

Vermont Conference, UCC
Annual Reports of Officers, Departments and Committees
2010 - 2011



Annual Report of the Conference Minister

As I write this annual report, winter maintains a tenacious hold on the Vermont landscape. And yet, the sure signs of spring are all around for, as Jesus might say, ‘those with eyes to see, ears to hear and hearts to understand.’ So, my thoughts on the Vermont Conference this year are in the form of a weather report.

Cloudy with a chance of rain: Like our sister mainline churches and an increasing number of evangelical churches, we continue to struggle with decline in both membership and giving. These realities affect our congregations in many subtle and not so subtle ways. In 2010, several of our churches made the move from full- to part-time pastoral leadership. We are aware that more are trying to discern what level of pastoral leadership they can sustain. The most requested services from the conference office are: assistance with finding a new pastor and assistance with issues of stewardship and budgets. In particular, the requests have grown exponentially for Jim Thomas to meet with church leaders, conduct workshops on stewardship and church finance and assist congregations trying to make decisions when dollars received are less than the church’s need.

It is taking our churches longer to find a new pastor and the burden is especially heavy on our part-time churches. Since over 70% of our Vermont churches have part-time pastors and less than 15% of all ordained pastors searching for a church are able or willing to accept a less than full-time call, Pam, Lynn Thomas and I are always scrambling to assist congregations in finding pastoral candidates.

There are other signs that the established ways of doing and being church are passing away. Technology is gradually playing an increasingly important role in the life of our conference. Economics may have forced our hand, but the society we live in also demands these changes. So, our communications about the conference and conference events, joys and concerns for one another and news of happenings in our churches and in the wider church are almost all electronic. Recognizing that asking people to drive from far locations within our conference to attend a two or three hour meeting is not necessarily the best use of time, we are experimenting with using conference calls for some of those meetings and looking toward video conferencing options for both meetings and conference-wide educational events.

The questions of this “cloudy” time include: what is the purpose and core mission of the conference now and into the future? How does the conference need to change/adapt to support

the changing needs of our congregations? What is compelling and life-giving in our mutual ministry? Where is God alive and moving and how do we join God in those places?

Warming trend with Spring-like temperatures expected: There are signs of health, vitality, creativity and faithfulness all around us, within our congregations and within our conference. Here are a few snapshots:

- Our congregations continue to be engaged in **mission that matters**. A growing percentage of our churches are involved in mission trips either within the U.S. or abroad. At a recent meeting of the Addison Association, I heard moving stories of lives changed by mission trips – both of the people receiving assistance and from those who have gone on these trips. More congregations than ever before are hosting Summer Lunch programs, food shelves and community meals where literally thousands of our hungry Vermont neighbors are being fed. In 2010 nearly all giving to UCC special offerings increased and our contributions to One Great Hour of Sharing nearly doubled.
- **New models of ministry** are being tried. One of our pastors is holding weekly “theology on tap” meetings at a local brew pub that is attracting community members who are under the age of 40 and who are not being reached by traditional church. Others are trying worship services on different days of the week. Several congregations are experimenting with new structures that they hope will help them focus more effectively on their mission.
- Your conference is **expanding leadership options for our congregations**. We are working in partnership with Andover Newton Theological School and Bangor Theological Seminary to develop an option for seminary students to serve as student pastors in some of our smaller congregations. Since many seminarians take four to seven years to complete their education, this gives our churches the possibility of stable pastoral leadership while also providing opportunities for students to learn about ministry in the small church. In addition, a steering committee is being formed to evaluate our VAST program and recommend ways to both keep its focus on lay theological enrichment while expanding the program as a defined path of preparation for licensed ministers. We are also continuing to find that our congregations attract some superb first-time pastors whose energy and faithfulness enrich not only their individual congregations but the entire conference.
- The **dedication of your conference staff** is an amazing blessing. Each person on the staff gives more than any of us know. **Jim** Thomas has responded to calls for stewardship related assistance far beyond expectations and with consistently outstanding reports of his effectiveness. **Pam** Lucas keeps more plates spinning than can be managed while responding to the search and call needs of our churches, VAST, Christian Education, Department of Church and Ministry to name just a few. **Sybil** McShane has done wonders not only with our Resource Center but with the whole variety of our electronic communications. **Lynn** Thomas does it all – answers your questions, provides support for staff and conference boards, serves as our Placement

Secretary and maintains our records. All of your staff do their ministries incredibly well and with grace and good humor even on the most trying of days.

- Another positive sign I see on the horizon is **smaller congregations searching together for a pastor**. The organizational issues may take different forms from cooperative ministry to forming multi-church parishes or even consolidation. The goal is for our congregations to be able to have the things no longer possible alone – youth and adult education, a youth program, confirmation, wider mission opportunities among others.

As your conference minister, my job is to **hold the “big picture”** not only for our conference, but as our conference relates to our denomination and our partners in faith around the world. Along with your Board of Directors, I am constantly and prayerfully seeking to see and articulate how the pieces of our ministries fit together to form a whole, reminding us of those larger realities, calling us to be mindful both of what has or is passing away and of our need to step out in courage and faith into God’s new day.

In these changing times, **the national setting of our church is also changing**. As a denomination and even in cooperation with other denominations we are exploring new ways to train pastoral leaders through multiple paths to authorized ministries. The governance structure of our denomination may change as early as this summer’s General Synod to move from four separately incorporated boards to one central board for all aspects of the life and ministry of our denomination. New ways of: identifying leadership skill sets of a new day, conducting search and call to address the varying needs of our congregations, and looking toward more effective ways of structuring conference and association life are some of the things being explored.

These are just a sampling of the ways I believe the Spirit is alive and well in our midst. Like the picture at the beginning of this report, the landscape of the church can appear frozen and lifeless. Yet, just under the surface the Waters of Life are flowing free, fast and fully alive. May the One who calls and claims us grant us the gifts of seeing, hearing and of understanding.

In peace,
Lynn
Rev. Lynn Bujnak
Conference Minister

Annual Report of the Associate Conference Minister

How do we learn to think outside the box called “the Church”? A box in which many of us are quite comfortable with the old traditions, the old hymns, the old order of worship, the old architecture and the old ways that order our governance and our life together.

Except – the old architecture, the old traditions, the old hymns and the old ways to be “the Church” are showing signs of wear and tear. Financial challenges, maintaining facilities and finding ways to rescue the steeple or become handicapped accessible are increasingly difficult. Financial challenges mean that many churches are turning to part time, bivocational and licensed ministers,

We know that the culture around us is changing – but what about “the Church”? We know that the people around us need Good News. We know that people are searching for something deep and rich to stake their lives on. Is the box called “the Church” where they will feel comfortable?

By changing just one letter “change” becomes “chance”! How are our Vermont Conference Churches meeting the challenges and finding new chances?

Almost every Sunday I am worshipping or preaching in our churches and find the incredible diversity is amazing. Whether large or small, most of our churches enjoy a congregation that wants to be present, worshipping, praying, and being with one another. Many of our churches are returning to the most basic of questions.

Why are we here?

To whom do we belong?

What are we supposed to be doing?

They are not easy conversations because it means we have to confess that we aren’t and can’t be what we used to be. But God knows that we aren’t what we’re going to be either.

YES - We do have “A Faith Worth Living”. And YES - It means looking up – not down. It also means looking out at the world around us. Celebrating what we have rather than mourning what is no more. Building on existing strengths rather than complaining about our lacks. Churches are stepping up to the conversation seeking new ways to both understand and live out our ministry and mission in our time and in our communities. It means recovering and rediscovering our particular gifts so we might effectively work together as the body of Christ.

Through this past year I have observed our churches doing just that. Re-claiming and re-articulating a mission and a vision. Re-configuring governance so that people aren’t burned out by wearing too many hats with nothing left over for ministry and mission. Asking questions like:

What do we want our children to grow up and know about Jesus, God and the Bible?

What kind of Christian do our churches want to send out into the community?

What do they need from the church to become that kind of person?

What is the world looking for from us?

How might we answer their needs?

I continue to be in awe of our local church search committees. In the past year we have worked with 31 churches who are some place in the Search and Call process. Prayerful and committed, these search committees are helping their church have these conversations. Sometimes painful information about financial resources means changing expectations around pastoral time and availability. Sometimes painful memories or hidden conflict arise which means stepping back

and paying attention to their history. Always I am amazed when this faithful, prayerful work brings gifted pastors to our Conference.

What is the future for student ministry in our Conference? What is the future of Licensed Ministry? A Partnership with Andover Newton Theological School may offer opportunity to introduce small church ministry to seminarians and strengthen the foundational preparation for Licensed Ministry.

What is the future of VAST? A program that has widened the faith horizons, biblical knowledge, and theological articulation for our laity for so many years.

What about continuing education for our clergy? Can ANTS, long distance learning, teleconferencing, or things that haven't even been developed yet provide answers that will work in this time of gas prices, so little time, electronic marvels and possibilities?

Through this past year I have met with pastors and search committees, Diaconates and Pastoral Relations Committees, Church Councils and Congregations, I've led workshops and retreats, attended ordinations and installations, clergy gatherings and Conference and Association meetings and gatherings.

I'm ready to think outside that box with you.

Pam
Rev. Pamela Lucas
Associate Conference Minister

Communications and Resource Coordinator Report

Resource Center Activities

During 2010, the Resource Center collection became searchable online (by author, title, subject and keyword) via the Resource Center webpage: http://www.vtcucc.org/Resource_Center.html

More than 100 items were added to the collection by purchase or donation.

349 items were borrowed from the collection in 2010 about 6% more than 2009. 207 individuals are registered to borrow from the Resource Center.

Communications Activities

The Conference published the following e-mail newsletters during 2010:

E-KIT (Electronically Keeping in Touch) newsletter – published weekly.

E-Event – Events from the Conference Calendar including conference, local church, ecumenical, regional, and national events of interest. Published bi-weekly on the 1st and 3rd Thursday of each month.

E-Link – a quarterly Christian Education Department Newsletter.

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

DoM Newsletter – an occasional newsletter of the Department of Mission.

In addition, a print publication – *Vermont Conference News* – a 4-page bulletin insert is being published on a quarterly basis. The insert contains 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>.

Sybil Brigham McShane
Communications/Resource Center Coordinator

Treasurer’s Report

Some random thoughts from your Treasurer:

When I read the duties of the Treasurer of the Vermont Conference I get the shakes. “The Treasurer shall monitor the receipt, accounting for, and disbursal of all current funds of the Conference, including income of endowments and trusts, pursuant to such regulations and directive as may be made by the Board of Directors and such other departments, boards, and committees the Conference may have charged with the care of special funds...” That sounds suspiciously like a full-time job and will scare the volunteerism right out of you.

The Vermont Conference office people are very good at their work and that makes my responsibilities much easier. On about a six- to eight-week cycle I review the financial books. The Business Manager, Jim Thomas, provides the materials I request. During each review I will choose a few deposits and drill into the source of the funds, the timeliness of deposits, and the accounting thereof. I review the income logs and assure that two sets of eyes have monitored their receipt.

We will then examine expenditures and choose several for further documentation. The invoices for payments will be reviewed, we will determine that two people have agreed to the bills and payment, and then track those payments through the accounting books, the check book, and verify canceled checks.

I have found through these lay audits the funds are handled in a business-like manner and recordkeeping is clean and understandable. In each instance I have received data and explanation to my questions in a thorough and complete fashion.

The bylaws of the Vermont Conference go on to say “The Treasurer shall be a member of the Investment and Finance Committees and an ex officio member of the Department of Stewardship and Financial Development Council and all other committees of the Department of Stewardship...” The Investment Committee meets quarterly with the money managers who handle our investments. The Finance Committee meets frequently during January through March to prepare the annual budget. The reports for these Committees appear elsewhere in this booklet. These Committees serve diligently and well for your benefit and that of the Vermont Conference.

During the past several years of watching the finances of the Vermont Conference I have been impressed with the cost containment steps taken during difficult times. When craziness in the financial world hurt our invested funds, great efforts were taken to reduce expenditures. We are now at a time when cost-cutting has reached its end. We have instituted a new income line called Friends of the Conference and the idea is catching hold that such donations are crucial to the health of the Vermont Conference. We have adopted the rule that if we overdraw from our invested funds then we will have to pay those overdrafts back to the funds within ten years—such courage from this body.

So we have come to a hard spot in the road. We are not supporting this Vermont Conference. Last year fourteen churches sent 0 for per capita payments. Last year forty two churches sent 0 for their offerings to Our Church’s Wider Mission (OCWM). Last year forty churches sent less money for OCWM than the year before and thirty five churches reduced their per capita payments. How can we sustain? Our givings were down substantially in the last two years—18%.

Each year we adopt a resolution to give 10% of our operating expenses to support the Vermont Conference. We are even so bold as to suggest 1% annual increases in our churches giving. Then we do no such thing. **Please ask your church to budget not simply to match last year’s contribution, but to reach our resolve.**

So, shall we commit to a tithe? Do we believe in our deepest being that providing 10% is right? What could we do as a conference if Per Capita and Our Church’s Wider Mission were fully funded as we profess? It would be amazing to see broadened education programs and training offered to churches by dedicated staff, to make Covenant Hills known to thousands of youngsters, to reach out to neighbors in need, to provide lunches to children in every UCC church every summer, etc.

But make no mistake the tithe and its number are limiting and easily forgotten. Consider:

Romans 12:6-8

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who

teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

Where do you stand in supporting the Vermont Conference? Where does your church stand in supporting the Vermont Conference? Where do we all stand as we benefit from the work of the Vermont Conference?

Just some random thoughts from your Treasurer.

David K. Damkot

Board of Directors Report
Debbie Ingram, Chair
Written by David Durfee, Scribe

The year began with the first formal training session for Board members in more than a decade. Aided by UCC General Counsel Don Clark, the Board spent a Saturday retreat at Halelujah Farm in New Hampshire considering the purpose and proper functions of a Board and the responsibilities of the members as a whole and as individuals. With the help of this session, the Board was able to spend more of its time throughout the year on areas most appropriate for the entity that is responsible for governance of the Conference between Annual and Special Meetings. The Board was pleased to observe and support increasing effectiveness of Department leadership which also enabled this focus.

The Board continued its quest for clarification of the vision and mission of the body during this time of changes in how we can be church. Many of these are changes taking place in churches, associations or other bodies within our Conference. Others are new ideas being considered by the National Setting as it faces a changing society. The Board is grateful to Lynn Bujnak who faithfully keeps it up to date and explains what National is thinking about so clearly. At times, during this quest for vision, it has seemed hard to keep pace with change, let alone anticipate it.

Not counting the short organizing meeting at the end of the 2010 Annual Meeting and the retreat, the Board held eight meetings during the year. It met its Constitutional responsibility to arrange for a performance evaluation of the Conference Minister and was pleased that the results were very positive overall. It made new efforts to improve communication with local churches, including a plan to have individual Board members visit and share in worship with them. It has practiced a spiritual discipline at a number of meetings, which it hopes to share throughout the Conference. With the clear presentations of Jim Thomas, it has kept care watch on financial developments.

Though the Board now deals with fewer crises and practical and administrative matters than in past years, there are still enough of those demanding attention to insure that the meetings take up the full five hours allotted – or more. In many of these matters, the Board is helpful, though inevitably there are times when not everyone is happy with the Board's decision or action.

Everyone can be assured, however, that the members of the Board take their responsibilities seriously and make decisions only after careful and prayerful deliberation.

The Board is grateful for the gifts, talents, and hard work of the staff -- Pam Lucas, Jim Thomas, Lynn Thomas, and Sybil McShane, as well as Lynn Bujnak -- as they work with us and keep us and the whole Conference on the right track.

Department Of Church And Ministry Council

The Department of Church and Ministry Council continued in its work on behalf of the Associations, local churches and ministers of the Vermont Conference. The Council is made up of representatives from the eight Associations of the Vermont Conference and the Committees of the Department*. The Council met bi-monthly throughout the year and received regular reports and updates about the life and activities of our Associations and the work of our committees.

In our continuing efforts to provide useful resources and engage in meaningful dialogue with the leadership of our Associations, and in recognition of the fact that neither the Conference Department nor Associations had committees focusing on issues of local church standing and standards, we held two gatherings confronting that need. The first was in September 2010. It focused on what it means to be a church shaped by covenant and what are the marks of a faithful and effective church on both the local and Association level. The specific tasks of an Association for maintaining an ongoing covenant of mutual nurture and accountability with its local churches were highlighted and discussed. We talked about matters of church standing and standards utilizing the *United Church of Christ Manual on Church*, and began a discussion concerning which if any of the responsibilities for church standing and standards the Associations might wish to ask the Vermont Conference to do on their behalf. Following up on this meeting we gathered Association Moderators and interested leaders in January 2011 for a more in depth conversation covering the specifics involved in the covenantal responsibilities for church standing and standards. This gathering used *A Statement of Principles Governing the Standing of Churches in the Associations of the Vermont Conference* (with revisions accepted in principle by the Board of Directors January 2011), looked at the specific tasks involved and the possible wording in bylaws that is needed to reflect these responsibilities at both the Association and Conference level. The participants were asked to take this information back to their Associations for discussion with the desire that they bring their decisions to a vote by their spring Association meetings 2012.

We also set up an April 30, 2011 gathering for Association leaders to focus on what it means to be an Association. Rev. Dan Wright agreed to provide our keynote address on the history/role/purpose of an Association in our congregational history. The schedule then included opportunities to explore together the nuts and bolts of how our Associations are working today based on historical experience, present realities and transformation going on in how we do church. Opportunity for participants to share what is working well in their Associations with one another, their concerns and resources were also included.

Our efforts to revitalize several committees of the department that had become virtually inactive (Ministerial Compensation Committee, Continuing Education Committee and Church Standing) have progressed. 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, assistance and inspired worship liturgies 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

Rev. Dereen Vanderlinde-Abernathy, Chair

Ministerial Standing and standards Committee Report 2010

Ministerial Standing and Standards Committee (MSSC) oversees ministerial authorization for ordained, licensed, and commissioned ministers on behalf of five of the eight Associations in the Vermont conference.

This is a 12 member committee that meets monthly and is comprised of three subcommittees: Members in Discernment, Members in Transition and Licensed Ministries. Each subcommittee attends to the specific oversight for their members and then reports back to the larger committee which is MSSC.

In 2009 and 2010 we have been making a significant shift in our work with candidates for authorized ministry from the traditional “In Care” model to “Members in Discernment”. We have been informed in our work by the suggested guidelines from Implementing the Pronouncement: “Ministry Issues; Forming and Preparing Pastoral Leaders for God’s Church”. These guidelines were voted by the General Synod of the UCC in 2007 and it has taken us some time to adapt them for the needs of the Vermont Conference. The key concept is **Discernment**, both for the candidates and for MSSC. This process involves discerning if one is called and equipped for authorized ministry and if so, what form of ministry. This work is done on behalf of the entire United Church of Christ. Another aspect of our work this year was to develop a general framework for Multiple Paths to ordination. Again we are working with the Ministry Issues Pronouncement and will be in conversation with a small group of potential candidates in the near future.

The Licensing Subcommittee reviews and authorizes Licensed Ministers to serve in local parishes around the state. This subcommittee tries to meet with Pastors annually when possible. Some of our Licensed Pastors are modern day tent makers and so our contact is not always face to face. Given the long distances Pastors have to travel in this state we have been trying to make more use of technology. The Transitions team reaches out to Pastors who are transitioning into

or are leaving the conference or in need of four-way covenants. MSSC also conducts Informational Reviews, reviews and approves all Transfers of clergy in and out of the Vermont Conference, offers Boundary Awareness training, and Fitness Reviews when needed.

MSSC participates in regional gatherings of the Council for Theological Education in New England, which shares the common concerns of the two seminaries (Andover Newton and Bangor) and the six New England conferences around ministry issues.

This year we have 6 Members in Discernment and 7 seeking to be in Discernment or exploring Multiple Paths to ordination. Each member has a Liaison and Advisor assigned to them by MSSC. The members of the committee are both lay persons and clergy and are in consultation with our Conference staff. This committee has a big agenda every month and it is attended to prayerfully by the faithfulness and good cheer of our members. Prayer is an essential component of our work and we appreciate yours on our behalf.

Rev. Nancy S. McHugh, Chair

2011 Annual Report Department of Mission

From the Bylaws of the VTUCC

The Department of Mission shall determine and appropriately implement specific actions – whether encouragement, education, assistance, advocacy, intervention, or other – arising out of a creative tension between, on the one hand, the hopes and needs of the world and, on the other hand, the capacities, talents, and passions of the churches and others to act. Such actions shall be ecumenical wherever possible and interfaith where appropriate.

Wonderful things have been happening in the Department of Mission, thanks to the continuing dedication of its members and the congregations and individuals in the conference who are actively engaged in mission in many areas. Committee reports follow to describe some of what has been accomplished and planned.

The main news for the Department as a whole this year is the reorganization that we have undertaken in response to conference guidelines, and new initiatives planned in response to the needs around us.

We have added two new committees on Diversity and the Environment. 2010 marked the end of the 10 year mandate for the URTF. But the end of this mandate did not end the commitment of the VT Conference to the work we still have to do to end racism. With the formation of the Diversity Committee the Conference is not only committing itself in a more permanent way to the work of eradicating racism, but it is also allying itself with those who want to end all kinds of bigotry and discrimination. We give thanks to all of those who served on this task force, paving the way for the continuing work of affirming diversity that this Conference holds so dear.

The Environmental Ministry Committee was created to equip the churches and guide the conference in addressing our pressing environmental concerns. Under the leadership of Rev. Adrienne Carr, the committee is still organizing and defining itself, but has been active as an ad hoc group this year.

One of the big tasks of the Department and the Committees has been to begin to bring ourselves into compliance with conference guidelines around membership, term limits, and focus. We were asked to do two things differently. First, to establish term limits for the Mission Department and committees members. Recognizing that to renew ourselves and energize our work, we need to continually involve new people, we have moved toward the conference guidelines of three year terms with a possibility of one renewal, for a total of six possible years on any one position. This is a new but necessary step, as some of our committees have grown smaller and smaller, with no new members to replace long-term members as they depart.

We were also asked to focus on how we can be most helpful to our churches; and to identify the ways in which our local churches are engaged in mission. From the Board of Directors of the conference, ...*The idea is to focus the energy and expertise of our organizational structure (departments, committees and the Board) on encouraging local congregations' involvement, collaboration and sharing of what has excited and energized our local churches and to continue to find ways to connect local churches to the Association, conference and national settings of the UCC.*

The representatives to the Dom from the Associations have been asked to identify a mission contact in each congregation through whom we can be in touch. They have met with varying success in these efforts, and we encourage churches to let us know how best to reach you. We are looking at ways to increase our concrete help to congregations and to support, energize, equip and share in their efforts to do Christ's' work in the world.

The year has not been without its bumps along the way. The formation of the Diversity Committee and the transition from the URTF was confused and hurtful for some. I take responsibility and regret it. I do think our witness in this area will be strengthened, but as a new chair from outside the Department, I still have a lot to learn. It's a bit like trying to jump onto a speeding train. I bring organizational skills that I feel will be helpful. But the main work of the department is done by the committees and dedicated volunteers. Our task is harder for the loss of many long-term members in the last year and a half, who have served the church and the Mission Department for many years with dedication, deep passion, and great grace. We have said goodbye, or will say goodbye, to Skip Dickinson, David Brown, John LaRue, Helen Jean Reindel, Betty Edson, Anita Bellin, Betty Keller, and Eric Webster. Their names are an honor roll of service and we thank them for all they have done so faithfully. These dedicated volunteers have helped to shape the department and our witness in the world. They are sorely missed. The only fitting tribute is for others to take up the task so admirably carried by these dedicated servants of God. I thank them for their service. I am deeply grateful for the Department members and all they do. I thank Jim Thomas for his work on our behalf in keeping our finances clear and especially for research he did to help us as we began to consider how to build on our relationship with Dillard University. I especially want to thank Lynn Bujnak for her unfailing support, wisdom and guidance.

I encourage all of you to prayerfully consider what God may be calling you to, and to faithfully discern what you are meant to do in our mutual mission to be the church.

Faithfully,
Susanna Griefen, Chair

Reports of the Committees of the DOM

Just Peace Advocates

Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with *us—and our churches*

The Just Peace Advocates is the arm of the Department of Mission that concerns itself with following the nonviolent way of Jesus in matters of peace with justice. We assist the Conference in being a witness for justice and peace. We are also a resource to local churches in their efforts to increase peace and justice in the world. Recognizing that we all have to model the peace we want to see in the world, JPA has created a Culture of Peace program, which was recently presented at the Washington Association spring meeting. It focuses on increasing peace in ourselves, our churches and our communities, and includes worship based on a Peace and Civility Pledge adapted from Sojourners and the Charter for Compassion. We'd be happy to share this program with other associations and local churches! JPA has worked on the Legislative Day and Legislative Dinner for the Vermont Low Income Advocacy Council and nominated the 39-year-old Council for the UCC's Justice Award to be presented at General Synod. We penned the Just Peace Conference resolution to be voted on at Annual Meeting, which urges the Conference and churches to affirm the commitment to Just Peace and engage in reflections and actions that advance peace with justice. JPA has full responsibility for the annual Peacemakers' Breakfasts at Annual Meeting. We endeavor to support individuals and churches in their efforts to increase peace with justice locally and globally. Please let us know what peacemaking you are doing and what you would like to do!

Just Peace Advocates and terms
David Brown, Charlotte, 2013
Betty Edson, Randolph, 2013
Sam Guarnaccia, Charlotte, 2013
John LaRue, Richmond, 2013
Theresa Lever, Montpelier, 2013
Andy Schoerke, East Arlington, 2013

Global Ministries Committee

Committee Mission and Goal Statement (under consideration by the members of the committee)

Guided by the love of God and by the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, we seek to:

1. Help the Vermont Conference UCC, the associations, and local churches to stay in vital touch with the mission efforts of the Wider Church Ministries of the UCC.
- 2) Help churches to network together regarding their particular mission projects to enhance the effectiveness of all.
- 3) Respond to the needs and interests for mission projects and activities of the associations and local churches, as we are able.

1. For some time we have considered whether and how to select a Vermont Conference mission focus for those churches which choose to work on some facet of mission together with other Vermont churches. A conference-wide focal approach could be one of the following: a) to develop a program of church- to -church partnerships, as Vermont once had in the past , such as that in New Hampshire where a number of UCC churches partner with churches in Zimbabwe); b) to work on various projects in a given country (women’s work, orphanages, schools, medical clinics, etc. in one country); c) to work on a given type of project in various countries (orphanages in several countries) and so on. We hope for this 2011 Annual Meeting of the conference to provide information about these choices and to assess delegate responses regarding a helpful and desirable direction.

2. In 2009, our resolution calling for Muslim-Christian study, dialogue and friendship building, “A Common Word Between Us and You”, was passed by the Vermont Conference Annual Meeting. Several churches have proceeded productively with this work. We hope to assist other churches to work on this critical need for understanding and respect toward our Muslim neighbors. Please contact Bob and Dee Keller for suggestions regarding speakers, (they are prepared to speak in your church), and materials that are available from the Conference Resource Center. (Dee has lived for 24 years with Muslim neighbors and colleagues in Turkey, 12 of those years with Bob in educational missionary service.) rsdbkeller@yahoo.com.

3. The resolution to affirm the “Charter for Compassion” was adopted by the Conference Annual Meeting in 2010. This Charter, initiated by Karen Armstrong and developed by many individuals and leaders from all over the world, calls us as individuals, congregations, communities, organizations, and political entities to learn and use skills and actions of respect, compassion, and empathy towards those with whom we differ, even toward our enemies. A study outline for churches is being developed to be sent to pastors, religious education directors and relevant church leaders suggesting books, videos, and discussion topics on compassion, story sharing and other approaches. Group study of Karen Armstrong’s book, “Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life” is one useful approach. Other possibilities include church efforts to design projects that carry out compassionate behaviors related to conflict situations.

4. For some time we have tried to develop a list of the mission projects undertaken by all the UCC churches in Vermont. Please help us complete such a list by bringing to annual meeting a list of the mission projects (national and international) of your church.

5. Get ready to be a part of: 11.1.11 to 11.11.11 MISSION 1, ONE UNITED CHURCH on a shared mission for 11 powerful days to feed the hungry and confront food-related injustice, this November. www.ucc.org/mission1

We welcome your suggestions to help our work be fully relevant to your needs and interests.

Dee and Bob Keller, Co-chairs, Global Ministries Committee,

Global Ministries Members and Terms

Dr. Dorothy B. Keller (Dee) and Dr. Robert S. Keller (Bob), Co-chairs

Rev. Adrienne Carr,

Rev. Jordan Dickinson (Skip),

Theresa Lever,

Rev. Joan O’Gorman

Prison Justice Committee

1. FORMALIZATION OF OUR COMMITTEE: One of our accomplishments this year was setting ourselves up as a committee, as opposed to a task force. At Annual Meeting, 2011, Betty Edson and Alan Perkins will complete their terms. Betty will not continue to serve and is being replaced by Alan Hood of Sharon. Alice McDonald and Will Hunter will serve two more years, and Jeanne Zammataro and Lynda Hadley, three. We have moved to a format of having every other meeting by conference call, and one pleasant side-result was that Sala Nolan Gonzales, the UCC Minister for Criminal Justice and Human Rights, was able to join us for a meeting.

2. BLUE SPRUCE: This is not a project of the Vermont Conference, but two members of our committee (Jeanne and Will) are on the Board of the non-profit which is implementing it. The Blue Spruce is a former ski inn in Mount Holly, which was given to the New England Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of America, and has been renovated by the afore-mentioned non-profit, for use as a residence for inmates who have served their terms and are returning to society. Will has brought the renovation about pretty much single-handedly and deserves much credit; it is now a very attractive facility. Despite the interest and support of the Department of Corrections, there have been many ups and downs, as to what inmate population Blue Spruce would serve and what rehabilitation program would be in place. The plan is for there to be 24/7 supervision, a rehabilitation program, and opportunities for residents to learn trades. The hope is still that the facility will open this fall. A work project at Blue Spruce is being offered to people attending Annual Meeting, the morning before the meeting begins, and people are asked to bring books to Annual Meeting for the library Will is developing at the facility.

3. LAST YEAR'S RESOLUTION: The resolution passed at last year's Annual Meeting, urging reassessment of our policy, as a state, regarding the relationship between drug use and incarceration, was sent to our Congressional Delegation and to then Governor Douglas and Lieutenant Governor Dubie.

4. CAMP AGAPE: The committee continues to try to support Camp Agape, the inter-denominational camp, held at Covenant Hills, for children who have an incarcerated parent. Thanks to the generosity of churches throughout the Vermont Conference, the UCC supplies the towels, beach towels and flash-lights that are put in the backpacks (filled with items needed at

camp), which each child receives. Last year, Will Hunter volunteered one of the weeks, Leslie DesRosiers is very involved and volunteers there and several Vermont Churches made financial gifts to the camp. We hope to increase both volunteer and financial support of this excellent ministry.

5. CONTACT NETWORK: Lynda Hadley has been working on developing an e-mail network, and hopes eventually to have a contact in each Church in the conference. She presently has 21 UCC church contacts and 3 UU contacts, and hopes more churches will sign up at Annual Meeting. We have used the network for such things as soliciting the items for Camp Agape and soliciting books for the Blue Spruce library.

6. WEBSITE: We appreciate Sybil McShane's work in setting us up with a presence on the Conference website, which has, as well, a link to the denominational Prison Justice website.

7. MAINLINE WORSHIP IN VERMONT CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES: It is our hope that there will eventually be mainline worship in all of our facilities. Northeast Association has pledged to pursue this. The only functioning program, at the moment, is at the Springfield facility. Jeanne has worked on this very faithfully, and she and Will both conduct worship services there, in a rotation that includes other faith communities, as well.

8. CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMITTEE TO THE CORRECTIONS COMMISSIONER: Will serves on this board, and this is an important liaison, as Will can and does bring to the attention of the Commissioner issues he and Jeanne encounter in their work in Springfield.

9. JUSTICE E-NEWSLETTER: We continue to contribute articles to this newsletter.

10. ANNUAL MEETING: In addition to the work project at Blue Spruce, Prison Justice will have speakers at the Peace Breakfast and a display table.

When we look back over the six years we have been in existence, we are aware that we have made progress, but there is such a long way to go! We appreciate any support you and your churches have offered or may be able to offer.

Respectfully submitted,

Betty Edson, Chair.

Members

Jeanne Zammataro and Lynda Hadley, 2013

Will Hunter and Alice McDonald, 2012

Betty Edson and Alan Perkins, 2011

Diversity Committee

The Diversity Committee of the Department of Mission is a new undertaking of the Vermont Conference. The Committee is still in the formational stages. We are finalizing our membership and making sure that advocates for all areas of cultural and social diversity are represented.

As a committee we will be examining the ways in which we can respond to, and proclaim the goodness of, the diversity of God's children. This includes concerns related to differences of race, ethnicity, religion, ability, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, gender identity and more.

Our aim is to not just encourage the commitment to affirming diversity in the churches of our Conference, but to also equip UCC members across the state so that they may advocate for inclusivity and mutual understanding in their daily lives. As advocates for diversity in the Conference, we also hope to continue to encourage our commitment to true diversity, and to facilitate ongoing discussions on how we can affirm all of the goodness of God's diverse creation.

Some concerns that the committee may take up over the next year include responding to bullying, exploring ways to increase our commitment to racial diversity, and confronting ableism in the church. We ask for your prayers as we undertake this new endeavor. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at revheath@me.com.

In Christ,
Emily C. Heath

The Summer Lunch Grant Committee Annual Report

The Summer Lunch Grant committee consists of Grace Cleary, Chair, and Mary Lou DeCosta. Fifteen churches received grants in 2010 totaling \$3600. An article about hunger in Vermont, ways to help feed kids in the summer, and directions on how to apply for at Vermont Conference Grant was published in e-Kit six times between March 31st and May 12th. The grants were determined in consultation with The Vermont Campaign to End Childhood Hunger (now called **Hunger Free Vermont**) and distributed May 15th. Grace spoke at the Annual Meeting at the Peacemaker's Breakfast, again stressing the need to feed hungry kids in the summer and ways our churches could help. An article in the Fall DOM Newsletter summarized the involvement of 6 churches in their own unique ways of helping feed kids in the summer.

Grace Cleary, Chair 2012
Mary Lou DeCosta. 2012

VLIAC

THE CHANGING FACE OF POVERTY

"Migrant Mother," a photograph taken by Dorothea Lange in 1936, was the face of poverty during the Great Depression. It depicts a mother with three small children in distressing circumstances and evokes compassion and an impulse to help.



75 years later, there is no "Migrant Mother" to represent the face of poverty. The poor are among us (about 10% of Vermonters receive benefits), but often, we do not know them. We do not recognize them in college graduates "overqualified" for available work, or veterans out-of-work long after returning from active duty. We do not see them in single mothers or families with young children and no place to go except a homeless shelter. Low income Vermonters may be next door: the elderly couple trying to make Social Security cover necessities, or the young man with disabilities living with his mother (she worries over what will happen to him after she is gone).

For 39 years, the Vermont Low Income Advocacy Council (VLIAC) has been a presence at the State Legislature on behalf of these and other low income Vermonters. Each year, the VLIAC Board takes testimony and selects priorities in such areas as Proven Strategies for Self-Sufficiency, Weatherization and Emergency Fuel Needs, Affordable Housing, Well-Being and Nutrition, Mental Health and Disabilities, and economic services such as 3SquaresVT, Reach-Up, Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Rehousing. Karen Lafayette, VLIAC's advocate, encourages House and Senate members to consider VLIAC's positions when voting on bills and budgets affecting people in all parts of the state. VLIAC's interests are also advanced at annual Legislative Days and Dinners, co-sponsored with Just Peace Advocates of the Department of Mission of the Vermont Conference. (Meals were prepared this year by members of Bethany Church Montpelier.) The 2011 Legislative Dinner honored the memory of long time VLIAC President, Edna Fairbanks-Williams, who worked tirelessly on behalf of all Vermont's poor.

Through the Department of Mission, the Conference contributes to Vermont Assistance, Inc., which funds the VLIAC advocate's work.

David Brown
Conference representative to VLIAC Board

Department of Christian Education Report

This past year the Department of Christian Education worked at completing the charge of creating a document which outlines the priorities of this department. The priorities were narrowed down to four areas:

1. Strengthening the Resource Center,
2. Maintaining our Covenantal Partnerships,
3. Providing Quality and Pertinent Christian Education Programs and Activities for Adults and youth in the Vermont Conference
4. Strengthening our Commitment to Outdoor Ministry and Covenant Hills

There were many positives outcomes in relationship to these newly outlined priorities in the past year. Several youth and adults attended the New England Youth Regional Event in Boston, several people attended NEAUCE in 2010 and this year there are over 20 Christian Educators attending the 40th anniversary of NEAUCE in Craigsville, Massachusetts, Open Houses at the Resource Center were offered and Sybil McShane has worked hard at sharing new information about the Resource Center and CE events through E-Kit and the CE newsletter, VAST continues to provide great opportunities, and Covenant Hills Camp had a successful summer in 2010 and has hired a new director for 2011.

Nancy Fowler resigned as the chair of the department and was replaced by Sandy Daly. The committee is looking forward to their summer meeting at Covenant Hills and outlining a plan for new opportunities in our department during the upcoming year.

Peace,
Nancy Fowler

Department of Stewardship Report

Christian Stewardship encompasses at least 3 major sub-sets:

- a] of Creation and the Environment
- b] of the Biblical Story
- c] of our Economic Resources

In our American economic environment, money, by itself, has little or no value depending on whether it is metal or paper. Money is, however, a medium of exchange. With it, we can buy goods and services.

The need for money in our religious lives becomes clear when we realize that people are needed to share the Gospel Story and to keep our water and air safe. And people are not free - they need to be supported.

Why then are we so reluctant to talk about money--particularly when we know that Jesus talked about it all the time--and particularly as it relates to those of us who identify ourselves as Christian?

As chair of the Stewardship Department of the Vermont Conference of the United Church of Christ, I am in the position of having to report that not much has been accomplished this year. Yes, the Finance Committee and the Investment Committee do meet and faithfully carry out their assigned tasks. But the Fund Raising side of our work is sadly missing.

What do we need? We need at least one person from each association who is willing to share their interest in financial stability for not only their local church, but also for the conference and the national church. We need to gather people at every level who know that the work of the Christian Church is doing Mission--wherever the need exists.

And promoting Our Church's Wider Mission [OCWM] is the way we do mission in the United Church of Christ.

Currently, four [4] associations are represented.

The possibilities are endless--even the Bible tells us that "the Poor will always be with us."

If YOU have an interest in this adventure, please be in touch with me at ruficon5@gmail.com or the conference office.

Rufus Cushman, Chair
Stewardship Department

2011 Finance Committee Report

Our committee, consisting of Lynn Bujnak, Jim Thomas, Rufus Cushman, David Damkot, Robert Delaney and Linda Kulas, met four times beginning in January. Based upon our review of last year's financial results, we recommended reductions in the 2011 budget, which were approved by the Board of Directors. We also prepared the 2012 budget and submitted it to the Board. This will be presented to the delegates for their approval at Annual Meeting.

The financial results for 2010 were disappointing. Basic Support for Our Church's Wider Mission was down to \$411,177 from a budgeted income of \$467,500. Nevertheless, due to an unexpected gift, we ended the year with a slight surplus. Income through February 2011 continues to lag behind the budget projections.

As the economic recovery continues, the committee is somewhat optimistic about next year. We are submitting a balanced budget, projecting total income of \$723,164, up from actual income of \$708,433 in 2010 and OCWM giving of \$440,000, up almost \$29,000 from last year's results.

Unfortunately, to keep the budget in balance, we must again reduce the percentage of OCWM receipts committed by the Conference to the National Church from 40% to 35%. This is the second such reduction in two years and requires the approval of the Annual Meeting delegates. In 2009 we reduced the sharing ration from 45% to 40%. This is a painful decision and one that the committee wrestled with prayerfully. After discussing the options over two meetings, the

committee voted unanimously to recommend this change. We saw the choice as between reducing the sharing ratio and disregarding the policy we have set to limit withdrawals to the following formula: 4.25% of the four year trailing average value of the Unrestricted Fund. Cutting staff is not an option. Staff has been reduced in recent years and is now at the minimum that we need for the Conference to be effective. The formula was adopted at a previous Annual Meeting after years of deficit budgets that resulted in the Conference spending over \$1,000,000 from the Unrestricted Fund within five years from 1998 to 2003.

The budget contains an increase of \$12,703 for Compensation of Staff, line 8000. This reflects a 2% increase in staff compensation and a projected 11% increase in health insurance costs.

With the approval of the Board, the committee is recommending that any surplus at the end of 2012 be split with 65% going to the National and 35% staying with the Conference.

The Vermont Conference has been one of the national leaders in our share of OCWM giving. Currently, at 40%, we are tied for 4th. If we reduce the share to 35%, we will be 9th out of 38 conferences.

John Holme, Chair

Investment Committee Report

The recovery continues and we saw improvement in the investment portfolios during the year. The Unrestricted Fund, of which the conference depends for a portion of its budget, was up over 8% for 2010. We still have a ways to go to get back to the pre “world is coming to an end” of 2008 & 2009 but I like the direction we are going. The results are similar in the other funds we oversee.

Its is times like these last few years that it is imperative we continue to create realistic budgets and discipline ourselves to stay within those guidelines. I commend the conference leadership for directing our ship through some difficult times. We must continue to be good stewards of the funds so generously given by our supporters.

The world seems to be looking a little more positive. We still have much to get through and we will always have ups and downs. I feel good about our future.

Paul Simpson, Chair