if you have questions or need more information.

### Minister's Camp @ Pilgrim Point Camp

There is still time to register for [Minister's Camp at Pilgrim Point Camp](#) August 9-14th. Just give me (Dee) a call (320-241-1394) or [an email](#) to let me know when you will be arriving and when your first and last meal will be. Lodging will be in [the Lodge](#) unless you'd like to be off on your own in one of [our POEM cabins](#) or perhaps you want to bring your mobile home or pitch a tent in [the campground](#). The staff look forward to hosting you and/or your family.

## UCC Web University

**28 August 2009, Friday 05:00 PM**  
**UCC Web University:**  
**Internet Technology in Vital Churches**

Does your congregation want to build an effective web ministry on the web but you are feeling technologically and financially challenged?

Join us for hands-on workshops on:

- How to build effective websites at low cost.
- How to increase traffic to your website.
- How to develop cost-saving email newsletters for your church.
- Best practices for safe youth and young-adult ministry on Facebook.
- Reaching your community through podcasting, testing and videostreaming.
- Safe and secure online fundraising.
- Introduction to myUCC-our church's new social networking community.

After the workshop, your church will have access to continuing online support from the UCC's team of web mentors as you begin to use the internet as a tool for ministry.

This is a hands on event so we need you to bring a wireless-equipped laptop. It's important enough to borrow one if you don't have one.

For more information and online registration: [UCC Web University](#)

## Save the Date

Action at the 47th Annual Meeting of the Minnesota Conference United Church of Christ postponed a vote on the budget until a Special Meeting of the Conference. An official announcement of that meeting will follow. For now, please hold the following date and time:

**Saturday, September 26, 2009**  
**beginning at 1:00 pm**  
**@ Wayzata Community Church**

The Board of Directors considered several venues but chose one that was easily accessible, had adequate parking, and had room to accommodate the number of participants that might be expected.

## 2009 Women's Retreat

Women's Retreat at Pilgrim Point

**September 18-20, 2009**

### Creating Space for Spirituality

Join friends, old and new, for a wonderful weekend of fun, fellowship, and relaxation!

#### Retreat Focus:

Join us as we explore ways to make room for spirituality in our busy lives. This fun filled weekend will include time for rejuvenation, opportunities to try new meditations, artistic expressions, and Taize worship.

Rev. Barb Martin, one of our retreat leaders shares this: "Creativity for me is a gateway to the sacred garden of my soul where I commune with God. Creating time and space for the sacred requires some intentionality and I hope we can share that with each other during our retreat time."

Please *share this info in your bulletins and newsletters*. Please make copies of the [linked brochure](#) and display the [linked poster](#).

## Save the Date

Make plans now to attend one or both of the Intergenerational Church events:

### *Communicating Across the Generations*

w. Rev. J. Bennet Guess, Minister and Team Leader  
for the Proclamation, Identity and  
Communication Ministry of the UCC

October 1-2, 2009 @ Christ the King Retreat Center,  
Buffalo, MN | [Meet and learn more about J. Bennett Guess on YouTube!](#)

### *Ministering to the Missing Generation*

w. Rev. Carol Howard Merrit, author of Tribal Church

October 30, 2009, 9am-3pm @ United Theological  
Seminary of the Twin Cities, New Brighton, MN

[Find more details, a flyer and registration information by clicking here.](#)

## Sing the New Century Hymnal

**Sing the New Century Hymnal with Art**

## Clyde

Spend Saturday, October 3rd at Pilgrim Point Camp singing the *New Century Hymnal* with its editor! Grab this amazing opportunity to learn the stories behind your favorite hymns, and hear the reasons they're included. Best of all, we will be singing together! Warm up your vocal chords and come on out for this wonderful experience!

[Learn more and download the registration by clicking here!](#)

### Celebrate Children's Sabbath - Oct. 16-18, 2009

This year's theme, Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow focuses on children in poverty, children's health care, and the pipeline to prison. In this time of economic hardship, it is more important than ever to insure that our children do not fall through the cracks. Children's Sabbath is a great way to get your congregation aware of and involved in children's issues. Join congregations across the country that will be participating in the National Observation of Children's Sabbath. See the [Joint Religious Legislative Council \(JRLC\) website](#) for more information about Children's Sabbath and to find stories from congregations who have participated in the past.

## Employment Opportunities

### Job Opportunities

Check out the Employment Opportunities portion of the Minnesota Conference Website. [Click here to see listings.](#)

#### *Current listings:*

- Part time supply pastor - Cong. UCC, Medford
- Interim minister - Grace UCC, Millville
- Youth ministry coordinator - Plymouth Cong., Mpls.
- Interim minister - Pilgrim Cong. UCC, Benson
- Christian education - Pilgrim Cong. UCC, Duluth
- Faith formation coordinator - St. Paul's UCC, St. Paul
- Youth choir director - Lynnhurst UCC, Minneapolis

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