

Looking Up: A Faith Worth Living

Thank you for electing me as one of your delegates to the VT Conference UCC Annual Meeting in Castleton held the first weekend in June. I can report back that we are part of a wonderful ministry in Christ. We have brothers and sisters concerned about the same issues we discuss at Church Council, in our committees, among our old friends in the back pews, over the phone to our neighbors and family. We all want to grow in our faith and grow in numbers. The challenge for most of us is recognizing that change is here, now and if we want to move forward we need the support and hands of each other to join the walk to and with Christ. There are not less people seeking God, but they are seeking him in different places; in service to others, in gathering times other than Sunday morning, in small group ministries, in sharing faith stories, in seeing a need and saying "Here I am Lord, send me".

I voted for us to become a Green Justice Conference. Our church has already been working on finding ways to be more energy efficient, providing bins for recycling products and has continued to work on ways to raise our awareness of the importance of being responsible stewards of creation. Now we have the resources of the Vermont UCC Conference to help us in this task. I voted to re-affirm the Conference as a Just Peace Conference. In 1993, the Conference declared itself to be a Just Peace Conference. This has led to adopting several other resolutions; Uprooting Racism (1999), Clergy of Color (2002), Open and Affirming Conference (2002), War in Iraq and Future Plans for Peace (2004), Health Care for All (2005 and 2009), No Attack in Iran (2007), Anti-Poverty Work (2007), Summer Lunch Programs (2007), Fair Trade Conference (2007), Multiracial/Multicultural Conference (2008) Christian/Muslim Dialogue (2009) and Charter for Compassion (2010)...Wow! For each of these resolutions, there is Conference support and assistance.

The 2012 Conference budget was passed unanimously. It included a change, from 40% to 35% of sharing with the national church of Our Churches Wider Mission (OCWM) donations to the VT Conference. On the state level, there has been a significant decline in the amount of support for OCWM from member churches. Our VT Conference counts on this support for staff and program support. Our church currently gives

10% of our pledged amount to OCWM. The Conference guideline is for 10% of our operating budget. Part of OCWM provides Conference assistance for Pastor searches, stewardship, resource materials, support for VAST (Vermont Academy of Spiritual Training) that our own John Parker helped to establish, disaster relief to our nation's towns and villages as well as internationally. OCWM has set up a structure to move people, money and supplies to areas within 24-48 hours. This is Mission that works!

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MISSION: 1 We will be united as ONE CHURCH with a shared mission on November 1st, 2011 to the 11th. For eleven powerful days we will feed the hungry and confront food-related injustice by:

- ✓ Collecting more than 1 million items of Healthy Food and other household items for local food banks and outreach services,
- ✓ Gather on-line contributions for more than \$111,111 For NEIGHBORS IN NEED, offerings that will be shared for hunger-action purposes and with agencies of justice and compassion throughout the United States,
- ✓ Offer more than 11,111 Letters to Congress asking our government to reform US foreign assistance in a way that more effectively benefits hungry and poor people worldwide, helping to provide a major final push to Bread for the World's 2011 "Offering of Letters" campaign.

The Blessings of the Quilts video was shown many times during the conference as people were gathering for the meeting sessions. I had a chance to "Speak Out" about our mission to send these quilts to the infants and families in the Intensive Care Unit of Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center. It was a good moment to appreciate the work, talent and time given in love to others by the members of our Quilting Group.

We will be looking into joining the UCC Coffee Project that seeks to reconnect people with the farmers who grow their food, and to create a unique, mutually beneficial network. We can buy our Coffee Hour coffee from democratically organized small farmer co-operatives at good prices that work for all of us. They also have tea, cocoa and chocolate!

Thank you for staying with me through this writing. What would take another page or two to try to give you a flavor of the 2 ½ day meeting, I will try and do with images. Imagine 40 tall thin

electric candles from 6 feet to 1 foot placed on the stage of the meeting. Randomly placed on day one, a heart on day two and a heart opening to include the communion table on day three; a professor from Dillard College asking for funds to continue the rebuilding of the college in the wake of Katrina; our guest speaker, Rev. Dr. Ben Guess, from the national office, preaching each day from Jeremiah and the last day from 1Peter with the communication skills of a man full of the Spirit of our Lord and of hope; attending the Peacemaker's breakfast and hearing about mission projects from area churches; wishing each of you could feel the spirit of God moving through the gathering. Let the people say...Amen!

Diane Holme