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-Vertie Powers



SOC Staff
members
witness
challenge
of how
to put it
all
back
together
again

New Orleans Revisited



"We drove around most of the day, and the sight was chilling." "In the worst part, there had been 18 feet of water. There were cars on top of one another, remnants of houses where what had been the second floor was now the first floor." -Steve Camp photo and comments

by Irwin Smallwood

You could detect a distinct stillness in his voice as he tried to describe what they had seen.

"There was no sound, no movement, no life, no smell, just a vast wasteland as far as you could see," he said in what was almost a whisper. "You knew that there were bodies that have not yet been found in what was left of some of those houses. It was an overwhelming feeling."

The Rev. Steve Camp, Southern Conference Minister, and Associates The Rev. Vertie Powers (ENC) and The Rev. Larry Walsler (WNC) had just recently returned from a trip to view the destruction wrought by Hurricane Katrina in old New Orleans, and it was obvious this was not your ordinary disaster exploratory experience.

"It was one of those moments in life when you are kind of awestruck by what you are witnessing," Camp continued. "As one moves through the most devastated neigh-

borhoods, you tend to react almost reverently. It was like walking through some bombed-out, war-ravaged place."

On the 800-mile journey south, they drove along amid the normal chit-chat of professional colleagues hashing out one thing and another.

On the journey home, it was a different story. All they could talk about was "our anger at the way this was mishandled by our government" and, most importantly, "what a challenge it presents us as the church," Camp said. "It is my hope that the Southern Conference will continue to be generous and not forget, because the work has just begun."

The three conference executives embarked on the marathon endeavor as the result of extensive staff discussions. "We are often called on to talk about such things, and we determined that it was appropriate for us to see for ourselves what we are supposed to be

interpreting for the conference and its churches," Camp said.

And see for themselves they did.

They were met in New Orleans by Brenda Square, the archivist at the Amistad Research Center, a United Church of Christ-related agency that is a repository for African-American history. And what a guide she turned out to be. She had actually grown up in the 9th Ward of New Orleans, the most devastated part of the city.

"We drove around most of the day, and the sight was chilling," Camp went on. "In the worst part, there had been 18 feet of water. There were cars on top of one another, remnants of houses where what had been the second floor was now the first floor. You could see the water line on every house that remained, though none was intact. Every house that had been searched

continued on B-2: New Orleans

Annual Meeting
on Catawba's
Campus Will
Feature
Thoughtful Words
from Associate
Conference
Ministers



(PHOTO: LEFT TO RIGHT) Vertie Powers will deliver keynote address; Larry Walsler and Drew Morris are to preach worship messages.

Consider the Possibilities of a Pentecost Spirited Church

Camp's Notes

by Stephen W. Camp
Conference Minister

I have three items to address this month...



Steve Camp calls wife Pat during SOC Board meeting four years ago, as he waits while Board and Search Committee deliberate in closed door session.

#1 ... On the first page of this issue of the Southern Spirit, we featured an article about a recent trip to New Orleans that the Southern Conference staff made, to the city that has dominated the news in America for several months. I am one that is glad that the media has not yet let go of this important story. It is right that America continues to understand, even feel, the depth of the devastation that occurred, and seeks to find the hope that must emerge from the rubble and shattered lives present there. It would truly be an American tragedy if we allowed this story to end, be ignored and disregarded without doing all that we could to help the people of the region recover, piece together their lives and go forward into their future. Katrina relief is America's challenge, but also a challenge for the church. The church will remain long after FEMA has done all that it is assigned to do and the Red Cross has moved on to another crisis. The church will be present in the region for the long haul and serve as many as possible given your past financial help.

Pentecost is upon us in the church. It was a time when the Holy Spirit came upon the church and filled the house so that all of the present diversity could celebrate the goodness of God.

My suggestion is that so many Southern Conference members have given generously toward Katrina relief to date, yet I would suggest to you that we have miles yet to go before our collective work is done, our mission of caring and help in the region is still incomplete. Your continued and sustained help is needed.

I am thankful for the Southern Conference contributions to date total nearly \$100,000 to the United Church of Christ Disaster Relief Ministry efforts. The whole UCC has given more than four million and many conference churches and institutions have sent members to the region, with one intended outcome, to roll up their sleeves and help. Each of you that have contributed in large and small ways, we say you truly are the face of Christ through your acts. Thank you.

#2 ... Let me encourage you to make sure your local church is represented at this year's Annual Meeting, a gathering of the Southern Conference. Your Board of Directors and staff are hoping for a gathering this summer with most and many of our churches represented. We encourage your church to bring visitors or a delegation with you in addition to your church's

official delegates. It promises to be an exciting time of sharing hopes and aspirations for the next few years. We have come a very long way over the last four years together; we will give God thanks for the journey. Challenges of great weight have been addressed. While we are not where we want to be, we are not what we used to be either. We continue to seek to "Live the Vision" in the Conference's life. We are hopeful, expectant, raring to go with new initiatives and programs, a skilled and gifted settled staff and many new church starts and church renewals to celebrate together. Our Capital Fund Raising Campaign is well underway and growing. Crisis... no way, hope abounds!

You will not want to miss the emphasis upon worship that this year's gathering will bring. The workshops will be informative and useful for your local church's life. We will hear from each of our Associate Conference Ministers in major presentations designed to engage you, challenge you and help you to know your gifted staff better. The meeting this year will be our chance to begin to restore faith in each other, learn from one another and find places of unity with one another. The

"Conference Ministry Fund" offering (each local church received information) will be received and giving goals will be distributed. \$6 per member is simply a token of support for the Southern Conference, but will mean so much more. The gift will show commitment and support for the ministry and future of the Southern Conference. We hope your local church will be represented and that you will bring your gifts to support future mission efforts.

I am amazed that four years have passed since my family and I arrived for service among you. I am encouraged that so many of you have offered words of encouragement for the next four years ahead. I look forward to greeting you at this year's Annual Meeting at Catawba College.

#3 ... Pentecost is upon us in the church. It was a time when the Holy Spirit came upon the church and filled the house so that all of the present diversity could celebrate the goodness of God. God was and is still speaking and the wind of the Spirit still blows among us in the Southern Conference. I believe that the Southern Conference is in a moment of Pentecost. Do you feel the wind blowing, or have you shut all your doors and windows seeking to keep the wind at bay? This month a question I often ask myself: "What would happen if we really let the wind of the Holy Spirit blow freely among us in the Southern Conference?"

continued from B-1: New Orleans

had a big X on it, and around the X was writing that told rescue workers what the result was - one body, or one dog, name of search party, and the date."

They were especially moved, Camp said, by the obvious hurt in the eyes of their guide, who was making only her second visit back to the area where she grew up. "We could tell it was very disconcerting for her," Camp recalled, "and then we found out why. She kept driving around trying to find her old home - but couldn't."

There were, of course, other reminders of where there had been life but now there was only silence - vacant store fronts, school buildings, and hollow church buildings, some with their steeples still standing. But it was there that they found a ray of hope. "Suddenly we came upon what was left of one of our UCC churches in one of the neighborhoods close to the 9th Ward," Camp said. "On it was nailed a sign that says: 'WE ARE COMING BACK.' That gave us a lift."

One thing that "jumped out at us," Camp said, was the sea of trailers sitting in the staging area, help-

ing no one. "People who need them still cannot get access to them because of the red tape," he said. Their guide told them it took seven steps for a family to get a trailer, get it delivered and then hooked up to city facilities. "She told us the people who need them the most are the poorest of the poor, most of them uneducated and not equipped to deal with the mountain of paper work needed to secure a trailer. Some have just given up."

The horrible sight of it all was in sharp contrast to the downtown area, Camp said. "Downtown is almost as it once was - cleaned up, fixed up and open for business, including the Super Dome that will be ready for football again this fall and the horse-drawn carriages that show people the sights. But I doubt that many tourists get to see what we saw."

Dillard University, an historic AMA institution with close ties to the UCC, is unusable, Camp said, though a small number of students meets in a downtown building for some classes. "The main campus sustained significant water damage, and they have a fence around the

property right now. As far as I know, there is no plan yet in place to restore it."

The bottom line of the visit, Camp said, is that "it brought us in tune to the pull of the Gospel to help the least of God's children." And his idea of how to apply that feeling is to help the two UCC churches that were total losses. "I believe the Southern Conference should consider adopting one of those churches to help them get back on their feet."

Both churches lost were African-American, and some of the congregations are now meeting with other white UCC churches in the suburbs. Some have also moved away, to places like Baton Rouge, where one group is considering the possibility of remaining and starting a new church.

"There are countless opportunities for our churches to pitch in and help them rebuild or start from scratch," Camp said, adding that "After seeing the disaster for myself, I am all the more grateful for what some of our churches and members have done already or are planning to do in the months ahead."

God is Still Singing... through ALL our songs

CHAPEL HILL -- A musical event of noteworthy calibre is expected to draw participants from across the United Church of Christ and gather them into the United Church of Chapel Hill facility. The national workshop for musicians, worship leaders / planners, liturgical artists, and pastors will extend over the dates of August 4, 5, 6, 7, 2006.

"This is the sixth event of this kind for the United Church of Christ Musicians National Network, which began in 1992," states the Steering Committee in their promotional material. "We are pleased to have planned this event as a partnership of Local Church Ministries of the UCC and the Worship and Education Ministry Team."

Marty Haugen -- a liturgical composer, performing / recording artist and author -- will be the featured keynote for the event. Marty currently serves as composer-in-residence at Mayflower UCC in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

For further information about workshop sessions and registration, check the following website: www.ucc.org/musicarts/

Our faith is over 2000 years old.
Our thinking is not.

UCC.ORG UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Southern Region Youth Event
God is still speaking and...
IT'S TIME FOR CELEBRATION

Thursday June 22 - Sunday June 25, 2006
at Elon University in Elon, NC

www.godsaysistime.net

New Orleans, Oh New Orleans what will become of New Orleans?

by Vertie Powers

Looking at the footage on the television or seeing the pictures in the newspaper does not begin to describe the ravages that exist, even now, in parts of New Orleans.

When I moved to West Philadelphia there were blocks and blocks of boarded up homes and stores with graffiti on them, sitting on lots where the grass and weeds had grown up and had choked the life out of whatever had been. It looked like West Philadelphia had never recovered from the riots of the late sixties. However, that was not the case. The homes and stores were not vacant and desolate as the result of the riots but that was the closest description I could use to explain to others what parts of West Philadelphia looked like.

The Ninth Parish, other neighborhoods and Parishes look as if they are parts of a war torn country where bombs were exploded, buildings ransacked, and torn down; vegetation looks as if chemical warfare had been used, and the troops moved on to do battle elsewhere. The people are gone for the most

part from the Ninth Parish and there is an eerie silence as if waiting for a movie director to yell "cut, that's a wrap."

In other places where people are coming back and trying to rebuild not only the physical living spaces but their lives, there is a sense that they will awaken and this will all have been a bad dream. However, it is for real and everyone knows that New Orleans will never be the same. While we mouth platitudes that it will be better than before, and mean it in the nicest way possible, what are we saying about the lives of the people before the hurricanes? For those who have come back there is a sliver of hope that they will make it. For those who choose not to return there is hope that they will be able to make new lives and livings for themselves and their families.

For the rest of God's people, we have not done all that is required of us. We should be weeping and crying out to God in a loud voice asking what can we do for our sisters and brothers, who are in a lonely place.



Steve Camp and Vertie Powers present check from Southern Conference to Beecher Memorial UCC. Brenda Square (center), a member of the church and archivist at the Amistad Research Center in New Orleans, accepts the gift.

'Something more': Churches aid Sudan

(The following article, written by Nancy H. McLaughlin, was reprinted from the May 8, 2006 Greensboro News and Record)

GREENSBORO -- Congregational United Church of Christ had the same problem as other houses of worship in the city.

"Everybody's been very disturbed about the situation and struggling with how can an individual or congregation make a difference in Darfur," where hundreds of thousands of Sudanese have been killed, said the Rev. Julie Peoples, the church's pastor.

Since 2004, government-sanctioned genocide has displaced 3.5 million people -- and many are starving to death. Religious groups have been among the loudest asking the United Nations and the Bush administration to step in.

"We can sign petitions and write letters, but we wanted to do something more, and we heard about the Dear Sudan campaign," Peoples said.

Charitable groups estimate it costs 16 cents to feed one refugee for a day.

Greensboro Dear Sudan, a local effort modeled after others across the nation, asks houses of worship and other groups to donate at least that much per member or hold collections throughout May, said Ralph Wenger, chairman of Greensboro Dear Sudan.

"We just put a jug out (during a service) and said, 'Give us your change,'" Peoples said.

Greensboro's people of faith have long been active in the Darfur effort.

Olympic gold medalist Joey Cheek donated his winnings to Darfur refugees, and the Greensboro Jewish Federation reserved buses to join people from across the country protesting on the National Mall.

Church World Service is at Work in Sudan

CWS/NEW YORK -- More than 2 million people in the Darfur region of western Sudan have been uprooted from their homes by widespread violence, including the burning of villages. As many as 400,000 people have been killed by ethnic violence or have died from hunger or disease. Most of the displaced families are living in makeshift camps in west, north, and south Darfur, and more than 200,000 have fled across the border into Chad. In a coalition effort, Church World Service is helping to provide food, medicines, water and sanitation, agricultural inputs and tools, and counseling to some of the most vulnerable of the uprooted people in the Darfu.

Live The Vision" Capital Campaign Update

ELON -- Visitation teams have begun making presentations in local congregations seeking support and pledges to the "Live the Vision" capital campaign. Pastor's and lay leadership in our churches are encouraged to receive the visitors and accept the challenge to make their pledge. This is a three year campaign so that a congregation's pledge may be given over the next three years--- 2006-2008. Come, be a part of the "Live The Vision" campaign as we "live" into the present and future mission and ministries of the Southern Conference.



An update on the "Live The Vision" campaign will be given at the Southern Conference Annual Meeting in June, including an opportunity for all present to view the DVD that introduces the campaign to local congregations. This video was produced by the Elon Television at Elon University with input from conference staff and four of our congregations: Gregory Congregational UCC, Wilmington, NC, United Churches of Chapel Hill, First Reformed UCC, Lexington, NC and Chapel Grove UCC, Windson, VA.

Office Support Staff Attend Meeting in Cleveland

CLEVELAND -- Three Southern Conference office support staff attended the United Church of Christ Office Support Staff Network Annual Meeting in Cleveland, Ohio, on April 27-30, 2006.



Linda Carter, Libby Parker, and Janelle Bunn attend Support Staff Network Annual Meeting

Janelle Bunn and Linda Carter from the conference and Libby Parker, Administrative Assistant to Rev. Larry Walsler in Western North Carolina visited the "Church House" or national setting for the United Church of Christ for the first time. A highlight of the meeting for them were the inspirational worship services in the beautiful Amistad Chapel. Janelle was asked to assist Rev. Davita McAlister, Ms. Gerri Hudson, from Southeast Conference, and Ms. Bettie Graves Thomas in the Communion Service on Saturday morning. Women from all across the country enjoyed fellowship, sharing ideas, and meeting others in conferences, associations and churches of the United Church of Christ.

Some of the workshops offered were: Honoring our Diversity, Honoring Ourselves: Balancing Work and Personal Belief in the Inclusive UCC; Volunteering in the Face of Disaster; How to Say "no" without feeling guilty; UCC 101; Liturgical Arts and Dance; Walking the Ancient Paths (rediscovering the labyrinth); and What to do with all those Records- how to archive records and sort and keep important papers.

The keynote speaker was the Rev. Ben Griffith, former President of Andover Newton Theological School and United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities, and currently Interim Minister at First Congregational Church in Elyria, Ohio. Rev. Cally Roger-Witte, the new Executive Minister for Wider Church Ministries, welcomed us warmly. Rev. Hans Holznagel, Assistant to the Collegium for Community Life in the National Setting, gave us a whirlwind tour of the 9 floors of the national setting and told us the heart-warming story of the history of the Amistad ship. Hans closed the meeting on Sunday with worship and a brief history of how the chapel was built and furnished. Wood used in the cross, center table and organ came from Africa.

The Conference extends an invitation to all of our churches to consider sending your church secretary to this inspirational meeting next April. The next meeting is scheduled to be held in New York City where we will visit the Pension Board's offices and Riverside Church. All UCC members are also invited to visit the "Church House" if you are visiting in Cleveland. The Radison Hotel (located in the building that houses the national offices) offers a discount to UCC members. It is also across the street from the baseball stadium where the Cleveland Indians play.

We made a mistake last edition in reporting the location of this sign. There is no mistaking, however, the role of OCWM funds in creating a foundation and infra-structure for ministry. Listen for God to speak when you gather for worship, and respond by giving generously to Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM).

**If you must speak...
SPEAK TO GOD!**

This sign can be seen in balcony of Lynnhaven Colony Congregational UCC in Virginia Beach where it reminds persons in the balcony of the worshipful setting.

SOUTHERN SPIRIT

The Reverend Stephen CampConference Minister and Editor
 Janelle BunnAdministrative Secretary and Managing Editor
 C. L. "Curly" Stumb, Irwin Smallwood, Linda CarterCommunication Team

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Pastor Prepares for "Call" to German Parish

Church leaders in the German-American partnership are aware of an imbalance in the exchange rate of pastors serving or interning in the European side of the equation. Southern Conference's partnership with the Evangelical Church of the Rhineland has been in place for many years. During that time, a number of American congregations have welcomed German pastors into various roles in their parishes. The flow of ministers in the opposite direction to be called by a German congregation however, has been virtually non-existent. "This," states Chris Burr, "is because there are not many UCC pastors who speak German."

Rev. Burr is planning to change that. "I am presently learning German in an intensive course [in Bochum, Germany] for students who need to speak German to complete a degree. We study German for five hours a day of class time and then we have *hausaufgabe* (homework) every night." He says the class list reads like a world map, with him being the only student from North America.

"The plan," as he describes it, "is for me to be proficient enough in German, with six months study, to be able to pastor a German church along with a

German pastor beginning in September." "It is a little bit strange to be back in a dormitory 40 years later [Chris is 60], but I am managing fine."

Chris describes himself as a UCC pastor with 34 years experience. He served four churches in the Southern Conference during an 18 year period. In a second career, he held the administrator position of Durham County Health Department for 13 years. Given what many would already view as a full life, he looks ahead to a shift and new challenge. "I decided to do something different with my next few years of ministry by volunteering to be a pastor in the *Evangelische Kirche of the Rhein*, in Germany."

Chris has already been doing some networking, and expects to be starting as a pastor with three other ministers in a parish of 7,000 persons in September, probably in Dusseldorf, which is the capital of the state of Rhineland/Westphalia.

Chris has a wife who will continue teaching math at Davidson County Community College, though she plans a trip to Germany in July with their youngest son. Chris plans to travel back to the states in June to attend the Southern Conference Annual Meeting.



The Rev. Chris Burr visits Amsterdam prior to his intensive German language studies which he hopes will prepare him for parish ministry in an Evangelische Kirche Rhineland congregation.



Cardinal Flower
Lobelia cardinalis Linnaeus
Photographed at Johns River Valley Camp
by C. L. Stumbo

2006 Calendar

June 8-10: SOC Annual Meeting, Catawba College

June 16: First day of summer camp at Black Lake Retreat Center

June 18: First day of summer camp at Johns River Valley Camp

June 21-25: Mix in '06 Women's Event, Indianapolis, Indiana

June 22-25: Regional Youth Event, Elon

July 22: Open house at Johns River Valley Camp; 12 noon until 4:00 pm; celebrating 70 years of outdoor ministry by the Johns River

August 4-7: UCC (National) Musicians Event - UC-Chapel Hill

September 18-22: United Black Christians meet nationally in Cleveland

September 23: Capital Campaign Rally in Burlington

November 2-4: Rebuilding Rural America: a Southern Region Conference at Franklinton Center

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

God is still speaking,

Missionary Visits Southern Conference

"We've got to have things to pull our churches back together again," suggested Rev. Bill Campbell, pastor at Mt. Zion UCC, China Grove. Rev. Campbell initially connected the dots between local churches, UCC Global Ministries, and a person named Pablo "Paul" Pitcher. Paul recently completed a tour in Southern Conference, highlighting his work in Guatemala, sharing needs of that country, and offering a glimpse into his philosophy of mission work in the twenty-first century. Campbell was pleased with Paul's commitment toward initiating programs contributing to sustainable growth for those communities with which he worked. Specific projects involved a stove project, addressing health and wellness issues, a ham radio project around communications, and a scholarship initiative aimed at boosting the importance of youth getting an education. Rev. Anne Abernethy Wepner

saw in Paul Pitcher a person who "immersed himself in that culture. He understood how to make a difference. He knows what works."

"I wanted someone who would be a different kind of missionary, one who would help change the stereotype we classically have of missionaries," explained Campbell. "Paul Pitcher was that person, and he was good for the church." Rev. Campbell says he has been concerned that the mainline church is withdrawing from missionary work, leaving the work to more fundamental churches. "I saw this as a project where more conservative and liberal churches could work together. The project was never in my mind intended as an alternative to OCWM," (and he reiterated this position in programs, always stating that understanding when he was promoting the project). "While many churches have distanced



Jane Hamilton poses question to "Paul" Pitcher. Next to her are husband Tom, Anne Wepner, and "Paul" Pitcher.

themselves, the inception of this venture was intended to pull our churches back together."

Anne Wepner also viewed this particular partnership with Global Ministries as a positive model. "It reveals that the UCC is doing things that are positive and broad speaking."

Camp Celebrates 70 Years by the Johns River

Thirty young people attended that first camp in 1936, which was apparently a disappointing number for Dr. Althouse, though he is reported to have said, "This is a decision we've got to make. Let's go through with it."

In a history of Johns River Valley Camp compiled by The Reverend Richard N. Rinker, an interview with Mrs. Geneva Leonard Aley offers a glimpse at the camp's birthing moment. A site proposal had been offered to Southern Synod as early as 1928, but the timing did not seem right, and "the 'camp thing' quieted down for a few years." In 1936, Miss Geneva Leonard, who was president of the Young People's Conference according to the Rinker account, put forth another request on behalf of the young people.

An interview Rev. Rinker secured from Mrs. Geneva Leonard Aley as he was compiling the history [*Where Eyes Are Lifted, The Story of Johns River Valley Camp*, c1994], retrieved her recollections of the initial proceedings as follows:

Carl Clapp, Huitt Carpenter and I brought it up before the old Classis, and there was a lot of opposition. The elderly ministers -- we didn't need any camp and we didn't need to spend money -- we three with Dr. Althouse, who was the pastor of Corinth Church in Hickory, were in on it and we ran into a wall as far as some of them were concerned. Some others took it up; Dr. Althouse finally got it before the Classis and we met in First Church, Lexington, and they formed a committee. They finally decided to open it up.

One camper representing the early years of Johns River retains vivid memories of his first experience away from home. "I had never been that far from home before. It was an adventure." He spoke of a bus ride with a missed pick-up in Lenoir and a connection with a second bus running from Lenoir to Globe. It rained every day for the first week, which didn't help the morale of this introverted youth who had never been that far away from home before. And as if the rain was bad enough, his cabin was Hilltop, located on a steep bank [behind the current boys bathhouse], and open on all sides. There was no hot water for showers, and the Johns River was too cold for his liking. The staff tried to get him to come out of his shell and interact with girls, but he resisted. Later he would discover that Eulene -- his bride to be -- was among those girls at that camp. The featured camper's name is Banks Shepherd, who admits he didn't notice that special girl until they were both delegates to the United Christian Youth Movement Convention held in Grand Rapids, Michigan in 1948, and accompanied by the Rev. Art Detweiler.

Banks says the weather turned for the better on the Sunday between the two week session, and so did his experience. "I had a great time," he says. "My experience at Johns River, along with my home pastor at the time of High School graduation (The Rev. Sterling W. Whitener), and the Rev. Art Detweiler, all helped me to think of my life [including a key decision to attend college as an "in care student" preparing for ministry].



The Rev. Banks Shepherd (First Reformed UCC, Lexington) and Mr. Joe Bill Young (Hedrick's Grove UCC, Lexington), participate in JRVC spring workday clean-up in March of 2006.

Two events will commemorate the 70th Anniversary of Johns River Valley Camp.
1) On July 22, noon - 4:00 pm, all visitors are guests, and invited to bring a picnic lunch, enjoy the valley setting, and share camp stories.
2) On December 2, guests will participate in a dedication of the Living Unit currently under construction, followed by a special noon meal (reservations required).