



Vermont Conference Participates in the Vermont Campaign to End Childhood Hunger

The Department of Mission of the Vermont Conference offers grants to local congregations willing to take action to end childhood hunger. These programs are making a difference in the lives of many in our communities. Below is the story of one such congregation that chose to reach out to respond to Jesus' command to feed the hungry.

Summer Lunch Program — South Hero, Vermont — 2008

This past spring there was an article in the Vermont Conference E-KIT that really spoke to me. 25,000 children in VT were at risk for hunger during the summer. 25,000. That number stayed and stayed with me. I brought my idea to the congregation and wow, did they re-

spond! That E-KIT article was just the information and encouragement that our congregation needed to get involved. The South Hero Congregational Church was ready to make a difference.

We would like to share the results of our first Food for Thought Program. What started out as a small local mission project grew to a glorious example of God's grace.

When Food For Thought was first formed the plan was to provide supplemental summer lunch foods and books to children at risk of hunger in the Islands. The initial goal was to serve 10 families with up to 20 children. During the sign-up period, it became clear that there was a far greater need. This mission was going to be bigger than anticipated and more hands would be needed.

Money needed to be raised, and quickly. Soon the Missions Board, Woman's Fellowship and The Grand Isle Rotary donated to the cause. We applied for and received grants from the VT UCC, Seventh Generation, and The VT Dept of Food and Agriculture. Then we turned to the congregation. In 2 weeks of announcements at church, the congregation was moved to donate more than \$700. We were very thankful for each penny given. We just couldn't let children go hungry, so we kept signing people up and asking for more help. Through God's grace and the generosity of the congregation and the community we raised over \$4,000. The program cost us over \$3,000 with roughly \$1,000 worth of food and book donations. God's Grace shone through.

Ultimately our church provided for 47 children in 21 families — more than twice the initial design. For 9 weeks this summer we gave away boxes of nutritious lunch foods, milk, local produce, and fun books. Over 450 books were given away. Each week we shopped for the best prices and volunteers picked up the food.

Surveys done at the end of the program indicated that very little of the food went to waste and that the families were so thankful for this program during these difficult economic times. Two experiences that really stuck out in my mind that I would like to share:

- An eleven year old boy came in with his grandfather, his legal guardian. When he saw the book in with the food in

his box he got really excited. He was really looking forward to reading this book. The following week when they came back he had the book with him. I asked him if he had a chance to start it yet and he said "I knew I had to bring it back so I read it the first night." I told him that the book was his to keep and the smile on that young boy's face will be in my heart forever. The biggest smile I've ever seen. He must have thanked us 10 times over for that book.

- One mother of 4 received a gallon of milk each week and she was always so thankful. One Sunday during pick up time she and I were chatting and she shared with me that her children hadn't had fresh milk at home for almost 6 months because the cost was so high. She purchased powdered milk and mixed it up for them to have with their cereal. She said that it felt "normal" to have milk in the house again and how relieved she was to have the milk for her children.

I'm so thankful for each family that we had the opportunity to serve and our congregation continues to pray for them.

Thank you so much for your generous donation that started this entire process. Thank for the encouragement when we started this project and we look forward to another successful program next summer.

Sincerely,
 Kaight Althoff

The Department of Mission will offer grants for the summer of 2009. Summer Lunch Grant Applications will be available on Ekit and through the Conference Office in February. The Vermont Campaign to End Childhood Hunger continues to be a valuable guide and resource.

Reflections on a Trip to the Asian Rural Institute in Japan

About three years ago at Green Mountain College in Poultney, several of us heard about the work and outreach of the Asian Rural Institute (ARI) in northern Japan. In mid October of 2008,

I joined four other American friends of ARI in traveling to Japan to be a working visitor helping prepare for ARI's 36th Annual Harvest Thanksgiving Celebration.

Founded in 1973 with the vision of founder Toshihiro Takami and friends, ARI conducts a yearly Rural Leaders Training Program inviting 25 to 30 local grassroots leaders from communities throughout Asia, Africa, and the Pacific for 9 months of training in sustainable agriculture, leadership and community development. Emphasis is placed on reaching the most marginalized, poor, and oppressed, with particular attention to the recruitment of women leaders.

Located on a 6 hectare (15 acre) farm, ARI does intensive integrated organic farming with the growing of rice and many kinds of vegetables. Livestock includes chickens, pigs, ducks, a cow and calf, fish in two ponds and rabbits in previous years. Working together, participants, staff, and volunteers produce most of the food the community eats. Training focuses on servant leadership in building a multicultural, multi-faith community in which everyone actively participates.



The highlights of my journey included:

- A reunion (after 49 years) with ARI's founder, the Rev. Dr. Toshihiro Takami, a Yale Divinity School classmate, and his wife, Shinko Takami.
- Assembling for 6:30 AM community exercises to a Japanese radio program, before chores;
- At ARI my personal morning and evening chores included feeding and caring for chickens, alongside a Muslim woman from Bangladesh and an Episcopal volunteer from Texas.
- The community meal times with grace sung in Japanese or English followed by a spoken prayer by a participant in his or her native tongue.

Participating in worship and assembly by the community led by one of the participants.

The offering of first fruits of the harvest at the outdoor amphitheatre gathering with the Ambassador and his wife from Maui as invited guests.

Takami sen sei raising his hand in benediction from his wheelchair for us all.

Observing with anticipation the early morning food preparation of indigenous dishes over open fires by participants and volunteers for the two-day Thanksgiving Celebration.

Joining with over 2,000 visitors at the Harvest Thanksgiving Celebration, helping with dish washing and various opportunities of welcome.

Reflections — cont. on page 4

From Your Conference Minister...

By Rev. Dr. Lynn Bujnak

For the Common Good



Rev. Dr. Lynn Bujnak
Conference Minister

In the Apostle Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth, he writes: *To each is given a manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.* (12:7) This passage is part of a longer discourse on spiritual gifts and the nature of Christian community. It was written to a church deeply divided as a reminder of their unity in Christ and their genuine need for one another.

As we, in the Vermont Conference begin to live into a new structure and as a nation we begin to live into a time with a new president, I find myself returning to this passage again and again. What does it mean to make decisions and take actions not out of our own individual passions or perspectives, but "for the common good?" This idea runs counter to much we have come to value in our culture and in our church. In a time when individualism and self-reliance are highly prized, the "hero" who goes alone into danger to save the world, it is often hard to hold on to a wider and deeper perspective, to understand our call as Christians to be one of accepting and living out the "costs and joys" of discipleship not just as individuals, but as a community.

Our new Vermont Conference board of directors will be charged with helping us do precisely this. No longer a board made up of representatives of separate program areas, this new board will hold and hold us to the "big picture." These faithful leaders will be assisting us to ask the questions about what God is calling us to do and be as an entire conference. In light of that clarity of calling, what should we name as our priorities? Which of our programs need to be continued and which celebrated and allowed to die? What new initiatives do we need to embrace? Where is God calling us to put our time, our energy and our money?

In order for this leadership to be effective, we will all need to engage in several important community practices. First among these is **trust**. Even if priorities are different from our personal priorities, can we trust that those who are looking at the "big picture" have the very best interests of the conference at heart and are trying their best to listen for the voice of the Spirit? Let's practice assuming the best intentions from one another and respect the variety of gifts resident in this conference by the grace of God. Second, we will need to practice **respectful engagement** with one another, including in places where we disagree. Learning to actively participate in discernment, being willing to speak up AND being willing to listen to one another will be important skills to foster. The twin practices of **letting go** and **openness to the new** will also be important. In any living entity, whether a person or a faith community, change is a constant occurrence. Initiatives, structures and programs live out their life cycles and die and new initiatives, structures and programs are born. Can we have the flexibility to engage in this life-giving cycle? True **spiritual discernment**, seeking the desire of God, requires all these skills and many more as well.

If we are to respond to the Still Speaking God, we need to be a people and a conference deeply committed to the common good, using our gifts, fostering and respecting the differing gifts among us and always seeking to follow where God leads. I look forward with eager anticipation to the next chapter of our common life.

In peace,
Lynn

Vermont News

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Vermont News is published six times a year through your support of Our Church's Wider Mission. We welcome articles and pictures from local churches and associations.

Send them to: information@vtcucc.org

Deadline for the next issue: February 23, 2009.

Reflections from Our Representative to the Executive Council of the United Church of Christ

By Arlinda Wickland

This past October brought an inaugural event for one new Executive Council member. For her, business at the national church level resembled in many ways the work of her own Vermont Conference, but on a magnanimously larger scale. At the Cleveland Council meeting, we heard reports of various boards highlighting the variety of faith and justice efforts that minister to many at the local, national, and global levels. It was awe inspiring to listen as each board representative detailed their wonderful program activities and their positive impact on the lives of individuals and communities. There were also complex reports and difficult conversations to which council members attended at this meeting.

The Council appointed a committee (in two interactions) to develop a new governance structure to manage the work of the national church. The goal was to enhance efficiency in management by bringing together representatives of the Covenanted Ministries, the Executive Council and the Council of Conference Ministers together in a single governance structure. The new structure ensures representation of the diverse groups currently identified as historically under represented groups while achieving a streamlined total membership. Upon review of the 36-page report it was evident that the committee proposing this new structure had worked thoughtfully, carefully, prayerfully, and painstakingly to develop a structure that addressed conflicting concerns and needs. So, how is it that the tenor of this Executive Council meeting (along with its spring meeting) erupted into a level of angst with fallout little resembling anything most of us would understand as Christ centered dialogue?

In the end, the proposal for a single governing structure was accepted by the Executive Council. But the aftermath of misunderstandings and hurt feelings cast a sad shadow on the excellent work of the restructuring committee. Owing to the sensitive leadership of the ICC Collegium of officers, the end of the October meeting was marked with a symbolic olive branch in which individuals with different perspectives on the history and future direction of this church came to recognize how much our individual experiences inform how we are able to experience the United Church of Christ of today. The fact that many individuals within a cultural or racial community perceive and experience the world differently was a revelation for some of us. There is rich diversity within each culturally and racially diverse group. So, this newbie to national church governance found that change, growth and revelation are once more borne of pain and suffering. Christ was and is with us.

Calling All Youth!

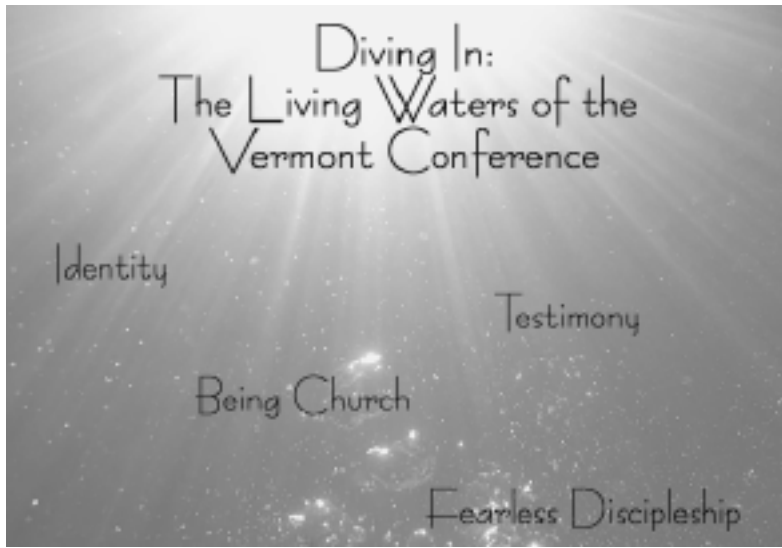
New England Youth Event 2010 is just around the corner! It is already 2009. Can you believe it?! Which means the NEYE 2010 is almost here. What is NEYE? It is a great time to meet the youth of the New England; Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts. Join your fellow U.C.C. youth for a weekend of music, fellowship, worship, and growth.

Mark your calendars now!! Thursday to Sunday June 24-27!

The weekend is open to all youth entering 8th grade through graduating 12th grade. Registration is limited to the first 300 participants, so mark your calendars now. This is YOUR event so look for event planning opportunities coming up soon!

A Celebration of the Sacred Arts

The Washington Association of the Vermont Conference takes seriously its responsibility to find ways to foster community among the churches, pastors and people of the Association. Following a very successful combined worship experience a couple of years ago, plans are now underway for a different kind of event. On Sunday afternoon, April 19, 2009 churches will be invited to gather at Spaulding High School for a Celebration of the Sacred Arts. The event will include a combined choir from all Washington Association churches that wish to participate, original artwork by church members, sacred dance, and poetry. Put the date on your calendar now and watch upcoming E kits for further information.



Vermont Conference Annual Meeting Planning Underway

“Diving In: The Living Waters of the Vermont Conference”

The 2009 Annual Meeting Planning Committee has been hard at work. We are pleased to announce that the Rev. Felix Carrion, Coordinator of the United Church of Christ *Still Speaking Initiative*, will be the keynote speaker at our Annual Meeting, held in Lyndonville, VT, May 28-30, 2009. Rev. Carrion is a dynamic preacher and speaker who will help us continue the work of sharing our unique UCC faith message with the wider world. Your planning committee sees this year's theme as a continuation of the work which we as a Conference began last year with Rev. Martha Grace Reese's encouragement. We are excited to “dive in” to our conversations with Rev. Carrion,

and look forward to engaging with him in our common witness to the Still Speaking God in Vermont. Watch for opportunities to engage in book and Bible studies and even film discussions in preparation for our time together.

In addition, the Service of Installation of Rev. Lynn Bujnak as Conference Minister will take place during our Friday night worship on May 28th. There will be several guests with us to help celebrate this event, including members of the UCC jazz band, *Oikos*. A reception will follow the service at the college. We are looking forward to this great event, to welcome Lynn officially and celebrate her ministry among us!

2009 Pastors Convocation Speaker Announced

By Bruce Comiskey

The Convocation Committee proudly announces that Dr. Kirk Jones of Andover Newton Theological Seminary will be our presenter for Convocation, September 21, 22, and 23, 2009 at the Bishop Booth Conference Center at Rock Point in Burlington.

Kirk Byron Jones formerly served as Kelsey-Owens Professor of Black Ministries and Assistant Professor of Ethics at Andover Newton for several years. A pastor for twenty years, Rev. Jones was the founding minister of Beacon Light Baptist Church in New Orleans, and Senior Minister at Calvary Baptist Church, Chester, PA; Ebenezer Bap-

tist Church, Boston, MA; and First Baptist Church, Randolph, MA. Dr. Jones is the author of several best-selling books including *Rest in the Storm: Self-Care Strategies for Clergy and Other Caregivers*, *Addicted to Hurry: Spiritual Strategies for Slowing Down*, *The Jazz of Preaching: How to Preach With Great Freedom and Joy*, *Morning B.R.E.W.: A Divine Power Drink For Your Soul* and *The Morning B.R.E.W. Journal*. His latest book is *Holy Play: The Joyful Adventure of Unleashing Your Divine Purpose*.

Dr. Jones will address the ongoing issue of Pastoral Self Care. The

Committee will be offering more information for future newsletters. If you have any specific questions about the schedule and other particulars, please feel free to email me at Bruce@stowechurch.org. Our other committee members are: Susan McKnight, Alan Parker, Peggy Tooker and after her commitment to MSSC, Martha Peck. We hope to meet again in the early spring. We thank all of you for your continuing support of this meaningful event. Your evaluations from our last Convocation were very positive. Thank you all for your support and interest.

Community Award Presented

By Beverly Carroll

On Wednesday, October 29, 2008, Rev. Dr. Steven E. Berry and Rev. Jordan “Skip” Dickinson of Interfaith Council of the Northshire were honored guests of the AHS Secretary, Cynthia LaWare, at a Community Award Ceremony in Rutland where Dr. Berry, chairperson of the Interfaith Council of the Northshire, accepted the Agency for Human Services Secretary's Community Award on behalf of the Northshire's Emergency Needs Fund.

Every year, the Agency of Human Services Secretary requests nominations from all of the AHS districts for the Community Award. This Award is given to those organizations or individuals that have

made extraordinary contributions to the health and well-being of Vermont residents. These contributions are often behind-the-scenes and offered with little or no fanfare said AHS Field Director for Bennington County, Charlie Gingo, who nominated both the Interfaith Council of the Northshire Emergency Needs Fund and Bennington Interfaith Emergency Food & Fuel, who also received the award.

In his introductory remarks, Mr. Gingo indicated that Bennington County is fortunate to have two dynamic and engaged Interfaith Councils that work to spread hope where there is despair, joy where there is sorrow, and justice where there is adversity to overcome. He stated the

award recognizes the exemplary efforts of valued community partners who deliver outstanding services to Vermonters of all ages and to significantly strengthen our state's communities.

Dr. Berry, in accepting the award for the Interfaith Council of the Northshire, stated he was honored by the nomination and thanked Charlie Gingo and Secretary Cynthia LaWare for the honor. He stated the strength of the Interfaith Council and its significant outreach to Manchester and the mountains has been driven by extraordinary volunteers from all of our houses of worship who believe and are committed to service to others as an expression of their devotion to God.

Flying Forward, Reaching Back — NEAUCE 2009

by Nancy Fowler

The New England Association of United Church Educators 38th Annual Conference on Christian Education will be May 5-7, 2009 at the Craigville Conference Center, Cape Cod, Massachusetts.

The theme this year is inspired by a philosophical principal of the Akan people of West Africa called “Sankofa,” which holds that in order to move into the future, one must go back and learn from the past.

The keynote speaker is Dr. Kirk Byron Jones, an adjunct faculty member at Andover Newton, and author of *Holy Play: The Joyful Adventure of Unleashing Your Divine Purpose* and several other best-selling books.

There will be a variety of workshops including Making a Joyful Noise with Children, Sacred Movement, Communion, Faithbooking, Creative Ways to Engage Families, Prayers in Color, Conflict Transformation, Meeting God in Virtual Reality and many others.

Look for more information coming soon to your church or check out www.AUCE-Educators.org and click on Regions. The Vermont representative on the planning committee is Nancy Fowler of Barre Congregational Church. If you have questions, please call or email her at 476-3065, fowler5vt@verizon.net.



Pictured left to right are AHS Field Director Charlie Gingo, Secretary Cynthia LaWare and Rev. Dr. Steven E. Berry.

Reflections — continued from page 1



Other highlights beyond ARI included:

- Visiting the famous Toshogu Shrine in Nikko where one sees carved on a lintel of the Sacred Stable the three “See no evil, Say no evil, Hear no evil” monkeys.

- Riding in a “Nursery Van” given to ARI by a nearby Nursery School. With brightly painted animal faces on its sides, the van evoked smiles from adults and often peals of laughter from children.

- A heartwarming visit with UCC missionary, Jeffrey Mensendiek, at the Sendai Christian Center. Jeff and staff reach out to students at Sendai University and have led them in work camps as far away as India and Africa.

- Overnight ferry rides to and from the northern island of Hokkaido, complete with my introduction to the welcome tradition of Japanese hot baths, and a Pacific Ocean sunrise.

- Visiting Menno Village, an organic farm on the Island of Hokkaido. Raymond Epp, born and raised in Nebraska runs the farm with his Japanese wife and helpers. With roots in the Mennonite faith, Menno Village provides food shares for eighty area families.

- Ray actively works with others to keep farmland free of GMO seeds on Hokkaido. His father-in-law, a retired Agricultural University professor, has pioneered the science of building insulation, and the farm is capable of storing the potato harvest through to the following June. With greenhouses, chickens, vegetable, rice and wheat cultivation, grains are harvested and processed on site, and wheat is milled for their own bakery.

- Visiting Rakuno Gakuin, an Agricultural University in Hokkaido, a pioneer in dairy science on the island with a herd of Holstein cattle imported from Holland to Japan.

- Visiting the methane bio gas processing unit, and the Veterinary Science Teaching Hospital, premier in Japan and Asia.

- Learning of the Three Love Movement: Love of God, Love of

Neighbor, and Love of the Earth (i.e. the Soil/ Land).

Personal overnight stays with two clergy and their families:

- with the chaplain of the Agricultural University in Sapporo and his family, and

- with a local United Church of Japan pastor in northern Japan, author of a book on the church, its beginnings with German Reformed Missionaries (UCC), its history and present challenges. As a clergy person among the American visitors, I was presented with a copy, which fortunately has English summaries added to the Japanese text.

- Worship at a Japanese church where my inability to read the Japanese did not diminish an experience of the vitality of prayer, singing, and sharing in God’s love.

- A Sunday afternoon visit to a model Jersey Farm in the highlands which processes its milk and ice cream and was crowded with visitors on a sunny fall day.

- Learning about the Rainbow Plan in the town of Nagai that has organized an entire town and surrounding rural community in the recycling of wastes and renewal of the soil. “Product consumers become compost producers, and product producers become compost consumers.”

- An afternoon of sight seeing in Tokyo, with a visit to the oldest Buddhist Temple in Tokyo and a river boat ride back to the harbor. A sign “May Peace Prevail” was posted on the boat.

The Japan trip was a wonderful experience in a diverse and vital community working for food and earth sustainability and community leadership, as well as visiting the work of graduates and colleagues in northern Japan. I wholeheartedly join with the Asian Rural Institute in their motto, “That We May Live Together.”

*Jordan “Skip” Dickinson
12/30/08*

*Rev. Jordan E. Dickinson,
member United Church of
Dorset, and the Dept. of
Mission, VT Conf. UCC.*

Vermont Conference Pastoral Transitions Since November 1

Ordinations

Ryan Gackenheimer, Associate Pastor Essex Junction, ordained by the Pacific Northwest Conference, Washington State on December 14

Installations

Dale Hindmarsh was installed as pastor of the First Congregational Church in Cornwall, VT on Nov. 9

Ecclesiastical Council

An Ecclesiastical Council was held on November 23 for **Barry Jacobson** at the Bethany Church, Randolph. He was approved for ordination pending a call.

New Calls

Marisa Laviola has been called to serve the First Congregational Church of Morrisville. She is from the Metro Boston area and will be starting in February.

Judith Horgan has been called to serve the First Congregational Church of Lyndonville and the E. Burke Congregational Church beginning in February. Judith is from Arizona.

Rev. Carra Bradt has been called to serve Centre Congregational Church, Brattleboro. She is from Maine and will be starting in February.

Resignations

Rev. Ward Wilson will be retiring from the First Congregational Church of Newbury effective January 31

Rev. Dr. Chris Petrak retired from the First Congregational Church of Newfane effective Dec 31

Interim Pastor Resignations

Rev. Rona Kinsley finished as Interim Minister at the First Congregational Church, Morrisville on December 28

Interim Pastor New Postitions

Mr. Chris Heintz will be serving as a Licensed Interim Pastor for the Pittsford Congregational Church beginning January 4

Rev. Howard Tobak will be serving the Norwich Congregational Church as Interim Minister beginning January 14. Howard comes to Vermont from Minnesota.

Rev. Ed Jager will be serving the First Congregational Church of Newbury as Interim Minister beginning February 1. He is a retired American Baptist minister who lives a short distance from the church.

Intergenerational Connections

One of the challenges of our churches is finding ways to bridge the various generation gaps that naturally exist within any given congregation. One church is experimenting with a unique solution. Centre Congregational Church, UCC of Brattleboro is offering “Holy Spirit Cafes” to encourage youth and adults to get to know one another. On the second Sunday of each month members of the current confirmation class meet over muffins and juice or coffee with interested adults in the church to talk about diverse topics such as: the separation of church and state, creationism, baptism, heroes, hopes – you name it! There is always a discussion starter on slips of paper in the middle of each table. Conversations begin there but sometimes go in other directions as well.

In addition to the adult mentors that many congregations use with confirmation participants, this is a great way to foster communication in an informal and fun way. It breaks down barriers and becomes a way to share faith across the lines of age. In what ways are your congregations making intergenerational connections?

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@vtucc.org.