

New

TIMES

The UCC...*New* Ideas for *New* Churches

Spring / Summer 2011 ■ Issue 1

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Who Needs Progressive
Christianity?

We Do!



THE CENTER FOR
PROGRESSIVE RENEWAL

Progressive Christianity

By **Michael Piazza** | Co-Executive Director of CPR

Who Needs It?

A recent study by the conservative Barna Group revealed that a majority of young people believe the church to be judgmental, excluding, sexist, old-fashioned, boring, and homophobic. Our churches may be none of those things, but how would people know? The most visible and vocal representation has led people to believe that the church is often deeply incongruent with their values and world view. Without a countervailing voice, the church soon will live fully into that reputation because those who do not share those values will have nothing to do with the faith.

The time is overdue for mainline churches to find their prophetic voice again. We who once spoke against slavery, for women's suffrage, and marched for civil rights need to recover that passion and speak again against injustice, greed, environmental destruction, exclusion, and discrimination. We need to be the prophetic voice of the God of mercy and compassion who stands on the side of the poor, the sick, the oppressed, the excluded, and creation.

Religious dialogue is so dominated by conservative churches, denominations, and para-church organizations that the average American is left believing that radical conservative views are the only ones held by spiritual people. In recent years, it has become apparent that there is a need for a faith community that will speak to the values and views that are held by progressive people of faith and give voice to those views in our national dialogue.

Seeking justice for the marginalized and advocating for peace have been, and continue to be, values deeply rooted in the

tradition of Judaism, the history of Christianity, and the authenticity of Islam.



The progressive church has a long and noble history of engaging the political system around issues of peace and justice. From the fight for the abolition of slavery to the modern civil rights struggle, churches,

“From the fight for the abolition of slavery to the modern civil rights struggle, churches, synagogues, and mosques have worked for justice.”



NEW TIMES: *New Ideas for New Churches*

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synagogues, and mosques have worked for justice. In that tradition, we must stand courageously. There are millions who are looking for a faith that represents their values, and those millions would join us if they knew what we passionately believed and who we really are. Our silence has left them spiritually homeless and allowed the Church of Jesus a reputation that is not accurate.



Who Needs Progressive Christianity?

The earth, the excluded, the poor, the sick, the victims of war, and our own children and grandchildren need a church like the church we love. This is our work through the Center for Progressive Renewal. We exist to equip leaders to renew the church. We must renew it for the people we love, and for our own soul's sake.

For more information, visit www.progressiverenewal.org, and follow **The Center for Progressive Renewal** on **Facebook**.

WHO NEEDS PROGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY? WE DO!



Rev. Cameron Trimble and Rev. Michael Piazza started the Center for Progressive Renewal in partnership with the United Church of Christ and others because they all believe that the world needs a strong progressive church. The Center for Progressive Renewal exists to train and equip leaders to start and renew progressive churches. We will not rest until we have reversed our declining numbers and rediscovered our calling for prophetic witness in the world.

To do this, we need your help. The shifts taking place in our world and in our churches demand that we re-tool ourselves for these changing times. We encourage you to seek ongoing continuing education through us or other organizations. Attend regional training events, take an online course, work with a coach. We will not succeed unless you do. These are exciting but critical days to be leaders in the church. Let's work together to ensure a bright future.



Cameron Trimble, Co-Executive Director, CEO
Michael Piazza, Co-Executive Director



JOIN US at The Place Church Leaders Go to Learn | 2011

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 reNEW Skills for Leading New + Renewing Churches

► **AUGUST 4-6**
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► **OCTOBER 29**
Social Media Boot Camp | Pacific School of Religion | California

► **NOVEMBER 10-12**
New Church Leadership Institute 2011 | West Coast
The Seven Secrets | California

New Church Starts

By **Malcolm Himschoot**, Pastor of Parker UCC | Parker, CO

God's Infamous, But . . .

I'm not a promoter. I'm a poet. I'm not an entrepreneur. I'm a pastor! But. . .

For the longest time—since I was 12 years old in Colorado, hearing Bible-thumping, gay-bashing messages from the pulpits of the Religious Right—I felt a calling to do something different. This calling in my life would become the vocation to create a ministry alternative to the dominant culture, steeped in the transformative witness of Jesus. I became a member of the United Church of Christ as a young adult, the fruit of intense change in my life, plus the outreach of a compassionate, liberal minister, and some international, cross-cultural, multi-racial encounters deepening my Christian faith. I began seminary in 2000, and, for 10 years, I only daydreamed about a new church start. I disqualified myself—too young, too radical, too broke—but the new church start calling would not go away.

Meanwhile, just three years ago in Parker, Colorado, a band of people broke away from an existing congregation to form a new church that is unabashedly open and affirming, courageously just peace, abundantly whole earth, and expansive in its belief that God Is Still Speaking, the first such church in the entire far-flung, once-rural, now-suburban county. “We welcome everyone who welcomes everyone else!” they declared. They invested in the UCC vitality initiative, producing a website, even commercials. In this growing area, they attracted dozens of others with like minds and hearts, and prepared to call a full-time pastor who would be organized, missional, competent, and catalytic for their best action.

Gifts and Graces of Spiritual Growth

They found me. And I found them. So I'm reinventing my brand: Poet-promoter. Pastor-entrepreneur. All for Jesus!

In four months, thanks to relational networking and some media coverage, we have grown the body from 40 members to 50, from 40 in worship on Sundays to 55. Those are the numbers.

The stories—the true ministry—are in the interactions people have with one another at Parker UCC. The gifts and the graces of spiritual growth are most evident in our energetic announcements and our genuine hospitality hour.

“We welcome everyone who welcomes everyone else!”



A Community of Support

An old guy and a young guy discuss (over fair trade coffee in the gym after worship) whether escalating violence is worth it, and what forgiveness looks like. A teenager endures bullying at school, but finds, for the first time, Christians who affirm lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. A young family with a “special needs” daughter discovers the community wants to fully support them in an adaptive summer vacation Bible school. A retired man, new to the area, with no friends but severe health problems, finds he can breathe easier with our brand of “fresh air.” Musicians love to sing; children love to pray; thinkers love to read; everybody loves potluck. My favorite story: One young couple, currently homeless, biked 30 miles round-trip and camped overnight to be with us at Easter worship!

Finding Their Way

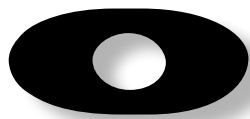
Some people find Parker UCC as they move to Colorado from all over the country, bringing with them strong UCC roots. Others make their way downstream from abusive religious currents. Still others come from no particular religious background, but surprise themselves with their attraction to the compelling gospel preached at Parker UCC, and the quality of relationships in which they can predict their own spiritual growth.

Could God elicit a new church start setting for someone like me? I believe God has.

For more information contact Rev. Malcolm Himschoot, rockymalcolm@gmail.com; parkerucc.org

The Spirit's Whispers

By Nicole Lamarche, New Church Planter | Northern California



One of the first signs of the Spirit's whispers appeared in doodles. The doodles began to appear in the margins of my many notebooks, like the way I would secretly crush on a boy in middle school, writing my name with his last name in all of the ways my hand could pen. I doodled names of a hip church, a church that I would attend even if I weren't the minister. I doodled slogans and jingles and words for banners that would invite people into this dream church. "Not your grandma's church (although your grandma would be welcome)." "Yes we believe in God, but She's not the Man you think She is." "The church you never thought existed." I had pushed aside the thought of starting a new church for a while, creating one obstacle after another in my mind, until a phone call from a friend. I had been in a time of deep discernment and God spoke through her, offering just the kind of clarity I thought only happened to other people. "I know you have been thinking about starting a new church. My husband and I have met with our financial planner and we would like to offer a \$10,000 seed for you to do a new church start." I suppose God knows that anal-retentive people need not just a little sign, but something like a knock over the head, and I got it.

The Particulars of Planting Churches

Since that day, I have been in constant prayer, read as many books about church planting as I could find, interviewed church planters, attended the Center for Progressive Renewal's Church Planting 101 class, and talked with people of all kinds, including demographers, youth ministers, community organizers, church haters, and anyone who could offer insight for this endeavor. While my denomination has been supportive, I have learned that many well-meaning people know nothing about the particulars of planting churches. It is not the same as starting a second worship service, or improving hospitality, or reworking existing church boards. Often the names given to me as "helpful" people were enthusiastic, supportive souls who knew nothing about this unique kind of work. Quite a few people have even gone to great lengths to caution me that what I am doing is nearly impossible. I have been told that this area is too secular, too anti-institutional, too far gone from the era of church for even a progressive Christian community to thrive. While I agree with most of these assessments,

"This is just the group I am targeting - the young, rowdy, progressive bunch that believes the Church to be too hypocritical, too boring, too dogmatic."

I often smile inside knowing that this is just the group I am targeting: the young, rowdy, progressive bunch that believes the church to be too hypocritical, too boring, too dogmatic.

Hold onto the Vision

Most of my time in the past months has been spent in one-on-one visits with anyone and everyone who was willing to hear about the vision, offer wisdom, or share resources and contacts. After a series of encounters where I left feeling like maybe I was indeed crazy for thinking this was possible, I wrote the words, "Hold onto the vision" on an index card and stuck it in the corner of the mirror on my bureau. I want to remind myself daily that this vision is from God and might appear strange to those who haven't spent time in my head and heart. I think of the church planters in Acts and how loony they must have appeared to the people with whom they shared the story of a new kind of community, a community grounded in the teachings of a guy who had died, a community that was beyond even what the planters themselves could imagine. So, even on the days when I feel overwhelmed by how much money I have to raise, or how far I have to go before this adventure will be considered a church, I have peace with the fact that the Gospel of Jesus Christ has connected hearts with God even when the people sharing the Good News have done it imperfectly.

Most of the United Church of Christ congregations in Northern California are in sync with people theologically, but not liturgically. I am convinced that, even if not all of the young, rowdy, progressive people in the Silicon Valley are intrigued by this new church, there are enough who are intrigued by the prospect of a spiritual community that is both radically welcoming and radical in worship. The churches that are growing tend to be the ones that meet people right where they are, using the language, media, and hospitality to which most of us have become accustomed in our everyday lives. I keep working, keep praying, and keep going because I believe that this church not only could exist, but also should exist. God longs to have a relationship with the group that has mistaken the church's failings for God's; She just needs a new venue to make it happen. For now, I am holding onto the vision, the vision of Silicon Valley United Church of Christ: bravely inclusive, boldly Christian, blatantly spiritual.



| For more information contact Rev. Nicole Lamarche; nicolemlamarche@hotmail.com

I Can Hardly Believe I Am Planting A Church



CPR On Campus



CPR University



NCLI Regional Events

S By Kay Albright, Pastor of First Congregational UCC | Huntington, WV

ometimes I can hardly believe I am in the middle of planting a new congregation! God calls us to some wild and crazy things. My name is Rev. Kay Albright, and I am a second career pastor. My status for three long years was “approved for ordination pending call.” It often seemed like a call would never come; little did I know what God had in store for me ...

A Multiplication Plant

I was called by First Congregational UCC to a multiplication style plant, what is now known as Bridges of Grace United Church of Christ. Bridges of Grace is still in the infancy stages of development, which I keep reminding myself and the advisory board. We have experienced the work of God in so many ways that we often forget we are not even a year old yet. God’s grace has been apparent from the support of so many churches, friends, and colleagues, to our donated worship space.



When you do a church plant, the first thing you need to know is the area in which you are planting. I have spent a lot of time trying to get to know West Virginia and its people. I moved there from Central Ohio. It has been quite the culture shock for me and my partner MK. Equipped with our various life experiences, we immediately began to see how differently people talked about church and their faith. Faith is integral to this culture; it is a part of who they are as a people. The importance of church was evident each time we reached out to people in the community about Bridges of Grace. The first question always was, “When is worship?” Facebook and the website www.bridgesofgraceucc.org have been key to spreading the word thus far. People seemed to wonder, however, without worship, how is it church? Thus, the question remained, “When is worship?” “Come and See” events just did not seem to interest people in this area. Churches come together for worship.

Where Will We Worship?

I felt called by God, and the input I was getting was to begin having worship as “Come and See” events. I announced this at my local clergy group meeting. I added that I was not sure where we would worship, maybe a street corner, but it needed to happen. Two days later, I was contacted by St. Paul’s Evangelical Lutheran Church in Charleston, who gracefully offered us the use of their facilities, without strings or financial compensation. This past March, Bridges of Grace began having worship on the first and third Sundays of every month at 3 p.m. in St. Paul’s fellowship hall.

We are still young, yet the question we now confront is, “When do we begin worshipping weekly?” As we are called to minister to the left out, pushed out, un-churched, and de-churched, we are building a strong core group. Some of them go to other churches for worship on our off weeks. Their lives are committed to God and a strong sense of need for weekly worship. Each time Bridges of Grace has stepped out on faith, God has been there. We are not even a year old; is it time to take a giant leap of faith? We know that God is Still Speaking; we just have to continue to listen!

For more information contact Rev. Kay Albright, pastorkay2@gmail.com; bridgesofgraceucc.org

The Changing Face of America

By Rev. Pérsida Rivera-Méndez | UCC Cleveland, OH

Hispanic/Latino Gathering

The face of America is changing, and our churches and denominations need to be prepared. In the coming years, the way we do ministry, and with whom we will do this ministry will change dramatically. Hispanic/Latino denominational leaders are keenly aware of this shifting population in America, and they are eager to provide leadership and resources relevant to our churches and the faith communities we serve.

AETH Network of Leaders

The Asociación para la Educación Teológica Hispana (AETH) is a not-for-profit religious organization comprised of Hispanic/Latino ecumenical partners, who are pastors, professors, and laity who are passionate and committed to serving the Hispanic/Latino population in the United States. AETH provides a network of Hispanic/Latino leaders in various fields who write resources, books, and articles with a Hispanic/Latino perspective in areas of church life, theology, pastoral counseling, Christian education, and discipleship formation, as well as Bible commentaries and other resources. These materials can be used by any Hispanic/Latino ministry, no matter the denomination, because they understand the Hispanic/Latino communities of faith within the USA context. They write with an open mind, with an authentic Hispanic/Latino perspective and with academic excellence.

Meeting the Needs of a Growing Population

AETH gathered a group of denominational leaders from across the country in a historical convocation to discuss the vision to establish the Justo Gonzalez Resource Center for Latino Ministries to be located on the campus of Asbury Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida. AETH and Asbury Theological Seminary are partners in this venture and are calling upon the denominational leaders that were present to partner with them in creating a center that will meet the needs of a fast growing Hispanic/Latino population in the United States. The 2010 census shows that the Hispanic/Latino population is 16.3 percent of the entire population, making it the largest minority group in the country. All denominations should take seriously the statistical data that shows the increase of Hispanic/Latino/a persons in our midst, and realize what an opportunity for church development and renewal we have in front of us. We are aware that a large segment of the population needs to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ; if we pay attention, we will develop leaders that understand, and can reach, the Hispanic/Latino population for Christ and be the relevant church for the 21st century.

Develop Leaders to Radically Transform

The denominational leaders, along with Justo Gonzalez, agree that a center such as this is critical for our future. We believe that the future of any denomination depends on their ability to prepare

excellent Hispanic/Latino leadership for the 21st century. This center will assist denominations in understanding the demographics of a changing population and how to best do ministry in those settings.

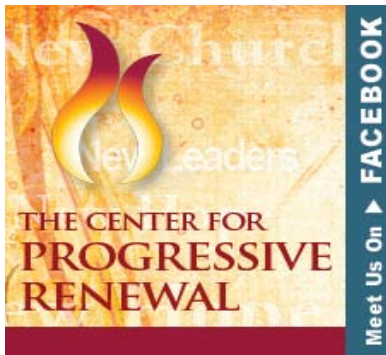
“2010 census shows Hispanic/Latino population is 16.3% of the entire population... what an opportunity for church development and renewal we have in front of us.”

This center will provide written materials, including books published by distinguished Hispanic/Latino seminary professors, as well as webinars on many important issues that are pertinent to the Hispanic/Latino communities in which we do ministry. AETH will develop the leaders to radically transform the church and the Latino community in the United States, Puerto Rico, and Canada, contributing to their vibrancy, health and growth through The Justo

L. Gonzalez Resource Center for Latino/a Ministries. We will continue to work to increase our knowledge of each other and promote the Hispanic/Latino ministries in our various settings, understanding that, together, we can accomplish greater things, influence others in navigating the changing face of America, and transform our world into a place where all are treated with dignity and justice. This is truly good news for all the denominations because we do not have to do it alone, we do not have to reinvent the wheel, and we will have access to excellent resources written in Spanish that will be available through The Justo L. Gonzalez Resource Center. The future looks bright and full of possibilities. Let us seize the moment and rejoice in this important historical time for Hispanic/Latino ministries in the United States.



For more information contact Rev. Pérsida Rivera-Méndez, Minister for Multiracial and Multicultural Transformation of LCM and Justice and Witness Ministries of the UCC / Cleveland, OH. Historic Hispanic / Latino Denominational Leaders Gathering April 2011. RiveraP@ucc.org



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700 Prospect Ave. East, Cleveland, OH 44115

Keep current with news, discussions, webinars, and other information from The Center for Progressive Renewal.

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Resources for Church Leaders

Visit progressiverenewal.org today and sign up to receive monthly e-news information from CPR. Additional ministry resources direct to your email.

WEBSITE

• www.Progressiverenewal.org

The mission of the Center for Progressive Renewal is to renew progressive christianity by training new entrepreneurial leaders, supporting the birth of new liberal/progressive congregations, and by renewing and strengthening existing progressive churches. You can find information about the New Church Leadership Institute and



upcoming church vitality events, including webinars and conferences.

BOOKS

• **Liberating Hope**

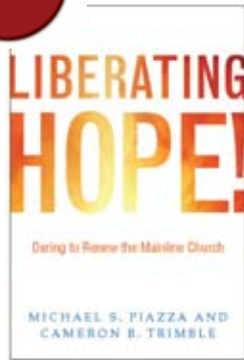
by co-authors, Michael Piazza & Cameron Trimble, Released globally July 1 by The Pilgrim Press.

Liberating Hope: Daring to Renew the Mainline Church

This book provides concrete and tangible 21st-century insight to those churches looking to renew their congregations through hope and optimism rooted in the resurrection. Based on the successful work that Piazza and Trimble have done through The Center for Progressive Renewal, the book provides accurate and strategic evidence that the decline of the mainline, progressive church can be slowed and even reversed, despite the challenges it is facing.

This is Piazza's and Trimble's first book together, but not their last. Visit the CPR website to find other publications by both of these authors.

View the book on The Center for Progressive Renewal website.
www.progressiverenewal.org
To purchase Liberating Hope visit The Pilgrim Press:
www.ucc.org/liberatinghope Use Promo Code: CPR



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Third Quarter 2011 | Register Today!

www.progressiverenewal.org

JULY

- **Making Churches Safe: For all God's Children**

AUGUST

- **Socially Network Your Ministry**
- **Conflict & Change in Renewing Churches**
- **Moving to a Part-Time Minister: Opportunity for Vitality**

SEPTEMBER

- **Church Planting 101**
- **Developing a Stewardship Plan for Your Church**
- **Using Coaching Skills to Lead the Church**
- **The Praying Pastor**

OCTOBER

- **Effective Worship in Small Churches**
- **Church Renewal 101**
- **Effective Leadership in Churches**

Online Learning With The Center for Progressive Renewal

Online learning is becoming one of the best ways for adults to learn. Certain work habits, learning styles, and skills contribute to a successful experience.

Webinars vs. Courses

Webinars are one hour, live web events. Webinars are usually offered at \$14.99. Online courses are five-week online learning experiences built on asynchronous learning (learn anytime, anywhere). These are usually priced at \$299.00 and taught in collaboration with the Pacific School of Religion.

Flexibility

Online courses provide busy leaders an excellent opportunity to pursue their educational goals at times and locations convenient to them. An online course uses the Internet to deliver lessons and classroom interaction. Online classes present objectives and content, in essentially the same fashion offered in a traditional classroom.

In an online course, the student accepts responsibility for learning outcomes. The instructor's role is facilitator and guide. They will provide feedback and evaluation as the student completes class sessions, homework, and projects.

Collaboration

Online learning emphasizes process, involving more than information accumulation and memorization. It offers high levels of collaboration and interactivity required to seek, evaluate, and process the almost limitless amount of available and useful information.

Meet Us In the Online CPRU Classroom!
Use online code to receive **10% discount on courses and webinars** | **KSNSUN** (code)



New Courses | New Speakers | New Leaders
www.progressiverenewal.org



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