



Author Connects Children, Care and Chaos

"Adults don't see children," stated Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore in her keynote address to a group of Christian educators gathering for an event hosted by United Church of Chapel Hill in February. "Adults move too slowly; children move too quickly."

In the preface to her book *In the Midst of Chaos, Caring for Children as Spiritual Practice*, she asks: "What would happen if we considered how people discover God not just when alone, in worship, or on the mountaintop, but when with others -- specifically when with children and all the turbulence and wonder they bring into our world."

Bonnie Miller concluded her remarks by highlighting five practical tips:

- 1) Include children and youth in liturgy and the sermon.
- 2) See parents as a critical piece of youth ministry. Parents are religious educators also.
- 3) Recognize ordinary practices as spiritual practices.
- 4) Support parents.
- 5) See adult members as a critical part of ministry



Children of Iglesia Getsemani -photo by Marc Mullinax

Youth

Ask:

"What

Can

We

Do?"

"I don't think I'm stretching it to say that the young people of our congregation are viewed as its single most valuable resource."

-Jay Laurens, First UCC, Sallsbury, NC



A camp experience often springboards from thoughtful or celebrative moments by the River Chapel or on Vesper Hill. "There is a feeling [in that setting] like no other," says Hilda Ramseur as she reflects on her camp memories.

-Photo by C. L. Stumb

by C. L. "Curly" Stumb

"Do you know what we remember most about attending Bible School at your church?" asked two men of Rev. Nevin Feather during a family reception for a funeral recently. Feather did not remember, but continues, "They said they remembered how, during the break, we would go across the road to play ball and I always played with them; I pitched for both sides." The two former

parishioners were recalling an experience that occurred some fifty years ago at Bethany Church (Hickory), the first parish served by Rev. Feather. "Somehow," he says, "this was the most lasting impression I had made with these two men. I trust it was a good impression."

More than fifty years ago Hilda Ramseur, a member of St. John's UCC, Kannapolis, was sitting on Vesper Hill at a Johns River Valley Camp summer session directed by the Rev. Art Detweiler.

She can still remember sitting on those benches, looking at the mountain across the valley and seeing its distinct lines, appreciating nature, and "getting the highest feeling you can get."

Youth do not always remember the specific words from a sermon, confirmation class, or Bible Study, but can often recall -- in detail -- encounters they had on a ball field, impressions retained from a mission trip or experiences

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Church Cultivates Friendship with Cuba

by Rev. Joyce Hollyday

Camaguey, Cuba, was the destination of four of us from Circle of Mercy congregation in Asheville, NC, in late January. Originally named Puerto Principe, this dusty little town was also the destination 170 years ago of the Amistad, which never arrived because those on board refused to be enslaved and took control of the ship. I noted with gratitude that

Circle of Mercy and our sister church, Iglesia Getsemani, are connected through a story of liberation and a ship whose name means Friendship.

Our friendship spans several years and many visits. So far, despite our efforts otherwise, the visits have all been one-way; the Bush administration consistently denied members of our sister church visas to travel here.

We're committed to our rela-

tionship being a mutual spiritual partnership, rather than a connection through charity or even "mission." But we were sadly aware that our friends suffered great losses when Cuba was slammed by three hurricanes last fall, bringing massive destruction of homes and crops. In their wake, the Cuban government had asked the Bush administration to temporarily lift the U.S. economic blockade against their country, but our government

refused.

Our choice seemed clear. We wanted to get as many usable goods into Cuba as we could. So on this trip we carried 200 pounds of medicine, vitamins, clothes, and linens as well as \$12,000 that we had pooled from Circle of Mercy's budget excess, personal donations, and last spring's tax rebates: a gift to enable Iglesia Getsemani to pur-

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Think about Living

Camp's Notes



by Stephen W. Camp
Conference Minister

In the last issue of the *Southern Spirit*, the message shared by me was one that asked the conference to hold tightly to a sense of life and vitality, and embrace a new sense of shared mission and ministry. This month I would offer several ways we already do so, and a comment.

The Southern Conference has a first rate training program that built upon the work of the SCOPE program, but has taken it to a new and improved level of ministry. The Pastoral Leadership Development Program came out of many conversations I had with eastern North Carolina coastal pastors. These pastors were crying out for a program that generated leadership for our churches in a climate that saw many churches unable to afford quality leadership. With the graduation of this year's PLD class we offered to our churches and ministries (like chaplaincy programs in hospital settings) over a dozen trained, high quality leaders. This three year program is first rate, with professors from Lancaster Seminary, the Interdenominational Theological Center, and other accredited institutions. The program is financed by large grants secured through our efforts from foundations outside the Southern Conference.

The Southern Conference has also secured significant funds, over a quarter million dollars over the last few years, for church development efforts. We have seen a rise in the number of new church starts and our work with revitalizing congregations is making a difference. I celebrate the partnership that the Southern Conference has with the national setting of the church. They have been very generous with us as we have identified the Southern Conference region as a growing area within the United Church of Christ.

The Southern Conference is clearly a conference that has had a tough time with its internal conversations. Every generation has had its issues including race, women in ministry, the Wilmington 10, and the validity of divorce. The divisive issue for this generation has been principally around human sexuality, particularly homosexuality. As in past generations, churches left, and new understandings were discerned. We as a Conference tried to be faithful, and we have been. When I came to the Southern Conference in 2002 the years of pain and frustration had reached a boiling point. We needed a new way forward, and a sense of collective mission. While some left the

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Southern Conference while we were finding our way toward that mission, we are now more theologically clear, still diverse, and have only one central covenant that binds us. Most of us have agreed that all are welcome at our table, even when we disagree, but we believe that no one person or group should dominate the conversation we have as a conference family. We have tried to resist the divisiveness of being a conference that has separate and competing tables made up of those who project that they know what's best for all. Resisting the lure of separation and dominance is hard work, but as long as the covenantal principle of theological equity at the conversational table remains central, we will be fine. Perhaps that is the underlying reason for our *Conversation on Race*. That is also why I have been encouraging everyone in the conference, moderates, conservatives and progressives alike, clergy and laity, women and men's groups and individuals, to submit to the next Annual Gathering proposals for our shared way forward. Proposals are to be submitted to the Southern Conference Board with the assurance they would be forwarded to the Annual Gathering in May.

We have other issues which should not be ignored. Care of our clergy is important and neglected. Youth and young adult programs and leadership development would insure the continuation of the Conference into the future. The Southern Conference has been also

working hard to develop a new *Southern Conference Foundation* with the express purpose of receiving Planned Gifts, Annuities and Bequests for the future of

the Southern Conference. This foundation will help to ensure the future of the Southern Conference in ways that the Southern Conference has not seen before. Information about it will be shared with each church at Easter time and the next Annual Gathering. In that same vein, we have a signed contract on Christian Temple, and await closing. This sale will result in our being debt free and having at least as much money as we had the day I arrived in the Southern Conference. Thank you for all of your prayers and encouragement in this very difficult work done on your behalf.

A final comment: In these tough times we should continue to choose life. We must not fall into the unhealthy notion that any of us are not needed. The conversation about our future should not focus on me, but instead focus on each one who helps in various ways move the Southern Conference forward. I charge you to share your sense of vision with the Southern Conference in loving and caring ways.

2008 SOC Friends Fund

- Kristin Andes / Tom McGraw
- Dot Ballinger*
- Dale & Lucille Bennett
- Bethel UCC, Hickory NC*
- Norma Boggs
- Steve & Pat Camp
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- "Curly" & Margaret Stumb
- Hunter & Pamela Thompson
- Shelly Wilson

*Listing indicates a gift of at least \$200.00. An asterisk * highlights second mile giving.*

Southern Regional Women's Meeting

October 16-18, 2009
Keynote Speaker: Rev. Jo Hudson, TX
Bible Study Leader: Rev. Rose Wright Scott, NC

Heartland Country Inn & Christian Retreat Center, Brenham, TX

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shared at camp half a century in the past.

Maybe that's why Tyler Smith, a member of Holy Covenant UCC in Charlotte, is training for a long journey - actually - several journeys. One will take him this summer to Lancaster, Pennsylvania (a bicycle benefit ride to help underwrite an even bigger trip). The second journey, part of Lancaster Theological Seminary's "Summer Global Experience," will immerse Tyler into the culture of Thailand. On Tyler's benefit ride to Lancaster, he plans to stop at host churches (including Peace UCC in Greensboro on April 4) to engage in dialogue (the topic of his Senior High School required exit project) about "how people of different faith traditions can work together toward the common good." Says Tyler, "All some want to do is talk, not listen. It takes both [to have good dialogue]." The journey, with planning, training, assumptions, visions, has already begun.

His departure from Holy Covenant UCC in Charlotte, en route to Lancaster Pennsylvania, takes place on April 4.

Engaging youth with the issue of homelessness, Rev. Carla Gregg (Assoc. Min., Pilgrim UCC, Durham) describes a "lock-in" bringing together youth of several UCC Triangle area churches. "We explored homelessness," she explains, "by having two formerly homeless people visit with us, packing lunches for homeless people, and spending time outside on a cold night." That might have been the end of the topic, until the Rev. DaVita McAlister, during a UCC ski retreat at Blowing Rock Conference Center, encouraged youth to "put something on it" when it came to solving poverty. "Our kids remembered the visit with the formerly homeless folks," Carla explains, and how they talked about what a great gift new socks were when you were living outdoors." Her youth returned to

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chase a church building.

Although this was a violation of the blockade and technically illegal, the significance of heading to Cuba on inauguration day of the Obama presidency did not escape us. The fervent hope for a thaw in the relationship between our two countries was palpable all across Cuba. We at Circle of Mercy invite you to join us in prayers that the way will be opened for more amicitia between us and our sisters and brothers in Cuba, whom we have found on every visit to be gracious and generous neighbors.

Rev. Joyce Hollyday is co-pastor of Circle of Mercy in Asheville, NC.

SOUTHERN SPIRIT

The Reverend Stephen CampConference Minister and Editor
Janelle Bunn Administrative Secretary and Managing Editor
C. L. "Curly" Stumb, Irwin Smallwood, Linda Carter Communication Team
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News items and pictures of interest are welcome. Send to 252-B West Fifth Street, Burlington, NC 27215. Deadline is the fifth of each month prior to published editions.

"Always Keep Your Supper Dish in Sight"

by Larry Walser
Associate Conference Minister, WNCA

At a recent meeting of the Board of Directors of the Center for Congregational Health, the Rev. Dr. Les Robinson, Interim Director, told of one of his favorite cartoons from the Snoopy comic strip. In the first panel of the cartoon, Snoopy is sitting on top of his doghouse with his trusty typewriter preparing to write about the truisms of life. In the second panel, Snoopy writes that one should always look ahead. In the third panel, Snoopy warns that one should look over his or her shoulder occasionally. In the final, panel, Snoopy advises that one should always keep your supper dish in sight. Perhaps, this simple cartoon has great words of wisdom for the Southern Conference.

I think most of us have little trouble looking back over our shoulder. In spite of the somewhat awkward position, we enjoy looking at where we have been. We relish our history and bathe in the glory of our successes. That is good! But we cannot live in the past!

It is easy to look ahead. After all, that is the way we seem to be put together! In looking ahead, we can seek to dodge the dangers. We can also look for the most comfortable route ahead where we can seek to recreate the glories of the past.

But keeping our supper dish in sight, that is something else all together. That supper dish holds what is critical to life itself! It

provides the nourishment that makes everything else possible. It is the right now! For the Southern Conference, the supper dish holds what is critical for our survival!

We always need to know whose we are and who it is that calls us into being. We must always know that we are called by Jesus Christ, himself, to be the living body of love and justice and hope not only to our congregations but to the communities in which we live and work and play. This knowledge gives reason to everything else we do as the Southern Conference.

We must constantly be developing our sense of mission and ministry to our congregations and their members. We must help the strong churches enhance their ministries and help the weaker churches grow stronger.

We must welcome new members and new churches that seek to enlarge the mission and ministry of Christ's Church. We

must explore new ways of being the church that speaks to people who might not understand the church we see looking back over our shoulder. And we must learn how to do this together as the body of Christ.

Knowing whose we are and what we are called to be, will enable us to nourish and strengthen us as people of Christ. Our life as the Southern Conference of the United Church of Christ will take on new and renewed vitality.

That supper dish holds what is critical to life itself.

Larry's Thoughts



Rinker Celebrates 80



Elon, N.C. From the inception of the Southern Conference as a United Church of Christ entity, until his retirement in 1992, the Reverend Richard Rinker sparked energy as a catalyst for Christian Education and outdoor ministry programs. In an Associate Conference Minister role, Rinker cultivated Christian Education leadership, worked through assessment inventories with local church school leaders, guided outdoor ministry programs hosted by four Conference sites, and for many of those

years, edited the *Southern Conference News*.

In February, he turned 80, and his children - Sharon, Cindy and Mark -- gathered friends and colleagues for a party at the Elon Community Center. Said Rinker when given the "last word," and quoting George Burns, "If I had known I was going to live this long, I would have taken better care of myself." and then he quickly added, "Let's do this again in ten years."



Elon Homes and Schools for Children to Open Francis Elementary School

Charlotte, N.C. Elon Homes and Schools for Children is presently renovating one wing of its main building on the Kennedy Campus in Charlotte to house the Francis Elementary School scheduled to open in August 2009. Francis Elementary will be part of the existing Kennedy Charter Public School and will initially open with 30 kindergarten and 30 first grade students. An additional grade will be added in subsequent years until the charter school serves students in grades K-12. The school will serve siblings of current charter school students as well as disadvantaged children from the community.

Francis Elementary School is named in honor of longtime friend and benefactor Mrs. Mary Elizabeth Francis and her family. In the early 1970s Mrs. Francis was a faithful supporter of Boys Town of North Carolina which merged with Elon Homes for Children in 1985. In November, the agency is planning an event to honor Mrs. Francis and individuals who helped establish Boys Town.

The Duke Endowment has provided a generous grant of \$172,500, payable over three

years, which will enable the school to offer the FAST program to the families of the children who attend Francis Elementary. FAST, which stands for Families and Schools Together, is designed to help parents become more involved in the lives of their children and be better prepared to promote their children's academic success while teaching them to lead safe, happy and smart lives. The program brings together partners from the school and various community organizations (social service groups, non-profit agencies, religious institutions, police departments, etc.) to provide parents with the support and resources they need to adequately nurture and guide their children. The children, in turn, benefit by learning good habits, by receiving help with their school work and by having involved, engaged parents.

For many years educators and others have known that the sooner adults intervene in positive ways in a child's life, the greater the impact. Elon Homes and Schools for Children is excited about this wonderful opportunity to provide an outstanding educational experience for very young students.

The Numbers Are Down



Chapel Hill, N.C. Triangle clergy gathered in March to hear Dr. Mark Chaves (photo>left), Duke University's Professor of Sociology and Religion, describe changing church trends. He has at least two books published. One is an analysis of the first *National Congregations Study* undertaken in 1998 (*Congregations in America*). The other speaks to conflict in churches

and religious organizations over ordaining women.

Chaves began by noting that 68% of persons definitely believe in heaven and 52% definitely believe in hell. His conclusion: "We're optimistic."

On a more serious note, he reported findings indicating an increase in religious diversity, a softening of church attendance (20% on any given week), declining belief in an inerrant Bible, and declining confidence in organized religion.

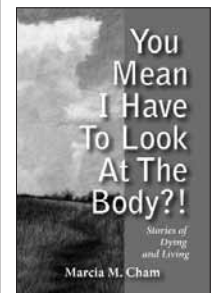
YOU MEAN I HAVE TO LOOK AT THE BODY?!

An insider's "eye" into the depths of living and dying ... a passage no one escapes

Reverend Marcia M. Cham is a retired pastor in the United Church of Christ and member of High Country UCC. She works as an on-call Chaplain at an area medical center.

From the Prologue:

Dying is like birth; sometimes births are easy; sometimes difficult. ... Our predictions, expectations, timetables and guesses are just that: predictions, expectations, timetables, guesses. In death as in birth, there is no pattern; There is only the assurance that death will come and God's promise of new life.



... NEW ...

Southern Conference Foundation
to be unveiled in April

Youth Leaders Share Glimpses Into Their Ministry

(Editor's note: The following comments are responses to Southern Spirit staff driven e-mail interviews, and are being presented as if they took place in a virtual forum discussion, as moderated by "Curly" Stumb.)

Curly: What is at the core of your youth ministry?

Kelly Barefoot (Calvary UCC, Thomasville): The phrase that has stuck with me and which I have tried to incorporate into youth ministry was something said by my youth ministry professor, Dean Borgman. He said at its heart, youth ministry must be an "incarnational ministry." Youth ministers must be like Christ to their kids. No amount of slick programming can substitute for this.

Curly: What aspect of programming gets youth in the door?

Paul Cummings (Corinth Reformed Church, Hickory): A crowd attracts a crowd, but excellence in music, drama/games and teaching [gets them in the door].

Nora Driver Foust (First Reformed UCC, Burlington): Mission projects.... This year, our spiritual growth and study curriculum encouraged us to meet in local coffee houses and that has been EXTREMELY popular. We also do a lot of work with mandalas, and I have tremendous success when using them.

Curly: What part does music play in your program?

Paul Cummings: A huge part: weekly youth/adult led worship with a full band

Sharon Hammill (Elon Community UCC, Elon): We have a Wonderful Youth Hand Bell program. In the summer we have a week of "Music" camp. During Music camp, the "Young Ringers" as they are called, work on a piece that they will perform at the Regional Hand Bell Festival in the fall. They also sing, participate in drama or art during the week.

Curly: How does church leadership view youth ministry?

Linda W. Cheek (Gregory Congregational UCC, Wilmington): In November 2008, the outreach committee started its Saturday morning tutorial program. The start up of this program was made possible through a grant received from the *Neighbors In Need Ministry* (Office of Justice and Witness). These funds have enabled us to provide practice materials and a new computer for student use, as well as a light lunch or snack each week. This project came into being because we were concerned about the African American student achievement. Their attendance each week, especially on a Saturday morning (about 14), speaks to how much they want to succeed. The parents have been very supportive and have expressed great appreciation for the program. They call it a blessing. Our main goal is to be an additional support and inspiration to those who come to us.

Ken Sehested (Circle of Mercy, Asheboro, NC): It is very important in our Circle that our children actually be involved in some form of ministry from time to time. Like our celebration of St. Nicholas Day on Dec. 6, when we take baskets of food to people in the area who are living on the margins. The kids deliver boxes to the front steps, ring the bell (or knock) and then run away, so that the gift is anonymous. (St. Nicholas was known for giving gifts to the poor anonymously.) This is also how we redirect some attention away from Santa Claus at Christmas, by giving attention to St. Nicholas.

Curly: Are there comments about your program that you've heard youth or parents state?

Kelly Barefoot: After last summer's workcamp, one mother was visibly touched by how her son, a young man who was really struggling with faith,

had grown in the experience of serving others. He had seen God and his life will never be the same, I think....

Sharon Hammill: There are meaningful components that take the youth beyond the walls of the church. We have participated in annual Southern Conference Ski Retreat the last few years with very good participation these last two years. We have also been able to attend the National Youth Event.

The youth also participate in feeding the Homeless Shelter, participating in worship at Twin Lakes Retirement Community by performing with their hand bell group, ringing bells in the Hospice Memorial Service, helping with tutoring of our Burmese family we sponsor, and participating in the "Heal the Land" project which is an effort to plant new trees in designated areas around the local area. We plan this summer to go on Mission trip to Carolina Cross Connection in Western North Carolina.

Curly: Can you share the kernel of a story that ought to be told about someone in your group?

Shelly Wilson (High Country UCC, Boone/Vilas): Lots of stories...the kids have an awareness of their own gifts. Some are very gifted with the construction aspects of our workcamps, and are strong, skilled, and get lots of work done. Others, not so much, but those kids know they have other gifts: they go into the homes, they talk to the residents, they spend time doing the people-skill compassion work. The youth group members are supportive of each person exercising his/her significant gift for service. Our youth group believes in itself; the kids are confident, they know they are capable, skilled, and have important things to give. They are very welcoming to new people, and are visionary and able to make their visions realities.

Brenda James (St. Stephen UCC, Greensboro): A young man grew up in St. Stephen. He was raised by his grandmother alone, with parents unable to care for him. Was told by teachers he would never be successful. Through the church, he was active at local, conference and national levels. He graduated high school, college, taught math and answered the *call to ministry*, earned two Master Degrees in Theology, and is currently a local church pastor. He is a role model for the youth, and they look up to him.

Annette Olsen (Duke Pastoral Services): From a healthcare chaplain perspective, am wondering how congregations help their youth ministers care for young parishioners with long term health challenges that keep them in the hospital or away from church. Each day I hear stories of how congregations helped a patient get through their 3 year cancer treatment, or who provided fundraisers on a regular basis for parents to be able to pay for things like rent, mortgage, food in the hospital cafeteria, parking money for clinic visits and you name it. It is quite noticeable how churches make it possible for kids with potentially life-limiting illnesses or injuries help teens make it through, and, help their parents cope.

Curly: And finally, I'm asking this because of a personal interest in a story angle. The author Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore offered a keynote address at a recent educators' workshop in Chapel Hill. In her book *In the Midst of Chaos, Caring for Children as Spiritual Practice*, she takes a chapter to look at the role of play and fun in the role of family and spiritual practice. Do you have any thoughts about the role of play and fun as part of family and/or church?

Jay Laurens (First UCC, Salisbury, NC): My answers to the other questions prior to reading this one probably make my feelings obvious. It is my belief that youth groups (and families) who regularly engage in fun activities bring a smile to God's face. Fun is, in fact, one of what I would consider the "Four Essential F's" of youth ministry - the others being friends (peers and adults), fellowship (with others and with God), and food (for our bodies and souls).



Golden Ragwort
sdnheh tfei eht
Photographed at
Johns River Valley Camp
by C. L. Stumb

2009 Calendar

April 6-7: The Critical Question on Race: continuation of a sacred conversation at Franklinton Center

April 8-12: Southern Conference to host German delegation from Rheinland Church

April 14: EVA Church Women's Meeting; Wesley Grove UCC

April 19: Event honoring Rev. Richard McBride, Elon University

April 24-26: Mothers' Retreat at Johns River Valley Camp

April 24-25: SISTA's Keeping It Real; Franklinton Cntr. conversation on race for women

April 24-25: United Church Homes and Services Retreat, W.S.

April 28: NC Council of Churches Strategic Planning Meeting; Chapel Hill

May 9-10: John Thomas (UCC president) visiting WNCA

May 10: Bethany UCC (Claremont, NC) celebrates 100 yrs.

May 17: Providence UCC (Chesapeake, VA) celebrates 155 yrs.

May 20: SOC Board Meets; 9:00 AM - 12:00; Catawba College

May 20-21: Annual Southern Conference Gathering, Catawba College

May 29-30: Strong Men's Conference; Franklinton Center

June 6-7: Cong. UCC, Hendersonville presents Ashley Lecture Series with Dr. Walter Bruggemann; www.wnca-soc.org/category/news/

June 7-10: UCC Community boys Football Camp at Franklinton Center

June 26-30: General Synod meets in Grand Rapids around theme "Immerse Yourself"

**UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST**



Rev. Mark Burns (center) orchestrates group photo session in camp setting.
-C. L. Stumb photo



Pulling strings involves more than manipulation and control. Participants are introduced to techniques of a puppet ministry at a Catawba District (WNCA) Leadership Training School. Linda Peterson (background in black) offered the instruction.
-C. L. Stumb photo



Tutorial program at Gregory Congregational UCC offers supplemental education, support, and inspiration to neighborhood families.
-photo provided