

CONTACT: an edition of United Church News

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FOR THE GLORY OF GOD GLORIA DE DIOS



BY REV. INEKE
K. MITCHELL

Over 200 people gathered for worship on Epiphany Sunday at Immanuel United Church of Christ in Hartford to celebrate the new partnership formed

between Immanuel and Iglesia Cristiana Nueva Esperanza (New Hope Christian Church). New Hope, a church in development, has been worshipping at First Congregational Church in East Hartford. New Hope's need for expanded space and the congregation's sense of call to a regional ministry prompted them to seek a new home in Hartford. The Rev. Edwin O. Ayala, Interim Pastor at Nueva Esperanza, and the Rev. Nancy Allen, Associate Pastor at Immanuel, both work at the Christian Activities Council. Over the course of several months in 2008, their combined energy and vision for this partnership helped bring about this day of celebration.

Immanuel's Senior Pastor the Rev. Dr. Edward Horstmann welcomed everyone to the festive service.

Hartford Mayor Eddie Perez and his wife Maria brought greetings; the mayor thanked the congregation for the invitation to this celebration and then reminded the worshipers that the meaning of "epiphany" is "to reveal," that this partnership will indeed show that God is present in the good work done through ministry in the city.

Revs. Allen and Ayala spent time with the children who were surprised by a visit of the Three Kings. Rev. Ayala explained the importance of the Epiphany holiday in parts of the Hispanic tradition. As Jesus received gifts from the magi because he was so special, the children would also be receiving gifts from the Three Kings because they, too, are all special children of God.

In his reflection, Rev. Horstmann shared insights gained from recent readings about the challenges of urban ministry. Among its challenges are a *relative comfort with a high degree of chaos* and *being as open as possible to the unexpected*. His hope and prayer for this partnership is that true friendship will develop between the congregations and that it be a light to the world.

The two congregations will be worshipping at the same time so that church school can be a combined program for all children together. Members of each church will

feel free to worship with the other community from time to time to learn and to build community. Both congregations value the experience of diversity and are committed to God's call to justice work.

Rev. Ayala, in his meditation on this special day, expressed deep gratitude for Immanuel's stewardship of space. He said, "often I am asked what it means to say 'God is Still



The Rev. Edwin O. Ayala and the Rev. Dr. Edward Horstmann

Speaking.' Today it is very easy to explain." He remembered words by the late Robert Kennedy on the difficulty that people alone have in making history and said, "together we will make history."

The gift of space from Immanuel and the gift of diversity that New Hope brings to this adventure is a blessing to both congregations, as they dream together of making a true difference with and for the Hispanic community in Hartford.

Just before celebrating the Sacrament of Holy Communion, the children rejoined the congregation and offered their musical gifts as they sang together with the adult choir. God's spirit was indeed present not only in worship but in the fellowship time following the service where friendship building got off to a great start.

Rev. Ineke K. Mitchell is North Central Regional Minister of the Connecticut Conference, UCC.

*Somos uno, uno solo
Somos uno en Cristo,
somos uno
Somos uno, uno solo
Un solo Dios
Un solo SeZor
Uno sola fe
Un solo amor
Un solo bautismo
Un solo espiritu
Y ese es el consolador*

*We're united in Jesus,
we're united
Like a family, we're
united
We're united in Jesus,
we're united
Like a family, we're
united
We have one God
One Holy Lord
We have one faith
Only one love
Just one baptism
One Holy spirit
One Comforter sent
from God above.*

Lift Every Voice



As I write, the nation is just a few days away from the Inauguration of our new President. And as you read, we are beginning African American history month. This year, the

two converge in a stunning and inspiring historic moment.

There are many who have taken this moment to mean that our country is finally beyond the tragedy of slavery and all its evil effects in our common life; many who say that now racism has ended and we no longer need to focus on it.

So I celebrate with exuberance the election and inauguration of President Barack Obama, a man raised up into Christian faith within our own United Church of Christ tradition. Yet I also must state unequivocally my conviction and the fact that racism still thrives.

The call the United Church of Christ issued last spring for Sacred Conversations on Race still stands as a call to each of our churches and members. Some of our churches have offered short term programs that have jump-started dialogue and opened eyes. If we are really going to make a difference, however, Sacred Conversations must be sustained over a long period of time. And they must be accompanied by intentional training, not just conversation – training that is transformative for all our generations.

Meanwhile, it is imperative that we pay attention to the decisions our state legislators make in this financially challenging time so that budget cuts do not embody and exacerbate racism. While it is the case that an increasing percentage of African Americans have risen to leadership and are thriving, it is still the case that an extraordinary percentage are living in poverty, attending schools that are unable to meet their educational needs, and live essentially segregated from white America. During a time of financial stringency, let's keep our eyes focused on the needs of the poorest and the most disenfranchised among us – a Biblical imperative, if there ever were one.

As President Obama begins his term of office, I offer this prayer, drawn from and inspired by the powerful words of James Weldon Johnson's hymn, "Lift Every Voice and Sing" (NCH 593):

Holy One, You have led our weary feet over a way that has been watered with generations of tears. You have made a path through the blood of the slaughtered. You have brought us out from the gloomy past and into the bright morning of a new day.

God of our weary years, God of our silent tears, You have brought us thus far on our way! Now sustain us in our hope, in our conviction that Your justice and Your love will indeed prevail. Guard our new President that his hope and his faith will lead him rightly and courageously to shape a new just and peaceful future for our nation and our world. Keep him and his family safe even as he works to ensure the security of the American people.

Unite us, O God, as a people and as a nation that we may overcome the challenges before us. Inspire our hearts beyond partisanship and toward the common good. Free us from malice and from rigidity, commit us to face the rising sun of a new day begun, with all the promise it holds. Let us lift every voice and sing till earth and heaven ring – ring with the harmonies of liberty. Let our rejoicing rise, high as the listening skies, let it resound loud as the rolling sea! Amen.

Freedom Center



As the year closed, my family and I made a long drive to visit my children's godparents, who live near Cincinnati, Ohio, the home of the National Underground

Railroad Freedom Center. This four-year-old museum tells the harrowing story of slavery in America, the heroic story of the Underground Railroad's efforts to aid those who sought freedom, and the hopeful story of citizens' efforts to end a social order that denied the personhood of some within their midst.

The museum's design effectively engages the emotions, intellect, and imagination of its visitors. Hand-held digital audio players given to all patrons at the door offer age-appropriate descriptions of each exhibit. In addition to artifacts in

cases, many galleries include interactive stations, such as a crate the size of the one used by Henry "Box" Brown to mail himself to freedom in Philadelphia.

But one exhibit gave me immediate pause. A rugged wood structure stands incongruously in the tall, clean, modern atrium of the museum: a two-story slave pen, re-assembled after transport from its original site in Kentucky. With its two stacked rooms – one for males, the other for females – each no bigger than a small bedroom, the cabin had been built for the purpose of temporarily housing enslaved people before they were marched further south, and separated from their parents, children, friends, and all they had ever known. The owner of the building, the man who sold people, shared my name: Anderson.

We're not related; not through the Anderson line. My great-grandfather immigrated to a nation that had banned slavery decades before. The coincidence, however, sent a chill down my spine, that even for a moment, I shared something in common with a trader in human beings.

But, of course, I do. "For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," wrote the Apostle Paul (Romans 3:22-23). If I or my family bear no direct responsibility for the misery endured by those held captive in a slave pen, we still share in this fallen humanity. We face the twin tasks



of all people: to act better than we even know to do, and to seek the forgiveness

of the people and the God we have sinned against. We face the work to see that slavery is finally ended, that torture ceases, that the homeless are warmed, the hungry fed, and the hopeless comforted.

In a gleaming building, a stark reminder: God has yet more light and truth to break forth in the world.

Rev. Eric S. Anderson is Minister of Communications and Technology for the Connecticut Conference, United Church of Christ.

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Danbury Churches Begin Outreach to Local Homeless Teens

BY REV. LAURA WESTBY
AND REV. ERIC ANDERSON

On September 21st, the First Congregational Church UCC of Danbury renewed its twenty-year covenant with the Amos House, a local homeless shelter founded by an interfaith coalition in the city. In her sermon that day, pastor the Rev. Laura Westby mentioned that the fastest growing homeless population in Danbury consists of teenagers. She invited those who were interested in helping to meet her the next week.

“The following Sunday I had twelve people in my office,” she reported. “Let’s just call a meeting and see who shows up! To have twelve people show up, it was pretty clear that something was up.”

The church created a small steering

committee to develop a ministry to local homeless and at-risk teens. The first stage of the project was a December drive to assemble personal care kits for the young people. Members of the church’s youth group joined with students in the New Milford Congregational Church UCC, New Fairfield Congregational Church UCC, and the United Church of Christ of Brookfield to put together one hundred twenty-two kits.

These congregations and communities donated soap, shampoo, toothbrushes and hair care items to be included in the kits. Among the most gratifying donations were boxes of personal care items donated by employees at Fuel Cell Technologies, where a church member posted a sign on her door. Her co-workers “brought in tons of stuff,” said Rev. Westby. The youth group also gathered six bags of gently used clothing.

The project idea came directly from the Danbury High School social work department who will distribute the supplies. When Rev. Westby asked what homeless teens need most, the social worker instantly suggested combs, toothpaste, clothes, shoes and socks. “They leave [home] with a cell phone and not much else,” Rev. Westby reported.

The National Alliance to End Homelessness reports research indicating that 5 to 7% of teens — over one million — will experience homelessness at least



Danbury area youth with supplies for their homeless peers.

once each year. Some have been kicked out for pregnancy or substance abuse. Many get mad and leave home. Others age out of the foster care system with no place to go. Some belong to families without homes, but those over 13 cannot join their parents and younger siblings in many shelters.

The church has set three goals for the developing ministry. First, they plan to hold a second community forum, following up on one that attracted 75 people, mostly from area churches.

Second, they hope to develop a drop-in center or emergency shelter similar to some already operating in Greenwich.

The tentative plan is to offer 3 to 4 days accommodations, “where kids can get their heads together,” according to Rev. Westby.

Third, the church looks toward establishing a transitional living and supportive housing facility for the young adult population. The city already has a solid model in Amos House, established in 1988 by five Danbury congregations, including First Congregational. Yet, the need remains for a program aimed at teens.

The Rev. Laura Westby is pastor of the First Congregational Church UCC in Danbury.

Green Task Force Interview

At the fall session of the 2008 Annual Meeting, delegates voted a resolution encouraging churches and members to become more “green.” George Stone and Katherine Freygang, members of the Environmental Ministry Team, tasked with providing resources toward this work, responded to questions from *ConnTact* editor Eric Anderson this winter.

What is your background related to environmental ministries, and what gives you the passion you have for this work?

Katherine: I was trained and worked as an exhibition designer in natural history, children’s and science museums. I was active in my church and chaired the outreach program for five years. New to Connecticut, I worked with United Way to determine the areas of social outreach that were lacking in the state. Fuel assistance was number one and environmental issues were at the bottom. I found this fascinating and founded a group called ECCO that was a study and outreach group on ecological issues in Cornwall and Connecticut. My motive is awareness and action. My passion is creative ecology.

George: I have no formal background or training but have been an avid gardener, conservationist, environmental advocate and outdoor vacation person since my youth, now many years ago. I have come to see my concern for the environment through these activities and my growing knowledge that it is really quite fragile.

What are some of the steps you personally have taken to make your life more “green.”

Katherine: Simplest: I changed most of my light bulbs to CFLs, and took 200 kilowatt-hours off my bill. I have gradually been upgrading my home insulation too. Hardest: I drive a lot. Once the kids were away I traded the SUV for a Prius and expected to rent a larger car if I needed it but that has not happened in three years. Also now I share

errands with friends. You save on gas and emissions while enriching friendships.

George: At our house we recycle paper, plastic, and metals, including hazardous wastes. I recently changed my lawn service to an organic service, so no chemicals are used. My gardens have been mostly organic for many years. We keep the heat and water temperatures turned down low. We have replaced our home windows with energy efficient double pane windows and use storm windows as well to conserve heat.

What steps has your own church begun?

Katherine: We have renovated our heating system, changed lighting, recycle, use mugs, and reviewed our insulation. We have a running graph of our electrical usage that gets modified with more ideas. Currently we are tracking room usage and relocating events to efficient locales to affect our overall energy use.

What first steps do you recommend for other churches? What are some pitfalls they might avoid, and how?

George: I can recommend the steps our church has taken - start with the no cost

steps, like recycling. Then tackle more expensive steps, like programmable thermostats. A key pitfall to avoid is, if and when a church does renovations, to adopt energy saving measures at the time of the new building. It may cost a bit more up front, but will save lots of money (fuel) and environmental impact and it is more expensive to retrofit later.

Amid all the frightening statistics, what gives you hope that people can make the changes that they must?

Katherine: Unfortunately I think that the hard truths will be driven home in electric bills and at gas pumps. But people love creativity and love sharing their ideas and achievements.

George: The way we cut driving and gasoline use when the prices spiked shows that we can do it. And the experience of other highly developed countries, almost all of which use less energy per person that we do here in the US, tells me that it can be done.

Visit www.ctucc.org/greenchurch/ for more ideas and resources.

Spring Annual Meeting to Examine Health Care



Juan A. Figueroa, President of the Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut, will be one of the keynote speakers at the Spring Session of the Connecticut Conference Annual Meeting, to be held at the Asylum Hill Congregational Church on May 9th. Workshops, and a second keynote speaker yet to be named, will offer other perspectives and opportunities for conversation around the manifold facets of health and healing.

Mr. Figueroa has led the Foundation since 2003 in its work to bring about universal health care for all citizens. A former Connecticut legislator and Assistant Attorney General, he was also a staff attorney for the Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities. Prior to assuming the helm at the Foundation, he was the president and general counsel of the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund in New York City.

The Hartford *Business Journal* named Mr. Figueroa one of its 2007 "Health Care Heroes" for his contribution to the advancement of health care in our state.

The church has a long relationship with issues of health, going back to Jesus' healing ministry. In addition to advocacy, the United Church of Christ has founded and administered hospitals and convalescence facilities, supported parish nursing programs, brought meals to its illness-stricken members, lifted its prayers, and more. Join us May 9th for discussion and discernment of ways to care for the health of God's people in the twenty-first century.

ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING

BY PHYLLIS RICHARDS



Life can be tough at times. Hurricanes, earthquakes, cyclones, and tsunamis smash communities to bits. Wars and ethnic conflicts shatter the very foundations of life, shoving people out of their homes and transforming

them into frightened refugees. Persistent hunger, drought, poverty, lack of education, and ill health shrivel the life and dry the spirit, leaving individuals to crumble from the inside out.

Yet scripture gives us a different view of who we are. "You are children of the Lord your God. ... It is you the Lord has chosen ... to be God's people, God's treasured possession" (Deuteronomy 14:1-2). Although those words were spoken long ago to people in another part of the world, Galatians 3:26 assures us that we are included, too: "For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith."

As children of God, we are called to care for the things that God cares for. To treasure what God treasures. God is not calling us to a joyless life, but to a life of greater joy centered in worship, love, justice and service using gifts the Spirit has given to us, where our actions and decisions flow from being centered in God.

Through giving to One Great Hour of Sharing, we can address some of the difficulties that so many are facing today. We can offer a warm blanket, clean



water, shelter, and food in the wake of a disaster. We can provide assistance to communities internationally by offering education, health care, tools, seeds, and animals as resources to people who want to build better lives for themselves and their children. Through One Great Hour of Sharing, we kindly, persistently and boldly care for God's treasures by sharing our earthly treasure with those who need it.

First Timothy 6:18-19a exhorts us "to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up...the treasure of a good foundation for the

future". Our treasure lies in honoring God, doing God's will and loving God's treasured people. Giving to One Great Hour of Sharing is just one way to show God's love to others. Please give generously!

You can find stories of lives transformed by generous gifts to One Great Hour of Sharing on the website at: www.ucc.org/oghs.

One Great Hour of Sharing, sharing resources, changing lives

Where your treasure is, there your heart be also (Matt 6:21).

Christmas in Jerusalem

BY LYDIA

Sitting outside the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem on Christmas Eve, I considered myself lucky to be far from crowded malls, Christmas advertisements, and "It's a Wonderful Life." The director of an organization I work for in Jerusalem described Christmas in the Holy Land as a quiet preparation for Jesus' birth. I felt blessed to be in a place where the meaning of Christmas was not lost.

However, when a nearby mosque began its call to prayer, my quiet was shattered by the banging of the bells of the church. A competition ensued between the most holy site in all of Christendom and a neighboring mosque. So loud was this battle that children actually started crying and I hung my head in shame, because I had been acting as co-tour guide for my fiancé's family, who had to be convinced that this holy site was worth seeing. I later found out that a similar incident happened in Bethlehem in Manger Square between the Church of the Nativity, the site where Jesus was born and another neighboring mosque.

Feeling discouraged by disputes between two Abrahamic religions on Christmas Eve, my fiancé and I decided to take his family to culturally rich Ramallah in the West Bank in an attempt to regain the quiet my supervisor had described. We sat at a table next to a Christmas tree in a cafe drinking hot chocolate and enjoying the family reunion. I quickly realized that quiet would be lacking regardless of

where I traveled in the Holy Land this Christmas season, because chanting began outside the windows of the café and the television started broadcasting pictures of Palestinians in Gaza mutilated by the Israeli Air Force.

Numbers of casualties flashed across the screen along with images of angry protests across the region, including one right outside of our café. My fiancé's family excitedly peered out the window and texted home that they were "in the thick of it." Disappointed and concerned for our safety, we stayed inside until a Palestinian friend, Dalia, was able to meet us. We could move around the city freely but were warned that the border from the West Bank into Jerusalem might be closed.

Dalia pointed out music schools for Palestinian children, posters for international Baroque concerts held in her city, and cultural centers. She meant to fill the observers with optimism, but the sound of gunfire in the background and the concern that began to creep into her eyes offset this. She told us that she hasn't seen Ramallah like this since the second Intifada.

As we said our goodbyes and traveled back through the military checkpoint, passing burning tires, I came to the conclusion that there is no such thing as physical

quiet in the Holy Land, and it is incredibly difficult to find spiritual peace when the conflict affects so many civilians.

Over half of the 1.5 million residents of Gaza rely on humanitarian aid. The United Nations considers 75% of them as refugees. Due to border closures, they have been unable to receive sufficient supplies, and Gaza's only commercial border crossing has been closed since the Hamas take-over, interrupting foreign trade and closing 75% of the area's factories. More than 75,000 workers supporting half a million dependants have lost their jobs.

For more information regarding the situation in Gaza, please visit these sites:

<http://www.ochaopt.org/>

http://www.btselem.org/English/Gaza_Strip/

Lydia, a member of a Connecticut UCC congregation, is serving as a Global Ministries intern in Jerusalem. Her last name has been omitted at her request. At press time, Israeli troops and Hamas fighters still fought in Gaza. Current information may be found at www.btselem.org or www.ochaopt.org

Lydia's stories are collected at www.ctucc.org/news/lydia/



Tim Hughes explores a "bee-hive" stone hut in Ireland while on sabbatical.

Spirit in the Stones

BY ANNE HUGHES

Upon our first visit to Ireland, we are struck by the preponderance and survival all over the land of 30,000 ancient sites: prehistoric ring forts, sou-terrain (underground) tombs, "bee-hive" stone huts, towers, monasteries and oratories, dating as far back as 8,000 years. Prior to the invention of the wheel, in spite of the mega-efforts required to survive, large groups of ancient folks hauled multi-ton stones 50 kilometers or more to lay them precisely in impressive structures. Excavation reveals an internal cross-shaped chamber, which, during the spring equinox and winter solstice, the sun illuminates through a special window for several thrilling minutes. I am particularly struck by Newgrange, Knowth, and other megalith sites that were built during the Stone Age by experts in astronomy, art, engineering, building, and presumably, for deep spiritual or religious purpose.

It's an awesome, humbling piece of human-made heritage to wonder about. What compelled people to seek out a rocky, unforgiving tiny island to form community and create sites of retreat, monastic living, and religious rituals?

A search for the Spirit led folks to find the most remote, difficult-to-get-to cliffs and islands, to build these little rock oratories and towers, to abide, to pray, to contemplate, to sing, and somehow, to survive. I find this impressive. Some people went to extreme lengths to pursue this life, and they didn't apparently complain about how far they had to travel to go on retreat. Or maybe they did, but going to the most remote, difficult cliffs and jagged rocks to get to some drafty, cold, stone hut on this island was the point. Even then, they needed to retreat from civilization, and they didn't even have 24-hour podcasts,

streaming web, email, digital news, cell phones or television: just farmlands and neighbors.

How important is it to have a retreat facility and a sacred place of remote beauty in this culture, in this time? We don't have a long memory of a contemplative heritage in the UCC, partly because we've grown out of a culture of puritan settlers who pursued religious freedom to be "doers." They set out to a new land to settle and get about the business of organizing towns and civic communities. So we have historic houses of worship and civic life, but we don't have much in the way of places of contemplation.

So who are we? And where are our touchstone places? Is it too late to create an historic, spiritual heritage for generations to come? I think not, but we have to start using these special places, to create those touchstones, to root them in our blood and to weave the threads of purpose and history and sacredness.

As Kevin Witt writes in his article, "The Long-Term Importance of United Methodist Camp and Retreat Centers:"

"A great attribute of camps and retreats is that people spend a more extended period of time focusing on their connection with God and their growth as spiritual leaders. This gives persons or groups the opportunity to delve far more deeply into a topic or a practice or in knowing each other better and growing as a faith community. A single weekend retreat could provide an additional 32 hours of intentional spiritual growth and living together as a faith community. A single week of camp could contribute 96 hours or more... What an incredible resource a camp and retreat center is for local congregations and conferences serious about 'making disciples' or developing spiritual leaders!"

When the going gets tough, do the tough go on retreat? Or is it too frivolous, time-consuming, and non-essential to our survival? These are questions that come up after spending time among the enduring ruins of stones placed by ancestors many thousands of years ago, a testimony to what they deemed important.

We have an amazing opportunity to proclaim, to our churches and our people, the vital role of retreat ministry and of this "sacred place apart" that has welcomed, and can welcome, the spiritually starved: Silver Lake Conference Center.

And there's a lot fewer rocks here.

Anne Hughes is Co-Director of Silver Lake Conference Center. She and her husband Tim visited Ireland during their sabbatical in 2008.



The "slave pen" at the Freedom Center in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Four Walls

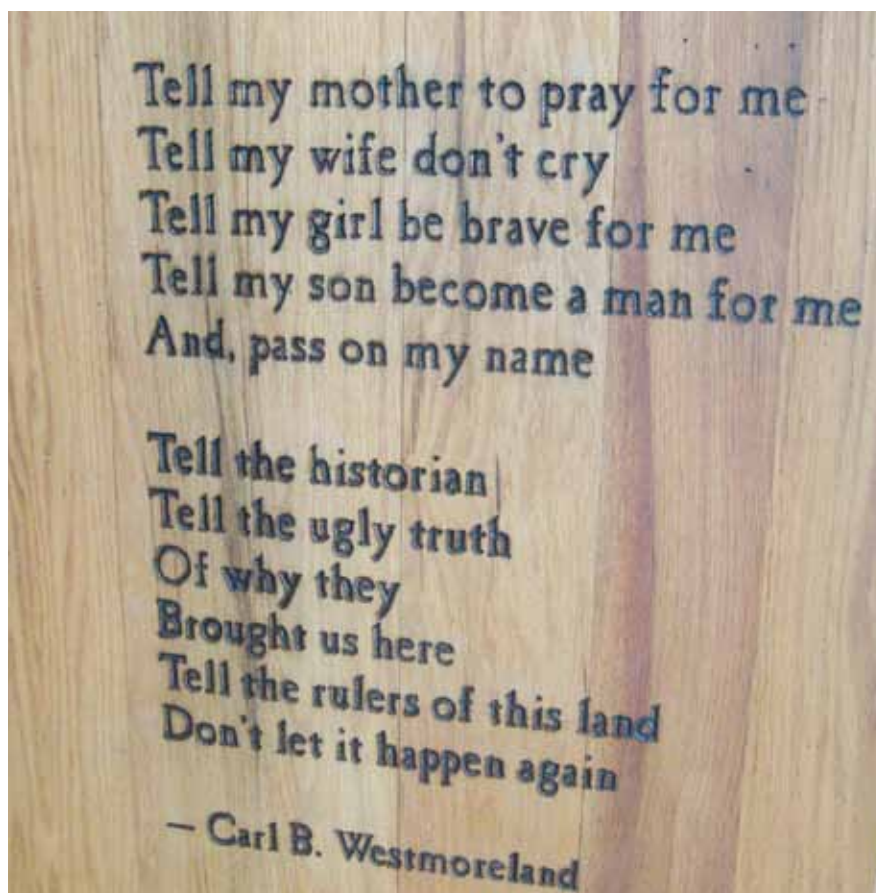
**Four walls
Close in this space.
They make a shelter,
A building,
And under normal
circumstances,
That would be all.**

**But these are not exactly
normal:
This place has held people
who were brought here against
their will,
People who had done nothing
to deserve their fate.**

**This place held slaves.
I can sense them around me
now,
Chilling the air with the sheer
force of their presence.
Their ghosts cry out in
despair,
Shouting at the living to
remember,
Remember!
What they see,
And what they don't.**

-Leif Ericson

*Leif Ericson is the pen name of
Brendan Anderson, a member of
the Senior High Fellowship at First
Church of Christ in Glastonbury.*



This is the third in our series considering the insidious, pervasive effects of racism on our society, arising from the Sacred Conversation on Race launched in our churches in May.

Racism and Public Education

BY REV. LYNN ONDERKO

In *Brown v. Board of Education*, the court ruled that racially segregated education was not equal education. If it was to be equal for all children, schools had to integrate.

Brown was implemented in the 1960s, which became the period of the greatest integration of US public schools. By the 1970s the process was being eroded by factors that included hostility toward bussing, white emigration from urban areas, and segregated grouping within schools based on achievement.

By 1989 the Hartford public schools, like city districts across the US, were as racially separate as they had ever been. In Connecticut, a small coalition of students and their families of African American, Hispanic, Jewish, and European ancestry felt that the racial segregation of their schools was the cause of educational inequities between urban and suburban students, and decided to challenge it in court. Elizabeth Horton Sheff, a member of the United Church of Christ, and her son Milo were chosen to be plaintiffs in the case along with 9 other families.

The plaintiffs claimed that the General Assembly was not ensuring equal educational opportunity as guaranteed by the state Constitution, based on the differences between Hartford's educational outcomes and those of the surrounding suburbs. Connecticut Mastery Test results provided clear evidence that Hartford students were receiving an inadequate education in 1989, a shocking 74% of Hartford eight graders required remedial reading services.

After losing in a lower court, the plaintiffs won a State Supreme Court ruling in 1996 which ordered the legislature and the governor to remedy the situation. The agreed solution was a voluntary desegregation plan that included the building of magnet schools and the expansion of Project Choice with a goal that 30% of Hartford children would attend integrated schools. When this figure was not reached, the plaintiffs returned to court. In 2008, new goals were established that increased the number of regional magnet schools and expanded the number of students in Project Choice, which enables Hartford students to attend suburban schools.

The United Church of Christ has long supported quality, integrated schooling for all children, through the Sheff case challenge, and other related initiatives. At the national level, we have a wonderful resource in Jan Resseger, our Minister for Public Education and Witness. At the local level, we have the Public Education Advocacy Team, which has been advocating for policies that promote quality, integrated education since 1974.

Much work still needs to be done if the Sheff goals are to be realized. As people of faith, we can support these goals by encouraging our legislators to improve magnet school funding, provide funds which shorten bus rides for students, provide better reimbursement to schools that accept Project Choice students, and continue to support Educational Cost Sharing grants.

Rev. Lynn Onderko is a member of the First Church of Christ, Congregational in Glastonbury and of the Public Education Advocacy Team. For more information contact the Team through Rev. Lois Happe (860.429.2076) or Everett Watson (860.429.3772), or visit www.ucc.org/justice/public-education/.

Church Camps: A Peace Movement

BY ANNE AND TIM HUGHES

During our 3-month sabbatical from Silver Lake, we were fortunate to engage a retired Camp Director couple to be our "Sabbatical Angels." Upon returning to our site for a weekend-long "Wedding Camp" of two of our beloved former staff, we walked down to the Waterfall Chapel for a reflection, meditation and worship time the morning of the wedding. As those gathered spontaneously shared their reflections on the role of this sacred place in forming the lives of so many young people, our seventy-something Sabbatical Angel, Dave Schar, offered this:

"I truly believe that the church camps that were bought, established and grew in the fifties and sixties, did so because their fathers who experienced the horrors of World War II were committed to creating a different space, a community where their children might come to know the radical love of Christ, to know God, so they might live their lives in a different way, and not have to be subjected to the hell of war that their fathers experienced.

"Church camps are indeed the Peace Movement that grew out of World War II."

He choked up when he mentioned their fathers' horrors, and his words seemed to me a revelation. There *were* a lot of church camps

established in those two decades, which I always attributed to the wisdom and foresight of budding denominational leaders to put resources, money, and will towards a program already well-established by other denominations.

Why camps? Why then? UCC bodies established 63 camps in America in the first decade of a newly united denomination. The Methodists have an older camp tradition, but added over two thirds of their current 250 Camp and Retreat sites in the fifties and sixties; the Catholics opened dozens more.

The church leaders of the day had witnessed the emergence of the atomic bomb and the horrors wreaked by the Third Reich. What did our American fathers and mothers do for their children in a post-Holocaust, post-Hiroshima, H-bomb haunted world? They sent their kids to church camp.

Many of our alumni/ae, recalling how they came to our church camp for the first time in 1957 or 1958, say they were compelled by their parents. Their first week of living in cabins, sharing meals, going to worship, and swimming in the lake, was not their choice. After that first week, they wouldn't miss it for the world. But parental authority and direction played a big part in establishing the sacred ritual of going to camp for a generation that would see many sending their own children down the same entrance path. For fifty continuous years, this experience of living in community — serving meals family-style, cleaning up after one another, playing games, hearing Bible stories, singing by the campfire, making

new friends and challenging one another to try out living as Christ's disciples — has been shared by thousands upon thousands.

How is this a Peace Movement? A Peace Movement is something that sweeps across different sectors of a society, that gathers momentum and intensity, that finds a non-violent way to create a different culture of justice, of inclusion, of conflict resolution that does not lead to war, that does not wipe out whole cities and populations to end tyranny.

Cultural transformation does not happen only within the context of church school walls, or in white clapboard churches on town greens. It also needs to happen in the woods: on quiet paths to outdoor chapels, beside still-unpolluted lakes and streams, through friends that were formed by living together and sharing deeply from hearts set free, by playing games, by singing songs, by planning and participating in all-camp worship, by acting out skits and through being nurtured by volunteer counselors and leaders.

Camps are a Peace Movement. Listen, and you will hear lives changing in these words: "I'm not a Mean Girl anymore; sometimes I was at school, but not now." "Reduce, reuse, recycle." "God thinks I'm the light of the world." "I first learned to meditate, to experience the sacred, in that half hour I was invited/made to sit on a rock here, by ourselves, to reflect and journal, when I was 12."

"Love God, Love Your Neighbor, Love Yourself."

Recession Challenges State Budget

BY KIM HARRISON

The overarching issue of the Connecticut General Assembly's 2009 session will be the state budget and the unprecedented deficits the state faces for 2010 and 2011. The 2008-2009 budget year bears a deficit of \$330 million, with six months still left in the fiscal year.

In November of 2008 the governor called a special session of the General Assembly to try and eliminate the current deficit. The legislature reduced it by half through lapses and spending cuts. During the first few weeks of the 2009 session legislators will try again to erase the current shortfall and, most likely, the rainy day fund will be used to close some budget holes.

However, the budget crisis the faces is enormous, probably not like anything

seen since 1991. The state's budget for current services is a little over \$18 billion, and projections for the next two budget years warn of a shortfall of over \$2 billion in 2010 and over \$3 billion in 2011.

The budget crisis in 1991, which led to the creation of the state's first income tax, was not this large. That tax now accounts for almost 50% of the state's revenue while the Sales and Use tax makes up about another 20% of all revenue.

The Governor will release her biennial budget in February and she has stated that she intends to deal with the deficit without increasing taxes, opting instead to cut services. The legislature will have until June to craft a budget bill that the Governor will sign.

Cutting over \$6 billion in state spending will result in a huge loss of services for the state's most vulnerable residents, losses which

couldn't come at a worse time given the dismal economic forecasts. More and more residents will need to rely on state services as job losses continue to mount. Homeless shelters and food pantries are already being heavily used and their staffs are seeing people who once gave donations now visiting as clients. Every town is experiencing more home foreclosures than ever before.

It is going to be a difficult session that will no doubt stretch into the summer, and the solutions will not be easy or painless, but they must be just and fair to all of Connecticut's people.

Kim Harrison is Public Policy Advocate for the Connecticut Conference. The General Assembly had just opened its 2009 session at press time. Visit www.ctucc.org for current information and comment on the state budget challenges.

For fuller descriptions of these and other events, including registration forms and directions, please visit www.ctucc.org/events.php

CAUCE: "Let's Talk About... Faith, Family and Sexuality" • Feb. 7, 8:30 am - 2:00 pm • First Church of Christ, 2183 Main St., Glastonbury • "Can We Talk About... Faith, Family and Sexuality" will be the theme of the Connecticut Association of United Church Educators rescheduled Gathering. Dr. Kate Ott, Associate Director of the Religious Institute on Sexual Morality, Justice and Healing in Norwalk will be the keynote speaker • Cost: \$15.00 includes lunch if received by Jan. 23. • Contact: Ruth Martz, First Church of Christ Congregational UCC, 2183 Main St., Glastonbury, CT 06033.

Concert: Happy 200th Birthday, Felix Mendelssohn! • Feb. 8, 4:00 pm • South Congl./First Baptist Church, 90 Main St., New Britain • Cost: Premium \$30.00; General \$20.00; Senior/student \$10.00. • Contact: Christine Laird, The Music Series at South Church, 90 Main St., New Britain, CT 06051-2287. 860.223.7555.

The Staff of Life: Multiple Staffs that Thrive • Feb. 11, 9:00 - 3:00 pm • Massachusetts Conf. UCC, 1 Badger Rd., Framingham, MA • This event, geared toward senior and associate pastors, co-pastors, and other clergy working together in the same setting, is a day-away for your team to reflect on what gives life to your collective ministry when it is at its best. • Cost: \$35.00 per person. • Contact: Kris LoFrumento, Massachusetts Conference United Church of Christ, One Badger Rd., Framingham, MA 01702. 508.875.5233 x274.

Stepping Stones: Church School Celebrations • Feb. 11, 6:00 - 8:30 pm • First Congl. Church, 37 Main St.,

Southington • Join us as we explore Children's Day programs from the past, share ideas for the future and exchange thoughts for highlighting Christian Education programs in our congregations during special worship services. Snow date is Feb. 12. • Cost: \$12.00 per person, \$25.00 per church for 3 or more participants. • Contact: Karen E. Ziel, 125 Sherman St., Hartford, CT 06105. Toll free: 866.367.2822, or 860.233.5564 locally.

Confirmation Retreat • Feb. 27 - Mar. 1 • Silver Lake Conference Center, 223 Low Rd., Sharon • Cost: \$100.00 per person. • Contact: Sue Wilber, 125 Sherman St., Hartford, CT 06105. Toll free: 866.367.2822, or 860.233.5564 locally.

A Mendelssohn Marathon: Part 1 • Mar. 1, 4:00 pm • Center Church, Main and Gold St., Hartford • 2009 marks the 200th anniversary year of the birth of Felix Mendelssohn. • Cost: \$10.00 suggested donation. • Contact: Jason Charneski, Center Church, 60 Gold St., Hartford, CT 06103. 860.249.5631 x19.

Stepping Stones: Using Games in Church School and Youth Work • Mar. 3, 6:00 - 8:30 pm • Wapping Community Church, 1790 Ellington Rd., South Windsor • Games are a great way to help groups connect as well as a vehicle to teach messages about faith. Get some ideas to "mix it up, stir it up, team up and open up." Snow date is Mar. 12. • Cost: \$12.00 per person, \$25.00 per church for 3 or more participants. • Contact: Karen E. Ziel, 125 Sherman St., Hartford, CT 06105. Toll free: 866.367.2822, or 860.233.5564 locally.

Balancing and Renewing Your Ministry • Mar. 4 9:00 - 3:00 pm • Massachusetts Conf. UCC, 1 Badger Rd., Framingham, MA • Could you use just a little help in balancing your physical, emotional,

intellectual, and spiritual health as a clergy person? Our day will be led by Larry Peers, Senior Consultant with The Alban Institute. • Cost: \$50.00 per person. • Contact: Kris LoFrumento, Massachusetts Conference United Church of Christ, One Badger Rd., Framingham, MA 01702. 508.875.5233 x274.

Silver Lake Dean's Retreat • Mar. 6-7 • Silver Lake Conference Center • This is the annual planning and training retreat for Silver Lake's summer Deans. • Cost: • Contact: Silver Lake Registrar, 223 Low Rd., Sharon, CT 06069. 860.364.5526.

Confirmation Retreat • Mar. 13 - 15 • Silver Lake Conference Center, 223 Low Rd., Sharon • Cost: \$100.00 per person. • Contact: Sue Wilber, 125 Sherman St., Hartford, CT 06105. Toll free: 866.367.2822, or 860.233.5564 locally.

Concert: Jane Parker-Smith, Organist • Mar. 15, 4:00 pm • South Congl./First Baptist Church, 90 Main St., New Britain • Cost: Free will offering. • Contact: Christine Laird, The Music Series at South Church, 90 Main St., New Britain, CT 06051-2287. 860.223.7555.

Children's Choir Festival • Mar. 21, 8:30 am - 4:00 pm • Tewksbury Congl. Church, 10 East St., Tewksbury, MA • Join conductor Mark Patterson for a day of music-making and fun! Geared for children in grades 3 to 10. • Cost: Director's Workshop \$20.00; maximum choir festival fee \$60.00. • Contact: Tewksbury Congregational Church, 10 East St., Tewksbury, MA 01876.

Concert: Music for a New Day • Mar. 21, 7:00 pm • Trinity College Chapel • CitySingers of Hartford will present "Music for a New Day" a choral and instrumental concert that includes exceptionally gifted young artists from the Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts and the accompaniment of professional musicians. • Cost: \$10.00 suggested donation. • Contact: Joan Pritchard, 196 Terry Rd., Hartford, CT 06105.

Concert: Music for a New Day • Mar. 22, 4:00 pm • Trinity College Chapel • CitySingers of Hartford will present "Music for a New Day" a choral and instrumental concert that includes exceptionally gifted young artists from the Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts and the accompaniment of professional musicians. • Cost: \$10.00 suggested donation. • Contact: Joan Pritchard, 196 Terry Rd., Hartford, CT 06105.

Maple Sugaring at Silver Lake • Mar. 27-29 • Silver Lake Conference Center, Sharon • Come for a fun-filled weekend of experiencing nature's renewal and its wonderfully sweet gifts. We will be tapping the trees, collecting the sap,

and boiling it all over a big fire as we participate in the transformation of sap into syrup. • Cost: TBA. • Contact: Silver Lake Registrar, 223 Low Rd., Sharon, CT 06069. 860.364.5526.

Conference on Church Buildings • Mar. 28, 8:30 am - 4:30 pm • United Congl. Church, 6 Institute Rd., Worcester, MA • Save the date for this conference on the church buildings we care for and occupy. • Cost: TBA. • Contact: Ron Brown, 125 Sherman St., Hartford, CT 06105. Toll free: 866.367.2822, or 860.233.5564 locally.

Concert: Music for a New Day • Mar. 29, 3:00 pm • First Church of Christ, 689 Hopmeadow St., Simsbury • CitySingers of Hartford will present "Music for a New Day" a choral and instrumental concert that includes exceptionally gifted young artists from the Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts and the accompaniment of professional musicians. • Cost: \$10.00 adults, \$5.00 students, free to children 12 and under. • Contact: Joan Pritchard, 196 Terry Rd., Hartford, CT 06105.

Daniel Pereira in Concert • Mar. 29, 4:00 pm • Center Church, Main and Gold St., Hartford • Cost: \$10.00 suggested donation. • Contact: Jason Charneski, Center Church, 60 Gold St., Hartford, CT 06103. 860.249.5631 x19.

Silver Lake International Youth Work Project • Apr. 18 - 25 • Oaxaca, Mexico • In conjunction with Simply Smiles, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to improving the lives of impoverished children, our team will live at the Casa Hogar Children's Home, allowing the face-to-face experience of living as these children do; children that have been orphaned, or abandoned - many with disabilities. • Cost: \$1,700.00. • Contact: Rev. Peter Allen, 203.268.9327; or call Josh Dufresne at: 203.982.5461.

Spring Action Weekend • Apr. 24 - 26 • Silver Lake Conference Center, Sharon • Action Weekends are your chance to give something back to Silver Lake. So put on your work gloves and come join us in the beautiful foothills of the Berkshires this Spring! • Cost: TBA. • Contact: Stephanie Pitman, 223 Low Rd., Sharon, CT 06069. 860.364.5526.

Connecticut Conference Annual Meeting, Spring Session • May 9 • Asylum Hill Congl. Church, 814 Asylum Ave., Hartford • Join us for the Spring Session of the Connecticut Conference's 142nd Annual Meeting. We'll be looking at issues of health care. More details to come! • Cost: TBA. • Contact: Cecile Gilson, 125 Sherman St., Hartford, CT 06105. Toll free: 866.367.2822, or 860.233.5564 locally. C. 203.272.5323.

Recent and Upcoming Pastoral Transitions

NEW CALLS

Angulo, Maritza to Pastor, Iglesia Bautista Congregacional, New Britain, June 30, 2008

Bays, Martha from Ohio to Pastor, to Congregational Church in Killingworth, January 12, 2009

Blodgett, Barbara, from Yale Divinity School to Minister for Vocation and Formation, United Church of Christ, Cleveland, OH, April 1 2009

Braun, Jeff, from Associate Pastor, Redding Center, to Pastor, First Congregational Church of Cheshire, Mar. 16, 2009

RESIGNATIONS

Heilshorn, Mark from Pastor, First Congregational Church of Woodbury, September 30, 2008

Dunn, Rachel from Pastor, Congregational Church of North Stonington, October 12, 2008

Jordan-Haas, David, from Darien to Vienna Presbyterian Church, Vienna, VA, November 24, 2008

Rodriguez, Julio from Pastor, Iglesia Bautista Congregacional, New Britain, June 30, 2008

Positions

WATERTOWN: First Congregational Church seeks a part-time Director of Music Ministries to continue our strong musical tradition. Responsibilities include directing the adult and youth vocal choirs, providing music in worship and participating in special services during the year. This individual is a vital member of the church ministry team and will collaborate with the pastor in planning and conducting worship. Ideally, the Director of Music Ministries will demonstrate strong interpersonal skills, leadership skills and organizational skills. Our Director of Music Ministries will provide music for all weddings and funerals or arrange for a substitute. Salary is up to \$26,000 depending on experience. Email resume along with a brief note on philosophy of church music ministry to: Sam Dexter: First Congregational Church, revdexter@hotmail.com.

SHARON: Silver Lake Conference Center seeks an Assistant Food Manager/Sous Chef for the summer camp season. This is a unique educational opportunity for someone pursuing a career in food service. This position will run for nine weeks starting the third week of June thru the third week of August. Good compensation, incl. room/board and a dynamic work environment. If you like to work with young people and are interested in being a key skilled component of our culinary team this summer, please contact the Silver Lake Conference Center at 860.364.5526, or by e-mail to Chef Bob Slagel at bobs@ctucc.org.

from the
THE SPIRIT
calendar



BY CHARLIE KUCHENBROD

Scripture: Psalm 8

I drove out to Silver Lake the day after a recent winter storm. I experienced quite a variety of weather, from bright sun to a short, intense snow squall. In places, the trees were sheathed in ice, while in other places the trees were bare. Some places seemed to have a fair amount of snow; other places hardly any. It was a wonder of diversity.

I saw a lot of downed trees in one stretch. Not just tree limbs: entire trees brought to the ground. That's life, I thought. Years, perhaps decades, of righteous and upright living suddenly ended. Where's the justice in that? God does not intervene to reward the good and punish the wicked.

Yet God is present. God's love is unconditional. God yearns for the best outcomes. The downed trees are still a part of the forest. Having vacated space for new growth, they will also provide shelter and food for many other living things. God has a plan. God provides.

I arrived at Silver Lake, a place loved by many, and a place I like to think of as God's backyard. We try to play by God's rules at Silver Lake. Not that we don't all try at other places and other times, but Silver Lake is a place set aside as a sanctuary.

My kids love summer camp at Silver Lake. Most kids, though, do not love, hate, or have any opinion about summer camp at Silver Lake. They have never been there and that seems like a shame to me. There is room for them in God's backyard.

There are other places to learn about God and to practice playing by God's rules, but this is our place, for our children and for all children. God provides.

Charlie Kuchenbrod is Associate Conference Minister for Endowment Ministries, and a frequent dean at Silver Lake.

The Spirit Calendar arrives via e-mail each Monday. Sign up at www.ctucc.org/fido/, or read them online at www.ctucc.org/fido/spiritcalendar/

Smiles of joy from Olga Agosto and Ed Ayala. Glory to God; Gloria de Dios.

