

## Ministry of the Connecticut Conference, UCC, in 2008

Following the exhilarating year of hosting the United Church of Christ's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary General Synod, the Connecticut Conference entered the new year with confidence, and found itself facing both significant blessings and unforeseen challenges. A year that was pivotal for so many was no less so for the Conference and its 246 member congregations.

As the year began, the Conference found that member churches' giving to Our Church's Wider Mission had increased in 2007 over the previous year. Local church leaders experienced new and innovative program initiatives, including "Church on the Brink," "New Dollars, New Partners," and two Small Church Convocations. The Partners in Education (P.I.E.) series of mini-courses, "Stepping Stones," presented invigorating new ideas for educational ministries in Sunday Schools, youth groups, and on mission trips. Conference financial and moral support enabled the Freedom Schooner *Amistad* to complete its Atlantic Freedom Tour.

In May, the Conference gathered at South Congregational Church UCC in Middletown to explore creativity within the Church. The Rev. Cliff Aerie, with the national church's Ministry of Imagination, Creativity, and the Arts, led the assembly in a Worshipful Imaginarium around Pentecost, featuring music, dance, visual arts, and drama. The day also included presentations from local churches' art programs in a New Wineskins festival around downtown Middletown.

The new Associate Conference Minister for Youth and Young Adult Ministries, the Rev. Da Vita "Day" McCallister, began to reach out "N.O.W." to young people and church leaders, working with them to Nurture Gifts and Call, foster Outreach, and Worship, Welcome, and Work together. In July, over sixty young people journeyed to the National Youth Event in Knoxville, Tennessee, for four days of faith and renewal.

*Now for the Future*, the Campaign for Silver Lake, reached over \$2.6 million in pledges, had representatives in 92 churches, and had its first new structure standing by the end of 2008. The Commons Building for the Hillside cabin village rose from bare ground to walls and roof in just four weekends in November thanks to the efforts of the First Congregational Church of Wallingford, UCC. Plans are to break ground for the first year-round structure, the Retreat Lodge, by 2010.

At Silver Lake Conference Center, *your* Conference Center, 1,136 conferees — 8% more than last year — learned to love God, love their neighbors, and love themselves in one of God's most beautiful settings last summer. Over 37 weeks in the retreat season, 97 groups totaling 2,611 participants — an 18% increase — sought renewal and refreshment. June's second Silver Lake Golf Tournament attracted 60 golfers and raised \$6,000 in support of the Conference Center's program.

Throughout the year, Regional Ministers the Rev. Susan Page Townsley, the Rev. Michael Ciba, the Rev. Dr. Michael Penn-Strah, the Rev. Dr. Lois Happe, and the Rev. Ineke K. Mitchell carried on their ministries in support of the work of local churches. They assisted with congregations in transition and with those facing challenges; they celebrated with their joys and brought comfort in their sorrows.

The Conference published a brand-new adult study curriculum on Universal Health Care. Written by Amy Beveridge, the material is freely available on the Conference's web site at [www.ctucc.org](http://www.ctucc.org).

Karen Ziel joined the Conference staff as part-time Minister of Christian Education in November, following the retirement of Amy Beveridge earlier in the year. She works with local church educators and consultants and administers the Ruth Dudley Resource Center. Silver Lake welcomed new Site Manager Dave Kobersmith, and as the year ended prepared to bid farewell to Registrar Lesley Munshower.

The Conference announced a new Associate Conference Minister for Generosity Ministries position, which will offer support to the whole Church as it seeks to understand the new patterns of giving in this time. To create the new ministry, the position of ACM for Wider Church Ministries had to be eliminated. Communications and Technology ministries were consolidated at the desk of the Rev. Eric S. Anderson, who is now responsible for print and electronic media.

In late summer the Conference received a shock: Conference Minister the Rev. Dr. Davida Foy Crabtree had been diagnosed with breast cancer. Prayers, cards, and electronic messages began to arrive, particularly at the Caring Bridge site where she shared her journey. By year's end, her medical team reported excellent results from chemotherapy and surgery. Follow-up radiation will be less strenuous, allowing her to return to a more active schedule. During the fall, she relied heavily on the gifts of the Rev. Dr. Ron Brown, Associate Conference Minister for Clergy Concerns.

As the summer ended and the Conference prepared for its Fall Meeting, the nation and the world suddenly realized the extent of the financial crisis. Keynote speaker the Rev. Stephen Gray came at the right time, and brought a compelling message of the reality of abundance to oppose the fear of scarcity: "In the face of the fear of scarcity, we are called to do two things that at first appear powerless, but in reality, can change the world: we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength and with all our mind. And like unto it, we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. When we take these two commandments with utter seriousness and when we actually do these two commandments: we witness the abundance and generosity of the God revealed in Jesus Christ."

During the year, UCC members in Connecticut responded generously to assist those affected by a major cyclone in Myanmar, an earthquake in China, tornadoes and floods in the Midwest, and more hurricanes in the Gulf of Mexico.

Connecticut's gay and lesbian citizens obtained equal recognition for their relationships when the state Supreme Court ruled that all are entitled to marriage licenses. The Conference responded by making worship resources available at [ctucc.org](http://ctucc.org). As the year closed, Public Policy Advocate Kim Harrison warned that anticipated shortfalls in state revenue could result in severe budget cuts for services to the most vulnerable citizens in Connecticut.

As 2009 begins, the Conference faces a world in even greater need of the grace of Jesus Christ and the generosity of Christ's people. In partnership with the local churches of this state, and in prayerful fellowship with UCC congregations across the nation, the Connecticut Conference of the United Church of Christ will strive to faithfully serve God's people, by equipping the saints to proclaim the Gospel, to teach the Good News of Jesus Christ, to do the work of reconciliation and justice, and to live faithfully in daily life.