

2015 Annual Reports Vermont Conference, UCC

These are the Reports from Staff, the Directors, Boards, Committees, and related organizations of the Vermont Conference of the United Church of Christ. This is a report of their work in 2015

Annual Report 2015 Executive Conference Rev. Dr. Lynn Bujnak

In 2015 our Conference took significant steps to fulfill the mission of the Conference: *Equipping congregations for Christ's ministry and mission today and tomorrow*. Here are a few of the ways your conference staff and Board have equipped our clergy and congregations:

Center for Progressive Renewal

We have continued our three year contract with CPR to work on the following vitality initiatives.

- We added four additional congregations to the **"Next Step"** program designed to assist already healthy and engaged congregations identify and take the next step towards increasing vitality in ministry and mission. (Churches that have been or currently are engaged in Next Steps are: Guilford, Bennington, Vergennes, Charlotte, Bethany Randolph, Grace Rutland, Middlebury, and Richmond.)
- An initial **"Coach-Share" group** for smaller membership congregations continued to meet.
- Congregations and their pastors were identified for a new **"Coach-Share" group** for those whose pastors will be retiring within the next 1-2 years.
- A **training** was conducted for our New Expressions Task Force aimed at training committee members to "coach" our congregations in experimenting with new expressions of church aimed at meeting the spiritual needs of those who are not attracted to our traditional ways of being church.
- A Fall **Vitality Event** featuring Rev. Doug Pagitt addressing themes from his book, "Church in the Inventive Age."

Strategic Investment in Sacred Places

Five of our congregations and five Episcopal congregations took part in a Lilly-funded pilot project about identifying common mission in order to create better partnerships in their communities and create new partners and new dollars for their mission.

- These are our five churches: Centre Brattleboro, Dorset/East Rupert, Underhill, Morrisville, Bethany Montpelier.

2015 Annual Reports Vermont Conference, UCC

- Each of these churches has identified a project to further their mission and have received small planning grants. I look forward to seeing those projects take shape and learning from their experiences.
- In 2016, we expect that these congregations will be willing to share what they have learned with the Conference churches in their areas.

Micro-Churches

An invitation was issued to our churches that worship 20 or less people on a Sunday morning to gather and talk about issues unique to that setting. Pam Lucas, Jim Thomas and I led this event. We offered a variety of tools for congregations to assess their vitality as small member congregations. One of the most important parts of the gathering was the opportunity for church leaders to talk with one another about common challenges and joys.

General Synod

Conference staff and our nine delegates attending the UCC General Synod in Cleveland, Ohio. There were many inspired opportunities for worship, study, witness and fellowship. We considered resolutions on items as diverse as boycott, sanction and divestiture of companies doing business in the West Bank to proposed bylaws changes that would end the Collegium of Officers model and replace it with a more defined role and authority for the General Minister and President.

In addition to these defined initiatives, Jim Thomas coordinated the planning for a home-grown vitality event, "**Recalculating the Way II.**" There was a great deal of support for our churches and pastors in transition including a recognition that we are in a period of transition as clergy reach retirement age. Search and Call work is primarily staffed by Pam Lucas with the Conference Minister supporting 5-9 congregations in transition.

2

We had a very well-received **Annual Meeting** at the Lake Morey Resort on the theme, "Justice and Joy." The meeting was structured in such a way that it allowed us focused time on a variety of justice issues with inspiring speakers for each one. Peacemakers breakfast was once again a major highlight.

In 2015 we continued seeking and strengthening **partnerships** within and across denominations. Preliminary meetings were held with BOD chairs and Conference Ministers for Vermont and New Hampshire to begin to identify each Conference's strengths and where we might realistically look to do together. In 2016 we anticipate adding the Maine Conference to the conversation. In addition we continue to seek ways to partner particularly in a common voice for justice with the Episcopal Diocese of Vermont.

Another significant event for us in 2015 was the offering of a luncheon for retired clergy and spouses that included a program about negotiating challenges and boundaries once retired. Rev. Marti Baumer and our own Rev. Carole Carlson facilitated this gathering entitled, "**Called for Life: Now What.**"

2015 Annual Reports Vermont Conference, UCC

For the annual **Clergy Convocations** we had the leadership of Professor Mark Heim from Andover Newton Theology School. Mark helped us to explore new understandings and theology for understanding how we believe Christ "saves" us.

Pam, Jim and I led an **Advent Day Apart** for Clergy where we worked with key scriptures for the season, shared a simple meal and joined together in worship to prepare ourselves for the Advent season.

In the past year we also had the joy of welcoming the First Congregational Church of **Wallingford** into the UCC. A huge thanks to the Southwest Association and to Pam Lucas for their extravagant welcome and willingness to walk with this church as they explored what joining the UCC, the Vermont Conference and the Southwest Association would mean for them.

In this fullness of time it feels like a great page in the story of the Church is being turned. We both await what will come and seek to write the next lines. We do this with faith in the One who accompanies us and hope that God is not finished with God's Church. Together we travel lightly so we are awake and willing for God's Spirit to form us for new directions and tomorrow's ministry and mission.

In peace,
Lynn

3

Annual Report 2015 Associate Conference Minister for Stewardship, Church Vitality, and Finance Rev. Jim Thomas

2015 was, by almost any measure, a good year for your Vermont Conference! Our efforts of the last few years to reconnect and enhance existing covenant bonds with local churches and associations are bearing fruit. We have a growing group of churches reporting increased attendance and membership, financial giving is increasing, and congregations are reconnecting with their communities in new and exciting ways, living into their discipleship all during the week, not just for an hour on Sunday morning.

Some of my time is devoted to the necessary including finances, investments, monthly financial reports and the like. The rest is devoted to assisting local churches in all facets of stewardship, church vitality, simplifying governance, leadership development and strategic planning. Here are some of ways I did this in 2015:

2015 Annual Reports Vermont Conference, UCC

- I visited 28 different churches, preaching and sharing worship; presenting workshops on Planned Giving, Managing Endowments and Investment Policies, Narrative Budgeting, Capital Campaigns, Governance, Strategic Planning, and Community Engagement; and worked with pastors and leadership boards on leadership development. I engaged with dozens more via phone and email.
- Keynoted Addison Association Meeting
- With a planning team followed the ecumenical *Recalculating the Way* event with a very successful sequel.
- Coordinated the fall vitality event: *Church in the Inventive Age*
- With Lynn Bujnak and Pam Lucas convened a Small Church Gathering, speaking to the particular challenges of the rural, family sized church
- Returned the Bluegrass Gospel Project to Randolph, resulting in a wonderful concert that also served as a successful fundraiser.
- Served as a member of the Northeast Ecumenical Stewardship Council, planning and teaching workshops at the April event in Boxborough MA.

All of that feels a bit like providing input for an annual review, but I think it's important for you to know how we use the precious resources you entrust to us. Your congregation's financial support of the Conference, through covenantal contributions to Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM) and the paying of Per Capita, are the two largest income streams that allow us to do work with you and on your behalf. Individually, many of you also support Friends of the Vermont Conference with annual or sustaining gifts.

While mission giving (including OCWM) is not transactional, that is to say we shouldn't ask, "What do we get for that?" Yet we do have a responsibility to demonstrate to the givers that their contributions are used effectively and efficiently.

2015 was a good year for Conference finances. After several years of decline, OCWM giving was up substantially in 2015, and we ended the year with a surplus, enabling us to send an extra OCWM contribution to the national setting of the UCC as per the financial resolutions passed at the 2014 Annual Meeting. The annual external audit (yes, we do one every year, just like your church should!) found no discrepancies. The audit is public, and posted on the Conference website. I also want to add that each month's financial report that I prepare for the Board of Directors is also posted on the website, along with several years of past reports. We are committed to being open and transparent with our finances.

Please accept my thanks for your efforts to live into our shared covenant; inviting the Conference into the work of the local church, being willing to engage in

2015 Annual Reports Vermont Conference, UCC

uncomfortable conversations about change, and moving from a culture of ‘maintaining’ to one of ‘enhancing.’

And most of all, I am thankful for the opportunity to live my faith and discipleship in this way. What an awesome call!

Annual Report 2015 Associate Conference Minister for Search and Call and Small Churches Rev. Pam Lucas

Long ago, I came across a quote attributed to Henry Ford. “Coming together is a beginning, keeping together is progress, working together is success.” Maybe when Henry Ford said these words it was in those golden years after World War II when we thought everything had come together to bring success. Except that with the ebb and flow of time and change it is never the end of the story. Choosing to come together is always a choice. We recognize that in the changing religious landscape of our time there are many who are not choosing to ‘come together’ to worship or to participate in Being the Church.

This is leading to difficult conversations in some of our Vermont Conference Churches.

Some are facing unwillingly into the reality that they need to reduce pastoral time. There are some who wonder whether they will actually survive. In this last year, the Quechee Community Church ended its local church ministry with deep sadness and yet will continue ministry into the future with the ways they have bequeathed their assets to missions and ministries dear to their hearts. On the other hand, after several years of conversation and intentional work, in this last year, North Church and South Church in St. Johnsbury chose to ‘come together’ and merged to become United Community Church, United Church of Christ. Several churches in near geographical proximity are testing the possibility of sharing a pastor during their interim time by asking the question, ‘Are we alike enough to be able to share a pastor?’

All these stories begin with ‘coming together’.

The United Church of Christ is not a connectional church. It is a covenantal church. Connectional implies ‘required’. Covenantal requires ‘choice’. Jesus invited persons

2015 Annual Reports Vermont Conference, UCC

into a covenantal relationship. Disciples and followers had to choose to say 'yes'. But once 'yes' was said - much was required that they might 'keep together'.

The United Church of Christ has invited each local church into a covenantal relationship with sister churches in an Association, a Conference, and a national denomination. And once 'yes' was said - something is required.

Yes, our polity affirms the "autonomy" of a local church as a basic building block of the UCC.

What then are the responsibilities we have for one another. What is the 'something' required of us. The UCC Manual on Ministry has some, perhaps, long-forgotten words in its Code of Ethics for ordained, commissioned and licensed ministers.

"I will stand in supportive relationship with my colleagues in ordained, commissioned and licensed ministry, offering and receiving counsel and support in times of need."

"I will be a responsible participant in the life and work of my Association, Conference, and the United Church of Christ."

The UCC Manual on Ministry also has some, perhaps never-known, words in its Code of Ethics for the local church.

"We recognize that our church and our pastor are part of the larger faith community which is the United Church of Christ and **we will be, and support our pastor in being**, a responsible participant in our Association, Conference, and the United Church of Christ.

So what does this mean? This is how we are able to 'keep together'!

All of our Vermont Conference Associations offer opportunities to "come together" as pastor and delegates at least twice a year. It's up to you - pastors and delegates - to choose to help "keep together" to make these meetings worthy of being present and accounted for. And maybe even choosing to 'work together' in those places where together we can make a difference in ways we cannot make as a single church working alone.

But what else does it mean?

In this past year, twenty-seven Vermont Conference Churches were someplace in pastoral transition. Presently, seven more churches have or will be installing newly called pastors. Installation is an act of the Association. The Association which gathers to install a new Pastor is made up of the Pastors and delegates from the

2015 Annual Reports Vermont Conference, UCC

churches of the Association. If there are but few Pastors and delegates present - where exactly is the Association?

One of the great joys of what I do as I travel among the Conference Churches is getting to know the different shapes and sizes and distinct personalities each church comes in; getting to know the different strengths and challenges each church has. Since most of you worship in the same space each Sunday, I recommend that you all - pastors, delegates and visitors - take advantage of the opportunity to visit other churches on the occasion of installations and get to know those churches and pastors a little better. Celebrate with them their opportunities for ministry. Offer thanksgiving with them for their past and their future.

For the more we 'come together', the better we will know how we can be supportive to one another; the better we will know what to pray for one another; the better we will know how to help one another increase the local church's ability to minister faithfully and well.

In addition, the Association is the setting in the United Church of Christ where Ministerial Standing is granted and held. What does that mean?

In this past year there have been three Ecclesiastical Councils to examine Members in Discernment (MID). Each MID has been on a journey, sometimes for years, at least for two years, of study and preparation for ministry. Classes, Field Education, Clinical Pastoral Education all play a part in this preparation. In addition, each MID has a local church and an Association and a Committee on Ministry accompanying them on this journey. At this Ecclesiastical Council, the MID shares an Ordination Paper, receives questions and then leaves the room. The Pastors and Delegates of the Association Churches have 'come together' to discern whether or not this person is fit for ministry in and on behalf of the entire United Church of Christ. If so, they vote to 'approve this person for Ordination pending call'. Amanda Swoyer was recently installed and ordained in North Pomfret. Sally May, called as Associate Pastor at First Church in Burlington will be ordained in her home church of Jeffersonville in September. Lynn Wickberg, MID from Christ's Church, Saxtons River was recently approved for Ordination pending call. Presently there are five MID's and two persons are applying for that status. We have some amazing gifts in this Conference. Let's celebrate them by 'coming together'.

And 'keeping together'.

Why not make an intentional effort to invite interested members of neighboring churches to your non-Sunday morning study groups, speakers, special musical programs? And maybe even choosing to 'work together' in those places where

2015 Annual Reports Vermont Conference, UCC

together we can make a difference in ways we cannot make as a single church working alone.

What about youth group, Confirmation Class, Vacation Bible School, curriculum, a mission trip? Are these things you could 'come together' around? How about your youth group offering to spend a day at a neighboring smaller, older church to help Spring clean-up, inside or out? What about pulpit exchanges so that congregations hear another voice periodically?

The more ways that we can multiply our resources the more faithful we can be as local churches. Think and dream outside of your local church box. The larger boxes that make up the layers of church that is the United Church of Christ support you and are ready to think and dream with you. Together we can strengthen our mutual witness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in our communities and our world.

“Coming together is a beginning, keeping together is progress, working together is success.” This is ministry in the United Church of Christ.

Annual Report 2015 Board of Directors of the Vermont Conference Rev. Amy Pitton

8

The Vermont Conference Board of Directors continues to keep the Conference Mission Statement, *“Equipping congregations for Christ's ministry and mission today and tomorrow”* as the focus of its work. Over the course of the last year, the Board has pursued several avenues as we have sought to align the ministry and mission of the Conference with the needs of the local church.

One of those avenues has been our attention to the Conference Finances and how we can be most faithful in our management of them so that we can do the most we have with the resources we have. This has been addressed in several different ways. We are pleased to report that gifts from the special offering, “Friends of the Conference” (which the Board oversees) increased significantly this year. We are working to continue this trend. There has been much conversation on the Board about facilitating more education at the local church level about stewardship, including education about the OCWM offering and what ministries it supports, which includes the ministry of the Vermont Conference. Also under discussion is an evaluation of how our assets are invested, especially around the question of whether or not the Conference should consider divesting from our investments in fossil fuels as a response to our concerns about global warming. Yet, with all our careful financial management, unfortunately we were unable to balance the proposed budget for 2016, and were faced with the unhappy task of cutting the hours of one of our Associate Conference Ministers from full-time to three-quarter time. The Board's intent is to

2015 Annual Reports Vermont Conference, UCC

continue to closely consider our financial situation in the coming year so that we can continue to do to most ministry we can with the resources we have.

One of the other conversations that has been on the table of the Board of Directors was to begin conversations with the New Hampshire Conference about ministries we might be able to do together. As the Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island Conferences begin conversation about shared ministries, the Board thought it would be good to have some introductory conversations with New Hampshire. Rev. Bujnak and I met with the NH Conference Minister and their Board Chair for an initial conversation and discussed the strengths and needs of each Conference. We agreed to continue to be in conversation.

Another subject that was under discussion this year was the fate of the Covenant Hills Christian Camp that the Conference shares with the New England Methodist Conference. The Methodist Conference, being in possession of five summer camps, decided that Covenant Hills was not a viable option for the coming year, and that 2015 would be the last year of camp before the camp was shuttered. Those involved in Covenant Hills in the Conference began to look at how Christian camping could be continued. Conversations were held, and led to a partnership with the New Hampshire Conference's Horton Center. The camping ministry became the first ministry that the NH and VT Conferences could collaborate on.

The Conference continues its relationship with both the Center for Progressive Renewal and Partners for Sacred Places. Both programs continue to meet the Board's mission statement of equipping the churches for ministry and mission, and we are pleased with the investment that we have made in these programs.

In the fall, the Board began a process of Asset Mapping, looking at all the different kinds of resources the Conference has and how we might utilize them better. This conversation continues into 2016, in hopes that we can refine and direct the work of the Conference in effective and faithful ways.

I conclude by saying thank you to the Staff of the Conference - Lynn Bujnak, Pam Lucas, Jim Thomas, Mark Pitton, and Jesse Davis. We on the Board very much appreciate your wisdom, your thoughtfulness and your prayerful discernment as we work together for the good of the churches of the Vermont Conference. And thank you to the members of the Board, you have been a joy to lead! May God bless us as we continue to discern how we can continue to be faithful in a fast changing world.

Respectfully submitted for the Board,
Rev. Amelia Pitton, Chair

2015 Annual Reports Vermont Conference, UCC

Annual Report 2015 Personnel Committee

The personnel committee met several times over the past year, primarily to work through the recommendations of the 2015 annual meeting of the Vermont Conference, UCC to reduce one staff position from full time to $\frac{3}{4}$ time. Under instruction from the Board of Directors, the committee re-wrote an Associate Conference Minister job description, trying to utilize technological and lay resources to meet the reduced hours available.

During the late winter and early spring of 2016 we have worked with Rev. Dr. Lynn Bujnak to clarify the goals of her sabbatical and to help arrange for an “interim” conference minister. We are delighted that our first choice, Rev. Carole Carlson, to act as part-time conference minister in Rev. Bujnak’s absence has come to fruition.

We met and will continue to meet to address any other conference staff issues that arise. We are blessed, in the Vermont Conference to work with such caring and dedicated people.

Respectfully submitted,
Peter Plagge
Jeremy Schrauf
William Anderson
Martha Peck

10

2015 Annual Report Vermont School of Ministry

Regional Schools of Ministry are something that the UCC has been encouraging for a few years in an effort to provide either continuing education for clergy or foundational education for those who are thinking about an Authorized Ministry. This is the end of the first year for the Vermont School of Ministry. We have partnered with the New York Conference who has had one for 10 years.

For those who knew the VAST Program (Vermont Academy of Spiritual Training), one piece of the new VT School of Ministry continues: our interest in providing quality education of theological studies to any and all. *The Christian Studies Program* allows anyone who would like to take a class to do so. And one person has taken several classes simply because she likes to learn more (breadth and depth) than a local church can offer.

Currently there are three people who have been accepted into the *Christian Leadership Program*. This program provides an educational foundation for those who are interested in being a Licensed Minister. Twelve Courses, boundary awareness training, polity, and supervised field work are all a part of the foundation. It would

2015 Annual Reports Vermont Conference, UCC

be possible to complete this in 3 years if a person can take 4 online classes in a year. The classes for fall 2016 are Intro to Christian Theology, Liturgy and Worship, and Family Systems and Pastoral Leadership.

In the fall of 2015 we offered a program to train (or improve) lay preachers who would like to be on the Pulpit Supply list. We did not meet the needed number of people for the class to be a go. We had two people interested in this. Because of the instructors other commitments, we will not offer this again until next year, the fall of 2017.

If you would like to know a bit more, you can read about class sign up deadlines and the range of classes for the Leadership and Pulpit Supply Preaching program by visiting the web at <http://www.vtcucc.org/VSoM.html> . If you have an interest in any of these classes/programs, just be in touch with Pam Lucas.

VT SOM is a great program that is going to fill a real need in Vermont. I have stepped down as the Dean of VT SOM as I will not be the one to bring it into its future.

Rev. Mark Pitton

2015 Annual Report Open and Affirming Coordinator

ONA is not for every church. Those that will not make a covenant statement and those who do not believe it should not consider putting rainbows in their church. But for those churches who might and those that *want* to become ONA, it is a spiritually rich time. The conversations in such a church are about what it means to be a Christian and a church. This is not something done in an attempt to be “politically correct”. Neighbors who know that churches disagree about this issue want to know where your church stands on the issue of inclusion or exclusion. It is relevant. This is about a church making their statement of faith about God and God’s love, what it means to be a church, how to read the bible, what the bible does and does not say, and how a church deals with tough issues. This has been one the most theological and faithful things I get to do.

What I do as Coordinator is simple. When a church is thinking about becoming ONA or has started moving in that direction, I give help when asked. Sometimes that is a phone conversation or email exchange. Sometimes I meet with a committee or task force of a church. In 2015 I met with two churches. Sometimes all a church wants is to know how to become certified as an ONA Church so it can be listed on the National and Conference list of welcoming churches. Sometimes churches let me help by doing bible studies, which I really like.

As of this writing, there are 46 churches in VT certified by the UCC Open and Affirming Coalition. Nearly 1 out of every 3 churches is certified ONA. Nationally, the

2015 Annual Reports Vermont Conference, UCC

number is about 1 out of 4. And in the world of denominations that are welcoming of LGBTQ, the Open and Affirming program of the UCC is the fastest growing program.

The Vermont Conference voted to become an Open and Affirming Conference in 2002. In 2017 for the 15 anniversary of that vote I would like to lift up those churches that have made this faith statement. I am not sure if ONA is still cutting edge but it is a very significant statement to make. It would be very cool to have 50 ONA churches in Vermont by Annual Meeting 2017. If you want help, get in touch.

Rev. Mark "ONA Guy" Pitton

2015 Annual Report The Department OF Finance

The "new" organizational structure for the Conference is now seven years old. These times of rapid change in the Church would try any structure and we are now seeing the places where our structure is no longer facilitating our ministry and mission.

Like many congregations, we have more positions to fill than willing people to fill them. Like many churches, our leaders are stretched thin already and often not willing to add one more meeting to their schedules or make a multi-year commitment to serve.

We are between the no longer and the not yet. Your Board of Directors will give consideration to what sorts of changes are needed. You will be hearing more about this in 2016. In the meantime we are allowing portions of our structure to lie fallow. These areas include the Department Councils for Stewardship, Christian Education and Church and Ministry. The Committees of these Councils that are actively and effectively engaged in ministry will continue. There are also a couple of "Task Forces" that have formed around places where there is both interest and energy. We will see how that model unfolds. So, please be patient. A new organizational model will be created out of what we perceive to be our needs in order to do the ministry we are called to do.

2015 Annual Report of the Investment Committee

The Investment Committee continued to review our monetary blessings throughout 2015. The year continued to be challenging as the equity and fixed income markets showed little to no growth. Our view of the markets has always been over the long term, and we are satisfied with our results.

The committee, while reviewing our overall portfolios, began discussions on the energy sector. We believe the sector is an important part of our diversified holdings,

2015 Annual Reports Vermont Conference, UCC

but have concerns on the effect some of these companies have on Mother Earth. We are currently investigating the possibility of repositioning some of our holdings into less invasive and renewable energy companies. The discussions must encompass the possibility of more risk to the portfolios.

The final concern is that over the years more money has been taken out of our investments than they are generating. We have a reasonable formula for disbursements, but if the conference needs an excess to that formula, it is dispersed. I feel we need to become better stewards and grow our funds.

Paul C. Simpson
Chair of Investments Committee

2015 Annual Report The Department of Mission The Rev. Bert Marshall

My shortcomings as Chair of this Department are overcome by the faithful commitment and dedication of its members, and by the manner in which the Department functions as a coalition of smaller teams - each working on an area of mission that the group collectively supports and for which we advocate on behalf of the Vermont Conference. At our December, 2015, meeting at the Conference Center, we discussed a wide range of issues and basically agreed to continue in the directions we are going, as well as entertain some discussion going forward about the nature and purpose of our work, and how we should think of "mission" in our time - a word which raises decidedly colonialist overtones.

The Department allocated budgeted funds to continue support for social justice work with which we have traditional and long-standing relationships in Vermont: VLIAC, VIA, and the Summer Lunch Program primary among them. We have individuals who work tirelessly on behalf of causes - regional and global - for which they have particular aptitude and passion: environmental justice/climate change, prison reform/restorative justice, refugee resettlement, and others as they arise. The Department authored a letter to Governor Shumlin last Fall, supporting his public stance to receive Syrian refugees in Vermont if called upon to do so. In addition, the Department submitted a resolution to Annual Meeting supporting refugee resettlement and justice - a resolution that was passed after some timely wordsmithing.

Our Department assisted in planning for Global Ministries partner Gloria Vicente's visit to the Vermont Conference in the spring of 2016 - a visit that included presentations in some of our churches and an address to the gathered assembly during a plenary session.

2015 Annual Reports Vermont Conference, UCC

We welcome suggestions and comments. We also consider requests for funding, within the constraints of our budget. It is our goal to represent the members of the Vermont Conference in the best ways possible, to reflect a shared consciousness about justice and fairness among all God's people, to resource our churches, and to advocate for policies and practices that more faithfully serve the common good and move us closer to the Realm of God.

Special thanks to Jeanne Zammataro for her invaluable guidance and assistance as co-chair of the Department.

Rev. Bert Marshall
Chair, Department of Mission

2015 Annual Report Vermont Low Income Advocacy Council (VLIAC)

In 2014, 73,000 Vermonters were living in poverty, including more than half of Vermont's single mothers with young children. There were 1,523 homeless Vermonters, a 25% increase since the official end of the recession in 2009. 1 in 7 Vermonters needed help to put food on the table.

In the 2015-216 Legislative Biennium, the Vermont Low Income Advocacy Council (VLIAC) and the Vermont Conference continued their mission partnership, giving low income Vermonters a voice, and serving those who are poor, elderly, living with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged; also those suffering from homelessness, food insecurity, and increased energy burdens, without the means or opportunities to move forward. VLIAC's long-time advocate in Montpelier, Karen Moran Lafayette, represented the interests of low-income Vermonters to the Vermont Legislature. These interests require maintaining a short-term safety net and the smart programs that alleviate and end poverty for the long term. The safety net meets emergency housing needs, basic necessities, and fuel assistance in the short term. Long term, VLIAC seeks investments in anti-poverty initiatives and programs that promote the health and welfare of poor Vermonters. Examples include economic policies that provide opportunities, permanently affordable housing instead of motel vouchers, oral health access authorizing a Dental Therapist professional, the means and process to address services for those with disabilities by creating a Deaf, Hard of Hearing and DeafBlind Advisory Council and dedicated funding for the Vermont Low Income Weatherization Program to provide long term fuel savings.

Karen Moran Lafayette wrote, "Once again, the Vermont Low Income Advocacy Council worked alongside a number of dedicated advocates and organizations, with administration members, and the Legislature, to fund necessary programs and to advance policies that help stabilize families in need and to promote investment in those initiatives that lead to economic opportunities and prosperity for all Vermonters."

2015 Annual Reports Vermont Conference, UCC

We are fortunate to retain Karen Moran Lafayette as the exceptionally dedicated, effective and generous VLIAC lobbyist. Karen was recently honored by the Northern New England Community Action Partnership with their Community Service Award for her years of trusted advocacy for the poor and those with disabilities. We need to maintain support for her passionate and skillful work.

Vermont Assistance Inc. (VAI) is a non-profit that generates support for VLIAC advocacy. It provides a way for members of Vermont's Faith Community to contribute without affecting their tax-exempt status. The Vermont Conference of the UCC is represented on VAI's Board by John Nutting (co-chair), David Brown, Theresa Lever, Jeanne Zammataro, Esther Farnsworth and Beverly Anderson. During 2015, Judy Joy and David Vanderlinde-Abernathy represented the Conference at VLIAC's regular meetings.

To receive the annual VAI mailing and the "VLIAC Priorities - Legislative Wrap-Up," please send your address to John Shullenberger (VAI's co-chair), 228 Nashville Road, Jericho, VT 05465, or email Karen at: kmlafayette@aol.com.

"There is nothing new about poverty. What is new, however, is that we have the resources to get rid of it." (Martin Luther King, Jr.)

David E. L. Brown, UCC and VAI Member

2015 Report About Department of Church and Ministry

15

The "new" organizational structure for the Conference is now seven years old. These times of rapid change in the Church would try any structure and we are now seeing the places where our structure is no longer facilitating our ministry and mission.

Like many congregations, we have more positions to fill than willing people to fill them. Like many churches, our leaders are stretched thin already and often not willing to add one more meeting to their schedules or make a multi-year commitment to serve.

We are between the no longer and the not yet. Your Board of Directors will give consideration to what sorts of changes are needed. You will be hearing more about this in 2016. In the meantime we are allowing portions of our structure to lie fallow. These areas include the Department Councils for Stewardship, Christian Education and Church and Ministry. The Committees of these Councils that are actively and effectively engaged in ministry will continue. There are also a couple of "Task Forces" that have formed around places where there is both interest and energy. We will see how that model unfolds. So, please be patient. A new organizational model will be created out of what we perceive to be our needs in order to do the ministry we are called to do.

2015 Annual Reports Vermont Conference, UCC

2015 Annual Report Convocation Planning Committee

On September 21-23, 2015 it was with great pleasure that approximately 50 UCC clergy from across the state came together for the 99th Clergy Convocation of the Vermont Conference. This much anticipated three-day event took place once again at the Bishop Booth Center at Rock Point in Burlington. We were honored to welcome the Rev. Dr. Mark Heim, Professor at Andover Newton Theological School, as the presenter for the topic "Saved from Sacrifice: The Cross and Our Communities."

Professor Heim led 5 different sessions over the three days as well as delivering the sermon during the final worship service which included communion on Wednesday morning, presenting on the concept of atonement and the historical and theological approaches to how we approach the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As always there were plenty of opportunities for conversation over meals and social hours and in-between sessions as well as during the free time set aside on Tuesday afternoon. We were pleased once again to be able to avail ourselves of the multitude of books and resources brought to us from Hopkins Bookshop and previous feedback on the quality of meals was heard and addressed with much more pleasing and delicious results in 2015.

At the conclusion of Convocation the committee was able to secure the Rev. Dr. John Dorhauer, UCC General Minister and President as presenter for the 2016 Clergy Convocation set for September 19-21.

The 2015 Convocation Planning Committee was:
Elisa Lucozzi, Chair; Laura Cadmus, Doug Carter,
Kathy Clark, Elissa Johnk, Pam Lucas, and Susan McKnight.

16

2015 Report About Department of Christian Education

The "new" organizational structure for the Conference is now seven years old. These times of rapid change in the Church would try any structure and we are now seeing the places where our structure is no longer facilitating our ministry and mission.

Like many congregations, we have more positions to fill than willing people to fill them. Like many churches, our leaders are stretched thin already and often not willing to add one more meeting to their schedules or make a multi-year commitment to serve.

We are between the no longer and the not yet. Your Board of Directors will give consideration to what sorts of changes are needed. You will be hearing more about this in 2016. In the meantime we are allowing portions of our structure to lie fallow. These areas include the Department Councils for Stewardship, Christian Education and Church and Ministry. The Committees of these Councils that are actively and

2015 Annual Reports Vermont Conference, UCC

effectively engaged in ministry will continue. There are also a couple of "Task Forces" that have formed around places where there is both interest and energy. We will see how that model unfolds. So, please be patient. A new organizational model will be created out of what we perceive to be our needs in order to do the ministry we are called to do.

2015 Annual Report Vermont UCC Outdoor Ministry

At the Covenant Hills Camp board meeting in March of 2015, the board learned that the NE UMC would be hiring a site director for the 2015 summer season instead of hiring a replacement for the Executive Directors that had given then notice. NE UMC was making arrangements for other UM staff and the CHCC board to take on some additional responsibilities. The NE Camping Retreat Ministry also reported to the CHCC board that their recommendation to the NE UMC annual meeting in June will be for the summer camping program at Covenant Hills be suspended following the 2015 summer season.

At our Vermont Conference Annual Meeting in April of 2015 there was a designated time for people to gather who wanted to talk about the future for outdoor ministry and our UCC children and youth. There was a group of 15-20 people who shared their concerns. What came from this was that the UCC people serving on the CHCC board who had outdoor ministry experience to help the conference would bring others on board along with a VT UCC board member and a conference staff person to be the Outdoor Ministries Task Force. They were tasked with the objective of putting together a program for Vermont UCC children and youth for the summer season of 2016. We then learned in June that the NE UMC had voted to suspend operations for the 2016 season and that affairs would be delegated to the NE Trustees and CHCC Site Committee.

The VT UCC OM Task Force - Rev. Ryan Gackenheimer, Nancy Fowler, Leslie Desrosiers, Laurie Chipman, Wendy Farrell (VT UCC board), Jim Thomas (VT Conference staff) was represented at the April and May CHCC board meetings and those who served on the CHCC board volunteered and helped with the 2015 summer camping season at CHCC. Our \$10,000 contribution to the 2015 summer season was sent to CHCC, as in years past. The task force met separately on September 9 to beginning planning for a 2016 summer program and were represented at the CHCC September board meeting where we heard that the CHCC board chair and at large member had met with the NECUM bishop and learned of his hopes to see CHCC site open to churches and retreats in 2016.

In October the task force met with Executive Director, Rev. Mollie Landers Hatt, of Horton Center UCC Camp in Gorham, NH and talked about how the VTC and NHC might partner for OM. We drew up some action items and next steps to be enacted on rather quickly in order to move forward with OM in VT for 2016. We reached out to other sites that could host a VTC week and what a VT week at Horton Center would

2015 Annual Reports Vermont Conference, UCC

look like (attended by both VT and NH campers). We needed to determine age of campers, obtain previous year camper list from CHCC registrar, found out about scholarship funds, determine and clarify VTC OM funds (uses, authorizes, etc.), secure time at VTC Annual Meeting to share future OM program and gather support, identify weeks of camps - deans - counselors, develop publicity and publications for VT OM. In November we made arrangements for a tour of Rock Point Episcopal Camp in Burlington and met with its Executive Director, Sherry Osborn. We then were left with questions of number of weeks to hold camp, do we look at other sites, how to move forward, when do we meet again. Our summer camps would be under the umbrella of Horton Center in NH and their insurance as well as guidelines.

The Task Force held one more meeting in 2015, the first week December after many conversations with Sherry at Rock Point and Mollie at Horton Center. When we met we had a week of camp booked at Rock Point for July 31- August 5 and the week of Horton Center booked for July 10-16 for those going into 6th through 8th grade. Ages were determined of Rock Point of being a little wider of those going into 4th through 8th grade. We brainstormed a list of possible deans to direct a week of camp as well as counselors. We were given volunteer dean training dates by Mollie of February 26-27 in Oceanwood, ME and tentative volunteer counselor training dates. Laurie Chipman volunteered to work along with Jim Thomas to keep our finances in order, using the \$10,000 marked for OM as a budget. Nancy Fowler volunteered to work on publicity and connect with Mollie on the information needed for the Horton Center brochure, where both camps would be advertised. Laurie was connecting with CHCC register for the previous year's camper list, connecting with VT UM about use of CHCC vans and connecting with Jim on who to talk with about time at VT UCC Annual Meeting. We left the meeting wanting to widen our circle of who was a part of this OM Task Force and realizing that for a group of 6, that 4 more would be really nice.

As 2015 drew to a close, we were excited and optimistic about providing a camping season for Vermonters in 2016. In addition, we look forward to doing more long range planning in 2016 to ensure Outdoor Ministries continues as an important part of our shared ministry as the Vermont Conference UCC.

Respectfully submitted by
Laurie Chipman,
Leslie Desrosiers,
Nancy Fowler,
Jim Thomas

Related Organizations

2015 Annual Report Cooperative Christian Ministry at UVM - 2015 *Bringing a Higher Power to Higher Education*

The departure of former part-time Campus Minister and UCC pastor Abby Gackenheimer was an opportunity for the Board of the Cooperative Christian Ministry at UVM (CCM@UVM) to develop a new mission strategy. The Board, previously a Policy Board, is now a Working Board, having accepted responsibility for mission oversight, fund development and administrative activities such as participating in the University's search for an Inter-Faith Coordinator.

The Board, which includes representatives from six denominations: American Baptist, ELCA, Episcopalian, Presbyterian (USA), United Church of Christ and United Methodist, prayerfully attempted to discern where the edges of opportunity now lie. At our annual retreat, we decided "to live boldly and adapt nimbly," following God's leading, first in these four areas:

1. Sustainable funding. (What sources, including grants, are available?)
2. Market research. (What are students concerned about? How can CCM reach the 8,000 of UVM's 14,000 students who live off campus? What ministry is appropriate with international students?)
3. Ministries at peer institutions. (What is faithful and effective there?)
4. Potential partnerships. (How will CCM take part in the University's new inter-faith emphasis? What partnerships are appropriate?)

19

We hired a Research Consultant. Based on his findings, the Board decided to move the ministry forward using a core team approach, with representatives from affiliated churches connecting the Campus Minister and local congregations, particularly in regard to service projects and off-campus worship opportunities, attending occasional on-campus fellowship meals, and helping prepare students to continue their faith journeys after they leave UVM.

As part of the process for calling a part-time Campus Minister, the Board developed a job description, emphasizing the role of the core team. The salary for 15 hours a week is projected at \$15,000 a year. We intend to have the new campus minister in place by the start of classes on August 29, 2016.

58 years ago, the Vermont Conference led in organizing the predecessor of today's Cooperative Christian Ministry, with Walker Hawley, pastor of our Middlebury church, and Dean of Students George V. Kidder playing key roles. Financial support came mostly from the Conference, rather than local congregations, which was not a sustainable or leveraged model, since it did not develop ties between the campus ministry and the local churches. The core team model requires CCM to work with local churches to make that important connection for today's students.

2015 Annual Reports Vermont Conference, UCC

Please send contributions to the Cooperative Christian Ministry, payable to CCM@UVM, to Lindsey Huddle, Esq. (CCM Treasurer), P. O. Box 5360, Burlington, VT 05402. CCM is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization.

Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other. (NLT)

Representatives from the Vermont Conference UCC to the CCM Board
Sally May,
David Brown

Bonus Mission Moment, for newsletter or Sunday bulletin:



Many campus ministries have changed from a religious model to one emphasizing engagement in peace, justice and environmental issues. At UVM, six Protestant denominations, including the United Church of Christ, are experimenting with ways to construct a covenant-keeping ministry that includes both dimensions. For details, see CCM@UVM.org.

2015 Annual Report Frances Atkinson Residence for the Retired

20

We are now in our 53rd year of providing personal care, healthcare and other supportive services to elders in a safe and comfortable home setting. Originally created to serve older Vermonters connected with VTCUCC member churches, the Atkinson Residence now welcomes all seniors whose level of care needs are appropriate and can be fulfilled in our home. We are a licensed Level III Residential Care Home, with a capacity for up to 15 residents.

Our occupancy for the past year was 99.9%. Our home provides an important niche in our community. Folks want to come to our facility because it has a house feel and residents feel if they can't stay in their own homes this is the next best place to be. Currently, we have a waiting list of five people with daily inquiries about our facility.

We continue to provide around-the-clock healthcare, personal care and other supportive services, including nursing supervision and medication management. Three meals a day, including modified therapeutic diets as ordered by physicians, snacks, laundry, housekeeping, care coordination with outside providers, and transportation are also included. Social and recreational activities offerings have increased and we have several volunteers assisting in keeping residents active and involved.

2015 Annual Reports Vermont Conference, UCC

Efforts are ongoing to increase our visibility and involvement in our local communities, to benefit not only our residents but our home as well. We have worked with area schools for students to gain community service hours, special needs educational opportunities. Students have blessed the residents with music programs, poetry readings, student government visits. Volunteers have brought their dogs and goats to entertain the residents. Volunteers have come to play the piano and have sing-a-longs. Community members have helped weed and water our garden. Area Women Fellowships have provided entertainment, holiday treats and gifts. We have an online presence with a website (www.atkinsonresidence.org) and a Facebook page (Frances Atkinson Residence for the Retired).

We are preparing our own food. Thanks to our primary cook we have worked with the residences to create menus that are nutritious, calorie conscious, homemade, and appetizing

Our aging building, systems, and equipment continue to need repairs, re-placements and upgrades as does every aging facility. Now that the facility has a resident in every room, this has afforded us the opportunity to cover the cost of needed upgrades. We have remodeled the porch which is the main entrance to the building. Three bathrooms have been remodeled. The old bathtubs were removed and replaced them with walk-in showers, allowing for a safer environment for the residents. To increase efficiency of the kitchen staff's time a dishwasher replaced the sanitizer relieving the staff of hand washing the dishes. Plans are being made to remodel the kitchen in the future. The portion of the barn that was dilapidated and unsafe was removed and a new roof was put on the one side of the remaining barn. Upgrades were made to the driveway to accommodate more parking spaces.

With the support of the UCC we can continue to grow and meet the needs of the aging population in our area. We are grateful for the continued support of the Vermont Conference of the United Church of Christ. Thank you.

From the Annual Report of JaneBeth C. Smith, Director
Board Members include Rev. Cindy Batten and Rev. Jim Thomas

2015 Annual Report The Vermont Ecumenical Council

The Vermont Ecumenical Council (VEC) was at a crossroads in 2015. There was uncertainty about whether or not the Council would continue. The Board of Trustees decided to hold a meeting and to invite everyone with an interest in Christian cooperation to come. The meeting title was "*Who Cares? The Future of Christian Cooperation in Vermont.*" It was held at Christ Episcopal Church in Montpelier on April 26, 2015. The VEC trustees felt that a showing of 30 or more people would be an indication of interest in having a statewide ecumenical organization.

2015 Annual Reports Vermont Conference, UCC

Over 50 people attended the meeting. Many ideas were shared for the direction the organization could take. One that came up repeatedly was being a communication network to help connect Vermont Christians. Following the April meeting, a Coordinating Team formed which began to meet regularly to lay the groundwork for the "new" VEC -- Vermont Ecumenical Council: A Network of Christian Cooperation. This organization would have broad representation of Vermont Christians and would focus on communications- helping to connect Christians throughout the state. Stay tuned!