



Vermont Conference Pastors Awarded Clergy Renewal Grants

This year, three pastors from the Vermont Conference, UCC have been awarded grants through the Lilly Endowment for sabbatical and clergy renewal. These grants are structured to provide renewal experiences both for the pastor and for the congregation. In this issue, we will learn about the plans of the Rev. David Vanderlinde-Abernathy and the Barre Congregational Church, UCC as well as those of the Rev. Amanda Lape-Freeberg and Old South Congregation Church, UCC Windsor.

The theme for Rev. David's sabbatical is drawn from the Latin phrase *solvitue ambulando* which can be loosely translated, "you can sort it out by walking." David writes, "A sabbatical is a gift of time for pastors to explore where they are and what they need to see in relationship to themselves and those served." The Appalachian Trail is the companionable path beckoning Rev. David for this exploration. Built into Rev. David's proposal is the idea of accompaniment. His long time spiritual director, Rev. Joan Jordan Grant will accompany him in spirit and help direct his inner work.

The congregation will accompany David in a variety of ways. The Mission Committee hopes to revive the Crop Walk in Barre. Members and friends of the church will be invited to take up walking, running or biking to during Rev. David absence to learn the wisdom of *solvitue ambulando*. Pedometers will be made available to parishioners to assist in tracking their efforts. Central to the congregations renewal will be two retreats lead by Rev. Grant. The retreats will take place at the Alcyon Retreat Center founded and directed by Rev. Grant and Rev. Kathryn Booth on Mount Desert Island, ME. Nearby Acadia National Park, with its many trails and carriage paths will afford parishioners their own opportunity to expend physical energy and sort it out while walking.

The Rev. Amanda Lape-Freeberg, Pastor of Old South Church, UCC, Windsor, Vermont, writes concerning her Pastoral Renewal Grant:

Generally life's most vexing problems don't have obvious, successful solutions. But for me, the problems of spiritual exhaustion and compassion fatigue are best address by sewing or silk painting or weaving — go figure! And the longer the time spent in "mindless," or more accurately, wordless creativity the better. However, the demands of church work and community committees and family and friends leave little time for tactile creativity activity. This is why I am elated to have recently been awarded a Lilly Endowment Pastoral Renewal Grant to fund a four month sabbatical, beginning July of 2009.

Mandy plans to rent an art studio for ten months, travel to Europe with her family, and study with several renowned liturgical and fiber artists. The grant will also provide the resources to hire part-time pastoral help and fund three different artist residencies within the congregation during her leave. Her goal is to provide space and time for contemplation, not only for herself, but also for anyone else who is interested in exploring the restorative nature of artistic play.

We are grateful to the Lilly Endowment for making these Pastoral Renewal Grants available to a wide variety of pastors across the denominational spectrum. We also recognize that the process of applying is time and energy intensive for both pastor and congregation and the grants themselves are highly competitive. Congratulations to David and Mandy! We look forward eagerly to the things they and their congregations will learn and share with us throughout their Sabbath times and beyond.



Rev. David Vanderlinde-Abernathy



Rev. Amanda Lape-Freeberg



Save the Date!

Vermont Conference Annual Meeting is May 28–30 2009.

Look for information coming soon around our theme.

We Can Help With the ONA Process

Is your church considering engaging in the Open and Affirming (ONA) process? First, we are fortunate in the Vermont Conference to have an ONA Coordinator who can help answer questions and get you connected with helpful resources. You can contact Mark Pitton at ona@vtucc.org or by phone: 802-223-2424. Also, if you would like to talk with members of another Vermont Conference UCC church that has already gone through that process, the members of the First Congregational Church of Thetford, UCC consider talking with others about their ONA journey to be an important part of their mission. To contact the church, please email: ThetfordHillChurch@valley.net. (Priscilla Hill, co-chair of the Deacons.)

From Your Conference Minister...

By Rev. Dr. Lynn Bujnak

What I say to you I say to all: Keep awake. (Mark 13:37)



Rev. Dr. Lynn Bujnak
Conference Minister

It's Advent — the season of watching and waiting and staying awake. It seems like such a deceptively simple task! Yet, there is so much in our lives and culture that lure us to do the exact opposite. Instead of remaining watchful, alert for God's presence, God's in-breaking into our world, it is so easy to get caught up in the somnolence of things and the false comfort of life as we've always known it. I have been pondering these themes as I think about our ministry together in the Vermont Conference, United Church of Christ.

This coming year promises us many opportunities to practice staying awake to God. First, we will move into a new structure with a smaller board of directors. This group will hold the "big picture" for our conference and will begin the important work of helping the whole conference set priorities that reflect the vision of where we see God leading us. Listening for the Spirit's movement already within us and also listening for those challenges to which God may be calling us will require extreme attentiveness on all our parts.

In addition, there are several ideas which seem to be bubbling up in our midst. Here are just a few. There seems to be a renewed interest in outdoor ministry and in ministry to/with youth and young adults. We have entered into a partnership with the Massachusetts Conference, UCC as part of their most recent Lilly grant to create learning and support communities for our new pastors and foster pastoral excellence in the Vermont Conference. In addition to all the fine mission partnership work happening in our local congregations, the Department of Missions is exploring whether the time might be right for us to enter into a partnership with a church and a people in a developing country. There is a spoken desire to find ways to strengthen licensed ministry training and our support of licensed pastors to serve our small-member congregations. We continue to have strong commitments to peace-making, uprooting racism and justice for those imprisoned. Both stewardship and Vermont Gifts have recently been infused with new leadership and renewed commitment. Underlying all programmatic "bubbles" I am hearing over and over again from pastors and lay leaders that they are hungry for connections, spiritual renewal/grounding and for increasing vitality in our congregational lives.

It is, indeed, time to: Watch! Wait! Stay awake! God-with-us is bringing new things to birth.

*In the peace of this holy season,
Lynn*

Vermont News

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Send them to: information@vtcucc.org
Deadline for the next issue: December 26.



Ascutney Pastor Wins State Award for Work at Cedar Hill

Rev. Connie Moser doing services at Cedar Hill Continuing Care Community.
Photo by Robin Kolvacin.

Rev. Constance D. Moser, pastor of Ascutney Union Church – United Church of Christ, won Spiritual Caregiver of the Year from the Vermont Health Care Association for her work at Cedar Hill Continuing Care Community in Windsor. Rev. Moser received the award Wednesday evening, September 17th, at the annual banquet of the VHCA.

Rev. Moser has worked closely with Cedar Hill for the last nine years, serving as a spiritual counselor to the senior community's residents, families and staff.

"To Pastor Connie, spiritual care to the residents of Cedar Hill is as vital to their quality of life as nursing care. Her passion for the elderly and her willingness to develop a deep relationship with the staff, family and residents at Cedar Hill has significantly improved the life of everyone here," said Cedar Hill in its nomination of her.

Rev. Moser has asked for and receives a call every time a resident is dying or goes to the hospital for a serious medical condition, even at 2 a.m., points out Community Administrator Kirt Sampson. She works with Cedar Hill's team of nursing, activity and social services staff on the community's Angel/end-of-life program, including training staff in the spiritual side of end of life care.

Last year, Rev. Moser worked with Cedar Hill's activity director to win a grant to develop a team of spiritual caregivers to hold weekly Sunday services and offer one-on-one spiritual care to residents. As part of that grant, she also researched and ordered new large-print song books for the community's church services.

Rev. Moser has attended Cedar Hill's monthly support group for families as a guest speaker and actively seeks out and works with the community's families. She hosts the community's Service of Remembrance for residents who die (which is held a few times per year) and has held funerals at Cedar Hill for residents' families who request that service. She writes a spiritual column for the community's bi-monthly newsletter and serves in an advisory capacity to Cedar Hill's board of directors.

And Rev. Moser helps to bring Annie, a gentle horse that belongs to her friend, Lee Alexander, several times each summer and fall to Cedar Hill for the residents to spend time with. Many of them grew up riding and owning horses and love their time with Annie.

Pastor Connie's Service of Remembrance embodies what makes her presence special at Cedar Hill, says Kathleen Eames, Cedar Hill's director of social services and admissions. "Connie has always provided a sense of celebration of a resident's life during the Remembrance Services that really helps family, friends and staff," she said. "And that is an essence of Connie — that sense of celebration, even through sad and difficult times."

"Pastor Connie brings a lot of joy and comfort to our residents," says Cedar Hill co-founder and owner Mary Louise Sayles. "She's a standout among the ministers. She will come in any hour of the day or night, if someone is dying and family wants to have them present. She is there for family, residents and staff for support."

After the attacks of 9/11, for example, Pastor Connie immediately came to Cedar Hill to see what comfort she could give, says Eames. "At holiday time, she will ask 'who doesn't have a family member coming to be with a resident?' and she would come and be that resident's 'family' for the holiday dinner event."

Pastor Connie says she has come to realize that American culture doesn't really understand the blessing of the older frailer elderly and that they still need and deserve a fullness of life up until the end, no matter what their health condition. "What I like to try to offer is a spiritual piece of that fullness of life," she says. "What I get back surpasses what I can offer."

Dismas House, Rutland

Every weekday evening at 6 pm, 12–18 people sit at a large squarish table at Dismas House in Rutland. Approximately 10 are residents, furloughed inmates who have completed their minimum sentences and are living at Dismas House as a way to re-enter society. Sometimes there are college age volunteers — there is always a staff member. One



Thursday night a month, 2 or 3 are members of the Second Congregational Church in Londonderry. Other evenings those around the table might include members of Grace Church in Rutland, Perkinsville Community Church and the Windham Church. These church members have either cooked the evening meal in the Dismas House kitchen or have brought the dinner that they or other church members have cooked at home.

Someone says grace. Then each person states what they are grateful for that evening. Some are grateful for the mundane — a day off, that tomorrow is Friday. Some are grateful that they had a good day at work and/or at school. Some are grateful that they are dry and sober for another day. Some are grateful that they have seen their children and are reestablishing relationships. Some, like me, an inexperienced cook, are grateful for getting dinner on the table on time and that joining Second Congregational has brought me joy in a time of mourning.

After each person has then said their name, the food is passed around, there is conversation and the meal is eaten. A few may linger at the table. But often there is conversation in the kitchen as the cleanup crew of residents returns the kitchen to its proper order. As 7 o'clock approaches, the residents drift off to the living room for their Thursday weekly house meeting.

Dismas House in Rutland is one of three Dismas Houses in Vermont, the other two are in Burlington and Winooski, and is one of many in the United States. Founded in 1973 in Nashville by the then Roman Catholic chaplain at Vanderbilt University and named after the traditional name for the repentant thief who hung on the cross to the right of Jesus, Dismas House provides transitional housing for prisoners trying to make a new life, and is where they find a sense of belonging and support. The vision of Dismas House is the realization of justice through the successful reintegration of prisoners back into the community. The community building at Dismas House goes a long way to help residents rebuild their lives, so that when they leave they can become fully productive citizens.

Each church that sends volunteers to Dismas house organizes its efforts differently. Second Congregational sends me and one or two other members who are available, and we cook the main meal from pre-arranged supplies supplemented by salad fixings and baked goods that we bring. Will Hunter, the lay pastor of the Perkinsville Church, and his teenage son cook with whatever provisions they find in the Dismas House pantry. Grace Church has several groups that volunteer. One of their groups consists of five or six different individuals or families who contribute to the Church's efforts one evening a month. Grace Church choir members volunteer for another evening, and there are several Grace Church couples or families that cook on their own once a month. And the Windham church members organize groups that do the cooking at home and then other members bring the food and join in the meal with the Dismas House residents.

Regardless of how they do it, all the Dismas House volunteers are mindful of the following passage in Matthew:

I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me. Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me. Matthew 25:35-40

Submitted by: Jeanne Zammataro, Member of Second Congregational Church of Londonderry; Member, Vermont Conference Department of Mission Prison Justice Group

Tell all the Truth but tell it Slant —

— Emily Dickinson

This edited reflection on the Vermont Conference Minister's Convocation was offered by Rev. Bruce Comiskey to his congregation shortly after attending the September 22–24 event.

I attended a conference this past week led by Dr. Mark Burrows, who led us through scripture and poetry in an intriguing way. I had never heard Mark speak before nor had I ever met him.

Since I was the Chair of Vermont Conference Convocation Committee, it was my responsibility to meet him and get him settled when he arrived from Andover Newton Theological Seminary outside of Boston. I have to admit that I am too easily awed by Professors of Theology, even when they are younger than me. Dr. Burrows received his M. Div. from Princeton Theological Seminary and his Ph.D from PTS as well. He attended the seminary four years after I did. So, we didn't know each other back then.

In our emailing and phone calling to plan for the workshops, Mark was quite down to earth and very pleasant...not at all stuffy or haughty. I looked forward to our meeting.

He arrived on time and after I got him settled in his room, we talked at great length about our experiences at Princeton. Every once in awhile, I have this problem of putting my foot in my mouth and wishing afterwards, I hadn't! He asked me how I would describe my preaching style. I told him: "Spontaneous combustion! I learned years ago that most people have moved on from the old model of three points and a poem."

What was I thinking? Dr. Burrows was going to lead a three day workshop on using poetry in worship. And I just told him...*I didn't use a lot of poetry if at all in my sermons.* He kept smiling and didn't seem to take offense. When I realized what I had just said, I added: "But I certainly would use poetry if people would listen to the words."

In my experience through the years, I have read classic poetry, mostly to show off! To show you all that I was literate in the arts. And I confess that I have used Robert Frost's poem, *Two roads diverged in a wood*, way too often. It seems that if I offered a poem that some of you were familiar with, it worked. If you didn't know the poem, it would be just so many words.

Dr. Burrows shared a wonderful anthology of poetry that got my at-

ention. I'd like to share one to help us understand the Exodus text.

The poem is *Vespers* written by Louise Gluck. It is about the way common things can awaken us and change us.

Vespers

Even as you appeared to Moses,
because
I need you, you appear to me, not
Often, however. I live essentially
In darkness. You are perhaps training
me to be
Responsive to the slightest brightening,
Or like the poets,
Are you stimulated by despair,
does grief
Move you to reveal your nature?
This afternoon,
In the physical world to which you
commonly
Contribute your silence, I climbed
The small hill above the wild blueberries,
metaphysically
Descending, as on all my walks:
did I go deep enough
For you to pity me, as you have
sometimes pitied
Others who suffer, favoring those
With theological gifts? As you anticipated,
I did not look up. So you came to
me:
At my feet, not the wax
Leaves of the wild blueberry but
your fiery self, a whole
Pasture of fire, and beyond, the red
sun neither falling
Nor rising —
I was not a child; I could take advantage
of illusions.

— Louise Gluck, *The Wild Iris*
(Hopewell, NJ: Ecco Press, 1992)

This is a nice segue into Exodus 17, a story of mumbling, groaning, disbelief and finally faith. This is a story that requires imagination and creative discernment. As an old Native American medicine man once said about his story telling: *I don't know if it all happened exactly this way, but I know the story is true.*

Imagine the either the guts or poor planning of Moses, leading his already feisty people into the desert with no provisions for water. If you look at the map of the Sinai desert, you really get the picture that Moses



and his people wandered a long time, seemingly almost needlessly. Where was the soldier in charge of the map?

Of course, once we delve into this text with our modern need for being prepared and having global positioning signals to guide us, the story just plain goes nowhere.

We need to see this story through the lens of imagination. We need to see it replete with God's challenges and His people's complaints and lack of faith.

Strangely, the story is all about simple, basic images: water, rock, and a staff.

The story is of course greater than Moses hitting a rock and having water come forth from it. The story is that God was with them all the way, through the way, and in the way.

Perhaps of all the images presented, water speaks to me. I love to be on the water, in the water, showered by water, baptizing with water, and drinking good water. The image of the rock is important as I remember that Simon is named Petra, the Rock. The image of the staff requires more imagination.

I use a walking stick when I negotiate a steep trail. I use ski poles to push off on Nordic trails. But I don't generally use a staff...certainly not in worship. Maybe I should! A shepherd's crook or finely carved staff would be helpful when I need to hit various rocks that keep us from being given the water of life. Just a thought, but maybe having a few rocks set on the communion table with a staff set beside them would create in us a thirst for more meaning, a thirst for more quiet moments in our worship and life.



From the Vermont Women's Fellowship

By Pat Mattison

May one day accept what I am told is an inevitable fact or reality: you can't make everyone happy. But you couldn't prove it to me on September 20 at the annual meeting of the Vermont State Women's Fellowship in Dummerston or, traveling back in time just a bit, on Saturday, May 3, at the Women's Fellowship spring retreat in Warren. I believe there was universal agreement, music speaks to each and all of us. Music pushes us, it pulls and triggers emotional chords.

This year the Women's Fellowship used music as a theme for both traditional events and truly kept our attention from opening through final notes. The principle focus of the an-

nual meeting was making music ministry doable in all our congregations regardless of the size.

The Rev. Jo Shelnut-Melendy and Ellen Satterthwaite led us through a history of music. Typically we would break up into groups following the keynote address, but no one wanted to chance missing "a note" or an idea, including the workshop leaders. So Jo, Ellen and the Rev. Peggy Wright tag teamed each other in presenting to the group what they have done to energize church choirs. Peggy Wright shared that her church decided that choir practice would be a half hour before Sunday worship service and whoever showed up would be the choir that week. We were encouraged to

be adventuresome with music and to keep it simple so the worship can be inclusive. We listened to the stories of music through time, sang old and new songs, and worshiped together.

Years ago I walked into a church in Arizona and remember being greeted by a banner that announced St. Augustine's words, "To Sing is to Pray Twice." Jo, Ellen and Peggy brought a reality to our ability to "Pray Twice."

Keep your eyes and ears open to see what is coming next or just check out our soon to appear webpage, linked from the conference site. The State Women's Fellowship continues to strive to meet the needs and interests of women in congregations throughout our state.

Stepping Out in Faith and Action

Here in Vermont we are well aware that winter will bring many hardships to folks struggling to keep up with the costs of fuel, food and other necessities. One of our local congregations, First Congregational Church in Randolph Center is determined to help, even if in a small way. The Church Council voted at their October meeting to double local mission giving; with the bulk going to the Randolph Food Shelf, Central Vermont Community Action Council (CVCAC), and The Randolph Ecumenical Emergency Committee on Housing (REECH). This effort brings to \$250 per month the amount contributed to these agencies, and is in addition to regular contributions to statewide and wider mission through the Vermont Conference, United Church of Christ.

Pastor Jim Thomas commended the congregation for this bold action, despite the fact that many of the church's twenty-seven members are themselves struggling along on a fixed income. As part of the church's fall stewardship campaign, members were encouraged to increase their giving — not to spend on the building or the pastors — but so they can give more away to where it's needed. It is an acknowledgement that many find themselves in difficult circumstances, and a statement about faith in a climate of fear.



Vermont Conference Pastoral Transitions Since October 1

Ordinations

None

Installations

Kevin Goldenbogen, Underhill, October 12

Mary Nelson Abbott, Malletts Bay, October 26

Rob Noble, Castleton, October 26

Ecclesiastical Council

None

New Calls

Ryan Gackenheimer, recent graduate of Eden Theological Seminary received his first call to serve as Associate Pastor of First Congregational Church, Essex Junction effective 10/1/09.

Resignations

Sue Marie Baskette, Bakersfield/E Fairfield, accepted a call to St Paul's, Herndon, Pennsylvania effective November 2

Doug Moore, Norwich, retiring effective Jan 4, 2009

Interim Pastor Resignations

None

Interim Pastor New Postitions

None

Federated Church of Williston Steps Out in Mission

It all began after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina left so many church members wanting to reach out and help in a concrete way. Yet, what could a small congregation do? Thanks to a United Methodist Church program called Volunteers in Mission, five people from the Williston Church were able to travel to Vancleave, Mississippi to coordinate with others helping to clean up from the hurricane's aftermath. This mission project has expanded not only through the Williston Federated Church, but spread to neighboring churches, both UCC and UMC. This fall, volunteers from Williston, South Hero Congregational UCC, Enisburg Falls UMC, Shelburne UMC and one member of the UUA — a total of 71 people that includes 12 youth — will be working to build a "Vermont House." This house will become the new home of a woman raising her two grandchildren. The woman's husband died just before Katrina struck and then they lost their home in that hurricane. The family has been living in a FEMA trailer that is no longer habitable.

We're proud of Rev. Joan O'Gorman, lay leader Tony Lamb and all the volunteers from the Williston Federated Church and beyond who have put their faith into action!



Rev. Dick White and two appreciative friends.

Pastor Appreciation!

One of the nice ways for a church to celebrate its mutual ministry with its pastor is to create a Pastor Appreciation Sunday. This is precisely what happened at the Brandon Congregational Church, UCC on October 12th. The congregation honored Rev. Dick White's service to and with them by presenting him with a card and gift during worship and then making him the "guest of honor" at their after-service fellowship. The crowning touch was an advertisement that appeared in the following Monday's edition of the *Rutland Herald* newspaper complete with a picture and thanking Dick for his twenty years of service to the church and the wider community.

Our Church's Wider Mission
It's who we are.

Thanks For Your Support!

This insert to the United Church News is made possible by the generous donations of our local churches to Basic Support for Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM). Want to know more about OCWM or how to enhance your local Stewardship Campaigns? Contact Jim Thomas in the Conference Office at 728-4999 or thomasj@vtcucc.org.