



The Seneca Valley Voice

The United Church of Christ of Seneca Valley
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CAROLYN'S COLUMN

As you already know, I spent the end of June and the first part of July at Virginia Theological Seminary, participating in the 2008 Summer Collegium for pastors of small congregations. Since a small congregation is defined as any congregation with under 100 in worship, UCCSV qualifies. Although there were times when the collegium's focus had to do more specifically with small rural churches and their particular challenges, much of the material was relevant to UCCSV. It's impossible to condense ten days into a few short paragraphs—additional pieces will come out over the coming months. What follows is a small sampling of topics covered.

For all of the press that mega-churches command, small churches are the predominant form of church; the vast majority of congregations in the United States are small. What's more, small churches are the normative form of church across history. It wasn't until the advent of mass transit in the late 1800s that large churches drawing congregants from many miles away were even an option.

Following World War II, rural church-going people moved from the country to the city and suburbs in large numbers, bringing their church-going habits with them. That primary migration pattern ended in the 1960s...which coincides with the high point of church attendance. (1962 was the year that saw the peak percentage of the US population attending Sunday worship.) In other words, what many of us grew up with in terms of the "build it and they will come" model of church planting and church growth is actually a blip in church history. Unfortunately, many of us have a "bigger is better" image of what it means to be a "successful" church.

While it is true that there are some limitations to small congregations, (diverse programs are more easily provided by larger congregations, for example), renewed attention to the dynamics of smaller congregations reveals one of their primary strengths: their relational component. Because small churches know most of their members personally, they generally do a better job of integrating new members. However, in general, late "boomers" and early "gen-X-ers" tend to have *no* church memory. This suggests that we need to do our best to make our service of worship as seeker-friendly as possible. It also means that *each member has a central role in helping to interpret how God is at work in their life, how they are becoming a different person because of their involvement with this congregation.*

It is also vital that we pay serious attention to each person's spiritual gifts. One example given was an individual's gift of teaching, which was coupled with his passion for cars. That combination led to a Saturday car shop in which the member taught others how to care for their cars—and helped to keep cars of fixed-income members in good running condition. His comment? "This is the first time I knew I had anything to give back to Jesus."

May our gifts and our passions also find the right combination in this congregation

Blessings,

Carolyn

MODERATOR'S REPORT

Completing the Circle



Last fall, Carolyn, the Human Resources Committee and members of the congregation participated in a process to provide an evaluation of the Pastor's work at UCCSV. This was interrupted by Carolyn's sabbatical. Once she returned, the process was completed and a transition team was organized (Sandy Renner, Ruth Bulger, John Ellis and Colby Harmon) to help with her re-entry back into the life of the congregation. The feedback from the evaluation and observations from our sabbatical pastor, Anne Holmes, about our congregation have helped shape our plans for our ministry together for the coming year. In addition, it was decided to move to a more holistic evaluation process that will help Carolyn and our congregation grow together.

The Transition Team, the Human Resources Committee and the Church Council will soon be implementing a new formal process to provide high-quality feedback to our pastor, other staff members, and lay leaders on how our members are experiencing the life and mission of our church. A series of small group feedback sessions will be held to provide participants with opportunities to discuss what they are personally experiencing regarding various aspects of our church life and mission.

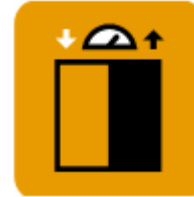
Each session will be devoted to a different facet of our church life. For example, we want to assess the effectiveness of the UCCSV boards and committees; individual programs and activities, such as Christian Education for Children, Youth and Adults, Confirmation Class, and support for Adopt-a-Road and Community Based Shelter; as well as aspects of the major ministries within our church, such as music, worship and pastoral care. Many other topics will be covered during a three-year cycle that is intended to review every major activity that our church engages in.

The specifics of how the program will be implemented, which topics will be addressed first, and when the sessions will be held are still being worked out. The program is being initiated because we want to

improve the overall quality of all of our ministries, which we believe already have a strong foundation. In the past, we have had no consistent ongoing method to address concerns about how our church ministries were conducted. Completing the Circle will provide us with a reliable means to solicit feedback and to track and address any concerns raised.

One of our primary goals is to provide improved and more effective systems of communication within our congregation. You will be hearing more about Completing the Circle soon.

"Elevator Speech" Roundtable Discussions Prompting Changes in UCCSV Outreach



On May 4 the Spreading the Hope Team sponsored a fun event where we acted out what we might tell a stranger about our church if they asked us about it at the beginning of a short elevator ride. After we heard some great "elevator speeches," four roundtable discussions were held to help come up with ideas for improving the ways in which our church is presented to the broader community. These four discussions focused on the UCC and UCCSV Brochures that are provided to visitors, our Website, the Sunday Worship Bulletin, and the possibility of promoting our church at local events, like Oktoberfest (see more Oktoberfest information in the following article in this edition of *The Voice*).

You may have already noticed some small changes in how information is organized in our Sunday bulletin to make it easier to use. The Spreading the Hope Team is working on still more enhancements to the bulletin and to our visitor brochures. We will be taking advantage of some of the national United Church of Christ "branding" themes that are part of the "God is still speaking" campaign, www.ucc.org/god-is-still-speaking, while also highlighting what makes our congregation here in Seneca Valley special.

The roundtable discussions also helped us identify several aspects of our website, www.uccsv.org that could be improved. Suggestions included ideas about the content – more information about our programs,

ministries, staff and what a typical worship service is like, as well as ideas about improving the way the website is organized and how navigation through the site is structured.

The web is one of the most important ways in which people find a new church. We want the UCC of Seneca Valley website to present information that is useful to new visitors and members alike and in a way that's easy to use. There will be more opportunities for the congregation to weigh in on the new website design as it is developed.

Moderator

Das Oktoberfest kommt nach Deutschstadt! (The Oktoberfest is coming to Germantown!)



Circle Saturday, October 4, on your calendars. After a long absence, **the UCC of Seneca Valley is returning to the Germantown Oktoberfest.** We will be hosting a booth to share brochures and bookmarks with information about our church, as well as small trinkets with our name and web address printed on them. We will also be selling our famous fair-trade coffee.

This is one of the biggest community events in Germantown and it's an excellent opportunity to tell our neighbors a little about ourselves. **Please sign up to help staff our booth.** Festivities run from 11 am until dark. Oktoberfest includes local crafts, music, dancing, food, games for kids, and of course the Oktoberfest Biergarten. We're excited to be a part of this fun day. Come be a part of it too!

NOTES FROM THE DEACONS

The "**Care of Members**" is the first directive outlined on the list of responsibilities that deacons assume when they join this board. There is no question that it is essential to have the Sanctuary ready for worship and Fellowship Pads in the pews. There are definitely duties that need attention every Sunday morning. None are so important, however, as connecting with the members and visitors. Last month you received the Phone Tree showing which deacon was "yours." In September you will receive a card from "your" deacon. This is being done with the intent of reaching out to our friends/members.

There is an old Swedish Proverb that goes like this: "*Friendship doubles our joy and divides our grief.*" We all have need of help from time to time. Know that you have church friends who are ready, willing and able to share in your joy and also help when it's needed.

Chair, Deacons

ADULT CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Mind, Body, Spirit

Mind, Body, Spirit will resume on Tuesday, September 9, from 7:30-9:00 pm. This group affords the opportunity to learn meditation as a means of improving health through relaxation and provides a path for drawing closer to God. Please call the office at 301-540-3449 to confirm that you are attending and to get directions. All are invited.

SOCIAL CONCERNS



Community Based Shelter

Montgomery County has a program in which homeless people are given training to prepare them for jobs leading to independent living eventually. During the time they are in training they live in a shelter in Rockville. The program is called Community Based Shelter. While living in the shelter the residents are provided food by various churches taking turns preparing and serving dinners and providing breakfast foods and lunches for the residents to take with them when they go out for the day's training.

UCCSV has been taking part in feeding these people for many years and will again do so this September from dinner on September 21 through lunch on September 24. In the coming weeks there will be sign-up sheets on the Social Concerns bulletin board denoting the things that will be needed. Generally we will need people to cook, serve the food and clean up, prepare lunches and provide breakfast foods. Also things like laundry soap come in handy for the residents.

Those UCCSV members who have participated in this program in past years have found it to be a rewarding experience and actually quite a lot of fun. So look for information in the coming weeks in your bulletins and on the bulletin board. There will be names, phone numbers and e-mail addresses of people to contact if you have further questions.

Please consider signing up for this worthy project. It will make you feel really good inside. If you should want to help but don't want to cook, serve, etc, donations can be given to help with expenses, e.g. providing lunch materials etc.

Emergency Assistance



Thanks to the generosity of UCCSV members and friends the Emergency Assistance Ministry has provided assistance to 16 families in our greater community. Help is given for eviction notices, prescriptions and utilities. We also had two large food donations made to Germantown Help because of the generous spirit of UCCSV!

Donations to the Emergency Assistance Fund are taken on the first Sunday of each month. We thank you for your continued support.

Thanks also to the volunteers who cover the desk each Tuesday and Thursday morning faithfully serving in this ministry. If you would like to help out please speak to any of these folks. They would be glad to give you any information you need and training will be provided.

NOTES FROM THE CENTRAL ATLANTIC CONFERENCE

MINISTERIAL PROFILES

Today, after months of preparation, we implement a new system to support our Associate Conference Ministers and Pastoral Search Committees. All profiles will be coordinated through our New Jersey office by Beth Pugh. We hope that this change will reduce redundancy and provide more efficient support for everyone participating in the Search and Call process--search committees, candidates and the Associate Conference Ministers.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Our new system of "instant bank deposits" has been implemented and works! As checks are received they are scanned and electronically deposited from the office. This change should continue to provide increased accuracy and reduce the number of staff trips to the bank.

Arnetta Jones has assumed additional responsibilities in financial oversight and Chris Casio continues as our contract accountant.

HARRISONBURG OFFICE

Mary Geise's last day on our staff, following seven years of service, was yesterday. Richard Vaught and I treated Mary to a farewell lunch and the Shenandoah Association held a special event in her honor.

Staff support in Harrisonburg will continue through the use of volunteers and individuals contracted for specific activities.

JERRY'S RETIREMENT

Last month Associate Conference Minister Jerry Foltz announced his plan to retire next June (2009).

Congratulations--Jerry! We're looking forward to the party (ies)...celebrating Jerry's ministry in each of our five associations.

ACM SEARCH COMMITTEE

The Board of Directors, at their June meeting, affirmed a process and timeline to begin the search for how best to fill the two part-time Associate Conference Minister positions. A committee drawn primarily from the Catocin and Chesapeake Associations will be assembled in September to begin work on a job

description(s) and profile(s) for the position(s).

Patricia Barth continues as the Interim Associate Conference Minister working with the Chesapeake Association.

BYLAWS - PERSONNEL POLICIES – CONFLICT OF INTEREST POLICIES

In June the Annual Meeting affirmed revised bylaws and the Board affirmed revised and updated Personnel Policies. The Board also adopted a new conflict of interest policy.

These three documents represent two years of detailed, caring work by a special committee chaired by 2007-2008 CAC Moderator Glenn Patterson.

Check at cacucc.org to see the documents soon.

SABBATICAL

Part two of my sabbatical has begun.

I will be returning to the Middle East with Conference Minister colleagues. Led by our Middle East executive, Peter Makari, we will be visiting partners in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Israel and Palestine with a special emphasis on our ministries to refugees. Two of us will also be participating in a seminar in Jerusalem organized through the American Jewish Committee. A foundation grant is supporting the trip's expenses.

I will return from the Middle East in early August. We invite your prayers for our safe travels.

After vacation I plan to be back in the office after Labor Day.

While I am away in the Middle East Kwame Osei Reed will be the Acting Conference Minister. During August two or more of the Ministry Team will be available at all times.

Have a great summer...may it be restful and renewing. See you in September!

Rev. Dr. John R. Deckenbach,
Central Atlantic Conference Minister

CENTRAL ATLANTIC CONFERENCE ANNUAL MEETING REPORT

The Central Atlantic Conference recently concluded its annual meeting for 2008, organized around the theme "IMAGINE!—A New Church Is Possible." This report is designed to report back to our congregations and clergy on that gathering June 13-15 at the University of Delaware.

This year's annual meeting was graced by the presence of Rev. Dr. John Thomas, president and general minister of the United Church of Christ. The meeting got off to a great start with a provocative dialogue between John, Rev. Dr. Barbara Brown Zikmund and Conference Minister Rev. Dr. John Deckenback, reflecting on the UCC's first 50 years and where it is likely to go in the next half-century. John Thomas followed later that evening with a keynote address, suggesting that it was time for the UCC to move from its "big tent" of inclusivity out into a "parade" that would seek to engage with the rest of the world. "The days of being able to pitch a big tent on the town green are over for the United Church of Christ," he asserted. The age of cultural establishment when our churches could thrive by simply mirroring cultural respectability are behind us. No matter how welcoming, no matter how courageous, a church only imagined as big tent all too easily surrenders to a culture eager to privatize and marginalize it."

John also brought the sermon at our Saturday afternoon worship and then joined with John Deckenback and Rev. Felix Carrion, head of the StillSpeaking Initiative, to discuss how the UCC is continuing to respond to the various public relations challenges it has faced this year. We are grateful that John Thomas could be so generous in sharing his time with us, and also that our annual meeting provided him with the opportunity to spend some time with his twin brother, Dick, a member of First Congregational Church of Montclair, NJ. We were also able to enjoy a few jokes at the expense of the nearly identical Thomas twins.

The Conference culminated some 18 months of work by approving revisions to the Conference Bylaws. At its June 13 meeting, the CAC Board of Directors also approved revisions to the Conference's Personnel Policies and Practices and a new conflict of interest policy for Conference board members and staff. Thanks to Glenn Patterson, chair of the board's Operations and Personnel Committee, for shepherding this process, and to all of the board

members and conference members who contributed to this process. The Bylaws passed with just a few amendments; the updated document will be posted to the CAC Website at a future date.

During the course of the meeting, delegates approved the Conference's budget for calendar year 2009, stipulating again that 65 percent of church contributions to Our Church's Wider Mission will be kept within the conference, and 35 percent sent on to the national church. Delegates also approved the CAC's 2008-09 Clergy Compensation Guidelines. The guidelines were revised this year to respond to issues that had been raised in recent years by delegates to the annual meeting. The revisions are designed to better serve the needs of small congregations, to clarify the concept of the housing allowance and to provide a list of online resources to help churches determine local housing costs. Thanks to Rev. Dr. Gerry Hanberry and his subcommittee for their work on this initiative.

Delegates also voted to approve a resolution in support of Physician Assistance in Dying. This topic was first discussed at a workshop at the 2007 CAC annual meeting, in consideration of another resolution at last year's General Synod and then during a hearing at the start of this year's CAC annual meeting. The CAC board will take appropriate action in response to the resolution's call for it to be forwarded to General Synod 2009 for consideration.

The annual meeting provided an opportunity for many persons working in youth ministry around the conference to network with Kristen Curlee, the Conference's part-time youth ministry coordinator. Young people attending the annual meeting got dedicated time to meet with John Thomas. A contingent of more than 100 young people from the Central Atlantic Conference will be attending the National Youth Event later this summer, and plans are progressing for regular meetings of youth ministers and leaders from around the conference for working together to strengthen these programs.

We also appreciated an opportunity to interact with two representatives of our partner church in Germany, Rev. Johann-Heinrich Witzel and Rev. Peter Kube of the EKMD (Evangelical Church of Middle Germany). The EKMD is the newly formed merger of our former partners in the KPS (Church Province of Saxony) and their Lutheran neighbors in Turinga.

This year's workshops were designed to focus on the needs and interests of our congregations, and

included programs on church fund-raising, Christian education and responding to the immigration policy debate, among other topics. Speakers' presentations and other resources will be made available on the CAC website where possible.

These and other materials from the annual meeting will be made available on the CAC's website (www.cacucc.org) in the coming weeks so that more of our churches and members can benefit from the annual meeting resources.

Workshop leaders on Sunday morning included the Rev. Dr. Donna Allen, assistant professor of preaching and worship at Lancaster Theological Seminary and founder of New Revelation Community Church in Oakland, California. Donna brought the sermon to our closing worship together.

Thanks to the New Jersey Association for serving as hosts, and particularly to Rev. Linda Holzbaur, who served as Chair of the Annual Meeting Planning Task Force, Rev. Sherry Taylor of the CAC staff and Christine Sheslter, who coordinated all of the workshops. Thanks also to the choir of Holmdel Community of Holmdel, NJ, for providing the core of the Conference choir, and our other worship leaders from New Jersey. Many people took on tasks, both large and small, and for that we are very grateful.

REPORT FROM UCC GENERAL MINISTER AND PRESIDENT

UCC General Minister and President John Thomas sent the following report on the National Youth Event and the tragic events in Tennessee.

Today youth and adult leaders from your conference are returning from the National Youth Event in Knoxville, Tennessee. It was a marvelous event and, by all accounts, enthusiastically received by the youth and their advisors. I heard many veterans of NYE say that this was the best event in their memory. About 2800 people participated, including nearly 2100 youth.

Kelly Burd deserves tremendous credit for her work along with Jose Abraham de Jesus and the Worship and Education Team. Called to her position relatively late in the planning process, Kelly gave the planning team focus, brought together an impressive cross-ministry team of national staff, and led staff and volunteers with clarity and energy and a remarkably "non-anxious" style. Along with the other members of the Collegium, I was proud to see a large representation of our national staff guiding the mechanics of the meeting and interacting effectively

with the youth. The Collegium, many team leaders, program staff, and support staff worked long hours to make this a meaningful event. Participation in the plenary sessions and in worship was an appropriate blend of exuberance, attentiveness, and respectfulness. The internationally known keynote speakers were excellent and were well received. The vast majority of the youth engaged in workshops, service projects, and forums with deep interest. The commitment of the church to be a multi-racial, multi-cultural church, while somewhat modestly represented in the participants, was everywhere present "up front." Adult advisors were great partners with us and it was good to have time to spend with those in our churches, as well as on your staffs, who make it possible for the youth to have these experiences. Particularly impressive was the leadership of youth and young adults as speakers, preachers and worship leaders. With the exception of an ageing GMP who spoke to the Sunday plenary, adults were very much in the background!

As you know, the final day of the event was marred by the tragic violence in a Unitarian Universalist congregation a short distance from the campus that left at least two members of that church dead and several wounded. Our youth responded to this with maturity, compassion, and creativity. Look at the UCC website to see what they did.

From what I heard, youth by and large honored the behavioral covenant. No doubt there were issues here and there, but this was a group of young people that took seriously their commitments to one another and to us.

Over the coming days I hope you will find ways to thank the youth from your conference who attended and encourage them to share their experiences and stories in conference, association, and congregational settings. And I hope you will personally thank the adults from your conference who gave generously of their time to make this trip possible for youth. I'm sure a personal word from you would be appreciated and would be received as an important symbol of how leadership values their ministries. We do hope to have some video on the web as a way to help interpret the vibrancy of the event.

John H. Thomas
General Minister and President
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SCRIPTURE READINGS - AUGUST

Sunday, August 3

Theme: Table of Plenty.

When we are centered in compassion, God can nurture many.

Matthew 14.13-21

Genesis 32.22-31

Psalms 17.1-7, 15

Romans 9.1-5

Sunday, August 10

Theme: Lifted Up.

Even when the events of life overwhelm us, God is with us.

Genesis 37.1-4, 12-28

Psalms 105.1-6, 16-22, 45b

Romans 10.5-15

Matthew 14.22-23

Sunday, August 17

Theme: Blessed and Forgiveness

Living together as the human family is never easy, but when God is part of the equation, even forgiveness and reconciliation are possible.

Genesis 45.1-15

Psalms 133

Romans 11.1-2a, 29-32

Matthew 15 (10-20), 21-28

Sunday, August 24

Theme: Courageous Women

Regardless of the forces of evil arrayed against us, God can and does use individuals to counter those forces and bring hope.

Exodus 1.8-2.10

Psalms 124

Romans 12.1-8

Matthew 16.13-20

Sunday, August 31

Theme: A Mile in My Shoes.

Our shoes are reminders that wherever we are, We are standing on God's holy ground.

Exodus 3.1-15

Psalms 105.1-6, 23-26, 45c

Romans 12.9-21

Matthew 16.21-28

CHURCH COUNCIL



If you have questions for our council please email the church at uccsv@verizon.net



August Calendar

Friday, August 1

No meetings scheduled

Saturday, August 2

7th Day Adventist Church – all day

Sunday, August 3

10:00a – Worship

11:00a – Coffee/Fellowship

8:30p – AA

Monday, August 4

7:00p – Deacons

Tuesday, August 5

No meetings scheduled

Wednesday, August 6

7:30p – Stewardship Board

7:30p – One Anothering

Thursday, August 7

7:30p – Boy Scouts

Friday, August 8

No meetings scheduled

Saturday, August 9

7th Day Adventist Church – all day

Sunday, August 10

10:00a – Worship

11:00a – Coffee/Fellowship

11:30a – Human Resources/Pastor Relations

Small Group
8:30p - AA

Monday, August 11
No meeting scheduled

Tuesday, August 12
10:00a – Staff meeting

Wednesday, August 13
7:30p – One Anothering

Thursday, August 14
7:30p – Boy Scouts

Friday, August 15
No meetings scheduled

Saturday, August 16
7th Day Adventist Church – all day

Sunday, August 17
10:00a – Worship
11:00a – Coffee/Fellowship
11:00a – Spreading the Hope
11:30a – Dine with the Divine
8:30p – AA

Monday, August 18
No meetings scheduled

Tuesday, August 19
7:30p – Council

Wednesday, August 20
7:30p – One Anothering

Thursday, August 21
7:30p – Boy Scouts

Friday, August 22
No meeting scheduled

Saturday, August 23
7th Day Adventists Church – all day

Sunday, August 24
10:00a – Worship
11:00a – Coffee/Fellowship
8:30p – AA

Friday, August 22-Thursday, August 28
Carolyn Roberts will be on vacation.

Monday, August 25 through Friday, August 29
No church meetings scheduled

Saturday, August 30
7th Day Adventist Church – all day

Sunday, August 31
10:00a – Worship
11:00a – Coffee/Fellowship
8:30p - AA