

# Vermont Conference, UCC 2009 Annual Reports

## Conference Minister's Annual Report Rev. Lynn Bujnak



When you visit my office in Randolph, you will find a similar collage on my wall. It is there to remind me of the ministry we do together, of the churches we serve and of our centering within the sacred mystery of our common life in Jesus Christ.

In this past year, the churches of the Vermont Conference of the United Church of Christ continued doing faithful ministry within and far beyond the boundaries of our conference. As I visited our churches, I experienced vital and renewing worship, the energy of youth participation, and the dedication of lay, licensed, commissioned and ordained leadership. Our congregations are involved in a wide variety of mission such as: summer lunch programs, food shelves, ministry to those incarcerated, partnerships of learning, building, helping, visiting that stretch across the country and across the world. Our churches have responded generously to the natural disasters and crises that have impacted so many and the efforts to help the people of Haiti were truly extraordinary. Advocacy continues for the most vulnerable among us through our participation and support of such programs as Vermont Low Income Advocacy, Vermont Interfaith Action and the recent Legislative Day. These are just a few of the many ways in which we continue to put our faith in action.

Your Board of Directors has worked very hard this past year, forming a cohesive unit with respect for the diversity of opinions, gifts and graces of each. I believe we are poised to begin the work of strategic planning and to name what it is we believe God is calling us to do and to be as we move forward into God's future.

Yes, there are challenges that we face. We continue to live in a time of decline among mainline and now evangelical churches. We continue to face the task of both serving the needs of those already in our churches while finding new ways to keep the gospel message alive, relevant and engaging for new generations. As we come more and more to understand that we are no longer the church in the center but rather the church on the margins we will need to be bold and creative. I believe we need to encourage pastoral leadership that is equipped and willing to be bi-vocational to serve the needs of our many smaller membership congregations. Support and ongoing education are needed for leadership at all levels.

We have a message to share that is absolutely needed in our world today. It is a story of a **Still Speaking God** who is active and engaged in our lives here and now and calling us to partnership in an ever unfolding sacred story. Ours is a message of **radical welcome**. Just think for a moment what Good News it is for those who have felt rejected to hear a message that proclaims: *No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you're welcome here.* We have been entrusted with a story of **changing lives**. That really is what our mission is all about: to be changed ourselves by our encounter with the Jesus the Christ and to become agents of that change through our outreach, justice seeking, peace making, global partnerships, and the preaching and living out of the gospel.

Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us and be fearless as we put our discipleship into action.

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### **Associate Conference Minister**

Rev. Pamela Lucas

As is true each and every year this has been a year of pastoral comings and goings. But what continues to be exciting to us are the number of first time pastors who are arriving in Vermont. Last year we reported that one "new to ministry" clergy group had begun – with facilitators trained by the Lilly Grant in the Massachusetts Conference. A second group was beginning soon – and both are doing well – as are each of the pastors in the groups. But now we are ready to begin a third group! These new pastors are bringing such energy and passion to our Conference. It's a delight to "meet the church again for the first time" through their eyes.

Electronic communication is a growing phenomenon in our churches. More and more congregations are using electronic newsletters. Rather than meeting face to face for Advent or Lenten studies, some churches have tried on-line discussion groups. Church web sites are growing more and more creative.

Yet challenges continue around actually “showing up” in person for worship and/or church school...or for doing the work of the church. Church Educators plan for random rather than steady attendance of children and young people. Congregations are looking at their committee structures asking, “does how we are doing things make sense for us now?” We are having to re-think what it means to be community – to be in covenant with one another – to be church as the body of Christ in a particular geographic location.

Remember that the early church grew day by day because believers gathered together for worship, learning, outreach and fellowship!

But still there continue to be signs of spiritual growth and faith formation among young people and adults. Book and bible studies are creating space for sharing spiritual journeys, questions and insights. Faith Practice Resources from our UCC Partner in Education Network will be introduced this summer. The Vermont Academy of Spiritual Training (VAST) continues to attract new students.

What’s next? Perhaps Christian Educator Cluster groups for support and nurture of their leadership in the local church. Perhaps more VAST Continuing Education (three new classes were offered this past year). Three times in the last week I have been asked about whether there could be a one-day “reunion” class offered in the four quadrants that have hosted VAST over the past 28 years! WOW!

But this year, I want to bring attention to all the Local Church Search Committees I have worked with over the last ten years. I think this is one of the places that deepens the faith and expands the horizon of their present boundaries of every person who has ever served on a Search Committee!

Search Committees are charged with helping their congregations create an honest word portrait of their church in the Church Profile. And then, using their learnings about what their congregation believes God wants them to be and do in their next chapter of life, they seek out just the right pastor for their church. These committees, while all very different – even as their churches have their distinctive personalities – have each been so faithful and prayerful. They have taken their work seriously. They have embraced their work as a spiritual work on behalf of their congregations. They have become sacred communities as they gather so often. They know their congregation’s strengths and weaknesses and they seek the one who provides the balance with their own strengths and weaknesses.

I have learned so much about life and faith, wisdom and compassion, honesty and going the second mile. I never cease to be amazed by the ways God works in the individual church search processes as the Committees travel with God through the wilderness of in-between time into God’s future planned just for them.

Thank you to each Search Committee person who has passed through my heart over these years.

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## **Communications and Resource Coordinator Report**

Ms. Sybil McShane

### **Resource Center Activities**

Work has been completed on organizing/classifying all the materials in the Resource Center, including the special collections for the Vermont Academy of Spiritual Training (VAST) and the Uprooting Racism Task Force (URTF). All the items were entered into a library database designed for use in church libraries. The collection is now searchable at the Conference Office by author/title/subject and keyword. Several indexes of the special collections were posted to the website, thus searchable online, including VAST, URTF and Stewardship materials. Options for making the entire collection searchable online are being explored.

The VAST collection was move to the small conference room in the Conference Office to make it more accessible to VAST students.

330 items were borrowed from the collection in 2009.

### **Communications Activities**

The Conference expanded its e-mail communications during 2009. Besides the weekly *E-KIT* (*Electronically Keeping in Touch*) newsletter, the following newsletters were started:

*E-Event* – Events from the Conference Calendar including conference, local church, ecumenical, regional, and national events of interest. This is published bi-weekly on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of each month.

*E-Link* – is the monthly Christian Education Department Newsletter.

*Faithful Stewards* – is the monthly Stewardship Department Newsletter authored by Jim Thomas, the Conference's Business Manager/ Stewardship Associate. It is published on the 15<sup>th</sup> of every month.

*DoM Newsletter* – is the occasional newsletter of the Department of Mission.

In addition, the UCC ended publication of the *United Church News* in 2009. This also ended the publication of the Vermont Conference New Insert to that publication. As a replacement the Conference created a 4-page bulletin insert which will be published on a quarterly basis. The insert will contain two local church articles, as well one conference and one national article.

A newsletter archive is available online at: <http://www.vtcucc.org/news.html>.

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## Treasurer's Report For The Vermont Conference

Mr. David K. Damkot

In our church, and likely most United Church of Christ worship services, our pastor asks for a time of sharing joys and concerns before we pray. I have a joy to share. Looking back at the recent financial history of the Vermont Conference I see a profound and successful reduction of costs and controlling the drawdown from the saved/invested funds. This is a joy because it means we are being the stewards we can be, and we are poised for greater service and care.

Similarly we have tackled the bludgeoning of the Unrestricted Fund on investments. The draws from the Unrestricted Fund, which supports operating our Conference, were in the \$50,000 to \$75,000 range in the early 1990s. Then we began to draw considerably more for several years in the late 90s and early 2000s to meet ever growing expenses. During four difficult years we were taking between about \$200,000 and \$250,000 each year. Clearly, such drawdown was unsustainable unless the economy boomed and the funds grew hugely. The Spirit sounded caution. Beginning again in 2003 we demanded of ourselves prudence and fiscal care in following a formula which will maintain the principal dollars in the fund as we draw against a trailing average. Now we are taking about \$50,000/year from the unrestricted fund. If the economy and market improve, then the principal amount should also again begin to slowly grow. Then the draw will also increase by formula. We share and celebrate this joy.

Another necessary action, as noted above, was to control our expenses. The joy is we have succeeded in that endeavor. All departments have been fiscally responsible in keeping their expenses to less than 100% of budget in the past three years. We have been faithful through the financial anguish and continued our missions with careful management. **Thank you.** We surely desire increased presence for all Departments and hope we can build our service capability.

Conference operations have been trimmed to the bone and services have continued. Note, for example, the Conference Office Operations (line 8401) has decreased expenses. In 2006 expenses were \$37,923, and for 2009 they were \$31,063. That is a huge accomplishment as costs for everything continued to rise. **You are urged to use the eKIT available on-line** as much less printing, copying, and paper is being sent from the Conference office. Now the task will be to maintain such lean operations.

Staff compensation as well as staff travel and expenses have been similarly held low. We must remember a service organization should pay staff equitably and provide ample expense reimbursement for travel. Of course cost of living continues to climb and we must be fair to conference employees by at least matching inflation figures if possible. It would be good to build more service to our churches as well.

That brings me to a concern. In fiscal matters, our covenantal relationship struggles. If each church gave the requested per capita dues nearing the calculated amount based upon \$10.36/member (for 2009), then the VT Conference would have received \$154,220 in per capita contributions rather than \$147,325 actually received in 2009. For 2010, that per capita income figure will be \$156,565 given no change in church membership.

If each church met the request for Our Church's Wider Mission giving to the VT Conference with a tithe of 10% of operating cost, then we would have seen income of about \$1,228,196 rather than the actual per capita income for 2009 of \$438,530. **Wow, only one-third of Our Church's Wider Mission expectations are met.**

Of course, such expectations are not likely to be realized given the struggles many churches have to meet their own local budgets. Over the years we have had to reduce to one Associate Conference Minister from two, we have lost a paid stewardship staff person, we have lost a paid outdoor ministry coordinator, and we have tightened the belt wherever such was possible.

So I urge each church to consider whether they can achieve per capita and Our Church's Wider Mission givings. Pray for the means to do more and do better. We can more closely live our covenantal relationship.

I would also like to point out the Friends of Vermont Conference line (3204) in the budget. This line is very important and represents special gifts made to the Vermont Conference by friends. One hundred percent of the Board of Directors members have contributed to this line and many others have as well. The need is clear to be able to meet budget and all are urged to consider a donation no matter what size gift that may be. **Become a gifting Friend of the Vermont Conference if such is possible for you.**

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## **Board of Directors Report** Rev. Debbie Ingram, Chair

For many years the Conference Board of Directors had 25 members. On January 1, 2009, the number was reduced to 12 in accordance with the newly adopted Bylaws. Between the 2009 and 2010 Annual Meetings, the Board has enjoyed its first full program year in its new size. The smaller size has proved to have a number of advantages. The members have gotten to know each other much better than was possible with the large Board and members have become more comfortable sharing freely and speaking frankly. Perhaps most important, the same group of people is present at every meeting so that time need not be spent going over what was covered at previous meetings. The smaller Board meets more frequently than its larger predecessor. With no Executive Committee to meet between Board sessions, there is no longer the danger of an "us and them" division.

The Board began and ended the program year with a focus on questions about vision. What are we doing as a Conference and is it what God would have us do? What is the future of the Church if we keep doing what we are doing the way we are doing it and what do we need to change to be the Church God wishes in the future? The Board started with a retreat at which it looked at the first of those questions and came up with the goals of helping Conference, Associations, and Local Churches move inwardly in spiritual formation and renewal, and outwardly in mission. The Board ended the year planning another retreat to focus on the second question.

In between these bookends, the Board met eight times as a Board and groups of members participated in other meetings. Board Representatives to each Department provided information about, and were involved in the work of, those Departments, enabling the Board to work toward the spiritual and mission goals it had established. The program Departments and their Committees can be the most effective instruments for supporting Local Churches.

Much of the Board's time and effort was still devoted to practical and administrative matters. These were handled with the invaluable help of staff members. The Board needed to know what was going on in the Conference and in the national setting. Conference Minister Lynn Bujnak regularly updated the Board on what was happening, why it was happening, and what results were to be expected. Lynn also reported what she and the other members of the staff were doing as each carried out the multiple duties they had accepted so willingly. Business Manager Jim Thomas provided thorough and very understandable financial reports which enabled the Board to make decisions informed by both faith and its fiduciary responsibility. The work of all involved resulted in 2009 ending in the black, the third straight year for this happy outcome. Associate Conference Minister Pam Lucas attended meetings frequently, often shedding needed light on the history behind current situations the Board faced and offering helpful suggestions. Administrative Assistant Lynn Thomas and Communications and Resource Coordinator Sybil McShane kept Board members well supplied with needed documents and other materials.

Board time was also devoted to matters raised by specific situations. Most of these were relatively simple and related to items like bequests or property transfers. One more complex situation, however, involving one of the Associations, required considerable Board time and energy.

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### **Department Of Church And Ministry Council**

Rev. Dereen Vanderlinde-Abernathy, Chair

The Department of Church and Ministry Council had as its focus for the year to do the work necessary to function well on behalf of the Associations, local churches and ministers of the Vermont Conference. We began the year gathering information from the eight Associations of the Vermont Conference and the Committees of the Department\* about how they are organized, how they fulfill their responsibilities and mission, their activities, membership, and needs. It soon became apparent that there is much vitality in our Associations and much variation in how the responsibilities of church and ministry concerns are addressed. In response to the expressed confusion about the coordination of the work of the Ministerial Standing and Standards Committee and that of the Association Church and Ministry Committees, the Council invited the leadership of our eight Associations to a workshop in April that addressed this confusion. The workshop was also a time for Associations to share with each other the activities and ideas that have served to enliven them in recent years. A handbook titled "A Guide for Associations as They Partner with the Ministerial Standing and Standards Committee in Matters of Ministerial Authorization and Standing" was put together and given to those attending. It is hoped that this was the first of what will be regular gatherings of Association leadership for training, sharing of ideas, concerns and resources, support and communication.

The next Association leadership workshop will be held this coming September. It will deal with matters of church standing and standards and utilize the *United Church of Christ Manual on Church*.

The Council also began work to address the need to separate the responsibilities of church growth from church standing in our structure, sought to revitalize several committees of the department that had become virtually inactive (Ministerial Compensation Committee, Continuing Education Committee and Church Standing), and received reports from committees on their activities, goals, organization and membership.

We look forward to continuing our efforts to promote and nurture the covenantal ties between our churches, Associations, ministers and Conference, oversee the pastoral care of churches and ministers (ordained and lay), and uphold and foster standards of excellence in all levels and all kinds of ministry within the Conference. We are grateful for the Council members who have met regularly and given their time to the work of the Department. We are also grateful for the wise guidance and assistance of Rev. Pam Lucas, as we have endeavored to become a faithful and functioning Department of the Conference.

\*Ministerial Standing and Standards Committee, Church Growth Committee. Clergy Convocation Committee, Continuing Education Committee, Ministerial Compensation Committee, Healing Committee and Women's Fellowship

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## **Ministerial Standing and Standards Committee Report**

Rev. Nancy S. McHugh, Chair

The Ministerial Standing and Standards Committee oversee credentials for Clergy and Licensed Pastors on behalf of six of the eight Associations in the Vermont Conference.

In 2008-2009 this committee of 12 clergy and laypersons has met faithfully each month for a 6 hour meeting. The committee consists of three subcommittees; the MID, Members in Discernment committee, the MIT, Members in Transition and the Licensing Committee. Each subcommittee has specific work, but all report back to the broader committee and make up the MSSC as a whole.

Members in Discernment subcommittee works with all the candidates who are pursuing authorized ministry in and on behalf of the UCC. This process had previously been known as the "In Care" process. The change from "In Care" to Members in Discernment has required some significant shifts in process so that we would be current with the material which had been developed on the national level. This year we have been striving to incorporate the use of The Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers of the United Church of Christ which is a tool useful in evaluating leadership in ministry and is based on the work of the Ministry Issues Implementation Committee which emerged from General Synod 25. We continue to refine this process so that our partnering with each candidate will provide the support for true discernment needed for ministry.

The MSSC also reviews and authorizes Licensed Ministers to serve in local parishes around the state. We conduct Informational Reviews for all authorized ministers; approve transfers of clergy standing in and out of the Vermont Conference, and conduct Fitness Reviews when required. We are currently working to provide a variety of opportunities for all of our authorized ministers and candidates to attend boundary training in 2010. This will be an opportunity for renewing information and introducing it for others.

The work of MSSC is constantly evolving as we seek to serve God, The Vermont Conference and the Authorized Ministries of the United Church of Christ. The commitment and faithful dedication to the body of Christ by each member is of utmost importance and our work is done prayerfully at every step of the way. It is an honor to serve God and the Church on your behalf in this very important manner.

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### **Healing Ministry Committee**

Rev. Robert Boutwell, Chair

May 2009, the Healing Ministry Committee set up a display at the Vermont Conference Annual Meeting and led a workshop on Christian Healing Ministry.

October 21, 2009, we responded to an invitation from the Sherburne UCC to talk with the Board of Deacons about Healing Ministry.

November 19, 2009, the Healing Ministry Committee participated in the wellness Fair at Green Mt. College in Poultney, VT with an emphasis on helping people quit smoking and overcoming other addictions. Bob Boutwell and Fran Tice, set up the Healing Prayer display, distributed healing literature, discussed Christian Healing Ministry as a spiritual complement to other healing procedures and offered anointing with oil, laying on hands, and healing prayer.

January 30, 2010, the Healing Ministry Committee offered a Healing Retreat at Bethany UCC in Randolph. Our guest leader was the Rev. Alex McCullough of Healing Joy Ministries. He is a retired Bishop of the Evangelical Apostolic Church of North America and has been a member of the Board of Directors of the International Order of Saint Luke the Physician. He shared with us how we can bring joyful hope to people in distressing times and restore the joy of living through laughter and music.

April 15, 2010, we returned to Green Mt. College in Poultney for their spring Wellness Fair. It was a wonderful opportunity to network with others offering various kinds of healing, to emphasize the importance of the Spiritual aspect of Wellness and offer prayer for those attending the event.

April 25, 2010, we prepared the closing worship service for the annual meeting of the Southwest Vermont Association adapting elements of the Order of Reconciliation from the Book of Worship of the United Church of Christ.

The Committee is planning a display and a workshop for the Vermont Conference, UCC Annual Meeting at Lyndonville in June.

The Committee offers a wonderful opportunity for training and experience in Christian Healing Ministry and is seeking interested persons to join the committee.

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## **Department of Mission Annual Report**

Mr. Eric Webster, Vice-Chair

During the past year the DOM Chair, Bill Neil, encouraged each sub-committee to develop a mission statement. This activity assisted each group to refocus their purpose and mission.

Just Peace/Low Income Advocacy continued its work to reduce the impact of poverty on those less fortunate financially. The involvement of VILIAC and Karen Lafayette were also utilized.

Prison Justice is working on establishing a transitional housing program for those that are formerly incarcerated and those in drug rehabilitation.

The health Care sub-committee worked on passing the "Health Care for All" resolution at last years annual meeting. Continued efforts have been made over the past year to advocate for the needs of those either uninsured or underinsured.

There has been concern expressed this year from the Summer Lunch program that they have not received applications this year. An attempt was made to reach churches this year electronically.

Global Ministries had a resolution passed at last year's Annual Meeting relating to the Christian-Muslim Dialogue. Additionally there have been discussions about a possible Conference-wide mission partnership.

The Uprooting Racism Taskforce is celebrating their tenth (10<sup>th</sup>) anniversary this year! They have worked hard as a group on producing a DVD and passing two (2) resolutions. In 2003 a resolution on Increasing the Number of Clergy of Color in VT was passed. In 2008 the resolution on Becoming a Multiracial Multicultural Conference was passed. *CONGRATULATIONS* on the work that has been accomplished.

In March "Mission Department News from the VT Conference" was sent out through E-KIT. I encourage everyone that has not done so to check it out through the VT Conference web page.

During the past year, Bill Neil compiled all of the DOM resolutions that are still relevant. This is an easy way of referencing all of the resolutions. Thank you Bill.

This spring Bill resigned his post as Chair of the DOM, as he was called to a pastorate in MA. We wish him God Speed with his new faith journey!

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## **Prison Justice Committee**

Ms. Betty Edson, Chair

This has been an exciting year for those participating in the Prison Justice Committee. Those presently on the committee include Skip Dickinson, Betty Edson, Lynda Hadley, Will Hunter, Alice McDonald, Vy Manovill, Alan Perkins and Jeanne Zammataro.

### **BLUE SPRUCE INN:**

Last year two of our members, Jeanne Zammataro and Will Hunter, were invited to attend a meeting to present a proposal for the use of the Blue Spruce Inn located in Mt. Holly and owned by the New England Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. After touring the property, Will and Jeanne suggested that the Synod use the property for transitional housing for inmates who have met their minimum sentences. There is a great need for such housing in Vermont, and the Vermont legislature had recently committed to increasing its supply.

Will and Jeanne then met with representatives from the Department of Corrections to ascertain whether the property would be suitable for its proposed transitional housing programs. The department was very enthusiastic, as the property not only has terrific common rooms, a commercial kitchen and room for up to 30 beds, but there is also sufficient and suitable acreage for gardens and possibly a facility for Good News Garage that could provide work opportunities for residents.

In early January, Will and Jeanne met with representatives of both the synod and the DOC to see if both parties wanted to go forward. The DOC agreed that they would fund transitional housing at the Blue Spruce, and the Synod's Executive Council later agreed to go forward on the basis that it would forgo any rent, but would also be spared any expenses, and that there would be a faith-based component to the programming. As this report is being written, the parties are waiting to hear from Phoenix House, one of the country's premier substance abuse treatment providers, as to whether Phoenix House, funded by the DOC, will operate the Blue Spruce as transitional housing for released inmates who need long term substance abuse treatment. Assuming that Phoenix House decides to go ahead, the housing will be ready sometime this summer. At that point, the Prison Justice Committee will seek out volunteers from the Vermont Conference and other faith based groups for volunteer opportunities at the Blue Spruce.

**VOLUNTEER AWARENESS DAYS:** We held our fourth Prison Volunteer Awareness event in Burlington this past April. At these events, we have a panel of volunteers who work inside correctional facilities and/or in other venues along the correctional spectrum, such as Dismas Houses, Court Diversion, etcetera; we share in a simple supper; and we tour the Correctional Facility in the area. In each instance, there has been at least some follow-up - someone becoming involved on our Committee, or in volunteer work in a correctional facility, or in networking between the various groups who present.

**WEBSITE:** We have a website, with links to many articles, which can be reached via the Department of Mission page of the Vermont Conference website, and have recently established a Facebook group, Vermont Conference Prison Justice Group.

CAMP AGAPE: Again this year, we will be asking for people to bring new towels, with a goal of collecting 80, one for each camper. (Camp Agape is a camp for children who are experiencing the incarceration of a parent and is an ecumenical project.)

WORSHIP IN THE SPRINGFIELD FACILITY: Jeanne Zammataro, a member of our committee, helped to firm up a rotation of pastors and lay people to do mainline worship in the Springfield facility. When she herself leads worship, she includes a time of sharing prayer concerns and this has been very well received by those who attend. She is also working with people in other parts of the state who have expressed interest in doing worship in facilities in other areas.

ANNUAL MEETING: At Annual Meeting, we will, of course, have a display; we will be offering a workshop; and members of our committee will be speaking at the Peace Breakfasts. As well, we have submitted a resolution which asks our Legislators to revisit present policy which spends much more money on incarcerating people with addictions than in rehabilitation of these people, at tremendous cost to taxpayers and with minimal positive results.

CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE TO THE COMMISSIONER: One of our members, Will Hunter, is serving on this committee, giving us insight into what is going on at the policy-making level.

LOCAL CHURCH CONTACTS: Another member of our committee, Lynda Hadley, is assembling a list of people in local churches who would be willing to be a point person for information on prison justice issues. If your church has not yet responded, there will be an opportunity on our Annual Meeting Display table for you to sign up.

FAILURE OF PRESENT POLICY REGARDING DRUG-RELATED OFFENSES AND THE NEED FOR OTHER APPROACHES: Our committee sent a letter to gubernatorial candidates, the Governor and other state officials, urging restudy of our present costly and ineffective policy. As well, although not yet firmed up, we are planning to sponsor a panel, with the gubernatorial candidates, before the primary this summer, for discussion of prison-related issues, including the policy of the 'war on drugs'.

THE COMMITTEE: We would welcome new members to our committee. We meet once a month, usually on a Tuesday in the morning, although that could be negotiated!

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**Report of the Uprooting Racism Task Force of the Department of Mission to  
the 2010 Annual Meeting of the Vermont Conference, UCC**

Mr. John LaRue, Chair

At the Two Hundred and Fourth (1999) Annual Meeting of the Vermont Conference held at Lyndon State College, the Vermont conference passed, A Resolution on Uprooting Racism in Vermont. Previous to that the Vermont Conference at its 1996 Annual Meeting voted, Resolution Regarding the Indigenous People of Vermont in which it was pointed out that,

“...conditions of racism, racial intolerance and negative stereotyping exist within our communities, schools, homes, workplaces, and even within our churches...” Also, America’s first human rights organization, the **American Missionary Association** was formed in 1846 in response to the Amistad event. It is still functioning as **Local Church Ministry** and in many other units of the greater **United Church of Christ**. In 2003 the national UCC passed a resolution (03-GS-44), Calling the United Church of Christ to be an Antiracist Church in which it stated, “...racism is rooted in a belief of the superiority of whiteness and bestows benefits, unearned rights, rewards, opportunities, advantages, access, and privilege on Europeans and European descendants...” And in 1993 passed the Resolution (93-GS-33), Statement of Christian Conviction of the Proposed Pronouncement Calling the United Church of Christ to be a Multiracial and Multicultural Church. In 1963 the 4<sup>th</sup> General Synod of the United Church of Christ called upon the United Church of Christ to be “radically committed” to “uproot intolerance, bigotry, and prejudice within our own living and to replace them with goodwill and the determination to strike down immediately the barriers which divide [people] on account of race.”

The first resolve of the 1999 Vermont Conference resolution calls for the Department of Mission to formulate plans for a decade-long (annual meeting 2000 to annual meeting 2010) education and training activities to identify and seek to eliminate racism within all elements of the Vermont Conference of the United Church of Christ and our communities. Here it is annual meeting 2010. A time to look back. A time to look forward. What we have done in recent times, what we are doing now is only one step in a long path of bringing **God’s Beloved Community** to all of humanity.

When the Department of Mission began the discussions that led to the 1999 resolution it was proposed that we have a one year effort to uproot racism in Vermont, the next proposal was a three year effort. The short time emphasis was in part from our history, we have a (good) theme for a year then move on to another (good) theme for the next year. It also may in part reflect our lack of commitment. If social justice problems – including racism - could be resolved in a year or so, they would have been resolved a long time ago. We should recognize that there may have been progress related to racism in the past ten years, however, the current condition is only “good enough” for those that have the privilege of not being the victims of racism in the first place.

The Department of Mission, through the Uprooting Racism Task Force, requested the broadening of our support within the Vermont UCC for human rights in the, Resolution on becoming a Multiracial and Multicultural Conference presented at the 2007 annual meeting and passed at the 2008 annual meeting after a year of prayerful consideration in local churches and at gathered Associations. The two resolves in it are, “that the Vermont Conference of the United Church of Christ commit itself to becoming a multiracial and multicultural Conference” and, “that the Vermont Conference encourage all churches within the Conference to declare themselves multiracial and multicultural churches as defined in the 1993 General Synod pronouncement. Through the process of self-examination the churches may develop a change of vision toward new ways of being together that would include culturally diverse forms of worship and fellowship.”

You may recall in January of this year we asked local churches to share what they have been doing to eliminate racism in themselves, their churches and their communities. Please stop by our display table for a copy of the survey responses and to add a statement describing your churches activities and goals.

The Vermont Conference Resource Center has a wide variety of materials related to racism and other human rights issues. These resources can be borrowed for individual use as well as by local churches – and others in the Vermont community. They have adult books, fiction and non-fiction, children’s books, videos and DVDs (a couple are Vermont produced), and more. They are as close as: [mcshanes@vtcucc.org](mailto:mcshanes@vtcucc.org), or 802-728-4999.

Would you like to have a conversation on race at your church? How about a sacred conversation? You may say, “What would make it a Sacred conversation?” A good place to start is: [www.ucc.org/sacred-conversation](http://www.ucc.org/sacred-conversation) where you will find: “Our conversations will be sacred if we trust in the Spirit of the living God to do a new thing in our midst and create **Beloved Communities.**”

We urge you and your church to consider improving your awareness of human rights justice as it affects your neighbors near and far. The God is Still Speaking initiative uses the statement, “**No matter who you are, or where you are in life’s journey, you are welcome here.**” Does that describe your church? What would it mean for your church to work toward being a Multiracial and Multicultural church?

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### **Annual Report Regarding Low Income Advocacy Legislative Day**

Ms. Betty Edson

When the decision was made that we could no longer continue to implement Camp About Face, there was a modest amount of money left from contributions churches had made to support camp. The hope was to use it to fulfill a similar purpose - the empowering of low income Vermonters. It was decided by the Department of Mission that the money would be used to strengthen the annual Low-Income Advocacy Legislative Day. David Brown, Betty Edson, and Theresa Lever worked with Karen Lafayette, the Low-Income Advocate whom the Vermont Conference helps to fund and with VLIAC to do this.

The Legislative Day was held on April 15 and was a great success. There were about 16 UCC pastors and/or lay-folk present, and about an equal number of VLIAC folk and folks from Community Action Agencies. Karen does a wonderful job and had prepared an interesting day for us.

Bright yellow buttons, saying, "REMEMBER LOW INCOME VERMONTERS" were passed out at the Display Table, and it was fun to see them, all over the State House, sported on jackets of UCC folk, VLIAC folk and Legislators.

Throughout the day, Karen managed to bring to us four of the six gubernatorial candidates, as well as the Speaker of the House. If one wished to do so, there was time to visit a hearing, chosen from several Karen recommended as pertinent. We enjoyed a tasty bag lunch, provided by folks from Bethany UCC in Montpelier, and, at 1, went to the House Chamber for the Orders of the Day. Betty Edson, a licensed pastor in Windsor-Orange Association, led the devotions; and UCC participants, as well as those there on behalf of VLIAC (Vermont Low-Income Advocacy Council), our co-sponsor, were recognized at that time.

Karen has expressed profound appreciation for this burst of support and hopes we can build on it. David and Theresa and Betty will be meeting with her soon, in that regard.

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### **Department Of Stewardship And Financial Development**

Mr. Rufus Cushman, Chair

The Investment Committee and the Finance [Budget] Committee have continued to meet regularly in an effort to be good stewards of what we have [investments] and that which we are charged to do in the spending process. The Properties Committee has not had a need to meet since the sale of the Newbury property.

The Department Council has found it difficult to get its footing. Whether it is the general economic times that cause we humans to pull back, the ability to find a common time to meet, just plain busy lives, or a long-standing desire to NOT talk about money and Jesus Christ in the same sentence, your chair is not sure.

The need for us all to be telling the stories of our local church's efforts at Mission continues.

The Bible tells us not to "hide our light under a bushel".

As Christians, we are enjoined to be aware of local needs, but also the needs of those whose faces we cannot see. Our Churches Wider Mission dollars are important in telling the story of Christ's Love for us all requires us to step up and do what is necessary to keep the story being told everywhere and all the time.

Can you help?

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