



common lot

WINTER 2009
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WOMEN'S WEEK 2009



The Power to DO





common lot

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Sharing Our Common Lot

by Deborah Bailey

For Just Such a Time as This...the intersections of our faith and technology

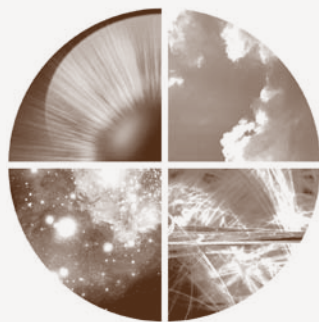


EVERY YEAR AS WE APPROACH the planning of the Women's Week issue of *Common Lot* we look first at the focus theme and text, always seeking new ways to engage women in local churches about the compelling aspects of our faith perspective. The 2009 focus theme is the *Power To Do* and the supporting scripture text is Mark 1:21-28.

At the same time we began looking at the Women's Week text and theme this year, the United Church of Christ released a pastoral letter on faith engaging science and technology, called *A New Voice Arising*. Struck by the similarities in the text and the imagery and insight in the pastoral letter, this year's Women's Week issue will seek to explore God at work in our lives through advances in science and technology. We are grateful to members of the Science and Technology Network and others in related fields of study for graciously agreeing to provide the daily meditations.

Advances in science and technology many times reveal new discoveries, discoveries that raise additional questions for many of us. The pastoral letter reminds us, that "for many people today, old answers to some questions no longer seem credible. Science can sometimes be unsettling because it destroys old foundations without always providing new ones. Yet because of science, many today are on a new search for meaning."

I trust the daily meditations and related material in this issue will stimulate your thinking, and as people of faith, provide an opportunity to openly ponder a variety of questions. One of the insights raised in the pastoral letter challenges us by asking, "can we dare to seek, to wonder, and if necessary to doubt until we believe anew, confident that in the end we will be filled with a fresh faith that engages the hunger in so many hearts and minds?" I pray that will be so for you as you read through these pages. May you hear our Still Speaking God call you in a fresh new way.



faith engaging
SCIENCE | RELIGION

Empowering God's People: A Service of Holy Communion for UCC Women's Week at the time of the Asian Lunar New Year and St. Brigid's Day

Just as the United Church of Christ moves into its 22nd annual Women's Week, a week set aside to celebrate the gifts of women and young women in the church, the calendar coincides with other important celebrations from across the globe. . . . This service of communion brings them together with respect for the differences between these celebrations—and a spirit of respect for the common hopes to which they point as well. The Communion Prayer is adapted from Word and Sacrament II A in Book of Worship.

LUNAR NEW YEAR

Asian North Americans and people across the globe from China to Thailand, Korea, the Philippines, Vietnam, to mention a few, celebrate the Lunar New Year festival at this time. Family celebrations and special themes mark this fifteen day holiday that concludes with "Lantern Day," or "Courting Night" in some countries. Sunday, February 1, 2009, is the seventh day of the Lunar New Year holiday that is called the "Common Person's Birthday." Everyone celebrating the New Year gets to celebrate a new birthday, a new year of life, together.

The Lunar New Year holiday has roots in a myth that tells the story of peoples' empowerment to face off a beast named "Year" or "Nian" through the spirit of a lion. Later, when the lion spirit protected only the Emperor, the legend goes, people made a statue of a dragon and dressed up in lion spirit costumes, and kept the community safe.

The legend of the people being empowered to care for one another, and a celebration of the life of each one and everyone, seems especially resonant with our lectionary texts for today. Psalm 111 sings of God's great works and wonderful deeds; the gospel reading tells about the casting away of the unclean spirit in the temple—witness to the liberatory and healing power of Christ in community.

BRIGID OF IRELAND

Oceans and continents from the hub of UCC women's week activities and the Lunar New Year festivities, the church year has historic celebratory roots honoring an early leader of Celtic Christianity. Brigid of Ireland is known in church legend as an early bishop, a wisdom figure who supported the arts, agriculture, and healing miracles. According to legend, she wove a cross made of

grass to heal a dying man, gave away family resources to help the poor, and ran a monastery that helped farmers in the community and supported scholars of the church.

Historians see the myth and fact in the details of Brigid's life tied to pre-Christian roots and early traditions of Ireland that celebrate spring renewal and the empowerment of women. The religious leader we know as St. Brigid is a figure of intercessory prayer to Christ in the Orthodox tradition of Christianity. She is in devotional practice a window to Christ, who is one with the Holy Spirit and our Sustaining God. The Corinthians text from today's readings would have us remember the centrality of this trinity of creating, refreshing, and sustaining power.

INVITATION

Luke, the evangelist, wrote of our risen Savior, who at the table with two of the disciples took bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. Their eyes were opened, and they recognized the risen Christ in the breaking of the bread.

In community with all believers in every time, on every continent, across history and time, and in celebration of the beauty of the differences that link us in a common hope that all might be well, let us pray:

In every season, may we be held together in Christ, through the blessing of this table where we celebrate the risen Christ in the sharing of this bread.

COMMUNION PRAYER

The God of new beginnings and each new year be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts with gladness people of God!
We lift them up to God, with our empowered creativity, celebrations, and dreams!

Let us give thanks to God and for our families and friends, and those around the world.

It is right to give God thanks and praise!

(continued on next side)

(continued from previous side)

Holy God, our loving Creator,
close to us as breathing and distant as the furthest
shore and star, we thank you for your constant love
for all you have made. We thank you for the moon
in all its passages from waxing to waning, and the
sun, the air and water.
We thank you for this earth, for each cell that
sustains life, for all people of faith in every
generation, and especially for Jesus Christ whom you
have sent from your own being as our Savior to call
forth the mission of your church in the world.

We thank you for your wisdom that empowers your
people. We take courage from the abiding presence
of the Holy Spirit in our midst; and the faithful men
and women in every age who stand as witnesses
to your love and justice. With all the prophets,
martyrs, and saints...with Brigid of Ireland in her
passion for women's leadership and community
service... with all the women in our lives who
nurture faith and leadership today... and with the
company of heaven, we give glory to you:

**Holy, holy, holy God of love and majesty,
the whole universe speaks of your glory, O God
Most High. Blessed is the one who comes in the
name of our God! Hosanna in the highest!**

Merciful God, as sisters and brothers in faith,
we recall anew these words and acts of Jesus Christ.
Now, as they were eating, Jesus took bread,
and blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples
and said, "Take, eat: This is my body."

Jesus took the cup, after supper, saying:
"This cup is the new covenant, do this, as often as
you drink it, in remembrance of me."
By eating this bread and drinking this cup,
we proclaim Christ's death,
celebrate Christ's resurrection,
and await Christ's coming again."

Come, Holy Spirit, come.

Bless this bread, and bless this fruit of the vine.
**Bless all of us at this table that our eyes may be
opened, that we may recognize the risen Christ in
one another.**

Through this bread and this cup we participate in
the body of Christ, and in new life in each new year,
every one, sister, brother, across the globe:
That we might share your light, together.

Christ our Light in every season.
Therefore let us keep the feast.

The gifts of God for the people of God. Come, for
all things are ready.

POST COMMUNION PRAYER

Holy One of all our days and years, bless our sisters,
mothers, daughters, and partners in the celebration
of Women's Week. Bless our friends around the
world who celebrate the Lunar New Year! And bless
those in the church remembering the gifts of Brigid
of Ireland to Christianity.

May the love of God, the grace of Christ, and the
communion of the Spirit inspire us to share stories
and histories—and ever our common dreams.

**Empowering God's People: A Service of Holy Communion
for UCC Women's Week**, was written by Dr. Kimberly Whitney,
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**UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST**



Service of the Word

To Celebrate Women's Week, 2009



Prayers for this service come from images and prayers offered by UCC leaders in science and technology gathered at the UCC Church House to celebrate the launching of the pastoral letter A New Voice Arising: Faith Engaging Science and Technology.

Prelude/Gathering Music

Gathering in the Presence of God

Responsive Call to Worship

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.
God said, "Let there be light";
and there was light, in all its spectrums
—visible light, UV light, X-rays and gamma rays—
and its enormous power.
**We praise you, O God, for light,
the source of energy for all living creatures.**

Then God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation";
and there was vegetation
able to use energy from the light
to synthesize nourishment for all living creatures.
**We thank you, O God
for interdependence of light, plant and animal;
we marvel at your creation.**

And God created humankind in the divine image,
in the image of God, God created them; male and female God created them.
**And humankind grew in wisdom and intellect and freedom,
and learned to love their maker.**

For all your works, we praise you, O God!

Hymn TNCH 556 God Who Stretched the Spangled Heavens HOLY MANNA

Invocation and Prayer of Our Savior

Holy God, you have called the worlds into being
and set your patient Holy Spirit to brood over creation,
evolving ever more complex forms of life from simple ones.
Stir in us a sense of kinship with our fellow humans,
with all other living things, and with the earth itself.
Though we are but insignificant specks in the vastness of time and space,
you have blessed us with a still evolving capacity
to comprehend the wonders of nature and all creation
and to worship and adore you.
Give us wisdom and courage and faith for the living of these days.
Bring healing and hope to those we know to be in need
and guide us in helping to bring about your Reign of peace with justice
for which we pray:

Listening to the Word of God

Scripture

Children's Message

(continued on next side)

Prayer of Confession

Creator of all, you have made all of humankind in your own image.
When we do not honor that divine image by fostering abundant life for all:
God have mercy.

Creator of all, you have given us a share in your creative work.
When we do not use that power to sustain abundant life for all:
Christ have mercy.

Creator of all, you have placed us in the world to tend and cherish the whole
of your creation.
When we abuse, and waste, and harm your abundant life for all:
God have mercy.

Assurance of Pardon

Creator of all, your mercy is new every morning, and we may depend on your
sustaining grace to believe that in Christ, we are forgiven, and may turn our
lives and our work to your service with renewed hope.
Thanks be to God!

The Passing of the Peace

Hymn TNCH 3 Many and Great, O God, Are Your Works LACQUIPARLE
Wakantanka Taku Nitawa

Sharing the Word

The Anthem

Responding to the Word

Pastoral Prayers/Prayers of the People

Call for the Offering

The universe is so vast—we are learning that it has no edge, and so no center. To ponder
our small lives within such immensity is to ponder mystery: And yet here we are, alive and
present to ourselves, to each other, to our community and to our world—alive in the divine
Mystery of inter-connectedness which is God. Our response can only be Thanksgiving. Our
offering is a symbol of our connectedness with God's world—we give of our own means to
foster the life of the much wider world, and the mission of justice and peace within to which
our God, through Jesus, calls us.

Doxology

Prayer of Dedication

**O God, we dedicate these gifts to your service.
May they be used to continue your creative work in our world, fostering of
communities of justice and peace. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.**

Going Forth with Good News

Hymn TNCH 35 O Mighty God O STORE GUD

Benediction

Creator God,
Let us work with you to make all things new!
Christ, God with us,
Let us walk with you the Way of peace and justice!
Spirit of God,
Let us welcome your passion for life in our hearts and our minds!

Amen!

February 1 – 7, 2009

WOMEN'S WEEK WORSHIP PLANNING



✓ PASTORAL LETTER

New Voice Arising: A Pastoral Letter
on Faith Engaging Science and Technology

✓ FAITH SHARING GUIDE

Reflection questions that pursue the questions
and themes raised in the above pastoral letter

✓ SELLING GOD TO SCIENCE

An article by Ashley Makar in the July/August
2008 issue of *Search Magazine* (available online from the
ucc.org website)



✓ SUGGESTIONS FOR USE

View online the seven suggestions for
congregational use

✓ SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND GENERAL SYNOD

Read the General Synod actions online

- Resolution on Climate Change
- A Christian Response to Development in Genetic Technology
- General Synod 23 resolution on the Support for Federally Funded Research on Embryonic Stem Cells
- General Synod 21 resolution "Access to the Age of Computer Information"



✓ THEOLOGICAL STATEMENT ON EARTHCARE

- A litany of an Environmental Confession
- Environmental Prayer
- Making Peace with the Earth: A Green Ritual of Passing the Peace
- Sermons, Biblical texts, hymns and more...

✓ UNITED CHURCH NEWS

April/May 2008 article *Churches are Learning,
Living the Complexity of "Going Green"*,
by Joanne Griffith Domingue

Justice for Women

THE POWER OF WOMEN

by Loey Powell



Mrs. Benz was my 5th and 6th grade science teacher. She loved teaching science and I was unaware at that age that I as a girl wasn't really supposed to like science; or math, for that matter. We were the lucky ones at Holmes Elementary School in Oak Park, Illinois, because those gender biases weren't fully in force in the early 1960's. The boys had to take home economics and learn to cook and sew and the girls had to take shop and industrial arts.

I remember the day Mrs. Benz had us look at a real cow's eye as we were studying human biology. We got to dissect the cow's eye and see the retina and all the other goo inside of an eyeball. I remember her fascination with astronomy, and her excitement about photosynthesis. By the time I got to high school, I was ready for freshman biology and sophomore chemistry. I loved the test tubes and Bunsen burners, glass tubing and strange smells found in the lab.

But other subjects ultimately fascinated me more, and I did not pursue the sciences as a major emphasis in my education. I still love the questions, the theories, the search for understanding how things work, how they got to be the way they did, and how small the smallest bit of stuff can be and how big the biggest chunk of stuff can be. Like the universe—I still wonder often about the edge of the universe. How can there be an edge on something that is infinite? If it's not infinite, what's on the other side?

Girls are still discouraged from studying and succeeding in the hard sciences. We go more for the social sciences. But we forget that women were the first ones to really develop and understand computers, radiation, and many other physical phenomena. Behind the Madame Curies are scores of unnamed

women whose scientific discoveries forever changed the way we live but who never received the attention poured on the Newtons or Gallileos or Edisons.

What I find hopeful today, however, are not only female students who enter into engineering or ocean biology or genetics or higher mathematics but women around the world who are leading the environmental movement. These are women from the Brazilian rain forest who understand that their communities, villages and ability to grow food and support their families are being destroyed by the greedy corporate barons who clearcut forests, pollute the pristine streams, contaminate the groundwater and poison the soil.

They are organizing to protest, to institute environmental protections and get governmental regulations to stop the rape of the earth. They are getting elected to local, state and national positions to effect more ecologically-friendly policies. They are planting trees all over Kenya or sharing low-tech methods of sterilizing water to make it safe for drinking by using the sun and plastic jugs placed on their roofs.

These women, like Kenya's Nobel Prize winning Wangari Maathai or Brazil's Marina Silva, use science—the art of observation—to convince people that their country's future is dependent upon caring for their land and natural resources. They use science—the art of transformation—to move public opinion from one state to another. They use science—the art of asking questions—to get answers to troubling realities. Maybe they were inspired by a teacher like Mrs. Benz who demonstrated to me that girls and women could venture into any area of exploration they wanted to and be good at it. Or maybe they came to understand that all of life is inextricably linked.

What I am most moved by is the commitment

Women around the world are asking that science and technology adhere to the same kind of code that physicians uphold: first, do no harm.

of such women to make sure that science serves the people first. Science and technology have offered humanity possibilities for increasing our quality of life as well as possibilities for ending all of life. We can eliminate diseases like malaria—if we have the collective will. We can provide safe, clean water to all villages and communities around the world—if we have the will. We can unhook our dependence on oil—if we have the will.

Women around the world are asking that science and technology adhere to the same kind


of code that physicians uphold: first, do no harm. They are reminding us that there are ethical and communal implications in every scientific advance or technological breakthrough. We as people of faith, awed by the glorious creation which reveals so much to us about God and which tells us how much we do not know, must add our voices to this world-wide movement to put people's needs first and to know deep in our bones the inextricable linkage of all things.

ADVERTISEMENT



One Great Hour of Sharing and the Blessing Box

Women and children around the world receive and offer blessings through their engagement with the ministries supported by your Blessing Box gifts to One Great Hour of Sharing, the refugee, relief and development fund of the United Church of Christ.



Liberia
Women are leaders and participants in civic education courses and empowered to vote.



United States
Refugees from around the world are welcomed and resettled by UCC congregations to begin a new life.




Pakistan
Village health workers are trained through Church World Service to provide reproductive health care education and well baby training.


GRATITUDE IS A
Spiritual Practice

Be joyful always,
pray constantly,
give thanks in all circumstances
for this is God's will for you
in Christ Jesus.


— 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18



China
HIV+ orphaned children receive nutritious meals, medical care, education and shelter.



Bosnia-Herzegovina
Stano Kukobat and her son are rebuilding their war damaged home in the village of Rore.



Egypt
Young girls and their families are enabled to participate in community health education seminars designed to combat the practice of female genital mutilation.



Guatemala
Antonia Tzul, a human rights supporter, is assisted in her work to improve food security and protect the rights of Mayan women and children.

The Power to DO... THROUGH THE LENS OF NEUROSCIENCE

by Karen Lebacqz

In Mark 1:21-28, Jesus expels an “evil spirit.” The Bible does not specify what that evil spirit is, but we can imagine some possibilities:

- Depression, which runs rampant world-wide;
- Bi-polar disorder, which tears apart homes and families;
- Addictions of all kinds, with devastating effects on work and self;
- Alzheimer’s disease, with spiraling loss of memory and capacity;
- Stroke, with tenacious loss on ‘muscle memory’;
- Post-traumatic stress disorder, with crippling legacy.

The list could go on. How many of us have been “possessed” or affected at one time or another by such a spirit? How many fear the crippling effects of stroke or depression? Is there hope on the horizon? Will drinking coffee help us retain memory in later years? Will paralyzed veterans returning from Iraq be able to move limbs just by thinking? Will we some day have a cure for schizophrenia or for bi-polar disorder? Will we understand how language is formed and be able to replace quickly speech lost in stroke or brain damage? Will we some day learn a new language easily, react quickly to stress or crisis, avoid mental illness or addiction?

All of these are exciting possibilities brought to us by the neurosciences. New technologies now allow us to see images of the brain as we perform different tasks. This ability helps us to locate regions of the brain that may be crucial for hearing, for seeing, for holding, for naming, and for many other important human capacities. The brain is no longer so mysterious or so unapproachable. We can now study normal, functioning brains, not just diseased brains or brains after death. Some have called neuroscience the next great medical frontier, following after molecular

biology and stem cell technologies. The UCC celebrates scientific advances. We encourage work in the neurosciences that offers new knowledge of how our brains work. We rejoice in discoveries that offer hope of casting out demons of mental illness and overcoming limitations brought about by aging, stroke, or brain injury.

Above all, advances in neuroscience and brain imaging technologies remind us that we are “fearfully and wonderfully made.” (Psalm 139:14) Our brains are more complex than we ever imagined. Our brains have “plasticity”—the ability to redefine nerve pathways, to change and grow and add new neurons and other cells even late into life. As we age, if we learn new skills and keep physically active, our brains stay healthy. “Brain fitness,” the popular public television series calls it.

But as always with scientific and technological advances, there are “shadow sides,” concerns and questions that we must also address. As exciting as it is to learn that different regions of the brain are primarily active when we engage in certain tasks, it is important not to let technology blind us to fundamental truths. Contemporary science tells us that our brains are a network of interactions. There is no “God center” in the brain—no particular “spot” or region that is active when we are at peace with God. Memory seems to involve many regions of the brain; there is no single “place” where it happens. This very diffusion of skills may be crucial for our survival and for our being “fearfully and wonderfully made.” Will our increasing knowledge of how brains work make us more inclined to identify our minds and our very selves with our physiology? Will we lose our sense of self and moral responsibility for our actions? Will “my brain made me do it!” be the next legal defense for unacceptable behavior? How can we recognize brain malfunction and still hold to a proper sense of personal responsibility? Where will we locate our

As we celebrate our brains and the sciences that study them, hoping to cast out demons and grow closer to God, may we always remember God's purposes of bringing love and justice throughout the universe.

deepest sense of self? Will new knowledge expand or contract our sense that there are different kinds of intelligence in the universe, and that we have some of those, but not all?

God gives us the "power to do." With power comes responsibility. If we are both wonderfully and fearfully made, then we must find ways to explore the wonder but also to keep the fear—a healthy respect for the limits of our knowledge. Our brains are God's gift to us. New sciences and technological advances are also God's gift to us. As we celebrate our brains and the sciences that study them, hoping to cast out demons and grow closer to God, may we always remember God's purposes of bringing love and justice throughout the universe.

Rev. Dr. Karen Lebacqz is Professor of Theological Ethics, Emerita, at Pacific School of Religion in the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, and former Bioethicist in Residence at Yale University. She taught bioethics for three decades and served as a member of the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What kinds of human qualities should we try to enhance? What methods are acceptable to enhance those?
2. Where is the seat of the soul? What role do our brains play in making us who we are?
3. One worship service ended with people putting their hands on their heads and saying, "God bless our beautiful brains." How might we "bless" our brains?

UCC WOMEN TO CELEBRATE "TOGETHER BUILDING BRIDGES"

United Church of Christ Women from all of New England will gather in Burlington, Vermont on March 12, 13, 14, 2010 for their 8th CELEBRATION. The theme is **TOGETHER BUILDING BRIDGES ...a time to break down and a time to build up....**" Ecclesiastes 3:3

In 1980 during the Annual Meeting of the New England Women's Fellowship Presidents, five women had a dream. That dream was to reach out to the women in the pews, to involve them in learning and sharing about their faith. The dream was realized in 1982 when the first CELEBRATION, WEAVING THE FABRIC OF OUR FAITH, took place in Portland, Maine. Over 1000 women took part in that event and many looked forward to and participated in similar CELEBRATIONS which have been held every four years ever since. Over the years, this has become an intergenerational event.

CELEBRATION VIII- TOGETHER BUILDING BRIDGES offers exciting opportunities for discovering and understanding differences. Topics such as Race, Immigration, Sexuality, Economics, Generational Differences, and Worship Choices will be examined. Plan to join us to make new friends and re-establish old ties with people from New England and beyond. We CELEBRATE our faith, our heritage and our woman-hood, as we pray, sing, laugh, and learn. We invite you to mark your calendars for March 12, 13, 14, 2010. Be with us to CELEBRATE - together building bridges!

LOOKING AHEAD...

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Women's Quadrennial Gathering
June 23-27, 2010 Greensboro, NC

The Power to DO... THROUGH THE ONLINE COMMUNITY

by Andy Lang

i.UCC (on the web at i.UCC.org) is an online community for seekers and members of the United Church of Christ. It doesn't replace membership in a local church—the "basic unit" of the UCC—but provides opportunities for daily online prayer, spiritual conversation, Bible study and other interactive experiences that bring UCC members into relationship with seekers and with each other. In the past two years i.UCC has grown into the second most used website in the denomination.

During the last year of her partner's life, the real-time Prayer Chapel at i.UCC.org became a caring community for Bonnie.

Judy, her partner, was struggling through the last stages of cancer. As she grew weaker and required constant attention, Bonnie had few opportunities to worship in her congregation. At the end of a tiring and discouraging day, she would often turn to the i.UCC Prayer Chapel for a quiet time of devotion—and a reminder that she and Judy were not alone.

"I have found the fellowship of believers to be vital in my emotional, physical and spiritual health," Bonnie wrote towards the end of Judy's life. "This chapel very well may have saved my life when I have been in my darkest places."

The online prayer community accompanied Bonnie through Judy's death and the time of grieving that followed.

Sometimes only two or three may gather in the online Prayer Chapel at 9 p.m., sometimes nine or ten. Some are seekers—checking out the UCC for the first time. Others are life-long members of the church. But whatever the number, daily prayer has become the heart of online community at i.UCC.org. One frequent participant describes the experience: "When we pray together online, it is almost like I can 'see' golden ribbons connecting us across the

U.S. where we each live, holding virtual hands, bowing our heads together, sacred intention joining as one. A blessing!"

i.UCC (pronounced "eye-dot-UCC") is the first attempt by a denomination in North America to build and maintain an online Christian community that gathers virtually for prayer, study and conversation. Usage has grown steadily, and in the first six months of 2008 the site registered a record 270,000 visits. Active participants include not only seekers who use the site as an interactive introduction to the church, but also UCC members who because of age or disability find it difficult to participate in worship with their congregation.

"In an important sense, i.UCC can be an extension of a congregation's outreach to those whose mobility is limited by disability, illness or age," says Dave Schoen, minister for evangelism in Local Church Ministries. "And as an engaging introduction to the UCC, our online community can be used by any local church as an effective tool for evangelism."

"Because i.UCC is interactive, local church members can embody our church's inclusive hospitality by welcoming seekers who visit the online community, and by supporting them through prayer."

Whenever possible, i.UCC tries to guide seekers towards UCC congregations in their community. Every menu on the site links to the UCC's church locator page.

i.UCC is the home for two popular email resources—the "Weekly Seeds" reflection on Sunday's lectionary readings and the "Stillspeaking Daily Devotional," which now reaches more than 8,500 subscribers.

"I'm a member of a local UCC church, on permanent disability," one user writes. "Much of the time, I can't get to church, which is very sad. But I appreciate receiving the daily and weekly devotions,

which support my spiritual growth and help me feel less isolated.”

Some congregations are using “Weekly Seeds” as a pump primer for Bible study. Bible study groups in UCC congregations gather virtually on i.UCC to compare notes on next Sunday’s readings with each other and with seekers who are beginning their own exploration of the Bible. In this way, Weekly Seeds can add value to Bible study in the local church and remind us that we’re not reading scripture alone, but as part of a wider church gathering every Sunday to hear and respond to God’s word.

CONCLUDING THOUGHT

In a Christian online community, the practice of community comes first; technology is secondary. A means of communication can provide a space for Christian community in the same way a building provides space for a gathered congregation, but neither the technology nor the building are the church: it is the people of God, when they gather virtually across distances or locally in one place, who participate in the Body of Christ by hearing God’s Word and responding in acts of love. If in the past three years, i.UCC has become an engaging community both for seekers and for members of our church, it has been the experience of mutual support, especially through prayer, that has made this community come alive.

Andy Lang is Minister for Web Community and Communication in Local Church Ministries, United Church of Christ. You can reach him at langa@ucc.org.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How could I show radical hospitality to others in an online community?
2. What are some of the differences between a relationship in a local congregation and a “virtual” relationship?
3. How could Jesus be present to me and to others on the Internet or in a social-networking site like Facebook?

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HELP WOMEN, HELP THE EARTH!

The Good Deed Foundation’s program to promote cell phone recycling and to co-brand products will help the environment as well as women. As part of the Women’s Funding Network, Good Deed will convert cell phones sent to them into emergency phones for women living with the threat of battering and recycle others phones for materials and donate money to efforts to eliminate poverty among women and children. Good Deed is also co-branding products such as Cabot brand cheese and milk, again with a portion of the profits from sales to support poverty eradication efforts. They also sell compact fluorescent light bulbs through their site with a dollar being returned to the organization promoting it.

The UCC is part of this Good Deed program and is encouraging our congregations to take part.

For more information, go to:

<http://www.gooddeedfoundation.org/widget/ucc>, or contact Loey Powell at powelll@ucc.org. This is our dedicated site for UCC participants.



The Power to DO...

THROUGH CLIMATE CHANGE AND GREEN TECHNOLOGY

by Terry Yasuko Ogawa

Mark 1:21-28

[21] And they went into Caper'na-um; and immediately on the sabbath he entered the synagogue and taught. [22] And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes. [23] And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; [24] and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." [25] But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" [26] And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. [27] And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching! With authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." [28] And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.

I struggle with the casting out of demons in general. Maybe it's because I've often felt cast as a woman possessed with whim, fancy, and driven by God to do only-God-knows-what. This scripture is a puzzle to me for the week of women's meditation. But upon reflection, and specifically being asked to reflect upon climate change and green technology and not just "the environment" or climate change, I am thinking about our disconnect from our earth and each other. How we fascinate ourselves with technology and e-connections and plug-in everything. I am as guilty as the next person of staying engrossed in my computer screen waaaaay too often.

I'm begging all of us to consider getting out of that mode and to remember to connect with the earth and each other. Cast out the demon of false connection. Because God and our earth demand it. Speak truth to power while holding the hands of the women on either side of you. But do it from a grounded place of community and connection to God's creation.

Friends, it is true. Drastic measures must be taken to stem global climate change. This requires paradigm

shift way beyond the changing of some lightbulbs. It takes policy change and massive reductions in our consumption patterns.

Face it: we are messing up this planet. Big time. We are profiting at the expense of the many, and damage is being done because of our consumption patterns.

The actions we in our community take every day: filling our gas tanks, choosing to drive, buying food shipped across oceans, buying products produced in foreign countries with lesser environmental and labor standards based on free trade agreements that contribute to poverty and injustice: We create pollution and degradation every moment while the rest of the world pays in sea level rise, air quality reduction, poisoned rivers, and more.

Locally, our high food costs incorporate the ever higher fuel costs of shipping the food here. The poor cannot afford to eat or live, and they grow in number every day. The rush to biofuels in corn and soybeans is only raising the global price of food.

A whole treatise could ensue on energy, but not at this time, because for most of you, this is not new information. It just serves as an overwhelming reminder.

So let's take it personal. What are the solutions here, now?

Buy local? Grow local?

What can I do to contribute?

The challenge is to balance prophetic witness with the stories and realities of those sitting next to us in our pews and in our hearts and with the total stranger outside of our eyes' reach.

Can we be gentle messengers?

There are times when God calls us to speak out in righteous anger to the councils and governments in charge. Be truth-tellers. The challenge in our daily lives, though, is to be in dialogue and to keep the bonds from breaking. To love those with whom

we disagree. To try to understand those who think differently and let them not fit into our politically correct boxes, because in God's household—we own them all.

We own ourselves.

Our very souls hurt for real community. Real connection.

I'm asking you—us—to look at how we form community, to expand our understanding of community way beyond the walls of our churches to include connection to the earth and seas and each other, to understand our place in the local and global ecosystem, and to act with respect accordingly. To be gentle, loving, challenging messengers in community with those with whom we struggle. This paradigm shift will be what carries us to the change we want to see on this planet.

Do your part. Find that way to poke your head through the curtain of your routine and do, be, form relationship beyond your comfort zones with the earth and each other. Shoo! Bring a friend with you! Put your hands in the earth. Marvel at its wonder.

Find that one thing that connects you to the land and commit.

Today. This time next year, arrive not with a litany of sorrows and woes and broken bonds and unfinished dreams, but with stories of connection and relationships and repeated dirty sweaty work. Live in that light.

Quit your computers. Look into the faces of those next to you and whisper, "We can do it." And we will. With the help of God.

Amen.

Terry Yasuko Ogawa is an environmental planner in Honolulu, HI. She is completing a Masters degree at the School of Natural Resources and Environment at the University of Michigan, where she worked with the Environmental Justice Institute. Terry served as the Charles E. Cobb Environmental Justice Resident with the United Church of Christ Public Policy Office in Washington, DC from 2001-2003.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Do you buy or grow local?
2. How do you form community?

World Day of Prayer 2009 Papua New Guinea

**In Christ There Are Many Members,
Yet One Body**

Begin now your preparation for World Day of Prayer 2009. An essential resource for your preparation is the Leaders/Planners Guide . It contains important information needed for preparing your Worship Service. Consider ordering enough copies for your entire planning committee. To order WDPUSA resource materials, go to wdpusa.org

This year's theme, "In Christ There Are Many Members, Yet One Body," calls us to unite with women and youth impacted by migration, violence against women, unemployment as well as underemployment and the impact of HIV and AIDS on their lives and livelihood. Together we can stand with those affected against the issues facing Papua New Guinea. **Let's turn our prayers into action!**

From Babies to Bundles, Bilums Carry It All

**WDP 2009 Papua New Guinea:
Worship Service Resources**

Bilums are a traditional, highly functional art craft of Papua New Guinea. It is a string bag hand made by crocheting or a process called *string looping*. Traditionally, the hand made string used to make bilums came from plant materials. Today, bilums are usually made from store bought yarn and string. Bilums are used to carry almost everything. From babies to bundles, bilums carry it all!

For World Day of Prayer 2009, three groups from Papua New Guinea have created the beautiful bilums that are available to purchase.

Use these beautiful bilums for the 2009 Worship Service or for every day use. Order early as quantities are limited. Download the 2009 Resource Materials Order Form. wdpusa.org/2009_order.pdf

"Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys."

*from the New Revised Standard
Version of Luke 12:33*

The Power to DO... THE INTERNET AND GOD'S GRACE

by John Mills

A lot has changed over the past few years. When my older children were in middle school ten years ago, the Internet and cell phones were not as pervasive. They knew about them, but their friends by and large didn't have frequent access. The Internet was something Dad used at work. But now my youngest middle schooler is required to use the Internet for school and is about the only student without a cell phone! In just ten short years!

This explosion of technology has brought a whole new world of information and especially relationship. It provides access to the world's knowledge and to people around the world. The Internet and the associated world wide telecommunications have the possibility of making all the people of the world our neighbors—not in some theological metaphor, but real and personal.

The Internet and the associated world wide telecommunications have the possibility of making all the people of the world our neighbors—not in some theological metaphor, but real and personal.

The Internet is creating new social relationships with Instant Messaging, Chat Rooms, MySpace and FaceBook. It has created a whole new market place with shopping on-line and a new concert hall with music and movie downloads. It has created a whole new realm of political discourse with blogs galore.

The amazing development of the Internet is little recognized. Yet it has quietly and subtly changed God's creation. It is as much a part of God's creation as trees and humans. Our creativity is an image of the divine movement in our world. Indeed, we do not create alone, but co-create with God. No human work stands alone, as no human stands alone. The Internet is valued by God as much as any of the other

works of our hands and minds.

But the Internet is a new world of sin as well. Only God is perfect. We can never make a perfect system. The Internet, our creation, will be imperfect and in its imperfection often lead us to alienation from God, which is how we understand sin.

So many questions, unique to this unique creation arise. For example:

The Internet marketplace is disembodied. On-line shopping and cyber concert halls take the personal touch out of these endeavors. What is lost when we no longer interact with our local merchants and neighbors?

Internet social networking brings people together as never before, but how do you trust those you meet? Are they who they say they are? Especially for young people, pre-teens and teenagers, these social networks are crawling with predators. Further, a child can stay at home and from the privacy of his or her own bedroom fall into all sorts of danger from plotting with their friends and trysting with a predator.

And what about access to the Internet? Not everyone has access or the wherewithal to use the Internet? Are we once again bifurcating society into the haves and have-nots? Those who have access to the Internet and know how to use it have the advantage of knowledge, job exchanges, and education leaving behind those who do not have access.

And what about our rights? The Internet and computer technology put into the hands of governments Orwellian power. It is possible today for the government to develop the means to maintain private information on everyone. What laws and controls do we need to bind the government?

And what about the discourse on the Internet? Without face to face speech, but with ready access by anyone, discourse often declines into innuendo, half-truths and slurs with no accountability.

**Without face to face speech, but with
ready access by anyone, discourse often
declines into innuendo, half-truths and
slurs with no accountability.**

Yesterday you meditated on faithful stewardship of God's creation. We are also called to be faithful stewards of the Internet. As God's grace flows through the organic creation, so it also flows through the Internet.

Yet the Internet is fraught with forces that can alienate us from God. Because the Internet is world wide and distributed, the influence of these "demonic" forces can be so widespread as to overwhelm the beneficial influences of the Internet. Users can succumb to broken, alienating lifestyles—isolation, gambling, pornography, character assassination to name a few. As followers of Jesus we are called to continue his ministry of exorcism. As he exorcised the "unclean spirit", so we are called to "exorcise" these alienating influences.

And like Jesus we must do this with authority that is recognizable to ordinary people. We must not abandon this strange new child, but embrace it with love. We must speak out when it is errant from a position of experience and understanding. By participating in the Internet and seeking advice from experts we trust we can speak with authority to these issues as we have spoken with authority on issues of global warming and peace.

The Rev. John A. Mills is an ordained pastor in United Church of Christ. Rev. Mills is currently a chaplain at Homeside Hospice in New Jersey and past pastor of First Congregational Church (UCC) in Closter, N.J. He also has been a computer software solutions architect in the telecommunications industry.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Where have you experienced the Spirit in the Internet?
2. How might the Internet nourish your spirit?
3. How might you be a good steward of the Internet?

i wonder...

by Jo Ann Chance, Cheney, KS 8/08

creator God
i wonder
how you perceive us
as we have struggled over the eons
or as we have grown, adapted and learned
through the changes in just the last century
just a blink in your time
i wonder
what you have in store for us in this century
new discoveries
new technologies
environmental surprises
communication developments
world peace
you have gifted us with talents and abilities
that we are finding new ways to use
i wonder
whether you feel we live to our potential
or waste our time in trivial pursuits
i wonder
whether advancing medical technologies will continue
to help bring new life with improved health and
less suffering
whether genetic discoveries will enhance or
interfere with your plan
whether extended life for the aging will include
suitable quality of life
i wonder
why those that should often cannot
and those that perhaps should not find it too easy
i wonder
what my days will bring
and yet
i wonder
how your praises i should sing
help me, compassionate God,
to trust
to listen
to pray
i wonder
and hope
that i can live as you wish me to be

The Power to DO...

HEALING MIRACLES AND GENETIC TECHNOLOGIES

by Olivia Masih White, Ph.D.

As a child growing up in India, I was fascinated by the stories of Jesus performing miracles, particularly healing miracles. Jesus could heal a blind person simply by applying mud to his eyes! I believed in the miracles and never doubted or questioned these stories. Jesus set an example of healing the sick and told his disciples to heal also. Missionaries followed this example, both teaching and healing. To this day, I believe that pursuing a health profession fulfils a biblical mandate.

Yet we have come a long way from Jesus' miracles to modern medicine. Jesus applied dirt to the blind man's eye; today, we have eye glasses and contact lenses, cataract surgeries and lens transplants. Such modern endeavors provide vision to many who were not able to see. The healing ministry continues. One exciting possibility is stem cell therapy for eye disorders such as macular degeneration.

Stem cells are proving important in many medical arenas. Strides have been made in the treatment of diabetes. While studying digestion in dogs, F. G. Banting & C.H. Best noticed that the urine from dogs whose pancreas had been removed attracted ants. The urine showed large amounts of sugar. That led to the discovery of the role of the pancreas in digestion. The pancreas secretes the hormone insulin, which metabolizes sugar. Millions of people suffer from "diabetes mellitus"—too much sugar in the urine. This discovery led to treatment by injection of animal insulin. Later, the gene responsible for the production of insulin was isolated. By removing the gene from human cells and inserting it into bacteria, human insulin could be mass produced in the laboratory. Since 1982, diabetics have a choice of genetically engineered insulin without any side effects. But this is not a cure, and work is now underway on stem cells for the treatment of diabetes so that patients will never have to take another shot of insulin; the stem cells will produce the insulin they need.

Stem cells are found in our bodies and they are very special because of their ability to differentiate into a diverse range of tissues. The process of differentiation transforms a cell into a specialized cell with a distinctive function. Some stem cells are present in various body tissues and are called "adult stem cells". There is another source for stem cells, viz. embryos, hence the term "embryonic stem cells". Stem cell therapy is controversial because to obtain embryonic stem cells, one has to destroy the embryo.

The objective of stem cell therapy is to program stem cells for a specific function and then insert them where they are needed. For example, stem cells can be programmed to create new blood vessels. These cells, when transfused into a heart patient's blood, create new blood vessels and improve blood circulation. Clinical trials of adult stem cell therapy are already underway in many research institutes. Unlike adult stem cells, human embryonic stem cells (hESC) are derived from the inner mass of an embryo at an early stage. hESCs are preferred by many scientists because of their potentially unlimited capacity for self renewal and their ability to be converted into a wide variety of cells. Since the moratorium on creating new hESC by the Bush administration, no federally funded facility is allowed to continue their research. At the time of the moratorium, there were some 60 cell lines available. Now most of them are no longer viable for research. The proponents of adult stem cell research consider embryos living beings and object to the use of embryonic stem cells. Proponents of embryonic stem cells want permission to use the thousands of leftover embryos in IVF clinics. While adult stem cell therapy sounds promising, scientists are trying to use embryonic stem cells to avoid shortcomings such as "rejection" and to take advantage of the embryos that have already been created and will never be used.

While the stem cells debate has become a political game, many individuals suffering from diabetes, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's disease and other such disorders are losing hope. In June 2005, then senate majority leader Bill Frist, a physician, said "I also strongly believe, as do countless other scientists, clinicians and doctors, that embryonic stem cells uniquely hold specific promise for some therapies and potential cures that adult stem cells cannot provide". As people of faith we must ensure that there are guidelines, accountability and safety measures in place for stem cell research. We must also ensure that any new technology will benefit all people and not the selected few who can afford health insurance. We have a responsibility to discuss the ethical, social and moral implications of all new technologies and have our voices heard for the good of humankind.

Dr. Olivia Masih White, is a Retired Professor of Biology/ Genetics from University of North Texas, Denton, Texas. She has served on local, Conference and National setting of the United Church of Christ at various positions, including serving as the former Executive Minister of Wider Church Ministries. Olivia served as Vice President of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (1997-2004), has served on Eden Seminary and CUE Boards of Directors and currently is a part-time faculty member at John Carroll University in Cleveland and a member of the UCC Science and Technology Network.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Share some example of modern healing miracles that you have encountered.
2. What are some ethical and social implications of the new genetic technology?
3. Do you think that leftover embryos in the IVF clinic should be used for stem cell research?
4. Will the general public benefit from these new technologies, or only the people with health insurance?
5. Should universal health care be promoted? And should any new genetic test or therapy be part of health care?

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The Power to DO...

FAITH AND WHOLENESS

by Christie A. Holland

“Daughter, your faith has made you well: go in peace and be healed of your disease.”

—Mark 5:25-34

From exploding knowledge of stem cells and their function in the human body, we may be on the brink of curing many types of human diseases. The latest reports of advancements in the treatment of diabetes are truly amazing and encouraging. Advances in the field of cancer research have resulted in understanding many of the genes that cause certain types of cancer. Advances in surgical techniques are truly astounding, made possible by fiber optics and other advances in imaging technology. Cures seem right around the corner. The message of science and medicine is that we determine whether we are healthy or sick, whole or broken. Jesus gives us a different message in this story of healing from Mark.

In today's world of exploding knowledge in the fields of biology and medicine, it is difficult to hear the message of this biblical story. The woman knows instinctively that if she but touches Jesus' clothes that she will be made well. It is her willingness to follow Jesus and her faith in him that provides for her the path to healing and wholeness. What does that say to us today? Jesus suggests that it is belief, following and faith that will make us well. Then we can consult physicians, listen to advice, get treatment, walk with Jesus and be healed of disease and go in peace.

Dr. Christie A. Holland is a retired Professor of Pediatrics at George Washington University and was Chair of Virology, Immunology and Infectious Disease Research at Children's National Medical Center in Washington, DC. She is currently a member of the United Church of Christ of Seneca Valley in Germantown, Md and is a member of the Science and Technology Network of the UCC.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. In what ways have medicine influenced you or your family members?
2. Think about your own health. What could you do to be more healthy?
- 3 What would change in your life if you walked in faith with Jesus?

PRAYER

We confess that by habit or neglect, we often choose to use our freedom unwisely. We do things that harm our health or affect the well being of our spirits. God please let us know that you offer forgiveness, hope and a way to health and wholeness. Amen

UPCOMING EVENTS

APRIL 4, 2009

K-O Conference Women's Faith Formation Workshops...something for everyone

Faith Formation – sharing ways to keep tots-to-teens involved in the Good News, learning and sharing at church and beyond. Ideas for parents and grandparents, babysitters and teachers.

Earth Care – God's evolving creation is extravagantly interrelated. Significant environmental issues are before us. Everything that we do to tend and appreciate the diversity of the earth matters. Ideas on how to “limit your carbon footprint”.

Adult Education – Presentations on programs that have worked well for other churches in the conference plus some new ideas!

Women in International Mission:

A DEDICATED LIFE: LOU ANN PARSONS, SOUTH AFRICA

by Ana Gobledale

In spite of missionary life not necessarily being a lucrative one, generations of people have dedicated their lives to serving others through the church in distant lands. Their salaries have adequately sustained them, but not necessarily resulted in large piles of personal capital! Returning to the USA upon retirement, these servants of the church often have limited resources. So, what to do with them?

In response to this concern, mission-minded folks realized the need for a continued commitment to missionaries, and made a mission project out of the task. The result... Pilgrim Place Retirement Community in Claremont, California. Having just spent a month at Pilgrim Place, I can vouch that it continues to thrive as a remarkable community of retired missionaries and other church workers. New generations of "Pilgrims" bring their rich international experiences, dedication and faith into this vibrant community. Tod and I look forward to our own retirement there!

At Pilgrim Place, I was re-united with Lou Ann Parsons, a wise and strong woman, with the "power to do" who served Global Ministries (and previously the United Church Board for World Mission) for more than 40 years in South Africa. Through the dark days of apartheid she and her husband, Jack, unswervingly continued their ministry in often violent and threatening surroundings. When Tod and I moved to South Africa in 1984, Lou Ann welcomed us with 30 years experience, and offered her love and guidance throughout our years there.

May Lou Ann's words, shared in this interview, inspire you as she has inspired me through the years.

Ana: What childhood relationships or experiences influenced you toward your commitment to the church?



Lou Ann: I was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and spent my high school years in Detroit...very involved in the Congregational church. ...My pastors were influential as was the church secretary, Esther, who put up with me asking if there was anything I could do to help, especially on Friday with Sunday's bulletin. She cared about me and gave me much wisdom. I had support from my mother and grandmother for all of the time I spent at the church.

Ana: What happened to make you consider international mission?

Lou Ann: A formative time for me was at senior high summer camps of the Michigan Conference. At one when I was 16, the stories and pictures of an American Board missionary from China, Alice Murphy, had a real influence. I encountered a new vision, a wider understanding. We also did a play about a young woman inspired to become a missionary but whose parents were dismayed. The play revolved around the dilemma. It was an emotional experience for me to play the part of the young woman. The more I learned as Mission Chairman for the Michigan Pilgrim Fellowship and on the National Pilgrim Fellowship Council, the more my direction became clear. My faith grew and led to a firm decision as I went to college. God called and the rest of my college was preparation for serving in a world context believing in the importance of a global presence of Christians. I met my husband, Jack, at Grinnell College and we shared the same convictions and plans. While at Hartford Seminary, it was decided by the Mission Board that we would go to South Africa.

I believe the observance and discipline of a quiet time, a withdrawal, to reflect and pray with a daily reading guide is important. It was for many of us in times of stress and difficult situations, helping us keep focused on God and keep our trust in God's love and guidance.

Ana: What other significant events in your faith journey might help the women of the church better understand your call to mission?

Lou Ann: A belief that 'we are one humanity' led to experiences with persons of different races. At Wayne University my best friend was Tunnie Martin from the African American Congregational Church. We often sat alone in the lunch room as race relations were at a poor point in Detroit, and we were often viewed with suspicion. This was also just after the war [WWII] when many people of Japanese heritage were returning from camps. We took in two women who lived with us and became good friends.

Ana: What was your work in South Africa?

Lou Ann: Jack and I worked with Congregational churches among the so called "colored " people. My work was mostly in Christian Education doing leadership training and assisting in developing programs with women. As apartheid became more entrenched, I worked ecumenically with educators from many churches to develop training programs to help deal with and work toward the elimination of apartheid. The church grew in its strength to oppose the injustice and help persons to claim their right to freedom and dignity. Two groups besides the church in which I worked were the Black Sash, a women's organization which wrote, spoke and exposed injustice, and the World Affiliated YWCA which worked for human rights and justice for women.

Ana: What was the most rewarding aspect of your work in South Africa?

Lou Ann: A great and rewarding part of my experience was being on teams with great people who were united in the belief that God calls us to

be faithful to the Gospel, and being part of the development of educational programs and a process which would lead to freedom of spirit and thus to freedom as citizens of their own nation. Many of us worked to help victims of apartheid, establishing advice offices, monitoring police action, searching for people taken by police, monitoring court trials and writing to inform the public of the real happenings especially in the [Black] African and [so-called] Colored communities.

[Also,] as I was a music major in college... I gave voice lessons to students in the high school in the Colored community in the town where we lived. This was great fun as there were no such opportunities for them in the community.

Ana: What was the most challenging aspect of your work in South Africa?

Lou Ann: Because beliefs and activities of many groups were in direct opposition to those of Apartheid (which separated people from one another by laws, force, and restrictions on gatherings and communication), it was always challenging to find ways to keep us together, to be one church, to keep courage and perseverance and to interpret the Gospel in dark times.

Ana: What is your favorite Bible verse?

Lou Ann: "Who will separate us from the love of Christ?...I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 8:35, 38-39 NRSV

The entire passage gave constant encouragement to people I worked and lived with under the Apartheid regime in South Africa.

Ana: What spiritual disciplines have strengthened you in your work and daily life?

Lou Ann: The discipline of reading on faith and spirituality has always been important to me. The Mystic writers and Henri Nouwen have taught me much. I believe the observance and discipline of a quiet time, a withdrawal, to reflect and pray with a daily reading guide is important. It was for many of us in times of stress and difficult situations, helping us keep focused on God and keep our trust in God's love and guidance. In retirement I have more time to explore new writers and to spend more time in prayer.

Ana: Please share a time when you met Christ or God face-to-face.

Lou Ann: A National YWCA conference, held during a time of deep crisis with great conflict in the townships between police and freedom fighters, met at a theological school the government was closing down. At a worship service my beloved colleague, Ellen Kuzwayo, and I sang the spiritual "Deep River" as a duet. Our deep emotion seemed to express all the tears over lives lost, but also God's guidance as we tried to affirm our resolve. It was a spiritual experience. God was present.

Ana: What have you done since retirement to keep you connected to international mission?

Lou Ann: I have taken groups to South Africa and have visited churches to tell of our partners overseas. I spent time as Missionary-in-Residence in the [Global Ministries] Africa Office working on projects including a special meeting in Lesotho of all our [International Mission] partners on the African continent.



Ana Gobledale has served Global Ministries in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Australia. She recently commenced a new ministry as interim co-pastor with her husband, Tod, at Kirkland

Congregational UCC in the Pacific Northwest Conference.

"Who will separate us from the love of Christ?...I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

—Romans 8:35,
38-39 NRSV

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How does your church or Conference help support retired missionaries and ministers?
2. How does your church offer opportunities for young people to feel useful and helpful, as Esther, the church secretary, did for Lou Ann?
3. Lou Ann felt called by God to a particular vocation as a young person. How are you helping the young people you know be in tune with God's call in their lives?
4. How is your church "growing in strength to oppose injustice" as did the churches of South Africa during the time of apartheid?

PRAYER OPPORTUNITIES

1. Pilgrim Place Retirement Community and the retired missionaries and church workers residing there.
2. The people of South Africa and Global Ministries missionaries serving there in the past, present and future.
3. Church Camp directors, counselors, staff and campers
4. Church secretaries

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