



Prepare for Renewal!

At last year's Annual Meeting, General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ, Rev. John Thomas described a new approach to doing church. "We need a new imagination today, an imagination not for settled churches announcing open doors and warm friendship, but an imagination for pilgrimage and parading churches... anointed not just to hear Good News, but to bring Good News." The theme of this year's Minnesota Conference Annual Meeting, *Together, we will be renewed!* develops that idea. Our keynote speakers, Paul Nixon and Susan K. Smith, are very much "about" church renewal and its relevance to community, both local and global.

The Minnesota Conference is partnering with Local Church Ministries of the national United Church of Christ and Nickerson Coaching to revitalize up to a dozen "pilot congregations." The Annual Meeting this year also offers an additional revitalization opportunity for Minnesota Conference churches: to participate in a short-term program, designed by keynote speaker Paul Nixon and outlined in his book, *I Refuse to Lead A Dying Church*. Churches that have begun or

completed Nixon's program by the end of May 2009, are invited to bring a team to a special conversation with Nixon himself on Thursday, June 4th, 7-9 pm, at Mayflower Community UCC in Minneapolis. This session offers participating congregations the chance to consult directly with Nixon and to dialogue with other churches involved in the same process. Registration is required, and a fee of \$40 covers participation for up to four persons from each congregation. This special workshop will not be available during the Annual Meeting. It is a unique opportunity for churches to begin a program of active involvement in revitalization practices.

This year's Annual Meeting features music by the jazz duo CODA and other musicians, including Gigi Nauer (Pilgrims UCC, Maple Grove), Annual Meeting choir direction by Malcolm Anderson (First Congregational UCC, Anoka), and a children's program under the supervision of Grace Anderson (CE Director, Olivet Congregational UCC, St. Paul). Dana Mann (Union UCC, Elk River) coordinates worship services, with clear biblical and thematic threads. Associate Conference Ministers Rick Wagner and Elena Larsson, will lead

I REFUSE TO LEAD A DYING CHURCH BY PAUL NIXON

Paul Nixon Ministry Team Seminar

Thursday, June 4, 2009, 7:00-9:00pm
Mayflower Community UCC, Minneapolis

An intimate gathering with author Paul Nixon, reserved for ministry team leaders (clergy and lay) from churches who have begun or finished the 4-week participation plan outlined in Nixon's *I Refuse to Lead A Dying Church*, during the months prior to the Minnesota Conference Annual Meeting (June 5-7, 2009).

- Join in interactive, live consultation with the author of the book and the program
- Examine how Nixon's principles are applied in your own congregation & situation
- Bring your questions, get direct feedback for your own context, share insights

Registration cost: \$40 per ministry team (up to 4 persons)

Registration Deadline: Postmarked by May 5

Churches must either have finished, or be engaged in, Nixon's 4-week program, to qualify. Please fill out the registration form on the reverse side, fully and completely.

Find registration information at www.uccmn.org

This seminar is being offered in conjunction with the Minnesota Conference UCC Annual Meeting: "Together, we will be renewed!"

Bible study sessions.

The schedule spreads awards and recognitions throughout the weekend, beginning on Friday afternoon. This allows for voting on resolutions and

other issues to begin on Saturday, expediting Sunday's agenda.

Don't miss the Minnesota Conference Annual Meeting, where we will *all* be renewed!

Lynnhurst UCC, Minneapolis votes to remodel

By Rev. David Lindsey, Pastor of Lynnhurst UCC, Minneapolis

On January 25th, 2009 members of Lynnhurst Congregational UCC in Minneapolis voted to renovate our sanctuary to make it more fully accessible. The renovation will focus on three areas of accessibility: physical, auditory, and visual. First, the narthex will be redone to include a ramp designed to welcome folks of all physical abilities. Second, the speakers for the sound system will be adjusted to make it easier for everyone in the space to hear

the sermons and the hymns (which are played on an electronic organ). Third, the entire space will be renovated to welcome more light into the sanctuary through new lighting fixtures and new windows. Our hope is that people of all abilities can participate in the service more fully as a result of these renovations.

While the members of the church liked the designs by architect John Barbour (a member of the church who has worked with both Lynnhurst UCC and New Spirit UCC in Savage), we had some serious

internal debates about starting such a project in difficult economic times. A substantial memorial gift was in place to pay for part of the efforts, but voting to approve the project meant that a capital campaign would begin soon.

For several months in 2008, the congregation debated whether or not this historic moment was the time for this project. On all sides, the congregation had the sense that this undertaking would be a tough sell in a congregation where some folks had recently lost jobs and others suspected their companies might

begin layoffs soon. These concerns were even more real once incoming bids indicated that the work would be more costly than expected, due to some deferred maintenance issues on the 99-year-old sanctuary.

These concerns were and are real for us, yet we as a church voted to go ahead with the renovations. In early February, a capital campaign began in earnest to raise the \$275,000 needed for the project. So far, nearly \$200,000 has been raised through pledges and the aforementioned memorial gift. The last \$75,000 may

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From Rev. Dr. Karen Smith Sellers, Conference Minister

Jewish theologian Abraham Joshua Heschel once said, "An individual dies when he ceases to be **surprised**." Heschel was vigorously opposing human indifference and accommodation to the forces of evil, but I hear in his assertion an indictment of my desire to manage and control.

I resist **surprises**. So you can imagine the range of feelings I experienced when Dale Dressler disclosed to me, not long after joining the staff of the Minnesota Conference as Managing Director of Pilgrim Point Camp, his lifelong sense of female gender identity and his intention to transition. Nothing was said publicly during the next few months, while we honored Dale's desire to share first with family members. Then, early last fall, two letters were sent to the pastor of every local church in the Minnesota Conference United Church of Christ — one from the Conference elected leadership and one from Dale/Dee. (Both are posted on the Conference website www.uccmn.org.) A few weeks later, when Dee's new name became official, the change was made on our letterhead and announced in *COMMANtary*, our weekly e-newsletter.

Since then, I have had many **surprises**. The most *unexpected* has been the limited response. To my knowledge, neither the Conference ministry staff, nor the ONA/LGBT Team, nor those trained in the Our Whole Lives (OWL) Human Sexuality curriculum have received requests for consultation or training. A few people phoned or emailed their support and affirmed the historic convictions of the United Church of Christ. The most *disturbing surprises* were the anonymous responses — including one sent to the moderator of each congregation.

It is no **surprise** to me that a transition in gender identity challenges perhaps our most fundamental way of organizing the world. General Synod and Minnesota Conference votes notwithstanding (votes which the Constitution of the United Church of Christ requires every Local Church to hold "in the highest regard" Article V, 19), most of us have a lot to learn. I know that I do.

To help us in this process Dee has generously and graciously agreed to share her story in this edition of *The Voyager*. Additional resources abound, and Kathleen Remund, chair of the ONA/LGBT Team reports that they welcome opportunities to be engaged with local churches. She also sent this valuable link to [Gender Identity and Our Faith Communities: A Congregational Guide for Transgender Advocacy](#) produced by the Human Rights Campaign (<http://www.hrc.org/issues/religion/11618.htm>). In addition, we are committed to ensuring that all Pilgrim Point Camp volunteer program directors and camp counselors will receive orientation and training to assist them in responding to the questions of children and youth.

Our UCC banners proclaim, "No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here." And our 2007 Conference Annual Meeting's open and affirming resolution committed us to seeking greater biblical and theological understanding of issues of human sexuality and to prayerful and respectful dialogue.

Let's open ourselves to the **surprise** of this opportunity for faithfulness in our midst. Let's not be indifferent or accommodate ourselves to the injustice that is visited on one of the most discriminated against and least understood segments of our population. Let's be the Body of Christ, where members care for one another, so that if one suffers, all suffer and if one rejoices, all do so together.

Lynnhurst UCC, remodel

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The current exterior of Lynnhurst UCC

well be the hardest to raise, but the church is continuing its fundraising effort until the middle of March. Despite these difficult economic times, the members of Lynnhurst are deeply committed to keep extending God's extravagant welcome to all people.

By the middle of this month, we should know more about the overall financial reality for this



Lynnhurst UCC's sanctuary

project. Once construction begins, we may yet learn of complications we hadn't anticipated. Still, as the senior minister at Lynnhurst UCC, I am truly honored to serve a congregation that takes bold risks on behalf of all God's children, even when it is difficult to do so. And once the construction is completed, I look forward to inviting you to stop by and visit us in our newly accessible sanctuary!

Pastor's Retreat Network

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I shared the week. One was Southern Baptist, one Church of Christ and one Missouri Synod Lutheran. Retreat guidelines state that we were not to talk politics or get into conversations about doctrinal differences. It was challenging because it was the week of the democratic primary and I confess to sneaking in my mp3 player to hear the results. I discovered that the Southern Baptist pastor had done the same — and what followed was an interesting conversation about how his 75 year old mother-in-law and her sister, who lived with them, were voting for Hillary Clinton! Made me think twice about my preconceived assumptions.

There were moments when I felt out of place theologically; I spent most of my time alone. I had a great week of renewal. It's not often that I get to

break bread with brothers and sisters whose lives seem so different from mine. I was grateful for the UCC's support of retirement when I heard the 68 year old Church of Christ pastor and his wife say that all he had for retirement was the IRA they had put aside during the ten years they were directors of a senior center. Throughout his career as a local church pastor he had received nothing.

This isn't the retreat opportunity for everyone, but explore the website. You never know where you might find God.

Rev. Rosemary Rocha, Pastor
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Member, MN Conference Professional
Development of Authorized Ministers Team



High School youth from across the Conference gathered in February at United Theological Seminary for the Winter 2009 Conference Youth Event

Minnesota Conference represented on National Credentials Committee

Sham Moteelall is a member of St John's United Church of Christ near Norwood Young America and his farm home is near Waconia. He will serve on the Credentials Committee for the next two General Synods, starting with the 2009 General Synod in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

The ten members of the Credentials Committee meet at the Synod site to clarify and audit the member composition of the General Synod. They are charged with the responsibility to check on the diversity requirements of delegates at these national meetings.

Sham currently works for an agricultural company and is President of Life Consulting. This company is designed to consult with business management in an effort to empower employees at all levels of their organization. He does motivational speaking and training in sales and technical issues, as well as cultural diversity.

Sham and his wife, Vicki, enjoy riding and driving horses around their farm. Vicki is the office manager at a local veterinary hospital that specializes in the care of small animals. They have two grown sons, Brant and David.

Sham Moteelall was born in a Hindu home in Guyana, South America. His ancestors emigrated there from India to work in the colonial sugar plantations monopolized by the British. As a boy he helped his family on their farm growing rice, bananas and vegetables. He also took care of cows, goats and sheep. He went to Anglican school during the day and was tutored in Hindi at night by the local pundits – he said the Lord's Prayer during the day and the Hindu prayers by night. His studies paid off and he became a science and chemistry teacher at the local high school.

Sham secured a student visa and came to the United States in March 1970. He came on a one-way airplane ticket with a small suitcase and only \$200 cash. His goal was to become a medical doctor and return to help the needy people of his homeland. The plane landed in Minneapolis on a cold night. "It was frightening" he said. "Guyana is in the tropics and Minnesota is part of the Frigid Zone."

Those early years were not kind to Sham. He found out that a person could not accept employment on a student visa. His family had no

money to support him. Out-of-state tuition was expensive and he did not qualify for student loans because he was classified as an alien. His \$200 quickly evaporated. He accepted unauthorized employment as a dish washer and did some janitorial duties when the opportunity presented itself. The only thing that was free to him was his faith in God. His motto was "God has brought him here and God will lead him forward". He met a group of students at the University of Minnesota who called themselves "Campus Crusade for Christ". They adopted him into their organization.

The lack of money and constant harassment from the US immigration officials made him realize that medical school could not happen, but he was determined to be the first college graduate on either side of his family. He turned his attention elsewhere and graduated from the University of Minnesota with degrees in agronomy and soil science. He also earned a diploma in business law from Minneapolis Business College.

For the past 35 years, Sham has found success with Pillsbury, Du Pont and Syngenta. He took on leadership roles in these companies and received numerous awards for his achievements. He still emphasizes that "without God, it would be impossible to achieve anything".

After the birth of their first son, Sham and Vicki joined the UCC congregation in Brownton, MN. Here their children were baptized and he served on the church board during the 1980s. Due to corporate relocation, they purchased their farm near Waconia. In addition to a home, they needed a place to keep their horses. The family of four then joined St John's UCC. He served on that board during the 1990s and is the current president of the congregation. In 2008, he attended the Vitality training in Cleveland and learned how much God is still speaking,

The transition from the Hindu religion to Christianity was natural for Sham. Everyone assumed that he was baptized as a Christian, but this was not true. After a long period of study, contemplation and prayer, Sham requested that he be baptized. So, on his Sunday birthday in 2007, with both family and friends present, both Christians and Hindus, Rev. Richard Mark, St John's pastor, baptized Sham Moteelall. Tears of joy streamed down the faces of family and church



Sham Moteelall, member of St. John's UCC, Norwood Young America, will represent the Minnesota Conference on the UCC Credentials Committee

members on that Sunday morning!

Sham has no immediate family left in Guyana, but he visits his old neighborhood at least once every year. His passion is with the orphans in the community. Both his father and grandfather were orphans. Their parents were victims of the poor living conditions, inadequate nutrition and long hours of work imposed upon them by the British plantation owners. Sham tries to understand the emotional, psychological, physical and other pain orphans suffer on a daily basis.

Recently, St John's UCC, Norwood Young America, has agreed to hire a full time staff person to work at this orphanage, caring for the young children. Later this year, members of St John's UCC are planning a trip to do some mission work in Guyana. Sham will lead this mission experience.

In his role as a business manager, farmer, church leader, husband and father, Sham found that God has guided him in his daily and long-term efforts. Sham Moteelall is a "walking model" which emphasizes that "God is still speaking."

Meet Your General Synod 27 Delegates!

The 27th General Synod of the United Church of Christ will gather beginning on June 25, 2009 in Grand Rapids, Michigan where the business of the UCC will happen. Please keep the General Synod Delegates of the Minnesota Conference in your prayers as they meet on May 9 for orientation and to get acquainted, and as they travel to Michigan June 25-July 1, 2009.

Clergy Delegates over 30

Rev. Ruth Beck, St. Peter's UCC, Stillwater
 Rev. Don Britt, First Congregational UCC, Princeton
 Rev. Bridget Haefner, Peace UCC, Eden Valley
 Rev. Al Thompson, First Congregational UCC, Mankato
 Rev. Dr. Dana Mann, Union UCC, Elk River
 Rev. Alan McNamara, Chapel Hills UCC, Edina
 Rev. Jennifer Jaimez, St. Mark's UCC, Bloomington
 Rev. Christopher Ross, Pilgrim UCC, Benson

Kathryn Ripley, United Church of Christ, Granite Falls
 Marlyne Leary, Community UCC, St. Paul Park
 Philip Cook, Peace UCC, Duluth

Lay/Clergy Delegates under 30

Elinor Strandskov, Lynnhurst UCC, Minneapolis
 David Becker, Parkway UCC, Minneapolis
 Derek Lyndes, United Church of Christ, New Brighton
 Nicholas Lemke, Bethlehem UCC, Maple Lake

Associate Delegates

Lisa Lindesmith, Conference Vice-Moderator
 Rev. Dr. Karen Smith Sellers, Conference Minister

Staff Visitors

Rev. Elena Larssen, Associate Conference Minister
 Rev. Rick Wagner, Associate Conference Minister

Lay Delegates over 30

Aleta Christopherson, First Congregational UCC, Austin
 Sham Moteelall, St. John's UCC, Norwood Young America
 Gabe Flynn, Community Church, Wayzata
 Karen Peterson, Peace United Church, Long Prairie

An Interview with Dee Dressler, Director of Pilgrim Point Camp

Many of you have expressed concerns or shared questions about the recent news regarding our Director of Pilgrim Point Camp, Dale Dressler, who is transgender, and is now Dee. She has graciously allowed us to interview her for this issue of the Voyager. We trust that many of your questions will be answered here. If not, our doors and Dee's are always open to you to continue the conversation.

Dale Dressler was walking home one autumn evening about two-and-a-half years ago when he made a painful decision. No one would ever know the truth about him. The truth was that Dressler never felt right in his own skin. He felt sure from early childhood that he was a girl trapped in a boy's body. But now, he was married to Jennifer, the love of his life. He had two wonderful children who were just moving into adolescence. How could he possibly disrupt their lives now, or ever?

But several months later, he had a dream. In it, he was a woman, and just like in his waking life, she was living in conservative rural Indiana with a secret. After making the decision to hide forever — the previous fall — the anxiety caused by his/her secret was creeping into her dreams. He confided in a dear friend, who was a pastor. "You have to tell Jennifer," the friend told him.

Dressler, 51, grew up in Ohio, the youngest of four children of a blue-collar father, who worked in a factory making giant coal crushers, and a homemaker mother. His childhood was largely happy, although his father was a strict DISCIPLINARIAN, whose abusive tongue often stung his children. Dressler's mother made up for it by "being an angel." He was drawn to the outdoors. He loved to spend his summers canoeing. But he was also drawn to "girlish things," he says. "I was drawn to dolls simply because I wanted my friends to be the girls, not the boys. I wanted to be with the children who were most like me, or at least, who I thought I should be."

But anytime he'd move in that direction, his family yanked him away. He was a boy. Those games were not for him. One of his earliest recollections was going to the movies with his family to see "My Fair Lady" when he was six or seven years old. "As I watched the movie I was Eliza Doolittle," he said. "I fell for Henry Higgins."

He learned very well how to act like a boy and then a man. He had a few close male friends in high school, but rarely dated. He wondered at times if he was gay or bi-sexual. But he never said a thing to anyone.

He met AND fell in love with Jennifer in his early 20s. They married in 1983. "Typical of people who are transgender," Dressler says, "I thought, 'This will solve the problem.'" And it did, briefly. But at night, he'd awaken, worried that Jennifer would hear him talking in his sleep.

The births of his children were magnificent, although he confesses to a bit of jealousy that he wasn't the one who got to be pregnant and to nurture their newborn children as only a mother can. Still, he said, "I enjoyed being a new father, a parent."

About 13 years ago, he took a good job with the UCC, as Director of Summer Camps in the Indiana-Kentucky Conference. "I told myself, 'You're getting on with your life. You're thinking about the Ministry.' But when the busy summer season ended and things slowed down, it all came creeping back."

With the encouragement of his pastor friend, he set the date to tell Jennifer. He picked a school day, early in the morning, so that the couple could spend a full day together before the children returned home. The news was, of course, stunning. Painful. Confusing. Jennifer, at first, sympathized, then pulled away. Questions of self-perception, others' perceptions, and all the stages and emotions of grief had to be dealt with. They hung together doing the hard work. Dale saw a therapist, and both of them saw a marriage counselor for a full year before telling their kids one year ago. Noah,



Dee, Jennifer and members from First Congregational UCC, Alexandria after Dee's name changing ceremony

now 16, listened thoughtfully, and when it came time to ask his father questions, he simply asked: "Can I give you a hug?" Grace, now 13, worried not for herself, but for her dad, who was beginning to transition out of his male appearance. Would he be comfortable showing his painted toenails when her friends came over?

On Nov. 25, 2008, Dale Allan Dressler legally became Dee Ellen Dressler. She invited her choir at church, her pastor, a few friends, and, of course, Jennifer. She expected just a few of them would want to come. When they entered the courtroom, five people were already there to show their support. When it came time for two witnesses to attest that Dee was who she said she was, she turned around. The gallery was full. Dee was tremendously moved by the goodwill. She cries in the retelling. "Transgender people worry about losing the four most important things in life: Family, friends, their work, and their church," Dee says. "I have kept all four. It's just been unbelievable."

Today, Dee must still shave once a day at least but she has begun electrolysis, shelling out the \$30 to \$60 per session when she has the money. She has pierced ears and her new hairdresser has given her a feminine hairstyle and taught her how to apply make-up. Dee wears skirts and keeps her fingernails painted teal rose. "Nothing flashy but I really need to present to the public as female and skirts and nail polish and jewelry helps a lot," Dee says.

Grace calls Dee "Moddy," a mix of Momma and

Daddy from when she was just learning her first words. She loves going out with Dee to shop and try on clothes.

Dee is taking hormones to help soften her skin and change the shape of her body, and she is allowing her female mannerisms to develop as well. She is considering surgery, although for now, the price tag of \$15,000 to \$30,000, not covered by insurance, makes that option prohibitive.

Most important to Dee, she and Jennifer are moving forward together, as two people who have lived nearly half their lives together and who are redefining their love for one another. "We are settling into what our relationship will be," Dee says. "We are still very close."

A few nights ago, Dee had an opportunity to sit on a panel and visit with some young members of the UCC at a gathering in Wadena. "These youth

were so welcoming and wonderful and supportive. They asked insightful questions as they sought to gain knowledge of what it means to be lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. "The parents I talk to are often concerned about how their children will react, but the youth and children have always been very accepting and supportive. They are growing up in a new world where people who are LGBT are able to be themselves and be accepted."

Before each week of summer camp begins this year, the staff will attend orientations to talk about how Dale is now Dee and is more eager than ever to do the work she loves. "I will be available to the campers and the adult leaders to talk about my experience and to help everyone understand me. I'm the same person, only different. I suspect it will be just like any other summer: softball, swimming, hiking, making friends, vespers, and lots of good food will be the most important part of this summer. But, not for me," she says with a laugh. "The way my church, my family, my friends and the Minnesota Conference have accepted me is absolutely wonderful. I am blessed!"

Please see www.uccmn.org/ministrygroups/analgbt for more transgender resources and frequently asked questions.

Special camp offerings in 2009

Rainbows and Beyond: LGBTQ and Allies High School Youth Camp

July 12-17, 2009,

Pilgrim Point Camp in Alexandria, MN

Clergy Camp

August 16-21, 2009,

Pilgrim Point Camp in Alexandria, MN

Registration forms and more information available at www.pilgrimpoint.org, by emailing mnuccna@rea-alp.com or calling 320-763-6549

Prayer, Renewal and Action on Immigration

Over 100 supporters of immigration reform participated in an interfaith prayer vigil at Lyndale Congregational United Church of Christ in Minneapolis on Sunday February 22. Featured speakers included Islamic, Jewish, and Christian faith leaders. In addition, over \$1100 in cash and product was given to help meet the continuing crisis in Postville, Iowa that followed last May's Immigration and Custom Enforcement (ICE) raid on the Agriprocessors meat packing plant in that community. The event was organized by a group of UCC pastors along with Jewish Community Action. It was one of over 200 vigils across the United States inspired by the national interfaith organization *Prayer, Renewal and Action on Immigration*.

The Rev. Matt Perkins, pastor of the Congregational UCC in Decorah, Iowa, was a special guest speaker. Rev. Perkins spoke of the interfaith response to the ICE raid at Agriprocessors. He said that the raid, which detained about 380 undocumented workers, left in its wake a humanitarian crisis to which faith communities have been the primary responders. At one point, he said, \$80,000/month was being given to support affected families (many no longer allowed to work) through the aegis of St. Bridget's Roman Catholic Church.

Rev. Perkins reported that for many years, Postville's leaders met the challenge of a succession

of new immigrants coming to work at Agriprocessors, by finding ways to celebrate and share that diversity, an effort that the ICE raid has destroyed. In addition, investigations into oppressive and unsafe working conditions in the Agriprocessors plant have led to it declaring chapter 11 bankruptcy, a situation that when combined with a 2003 fire that destroyed the poultry processing plant of another large employer, has the Postville economy reeling.

Among the others speaking were Rabbi Alexander Davis of Beth El Synagogue, St. Louis Park; Abdissalam Adam, director of the Dar Al-Hijrah Cultural Center in Minneapolis; Vic Rosenthal, Executive Director of Jewish Community Action; Michele Garnett McKenzie, Advocacy Director of The Advocates for Human Rights; and others from area Catholic and Protestant communities.

Over 500 religious organizations nationwide have endorsed the *Prayer, Renewal and Action* platform. Local sponsors include 25 Minnesota/Twin Cities faith based organizations, among them the Minnesota Conference, the Emmaus Anti-Racism Team, and the Minnesota Conference Justice Witness Team.

Prayer, Renewal and Action on Immigration calls faith communities to bring humanity and compassion to the public dialogue on immigration. Its policy statement describes how immigrant families and workers are living in a state of fear, constantly

worrying about the next raid or how the increasing anti-immigrant sentiment will impact their families.

Reforms advocated by *Prayer, Renewal and Action*:

- An opportunity for hard-working immigrants already contributing to this country to come out of the shadows, regularize their status upon satisfaction of reasonable criteria and, over time, pursue an option to become lawful permanent residents and eventually United States citizens;
- Reforms in our family-based immigration system to significantly reduce waiting times for separated families who currently wait many years to be reunited;
- The creation of legal avenues for workers and their families who wish to migrate to the U.S. to enter and work in a safe, legal, and orderly manner with their rights fully protected; and
- Border protection policies that are consistent with humanitarian values and with the need to treat all individuals with respect, while allowing the authorities to carry out the critical task of identifying and preventing entry of terrorists and dangerous criminals, as well as pursuing the legitimate task of implementing American immigration policy.

(More information: <http://www.interfaithimmigration.org/>)

This year, Passover coincides with the end of the Obama Administration's First 100 Days.



Rev. Matt Perkins of the Congregational UCC in Decorah, Iowa spoke at the February vigil

We call upon President Obama to issue an executive order ending immigration raids immediately. This would demonstrate that progress has been made toward the long-term goal of fair, humane, comprehensive federal immigration reform and is an important part of supporting immigrants and communities. Jewish Community Action and our partners will help make this a priority for the Obama Administration by flooding them with constituent requests for an end to raids via phone calls, petitions, letters and media. To sign the petition: www.progressbypesach.blogspot.com.

For more information or for a speaker, please contact: Rev. Loren McGrail (lorenmcgrail@mac.com); Rev. Don Christensen (rachelanddon@msn.com); Rev. Paula Bidle (bidlemoore@CorazonDigno.net); Rev. John Guttermann (intpasj@mac.com); Rev. Luis Alvarenga (luisalvarenga@mac.com).

Marshall Islands Church Leaders Make Commitment to Climate Change

By Jack Chandler,
Justice and Witness Team Member

I recently came across an article about Marshall Islands church leaders making a commitment on climate change. What caught my attention was that the commitment came out of a bi-annual conference of 230 United Church of Christ pastors and deacons on the Islands. The population of the Republic of the Marshall Islands is just above 56,000, and 55% of them identify as UCC.

People on the Islands are

observing increased erosion on the sea shores, rising tides, and increased storm surges. The Republic of the Marshall Islands web site states their concern that the Islands' average height above sea level is only about seven feet. The Marshall Islands are protected from the Pacific Ocean by fragile coral reefs. Due to warming oceans bleaching (killing) the coral reefs and raising the sea level, the people of the Islands fear that they may become some of the first environmental refugees.

In the conference, church leaders

expressed a desire to be "good stewards of God's creation," and emerged with actions to be taken. The UCC Marshall Islands pledged to voice their concerns to industrialized nations, and vowed to give greater presence and action by the Church on the issue of climate change.

I had not expected the UCC connection with the Marshall Islands. The more the Earth is understood, the more our interconnections become apparent. Excessive fossil fuel use in developed countries causes carbon dioxide pollution that affects the climate of the entire

planet. Pollution from burning wood and dust storms from deforestation in Asia affects the United States. The rising demand for oil in China affects the price at our gasoline pumps. The more we learn the more we realize that we are indeed one people, on one finite planet.

God has given us the knowledge to understand what we are doing to our environment; we have the means to save it, let us pray we have the will to sustain it.

Comments/feedback:
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Micro-Lending through Kiva

By Michael Stoos, Board of Missions —
New Spirit UCC, Savage

Our church is filled with extremely generous givers who rally to the cause of people in need. This is a tremendous blessing, but can be a problem for our Board of Missions which channels that giving spirit. We've found that varying our mission focus tends to keep people invigorated and involved. It's a constant challenge, however, to present interesting and meaningful opportunities for mission. That's why we were excited when we recently learned of and became involved in a new avenue for helping those in need: micro-lending.

Micro-lending — also called micro-finance or micro-credit — is the process of lending small amounts of money — as little as \$25 — to people and businesses that wouldn't ordinarily qualify for a traditional bank loan. This is most often found in developing nations where what we think of as traditional banking may not even exist, or might be reserved for only the wealthiest strata of the population.

Kiva is a non-profit organization that started within the last couple of years to facilitate micro-lending to those in need around the world. It works by establishing a link between lenders and borrowers through Kiva's technology platform and on-site lending partners.

A lending partner is the actual field force that has a presence in or near the borrower's location. Lending partners are most often other established non-profits. The Kiva website allows a lender to transfer funds to Kiva. Kiva then sends the money electronically to the lending partner nearest the



borrower and the lending partner disburses the funds to the borrower. The lending partner also collects the repayments and channels those back to Kiva, and then back to the lender.

Kiva has an online database of borrowers where you can view the histories, stories, and photos. Since, as with any loan, there is always a risk of non-repayment, the Kiva site keeps track of the borrowing and repayment history of each borrower and lending partner. In this way you can make some judgment as to the relative security of your funds when lent to a specific place. You can also monitor the funds you have available to disburse and the borrowers to whom you've lent. You can also easily view the repayment history and see update information about the borrowers.

Setting up an account on Kiva is very easy. We created a primary account for our church to be the "master" account. Individual members can then create accounts of their own to view loans and their progress.

Our Board of Missions initially made three loans to small entrepreneurs in Peru and Nigeria, and have already received two repayments on our first loan! Micro-lending through Kiva is an exciting idea that eliminates about as much of the "middle man" as is possible to do, and gets money to people that need it in a very direct way. It's very fulfilling to be able to see and read about the actual person(s) to whom you're lending funds, and many borrowers even give updates on their situations. If you're a church seeking to expand your outreach, Kiva may be your answer!

Global Gathering has Local Implications

By Rev. Dick Fylling, Pastor First Congregational UCC, Montevideo & Granite Falls UCC

Sometimes global gatherings have profound implications for local communities. This was the case in October of 2008 as a large representation of Minnesota farmers and food producers ventured to Turin, Italy to attend Terra Madre — the World Meeting of Food Communities.

This was also the case Monday evening, January 19, 2009 as more than fifty area residents gathered at the First Congregational UCC, Montevideo for a presentation and discussion regarding the Terra Madre event — and its implications for farming and food production in this part of Minnesota.

The presentations were made by Audrey Arner, Richard Handeen, Jim VanDerPol and LeeAnn VanDerPol who had attended the meeting at Turin and shared insights into the purpose of the gathering and its significance for Minnesota, the United States and the world.

Terra Madre ("Mother Earth") is a conference sponsored by Slow Food International which was formed in 1986 in an effort to awaken the world to the facts regarding the producing and processing of food throughout the world and to the biological diversity found in local cultures throughout the world.

More than 7,000 persons — 4,000 of whom are farmers — attended the meeting at Turin in October. They represent part of the more than 80,000 members of Slow Food International whose mission is to help farmers cooperate on a worldwide basis to develop ways of producing and promoting their products throughout the world with an emphasis on local communities and an appreciation of what these communities have to share with the global community in a world of multi-national corporations.

Arner reminded the attendees that every one who eats helps to determine, for better or worse, the quality of the food that is produced in this state, the United States, and throughout the world. She also related the benefits of biodiversity for local communities and beyond.

Handeen talked about expectations regarding accessibility to markets, subsistence living and persons he met at Turin, including one whose family has had "a 135-year focus on the family farm."

LeeAnn VanDerPol related that Terra Madre was "a smorgasbord of people" that included everyone from chefs to food producers to youth who were there related to social justice issues. Jim VanDerPol spoke of the United Nations not realizing its goal of 30 billion dollars to meet the needs of the world's hungry in 2008.

The current goal in Minnesota is to find young farmers who would be interested in attending the next Terra Madre gathering in 2010. In a world where more and more people are hungry, meetings such as Terra Madre have profound implications for both local communities and for the global community.

Introducing Larry Boatman

Lawrence (Larry) Boatman started as the Minnesota Conference's Financial Development Consultant. He is an ordained minister in the American Baptist Churches, and served congregations in Nebraska, Iowa and Minnesota before becoming an investment executive. He has done planned giving work for the American Baptist Foundation, has served as the Minister of Financial Stewardship at Hennepin Avenue United Methodist Church, and most recently was the Director of Development for the American Baptist Homes of the Midwest.

Larry has been married to Debbie for 38 years and they are blessed to have three adult children, Andrew, Lindsey and Jeffrey, all living in the Twin Cities. They have lived in Minnesota for 27 years, and enjoy the change of the seasons. Larry loves playing golf, collecting vintage fountain pens, eating delicious Mexican and Indian food and going for long walks in the woods. Debbie is a fantastic cook and an avid quilter. They love beagles, particularly their dear girl Abby.

We look forward to having Larry in the office about two and a half days a week.



Larry joined the Conference staff in March

LIVING THE FAITH

Called Out Sent Forth

The 2009 Minnesota "Open and Affirming" Celebration

Sunday, April 26th
Workshops @2:30 p.m. | Worship @ 4:00 p.m.

hosted by
Pilgrims United Church of Christ
8801 Rice Lake Road in Maple Grove

2009 Heritage Grant Recipients and their Predecessors

The 2009 Heritage Grant awards were presented at the annual Board and Donor recognition dinner of St. Paul's Family Resources, Inc. held at Oak Marsh Golf Club on February 20th. Board President Eric Kehle presided. Associate Conference Minister Rev. Richard Wagner thanked the Foundation for creating the Heritage Grants which encourage local UCC congregations to develop programs to improve the lives of seniors.

St. Paul's Family Resources Foundation president Charlie Hentzen, expressed the Foundation's thanks to last year's grant recipients for the excellent programs they implemented to improve the lives of seniors in their communities. He also expressed the Foundation's appreciation to those who have donated to the Foundation so that it can offer the Heritage Grant program.

The 2009 Heritage grants recipients are:

- Bethlehem UCC, Maple Lake, parish nurse program.
- Hazel Park Congregational UCC, St. Paul, day activities program.
- United Church of Christ in New Brighton, New Brighton, lay volunteer visitation program.
- The Federated Church, Fergus Falls, public transportation on Sundays program.

St. Paul's Family Resources, Inc. is affiliated with the Council on Health and Human Services Ministries of the United Church of Christ. Its affiliate, Oak Meadows, offers senior independent and assisted living through its facilities in Oakdale, Minnesota. Support for its mission is maintained through benevolence, fundraising, and development activities managed through its foundation. For more information, contact SPFR at 8131 Fourth Street North, Oakdale, MN 55128.

How did some of last year's recipients use their funds?

Hazel Park Congregational UCC, St. Paul

The support of the Saint Paul's Family Resources Foundation, by the gift of the Heritage Grant in 2008, has been crucial to the further growth and implementation of the existing Parish Nurse Ministry at Hazel Park United Church of Christ. The Grant funds allowed us to expand the hours of our Parish Nurse program, thereby increasing the number of individuals receiving services. Heritage Grant funds were also utilized to support regularly scheduled educational events which focused on issues and concerns pertinent to seniors. The lunch which followed these events provided a mid-week opportunity for fellowship, with lunches also being delivered to our home based members. We are most grateful to the St. Paul's Family Resources Foundation for their spirit of generosity and their foresight in creating and planning the Heritage Grant Program. The gift of Grant funds assisted our congregation in sharing the unconditional love of Christ by being in service to seniors in practical ways, meeting people at the point of their need. Your partnership has been a great blessing to our congregation.

In Christ's service,
Claudia Brumm

Parish Nurse, Hazel Park Congregational UCC
First Congregational Church UCC, Anoka

First Congregational Church UCC, Anoka was honored to receive a Heritage Grant in 2008 to



2009 recipients at the annual dinner. Front row: Rev. Beth Donaldson and Carolyn Chesebrough (UCC New Brighton); Rev. Sara Morse and Claudia Brumm (Hazel Park UCC); Curtis Loewe (SPFR Board); Ole Olson (Bethlehem UCC, Maple Lake); Back row: Rebecca Galkiewicz (VP of SPFR Foundation); Jonathan Morgan and David Misemer (SPFR Board); Charlie Hentzen (President, SPFR Foundation).

support the hiring of a Parish Nurse with emphasis on the church's senior population which exceeds 50% of the total membership.

In April 2008, Connie Reese, our new Parish Nurse was hired. Shortly thereafter, a Heritage Grant Committee of 8 was formed to oversee and consult regarding compliance with grant requirements. The Committee has been prolific in just a year:

- Presented the Heritage Grant to the congregation and requested Older Adult Ministry input.
- Had three seasonal "staying connected" luncheons. A fourth luncheon is planned for this spring. The attendees enjoy the fellowship and the short informative programs which are part of each event. The group voted to call themselves "The YAH'S" (Young at Hearts).
- Connie supervises the church's Caring Visitor Team. They, as well as the Heritage Grant Committee, have attended training sessions offered by the Anoka County Caregiver Support Staff and the Community Parish Nurse Program.
- A partnership has been formed between the older adults at First Congregational and the residents at Walker Plaza Assisted Living near the church. Church members attend Walker's Men's Breakfast and coordinate discussion topics. Our members have been invited to attend Walker's exercise group. The church's Knitting for Peace group invites Walker Plaza residents to their gatherings.
- The YAH'S have invited the neighboring churches and the community to attend an educational presentation on Amelia Earhart this March.
- Prevention of falls will be the topic for the church's education hour in April. Earlier, three educational sessions were devoted to health care directives, living wills and end of life questions. This month classes were offered in CPR for families and friends.
- Connie continues to supervise monthly blood pressure screenings and is available to discuss health concerns with church members, in addition to her visits with our homebound and hospitalized seniors.

On behalf of the Heritage Grant Committee and First Congregational UCC Church of Anoka, I wish to thank St. Paul's Family Resources Foundation for giving our church the opportunity to serve the

older adult community in so many ways.

Barb Schachtschneider

Heritage Grant Committee Member

Heartland Parish, New York Mills and Staples

Two churches along US Highway 10 share the common ministry of the Heartland Parish. First Congregational United Churches of Christ in New York Mills and Staples are served jointly by Rev. Muriel Hachfeld and Licensed Lay Ministers, Cindy Lemke and Sarah Yetter.

In 2007, the Heartland Parish Council applied for a Heritage Grant from the St. Paul's Family Resources Foundation. With a decision that two churches could match their share of the grant, the Heartland Parish requested a grant of \$500. The purpose would be to provide Life-Long Spiritual Growth for seniors. This would make it possible for members and non-members to attend church-endorsed events.

The congregation in New York Mills utilized their half of the grant and an additional \$605 to send nine women to the fall retreat at Pilgrim Point Camp in the fall of 2008. The member and non-member women "were pleased with the camp and the fellowship they experienced," wrote Howard Legried in his report to the Parish Council and to the governing Board of St. Paul's Foundation. Legried continued, "I think this could be used at other churches, especially small ones, for women with limited finances, giving them an opportunity to attend such a retreat."

The congregation in Staples chose to use their half of the grant and a match of \$250 to offer a ten-session class entitled, "Experiencing Jesus," which included a source book by Marcus Borg, *Jesus: Uncovering the Life, Teachings, and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary*. Sarah Yetter continues to lead ten participants in this bi-weekly study. The grant allowed the purchase of multiple resources for the participants, as well as a lunch gathering after the study.

The Heartland Parish is deeply grateful for the Heritage Grant which has made it possible for seniors to continue to grow spiritually as Christians. During the summer of 2009, Sarah will re-use the Marcus Borg materials to lead a study at the United Church of Christ in Wadena.

Rev. Muriel Pool Hachfeld, Pastor
Heartland Parish

Madison Church to Close

The Congregational Church UCC of Madison, MN, will end its ministry of more than 120 years at a worship service on April 26th, 2009. Its faithful congregation, aging and declining in membership, looked at the costs to maintain the church building and to support the wider church (something that has always been part of its mission), and decided a year ago that it would need to close this April. This will end an interesting chapter in the history of Congregationalism in Minnesota. Madison is very near to where Congregationalism first came to Minnesota. In 1837 the American Board of Foreign Mission assigned the Williamsons and Riggs to minister to the Indians and settlers in Minnesota. They arrived at Lac qui Parle Lake in the fall of 1837. It was here that Riggs wrote his Dakota dictionary and translated the Bible into that language. In 1882 the first Congregational Fellowship originated in Lac qui Parle Village, but soon moved to nearby Madison near a line of the Minneapolis and St. Louis Railroad. Madison was incorporated in 1885 and in 1886 the Congregational Church was officially organized, becoming the first church

to hold services in English in Lac qui Parle County.

Records show that a Sunday School with 120 children was operating in 1889 — the only Sunday School in the area. For nearly 100 years, Christian education was an important ministry of the church, including release time classes, vacation church school, Christmas programs, annual picnics and more.

That same year, 1889, a prayer meeting developed into what became the “Ladies Aid” or “Women’s Fellowship” whose mission included fundraising for benevolent projects and providing food for weddings, funerals, and church work crews.

Madison had a population of 600 in 1885, grew to its largest number (2,380) in 1960, and in the 2000 census had 1,768 residents. Though the demographics of the area have changed significantly over the years, the congregation’s financial commitment to mission has remained high. The Congregational Church UCC of Madison has given annually to Our Church’s Wider Mission, CUE, One Great Hour of Sharing, Neighbors In Need, and the Christmas Fund. It was also a supporter of the Make A Difference



The Congregational Church UCC of Madison this winter

Campaign and of local and regional mission efforts. Currently, it is one of four congregations that make up a single parish served by the Rev. Brad Larson, ELCA. The other congregations are the Marietta-Nassau First UCC, St. Paul’s Lutheran Church (ELCA) of Nassau and St. John Lutheran (ELCA) of Marietta.

At the service of closure on April 26th, the congregation hopes to have some former pastors present. Rev. Larson and former pastor, the Rev. Cynthia Huse, provided information

for this article. The Congregational Church UCC of Madison sits on a corner lot near the center of town. Its building, land, and furnishings are up for sale. The President of the congregation, Gary Hauck, reports that if the property sells, the congregation hopes to leave a legacy.

The Minnesota Conference UCC thanks the Congregational Church UCC of Madison for its long history of ministry and its generous support of mission.

Pastor’s Retreat Network offers unique opportunities

My assignment was to research the website of the Iowa Conference of the UCC (www.ucciaconf.org) for a clergy continuing education link with a good selection of opportunities. While exploring the Iowa Conference website, I got sidetracked, something I often do when shopping, walking or even talking — perhaps even when preaching!

What sidetracked me was The Pastor’s Retreat Network (www.pastorsretreatnetwork.org). Since 1997, Pastor’s Retreat Network has offered five-day retreats to full-time pastors and pastor couples. Programs balance solitude and community time; scripture and meditation are at the heart of the experience. In their own words, “The concept is both simple and profound:

Invite pastors and their spouses on five-day retreats in beautiful settings. There, they can focus completely on their relationship with God and their relationship with each other.” One of the best parts — it’s free! All you pay is your transportation.

To sign up, you must request an invitation to one of the three sites: Cedarly Pastors Retreat in Delafield, Wisconsin, Selah Inn at the Ranch, Mount Vernon, Texas and A Valley View Inn in New Bedford, Ohio. On the website, you can explore each setting before requesting an invitation. At each setting’s site is a list of dates available and an indication as to whether it is open or has a waiting list.

I asked to be invited to Texas and was invited. It is one of the

most beautiful places I have ever stayed. I knew the program was theologically and biblically more on the conservative than I am, but they knew I was female and ordained. I went knowing that God is everywhere and whatever happened, this would be an opportunity for me to meet people with whom I don’t often connect. Most importantly it would give me a beautiful setting in which to renew my heart and soul.

All retreats begin Sunday evening and end Friday morning. The noon meal is the only required event of your day. It was a sumptuous meal with the chance to get better acquainted and share some of what we were doing with our time.

The guest rooms are beautiful

with desks, chairs, and a private bath. There are books and other materials to read, some on spiritual disciplines and others offering inspiration. Three programs are offered: **Sabbath Rest** combines time alone with God, time with spouse, time in nature and time in fellowship; **Bethany Retreat** is an experience for couples; and **Sinai Experience** (which I chose) is a self-directed experience for individuals or couples. A daily selection of readings, prayers and recreational activities was in a folder on my desk. I found its suggestions inspiring and helpful.

One evening the owners of the ranch shared their faith story and how they came to discover and build the ranch. Three clergy couples and

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