



Southern  
Conference  
edition

## Tending Life Together - a Study in Christian Community

by C. L. Stumb

The atmosphere in Elon was expectant. Christian calendars noted a new year. United Church of Christ members in Southern Conference voiced anxious feelings while anticipating opportunities for a hearing in the company of their church leader. In the wake of General Synod 25 and a disproportionate reaction to one of its twenty-two resolutions (the resolution *In Support of Equal Marriage Rights for All*), Southern Conference leaders had scheduled an opportunity for John Thomas, General Minister and President of the UCC, to meet with church representatives. That day had arrived in mid-January 2006. "He's like the UCC pope," stated Wilson Hooper (First Reformed UCC, Lexington) several years ago to some of his peers, when looking toward his own chance to spend time with Thomas in an outdoor ministry setting. Persons understanding the polity and organization of the UCC denomination would caution about such a hierarchical understanding of church authority.

Nevertheless, Doug Sink of Second UCC (Lexington, NC) lamented after the first day of Thomas' visit that "maybe we did come with expectations that he would solve our problems." Rev. Bill Howell, at the end of the meeting, suggested that he was leaving the meeting "with a sense of a lack

of accomplishment." Rita Arundell, of Charlotte, on the other hand, expressed appreciation for the diversity invested in the core of the United Church of Christ. "I finally left the Catholic Church because they didn't let you think," says this now Pilgrim UCC (Charlotte) member who once took a job as Director of Religious Education for a very large Catholic Church.

The visiting John Thomas, in a soft spoken pastoral voice, assumed the stance of teacher in offering his understanding of scriptures and history. He built an image of 'bridge' as a dominant metaphor, and exposed the salt corroded infrastructure he sees on some of Cleveland's major spans. He showcased the allure of island living, and raised questions of a bridge to such an island, or drawbridge, or "easypass," or tollgate.

Randy Orwig, Southern Conference president, said the workshop setting "gave people a sense that they could talk around the table." "There was a lot of pain expressed in the question and answer time. But we were tending bridges. It made me look anew at the whole issue."

John Thomas also highlighted the expression of "testimony" as used in the African American and other traditions, suggesting it as a metaphor for understanding General Synod resolutions, which are expressions of a gath-

*Continued on B-2 - Tending Life*

### section B



Shelly Wilson, Boone, NC

Journal entry below describes impressions from a New Orleans mission trip (story on page 4) journal, photos and story by Linda Coutant

Monday we began work in the Pontchartrain Park area of New Orleans. Mrs. Graves' home had not yet been opened. We saw the stew left behind by four months of a sealed, wet space. The smell was overpowering... It was putrid, yet this was a woman's life that lay before us - her clothes, her stamp collection, the church bulletins she had saved, spools of thread and the toys of her grandchildren. The American flag that at one time draped her veteran husband's casket. She hasn't returned home since the flood, so I think our gift to her is that she never has to see how bad her home and her belongings looked. We've worked two days and still have more work to do - 10 people or so working seven-hour days. And hers is just one home among thousands - 5,000 they say - that need to be gutted. Amazing.



Mary Harwell, Nags Head, NC



Rev. Randy Orwig, Conference President, poses question to Rev. John Thomas. Workshop format offered study, dialogue, and opportunities for feedback. -C. L. Stumb photo

### New Church Starts Flourish in ENCA

by C. L. Stumb

ELON, N. C. - At a January 8, 2006 service in Elon, North Carolina, Rev. Vertie Powers welcomed Grace UCC as a new church start into the Eastern North Carolina Association.

Rev. Nancy Elsenheimer, representing the national church based in Cleveland, talked about new congregations starting "when they hear a voice, and when their people have a mission." Founding pastor Phil Hardy, in his sermon, proclaimed that "We hope to do some naked, passionate, positive things to build a community around Jesus Christ." He drew upon the text of Mark 1:1-11, which he said proclaims a certain suddenness when this earliest Gospel writer begins by describing "the heavens being ripped apart" as Jesus emerges

from his baptism by John. Grace UCC's mission statement proclaims: "We seek to build a home of faith where the Divine is encountered, barriers are broken and community is discovered."

Rev. Vertie Powers, Associate Conference Minister for Eastern North Carolina Association, notes that "Grace UCC, pastored by Rev. Phil Hardy, joins four other initiatives birthing new congregations since Easter of 2005." That roster of recent new church starts also includes Greater Grace UCC in Wake Forest, pastored by Rev. Henry Johen; Vessels of Clay, a new Mebane congregation led by Rev. Dian Jackson; Deliverance Ministries in New Bern with pastoral leadership by Rev. Elizabeth Green; and a Sanford church known as Word of Life and led by Rev. Sheila Crump.

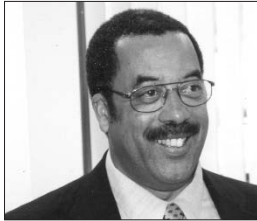


Rev. Phil Hardy greets Rev. Dian Jackson at Grace UCC service. Both persons are pastoring new church starts. -C. L. Stumb photo

# These Times - They Are Changing

## Camp's Notes

by Stephen W. Camp  
Conference Minister



Have you ever left the house without your cell phone, forgot it? You had every intention to take it with you when you left your home, now you have to turn around and go and get it, for you don't want that empty, out of sink feeling to be with you the remainder of the day. Twenty or thirty years ago, you had no cell phone. Times have changed though, and life is different. This time saving and innovating device is a real sign of our time and place in history, and if not on your person each day, present with you, may cause a panic or disconnect in your life.

The message I would share with you in this issue of the *Southern Spirit* is that times are changing. Surely you know that and each of us has embraced the change that daily life brings. But it is not only changing in the time saving, eye catching and space saving products on the markets that we enjoy. It is not just in the ways we have access to information and technology. But times are changing in the way community happens for us too.

Today the church is not exempt from change for example. I believe the great challenge of the church of our day is learning how to change with the times and finding ways to embrace the future. While we hold dear many meaningful things that have sustained us in the church over the years, even over centuries, change still comes. Our traditions matter, historic voices inform us and our ritual has meaning, yet our times call us to hear God speak to us afresh and for us to listen, have our "ears tingle", as John Thomas sug-

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gests, and embrace each other as we grow and mature in God's way.

This change for the church that I speak of does not mean that the message of the church or the word of scripture is somehow distorted or mutilated. It doesn't mean that the church is swayed by every wind and whim. Nor does it mean that change should be feared and kept at arms length. Yet it does mean that the church understands that it lives in a world where cell phones, televisions and MP3 players are present, a world where people think and reason for themselves. Embracing change may mean that it deeply understands that what I know today, my children and grandchildren will know differently even more fully and completely than I know now. While not all change is good, neither is it all bad. The central question for me is, will this change, whatever it is, help me live my life with more quality and meaning. That's the church's question too.

I remember the first cell phones with the huge shoulder pack and battery that had to be carried around. I couldn't afford one nor did I have anyone that important to call. Those who had them back then were few in number and it was a sign of success to have one of them. Then we saw a rapid change in size and function of cell phones and the end is still not in sight for what can be done with them nestled in our hands.

Let's be the church that is willing to embrace the future. Change is good, when nestled in the hand and way of Jesus Christ, the one with us before, today and tomorrow. Tomorrow morning, as just a reminder, don't forget your cell phone as you walk out of the house. In these present days, we should avoid as much panic and disconnect as possible in our lives. - s m i l e

listen



Continued from B-1 - Tending Life

ered people at a particular place and time. "Life becomes fragmented when testimony begins to be turned into test," Thomas stated.

Thomas drew on scripture when acknowledging the current church conflict, suggesting there has always been a struggle of persons lining up to want to sit at the right hand of God. "Conflict is inevitable," suggested Thomas. He continued, "Christians live not in cloistered life but in the midst of enemies. There we find our mission. The tension that so unnerves us is part of community."

His advice, drawing on German theologian and pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Life Together, is to listen, serve, and forbear. Note the meaning of forbear: "to be tolerant or patient in the face of provocation."

On 'listening,' Thomas read from Bonhoeffer: "one owes to others in community: listening to them." He continued, "We do God's work for our brothers and sisters when we learn to listen." "Often Christians, especially preachers, think that their only service is to always have to offer something when they are together with people. They forget that listening can be a greater service." Turning to 'serving' Thomas continued with Bonhoeffer's outline, and read of how we should allow ourselves "to be disrupted and interrupted by those who seek our help." And on forbearing, Thomas asked with Bonhoeffer, "How do I deal with the burdensome?" "We allow other persons," suggests John Thomas, "to come anew into our lives each time we encounter them."

"I think he did offer some answers," reflected Doug Sink. "I think the listening is it. At my age, I'm hard of hearing and hard of listening. I have a hearing aid to help with the hearing, but I still have to work at the listening."

Andrew Hege, a 16 year old from Zion UCC (Thomasville, NC), who cut school to learn more about his church, shared with the assembled what the UCC meant to him. "I don't agree with everything the UCC is about, but if I sit down and talk with each of you for long enough, I'll find something that we don't agree with. You are all my brothers and sisters in Christ. I just wanted to say that what has happened here is good. We've made an effort to start talking. And that is what it is going to take."

"I felt like the Conference was a little more together at the end of the day," stated Randy Orwig. "Not having to make decisions [was an important part of that process]." "As the denomination moves to clarity, it's going to be a more powerful time for the UCC. John has helped us see it. Now we have to do it."



## "Live The Vision" Capital Campaign Goes Public

A number of church visitors, lay and clergy, have received their training and been given their assigned congregations so that the "Live the Vision" Capital Campaign is now in its public phase. The pastor's and/or key lay leadership will be contacted in the near future requesting a time when a team of church visitors might be given the opportunity to present the details of the capital campaign to each local congregation.

We are thankful for those who have accepted the invitation to be church visitors. The following people have been assigned local congregations in each association whom they will request visitation:

Eastern North Carolina Association: Mark Nanny, Sandy Griffen, Doug Long, Cheryl McNair, Lee Mahon Evans, Wanda Hunt, Dan Kuhn, Mack Painter, Margot Pickett, Vicki Shields, Mark Pickett, Richard Weikel, Kaye Crawford, Dorothy Pennell, Dian Jackson, Tanya Best, Leroy Dukes, Hudson Barksdale.

Western North Carolina Association: Gred Alcorn, George Fidler, Faye Humphry, Jim Humphry, Joanne Flick, Anne Wepner, Bernie Ingram, Kristin Andes, Cheri Lovell, Bob Barrows, Joe Hoffman, Nathan King, Ed Holloway, Brenda James, Bill Smith, Dorothy Ballinger, Bea Barrow, Julie Peebles, Margaret Byrd, Dale Bennett, Doris Yeates.

Eastern Virginia Association: Myrtice Deshield, Jean Copeland, Lisa Gaul, Ray Hook, Valerie Coe-Lowder, Joy Deaton, Helen Seldon, Ernest Hamlin, Susie Keele, J.J. Ferguson, Walker Hughes, Thomas Hart, Nancy Riddick, Angela Artis, Sam Varner.

Each local congregation within the conference will be given a suggested monetary goal, which may be given over three years. The church visitors will provide a variety of ways in which each church may participate in the campaign, including a list of fund raising suggestions.

The campaign is off to a good start with pledges right at \$200,000 and over \$30,000 already received. This amount comes from fifty-four individuals and two congregations.

The future of the Southern Conference is an exciting one-- with a number of "new church starts" on the horizon in all three associations; the Pastoral Leadership Development (PLD) program in its second year; a Southern Regional Youth Event on the campus of Elon University this June; and the anticipation of a lay leadership program to be launched this year---all reflective of the goals of the Capital Campaign.

The "Live the Vision" Capital Campaign Committee invites every local congregation to share in the future of our life together as the Southern Conference, United Church of Christ.

serve

forbear



www.godsaysitstime.net

## Black History Month - An American Ideal



by Stephen W. Camp  
Conference Minister

As the nation celebrates the history and future of Black people in America during the month of February, it is right to remember the incident that impacted our nation greatly and sparked a new energy for change through non-violent action. Students from North Carolina A&T University "sat in" at the lunch counter of Woolworth's Department Store in downtown Greensboro, North Carolina and helped to change our nation. Soon Bennett College students would join the struggle, and before long black leaders and sympathetic whites would rally many to this noble freedom cause.

As for Woolworths, they really didn't have a national policy of discrimination; those rules to separate the races were left up to the individual store. Each store had autonomy to decide and act. The system of segregation, tolerated and enforced in the city at the time, was firm, and restricted African-Americans from the right to eat a sandwich and drink a cup of coffee at the lunch counter. "Give it time" surely could be heard, eventually it will change, many thought. Unquestionably the impatience of the young, the energy and commitment they had to remove a wrong and replace it with right was their primary motivation.

The student's actions changed a system that oppressed and helped shape a future and a path that this nation would follow. Eventually the law of the land would reflect the brave, courageous actions of the students, but the hearts of many to experience positive change would take so much longer. Even now racism exists, discrimination is real and can be seen morphed and ugly still, and just as divisive in our society. Crosses still burn and acts of hatred, words of revulsion still dot the landscape of ideas. Better now, yes, but still a very long way to go. No more do we see lunch counters as the focal point, but full equality or equal opportunity and fairness has not yet been achieved. A new spark and energy is needed in our day and in these times. We should again understand as Dr. King said, as he struggled with a justification for our presence in Vietnam, that, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." It begs a question of each of us. Where have we seen injustice and not acted to eliminate it?

Surely the students must have been fearful that February day. Those students did not give into fear, but instead embraced hope. It was a hope that was filled with courage and the audacity to believe that God would see them through the ordeal and safely keep them. Their hope was not for their own time but our time and beyond. "Sitting in" was a selfless act, an action that each American citizen benefits from today. They were seeking to make a difference, to change a system that was oppressive and harsh, that treated some as less than full human beings. The students were seen only of partial worth, while they could shop and spend their money in the department store, they were second class citizens at best. The hue of their skin prevented them from sharing in the fullness of being a first class citizen in the society. After all these years, the struggle continues.

Regardless of the hue of skin, the shape of a person or even the sexual identity of the person, discrimination is wrong and should not be tolerated in our society. To work for less than full citizenship for all in our society diminishes the shining star of freedom, the hope we all wish to enjoy.

*Send us your list of Black History Month activities; tell us what your church is doing to celebrate Black History Month.*

### SOUTHERN SPIRIT

The Reverend Stephen Camp .....Conference Minister and Editor  
Janelle Bunn ..... Administrative Secretary and Managing Editor  
C. L. "Curly" Stumb, Irwin Smallwood, Linda Carter, Lois Myers ..... Communication Team

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News items and pictures of interest are welcome. Send to P.O. Box 215, Elon, NC 27244  
Deadline is the tenth of each month prior to published editions.

## Letter from Dr. Fred Grosse - President of Elon Homes for Children

Greetings to you in this Season of Christmastide. This special time in the liturgical year is set aside for us to celebrate the birth of our Lord, new life and opportunity and the start of a new liturgical season. Much spiritual growth must be done before we leave this Season and move forward through the year.

Elon Homes for Children, too, is in a season of new life. We are preparing ourselves for better and more long-term life of the agency so we can offer Safe Haven, Life Skills and Education to children and families well into our second century of service. For the past two years an *ad hoc* committee of board members and community supporters has been meeting to plan the future scenarios for success of our agency. Senior management staff has separately been meeting on this same subject. We have also been consulting with state and national organizations which have expertise in children's services.

It has been evident since 1996 with the passage in Congress of the Adoption and Safe Family Act that children's services were going to change in a significant manner. The laws and regulatory mandates that have come about in these past ten years are primarily focused on in-home and community based services for children and families in need. The former orphanage style campuses and residential settings are simply

no longer valued as the best setting to help a child or family.

We agree with the major emphasis of the Act and have been preparing our agency for the changes over the decade. We have diversified our agency away from just residential treatment into a reduction of actual campus based beds from 107 to 60 beds agency-wide, adding 100 foster care homes in four different counties, opening a community based counseling service for hundreds of children a year, and building two North Carolina charter public high schools. We have also been very diligent about the investments of our Foundation and have grown its net worth from \$2.3 million in 1996 to a net worth of over \$18.5 million today. Five percent of the annual growth of the Foundation is used to scholarship children in care.

In further preparation for the future, our Board of Directors and I have concluded that we must close all services on the Snyder Campus in Elon. The child welfare system has changed so much that our campus location and program are no longer a location of choice for our placement sources. This year our residential and school population has not risen to above 50% of the needed census. We had prepared for this eventual reality and have properly ended our services from this one campus. All children have been properly transferred to appropriate next place-

ments and school settings.

At the same time, we are serving about 300 more new at-risk or abandoned, abused or neglected children this calendar year than last year through our expanded services. The new birth of our programs in Mecklenburg, Cabarrus, Union and Guilford Counties has quickly matured with very good results. None of these services will be offered in Alamance County.

We very much appreciate all concern and compassion for children in need. Contributions in the past have enabled us to serve a very needy and fragile population. We will continue to serve these same type children in many new areas and places. While we will not offer campus based services in Elon, we are growing as an agency and will be reaching more children and families than ever in the immediate future. Please know that denominational support continues to be vital to the effectiveness of our mission. A gift given to Elon Homes for Children benefits every child in our care.

In February our Board of Directors will be hearing a report from outside consultants about future use of our campus in Elon. We have been preparing for two years to decide on a new use of our beautiful campus and should reach a decision in early February. I will keep friends and supporters informed of our decisions.

## A Letter from Beirut - SOC Young Person Interns with Global Ministries

In my two months as a U.C.C. Global Ministries intern in Beirut, Lebanon I have been settling in, trying to understand my host country, including its history, culture and the partner organization where I work. With its rich history, ethnic diversity and lively mixture of faith traditions, Beirut has much to offer. Something I experienced right away was the combined use of Lebanon's three different languages. It is very common to hear Arabic, English and French all spoken within the same sentence. This is quite a change for one who was born, grew up and attended undergraduate school all in the Research Triangle area of North Carolina. This is my first Christmas worshipping apart from my home, United Church of Chapel Hill.

Currently I am serving as a Global Ministries Intern at the Forum for Development, Culture and Dialogue (FDCD). This non-profit organization focuses on three main program areas, Empowerment and Solidarity, Justice with Peace and Dialogue for youth. To give an example of the type of work FDCD does, they recently held an international work-study camp during the summer of 2005. It was an interfaith gathering of youth from Denmark, Canada, United States, France, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Egypt which provided a forum for inter-cultural and inter-religious understanding and dialogue and touched on such issues as personal faith, cultural diversity, and has resulted in meaningful friendships and ongoing

online discussions.

FDCD also serves as the regional coordinator for the Arab Partnership for Conflict Prevention & Human Security. The Arab Partnership is a network of organizations in the Arab world, which work on peaceful resolution of conflict and promoting comprehensive human security. Much of my time at FDCD has been focused on identifying sources of funding for furthering the organizations work.

*Ruth Edens is an intern at the Forum for Development, Culture and Dialogue in Beirut Lebanon. To read more of her adventures please visit her blog (website), <http://ruthedens.blogspot.com>. This internship is sponsored by the SOC. Ruth is a member of the United Church of Chapel Hill, where her parents Richard and Jill Edens, have served as pastors since 1979.*

### Installation Service

Drew Morris  
Associate  
Conference Minister  
Eastern Virginia  
Association

February 18, 2006  
10:00 AM

Providence UCC  
Chesaapeake, VA





Tulip Poplar  
*Liriodendron tulipifera*  
Photographed at Johns River Valley Camp  
by C. L. Stumbo

## 2006 Calendar

**February 1:** Ben Chavis preaches at Gregory UCC, Wilmington

**Feb. 10-12:** Ski Retreat at BRCC

**Feb. 18:** Drew Morris' Installation

**Feb. 19, 3:00 pm:** First Reformed UCC, Burlington building dedication

**Feb. 23-24:** SOC conversations with Ron Buford

**March 1:** Ash Wednesday

**Mar. 3-5:** Middle High Youth Event at BRCC

**Mar. 11:** Johns River Valley Camp Workday

**Mar. 12-13:** SOC Board Meeting

**Mar. 18:** SOC - UCC Women / Board meets in Elon

**Mar. 21:** National planning meeting for Rural Ministries at FC

**Mar. 31-April 1:** Elon University Board Meeting

**April 28-30:** JRVC Mothers' Retreat

**May 2-12:** SOC delegates to Germany

**May 15-17:** Clergy Retreat at Atlantic Beach

**June 8-10:** SOC Annual Meeting, Catawba College

**June 22-25:** Regional Youth Event, Elon

**August 4-6:** UCC (National) Musicians Event - UC-Chapel Hill

**UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

God is still speaking,

## Seeing New Orleans Firsthand

Churches unite to help residents recover  
by Linda Coutant

"I had no idea it was this bad" was the recurring comment from 20 UCC members who spent a week cleaning up New Orleans four months after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita ripped through the Gulf Coast. The destruction they saw in neighborhood after neighborhood became overwhelming as the group realized the full extent of the damage, which in no way had been fully captured in news reports. They would later feel the same way about their own photographs from the trip.

"It's like taking a photo of the Grand Canyon and telling someone who had never been there that that's how it looks. Photographs can't do it justice," said Reene Slack, a member of High Country UCC in Boone.

Slack was among 20 people from High Country UCC, United Church of Chapel Hill, Pilgrim UCC in Durham, Trinity Reformed UCC in Conover and Kitty Hawk Unitarian Universalist who traveled to New Orleans Dec. 31-Jan. 6 to help clean up in the wake of the immense natural disaster. Their work was part of a larger, ongoing UCC effort to help Gulf Coast residents recover from the storm.

UCC officials say that volunteers from across the country will be needed for months to come. In January, 85 percent of New Orleans still had no electricity. Almost every resident the group encountered said they are frustrated and angry over the local and federal governments' limited response. They told the work team "God bless you" and "Please don't let America forget us."

As one flood victim, Lilia, said: "It's the people who will make a difference here, not the government."

### Mold and Debris

More than three-quarters of the city flooded due to the storm and broken levees. The UCC group worked in the Gentilly and Pontchartrain Park neighborhoods, where homes and businesses were flooded with anywhere from six to 15 feet of water. The UCC National Disaster Ministries assigned the work team to clean out the homes of two elderly people who had not been able to return yet. Neither home had been entered since the flood waters receded, except for law enforcement officials who searched each home for survivors. The homes reeked of damp, moldy furniture and wet drywall.

Before a flooded home can be lived in again, it must be cleaned and gutted, then left to dry. Later, its studs must be sprayed with a bleach solution before remodeling can begin. The UCC volunteers - who ranged in age from 10 to 67 - cleaned and gutted both homes in three days, saving the owners money and also the emotional toll of having to see their ruined households.

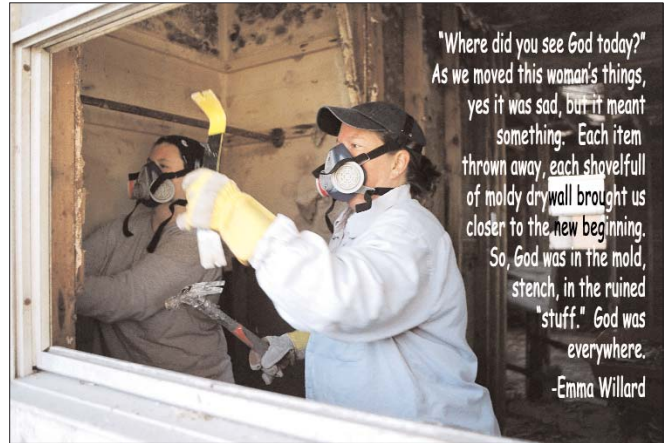
As much as they tried, the group could salvage only a few pieces of china and jewelry. The rest of the residents' belongings were set on the curbside - along with the debris of thousands of other homes throughout the city - for pick up by garbage trucks.

### Opening a Church's Doors

The North Carolina group also combined efforts with Massachusetts' First Congregational Wakefield and Ohio's Paradise UCC to clean and gut Beecher Memorial UCC Congregational Church. Like the homes, the church had not been touched since the flooding.

Church member Brenda Square met the group to unlock the front doors. When asked how many of the church's 125 active members were displaced, Square said it was far easier to count how many weren't. She paused, quietly counting names on her fingers. "All but three," she replied. "Everyone else has lost their homes, their jobs."

She thanked the volunteers several times, saying the destruction of



Casey and Bobbie Willard work to remove mold covered sheet rock from water damaged New Orleans home. Words are from the journal of Emma Willard, an 8th grade student at Valley Crucis School in Watauga County. The Willards are members of High Country UCC in Boone, NC

- photo by Linda Coutant

the church and neighborhood was hard to look at. Brenda, who is overwhelmed dealing with her own flooded home, as well as her mother's, brother's and aunt's homes, said, "What you're doing is so important because (our church members) are not even ready to deal with this."

Beecher Memorial, she said, has been a community leader since its founding 100 years ago. It set up one of the city's first schools for black children, and later, started a much-needed child care center. After Hurricane Betsy in 1965, the congregation rebuilt the church, but Square said she's not sure about this time.

"Our church family is scattered. This has separated us like no one could imagine, but God is helping us by sending help. God is with us through all of it," Square said. "We'll just have to listen and God will tell us what our new mission will be."

The North Carolina workers also aided St. Matthew UCC, the church where they slept each night. Rev. Fred Meade said he's not sure about the future of his aging congregation, as many members remain displaced. He's especially concerned over how to maintain facilities when many rent-paying civic groups no longer exist to meet there. He's thinking of turning part of the church building into bunk-bed space for future volunteer groups. Meade said the North Carolinians brought hope to his church, but also a financial boost: Their \$10-per-night, per-person fee covered staff salaries for a month.

### Reflecting on the Needs

Each work team member said they gained more from their New Orleans experience than they gave: an enlightenment with respect to serious social issues, and spiritual renewal. "It's not a choice to come help, but rather a commandment," said Louise Pagano of United Church of Chapel Hill. "We're instructed by Jesus Christ to care for one another, and the government isn't taking care of the people in New Orleans. We must do what we can to help."

Rev. Shelly Wilson of High Country UCC said she enjoyed the four churches' collaboration. "Each person brought different talents, strengths and experiences that all fit together and enabled the team to work effectively," she said.

Wilson pointed out that none of the New Orleans residents cared where the volunteers stood on the "open-and-affirming" issue.

"I wish as a conference we could move away from our infighting to do more real mission work," Wilson said of Southern Conference churches. "The situation in the Gulf Coast is an ongoing, national disaster that needs our attention, and will need it for a long time. We should put less money and attention into tearing each other apart, and, instead, pull ourselves together."

For more information on UCC National Disaster Ministries, visit [www.ucc.org](http://www.ucc.org). UCC's disaster relief in Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas is coordinated by Alan Coe. He is willing to visit the Southern Conference to discuss relief needs in New Orleans and other communities. He can be reached by cell at (830) 832-2222.

Back Bay Mission, a UCC center in Biloxi, MS, is also coordinating church response in the Gulf region. An update on their recovery efforts has been posted on the UCC and Southern Conference websites.



A Massachusetts team member holds Pulpit Bible recovered from Beecher Memorial UCC. Church members plan to seal and freeze the Bible in a process to save it.

-photo by Linda Coutant