



come as you are

GOD IS STILL SPEAKING

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST 2004 ANNUAL REPORT

Our son, Jason, lives in Seattle and makes his living in the computer field and surfs the web a lot. He caught up with the news that two of the major networks refused to air the ad and really got angry and said he was going to church on Sunday. He did and reports that he was pleased to find an open congregation that embraces its lesbian pastor. The ad was shown prior to worship and he said the pastor wept because of the openness of the church. I have prayed for some time that Jason would reunite with the church and I am stunned at the way it has come about — but then God speaks in his own way to each of us.

Marty (location unknown)

Come as you are...



**UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
2004 ANNUAL REPORT**

Dedicated to Sheila Kelly
1944–2004

Her gentle spirit, invaluable research skills,
and commitment to the United Church of Christ
have been a blessing to us at the national setting for 29 years.

*“What if we were in the business
of helping people overcome their alienation
from God and the Church?”*

— The Stillspeaking Initiative (TSI)

**UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST**



I want to compliment you for the wonderful ad you have created which shows inclusion for all persons in the church ... no matter their race, physical disability or sexual identity! I am a white, female, married, non-Christian, mid-westerner ... so I don't fit in any of the categories. I can say that if this ad reflects the attitude of your church, I may just give our local UCC my support!

Ann (Staunton, Ill.)

EXTRAVAGANT WELCOME — EVANGELICAL COURAGE

One hundred and fifty years ago abolitionist students from Andover Seminary in Massachusetts forsook the relative comfort of pulpits in New England and went to Kansas to establish communities and churches that would help ensure that the Kansas territory would enter the union as a free state. The violence of “bleeding Kansas” greeted these young leaders. In Lawrence, during the Civil War, Confederate raiders burned the town and killed the boys and men of the community, including many members of the church. Then, as now, justice requires evangelical courage grounded in the comfort of belonging to Christ, courage fired by the prophetic teachings of the Scriptures and the prophetic ministry of Jesus. Last December, thousands of our congregations experienced the joy of offering extravagant hospitality to those who responded to our television ads. The Stillspeaking Initiative (TSI) is calling the United Church of Christ to a renewed commitment to evangelism and to the vocation of welcoming the stranger to the community of grace and discipleship we know in Christ. As we discovered in the midst of the controversy caused by the mainstream media’s refusal to air our commercial, extravagant hospitality requires its own kind of evangelical courage. The Jewish scholar Abraham Heschel called it “spiritual audacity.” Our own Reinhold Niebuhr, perhaps more modestly, named it “a touch of daring.”

Extravagant welcome. Evangelical Courage. We have demonstrated this in the past. Both are at the heart of the vision God is inviting us to claim for our future. As you read this report, look for signs of both and, inspired by these stories, claim the vision for yourselves and your congregation.

John H. Thomas
General Minister and President

come as you are

During this past year we, in the United Church of Christ, have reaffirmed our biblical and theological commitment to hospitality and tolerance.



HOSPITALITY: A SACRED CALLING

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

— Hebrews 13:2 NRSV

Showing hospitality toward a stranger was a sacred duty throughout the early Mediterranean world. The Hebrew scriptures, although never specifically using the word, provide frequent instances of strangers (aliens) being received as guests and treated with honor and respect. Both Abraham and Lot received strangers who later turned out to be angels (Gen. 18 & 19). The Levitical code clearly stated, “You shall love the alien as yourself” (Lev. 19:34).

Time and again in the New Testament, Jesus relied on the hospitality and generosity of others (Matt. 8:20), and encouraged his disciples to do likewise (Mk. 6: 7-12). Jesus’ ministry of radical embrace and acceptance was an amplification of expressing love beyond one’s neighbor (Luke 10:29-37). During his mission journeys, the Apostle Paul relied upon the hospitality and goodwill of those who encountered him initially as a stranger (Acts 16:15).

Facing adversity, the earliest Christian communities were bound together in their commitment to provide supportive hospitality to one another (Rom. 12:13). The extravagant embrace by a loving God became a theological cornerstone for an emerging church, as the newly baptized were invited to a “sacramental party” celebrating the sacrificial love of Christ, whose parables of God’s forgiveness and invitation ushered in a new way of living (Luke 15:3-33).

During this past year, we in the United Church of Christ have reaffirmed our biblical and theological commitment to hospitality and tolerance. The Stillspeaking Initiative (TSI) was created with the support of the Executive Council, Collegium of Officers, and Conferences to spark a movement in the United Church of Christ. The Initiative is a collaborative effort to build identity, enhance stewardship and spur evangelism in all settings of the church as we approach our 50th anniversary in 2007.

What has emerged this past year is striking evidence: many of us have fallen in love again with our beloved United Church of Christ; folks “out there” have discovered the vibrant and vital hospitality offered by our church families; a renewed sense of pride in our distinctive identity has blossomed. All this was capped by yet another distinctive mark of commitment — OCWM giving in 2004 was up by more than \$200,000. As one pastor commented, “It’s amazing what intentional hospitality can accomplish.” Truly, 2004 has been the year of “come as you are.” ●

INVITATION OR EXCLUSION?

If a person enters your church wearing expensive clothes, and a street person wearing rags comes in right after, and you say to the first, "Sit here, this is the best seat in the house!" and either ignore the second or say, "Better sit here in the back row," haven't you segregated God's children and proved that you are judges who can't be trusted?

— James 2: 2-4, *The Message* (adapted)

What if Jesus were to stand on the doorstep of any of our churches today? What would he witness? On any given Sunday morning, many of his faithful followers enter the gateway to worship. Yet many more pass by feeling unwelcome — alienated from a community that proclaims welcome, yet often sets up barriers making entrance difficult. The gospel narratives contain many stories about people feeling rejected and isolated from the community of their faith. Their encounter with the Christ was life transforming and brought them into deeper relationship with the living God. If these biblical characters were to seek entrance into a church today, would they be welcome, or would they encounter barriers similar to those that kept them at arms length from the Temple in Jesus' day? Consider the following contemporary parable¹.

As Jesus stood near the entrance of a church, he observed the people seeking entrance. Each worshiper was inspected by the Guardians of the Gate, whose task it was to allow entrance only to those deemed most worthy — subject to the

standard of the accepted norm. To some the guardians gave admittance, yet to others a barrier was erected and those rejected found themselves denied entrance. Jesus gave notice to the standard of the accepted norm, to those turned away, and remembered the lives of those he had touched.

- "You may not enter," proclaimed the Guardians of the Gate. "You are little more than a Samaritan woman. You follow a religious path that is not orthodox. Only those who profess a faith without doubt and question may enter here. Be gone."²
- An impoverished, blind man by the name of Bartimaeus sought entrance. Carrying his belongings in a shopping bag and using a cane for guidance he, too, was stopped by the Guardians of the Gate. "There is a homeless shelter down the street," they announced. "You will find welcome there, not here."³
- "We know of you," declared the Guardians of the Gate. "You follow in the stature of Zacchaeus — one who makes a profit at the expense of others. In your zeal for materialism and wealth you have defrauded many of their income. We do not want your kind setting foot in this sanctuary."⁴
- Suffering from severe hemorrhaging, a nameless woman begged entrance, saying she sought spiritual healing and to know the will of God. "We do not have time for you," stated the Guardians of the Gate. "Go to the medical clinic and seek physical healing."⁵

- A father pushing his wheelchair-bound son stopped at the bottom of the steep steps. "My son is epileptic, and has recently fallen. Please help us up the stairs." The Guardians of the Gate remained silent, staring straight ahead. Exasperated, the man wheeled his son away.⁶

- "Stop. Proceed no further," shouted the Guardians of the Gate. Startled, the two men asked explanation. "It would better for you to be lepers then to bring your unclean lifestyle into this hallowed sanctuary. You may enter only after repentance and renouncement of your sin. Leave immediately."⁷

- Finally, "she" arrived. The Guardians of the Gate knew of her. Everyone knew her. Her reputation preceded her. "How dare you seek entrance? Your sexual indiscretion has marked you as immoral. We do not wish your kind here in the purity of our gathering. Go."⁸

And Jesus, gathering around him those who had sought entrance and been rejected, said, "No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, **come as you are** to me." Turning to the Guardians of the Gate, he said, "God still speaks this day of welcome and acceptance. If you have the heart to hear, then listen." ●

See notes on inside back cover.

I was an active UCC member for 35 years (and out of touch with this denomination for the last five — nothing specific, just drift). Nothing has ever made me so proud to be UCC as this [campaign]. This will motivate me to rediscover the UCC again.

Denise (Kensington, Md.)

...the church needs to be a welcoming place that uplifts one's self-image and encourages individuals to be a vital member of the community.

THE STILLSPEAKING INITIATIVE: UCC TAKES THE SPOTLIGHT

SETTING THE STAGE: FOCUS GROUPS

2004 began with a mad scramble. The decision had been made — full speed ahead with a strategic, five-year marketing plan to proclaim to the world that anyone could find a home in the United Church of Christ. The Stillspeaking Initiative was formally established as an independent, inter-covenantal department reporting to the Executive Council, and an advisory task group was created. Then there were resources to prepare, commercials to produce, people to train, web sites to construct, staff to hire ... so much to do, with so little time before the test market phase began in February.

One of the first items of business was to hold focus groups in three test market areas to gain objective input into what unchurched people thought about the church. Gathering demographic data was essential to initiating a successful campaign. In each market, two focus groups were conducted among Christian non-church or infrequent church attendees, 35–54 years of age, who believe in a higher power and consider themselves to be spiritual. Here are some excerpts from the findings of the report issued by the advertising agency working with TSI:

- Almost no one in any of the focus groups was aware of the UCC.
- Disaffection from the church was very apparent. Everyone had a story stemming from personal rejection, disappointment, and the failure of the church to be there for them.
- Several themes ran through the meetings. One, in particular, was emphasized repeatedly: the need for openness and acceptance of all God's children by the church.
- Participants were unanimous — the church needs to be a welcoming place that uplifts one's self-image and encourages individuals to be a vital member of the community



THE BOUNCER



come as you are

The focus group leaders concluded that alienation was at the heart of these individuals' disaffection with the church. "Alienation is about real personal experiences and deep hurts that have caused people to turn away from the church. It is not about the rejection of God or spirituality." However, even with deep levels of distrust — even anger — projected at the church, the focus group participants gave positive feedback. Facilitators observed, "There appears to be a genuine opportunity to bring these people back because they are open to a welcoming church community and extended support system."

The final report provided clear direction: **"A positive, welcoming, come as you are message will reach the desired audience."**

THE COMMERCIAL MESSAGE AND RESPONSE

The 30-second TV commercial, "The Bouncer," has been hailed as a masterful piece of storytelling in the tradition of Jesus' parables. The burley bouncers are a metaphor for that which alienates people from the church. While no church actually has bouncers outside its doors, it's obvious to many (often through the painful experience of rejection) that they are held at arm's length. For whatever reason — age, ethnicity, disability, socio-economic status, sexual identity, whatever — these children of God, in search of a spiritual home, feel left out in the cold. The message of the commercial is simple:

Jesus didn't turn anyone away. Neither do we. No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you're welcome here.

The results of the test market run were overwhelmingly positive. The next phase of the campaign began — inviting UCC congregations across the country to "opt in" and become still-speaking churches, receive hospitality training, update or create new web sites, and be prepared to embrace visitors. The number of churches opting in rose to 2,229 — more than one-third of all UCC congregations.



I swear to you, your new commercial brought immediate tears to my eyes and has inspired me to seek a return to a life of Christianity and God. Thank you so much!

David (Santa Rosa, Calif.)

**Those who needed a friend
to clasp their hand, plus a spirit
to touch their heart.**

With the roll-out of the commercial on independent and cable stations, and the resulting denial by CBS, NBC and ABC to air the commercial, we received more publicity than we could have hoped for. During December, we posted 787,056 web visits (compared to 80,000 per month earlier in the year) and 137,103 visits to the “Find a UCC Church” option (there were 4,000 hits in November).

Testimonies from people alienated by the church filled e-mail boxes at the national setting, and many stories of hope were shared on the special edition Yule Blog at ucc.org. Stories from pastors also flooded in, many about visitors checking out their churches.

- A church in Chapel Hill, N.C., saw more than 50 visitors in December.
- In Massachusetts, one church saw more than 60 newcomers.
- A church in Iowa had 40 new families come through their doors.
- The UCC congregation in Huntington, Pa., had 50 in worship the last Sunday of November and 90 on the first Sunday in December. By mid-January, they had “settled back” to an average attendance between 75 and 80 (that’s a 50 percent increase!)
- In Seminole, Fla., one UCC congregation had 200 more in attendance this Christmas Eve than last Christmas Eve.
- At one church in Cleveland, attendance is up 10-15 percent compared to the same time last year.

Statistics aside, the big story in 2004 was not the TV commercial, but the groundswell of renewed vitality in the UCC. At the national setting, a cross-covenantal program has emerged out of the Evangelism ministry team — the Congregational Vitality Initiative, which already has begun developing resources to aid congregations. The Stewardship and Church Finances ministry team has produced a video production — *Take Hold of Real Life* — integrating stewardship principles, TSI and biblical storytelling into a useful tool for congregations. The first phase of the strategic plan is history. More adventures lie before us as national staff, Conference leaders, and congregations partner together in our ministry of radical welcome. ●

WEB DEACONS: REACHING OUT THROUGH THE WEB

As e-mails began inundating TSI, a trained group of 80 Web Deacons (many retired UCC clergy) answered 858 inquiries submitted on the “Ask a Question” page of the web site. These volunteers responded to people wanting to learn more about the UCC, searching for answers to theological questions, seeking guidance for their spiritual direction, and just plain curious about a church involved in such a “controversial” issue as tolerance. After being part of a team that logged more than 1,435 responses, three Web Deacons shared their experiences.

Being a Web Deacon was a good experience from the word “Go!” I approached my computer each time with excitement. Most of the time, I did not even know the gender of the person making the enquiry. I tried to envision “the shoes” that person might be walking in. What caused them to write what they did? Before I composed my response I offered a prayer for guidance. It was easy to discern that some needed to hear a word of care and well wishes.

Enquiries ranged from genuine faith concerns to their reminding me that I am a sinner, to a professor who sought permission to use our ad in his classes. He felt it was the best church/denomination ad that he had ever seen. This was an exciting adventure for me.

I am now closer to 80 than 70 years of life, but this was a learning experience. In my mind, I saw most of these people as loners. Those who

needed a friend to clasp their hand, plus a spirit to touch their heart. All of this made me more appreciative of the United Church of Christ. We have a treasure to share and we need to be more willing to invite others to join us in this faith venture.

Web Deacon C. J.

Count me among those who have always been suspicious of e-communication, especially with parties who are unknown to each other. Human contact, in my view, should be honest, straightforward, with appropriate intimacy and distance. But my experience as a Web Deacon has changed my perception about the role of e-communication. The mail directed my way often carried questions not easy to ask face to face: What would be the response of “your church” to the children we as a gay couple are raising? How would we as an interracial family find acceptance in your congregations? You don’t just dial-a-church with a question like that.

For a few weeks, our Stillspeaking web site was a portal to a world searching for truth, acceptance, grace and faith. That was true even for the occasional angry person who took exception to our ad, and the member still grappling with our identity. I am convinced it is important to provide safe places for people to ask dangerous questions. It is equally important to respond honestly and with grace. Thank you for trusting us to do that.

Web Deacon George

I’m not sure what I expected when I

volunteered to be a Web Deacon. I was not expecting what became, for me, a pastoral effort to assist folks “out there” to hear this suddenly radical message of the inclusiveness of God’s love. I found myself eager each day to get to the computer, to find the “new” person there, with their question, regardless of what it might be. After about five days, and as many questions, it suddenly dawned on me that just like in the time of Jesus’ ministry, there are a whole lot of people out there struggling with a few very basic (and critically important) issues! Individuals want to understand the “meaning” in their experience of life and death when life is not all that easy. One by one, we are all frequently puzzled by the issue of what “faith” means.

As I worked on some of the questions or comments, it helped me to hear and better understand the anger or fear just living in this world can produce. What surprised me (once again!) was the power of that simple tenet of our faith ... that God is love and that my calling, as a Child of God, is to love my neighbors — regardless of who they are or where they are on life’s journey. It’s just that simple and that challenging, when my “neighbors” are, or seem to be, so different from me!

Web Deacon Eleanor

I am Jewish, my husband is Catholic. We have no official affiliation but care very much about the inclusion of every person into our society. You are doing work that must be done and speaking words that must be spoken. Thank you.

Beth Ann (Bedford, N.H.)

Through a controversy not of our choosing,
we have been given a gift —
the gift of recognition.



WE'RE DIFFERENT NOW

Those were heady days, that first week of December. The United Church of Christ was all over the news. Talk show pundits debated the controversy surrounding us; editorial writers defended our cause. Countless e-mails poured in from individuals proudly identifying with the UCC or joyfully discovering our congregations in their midst. The learnings from this media immersion are multi-layered and complex, humbling and exhilarating. One thing, however, is clear: the UCC is different today than it was at Thanksgiving.

This is a *kairos* moment for our church. People now have a reference point for who we are and what we believe. Phrases like inclusive embrace and extravagant welcome — our phrases — are part of the public lexicon. Columnists in *The New York Times*, commentators on National Public Radio, even a cartoonist in *The Village Voice* now cite the UCC, confident their audiences will recognize the reference. A reporter from BBC radio's popular program, *The World*, calls our office to inquire about efforts regarding tsunami relief.

Through a controversy not of our choosing, we have been given a gift — the gift of recognition. Robert Chase, team leader of the Proclamation, Identity and Communication ministry, explains: "It is incumbent upon us to be good stewards of this gift: to proclaim the Gospel in all its fullness, to help re-cast the national debate on moral values, to stand for Jesus' message of justice, to practice the discipline of hospitality, to engage the public in a nuanced theological conversation about what it means to be a Christian in our time, to break barriers that divide us."

It has become clear that our public ministry has shifted. We need to discern how God is speaking to us in ways that differ from a few short months ago. The insights we uncover will guide us anew as we continue to proclaim the Gospel in our time. ●

**THUMBNAIL SKETCHES
OF NATIONAL MINISTRIES IN 2004**

WIDER CHURCH MINISTRIES

National Disaster Ministries

Four forceful hurricanes hit Florida in the late summer and early fall, leaving heavy damage. The UCC is taking a major role helping to put the long-term recovery plans into place, with four of our churches hosting sites for volunteer work groups for the next several years.

One Great Hour of Sharing

The 2004 OGHS offering broke its \$3 million goal for the seventh consecutive year. Gifts to OGHS allowed the UCC to respond immediately when the tsunami struck Asia and Africa in December. Additional monetary donations and supplies for health and school kits in the recovery effort enabled us to expand our response through Church World Service and other global partners.

Health and Wholeness Advocacy

A new web study resource, "God is Still Speaking About Marriage" explores the complex issues of marriage, especially in light of the public debate concerning same sex-marriage and legislative issues on marriage. In addition, a trip to rural China by three staff members led to a new project to address the difficult challenges of responding to HIV/AIDS in Chinese villages.



Volunteer Ministries

During the UCC National Youth Event, Volunteer Ministries coordinated the donation of more than 750 pounds of food. The ministry continued to work with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in a summer building/educational program in Appalachia called F.A.S.T. (Faithful Advocates Serving Together). Volunteer Ministries celebrates its 50th anniversary in 2005.

Refugee Ministries

In 2004, Refugee Ministries helped resettle 623 refugees. Arrivals have increased by 92 percent due in part to the advocacy efforts of the ecumenical organization Church World Service, of which the UCC is a member.

Global Ministries

Eighteen short-term mission volunteers, four mission interns, and one missionary-in-residence to the United States joined the 100 long-term missionaries serving in more than 50 countries. The Common Global Ministries Board adopted resolutions calling upon the U.S. government to engage in a process toward the peaceful coexistence of two states, Israel and a future Palestine, and called upon the Israeli government to cease the construction of the wall.

Missionworks Too!

The biennial national mission fest for 150 UCC and Disciples members included keynote speeches by former missionaries, presentations of newly produced Global Ministries videos, and workshops on mission programs. Participants were invited to volunteer for the newly initiated Ministries and Mission Interpreters Advocacy Network, to be launched in 2005.

LOCAL CHURCH MINISTRIES

National Youth Event

"Exceedingly Awesome" was the phrase used by the 3,600 participants to describe NYE 2004. The daily themes of Embrace, Encourage, Empower, and Enlighten set the stage for inspiring leadership by singer/worship leader Ken Medema, Craig Kielburger of "Free the Children," storyteller Valerie Tutson, and the music of Stephen Iverson, David Kinnick, and Lost and Found.

Worshipping into God's Future

After extensive denomination-wide research, this new worship resource has been created and sent to every UCC church. Contemporary music, accompanying visual images on CD, innovative liturgies, and questions for reflection provide a prayerful and exciting opportunity to reflect on the meaning and practice of worship.



I just want to thank you for your new ad campaign. It pleases me so much to see a Christian religion openly welcome all people. There is enough hate in the world, so your message of love of everyone is truly needed and welcome.

Lorraine (Spring, Texas)

Parish Life and Leadership

2004 saw the creation of the “Manual of Church” to complement the “Manual on Ministry.” Both can be found on ucc.org. The new Search and Call video, “Sailing on Faith,” highlights the stories of both congregations and pastors remaining open to unexpected possibilities of being called to ministry together.

Congregational Vitality Initiative

This new initiative, driven by a General Synod mandate, seeks to support, strengthen, affirm and resource local UCC congregations of all sizes, shapes, settings, ethnicities and locations. The CVI working group includes staff from all the Covenanted Ministries, The Stillspeaking Initiative, and a number of Conferences.

Evangelism

The success of The Stillspeaking Initiative has provided new data to help determine placement of new UCC church starts. The new resource, “Planting New Congregations in the UCC,” provides valuable “nitty-gritty” information about starting a congregation from scratch and can be found at ucc.org. Sixty-six new church starts will be invited to the upcoming General Synod.

Stewardship and Church Finances

The new DVD, “Take Hold of Real Life,” provides viewers with inspiring stories of stewardship commitment, links to the revised “Inspiring Generosity” curriculum, with study questions to help congregations and individuals consider their role as stewards. The stewardship team

continues to lead regional gatherings to help educate and resource churches in their ministry.

Cornerstone Fund

Twenty-two churches received loans totaling \$9.5 million for a variety of capital ministry projects — roof replacement, building accessibility, energy efficiency, the renovation of existing structures, and many requests to make facilities more inviting and hospitable. The Cornerstone Fund was able to make a contribution to OCWM — \$44,000!

JUSTICE AND WITNESS MINISTRIES

Let Justice Roll

This campaign was a national interfaith effort to push poverty to the forefront of the U. S. presidential election. The coalition of religious and community-based organizations in more than 30 states sought answers from public officials, delegates to the party conventions and candidates for public office asking the question, “What will you do end poverty?”

Advocacy Issues

JWM worked with our ecumenical partners in Washington, advocating for a full reauthorization of the Welfare Reform program of 1996, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), with primary focus on reducing poverty rather than reducing case loads. Other advocacy efforts include the Social Services Block Grant, child care, food nutrition programs and budget cuts to entitlement programs.

Faith-based Initiatives

JWM worked to cease the advancement of faith-based legislation that would have promoted federally-funded employment discrimination, undermining the credibility and ability of houses of worship to fully provide social services. We advocated for uniform standards for faith-based initiatives to demonstrate how religious and community-based organizations partner with government to provide social services.

New Facilities Planned

The Franklinton Center at Bricks, a UCC conference, retreat and educational facility in eastern North Carolina (which focuses its work in justice advocacy and on leadership development), launched a capital campaign to support the construction of a hotel on the grounds of this historic center.

Rebuilding Rural America

Rebuilding Rural America offers advocacy support for economic justice and the social justice tools and resources needed to strengthen rural communities, from mining towns in Appalachia to desert villages in Arizona.



Thank you for providing a safe and welcoming place for all people to worship. It gives me hope that there are denominations such as yours that embrace all walks of life, all people of color, and all citizens regardless of their sexual orientation.

Grace (location unknown)

Decade to Overcome Violence

JWM partners with the World Council of Churches to seek reconciliation and peace through this initiative that calls churches, ecumenical organizations and all people of goodwill to work together for peace, justice and reconciliation at all levels — local, regional, and global.

The Border Project

This new program brings together JWM and other national setting staff, conferences and associations to grapple with on going border-related issues. The project provides opportunities to meet the people affected, provide humanitarian assistance to those crossing the border, volunteer, and become acquainted with efforts to advocate against flawed U.S. policies.

OFFICE OF GENERAL MINISTRIES

National Setting Community Life

Community Life welcomed more than 525 guests to the church house with tours given to youth groups, confirmation classes, seminarians, lay leaders, international and ecumenical guests, board members, and program attendees. All Staff Days and the compassionate work of our Parish Nurse have provided internal support for national setting employees.



Partner Relations

COREM (the Council for Racial and Ethnic Ministries) met in convocation with present and charter members to assess its future direction; nine UCC delegates attended the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in Ghana to discuss globalization and economic justice; Conference relationships were deepened through programming and partnering in The Stillspeaking Initiative.

Research Services

This past year saw the transition to “e” based documentation. The 2004 Yearbook was produced in CD format and a new web-based application to collect 2005 Yearbook data from local churches and conferences was developed. Research Services worked with the Worship and Education Ministry Team on “Worshiping Into God’s Future,” a four-part survey created in response to a General Synod 24 resolution.

Historical Archives

It’s taken five years, but all the historical information gathered during restructure has been inventoried. A new microfilming project to document important historical data — General Synod minutes, Constitution and By Laws, United Church News, yearbooks, etc. — has been initiated. As the 50th anniversary of the UCC approaches in 2007, historical records and memorabilia are being gathered to enhance upcoming celebrations.

Financial Development

Our commitment to deepen discipleship by encouraging financial investment in ministry was achieved in four major ways this past year: through Financial Development Workshops (with Conferences and local churches), Cultivation Events (bringing together Conference leadership, Collegium members and major donors), continued support of the Stillspeaking Initiative, and “e” technology development to make on line giving more accessible.

Information Services

2004 was the year of spyware (invasive markers to attack a user’s movement on the internet), viruses (worms seeking to break through cracks in firewalls to illegally obtain information), and spam (unwanted messages by the millions). The mission of IS 24/7 has been to prevent our computer network from being slowed down, clogged and incapacitated so that we remain “e” connected with our churches and colleagues in ministry.

Proclamation, Identity and Communication

PIC continues to work in partnership with The Stillspeaking Initiative, providing assistance in video production, web development, and opt-in training. The documentary produced for ABC-TV, “Strong Roots, Fragile Farms” received a top prize platinum award at Houston Filmfest. The initial work for expanding United Church News into an online news service was put into place.

.....
I sit here with tears in my eyes as I write this e-mail. Thank you for recognizing gay and lesbian couples. I have been “married” for 29 years and have tried for too long to integrate my gay life into my [denomination’s] upbringing. It isn’t going to happen soon but UCC gives me hope. I plan to attend a service next Sunday. Thank you, acceptance feels good!

Ron (location unknown)

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST • 2004 Mission Spending Statement of Activity

Unaudited Statement for the Year Ended 12/31/04

	(Note 3)					(Note 1)	(Note 1)		
MISSION FUNDING *	EC	OGM	JWM	LCM	WCM	PB	UCF	TOTAL	% OF TOTAL
OCWM-National Basic Support (NBS)	0	2,367,750	1,821,750	3,087,000	2,483,250	740,250	0	10,500,000	26.64%
OCWM-Special Support	0	0	874,269	61,445	3,155,295	0	0	4,091,009	10.38%
Total Return Draw on Investments	28,291	993,546	1,375,075	4,879,316	3,587,004	0	0	10,863,232	27.56%
Trusts & Gifts	768,983	304,024	41,156	611,110	550,818	0	0	2,276,091	5.77%
Reimbursements	0	634,630	0	920,130	1,594,491	0	0	3,149,251	7.99%
Resource Sales/Fees	433,913	962,894	2,425	3,149,715	1,482	0	0	4,550,429	11.55%
Draw on Unrestricted Reserves	7,131	72,611	144,155	0	602,913	0	0	826,810	2.10%
Internal Fund Transfers (See Note 2)	345,508	0	0	66,392	0	0	0	411,900	1.05%
Other (See Note 4)	2,518,524	15,264	7,294	56,333	146,893	0	0	2,744,308	6.96%
TOTALS	4,102,350	5,350,719	4,266,124	12,831,441	12,122,146	740,250	0	39,413,030	100.00%

MISSION SPENDING *	EC	OGM	JWM	LCM	WCM	PB	UCF	TOTAL	% OF TOTAL
Program Ministries	3,440,084	1,484,442	557,450	2,959,286	4,233,130	740,250	N/A	13,414,642	34.04%
Staff Ministries	219,301	2,493,798	2,243,418	5,301,046	1,930,466	N/A	N/A	12,188,029	30.92%
Overseas Personnel	0	0	0	0	3,351,989	N/A	N/A	3,351,989	8.50%
Retired Overseas Personnel	0	0	0	0	456,631	N/A	N/A	456,631	1.16%
Shared Ministries (Common Services)	48,393	514,224	418,300	1,544,363	528,815	N/A	N/A	3,054,095	7.75%
Operating & Support Ministries	106,189	561,953	697,454	868,815	951,231	N/A	N/A	3,185,642	8.08%
Church House and Other Facilities	13,642	232,250	136,704	563,115	157,974	N/A	N/A	1,103,685	2.80%
Ministry of Governance (Includes General Synod)	115,222	64,052	68,066	110,394	131,432	N/A	N/A	489,166	1.24%
Grants & Subsidies	159,519	0	144,732	1,484,422	380,478	N/A	N/A	2,169,151	5.50%
TOTALS	4,102,350	5,350,719	4,266,124	12,831,441	12,122,146	740,250	0	39,413,030	100.00%

EC Executive Council
OGM Office of General Ministries
JWM Justice and Witness Ministries
LCM Local Church Ministries
WCM Wider Church Ministries
PB Pension Boards
UCF United Church Foundation

*Figures on this statement include interministry transfers.

Interministry transfers are eliminated in the combined audited financial statements.

Note 1: Pension Boards is included to report their distributive allocation of NBS. United Church Foundation does not receive NBS.

Note 2: For EC this figure represents funds transferred from the Office of General Ministries to fund the Executive Council budget.

Note 3: Figures include the operating activity of The Still Speaking Initiative.

Note 4: For EC this figure represents loans made to support The Still Speaking Initiative (TSI).

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST • 2005 Mission Spending Plan

MISSION FUNDING*	EC	OGM	JWM	LCM	WCM	PB	UCF	TOTAL	% OF TOTAL
OCWM – National Basic Support (Note 3)	0	2,462,407	1,916,408	2,994,390	2,408,752	718,043 (Note 1)	N/A (Note 1)	10,500,000	30.40%
OCWM – Special Support	0	0	866,124	57,000	3,000,000	N/A	N/A	3,923,124	11.40%
Total Return Draw on Investments	0	932,935	1,286,354	4,453,041	3,403,659	N/A	N/A	10,075,989	29.20%
Trusts & Gifts	25,000	296,429	128,729	587,393	565,000	N/A	N/A	1,602,551	4.60%
Reimbursements	339,010 (Note 2)	339,752	0	2,076,051	1,528,723	N/A	N/A	4,283,536	12.40%
Resource Sales/Fees	0	605,500	0	1,955,762	0	N/A	N/A	2,561,262	7.40%
Draw on Unrestricted Reserves	0	112,929	144,705	354,420	912,980	N/A	N/A	1,525,034	4.40%
Other	0	26,000	0	20,000	25,000	N/A	N/A	71,000	0.20%
TOTALS	364,010	4,775,952	4,342,320	12,498,057	11,844,114	718,043	n/a	34,542,496	100.00%

MISSION SPENDING*	EC	OGM	JWM	LCM	WCM	PB	UCF	TOTAL	% OF TOTAL
Program Ministries	0	1,318,043	807,085	3,285,561	4,007,425	718,043	N/A	10,136,157	29.30%
Staff Ministries (All Staff)	0	2,075,319	2,086,042	4,905,888	1,980,986	N/A	N/A	11,048,235	32.00%
Overseas Personnel	0	0	0	0	3,072,329	N/A	N/A	3,072,329	8.90%
Retired Overseas Personnel	0	0	0	0	480,000	N/A	N/A	480,000	1.40%
Shared Ministries (Common Services)	0	539,790	483,880	1,424,474	650,000	N/A	N/A	3,098,144	9.00%
Operating & Support Ministries	125,000	536,991	728,720	755,599	899,586	N/A	N/A	3,045,896	8.80%
Church House and Other Facilities	0	245,309	141,593	585,297	165,000	N/A	N/A	1,137,199	3.30%
Ministry of Governance (Includes General Synod)	80,000	60,500	65,000	130,000	160,000	N/A	N/A	495,500	1.40%
Grants & Subsidies	159,010	0	30,000	1,411,238	428,788	N/A	N/A	2,029,036	5.90%
TOTALS	364,010	4,775,952	4,342,320	12,498,057	11,844,114	718,043	N/A	34,542,496	100.00%

EC Executive Council
OGM Office of General Ministries
JWM Justice and Witness Ministries
LCM Local Church Ministries
WCM Wider Church Ministries
PB Pension Boards
UCF United Church Foundation

*Figures on this statement include interministry transfers.

Note 1: Pension Boards is included to report their distributive allocation of NBS. United Church Foundation does not receive NBS.

Note 2: In 2005 \$339,010 is budgeted to be transferred from the Office of General Ministries to the Executive Council to fund their budget.

Note 3: Allocation % will not agree to the GS allocation because the ministries agreed to each contribute 3% of their distributive share of NBS "to create a budget stabilization pool for 2005, which was then allocated by agreement among the Collegium."

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST OCWM • Basic Support 2004/2003 Comparison by Conference

CONFERENCE	2004					2003				
	NATIONAL	% of Total	CONFERENCE	% of Total	TOTAL	NATIONAL	% of Total	CONFERENCE	% of Total	TOTAL
CAL NEV NORTH	159,400	20.0%	637,599	80.0%	796,999	106,853	18.2%	480,335	81.8%	587,188
CAL NEV SOUTH	190,581	40.0%	285,872	60.0%	476,453	196,682	40.0%	295,022	60.0%	491,704
CALVIN SYNOD	326	(Note 3)	(Note 1)	(Note 3)	326	600	(Note 3)	(Note 1)	(Note 3)	600
CENTRAL ATLANTIC	424,788	35.0%	788,720	65.0%	1,213,508	431,791	37.1%	733,322	62.9%	1,165,113
CENTRAL PACIFIC	74,588	23.0%	235,792	76.0%	310,380	69,632	22.5%	239,842	77.5%	309,474
CONNECTICUT	1,519,392	63.1%	888,432	36.9%	2,407,824	1,592,163	63.2%	927,666	36.8%	2,519,829
FLORIDA	138,806	19.6%	569,269	80.4%	708,075	132,984	18.8%	575,381	81.2%	708,365
HAWAII	108,452	33.3%	217,656	66.7%	326,108	117,368	31.2%	258,860	68.8%	376,228
ILLINOIS	657,168	31.5%	1,429,079	68.5%	2,086,247	638,162	31.5%	1,388,653	68.5%	2,026,815
ILLINOIS SOUTH	226,910	35.0%	422,200	65.0%	649,110	229,045	34.7%	430,483	65.3%	659,528
INDIANA-KENTUCKY	393,318	35.0%	730,448	65.0%	1,123,766	391,625	34.1%	755,230	65.9%	1,146,855
IOWA	485,273	45.0%	593,478	55.0%	1,078,751	501,205	46.0%	588,370	54.0%	1,089,575
KANSAS-OKLAHOMA	73,782	25.5%	215,560	74.5%	289,342	72,807	25.0%	218,423	75.0%	291,230
MAINE	137,500	22.4%	476,369	77.6%	613,869	137,000	22.5%	472,083	77.5%	609,083
MASSACHUSETTS	1,298,966	60.0%	864,778	40.0%	2,163,744	1,408,315	60.0%	938,877	40.0%	2,347,192
MICHIGAN	264,136	31.0%	588,416	69.0%	852,552	276,120	32.3%	577,485	67.7%	853,605
MINNESOTA	308,188	34.8%	578,683	65.2%	886,871	317,023	34.8%	593,823	65.2%	910,846
MISSOURI MID S	218,549	25.0%	655,114	75.0%	873,663	221,678	25.0%	665,034	75.0%	886,712
MONT N WYOMING	33,420	20.0%	133,683	80.0%	167,103	34,470	20.0%	137,880	80.0%	172,350
NEBRASKA	140,745	30.4%	321,804	69.6%	462,549	145,336	30.4%	332,416	69.6%	477,752
NEW HAMPSHIRE	396,685	45.0%	484,837	55.0%	881,522	352,461	47.0%	398,024	53.0%	750,485
NEW YORK	107,018	11.8%	799,648	88.2%	906,666	140,500	14.6%	820,150	85.4%	960,650
NORTHERN PLAINS	13,435	14.0%	82,374	86.0%	95,809	13,070	11.5%	100,536	88.5%	113,606
OHIO	718,207	27.8%	1,866,939	72.2%	2,585,146	836,018	30.2%	1,931,638	69.8%	2,767,656
PACIFIC NW	139,904	24.1%	441,414	75.9%	581,318	171,035	29.3%	412,049	70.7%	583,084
PENN CENTRAL	526,088	43.8%	673,864	56.2%	1,199,952	527,691	42.9%	703,420	57.1%	1,231,111
PENN NE	69,702	10.0%	627,323	90.0%	697,025	82,069	11.4%	638,619	88.6%	720,688
PENN SE	406,096	31.4%	889,057	68.6%	1,295,153	400,171	30.8%	899,902	69.2%	1,300,073
PENN WEST	72,293	17.0%	353,521	83.0%	425,814	66,408	16.1%	344,913	83.9%	411,321
PUERTO RICO	7,000	2.0%	349,692	98.0%	356,692	5,500	1.5%	352,000	98.5%	357,500
RHODE ISLAND	130,000	40.8%	188,442	59.2%	318,442	130,000	44.8%	159,983	55.2%	289,983
ROCKY MOUNTAIN	151,482	30.0%	353,459	70.0%	504,941	102,307	20.0%	409,228	80.0%	511,535
SOUTH CENTRAL	61,599	19.8%	249,219	80.2%	310,818	60,000	20.5%	232,365	79.5%	292,365
SOUTH DAKOTA	75,947	25.0%	227,841	75.0%	303,788	73,038	25.0%	219,112	75.0%	292,150
SOUTHEAST	31,200	14.2%	187,822	85.8%	219,022	32,000	12.8%	217,768	87.2%	249,768
SOUTHERN	49,691	8.4%	545,280	91.6%	594,971	65,404	10.0%	588,638	90.0%	654,042
SOUTHWEST	99,211	24.0%	314,168	76.0%	413,379	90,307	23.0%	302,332	77.0%	392,639
VERMONT	218,072	44.6%	270,361	55.4%	488,433	213,447	44.9%	261,663	55.1%	475,110
WISCONSIN	505,000	23.0%	1,693,918	77.0%	2,198,918	500,000	22.1%	1,759,983	77.9%	2,259,983
MISC.	99,639	100.0%	(Note 2/Note 3)	00.0%	99,639	53,106	100.00%	(Note 2/Note 3)	00.0%	53,106
TOTAL (Note 3)	10,732,557	33.4%	21,232,131	66.6%	31,964,688	10,935,391	33.7%	21,361,508	66.3%	32,296,899
Retention Ratio 1967		58.0%		42.0%						

Note 1: Information not provided by the Conference Note 2: Support sent directly to National by churches or individuals. Note 3: Excluded from retention %, no conference data

CONFERENCE	CHANGE GAIN/LOSS	CHANGE GAIN/LOSS	TOTAL
	NATIONAL	CONFERENCE	
CAL NEV NORTH	52,547	157,264	209,810
CAL NEV SOUTH	-6,101	-9,150	-15,251
CALVIN SYNOD	-274	N/A	-274
CENTRAL ATLANTIC	-7,003	55,398	48,395
CENTRAL PACIFIC	4,956	-4,050	906
CONNECTICUT	-72,771	-39,234	-112,005
FLORIDA	5,822	-6,112	-290
HAWAII	-8,916	-41,204	-50,120
ILLINOIS	19,006	40,426	59,432
ILLINOIS SOUTH	-2,135	-8,283	-10,418
INDIANA-KENTUCKY	1,693	-24,782	-23,089
IOWA	-15,932	5,108	-10,824
KANSAS-OKLAHOMA	975	-2,863	-1,888
MAINE	500	4,286	4,786
MASSACHUSETTS	-109,349	-74,099	-183,448
MICHIGAN	-11,984	10,931	-1,053
MINNESOTA	-8,835	-15,140	-23,975
MISSOURI MID S	-3,129	-9,920	-13,049
MONT N WYOMING	-1,050	-4,197	-5,247
NEBRASKA	-4,591	-10,612	-15,203
NEW HAMPSHIRE	44,224	86,813	131,037
NEW YORK	-33,482	-20,502	-53,984
NORTHERN PLAINS	365	-18,162	-17,797
OHIO	-117,811	-64,699	-182,510
PACIFIC NW	-31,131	29,365	-1,766
PENN CENTRAL	-1,603	-29,556	-31,159
PENN NE	-12,367	-11,296	-23,663
PENN SE	5,925	-10,845	-4,920
PENN WEST	5,885	8,608	14,493
PUERTO RICO	1,500	-2,308	-808
RHODE ISLAND	0	28,459	28,459
ROCKY MOUNTAIN	49,175	-55,769	-6,594
SOUTH CENTRAL	1,599	16,854	18,453
SOUTH DAKOTA	2,909	8,729	11,638
SOUTHEAST	-800	-29,946	-30,746
SOUTHERN	-15,713	-43,358	-59,071
SOUTHWEST	8,904	11,836	20,740
VERMONT	4,625	8,698	13,323
WISCONSIN	5,000	-66,065	-61,065
MISC.	46,533	N/A	46,533
TOTAL (Note 3)	-202,834	-129,377	-332,211
	-61.06%	-38.94%	

NOTES to PAGE 7

1. Adapt this parable for use in worship or other programs. Have a narrator read the main text with additional voices reading the encounters of rejection. Two people can stand as Guardians of the Gate (bouncers) and act as visual enforcers.
2. *John 4 1-20*, the story of Jesus and woman at the well.
3. *Mark 10 46-52*, Jesus' encounter with the blind beggar on his way to Jerusalem.
4. *Luke 19 1-10*, Zaccaheus has a change of heart upon seeing Jesus face to face.
5. *Matthew 9: 20-22*, this is the briefest gospel telling of this woman's brave action.
6. *Mark 914-29*, the child's epilepsy was so severe that the seizures left him battered and bruised.
7. *Mark 1 40-45*, lepers were considered unclean and untouchable.
8. *John 8 1-11*, Jesus' act of forgiveness saved the woman's life.

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