



Southern Spirit

October / November 2008 Southern Conference edition Section B



"In my mind, this [the National Youth Event] is truly a MUST attend event for UCC youth, and I will do my best to see that we again offer this opportunity to our youth in 2012."

-Jeanne Tayloe [High Country UCC, Boone, NC]

Youth...

Live

Love,

Live

Green,

Live

Peace



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

-UCC Steeple Ad-



Youth and leaders each connected with 2,899 others to extract a feeling of connection to something beyond self and bigger than local church.

- Photo by Jamie Sokolowski (First UCC, Salisbury, NC)

"Sitting in the arena with 2,900 Christians in the United Church of Christ and feeling connected to something beyond myself and my local church was a great feeling," reflects Rev. Lisa Gaul as she recalls images of the 2008 National Youth Event. The University of Tennessee in Knoxville housed the UCC event in late July. Planners developed a theme boasting *Living the Life*, and implemented daily themes around

Living Love, Living Green, and Living Peace.

Lisa Gaul, Associate Minister at First UCC, Hampton, VA, was among six churches in Eastern Virginia Association that filled a charter bus for the trip. Additionally, North Carolina churches also found their way west to the rallying event. "We weren't just a church with seven youth present," says the Hampton pastor. We were a conference with at least 90 people present. We laughed

together and we prayed together."

Youth leader and parent Jamie Sokolowski of First UCC in Salisbury (NC) says the inspirational speakers were awesome! "They included Eboo Patel, (founder and Executive Director of the Interfaith Youth Core, a Chicago-based international non-profit youth movement) who spoke about the diversity of inter-

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Youth Live Faith**



Pat Russell and his guide Chenjie are accompanied by local school and community officials to the site of the mysterious hanging Bo coffins in southern Sichuan Province, 2003.

Good Shepherd Establishes A "Chengdu Connection" For China's Earthquake Victims

Cary's Good Shepherd UCC was already well into planning Pastor Pat Russell's January 2009 sabbatical trip to Chengdu in the Sichuan Province of China when news of the tragic May 12 earthquake reached the Southern Conference. At the May 15 Church Council meeting, as estimates of deaths and missing persons surpassed 80,000, Russell

was describing his concern and prayers for the people of Chengdu and other areas in the Sichuan Province.

The earthquake struck the area where he has visited three times since 2001 and where he planned to return in January-April 2009 for his pastoral renewal experience. Someone then asked the question, "What can we do to be of support

for the people of China?" "That prompted a brainstorming session," says Susie Oliver, "that resulted in our deciding to host an event at our church to put a personal touch on the people of Chengdu and to find how we could best help." An energetic discussion

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Chengdu Connection**

The Church has a Role to Play

by Stephen W. Camp
Conference Minister

Camp's Notes



EVENT FOR CLERGY OF SMALL CONGREGATIONS

Applications are now being accepted for the Summer Collegium, a Lilly Endowment project in support of small congregations. Twenty-five clergy and their spouses/partners from all Christian denominations will be invited to spend nine days at Virginia Theological Seminary in Alexandria, Virginia, focusing on Body, Mind, and Soul: Celebrating, Strengthening and Sustaining Clergy Wholeness in Small Congregations. The Summer Collegium takes place June 24-July 1, 2009, and applications must be postmarked by December 15, 2008 to be considered. All expenses for the event, including travel, meals, lodging, books, pulpit supply and child care at home are paid for by the grant. For more information and an application packet, visit our website at www.vts.edu/education/collegium or call Marilyn Johns at 703-461-1760.

I can not ever remember my maternal grandmother ever talking about voting. But she did talk a lot about freedom, particularly the parts of freedom she longed for in her life. Racism and sexism was real for her as she was never satisfied with the way things were at the time. For so long my grandmother was denied the right to vote. It was the way the world was then. Living in the south, growing up poor, female and black, voting was not something that was instilled in her as important. Gosh, it wasn't even on the day to day radar screen. People in her generation did not have that kind of expectation, not her reality. Survival, providing for daily needs was what mattered. It mattered most that family needs were met. Bridges to nowhere would have been a distraction she could not afford. She often saw government as oppressor rather than liberator.

Yet she was as patriotic as the next person. Getting from day to day would have been her elected campaign. Voting in a local or national election would have been something less likely for her to do for many reasons. I would not be that she would not want to do so, want to exercise her right or cast a ballot for the candidate of her choice, but the full and unimpeded right was not given to her at least until 1965. I assure you though, she would have delighted in the campaign we watch and participate in today.

What a privilege we each have in our time. We can vote. None of us are hindered to do so. It is a civic duty that too many of us ignore though or at the very least neglect to find the time to do. We take for granted the shed blood and tears that have fallen, the sacrifice done for all of us. Our American history, as checked as it has been in racial terms, reveals that many died so that

For so long my grandmother was denied the right to vote. It was the way the world was then.

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emerged, leading to what became known as the Chengdu Connection.

The church held a presentation on Friday evening, June 6, at which time Russell familiarized church family and attendees from other churches and the Chinese-American community with the people and region of China most affected by the earthquake. Russell showed slides from his previous trips, followed by questions, conversation, and brainstorming on how to create a Triangle-based response to assist victims of the tragedy. A Chinese woman who had been in Chengdu at the time of the earthquake attended and in broken English described her experience.

Information on tax-deductible organizations already assisting in the recovery effort was made available for those who wished to make a donation for China's disaster relief. "They were ready and eager to respond as I shared with them, and I'm deeply grateful," says Russell. The effort collected more than \$2,500, which was sent to Wider Church Ministries where the money could be put to work quickly and effectively.

A Chengdu Connection website was developed with information on how others can assist with the relief effort. The congregation hopes this will be the first of a multi-phase effort to assist the people of China-before, during, and after Russell's upcoming trip to Chengdu-that might include connecting with other groups, including students and the Chinese American Friendship Association.

Russell has befriended many people in his previous visits to Sichuan Province, where his grandfather was a missionary, humanitarian and noted scientist in the region for 37 years. He is grateful to know that Baorui, who was his translator in 2006, has survived despite living close to the epicenter of the earthquake. However, there are countless other people who still desperately need our prayers and active support. Through the Chengdu Connection, Good Shepherd is hoping to make a difference and encourages others to join in this effort as additional information on needs of the people in the Sichuan Province are identified.

Russell's sabbatical plans are on hold as China comes to grips with survival level issues of people in the Sichuan Province. If the trip materializes, either in 2009 or 2010, Russell hopes to teach English to the minority population in Chengdu. He continues to plan, and is working through The Common Global Ministries of the UCC and the Disciples of Christ.

(Read more at www.chengduconnection.org)

each citizen could have and hold this stratum American right. Voting is American, it is part of being an American adult, and it is duty. As we have seen in the past few elections, each vote counts and matters. For a person like me, it honors the past.

The church has a role to play too. We should not shy away from that which the church is called to do. We ought to encourage every person in our churches to vote and to participate in the election process. It is the church that should point each parishioner to the intersection of the church house (what the church stands for) to the public square (what the reality is in society). Yet the line must remain clear and continue to separate church and state, religion from civic duty. It is the church who should always remind society that society has a duty to care for those without and those who are the least, the left out and the lost in our society. It is not our role in the churches, in our free society,

to steer or tell others, especially from our pulpits, who to vote for, make our church way the national way, but rather remind people why it is important to vote and the responsibility it is to do so as an American citizen. To vote is one durable way, a chance to express your desired direction for our nation. To vote means that not only your self-interest, but the interest of others matters to you. Those who don't vote really don't have or should not have much to say about where the nation is going into the future.

I encourage you to encourage those in your circles of life and communities to vote. Each election is important, but this election surely is really important for the days going forward. Remind them how important the privilege is and how much it matters. My grandmother would expect nothing less from me. I suspect your grandparents would expect nothing less of you too.

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faith. Julia Butterfly Hill, (accomplished activist) who spoke about environmental responsibility and John Thomas, our president, who challenged our youth to make their faith relevant in today's world. We left each program feeling very inspired."

"I liked meeting people from other places," says EVA youth participant Justin Smith. The event offered a smorgasbord of experiences aimed at capturing the attention of a youth audience with diverse interests. The list of events capturing high marks with some youth included the Starfield [Canadian Christian Rock Band] concert (Curtis Edwards), and "hearing the guy from Sudan tell his story" (T. J. Gallagher).

Jamie Sokolowski, representing WNCA youth from First UCC [Salisbury] and Holy Covenant youth [Charlotte], offers a sampling of the learning opportunities. "For the most part, the workshops were well organized and full of good information on many subjects. Examples that we attended were: Old Faith, New Music, Origins of Violence, Telling your Sacred Stories, Caffeine and how you and your youth group can have fun, Dismantling racism, Gifted for a Purpose, and Finding the gospel in 'King of the Hill.'"

Adult leaders praised the keynote speakers for their inspiration and faith driven lives. Mark Sokolowski highlights his chance to meet the Collegium of UCC in one of the workshops he attended. "I was very inspired by their stories about their journey of faith," he notes.

High energy worship, new music, a parade of conference banners, inspiring keynote speakers, varied culture songs and dance, workshops that at times stretched participant horizons, and fellowship moments with old and new friends all combined to nurture and feed this important slice of a denomination's rich demographic profile.

SOUTHERN SPIRIT

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Face the Image in the Mirror with Expectation

by Drew Morris
Associate Conference Minister
Eastern Virginia Association

Whenever I see my image reflected in a mirror or a large store window I am forced to face reality because in my mind I envision myself as 30 years old, physically fit, with hair and only one chin. What I see looking back at me is my father in his mid sixties. This image issue is not a problem, as I really know that I am approaching 67 and it does not effect how I carry myself, how I do my job, or how I see my potential. But for some the difference between a realistic self image and one that is unrealistic is serious, and if unchecked, limits potential and can be paralyzing.

Whether or not we are in the search and call process we need to know the reality of today's churches; most congregation have an attendance under 150 people, in fact most don't even hit 100.

Since returning to civilian ministry in 1995 I have seen in many churches a pattern of self-deprecation, particularly when it comes to congregation size and money. Many see themselves as too small, too poor, and of little value to the community, the association, the conference, the denomination. I have experienced this question of image most notably with congregations who are participating in the search and call process. Many fear that they are not significant enough, large enough, or exciting enough to attract capable and effective pastoral candidates. What I find myself doing during the initial phase of the search and call processes is help change a negative self image into one with enthusiasm and a positive expectation, embracing the potential for new opportunities in ministry and mission.

Whether or not we are in the search and call process, we need to know the reality of today's churches; most congregations have an attendance under 150 people; in fact most don't even hit 100. While there are congregations that hit the heavy numbers on a Sunday morning, the majority do not. Reviewing pastoral profiles that come across my desk confirms this on a national basis, for the difference between membership and worship attendance is less than 50 percent, and the greatest number of congregations have attendance between 70 and 100.

The other issue we need to engage is working to get out of a survival mentality. While many if not most congregations have a deficit balance sheet, the vast majority manage to cover their expenses and continue to support missions outside of their parish boundaries. Thinking of ourselves as barely surviving places on us boundaries and false limitations, and we wind up settling for less than we deserve. The church is not a business striving for profit; it is the body of Christ called to serve God and people. The goal is mission, with money simply as a way to cover the cost of mission.

The reality is that we are who we are, Christ's body, walking with him in humility and in faith, whatever the size or financial strength of our congregations. We need to see ourselves in a new way not as we wish but as we actually are, with promise, potential, able to accomplish much as we move into God's kingdom. We are greater than we think, we have more potential than we believe we do, and we all are of great value to God and to one another.

Drew's Thoughts



Get Out of the Pit

by Rose Wright-Scott
Minister of Program Development
Franklinton Center at Bricks

I strongly believe you're in a pit when you can't see beyond your house, church, and community. You're in a pit if you feel that because I am not your skin color, don't look, believe or act like you, I'm inferior. You're in a pit when you try to tell me who I can or cannot love. If being in the presence or interacting with someone that has been diagnosed as HIV/AIDS unnerves you, then you are in a pit. The pit has you bound when you think, because I am a woman, my work, mind, ministry and creations are insignificant.

In times when we are talking about race relations, many remain in the pit. I agree, conversation is needed. Nevertheless, our hearts and minds must be prepared to move from conversation to a state of transformation process. Transformation process means, when I'm done talking, I'm willing to be open, learn, My mind is released from the pit first.

I had an opportunity to move from conversation about race, to communion among races. As I preached the 6th year Church and Pastor Anniversary of High Country UCC (Rev. Shelly Wilson is the

Pastor) I felt the love of God. I witness Jesus Christ hands in action as the congregation embraced my two little granddaughters and my daughter. This was not a one day event, but a weekend of love, kindness, and joy. It was evident this was a life-style for this congregation. The home in which we dined welcomed us to the actual table. It was warm and inviting. The church family gathered in the foyer on Sunday morning to say, "we're glad and honored that you are here." These were not weekend pretenses, it was a body of people that had allowed God to lead them out of the pit. It was a congregation that had visited New Orleans five times to do ministry. A young man that was HIV positive said, "I am loved and feel the support of my church family at all times." It was a congregation the pit could not hold. The elderly were as active in the worship as the young. Gender only determined the restroom in which to use. Passing of the peace was more important than the clothes worn or where to sit.

If the congregation in Boone, North Carolina can see the necessity to love all people then that's a witness it can be done. There's no need for any of us to remain in the pit, it's a choice that we make. The cold, dark and lonely pit was not made for God's creation. Let the transformation process in you begin today.

Rose's Pen



Across the Conference - Fall / Winter Programs of Note : soc-ucc.org

Sacred Conversations on Race
A time for self-exploration and dialogue
October 13-14, 2008
Includes a facilitated conversation with
Rev. Bernice Powell Jackson and Rev. Rollin O. Russell
Franklinton Center at Bricks

Fired Up and Ready to Go!
A Southern Conference Christian education event
with focus on building youth and young adult ministries
October 24-25, 2008
Featured leadership: Rev. DaVita McAllister
Black Lake Retreat Center

Caring for God's Creation
October 20-22, 2008
Rev. Steve Halsted, facilitator
Johns River Valley Camp

Watching and Waiting - Advent Church Day
November 15, 2008
InterPlay, Inc.
Contact Rev. Nora Driver Foust @ blrcucc@yahoo.com
Black Lake Retreat Center

Youth Ski Retreat
January 19-21, 2009
In the High Country
Coordinated by Kristin Gerner Vaughn
Blowing Rock Conference Center

The Road to Bethlehem: Clergy Planning Retreat
October 29-31, 2008
Rev. Carla Gregg, facilitator
Johns River Valley Camp



Tall Goldenrod
A Solidago altissima Linnaeus
Photographed at Johns River Valley Camp
by C. L. Stumbo

2008

Calendar

- October 4:** Western North Carolina Association Meeting, Congregational UCC, Greensboro
- October 9-11:** African American Women in Ministry Retreat at Franklinton Center
- October 9-11:** Elon University Board Retreat
- October 11:** Eastern North Carolina Association Meeting, Oak Level UCC
- October 13-14:** Sacred Conversations on Race, Franklinton Center
- October 18:** Eastern Virginia Association Meeting, Bayside UCC, Virginia Beach
- October 20-22:** Fall Foliage Retreat led by Rev. Steve Halsted, Johns River Valley Camp
- October 24-25:** Christian Education Meeting at Black Lake Retreat Center
- October 29-31:** Advent Clergy Retreat facilitated by Rev. Carla Gregg, Johns River Valley Camp
- November 5-6:** Virginia Council of Churches Annual Meeting
- November 5-6:** Leadership Development Seminar, Franklinton Center
- November 10:** SOC Executive Committee
- November 15:** Johns River Camp Board
- November 15:** Advent Church Day featuring InterPlay, Inc., Black Lake Retreat Center
- December 3-8:** National Meeting of Search & Call for ACM's, Orlando, FL
- December 11:** NC Council of Churches /Judiciary heads meet with new NC governor
- January 19-21, 2009:** Youth Ski Retreat at Blowing Rock Conf. Cntr.



Certificates of Excellence Awarded

Newton, N.C. United Church Homes and Services (UCHS) recently awarded Certificates of Excellence in Corporate Compliance to four of their communities. Awards were received by Centerclair Nursing Community in Lexington, NC; Abernethy Laurels in Newton, NC; Piedmont Crossing in Thomasville, NC and Lake Prince Woods in Suffolk, VA. Each community was recognized for superior performance in Financial Services, Administrative Services, Clinical Services, Safety, Human Resources, Privacy and Confidentiality. "Successful performance in these areas certainly indicates that resident care and quality service is a priority. We are extremely proud of this recognition", stated Steve Paterson, Vice President of Compliance and Education.

United Church Homes and Services is a not for profit corporation with a rich tradition of commitment to older adults. UCHS is affiliated with the United Church of Christ and operates 14 programs at 11 sites in North Carolina and Virginia.



Left to right, Aimee Reimann, Executive Director, Abernethy Laurels; Celia Soper, Executive Director, Lake Prince Woods; Donna Sprinkle, Executive Director, Piedmont Crossing and Lee Syria, Vice President of Operations receiving the award for Centerclair.

Rising Stars Honored at Annual Gathering



Left to right, Rev. Brent Bissette receives award on behalf of Pinehurst congregation. Rev. Dian Jackson (SOC President) and Rev. Steve Camp, (Conference Minister) are making the presentations.

Pinehurst, N.C. The Southern Conference of the United Church of Christ has honored Congregational Church of Pinehurst, UCC as a "Rising Star." Each year the Conference singles out one congregation from each of the three associations for this distinction. The Rising Star Award celebrates the Spirit of God working in these outstanding faith communities.

In presenting the award to members of the congregation attending the Southern Conference Annual Meeting in mid-June, Conference Minister Rev. Stephen Camp noted the congregation's forward-thinking ministry and openness to innovation. Congregational Church has increased its financial stewardship significantly over the past year, broadened the diversity of its music program in worship, and opened its doors to a new Montessori Preschool and other community groups. "We are looking for churches that stand up and stand out. CCP is a light among us." Rev. Camp noted particularly the fine leadership that Pastor Bissette and the parish Council provide. The congregation looks forward to what God will do next in its midst.

(Editor's Note: Rising Star Awards were also given to Great Awakening UCC, Virginia Beach, VA [EVA]; and First Congregational UCC, Asheville, NC [WNCA].)

Camp Reunion Shares Heartfelt Moments

Collettsville, N.C. Former summer camp staff gathered at Johns River Valley Camp with the prompting of former SCAT (Summer Camp Assistance Team) member David Edmondson (1991-94). Fifteen persons attended, along with family members and friends. "I've learned how important time is," David told others, "even how important very small moments can be." David had come to accept the reality that he only had 3-5 years to live, when he received the phone call earlier this year asking the question: "How fast can you get to Charlottesville?" Edmondson now lives with a new heart, and a renewed appreciation for each breath of life he inhales.

He first attended JRVC as a youth from First UCC, Hampton Virginia. The positive camp experiences always countered geographic distance. David would even find bus money to attend fall reunions Senior High program director Lee Jessup would organize during that era. Edmondson spent his college days attending Virginia Intermont, and worked summers at Johns River in the SCAT role as a counselor and canoe instructor.

Emily Kempley, who grew up in Second UCC (Lexington) reflected how for her "this place is like a time machine. It's the exact same place, even with the new buildings."



Left to right, David Edmondson leads a closing worship on the SCAT reunion weekend. Emily Kempley listens to David's meditation. See more photos at www.jrvc.org

Youth Voice Added to Conversation on Race



Left to right, Kare' Webb of Children's Chapel UCC, Graham; and Abigail Kennett, Hillsborough UCC

Whitakers, N.C. Historic Franklinton Center at Bricks is hosting a series of sacred conversations on race. The pilot project is designed to encourage candid, safe, loving and honest conversations about race. The intentional dialogue was initiated nationally in May with the assistance from a full-page USA Today advertisement in April of this year, when the UCC invited the country to join in a sacred conversation on race.

A youth gathering in mid-August added another chapter to the invitations extended by Franklinton Center to bring people together. Said one person after the event: "Racism affects all ages, all races, all gender. From the simplest to the most severe, all forms of racism have a profound effect. A scar is a scar. That scar may never go away."

Participants went away from the event talking about how they could make a difference. Says one youth engaged in the dialogue, "I need to be more frank with myself about my own prejudices and begin to change them. I also know that I need to make my group of acquaintances more diverse (including race and other groupings) and create more variety in the viewpoints I am exposed to."

SOC Board Wrestles Tough Issues

Burlington, N.C. At the September 11 - 12 meeting of the Southern Conference Board of Directors, members (1) participated in Financial Statement Workshop -- *Making Friends of Church Numbers* -- led by Cheri Lovell; (2) received from Restructure Task Force and worked through a draft of SOC Constitution and Bylaws; and (3) addressed implementation of SOC *Financial Solvency Strategy* (as mandated by the 2008 Annual Gathering).



Left to right, Jay Kennett, Sharon Hammill, Bob Barrows, Hudson Barksdale and Lorita Mayo