

Global Mission Moment

Praying With the People of East Timor

"Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." Gal 6: 2

How does the church respond to the spiritual needs of the community of believers? In Timor Leste (East Timor) the Protestant Church of Timor Leste (IPTL), a partner of Global Ministries responds almost daily with the tradition of the "kultu uma kain" which, in Tetum means "family worship service." Through this ministry, church members feel a sense of community and solidarity in a context where many are on the margins of society.

As missionaries working with the IPTL Monica, our two children and I often participate in these home worship services. Rev. Sammuel De Jesus of Immanuel Protestant Church in Lospalos says that the 'kultu uma kain' began during the Indonesian occupation of Timor. This ministry gives each family in the church a service conducted in their own home which is tailored to their own concerns and longings. Since many parts of Timor are very remote, worship is brought to people who often cannot get to Sunday services. It is also an important way for lay people to participate in the leadership of the church. Here, lay preachers make up most of the leadership of the church. Usually four or five lay people will travel to the host's home with one leading the service. Preparation provides an opportunity for these lay leaders to develop biblical literacy and practice theological reflection. There are songs, scripture reading, preaching and a "general prayer" which is focused on the specific needs of the family. During the year every family in Immanuel Church receives their own family service. In addition to the 'kultu uma kain' there are also frequent pastoral visits made by church members to each other's homes. Very rarely does a pastor go alone; it is almost always a community activity. If someone is sick or bereaved or otherwise in need of consolation, several members will go. Through this witness of bearing one another's burdens, the church is fulfilling the law of Christ.

Tom and Monica Liddle serve with the Protestant Church of East Timor. Tom serves as facilitator for church programs; teaching English and helping with worship leadership in village churches. Monica works as a Naturopathic Doctor (ND) in Immanuel Clinic Lospalos. Monica's appointment is supported by One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS).

Through your continued support of Our Church's Wider Mission the Calendar of Prayer for the Mission of the United Church of Christ is made possible; thank you!



Mission Moment - Congregational Life Quiz Second Sunday after Christmas January 2, 2011

Would you like your congregation to have worship that is joyful and inspiring, and to offer educational programs to help you understand and reflect on the Bible with people of different ages?

Do you want to live more fully in thanksgiving and generosity, praising our generous God through your daily actions?

Can your congregation do more to be a safe and sacred place?

Does your congregation want to better equip members for service and witness, strengthening efforts in spiritual formation?

Can your congregation grow in prophetic ministries of doing justice and peace-making, and in being locally responsive yet globally responsible?

Do you think the United Church of Christ can help its leaders to be more nurtured and supported for the sake of the whole church?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you will want to know more about the continuing ministry of Congregational Vitality of Local Church Ministries.

The Congregational Vitality Ministry uses your congregation's support for Our Church's Wider Mission to enrich the ministries of local churches.

Jeremiah 31:7-14 or Sirach 24:1-12
Psalms 147: 12-20 or Wisdom of Solomon 10:15-21
Ephesians 1: 3-14
John 1: (1-9), 10-18

1/3/2011

Clean water should not be considered a luxury, but in many parts of the world it is. First Congregational UCC Salem (Oregon) founded the Zabriko Project to fund clean water, sanitation and health education projects in the Central Plateau of Haiti. Zabriko operates as a partnership between First Congregational, Haiti's **Peasant Movement of Papay (MPP) and American churches and school youth groups. MPP – an organization with more than 50,000 members made up of farmer collectives – provided clean water to areas of Haiti** until international support evaporated. Funding through Zabriko has rejuvenated MPP's clean water projects. As of 2010, the Zabriko Project will have provided clean water to 18,000 Haitians, helping to prevent the spread of contaminated water illnesses especially among children. In addition to First Congregational, 14 congregations in the Central Pacific Conference helped fund the Zabriko Project last year.

Genesis 28:10-22 -- Hebrews 11:13-22 -- Psalm 72

1/4/2011

Non-Muslim Turkish citizens must feel fully valued as citizens of this country - they should not be treated as lower than others," said Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan in May of 2010. Erdogan, head of the Turkish government, signed a decree urging "all state organs to uphold the rights of the Christian and Jewish minorities, to behave with respect towards their clergy and to act decisively against all publications inciting hatred and discrimination." Five days before the decree was published in the official government gazette, a Syriac Catholic church at Iskenderun was restored to its original purpose as a place of Catholic worship after being used for more than 50 years as an erotic cinema. Adherence to the decree could help pave the way for Turkey's admittance into the European Union by 2015 – a membership that has been denied to them because of frequent complaints from Christian minorities of discrimination in Turkey, most of whose 71.5 million inhabitants are Sunni Muslims.

Exodus 3:1-5 -- Hebrews 11:23-31 -- Psalm 72

1/5/2011

Today we pray for the ministry and mission of First Congregational Church of Madison, WI:

First church is a dynamic and welcoming community of 500 unique and valued individuals, families and friends. While each of us may be at different points on our own faith journeys we are united in spirit and called by God's love to engage in the world as instruments of God's grace and mercy. We witness that spirit and calling as an "open and affirming" church, committed to tying faith to social justice, and providing programs and services that nurture our faith community while supporting our broader mission in an ever-changing world. At First Congregational Church, we know God is still speaking. In its efforts to provide access and comfort to all who may enter the doors of First Congregational UCC, the Special Needs Committee provides a Respite Room. The Respite Room is just a part of the ministry to make First Congregation UCC more accessible to ALL THE PEOPLE.

Joshua 1:1-9 -- Hebrews 11:32-12:2 --Psalm 72

Epiphany, Dia de Reyes

1/6/2011

Being "different" is relative, as a group of theological students found out on a visit to China in 2010. The trip, sponsored by Global Ministries Council of Theological Students, included Lori Heutmaker, a student at United Theological College who hails from Minnesota. After the students first full day in China, Lori wrote in the group's blog, "Being of Scandinavian heritage, I am blond and blue-eyed which blends easily in my native Minnesota. What a difference it was to be somewhere that because I looked so completely foreign, people throughout the day stopped to take pictures of me." The experience provided a crash course on what it feels like to be "the other". Lori was reminded of Paul's words, "You are all one in the body of Christ..." (Gal. 3:28) Being in a country of millions Lori said, "I think I will need to readjust my idea of the size of Christ's body."

Isaiah 60:1-6 -- Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14 -- Ephesians 3:1-12

Matthew 2:1-12

Orthodox Christmas

1/7/2011

Philippine church leaders signed a Statement for Just Peace in Palestine after the May 2010 Israeli attack on a ship from the Gaza Freedom Flotilla which killed 9 peace activists. The statement, signed during the World Week for Peace in Palestine-Israel sponsored by the World Council of Churches, states, in part, "we join faith-based and civil society groups around the world in calling on the Israeli government to end the isolation of Gaza and the collective punishment of its 1.5 million residents." The ecumenical group of signatories further state, "It's time for healing to begin in the land called holy. Jerusalem must be an open, inclusive and shared city in terms of sovereignty and citizenship. The rights of its communities must be guaranteed Muslim, Jewish and Christian, Palestinian and Israeli—including access to Holy Places and freedom of worship. Now is the time for each one of us to speak out and act, fulfilling our Christian vocation as peacemakers."

1 Kings 10:1-13 -- Ephesians 3:14-21-- Psalm 72

1/8/2011

Today we pray for First Congregational United Church of Portland, OR:

We are a progressive Christian community in the heart of Portland, Oregon. We celebrate diversity through our warm and inclusive welcome. In our worship and in our lives, we believe that God is still speaking and that the risen Christ lives in and among us. We covenant together to:

Create a sacred space that is accessible and welcoming to everyone; Work for justice in our community and in our world; Express, in our living, a care for creation and a stewardship of all God's resources; Nurture our relationships with one another through our listening and our caring; Grow in faith, learning an service.

1 Kings 10:14-25 -- Ephesians 4:7, 11-16 -- Psalm 72

1/14/2011

A flyer with the outline of South Africa, set against a backdrop of a poverty-infused South African neighborhood, has these words printed on it:

REMEMBER THE POOR

Arguably the greatest sin of our day is our failure to care for the poor and to deal effectively with the menace of poverty. That failure – of compassion and of justice – underlies all the other great sins of our day: war, greed, abuse, violence, drug peddling, human trafficking, environmental destruction, crime... The list goes on. God cares especially for the poor, yet we appear unconcerned. We invite visitors to South Africa to see beyond the soccer stadiums. To see the people of South Africa, their talents and achievements – and in many cases their destitution. To see the true state of the economy. To remember us and our needs when the season of soccer tourism is over. We invite you to take a closer look, to ask questions and to raise your voices about the reality.

(continued on 1/15/2011)

Creator God, our soul's delight, your wise voice thunders over the waters, liberating the future from the past. In the Spirit's power and the waters of rebirth, Jesus was declared your blessed and beloved Son; may we recall our baptism, and be disciples of the Anointed One. Amen.

Genesis 27:30-38 -- Acts 1:1-15 -- Psalm 40:1-11

1/15/2011

(continued from 1/14/2011)

The message, from the South African Conference of Churches, was intended and distributed to the millions of spectators at the Soccer World Cup in June 2010. Their message didn't stop there. They explain why the sin of not solving the crime of poverty is double in South Africa. Among the reasons:

- **Because we speak of the struggle against apartheid, but have neither undone the harm entrenched by that system nor built the just society for which we fought.**
- **Because of all African countries, we have the material resources to address the scandal of poverty – yet we have allowed ourselves to become the most unequal society in the world.**
- **Because eliminating poverty is a stated public policy objective in South Africa, yet we are not doing as we say.**
- **Because we boast of our culture of ubuntu without treating others humanely.**
- **Because we have failed to resist the impact of globalisation on our economic life.**

We pray that global sporting events call attention to the arena of poverty and that they help to level the playing field for all people.

1 Kings 19:19-21 -- Luke 5:1-11 -- Psalm 40:1-11



The Baptism of Christ 1/9/2011

Possibilities Unfolding

Out of what holds us back, God calls the church, enabling us to know in the spirit of Jesus the hope and promise which is the world's too. The local church is "held back" when it is cut off from help outside itself. In the familiar words of the poet, "No man is an island"—and neither is any local church. Part of a worldwide movement, connected to something bigger than itself, what is local and personal acquires power and significance.

This connection to "something bigger" starts very close to home, and within the church itself—in our relationship with other congregations. We have much to learn from one another, much to give and receive. "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love *for one another*." (John 13:35) What holds back our own growth in ministry and mission is often the withholding of that love.

Gifts to Our Church's Wider Mission include support for programs aimed at the strengthening of congregational life. An important way this happens is through the gathering and sharing of leaders, lay and clergy, from different Conferences and congregations. Often we are each other's best resources, gifted with ideas and experience that we too frequently keep to ourselves. We are unaccustomed or unable to take advantage of what we can offer one another.

Out of what holds us back and keeps us from helping one another, God calls the church to closer collaboration between and among its own members and leaders. Giving to Our Church's Wider Mission is one way we can grow together in the love we are meant to share with the world.

**Isaiah 42:1-9 -- Psalm 29 -- Acts 10:34-43
Matthew 3:13-17**

1/10/2011

Today we pray for Lake Edge United Church of Christ, Madison, WI:

- * Who we are: a community of about 650 Christians.
- * Our leaders: Pastors and Staff and our elected lay leaders
- * What's special about us:
 - o Our commitment to the poor and disadvantaged
 - o Our strong faith education programs
 - o Thought-provoking, relevant sermons
 - o Choice of worship styles: traditional or contemporary
 - o Singer-songwriter Marques Bovre
- * Where: Madison's East side

What we do:

- * WORSHIP with integrity, joy and challenge
- * GROW spiritually, encourage and challenge each other to grow spiritually
- * SERVE: Love one another, and love our neighbors

Who are we for?: EVERYONE is welcome -- spiritually curious as well as life-long Christians, regardless of race, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, physical or mental ability, or economic status. rainbow flag indicating this is a GLBT-friendly church.

Genesis 35:1-15 -- Acts 10:44-48 -- Psalm 89:5-37

1/11/2011

We all need time and distance, periodically, to put things in perspective. Lollie Kasulones, Global Partnership Chair with the Southern Ohio Northern Kentucky Association (SONKA) of the Ohio Conference, has witnessed those perspective-raising moments from college students on mission trips to Kenya. One student wrote of an experience upon arrival at the Rubate Presbyterian Teachers College where the volunteers would join students in an exchange of prayer, faith and spirituality. The student wrote, "We were late arriving to the college, not only were we exhausted from the drive, but the Rubate students had also become weary." Weariness, though, is no excuse in Kenya to be unwelcoming. "There was a distant vision of students running out to greet us. They danced down the road with drums and whistles, singing songs of praise." This African welcome was the volunteer's signal that she was home, "where my Christian spirit would mature and those from Africa and America would be united through the wonders of God."

Steadfast God, you have enriched and enlightened us by the revelation of your eternal Christ. Comfort us in our mortality and strengthen us to walk the path of your desire, so that by your word and deed we may manifest the gracious news of your faithfulness and love. Amen.

Jeremiah 1:4-10 -- Acts 8:4-13 -- Psalm 89:5-37

1/12/2011

Today we pray for The Congregational Church of Needham, MA:

Our Church Covenant says what we believe:

- We strive to be a joyful, welcoming Christian community.
- We seek to be faithful in a world torn by suffering, injustice, oppression, and war.
- We are inspired by God, Christ's ministry, and the examples of other faithful people. We join together in worship and song, fellowship, study, and mission, to embrace the risks and challenges of continuing Christ's ministry.
- We struggle to live out our faith in the world by furthering justice and peace, witnessing to the truth, and proclaiming God's love and mercy for all people. In 2000, the church adopted this Open and Affirming Statement as an extension of the Covenant:
 - As a covenant community we are committed to the belief that all people are created equal before God.
 - In affirmation of the inclusive love of Christ Jesus, we welcome persons of any race, gender, age, sexual orientation, ability and economic circumstance to full participation in our community life and ministry.
 - We strive to reflect these beliefs in the language and content of our worship and in our lives together.

Where you will find a Warm and Caring Environment...From the promises we make as a congregation at a baptism to the visits to the elderly or sick by the pastors and deacons, the members of this church "walk the walk" as well as "talk the talk!"

Isaiah 51:1-16 Matthew 12:15-21 Psalm 89:5-37

1/13/2011

Today we pray for Church of the Beatitudes, Phoenix, AZ:

For more than half a century, Church of the Beatitudes has been a beacon of faith, education and service. Located in north central Phoenix, the Church provides many spirit-filled opportunities for worshipping our God through the spoken and written word, prayer, music and outreach.

Our history is rich with innovative outreach projects that have improved the lives of many people.

Church of the Beatitudes affirms that every person has worth as a unique creation made in the image of God. We recognize, celebrate and give thanks for the many diverse gifts of God among us. We declare ourselves to be an Open and Affirming congregation, welcoming into the full life and ministry of the Church persons of every race, culture, age, gender, sexual orientation, ability and economic status.

Church of the Beatitudes is a community that welcomes all people. No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are always welcome here!

Isaiah 22:15-25 -- Galatians 1:6-12 -- Psalm 40:1-11

1/21/2011

(continued from 1/20/2011)

"No girl child should be denied access to education because she was born a girl; neither should any woman not be allowed to express her views just because she is a woman. It is only within an environment of equal rights and equal opportunities that the energies and strengths of women can be harnessed for the betterment of our continent. Never before has Africa needed the contribution of women in its fight against poverty, wars and conflicts than today." Vivi Akakpo, Executive Secretary for AACC Women and Migration Program, expressed her appreciation for "the role played by the Church in Africa towards the empowerment of women and girls in the continent. It is our sincere hope that the Church will continue journeying with women of Africa and ensure that their rights are jealously protected and that equal opportunities are availed to them for progress of society. May the Lord Himself strengthen us in our quest for equality and justice for the life bearers and nurturers!"

God of blazing light, through the power of the cross you shattered our darkenss, scattering the fears that bind us and setting us free to live as your children. Give us courage and conviction that we may joyfully turn and follow you into new adventures of faithful service, led by the light that shines through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

1 Samuel 9:27-10:8 -- Galatians 2:1-10 -- Psalm 27:1-6

1/22/2011

Awards are nice, but the reward of helping people is the ultimate goal. In September 2009, the Sichuan Radio and TV University and the Amity Foundation, both Global Ministries partners, received the highest award given by the State Council of China for "Model Organization in the Unity and Advancement of Nationalities". Since 2000, Global Ministries, One Great Hour of Sharing and Week of Compassion have partnered with the Sichuan Radio and TV University in working in minority areas of the Ganzi region of western China – an area where 80% of the population are ethnic Tibetans. The group has trained English teachers, built greenhouses, provided health care in rural areas and provided milk for school children. The Amity Foundation, a Global Ministries partner for decades, is an independent volunteer organization, which encourages health, education and development in China, striving to build friendships based on mutual respect and peace. The DVD, "Love in the Snowy Mountains", tells this amazing story.

1 Samuel 15:34-16:13 -- Luke 5:27-32 -- Psalm 27:1-6



Second Sunday after the Epiphany The Legacy Lives On 1/16/2011

In observance of Martin Luther King Day, we give thanks for the continuing transformation of individual hearts and for the difference one person can make in the lives of many.

One place where the United Church of Christ builds on Dr. King's legacy of love's healing power is the Franklinton Center at Bricks in eastern North Carolina. Managed by staff members of Justice and Witness Ministries, Franklinton Center nurtures transformation.

One year after participating in an African American Women's retreat, a woman returned to Franklinton Center and announced that she had quit smoking, initiated a healthier life style, and improved relationships with family members. One change led to another, and a new sense of wholeness emerged.

After attending a youth conference at Franklinton Center, a young woman organized others in her church and school to boycott Taco Bell in support of migrant farm workers. Similarly, a Grinnell College student was impressed by grassroots leaders who taught at Franklinton Center about environmental justice issues involved with hog farming. When summer came, he left Iowa to volunteer with a local community group in North Carolina. With a new passion for justice advocacy, these two people have initiated change.

Franklinton Center itself has been transformed over the years, from a plantation to a Christian college, and then a school. It is now a conference center focused on leadership development and justice advocacy for the marginalized, the oppressed, and the poor. Fundamental concerns such as rural justice, community development, environmental racism, and workers' rights are woven into programs throughout the year. Dr. King's legacy is alive and thriving at the Franklinton Center.

All of the transformative efforts of Justice and Witness Ministries are supported by congregations' gifts to Our Church's Wider Mission.

**Isaiah 49:1-7 -- Psalm 40:1-11 -- 1 Corinthians 1:1-9
John 1:29-42**

**Martin Luther King Jr. Day
1/17/2011**

Making something out of nothing is a gift that is essential to those who live surrounded by hopelessness and need. Jean Paul Chami, Program Manager with Forum for Development, Culture and Dialogue (FDCD) in Beirut, Lebanon sees this daily in the Palestinian youth volunteers who serve at a youth camp in Lebanon. "Amidst the misery, sadness and hopelessness they live in, they still managed to deeply touch my heart with their ideas, as they taught me great lessons in humanity, humility and in perseverance," Chami said. One youth in particular, called "Gago" by his peers, is a mentor to other youth despite his own fear that he will never be free of the camps simply because he is a Palestinian. "What is unique about us as a group, and center, is that we are capable of making something out of anything," Gago said. Like making hope out of despair and a way out of no way.

Exodus 12:1-13, 21-28 -- Acts 8:26-40 -- Psalm 40:6-17

**Week of Prayer for Christian Unity
1/18/2011**

The Rock Spring Congregational UCC, Arlington, VA has taken to heart the UCC's "God is Still Speaking" initiative. We are a place that "wherever you are on life's journey, you are welcome here."

We also profess as central to our life as a congregation the Great Commandment attributed to Jesus:

He answered, *'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.'* Luke 10:27

Our congregation understands the importance of each person in our community finding support in developing their spiritual self and religious understanding, and in having a community to which to turn at life's decisive and difficult moments.

As a progressive Christian congregation, we recognize that we must work as a body to care for ourselves and our neighbors as called by the Spirit.

Isaiah 53:1-12 -- Hebrews 10:1-4 -- Psalm 40:6-17

1/19/2011

If we can speak truth to power, can play be an act of truth as well? Part of the peace forum during the Second Ecumenical Kirchentag (church convention) in Munich called upon parents across the globe to stop buying toy weapons for their children and to get rid of violent toys already in their homes. The challenge came from Nicolau Jemusse Luis, leader of the Swords into Ploughshares program of the Christian Council of Mozambique. The idea was echoed by Gisela Mayer, spokesperson of the action group "Amoklauf Winnenden" who had launched a campaign to create a peaceful environment for our children after her daughter and others were shot at school. "What sort of beings are we that see the practice of efficiently killing as a leisure or sporting activity?" she asked. Mayer knows "that the struggle for peace will never come to an end, and exactly for that reason must begin afresh every day."

**Isaiah 48:12-21 -- Matthew 9:14-17 -- Psalm 40:6-17
1/20/2011**

Although the proverb 'women hold up half the sky' is of Chinese origin, its message is universal. International Women's Day, celebrated each year on March 8, recognizes that women of the world must be active and equal participants in the struggle for peace, progress, human rights and fundamental freedoms. The day also acknowledges women's contributions in strengthening international peace and security. For the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), the theme of International Women's Day in 2010 – Equal Rights, Equal Opportunities: Progress for All – had an even wider meaning. Global Ministries partners, members of the AACC took time to "celebrate African Women for their spirit of resilience, healing and wholeness alongside their wonderful achievements in different areas such as family and social cohesion, peace building, science and education". The list also includes trauma healing, the fight against gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS. The group acknowledged that lasting progress must include equal rights and opportunities in order for sustainable development and progress to take root. (continued on 1/21/2011)

1 Samuel 1:1-20 -- Galatians 1:11-24 -- Psalm 27:1-6

1/28/2011

Being "different" is relative, as a group of theological students found on a visit to China in 2010. The trip, sponsored by Global Ministries' Council of Theological Students, included Lori Heutmaker, a student at United Theological College who hails from Minnesota. After their first full day in China, Lori wrote in the group's blog, "Being of Scandinavian heritage, I am blond and blue-eyed which blends easily in my native Minnesota. What a difference it was to be somewhere that because I looked so completely foreign, people throughout the day stopped to take pictures of me." The experience provided a crash course on what it feels like to be "the other". Lori was reminded of Paul's words, "You are all one in the body of Christ..." (Gal. 3:28) Being in a country of millions Lori said, "I think I will need to readjust my idea of the size of Christ's body."

God our deliverer, you walk with the meek and the poor, the compassionate and those who mourn, and you call us to walk humbly with you. When we are foolish, be our wisdom; when we are weak, be our strength; that, as we learn to do justice and to love mercy, your rule may come as blessing. Amen.

Deuteronomy 24:17–25:4 -- 1 Timothy 5:17-24 - Psalm 15

1/29/2011

Individually, members of First Church are encouraged to, and do in fact, participate in a wide variety of service organizations throughout the community. Together we seek to make life better for all God's children, but especially providing care and support for those who are among the "least of these."

First Church, Nashua, NH provides financial support to a variety of community help programs as part of its outreach.

People are an important part of outreach and members of First Church join with members of other faith communities and no faith community through church and secular helping organizations to make a difference in people's lives locally. Members also join with members of other UCC churches in serving on various boards, committees and task forces within the New Hampshire Conference and the United Church of Christ as part of our support of wider mission outreach.

Micah 3:1-4 -- John 13:31-35 -- Psalm 15



**Ecumenical Sunday
1/23/2011**

Third Sunday after the Epiphany

What IS Our Church's Wider Mission, Anyway?

It's a well-kept secret in a lot of places, but Our Church's Wider Mission is, in a lot of ways, who we are in the United Church of Christ.

The God is still speaking campaign is attracting thousands of people to the United Church of Christ. For them, we are the kind of church they "never knew existed," the kind of church that actively welcomes everyone and takes courageous stands on controversial issues—and all the while tends to the traditional basic mandates of the gospel to spread the Good News, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and shelter the homeless.

Our nearly 6,000 congregations contribute to Our Church's Wider Mission, making us the kind of church so many people "never knew existed."

Without Our Church's Wider Mission . . .

We could not gather the great strengths of our congregations or make our voice heard in the public arena. We would not have missionaries in over 70 countries worldwide. We could not help small, struggling, or emerging new churches with support for pastors or buildings. We could not provide congregations with distinctively "UCC" resources: for worship, stewardship, leadership. Congregations would be entirely on their own when looking for a pastor. There would be no United Church of Christ presence at all in parts of the United States. Our Church's Wider Mission: It's who we are. Does your congregation contribute?

**Isaiah 9:1-4 Psalm 27:1, 4-9 1 Corinthians 1:10-18
Matthew 4:12-23**

1/24/2011

Two years ago, a severe ice storm hit the Cheyenne River Lakota Reservation in South Dakota downing 6,000 electric poles and causing power outages for more than 12,000 people. Not only were they without electricity, but the water treatment plant was also damaged which forced residents to be without water for more than 10 days. National Disaster Ministries, the UCC South Dakota Conference, the Dakota Association and others pooled their resources to provide assistance. The Conference provided \$5,000 and \$3,000 was sent from the One Great Hour of Sharing special fund Emergency USA.

UCC Pastor Louie Blue Coat was grateful for the quick response, especially in helping those in remote areas. "In our Lakota language, "Lila Wopila," or (many thanks)! Your love and generosity cannot be repaid, but will never be forgotten. You will be in our hearts and prayers and we ask that our Creator bless each and every one of you."

Judges 6:11-24 -- Ephesians 5:6-14 -- Psalm 27:7-14

1/25/2011

Today we pray for the ministry and mission of Plymouth Church, Milwaukee, WI:

We are a Christian community and church with a long history in Milwaukee, founded in 1841.

We are a people of prayer, turning to God for strength, guidance, challenge and comfort. We practice a radical welcome, and seek to follow Jesus, to do the work of love, reconciliation, and service, which he calls us to do. We speak to the great questions and challenges of justice and mercy in our personal lives and in our society. We care for the wounded, the hurting and for those experiencing crisis in their lives.

We seek an informed faith and welcome questions. We acknowledge what we don't know, even as we sincerely affirm the truth we do know. We take the Bible seriously, but not literally. Preaching at Plymouth is informed Bible preaching.

We are a playful people who believe in living joyfully. We love to sing, to create, and to be moved by the Spirit. We enjoy lively worship, dance, and music.

We respect, share and work with other churches, as well as people of other faiths. Our community is comprised of people from all walks of life, economic conditions and back grounds, all ages, and all races and cultures. We warmly welcome gay and lesbian persons, their families and friends.

We love this city and what it represents in vitality and diversity.

Judges 7:12-22 -- Philipians 2:12-18 -- Psalm 27:7-14

1/26/2011

Today we pray for the mission and ministry of Shadow Rock UCC, Phoenix, AZ

Our Covenant

We covenant one with another to be that sensitive and responsive part of human society which perceives and responds to God's newest thrust in the midst of history.

The uniqueness and greatness of every life is radically affirmed.

Our task together demands a comprehensive view of life, always pointed intentionally to the future.

Our life together involves us individually and corporately in study and worship, always maintaining a proper balance between proclamation of the Word about life with the deeds which make life good.

Those activities which eliminate age barriers, cut across religious dogma, reduce cultural parochialisms, and engage secular people with life's ultimate possibilities will be worthy of our best efforts.

Genesis 49:1-2, 8-13, 21-26 - Luke 1:67-79 -- Psalm 27:7-14
1/27/2011

The Good Shepherd United Church of Christ, Sahuarita, AZ is a gathering of people committed to creating a bold, spirited, life changing presence in the Santa Cruz Valley. We seek to include everyone on the journey of faith because Jesus included everyone on the journey with him.

We seek an informed faith and welcome questions that lead us to deeper places of understanding-because we don't have all the answers. We take scripture so seriously that we find it can't be taken literally. We seek a life and faith that is grounded in service and compassion so we find ways to actively and boldly live out this call.

We are playful people who believe in living joyfully, we love to sing, whistle, create and be moved by the spirit. We enjoy lively worship, fellowship, study, and bread that is broken together. Some of us live within a few blocks of the church building while others come as far as Tucson, Vail and Tubac. Some of us came just because we live nearby, some for our wonderful music, still others as a place for our children.

Deuteronomy 16:18-20 - 1 Peter 3:8-12 - Psalm 15

2/4/2011

We, the First Church in Windsor, following our Lord Jesus Christ, declare that we welcome all to share in our community of faith. We acknowledge our diversities, and our welcome is to all people without regard to their race; nationality; age; marital status; gender; mental, emotional, or physical challenges; economic status; or sexual orientation. We affirm that all are children of God. We acknowledge that our individual fears and ignorance prevent us from being a whole community. We further acknowledge that the Christian church has perpetuated injustices toward people because of their differences. For these reasons, we want to be more open sensitive to others. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we seek to live our belief at church, at work, at school, and in our families that there are no outcasts in a community that is obedient to the will of God. Together we encourage everyone in our mutual journey of faith to understand and celebrate the diversity of God's creation. We invite all who seek God's guidance to join our open and affirming faith community and share fully in our church's life and opportunities for ministry. We come from different perspectives and experiences and pray for courage, blessing, and God's unifying love as we respond to God's call.

Isaiah 29:1-12 -- James 3:13-18 - Psalm 112:1-9 [10].

2/5/2011

Today we pray for the mission and ministry of Emmanuel UCC, Allentown, PA:

The Mission Statement of Emmanuel U.C.C.

We take as our mission to be disciples of God:

- * Teaching our Children and Youth
- * Spreading the Word through Outreach
- * Loving our Neighbors
- * Being a Shining Light in our Community

Following Jesus' example, we do this with love, respect, and understanding for all knowing God that is with us always.

O God of light, your searching Spirit reveals and illumines your presence in creation. Shine your radiant holiness into our lives, that we may offer our hands and hearts to your work: to heal and shelter, to feed and clothe, to break every yoke and silence evil tongues. Amen.

Isaiah 29:13-16 - Mark 7:1-8 - Psalm 112:1-9 [10]



Calendar of Prayer Mission Moments
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Health and Human Service Sunday
1/30/2011
Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany

Expecting the Unexpected

"The coming of the Son of Man will be like a thief in the night."
1 Thessalonians 5:2

"But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that time to surprise you like a thief." 1 Thessalonians 5:4

"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it." Hebrews 13:2

"Watch, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which Christ is coming." Matthew 25:13

When the water got to the farmer's bottom windows, a neighbor rowed over to rescue him. The farmer declined: "I'm a man of faith. God will save me."

When the waters rose to the second story windows, another neighbor appeared in a motor boat. Again the farmer refused to be rescued: "I'm a man of faith. God will save me."

Finally the man sat on top of the roof. A helicopter flew over and lowered a ladder. Once again, the farmer declined. "I'm a man of faith. I'm certain that God will save me." The next thing he knew, the farmer found himself at the pearly gates. "What happened?" he moaned to St. Peter. "Why didn't God save me?"

St. Peter shook his head sadly, saying, "Listen here, we sent a rowboat, a motor boat, and a helicopter!"

Micah 6:1-8 - Psalm 151 - Corinthians 1:18-31
Matthew 5:1-12

1/31/2011

Today we pray for the mission and ministry of First Church of Christ, Congregational, Glastonbury, Connecticut:

We understand that we are all children of God who are called to be in community. Any person who joins us in membership shall be part of our Church family and shall be invited to share fully in our Church life and ministries.

Our Church seeks to break down the barriers of prejudice, declaring respect for the worth and dignity of all persons who come to our Church family regardless of race, age, marital standing, gender, economic status, mental or physical challenges, nationality or sexual orientation. With Jesus Christ as our guide, we rely intentionally upon the power of the Holy Spirit to bring us together as a community of justice and love.

As an open and welcoming Church, we join with our sisters and brothers in the United Church of Christ who are like-minded in this struggle for love and justice.

Ruth 1:1-18 - Philemon 1-25 - Psalm 37:1-17

2/1/2011

Our mission is to use the resources God has given us to worship Him, to teach and spread His gospel in our local and world communities, to cultivate the spiritual gifts of our members, to be open to the direction of the Holy Spirit, and to be faithful in our stewardship of our time, talents, natural and financial resources.

We recognize the overwhelming need to participate in God's mission in a hurting world.

Here at Trinity Great Swamp, Spinnerstown, PA we embrace openness and individuality, characteristics of the UCC's wide welcome and hospitality. That sense of our identity, rooted in history and in our commitment to Jesus Christ, stresses an attitude of respect and acceptance. It also calls us to take pride in our history and our ever-evolving call to serve each generation in new and relevant ways. The Good News of Jesus Christ is not static.

*God is still speaking,
Come and Listen,*

Ruth 2:1-16 - James 5:1-6 - Psalm 37:1-17

2/2/2011

The question of immigration reform is an emotional issue, and that is exactly why Algonquin UCC of the Illinois Conference scheduled a mission trip to Postville and Decorah – the site of immigration raids at a meat processing plant in 2009. One of the participants wrote of being deeply moved: "I went on the trip to Postville and Decorah with my mind pretty much made up about the illegal immigrant. However after hearing about the immigration raid and seeing the awesome commitment of the folk in both places my mind and heart was changed. What an awesome experience!" Hearing from people who have been involved in the aftermath of the raid, learning of the efforts to help the women and children left behind and knowing the emotional pain of those who have been detained and are awaiting trial is a life changing experience.

Ruth 3:1-13; 4:13-22 -- Luke 6:17-26 - Psalm 37:1-17

2/3/2011

Global Partners is a 200-church-strong partnership between the UCC Rocky Mountain Conference, the Rocky Mountain Disciples of Christ (DOC) and the Evangelical United Pentecostal Church of Venezuela (UEPV). Each of the denominations' memberships have committed to work together to share God's love but not try to change each other theologically, plan and work on projects together, exchange people and share resources, and support each other through social, political and spiritual challenges. Although each mission opportunity is centered on a particular project, the real goal is cultural exchange and relationship building. The membership represents 200 churches in western Venezuela, Colorado, Utah and Wyoming with members of various ages and genders, both lay and clergy, including those who have been to Venezuela before and first timers. All participants seek peace and justice in our world as they walk together and support each other on their spiritual journeys. Global Partners, global peace.

Deuteronomy 4:1-14 - 1 John 5:1-5 - Psalm 112:1-9 [10]

Global Mission Moment

Passing on the Mantle

May my teaching drop as the rain, my speech distill as the dew, as the gentle rain upon the tender grass, and as the showers upon the herb. Deuteronomy 32:2

The Kálvin Tér Reformed Church here in Hungary has long been known as “the Bishop’s Church”, so serving there in any capacity has been an honor. This Church is also where “our” Károli Gáspár University Theology students progress to doing their practice preaching in a Thursday evening worship service throughout the school year. We enjoyed a quiet but note-worthy worship service there this last Sunday.

Our nephew, young Balázs, was filling this rather august pulpit for the three months that the Sr. Minister, the Rev. Pál László, would be on sabbatical. We sat on each side of Balázs’s young wife. Behind us was the Rev. László Kovacs, visiting from our Calvin Synod Conference of the United Church of Christ in the US.

Though Balázs was a bit nervous, he preached well, meaningfully, helpfully, with especially good exegesis, and the congregation listened, actively. And, he was wearing my ‘palást’ (clergy robe), as his sister wears one of Coralyn’s every Sunday in “her” church. After the service the whole family gathered and we all shed a few tears of joy together. It’s no small thing to launch a new young minister who is both our own nephew and one of our past students! It is a worthy thing to participate in the beginnings of a new Hungarian Reformed clergy, and it certainly shows us that we are passing on the mantle –

Laslo and Coralyn Medyesy are missionaries with the Reformed Church in Hungary, based in Budapest, Hungary. Laslo serves as professor of theology in the Department of Theology of the Gaspar Karoli Reformed University in Budapest. Coralyn T. Medyesy serves as a teacher of Social Work and Diakonia at the Nagy Koros School.

Through your continued support of Our Church’s Wider Mission the Calendar of Prayer for the Mission of the United Church of Christ is made possible; thank you!



UCC Women’s Week, Feb, 6-12 2/6/2011 Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

Beloved - Come, Wait, Listen

The “business” of a church is to change lives - a point made by C. Kirk Hadaway in his book, *Behold I Do a New Thing*. We ask, “Are people being transformed in my congregation?” Each year since the mid 1980s, *Common Lot* has provided resources for United Church of Christ women’s groups to be catalysts for transformation in their congregations.

In the Winter 2005 Women’s Week issue of *Common Lot*, the mountain-top experiences of Moses and Jesus provide opportunities to consider the responsibility that comes with having listened and been transformed, of having been called “beloved.” Daily meditations invite reflection. What is it like to be aglow? What is your responsibility to let your light shine? To recognize the reflection of God’s light in another? What is God calling you to contribute toward building the beloved community where each person is affirmed as a child of God?

Common Lot is available quarterly through individual or group Women in Mission Partnerships. Because your gifts to Our Church’s Wider Mission provide for the writing, editing and publication of *Common Lot*, all partnership dollars are used for mission! They are given out as grants in response to proposals received from local churches, associations, and/or Conferences of the United Church of Christ for projects that have a direct outreach to women and girls of all ages. Back issues of *Common Lot* are available to the whole church on the UCC Website at www.ucc.org/women/

**Isaiah 58:1-9a [9b-12] -- Psalm 112:1-9 [10]
1 Corinthians 2:1-12 [13-16] -- Matthew 5:13-20**

2/7/2011

Jesus taught us to share, but does that mean we have to share our church members, too? When "Ali" first came to St. Columba's Budapest, he didn't know much Hungarian and, as a refugee from Iran, he was a stranger. Still, he wanted to learn more about Jesus. Ali was baptized at St. Columba's and, at the time, it made sense for him to attend the international English-speaking congregation. But things change. People grow and move on. Now Aaron Stevens, a member of St. Columba's, sees Ali only in passing. He lives out of town now, has his own business and has learned the language. Ali attends the Hungarian Reformed Church in his own neighborhood. And Aaron says that's okay. He is thankful that St. Columba's was able to welcome a newcomer and then set him on a road to his own place and time. Yes, sharing does include church members. And where else should we follow Jesus' teachings than in church?

2 Kings 22:3-20 -- Romans 11:2-10 -- Psalm 119:105-112

2/8/2011

Today we pray for the ministry and mission of Jordan UCC, Allentown, PA:

Jordan Church has benefited from the foresight of previous generations. In 2002, we celebrated our 250th Anniversary of ministry at our current location in South Whitehall Township (Allentown, Pennsylvania). We were blessed by that "great cloud of witnesses," as Hebrews calls them, who have gone one before us and endowed us with 38 acres of land. Our shaded grove and its pavilion, our two stately homes, our well-maintained cemetery, our beautiful wedding gazebo, our lovely outdoor chapel, our ample paved parking lot, our education wing and social hall and our newly renovated church building, are part of the legacy of generosity and devotion we have been entrusted in our time. Jordan is a living tribute to those who have loved the Lord over the years, and have sought to worship God and follow Christ. Jordan United Church of Christ is a vibrant, growing church, with an incredible music and Christian education program, programs and activities for all ages, and an easy to find location.

2 Kings 23:1-8, 21-25 -- 2 Corinthians 4:1-12 -- Psalm 119:105-112

2/9/2011

The phrase 'walking the walk' doesn't get much more poignant than this. Erin McKinney was a Global Ministries intern working with an organization in the Dominican Republic named Caminante – which means 'to walk the path'. McKinney joined Caminante and Servicios Sociales de la Iglesia Dominicana, (Social Services of Dominican Churches), on a CROP Walk to witness in the struggle against hunger and poverty in the world. "I have participated in many CROP walks with my church and community growing up, but this was by far the most powerful and unforgettable. The idea of a CROP walk is to bring people of different faiths, cultures, and ages together to walk in solidarity with the oppressed and marginalized. The slogan "we walk because they walk" took on a whole new level of meaning," McKinney said. "The symbolism of walking together in the first international CROP walk was inspirational and powerful and a great experience of solidarity with this international **C**ommunity **R**esponding to **O**vercome **P**overty."

Proverbs 6:6-23 -- John 8:12-30 -- Psalm 119:105-112

2/10/2011

The best way to learn about being in mission is to go to the source. Global Ministries has created a resource with a series of missionary interviews, available online at <http://globalministries.org/resources/multimedia-resources/index/>. One of those interviews is with Lisa and Steve Smith, former missionaries to Germany, who speak about 'Berlin, Before and After the Wall'. The Smiths give churches in Germany well deserved credit for their role in the peaceful revolution which took place in Germany before the wall came down in 1989. In their estimation, the actions of German churches deserves the same kind of respect and reverence afforded to other peacemakers, such as Gandhi. After the wall came down, these same churches have done a good job of looking at their past honestly and trying to heal the injustices perpetrated on German citizens.

Genesis 26:1-5 -- James 1:12-16 -- Psalm 119:1-8

2/11/2011

Today we pray for the mission and ministry of Little River UCC, Annandale, VA:

From its founding, the church has welcomed people of all races and ethnicities. In the 1960s, when the schools were still segregated, Horizons Day Camp in the summer gave children of differing races a chance to learn and play together. In 1963, we hosted and gave support to those who came to the area for the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. In 1968, church members took supplies to Washington after the assassination of Martin Luther King and the riots that followed. In 2001 we formally declared Little River to be Open and Affirming, explicitly expressing a welcome to people of diverse personal and religious backgrounds – without regard to race, gender, age, physical ability, or sexual orientation. We serve the community around us in a number of ways – by providing meeting space, by hosting an exercise class for seniors, by giving a home to the Annandale Co-Operative Pre-School, and by First Friday, which brings together children from the church and from the community for an evening of fun and food and entertainment six times a year.

Leviticus 26:34-46 -- 1 John 2:7-17 -- Psalm 119:1-8

2/12/2011

Welcome to Avon Lake UCC, Avon, Ohio We are a congregation that believes Christian faith should be intelligent, helpful in daily life - a source of comfort and courage, of joy and excitement! We draw closer to God through worship, service, education and social activities. We think of ourselves as a community church. So we open our doors to a number of groups including the Avon Lake Women's Chorus, Girl Scout, Cub Scouts and three weekly Alcoholics Anonymous groups. We are proud to be the home of the Jack-N-Jill Nursery School, the largest preschool in Avon Lake, providing quality education for three through five year olds. The Good Neighbor Thrift Shop is an outreach ministry of this congregation. The store on the corner of Lear Road and Electric Blvd offers affordable, quality resale merchandise to shoppers and is staffed largely by volunteers.

Deuteronomy 30:1-9a -- Matthew 15:1-9 -- Psalm 119:1-8

2/18/2011

Most of us have heard it said many times in our lives, "there, but for the grace of God..." But a seminary student who volunteered at an agency serving people with mild to severe mental health challenges lived the experience. When the Olympics were held in Atlanta in 1996, the city paid for one-way transportation to send low-income, mentally challenged people out of the city to temporary agencies they had set up for the occasion. The idea was to keep them away from the television cameras and out of sight of the rest of the world. Some of "those people" wound up at an agency administered by an Episcopal Church—one of the few agencies that continued to operate long after the Olympics ended. The seminary student had volunteered there "just to check things out" but during his first few months, he had an unfortunate episode with his own bipolar disorder. His wife left him, taking most of their possessions with her. He found out, first hand, what it feels like to be one of "those people".

(Continued on 2/19/2011)

Leviticus 6:1-7 -- Galatians 5:2-6 -- Psalm 119:33-40
2/19/2011

(continued from 2/18/2011)

Volunteers from Evangelical UCC in Highland, Illinois learned of his story on a recent mission trip to Atlanta with their senior high youth group. Lynette Schuepbach, communication coordinator for UCC Illinois South Conference, said, "God changed his heart that day and he now knows firsthand the sting of being the outcast, society's orphan, an outsider. His passion is now intertwined with this amazing ministry, as he seeks to show others the true inner nature of God's love to all of God's children. His story serves as a powerful testament to Christ's mission while on earth and causes us to stop, listen, and love." The ministry, along with a Baptist church partner, continues to shine God's light on volunteers, visitors and clients.

Leviticus 24:10-23 -- Matthew 7:1-12 -- Psalm 119:33-40



Racial Justice Sunday
2/13/2011
Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany

Lifting Every Child

"Lift every voice and sing, till earth and heaven ring, ring with the harmonies of liberty..."

James Weldon Johnson's hymn "Lift Every Voice and Sing" describes a vision of unity we can apply to American public education. Our country might be very different if we imagined a system of public schools where all children's voices would be lifted together. Imagine!

Jonathan Kozol, a noted author on education, contrasts the kind of education for children of privilege with schooling for poor children, and especially children of color in big cities. He interviewed a girl at Fremont High School in California. "Why is it," she asked, "that students who do not need what we need get so much more? And we who need it so much more get so much less?"

Jan Resseger serves the United Church of Christ in the national ministries as the Minister for Public Education and Witness. She calls the church to advocate for equal education in public schools. Pointing to the opportunity to rectify the injustices in our schools, she simply states, "The choice is ours. Will we imagine a future where all children in the United States can lift their voices to sing together?"

Deuteronomy 30:15-20 or Sirach 15:15-20
Psalm 119:1-8 -- 1 Corinthians 3:1-9
Matthew 5:21-37

**Valentine's Day
2/14/2011**

Laura Anderson, a member of First Congregational Church of Tallmadge, Ohio, was a high school junior when the earthquake struck Haiti in January of 2010. She led a "Hearts for Haiti" campaign to raise money to assist those affected by the devastating earthquake. A chain of paper links in the shape of hearts marked each gift, large or small, that was given in the campaign. The chain symbolized how far their hearts could go and how much love they could give. The church showed a lot of hearts by the time the campaign was concluded, and had raised \$2,027.24. The mission movement was started over 200 years ago by young people in the church, and Hearts for Haiti demonstrates that young people continue to give important leadership to the church.

Divine Gardener, you give growth to our seeds and to the towering forest trees; you raise to abundant life that which seems dead. Teach us to choose blessing and life rather than death, so that we may walk blamelessly, seeking you through reconciliation with all of your children. Amen.

**Exodus 20:1-21 -- James 1:2-8 -- Psalm 119:9-16
2/15/2011**

Children are the future. At Inanda Seminary in South Africa, that future is being made more secure through the school's success in nurturing its students. The school was founded in 1869 by American Congregationalist missionaries and is now administered by the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA), a partner of the United Church of Christ. Part of Inanda's success stems from their belief in developing the whole child – socially, intellectually, physically and spiritually – and in upholding six core values; honesty, respect, responsibility, loyalty, self-discipline and sociability. While the future is important, so is the preservation of tradition and the past. The students at Inanda Seminary know the balance of holding the future in one hand and carrying their culture, stories and traditions in the other. There are 392 female students whose future is brighter and whose families have made an important investment both for their financial stability and for the preservation of future generations.

Deuteronomy 23:21–24:4, 10-15 -- James 2:1-13 -- Psalm 119:9-16

2/16/2011

Today we pray for the mission and ministry of First Congregational Church of Berkeley, CA:

- * We are people who may have been brought up in other faith traditions or none at all.
- * We are people of different ages and styles of life.
- * We are people of different races, including multi-racial families.
- * Our families are different shapes and sizes and include singles, significant others, and those who have lost partners or spouses.
- * Some of us have children, some of us don't, some of us are children.
- * We respect other faith traditions, and some of our families are interfaith.
- * We are all over the map politically (but we are located in Berkeley!).
- * We are free to wrestle theologically.
- * We take care of each other.
- * We like to think and exchange ideas and opinions.
- * We value creativity and use the arts in many ways in the life of the church.

Proverbs 2:1-15 -- Matthew 19:1-12 -- Psalm 119:9-16

2/17/2011

The Covenant of The Federated Church, Chagrin Falls, Ohio:

Believing in Jesus Christ, the interpreter of God to humankind, we accept his teachings as the guiding principles of our lives and consecrate ourselves and our Church to their fulfillment. We therefore join and covenant, one with another, to worship, work and serve together, that we may express through our Church and our individual lives the love and faith taught by Jesus Christ.

The Mission Statement of The Federated Church
God accepts me just as I am and loves me too much to leave me that way.
Federated accepts all people as they are and supports them in the spiritual journey. With Christ we offer hope and healing to change our world.

Exodus 22:21-27 -- 1 Corinthians 10:23–11:1 -- Psalm 119:33-40

President's Day
2/25/2011

(Continued from 2/24)

The group created its mission statement during the February meeting, saying:

We, from various streams of Muslim and Christian communities, seek to enhance mutual understanding, respect, appreciation and support of what is sacred for each other through dialogue, education and sustained visible encounters that foster and nurture relationships.

1. Foster capacity for continued dialogue of national religious leadership;
2. Ensure that visible representatives from each other's communities are invited to local, regional and national organizational meetings;
3. Model to our communities shared examples of best dialogue and engagement practices;
4. Respond with due diligence to critical issues and situations in ways that uphold the inherent worthiness, dignity, and integrity of our two communities;
5. Create a speakers bureau of Christian and Muslim leaders around the country who are available for consultation, workshops, and general presentations; and pair congregations and mosques for the purpose of building relationships, through educational materials and other means.

(Continued on 2/26)

Isaiah 26:1-6 Philipians 2:25-30 Psalm 131

2/26/2011

(Continued from 2/25)

Dialogue, relationship and mutual respect are the bywords of this interfaith engagement. In the midst of this time following the Epiphany, may we, as Christians, remember The One who called all of us brothers and sisters in the family of God, preached and lived peace and justice, and made room at the table for all. Let us pray for -- the continued efforts of the National Muslim-Christian Initiative, the understanding and wisdom that come from open dialogue, and a commitment to overcome fear of "the other" in our everyday lives.

Isaiah 31:1-9 -- Luke 11:14-23 -- Psalm 131



2/20/2011

Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany

Is This the Church of My Heart?

February, in some ways, is the season of the heart, with Valentine's Day providing an opportunity to tell those we love just how much we care about them. We send gifts, cards, and flowers to let them know that they occupy a special place in our hearts.

But love is something that is always "in season," and it needs to be expressed, day in and day out. That includes love for our church. Many of us have grown up in the United Church of Christ: we know its history, its traditions, and its "feel" from having breathed the air of this great denomination all of our lives. Others among us have come to the United Church of Christ from a "far way off," having searched for a church home that offers extravagant hospitality, a bold witness, and, for many, a safe haven. Here, in this faith community, we learn from one another, we worship God together, we follow Jesus more closely than we would alone.

Whether we have claimed the United Church of Christ as our home all of our lives and only in recent years, there comes a time to look at the gift of both the local church and the wider church, their mission and witness, their ministries of caring and outreach, their faithfulness and welcome, and ask ourselves, "Is this the church of my heart?" Faith itself is truly the way of the heart as much or more than the way of the mind. Offering our hearts leads to deeper faith and a closer walk with God, in the good company of so many others who are also "on the way." Let us give thanks for all we have received, and for all we hope to become, together!

Leviticus 19:1-2, 9-18 -- Psalm 119:33-40

1 Corinthians 3:10-11, 16-23 -- Matthew 5:38-48

2/21/2011

Let me see your papers" is a sentence one might expect to hear in a movie about Nazi Germany – not spoken by an officer of the law on the streets of a city in Arizona. SB 1070, signed into law on April 23, 2010 by Arizona Gov. Jan Brewer, made unlawful presence a state crime and required police to question those they suspect of having questionable immigration status. Members of the Southwest Conference sent an open letter to President Obama and two cabinet members saying, in part, "It is legislation such as this that codifies racial profiling and creates an atmosphere of suspicion, hatred, and scapegoating of immigrants and U.S citizens." The Conference and other racial justice groups call for comprehensive immigration reform that will focus on justice and move the country forward, "striving to be our best selves, not our lowest selves," said UCC minister for racial justice Rev. Karen Georgia Thompson.

O God most holy, in Jesus Christ you have laid a foundation upon which to build our lives. Help us to follow your perfect law of love, that we may fulfill it and observe it to the end. Amen.

Proverbs 25:11-22 -- Romans 12:9-21 -- Psalm 119:57-64

2/22/2011

Today we pray for the mission and ministry of Claremont UCC, Claremont, CA:

"My house shall be called a house of prayer for all people."

We are an open and affirming congregation in which all persons regardless of race, ethnic background, economic status, gender, age, personal ability, or sexual orientation are equally affirmed into membership, leadership, employment, and are joyfully welcomed! Claremont UCC was formed in 1887 as the Claremont Community Church. It is now an Open and Affirming congregation.

The Claremont United Church of Christ Covenant

In response to God's creating, redeeming, and sustaining love, we unite for the worship of God and the service of all.

We seek to know the will of God and to walk in God's ways made known in Jesus Christ,

To love one another,

To proclaim the Gospel to all the world,

To work and pray for peace and justice,

And to live in harmony with all creation,

We trust the presence of the Holy Spirit in trial and rejoicing and the promise of eternal life both now and for evermore. Amen

Genesis 31:1-3, 17-50 -- Hebrews 12:14-16 -- Psalm 119:57-64

2/23/2011

Today we pray for the ministry and mission of Plymouth Church, Des Moines, Iowa:

What We Believe

Our purpose - To increase the love of God and neighbor - comes from the Great Commandment of Jesus: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind and love your neighbors as you love yourself.

Members of our congregation hold to God and to each other through a covenant, or sacred promise, and not through creeds, doctrine or dogma. We agree to differ. We resolve to love. We unite to serve.

We are people on a journey, witnesses for God and disciples of Jesus Christ. As pilgrims, we are energized and led by the Holy Spirit toward unity with God and each other. Living our faith in relationship to our Creator and each other, we seek to make a difference in the quality of all life. We are called to be authentic in our worship, fellowship, teaching and service. Individually we may differ in our calling, but we regard diversity as creative and productive. We desire to enable each other to work toward wholeness and peace in the world. We honor, celebrate and practice inclusiveness. Plymouth Church has been an Open and Affirming congregation since 1993.

Proverbs 3:27-35 -- Luke 18:18-30 -- Psalm 119:57-64

2/24/2011

Two years ago, the National Muslim Christian Initiative met in Los Angeles on February 24, hosted by the Islamic Center of Southern California. The Initiative meets twice a year and brings together members of Muslim and Christian communities including the Islamic Society of North America, the Islamic Circle of North America and member churches of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA of which the United Church of Christ is a member.

(continued on 2/25)

Proverbs 12:22-28 - Philippians 2:19-24 -- Psalm 131

World Day of Prayer
3/4/2011

Finish this sentence: It is a woman's right to... In too many parts of the world, that sentence would remain as incomplete as the very concept of women's rights. Alison Stendahl, who serves with the American Board in Istanbul, Turkey, celebrated Women's World Day of Prayer with Christian women in Istanbul in what she describes as an amazingly diverse group of Christians. The annual March gathering around the world unites ecumenical groups of women in informed prayer and prayerful action. Each year, the event is planned by a host country where the service is tailored to reflect the life experiences and culture of their people. The year Stendahl attended, the host country was Cameroon. "The scriptural passages were taken from Isaiah 42:10-17 and from Acts 16:16-34. Part of the Acts reading was read in Turkish, Chaldean, English, Armenian, French, Greek, German, Arabic, Italian and Assyrian. It was adapted to the life context of the Christian women who wrote the service. The comments focused on the treatment, exploitation and challenges facing girls in Cameroon," Stendahl said.

(Continued on 3/5)

Deuteronomy 30:1-5 -- Romans 9:6-13 -- Psalm 31:1-5, 19-24

3/5/2011

(Continued from 3/4)

Although the girls in Stendahl's school in Turkey are lucky to have the support of their parents who believe in them and their right to education, "this is certainly not the story in all parts of Turkey (and the world) where one does not "waste" resources on girls," Stendahl said. She admitted that there are still parts of Turkey where girls are not sent to school which prompted the Turkish Ministry of Education and UNICEF to sponsor a project called "Haydi Kizlar Okula" or, loosely, "Come on Girls, Let's Go to School". As a result of the project, UNICEF reported an increase of enrollment for girls of 74,500. As Stendahl worshiped with women in a small Chaldean Church on World Day of Prayer, she was able to personally relate to parts of their stories. "We were all bonded together in worship and prayer for a brief period of time before we walked out the door to resume our individual lives. I could appreciate, though, the faith that does bind us," Stendahl said.

God of the covenant, the cloud of your splendor and the fire of your love revealed your Son on the mountain heights. Transform our lives in his image, write your law of love on our hearts, and make us prophets of your glory, that we may lead others into your presence. Amen.

Amos 2:6-11 -- Matthew 7:1-6 -- Psalm 31:1-5, 19-24



2/27/2011

Eighth Sunday after the Epiphany

Seminary Scholarships for Church Vocations

One of the most cherished features of the United Church of Christ has been rigorous practical and academic preparation for people seeking church vocations, whether as pastors, chaplains, administrators, or educators. Today, that tradition continues through scholarships made available through our national ministries.

Linda Jaramillo, a 2002 grant recipient, was raised a Catholic and came to the UCC over 20 years ago. She says, "As a lay woman in the United Church of Christ, I feel respected, I feel honored and I feel heard. I have hope for the United Church of Christ to become the multiracial, multicultural, open and affirming, accessible-to-all church that it seeks to be. And I really do believe that this will happen in my lifetime." Linda has been helping it happen, serving on several national boards of directors over the years. And today, the Rev. Linda Jaramillo is the Executive Minister of our national Justice and Witness Ministries for the United Church of Christ.

Each congregation's contribution to Our Church's Wider Mission helps provide for the administration of precious scholarship funds that prepare church leaders to guide us into God's future.

Isaiah 49:8-16a -- Psalm 131
1 Corinthians 4:1-5 -- Matthew 6:24-34

2/28/2011

Today we pray for the mission and ministry of Plymouth United Church of Christ, Detroit, MI:

A congregational church which belongs to the United Church of Christ
A Moderate-sized church, yet large enough to feel the power of the community
A church where the Pastor knows you and your family by name
A Bible-based church which places Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior
A church with a marriage ministry to families and the raising of children
A Christian education program of Sunday School and Youth Ministry
A church with a mission to serve the wider community in housing, education and mental health
A blend of traditional and contemporary music worship.

Deuteronomy 32:1-14 -- Hebrews 10:32-39 -- Psalm 104

3/1/2011

March is National Women's History Month. While we recognize and celebrate the accomplishments of women in the United States – achievements that include U.S. Senate seats and leaders of Fortune 500 companies – the endeavors of our sisters in other parts of the world are no less momentous. The Illinois South Conference has sponsored students to attend high school through their Ecuador Partnership ministry. Johanna Blancio, one of the first three girls sponsored by Illinois South congregations, graduated in May 2009 from the Technological University in Quito. Johanna graduated with a degree in mechanical engineering and was the only woman in the class of 2009. More importantly, she is the first woman to ever graduate from that University. Seven more young women received scholarships from ISC congregations for the 2009-2010 school term including Maria, Karina, Monica, Erica, Jessenia, Sandra, and Lizbeth.

God of tender care, like a mother you never forget your children, but comfort and quiet those who are restless and fearful; like a father you know already what we need. In all our anxiety, give us faithful hearts; that in confidence and calm we may seek the kingdom of Christ where your holy will of peace and justice has been made known. Amen.

1 Kings 17:1-16 -- 1 Corinthians 4:6-21 -- Psalm 104

3/2/2011

Today we pray for the mission and ministry of Union Church UCC of Hinsdale, IL:

We are all called by God as disciples of Christ. We affirm all persons as precious to God, just as God made them. As a community of faith in the service of God, we are enriched by our differences including diversity of gender, age, marital and economic status, ethnicity, sexual orientation, race, and physical and mental abilities. We pledge to love, support and serve one another as the Body of Christ. God Is Still Speaking,

We are all called by God as disciples of Christ. We affirm all persons as precious to God, just as God made them. In the service of God, we are enriched by our differences including diversity of gender, age, marital and economic status, ethnicity, sexual orientation, race, and physical and mental abilities. We pledge to love, support and serve one another as the Body of Christ.

Our extravagant hospitality extends beyond the borders of Union Church. We affirm that God calls us to care for one another, and to actively engage in compassion toward neighbor. This commitment leads us to social justice advocacy work on behalf of the impoverished and marginalized. It sends us out into the cities and neighborhoods of our country and into developing nations of the world where mission partnerships offer a hand up instead of a hand out.

Isaiah 66:7-13 -- Luke 12:22-31 -- Psalm 104

3/3/2011

United Under God's Tent

Ecumenical, multiracial, multicultural, multigenerational, inclusive, diverse yet united... sounds like the United Church of Christ! It is – and it also describes our partnership in a worldwide movement of Christian women of many traditions who observe a common day of prayer each year. The World Day of Prayer, observed the first Friday of March, grew out of women's involvement in mission work. Through World Day of Prayer, women affirm that prayer and action are inseparable and that both have immeasurable influence in the world.

World Day of Prayer dates back to 1812 when women encouraged one another to engage in personal prayer and take leadership in communal prayer within their mission auxiliaries and associations. Women's public prayer and public church leadership were controversial in the mid-nineteenth century. Yet, this emphasis on prayer led to annual days and weeks of prayer. In 1897 women of six denominations formed a joint committee for a united day of prayer for home missions. In 1912 the Women's Boards of Foreign Missions called for a united day of prayer.

Exodus 24:1-8 -- Romans 2:17-29 -- Psalm 31:1-5, 19-24

Global Mission Moment

Does Anybody Really Know What Time It Is?

Who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this? Esther 4:14b

Everyone jokes about African time, but I think the North American concept of time is a big joke. Have you ever noticed how often you hear the word 'busy' in a day? Being busy in North American culture is highly valued. By contrast, African culture does not value being busy. If you ask someone if they are busy, they look at you strangely. Don't even try to ask someone what time it is. They don't have watches. This culture values spending time with friends and family, and helping each other.

In North American culture, I may have had six or seven meetings a day. A typical day in Africa consists of 'footing' to my office and waiting until someone walks in and wants to talk to me. Sometimes there is a meeting scheduled although it's rare to have an appointment. No one has a watch, let alone a phone to call ahead. A meeting scheduled for nine, generally starts at 9:30 but sometimes it gets underway at ten or even eleven. This culture values discussion and consensus building. Decision making by consensus takes time, so there is no predicting when a meeting will end. The more people that attend, the longer the meeting.

Waiting, such as waiting in line or a "queue" is something we in North America abhor. But it is expected in Africa. Why hurry? We in North America never loiter, dawdle or linger around. We are busy. In my former life I was so busy I had to schedule a phone call with my friends. There were never enough hours in a day. When my children were young I often missed their sporting events or dance recitals because I was busy. But here, loitering is a way to chat and connect with friends and family. (And everyone is family.) In Africa, I loiter. I meet a lot of people that way. I learn about their life, their families, and their values. Maybe we in North America have it all wrong. Maybe the joke is on us. Maybe we should loiter more often.

Donald and Maryjane Westra are missionaries with the United Church of Christ in Zimbabwe. Donald serves as staff to the Micro-Enterprise and Strategic Planning/Management Program at Mt. Selinda. Maryjane serves as a health and child care consultant at Mt. Selinda

Through your continued support of Our Church's Wider Mission the Calendar of Prayer for the Mission of the United Church of Christ is made possible; thank you!



3/6/2011

Ninth Sunday after the Epiphany Transfiguration

Amistad Sunday

In 1839, a group of enslaved Africans broke free while being transported around the island of Cuba aboard the coasting schooner *Amistad*. They attempted to sail the small vessel back to Africa, but were captured by the US Revenue Brig Washington off the coast of Long Island, charged with mutiny, and threatened with return to slavery.

Connecticut Congregationalists formed the Amistad Committee, which organized a legal defense, eased the captives' confinement during the lengthy court case, and eventually funded their return to Africa after winning a favorable decision from the US Supreme Court.

The Amistad Committee became a seed for wider advocacy for the abolition of slavery in the United States. In 1846, Lewis Tappan, an Amistad Committee leader, founded the American Missionary Association, the first abolitionist organization with integrated leadership. After the Civil War, the AMA went on to found schools, churches, libraries and universities for the newly freed African Americans of the South.

A Prayer for Amistad Sunday

On this day when we commemorate the Amistad Event, we remember the faithful believers of our church who took up the Amistad cause and fought to secure the inalienable rights that are endowed by you. And yet, O God we know that we cannot rest on remembering because you call upon each of us to act to make a difference in our world today. We need you to move us with your Holy Spirit, the same spirit that charged the Amistad captives to stand up for the freedom that was rightly theirs.

--excerpted from "We Cannot Rest on Remembering," Bernard R. Wilson, Norfield Congregational Church, UCC, Weston, CT.

**Exodus 24:12-18 -- Psalm 2 or Psalm 99
2 Peter 1:16-21 -- Matthew 17:1-9**

3/7/2011

Ever aware of our needs we acknowledge as our Biblical mandate the call to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, receive the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick and visit the prisoner.

- Matthew 25:35

The First Congregational Church of Greenwich, CT church's mission is to proclaim the gospel to all people and to work for the promotion of justice, the reign of peace, and human understanding in all our relationships. We strive through our example to overcome exclusionary practices, discrimination and violence in our society based upon considerations, including but not limited to race, ancestry, age, physical or mental limitations, gender, sexual orientation, social or economic class, and religious background. We commit ourselves to work towards ending hatred, prejudice and discrimination, thereby providing a safe physical, emotional and spiritual haven. As Jesus accepted and included all people, so do we as individuals and as a congregation welcome all who wish to enter our community of faith and invite their participation in the full life of the church. Without exception, we accept each person who joins our community of faith, as an individual and our equal within God's family.

Exodus 33:7-23 -- Acts 7:30-34 -- Psalm 78:17-20, 52-55
3/8/2011

Today marks the 32nd anniversary of the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero. The Roman Catholic Archbishop was killed while celebrating Mass in El Salvador and represents the enormous number of 20th century martyrs who died fighting for human rights in the name of Jesus Christ. Felix Ortiz-Cotto, Area Executive for Latin America and the Caribbean for Global Ministries advises those who plan to serve in Latin America to watch the movie, *Romero*, based on the archbishop's life. The movie helps volunteers to understand the struggles and theologies present in the region. Still an inspiration to many, Archbishop Romero's words continue to reach us: "Peace is not the product of terror or fear. Peace is not the silence of cemeteries. Peace is not the silent result of violent repression. Peace is the generous, tranquil contribution of all to the good of all. Peace is dynamism. Peace is generosity. It is right and it is duty."

-- Oscar Romero

1 Kings 19:9-18 -- Romans 11:1-6 -- Psalm 78:17-20, 52-55

Ash Wednesday -- 3/9/2011

A hymn for those who support Afghan refugee relief efforts:

God, how can we comprehend – though we've seen them times before –
Lines of people without end fleeing danger, want and war?
They seek safety anywhere, hoping for a welcome hand!
Can we know the pain they bear? Help us, Lord, to understand!

You put music in their souls; now they struggle to survive.
You gave each one gifts and goals; now the flee to stay alive.
God of outcasts, may we see how you value everyone,
For each homeless refugee is your daughter or your son.

Lord, your loving knows no bounds; you have conquered death for all.
May we hear beyond our towns to our distant neighbors' call.
Spirit, may our love increase; may we reach to all your earth,
Till your whole world lives in peace; till we see each person's worth.

ABERYSTWYTH 7.7.7.7 D

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17 or Isaiah 58:1-12 -- 2 Corinthians 5:20b–6:10
Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21 -- Psalm 51:1-17

3/10/2011

First Congregational Church of San Jose, CA celebrates the diversity and glory of God's creation through a covenant with the Divine and with one another. We commit ourselves to be active disciples of Jesus Christ through acts of justice and service as we walk humbly with our God.

As a progressive Christian Church, we believe in:

- * Celebrating the Good News with joy and enthusiasm through worship, service and outreach
- * Guiding the faith exploration of our children, youth and adults through Christian Education, intellectual dialogue and opportunities for spiritual growth
- * Valuing and honoring all individuals as children of God
- * Walking with our brothers and sisters during times of joy and sorrow
- * Drawing on lay leadership to provide wisdom and faith within our congregation and the greater community
- * Reaching out to the world for the advancement of peace and justice
- * Sharing our gifts and resources wisely in the service of our Lord

Jonah 3:1-10 -- Romans 1:1-7 -- Psalm 51
3/11/2011

We are Christian: "Christian" means we perceive in Jesus the divine qualities of love, peace, joy, and justice. Following the teachings of Jesus is a path to God. "Christian" means we eagerly explore the Bible for its spiritual wisdom contained in symbol, metaphor, and history. We find in this sacred book stories that echo our own lives and struggles. "Christian" means we have a specific tradition and history to which we are drawn. We also explore other faith traditions and create new ideas that will themselves become history for later generations.

We are Open-Minded: "Open-Minded" means we understand faith as a quest, not a clutched certainty. "Open-Minded" transcends the conservative and liberal labels. We enter appreciatively into different points of view with the expectation of learning and growing. We see openness as a key to meaningful spirituality. We are Spiritual: "Spiritual" means we believe God is a spirit of love that can be felt and known by each one of us. It means Christianity is as much about the heart as the head, as much about the body as the mind. We are the Congregational Church of San Mateo, CA.

Jonah 4:1-11 -- Romans 1:8-17 -- Psalm 51
3/12/2011

God is still speaking....and the United Church of Christ isn't the only denomination that is listening. "Since 2004 the United Reformed Church has been following the UCC's God is Still Speaking campaign with great interest and excitement," said Roberta Rominger, UCC Mission Associate and General Secretary of the United Reformed Church. "Several groups of URC leaders visited the UCC in Cleveland to learn more. Plans were laid, funds were raised and a campaign coordinator was employed. Then the work on identity began seriously so that an ad agency could be briefed." The work came to fruition and in March of 2011, Rominger said, "the URC's 13 synods (like UCC conferences) met to see the content of the campaign for the first time and to commit themselves to the preparation required in order to offer an open-hearted welcome to people who will encounter our ads." Pray for the URC in order that God's invitation may be heard.

Isaiah 58:1-12 Matthew 18:1-7 Psalm 51

3/18/2011

Today we pray for the ministry and mission of Plymouth Church Shaker Heights, OH:

Nurtured by God's grace,
challenged by Christ's witness,
emboldened by the Holy Spirit,
we are creating a true community, each of us a diverse expression of One God.
Acknowledging our role in God's mission,
through our faith and amidst our doubts,
we explore our call to live the Gospel.
Opening our hearts to God's ongoing revelation,
we steward our gifts in faithful discipleship.
Leading lives of compassion, sharing and celebration,
We join with God in building a world of peace, justice and liberation.

Micah 7:18-20 Romans 3:21-31 Psalm 121

3/19/2011

Most people have heard of summer squash, but what about March green beans? Or May pork and beans? No, this isn't some new hybrid organic farming. It's a great idea from the Mission Board of St. Peter UCC of Centralia, Ill. for collecting food for the local food pantry. Instead of asking the congregation for canned goods, the church collects just one item for the month – corn in January, for example, or peas in September. Not only is it easy for members to remember what to buy, but the Mission Board takes inventory of the items and that makes it easy for the food pantry to keep track of what they have received. More than 400 cans are collected at St. Peter UCC each month which helps serve the more than 1,000 people who use the Centralia food pantry. Yes we can!

God of amazing compassion, lover of our wayward race, you bring birth to a pilgrim people, and call us to be a blessing for ourselves and all the world. We pray for grace to make your generous gift and step with courage on this holy path, confident in the radiant life that is your plan for us, made known and given in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Isaiah 51:4-8 -- Luke 7:1-10 -- Psalm 121



**3/13/2011
First Sunday in Lent**

"Hands Wide Open"

Lent is a time of spiritual discipline in preparation for the celebration of Easter. At root, penitence, like repentance, involves a turning away from self-reliance to trust in God—a change of mind and life direction evoked by the good news of Jesus Christ.

At heart, stewardship is about where we place our trust. It is less about possessions than possessiveness. Our capacity to love is hampered by our need to have. This is an issue of control: How much must I maintain to feel secure? Stewardship is a spiritual discipline that loosens our grip on what we have for the sake of what we love. Loving and trusting God in the spirit of Christ, we live and give more freely and openly, less anxiously, less selfishly, more generously.

An ancient rabbi wrote, "We are born with our fists clenched and die with our hands wide open." The plain facts of life and death confirm God's will and point to God's way for us. In effect, we have to find a way to hold onto life with open hands. That is the Lenten discipline of stewardship: learning how to hold what we have less tightly, without clutching, more openly and hopefully—turning toward God, hands open.

**Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7 Psalm 32 Romans 5:12-19
Matthew 4:1-11**

3/14/2011

Today we pray for the mission and ministry of Plymouth Church Seattle, WA:

Plymouth has a church community heritage of social justice in Seattle that dates back to the late 1800s. We're proud of the church community we've become. When we say, "come as you are," we mean it.

We are a diverse group of people. We are persons of different ages, education, races, abilities, sexual orientations, theological and political beliefs, socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds. We celebrate and find strength in that diversity, and view it as a way to understand the inclusiveness of God. We affirm that gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons are welcome within the Plymouth community upon making the same affirmation of faith that all other members make. We encourage gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and their loved ones, who are already loyal and active members and friends of Plymouth Church and the United Church of Christ, to share their talents, gifts, and energy in the liturgy, life, employment, and leadership of the congregation.

We covenant with one another to seek and to respond to the word and the will of God. We propose to walk together in God's ways, made known and to be made known to us. We hold it to be the mission of the Church to witness to the Good News of God made known to us in Jesus Christ and to strive for truth, for justice, and for peace. As did our forebears, we depend upon the Holy Spirit to lead and to empower us. We pray for the coming of God's Peace, and we look with faith to the triumph of righteousness and life. Plymouth Church

1 Kings 19:1-8 -- Hebrews 2:10-18 -- Psalm 32

3/15/2011

Judy Chan is a missionary serving with the Hong Kong Christian Council. In May 2010, Judy celebrated her 16th anniversary in Hong Kong – a milestone she admits should make her an "expert" on Asia. But she humbly says that isn't the case because she "is constantly discovering something new that I probably should have learned a long time ago." To prove her point, she recalls a recent course she took on Asian Theologies at a local seminary, taught by Dr. K.C. Abraham. What she remembers Dr. Abraham saying that profoundly informed her own spirituality is that if you want to do Asian Theology you must take two things seriously: the multi-faith experience of Asia and the grim reality of poverty. "In earlier days, I was more resistant to changing my theology because I believed it would compromise my hard-earned core beliefs. Now I find myself more willing to see what God has offered – not a compromise, but an opportunity to open myself to wisdom that is not of my own making," she says. (Continued on 3/16)

Genesis 4:1-16 -- Hebrews 4:14–5:10 -- Psalm 32

3/16/2011

(Continued from 3/15)

Judy has had the chance to visit India, the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia and Myanmar through her work with the World Association for Christian Communication. Though her visits lasted only about a week in each place, Judy says she "was able to get a glimpse of the beauty and pain in each place. It is humbling to see how the Christian Church continues to witness and serve under such complex and often oppressive conditions." In Asia, Christians are usually a minority who face dangerous circumstances, Judy says. "How can they live in peace and unity with their neighbors? At the same time, we can't speak about the Bible, church, etc. without dealing with the fact that much of the world's poor live in Asia. What word of hope do we speak? What action for justice do we take?" She quotes Salvatore Martinez' prayer in answer: "In the lands of Asia, fear and terror reign; people long for true peace in the light of your face. O God, let your mission fill your children's vision, to heal the suffering and help the struggling."

Exodus 34:1-9, 27-28 -- Matthew 18:10-14 -- Psalm 32

**St. Patrick's Day
3/17/2011**

Today we pray for the ministry and mission of University Congregational UCC, Seattle, WA:

As an open and affirming congregation, we celebrate our diversity in religious background, sexual orientation, race, and abilities. You are welcome... whether you are a **believer**, a **seeker** or a **doubter**.

University Congregational United Church of Christ is a *progressive liberal Protestant church*. We see ourselves as an inclusive church, open to diverse people and beliefs, but rooted in God's extravagant love, mercy and justice. At the start of every worship service our clergy declares, "You are welcome here, whether you are a believer, a seeker, or a doubter. We pray that you will be met here by the living Christ."

We are a *covenantal church*, not a doctrinal church. This means that members of our church agree to work together toward certain shared principles. Our members are not required to swear allegiance to a defined set of beliefs.

Isaiah 51:1-3 -- 2 Timothy 1:3-7 -- Psalm 121

3/25/2011

The psalmists took life experiences and turned them into prayer poetry. The psalmists, like God, are still speaking. Global Ministries missionary, Elena Huegel, an environmental and Christian education specialist serving the Pentecostal Church of Chile, is our modern-day psalmist -- weaving beauty from uncertainty in the aftermath of the earthquake:

Silent Aftermath

Written by Elena Huegel / March 25, 2010

*Young tree growing crooked within the only
available patch of light brightening the
walled hole of a patio.
Poverty's condominium,
long row of dark doorways,
mirror images endlessly
copied from the one out to the street.
And on the morning after
the earth broke you free
your leaves quaked in the breeze.
Rubble rising high round your roots,
you survived when the patio
was cracked open letting
hope out,
trembling free
in the silent
aftermath.*

Exodus 16:9-21 -- Ephesians 2:11-22 -- Psalm 95

3/26/2011

The Youth Mentoring Initiative (YMI) of Bath United Church of Christ, Bath, Ohio, helps young people learn about the importance of saving money. Janie Bechtel of Bath United Church of Christ said about the not for profit agency that it is a "mentoring project that serves at risk adolescents in a variety of areas pertaining to making smarter decisions." The youth attend a class in the church each Sunday evening and work through the book by Dr. Ruby Payne, *The R Rules*. This study helps them to learn about the 10 different resources necessary for success. Ten adults from the church serve as mentors for the eleven students that are in the program. The next step in the program is to assist the young people in finding employment. Working with the county the program was able to successfully not only create jobs for 75 more young adults in the area, but help the eleven young people save money for their education as they attend college. This saving was partially made possible through matching funds made available by the congregation.

Exodus 16:27-35 -- John 4:1-6 -- Psalm 95



3/20/2011

Second Sunday in Lent

Keeping Churches Strong

"Heavenly Parent, your loving warmth comes to us in the sun's first rays and the moon's first beams. You have placed us at the edge of Your sea where we can walk paths like those Christ walked. By Your grace, may we always give thanks, always contribute joyfully, and always offer our energies to bring hope and compassion for all Your creatures. Amen."

A prayer from Eastport Central Congregational Church, UCC, the Rev. John MacDuffie, Pastor.

The steeple at Eastport Central Congregational Church, UCC, in Eastport, Maine, receives the sun's light each morning before any other UCC church—and possibly before any church in the country!

Church steeples are enduring parts of the landscape in much of the country. In many places, they rise above everything else in town—symbols of hope for many, and holding meaning for church and community members alike.

Like 95% of all UCC churches, Eastport Central Congregational Church was built before 1960—well before 1960, in the case of Eastport. Church buildings, and their steeples, often require costly maintenance. Fortunately, in the United Church of Christ, our congregations can turn to the Cornerstone Fund, which provides loans to churches when, frequently, banks turn them down. Not only that, the loans—for refurbishing, rebuilding, and refinancing debt—are provided at the lowest possible interest rate.

The Cornerstone Fund is ready to help the churches of the United Church of Christ endure well into the 21st century.

**Genesis 12:1-4a -- Psalm 121 -- Romans 4:1-5, 13-17
John 3:1-17 or Matthew 17:1-9**

3/21/2011

Who would think that a banana could be used to teach an Easter week lesson? In the Orthodox Church, Holy Week begins on St. Lazarus Day, the day before Palm Sunday. At the Church of St. Mary and Martha in al-Azariyya, a Jerusalem neighborhood, the congregation celebrates the Eucharist and then processes to the Tomb of Lazarus. On the 500 meter walk to the tomb, banana vendors sell their fruit to the worshippers. Everyone is eating a banana as they walk to the tomb. Why eat a banana? An Orthodox Palestinian Christian answered, "unbind him and let him go." Eating a banana on St. Lazarus Day symbolizes the ultimate unbinding in the coming days of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday and finally Easter Sunday. As the peel of the banana is removed, these Orthodox Christians are mindful of how Jesus unbinds us and sets us free.

Numbers 21:4-9 -- Hebrews 3:1-6 -- Psalm 128

3/22/2011

Today we pray for the mission and ministry of First Congregational UCC, Sioux Falls, SD:

- We are believers in a living, stillspeaking God.
- We seek to shape our lives by the teachings and example of Jesus.
- We strive to embody the Spirit of God: we are "God's hands at work in the heart of the city."
- We celebrate diversity of thought and interpretation.
- We seek to balance personal and social transformation in our faith practices.
- We are a covenantal rather than a creedal church, attentive to scripture, devoted to education and selfgovernance, informed and guided by the continually unfolding revelation of God.
- We don't tell you what to believe, but we promise to step up and walk beside you as you explore the faith for yourself.
- We take the Bible far too seriously to take it literally.
- It feels warm and safe here, big enough to be diverse, small enough to feel like family.
- We blend familiar traditions and symbols with fresh ideas that keep the faith relevant.

We offer a generous portion of our gifts and resources, passions and dreams, talents and financial support to nourish our shared life of mission and ministry. We offer ourselves in service to God in all the places we live and work, allowing ourselves to be continually shaped into more compassionate, more merciful and more just persons for the sake of the broken world.

Isaiah 65:17-25 -- Romans 4:6-13 -- Psalm 128

3/23/2011

The Urbandale UCC, Urbandale, Iowa is a community of people who covenant with God and each other to walk together in the way of the Christian faith, responding to and rejoicing in the cost and joy of discipleship. Together, we commit ourselves to:

- * Affirm the tenets of the Christian faith
- * Celebrate the good news that God has come and remains among us
- * Proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ through word and deed
- * Embody God's love and justice in all that we do and share with the world.

We covenant to be a community which remains open to the challenges of the Christian faith. We welcome into this community of faith, and affirm the participation in all aspects of church life, persons of every age, race, gender, nationality, ability, and sexual orientation. We will continue our efforts toward inclusiveness, and stand against all forms of discrimination.

We will empower ourselves, our children, and one another to be fully present in the world, living in Christ's image and striving for justice and peace.

Ezekiel 36:22-32 -- John 7:53-8:11 -- Psalm 128

3/24/2011

Transitioning from prison to "the outside" has its unique set of challenges – not the least of which is finding employment and a place to live. First Congregational Church in Bloomfield, Connecticut has joined in ministry with Community Solutions, Inc. – a non-profit agency that works with male ex-inmates as they rejoin society. These men have been chosen to live in a local transitional housing facility and are provided shoes and clothing at no charge from "The Clothes Closet". Volunteers from First Congregational help by sorting and displaying clothing donations at the church. The former inmates transport the clothes to The Clothes Closet and can then make their selections. Providing new and gently worn clothing for these men as they seek employment and reconnect with their communities is an important step in bridging the many obstacles they face.

Enduring Presence, goal and guide, you go before and await our coming. Only our thirst compels us beyond complaint to conversation, beyond rejection to relationship. Pour your love into our hearts, that, refreshed and renewed, we may invite others to the living water given to us in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Exodus 16:1-8 -- Colossians 1:15-23 -- Psalm 95

4/1/2011

Here at Danville Congregational Church, Danville, CA our members come from many religious traditions, from Baptist to Catholic, from Unitarian to Orthodox, or with no church background at all. We celebrate our differences, rejoice in our common faith, and encourage one another on the journey. We believe that God is still speaking to us in our everyday lives and that God has yet many truths to be revealed. Through study, sharing, serving, listening, and prayer, we seek to discover the sacred in our lives and in our world.

We are a body of 325 members who care deeply for each other and for our neighbors near and far. Our compassion becomes action as we strive to provide assistance and support to our members, to our community, and to those beyond. At DCC, members express their passion and compassion for our brothers and sisters through prayer, presence, financial support, gifts of food and supplies, and hands-on work and service.

Christian education and spiritual nurture are a top priority for us. Each week, children, youth, and adults engage in study of the scriptures, life issues, and current events.

We believe that every person is a child of God, and every person matters. No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here.

1 Samuel 15:22-31 -- Ephesians 5:1-9 -- Psalm 23

4/2/2011

Central Congregational UCC, Atlanta, GA has been a liberal, progressive Christian church in Atlanta since 1882. As part of the United Church of Christ, we look back to the teachings of Jesus for guidance as we seek to continue to foster the emergence of God's realm of justice and peace. We are an Open and Affirming church with a Safe Church practice.

Members at Central join with each other as we simultaneously make our journeys as individuals and as a community. Each person is responsible to make their faith "their own". We recognize that the Love of God calls us to accomplish some things that we cannot do alone. We are a Christian community where "Heart and Mind meet." To those efforts, we strive to add our Hand as well. Safe Church

Central is committed to creating and maintaining programs, facilities, and a community in which members, staff, volunteers, and friends can worship, learn, and work together in an atmosphere free from all forms of discrimination, harassment, exploitation, and intimidation. All involved be adequately prepared and educated for the ministry in which they serve others, and to understand the ways in which their use or misuse of authority may impact others.

1 Samuel 15:32-34 -- John 1:1-9 -- Psalm 23



**3/27/2011
Third Sunday in Lent**

Is Your Church 5 for 5?

What is your church batting average?

We're not talking about the summer softball league, because this average has nothing to do with hits, walks, or strikeouts.

It's about being part of Our Church's Wider Mission—giving financial support to the whole United Church of Christ and to our brothers and sisters in need at home and overseas.

There are five annual ways your church can give to support Our Church's Wider Mission. There are the four special mission offerings of the United Church of Christ:

- One Great Hour of Sharing
- Strengthen the Church
- Neighbors in Need
- The Christmas Fund

And then there is **Our Church's Wider Mission Basic Support**: the foundation of all mission in the United Church of Christ. Without Our Church's Wider Mission Basic Support, we cannot reach out through the other special mission offerings. With Our Church's Wider Mission Basic Support—which is the financial lifeblood of the United Church of Christ, supporting our regional, national, and international work—the United Church of Christ can change lives.

If your church contributes to all four Special Mission Offerings and also contributes to Our Church's Wider Mission Basic Support, then your church is batting five for five.

In 2004, more than 900 United Church of Christ congregations batted five for five. Is your church one of those? Each year since 2001, the number of 5 for 5 churches has grown. Join them! Find out about your church's batting average. If it's not five for five, see what you can do!

**Exodus 17:1-7 -- Psalm 95 -- Romans 5:1-11
John 4:5-42**

3/28/2011

We are a strong and active 2,200 member church centered in the downtown area of Vero Beach. Standing in the long tradition of the Protestant Reformation, we partner together to worship God, care for one another, and participate in local missions to help our greater community.

Founded in 1924, Community Church, Vero Beach, FL has had a long tradition of celebrating the arts, caring for the residents of Vero Beach, and nurturing children. Our church hosts the Indian River Symphonic Association which brings world-class symphonies to our community. Through the Music Ministry, we produce a yearly concert series that brings talent from across the country.

Community Church also designates 12% of our annual budget to missions with the vast majority of that money staying within the county. We also have a few special offerings each year to support needs around the world. We not only send money out, but we also send people as well. Whether tutors or volunteers, our members are actively involved in local mission work.

Children are celebrated at Community Church! The Community Preschool prepares 150 young learners each day to find a passion and love for learning. Our Children's Ministry and Youth Ministry help foster children's spiritual lives in themed rooms that range from a theatre, to art, to a state of the art teen center.

Genesis 24:1-27 -- 2 John 1-13 -- Psalm 81
3/29/2011

St. Paul's UCC, Westminster, MD is a faithful and forward-looking Christian congregation. We welcome every person into loving community and bear witness to the power and love of God through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Following Jesus' example, we strive to serve God by serving all of God's creation in everything we do.

It is the Vision of the People of St. Paul's United Church of Christ to:

1. Engage with God in worship
2. Experience God's presence in our lives daily
3. Be a church for all people
4. Sustain one another in faith and love
5. Equip members for Christian service
6. Work toward justice and peace for all of God's creation
7. Invite others into Christian covenant

Genesis 29:1-14 -- 1 Corinthians 10:1-4 -- Psalm 81

3/30/2011

For more than 30 years, the people of Colombia have watched their country torn apart by the violence and greed of three opposing military groups. UCC visitor to Colombia, LaVerne Thorpe met a young Colombian woman, Juanna, whose entire village was forced off their land by a military group because their property was to be used to grow drug crops. The women were herded into the town square where they were forced to sit for hours in the hot sun while their fate was decided. Some were beaten. The group prayed as they became more anxious about what would happen. "Miraculously no one was killed and they were allowed to leave. They left their homes on foot with nothing but the clothes on their backs," Thorpe said. "Juanna is one of the 3 million displaced people in Colombia living in poverty." Juanna now works to help other trauma survivors through the Womens' Network in a church sponsored recovery program that teaches quilting.

Jeremiah 2:4-13 -- John 7:14-31, 37-39 -- Psalm 81
3/31/2011

From everyone who has been given much, much will be required - Luke 12:48

There is a way for those who have been abundantly blessed to share their bounty with others. The Global Ministries Child Sponsorship Program has been providing food, basic health care, clothing, school fees and supplies, livelihood opportunities and in some cases housing for more than 40 years to poor children in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, the Middle East and Europe. The Child Sponsorship Program works in partnership with established agencies linked to the UCC throughout the world. These partnerships allow sponsors to be sure that their gifts will reach children in need. There are currently 15 participating centers with approximately 900 children being served in the program. Throughout its many years of ministry, more than 3,000 children have benefited from the gifts and support of sponsors.

1 Samuel 15:10-21 -- Ephesians 4:25-32 -- Psalm 23