

Covenantal Ministries Report for the Year 2009

Covenantal Ministries includes the Mission Work we do with other ministries and settings in the United Church and beyond. The work of the Delegates to the Naugatuck Valley Association (NVA) and the Connecticut Conference of the United Church of Christ is also included here.

Stacy Cypher once again led a team in the CROP Walk for UNICEF. The Ecumenical Toy Sale was held at our church this year. We donated food to the Ecumenical Food Bank. Rich Smilo worked with The Naugatuck Ecumenical Outreach Network, which served hot meals several times this year in town to those who need meals. Our delegates Lori Hale, Josh Dufresne, Jillian Dufresne, and David Shaw attended the various meetings and events of the Association, the Conference, and the Ecumenical Conference, as did Gordon, Fredd, Marji, and others. Many participated in Mission Trips to Oaxaca and La Romana, as we continue our covenantal ministries with them. The Silver Lake Conference Center "Now for the Future" campaign is on-going to provide for the future ministry of this sacred space. We'll still have the opportunity to join the campaign as a church, as well as individually. And our Soft Ball Team had another great year under Ron Bottacari's coaching.

During the year, we kept our Conference Minister, the Rev. Dr. Davida Foy Crabtree, her husband David, and her family in prayer for healing from many concerns.

Bring ideas to our various meetings, of other ministries we may feel lead to covenant with. Occasionally, we'll have a second hour with the delegates on a Sunday to discuss and learn about NVA and Conference activities. Visitors are welcome at NVA and Conference Meetings. (There are nominal visitor fees.)

See www.ctucc.org for the Connecticut Conference and Silver Lake activities.

See www.ucc.org for the activities of the General Synod of the UCC.

See www.stillspeaking.com for the United Church Identity campaign.

See www.amistadamerica.org for the ship Amistad's Itinerary.

See www.simplysmiles.org for information on Oaxaca Mission Trips.

Respectfully submitted,

David Shaw
Coordinator of Covenantal Ministries



Report of the Connecticut Conference of the United Church of Christ The Ministry of the Connecticut Conference, UCC, in 2009

As the year began, the metaphoric skies overhead were gray and stormy.

The international economy was in full crisis, and the value of the Conference's Consolidated Trust Fund had fallen by nearly 25%. As the nation inaugurated a new President, the Conference reported a 17% increase in the free breakfasts served by volunteers at the First Congregational Church UCC in New London. Though investments would recover some of their value by the end of the year, unemployment continued to rise, reaching 10.2% nationally and 8.8% in the state by October. Connecticut's cities suffered disproportionately: unemployment in Bridgeport, East Hartford, Hartford, Killingly, Meriden, New Britain, New Haven, Plainfield, Torrington, Waterbury, and Windham exceeded the national rate.

The Connecticut Conference and its churches labored to meet the developing needs. Pastors and lay leaders shared and inquired of each other as they created programs and ministries, which were offered to the Conference as a whole through the These Times series of stories in *ConnTact* and on ctucc.org/thesetimes. The Spring Session of the Annual Meeting included a conversation opportunity on responses to the recession, led by Conference Minister the Rev. Dr. Davida Foy Crabtree and Moderator the Rev. Mark Abernethy.

Though some local churches reported no reduction in giving from their members (and a few reported gains), others found the anxieties of the time and the reduced circumstances of their members reflected in the offering plate. The Conference saw corresponding shortfalls in Our Church's Wider Mission Basic Support. In September, Dr. Crabtree informed the churches through *ConnTact* that giving was down 14%. As year-end contributions come in, Conference leaders believe that OCWM income will be down between 9 and 10% for 2009.

The crisis forced difficult decisions in April. The Conference cut over \$55,000 from program and administrative budgets, closed the office for an unpaid furlough for all staff in August, and required senior staff to take a second week's furlough. At the Fall Session of the Annual Meeting in October, delegates authorized a Special Commission on Conference Sustainability to study current and alternative models for funding the Conference's ministry. The Commission will first meet in January.

The Conference bid farewell to two Regional Ministers in the summer of 2009: the Rev. Lois Happe of the Eastern Region retired, and the Rev. Susan Townsley of the Fairfield County Region accompanied her husband to his assignment in Japan. In the fall, the Rev. Susan Tarolli and the Rev. Sarah Verasco joined the staff as half-time Eastern and Fairfield Country Transitional Regional Ministers respectively.

Patricia R. Bjorling began her work as Associate Conference Minister for Generosity Ministries on April first, embarking on a whirlwind series of workshops, addresses, and meetings with local church leaders. Archivist the Rev. Evans Sealand retired in October, and was succeeded by the Rev. John Van Epps. Campaign Coordinator Beverly Hughes also retired in October.

Silver Lake welcomed 1,120 conferees from 167 churches to 38 conferences this summer, and 3,497 guests during the 2008-2009 retreat season. The new Hillside Commons and two cabins were dedicated in September, and a new Commons building for Cabin Circle began to rise in the fall. Partners in Service Volunteers Mary and Bill Ruth brought abundant energy to their work with alumni/ae lists and database integration. Acting Registrar Diane Ciba brought her welcome experience to the camp office throughout the year.

The Rev. Da Vita "Day" McCallister continued building youth and young adult ministries, with the first gatherings of Young Adults for service and conversation, and foundation of several Give2 chapters for youth. At Silver Lake during the summer she urged conferees to consider the call of God, and whether they might want to "work for God for a living."

United Church News, the national newspaper of the UCC, ceased print publication in September, and in November the Conference published its first independent edition of *ConnTact* since 1986. The Conference plans four issues of *ConnTact* in 2010, supplemented by coverage at ctucc.org, as it completes a media research project to guide future decisions.

The Spring Session of the Annual Meeting drew over 400 people to Asylum Hill Congregational Church UCC in Hartford to explore the Church's role in Health and Healing: blessing prayer shawls, seeking healing prayers, and hearing the challenge to bring universal health care to Connecticut from Juan Figueroa. He returned to the fall meeting, to congratulate the Conference and celebrate the passage of Connecticut's Sustinet law. Delegates had voted a resolution seeking universal coverage at the fall 2007 Annual Meeting. Their long-established opposition to the death penalty had some fruit, with the first passage of a capital punishment abolition bill in the state's General Assembly, regrettably vetoed by the governor.

The Fall Session turned the over 500 attendees' attention to the Sacred Conversations on Race. Delegates engaged in facilitated discussions during the gathering; those facilitators are now the core of the Conference's Sacred Conversations Team which will develop further programming in the coming year. "I am leaving a little less cynical," reported one. Said another, "Conversations must go on."

The 2009 General Association celebrated the 300th anniversary of that regular gathering of clergy, the oldest in the nation, with addresses from outgoing UCC President the Rev. John Thomas and Conference Minister Crabtree. The latter used her research into the Association's history of concern for the welfare of the state's people to encourage the Conference in considering challenging ministries in the future.

As the Conference's delegation prepared for June's General Synod XXVII in Grand Rapids, Michigan, they received word that Dr. Crabtree would not be accompanying them. Though she had recovered well from her treatment for breast cancer earlier in the year, her husband David Hindinger had been diagnosed with stomach cancer. Staff, leaders, and church members around the Conference and the UCC raised new prayers for their household, including a rapped greeting from the floor of Synod by Board of Directors Chair the Rev. Sandy Koenig and youth delegate Mark Stevenson.

General Synod elected the Rev. Geoffrey Black as the new General Minister and President of the denomination, and the Rev. Steve Sterner as executive of Local Church Ministries. Black keynoted the Fall Session of the Annual Meeting, and Sterner is one of the two keynoters for the Spring Session of the 2010 meeting. And in a great honor, Watertown's Jim Robertson, Moderator of the Conference, was elected Moderator of the 2011 General Synod in Tampa, Florida.

In 2010, the Conference brings its attention to the vitality of the local congregation – the basic unit of the Church's life – with new programs being developed and the Spring Session of the Annual Meeting. Work on generosity education, communication, Sacred Conversations, youth and young adult ministries, resource collection, Christian Education support, and care for authorized ministries of the UCC will continue. In the midst of it all, the Conference looks to the guidance of a gracious and Still Speaking God, to bring light and warmth to Christ's people beneath the clouds and storm.

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