



# ConnTact

United Church News  
God Is Still Speaking,

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CONNECTICUT CONFERENCE 2005 ANNUAL REPORT

## Lively Faith... Faithful Lives

Renew your church, its ministries restore; both to serve and adore./ Make us again as salt throughout the land, as a light from a stand./ 'Mid somber shadows of the night, where greed and hatred spread their blight./ O send us forth with power endured. Help us, God, be renewed.

From the New Century Hymnal, "Renew Your Church" (hymn #30)



## Urban and Justice Ministries



by Rev. Lois Happe  
Hunger is my native place in the land of passions. Hunger for fellowship, hunger for righteousness — for a fellowship founded on righteousness and a righteousness attained in fellowship. Dog Hammarskjöld, Markings

We cannot do justice alone — it is always done by, with and for community. And so, more than anything else, we who wish to do justice must find companions. We need folks who will walk and sing with us, pray and persist with us.

Doing justice requires fellowship of two kinds — the companionship of fellow travelers and the solidarity we feel with fellow human beings who have been left out of the circle. The work of the justice ministries of the Connecticut Conference is seeking and maintaining connections with our companions.

Our Conference has a rich history of making common cause with those whose voices are muffled, whose future is constricted, whose efforts are thwarted. Through the years, as moral and ethical issues have emerged, groups of passionate folk among us have come together to challenge us to leave our zone of comfort, to look at circumstances from another point of view, to recognize how passivity contributes to unjust systems and practices. When their hunger for righteousness has been fierce enough, those

groups have worked miracles.

As the Regional Minister whose particular focus is Urban and Justice Ministries, I want to focus a bit of hunger among us — enough hunger for righteousness that we cannot turn aside when we encounter occasions of racism, poverty, or abuse of power. And I want to promote fellowship — connections among those with a particular hunger so that they may inspire, support and sustain one another in the quest for a better world.

I have discovered, in recent months, many people with a passion for justice. Some of them have found each other and are engaged in changing conditions

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they find unacceptable. There are folks who want to wage peace, others who are concerned about public education, still others who work diligently on behalf of our ONA ministry. A newly gathered group for the protection of the environment is considering how and where they may apply their resources. I am

sure there are others. There is no dearth of issues that beg for attention. I hope to foster the connections that are already in place and to stimulate others to join in their efforts.

We are in a rebuilding phase in the conference with regard to connecting those groups to our formal structure. We wish to strike a balance between freedom and accountability, recognizing that for passion to be often inspired in the moment of need and that it is not always amenable to regulation. At the same time, in order for the resources of the conference to be brought to bear on particular issues, we need to have a process in place that ensures consistency with our past and present commitments.

Over the coming months, we will be formalizing ministry teams, groups of people throughout the conference who are organized around a particular issue. In order to be recognized by the Board of Directors, we will need to identify who is part of the team, a brief statement of purpose, and a plan that takes into account the conference priority for becoming multiracial and multicultural in all our settings.

My hope and my goal is for our conference to receive the blessing promised to those with a hunger for righteousness.

Rev. Lois Happe is Regional Minister for the Eastern Region of the Connecticut Conference, serving the New London, Tolland and Windham Associations.

## Teach us your word, reveal its truth divine;

FROM THE CHAIRPERSON, BOARD OF DIRECTORS, JOAN BENNETT KRATZER

As I look back over the past year, I think we have probably moved through one of the most active times in the history of the Connecticut Conference. Think of the decisions made during Annual Meeting 2004! Votes taken by the Board of Directors are listed elsewhere, but just focus for a moment on the

changes: support for same-gender civil rights; active—not just passive—work against the death penalty; great activity in the “God Is Still Speaking” campaign; a change to two sessions of Annual Meetings; Spring and Fall work completed and in

progress on our precious, vital Silver Lake Conference Center facility; and other changes, perhaps less dramatic, but no less significant.

For example, we now have five working regions within the Connecticut Conference, with their respective Regional Ministers. Working with serious budgetary concerns, we cut back on staffing at the Conference Center. In spite of those cuts, our staff has labored on diligently to “make things happen” as usual, and they deserve a great big “THANK YOU!” for their efforts. I have never, in my many years as an educator, seen a more willing and cooperative spirit among colleagues! Without our Conference Minister’s leadership and example, of course, none of this would or could have happened!

Kate and Hugh McLean continue to show that some wonderful spirit which caused them to say,

“Yes” in the first place, and we all delight in that which is the main thrust of our *New Forth Future* effort is to be at Silver Lake Conference Center, for we recognize that Silver Lake is one of our most important ministries. My hope is that everyone will have a chance to meet these two dear people, for to know them is to love them!

Carole Carlson, our Associate Minister for Clergy Concerns, retired in June, and her presence will be sorely missed, but we all loved her. We hope that her retirement will be all that she wants it to be, for she deserves the very best that life has to offer!

As the hymn “Renew Your Church” says to us: “Help us, God, be renewed” and, at the end of another verse, “Help us, God, know your word.” But the line which I like best, and with which I end this, my final report, is, “Teach us, God, how to love.” Amen.

FROM THE CONFERENCE MINISTER, REV. DAVIDA FOY CRABTREE

“Lively faith ... faithful lives” stands as the theme both for this year’s annual report and for our fall meeting. It is apt because it is how we understand the focus of the work of our Conference: encouraging a lively faith among our members leading, then, to faithful lives as churches and to faithful lives as individuals.

The controversies of last fall’s annual meeting spilled over into the churches, especially churches that had not paid much attention to their covenantal relationships through the associations and the conference in recent years. Through the winter, your staff received many reports of churches where members and leaders were taken by surprise at receiving the news of the delegates’ vote (300 to 138 with 20 abstentions) to declare the denial of the civil right of marriage to same gender couples to be an unwarranted act of exclusion.

In a great many churches, after a time of turmoil and some good teaching by pastors and leaders, stronger covenants are now in place. Deeper understanding of our polity and the role and responsibility of local churches is taking root. Their faith has become livelier and their lives more faithful as a result.

Yet there are still churches where the turmoil resulting from the surprise has not subsided. In some instances, this turmoil is being stirred intentionally through misinformation spread over the internet. We have made multiple efforts to address these distortions, exaggerations and lies, but have found it difficult since so much is being done so rapidly. Praise God for the churches that have earnestly sought clarification and been open to the truth of our identity and teaching!

In that context, there were some great gifts of the Holy Spirit over a six-month period. One was the launching of the Still Speaking Initiative and its ads that created a national “buzz” about the United Church of Christ and our conviction that “no matter who you are or where you are on life’s journey, we are welcome here.” Many of our churches have

received new members as a result, and long-time members have expressed their pride in being UCC.

The second gift of the Spirit was in our having decided to have a one-day Spring Meeting after shortening the Fall Meeting to two days. When 600 people crowded First Church in Wallingford on May 14 to hear our national General Minister and President, Rev. John Thomas, and to participate in 30 workshops, a “conference picnic” and inspiring worship, as well as an update on Silver Lake Conference Center, it was a glorious day! Much like a family reunion, the spirit of the community was palpably high. A day made lively by faith and lives made more faithful by our being together.

In December, the Executive Committee of our Board of Directors decided to find a *pro bono* attorney to seek means of ensuring that every death row inmate had access to a communication hearing. While the discovery of this was not the case was prompted by a scheduled execution, the focus has not been on one inmate, but rather on the moral issue of our state not attending to basic due process and equal protection measures. Our lawsuits to press for this basic measure

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continue forward. This was also a matter of controversy, especially for churches in eastern Connecticut where the executed inmate had wreaked his home twenty years ago. The position of the annual meeting delegates on this issue was not a new one, however, and our longstanding opposition to the death penalty enabled us to address a pressing moral issue in the public arena. From both within the Conference and outside, we received many expressions of thankfulness, as well as expressions of anger from detractors. A lively faith is one that is engaged with the ethical dilemmas facing us as a society, and that engagement may result in differing understandings of faithfulness. Still, we are united in our faith and baptism in Christ and trust that He is at work in each of us.

During this year, we shifted from three regions to five.

We said farewell to Rev. Kathy Peters as Associate Conference Minister for Local Church Ministries and celebrated her call as minister of the United Church of Christ. We blessed Rev. Gordon Bates on his way to retirement after seven years of service as an ACM with us, most recently working in Justice and Witness Ministries. Eliminating those two positions and an administrative assistant job (deepest thanks to Sarah Annis for her years of service with us!) enabled us to make the transition to five regions without a major budget increase. The Revs. Mike Chis, Lois Happe and Raymond Harwege began April 1 as Regional Ministers, joining Revs. Kent Shild and Susi Tonsley. After a few months with us, Raymond decided that his call really belonged in Florida and so in late summer he returned there and we now seek another to take his place.

We also bid a fond farewell to Rev. Carole Carlson, for four and a half years our ACM for Clergy Concerns, as she moves to retirement in northern Vermont. Our search for her successor led us to Rev. Ronald Brown, who began his work in early August.

In the midst of all these transitions, we have kept a lively faith to light on our feet, so to speak, and responsive, we believe, to the call of God to serve our churches in the best way possible. It has not been an easy process, and it continues to be very challenging financially, yet we are heartened by the growth in faith and understanding evidenced in so many places in these twelve months.

It is finally about the faithfulness of the local church in God’s mission in the midst of this world that is so hurting. That is what we are about in covenant as a Conference. Responding to the needs you articulate, to the witness you call us to, to the mission of Jesus Christ as a compelling calling for our time. Keeping Silver Lake strong as an extension of your church’s ministry. Encouraging pastors, developing faithful leaders, managing your endowments, working toward strong theological seminaries for all our ministerial candidates, helping search committees, intervening in conflict, keeping the Amistad sailing as a sign of hope in the midst of a polarized society. All these ministries are about a lively faith and faithful lives. Thanks be to God!

## on our path let it shine, / Tell of your works,

### • United Church News •

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### Contact Edition

Connecticut Conference,  
United Church of Christ,  
125 Shiloh Street,  
Middletown, CT  
06457-0247.  
Phone: 860-922-8224

Fax: 860-922-8224  
E-mail: uscn@uconn.net  
Web: ucc.org/news  
Jan Morgan, Editor, jamm@uconn.net  
Cecilia Gilroy, Editorial Assistant,  
cecilg@uconn.net

James Baker, Designer  
Send classified ads to:  
United Church News,  
Classified Ad Office,  
Send e-mail to:  
uscn@uconn.net

### National Edition

The Rev. Robert Chase, Publisher  
The Rev. J. Brown Giese, Editor  
The Rev. W. Egan Galder,  
Assistant Editor

Phone: 800-950-0575  
E-mail: uscn@uconn.net  
Web: ucc.org/news  
Barb Varscho,  
Design Editor  
Carmel Larkins,  
Advertising Manager

Lee Foley,  
Business Manager  
Send e-mail to:  
uscn@uconn.net  
Web: ucc.org/news

*"Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out... God brings the best out of you, develops self-formed maturity in you."* - Romans 12:2 The Message



In 2000, the Board of Directors of the Connecticut Conference made a significant change in the Conference staffing pattern by creating a unique position: Associate Conference Minister for Clergy Concerns. The position description identified the need for a Hartford-based ACM who would assist the Regional Ministers in gathering the largest possible pool of well-qualified ministerial candidates for local church search committees. In addition, the new staff person was charged with beginning an implementation process for the 2000 Annual Meeting Resolution urging Associations to require Misconduct Prevention Training for all Authorized Ministers. The Resolution was subsequently adopted by all 15 Associations. (Since January 2001, more than 375 ministers have completed Phase One of this boundary training.)

Coordinating and supporting interim pastors, arranging continuing education events for clergy, assisting the Regional Ministers and the Conference Minister with pastoral care needs of clergy and their

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families, designing Committee on Ministry training sessions, and a host of "other duties as assigned" more than completed this position. It has been my great privilege to serve you in this capacity.

Looking back, it becomes clear that all of our work with clergy was ultimately about transformation, about discerning the will of God for our churches. We are blessed in this Conference with exceptionally well-trained and faithful UCC ministers. They are visionary, and they know that creative leadership

and reliance on the Holy Spirit can dramatically change our congregations "from the inside out." They also know that such ministry is demanding and often emotionally draining; and they are fortunate to serve in a Conference with the resources to call faithful-filled Conference staff to advise, encourage, and pray with pastors, supporting them in countless ways.

Our clergy and churches have taken risks in mission and structure and worship, risks that are possible because they have fixed their "attention on God." I pray that you will continue to take these powerful stories of transformation. And I pray that you will continue to raise up new leaders, risk-taking pastors who immerse themselves in scripture and provide the Christ-centered leadership so needed for our churches. God bless you.

*New Carole Carlson info T/K*

## your mighty acts of grace;

Financially, your Conference had a satisfactory year since my last report. Our generous churches provided nearly \$2.4 million in Our Church's (Wide Mission) (OWM) Basic Support (OWMS) in 2004, of which \$1.3 million was provided to UCC national and global ministries. After other expenses, we ended 2004 with a \$27,422 operating deficit, taking into account adjustments arising from our cash basis accounting. This is a modest amount compared to the total budget of over \$5,000,000. Expenses were kept down by the strong management by our Conference staff and the deferral of planned capital campaign work. The major financial concern is the long-term decline in local church contributions to OWM Basic Support. A 5% per year decline, as we have experienced in recent years, puts heavy pressure on the Missionary Society of Connecticut (MSC) operating budget and on our commitment to send 63% of OWM on to the UCC national setting, as directed by the local church delegates to the Annual Meeting.

Over \$18 million of MSC assets are invested in the Consolidated Trust Fund of MSC. The CTF - similar to a mutual fund - is managed by Columbia Management, an arm of Bank of America, under the direction of our Investment Committee. The Fund experienced an annual rate of return (income and appreciation less expense) of 11.4% in 2004.

The assets under management are over \$56 million of Conference and other church investments. The CTF follows a prudent investment policy, which supports the Conference's total return spending policy of 5% per year on restricted assets. Our church is welcome to contact me or the Conference Administrator, Charlie Kuchenbord, with questions about how to use the CTF to manage endowment funds.

### Audit Arrangements

This year, our Conference Committees on Audit and Finance invited bids from a number of accounting firms to undertake the annual audit for the Missionary Society, the Trustees for the Fund for Ministers, and the Consolidated Trust Fund. While we have had good experience with our longstanding auditor, we were strongly encouraged to put the process up for competitive bid to get a fresh analysis of Conference finances and operating procedures. After an extensive review of proposals, the firm of Haggett Longobardi was selected.

Why do we have the annual audit? These should your church have a regular audit? Why are almost the same question. Neither the local churches nor our Conference are legally required to have external audits or reviews, as are other non-profits. For a number of good reasons, your church governing body, like the Conference Board of Directors, needs to do it anyway: (1) The Church or Conference Board needs a full and accurate picture of its financial condition, both operating accounts and endowments, to know if it is healthy for the long run. (2) We need to know the economic, legal, and other risks facing our organization, objectively including potential fraud. And, (3) we need a regular audit to determine whether our procedures need improvement, with attention to good checks and balances.

The appropriate scale and cost of the financial audit or review depends on the size of the organization. If you hear the argument "We've never had to do it before," that's a sign that you do need a review. We can get set in our ways of doing business and easily overlook unpleasant problems or miss important opportunities if we do not seek objective advice. As Paul said, "Be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God." (Romans 12:2) Good advice for financial officers!

## Identity and Evangelism

by Rev. Michael Ciba  
My favorite Psalm is 107. It tells the story of four groups of people who are lost. One group "wanders in desert wastes." Another "sits in darkness and gloom." A third is "sick through their sinful ways." The final group "sails on stormy seas." The situation of each group gets increasingly worse until the people "cry to the Lord in their trouble." God rescues them from their distress and brings them to a safe place. God gathers people from the east and west, from the north and the south. Those whom God saves "extol God in the congregation of the people and praise God in the assembly of the elders."

What was your first experience of the United Church of Christ? Did your parents bring you to be baptized when you were a baby? Did you attend Sunday School or youth events at one of our churches? Did a campus minister help you with

questions of faith? Did your future spouse invite you to worship? Did a friend or neighbor tell you about a great music or education program? Did you go to church in response to an ad?

Each of us has a story about our relationship with the United Church of Christ. It is a story about a God who calls lost individuals out of their isolation into a community of believers. It is also a story of

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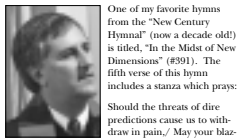
faithful people, lay and clergy, who proclaim the Good News in deeds and with words, who inform, invite, welcome and care for all whom they

encounter. Talk with the people of your local church. Let them tell you how they got there. Ask them what they have done to welcome others. Ask yourself and ask others, "What more can we do?"

We, the members of the churches of the Connecticut Conference, are called to work together to invite and welcome our sisters and brothers into our communities of faith. My hope is to work with you in the areas of United Church of Christ identity and evangelism. We need to share ideas with each other, listen to each other, and learn from each other. The Letter to the Congregation encourages us to "not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it." What will you do to welcome the next angel to your church this Sunday?

*Rev. Michael Ciba is Regional Minister for the Valley-Northeast Region of the Connecticut Conference, serving the Naugatuck Valley, Litchfield North and Litchfield South Associations.*

## from each page, show your face.



One of my favorite hymns from the "New Century Hymnal" (now a decade old) is titled, "In the Mist of New Dimensions" (#91). The fifth verse of this hymn includes a stanza which prays:

Should the threats of dire predictions cause us to withdraw in pain./ May your blazing phoenix spirit resurrect the church again./

One reason this hymn has become so well known in such a short time is that we are facing new challenges in our churches, challenges that require us to reassess how we understand our call to ministry and mission as the church of Jesus Christ in this new millennium. In many ways the "wandering in the wilderness" theme of this hymn highlights the transitions that so many of our churches are experiencing.

One of the things that I love about my ministry as a Regional Minister is my retreat work with leadership groups in local churches. As people introduce themselves they are asked to respond to this question: "How has your church changed you?" On a per-

sonal level people often share how their lives have been transformed by being a member of their local church. We then move through a process of discernment around Scripture. Small groups are asked to locate their church in a story from the Bible that describes their church today. They are then invited to find a story that illuminates for them their vision of where they want the church to be in God's future. Through these simple but often powerful conversations people begin to catch a glimpse of the "blazing phoenix spirit," calling the church into a renewed sense of its own mission and ministry.

The challenges facing our churches today are many. We live in a polarized world where too often we dismiss those with whom we disagree. The cultural supports for which we are less prominent; the church finds itself at the margins of the society. Structures of church life have lost vibrancy. The question of Biblical authority around current social issues often is missed in heated debates. Lack of interest and knowledge about UCC history, theology and polity has often led to confusion and disension in some of our own congregations. In some cases we have let the media and other defers who are as a church, rather than relying on our rich and distinct heritage. Dwindling resources invite us to re-examine our stewardship practices and our theology of money.

The church in every age faces challenges. We could view the challenges we face from a pessimistic viewpoint. We could choose to simply turn our ministries inward and "take care of our own." We could ignore these changes and head into the future resistant to change. Or we could view these challenges as opportunities to discern where God is speaking to us. We could see our covenantal relationships as opportunities to learn from one another. We could turn to Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, to lead us with the "phoenix Spirit" to a new and fully filled future. What an exciting time it is - a time filled with perils and possibilities!

I give thanks that on this journey of ministry there is support and encouragement from those with whom I am in partnership. The authorized ministers and congregations with whom I am blessed to work in the South Central Region daily remind me that God is present in our midst. I see renewed interest in our Associations to build deeper and stronger relationships and for this I am grateful. My Conference staff colleagues inspire and support my ministry in deep and abiding ways.

May we be transformed by God's creative Spirit into faithful disciples of the One who bids us to "come, follow me."

## Youth Are Spiritual Leaders in Monroe

by Rev. Peter Allen

Like many active youth programs in the Connecticut Conference, the Senior Pilgrim Fellowship (PF) at Monroe

Congregational meets weekly to provide a safe, nonjudgmental space for high school young people to discuss concerns, grow in faith, play, worship, and serve the



community. What makes this group special is the sense of stewardship the youth themselves have developed within the group and the spiritual leadership they provide to the church as a whole.

"The older members of the group, especially the seniors, take tremendous pride in the group's culture and traditions – including the tradition of youth leadership – and want very much to pass them along to the group's younger members."

says Tracy Summerer, one of five adult advisors with the group. "Young people are encouraged to be completely honest here. That allows all of us to be open to God's healing and guidance in an authentic way."

Several of the group's members started out as visitors and found themselves joining both the PF and the church. Some even brought their entire families with them.

**"The kids take ownership of everything they do. They empower one another. It's fantastic."**

Desiree Acomando, who is entering her junior year at Hofstra University, became active with the group while in high school and later started attending worship. She is now one of the leaders of the newly-formed College Fellowship (an outgrowth of Senior PF), which meets during summer and winter breaks. "I found that the group was accepting of people from different denominations and also of those with no spiritual background whatsoever. The church as a whole is the same way. I walk into worship and it feels like a bear hug. They don't care

where you come from; you are there and that's what makes you a part of the congregation."

Dana Allen Walsh was 17 and a senior in high school when she joined our Senior PE. Today, she is entering her senior year at Princeton Theological Seminary, seeking ordination through the Fairfield East Association, and serving as the summer Student Minister in Monroe. "Evidence of the spiritual growth the PEers experience and the leadership they provide can be seen in the worship service they lead each year," says Walsh, reflecting on the group as she finds it today. "The kids take ownership of everything they do. They empower one another. It's fantastic."

Mission trips are a common highlight in many youth programs but in Monroe, the youth's mission experiences have inspired the adults in the congregation to begin their own tradition of an annual summer mission trip. According to the newly elected Senior PE President, James Vignone, "Our group is willing to be open to new ideas and to the different ways God touches us – and I think that's beginning to rub off on the rest of the church."

*Rev. Peter Allen is Pastor of the Monroe Congregational Church.*

## As you have sent your Christ to save,

FROM THE WESTERN REGIONAL MINISTER, REV. SUSAN TOWNSELY



Transforming people from no people into God's people: That is the work of the church. The way this is accomplished is as varied as the combinations of letters that make up town names in our state. It is as varied as the people that God brings to the doors of our church, as varied as the communities we serve.

It is my great honor and privilege to serve with you – churches, church leaders and clergy. In particular, I have seen transformation happening in these ways:

- Search committees growing from 12 people with disparate points of view to a coherent community of consensus building and devout discernment.

- Church leaders moving from fear and avoidance around difficult topics to people willing to deepen our appreciation and understanding of the variety of viewpoints.

- Churches wanting to enhance their sense their ministry not just to their membership, but also to their communities, to the Wider Church, to all of God's creation.

- Students in care who move from the individualistic and autonomous sense of having been "called by God," to the covenanted and holistic sense of having been given gifts for the building up of the church.

- Study groups engaging in close and faithful reading of scripture to attend to the still speaking God.

- Clergy beautifully open to retooling their ministries, trying a new thing, letting God challenge and shape them in new ways.

I too am being transformed as I do this work. I am increasingly compelled to witness to our oneness in Christ. It is my deepening conviction: That our covenant is not based on gifts I bring, or my inclusive ideal, or my position as Regional Minister, or your invitation. Our common faith in Jesus Christ binds us together. Christ alone incarnates our oneness. In his body, and by his grace, comes the gift of unity.

I am reminded of the Constituting Prayer, offered by the Rev. Gerhard Grauer at that Synod 48 years ago when the United Church of Christ came into being:

"We have covenanted together, but we cannot create, we cannot unite, we cannot constitute a United Church of Christ. What we propose, do Thou perform... O Lord, humbly we ask that the inspiration of thy presence may guide us and those who through the years shall seek to continue to build a United Church of Christ."

FROM THE INTERIM NORTHERN REGIONAL MINISTER, REV. BARBARA J. LIBBY



I once again had the privilege to serve as an Interim Regional minister for the CT Conference of the United Church of Christ for the final ten months of the former Northern Region's configuration, from June 1, 2004 to April 1, 2005, following the retirement of the Rev. Judy Hirsch after her more than eight years of faithful service.

It was an exciting and remarkably lively time in the life of the Conference, with a wide variety of churches engaged in the search and call process throughout the region, a number of new pastors arriving and settling into new pastoral positions, as well as the exciting Annual Meeting of the CT

Conference in October of 2004, which passed a resolution in support of the civil right of marriage for same-sex couples. This was followed by a national presidential election in November that left a polarized American people with even more energy for lively debate about a wide variety of topics. The unexpectedly controversial *God's Gift: Spoken* television ad in early December helped many of our churches begin and commit to ongoing conversations about their United Church of Christ identities and helped us open our doors to receive folks hungry for an extraordinarily welcoming church in which to worship! And then there was the high profile case of Michael Ross and the possibility of the death penalty being used here in CT for the first time in nearly a half century. There were plenty of things to talk about!

It really was a fascinating time to serve the CT Conference and to walk with the Committees on

Ministry, the churches, and the pastors of the five associations of the Northern Region: Farmington Valley, Hartford, Hartford East, Tolland, and Windham. Following the completion of my interim time, the regions were reorganized and redistributed to better serve the churches and pastors of each region and new settled regional ministers came aboard.

There is no doubt in my mind after serving this Conference that we share a great covenant and commitment to the God who is still speaking in our midst. Let us continue to be open to the God, the Christ and the Holy Spirit that moves among us to transform and change us every day of our lives!

## in love to triumph o'er the grave,

FROM THE ASSOCIATE CONFERENCE MINISTER, ADMINISTRATION, CHARLIE KUCHENBROD



I work with Conference staff, vendors, and volunteers to exercise stewardship over the assets of the Conference, including financial resources, property, and the time and talent of Conference staff, vendors, and volunteers. There is a hall of mirrors aspect to this statement, which reflects that staff, vendors, and volunteers are at once stewards and have to steward, and I almost always work with others in a facilitative role.

A good example is seen in the privilege I've had of supporting the development of a strategic plan and comprehensive site plan for the Silver Lake Conference Center. Working with volunteers, a consultant, and staff, we have developed an achievable dream for the Silver Lake ministry of the Connecticut Conference, a dream that builds on almost fifty years of history and looks forward to another fifty years (or more!) of vital ministry.

A less visible activity is the management of the Consolidated Trust Fund (CTF). With a volunteer Investment Committee working with professional investment managers, we took steps to further diversify the holdings of the fund. CTF has had strong results – an 11.9% annual rate of return for the ten-year period ending December 31, 2004 – while sticking to prudent investment principles and following socially responsible investment guidelines. CTF is open to all Conference churches. An investment fund might not be the first thing people think about when they consider the professional and technical support services provided by the Conference, but is a valuable resource, particularly for small or medium-sized congregations.

We engaged new financial auditors this year, an example of the volunteers on the Finance and Audit Committees working with staff to match the talents of a vendor with our requirements. While this action is unlikely to make anyone's top ten list of exciting developments in the life of the Conference, financial auditing is an essential stewardship function which helps assure that resources are effectively deployed.

After many hours of deliberation, we have put Ingham House on the market. This is another stewardship decision – in this case that the funds obtained from the sale can contribute more towards the Conference's ministry than the property can directly.

We are living with the consequences of a stewardship decision made last year, with the elimination of three Hartford-based positions to fund two new Regional Minister positions. We miss Gordon Bates, Kathy Peters, and Sarah Annis, even as we welcome the new regional ministers. It has been particularly challenging for the support staff to manage the demands of Annual Meetings (twice a year, now) with fewer hands to pitch in.

I am grateful to have the opportunity to work with many special people who serve the Conference as volunteers, as staff, or as vendors.

## O let our hearts with love be stirred.

## FROM THE CAPITAL CAMPAIGN PLANNING COMMITTEE, KATE AND HUGH MCGLEAN

After reviewing the information that was gathered during the *Now For the Future* listening sessions in the spring of 2004, the Board of Directors agreed that the most compelling objective was to ensure that the ministry at Silver Lake remain vital and viable for the churches in the Connecticut Conference.

For almost 40 years that ministry has addressed two of *Now For the Future's* original goals: enhancing youth ministry with summer conferences and youth weekend retreats, and the development of future leaders for the church. After a six-month process that included dialogue, gathering of data on current use, and evaluating the facilities in light of current and projected uses, the Board of Directors accepted a Comprehensive Strategic Plan for Ministry at Silver Lake. The Silver Lake Board of Directors was closely involved in the planning process and enthusiastically recommended the plan to the Conference Board of Directors. An architectural firm, Susan Maxman Associates, widely experienced in camp and conference center designs, has been retained to develop proposals for the new and renovated buildings in the strategic plan.

We are pleased to report, therefore, that all the pieces are now in place so that by October we will have gathered a fundraising committee and will be in a position to ask the delegates at the Annual Meeting to approve Phase 1 of *Now For the Future, The Campaign for Silver Lake*. We don't yet know the financial goal, but we do know that the money raised will make all the facilities at the Lake more attractive, more accessible, and more amenable to use by groups of all ages.

## FROM THE DIRECTORS, SILVER LAKE CONFERENCE CENTER, ANNE AND TIM HUGHES

One of the privileges of serving as your co-directors of Silver Lake is the opportunity to work with other deeply committed folks. Like volunteer summer deans, summer conference deans, Confirmation Retreat leaders and church group retreat leaders, and to see the ministry at work! Silver Lake is truly an incarnation of the covenant between God and the churches of the CT Conference. As a year-round ministry it is a place where people of all ages share the experience of an inclusive and nurturing Christian community. Silver Lake is a place where people explore their identity and grow as Christ's disciples, where people are nurtured and shaped as life-sustaining leaders for the church, their communities and the world.

Last year, in addition to more than 1,300 conferees, counselors, deans, and summer staff, we also hosted year-round programs for 600 youth, and a wide variety of youth, family, and adult groups from congregations that brought over 3,000 people to Silver Lake.

We are proud of the several deferred maintenance projects completed during the last year. The Social Hall has a new roof and we have completed the renovation of the summer kitchen to address health code requirements. The Pines has a new bathroom and a new flooring in the main room. The Retreat Center has a second improved bathroom to complement the one that was renovated several years ago. All five winterized lodges have new energy efficient lighting, thanks in part to a grant from CLAP. Last but not least, we consolidated our offices and the health center into the new Health & Welcome Center.

Other changes are not as visible, but just as important, including substantial improvements to the electrical and water, phone and computer network systems.

The most exciting project we have taken on thus far is Strategic Planning. In October, the Conference Board of Directors authorized the development of a strategic plan for the Silver Lake Ministry. The Silver Lake Board of Directors selected Kaleidoscope Inc. to lead this process and we have been working with Kaleidoscope consultant Kathy Trotter since January.



Some of the exciting key findings are:

There is great potential to expand the summer program.

Upgraded facilities and additional program elements are essential.

We must address our facility needs to provide quality facilities for 200 conferees, grouped into five or six program areas that include nice bathrooms and showers, expanded summer dining space and additional program space including waterfront activities.

We need to improve the quality and quantity of our retreat facilities. This includes quality facilities for 200 youth and adults, including the replacement of the Retreat Center with flexible space to host a variety of group sizes and mix of youth, adult and families.

We need to expand our dining and conference facilities and address deferred maintenance.

We need to consolidate maintenance and storage away from accommodations and address our support facilities and infrastructure needs.

We look forward to *Now For the Future: The Campaign for Silver Lake* to successfully see the fulfillment of the strategic plan. Silver Lake is truly a ministry of the Connecticut Conference. While other denominational facilities rely on outside user groups, 98% of Silver Lake utilization is Conference related!

We share a vision of the future in which we offer facilities and programs that are worth driving across the state to get to, that generate excitement, that catalyze program development and, most important, that inspire people of all ages to grow in faith as Christ's disciples.

Help us,  
God,  
know  
your  
word.

## FROM THE PUBLIC POLICY ADVOCATE, KIM HARRISON



There's no doubt the 2005 session of the General Assembly will be viewed as historic, due in large part to the passage of civil union legislation for same-gender couples. At the same time, legislators failed to pass a comprehensive campaign reform package, despite former Governor Rowland's conviction and prison sentence. It was also a session that featured new leadership

in both houses, as well as a new governor for the first time in 10 years. A biennial budget was passed on time, something that hadn't happened since the '90s.

Yet, despite these highlights and occasional shortcomings, this time may be looked back on for what dominated the news and political stage for months – the first execution in 45 years.

Early in the fall, it became clear that one of the state's seven death row inmates would no longer use possible further appeals of his sentence, and in essence volunteered for lethal injection. January 26 was set as the execution date. In early December, Governor Judi Reil indicated that although she had the power to postpone the date by a year she would not intervene.

When the legislature convened in early January, two

bills were introduced to abolish the death penalty and hearing dates set for later in the month. Given the past history of failed attempts to abolish the death penalty there was little hope that a bill could even make it out of the Judiciary committee. The state's religious community came together, organizing a worship service, press conferences, a lobby day and a meeting with the Governor's staff, and being a presence at the Legislative Office Building throughout the session.

Many of those opposed to capital punishment used the legal system to try to prevent the execution from taking place. The conference pressed the courts with leadership from attorney James Wade, asserting that the new Board of Pardons and Parole – the only body that can commute a death sentence in the state – had established no process for doing so. In an historic Saturday session of the state Supreme Court just days before the execution, Wade made an excellent presentation to the justices on the Conferees' behalf, arguing our "compelling interest" as an organization opposed to the death penalty that thought such procedures for commutation must be in place before the state puts someone to death. The appeal was dismissed for lack of standing. And then, just hours before the January execution date, other legal maneuvering went on, postponing the execution date until May.

In the legislature an abolition bill did make it through the Judiciary committee. Although this

hoped spirits, there was still little hope the bill could pass both houses, or override a promised veto from the governor. Late in March, the House took up the proposal in a six-hour debate. Though it was defeated, 60 legislators did vote for the proposal, including many of those newly elected to the General Assembly. The state's first execution in 45 years took place on May 11, during the last weeks of the legislative session.

On a much brighter note, Connecticut is the first state to pass civil union legislation without a court mandate. It is a separate statute that allows same gender couples to form a civil union, which confers upon them all the rights and responsibilities currently available to heterosexual couples under state law. The Conference, along with Connecticut Civil Liberties Union, worked hard to gather the requisite number of votes in both houses to secure its passage. A last-minute press conference the day before the Senate vote helped convince legislators that many religious groups were not opposed to such legislation. The Senate voted 26:8 in favor and the House, 85:63. Governor Reil signed the bill within an hour of its passage.

The Conference, through the hard work of staff, clergy and lay members, had significant impact on these two major issues. A heartfelt "thank you" to everyone who wrote letters, testified, held signs, protested, or prayed. These expressions of your "lively faith" made a difference.

# Our souls are restless till they rest in you;

LIVELY FAITH... FAITHFUL LIVES

## Transformational Leadership

by Rev. Susan Page Townsley

Are gifts for leadership God-given or learned skills? Yes!

Yes, some people seem to be especially gifted for the work of leading God's people through challenges of our times. Yes, others have learned skills as they have loved the church of Jesus Christ, and labored on its behalf. In my new work on Transformational Leadership I hope to engage people in the work of learning and honing leadership skills.

Leadership for the church requires faith, self-discipline, organizational understanding, theological

grounding and the company of others engaged in the work of building the kingdom. Keeping an eye to the variety of ways that people learn, I hope to equip leaders – lay and clergy – with new skills, to strengthen existing skills, and to envision what gifts are needed for the ministry into which God is calling us.

My work is both to resource my Regional colleagues as they work with local churches and to keep an eye to offerings for the whole conference. Your Regional Minister is equipped to offer programs for deacons, for example in the local church, even when they are working on a deacon's gathering. We are especially pleased to be offering a

two-day program on Systems thinking and leadership skills for clergy and lay leaders November 4th and 5th, with leadership by the widely respected Lombard Mennonite Peace Center.

Even as God's grace transforms us from no people into God's people, leadership skills transform faithful church members into able church leaders, who in turn transform our churches into vibrant communities of faith.

Rev. Susan Page Townsley is Regional Minister for the Fairfield County Region of the Connecticut Conference, serving Fairfield East and Fairfield West Associations.

138th Annual Meeting of The Connecticut Conference, United Church of Christ •

Friday and Saturday, October 21-22 • Kennedy High School, Waterbury

"Lively Faith... Faithful Lives"