



SOUTHERN SPIRIT

December / January 2009 Southern Conference edition Section B



600076



"Here is the church, here is the steeple; open the door and see all the people."

-UCC Steeple Ad

2009...
Living
Toward
a
Vision
of
One



WNCA: First UCC Salisbury, NC



ENCA: First Reformed UCC Burlington, NC



EVA: Wesley Grove UCC Newport News, VA



Eastern North Carolina Association meeting photo portraying the sanctuary of Oak Level United Church of Christ offers a Southern Conference image of "Steeple Ad" message.

- Photo by C. L. Stumb

I still believe that one day mankind will bow before the altars of God and be crowned triumphant over war and bloodshed, and nonviolent redemptive goodwill will proclaim the rule of the land.

Most of these people will never make the headlines and their names will not appear in Who's Who. Yet when years have rolled past and when the blazing light of truth is focused on this marvelous age in which we live -- men and women will know and children will be taught that we have a finer land, a better people, a more noble civilization -- because these humble children of God were willing to suffer for righteousness' sake.

-Martin Luther King, Jr.
Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech (Dec 1964)

A Pastor Travels the Long Road to Galilee (UCC)

by IRWIN SMALLWOOD

It's a long way from the battlefields of Vietnam to the fishing villages of Merritt and Pamlico on the eastern reaches of North Carolina. But Leroy Dukes made that journey, and a congregation of the United Church of Christ is the better for it.

Leroy Dukes, a decorated

(Bronze Star) Marine Corps combat engineer four decades ago, is now The Rev. Leroy Dukes, pastor of Galilee UCC, which is listed as in Merritt, NC, but is probably closer to Pamlico, just down the road a piece.

And the story of his faith journey is a remarkable story of God at work in the 21st century, specifically through the Pastoral

Leadership Development program of the Southern Conference.

Dukes was drafted into the Marines not too long after graduating from New Hanover High School in Wilmington, and when he was discharged in 1970, it would be 30 long years before the

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Road to Galilee UCC



Rev. Leroy Dukes attends banquet at 2008 Annual Gathering in Suffolk, VA, and applauds 2008 PLD (Pastoral Leadership Development) graduates. Rev. Dukes was in the first graduating class of the PLD program.

soc-ucc.org

God is still speaking

Faith or Fate ... Following a Destiny of One

Camp's Notes



by Stephen W. Camp
Conference Minister

During the children's sermon, the pastor was speaking to the children about the need for unity within the church. The pastor looked at the children and emphasized, "God wants us to be one!"

One of the youngest children who was four years of age immediately protested, "I've already been one; I want to be five."

The Southern Conference has gone through significant change and considerable struggle. At an earlier point we were seventy churches stronger and we claimed several thousand more people in our pews each Sunday. The financial corpus was larger and we were known for more than a single issue. A narrow view of what was determined as theological correctness was found wanting. Over time we began to realize that diversity could be celebrated. It has not been an easy time for us, but we have endured.

As time passes, yet another year comes to a close, and we ask ourselves: *is there any unity among us? Is there shared purpose? Do we see a common destiny or simply live by fate? Does the meaning of this Advent season, upon us again, mean for us that we have clarity that God is with us, calling us together, calling us to be one?*

During this Advent let us be prayerful for the future. I would ask that every member of the Southern Conference of the United Church of Christ, every leader, every person in our pews, staff and volunteer, young, old, male or female, gay or straight, black, white, Hispanic, Asian or Native American member, find new ways to bring forth the unity the church needs to meet the challenges of

Does the meaning of this Advent season, ... mean for us that we have clarity that God is with us, calling us together, calling us to be one?

this new day that are emerging. Some can give time in local settings to lift up the image of your local church in your local community. Teach the faith stories again, as if we have never taught them before. Be a person in mission. Preach with new energy and vitality. Some can show unity by attending programs of the Conference or the Associations. Give in ways that inspire, instead of out of mere duty. Write a check to sustain the work and ministry of the Southern Conference and the United Church of Christ, be a *Friend of the Conference*, and/or make a planned gift to ensure a legacy in the years to come. A few might need to answer a call to service that has been nagging at the heart or enable another to fulfill what God is calling forth. Let it all lead toward places of unity.

This is no time to say, "I've already been one; I want to be five." That is the child's response. It is time to embrace the church and strive for unity in a time of our history when division, challenge and change is present in so many ways. The pastor was right, "God wants us

to be one." Jesus was right as it says in scripture, "that they may all be one." Yet to be one, to reach places of unity, will take significant effort from each of us, in ways that each of us can uniquely contribute. All are called to live the faith in ways that surprise those around us and maybe even surprise ourselves. It may mean giving of ourselves extravagantly and lavishly.

In this time of Advent, let us find the faith and the fortitude to embrace the future with hope, by caring for the church's future. In this season, let us care for one another.

HAPPY HOLI DAYS!

Post-election Commentary...

Some say racism is dead, now that the recent UCC member has been elected to this high office of leadership. A new "post racial era" conversation is now present for many, thus negating the past conversations that gave focus upon the glaring deficiencies and fault in our national story. Others say that this is a turn in the road for race relations in this country but not the end of racial insensitivity in our nation and among us. **-Rev. Steve Camp**

What do you think?

I believe that dream [MLK] has begun to be fulfilled in the recent Presidential election. The many races of people who came together as one human family to vote for the first African American, President Elect Obama, a dream that recognizes that we are all created in the image of God, one human family working and striving together as one. **-Rev. John Myers**

The election of an African American to the office of President of the United States gives credence to the notion that in this country you can be whatever you set your mind to be. **-Rev. Linda Clark**

Colin Powell said it best, "Barack Obama is a transformational figure in our world." To me, he is that once in the century leader. **-Rev. Jill Edens**

I'm grateful that America has come to its senses and sees that someone of another race is capable of running this country. **-Rev. J.C. Cheek**

continued from B-1 ... Road to Galilee UCC

call to the ministry finally captured him. Meantime, he graduated from St. Augustine's College, did recreation, social and personnel work for a spell, then began a career as a public school teacher that lasted for 25 years.

But the church was not a part of his life at all. He had stayed mostly in Wilmington, teaching at Hoggard High School, and one day in 1995 he decided to go back to church -- Gregory United Church of Christ. "But when I went, I told them not to call on me to pray or anything," he says. Testing the waters, sort of. But as time went on, he became more deeply involved, first as a Sunday School teacher and then as chair of the Board of Deacons.

It was from the latter role that sprang his new calling. On a bright Sunday in 1998 "I got a call from the church at 8 a.m. telling me that they had no pastor for that day," he recalls, "and as chair of the Deacons, it was my responsibility to carry on the service." So what did he do? He carried on. "The Lord laid on my heart that this is what I've been training you for," he says, "and I've been doing it ever since."

He got his first official call in 2000, as interim pastor at Gregory, and in 2003, to further prepare himself for his new career in the ministry, he enrolled in the Southern Conference's Pastoral Leadership Program at the Southern Conference UCC office located at that time in Elon, North Carolina. He was in the PLD's first graduating class three years later and got the call that took him to Galilee UCC, where things are alive and moving ahead.

To say that he's sold on the PLD program is an understatement. "Any student who comes out of that program can go toe-to-toe with Duke graduates," he says. "It's especially great for those over 50 or who are working or cannot otherwise go to seminary." When he got into the program (once-a-week Friday/Saturday sessions) "I found out how much I did not know," he adds.

The program included two-week summer sessions at Lancaster

Seminary for two of the years, and also a two-week trip to Germany to interact with people of faith from other cultures. "It (the trip to Germany) really opened my eyes and taught me to listen and see people in another way, to get to know people who may interpret the scriptures in a different way," he says.

Dukes, who still lives in Wilmington with his wife (he has three grown children, three grandchildren and one great-grandchild), drives the 114 miles to his church twice a month for Sunday services and every Tuesday for Bible study. He considers himself blessed that he has his school retirement income so "I could still live even if they could not pay me."

Galilee Church, just under 50 members, "has grown spiritually if not in numbers" since he's been there and is now beginning to reach out into the wider coastal community. A 108-year old African-American church is doing a pulpit exchange with a small white United Methodist church a mile down the road and plans further joint ventures with it.

"We are also making plans to move our outreach into the New Bern area," Dukes says, "hoping to do some nursing home services and also minister to young men who are on the street, on drugs, or just down on their luck and unemployed."

Southern Regional Women's Meeting
"The Clothes We Wear" (Colossians 3:12)
 October 16-18, 2009
 Keynote Speaker: Rev. Jo Hudson, Senior Pastor, Cathedral of Hope UCC, Dallas, TX
 Bible Study Leader: Rev. Rose Wright Scott, Minister for Program Dev., Franklinton Center at Bricks, Whitaker, NC
 Heartland Country Inn & Christian Retreat Center, Brenham, TX

SOUTHERN SPIRIT

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What Christmas Means to Me

by **Lon McSherley**
 Minister, Trinity United Church of Christ
 Conover, NC

My first real Christmas came when I was a young family man in my 30's. That's not to say that I had never experienced Christmas before; it means that I had never understood the meaning of Christmas before this time.

Preceding the days of Christmas that year, my son had spoken many times of a class jacket he would 'just love to have'. He was a state qualifier in wrestling now for the second year, and he had won letters for his wrestling, but had no way to display them. Frankly, we were poor and I had not responded to his request for lack of money to pay the bills. And beyond that, I was so much wrapped up in my ministry, the development of a new church, that I failed to sense his great need. As parents we do the best we can, but sometimes we fail to see the larger picture.

Christmas morning came and we each sat around the Christmas tree and prayed and told the story of Christ's birth. We opened our gifts and prepared to sit down for our Christmas meal. My wife needed some last minute supplies, so I started out the door to go to the store. Blocking the door on the porch was a package addressed to my son from someone who simply signed the gift card, "Anonymous." I took the gift into the house and my son opened the package. Of course, it was a class jacket, with leather sleeves and all. Tears came to my eyes; tears of gratitude and also tears of embarrassment, that someone had known the needs of my son more than his father.

That day I made a pledge that I would return that favor to others and it has been duplicated multiple times, not only at Christmas, but many times each year.

I have reflected upon this day now for the past twenty years. The embarrassment of failing to sense the needs of my son has long disappeared, but the gratitude has remained. That day I made a pledge that I would return that favor to others and it has been duplicated multiple times, not only at Christmas, but many times each year.

Whoever "Anonymous" is has become a symbol of God for me. So unselfishly, God gave his life that I may be blessed with the clothes of salvation. In the low moments of my life, God has appeared to me in anonymous blessings that brought me back to life again. When my wife died, there were people who brought me food and comforted me in my grief. When I chose to move to a new church, in the midst of my sorrow a young man came up to me to ask if he could be the one who would read the scripture lesson on the last day I would serve that church. As I now move to a new location, people whom I did not even know, have concerned themselves that I am cared for in my new place. They cannot know the depth of my need; they only know that there is a need. God is made known once again in the unselfish gifts of the people God inspires.

Paul spoke to the Greeks about the statue of an unknown God, that holds the answers to the questions we have always wondered about. I think that this unknown God is the one I met one Christmas morning twenty five years ago on the steps of my porch in the love of a package delivered to my son.

Operation Helping Hands Reaches Out

by **Jeremy Quattlebaum**

In an effort to make a positive impact in the local community, the Tryon Congregational UCC Church of Tryon North Carolina undertook a mission to assist in the repairing of five homes in the area. Called *Operation Helping Hands*, the mission took place on September 13 and 20, with six teams of volunteers who made repairs to houses in Landrum, Campobello, Sunnyview, and Tryon. A total of over 50 volunteers participated.

"The houses were in pretty bad shape. One of them had holes in the floor, others had clogged gutters, so moisture was coming into the houses, another had a leaky roof, so they need some help," said Tryon Congregation UCC Minister Bob Barrows. The houses were selected based on their need, the skills of the volunteers, and the ability to complete the work in one day. After assessing some of the houses, the Board of Outreach decided that some of the projects would take two work days.

Rev. Barrows said "We got referrals from Thermal Belt Outreach and from the Department of Social Services, but most of the recommendations came from church members who deliver to homes with Meals on Wheels".

In addition to the work projects, another team of volunteers visited 16 people at the White Oak Nursing Home who rarely receive visitors, bringing them gift packages decorated by children of the church. Another team of volunteers made lunches for the work teams.

The program was inspired after three teams from the church went to New Orleans where they assisted in the Hurricane Katrina Relief. They worked through the South Central Conference United Church of Christ Disaster Response Ministry in New Orleans. On returning from the Crescent City, the members of the church's Board of Outreach decided to turn their attention on the local community, citing a need to help those near-by as much as those far away.

"We just thought that while doing something on the national level was good, we also needed to do something locally," said Cliff Joens, Board of Outreach Chairperson. The congregation raised over \$5,000 for the mission with a fundraiser in which church member's Kip and Carol Jean Vosburgh rode their bicycles across the country. In addition to the money raised, members of the congregation donated a truckload of lumber, which Joens estimates to be worth over \$3,000.

The Congregational Church plans on continuing *Operation Helping Hands*, with the goal of having two volunteer projects a year, said Barrows.

Elon Homes Retrofits for Classes

A major rehabilitation of an existing campus building allowed The Elon School to create new classroom and laboratory space to support the school's strong emphasis on science and math and the arts. The McEwen Science and Math building is a 9,500 plus square foot facility that offers five classrooms, the academic support office, and a student study lounge.

The space includes state of the art 'wet labs,' math classrooms and a brand new kiln for pottery classes. The expansion of McEwen continues the school's commitment to challenging students' critical learning skills in an up-to-date academic setting. The facility will help the school meet its need for more learning environments as the student body grows.



Dr. Leone Broadhead outlines a chemistry experiment for students Eric Blaser and Jennifer Herman.

This building, formerly known as McEwen Cottage, has a rich and diverse history. Built as a large "house" environment for orphans and named for a prominent family supporting the then-orphanage, the building has seen decades of service to the agency and community. Over the years it has housed children in a family setting, children in a charter school, administrative offices for church officials and now beautiful classrooms for The Elon School. Funds for the project (about \$400,000) were provided by Elon Homes and Schools for Children which owns and operates The Elon School.

(Editor's Note: The former McEwen Cottage housed the SOC offices from spring of 2004-Spring 2007.)

Lonny's Thoughts



Youth Ski Retreat

January 16-18, 2009
 In the High Country
 Coordinated by
 Kristin Gerner Vaughn
**Blowing Rock
 Conference Center**

Practicing Faith with Children

February 13, 2009
 9am - 5 pm
**United Church
 of Chapel Hill**

A one-day ecumenical
 conference for
 Christian Educators,
 Children's Ministry
 Directors, Pastors,
 Volunteers and
 Seminary Students





Christmas Fern
Polystichum acrostichoides
Photographed at Johns River Valley Camp
by C. L. Stumb

2008-09 Calendar

December 3-8:
National Meeting of
Search & Call for ACM's,
Orlando, FL

December 11: NC
Council of Churches
/Judiciary heads meet
with new NC governor

December 11: Black
Lake Advisory
Committee Meets

December 15: Have
you made your con-
tribution to "Friends of the
Conference?"

December 31: All
OCWM contributions
due in Conference Office

January 16-18, 2009:
Youth Ski Retreat at
Blowing Rock Conf. Cntr.

January 19, 2009:
Martin Luther King Jr.
Day

February 13, 2009:
Practicing Faith with
Children, Chapel Hill

March 14, 2009:
Johns River Valley
Camp Work Day

April 24-26, 2009:
Mothers' Retreat at
Johns River Valley Camp

May 20-21, 2009:
Annual Southern
Conference Gathering,
Catawba College

June 26-30, 2009:
General Synod meets
in Grand Rapids,
Michigan around theme
'Immerse Yourself'



Western North Carolina Association Meeting Provides Stage for Book Release

Greensboro, N.C. It's not every year that delegates show up at an annual association meeting and walk away with a free beautifully bound coffee table edition of a history book. The publication of Churches Related was celebrated by the Western North Carolina Association as a long awaited update of the story that was first told in A Story of the Southern Synod (Banks J. Peeler, ed.).

Speaking for the Evangelical and Reformed Historical Society - Southern Region, which commissioned the work, Larry Bolick extended "profound appreciation and gratitude to the Rev. Donald P. Flick and the Rev. Thomas R. Hamilton for their labors of love through the completion of this project." "Both," he added, "are former pastors of congregations in the Western North Carolina Association of the Southern Conference of the United Church of Christ."

Says Flick about the publication, "Churches Related is a forty-year history (1965-2005) of the United Church of Christ churches, clergy, institutions and special ministries located in the former geographical area of the Southern Synod of the Evangelical and Reformed Church." This area now covers the Western North Carolina Association of the Southern Conference of the UCC.



Left to right: Don Flick signs copy of Churches Related as Larry Bolick and Tom Hamilton watch.

-C. L. Stumb photo

Justice Images Permeate Eastern North Carolina Association Meeting



Left to right: Host Pastor Leon White converses with Conference Minister Steve Camp

-C. L. Stumb photo

Manson, N.C. Refrains like "We've got people, and God's got us" rallied delegates as they gathered into a packed house at Oak Level UCC near Manson, NC. Says ENC President Jay Kennett about the *We've got People* theme, "We were teased when the re-staffing occurred, that our Associate Conference Minister [Vertie Powers], with the addition of Reverend Hardy and Reverend Hill 'had people.'" Kennett affirms the staffing model as an opportunity to live out the challenge and the promise of ENCA.

Host pastor Leon White reminisced about the journey of justice that characterized his ministry in the United Church of Christ, and was on a list of ministers honored in the Association. The Ministries Council highlighted six persons whose contributions and ministry to and within the ENCA put them in a category they termed "legacies." The list included J. C. Cheek, William Andes, Eddie Weathers, Leon White, Mary U. Davis, and Emmett Floyd.

Says Vertie Powers, "worshiping and hearing the preaching of Nancy Hastings Sehested was a highlight of my day." Sehested is one of three pastors who, on the first Sunday in Advent of 2001, launched a community that has come to be known as *Circle of Mercy*, and come to be known for its mission of peace and justice. In her message to the ENCA delegation,

Sehested brought to life the prophetic voice of Elijah, who in retreat at a cave was asked by God, "What are you doing here?" The speaker turned the question to the gathered body and asked, "In our caves of isolation, what are we doing here?"

Eastern Virginia Association Delegates Hear Message of Esteem

Virginia Beach, VA *Be Positive* was the resounding message of Charlene Smith, UCC Minister of Evangelism and guest speaker to the Eastern Virginia Association meeting. The words "Don't think about what you don't have, but what you do have," echoed in the sanctuary like a refrain throughout a two part presentation. States Drew Morris as he seeks to capture the core of her message, "It's all about overcoming the fear of being small, and not having much money or large numbers."

Pastors and delegates gathered at Bayview UCC for the 2008 meeting of the EVA. In a concluding part of the agenda, attendees witnessed a commanding voice of Tom Hart passing the baton of Association leadership to Julia Avery-Muse, a retired educator and former principal of two schools.

Simultaneously youth gathered for games, program, and discovery. A field trip as part of their day planted them in a thrift store operated at a Jewish Community Center where these young church members engaged in some hands-on ministry.



Clergy and delegates are attentive to the business and education segments of the day's agenda.

-Lisa Gaul photo

Church Experiences Joy of Giving



Members of the Foundation Committee along with Recipients gather for a group photo. Greg Alcorn stands tall as others interact with "official" photographer.

-C. L. Stumb photo

Salisbury, N.C. Amidst global economic news of doom and gloom, members of First UCC in Salisbury, NC gathered on All Saints Day to give away \$50,000 with smiles and celebration. Ironically, an initial gift of \$50,000 in 1996, with a matched amount by the congregation, created a principle for the beginnings of a Foundation that in 2008 supported twenty-five programs with a figure equal to the original gift.

Comments Greg Alcorn in an earlier interview with Kenneth Sell, "I think that First UCC Foundation for me is the best place for the members of First Church to give money that is above and beyond annual [church] giving. It is the absolute best place because of the perpetually to it. It is literally a dollar that can be given a hundred times over. If we could do that with other churches, it would be fantastic. I would recommend it to every church."

Alcorn says the Foundation "has helped our congregation in their understanding of the ministries that are out there and it has been very educational, especially on Foundation Sunday.... It makes everyone feel real good in our congregation."

Sell discovers that Greg Alcorn was only 39 when he helped create the Foundation. "I think that is the human interest part of the story. Here is a relative young person doing something like that -- not some old geezer that has been sitting on his cash for years." Greg replies, "Yeah, I don't understand that. Why do people wait until they die to give their money away?"