



SOUTHERN SPIRIT

February / March 2008

Southern Conference edition Section B



"You [in Southern Conference] are right on the cutting edge. The LCM Team is excited about partnering with Southern Conference. The Conference has taken time to develop a total strategy for planting, financing and training for potential new churches. It's a whole package."

-- Charlene Smith (Local Church Ministries Team, Cleveland)

February is Black History Month... Remember the story of the Amistad.



Southern Conference persons had an opportunity to step aboard the freedom schooner Amistad on October 24, 2001 at the Nauticus in Norfolk, VA.

Church Plants Take New Look In 21st Century



Southern Conference's three Associate Conference Ministers enjoy music by *Voices of Praise Choir* during the 2007 Annual Gathering on Elon University's campus. Left to right are Rev. Drew Morris (EVA), Rev. Larry Walsler (WNCA), and Rev. Vertie Powers (ENCA). Given the broad scope of the grant initiative with implications stretching to the far reaches of the conference, all ACM's and the conference minister expect to be busy with its implementation.

- C. L. Stumb photo

Congregational vitality and church growth have become hot topics of conversation and perhaps the substance of New Year's resolutions among Southern Conference church leaders. The conference minister's announcement in December '07 that "The Southern Conference has been awarded a \$200,000 grant" sparked an instant flurry of planning. Says Vertie Powers, whose area of expertise among the Associate Conference Ministers (ACM's) has been church development, "We must be careful and creative about

how we do new starts. We must do more work in the front end as we look for growing areas that will support UCC churches."

Asked if this initiative is an emergency stimulus like the proposed government checks to curb recession, Rev. Powers offered a quick "no." "This is not an emergency stimulus," she said, and "not short term." Quoting Isaiah 58, her passion for the United Church of Christ's justice ministries bubbled forth: "If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if

you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday." [Isaiah 58:9b-10] "This is what church and new church development will do for Southern Conference congregations. It will excite them."

Says Steve Camp, "The Southern Conference has an opportunity to finally be the kind of conference that is more concerned

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Planting Churches**

Register early for this year's Annual Gathering, June 26-27 in Suffolk, VA

The SOC Annual Meeting is now called the Southern Conference Annual Gathering. The SOC Board of Directors has decided that the new name *Annual Gathering* (rather than the word *meeting*) better reflects the sense of current time and place for coming together. This year the Annual Gathering will be a special one for all. The dates are Thursday June 26th through Friday June 27th. The time will include a celebration ban-

quet and two worship experiences, open to all delegates and church members. The banquet will bear a nominal cost per person without full registration. It is hoped that some of each church's youth will be present along with local church delegates for some or all of the festivities. Come one, and all to this year's Southern Conference Annual Gathering! It will be a time of learning, planning for the future and a great deal of fun for all.

One honored speaker this year will be Rev. Jeremiah A. Wright, pastor of the largest church within the whole United Church of Christ, Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago. Jeremiah is a dynamic and gifted preacher, pastor of the UCC's largest congregation, and also pastor of the largest local church in giving toward OCWM. Under Rev. Wright's leadership Trinity Church has lead the way in starting new congregations across

the country. Trinity has started over 30 congregations during the last several years. The church has started retirement homes, day care for dozens of children and supports theological education in the Chicago area in dramatic ways. Rev. Wright will preach twice in the annual gathering.

Rev. Reiss Potterveld, President of Lancaster Theological Seminary (PA), will join the gathering as a second notable speaker. Reiss has

distinguished himself as a strong church leader, having revived the financially challenged seminary and rejuvenated the educational programs the seminary offers to help develop pastoral leaders for the church in this new century. A rich tradition of partnership has and continues to flourish under Rev. Potterveld's leadership. He will be

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Gathering Annually**

soc-ucc.org

God is still speaking

BIG NEWS for the Southern Conference!

Camp's Notes

by Stephen W. Camp
Conference Minister

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Matthew 28: 19-20



Steve Camp

The news is big! The Southern Conference is starting new churches, many of them. For the next two years it will be our priority and our focus. It is work that all of us can be a part of and contribute toward its outcome. It is the mandate of our Savior, essential work that will offer new vitality and numerical growth. The Southern Conference is in the business of developing brand new churches. Every Association and local church will have a part to play. Each association will see new church growth. It is fundamental and significant work to get done.

Just recently the Southern Conference has received the first installment of a two year grant to build 6-9 new churches through 2010. We are grateful for our partnership with the national setting of the United Church of Christ; particularly this grant from Local Church Ministries as it shows confidence in our work and continues to encourage us to engage in a future that is revitalized and exhilarating, not divided or alienated from one another in our work. The \$200,000 LCM grant along with \$190,000 over the next two years from proceeds from our own Southern Conference Capital Campaign fund raising effort, will give the conference a significant head start in this vital work. This new church development effort coupled with the existing new churches started over the last few years in the Southern Conference will make the Southern Conference have the greatest number of new church development efforts in all the United Church of Christ. As we look toward the future, the outlook is better than ever.

The plan calls for one new church to get started in each Association in year one and six additional new church starts across the conference the year after.

contribute toward this effort with significant Southern Conference dollars. Where does the money come from, it come from you, especially if you have

The plan calls for one new church to get started in each Association in year one and six additional new church starts across the conference the year after. There will be workshops and seminars for new leaders, led by experts in church development, money for a new church start up kit with each new project, support for our existing new church planters and advertising across the conference to make our efforts more visible to the public along with the efforts of all of the churches in the Southern Conference known better.

In this new church development effort, all three Association Ministers have helped to develop our guidelines for this work ahead, and will be important to the implementation. Furthermore, the SOC Board of Directors has also been an active partner. Planning in many areas will continue as we move forward with this very important work.

In addition to the grant we as a Southern Conference have to been a contributor to our Southern Conference Capital Campaign, or if your church gives to Our Churches Wider Mission! Your gifts make a difference! If you haven't or your church has not made its pledge toward the capital Campaign or OCWM for 2008, please do so. It is not too late! Your gifts are needed. Just call or write the Conference Office if you need additional information.

All of this is big news for the people and churches of the Southern Conference. After a long season of conflict and difficulty, the Southern Conference is engaged in an effort that will lift all of us to higher and elevated ground. It is work we can all engage in and share in the outcome. Your prayers and support for this priority work of the Southern Conference will help ensure our success. After all it is our mandate from our Savior. It was Jesus who encourages us to "go" "make disciples" and "teach," and for this work Jesus promises to be with us to the end of the age.



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with adding new people into the life of faith rather than being a church seeking to multiply the church by the actions of division. All of us can celebrate the good news that this new initiative will bring."

Excitement appears twofold, with no holding back of enthusiasm from the national church. "You [in Southern Conference] are right on the cutting edge," said Charlene Smith of Local Church Ministries staff. "The LCM Team is excited about partnering with Southern Conference. The Conference has taken time to develop a total strategy for planting, financing and training for potential new churches. It's a whole package."

A look at the organizational dates of congregations in UCC year book statistics indicates that the bulk of Southern Conference congregations were organized between 1850 and 1925 (135). Only 14 congregations were birthed between 1926-1950, 20 between 1951-1975, 10 between 1976 - 2000, and 12 from 2001 to the present (data based

on 2006 statistics / or 2007 data when available). The church development grant will again make planting congregations an important priority of the conference's mission plan.

Church historian Banks Shepherd remembers a model of church development when mission minded pastors or strong churches invested a portion of their energies toward birthing new congregations. "Rev. Harold Myers, for example, was instrumental in the church starts of Rogers Park UCC (Kannapolis), Community UCC (Raleigh), and Edgewood UCC [now part of St. John's New Mission] (Burlington).

"Dr. Jeremiah Ingold, pastor of the Grace Charge [according to A Story of the Southern Synod], consisting of Grace, St. Paul's and Bethel churches, conducted services in the village [Hickory Tavern Village / Catawba County / 1869] for interested families." [pp. 194-5] His work led to the formation of Corinth Church.

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the luncheon speaker on Thursday. Registration fees for the Southern Conference Annual Gathering will include cost of lunch.

Workshops will be designed to stimulate and teach. Guests from the wider church will include Rev. Doug Borko (Pension Boards); Rev Edith Rasell, Minister for Workplace Justice in Justice and Witness Ministry (Cleveland); and Rev. Cheri Lovell, who is with the Cornerstone Fund based in Charlotte, who can help those interested in knowing more about financial ministries of local settings.

In addition to workshops, the Board of Directors will set aside significant time to decide upon new ways of being together as a

Southern Conference. One significant decision will be a change in the size of the Board of Directors in the Southern Conference plus other structural changes to make our work more effective in the years ahead. Rev. Vertie Powers will guide a session around understanding church development. Choirs, activities for youth, communion and so much more promise to fill out the agenda.

Discounted early registration will cost \$90, with late registration at \$100.00 after June 1, 2008. The registration will include all materials for the meeting, a luncheon on Thursday and the banquet on Friday. Extra Banquet tickets will be available for \$30 each from the conference office. Forms and material for registration will go out by

April 4th with information for the hotel including a special rate of \$99/night per double occupancy. The meeting will be held at the new Suffolk Hilton Garden Inn in Suffolk Virginia. The Annual Gathering starts at 8am with Registration and 10am first Plenary. To get the best rate, register early with the Hilton Garden Inn at 757-925-1300 and mention the Southern Conference when reserving room. Plan to arrive on Wednesday evening and leave on Saturday morning. The last session with Dr. Wright will end at 9pm on Friday evening. Watch for an April mailing or check SOC website for more details in March.

www.soc-ucc.org

We have a plan for planting churches

by Vertie Powers
Associate Conference Minister

It was an October day like any other or so we thought. The news that we had been waiting for since the first of August came and the day became one we would not easily forget. We believed yet we just could not believe. It had happened! It finally had happened! We were the recipients of a \$200,000 grant from the Evangelism Ministry Team, Local Church Ministries, a ministry of the United Church of Christ, for Church Development, here in the Southern Conference. That's the good news we will turn into the Gospel News needed by all of us.

That jolt of adrenaline came just when we needed it the most. We were beginning to wonder if the saying attached to Nazareth could refer to us. But, the give of manna told us differently. We began to dream dreams of grandeur. Why we could start a bazillion new churches. We could use the Appreciative Inquiry method and any other methods to see our churches vibrant and healthy, vital and functional, mission and spiritual minded. We could provide opportunities for churches to expand their horizons and mentor and coach other churches. We could provide opportunities for training and leadership development. We could conquer the world! But, like the line in James Weldon Johnson's song says, "yet with a steady beat have not our weary feet come to the place for which our sighed." And so we settled down with cool heads and calm hearts, with excitement and enthusiasm, with fire and focus to begin the planning that would use the gifts God had given us to maximize the potential for the good gospel news to be heard.

In conversations with folk around the conference, in Cleveland, friends outside the conference we, the Associate Conference Ministers and our Conference Minister, have come up with a draft that we think would begin to address the needs of church development in the Southern Conference. We believe our church development plan should cover four areas:

1. New Church Initiatives,
2. Churches Seeking Vitality,
3. Churches Seeking to Affiliate, and
4. Healthy Churches Seeking Ways to be More Supportive.

This of course means that we will be more proactive in our approach to church development in all areas. While we have not put definite names to the four areas you get a sense of the width and depth and height and breathe of what we as partners with God are beginning to plan and carry out. While we are grateful for the gift and blessing from LCM and God we realize it is a small amount and has to be treated with great care and wisdom. It is our faith that will grow the amount to what is needed to do the work of Jesus the Christ here in the Southern Conference.

This much we do know, we have been given much and God requires us to give much. We will work to determine where our churches are needed and where they can be sustained. Congregations with made up minds to be in service for the Lord will receive the help from us that will help them turn the corner into life. Those congregations that want sanctuary within the Southern Conference of the United Church of Christ will be given every opportunity to know and understand who we are and where we stand in order to make an informed decision. Churches who have given much in the past to our beloved church when others could not or would not give will have resources available that will challenge them to be greater stewards of all of God's creation.

There may be some re-configuring of staff responsibilities. The intent, in the end, seeks to make this venture with God a success. Come on, I urge all of you let's go on the adventure of our lives! I am ready, how about you?

Can I get an Amen!

And so we settled down with cool heads and calm hearts, ... with fire and focus to begin the planning ... to maximize the potential for the good gospel news to be heard.

Piedmont Crossing residents make Victory Junction donation

THOMASVILLE- While donations come in many forms, five independent living residents of Piedmont Crossing recently made one from the heart. Along with two busloads of enthusiastic residents, Marge Veatch, Janice Klingenberg, Ruth Vendetti, Ailene Johnson, and Irene Barrier made the trip to Victory Junction Gang Camp in Randleman to present four crocheted blankets and two handmade teddy bears. The donation of such will be given to children with chronic medical conditions or serious illnesses who attend the week-long camp. In addition to their presentation, residents were given an inspiring tour of this magnificent camp built in honor of Adam Petty, the late son of NASCAR driver, Kyle, and wife, Pattie.

Resident, Nancy Meeks, brought the idea of crocheting blankets for these children when her own church got involved with the same project. After passing along the required dimensions to the Piedmont Crossing residents' "Knit Wits" class, they diligently worked on their blankets both in class and at home. Resident Services Director, Debbie Coggins, stated that she was very proud of her group of ladies as they "put their hearts and souls into each blanket and bear knowing that some child would greatly benefit from it."

Piedmont Crossing is a full service retirement community with attractive homes and apartments on 60 acres in Thomasville, NC.

Piedmont offers a casual, comfortable lifestyle with a safety net of services readily available on-site.

For more information on Piedmont Crossing, contact Sallie Hepler, Director of Marketing at (336) 474-3605.



Pictured at Victory Junction, from left to right, Irene Barrier, Marge Veatch, Ruth Vendetti, and Janice Klingenberg.

Vertie's Thoughts



Gregory Congregational United Church of Christ in Wilmington was featured

by Wilmington's Lower Cape Fear Historical Society's 2007 Christmas Candlelight Tour. In April 1865, the American Missionaries established a school for African Americans. The first church was organized in 1870. Church services were held in the school with Rev. D. D. Dodge serving as minister and school principal. In 1880, James J. Howard Gregory of Marblehead, MA donated funds to build the present church, teachers' home and expand the school which became Gregory Normal Institute. The church was dedicated in March, 1881. The church was named Christ Congregational Church, later taking on the Gregory name in his honor. Gregory Church has maintained its original interior structure and still uses original pulpit furniture. In the early '70s, Gregory gained national attention through events now known as *Wilmington 10*. It has received historic status from the city with a plaque and street marker.



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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Virginia church offers retreat ministry

The Church of the Covenant U.C.C./Disciples of Christ, Lynchburg, VA, has opened the Chrysalis Interfaith Retreat Center for individuals and small groups to come for spiritual retreat or meetings. The center is situated on 40 acres of mostly wooded land in the city, near the Blue Ridge Mountains. There is capacity for up to seven individuals. Persons of all faith traditions can come and find at Chrysalis a peaceful and restful place that is also part of a small, vibrant church community that is committed to the inward journey of prayer and the outward journey of ministry and mission. Read more: www.chrysalis-interfaith-retreat.org.



Dwarf Dandelion
Goat Dandelion
Argemone mollis
Photographed at Johns River Valley Camp
by C. L. Stumb

2008

Calendar

February 2: Partners in Education; EVA Office

February 5, 7:00 PM: Black Lake Board of Advisors meets on site

February 7-8: Franklinton Center Board Planning Retreat

February 8-10: Ski Retreat at Blowing Rock Conference Center

February 16: Lancaster Theological Seminary Discover Day and Youth event (Confirmation) Day

February 17-23: WNCA Mission Trip to Back Bay Mission

February 22-23: John Dominic Crossan lecture series at First Reformed UCC, Burlington, NC; *Jesus and the Kingdom of God*

February 22-24: Baking Bread for Life Retreat at Johns River Valley Camp

March 2: Suggested offering date for One Great Hour of Sharing

March 6, 7, 8: CHHSM meeting in Charlotte

March 8: Spring Work Day at JRVC

March 9, 10, 11: SOC Bld of Dir, Franklinton Center

March 27-29: UCC Office Support Staff Retreat in Cleveland

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

April 17-19: Stewardship event in Cleveland

May 12, 13, 14: Clergy Retreat with Dr. Randall C. Bailey

June 20-21: UCC Women's Summer Conference

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

July 8-12: United Black Christians, Durham

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

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

High Country church rallies justice issues on many fronts

by C. L. "Curly" Stumb

BOONE -- Rallied by the dream of Martin Luther King Jr. and moved by news reports that continue to report war casualties, a small band of protesters lined the steps of the Jones House in Boone as they have consistently gathered for the past fifty-two weeks. Martin Luther King Day (2008) marked an anniversary of this weekly presence in downtown Boone, when on a cold January day eighteen persons took up positions and signs. "I get strange looks from my friends," says church youth member Emma Willard, "when I tell them I can't do something with them because I'm going to stand for peace."

Mom Bobbie Willard was first to read from the list of casualties. Placards posted in the yard offered backdrop to an articulated cadence of deceased names, remembered individually and separated by taps of a percussionist on her drum. "Aren't 105 N.C. deaths enough? We think so! - *People for Peace.*" (People for Peace, as coordinated by Dorothy Sagel, represents a co-sponsor of the Boone Vigil.) Another sign asked the question, "Isn't this enough? US Casualties: January 15, 2008 / Wounded: 28,773 / Killed: 3,932?"

Petitioning the congregation of High Country UCC on January 20, Rev. Shelly Wilson - in her sermon -- echoed the words of King: "Will we continue to march to the drum-beat of conformity and respectability, or will we, listening to the beat of a more distant drum, move to its echoing sounds? Will we march only to the music of time, or will we, risking criticism and abuse, march to the soul saving music of eternity?" Like King, this church start pastor made her place on the



In foreground left, Pastor Shelly Wilson and church musician Martha Johnson stand with group to witness the cause. Church youth member Emma Willard (far right) reads from list of war casualties. -photo by C. L. Stumb

street with her flock.

Drivers in a parade of cars on a busy downtown street could be observed responding with waves, horns, thumbs up, peace signs, and - yes - the solitary finger gesture. Pedestrians often chose to detour the vigil *via* the opposite side of the street, unless by chance their car happened to be parked in front of this gathered people. Those who found themselves close enough to read a small sign would have seen a quote by Martin Luther King which read: "Wars are poor chisels for carving out peaceful tomorrows."

"They took my son away," Bobbie Willard remembers hearing an uncle and Navy veteran lament as a result of a cancer his son encountered after exposure to depleted uranium in the First Gulf

War. "Hearing this patriot say something against the war," she said, "along with seeing the United States' contrasting responses to (for example) Iraq and Dafur, motivated me to take my stand." Ms Willard, as one of the congregation's "Peace and Justice Team leaders, has offered a nudging voice and rallying cry to the congregation. Members routinely find an e-mail on their Yahoo list-serve reading: "Hey gang! This is your friendly reminder of the Peace Vigil @ the Jones House today from 2-3. Come join us if you can and have a peaceful, happy day!"

The "preacher" in Shelly Wilson echoed a challenging prophetic cry. In her Martin Luther King sermon, she pressed the High Country congregation to continue

the journey. "As the beloved community it is ours to embody the dream in our own flesh, in our own experience, in our own testimonies, in our own actions, in our peaceful protests, in our continuing work to abolish the hatred and violence and poverty and judgment that separate us from our sisters and brothers."

A few participants -- remembering the sixties and major demonstrations against the Vietnam War -- were conscious of the absence of college students during the entire history of the vigil. Explained Emma Willard without thinking, "There's no draft." Asked about her visible presence as a high school student, she replied saying, "I want to use my freedom of speech while I still have it. Even if persons disagree, it gets them thinking."

Homeless find warmth at church

by Leslie Boyd

Reprinted with permission from the *Citizen-Times*, Asheville, NC where it originally appeared on January 2, 2008

ASHEVILLE -- As more than 100 people crowded into the Friendship Hall of First Congregational United Church of Christ on Tuesday, the Rev. Joe Hoffman marveled at the miracle of it all.

The church opened to homeless people on New Year's Day so there would be a place where they could be warm and fed.

The event was not planned. No committees met to decide what would be on the menu or who would be there to greet and care for people. The idea was born Monday

afternoon and came to be at 7 a.m. Tuesday, when church member Hal Jacobs opened the door and a half dozen people came in.

"A woman we know from Room in the Inn (the traveling women's shelter), who comes in to warm herself sometimes during the week, called yesterday and asked if she could come into the church and warm herself during the day," Hoffman said. "She said nothing was open (on New Year's Day), and the forecast was for cold weather."

So Hoffman made a few calls and discovered that public buildings and day programs would be closed for the holiday. He made a few more calls and sent out an e-mail to his congregation. He went to some of the city's shelters and told people the church would be open.

I didn't know if any people would show up," he said. "I didn't know if we would have church members here."

But Kathryn Cartledge got into her car Tuesday morning and drove through town, telling people on the street there was a place for them to go.

As homeless people filled the room, church members began to arrive with food and warm clothing.

"The food -- talk about watching it multiply -- it was like the loaves and the fishes," Cartledge said, referring to the Bible story in which Jesus fed multitudes with a few fish and loaves of bread.

Again and again, people approached volunteers to thank them for the hospitality.

"No other church I know of is

doing anything like this today," said Ken Jones, who stays at the Western Carolina Rescue Ministry at night.

Bob Willetts called it "a blessing beyond words."

The church has been collecting items to give to A_HOPE, a day program that serves people who are homeless, and the bin was brought out after someone asked whether the church had a warm hat for him to wear. Later, a volunteer went to pick up some blankets for people who have to sleep outdoors to use overnight.

Timothy Lavelle came in during the morning after Cartledge told him the church would be open.

"You gotta love people who love you," he said as he hugged Cartledge. "Otherwise, you don't have anything."