

April 10, 2008

Occasional Letter #35

Dear Friends and Colleagues:

This occasional letter is written to encourage you to remember three important upcoming events and one additional item of importance in the life of the Southern Conference. I hope you and your church will fully support these efforts. Each is designed to deepen faith and strengthen our covenantal life in the Southern Conference. Please do what you can to promote these ministry efforts in the life of SOC.

First, let me encourage you to register early for our upcoming Annual Gathering this year. Most know that this Annual Gathering will be a special and exciting time in the life of the Southern Conference. Each church should receive, this week, registration materials in the US postal mail. We anticipate that the Hilton Garden Inn, in Suffolk VA., will fill quickly this year, so we encourage you to register early when the information is received. Participants will need to call the hotel directly to reserve a room at the special conference rate. Extra banquet or Christian Education luncheon ticket can be purchased through the conference office along with your registration for the event. We anticipate they will go quickly. So don't delay, send in your registration and other conference annual gathering requests promptly. More information can also be found on our Southern Conference website, soc-ucc.org, or call the conference office.

Second, we encourage the participation of all of our clergy and interested laity this year at the annual clergy retreat. The presenter will be the Rev. Dr. Randall Bailey, a noted scholar in New Testament studies but also the area of sexual ethics. He is a professor at Interdenominational Theological Seminary in Atlanta. Dr. Bailey is very engaging and will do an extensive study during this clergy retreat time, in offering some useful and insightful tools with biblical depth around sexuality and the bible. Now that our local church conversations around sexuality in our covenantal life is not charged with rancor or angry disagreement, we will use this time to take a serious and sober look at this subject at this retreat. It will be well worth your time. I very much want each clergy person to support the retreat this year. Please be present. Call the conference office or see information in the recent mailing as you consider registering for this event as soon as you can.

The third event is a "church day event" at Black Lake Retreat Center on April 26, in the brand new Leonard Lodge. This event is a first since the Rev. Nora Diver Faust has assumed leadership at the retreat center. Your local church will enjoy this day long event and you will be helping Black Lake too. It's only ten dollars per person which includes lunch. Information has been sent to every local church or telephone the conference office for details.

Finally a letter has been sent to each church under the signature of your Southern Conference Board of Directors President, Rev. Dian Jackson. The request is for a congregational donation of \$6 per member toward our ongoing "Conference Ministry Fund." Many will remember that this fund was established two years ago to help make ends meet in the life of the Southern Conference. Every dollars stays in the Southern Conference and for the ministry of the Southern Conference. This special offering is vitally important for the financial stability of the Southern Conference, especially during these challenging financial times. Currently for example, the conference is about \$10,000 behind in receipts from last year. It is hoped that your church will do all that it can to be consistent with its gifts to Our Church's Wider Mission and the Conference Ministry Fund. Each gift will make a difference.

As always, I celebrate the partnership that each local church has with the Southern Conference and the wider United Church of Christ. We are seeking to do all that we can to strengthen the connection and deepen our ministry together. Please pray for me and the staff for the work we seek to do. Know that we will continue to keep you in prayer in these days too.

Sincerely,

Stephen W. Camp