

2009 Annual Report From the Senior Pastor

One of my first “sermons” of 2009 was a letter I wrote to my Dad on the twenty-fifth anniversary of his passing. I talked a lot about how much things have changed in the past twenty-five years – in society and in the church.

In our church, in many ways 2009 has been a year of relative stability. But there are other ways in which we continue to feel the gale of the winds of change upon us.

Staff

It seems like in most years my report begins by outlining a series of staff transitions. Not so this year. Fredd, Marji, Mahlon, Linda, Gus and Anna have continued the vitalities of their ministries throughout the year. We are blessed by their work and by their commitment to Christ’s Church.

This is not to say that our staff members themselves have not experienced some change. 2009 brought some changing health for several of our staff. We all greatly appreciate the continued patience and support which our church family so abundantly demonstrates.

Worship and Pastoral Care

This year we baptized twelve young people. I officiated at six weddings. We commended into God’s eternal care eight members or friends of this community. We welcomed twenty-three new members into our church. And in June, we had fourteen youth confirm their faith.

One of the major events of 2008 was the start of our monthly Sunday Evening Worship Services. In early fall of 2009, we drew our Sunday Evening Worship practice to a close. There were many reasons for this. Chief among them was that the service initiated out a desire to have an alternative worship time for those who couldn’t attend on Sunday morning but the vast majority of our small attendance came from those who were returning for their second or third worship service of the day. With much discussion, we decided that the energy and resources we were putting into the Sunday Evening Worship might better be stewarded in other ways.

We continued with the Lenten practice we began in 2008 of holding Lenten Devotions on the Wednesday nights of Lent. Our theme this past year was the “Marks of True Christian” based on Romans 12: 9-21.

We continued to utilize our percussion circles to help our scripture come alive. This year we told the story of the passion of Christ in this manner.

We were privileged to have the Reverend Dr. Davida Foy Crabtree, our Conference Minister, preach to us in March. She shared with us a moving account of her healing journey. In July, Ms. Kim Hughes offered her first sermon as a student preparing for ministry.

Mission

Thirteen members/friends of our congregation ventured back to La Romana to continue our mission work there last March. We were excited to see the many things

that have changed at the Good Samaritan Hospital and enthused by the vision they have for their future ministry. Much of our work was spent in building and installing bio-water filters in batey homes. It was particularly meaningful work as you were able to see the direct impact of your efforts.

In September, we were blessed to have the La Romana Missionary Nurse, Kristy Engle, come to speak to our congregation. During her visit she was able to translate for us a letter from one of the batey health promoters we sponsor.

This past summer, our church again participated in the New Beginnings program providing clothing to Naugatuck children in need as they prepare to start a new school year. A small team participated in the CROP walk over Columbus Day weekend. The Advent season again saw hallways and offices filled with gifts in support of the Ecumenical Toy Sale and the Angel Tree. Our Clothier continued its outstanding service to the community throughout the year.

The efforts of NEON, the Naugatuck Ecumenical Outreach Network, really kicked into high gear in 2009. Their first dinner was served in February and was followed by several other dinners throughout the year. NEON also ran a bag lunch program during the summer months.

Christian Formation and Fellowship

The programmatic part of our life together continues to be so rich I am sure I will neglect to include something.

The Common Ground group and the Friday's group continued their various faith explorations this year. I was energized by a group that joined me to discuss the book, "The Faith Club", in the fall. The women of our church held another deeply inspiring retreat last spring.

A Corned Beef Dinner (with entertainment by Daniel Greenwolf) and our Spring Fling Barbeque Dinner (with entertainment by Boys in Hats) were both rollicking occasions. Our Christmas Fair, under the first year leadership of Valerie Dunn, was again very successful. The Material Girls continue to blend crafting with fellowship. Our softball team had its most successful season yet – both in terms of wins and fellowship.

Thanks are due to the many volunteers who comprise the ministry teams which make so many of the activities come to fruition.

In September, we held a meeting which brought about more inevitable change. It was clear that our Women's Christian Fellowship needed to experience some new life. After some heartfelt discussion, Women's Christian Fellowship was transformed into Whole Church Fellowship (still WCF) and a new leadership board was appointed. WCF organized several fellowship events in the fall including attending a coffeehouse at the United Methodist Church, a Christmas party and a Farkle night.

Wider Church

I continue to remain involved in the wider church on your behalf. I am the auditor for the Naugatuck Valley Association, I serve on the Now for the Future Implementation Committee for the Connecticut Conference and I am the president of the Naugatuck/Beacon Fall Conference of Church. Fredd is equally (perhaps even more

so) active currently serving as co-chair for the Justice and Witness Ministries Board for the national setting of the United Church of Christ.

One of the events that brought me the most pride in 2009 was attending the annual meeting of the Connecticut Women of the UCC. They chose to recognize one of our members, Louise Morgan, as an outstanding church woman.

Church Finances

2009 produced the kind of fiscal challenges and change that we anticipate – both for our members and for the church as an institution. Several of our church members have struggles with unemployment or underemployment during the past year. Finances were tight for the church as well. Discretionary spending was held to only the greatest necessities and yet we still ended 2009 with more than a \$42,000 deficit. And 2010, looks to have its challenges as well. At our October special congregational meeting, we adopted a budget that builds in approximately \$50,000 of deficit. While I believe this is a necessary action for the time, I know all too well it is unsustainable.

To the ends the congregation appointed an ad hoc “Ways and Means” committee to look at the way in which we do ministry and how we can be the church while living within our means. The members of that committee are John DeBisschop, Rolanda Mitchell, Dave Sletner, Emma Ardry, Stacey Jagello, Lisa Green and myself. The committee is beginning its work in earnest early in 2010.

I would continue to encourage us to maintain the same balanced perspective I spoke to in last year’s annual report. While the finances of the church continue to be tough, the finance of all those around us are tough as well. There are a lot of people who are hurting and lost and confused and suffering. They need witnesses of God’s grace more than ever. We mustn’t become so distracted by the task of institutional survival that we lose sight of the fact that imperative of ministry is increased by the current situation as well.

Other Change

One shifting dynamic that demanded a significant amount of my focus was the relationship between our church and Troop 102, the Boy Scouts of America troop that we have chartered for the past ninety-seven years. While this situation started with some significant tension, I believe the church and the Troop leadership are now working together to build significant scouting opportunity. I know that I certainly learned a lot about my role and responsibilities as Charter Organization Head throughout the fall. I am particularly grateful for the wisdom and devotion Barbara DeBisschop has shown in serving as our Charter Organization Representative this year.

Away for the events of church life, I experienced some other very significant changes in my life in 2009. My wife accepted a call to be the pastor of the Church of Christ, Congregational, in Goshen, Connecticut. One March morning I left my house in Milford and following our Lenten devotions I headed north to an empty house in Goshen. I thank you for all your support during this transition. I had a wonderful welcoming many of you to our new home during a July open house.

In that sermon-letter I wrote to my father, I wrote

“The church is no longer relevant to society in the way it used to be. And this is a challenge for many of us in the church. While we know intellectually that the church has several times found new ways to be relevant throughout its two thousand year history, we grieve the church not being the same as it was in our parents and grandparents generations...and for most of us, even in our lifetimes. The truth is, we, as any institution have built up our entitlements. We have felt entitled to the prestige we were so long afforded in society. We have felt entitled to exclusivity on Sunday mornings. We have felt entitled to being a priority in the time people committed beyond family and work. And now that these entitlements no longer seem to hold true, even in our own lives, we grieve their loss.”

I think this is the biggest change and challenge the most of us in the church face. The church is not what it once was and in order to be relevant to the world around us we will never be again. But while such change may cause us to grieve, it should also excite us. As I wrote to my father: “Dad, the world has changed in a great many ways over the past twenty-five years. But I am convinced that there is one thing that has not changed and all. That is the relevance and necessity of God’s word of love and grace.” There are infinite possibilities as we seek to make the word of God relevant to our world. These are challenging times, but facing challenges can be rewarding.

Let us “run the race with perseverance” in 2010.

Respectfully submitted,

The Reverend Gordon Rankin
Senior Pastor

Associate Pastor Annual Report 2009

I struggled, at first, in reviewing last year. In many ways, I am glad to put it behind me as I can't remember a more emotionally challenging year in my adult life. Maybe you have had a similar experience. In a certain sense, I simply wanted to say, in summary, "Thank God, 2009 is over!"

At this writing, however, it is awards season. By the time you read this report, the Golden Globe and Grammy award shows will have aired in January, recognizing outstanding achievement in the entertainment and music industries. The Oscars will be handed out in March for excellence achieved in the film industry. So, I started thinking about the last 365 days in terms of outstanding achievements in our faith community and...well...the envelope, please...

BEST PERFORMANCE IN A SUPPORTING ROLE

Last March I commented, "There is no final destination in the enterprise of faith. There is always a growing edge, thank God. We can believe and yet be called to deeper faith because the faith of other people pushes us lovingly beyond where our faith alone has brought us. That's how other people's prayers work." I recently had lunch with my friend, Peter. Peter has been pastor for more than thirty years. He tells me that the pastor's principle task is to love and care for the flock. I love the Congregational Church of Naugatuck to pieces! And I am eternally grateful that you have loved me to life.

BEST PERFORMANCE IN A LEAD ROLE (FEMALE)

Sandra J. Ward was the only nominee in this category. There are no words to describe the impact of her love and support -- last year and every year that we've been together.

BEST PERFORMANCE IN A LEAD ROLE (MALE)

Jesus of Nazareth, of course. "I thank you, Jesus, my savior God, for you brought me from a mighty long way" (Kenneth Morris, 1948).

BEST ENSEMBLE CAST (COMEDY AND DRAMA)

Gordon, Linda, Marji and Mahlon. I have a sincere and abiding appreciation for your ministries. The blessing of our harmonious work together in Christ through each season of the church is a source of great joy.

BEST NEWCOMER(S)

Each of the ten folks who officially became members of our fellowship last year. We're not the perfect church; but we hope that we're a perfect fit for you. We're closer to becoming the church that God intends by virtue of your commitment of time, talent and treasure. Thank you! Welcome!

BEST PICTURE

The egg toss in Gina and Starr's annual backyard church picnic! No, wait...coat rack volleyball with the youth group. Or, the Christmas caroling caravan making its way around Naugatuck. So many memories, good times...good people... and good food!

DIRECTOR OF THE YEAR

God, the Creator and Sustainer of all living things.

As it turns out, last year was a very good year.

Yours in faith,

Fredd L. Ward III, Associate Pastor

Christian Education and Youth Annual Report 2009

"I intend to keep on reminding you of these things, though you know them already"

1 Peter 2:15

One cannot be in educational ministry without expecting the occasional frustration or disappointment. However, one also expects numerous joys and triumphs and blessings. This was true for me and for the Christian Education and Youth program at the Congregational Church of Naugatuck, UCC in 2009.

2009 marked my 10th anniversary as your director of Christian Education and Youth. In September I was honored in worship and at a special coffee hour. I am grateful for the support and thoughtfulness of the members and friends here at the Congregational Church of Naugatuck, UCC.

A re-formulated hard-working Christian Formation Committee was a great highlight of my year. It is wonderful to again have a group of dedicated volunteers to discuss, plan, and make things happen.

The Church School held "Heifer Day" in March. Children participated in activities to help them learn about Heifer International and the entire church collected change as a donation. Our "school year" came to a close with Children's Day on Pentecost. "Talking To God" one broadly graded class for ages 4 through 10 met each Sunday from June through the end of August. Vacation Bible School in August had over 30 children at Camp E.D.G.E. - Experience and Discover God Everywhere. A small but dedicated group of teen and adult leaders made our week a success.

A teacher Barbecue brought all of our '09-'10 leaders together to learn about the new rotation model curriculum "Power Xpress". Faith and Bible themes are studied for 4-6 weeks. After participating in Jr. Worship, children ages 4 through grade 6, in 3 age groupings now rotate to a different "Experience Station" each week that reinforces the theme. The curriculum includes experience stations in Story, Art, Video, Games, Science, Cookery, Music and Drama. Teachers lead 3 weeks in each session, which affords the opportunity to teach a session or two without needing to commit for an entire year. 7th -8th grade continue to use the lectionary based, UCC curriculum "Seasons of the Spirit" under the excellent leadership of John Rodgers. We do have some new families but attendance on Sunday mornings still fluctuates. I trust that the energy engendered by our new church school model will pull back some of those who haven't been quite as committed this year for any number of reasons. Third graders and older children new to our church school received bibles in November. We again created a Nativity story slide show out at Theron and Mary Simons' barn. Special thanks to Kim Sherwood who put our photo shoot together while I was recovering from back surgery. Special thanks also to Dixie Lafo and Anna Messner and Ali Donaghy who adeptly kept the Church School running during that same time.

Much to my dismay, the Sunday Evening Service was discontinued this fall. Hopefully our small, but dedicated gathering of folks will find a place of fresh insights, with wider interest among and outside the congregation in the coming year. "Sacred Encounters" the third annual Women's Retreat was held at Silver Lake in May with 25 attendees exploring different ways to encounter the Holy through study, activities, games and worship. "Fridays" dinner and discussion group is thriving, with 15-20 adults coming together once a month for a meal, some amazing desserts and to discuss a variety of topics. Kay and Rich Smilo again provided their house and air-conditioning to allow us to meet over the summer.

Attendance at Silver Lake Summer Conferences was up in 2009. Almost 30 conferees from grades 4 through adult spent a week at the Lake as campers, and close to a dozen teens and adults volunteered their time and energy as counselors and deans. Every person who attended a conference regardless of need received \$100 scholarship and we were blessed to be able to help those for whom the cost of a week was too dear. For the fifth year I lead a high school conference called "God Slam" with the theme, expressing yourself and your faith. It was my 15th year as a dean.

God's Adventurers, youth group for 4th and 5th grade met once a month through May under the able leadership of Emily Hale Goodwin. In September she handed the reins over the Lauryn Pelletier who continues with a small but loyal following. Scrooby for 6th, 7th and 8th grades, led by Jennifer Dupont and Holly Major met twice a month for a variety of activities and service projects. The Senior High Pilgrim Fellowship - PF - created and led "I Want to Hold the Hand that Holds the World" Youth Sunday in February. A Car Wash with all donations going to the Heifer Project, a Lollipop Tree "booth" at the Fair, the much-loved progressive dinner, and annual bowling night were a few of the year's highlights. Advisors Dixie Lafo, Barbara DeBisschop, Mary Pelletier, Douglas Hughes and Marji Hughes shared the weekly responsibilities. PF and Scrooby came together in March for a fund-raising St. Patrick's dinner and Magic Show. The combined PF/Scrooby retreat has become a "do not miss" yearly event. Our 6th - 12th graders spent a spring weekend together at Silver Lake building community and deepening their faith.

In September I was elected Interdenominational Representative to the national Association of United Church Educators (AUCE). I will spend my two-year term keeping abreast of how other denominations educate and provide for their Christian Education and Youth workers, to help improve how we in the United Church of Christ "do" Christian Education. As a Connecticut UCC Partner in Education (PIE) I led a workshop for educators called "Christian Education through the Church Year". I continued toward my long-term goal of a Master's degree in Ministry in Daily Life with two courses at Hartford Seminary.

With gratitude for the many blessings being your director of Christian Education and Youth provides, I will continue to initiate and implement opportunities for all of our church family to worship, learn about and serve our Lord.

Respectfully submitted, *Marjorie Hughes*

Director of Music Ministries Annual Report 2009

This was a hard year for me physically. I was left unable to work for a far too long a part of the year by repeated surgeries. I would like to thank the people of the church for being supportive and understanding though this all. I would also like to thank Wendy Ruggeri for subbing for me. I hope for a better year ahead.

Thanks to hard work by many volunteers and the continued grace of God, the music program at our church has had many highlights this year.

The Chancel Choir has continued to provide music for Sunday morning services. In addition, the group sang special music for several services. The Christmas Eve services were particularly glorious with 30 singing in the group. The choir continued the tradition started two years ago of singing a Lesson in Carols at both the 8:30 and 10:15 services. Bob Delagrang again has given his talent on the trumpet to the Easter and Christmas Eve services. Thank you, Bob. We unfortunately lost Marge Reeves to cancer. She was central to the music program for so many years. Her grace and humor will be sorely missed.

The summer music was again provided very beautifully by volunteers from the congregation. We had solos and small ensembles singing a wide variety of music. We can not thank enough those who gave of their time and talent to sing for us.

The Carillon Bell Choir had a good year. They performed at several services on Sunday mornings as well as Christmas Eve and Easter. I composed the music for the Christmas service. We still hope to have maintenance done on the bells this upcoming summer.

The Dejimbe Drum Choir performed several services of bible stories as told with a narrator and drums. These have been very well received by the congregation. The Passion of Christ as told this way was particularly powerful. One of the wonderful things about the group is that it has members of all ages.

The Ecumenical Youth Choir continued to perform. They sang for Sunday services in the spring. They also did one Sunday afternoon performances with the Chancel Choir for the general public. They have been on hiatus for the fall while I continued to work though my health issues. We resumed rehearsal after Christmas.

The Sunday night service was discontinued just before Christmas. I would like to thank the group of singers who have been leading this service. They have been a faithful bunch who has helped the congregation learn the new praise hymns. I would also like to thank Marji Hughes. Without her leadership, this group would have been lost.

I would like to express a special thanks to Emma Fabian and Rich Smilo for all of the work they do to keep the music program running. They have volunteered countless hours to set up and file before and after rehearsals. The music program would be at a great loss without them.

Unfortunately, the Isabel Curtis Music fund is still below the \$100,000 of the initial gift due to the stock market decline. This means that we are unable to tap into it for the moment. It is hoped that it will rebound this upcoming year.

I would like to thank all of the people who have helped make this year work. I hope that the congregation could feel the warmth and love that has gone into the gift of music presented them by so many people. With the grace of God and the prayers and wishes of the congregation, I hope that we can continue to glorify His name in music.

Respectfully submitted,
Mahlon Peterson
Director of Music Ministries