



SOUTHERN SPIRIT

April / May 2008

Southern Conference edition

Section B



WNCA sponsored a February work camp to Back Bay Mission in Biloxi, Mississippi



Rev. Kelly Barefoot coordinated Biloxi Trip



Rev. Shari Prestemon is executive director of Back Bay Mission



Churches

Build

Homes

And

Bridge

Span

Of

Theological

Divide

The trip seemed to be a beautiful example of the Body of Christ at its best. Although we were from different churches and sometimes hold competing viewpoints and theologies, we worked well together, striving for the common good.

-- Rev. Kelly Barefoot



Tasks were divided into two units. One group worked on a renovation project; the second was assigned to a new home start where the original was destroyed by a 16-foot tidal surge.

- Biloxi photos by Paul Davis

By Irwin Smallwood

Develop programs and opportunities for local congregations to participate across racial and cultural lines in experiences of mutual service and reconciliation.

From those words in the constitution and by-laws of the Western Association, an idea was born that during the cold of February led 28 faithful from nearly a dozen WNCA churches to the Gulf Coast to warm the hearts of brothers and sisters in Mississippi and help them in the

vast rebuilding still to be done in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

As chair of the association's Church Development and Evangelism Committee, The Rev. Kelly Barefoot found in them the inspiration for a work trip to Biloxi, Miss., that he wound up leading personally.

Back Bay Mission, a community ministry of the UCC, organized the work itself. "Before Katrina," explained Barefoot, pastor of Calvary UCC in Thomasville, Back Bay "helped provide local residents various

forms of assistance, while also working in the political arena to bring about social justice." But after Katrina, he added, "they by necessity had to include home repair or construction as a part of their ministry. Which is precisely what we did."

The WNCA work group, which included 14 men and 14 women, stayed at a United Methodist assembly facility right across the road from the Gulf of

continued on B-2
Biloxi

New Staffing Aligns Conference for Church Growth

The Southern Conference is pleased to welcome to the SOC staff the Revs. Phil Hardy and K. Ray Hill. Both are deployed part time as Area Conference Ministers (less than 20 hours per week) in the Eastern North Carolina Association, having started work March 1st. Both will work for SOC for the next 18 months to two years. Each clergy-person brings exceptional proficiency and seasoned ministry skill to the position. Rev. Hardy will

cover the western part of the Association and Rev. Hill the eastern part. Both will be assigned responsibility with the varied ministries, commissions, board and help with the administrative tasks that happen day to day within ENCA.

Rev. Vertie Powers will remain the Association Minister one-quarter time, but supervise the new staff as needed. Both K. Ray and Phil bring significant pastoral experience and church management gifts.

"It was an easy choice for the Board of Directors to confirm," Stephen Camp said. "I am very pleased to have them both aboard our staff team. As we embark upon a season of new church development in the Southern Conference, with Vertie Powers leading that effort, we know that the care of the Eastern North Carolina Association is in good and solid hands. To K. Ray and Phil we say welcome!"



K. Ray Hill



Phil Hardy

Evangelism Drives People to Churches with E-tools

Camp's Notes

by Stephen W. Camp
Conference Minister



Steve Camp

The Southern Conference staff dreams of the day that we could have enough endowed money to ensure that every eligible employee has health and pension payment assured each quarter. So far we have managed to meet the deadlines. But with tightening financial concerns, it is feasible that a day will come when these staff benefits will no longer be doable. A gift legacy, on the other hand, could ensure that money is available each quarter. Have you or your family considered a gift to the Southern Conference in your will, or in the financial legacy that you will leave to the church? Talk to the Conference Minister or your ACM if you are interested in setting up a gift that will live long after you are gone on to your eternal reward.

Have you looked at the Southern Conference website lately? It is updated regularly, but currently has three items on it that I believe a quick look, would be worth your time. The address is soc-ucc.org. From this website you can get to the (ucc.org) national UCC webpage too. There are a variety of helpful items on the sites, both for your local church work and for the deepening of your personal faith. Check out the Southern Conference site this month.

In particular, on the Southern Conference website this month you will find an invitation to visit local churches. We hope your local church will be included. As you may know we are using some of the proceeds of the *Live the Vision Capital Campaign* to do some test market advertising in two target areas. We will have an interstate billboard in the Greensboro/Burlington/Lexington area and newspaper ads in several papers in that target area. Watch for it! We will also target the Norfolk VA., area with a similar advertising campaign too. Both will last about two months. We would hope that your local church would make sure that your church's website is linked to the SOC website and your church is part of our list of churches seen on the SOC website. If help is needed, contact the Conference office for

On the Southern Conference website this month you will find an invitation to visit local churches.

more detail.

Second, we hope you will check out information about the upcoming Annual Gathering of the Southern Conference of the United Church of Christ. This year we will have an exciting event hosted by the Eastern Virginia Association. We will be at the Suffolk VA, Hilton Garden Inn and we encourage you to check out our website for information about this special yearly event. Get your registration in early and call the hotel directly to reserve your room at the conference rate. Each church will also receive

information through the postal service very soon.

Third, you will find on the website the paper entitled "New Occasions Teach New

Duties, Hope for the Future - A Statement of Mission." The latest draft of the paper is on the SOC website. The paper has been reviewed by the staff, the SOC Board of Directors, several clergy and lay groups and a widening number of individuals, many of whom have made comment and voiced appreciation and/or concern. Take a look and send us your comments. I can be reached at stephencamp@soc-ucc.org. I would welcome your comments soon, as a final draft will be shared with each local church and at this year's Annual Gathering.



continued from B-1 -- Biloxi

Mexico. It was divided into two work units, one assigned to a renovation project and the other to a new home start where the original was destroyed by a 16-foot tidal surge.

"Our work was productive," said the Rev. Paul Davis, minister of Christian Education at Greensboro's Congregational UCC. But there were other benefits of the project as well, he said. It provided "ample opportunity to talk and to listen, to learn about one another's churches, to make new friends ... and it was a way to help others while doing something positive within the association," he added.

The trip "seemed to be a beautiful example of the Body of Christ at its best," Barefoot said. "Although we were from different churches and sometimes hold competing viewpoints and theologies, we worked well together, striving for the common good." And although they went to help others, he said, they learned again that "the

ones who seek to be a blessing end up being blessed themselves." He added that it reminded them that God loves the world and "cares for it one drywall screw at a time sometimes."

Mt. Zion church in China Grove allowed the group to use its two vans and paid for the gas for the entire trip, and St. Matthews church in Maiden loaned their van as well. The Davidson/Forsyth Ministerium gave \$300 toward transportation costs. "I never cease to be amazed at how God provides all that we need," Barefoot said.

The work crew was made up of members from Mt. Zion, St. Matthews, Peace UCC and Congregational in Greensboro, High Country in Boone, Zion and Calvary in Thomasville, Trinity Reformed in Concord, First and Second Reformed in Lexington, and Bethel Bear Creek in Mt. Pleasant. And included among them, Barefoot said, were many skills,

"ranging from licensed contractors to those of us who didn't know a key hole saw from a band saw."

WNCA representatives worked alongside a UCC contingent from Stamford, CT, and together they were part of more than 100 UCC volunteers working in five different groups that week, the largest number of volunteer work campers in Back Bay Mission's history. Back Bay provided two full-time construction leaders, as well as one full-time volunteer construction leader whose wife was the volunteer coordinator. "We were told," Davis said, "that there is a desperate need for long term (three months or longer) volunteers to serve in this capacity, and people interested should be in touch with UCC Disaster Relief Ministries."

(Note: Churches in the Southern Conference have given in excess of \$100,000 to assist the people of the Gulf Coast rebuild after Hurricane Katrina.)

UCC Women Plan June Retreat

The Women's Retreat this year will feature the "Dynamic Duo," also known as the Rev. Dr. Nancy Ellett Allison and the Rev. Judah Jones. Many know Nancy from the Bible studies and workshops she has led at women's meetings through the years. She is always interesting, entertaining, and spiritually enriching. Those who know Judah Jones say she will bring those same qualities to the music at this event.

Dates for the retreat are June 20 & 21 at the Summit Conference Center at Haw River State Park in Brown Summit, NC. The meeting will officially begin at 2 p.m. on Friday and end by 3 p.m. on Saturday, but those who work and must arrive later on Friday will still find it worth their while.

Overnight accommodations will be rustic motel-style rooms that have new beds, new carpet, and new bathroom fixtures but no television or telephone.

The 2008 Women's Retreat replaces this year's CWSC Summer Conference, traditionally held as a three-day event. Saturday's agenda will include a brief service recognizing those who received life memberships, honor certificates, and memorials through support of the Lightbourne Scholarship Fund during the year. Also back by popular request is the Silent Auction that helps raise seed money for the next summer retreat or conference.

Faye Humphrey is chairperson for the 2008 event. For more information, contact Lisa Barrows at 828-859-8357 or lbarrows@charter.net. At the time of this submission, the theme and registrar have not been announced.



Rev. Nancy Allison



Rev. Judah Jones



Leaders Continue Visioning Process

by Dian Griffin Jackson
SOC President

This is an awesome time to be a member of the Southern Conference of the United Church of Christ. Members of the Southern Conference Board of Directors met at Franklinton Center, Whitakers, NC on March 9 and spent two very productive days listening to the *God who still speaks* and discerning God's will for the life of our Conference - at least through the next five years. The weather was absolutely gorgeous; the food was scrumptious. More importantly, the dialogue was unforgettable.

What would you want the Southern Conference to be in the next five years? A place where we share a common mission and vision, where covenant becomes the buzz word rather than autonomy. A place where each church has a clear identity and understanding of the meaning of being the United Church of Christ. A place with a renewed focus on Christian Education. A place where young people are heard and welcomed as leaders in our midst. An ecumenical community - a community where people of all faiths are

welcomed and embraced. A place with a renewed focus on congregational vitality, where church becomes the priority. A place where each church generously and consistently gives 10% to OCWM so that we can do the work of the Conference. A Conference that is financially solvent, with a clear vision, where each church, pastor, lay person, guest, friend is bursting with unquenchable joy and exuberant enthusiasm to live the vision and engage the joy of being one in the Southern Conference.

In the Gospel of John, Phillip is so excited about his encounter with Jesus, that he finds Nathaniel and shares the good news. Nathaniel is skeptical, asking "can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Phillip's spirit is not dampened. He says to Nathaniel, "come and see!" So, I ask you the question, "Can anything good come out of the Southern Conference?" and your Board of Directors say "yes, yes, a thousand times, yes." I say to you, "come and see!" Join us in Suffolk Virginia for the Southern Conference Annual Gathering. You will be glad you did!
Yours in prayer and unity,

So, I ask you the question, "Can anything good come out of the Southern Conference?"

Dian's Thoughts



Catawba Calls New President

SALISBURY, N.C. -- Dr. W. Craig Turner, currently in his sixth year as President of Hardin-Simmons University (HSU) in Abilene, Texas, will become Catawba College's 21st President, effective June 1. The College Board of Trustees approved Turner's nomination at its February 19 meeting following a recommendation by the College's Presidential Search Committee.

Dr. Turner will succeed retiring College President Dr. Robert E. Knott who will step down in May at the end of this academic year after six years of service to the institution.

Dr. Knott has taken Catawba to new levels of academic excellence and with Dr. Turner's breadth of experience, we're confident that he can continue to move the institution forward, continuing the focus on strengthening our academic programs," explained Tom Smith, Chair of Catawba's Board of Trustees.

Dr. Turner joined the administration and faculty of Hardin-Simmons University in 1992, serving as Vice President for Academic Affairs and Professor of English from 1992 to 1996. He then became Executive Vice President

and Chief Academic Officer until he was named Chief Operating Officer in June 2000. Dr. Turner then served as Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer at HSU for a year before becoming the 14th President of Hardin-Simmons University on June 1, 2001.

During his tenure as President, HSU has seen record enrollments (2,435 in the fall of 2007), record endowment and similar funds (\$121.5 million in 2007), and surplus budgets. HSU finished the most successful fund raising campaign in its history in December of 2006, having raised \$49.7 million. The University successfully completed its Commission on Colleges reaccreditation in 2007, has been chosen as a Top Tier institution by U.S. News & World Report for six consecutive years and a Best in the West institution by Princeton Review for five consecutive years.

Dr. Turner and wife Annette have two grown children: Scott, a Development Officer for Texas Tech University in Dallas, and Shannon Hays, an attorney, writer, and mother in Jacksonville, N.C. Shannon and her husband Mike, a Marine Corps Captain, have twin daughters: Madeleine and Peyton.

Elon Expands School

CHARLOTTE, N.C. -- When Elon Homes for Children opened its Kennedy Charter Public School in the fall of 1998, approximately 40 students were enrolled. Today, Kennedy Charter has grown to serve 284 students in grades 6-12. The students, most of whom have not fared well in a traditional classroom, benefit from small classes, individualized attention, a highly structured learning environment and the dedicated staff offered by Kennedy.

The North Carolina State Board of Education recently renewed the school's charter for the next five years. Elon Homes also received permission from the state board to expand Kennedy Charter to include elementary grades. Beginning in the fall of 2008, the school will add three sections of kindergarten. It is Elon Homes' intention to expand the school until the school offers a total K-12 program.

President Dr. Fred Grosse explains, "We believe that to better meet our definition of Education at Elon Homes, there need to be educational opportunities for children younger than the 6th grade. The preponderance of evidence (we have studied) is weighted toward a fairly simple and almost common sense point - the sooner one can intervene with positive influence in the life of a child (and family), the better the chances for immediate and long-term benefits."

All programs and services provided by Elon Homes address one or more of its stated Ends or goals: Safe Haven, Life Skills, Education.

EVA's Youth in Mission a Success

Reports Bonnie Dinges, *EVA Youth in Mission* was a success... in spite of weather." Participants (There were 35 in attendance!) worked at the Food Bank of Southeastern VA (with donations of 275 pounds of food), made greeting cards for shut-ins, and prepared sandwiches for the homeless. "We also had games, food and an awesome closing worship service. The kids (and adults) were beaming when they left, and asking for more interaction within the association." Union UCC was host.

SOC Notes

The Conference Minister welcomes continued feedback on the "Covenant Statement." Download the most recent version from the web and discuss it at Councils, Bible Studies.

Watch for Annual Gathering registration material. There will be two ways to respond, (1) mail or (2) web (with Pay Pal).

Clergy Retreat to be held at VA Beach Resort & Conference Center with Dr. Randall C. Bailey of Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta, on May 12-14.

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(Contributors of \$100.00 or more)

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Thank You to all who gave!

SOUTHERN SPIRIT

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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.



Wild Bergamot
Monarda fistulosa
Miss Family (Labiateae)
Photographed at Johns River Valley Camp
by C. L. Stumb

2008 Calendar

April 4-6: Mothers' Retreat at Johns River Valley Camp

April 17-19: Stewardship event in Cleveland

April 19: Johns River Valley Camp Board of Trustees meets in Burlington

April 26: Christian Education planning meeting, Burlington

April 26: E & R Historic Society Meeting at Piedmont Crossing, Thomasville

May 12, 13, 14: Clergy Retreat with Dr. Randall C. Bailey at VA Beach Resort & Conference Center

May 16-17: Strong Men's Conference at Franklinton Center

June 20-21: UCC 2008 Women's Retreat, Summit Conference Center at Haw River State Park in Brown Summit, NC

June 26-27: SOC Annual Gathering, Hilton Garden Inn, Suffolk

July 8-12: United Black Christians, Durham

July 24-28: 2008 National Youth Event, University of Tennessee

August 2: Franklinton Center Day

September 26-27: Christian Education event at Black Lake Retreat Center

September 26-27: Fall Clergy Retreat at Franklinton Center

October 4: Western North Carolina Association Meeting

October 9-11: African American Women in Ministry Retreat at Franklinton Center

October 11: Eastern North Carolina Association Meeting

October 18: Eastern Virginia Association Meeting

**UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST**

UCC General Minister Illustrates Covenant Signs

by C. L. "Curly" Stumb

CHARLOTTE, N.C. -- CHHSM members came together in Southern Conference for their annual meeting to explore an understanding of covenant between their organization and the United Church of Christ. Stated John Thomas, General Minister and president of the United Church of Christ in an opening keynote address: "My central, primary point tonight is this: Covenants are not just about our promise of mutual aid to one another, promises that presumably can be offered or withdrawn, that can have conditions attached and that have a claim on us only to the extent that they serve our self-interest. No, these covenants are also about our promises of obedience to God. We "own" the covenant, but it is God who "gathers" us in covenant."

He shared several stark contemporary images highlighting CHHSM ministries in the wake of God's covenant with Noah [and Abraham/Sarah]. Having toured Hoffman Home in Pennsylvania shortly after September 11, 2001, Thomas spoke of being reminded "that terror has been a daily experience long before 9/11 for many of our children, terror that relentlessly

attempts to destroy their bodies, their spirits, their very souls."

Thomas talked of the sentimental images of the ark we find in things such as mobiles for babies' cribs which, he suggested, miss the terrible dimensions of the Katrina catastrophe. "Those who survived Katrina may have a better sense of what this story is about than any of the rest of us."

And in the days following the Central Committee meeting of the World Council of Churches where member groups spent considerable time reflecting on the church's response to global warming, he sensitized the body to its western most neighbors in covenant. "What is, for most of us, a somewhat academic exercise takes on terrifying reality for our sisters and brothers from the Pacific, those who describe themselves as inhabiting 'the liquid continent.' Rising waters there are not merely lifestyle threats. They literally threaten life itself. They are not just an 'inconvenient truth,' but a terrifying truth promising complete destruction of their culture and habitat."

"In any number of other institutional sanctuaries," Thomas concluded, "we are re-owning the covenant that 'never again shall all



Rev. Larry Walsler (WNCA ACM) offered Southern Conference greetings at Annual CHHSM meeting in Charlotte. Rev. John Thomas, UCC General Minister and President, delivered keynote address. Rev. Stephen Camp (not pictured), delivered sermon during service of worship at Holy Covenant UCC.
-photo by C. L. Stumb

flesh be cut off.' Terror and destruction, whether on the grand stage of creation, or in more intimate, private, and personal arenas, are not God's intention and cannot be our own. Healing, protection, and redemption are part of our covenant with God and with one another, part of the walk that we have agreed to take together under the promise of the rainbow."

[Council for Health and Human Services - CHHSM - is the Council of Health and Human Service Ministries of the United Church of Christ. CHHSM includes 75 corporate members, all affiliated with the United Church of Christ, that operate 357 facilities and programs providing health care, services to children, services to people with disabilities, and services to the aging.]

Read more: Thomas keynote text / Camp sermon text / CHHSM
<http://chhsm.org/annualmeeting/index.html>

Franklinton Center Projects History to Meet Future

WHITAKERS, N.C. -- "We build for the future. We build because our history compels us to develop God's sacred space," states Rev. Ervin Milton, director of Franklinton Center. Milton and the Center staff hosted a March meeting of the SOC Board of Directors, introducing the new 13,000 square foot facility to this gathering of Southern Conference church representatives. The new facility houses 22 double

rooms with individual baths and wireless capability.

A spacious meeting room complements the facility, adding significantly to the site's campus. Delegates assembled at round cloth covered tables in an inviting conference-style setting. Says Milton, "The new facility at Franklinton Center at Bricks offers visible evidence for our exciting future both structurally and programmatically.



SOC Board officers gather in front of new lodging / meeting facility at Franklinton Center. From left to right stand Dian Jackson (President), Dale Kennedy (VP), Ron Barlow (Treasurer), and Kristin Andes (Secretary).
-photo by C. L. Stumb

Congregation Approves Unusual Response to Tax Rebate

ASHEVILLE, N.C. -- Members of an Asheville, N.C., congregation have taken the unusual step of voting to give away the anticipated tax rebates recently approved by Congress and signed into law by President George W. Bush as an economic stimulus package.

In a special business meeting on Sunday, 24 February, Circle of Mercy Congregation approved an open letter to President Bush and leaders of Congress which states members' intentions to "give away all or part" of the rebate "to organizations that foster justice."

The letter begins by thanking the President and Congressional leaders for their bipartisan work to address the nation's economic crisis, but goes on to speak of the "fright-

ening, and escalating, pattern of economic disparity" both within the U.S. and between nations, saying "In the language of our faith, this disparity is a sin and the evidence of spiritual distress."

In criticizing the rebate goal of boosting consumer spending, the statement says, "We do not believe that shopping is an appropriate response to our trauma." Claiming no "special expertise" on policy options, the letter urges "there must be more commonness in the good we pursue."

Circle of Mercy's co-pastor, Ken Sehested, who drafted the statement, said when the idea for redirecting tax rebates came up, "We did some very quick calculations and realized checks totaling at least

\$25,000 will be coming to the 33 households in our membership. That's a significant influx of cash-and an exciting opportunity for us to consider extravagant missions funding."

Sehested acknowledged not everyone will choose to contribute all or even part of their rebate. "We have a few households living on a very thin margin." More important than the total amounts of money redirected, he said, is "prompting our congregation-and other communities of faith-to ask these kinds of questions [about economic disparity] in the context of who we are as followers of Jesus."

This is something everybody can do, Sehested said, "regardless of whether they agree with our per-

spective." People across the theological and political spectrum can agree that "there's something terribly wrong" with the way things are. "And together we can rise up, enter the public arena with our concerns and insights, and find ways to alleviate the suffering caused by poverty."

Recognizing that "relinquishing our rebate checks is a modest step," the open letter explains "our vow to forego the extra income is a sign of our resolve to bear the cost of moving toward the beloved community."

Circle of Mercy, founded in 2001, is affiliated nationally with the Alliance of Baptists and United Church of Christ. Sehested, along with Nancy Hastings Sehested and Joyce Hollyday, serve as co-pastors.