



The Seneca Valley Voice

The United Church of Christ of Seneca Valley
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Carolyn's Column

Lest we forget that our faith is always personal but never private, the issues campaign 2008 raises are as stark a reminder as we could ask for: Racism. Sexism. War. Environmental stewardship. Poverty. They're all there, and in one way or another, they intersect in our personal lives, our personal faith, our corporate witness, and our public policy.

One of the issues our own denomination invites—and challenges—us to attend to is the issue of racism. Several weeks ago I joined the multitudes of UCC clergy who accepted that invitation and challenge to begin a **Sacred Conversation on Race**, with a sermon that spoke to some of the realities of this pernicious issue from the vantage point of my personal experience. I also invited interested friends and members of UCCSV to join me in this conversation, and a significant number of you have responded. Our first conversation will begin **after worship on Sunday, 27 July**.

As part of my own participation in and preparation for these conversations, I have been taking part in a separate set of conversations for area clergy, primarily UCC. It is a group called together out of common concern, and reflects African-American, Caucasian-American, and Latina perspectives, but is missing Native and Asian experiences.

Participants have shared their own personal experiences of racism and privilege, and reflected on the ways in which they have shaped their understandings of faith and culture. We have heard the stories of those who have been imported to the Gulf Coast under false pretenses to help with the reconstruction that area still needs. We have discussed the media's handling of the campaign 2008 candidates in general, and the vilification of Jeremiah Wright in particular. And we have begun to share

suggestions as to how we might begin to make a difference in our corporate witness.

I anticipate that our own conversations will be similarly wide-ranging. Consciously lifting up and reflecting on our own experiences, faithfully, personally, culturally, is a healthy first step. It can also be difficult, and one of the primary concerns—stated or unstated—is whether or not we will choose to trust one another enough to share our perspectives, our fears, our visions.

I believe the answer is 'yes,' because we have done so already. UCCSV's process of discussion and decision to become an Open and Affirming (ONA) congregation provides us with an excellent model. We did not and do not always agree on the best way to move forward. We struggle mightily with how we can be welcoming and inclusive, yet remain true to our convictions concerning the gospel's claims on our faith and its personal and corporate expression.

Once again our ONA experience is instructive. As I mentioned at our Annual Meeting in May, I can cite specific conversations with individuals who express their own deep gratitude to UCCSV for being a faith community that clearly communicates its welcome to and affirmation of persons of all backgrounds. At the same time, we also have had persons come for a period, and express their appreciation of UCCSV's welcome, but who ultimately searched for another community of faith because they disagree with our affirmation of those whose sexual orientation or gender identity is not heterosexual.

This is a reminder that there will be people who experience UCCSV's genuine welcome, but cannot personally extend that same welcome to all others. There are still others who do not feel included

because of different perspectives on biblical interpretation or on the role of the church in society.

This is especially true at the moment. I am uncomfortably aware that, especially during this time of war, my own faith convictions as well as the pronouncements which come from General Synod and/or our denominational leadership may stand in contrast to the commitments made by our armed service personnel or those who are employed in related fields. This may suggest that such personnel are less welcome in our faith community. I want to say unconditionally that this is *not* the case. Their commitment is exemplary, their service is admirable, and the welcome is genuine. None of that changes because we disagree.

At the recent Central Atlantic Conference Annual Meeting UCC General Minister and President John Thomas invited us to move beyond the "big tent" theory of the church to a "parade" that would seek to engage the world. As our congregation has grown to include new members and friends from a variety of racial and cultural backgrounds (we are not the same congregation we were just a few years ago), we will be challenged anew to include newcomers in our conversations and in the fullness of our life together.

There is still much that we have to learn about being a faith community that lives into its mission of providing a welcoming spiritual home. Engaging with one another in faithful and honest conversation is an important place for this welcome and our own exploration of Christian discipleship to take place.

Blessings,

Carolyn

From the Moderator

Looking at our Facilities



The new UCCSV program year didn't start until June 1, but the newly elected Church Council got a jump on the year ahead by holding its first meeting on May 27. The first order of business was to take a second look at our facilities from the perspective of a new visitor.

The council decided that the broken and worn playground equipment in the back of the church must go. We may replace it with something safer and more attractive in the future, but we agreed that having nothing is better than the image that the playground projects now.

The council also took a long look at our church signs on Clopper Road. Our metal sign is showing signs of age and the hinges for the case holding the movable letters that announce our worship time are no longer working properly. The lettering on the wooden sign across the driveway is too small to see from the road. We agreed that the church should look into replacing both signs.

A small group called the "Spreading the Hope Team" is developing plans for better ways for us to spread the word about the UCCSV to the community, and developing better signage is on their to do list.

Looking at our Ministries



Our Human Resources Committee has started a program of systematically reviewing all of our church ministries. The goal is to get feedback from the congregation on their own personal experiences with the various aspects of church life here at Seneca Valley. The Committee recently participated in the Social Concerns Board's review of the Emergency Assistance Program. In the coming months the Committee plans on taking a look at our worship experience, the experience of our latest confirmation class, as well as asking new members and frequent visitors about what it was like for them coming to our church when they were new here.

Colby Harmon
Moderator

Will Obama & UCC Make Up?

Written by Nicholas F. Benton

Thursday, 19 June 2008



NEWARK, Delaware – The Rev. Dr. John Thomas, the general minister and president of the 1.2 million-member United Church of Christ (UCC) denomination, told 250 delegates to the annual meeting of the UCC's Central Atlantic Conference at a forum on the University of Delaware campus here Saturday that Sen. Barack Obama recently commented to him, "I'm sorry I've been such a problem for you." Obama was referring to need to disassociate from remarks by the Rev. Jeremiah Wright from earlier sermons posted on the Internet, and comments many allege were taken out of context at Wright's National Press Club speech in April. His comment also referred to his subsequent resignation from the Trinity Church of Chicago, following remarks by a guest preacher there that were seen as unduly derisive of Hillary Clinton. Obama had been a member of the Trinity Church, a popular mega-church in the UCC denomination, for over 20 years.

Thomas said the occasion for his recent encounter with Obama, now the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee, was a meeting of 45 church leaders that Obama convened earlier this month, aimed at both listening and reaching out to them.

"The vast majority of those present represented evangelical churches," Thomas said. "Certainly none of them, like us, support same-sex marriage."

He said that while Obama's relationship with the UCC has become at least temporarily estranged, Obama did represent his own values to the religious leaders at the meeting that closely corresponded with those of his UCC roots.

Otherwise, Thomas said he personally sensed the UCC as "marginal" among the denominations represented, because of its "legacy of risk-taking that is built into its DNA from the days of its support for anti-slavery Abolitionism and before."

In the discussion that ensued at the forum, moderated by Central Atlantic Conference Minister the Rev. John Deckenback, one participant responded that rather than sensing the UCC as "marginal," it is more

constructive to view it as "cutting edge," or the "way of the future."

The UCC distinguished itself as the first mainstream Protestant denomination to formally embrace same-sex marriage at its biennial Synod in 2005. Among other things, it was the first to ordain and openly-gay clergyman in 1972, and brought Cesar Chavez and the United Farmworkers Union into association with the religious community.

In the last century, it transformed its Abolitionist anti-slavery efforts prior to the Civil War into the establishment of colleges and universities for freed slaves afterward, including the founding of Howard University in Washington, D.C.

"Ours is the denomination rooted in care for the oppressed and vulnerable, and the welcome of the stranger. These are the measures of whether we're being true to ourselves," Thomas said Saturday.

Barbara Brown Zikmund, a church historian participating in Saturday's forum, noted that "many in other denominations look to us to be the cutting edge risk-takers, because they're not positioned to do the kinds of bold things we can, and they'd like to."

Thomas said the UCC is set up as a denomination to run a wide range from more conventional values and behavior to "doing odd things, profound sometimes, and other times, just odd."

The UCC does not require a uniformity of belief, and many in the denomination have learned "not to run away when they're not all of one mind," Zikmund said. "We can live with dissidence when we have it."

Thomas said a unifying feature of the denomination is the "shared language" in its Statement of Faith, originally crafted when the UCC was created by a merger of the Congregationalist church and the Evangelical and Reformed church 50 years ago.

While belief in the assertions in the statement are not required for membership in the UCC, he said, it does represent a basis for "commonality" among UCC members who may otherwise clash on specific issues.

Buoyed by this embrace of diversity, UCC leaders are hopeful that Obama and the UCC will reconcile, and that he will find a new church home within the denomination.

Mind Body Spirit

Mind, Body, Spirit will meet Tuesday, July 8, from 6:30-9:00pm in the home of Dianne Kaseman. 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. All are welcome. Please call the church office to confirm that you are attending and to get directions. Please note: The time change is to accommodate a picnic supper.

All are invited



Marilyn Vacation

Marilyn will be on vacation August 2-August 8. If you could help cover phones during that time please call her at 301-540-3449.

Notes From the Deacons

As the 'New Year' starts from the perspective of our newly formed board, the deacons are enthusiastically ready and willing to be supportive in all aspects of our church life together. We want to be responsive to the needs of our members and friends. Consider this an open invitation to all, with regard to sharing your thoughts and suggestions. It does "take a village". Feel free to speak to any one of us.

With only one meeting under our belt we are in the beginning process of planning for the up-coming year. The intent is to work toward incorporating the outcomes from the "Road Map Project" and to keep you informed.

You probably feel that you know most of us quite well. You've seen both Tom K and John up front

joyfully playing the drums and guitar. You've heard Terri beautiful voice soar. Beth has put her unique and wonderful touch on the piano pieces she plays. Jen not only lends her lovely voice to the choir but she also brings adorable Bethany with her! Dick mesmerizes us with his strong, deep announcer's voice (he is a professional radio personality). Andy greets everyone good naturedly with his warmth and playful sense of humor. Christie Holland is a jack-of-all-trades and brings calm, sensible perspective to

every group or committee she works with. I buzz around a lot!

You may think you know us but here is some inside information. Can you put the deacon with the description?????????????????

DO YOU REALLY KNOW THE DEACONS?

1. While a senior in high school, won the Kiwanis "Public Speaking Award."
2. Flew (tethered) in an astronaut suit over a live audience.
3. Was offered a football scholarship to Kalamazoo College.
4. Was romantically pursued by Barry Williams; he starred as Greg Brady on the "Brady Bunch."
5. Owned a Harley Davidson Sportster. (I'm thinking wild renegade!)
6. Can juggle two balls with one hand and three balls with two hands (sometimes) **ALSO**, (DRUM ROLL PLEASE) can catch 16 pennies stacked on flat of elbow!
7. Was King of the Senior Prom. "They only made me King because everyone wanted my date to be the Queen."
8. Was a radio DJ in college and hosted a Latino music program.
9. Loves Halloween; was a "Punk Rocker" and a "Field Hockey Player", complete with wig of long blond hair! This has taken place in the last two years!

Come talk with a deacon and see if you can get the matches correct. There's a **BIG PRIZE** for the winner. I'm talking **BIG!!!!!!!**

Chair, Board of Deacons



July Bible Readings

Sunday, July 6

Theme: *Sacred Rest.*

Disciples need to include meditation and prayer in life of faith.

Communion Sunday – no Children’s time

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67

Psalm 45:10-17 or

Song of Solomon 2:8-13 or

Romans 7:15-25a

Sunday, July 13

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Theme: *Abundant Possibilities*

Among all that is possible, we are called to choose that which is fruitful.

Genesis 25:19-34

Psalm 119:105-112

Romans 8:1-11

Sunday, July 20

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Theme: *Wheat and Weeds Together*

Even the weeds have a place in the garden.

Genesis 28:10-19a

Psalm 139:1-12, 23-24

Romans 8:12-25

Sunday, July 27

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

Theme: *Pictures of God’s Realm*

Genesis 29:15-28

Psalm 105:1-11, 45b

Romans 8:26-39