It is important for us to look back on a year past and reflect upon what has transpired in our world, our nation, our state, our Conference and in our churches. There is a part of me that resists looking back. I have enough impatience in my soul that says, “The past is past – it is finished and gone.” I have always tried to look forward – ahead to what God might have in store. I know that the place where action is most urgent is in the present moment. I also know that we create our past by what we do in the present, and this allows us to shape the future that lies ahead.

Taking stock is important. Our Conference has just experienced a banner year in so many ways! As I think about 2011, the highlight of the year is an easy one to name. Can you say, “GENERAL SYNOD 28”?! What an amazing experience hosting Synod was for our Conference. For the first time in our history we welcomed the entire United Church of Christ to Tampa, and expressed an incredible extravagant welcome to visitors and delegates. Everywhere I went during the Synod people would come up to me and say, “Thank you.” They thanked me for the incredible passion and enthusiasm of our volunteers. They thanked me for the welcome that every single one of our folks provided. They even thanked me for the weather! Our volunteers and our Local Arrangements Committee led by Mary Nutter, Rick Carson and John Syster and their committee chairs were simply awesome. The incredible amount of details were attended to, cookies were baked and served, visitors and delegates were registered, volunteers shuttled dignitaries between the airport and the hotels – so many tasks were accomplished with such grace and faithfulness. Our fundraising efforts were a huge success. We raised over $200,000 (see photo page 36) to be used for an intensive media campaign (with the catch phrase, “Jesus Didn’t Reject People – Neither Do We”), support for the Coalition of Immokalee Workers’ community center, resources provided to the General Minister and President’s Leadership Fund and coverage of our expenses...

continued on page 2

Preparing meals for Helping Hands of Boca at the Congregational Church of Boca Raton

Look inside for more MEMORIES...
While we welcomed Lighthouse we also were sad the Conference.

new member congregation into the life of as we consider future mission endeavors.

A vital church exists for mission. This be engaged in building relationships?

in Florida, in Durban, in Budapest? and ministry to include neighbors here expand our understanding of mission partners across the globe? How can we find new ways to be engaged with mission Nohemi Pagan who serve in Israel/Palestine.

At the same meeting we welcomed a new member congregation into the life of the Conference. Lighthouse Congregational UCC/Naples has enhanced our life together. While we welcomed Lighthouse we also were sad

dened by the closing of First Congregational/Palm City and Hope Unites/Orlando. These two congregations held closing services, which are always bittersweet. In these changing times we have the blessing of churches joining our communion and the sadness of churches closing.

Our Conference participated in a very important way in Mission:1. This all-church mission initiative to address global hunger was responded to in a big way among many of our churches. Over one million canned goods were collected across the country for local food pantries. Over 11,111 letters were written urging our Congressional representatives to address food-related injustices. Over $111,111 was raised for two initiatives: hunger-related ministries and East Africa relief. Here in our Conference we were a leadership conference in online donations – giving close to $19,000! What a great demonstration of unity this initiative proved to be for the United Church of Christ.

As we look back, I give thanks for the ministries that our staff has carried out faithfully and with great commitment. Our Regional Conference Ministers spent countless hours with churches in their respective regions working with: churches in transition (Interim and Settled search committees), churches in conflict, clergy “clusters,” Church & Ministry Teams and resourcing churches around expressed needs. Our Regional Youth Ministers, our Coordinator for Disaster Ministries and our Consultant to Older Adult Ministries all have worked diligently in their respective ministry areas to resource local congregations and to make a difference through their work.

Our Administrative staff is the glue that holds the Conference together. I am grateful for each of our staff and the work that they accomplished in 2011.

In 2011 we began offering the services of Mission Insite to our churches. This online resource provides extensive data on the areas where our churches are located. About half our churches have already taken advantage of this service. This tool allows churches to learn more about their community and to make plans to welcome people in new and exciting ways.

I was in a recent conversation with people thinking about the future of the church around what is it that we “measure.” What are the markers of vitality? What we measure makes a difference in what we value. The traditional measurements of success are often around church statistics. How many members did your church receive into membership last year? How many baptisms, weddings, funerals were conducted? How many pledges were church receive into membership last year? How many baptisms, weddings, funerals were conducted? How many pledges were church receive into membership last year? How many baptisms, weddings, funerals were conducted? How many pledges were church receive into membership last year? How many baptisms, weddings, funerals were conducted? How many pledges were church receive into membership last year? How many baptisms, weddings, funerals were conducted? How many pledges were church receive into membership last year? How many baptisms, weddings, funerals were conducted? How many pledges were church receive into membership last year? How many baptisms, weddings, funerals were conducted? How many pledges were church receive into membership last year? How many baptisms, weddings, funerals were conducted? how we have lived out the core values of the United Church of Christ: extravagant welcome,
Officers

Moderator.............................. Rev. Dr. Steven Hudder (Christ Congregational Church/Miami)
Vice Moderator ......................... Susan Cheney (Congregational UCC/Punta Gorda)
Treasurer ............................... Richard Anderson (Naples UCC)
Assistant Treasurer .................... Valerie Thomison
Registrar ............................... Lynn Blevins (First UCC/Orlando)
Chair, Church & Ministry .......... Rev. Clarice Mitchell (Hope UCC/Rockledge)
Chair, Budget & Finance .......... Rev. James P. Kvetko (Miami Shores Community Church)
President, Endowment Board... David McFarland (First United Church of Tampa)

Board of Directors — Class 2012

Under 150 - Lay Man Ed Pritchett (First Congregational Church/Orange City); Lay Woman Ms. Jan Steinberg (Key Biscayne Community Church/Miami); Clergy Rev. Mark Goforth (Community UCC/Lake Park)

151-250 – Lay Man John Pattavina (Miami Shores Community Church); Lay Woman Ms. Sammie Hartwell (UCC/ New Smyrna Beach); Clergy Rev. Phil Garrison (St. Andrew UCC/Sarasota)

251-500 - Lay Man Mr. Terry Waldron (Arlington Congregational Church/Jacksonville); Lay Woman Margaret Mahoney (Church by the Sea/Bal Harbour); Clergy Rev. Guillermo Marquez-Sterling (Coral Gables Congregational Church

501+ - Lay Man Open; Lay Woman Gladys Wells (Naples UCC); Clergy Rev. Dr. Keith Haemmelmann (Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach)

Geographically Isolated Scott Neal (Pensacola Beach Community UCC)

At Large Neal Watkins (Community Church/Vero Beach); Robert Kolterman (Cocoa Beach Community Church)

Men’s Fellowship Open

Florida UCC Women. Bunny Gruntler (Sunset Congregational Church/Miami)

Young Adult Representative Kimberly Watson (Longwood Hills Congregational Church)

Youth Representative Haley Knapp (Church of the Isles/Indian Rocks Beach)

Ex-Officio Rev. Dr. Ronald Patterson (Naples UCC), Executive Council; William Clarke III (Church of the Open Door Congregational/Miami), Wider Church Ministries; Rev. Aqueelah As-Salaam (First Church of North Miami Congregational), Justice & Witness Ministries; Steven Mayers (Church by the Sea/Bal Harbour) Local Church Ministries

Conference Staff

Conference Minister — Rev. Kent Siladi; Regional Conference Ministers — Rev. Dr. Raymond Hargrove (Northeast), Rev. Dr. Jean M. Simpson (Gulf Coast), Rev. William N. Koch (Southeast); Regional Youth Ministers — Michael Cain (Northeast), Rev. Dr. Sheila Guillaume (Southeast), Jeanne Haemmelmann (Gulf Coast); Disaster Response & Recovery Ministry Coordinator Rev. Dr. Bill Wealand; Older Adult Ministry Consultant Rev. Linn Possell; Webmaster Jeanne Haemmelmann; Celebrate Florida Editor Rick Carson; Associate Editor, Tom Mitchell; Executive Administrative Assistant to Conference Minister Candace Younglove; Conference/Placement Secretary Loretta Perry; Financial Assistant Beth Shedden

I am thankful for the ways in which our congregations live out the Gospel each and every day. I am grateful for the partnership that we share as the United Church of Christ in Florida. We face tremendous challenges with change swirling all around us. We have tremendous resources and assets to face those challenges. I would invite you to pray for our Conference. I would invite you to give thanks for those who have gone before us and entrusted us with the stewardship of this covenantal community. I give thanks for the year past, and I look forward with faith to God’s future!
Report of the Moderator, Conference Board of Directors

REV. DR. R. STEVEN HUDDER
PASTOR, CHRIST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH/MIA MI

The By-Laws of the Florida Conference of the United Church of Christ state that:

The Conference Board of Directors shall oversee the general management and coordination of the affairs of the Conference, being responsive thereby in that management to the will of the Congregations of the Florida Conference United Church of Christ. The Conference Board of Directors shall act as the executive body to carry out the orders of the Conference between meetings. Its action shall regularly be reported to the Congregations of the Florida Conference United Church of Christ and reviewed at every Annual Meeting Conference Meeting. In this light, the Conference Board of Directors shall have the power to employ personnel necessary for Conference functions and within budgetary provisions;

Since the last Annual Meeting in 2011, the Board of Directors of the Florida Conference has diligently worked at “overseeing the general management and coordination of the affairs of the Conference.” Along with all of you, we began this past year by providing an extravagant welcome for our sisters and brothers from around the United Church of Christ as they gathered in Tampa in July for General Synod 28. We have provided supervision and oversight and support to our Conference Minister, Rev. Kent Siladi, as he has led us this past year. We have provided the same to our very capable and hard-working staff including our Regional Conference Ministers, our Regional Youth Ministers, our Coordinator for Disaster Response & Recovery Ministry, our Consultant for Ministry to Older Adults and our three support staff in the Orlando Office.

We are charged with providing this management and coordination and with employing personnel necessary for Conference functions within budgetary provisions. That is the most difficult part of our task as the last several years have seen financial support for the ministry of the Florida Conference from the churches of the Florida Conference continue to decline. This has not been a recent trend, though it has been greatly exacerbated by the recent upheaval in the world, national and local economies.

The peak period for financial support for the Florida Conference was in the late 1990s. Since that time there has been a gradual decline in OCWM and Per Capita receipts each year. For the first few years of the 2000s this decline was not felt acutely as the Conference was engaged in a major transition period with a lot of fluctuation in the Conference staff, leading to a period with a reduced number of employees and a number of interim staff. During this period the receipts of the Conference were greater than the expenses, resulting in a significant amount of reserves accumulating.

Eventually, the Board of Directors decided, based on the recommendations of a Conference-wide survey conducted by the Chamberlin Group in 2004, to move forward with the hiring of three Regional Conference Ministers, even as we were searching for a new Conference Minister. This decision moved us quickly to a full staff complement a year before we called Rev. Kent Siladi as our Conference Minister. The vision was that by providing quality, professional, personal attention to the clergy and members of the churches of the Florida Conference, we would strengthen those churches, strengthen their connections with the Florida Conference and this would lead to greater financial support for the ministry of the Conference. Unfortunately, that has not been the result. Rather, Conference receipts have continued to decline and for the past several years our expenses have exceeded income by about $100,000.

As we have been doing for several years, the Board of Directors has taken seriously its charge to manage the affairs of the Conference within budgetary provisions by focusing on identifying ways to increase our revenue stream. Toward that end we have continued to:

• Send an annual “thank you” letter to all the churches of the Florida Conference for their support of OCWM and Per Capita
• Recognize at our Annual Meeting our “leadership churches” who set a standard for financial support of OCWM
• Provide leadership to regional OCWM task groups charged with assisting the Regional Conference Ministers in working with local churches in each region to strengthen their OCWM giving
• Develop materials to assist churches to stage a “Chili Cook-off” as a local fundraiser to raise additional dollars to support OCWM

Even with these efforts, declining revenue has continued to be a concern and so the Board has been forced to make some difficult decisions. For at least three years the Board has been discussing what the proper size of staff is for a Conference with our number of churches, our financial support and our geography. Initially we made a decision to give the current staff configuration time to work and see if financial realities changed. Then we made a commitment to maintain the current staff through the end of 2011 so we could properly evaluate the needs of the Conference.

In discussing the needs of the Conference, it became apparent that we needed to reach out to the clergy and members of the churches of the Florida Conference, to hear what opportunities and what challenges they faced. We did that this past Fall through an on-line survey. Listening to everything we heard, and to the ways
we have discerned the Holy Spirit leading us in these discussions in the previous years, we then developed a Proposed Vision Statement which has been brought to this Annual Gathering for discussion and approval. It is our belief that this statement will help us focus our energy and resources as a Conference as we move into the future together.

Anticipating that the financial trend will continue for the immediate future, and realizing that we are beginning a new day together as a Conference with clarity of purpose, the Board then wrestled with the question of the proper size and shape of Conference staff to employ to help us realize this vision, within budgetary provisions. After considering multiple options and models and several ways to implement a change, the Board decided that the fairest approach was to end the contracts for all three Regional Conference Ministers as of December 31, 2012, and begin a search to fill two new positions of Regional Ministers with new job descriptions. All current staff has been invited to apply for one of the new positions, if they so desire, and will be given full and complete consideration along with all other applicants. We have also made a change in our office support staff, transforming one position from full-time to part-time.

This decision will result in two Regional Ministers called to assist our Conference Minister in implementing the primary goal of the Florida Conference: encouraging, helping foster and equipping local congregations to become vital and faithful communities. This decision will also result in a cost saving of approximately $100,000 to the expense side of the Conference budget and will assist the Board of Directors in the future to be better able to fulfill its By-law mandate within budgetary provisions.

While this has been a challenging time for the Florida Conference and to serve on the Board of Directors, it has been a privilege and honor for me to serve you these past two years as Moderator. It has certainly been an interesting time, and I take that more as a blessing than as a curse. I trust you will join me in embracing the vision of the Florida Conference as we move into the future, continuing to listen for the Still Speaking God and continuing to open ourselves to the power of the Holy Spirit for changing lives.

Treasurer’s Report

Richard Anderson
Member, Naples UCC

Summarized below is the 2011 financial report for the Conference which was distributed on March 9, 2012, to all treasurers and clergy in the churches of the Florida UCC.

Our wonderful experience at Synod in Tampa last July had NO net impact to the Conference. All monies to cover expenses were released from national or were raised via donations from the Conference. We raised a total of $237,000 to cover all of the incurred expenses. A huge “congratulations” to all of our member churches and the Conference staff. Thank you.

It should be noted, however, that as a result of the time and energy devoted to Synod both income and expenses from other normal yearly activities -- such as Other Events, Trips, Camping, Annual Meeting, etc. -- were down significantly in 2011. We simply did not realize either income or expense for other Conference-wide activities during the year.

Specifically on the Income/(Loss) Statement--2011 OCWM and Per Capita, donations did not improve from 2010. Income in other areas -- such as from: the annual meeting; from seminars, trips; camping; from miscellaneous contributions -- decreased significantly in 2011. Overall receipts were $873,000 compared with over $1,000,000 in 2010.

On the expense side the reduction in income receipts was partially offset by reductions in spending. Meeting expenses were reduced by nearly $70,000 from 2010; camps and trips by $13,000. In total, spending was reduced by over $100,000 from the preceding year.

To relieve the 2011 operating loss, the Conference transferred Released Restriction monies from the balance sheet in excess of $143,000. This reduced assets on the balance sheet but resulted in a “booked” loss of $22,600 on the P&L for the year 2011.

The Conference received over $93,000 in 2011 from the sale of the Val rico property. We also receive $2,500/month from the Santidad sale. In spite of this cash influx, overall assets decreased by $78,300 because of transfers to the P&L to support operations.

A cash flow statement has been added to the FLUCC analytical package beginning with the 2011 year-end report. In total our cash and equivalents balance went from $295,000 at the end of 2010 to $334,000 in 2011, an increase of just under $40,000 for the year. The improvement in our overall cash position was as a result of drawing down other invested assets to fund FLUCC operations. Funds were provided from reductions in Board designated and unrestricted net assets.

Finally, as a result of the 2010 and 2011 actual results for the FLUCC, the Budget & Finance Committee approved (also endorsed by the Board of Director) a “re-planning” 2012 based on history and utilizing a more accurate forecast of 2012 to then prepare the 2013 budget.

Please continue to be faithful with your Per Capita and OCWM support. This is how we fund the programs, ministries and services of the Florida Conference.

MEMORIES -- for all who ...

... touched a child’s life

Key Biscayne Community Church reaching out to Haiti
Endowment Board

It has been a very interesting and productive first year for the reorganized Board of Trustees of the Florida Conference of the United Church of Christ Endowment Fund, Inc. (a Florida not-for profit corporation), referred to in this report as the Florida Endowment Fund. The Board began its work by voting affirmatively on the following officers of the Corporation Board:

President – David McFarland  
(First United Church of Tampa)
Vice President – Bonnie Blomberg  
(Plymouth Congregational Church/Miami)
Treasurer – Dennis Rodrigues  
(Coral Gables Congregational Church)
Secretary – Dianne Townsend  
(Mayflower Congregational Church/Naples)

The Board then began its task of learning how the Endowment funds were being managed. Don Hart, President of the national United Church Funds where the large majority of the Florida Endowment Fund’s liquid assets are invested, was invited to Orlando to speak to the Florida Endowment Fund Board. He gave a very thorough and informative explanation of how the Florida Endowment Fund assets are invested. Presently the Florida UCC funds are invested in the Moderate Balanced Fund which has 60% in the equity markets and 40% in fixed income. The Board is convinced that the funds are invested wisely.

However, to complete the Board’s due diligence of understanding other alternative ways of investing funds, Treasurer Dennis Rodrigues invited the Board to hold its next meeting in Coral Gables to hear a presentation on how Coral Gables Congregational does its investing through two investment managers, one of which is the United Church Funds. The presentation and subsequent discussions were most informative. The Board saw possible potential in eventually moving to engaging more than one investment manager; however, it seems that any advantage to such a change would most likely depend upon at least doubling the current amount in the fund.

One of the initial discoveries by the Board was the existence of several relatively small funds, each valued from approximately $1,000 to $32,000, which had been sitting without activity for several years. These funds were designated to provide resources for ministerial professional development, support for camp experiences for young people, college scholarships and seminary scholarships. Some are limited to disburse interest only and others are available to be spent until the principal is expended. These funds have been activated and their availability is in the process of being advertised to the Conference members.

Two properties were purchased in 2000 for potential church starts. They are located in Davie in Broward County and DeLand in Volusia County. These properties are sitting idle at the present time. The probability of the success of these land purchases for their original intent, the estimated current market values and the capability to sell the properties and the wisdom of selling the properties is being investigated. The monthly mortgage payment on the Davie property is $2,777 with a negligible annual property tax because it is treated as agricultural land. There is no mortgage payment on the DeLand property, but the annual property tax is $2,307.

In addition, the Hope Unites UCC/Orlando has closed and their building has been turned back to the Conference. The property has been listed for sale by the Conference for $390,000. Approximately $372,000 of debt remains on the property, most

### Financial Summary as of 12/31/2011 for the Annual Report

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Fund</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Charles Burns 2020 Fund</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Education Ministries Fund, invested at UCF</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outdoor Ministry Scholarship Fund, invested at UCF</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Florida Endowment Fund Balance</strong></td>
<td>$3,577,056</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
owed to the Florida Endowment Fund and the balance to the UCC Building and Loan Fund. There is a significant chance that upon sale of the property the Endowment Fund will experience a loss. The UCC Building and Loan fund has agreed to take the same percentage of any loss that is incurred by the Florida Endowment Fund. A vacant building invites problems, and the Florida Endowment Fund immediately acquired the appropriate insurance to protect the investment in the property. In addition, locks have been changed and bars have been put on the windows. The annual insurance cost for the building is $2,583.

The Board of Trustees found that unsuccessful attempts had been made to revise the initial by-laws of the Board and concluded that a revision needed to happen. However, Trustee Richard Anderson (Conference Treasurer) was working on an investment policy for the Conference, and it was decided that the Board needed to examine the investment policy before the by-laws are revised.

A draft of the proposed investment policy was completed and thoroughly discussed by the Trustees. A second draft of the investment policy is now being prepared. When that draft is finalized and further discussed by the Endowment Board, it will be forward to the Conference Board of Directors for discussion and consideration as an investment policy for both the Conference and the Endowment Fund.

In the interim, a small change to the by-laws was proposed to clarify the ex-officio members of the Board and to allow Trustees to be appointed beyond the normal two term limits in very special cases. On an endowment board, a member is occasionally found who is so important to the fundraising capability of a board that any effective board would keep that trustee for as long as both the board and the trustee believed it was an effective relationship. This recommended change in the by-laws was approved by the Conference Board of Directors.

The Endowment Board of the Florida Conference of the United Church of Christ has not had a current plan to play a leadership role in the search for increased resources to support the UCC in Florida. The Board has determined that a fundraising plan may be important to the future of the UCC of Florida. Initially, the Trustees believe that a vision for the Board needs to be determined, and a task force has been appointed to begin initial work on a vision. After that vision has been prepared and considered by the Board of Directors of the Conference, then the Endowment Board will determine if and/or what role the Endowment Board should play in that process.

The Board has now determined it has enough information to begin the full revision of the by-laws of the Endowment Board of the UCC of Florida, and a task force has been appointed to begin that task.

See previous page for Financial Summary of the Florida United Church of Christ Endowment Fund at the end of the 2011 calendar year.

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**Budget & Finance Committee**

*Rev. James Kvetko, Chair
Pastor, Miami Shores Community Church*

Your Budget and Finance Committee met quarterly in 2011 to review Florida Conference finances and make necessary decisions. We also reviewed financial statements each and every month and reported regularly to the Conference’s Board of Directors.

Most important for us all to know is that our Conference books are being well kept by Conference Financial Assistant Beth Shedden. 2011 was the first full year that we used the services of a CPA to both monitor and make improvements to our accounting system. And, in a letter to Conference Treasurer Richard Anderson, R. Michael LaBounty wrote:

“It appears to me that the Conference’s books are being maintained in a timely and accurate manner. The changes the Board requested to be made to the Conference’s accounting system have been implemented and the bookkeeper is very comfortable with the new system.”

The good news for 2011 is that: (1) Per Capita income increased; (2) we spent $100,000 less than in 2010; (3) we cut last year’s deficit; and (4) our cash flow balance at year’s end was very healthy. Additionally, our Board funds (as opposed to Endowment funds) actually had net growth despite $143,000 being used for both designated and undesignated purposes.

Our challenge remains on the income side of the ledger, with 18% of our churches not supporting OCWM at all in 2011. We are a fellowship of United Churches of Christ, and we all need to do our part in strengthening our life together in the Florida Conference.

**Budget & Finance Committee Members**

Rev. Jim Kvetko (Miami Shores Community Church), Chair
Rev. Dr. John Syster (First Congregational UCC/Sarasota)
Rev. Gaye Bosley-Mitchell (member, Fort Myers Congregational Church)
Rev. Dr. Bernice Powell-Jackson (First United Church of Tampa)
Rev. A. Bertram Miller (member, Church by the Sea/Bal Harbour)

**MEMORIES -- for all who ...**

... had fun

*Retreat at The United Church of Gainesville*
It has been a good year for the Church & Ministry Committee in Florida. We continue to live into the division of three regions that meet as needed and the two full committee meetings. The three regions are able to mentor and assist candidates in ways that the full committee never could. They help individuals seeking Member in Discernment status and those seeking Privilege of Call and Licensure. The regional chairs – Rev. Tim Woodard (United Church of Sebastian), Rev. Dr. David Schnepf (Jensen Beach Community Church) and Rev. Don Wilson (Venice UCC) -- and their committees have done an outstanding job. They can meet with the candidates and review the paperwork before it comes to the full committee. As time goes on we have expanded their duties. The biannual meetings of the full committee are more productive. It is our privilege to meet with churches wishing to join the United Church of Christ. We also again this year (2012) will welcome into the Florida Conference a new church at the annual gathering.

The full committee approved seven individuals for Ecclesiastical Councils. The committee does not approve for ordination. Ordination requires a successful vote at the Ecclesiastical Council and a valid call. The local churches are part of the Ecclesiastical Council and are both lay and clergy. If one is being held in your area, I encourage you to go hear the wonderful stories and enthusiasm that the candidates bring.

It has been an honor to serve as the chair of Church & Ministry.

**Disaster Response & Recovery Ministry**

Seven groups of volunteers totaling 127 individuals participated in rebuilding five damaged homes. A disaster plan for the Florida Conference office and staff has been developed. Three coordinating groups, one for each region, have been created with 24 members serving as consultants for local churches, liaison representatives with county Emergency Management divisions and with county long term recovery interfaith organizations. The first trailer to transport tools to rebuild sites has been acquired, signs have been placed on the trailer and tools are being acquired to equip the trailer [the trailer is on display at the 2012 Annual Gathering of the Conference at The Community Church/Vero Beach].

Congregations are invited to participate in six ways:
- Develop/update a plan
- Give a tool to help equip the trailer
- Collect items to create clean-up, hygiene, baby and school kits
- Encourage a church member to join the coordinating group
- Recruit people willing to be trained and certified as disaster childcare volunteers
- Agree to host groups of volunteer workers

For additional information about these opportunities, visit the disaster ministry display in the chapel, talk to the volunteers at the Disaster Ministry trailer or contact me at 352/406-4484 (BWealand@uccfla.org).
The Board of Directors approved the creation of an Older Adult Ministry late in 2010. I was selected as its consultant, and the ministry got underway in 2011.

During 2011 I led a “spirituality and aging” workshop at First UCC/Hollywood and a 60+ workshop at Union Congregational Church/Tavares. Plans were made to hold a long term care workshop at First Congregational UCC/Sarasota, scheduled for early 2012.

I continued work on my “Clergy Guide to Dementia,” which will be published and offered to our local clergy. My book, Alzheimer’s: A Beautiful Spirit Celebrated, was published in 2011 and is being reviewed as a possible resource for the national church. It is currently on various other dementia care websites as a resource.

My goals for 2012 are to offer more workshops on Spirituality and aging, present at the Florida Council on Aging Conference and organize a 60+ retreat.

During 2011 the Conference published six issues of our newspaper, Celebrate Florida. The editions, which ranged from 21-25 pages in length and were in full color, were posted on the Conference website. E-blasts notified clergy and church leaders throughout the Conference of the postings and provided links to the issues.

We also published a 24 page special edition devoted to Synod 28, hosted in Tampa by the Florida Conference. Also published was the Annual Report of the Conference for 2010; hard copies of the report were provided to delegates and visitors to the Annual Meeting held at the Congregational Church of Boca Raton on April 30, and it was posted on the website as well.

Thanks for assistance from Tom Mitchell (Hope UCC/Rockledge), our Associate Editor (and former Editor) and Sharon Bond (Faith UCC/Dunedin) of Zebra Graphics who provided professional layout services.

During 2011 we experienced new and creative ways to use our website and continue to explore new options. We have held live Q&A video conferences broadcast throughout the Conference and look forward to sharing more this year. We now have 11 Facebook pages. A brand new website design is in the works to be unveiled as we approach the Annual Gathering in Vero Beach.

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Reports from the Regional Conference Ministers

Greetings, Brothers and Sisters of the Florida Conference UCC. Another year of ministry with and among the churches of the Florida Conference has passed. As always it has been a challenging but good year. Some of the ministries and activities that I’ve been involved in this past year are:

Church Growth and Vitality

+ Worked with Pastors of UCC at The Lighthouse/Naples and New Vision UCC/Yulee to complete and submit funding applications to Local Church Ministries and the Florida Conference.

+ Began meeting with the Pastor and several lay leaders of Riverside UCC/Jacksonville to help develop strategies related to leadership development, church growth and vitality.

+ Participated in a meeting of the Florida Conference New Church Start Ministry Team.

Support to Congregations and/or Pastors

+ Met, trained and consulted with the pastoral search committees at: Union Congregational Church UCC/Holly Hill (Settled Pastor); University Congregational Church UCC/Orlando (Settled Pastor); Altamonte Chapel UCC/Altamonte Springs (Interim and Settled Pastors); First UCC/Orlando (Interim Minister); Community Church of Vero Beach (Associate Minister)

+ Met and consulted with Pastor and/or lay leaders of following churches: UCC/New Smyrna Beach (growth, vitality and stewardship development); Community Church of Cocoa Beach (assessment of Spiritual Life Teams with consultant Dr. Bobbie McKay); New Hope UCC/DeLand (participated in several congregational retreats led by the Rev. Persida Mendez, Church Vitality staff with Local church Ministries UCC as part of the church’s subsidy application and visioning process); Hope Unites UCC/Orlando (participated in several meetings as the congregation engaged in the planning and implementation process for dissolution of the congregation and transfer of property to the Florida Conference); UCC/St. Augustine (several meetings to assess pastoral needs and discuss the future of the church); First UCC/ Orlando (exit interview with former Pastor)

+ Consulted with finance committees at United Church of Sebastian UCC, Riverside UCC/Jacksonville and Seabreeze UCC/Daytona Beach.

+ Met and consulted with candidates seeking ministerial authorization in the UCC

+ Met with and offered pastoral support to clergy and congregations as requested

Preaching/Participation in Special Services/ Celebrations

+ Participated in the 9th church anniversary celebration service at Shalom Center Ministry/Jacksonville

+ Participated in the 25th church anniversary celebration service at The United Church of Sebastian

+ Participated in the 100th church anniversary celebration service at Edgewater Union Church

+ Participated in worship leadership at First Congregational UCC/Winter Park at a service in which the Rev. Geoffrey Black, President and General Minister of the UCC, was guest preacher

+ Participated in the 5th pastoral anniversary celebration for Rev. Scott Elliott at Riviera UCC/Palm Bay

+ Participated in the Ecclesiastical Council and the Service of Installation for the Rev. Steve Heath, Union Congregational Church/Holly Hill

+ Participated in the Service of Installation for Rev. Frank Faine, First Congregational Church UCC/Lake Helen

+ Participated in the Service of Installation for the Rev. Bill Wassner, Port Orange UCC

+ Participated in the Service of Closure for Hope Unites UCC/Orlando

+ Participated in Service of Farewell for the former Pastor at First UCC/Orlando

+ Participated in worship leadership at The Community Church/Vero Beach.

+ Served as guest preacher and officiant at the Service of Installation for Rev. Jack Fielding, First Congregational Church UCC/Orange City.


+ Participated in regularly scheduled regional clergy gatherings

+ Preached at Church of the Open Door Congregational UCC/ Miami

+ Preached at First Congregational Church UCC/Olde Naples

+ Preached at New Vision Congregational Church UCC/Yulee

+ Preached at the UCC/New Smyrna Beach

+ Worshipped at a different church in the region each Sunday

General Participation

+ Participated in: GISS initiative at United Community Church/Sun City Center; meetings of the Florida Conference Committee on Church & Ministry; meetings of the NE Region Church & Ministry and Team; Board meetings and Annual Gathering of the Florida Conference held at Congregational Church of Boca Raton; General Synod 28 in Tampa; planning meetings and planned activities of the NE Region Sacred Conversation on Race planning committee; meeting of the NE Region OCWM Task Force; Florida Conference Middle/Senior High Youth Retreat at the Community Church/Vero Beach; NE Region Youth Retreat; NE Region Disaster Ministry Response Team training; Spiritual Life Team training event; consultation for recipients of the Louisville Institute Sabbatical Grant, Louisville Presbyterian Seminary; memorial service for retired UCC Minister Rev. Noel Valez at First UCC/Orlando; Conference staff meetings; Conference Board of Directors meetings.

+ Helped organize and participated in Florida Conference Social Media Boot Camp at Community Church/Vero Beach
RCM Reports

+ Made follow up contacts with churches and Pastors to ascertain the churches’ financial commitments to the General Synod initiative, annual Conference per capita and OCWM
+ Met several times with the 2012 Conference Annual Gathering Planning Committee and Local Arrangements Committee
+ Serve on the UCC Pension Board Medicare Supplement Focus Group
+ Serve on the UCC Search and Call Working Group (Ministerial Excellence, Support & Authorization – formerly PLL)
+ Serve on the Daniel Hand Scholarship Fund Committee (Local Church Ministries UCC)

I continue to believe that the Florida Conference is moving forward on its journey and that we are still in a time that is equally wrought with new challenges and new opportunities. I believe that it continues to be a time in which we experience God’s Spirit in new ways. May God grant that we continue to grow in our commitment to mission and ministry as members of the Body of Christ who gather as the Florida Conference UCC.

Rev. William Noel Koch
Regional Conference Minister — Southeast

In 2011, I was honored to serve you as your SE Regional Conference Minister when I:

+ Attended and participated in 20 gatherings of the three clergy clusters in this region
+ Represented the Conference in 42 Sunday services in churches — preaching, speaking or visiting
+ Led or participated in 15 special services and gatherings (Ecclesiastical Councils, Ordinations, Installations, Release of Pastoral Vows, etc.)
+ Attended the Youth Peace River Canoe Trip and the Fall Youth retreat at the Community Church/Vero Beach
+ Participated in two annual gatherings of UCC Women in the SE Region
+ Attended Social Media workshop, Community Church/Vero Beach
+ Attended and assisted here and there at General Synod in Tampa
+ Conducted and participated in many phone and e-mail conversations and face-to-face meetings with Pastoral Search Committees and Interim Selection Committees
+ Communicated with hundreds of UCC (and other) clergy interested in serving as new pastors of UCC churches in Florida
+ Communicated with and tried to assist several clergy during stressful and difficult situations
+ Attended four staff meetings in Orlando and participated in four GoTo staff meetings
+ Participated in two Conference Board of Directors meetings
+ Assisted our SE Church & Ministry Team as it met eight times, and communicated and conducted “business” electronically as well; met with the whole C&M Committee in Orlando once
+ Participated in the Boundary Training event for UCC and DOC clergy
+ Planned and led a meeting for the Moderators in the SE Region to meet and get to know each other and share what’s happening in their churches, some best practices and challenges
+ Represented our Conference and the UCC as a member of the Advisory Council of the Ecumenical Institute of St. Thomas University
+ Was present and participated in the last service and closing of the First Congregational UCC/Palm City

As your SE Regional Conference Minister, I learned a lot, helped when I could and hopefully made a positive difference as I appreciated and valued every minute of serving you, our churches and clergy. Thank you for this honor and privilege during these last seven years.

May Peace be with you.

Rev. Dr. Jean Simpson
Regional Conference Minister — Gulf Coast

I wish to thank you and give God thanks for the ministry we have shared together these past seven years as your Gulf Coast Regional Conference Minister. And I wish to especially thank the 40 churches I have served along the Gulf Coast from Pensacola Beach to Marco Island for their constant determination to be the best UCC church and to witness to the wider community, not only with words but with actions lived out: “No matter who you are or where you are on life’s journey, you are welcomed here.”

I have been a very proud “Grandmother” as I have entered into your holy places to celebrate, install, preach, say farewell and mourn with you over the loss of one of our loved ones. It’s been a privilege to serve you in a very special way and to work alongside of you for special occasions. I am also grateful for our colleagues who serve in specialized ministries, in a four-way covenant: our chaplains, hospice, palliative care, educators and those who minister in prisons. I am also privileged to serve with our Conference staff: Raymond Hargrove, Bill Koch, Loretta Perry, Candy (“Sparky”) Younglove, Beth Shedden and our Conference Minister Kent Siladi. Know that my love and support for the Florida Conference will be unending. Below I have summarized my ministry among you from May 2011.
Preaching and Worshipping: Mayflower UCC/Naples, Trinity UCC/St. Petersburg. First Congregational UCC/Ocala, Congregational UCC/Punta Gorda, Chapel on the Hill UCC/Seminole, First Congregational UCC/Sarasota, Pensacola Beach UCC, Faith Family Community Church/Brandon, Community Church/Vero Beach (Fall Youth Retreat), UCC at The Villages, Holiday UCC, Faith UCC/Dunedin, Congregational UCC, Sanibel; Good Samaritan Church, Pinellas Park; Congregational UCC, Ft. Myers; Pilgrim UCC/Port Charlotte, Faith UCC/Bradenton, Congregational UCC/Bradenton, North Port Community UCC, Spring Hill UCC, Congregational Community/Ocala (Marion Oaks), Venice UCC, United Community Church/Sun City Center, St. Andrew UCC/Sarasota, Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg, All Faith’s UCC/Ridge Manor, Emmanuel UCC/Sebring, First United Church of Tampa, Church of the Isles/Indian Rocks Beach; Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach, UCC at the Lighthouse/Naples.

Celebrations, Transitions and Other Events

May 8: 4-way covenant, Rev. Charles Nicholas, First United Church of Tampa and Tampa General Hospital
May 22: Installation Rev. Kathy Rooke as UCC Pastor for Faith Family Community/Brandon
July 1-5: General Synod 28 was amazing. UCC Florida shined with hospitality! Folks around the world were greeted warmly with open arms, smiles and cookies! What an experience for us all.
July 17: After Synod I introduced the Laos Community Church to Trinity UCC/St. Petersburg. They had a joint worship together. Today both communities plus the Anointed Word Fellowship enjoy being together for Bible study, Sunday School and special worship services as well as their own separate worship services. Today Trinity is a multicultural center for all.
August 14: Ecclesiastical Council for Deborah McBride, First Congregational UCC/Sarasota
October 6-9: Southern Regional meeting, UCC Women
August 14: Installation of Rev. Dr. John Syster’s 40th anniversary ordination, First Congregational UCC/Sarasota
November 6: Dedication, Faith UCC/Dunedin
November 13: Installation of Rev. Deborah Kunkel, Associate Pastor, Sanibel Congregational

December 4: Ordination of Deborah McBride, First Congregational UCC/Sarasota
Church & Ministry The Gulf Coast Regional Church & Ministry Team meets every six-eight weeks with a very full schedule. We have many persons in discernment, folks preparing for privilege of call, working with churches which are going through challenges, Pastors in transition, 4-way covenants and licensure, meeting with Interim Pastors and sharing ways we can be with the clergy listening to their needs, joys and concerns. Also offered was Boundary Training, which is requirement for all active UCC clergy.

Clergy Clusters Gators, Pinellas Plus, Suncoast, Tweeners, Fort Myers and Naples clergy groups meet regularly on a monthly basis.

Sabbatical During July/August/September I am blessed to have sabbatical time. I have served as a UCC clergy for 25 years and this will be a first for me. I am thankful to the Board of Directors and the committee on Church & Ministry for their support for this time. My plans are formed and I invite you to follow my blog and Facebook as I try to connect with you as I am able. The journey begins on July 23 as my husband Paul and I fly from Tampa to Johannesburg (20 hours) and then to Nairobi we will meet with Rev. Phylliss Byrd and Rev. Della Fahnestock and spend the next 10 days in Kenya visiting orphanages, being with women and children also a visit with Dr. Joseph Mbilla, Programme for Christian/Muslim Relations in Africa, Organization of African Instituted Churches. Afterwards we will also have two nights in Maasai Mara Safari watching the great migration of animals. We will then fly to Harare, Zimbabwe, and meet with Rev. Edward Matunhunge, president of UCC Zimbabwe. He will also drive us cross country (12 hours) to Mt. Selinda School for young women (an early UCC school begun in 1800s). Back to Harare then travel to Durban to visit with Dr. Scott and Susan Couper and visit churches and mission stations there. Then we fly to Cape Town to visit Robben Island and Nelson Mandela’s home site. Then travel by train to Pretoria and fly to Kruger for two nights at a safari lodge, afterwards flying to Zambiasi with visits to mission places then to Victoria Falls and Johannesburg where we will also meet missionaries -- and then home on August 31. Paul and I will be taking photos, videotaping worship, music, liturgy, conversations; I’ll have my iPad with me and each day we’ll begin by mediation and journaling. In September we hope to put together a presentation that will enhance the knowledge of our churches about our global partners in Africa and will be looking forward in sharing this with you. Please keep us in your prayers as we travel -- you will continue to be in ours.

For me this will be my last annual meeting as your Gulf Coast Regional Conference Minister. I began October 1, 2005. I am assured of God’s presence as I go forward in my journey serving as a UCC Pastor. Of one thing I am assured is that I have an abundance of energy and love serving as Pastor. I look forward to my journey with joy and expectation of God doing a new thing with my life. Please be assured that these past years with you have truly been a gift for me, not only in serving you in a variety of ways but knowing that we have become more than just colleagues, but family. And I will always hold these past years as a challenging, joyful, life-changing and heart-felt call from God. Thank you for the privilege, and may God continue to enrich each of us as we go forward in this new time and new challenge, listening to the Still Speaking God. Blessings and joy.
With a quorum present — 65 churches represented, 44 clergy and nine specialized ministers in attendance plus 90 laypersons (8 of whom were under 25) — Conference Board of Directors Moderator Rev. Dr. Steve Hudder (Christ Congregational Church/Miami) opened the 112th Annual Meeting of the Florida Conference on Saturday morning, April 30. The 2011 gathering at the Congregational Church of Boca Raton was shortened to one day due to the upcoming Synod in Tampa in early July; as a result, a number of customary activities and programs had to be dropped, and the entire meeting was compressed into less than five hours.

Host Pastor Rev. Tom Lacey welcomed delegates and guests, who then heard from Conference Minister, Rev. Kent Siladi. He began by acknowledging God’s amazing gift to us of imagination and went on to raise this question, “What feeds that?” He answered by citing the hope and vision we find in scripture, such as what we learn in Isaiah. When we go up to the top of the mountain we are given the opportunity to see beyond current possibilities, where we can “pin our hopes on God’s vision…[which is] not a private journey but a communal walk” in which God will walk with us.

Rev. Kent believes God’s future for us is filled with new and amazing things, referencing Phyllis Tickle’s theory that every 500 years Christianity has a “rummage sale” in which old ideas are rejected and new ones emerge. Post-modern period Protestantism in the form we know it, he suggests, is passing now and we’re entering the time of the “great emergence” of alternative ways of Christian expression. So is this a crisis or an opportunity? he asked. Do we need to be uncomfortable in order to be bolder? Rev. Kent challenged us to embrace this new vision—the “new ways of being the church”—and to do this together. Earlier he had quoted an African saying he had learned on his recent trip to Zambia: If you want to walk faster, you walk together; if you want to walk further, you walk together.

He shared his vision of a “culture of experimentation”—to “accomplish collectively what we can’t do individually”—and urged the assembled to put that thinking into practice going forward. With Synod coming to Tampa in July, “God has given us this incredible moment, which is a gift we need to leverage” as the United Church of Christ in Florida. He encouraged each church to “imagine what’s possible” and think of itself as a new church start. Imagine leveraging our assets for God, he suggested—becoming a “green church,” reaching out to youth and older adults, maximizing our new relationship with Eden Theological Seminary in Florida. In closing, he proposed that “We need a new vision to imagine what’s possible…the possibilities that God has in store for us in Florida.”

Conference Treasurer Richard Anderson (Naples UCC) and Budget & Finance Chair Rev. Jim Kvetko (Miami Shores Community Church) presented their respective reports and Moderator Steve Hudder provided an overview of the Board’s activities during the previous year. A resolution to “underscore the priority of the Church to be involved in mission around the world through faith, justice and advocacy” was introduced by Hope UCC/Rockledge and Pilgrims’ UCC/Fruitland Park and adopted by the delegates. The Conference and local churches in the Conference are “encouraged to implement this resolution with education and striving to be a global mission church.” Board Vice Moderator Susan Cheney (Congregational UCC/Punta Gorda) presented OCWM certificates to those churches which had particularly distinguished themselves by their giving in 2010.

Kathy Church, a member of Jensen Beach Community Church and national Moderator for the UCC Coalition for LGBT Concerns, presented an update on how the Conference and Florida churches had responded to her 2009 challenge that the Conference become Open & Affirming (adopted at the 2010 Annual Meeting) and that 10 more congregations would become ONA by the time of Synod.

The Conference officially by vote welcomed into the fold Lighthouse Congregational UCC/Naples as a new church. Present for the celebration were its Pastor, Rev. Robert Townsend, along with a couple dozen members of the church (see right).

Chairs of the various committees composing the Local Arrangement Committee for Synod paraded into the sanctuary with balloons and signs, dispensing colored beads and “comma cookies” as they made their way to the chancel to share ways in which the delegates could return to their churches and recruit more volunteers to handle all the welcoming and administrative support tasks that need to be covered over the five days of Synod.

The coming of General Synod to Tampa in July was the subject of Edith Guffey’s message for the closing worship. As the UCC’s General Synod Administrator (her ninth and final in that role), she reflected on the “Imagine What’s Possible” theme and the reluctance of many of us in the church to imagine and dream. She admitted that the theme has pushed her to think about imagination as a gift from which she has benefited—an appreciation for the seeds which have been planted by others that have created so much good. This helps us, she said, to see beyond what is to what could be. Do you wonder about your life? What are your dreams and visions? she asked. Or have you stopped dreaming and found easy excuses for being disengaged? Edith encouraged us to think about those people in our lives who have made a difference.

Synod in Tampa, she said to follow up on Rev. Kent’s observation, may just be God’s gift to the Florida Conference right when it’s needed. She wants to imagine all the people who will come to the Convention Center in Tampa, ready to be refreshed for service, maybe ready to discover the UCC for the first time because they are hungry for the living Christ. Coming together in Synod is in itself an example of imagination. As she named some of those historic facts about the denomination and its forbearers from the earliest years to the present, she was identifying how those before us have imagined new ways to live out the Gospel, how they remind us of our commitment to the church and how transformation has happened. Her closing wish for us was that Synod would touch and transform us, as individuals and as a Conference.
Thanks for a terrific 2011. My primary goal continues to be acting as an advocate for the youth of the region and to partner in ministry with our local churches. I have again visited churches and their youth groups, with an emphasis on those that I have not yet been to. I also continue to communicate through a monthly e-letter and regular updates on the Northeast Region Youth Ministry Facebook page. Through these media, I share ideas and best practices as I see them or hear about them and pictures from church visits and youth activities.

I believe it’s important to support activities in the other regions. In January, I visited Walk on the Water in Key Biscayne and during the first weekend of March, I visited the annual Peace River Canoe Trip. It’s a wonderful opportunity to visit with youth and their leaders from this region and beyond…and all in one place.

Youth and leaders from the Northeast Region (see photo below) gathered for our second regional event: a day at Blue Spring in April. Weather and manatees both cooperated for this great day of games, water activities, fun and worship. Thanks to the churches who came and the team who planned the day. We’ll be doing it again next year.

Also in April, I attended the Annual Meeting at the Congregational Church of Boca Raton. Then many youth and their leaders from the Florida Conference attended Synod in Tampa. It was energizing to meet with UCC folks from across the country and beyond.

The Community Church at Vero Beach hosted 140 youth and their leaders from the Florida Conference for the year’s Fall Retreat (see photo above right). Over 50 youth were first-timers at the retreat. Imagine All the People was the theme, with focus on “me,” “God and me,” “Imagine all the people” and “Imagine the possibilities.” Special musical guest Ken Medema was the highlight of the weekend, and the Saturday night concert was broadcast live over the Internet. In addition there were games, small groups, workshops and lots of fun swimming and doing the obstacle course.

The year wrapped up with emphasis on Mission:1 11-1-11 through 11-11-11 with multiple churches in the region raising money, doing mission work and writing letters.

I look forward to working together with you again in 2012. If you have any questions, please contact me at mcain@uccfla.org

The following report for the Southeast Region Youth Ministry includes several events the youth of the Southeast Region participated in during 2011. In order to help facilitate these events, as the Southeast Region Youth Minister I spent many hours working with youth leaders and pastors in the Southeast Region.

In addition to direct contact with many of the youth ministries, these youth opportunities were publicized in a monthly newsletter, “The Southeast Regional: Our Youth Ministry on the Move.” Also, the Facebook fan page for the Southeast Region Youth captures many of the youth events listed below.

As a result of these regional youth events, 18 churches have either committed to and/or have been active participants in the youth ministry of the Southeast Region, which has sparked an interest in youth ministry at great levels across the region.

Thank you for this unique opportunity to serve our youth in the Southeast Region of the Florida Conference. It is truly a blessing and a privilege. Many blessings.

Walk on the Water

There was so much fun at WOW -- time at the beach, a campfire with S’mores, time to hang out with friends and a fantastic worship with our UCC General Minister and President! A youth from Coral Gables Congregational Church summed up his thoughts by sharing, “This year was the best youth event ever!” Special thanks to Key Biscayne Community Church for hosting the youth, and to Church of the Open Door Congregational/Miami for hosting us for Sunday morning worship. (Go to uccfla.org SE Youth Ministries for more photos)
Confirmation Retreat…
“A Keeper!”

On January 30, six churches (First Church of North Miami Congregational, Miami Beach Community Church, Key Biscayne Community Church, Coral Gables Congregational Church, Church of the Palms/ Delray Beach and Plymouth Congregational Church/Miami) were represented at the SE Regional Confirmation Retreat. Discussion topics ranged from confronting peer pressure to interesting facts about the UCC. It was a great way for our youth to engage with one another on a myriad of topics about their faith journey. Due to the success of the event, this will be an annual retreat. Yeah, God!

SE Youth Missions Gathering

First Congregational Church/Fort Lauderdale, Union Congregational Church/West Palm Beach, Church of the Open Door Congregational Church/West Palm Beach, Church of the Palms/Delray Beach and First Congregational Church/Lake Worth were represented at the youth gathering on missions on May 8 with guest speaker Conference Minister Rev. Kent Siladi. The group assembled 15 hygiene kits for Church World Service, which was delivered at Synod. It was so much fun as we also burned off some energy with a volleyball game and treated ourselves to ice cream. A special thanks to the youth for being great hosts!

General Synod 28…”Was So Much Fun!”

Nine congregations in the SE Region sent youth and young adults to General Synod 28. They were: Christ Congregational Church/Miami, Church by the Sea/Bal Harbour, Church of the Open Door Congregational/Miami, Church of the Palms/Delray Beach, Coral Gables Congregational Church, First Church of North Miami Congregational, Miami Beach Community Church, Plymouth Congregational Church/Miami and Union Congregational Church/West Palm Beach. Youth also helped as Youth Stewards. For video highlights that include a mission project, flash mob and a march for justice, go to Florida SE Youth of the UCC. Also, GS28 adopted a resolution calling on churches to adopt promises for those in youth ministry. Indeed, it was fun and eventful!

Summer Mission…Youth Helping Children

On August 20, the First Church of North Miami Congregational hosted our summer mission project. Twenty-four youth worked diligently throughout the day and ultimately painted the large hall that houses pre-school students for meals and activities. Also, some clean-up was done to help with clearing way for outdoor play. “We are so grateful for all of your efforts,” shared North Miami’s Pastor Rev. Aqueelah. Churches that had youth and/or a representative included: Coral Gables Congregational Church, Church by the Sea/Bal Harbour, First Congregational Church of North Miami, Union Congregational Church/West Palm Beach and First UCC/Hollywood. Our RCM, Rev. Bill Koch, was also present. Yeah, God!

Mission:1

Special thanks to the approximately 50 youth who attended this amazing youth event! The leadership offered at our host church, Coral Gables Congregational Church, was superb. For more details and photos, please go to uccfla.org, click onto Youth Ministries and find our SE Regional Youth Facebook page. This was an overnight event for Mission:1, which began on Friday, November 11, at 4pm and concluded on the following morning at 10am. We focused on the Mission:1 goals of feeding the hungry and confronting food-related injustice through a variety of activities for our youth. One of our memorable moments included Rev. Dr. Laurinda Hafner, Senior Pastor of CGCC, as she offered her spiritual gifts and leadership with the youth during a “hunger meal” followed by Communion. In one word, “inspirational!”

Wow

Jeanne Haemmelmann
Gulf Coast Region Youth Minister

I continue to be amazed at the many churches and youth in our Conference who are willing to be the hands and feet of Jesus as they seek to live out the gospel.

As I spend time talking with local churches and their youth, it is refreshing to hear the ways they are experiencing God in their lives… mission trips, food drives, work projects, prayer groups… the list is endless. Our youth are taking the words we so proudly embrace “God is Still Speaking…” literally.

It was an honor to be part of General Synod, held in our own Conference this year and to see the many youth from across the country who were here to learn more about the UCC. What a delight it was to see them perform their flash mob during worship! Their enthusiasm was contagious.

Looking ahead, this summer I will be traveling to and present-
Many of our churches participated in local gay pride parades and festivals during 2011 in St. Petersburg, Fort Lauderdale, Miami and Brevard County.

According to the UCC Coalition for LGBT Concerns, the following Florida UCC congregations were officially listed as having become Open and Affirming during 2011:

UCC/New Smyrna Beach
Arlington Congregational Church/Jacksonville
First Congregational Church/Winter Park
Hope UCC/Rockledge
First Church of North Miami Congregational
Faith UCC/Bradenton
Venice UCC
Jensen Beach Community Church
Miami Shores Community Church

As of early 2012, 31 Florida churches were identified on the official UCC Coalition for LGBT Concerns list as ONA (including Hope Unites/Orlando, which has since closed its doors). Several other congregations have either submitted documentation as having gone through the ONA process and are awaiting confirmation or are currently in the discernment process.
It was an exciting year starting with our first regional meeting for the Southwest region, held on January 27 at North Port Community UCC. The theme for the day was “The Seasons of Your Life: What Does God Have Planned for You?” based on the scripture from Ecclesiastes 3:1, “There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under heaven.” Pat Wanta from First Congregational UCC/Sarasota presented a very thought provoking devotion entitled, “Honey, It’s All in the Shoes,” which she creatively led us through the seasons of life indicated by the shoes we had worn. Keynote speaker Dee Jepsen, a member of Pilgrim UCC/Port Charlotte, spoke about the different seasons of her life and how God’s plans for her were sometimes drastically different from her own.

On February 5 the Miami-Dade/Monroe Counties region held its annual meeting at Christ Congregational Church/Miami. Guest speaker and Christ member Rev. Dr. Diane Hudder gave encouraging words on how we can “Grow God’s Garden”: we are God’s garden and by keeping our eyes and hearts and minds turned towards God, we can endure any and everything. No matter our circumstances or difficulties, we are still a part of God’s master plan and a vital member of his garden.

The St. Johns region met at First Congregational Church/Lake Helen on February 12. Keeping with the theme “Comfort & Chocolate,” the women of First Congregational served a variety of chocolate dishes, homemade soup and sandwiches. A retreat-style workshop was led by Donna Cooney, Women’s Ministry Consultant for UCC Women of the Southern Region (and currently a Licensed Minister serving the UCC/St. Augustine). Devotion, singing and sharing of communion were led by Pat Reilly and Rev. Linda Bishop.

On February 19 the Central West Coast Region met at Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg with Pastor Rev. Kim Wells giving words of welcome. Before the meeting we were entertained by a strolling guitarist. Guest speaker Jeanne Haemmelmamn, Gulf Coast Regional Youth Minister for the Florida Conference, spoke on the theme “Can You Text God?” The presentation explained the use of current electronic equipment by our children and grandchildren. The question was raised, “How welcoming are you to teenagers in your church? Do we automatically reject them because of the way they dress?”

Riviera UCC/Palm Bay hosted the Central East Coast Regional meeting on March 5. The program was titled, “An Interfaith Conversation Café: Getting to Know Women of Other Faiths.” There was a panel of speakers who were representative the following faiths: Muslim, Hindu, Jewish and Christian. Each spoke of their faiths and the attendees were given a time for questions and answers. After lunch we divided into small groups for further discussion followed by a closing worship service.

The 84th Annual Conference of the Florida UCC Women was held March 25-27 at the Quality Inn Hotel & Conference Center in Sebring with the theme “Growing in God’s Garden.” Friday worship, “A Service of Remembrance and Hope,” was led by Rev. Dr. Laurinda Hafner (Coral Gables Congregational Church). On Friday evening Dan Ketterer, from Trinity UCC/St. Petersburg, gave a slideshow presentation, “Today’s Haiti.” Saturday’s workshops included: “Listening to the Heartbeat of God”; “Caribbean Islands and our Presence There”; “Reading for Renewal”; “Mission of ECHO in the Caribbean”; “Permaculture -- Love the Creation.” Sunday’s worship was lead by Rev. Dr. Willie Mae Hawkins who serves as an Associate Pastor at Maple Temple United Church/Raleigh, NC, in addition to being a UCC Regional Women’s Ministry Consultant for the Southern Region.

On Sunday, July 3, at General Synod in Tampa a banquet was held celebrating the gifts of laywomen in the UCC. The Florida Conference honored Billie Carpenter (Church by the Sea/Bal Harbour) and Gerie Spence (UCC/New Smyrna Beach). We had a booth in the Exhibition Hall to provide information regarding the Florida UCC Women.

The 16th Southern Regional Meeting of the UCC Women was held October 7-9 at the Blowing Rock Conference Center, Blowing Rock, NC. Thirty-one Florida UCC Women attended of which 24 rode the Spirit Bus with our fearless leader, Colleen Hafner (Trinity UCC/St. Petersburg). Colleen challenged us with puzzles and led us in song, and there was a surprise stop at the campus of Billy Graham’s Library in Charlotte, NC.

In “Encountering God,” a history of the Florida United Church of Christ published for the 75th Diamond Anniversary, the last sentences in the introduction state: “…many names have been used for the women’s organization; the inclusive current name, Florida United Church of Christ Women includes YOU! May the good Lord continue to guide and bless us all as we seek to live lives of love and service in Jesus’ name.”
Auburndale/Christ’s Promise UCC: Rev. Elise Elrod was installed as the church’s Pastor and church members voted overwhelmingly to change the name of the church from Rainbow Promise Community to Christ’s Promise. The congregation saw growth in 2011 and looks forward to that trend continuing in 2012.

Boca Raton/Congregational Church of…: Members of the church regularly volunteer at a soup kitchen and food pantry in the area called Boca Helping Hands, a facility that on any given day feeds approximately 150. A few members volunteer weekly and others donate groceries regularly. Every few months a larger group goes on a Saturday from 8am-1pm to prepare a hot meal for those in need, make sandwiches for school children, pack groceries and help organize the warehouse. During the year the church hosted speakers from the Homeless Coalition of Palm Beach County and collected clothes for them, shared donations of food and monetary gifts with CROS Ministries and Boca Helping Hands through the Souper Bowl of Caring and other special food drives as requested. CCBR began a supporting relationship with Family Promise, a network that provides emergency housing to families with children through the help of faith-based organizations.

Boynton Beach Congregational: Boynton Beach had its Fourth Annual Nearly New Shop Fashion Show on February 12th for Valentine’s Day. Over 100 women from the community came for the event with refreshments afterwards. All the fashions were from clothes in the Nearly New Shop and the models were volunteers. A great day had by all with over 75 visitors attending this wonderful day at Boynton Beach Congregational.

Bradenton/Faith UCC: Youth at the church led worship in every month that has five Sundays. One service was on the theme, “You are Strong” and included a tribute to military families.

Cocoa Beach/Community: CBCC is alive and thriving and God is being served and celebrated in multiple ways. A beautiful, new sanctuary, surrounded and sheltered with walkways, flowers and shrubs. Fabulous preaching, exciting worship, a beautiful, powerful music program, Bible study, three ongoing adult education programs. The Spiritual life team program, begun at CBCC, now has five spiritual life teams glorifying God and working in the community to extend the church’s mission in sacred and secular directions. A new interfaith program extends mission and ministry, providing opportunities for spiritual dialogue among different faith traditions. CBCC is a church on the move looking for exciting new ways to attract people of all ages to worship God together and become an active spiritual voice in the community.

Coral Gables/Congregational: The growth at CGCC over the past year was measured not only by its increased membership but also through its spiritual growth, justice and witness work and increased spirit of identity and connection to the UCC. The adult education and Theologian in Residence programs explored concepts of the emergent church through the writings of Gretta Vosper and Phyllis Tickle. The justice and witness ministry added a program called Community Justice Agents, empowering members to develop justice programs unique to their own gifts and interests. Israeli/Palestinian relations were explored through the Near East Peace Project. Almost 90 of CGCCers traveled to Tampa for Synod and to support Senior Pastor Rev. Dr. Laurie Hafner as she preached at the Sunday afternoon worship. The year of celebration culminated as they ordained...
and called Pastor Megan Smith, who had faithfully served the church as its Director of Spiritual Formation for many years, as a new Associate Pastor. The new Ministry Team, which also includes AP Rev. Guillermo Márquez-Sterling, brings much creative and faithful leadership.

**Daytona Beach/Seabreeze UCC:** The church held an open house in the Spring, which was covered by the *Daytona Beach News Journal* and featured the restoration of the church’s 27 stained glass windows. The reporter shared about the beauty within the sanctuary as the beams of light spread “a rainbow across the dark oak pews” of the century-old church.

**DeLand/New Hope UCC:** Although it has a small membership -- about 15 -- the congregation decided to put its Mission:1 focus on the local neighborhood center, which is a food pantry and much more. The center was asked what the 11 most needed foods are and the church set its goal at 111 items and met it. Almost everybody brought one of each, just for the fun of it, and the giving was blessed each week. The church found it did wonders for church unity -- all getting behind the same goal -- and they also set a goal of $111 to add to its gift to the Neighborhood Center. A sidebar is the good relationship it is establishing with the center.

**Delray Beach/Church of the Palms:** January was the beginning of a year of activities celebrating 50 years since the founding of the church. At a worship service on Sunday, January 30, the first of the year’s anniversary celebrations, Senior Pastor Rev. Dr. Roger Richardson offered a sermon of praise in appreciation of the congregation’s original charter members who saw a need 50 years ago for a Congregational Church in the Delray Beach area and worked diligently to fulfill that need. A reception following the service was held in the Church Friendship Center with an exhibit of scrapbooks tracing the history of the church from 1961 to the present. On Friday, March 4, a gala dinner celebration was held at a nearby restaurant attended by 75 persons; it featured a slide-show presentation depicting the history of the church over the past 50 years. There also was a reading of the proclamation from the Delray Beach Mayor and City Council honoring the church and declaring Saturday, March 5, “Church of the Palms Day in Delray Beach, Florida.”

**Deltona UCC:** New officers, new vitality and the traditions of the past helped continue ministry at Deltona UCC. The congregation is very grateful for what the past has brought as it continued its bell choir in both the Christmas and Easter services. Perhaps what some believe to be the crowning achievement in terms of newness was the church’s involvement in Deltona’s Christmas parade. As well the music program got a shot in the arm as both organ and electronic piano have been added to the music and worship service. Overall it is the faithful people of the church who mark this church with the Spirit of Christianity.

**Dunedin/Faith UCC:** The transition that began in June 2010 with a beloved pastor’s departure at Faith UCC/Clearwater to joyful anticipation of new pastoral leadership now in Dunedin has been a wonderful journey. Debt, loss and moving tugged at the will to support the congregation’s passionate missions to its Sea Us Grow Preschool, local charitable agencies and to the ministries of the UCC. Sixty-two people from Faith attended the 2011 Nehemiah Action Assembly for social justice in Pinellas County — the most since the church joined in 2004. Having to move the preschool twice within a couple of years has been a difficult challenge but there continues to be a supportive relationship between church and school. Last Easter the congregation picked up and moved from its temporary quarters in a Methodist church to its own little church building. Moving and attrition has hurt but morale is high and attendance is up from over a year ago. The transition provided time to re-structure the bylaws for greater participation, and the congregation approved them in December. During 2011 the search continued for a settled pastor, who will be introduced to the congregation the weekend of May 5.

**Fort Myers/Congregational:** The church scheduled “testimonials” during its Adult Forum hour on Sundays in May from 11:30am-12:30pm. This offered members an opportunity to reveal something about their lives and their faith. Pastor Rev. Phil White encouraged his parishioners to think of the “divine moment” when they realized that there was something greater than themselves. As a result, interesting stories were shared.

**Fort Pierce/First Congregational UCC:** The church added five new members during 2011. It increased its evangelism efforts by producing a church brochure and placing copies in local senior living developments, doing direct mail and ads in local newspapers. They are very proud of their choir under the direction of Janis Gonzales. FCFP is a church small in number but proud of its music program and proud of the dedication of its members.

**Fruitland Park/Pilgrims’ UCC:** Members of the church continued to support the Los Guido ministry in Costa Rica – a special passion of church member Mae Louise Zeise. The church’s special January mission focus for this ministry in 2011 raised over $1,100. A note from the mission’s pas-
tor blessed the congregation for its generosity and help for the “children who do not have the basic necessities of food, education, health, love…”

Gainesville/United Church: UCG has continued to enhance its children’s programs where about 75 children participate each Sunday morning in a rotation program of different learning centers. One of the very popular non-Sunday morning programs for parents of pre-school and elementary school children at UCG is a monthly Parents’ Night Out. On one Friday a month UCG child care staff provides an evening of pizza, games, movies and fun for the children. Parents then have the evening to do whatever they want – some have their own date nights, some get together with other parents in the church for dinner or a movie. They (parents and children) all have a great time. Cost is $10 for the first child and $5 for each additional child.

Holly Hill/Union Congregational: This transitional year began with two of the congregation’s retired clergy members, Rev. John Nutting and Rev. Joe Stock, serving marvelously as Interim co-Pastors. On Palm Sunday, a special transitional liturgy was conducted celebrating the leadership given by Interim Pastor Rev. Dr. Bill Wealand prior to his resigning for medical reasons. At that time, a plaque was placed in the church’s new volunteer housing facility, honoring him for inspiring its development. In June, Rev. Steve Heath was called as settled Pastor, and he was installed on October 16. The church dramatically increased giving to its annual Advent Food Drive with the construction of a large “Santa Sleigh” which members were encouraged to fill — and which was filled to overflowing.

Indian Rocks Beach/Church of the Isles: COTI has seen its dream come true of offering an elementary school education to its island families. It took over ten years -- and not without conflict -- but the 155 member congregation voted unanimously in March 2011 to add a $180,000 wing to its existing preschool and opened K thru 5th grade classrooms five months later. Taking advantage of its location two blocks from the Gulf of Mexico, the congregation also began offering “Sunday Sunset” worship services on its beach during the Winter months and joined a social justice network of congregations in Pinellas County called FAST (Faith and Action for Strength Together).

Jacksonville/Arlington Congregational: The church had a faith-filled and productive 2011. It voted to become Open and Affirming and added the information about its inclusive stance to their web site. The congregation added 17 new adult members to its ministry and mission. In December the choir presented its annual Christmas Cantata, composed by member Ashley Wilkinson. One of the church’s primary mission projects for 2011 was the renovation of a house on an adjoining property that had been used for campus ministry offices. With the help of many volunteers, a Neighbors in Need grant as well as other funding both from members and from donations of services and products from the community, the church renovated the house to serve as a transitional residence for families who are homeless. Arlington is a host church for Family Promise and this is part of their work with this community ministry (the Family Promise ministry serves families who are homeless in cooperation with networks of churches in each city where they have a presence). The transition home will give families who are almost ready to move into permanent housing several months to be in one place at a low cost and gain even more financial stability. This is just one of over a dozen local missions in which they participate through either financial support, hands-on ministries or both.

Jacksonville/Riverside UCC: On November 19, inspirational singer Charlotte A. Martin performed a concert at her church home at Riverside UCC, featuring music from her newest CD (her second) titled “The Love of Angels.” She also debuted her first Christmas song, “The News is This Morning” (available at cdbaby.com). All proceeds from this Christmas release went directly to the church; Charlotte donates half the proceeds from her two albums to the church. For more, go to www.charlotteamartin.com.

Jensen Beach/Community: During the Summer the congregation became increasingly aware of and felt a spiritual calling to serve the hungry in the community. They learned that the homeless population who live in their cars were not able to provide proof of residency and as a result could not qualify for the various food assistance programs. So the church started the Shepherd’s Pantry filled with donations from its members. The congregation made a commitment to serve the hungry -- no matter what -- and the number of families asking for assistance has continued to increase each month. In addition JBCC is pleased that God has blessed the congregation with new growth. In April they started an alternative worship service providing contemporary music using a praise band with audio-visuals. This new service of worship has been well received. They were blessed with the addition of 20 new members during 2011, and their Sunday School has continued to grow with young children.

Lake Park/Community UCC: Members of Community UCC continued their once-a-month service of meals to the homeless at the St. George Mission in Riviera Beach. In September they served 140 people and 100+ in October.

Lake Worth/First Congregational: The church began partnering with area organizations to make positive changes in the community, including gleaning fields of local farmers to provide fresh produce for the hungry and making repairs to local homes. The
congregation also embarked on the discernment process of Open and Affirming.

**Longwood/Longwood Hills Congregational:** This is a congregation with a heart to feed God’s children, body and soul. In 2011 its food pantry gave away 8,000 pounds of food to people in need. It also provided a hot meal each month during its Second Sunday free lunch program. Last year, Longwood Hills added to its food ministries by breaking ground on a community garden and celebrated its first harvest, which allowed them to give away fresh vegetables to food pantry patrons.

**Marco Island/United Church of:** The church has run one of the oldest thrift stores in Collier County for over 37 years and has celebrated its first anniversary in their new building at 750 Bald Eagle (the previous location had the challenges of parking and the folks from whom the church rented a lot wanted to sell it to the church for three times what it is worth). This is not a run-of-the-mill thrift store but handles everything from clothing to household items to furniture and more. The store serves over 300 people a day and the proceeds help fund many missions and worthy causes. Over the next five or six years, the church hopes to have it paid off so United Church can do even more for missions and helping people with a hand up, not a hand out. The church also paid for its 14th Habitat house. United Church feels blessed and hopes it is a blessing to others.

**Melbourne/CrossRoads Community Church:** The church was an open site last summer for the Federal Summer Food Service Program. CrossRoads volunteers gathered every Tuesday and Thursday through July to serve lunch to their neighbors. Any child 18 years and younger could eat lunch provided free by the program while parents could enjoy a meal provided by the church. The congregation is eagerly awaiting Summer 2012 when it plans to expand the program to more days.

**Miami/Christ Congregational:** Stronger ties to the wider Church and wider digital outreach were the highlights of 2011 for Christ Congregational. Beginning with General Synod in Tampa, the church sent 14 volunteers to help with hospitality for attendees and had one youth attend the Youth at Synod program. The church was also a leadership congregation, providing a $5,000 donation to the Florida Conference General Synod Fundraising Initiative and the women of the church provided 200 dozen cookies for the Cookie Hospitality. This effort was followed by participation in the Mission:1 program with members of the congregation exceeding two of the three goals it set as challenges. The church continued to develop its digital outreach by seeking to provide clearly spiritual content on the web. Pastor Rev. Dr. Steve Hudder continued to produce a weekly eDevotional sent to 150 persons via e-mail plus posted on the church website. These eDevotionals continued to be used as the primary means of conducting the stewardship campaign with their frequency increased to twice weekly. The church is also developing a Facebook fan page as a means of widening its digital outreach.

**Miami/Church of the Open Door Congregational:** The Church of the Open — where their motto is “An oasis of resources in a desert of need” and the 2011 theme was “Reaping God’s Harvest” — witnessed several key events in the life of the congregation: 1) Hosted a Spring Revival, “A National Consultation of UCC African American Leadership,” attended by UCC General Minister and President, Rev. Dr. Geoffrey Black; 2) The annual Amistad Sunday was observed in memory of the 19th century slave revolt that was the turning point in the abolition movement led by the UCC; 3) Annual Homecoming and Revival Service, welcoming absent members and friends to reunite and recapture the spirit of love and unity, with revivalist Rev. Dr. James A. Forbes, Jr., Senior Minister Emeritus of the Riverside Church/New York City; 4) As participants in Mission:1 goal, the church chose a service project at one of the local rehabilitation centers for the homeless. They prepared and distributed 111 adult gift bags of toiletries and 40 children’s gift bags of special treats. 5) During the Thanksgiving season, the annual Harvest Fest ministry’s primary focus was feeding the homeless and elderly, providing complete food bags for families in need, financial tokens and clothing.

**Miami/Key Biscayne Community Church:** Church member Michele Estevez made more than a half dozen trips to Haiti, each time taking much needed supplies. She made it her goal to rebuild a Cap Haitian orphanage and school that were devastated by the 2010 earthquake. On each trip she personally supervised the unloading of her large cargo containers and the distribution of clothes, food, candy, toys and furniture. Michelle has brought back many paintings she purchased from Haitian artists, which are displayed in a restaurant she owns; the paintings are for sale to help support her trips. She took a $1,000 load of dolls and balls bought by the Children’s Church of KBCC along with clothing and furniture and other supplies donated by residents of Key Biscayne for the orphanage and school (the photo attached shows Michele with some of the students wearing their new clothes).

**Miami/Plymouth Congregational:** Plymouth had a good 2011. It continued its partnership with a 700 student school in Haiti and managed to deliver and install a water purification plant that supplies safe drinking water to not only the school but to the village as well. Closer to home Plymouth served and paid for 16 meals at the Chapman Partnership for the homeless in downtown Miami (between 350 and 700 individuals per
The congregation bought and wrapped the gifts and Santa de 1st and 2nd grades at Leisure Elementary School in Leisure City. The congregation helped Santa Claus deliver over 350 gifts to the children of K, the members and friends of Sunset Congregational Church also prepared and delivered 700 bags of cookies and candies for the children of the other grades in the school.

Miami/Sunset Congregational: For the 19th year in a row, the members and friends of Sunset Congregational Church helped Santa Claus deliver over 350 gifts to the children of K, 1st and 2nd grades at Leisure Elementary School in Leisure City. The congregation bought and wrapped the gifts and Santa delivered them to the children. The congregation arranged for the Santa to be escorted by members of the Miami-Dade Fire Department, which delivered Santa in one of their fire trucks. The congregation also prepared and delivered 700 bags of cookies and candies for the children of the other grades in the school.

Miami Beach/Community: The church received another grant to bring a string orchestra to the church from Europe in cooperation with the Symphony of the Americas Summerfest program. The Remenyec Ede Chamber Orchestra from Hungary again performed at the church.

Miami Lakes/Congregational: For the Mission:1 effort, the church collaborated with Church World Services to host the 4th Annual Refugee Family Thanksgiving event on the greens of the church grounds. For all of the 80+ people who participated — refugees from Cuba, Haiti, Colombia and Venezuela — this was their first Thanksgiving experience in the United States. Along with a bounce house, the children played soccer while the adults socialized with one another as best they could, in some combination of Spanish, English and Creole. A picnic lunch was served for more than 100 people, which included volunteers from Church World Services, the student Rotary Club from the University of Miami as well as from the congregation. Before leaving, each family was given a Thanksgiving basket, including a turkey, for their own family Thanksgiving celebration.

Miami Shores/Community Church: Pastor Rev. Jim Kvetko’s first communion class for third graders might have been unusual in at least a few respects. There were five students – all boys! – and the class materials were taken from UCC, Lutheran and Roman Catholic sources.

Naples/UCC: For Mission:1 the church packaged 111,111 fortified packages of macaroni and cheese with help from Meals of Hope. With over 300 volunteers, the meals were packed and ready to be loaded within two hours. In order to house all the volunteers and supplies, set-up for the event was in two different buildings. There were about 31 tables at the NUCC campus that held up the packaging supplies. Volunteers wore their hair nets and they filled, sealed, boxed and repeated until every piece of macaroni was in a bag. After the packages were taken to the Harry Chapin Food Bank, they were then divided among 170 food-assisting agencies throughout the Southwest Florida region. NUCC also draped a giant, blue banner in front of the sanctuary, large enough for passersby to see and begin to wonder how they could help those who go hungry day to day.

Naples/UCC at the Lighthouse: The congregation had 25 of its members join with Naples UCC to pack almost 112,000 meals exceeding the goal of 111,111 for Mission:1. Lighthouse had people participating from age four to over 90 years of age.

New Port Richey/Community Congregational: Community Congregational finished its 2010-2011 commitment as a cold-night shelter for the homeless in West Pasco. The church is working with a non-profit organization in New Port Richey called “One Community Now” whose mission is to promote ecumenism in New Port Richey while working on community projects for the welfare of the city and its citizens. 2011 was the year which we started bi-monthly bloodmobile drives to give the “gift of life.” Their last two drives were co-sponsored with First United Methodist Church in New Port Richey.

New Smyrna Beach/UCC of…: The year was certainly a challenging year for the church. It successfully weathered achieving Open and Affirming status in March, Pastor Rev. Dr. Sarah Lund took a well-deserved four month sabbatical July through October, several of the church’s beloved staunch members died and the reality of severely dwindling reserve funds was squarely confronted in December. Through it all, the congregation grew in knowledge and strength. For example, Pastoral Care Teams were created and taught by Revs. Sarah and Vonshelle Beneby on how to visit hospitals, nursing homes, etc. and address the spiritual needs of congregants and their families when no pastor is readily available. These successful teams continue their work today as needed. The church gives thanks for God’s steadfast love.

North Miami/First Church Congregational: The church once again held a community-wide health fair. This one took place on Saturday, March 26, and was free to the public.
Reasoning. The church continues to be integral to the Central Jews, Muslims, Buddhists Hindus, Sikhs, atheists and am-

Hal McSwain

by kids in the congregation) in cash contributions.

refreshments. The event was co-sponsored with the Jessie Trice

Medicaid and food stamp applications were available. There

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various health issues, which included heart disease, high blood

pressure, diabetes, cholesterol, cancer, HIV/AIDS and STDs.

Medicaid and food stamp applications were available. There

were clowns and games for the children along with music and refreshments. The event was co-sponsored with the Jessie Trice

Community Health Center.

North Port/Community UCC: For Mission:1 the church passed along 306 canned goods and almost $275 ($151 collected

by kids in the congregation) in cash contributions.

Ocala/First Congregational UCC: The church conducted an interfaith service on September 11th attended by Christians,

Jews, Muslims, Buddhists Hindus, Sikhs, atheists and am-

bivalent. Also offered was a Lenten series on moral/ethical

Reasoning. The church continues to be integral to the Central Florida Master Choir, which is conducted by Pastor Rev.

Dr. Hal McSwain.

Orange City/First Congregational: There is no doubt that the little congregation at First Congregational makes a

difference in the world around them as they continue to operate a thrift shop and garage for those in the community and share

buildings on their campus with five AA groups, Meals on

Wheels, art classes, the Volusia Music Club, Nimble Fingers

Quilt Guild and the VIA Orange City Women’s Club. Members

and friends of the congregation contributed more than $6,000

to mission projects throughout the year, including the UCC

5-for-5 offerings. They had a growing year in 2011, taking

in new members, celebrating multiple baptisms, introducing

a rotation-based church school curriculum and seeing a 26%

increase in pledges.

Orlando/First UCC: It was a year of service for First

UCC. The much needed food ministry of Rebecca’s Pantry

continued and was expanded to include TEFAP food. Hundred-

eds of people of all ages received groceries and information

on social services through this ministry, begun as a memorial
to a young woman. Another ministry, Cindy’s Thrift Shop,

provides clothes and household goods to neighborhood

families at very affordable prices, while producing income

for the church and allowing families to recycle items they no

longer need. The Mary Marthas, a long-time women’s group

in the church, meets every Wednesday to sew school bags for

migrant workers’ children, provide resources to local school

teachers and knit caps for newborns.

Orlando/University Congregational: The church began

having “Messy Church” on Christmas Day, and it plans to

continue the practice whenever there is a fifth Sunday in the

month. They started using this style of worship and educa-
tion to include children in the worship life of the church in a

more real way than just through a token storyline. The kids

also take the offering every Sunday. Because the church’s

Fellowship Hall and worship space are the same area, it

makes it a little easier. The setup is tables and chairs, instead

of rows of chairs and worship is in that setting. Just about

anything goes. On Christmas Day, they had a sing-a-long and

potluck brunch. They played a “get to know you” game and

then shared one thing new they’d learned about each other.

From the response, a good time was had by all, young and

old — Messy Church is a great way to include all ages in a

new worship experience.

Palm Bay/Riviera UCC: Last Summer the Community

Family Players, a theatre troupe ministry of Riviera UCC,
dedicated to connecting youth and the community through the

performing arts, performed William Shakespeare’s
timeless classic “Much Ado About Nothing.” A team of over two dozen

youth and adults was busy working on the play which opened in late

July ran for eight performances. Ticket proceeds from the special
gala performance ($20) on July 24 went to the church. Evening and

matinee performance ticket prices for adults ($11) and kids ($6) were

reduced $1 with the donation of a canned good. The play was directed

by Pastor Rev. Scott Elliott.

Pensacola Beach/Community UCC: Because of marketing, PBCC now calls themselves “The Beach Church.” 2011 was a great

year for them and they celebrate God’s blessing. It was a year

that they experienced increased attendance and membership.

However, the highlight of 2011 was their effort with Mission:1.

Conference Board Member Scott Neal, after the introduction

of Mission:1 at a board meeting, came back to the church and

challenged them. The challenge wasn’t just to collect food for

Mission:1 and have it on 11.11.11, but to collect 11 tons of food

for those in need. They took the challenge seriously and began

involving not only their congregation but the community. They
did not collect 11 tons but instead 14 tons! Thanks be to God.

Pinellas Park/Good Samaritan: In 2011 Good Sam cel-

ebrated the culmination of its centennial year. Historians and

videographers created lasting memories of where the church

has been and what everyone loves about this courageous and

compassionate church of justice and peace, calling them to

continue to be the change we seek in the world. The congregation

stepped into the future with a live-streamed cyber service with

participants Skyped in from South Africa and Australia and the

congregation texting prayer requests. Good Sam streamlined

organizational processes, revitalized its Sunday School and

launched a “home schooling” library of progressive Christianity

resources for adults. They sponsored their first annual commu-
nity art show by students in local schools, fought for the passage

of the Presbyterian Church’s Amendment 10-A for LGBT rights

and fed twice as many people as ever before through its food

pantry. Members then began to create a centennial mosaic of the

Good Samaritan, tile by tile and committed -- person-by-person,
together -- to be that Samaritan here-and-now.

Port Orange/UCC: Rev. Dr. William Wassner accepted a
call to become the Senior Minister in January and was installed

in November. He and his talented wife Lisa report they are
thrilled to be here (having relocated from South Bend, IN).

During the year a new outside sign was erected and the west

property cleared for future expansion. The church began its own

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Port St. Lucie/Faith Congregational Church: The con-
gregation celebrated the tenth anniversary of Faith Community

Kitchen, a program in which it has provided a hot meal every

Thursday evening to those in the community who are hungry

for food or fellowship. When first begun in 2001, they would

average 20-30 people per week. Over the years it has grown to

now averaging 175-225. With their commercial kitchen, they

are able to use glasses, cups, silverware and dishes to serve the
meals to their guests. Some 30 volunteers each week provide this meal, which is served to guests at their tables. Most of the volunteers are members of Faith Church, but they do have a few who come from the community. The cost of the meals is supported by member and community contributions and a variety of fundraising events and grants. The church has established a relationship with the local food bank from which it receives some free food for meals and for its food pantry. Good relationships with local food stores result in some food at low or no cost. Faith Community Kitchen was the first weekly meal established in Port St. Lucie and now there are three other programs operating.

**Port St. Lucie/First Congregational:** The highlight of 2011 for First Congregational was the calling of a full-time Pastor for the first time since 1988. After a long and extensive search, which included the review of more than 60 ministerial profiles, in August the congregation called Rev. Kenneth H. Frey to be its new Senior Minister. Through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Rev. Ken, who came to the church as its spiritual leader in October along with his wife Dawn, arrived from Pennsylvania and have brought with them a new energy that excites the members at First. And, as children of God, they are looking forward to spreading and sharing this new energy.

**Punta Gorda/Congregational UCC:** Leonardo DaVinci’s iconic painting “The Last Supper,” re-created by 16 local artists for the Visual Art Center in Punta Gorda, graced the sanctuary wall of the church throughout the month of March. The congregation’s inaugural “Fine Arts Month” celebrated the arts and the community and opened with “Leonardo’s Gala,” a reception celebrating the unique painting that was the centerpiece of the 2011 Year in Review.
Pilgrim reached its goal of over 4,200 boxes. These boxes are presented to Child Protective Services and are given by them when a child is removed from a dangerous or threatening environment in Pinellas County. Along with being a 5- for-5 congregation, the church continues its support of hunger programs in St. Petersburg with a monthly food collection and in the hosting of the 2011 Thanksgiving dinner in Fellowship Hall that served over 500 meals for the community. They give thanks for God’s still-speaking voice for and God’s grace that inspires them.

St. Petersburg/Trinity UCC: 2011 was a transformational year in the life of Trinity UCC. Two newly- gathered congregations – the Lao Ministry of St. Petersburg and Anointed Word Fellowship – brought new energy and a vision of a New Trinity with the three congregations worshipping at the same time on Sunday morning, each maintaining its own cultural flavor. Fellowship, education for children – including Vacation Bible School and some mission activities -- are shared. During the monthly shared meal following worship, everyone gets to sample food specialties of the different cultural traditions. A highlight was World Communion Sunday in October with all three congregations sharing communion in the courtyard. One participant said, “I think this is what heaven looks like.”

Sanibel/Congregational UCC: In late March members of the church participated in a discernment of their direction as a church family. Those attending worship received a copy of the summary, which had been prepared based on the surveys filled out by more than 250 members and friends of the church as part of its Mutual Ministry Review. This summary highlighted the results of that survey and pointed in some interesting directions in terms of their future as a congregation. Pastor Rev. Dr. John Danner thought it provided, among other things, wonderful grist for the mill as the Long Range Planning Committee began its work. He believes filling the survey was one way to be involved in the ministry at SCUCC “for the best ministry, is mutual ministry — shared ministry!”

Sarasota/First Congregational UCC: Two members of the congregation came from a church in Connecticut that helped sponsor an orphanage in Haiti with the initials H.E.L.O. They “infected” First Congregational with their enthusiasm for the work with the children. In 2010 their energy gathered in a lot of interest and funds and some mission activities -- are shared. During the monthly shared meal following worship, everyone gets to sample food specialties of the different cultural traditions. A highlight was World Communion Sunday in October with all three congregations sharing communion in the courtyard. One participant said, “I think this is what heaven looks like.”

Sebring/Emmanuel UCC: Emmanuel UCC saw 2011 as a year of continued growth in attendance, membership and outreach to the community. Its four annual fundraisers — Global Missions Fair, Harvest Home, Spaghetti Dinner and Yard Sale -- each exceeded 2010’s performance in both attendance and profitability. Each of these events also served to introduce the church’s welcoming congregation to others living nearby. To reach out even further to the community at-large, Emmanuel maintained a presence at local events such as art fairs, animal blessings and an aviation event. However, they believe that merely having a presence in the community is not enough to respond fully to what Christ has called them to be. Accordingly, they met their Mission: 1 goals and continued support of local food banks and charities.

Seminole/Chapel on the Hill: The Mission Guild at COTH stitched little dresses and boys’ britches for orphans in 46 countries plus Appalachia here in the U.S. Two dozen little blankets were completed for church member Elizabeth Torres to distribute to low income children and needy elderly in Ceiba, Puerto Rico.

Spring Hill/UCC: It was an exciting year for Spring Hill UCC. The congregation continued to grow in membership and to develop new mission outreach opportunities to serve the community. It began hosting the new Hernando County PFLAG group, which was inspired by several members of the congregation, and it started an HIV/AIDS support group for the community as well. The Mission Team took on a project of buying books for school children in a poorer area of the community and several others who hold their annual meetings in church facilities. Fellowship Hall was renamed Stewart Hall, to honor the life of founding pastor, Rev. James Stewart. Completed and dedicated was the large new lighted sign along Beneva Road to inform people driving by of the church’s message and activities. Members are involved in mission projects in the Sarasota area, such as SURE — Sarasota United for Responsibility and Equity, an ecumenical group to address local problems — and CROP Walk, which raises money to combat hunger.

Sebastian/The United Church of...: The congregation maintained its support of the Ecumenical Council Food Pantry with continued donations. A liaison from the church to the food pantry gathers the donations weekly and takes them to the pantry. They are blessed to have the constant support of Carl and Patti Goins, who transport the food and remind the church of the special needs of the food pantry. A frequent need is peanut butter because it spans so many nutritional needs and is a favorite (the photo shows a recent peanut butter pyramid at the church). Pasta and vegetables also seem to be in constant need. UCS was grateful for the ongoing support of the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, who also provide contributions to the food pantries when they use the church facility for meetings.

Sarasota: St. Andrew: St. Andrew was pleased to have its neighborhood community of Gulf Gate hold its Community Festival on church grounds, with several hundred adults and children in attendance. The church also welcomed that community and several others who hold their annual meetings in church facilities. Fellowship Hall was renamed Stewart Hall, to honor the life of founding pastor, Rev. James Stewart. Completed and dedicated was the large new lighted sign along Beneva Road to inform people driving by of the church’s message and activities. Members are involved in mission projects in the Sarasota area, such as SURE — Sarasota United for Responsibility and Equity, an ecumenical group to address local problems — and CROP Walk, which raises money to combat hunger.
The church partnered with FAITH guests. Those at FAITH believe in finding art in the heart. As into worship services, including more choir specials and music.

adopting new by-laws and making every effort to build up the is and where it is today. It began at its last annual meeting by adopting a fresh way of being the church and restructuring at Tamarac! The FAITH community re-plowed its foundation community service projects.

Each week the church continued to have first-time visitors in worship and the congregation is known in the community for its extravagant welcome and good music.

Sun City Center/United Community Church: The church presented a check for $1,145 to AMI Kids, a non-profit program for at-risk boys between the ages of 14-18. The facility is located in rural Wimauma and combines education, treatment and behavior medication to provide for the needs of the boys.

Tallahassee/United Church of: UCT became involved with two new areas of ministry in 2011. In February it became a partner agency with Second Harvest to provide a food pantry to people in need. The new arrangement allows the church to purchase food at a much lower cost, increasing the quantity of food available. In addition, the purchase of a large chest freezer allowed the storage of frozen food items which could also be made available to “shoppers” (averaged number in 2011: 133 shoppers per month). In August UCT began a campus ministry partnership with the Episcopal University Center (EUC) on the Florida State campus. The Episcopal Campus Chaplain and UCT’s Rev. Nancy Dahlberg offer two worship services per week – a contemporary service Thursday night and a traditional service Sunday evening, alternating between Episcopal and UCC-styles of worship. Both include a free dinner for students either before or after the service. In addition, students were involved in community service projects.

Tamarac/Faith United: It was an awesome year of rebuilding at Tamarac! The FAITH community re-plowed its foundation by adopting a fresh way of being the church and restructuring its community in ways that are more relevant to who the church is and where it is today. It began at its last annual meeting by adopting new by-laws and making every effort to build up the Body from the inside out. More music has been incorporated into worship services, including more choir specials and musical guests. Those at FAITH believe in finding art in the heart. As part of living out the “art of service,” the church partnered with the City of Tamarac and officiated at its first community-wide pet blessing at a local park. They partnered with a local family services organization and engaged in a special food drive to help feed children during the summer months, when school lunch programs are unavailable. They held a charity fashion show to benefit “Women in Distress,” a local women-with-children shelter. They supported the local Boy Scouts troop to facilitate several Eagle Scout projects.

Tampa (Brandon)/Faith Family Community Church: The church (in discernment with the UCC) celebrated its second anniversary with a stunning concert in the church given by member Ray Boltz. Ray invited the Pastor, Rev. Dr. Kathy Rooke, to the stage as he sang his famous “thank you” song. There was not a dry eye in the audience as congregants filed to the stage to pay their personal “thank yous” to the founding pastor.

Tampa/First United Church: The church together with the Islamic Community of Tampa, the Friends Meeting of Tampa, the Unitarian Universalist Church of Tampa, Friends of Human Rights and others sponsored two special events on September 10 and 11. First, they took time to break bread together at a barbecue at the Islamic Community of Tampa. It was a time for all the children to play together and for the adults to get to know one another in new ways. A special “Ribbons for Peace” project involved the children, who brought two-foot pieces of ribbon on which were written messages of hope and which then were tied together as a sign of unity and presented by the children as part of the ceremonies. The next day, the church co-sponsored an evening event at the Tampa Performing Arts Center theater, which concluded with a candlelight vigil along the nearby Hillsborough River, believing that we can only have peace if we come together and both pray and work for it. There were poetry readings, dramatic presentations and music. Attendees were asked to bring two items to the event: 1) a three-foot piece of colored ribbon in order to participate in the weaving of a large “Tapestry for Peace” during the event, and 2) a candle for the walking ceremony along the river bank following the end of the theater event.

Venice/The UCC: During the summer, Angela Wells (a Union Theological Seminary student and a member of Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg) was given the opportunity to serve the Venice UCC while their permanent Pastor, Rev. Don Wilson, took a sabbatical. He asked Angela to “lead his flock” while he took the summer to study and rejuvenate. Upon the conclusion of her experience, she shared how as a seminarian the experience had been such great hands-on training – becoming disciplined about all that goes into planning worship services each week (writing prayers, choosing hymns, choosing scripture and writing sermons) and somehow figuring out how to fit all of that along with many other pastoral responsibilities into a structured work week. She said it was a “profound learning and growing experience.”
Vero Beach/The Community Church: Mission: represented one united church on a shared mission to feed the hungry. VBCC contributed about 4,000 items and $21,267 to the area Indian River Food Pantry (compared to $10,850 the previous year). The church also forwarded $2,900 to the Samaritan Center through its Sunday and Thursday Soup Bowl sales, the second highest contribution level for a church in the county. As a result of the outstanding generosity of the congregation, VBCC was able to provide funds for food and shelter in unprecedented numbers to assist families locally. Food purchased in bulk from the Treasure Coast Food Bank at 18 cents per pound stretches dollars very well!

The Villages/UCC at...: Pastor Rev. Drew Willard (center) joined with Imam Abdurrahman Sykes of Islam, Inc. Peace Center (Minneola, FL) and Sheldon Skurow (Spiritual Leader of nearby neighbor Temple Shalom) at The Villages Peace Sunday Service on June 26, a Christian service that included Jewish and Muslim participation as part of the Faith Shared initiative.

West Palm Beach/Union Congregational Church: In reflecting upon the year at Union Congregational, there was great change and much reason to offer thanks as the church has grown in its membership and has begun to place a priority on missions in its surrounding community. In support of these changes, the church has moved towards a Unified Governance model which has enabled it to look closely at their style of leadership and, as a result, has adopted new areas of ministry to include an Events Ministry Team, Visiting Ministry Team and a Worship Arts Ministry Team. In terms of missions, they initiated ministries such as Family Promise, gleaning for others to have food in partnership with CROS ministries and launched a new community garden. Additionally, other ongoing mission and outreach projects included Christmas gifts for the children of migrant farmworkers and the community children’s Christmas party.

Windermere Union Church: The church hosted a free 12-week family-to-family education program offered by the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) of Greater Orlando beginning August 25. Family-to-family is for family members and caregivers of individuals who live with severe and persistent mental illnesses. It was led by trained family members with all instruction and course materials free to participants. Later in October it hosted a Greater Orlando community-wide interfaith candlelight service and educational event to observe the beginning of the nationally-recognized Mental Illness Awareness Week. The event was designed to inspire understanding of these illnesses by the general community and their impact on families. The evening featured a special program entitled, “In Our Own Voice,” developed by NAMI and led by their specially trained facilitators. The evening concluded with a unique and inspiring candlelight service with leaders from many faith traditions participating.

Winter Park/First Congregational Church: In late September First Congregational held its celebratory Global Peace Film Festival event as a place to honor those who promote global and community awareness of peace and environmental sustainability. Its purpose was to draw together filmmakers and filmgoers from all walks of life into a community of people inspired to take action in their daily lives to leave the world a more peaceful place than they found it (source: www.peacefilmfestival.org). Several of the films in this year’s Peace Film Festival were shown in the Media Center at FCC. They included: “Egypt: The Story Behind the Revolution”; “My America”; “One in Seven, The New Face of Hunger”; “Sempter Fi: Always Faithful” and “Operation Peter Pan: Flying Back to Cuba.”

Yulee/New Vision Congregational Church: As a new church start in Nassau County, the church continued to provide a progressive voice of faith in northeast Florida while exploring creative ways to worship and build community together. They are grateful for the financial support received from the Florida Conference that has strengthened their ability to become more known in the community. In 2011 the church was approved to receive a national grant from UCC Local Church Ministries. New Vision strives to offer many ways for people to experience their spirituality and in 2011 hosted an Appalachian storyteller, the Dances of Universal Peace, a workshop on yoga and spirituality and continued to host a jazz worship series in the Fall and Spring.
Mission:1

Churches of the Florida Conference responded with a huge heart to the nationwide UCC effort called Mission:1, which ran from 11.1.11 to 11.11.11. during this period the denomination-wide goal of donating 1 million items of healthy food was exceeded (by 50%) as were the goals of 11,111 letters to Members of Congress and $111,111 to both Neighbors in Need hunger-related ministries and East Africa famine relief. The national church gave us this blessed opportunity to demonstrate “religion with relevance” in such a creative and meaningful way, directly impacting our own communities as well as reaching out to our brothers and sisters abroad.

Congregations which participated included: Pilgrims’ UCC/ Fruitland Park, Faith UCC/Dunedin, Christ Congregational Church/ Miami (see below left), Trinity UCC/St. Petersburg, Good Samaritan/Pinellas Park, Hope UCC/Rockledge, Naples UCC, New Hope UCC/Deland, Miami Lakes Congregational Church, Faith Family Community Church/Tampa (Brandon), UCC at the Lighthouse/Naples, Boynton Beach Congregational Church (see right), Jensen Beach Community Church, Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach, Emmanuel UCC/Sebring, Pensacola Beach Community Church, Church of the Open Door Congregational/Miami, First Congregational Church/Orange City, Riverside UCC/Jacksonville, Fort Myers Congregational Church, Union Congregational Church/Holly Hill, North Port Community UCC.

CLERGY NEW TO FLORIDA
Kenneth H Frey P First Congregational Church/Port S. Lucie
Deborah Kunkel AP Sanibel Congregational UCC
Ann Phillips 4-Way Venice UCC
William Wassner P Port Orange UCC
Dennis Eastling IN Key Biscayne Community Church

CLERGY CHANGES
Charles Nichols CH First United Church of Tampa
Jack Fielding P First Congregational Church/Orange City
Angela Wells LM Venice UCC
Stephen Heath P Union Congregational Church/Holly Hill
Frank Faine P First Congregational Church/Lake Helen
John Nutting IN Union Congregational Church/Holly Hill
Joe Stock IN Union Congregational Church/Holly Hill
Leonard West SS Community Congregational UCC/Ocala
Robert Melhorn IN Altamonte Chapel/Altamonte Springs
Earl Keirstead IN Miami Beach Community Church
Sheila Guillaume Co-P Union Congregational Church/West Palm Beach
Phyllis Pantihem Co-P Union Congregational Church/West Palm Beach
Deborah McBride Ordained First Congregational UCC/Sarasota
David Wild P/T Marion Oaks Community Congregational UCC
Joseph LaDu IN North Port Community UCC
Brad Lutz 4-Way VITAS Innovative Hospice/Broward,
Miami Shores Community Church

Megan (Korallis) Smith AP Coral Gables Congregational Church
Mark Goforth P Community UCC/Lake Park
Joel Reif AP Community Church/Vero Beach
Merle Dech P/T P All Faiths UCC/Ridge Manor
Estrella Valino LM Arlington Congregational Church/Jacksonville
Donna Cooney LM UCC/St. Augustine
Donna Ives CH Moffitt Cancer Center/Tampa
Ellen Blaise CH Sacred Heart Hospital,
Pensacola Beach Community Church
Daniel Maiden IN Good Samaritan Church/Pinellas Park
Leigh McCaffrey IN First UCC/Orlando
Brenda Adcock P University Congregational/Orlando

ORDINATIONS
Deborah McBride First Congregational UCC/Sarasota
Megan (Korallis) Smith Coral Gables Congregational Church

RETIRED
Tom Brenner
Donna Ives
Margaret (Peg) Doherty
Luther Pierce
Richard Horn
Garth Thompson
Hiram Irizarry

SERVICES CONCLUDED
Daniel Maiden Island Chapel/Longboat Key
Charles (Bud) Schroeder Key Biscayne Community Church
Sandra Mineau Sanibel Congregational UCC
Robert Townsend Mayflower UCC/Naples
Garth Thompson Miami Beach Community Church
Merlin Conrad Miami Beach Community Church
David Wild All Faiths UCC/Ridge Manor
Barry Mick Congregational UCC/Bradenton
Susan Sherwood Good Samaritan Church/Pinellas Park
Charles Mory First Congregational Church/Orange City
Joel Reif First UCC/Orlando
Kenneth Briggs Congregational UCC/ Bradenton
Pamela Braid Hope Unites/Orlando
Aqueelah As-Salaam First Church of North Miami Congregational
David Dean

Services

First UCC/Orange City
First UCC/Bradenton
First UCC/Orlando
First Church of North Miami Congregational
Presbyterian & Disciples of Christ Student Center,
University of Florida, United Church of Gainesville
Haven Hospice, United Church of Gainesville
North Port Community UCC
Hope Unites/Orlando
### Specialized Ministers

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Institution/Location</th>
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<tr>
<td>Rev. Sherry Angus</td>
<td>Chaplain - Venice UCC, TideWell Hospice &amp; Palliative Care/Sarasota</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. Dr. Walter Barker</td>
<td>Pastoral Counselor - First Congregational Church/Winter Park, Pathfinders Counseling &amp; Consultation/Orlando</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. Vonshelle Benefry</td>
<td>Chaplain – UCC/New Smyrna Beach,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. Ellen Blaise</td>
<td>Chaplain - Pensacola Beach Community UCC, Sacred Heart Hospital/Pensacola</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. Thomas Brenner</td>
<td>Chaplain - Fort Myers Congregational, Cape Coral Hospital (now retired)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. Donna Carey</td>
<td>Chaplain - Hope UCC/Rockledge, VITAS/ Titusville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. Mardie Chapman</td>
<td>Chaplain - Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg, St. Anthony’s Hospital/ St. Petersburg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. David Dean</td>
<td>Student Center/University of Florida and currently with Global Ministries as Associate Missionary in England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. Dr. Virginia Doherty</td>
<td>Chaplain - First Congregational Church/ Lake Helen, Visiting Nurse Assoc./Orlando and currently part-time Pastor at First Congregational/Lake Helen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. Carol Fields</td>
<td>Chaplain - St. Andrew UCC/Sarasota, TideWell Hospice &amp; Palliative Care/ Sarasota</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rev. Graciela Flores</td>
<td>Chaplain - First United Church of Tampa, Moffitt Cancer Center/Tampa</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rev. Mark Goforth</td>
<td>Chaplain - Community UCC/Lake Park, VITAS/North Miami</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rev. Dr. Fay Golding</td>
<td>Chaplain - Faith UCC/Tamarac, VITAS/ Plantation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rev. Dr. Sheila Guillaume</td>
<td>Chaplain - Union Congregational Church/West Palm Beach, VITAS Hospice/Palm Beach County</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rev. Dianne Hudder</td>
<td>Chaplain - Christ Congregational/ Miami, VITAS/South Dade-Miami</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. Misti Johnson-Arce</td>
<td>Chaplain - Congregational Church of Boca Raton, Sr. ACPE Supervisor VITAS Innovative Hospice/Fort Lauderdale</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rev. Dr. Beth B. Kollas</td>
<td>Windermere Union Church, Orlando Regional Healthcare System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. David Lane</td>
<td>Chaplain - Christ Congregational/Miami, VITAS, South Dade-Cutler Bay</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rev. Jacqueline Lewis</td>
<td>Chaplain - Spring Hill UCC, Hernando-Pasco Hospice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rev. Marilyn Lewis</td>
<td>Chaplain - First Congregational UCC/Sarasota, Blake Medical Center/ Bradenton</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rev. Tom Lilly</td>
<td>Chaplain - First Congregational UCC/Fort Lauderdale, VITAS/Fort Lauderdale</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rev. Daniel Maiden</td>
<td>Interim Pastor at Good Samaritan Church/Pinellas Park</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rev. Gregorio Marin</td>
<td>Chaplain - Coral Gables Congregational Church, Baptist Health/ South Florida- Miami</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rev. Martha McInnes</td>
<td>Chaplain - Interfaith Hospitality Network of Greater Gainesville, Inc. and currently with Global Ministries as Associate Missionary in England</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rev. David Pitt</td>
<td>Chaplain - Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg, All Children’s Hospital/St. Petersburg</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rev. Ann Phillips</td>
<td>Chaplain - Venice UCC, TideWell Hospice of Sarasota, Charlotte &amp; DeSoto Counties</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rev. Linn Possell</td>
<td>Older Adult Ministry, Florida Conference UCC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rev. Dr. Patrick Powers</td>
<td>Chaplain, Rollins College/Winter Park</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rev. Nancy Prout</td>
<td>Chaplain – Christ’s Promise UCC/Auburndale, Good Shepherd Hospice/Auburndale</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rev. Mary Ramsay</td>
<td>Chaplain - First Congregational UCC/Fort Lauderdale, VITAS/Fort. Lauderdale</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rev. Dr. Jihey Esther Roach</td>
<td>Chaplain - Christ Congregational/Miami, VITAS/North Miami Beach</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rev. Beverly Ross</td>
<td>Chaplain - Coral Gables Congregational, VITAS/North Miami Beach</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. James T. Wagner</td>
<td>Chaplain - United Church of Gainesville, University of Florida</td>
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</tbody>
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### Memories -- for all who ...

- quilted or knitted something for a stranger
- paid tribute on 9-11

Members of Good Samaritan Church/ Pinellas Park wrote prayers on ribbons, which were tied to a tapestry in New York City’s Battery Park in remembrance of 9-11
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**MEMORIES -- for all who**

... made a joyful noise unto the Lord

Swing band at First Congregational Church/Orange City

... were touched by the Spirit

Rev. Ken Briggs serving Communion at Synod
MEMBERS IN DISCERNMENT

Maria Anderson (Coral Gables Congregational)
James Andrews (Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg) University of South Florida
Allison Baker (Windermere Union UCC) Chicago Theological Seminary
Ian Beason (Longwood Hills Congregational) Asbury Theological Seminary
Rosario Bottari (Miami Lakes Congregational) Duke Divinity School
Laurie Braid/Rabideau – (UCC/New Smyrna Beach) Florida Center for Theological Studies (dropped as inactive)
Sandra Cencebaugh (First UCC/Hollywood) Florida International University
Donna Cooney (UCC/St. Augustine) Florida Center for Theological Studies
Arturo de Robles (Christ Congregational/Miami)
Jenny Gragg (Plymouth Congregational Church/Miami) Princeton University
Zach Graves (United Church of Gainesville) Graduated from Candler School of Theology
Rick Harrell (First Congregational UCC/Sarasota) Bethel Seminary
Cynthia Lee (Miami Beach Community Church) Eden Theological Seminary
John D. Letson (First Congregational UCC/Fort Lauderdale) Florida Center for Theological Studies
Harvey Lockhart (Church of the Open Door Congregational/Miami) Graduated from Florida Center for Theological Studies
Brenda Marin (Coral Gables Congregational) Lancaster Theological
Sara Martz (Community Church/Vero Beach) Asbury Theological Seminary
Pamela McCorry (Union Congregational/West Palm Beach) Drew University Theological School
Elizabeth Miles (United Church in Tallahassee) Florida Center for Theological Studies, Emory
David Morse (First Congregational UCC/Fort Lauderdale)
Carrie Nelson-Johnson (The United Church in Tallahassee) Andover Newton Theological School (withdrawn MID standing)
Pamela Oliveria (Naples UCC)
Sheri Slusher (Longwood Hills Congregational Church)
Greg Smith (Naples UCC)
Megan Smith (Coral Gables Congregational) Florida Center for Theological Studies (now ordained)
Estrella (Star) Valino (Riverside UCC/Jacksonville)
Angela Wells (Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg) Union Seminary
Paul Werner (First United Church of Tampa) Florida Center for Theological Studies

ANNIVERSARY OF ORDINATION

5 Years
Sherry Angus
Ellen Blaise
Gaye Bosley-Mitchell
Graciela Flores
Glennycce Grindstaff
Talia Raymond
Gloria Van Houten

10 Years
Karen Curtis-Weakley
Linda Giroux
Deborah Kunkel
Nancy Ann Prout
Mary Ramsay

15 Years
Bonnie Frost
Robert Johnson
Guilermo Marquez-Sterling
Barry Mick
Denise Terry

20 Years
Luís Perez
Danny Roman-Gloro

25 Years
Karen Barker-Duncan
Raymond Hargrove
William Noel Koch
Myra Nagel
Matthew L. Neumann
Philip White
Robert Joaquin Willis

30 Years
Keith Haemmelmann
Anne Hess
William R. Mulford
Wayne A. Robinson

35 Years
William Breylinger

40 Years
M. Douglas Borko
Robert W. Clark
Gerald E. Schumm
David A. Wild

45 Years
Paul J. Binder
George Castillo
G. Scott Comrie
Albert Leroy Goddard
Thomas L. Golladay
Sandra Mineau
Randall H. Niehoff
J. Gregory Tweed

50 Years
Henry Frank Ackermann
Louis D. Leone
William Allen Main
Gerald R. O’Connor
Glenn E. Swope
Charles William Wealand
John H. Williams

55 Years
Walter F. Horlander
Wayne E. Smith
Arden M. Yakimow

60 Years
Harold Allen Davenport
Thomas Lawrence
J. Richard Stein
Kenneth H. Worthman

65 Years
William Koshewa

70 Years
James B. Allan
Frederick N. Nelson

IN MEMORY

Donald Hafner
July 4, 2011

Charles J. Sheffield
March 14, 2012

Karen Ducham
March 23, 2012
Thank you for the honor of serving as Florida’s representative on the Executive Council of the United Church of Christ. First of all let me remind you that all of the work of the Executive Council is available at [http://www.ucc.org/executive-council/](http://www.ucc.org/executive-council/). This includes budget reports, minutes, committee reports, etc.

Since the Synod meeting in Tampa, I have served as the co-chair of the Development Committee. Our committee works with members of the national staff to design strategies to provide the necessary support for the Church’s mission, including efforts to help local congregations in their fundraising efforts.

Since 1990, support for Our Church’s Wider Mission nationally fell by 24%, which is a 54% dip adjusted for inflation. That fall in income is somewhat placed in context by fewer members and fewer congregations, but the exciting thing is that there is still extraordinary vitality for mission in the UCC — with local congregations devoting over $50 million annually to local, national and international mission efforts. Amazing things are happening in congregations of every size because people are energized by mission and giving follows mission enthusiasm. Let me share a quote from a member of our national staff: “Extraordinary experiences inspire extraordinary philanthropy.”

Recognizing that mission is no longer a distant frontier and that we live in an era of “donor choice,” the current leadership of our denomination is working to support local congregations and conferences in their fundraising efforts.

In 2011, OCWM giving totaled over $24.6 million; conferences retained $17.2 million and sent $7.4 million on for the work of the wider church.

[To jump ahead to our 2012 Spring meeting, the Executive Council heard reports from the members of the Collegium of Officers, three of whom were elected at the Tampa Synod. To meet them and hear more about their vision for our UCC, go to [www.ucc.org/god-is-still-speaking/ads/](http://www.ucc.org/god-is-still-speaking/ads/) and play the one entitled: “UCC Values”. In their report to the Executive Council, they shared four “Bold, Inspirational Goals (BIGs)” that will guide their leadership. While this is still a work in progress, these goals reflect our UCC core values: continuing testament, extravagant welcome and changing lives. In the days ahead their energy will be focused toward these goals.]

If you have questions about this report or wish to communicate about your vision for the UCC, you can reach me at rpatterson@naplesucc.org or by phone at 239/253-1512.

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**Justice and Witness Ministry**

Women and men of faith descended upon the nation’s capital in late March 2011 to attend a gathering called Ecumenical Advocacy Days. The theme was “Development, Security and Economic Justice: What’s Gender Got to Do with It?” More than 700 persons representing over 50 national Christian organizations gathered to worship and dialogue and were inspired and helped to be equipped to speak boldly on behalf of people-centered sustainable development and economic justice, physical safety, security and peacemaking, all with a particular focus on those most impacted — women, girls and families. [The 2012 EAD was themed, “Is This the Fast I Seek?”]

During 2011 plans were made to move from advocacy to action with a first training event in late April 2012 at the UCC Environmental Justice Center at Pilgrim Firs in Port Orchard, WA. Participants will focus on five basic environmental justice themes: gratitude, humility, responsibility, justice, and community.

The Justice and Witness Ministry staff continues to address the issue of incarceration in the United States. Currently, there are more than 2.2 million people incarcerated in the United States according to the U.S. Department of Justice. About 1.5 million are in Federal or state facilities for adults with the remainder in local jails, juvenile facilities, military prisons, jails, Indian reservations or immigration facilities. However, this is not the complete picture; more than 5 million additional persons are under justice supervision, either on probation or on parole. Many of those incarcerated would biblically be considered the “least of these” -- they are poor with limited education and support. Rev. Sala Nolan Gonzales, UCC Minister for Criminal Justice and Human Rights (JWM), works on behalf of the UCC to highlight the inadequacies in the criminal justice system. In support of the efforts of the Justice and Witness Ministry around the issue of criminal justice, the UCC Collegium of Officers has sent letters to Federal and state officials protesting the sale of prisons to private companies, and they are encouraging others to do likewise.
Wider Church Ministries/Common Global Ministries

Herein is the report of the Wider Church Ministries (WCM) Board of Directors meeting at the Joint Board’s conference held in Cleveland, OH, November 11-13. The following items were presented to the board for action:

The Finance and Investment Committee of WCM recommended that the Board of Directors suspend the creation of the Executive Minister’s Discretionary Fund as previously considered at the April 8, 2011, Board meeting pursuant to the request of the Executive Minister after his review of the financial status of the ministry, the pressing programmatic needs of the ministry, and the availability of funds noted during the 2012 budget process. APPROVED

The Finance and Investment Committee of WCM recommended that the Board of Directors authorize the Area Executive of East Asia/Pacific to direct the Executive of the Shadan to retain a real estate agent in Japan to place the Fuchu House in West Tokyo for sale and to obtain a sales price not less than $475,000 USD, with the net sales proceeds ultimately being added to Unrestricted Reserves, if allowed under the laws of Japan. APPROVED

James Moos, Executive Minister, WCM shared his reflections with the Board, “Chang

ing Times.” Bing Tso, Chairperson, WCM Board, shared his reflections with the Board. The Nominating Committee recommended to the WCM Board that the election of Oletha Haller, Suzanne Robinson and Marja Coons-Torn to the Common Global Ministries Board be affirmed. APPROVED

The Committee deferred to MRSEJ regarding the replacement for Leon White as a representative to the WCM Board. MRSEJ has selected Toni Dunbar (CA) as the replacement.

The Nominating Committee moved to table the discussion regarding the two vacancies on the UCAN Board. An e-mail was sent to the WCM Board on Tuesday, November 1, 2011, from Nominating Committee Chair Joy Lacanienta and President of the UCAN Inc. Board of Directors Oliver Martin. At present we are seeking to fill the following: A. UCAN Board seat; B. UCAN Liaison seat that will represent the WCM Board Chair (Bing Tso) at all meetings.

The Committee also affirmed the program and administrative committee appointments. The Revised UCC Travel Policy was presented and approved by the board members. James Moos’ 90-day Officer Evaluation was completed by staff and board. The comments were shared with Mr. Moos.

The Combined Financial Report and Audit of the UCC for the year ending, December 31, 2010, was presented and approved. The Board received reports from all of the program committees via e-mail prior to the meeting. The Board received and approved the Ruen Report. Joyce Bathke, Chairperson of the Budget Committee, reported that there is a $362,000 deficit. The Clergy Housing Allowance was reviewed by the Committee and approved by the Board.

Ann Kiernozek gave a detailed report on the budget. The WCM revenues will increase $16,000 in 2012, due to the following:

1. Investment income will go up $9,000
2. A $15,000 increase in Funds and Trust income
3. An increase in transfer from unrestricted reserves of $192,000
4. An additional 1.5% draw per policy vs. 1.25% in 2011
5. A decrease in OCWM of $89,000 as a result of the OCWM National Basic Support Allocation Base being reduced to $7.1 million in 2012 from the $7.5 million Base in 2011
6. Contributions are projected down $100,000 since there is no matching gift program in 2012
7. In 2012, the Council of Theological Students Program will be funded from the use of distributable income on an endowment in the amount of approximately $20,000

WCM had an increase in health/dental premiums of 2.33%. WCM investment fees totaling $61,000 were redirected to the investment allocation vs. being listed as a budget expense. The WCM Legal Expenses and Common Service Allocation increased. There was a savings of $95,000 for 2012 in the Cleveland Resource Development as the UCC Development plan is being considered by the Collegium. The retired missionaries benefits were reduced by $25,000 based on historical trends.

The 2012 budget expenditures cap, not exceeding disbursements of $8,653,444, estimated receipts of $7,513,403 and transfers from FFE II (Unrestricted Reserves) of $1,140,041 (which includes 25% of the funding of the Financial Development office in Cleveland and an extraordinary draw of $191,585), was approved. It was affirmed that the WCM Executive Minister, in consultation with the Executive Committee and the Collegium, develop a plan for financial sustainability for FY2013 and beyond that does not rely on draws from our reserves that exceed our policy guidelines.

Please know that this is a cursory report reflective of this Board meeting. The amount of business covered during this short amount of time is almost overwhelming. However, it remains my pleasure to represent the Florida Conference on the Wider Church Ministries Board of Directors.
Reports from Conference Representatives to National Offices

Local Church Ministries

STEVEN MAYERS
MEMBER, CHURCH BY THE SEA/BAL HARBOUR

For Local Church Ministries, the 2011-12 year has been a year of significant change. In reflection, it seems like the year was one of constant change. And while many, if not all, of the other ministries that make up the board for the national setting probably underwent similar changes, there is no doubt the Local Church Ministries witnessed and took part in a sea of changes, which will have a profound effect on the United Church of Christ for many years in the foreseeable future.

The first of such change was in the retirement of Rev. Steve Sterner, the former Executive Minister, of Local Church Ministries. Steve was one of those people who was not only well-regarded by many but extremely well-liked too. He was both thoughtful and thorough in his approach to solving the complex issues that needed to be addressed by Local Church Ministries. His retirement became effective at the General Synod in July 2011, and his presence will forever be missed.

Steve Sterner’s retirement allowed for a young, bright and ambitious person named Rev. J. Bennett (“Ben”) Guess to be elected to the helm of Local Church Ministries to serve out the remaining tenure left by Steve’s retirement. The Board’s recommendation of Ben as the new Executive Minister was overwhelmingly approved at Synod. Ben, a former staff member of the UCC in Cleveland, has brought a new energy and vision to the position of Executive Minister, and the Local Church Ministries Board of Directors has quickly gravitated to Ben’s spirit and sensitivities. Ben is also a thoughtful and thorough person, as seen by the successful Mission:1 campaign that was his brainchild (although he humbly does not like to take credit for the idea). Many have expressed that under Ben Local Church Ministries is continuing on a very successful path in serving the needs of churches and ministers, while fulfilling the needs of those in need by orchestrating and assisting in the mission work of the church.

Also, as of November 2011, our Conference Minister, Rev. Kent Siladi, was added to the Local Church Ministries Board of Directors.

Local Church Ministries, like the other covenanted ministries, worked on moving forward the proposal for Unified Governance, commonly known as UGov. Once finally approved and implemented, UGov will dramatically change the governing structure of the national setting by combining the boards and covenanted ministries into one unified board of directors for the national church.

Separately, the Local Church Ministries, along with the other covenanted ministries, has recently developed a long-term strategic vision plan for the national setting. Initially, that strategic vision plan was raised and discussed at length at the joint board meeting (a meeting of all of the UCC covenanted ministries and the Collegium members) in November 2011. From that meeting, the strategic vision plan was revised; that plan is known as B1Gs (or Bold Inspirational Goals). In summary there are four major goals for the plan; they are:

1. The UCC is a bold, widely-known and respected public voice of Christianity in service of God’s ever-unfolding mission.
2. There is a welcoming UCC community of faith that is accessible to all — no matter who they are or where they are on life’s journey.
3. Every UCC member is well-equipped to be growing in faith, be theologically conversant and be active in the global mission of the church.
4. The UCC has a wealth of prepared, excellent leaders that reflect the diversity of God’s beloved community.

The Local Church Ministries, by recommendation from the Congregational Vitality & Discipleship Ministry Team, determined that when funding new and renewing UCC congregations that those congregations should be asked to “Pay It Forward,” meaning that they promise to replenish the fund for other churches in the future or financially assist other churches in the future in helping to meet their goals and aspirations.

Under Local Church Ministries there was a section (ministry team) called Parish Life and Leadership. That section has now been changed with a new vision and a new name. The new name is now Ministerial Excellence, Support and Authorization Ministry Team or MESA. MESA represents a movement away from “managing institution-focused relationships and other programmatic responsibilities.” Instead, the focus will be to serve, support and strengthen “authorized ministers (starting with discernment and formation, through education and preparation; ordination, commissioning or licensure; placement and transitions; lifelong continuing education toward ministerial excellence; and, ultimately, transition into retirement).” Also, relationships with college chaplains and campus ministries will be supported in MESA but in the now-expanded full-time position for chaplains and specialized ministries.

Also, it is worthwhile to note that the work of institutional relationships with UCC-related colleges and seminaries is moving from what was the Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team to a newly created leadership development position in the Office of the General Minister and President. [As of March 2012, the new position was open and being advertised.]

With a brief look at the past, as described above, it would a shame not to mention one event that the Local Church Ministries is coordinating in the future. The National Youth Event — NYE, in which the UCC expects over 3,000 youth to assemble at Purdue University this July 10-13 — will undoubtedly be a momentous, and probably a life changing, event for youth. If you or your local church can assist by sponsoring a youth for the event, please contact UCC staff person Ms. Waltrina Middleton, who is part of the Local Church Ministries/ Congregational Vitality & Discipleship Ministry Team, by e-mail at middletonw@ucc.org or by calling her at 216/736-3871.

Read the latest good news about the United Church of Christ in Florida in Celebrate Florida, published six times annually and posted on www.uccfla.org

FLORIDA, published six times annually and posted on www.uccfla.org
Not quite two years in the planning because this Synod was originally scheduled for Hawaii, we discovered what 100 Florida UCC congregations and 20,000 members could do together when we set our minds to it.

Slowly the recruitment began as Mary Nutter (The United Church of Gainesville), Rick Carson (Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach) and I met, strategized, deepened our friendship and learned how to creatively problem-solve. We became very familiar with members of the UCC’s national staff and I dare say that Candy and Kent must have started to mutter every time they saw an e-mail, text or phone call from one of us. What we did best, of course, was to recruit some amazing people to chair all of the committees. Given their tasks, they ran with them, asking appropriate questions and handling each seeming crisis with grace and ingenuity. There were moments: the worship space organizer wanted so many pounds of rock and sand that she put the stage in danger of collapsing; wondering why a national meeting of the church needed 20 toy sand buckets with shovels; VIPs changing in danger of collapsing; wondering why we weren’t there to pick them up. But we had wonderful volunteers, and they persevered and prospered in those five days of Synod. Whenever there was a need, someone stepped up. It was wonderful.

Each of the volunteers has Synod stories to tell. They are stories of friendship and hospitality, tales of laughter and great joy; moments of profound wonder and of finding the presence of God where it had not been anticipated. From a high school sophomore who walked up to the microphone and hit every note of her song, to the usher who held the chalice for hundreds of people to share communion, to the volunteer who took a lost soul by the hand and walked her to the place she wanted to be — Synod was a cherished moment in a life that will live on in memory and hope.

The story of the cookies is one worthy of First Kings’ story of Elijah. The boxes of home-baked cookies from our churches kept coming and coming, a mountain of cookies of every shape and flavor. No one believed we would ever consume so many cookies. Everywhere you looked people had a cookie in their hand—and mouth. Then on the last day, Tuesday, as Synod wound down and the final worship about to start, I sat at the table in the volunteer office and carefully hoarded the last ten cookies from the last box in the entire Convention Center. Several of us shared those cookies in celebration: when there was no more need for cookies, the cookies ran out. God took care of us, with a lot of help from our friends.

Synod changed us. It changed volunteers and visitors. It changed individuals who had never really known much about the denomination and were delightfully surprised. It changed the delegates and visitors who came from all over the world to be a part of those five wonderful days. They went home more aware about issues, praying in new ways, listening where they used to be just talking and hopeful about the United Church of Christ. It changed the Florida Conference, too, in ways that we aren’t yet even aware. We know we can raise $200,000 when it is important to us. We know that we have some powerful preachers and delightful worship leaders in our midst right here in this Conference. And we know that we have some great people in our congregations who can achieve whatever they set their minds to. We are indeed blessed.
The “Imagine What’s Possible, Florida!”
Fundraiser — Another Synod “First”

BY REV. KENT SILADI

CONFERENCE MINISTER

For the first time in Synod history, the host Conference conducted a fundraising effort associated with General Synod. When the Board of Directors approved this fundraising initiative, we set our goal at $100,000. Very quickly we discovered strong support for this effort and so we readjusted our fundraising goal to $200,000 – which we surpassed. We raised $225,000, and we celebrated at a wonderful banquet the Saturday evening of Synod!

The proceeds of the fundraiser went to an ambitious media campaign, provided support with a check for $25,000 to the Coalition of Immokalee Workers and their new community center, covered the expenses of hosting Synod and provided support to the Leadership Initiative of the United Church of Christ.

We are grateful for the 65 churches that participated in our fundraising initiative.

Left: Synod Administrator Edith Guffey sampling some of the tens of thousands of cookies baked by our church members.

Below: Registration desk volunteers preparing for the onslaught of delegates and visitors.

The UCC’s future — Imagine the Possibilities!

Delgates Representing Florida
28th General Synod

CLASS OF 2011

Lay
Aaron Mohammed, Church by the Sea/Bal Harbour
Rick Carson, Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach
Angela Wells, Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg
Charlayne Thompkins, Church of the Open Door Congregational/Miami
Neill Robinson, Miami Lakes Congregational Church

Clergy
Rev. Dr. Laurinda Hafner, Coral Gables Congregational Church
Rev. Susan Sherwood, Good Samaritan Church/Pinellas Park
Rev. Tim Woodard, United Church of Sebastian

CLASS OF 2013

Lay
Carlos Marquez-Sterling, Coral Gables Congregational Church
Jan Steinberg, Key Biscayne Community Church
Twila Rhodes, Arlington Congregational Church/Jacksonville
Ian Beason, Longwood Hills Congregational Church

Clergy
Rev. Bonnie Lipton, Pilgrim UCC/St. Augustine (member)
Rev. James Rapp, Church of the Isles/Indian Rocks Beach
Rev. Rebecca Stephenson, First Congregational Church/Fort Lauderdale
Rev. Ronal Freyer-Nicholas, Pilgrims’ UCC/Fruitland Park