



Southern
Conference
edition

section **C**

**PLANNING BEGINS FOR 2006
REGIONAL YOUTH EVENT**

Youth and Adults from the Southern Conference have accepted the opportunity to host the 2006 Southern Regional Youth Event (SRYE). The event is tentatively scheduled for late June of 2006 at a location in Southern Conference to be announced soon. At its initial meeting the planning team chose the theme, "God is Still Speaking andIt's Time!" SRYE will be open to youth ages 13-19 and their adult advisors. The planning team anticipates that approximately 400 participants will attend. In the past, the registration fee has been about \$300 per person. Information pertaining to SRYE will be available at your local church or at the website: www.godsaysitstime.net and the SOC website.

**WOMEN PLAN SUMMER
CONFERENCE**

The Women's Summer Conference will be held June 9-11, 2005 at Catawba College. The Keynote speaker and Bible Study Leader will be Rev. Nancy Allison of Charlotte, NC. Rev. Martha Brown will be Worship Leader. She is returning to our conference from Texas. Deborah Bailey from the national office will be leading study on program materials. Rev. Larry Walsler, WNCA Associate Conference Minister, Rev. Kristin Gerner, and Brenda James will be workshop leaders.

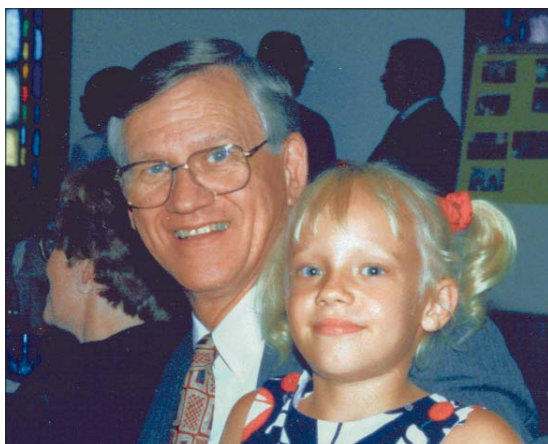
The cost for full registration is \$125.00. Women are encouraged to attend The Nazareth Children's Home Celebration. WNC Church Women sponsor a booth for the Scholarship Fund for Nazareth. For additional information, contact Mrs. Ruth Parks, Lexington, NC at 336-357-2912.

On June 9, 2005, churches in the Catawba College area are invited to a performance of the Piedmont singers in the Ketner Business Building at 7:00 pm. All are invited to join the women for this program.

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www.soc-ucc.org

**"We are delighted to honor Yvonne Delk and Rollin Russell. Even now they are building bridges and embracing the future."
- Steve Camp**

**Well Done
Faithful
Servants**



Rollin Russell and granddaughter Margit enjoy festivities of event celebrating his 17 years as Southern Conference minister. -photo by C. L. Stumb

**Rollin O. Russell
...respected
and esteemed**

(Based on an interview conducted by Richard N. Rinker in Elon on April 20, 2005.)

The Rev. Dr. Rollin O. Russell was born in Beech Grove, Indiana (just south of Indianapolis), the son of a parsonage family. His father was a Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) minister who served in that state for eleven years before moving to New

Orleans, Louisiana. He was thought of as a "church starter" because of his commitment to new church starts while he was there.

Rollin thinks of New Orleans as his home town because he was there from sixth grade through high school. He is a graduate of Transylvania College in Lexington, Kentucky, a Disciples school. After that, he attended and graduated from Vanderbilt Divinity School from which he received his B.D. and D. Min. degrees. It was at Vanderbilt that he met his future wife, Betsy, also a student there at the university. She was a teacher of French and English at the high school level in Virginia, Texas, and Burlington, North Carolina, with service also as

Continued on C-2 ... Russell



Yvonne Delk (left) and Ruth Varner stand before freedom schooner *Amistad* in Norfolk Maritime Center -photo by C. L. Stumb

**Yvonne Delk
...seasoned
and valued**

By IRWIN SMALLWOOD

It was no accident that The Rev. Dr. Yvonne V. Delk was selected to preach at the opening worship service of the 40th annual meeting of the Southern Conference. She earned the title of First Daughter of the conference through a remarkable career that itself reaches more than four decades into the past, making her a natural for the honor.

Her first job in the organized church was as Director of Religious Education for First Congregational Church (UCC) in Atlanta, 1963 to 1965. She hasn't taken her last job yet, though she has been calling herself retired since 1998.

The reason is simple. "I feel blessed to have reached age 66 April 15, but I still want my energy to account for something," she said in a recent interview.

What her version of retirement means is that she has a little more time for rest and relaxation and reflection, but that she is "still involved in things close to my heart."

She continues to speak and preach around the country, serves on boards of institutions that shaped her life, and remains a visiting lecturer

for Chicago's Seminary Consortium for Pastoral Education.

As part of the 2005 SOC annual meeting, she was honored with a scholarship established in her name. Women of Southern Conference seeking seminary training will benefit from this fund.

But right now she has a new passion. Rather, an old passion rekindled. Franklinton Center. She is spearheading a national campaign to build a new housing facility there, because, she said, "Many years ago the late Rev. W. H. Thomas told me, 'Wherever you go, whatever you do, don't forget Franklinton Center. It needs you.'"

She added, "I am among many who grew in heart and mind at Franklinton Center - A. Knighton Stanley, Henry Simmons, Yvonne Beasley, Leon White, Bill Land, Jim Hargett, and so many others."

She firmly believes that raising the \$1 million it will take is "more than doable," though the campaign is just in the beginning stages. A committee is working on strategy and hopes to have significant seed money in hand very soon. She is confident, she said, "that the many churches and people within the UCC who have been touched by the center would like to see it contin-

Continued on C-2 ... Delk

Has Uniformity Replaced Unity in the Church?

Camp's Notes

by Stephen W. Camp
Conference Minister



The account of the Pentecost event in the book of Acts talks about being filled with the Holy Spirit and speaking in many languages as the Spirit gave them ability. It had to be an exciting time. It was a time of hope and a time for them to embrace the future, to build bridges. It was a time of enhanced personal faith. It was a great time of unity among God's people.

How far we have come since those beginning days! Or should I say how little progress we have made in our day, some important ways in our faith. While followers of Jesus Christ started off not of one mind but with varied purposes and agendas. As far as we have come, how similar we are though, as we long to be together and in one place. How much we are like them and those early Christians like us. There was great uncertainty about the future. We echo that sentiment in our time. We find it hard to talk, to have honest dialogue and conversation, let alone listen to whatever the spirit may be saying to gather us. They were called to be one, but did that mean they had to do everything the same way or all think the same things or even feel the presence of God in one way of worship? Has uniformity replaced unity in the church? Jesus' prayer for oneness did not necessarily mean sameness, or did it? The scripture reminds and teaches us that "a tongue rested on each of them." But it also says that the result of that happening for each individual was that "all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit..." (NRSV verse 3b-4a) Unity was a result. God was declaring, speaking, to each one but together and they listened in the genre they understood. They were amazed and astonished as we can be when we listen to the still speaking God.

[as Pentecost people] We want God boxed up, ... rather than letting God do something really big....

We still seek a sense of Pentecost among us, the spirit falling upon each one of us. Too often today we want that sense of Pentecost to show us what we have always seen, not what could surprise us in our faith. We want to feel what we have always felt, not what may feel new to us. We want God boxed up, and tied to our understanding, rather than letting God do something really big and exciting in our lives. I long for a time when each can be heard, when each voice is of equal importance and value, when no one's special agenda will seek to dominate and dictate. Yet often today it seems that we work hard to have the church conform to our narrow vision, we are numbed by fear, terrified by the prisons we create and the tombs we seal up. We lose sight of the light of Christ in our quarrels and conflicts that still rage on among us and neglect to hear the still speaking God. We want our own way and all to see and do it our way and we tie our sense of faithfulness to that goal.

Help the Southern Conference work toward unity in the days ahead, not uniformity. Help the Conference realize it potential and feel the grace and hope that God places upon us like a tongue of fire resting upon each of us. Let us move with the filling spirit that is Holy. As the people who bear the name of Christ, we have the ability, do we have the will?

My prayer for us is for God to fill us with the fresh and mighty wind of God's spirit, not a stale and stagnant wind, but a wind of God's powerful presence among us. That is my prayer for the Southern Conference these days as we seek to be the church together. It is really a prayer filled with great hope for the future, a future I embrace.

Presidents of SOC Board of Directors

- 1965 Rev. G. Melvin Palmer
- 1967 Rev. Roy E. Leinback *
- 1969 Rev. Zanda P. Jenkins *
- 1971 Mr. Irwin Smallwood
- 1973 Mr. Joe H. Leonard *
- 1975 Rev. Joseph M. Copeland
- 1977 Mrs. Lucille Smith *
- 1979 Rev. Emmett Floyd
- 1981 Rev. Woodrow Piland*
- 1983 Rev. Yvonne Beasley
- 1985 Rev. Jerry Moore**
Ms Dorothy Ballinger
- 1987 Rev. J. Cecil Cheek
- 1989 Rev. Donald Kirkbride *
- 1991 Rev. William C. Smith
- 1993 Rev. Winston Waugh
- 1995 Ms Rena Langdon
- 1997 Rev. Dr. Carroll Bartholomew
- 1999 Ms Jean Copeland
- 2001 Mr. Charles Brooks
- 2003 Mrs. Faye Humphrey

* Deceased
**Rev. Jerry Moore was elected President at the 1985 Annual Meeting but resigned to accept a call to serve a church in another conference.

1965 - 2005 Celebrating 40 years as a conference of the UCC

Russell (Continued from C-1)

an adjunct professor for Elon College.

After graduation from Vanderbilt, he served his first church (Disciples of Christ) in Charlottesville, Virginia. In order to serve in the United Church of Christ, he sought and obtained Privilege of Call in 1963 from the UCC association located in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. He was then called to serve Salem United Church of Christ in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania in 1964. From there, in 1967, he accepted a call to Bethel UCC in Houston, Texas. That was followed by serving as pastor for First Congregational Church (UCC) in Fort Worth, Texas.

Between 1964 and 1969, Rollin and Betsy were blessed with three children: Beth (an elementary school teacher and drama instructor, as well as mother of their granddaughter, Margit); Stephen (teaching in the Sociology Department of the University of Arizona); Amy (a physician in Family Practice in Denver, Colorado and the mother of their grandchildren, Emma and Ben).

The South Central Conference of the UCC extended Rollin a call to serve as Associate Conference Minister in 1974. His responsibilities included Christian Education, Social Ministries, Outdoor Ministries, and Church Development. This Conference

covers Texas and Louisiana. He remained there until 1982 when he accepted a call from the Southern Conference (UCC) to be their Conference Minister. He served in this capacity until 1999.

From that position, he became director for a newly initiated program at Lancaster Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania. The Lily Endowment provided funding for Ministry Renewal; this was to be designed to develop a closer bond between local churches and the Pennsylvania conferences (as well as others) with the seminary for the purpose of continuing education for ministers. When he left this program to retire, it was evaluated and renewed with additional funding by the Lily Endowment.

Currently, Rollin and Betsy are enjoying retirement in Hillsborough, North Carolina. He keeps active caring for their home grounds; his dreams include having a small boat on which to flow down the Eno River that passes by their house. And, of course, paddling back up the river to get home again. He has remained actively involved in a variety of ministries that include serving as a volunteer with the North Carolina Council of Churches and the Ministers' Task Force of Churches Uniting in Christ.

One of his closing comments was, "I love to be back here."

Delk (Continued from C-1)

ued for generations to come."

But all her other activities notwithstanding, Dr. Delk has never lost her passion for preaching. "I have never lost touch with the spirit that fell upon me in Macedonia Afro-Christian Church in Norfolk," she said. "I was baptized there and never moved my membership. I think of it often when I recall that passage in Luke where Jesus goes back home after 40 days in the wilderness and says, 'The spirit of the Lord is upon me'"

The first African American woman to be ordained as clergy in the United Church of Christ, in 1974, her accomplishments are legendary. She was also the first African American woman to head a national instrumentality in the UCC, the Office of Church in Society, in 1981. In 1989 she became the first woman to be nominated as a candidate for the UCC presidency.

She has been a visiting lecturer

at Harvard Divinity School. She has chaired the World Council of Churches' Program to Combat Racism. For nine years she was executive director of the Community Renewal Society in Chicago, a faith-based metropolitan urban mission agency.

Along the way she earned a reputation as one of society's strongest allies in the fight for human and civil rights for people of color, children and the poor, serving as a teacher, educator, preacher, executive, organizer and author in the United States and other nations on five continents around the world.

But as she reflects on her distinguished career, the high point "clearly was my decade leading the UCC Office of Church in Society," she said, "It gave me a chance to travel throughout the UCC and see what we really are - a mission church that is connected with people who are in the margin as well as in power."

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

The Southern Spirit is published bimonthly as an edition of the United Church News. The publication is a successor to the *Christian Sun* (1894), *The Standard* (*The College Visitor*, 1887), the *Newsletter* (1951), the *News of Southern Conference Ministries*, and the *Southern Conference News*.
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.

Commentary

News and Notes ... TY Volunteers!

A CALL TO LOVE AND UNITY By Donald P. Flick



Two points of involvement have prompted the writing of this call to love and unity within the Southern

Conference of the United Church of Christ. The first involvement was when I was asked to teach an adult class for four weeks, using rather conservative material based on the International Sunday School Lessons. The scripture lessons for the first two weeks were Romans 12: 1-2, 9-21 and Romans 14:1-14 with the lessons being titled, "Marks of the True Christian" and "Do Not Judge One Another." As I began to study this material, I discovered that the main thrust of the lessons was unity within the community of faith. The statement was that regardless of the various opinions and actions on the part of members of the community of faith, it is important to present a unified family to the world, the world that is constantly trying to squeeze us into its mold. At one point in the text it says that when everything is considered, unity is the most important thing to be worked on because there is only one Christ and the world needs to feel the impact of a church united. It sounded a great deal like the prayer of Jesus "that they may all be one" or the call of Bishop Pike back in the early 1960s, when he challenged the churches to come together to present a strong witness to the world which faces tremendous new challenges.

The Union Gospel Press Publication states: "Even today we should not allow an opinion or a preference to disrupt the fellowship between believers. Well-intentioned people sometimes elevate their own opinions to the level of divine revelation. While it may be permissible to hold opinions, it is not right to divide the body of Christ over them." Individuals on both sides of the homosexual issue have allowed "an opinion or a preference" to disrupt the fellowship that has existed among us and must continue to exist among us, if the gospel we are called to proclaim is to make a significant impact on a confused and suffering world.

The second involvement for me that causes me to plead with fellow

travelers in the faith to give each other freedom to their opinions and beliefs, but remain in fellowship and mission with one another, is my reading of the book by Jim Wallis, *God's Politics*. Wallis point out that indeed homosexuality may be a religious issue, but there are other religious issues that are impacting our world that should cause us to act much more emotionally and aggressively than we do to bring about change. Some of these "hot-button" social issues are poverty, the environment, war, healthcare, and terrorism.

This past week there was a report that millions of children are dying from diseases that in western industrialized nations are preventable and/or curable. Wouldn't it be wonderful if those of us in the body of Christ could acknowledge that there are some religious issues and biblical interpretations that we are not going to agree on, but we are united on the teachings of Christ regarding poverty and the wellness of all God's children; therefore, we will work together to raise the necessary money and the commitment to eradicate these diseases around the world.

Perhaps one of the reasons we keep things so stirred up about an issue like homosexuality is that this issue doesn't cost us anything except some emotional energy and a portion of our time. Also, as long as we can keep people stirred up about this highly emotional and personal issue we don't have to deal with the "weightier matters" of the gospel. If Christians are to "love one another" and are not to pass "judgment on one another" we should be able to walk together as brothers and sisters committed to reaching out to persons in need, binding up their wounds and improving their relationship with God and one another.

The world is in crisis. Millions of people around the world suffer daily from terrible injustices that Christians are called to correct. Let us put aside our differences and walk together to the call of Christ to be united in love and in our efforts to overcome evil with good. Let us work to strengthen and unify the United Church of Christ, not look for reasons to weaken and divide it. Christ demands that his Body be One, and while there may be different opinions around His table, we are bound together in love and purpose.

(Donald P. Flick is retired Executive Director, United Church Homes and Service of the Southern Conference and organizing pastor(1963-1969) of Church of the Master, UCC, Hickory, NC)

VOLUNTEERS BEAUTIFY LAKE PRINCE WOODS

(SUFFOLK, VA) - Persons from local churches, area schools, and community groups pitched in to make the walking trails, woods, and gardens at Lake Prince Woods, Virginia site of United Church Homes, more enjoyable and more accessible to the seniors who live there. On Saturday, April 23, volunteers, residents, and staff worked to clear limbs, brush, and leaves from wooded areas used by residents. They planted hundreds of trees, shrubs, and bulbs to replace trees lost to Hurricane Isabel.

Lake Prince Woods Executive Director Celia Soper says it's exciting to see the Lake Prince's fourth Community Clean Up Day focus on beautification. "Our Clean Up Day started out of the crisis of Hurricane Isabel, and it's really turned into a huge beautification project, one that staff, volunteers, and residents look forward to every year."

WORK FOR NON-PROFITS EXPANDS PERSPECTIVES OF CATAWBA COLLEGE STUDENTS

(SALISBURY, NC) - Thanks to internship stints in the non-profit world, students from Catawba College's Ketter School of Business will have broader perspectives when they graduate.

"Even if they don't go to work for a non-profit, they're more likely to volunteer because of their understanding," explains Al Carter, an associate professor emeritus of business at the College.

Pam Thompson, an associate professor of information systems at Catawba, agrees and notes that Carter's sentiment is one shared by her and other professorial colleagues in the School of Business. The sentiment is so strong that most professors there require volunteering or non-profit internships as an integral part of their coursework.

Blair Matthews is in the home stretch of his college days. When a class with Dr. Andrew Morris led to his work on a Habitat for Humanity project, Matthews was at first shocked that a professor would require that of him. Later, his



shock changed to satisfaction. "After I went to work on the project, I found I felt better after doing it and I came to realize that there's more to be learned than just in the classroom."

Thompson's students have also worked to write grants, and to obtain and install computer systems which are now used by the clients at the two local Abundant Living Centers. Last fall, one of her students worked to create a computer backup system for the local Hanford Dole chapter of the American Red Cross.

Student efforts such as these have been so successful that Thompson is in the process of creating a Non-Profit Technical Assistance Center (NPTAC) on campus which will pair students with area non-profits that need technical or computer assistance at their agencies.

ANNUAL EVENT HONORS ELON HOMES FOR CHILDREN VOLUNTEERS

(CHARLOTTE / ELON, NC) - Elon Homes for Children is blessed with many volunteers whose wide range of interests and contributions to campus life support and enhance the agency's programs. These outstanding volunteers were honored during National Volunteer Week, April 17-23, with appreciation dinners at each of the Elon Homes campuses. The national theme for the week was "Inspire by Example."

Students had a prominent role at the events as they welcomed guests, offered the invocation, entertained with song, read from personal essays, acted as emcee and performed African drum music. They also helped decorate for the dinners with balloons, flowers and inspirational quotes for centerpiece.

At the Snyder Campus in Elon, Neill McNeill of Fox 8 News was guest speaker. Each week McNeill profiles a child waiting to be adopted on "Wednesday's Child," a segment of the evening news. He noted that while adoptions may not happen immediately, many fostering and mentoring opportunities develop from the segment. Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools Board Member George Dunlap, who spoke at the Kennedy Campus dinner, delivered a powerful message based on his personal experience of being encouraged and supported by volunteers and extended family in the

absence of his natural parents. Elon Homes welcomes volunteers who have expertise, interests,



Trinket boxes were presented to Girl Scouts Lauren, Lindsay and Morgan Busman. The scouts assisted Kennedy Campus with landscaping and donations of Easter baskets, crafts, art materials and games.

friendship and experiences to share with students. For more information contact Volunteer / Mentor Coordinator Lynette Kuehnell at Snyder Campus (336/538-4212) and Zaneta Wood at Kennedy Campus (704/369-2511).

BRCC BENEFITS FROM PARTNERS IN SERVICE

(BLOWING ROCK, NC) Mary and Bill Ruth will be concluding a year of voluntary service at Blowing Rock



Conference Center on June 16. They work with the UCC Partners in Service for placement, and are preparing for a new assignment. On August 15 they will begin that new term of service at Heifer Ranch Learning Center, Perryville, Arkansas (part of Heifer International). They welcome invitations (when home in Elon) for speaking engagements. Persons wanting to stay in touch with them via a periodic newsletter are invited to contact them at: <williamruth@hotmail.com>

70 YEARS OF MINISTRY

(ELON, NC) Imagine being ordained in 1935 and serving in ministry for seventy years. There is a story to be told with the life of Rev. William "Bill" Andes of Elon. Suffice it to say that he lived an incredible life as a pastor and proclaimer of the Word.



BLOWING ROCK CONFERENCE CENTER has teamed with Blue Ridge Learning Centers, Inc for a Team Building and Ropes Course Program, to be called *Discovery Course*. Using simulations (group interactions, initiatives and challenge courses) that model real-world challenges, participants will examine the structures that influence behavior. Their team building programs are designed to be fun, engaging and relevant to what your team is working on, while developing skills that bring about real change and allowing for sensitive areas to come to the surface in productive ways. Contact the center at 828-295-7813) about further information on half-day, full day, and multi-day sessions. [Photo left by C. L. Stumb: Bill Bourdon observes construction of *Discovery Course*.]



Fire Pink; Indian Pink
Silene virginica
Photographed at JRVCC by C. L. Stumb

2005 Calendar

JUNE

- 3** - 5: SOC Annual Meeting in Norfolk
- 9** - 11: Women's Summer Conference, Catawba College
- 11** : Black Lake Retreat Center "Christian Music Festival"
- 12** : Summer Camps begin at Johns River Valley Camp
- 13** - 16: Blowing Rock Conference Center "Special Days"
- 20** - 25: Franklinton Center music camp

JULY

- 1** - 5: General Synod XXV, Atlanta, GA
- 17** - 22: Franklinton Center Youth Overnight Camp
- 17** - 23: Black Lake Retreat Center Zoo-to-Do Camp
- 29** - 31: Black Lake Retreat Center Parent / Child Weekend

AUGUST

- 6** : Franklinton Center Day
- 6** - 7: Black Lake Retreat Center Parent / Pre-school overnight
- 18** : United Church Homes and Services Board meets at Lake Prince
- 20** : 60th Anniversary Celebration of Blowing Rock Conference Center
- 29** : Franklinton Center "Back to School Jam"

Church People Attempt Talks Amidst "Tug of War"

-by C. L. Stumb

On April 1 -- no joke -- thirty-five persons gathered in the parish house of Elon Community Church to talk, face to face. Facilitator Annette Simmons spent a morning setting the stage for conversation. Her goal, as etched in white ink on a book cover, sought to establish a safe place for dangerous truths, *Using DIALOGUE to Overcome Fear and Distrust at Work*. "It helps to use metaphor to describe dialogue," she states in that book and in her facilitating role. "Metaphor makes it easier to introduce a concept as mercurial as dialogue. When you want to entice a group to dialogue, it is important to start with a shared big picture first."

Artists and non-artists alike were asked to draw, and share their image with the group. Memorable were pictures of conflict and images from battle. Sketches included a cat and dog fight, tug of war, wall of frustration, stewing God, underwater golf, a choir not singing the same song, and a passionate argument. In the course of initiating dialogue, Ms. Simmons highlighted one sketch portraying a fortress, battering ram, and dragon. John Roberts offers his interpretation of that image, suggesting that "In Kelly Barefoot's metaphor map, traditional theology (which Kelly represents) was inside the castle while the new theology was outside the castle charging the castle with a battering ram. It seems like Kelly's perception is that he is on the defensive."

Focusing thought around "conflictive" metaphors caused Nathan

King to ponder his choice of underwater golf as an image. "Could be I see this more also as my own struggle with myself and a difficult environment in which to have fun or to make sense of what is happening around me." "War is usually what happens when the folks believe there are no other options for resolutions." "The only options seem to be to either fight or run. And my ego cannot handle running. This message is spoon fed to us from the time we are little children."

Dian Jackson concurred that "There is indeed a battle going on." "I believe the battle lines have been drawn and neither side is ready yet to hear the other. Each side is determined to be right, when both sides cannot be." She continues by suggesting that the battle is about human rights, scriptural interpretation, and power, though it is cast in the guise of sexuality rights, access to the mind of God, and ignoring covenant in the quest for power. As Rev. Jackson ponders what she has said, the preacher in her espouses a few more words: "I think there also might be just a touch of ignorance that is driving the forces to continue the battle. There is no way one can read the Jesus story and come up with some of the insane theological interpretations that we hear during the hottest scimmages of battle. We use the Bible to justify everything except to reveal the awesome and unconditional God of love."

JoAnne Flick qualified the premise of conflict, though also couched her remarks in a battle



Annette Simmons describes "Ladder of Inference" to John Roberts -photo by C. L. Stumb

image. "Yes, there were a good many metaphors for fighting, but I don't think they predominated. My own and a number of others lamented the frustration of being caught in this unasked for tug of war and our energies being taken up in this forever nonproductive issue."

Keith DeBord, pastor of Amelia UCC (Clayton, NC), speaks to the battle metaphor as he reflects from Amelia's perspective. "Amelia doesn't want to drop out or take over. We are, as a whole, more culturally conservative. We have to be true to that. We're not being properly understood."

"I would say that," suggests Johns Roberts, "the 'conservatives,' for lack of a better word are being reactionary toward something they think is a threat that they were forced to deal with. Hence the defensiveness pictured within the metaphors."

Speaking with prophetic voice, Nathan King offers summary words

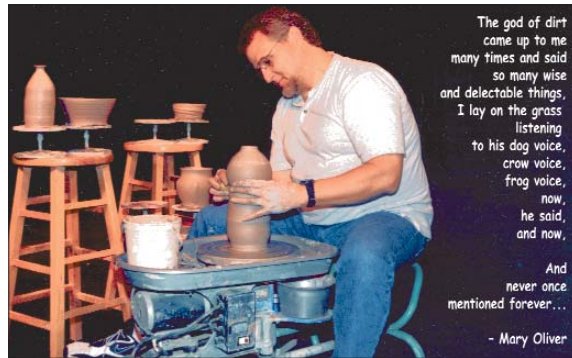
from his mindset: "The universe is born, not out of order, but out of chaos. Out of the tumult, new birth comes!"

Keith DeBord, reminiscent of his own spiritual journey, also speaks prophetically, or perhaps proverbially. "The monotheistic mindset is always a threat to the unity of the Church, because we are all so different. That's why I got out of the Baptist Church."

Annette offers her own metaphor as a reference for helping a group "visualize the layers of assumptions that are normally transparent." She describes it as a "ladder of Inference," a model also developed by Chris Argyris. "A lot of the time the dangerous truth, too dangerous even to discuss, is at the top of this ladder. But it is not the truth at all. If we step back down the ladder and examine each assumption on which it is based, it gets less and less dangerous and easier and easier to discuss."

Nathan King reviews new book by Rev. Tom Mann (pastor of Parkway UCC, Winston-Salem)...

GOD OF DIRT - Mary Oliver and the other Book of God



Russell Knop, potter, is a member of Hillsborough UCC photo by C. L. Stumb

So Tom Mann begins *God of Dirt*, subtitled, *Mary Oliver and the Other Book of God*. "We know the 'God of heaven,'" he says, "and even the 'God of heaven and earth,' but a god of dirt?"

From the beginning, one is aware that this is no ordinary book about an ordinary god. And there is an uneasy suspicion that the reader will be asked not only to think about God differently, but to imagine and experience both God and Creation in unimagined ways.

Into Oliver's imagination and experience Mann takes us, inviting us to consider how the poet hears all Creation as the voice of God and the natural world as "the other book of God." He further invites us to relate to the natural world as the realm of God. This makes us kin, in communion. This is demonstrated by drawing parallels between Oliver's poetry and the Hebrew Scriptures. For instance, referring to the story of Creation in Genesis, Mann says "Together [with all Creation] we

make up a dirty family created by the God of dirt as a potter shapes clay" (12). We are in relationship with all Creation, not as separate from the natural world, but as part of Creation.

Particularly interesting is a parallel drawn between one of Oliver's poems about the wildness of nature and the predicament of Job in the bible. After being shown the natural world in its wildlife and freedom, Job acknowledges his relative insignificance (34). Mann finds this same acknowledgement in much of Oliver's experience. And like Job's own spiritual transformation, Oliver's poems "reveal an almost 'evangelical' heuristic quality" empowering the reader to explore fresh ways of looking at the world leading to one's own search for what to do "with your one wild and precious life" (38).

The very idea that there is another book of God will stretch the religious imagination of many Christian readers. But once inside, the dirt rubs off on the reader. Then, engaging the God of Dirt clears a path of hope on which we can leave

behind our smug arrogance as the only mouthpiece of God. Essentially, this hope rests in new life, substantiated not only by the resurrection of the Christ, but by the whole realm of nature in all its (God's) glory.

God of Dirt is for anyone searching, even groping, for God, particularly if that search is spiritual. And what search for God is not? Along with copies of Oliver's poetry, the book would be well discussed in a Sunday school class or Earth Justice group. It provides a natural basis for Christians concerned about global warming. The experience would be profound however, if first each reader has dirt under fingernails, grass stains on knees, scent of deep wood in nostrils, and water of soaking storm running down the back of their memory.

Indeed, *God of Dirt* invites you not only to hear the still speaking God in a new way, but to experience the divine sacred, Eucharistic presence in all things.

[Oliver's writings include: *Winter Hours: Prose; Prose Poems and Poems; American Primitive; and Dreamwork.*]

God is still speaking,