



Pacific Northwest CONFERENCE NEWS

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Summer 2011

Young adults find PNC friends endure

Discussions on faith and values continue at retreats and informally

Dana Weir of Port Townsend recently joined in the Work Camp at N-Sid-Sen, where she began attending camps since she was a child in Newport.

Her friendships have continued from years at Pacific Northwest UCC camps and retreats, the former conference Youth and Young Adult Council (YYAC), and national and regional youth events.

"These friends have been like family," said Weir, one of about dozens of youth and young adults who keep in contact and continue to be involved with the conference.

Some still assist as camp counselors at both N-Sid-Sen and Pilgrim Firs. When the friends meet, they continue their discussions about faith, philosophy, Continued on Page 4



Robbie Gilchrist, Dana Weir and Brian Kay led a discussion on art and spirituality at Pilgrim Firs high school camp in 2010.

Photos courtesy of Dana Weir

PNC moderator offers blog with video clips

In April before Annual Meeting, then incoming Pacific Northwest Conference moderator, the Rev. Brandon Duran, began blogging, inspired by the Annual Meeting promotional videos prepared by Margaret Iribarra and Kmbri Bond.

"I decided to do a video blog, because it would save time. If I wrote something, I might obsess on grammar and word choice, but with video I did not obsess as much," he said. "It's less time consuming to do three-minute clips in one or two takes, rather than writing and rewriting."

He also believes it's less daunting for some people to watch a two-minute video rather than an online post.

"It's a great way to capture the life of the conference and events such as

the Leadership Retreat in June, General Synod in July and the Conference Council in the fall," said Brandon, who is director of children, youth and family ministries at Plymouth Church in Seattle.

One of the regular blog features includes interviews, which he began at Annual Meeting with interviews of Dave Shull of Spirit of Peace UCC, Jane Sorenson of Monroe UCC, Cory Maclay



Brandon Duran

of Education Ministries, and Conference Minister Mike Denton. They can be found at www.pncmod.org.

He intends to add vignettes of theological reflection on three questions: "1) What gives you hope? 2) What breaks your heart? And 3) What draws you to God?"

"I chose familiar faces of folks people would meet at Annual Meeting," he said.

He did not identify people in the initial round, as a way to give them a safe space for commenting. For future interviews, he plans to ask people for permission to put their names online.

"I hope the blog link will provide a different form of communication in the Continued on Page 3

Region grapples with environmental injustice

Conference Comments



By The Rev.
Mike Denton
Conference
Minister

Uranium
mining
leaves
contamination
on the
Spokane
Reservation

The Spokesman Review ran a recent series of articles on contamination from years of uranium mining on the Spokane Reservation—go to www.spokesman.com and type “uranium” in the search box. The pieces go into some depth about the history of mining there, as well as some of the effects. What this reveals is a sad, frightening picture.

Nearby local water sources, even after attempts at clean up, remain ruined. There are radioactive hotspots along the side of the road where open trucks carrying the uranium ore spilled some of their loads. Local wildlife is contaminated by radioactive waste that is in the earth and air. In spite of being ordered by courts to clean up this area several years ago, there is more left undone than done and, when considering all that needs to be done, there has been more inaction than action. It is an environmental disaster.

Still, that wasn't the most heartbreaking aspect of these articles. The effects this disaster appears to be having on those living on the reservation is horrifying. People live by and pass through those hotspots on the road. Their water is contaminated. The local wildlife is contaminated. The dust in the air is contaminated. This is resulting in what appears to be higher than normal cancer rates, birth defects and other health problems. While the uranium mined here was intended for nuclear weaponry, those who worked and lived around the mine continue to suffer from the fallout.

Places where human-caused environmental degradation affects poor folks and people of color is where concerns about environmental justice are born. The United Church of Christ helped birth this movement when, in 1987, our denomination published “Toxic Wastes and Race,” establishing firmly that toxic sites were disproportionately located near communities of color. A UCC follow-up study in 2007 concluded that people of color make up the majority of those living within 1.8 miles of toxic sites and that the facilities that produce industrial pollution are clustered within many of these same communities. The follow-up study also discovered that, in 90 percent of those regions where the EPA is already involved in monitoring environmental concerns, other racial disparities were also evident.

Even where in cases there are already laws and land-use controls that could reduce health risks in these areas, the enforcement of these laws is lax. Again and again, this study and others have proven that people of color and those who are impoverished are disproportionately effected by the effects of the un-natural disasters humans have helped create.

Within our region, there are many examples of where this has played out. The Spokane Reservation is far from being the only reservation affected by environments that have been made toxic by min-

ing and other industries. Air quality issues relating to diesel fumes have also affected poor communities near shipping areas all around the Puget Sound.

Those who count on subsistence harvesting of wild-life from our rivers have been told to cut back on their fish consumption in order to avoid long-term health effects from the pollution present there. In too many cases, inadequate safeguards have been taken to protect those who work in many of those industrial and agricultural facilities where toxic or radioactive materials are a part of the business.

Today's industries did not exist during the time the Bible was written, however, those living during that time assumed some need—for very practical reasons—to have a healthy interaction with the earth. Our understanding of the assumptions of those who wrote the Bible continue to unfold, and some of those assumptions are worth considering. Although we usually refer to some of these writings as “religious laws,” at that time and place they were just the law and many of these laws were put in place for practical reasons that were connected to practical assumptions.

Because the earth is God's, humanity worked with God by working with the earth. Areas that were harvested needed time to recover so fallow times were mandated. Excessive waste was considered a crime. Natural disasters were assumed to be the way God reset relationships between God, God's earth and God's people in to their proper order. To misuse those things that were God's was a crime.

Throughout the Bible, those who cause others to be impoverished are also condemned. The oppression and fraud of businesses, religious groups and governments are repeatedly named as acts of injustice. Although there isn't a consistent biblical condemnation of wealth, there are consistent condemnations of those who misuse the power that comes from wealth and warnings about how wealth, used oppressively and selfishly, can be a stumbling block on person's faith journey.

Both of these understandings have been part of the Christian tradition for centuries. It makes sense they would come together in this time and place as we find ways to participate faithfully in the environmental justice movement. For several months, you may have heard about the UCC Environmental Justice Center at Pilgrim Firs that our conference and denomination are working together to establish. This center will focus on the biblical, spiritual and theological understandings of environmental justice as well as to establish a framework to try to promote and sustain it.

Amos 5:24 says, “...Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an overflowing stream.” May those waters also be healthy, life giving and clean for all who drink them in.

Blog is a way to build connection

Continued from Page 1
conference where people can post and connect, such as posting minutes of committee meeting," he said.

He said that uses will also be considered when a Communication Implementation Team is formed to move forward with the report prepared by consultant Kathleen Hosfeld.

Brandon, who came to the PNC in 2004 to serve the Seattle Taiwanese Church, grew up Mennonite-Brethren in Madera, Calif., graduated from Azusa Pacific University with a bachelor's degree in biblical studies and earned an MDiv at Fuller Theological Seminary, has served as interim at Keystone UCC in Seattle before starting

at Plymouth a year ago.

He became active in the conference early, because he believes in connection with the wider church.

Brandon expects the board to review the conference vision adopted in the mid 1990s so the conference has a vision for local communities and churches connecting with each other and

the conference.

"I would like to see more collaboration on projects, such as churches working together to offer OWL studies, sharing outreach or communication staff, and finding new ways to do church together," he said.

For information, call 206-622-4865 x15 or visit www.pncmod.org.

Transitions announced

Randy Crowe, managing director of N-Sid-Sen for 21 years announced at Annual Meeting that he will retire in April 2012. **Linda Crowe**, pastor at Veradale UCC, has announced that she will retire in May 2012. They will still live in Veradale.

Jill Midori Komura was ordained June 10 at University UCC as chaplain at Providence St. Peter Hospital in Olympia.

Cameron Sharp was called as on-call chaplain at Tacoma General Hospital and Mary Bridge Children's Hospital June 23 at Wayside UCC in Federal Way.

Martha Kline was installed June 25 as pastor at Guemes Island UCC.

Peg Faulmann was ordained and installed June 26 at Keystone UCC in Seattle.

Frank Kelsey, executive minister United Ministries from 1975 to 1979, died June 12 at the age of 86. Ordained 1952, he served churches in Oregon, California and Washington, including Eastgate UCC in Bellevue, Fauntleroy UCC and interim at University Congregational UCC in Seattle. He was also an associate minister of the conference from 1968 to 1974, including a year as acting conference minister. His wife, **Jane Kelsey**, died last year.

Other clergy and PNC leaders who died in 2010 to 2011 include: **Harold Jones**, who retired from Naselle UCC after serving as an army chaplain and serving churches in Washington, Wyoming and Nebraska; **Lincoln Reed**, who served churches in Colorado, Oregon and Washington, including First Congregational in Bellevue; **Kenneth Rhoe**, who served churches in Oregon, Wisconsin and Washington; **Stephen Edwards**, who served First Congregational UCC in Dayton, and **Kathy Youde**, conference treasurer and former pastor at Tonasket.

Korean-PNC young adults meet in Seattle in July

The PNC Global Ministries Committee is hosting seven young adults from Seoul, South Korea, July 20 to 28 in Seattle.

South Seattle churches will provide housing July 20 and 21. The group will be at Pilgrim Firs July 22 and 23 and then will stay in North Seattle from July 24 to 26. **For information, contact Ed Evans, edevans@aol.com or Terry Teigen, TerryT@horizonhouse.org.**

Anti-racism event planned

Diane Schmitz, director of commuter and transfer student services at Seattle University, is co-facilitating a training, "Moving from Talk to Action: A Summer Institute for Anti-Racist White People," with UCC pastor, Melanie Morrison, national director of Allies for Change, on August 2 and 3. It is an opportunity for white people to deepen their commitment to challenging racism and white privilege in their lives.

The two-day institute, which is limited to 20 people, will be held at University Baptist Church from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., Tuesday, August 2 and from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Wednesday August 3.

For information, call 206-409-7551 or email dschmitz@seattleu.edu.

Justice LED trainings set

Fall opportunities to participate in the national UCC's Justice Leaders Engaging and Developing (J-LED) trainings include a Young Adult Training for UCC members 19 to 30 years old, Sept. 23 to 25 at Pilgrim

Firs. For information, contact Kelly Burd at BurdK@ucc.org.

There will also be Justice Leaders Engaging and Developing training for pairs of people from churches Oct. 14 to 16 at

Pilgrim Firs. For information, contact Susan Andresen at susan-andresen@hotmail.com.

The events share biblical, theological and sociological grounding for justice work, give a taste of J-LED for participants to share in their churches and communi-

ties to empower people to be faith-based leaders for justice.

Northshore hosts workshop on homelessness, advocacy

Northshore UCC in Woodinville is planning an ecumenical and interfaith "Fall Day of Action," an advocacy workshop from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., Saturday, Oct. 1, at the church, 18900 168th Ave. NE.

Nancy Amidei of the University of Washington School of Social Work will give an overview of advocacy and the importance of progressive Christians engaging in action, said Cynthia Riggan, pastor.

Rich Gamble pastor of Keystone UCC in Seattle, chair of the Justice and Witness Ministries Committee and member of Faithful Action in Transforming Homelessness will speak homelessness on what it means to be progressive Christians.

Jessie Dye of Earth Ministry will lead a session on "Whole Earth." There will also be a session on advocacy on Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender and Questioning.

For information, call 425-483-6557 or email pastor@northshoreucc.org.



UCC young adults still connect with camps

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theology and the role of the UCC, she said.

Weir, who graduated from Newport High School in 1997, became active through years of camping at N-Sid-Sen and quarterly meetings of the YYAC when she was in high school.

She was among four who went to Pacific University in Forest Grove, Ore.—Signe Hill of Edmonds, Harmony Welcher of Seattle and Brian Kay of Carnation—drawn by a camp friend, Becky Weaver of Spokane, who was studying there.

After graduating in 2001, Weir worked a year at an after-school program before studies for a master’s in spiritual traditions and ethics at Marylhurst.

“Becca Harviston-Kottler who went to Lewis and Clark College, Signe, Brian and I moved to Portland after college and kept our circle together,” she said. “Signe worked for an international student exchange program and completed a teaching degree at Pacific University. Becca earned a masters in public administration,” she added.

When Robyn Cummer, who was in the Tolt youth group in Carnation, moved to Portland, they reconnected with her while she finished a master’s degree in journalism.

Weir said her friendship with Kay deepened during college, and they are now married. Kay worked eight years with Oregon state parks. He and Weir married in 2006 and now live at Port Townsend, where they have reconnected with oth-

er UCC friends, Sean Brackett of Olympia and Rachel Teigen of Seattle, who also married.

Weir teaches art and preschool in Port Townsend, and Kay is an administrator at the Marine Science Center.

Becca Peterson and Nick Runte, who also married, remain active with Pilgrim Firs, renewing ties through their continued involvement, said Weir, who with Kay, led a 2010 workshop for senior high camp at Pilgrim Firs.

“When I go to camp, I feel it is my community. It’s where I belong,” she said.

“The friends were a support community during and after the death of Brian’s mother, PNC treasurer Kathy Youde, last November. Camp friends offered shoulders to cry on and a community,” Weir said.

The friends now also keep connected through Facebook.

At a retreat two years ago at Pilgrim Firs, they talked about the role of the UCC for 18-to-30-year-olds. They continue their discussion at camps and in personal gatherings.

“The community I was part of when I was young is still central to my growth as a person of faith,” she said. “It gives me a sense of belonging that carries into adulthood. We have a unique bond and understanding.”

At camps, Weir said she explored her religious experience and beliefs.

“The UCC allowed me to explore rather than be stilted by some doctrine or orthodoxy,” she said. “I was encouraged to discover my own spiritual life



One of a 36-panel collage using texts of Taizé songs.

and how it relates to the rest of the world.”

That faith, she finds, is reaffirmed every time she goes to camps or retreats or to be a speaker for senior high camp. After she goes, she comes back home “committed to be a better citizen, more compassionate and centered.”

Her community involvement centers around her work as a teacher and artist, advocating for the environment.

“When Brian and I say we met at church camp, most people assume it was an evangelical or fundamentalist camp with a rigid theology,” she said. “It’s hard to explain that there are forms of progressive theology that are alive and have along history.”

“My generation wants change and reform,” she said. “We found the most profound expression of that at camp.”

Most of the group continue to be involved in UCC churches, but do not necessarily go every Sunday.

Weir and Kay have attended a new, small UCC church group that is meeting at Port Townsend.

“We talk about what young adults are looking for in church—why camp is a draw but churches struggle to keep

young adults attending,” she said.

Camps are out-of-doors, a place to reflect with opportunities for artistic expression, music and spirituality through music, time for silent meditation and prayer outside the walls of a church.

“I love the UCC. It’s my heritage. I like the formal services, but I also would like more time for silence, meditation and contemplative practices,” she said.

To find that, Weir participates in a small group that does a monthly Taizé contemplative service in Port Townsend.

“I often go on walks and hikes,” she said. “I like to be outdoors in the wilderness and in touch with nature. It feeds my spiritual life.”

Weir said her art also reflects her spiritual life. She has done a collage using texts from Taizé songs and biblical phrases.

“Art has potential to connect people of vastly different belief systems and traditions,” she said. “Image and word bring people together. People come to galleries searching for images to connect with.”

In teaching preschool children at Firefly Academy and elementary children at Swan School, she finds them constantly open to discovering relationships within the world around them.

“So much of daily life in this culture is about separateness and lack of familiarity with what is around us. Early childhood fosters a sense of belonging and connection that serves children well the rest of their lives,” she said.

“As a teacher, I never stop learning. Children are teachers in a collaborative process,” she said.

For information, call 503-975-8991 or email sundial78@gmail.com.

My generation wants change and reform. We found the most profound expression of that at camp.

Group evaluates role and future of PNC camps

By Cory Maclay, Youth/Young Adult task force convener

Twelve people involved in Outdoor Ministries, Youth and Young Adult Ministries, the Personnel Committee, camp managers and the conference minister spent a recent Saturday thoughtfully and prayerfully taking stock of the role camps play in faith formation in the conference in these post-modern days. A thirteenth added helpful input via email.

They evaluated the effectiveness of PNC camp programs and anticipated what God might have in store for the conference camps in the coming years.

The day-long conversation included appreciation for what is working well—with camps located in beautiful settings, financially in good shape and staffed by a multitude of committed volunteers.

It also included “A-ha!” moments about what could be done better. For example, long before a camper ever steps foot on a site they, and often their parents or grandparents, are—and sometimes aren’t—experiencing the level of hospitality we would like to extend through in-church testimonies, brochures, online registration and pre-camp letters

“A-has” were also grounded in gratitude for everyone who makes an effort to invite and help people get to camp.

Sharon Linton, outgoing Outdoor Ministries Task Force convener, guided the conversation. She helped the group connect their hearts and heads.

Butcher paper filled the walls with responses to these questions:

1) What are the top three things the Outdoor Ministries camping program does well for all the ages participating?

2) What might we say to someone—a family with children and youth, a young adult or an older adult—asking about our camps? What might con-



Kaila Russell, Kristen Almgren and Sharon Linton review ideas noted on paper.

vince them to go to N-Sid-Sen or Pilgrim Firs instead of a YMCA camp?

3) What are the strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats of conference camps?

4) Who are the potential camp “customers”? What are their needs?

The group looked at dates of camp usage both by people in the conference and by non-church users. This type of data is invaluable when looking ahead to determine how to collectively steward the gifts of our campsites.

Camp managing directors, Deeg Nelson at Pilgrim Firs and Randy Crowe at N-Sid-Sen, have kept camp attendance records of use by conference people and those outside the conference. Linton presented the 20 years of data in graphic form. This information, along with other data, shows our camps can handle an additional 30 to 50 percent in attendance.

The Rev. Mike Denton, conference minister, shared some demographic shifts, highlighting the decrease in children and youth in smaller communities around our state.

Many in the group also shared changes and patterns they have noticed, such as that grandparents are often the ones bringing children and youth to camp, either because the par-



Kathie Forman and Randy Crowe share their thoughts.

Photos courtesy of Cory Maclay

ents don’t attend church or the grandparents are the primary caretakers.

One said whether children and youth live with parents or grandparents, camp is often a respite week for the adults.

Some noted that some families are unable to attend family camp because they cannot miss a whole week of work.

This information provides pointers for a sustainable future of these sites and their programs.

Throughout the day, it was clear there is much more good news to share with the conference. For example, the cost of PNC camps is low compared to most others, because of a large group of committed volunteers who are passionate about how camps complement local churches in faith formation. Most other church camps

hire seasonal staff, which increases the cost for campers.

It’s also good news to know that without having to make any physical changes, the camps are ready for more campers. We have room to grow!

Participants were Kristen Almgren, Kathie Forman and Kaila Russell of University Congregational UCC in Seattle; MaryLu Hubbe of Shalom UCC in Richland; Gale Peterson, of Kirkland UCC; Sharon Linton of Bellevue First Congregational Church; via email, the Rev Emily Tanis-Likkel, associate pastor of Eagle Harbor Congregational UCC; Mark Boyd, youth pastor at United Churches in Olympia and Pilgrim Firs staff; Cory Maclay of Plymouth Church, UCC; Judy Anderson of Wayside UCC; plus Nelson, Crowe and Denton.

For new Faith Action Network: Partnership for the Common Good

State Lutheran, ecumenical agencies merge

Washington Association of Churches and Lutheran Public Policy Office form one agency.

Out of a long history of working in statewide partnership on a common public policy agenda, the Washington of Churches (WAC) and Lutheran Public Policy Office of Washington (LPPO) are merging to form the Faith Action Network: A Partnership for the Common Good (FAN).

The WAC Board and the LPPO Statewide Advisory Council met on June 11 and voted to give birth to the new organization to bring together their staff and constituencies for their shared mission to be “a statewide partnership of faith communities striving for a just and sustainable world through community building, education and courageous public action.”

The decision came after several years of discussion and prayerful discernment, said the Rev. Carol Jensen, former chair of the LPPO council, and the Rev. Sharon Moe, former chair of the WAC Board.

“It is good stewardship of limited resources to bring two organizations with such similar purposes together,” they said. “Both organizations have been working ecumenically.”

Both are new members of the FAN governing board, which includes three representatives of each organizations and three more recommended by the FAN Advisory Council.

The advisory council includes the former boards of the two organizations, but will also broaden the base to include a diverse range of faith groups. More organizational details will emerge in discussions and



Alice Woldt speaking at a recent legislative conference.



David Hacker and Paul Benz lead a planning group.

decisions by the board in the coming months.

While LPPO constituents may be concerned about the loss of Lutheran identity that has helped LPPO reach into Lutheran congregations, Moe and Jensen said FAN will continue to be the ELCA’s public policy office and the ELCA is supportive of this development.

For some WAC constituents, there may be concern about how judicatories and ecumenical organizations find their place at the table, but bishops and judicatory leaders have been supportive of the merger, and ecumenical organizations such as the Church Council of Greater Seattle and Associated

Ministries of Pierce County were part of the decision-making process.

“FAN will approach its educational and organizing work in congregations drawing on the scriptural, theological and historical roots for advocacy within that congregation’s faith tradition,” said Moe and Jensen. “Faithful advocates in communities from Spokane to Port Angeles have been teaching us that education and action for the common good is more effective ecumenically and in in interfaith partnership than as individual faith communities.”

For the first six months, staff of both organizations will be retained, with Paul Benz

and Alice Woldt working as co-directors. Woldt will continue until the end of 2011. The board will work on a future staffing plan and will combine the administrative functions of the two organizations. Because the LPPO exists under the Lutheran Community Services Northwest, the new organization will use the current corporate status of the WAC.

PNC Conference Mike Denton said, “The plan makes sense. It formalizes a relationship that has existed for years; eliminates redundancy, and gives a new opportunity to create an organization that’s truly statewide in scope.”

Woldt said that FAN will continue to promote education and community-building projects and activities to build relationships among faith communities and other community groups on shared concerns, such as the Veterans Support Network and the new Mental Health Network.

Advocacy work will include training and organizing faith communities to participate in public policy advocacy and social-justice witness based on values of constituent communities.

Another aspect of the program will focus on cultural transformation, using the power of constituents’ shared theological resources and community relationships to frame public discourse, promote progressive values and inspire action for justice. It will include training, resources and organizing to support cultural engagement.

During the summer, the WAC plans to move its office from University Temple United Methodist Church to the LPPO office at Denny Park Lutheran Church at 766 John St. in Seattle.

For information, call 206-625-9790 or 206-464-4133.

Marj Johnston coordinates Shalom Ministries

After a three-and-a-half-year ministry as associate at Westminster Congregational UCC in Spokane, Marj Johnston began last summer as executive director of Spokane's dining with dignity program through Shalom Ministries at Central United Methodist Church.

Meals are served buffet style with silverware, china plates and cups offering guests choice on what and how much they want to eat.

"Shalom Ministries is a bridge between what we talk about in church worship and studies, and the reality outside the church," she said. "It helps us look at people in a different way—looking for God's image in them."

While she continues to search for a church to pastor, she is gaining experiences in loving neighbors and in seeing Jesus when she serves "the least" of her brothers and sisters.

Some are the same people Westminster used to serve when it offered a Life Feed free lunch on fourth Saturdays.

"The difference is now I have names and stories to go with faces of people," she said.

Started in 1993 by the outreach committee of Central UMC in response to a call by the General Ministries of the national UMC, Shalom Ministries seeks to provide a violence-free "Shalom Zone" for diverse people to gather.

Shalom Ministries serves breakfast to 125 people Mondays through Thursdays, with 150 to 175 coming the last week of the month. Monday dinners serve 150 to 200 people.

About 150 volunteers from local churches, businesses and partner agencies serve meals, help cook and help behind-the-scenes. Marj said there is currently a need for more

volunteers to drive and cook, since Shalom Ministries' head cook resigned.

At Shalom Ministries, guests for the breakfasts and dinners are from Hope House, the House of Charity, Truth Ministries, Union Gospel Mission, Crosswalk and Salvation Army shelters, from the streets and low-income units in the city. The only expectation is that guests treat each other with respect. Marj said the regulars provide self policing, plus are among the many volunteers.

"Because we serve single people who fall through the cracks for other meal programs, we also have service agencies provide resources," she said.

A representative from Spokane Mental Health's outreach team comes. Spokane AIDS Network does free HIV screening. Washington State University's Nursing School students come to build conversation about health care needs as simple as wearing dry socks.

For volunteers and guests, it's an opportunity to talk with people and build relationships.

"We hear many stories—and some are true—to build relationships and honor people with genuine conversation," said Marj, who brings to the work background in social services, as well as ministry.

Marj, who grew up American Baptist in Raymond, Wash., was a member of Westminster since 2004, joining to complete her credentials for ordination after earning a MDiv from Chicago Theological Seminary that year.

After graduating from Western Washington University in 1992 in Bellingham in human services, she served as social services director at a nursing home.

During a 30-month term volunteering with a nonde-



Marj Johnston of Shalom Mennonite/UCC and David Custer, a Shalom Ministries volunteer from Westminster Congregational UCC with a box of bread they picked up at Second Harvest.

nominal mission program in Washington, D.C., she said her pastor encouraged her to enter ministry.

In Spokane, she first worked for three years in housing and family development with the SNAP homeless program, then seven years with Catholic Charities' Partners for Community Living, coordinating a shared housing program for persons with disabilities.

"As many other nonprofits, our survival is based on donations of individuals, congregations, businesses and agencies, with a few grants," she said, "because, although we do not preach at people, we do bless the food and the hands that prepare it."

Second Harvest, Northwest Harvest and Feed Spokane help supply food.

Westminster UCC partners

in providing regular presence of members volunteering every morning and serving dinners. It also provides real milk, so guests don't have to drink powdered milk. It also hosted a recent Seattle Women's Chorus Concert and shared \$500 in donations with the program.

Shalom UCC/Mennonite Church, where Marj is now a member, has established a Shalom Cares Fund to help with urgent needs and for bus tickets, ID cards, rent and utility assistance.

She served on the Shalom Ministries Board before being asked to take on the role.

"Changes in city, county, state and federal resources for our guests mean there is more need for Shalom Ministries' safe, gracious space," she said.

For information, call 509-455-9019.

Near unanimous vote passes ONA resolution

Delegates pass budget and vote to change committee name.

After discussion in a hearing and on the floor of a plenary session, the 2011 Annual Meeting of the Pacific Northwest Conference passed nearly unanimously a resolution to be an Open and Affirming (ONA) conference, officially adopting what its practice has been.

Delegates erupted into applause, cheers and tears.

Some comments in the hearing and plenary follow.

Megan Crouse of Lummi Island said younger colleagues and friends are “amazed we are trying to make up our minds. It’s time for our words to match our behavior.”

Cameron Sharp of Wayside in Federal Way said the resolution encourages current open and affirming churches to add transsexual and intersex.

Esther Pfeifer of Eltopia UCC appreciates the wide parameter of the church, expressing concerns of some in her church who are afraid that inclusivity can be exclusive.

David McGee of Plymouth UCC in Seattle, said the resolution asks churches to continue prayerful dialogue and does not to push any church to make a decision.

Kathie Forman of University Congregational UCC in Seattle affirmed that “Annual Meeting does not tell churches what to do.”

Terry Teigen of Plymouth UCC said in the early 1990s a similar resolution brought heated discussion and Jeff Spencer was one of the first gay pastors to come out. He thanked the GLBT community for their patience.

Marie Fortune of Broadview UCC, who said she was one of the first lesbian pastors to come out, remembered saying in 1991 for the conference



Annual Meeting delegates at University UCC in Seattle.

Photo by Ben Von Ulrich of Kirkland Congregational UCC

to take it’s time, “but hurry, because we are still waiting.”

Jason Boyd of Kirkland Congregational UCC said while Massachusetts was one of the first ONA conferences, just over 20 percent of its churches are ONA, compared to the PNC where the majority of churches are ONA and 76 percent of PNC members are in ONA churches.

Jeff Barker of Columbia Lakewood Community Church expressed challenged the lack of concern about racial justice and inclusion of black leaders in the conference. Serving 20 years in the PNC, he has seen no change in the number of black pastors, members or conference leaders. “There is a glaring lack of racial justice and people of color,” he said.

The delegates amended the resolution to add that the conference “shall in all aspects of its administrative, program and worship life be Open and Affirming (ONA) of all persons, including but not limited to, those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender.” They also revised it to say that the Annual Meeting of the PNC “encourage member churches to continue a committed, prayerful and respectful dialogue with one another as we seek God’s guidance for greater biblical and theological understanding of important issues, including those relating to human rights, human sexuality, gender identity, and gender expression.”

Some of the discussion during the plenary follows:

Bob Fitzgerald of University Congregational UCC said that in 1982 his 22-year-old son told him he was gay. “That began a transformative spiritual experience that threw me into chaos and awareness of my ignorance. Needing people to talk with, I turned to PFLAG and friends at University Congregational. I discovered the UCC was leading the march of all denominations. As we began to take it seriously as a conference, it was the most theologically and biblically transforming and exhilarating experience of my life.

Kathleen Morgan who is active in the PNC said that in the 1980s, she felt like a step child when the conference rejected a similar resolution. She said baptism welcomes everyone as a beloved child of God: “Why do we draw lines about who can belong or be a moderator, pastor or treasurer?” she asked. “Why do we let people suffer?” Despite her anguish when the resolution was tabled 21 years ago, she and her partner, Ann Lev, continued to be part of the conference we have loved, but which has not affirmed us,” she said. “I’m older now and less afraid to speak my heart, so I ask you to affirm me and the many in the room.”

David Shull of Spirit of Peace UCC in Seattle said that PNC being open and affirming

does not force churches to be open and affirming. The resolution is 26 years late.”

Karin Frank of University Congregational said as a gay person going into ministry she is proud to be in a church that allows her to serve in ministry. “Sexuality and gender expression is not the real welcoming challenge today. I’ve never heard anyone in church say they don’t like how gays dress or act in church, gays don’t respect the church, we don’t want gays to mess up our worship service or want them in leadership. I’ve heard all of these said about youth and young adults. I want to be a part of a church that welcomes all of who I am.”

Donald Schmidt of Admiral UCC told of often being treated as less than human: “I wish it was a non-issue. If we mean no matter who you are or where you are on life’s journey, there are no exceptions.”

In other business, PNC treasurer Martha Baldwin of Kirkland UCC said Our Churches’ Wider Mission giving was \$42,000 over budget and the PNC collected \$176,000 for Haiti earthquake relief.

With a total of \$590,000 in revenue and \$530,000 in expenses, the board hopes to add an associate conference minister and double the amount for youth work in the next two years. There will also be enough for Mike Denton to have a sabbatical his fifth year and Arlene Hobson to have a sabbatical after 15 years with the conference.

A task force is looking at funding for theological seminaries and campus ministries.

A resolution to change the name of the Christian Life Service and Action Committee to the Justice and Witness Ministries Committee also passed.

Brandon Duran of Plymouth UCC Seattle is the new moderator. The new vice moderator is Christine Hanson of Peshastin.

Speaker stirs people to find their gifts and act

Da Vita McAllister energized 2011 Annual Meeting participants, flowing from her opening sermon on the love of the pelican and the grasshopper through her keynote address culminating in the call to transform the world.

Connecticut UCC Conference's associate minister for youth and young adult ministries set a tone for members of the United Church of Christ to know and celebrate "who we are" as UCC believers.

"Too often we in the UCC define ourselves by who we are not," she said.

Preaching on John 1's call for believers to "love one another," she said, "if we love one another, we know God and God's love is perfected in us."

Describing herself as a Baptist, she shared her journey—born Baptist, converted to Pentecostal, ordained United Methodist and finding her home in the UCC.

Encouraging participation of delegates and guests gathered April 29 and 30 at University Congregational UCC in Seattle, she invited them to allow their hands "to resist gravity and rise," to put their hands together and clap, to shout "Amen!" or "UhHuh!" or to sit quietly and stay awake. Her keynote address was punctuated with repetition and hand motions, inviting the congregation to say the words.

"If you have ever loved anyone or anything, you know God," she said. "On the surface, it seems simple, but the Scripture keeps going.

"What does it mean to be the body of Christ, brothers and sisters in God's family, when there are some folks we do not love?" McAllister asked.

She told of a pink pelican and a green grasshopper who were the best of friends, inseparable despite being different species with political parties, shoe sizes and worship styles.

The proud, distinguished



Da Vita McAllister presenting her keynote address.

Photo by Ben Von Ulrich of Kirkland Congregational UCC

and introverted pelican let the music of worship wash over him and liked silence to explore the depth of God's Spirit.

The extroverted grasshopper favored the Scripture, especially "God so loved the world, that whosoever..." He would hop around as he and the pastor went back and forth 20 minutes, repeating "whosoever."

Because people wondered how they could be the best of friends, the pastor asked them to give a testimony.

The grasshopper said, "God does not require us to change everything in the world or pray each moment, but to 'put something on,'" to do something to address racism, homophobia, patriarchy, oppression, the environment and more. As the pelican went silently to sit down, the grasshopper thought he didn't agree. The pelican replied with singing, "We are one in the Spirit."

Speaking on "Connections, Reflections and Directions," she reminded of the UCC welcome that "whoever you are and wherever you are on life's journey, you are welcome here."

She invited participants to reflect on the uniqueness of each and to realize God's love is great enough to make space for each. That welcome, she said, challenges UCCers to

think of things in new ways, to challenge themselves and allow others to challenge them to build up the church.

She urged participants to do something with information they gained at the meeting.

"God loves us whether we are pelicans, grasshoppers or pelihoppers," McAllister said. "We are not connected by our uniqueness but by God's unifying love."

Before each person was conceived, "God gave each a gift, and God expects each of us to use the gift to transform the world, she said, "because the world is full of violence and self-interest, which are not consistent with God's way of doing things. To transform it is a big job, so each needs help. Everyone is to discern their gift and to use it collectively.

"God understands we are already connected," she said, commenting that many church people, although part of 15,000 committees and 4,000 task forces think they have to transform the world by themselves, so they become burned out.

"The church needs to be connected in a disconnected world," she said. "We need to see ourselves as standing side by side, connected in the palm of the hand of the living God."

She offered a vision that

gives sight of long-term possibilities—working interdependently to transform the world, stepping out of survival mode and "standing together to see what we can do together to transform the world," she said.

"We need to 'put some on,' stir things up and transform the world," she repeated. "The church is the place to go to be stirred up—whether sitting silently in touch with our inner pelican or hopping about as the grasshopper.

To stir things up, she called for recognition of differences, such as between those born before and after 1980.

She suggested that those born before 1980 tend to do one thing at a time, use technology to people with whom they already relate, had limited media exposure to differences, and participated in church as the center of civic life.

Those born after 1980 tend to do multiple things at one time—study, tweet, listen to a iPod and search the web—use technology to form relationships, are exposed to diversity in media, and have grown up in a world where the church is not at the center of society.

"For the young, 90 percent of what we do in the church is done thousands of ways elsewhere and better," she said, but what the church does best is to help people discern their gifts, and to hear and feel God's will and call to transform the world.

"The sweet spot is to find what God wants, what you have and what the world needs. Each of us needs to find the sweet spot. That's the 10 percent the church does that no one else does," she said.

"God gives us the tools to put some on, stir up our gifts with others and the compassion to stir gifts in others to make the world more loving and caring."

For videos of her presentations see <http://www.youtube.com/user/PNCUCC>

Conference has a UCC rep for disaster recovery

Ken Colman has served as PNC's disaster coordinator since 2002.

The Rev. Ken Colman, pastor at Renton UCC, represents the PNC on the Washington Volunteers Assisting in Disasters (WAVOAD) and on the Washington Interfaith Disaster Recovery Organization (WIDRO).

He said he has been directing volunteers interested in regional disaster relief to contact David Bell at the Yakama Christian Mission. He is organizing recovery and rebuilding homes following fires driven by a hurricane-force windstorm in February.

Colman said that represen-



Ken Colman

tatives of the Reformed Church in America came there to assess

the needs.

"WAVOAD and WIDRO help in the recovery stage after the TV cameras have left a disaster area," said Ken, who has been at Renton 11 years.

He first took national UCC training to be a disaster coordinator for the conference in 2002. For several years, Steve Erickson worked with him in that role.

"During my high school years, 1975 to 1978, in Afghanistan, there was a coup d'etat and after that a form of disaster, so I said yes when asked to assist the conference and national UCC in that role," he said.

After Hurricane Katrina he had also worked at a National Guard base for the WAVOAD, looking at needs for bringing

refugees from Louisians.

A primary task of his role is education, helping churches establish emergency plans in case of an earthquake or disaster on a Sunday. He has free resources to offer churches through Church World Services and he has led annual meeting workshops.

"One Great Hour of Sharing offerings help with disaster recovery across the United States," he said, "plus people can designate gifts at any time through the ucc.org website. Through UCC contacts, we know how to send the money to people who will be sure to meet the needs.

For information, call 206-856-8547 or email pastorken@uccrenton.org.

Volunteers needed for rebuilding after firestorm

In White Swan at the Yakama Christian Mission, director David Bell is coordinating construction for rebuilding homes destroyed by fire storms with winds of more than 50-mile-per-hour in February that destroyed or damaged more than 100 houses.

He is working both with the Yakama Tribe and with SAGE, an ecumenical venture between the Yakama Christian Mission and Wilbur Memorial United Methodist Church.

United Church of Christ volunteers are needed to help through the summer and particularly for a 14-day Blitz Build of one house beginning Labor Day weekend and ending with the annual Yakama Indian Days Powwow. The blitz build, he said, needs 20 volunteers a day.

The owner of that home cannot afford a loan, so to have a roof overhead by winter, volunteers are needed to rebuild. A lack of summer volunteers to help rebuild has caused five other low-income homeowners



Wesley United Methodist youth help repair wind damage to roof of one house.

Photos courtesy of David Bell

to seek loans to hire contractors to do the work.

Many repairs are from wind damage to roofs, windows and doors, plus fire and smoke damage in other homes. The Yakama Nation is engaged in

rebuilding all destroyed homes.

From June through August, the SAGE is focused on rebuilding. It offers volunteers the opportunity both to help survivors gain safe and healthy housing and to learn how racism, cul-

ture and economic injustice helped cause such events as the February firestorm.

For information, call 509-969-2093, email dave@yakamamission.org or visit yakamamission.org.

Conference leaders urged to set audacious goals

By Ed Evans

Citing an article published in the Harvard Business Review, the Rev. Felix Carrion, the UCC's Still Speaking coordinator, urged PNC leaders to enhance the voice of the conference by setting some Big Holy Audacious Goals, or BHAG for short (pronounced BEE-hag).

"BHAG," said Carrion, "is an ambitious plan that revs up the entire organization. BHAGs typically require 10 to 30 years to complete." The 1996 Harvard Review article described BHAGs as Big Hairy Audacious Goals. For church purposes, Carrion suggested that the acronym be changed to Big Holy Audacious Goals.

The idea of BHAG goals was introduced at a recent weekend retreat of Conference leaders at Pilgrim Firs, meeting on the theme of "Vision, Vocation and Voice."

Carrion said the article suggests there are two components of any lasting vision for an organization.

One is the organization's core ideology, which defines its timeless character. That ideology cannot be invented. It must be discovered.

The second component is an envisioned future, which is active and visualized. The core purpose or vision is to understand and articulate the most fundamental reason for the organization's existence. When the PNC talks about vision, it's about its core values.

"What are the core values at the heart of the Conference, or local church, or even yourself?" Carrion asked.

Values identified by participants included unqualified acceptance of people and ideas, emerging stewardship of the planet, trust in the healing power of the spirit, and peace through justice. These values include the possibility of changing lives.

While a BHAG is a clearly



The Rev. Felix Carrion leads discussion at Pacific Northwest Conference Leadership Retreat.

Photos by Ed Evans

articulated goal, a core value is lasting and can never be completed, he said, noting, "Great companies understand the difference between what should never change and what should be open for change—between what is sacred and what is not.

"Vocation is your being, not occupation. It is who you are and fundamentally the core of your life," he said.

Maureen McLain pointed out that theologian Frederick Buechner describes vocation as the place "where your deep joy and the world's deep need intersect."

Bob Jackson of East Wenatchee commented that "many people use the word vocation and the word occupation as if they were synonymous, but they really aren't. Occupation is what occupies our time and a lot of that time is just busy work. Vocation, in theological terms, is a calling. Are we just doing stuff to keep busy, or are we actually hearing what God is saying? To be compelled by the voice you are hearing is a whole different thing than being occupied."

He noted that the UCC's God is Still Speaking campaign provides a context to give voice to that sense of calling.

Carrion added that "once you find your true voice which comes from within, when it is authentic and genuine, it mediates the presence of the living Christ, the living God, or that Great Mystery. God is

still speaking. Are you taking notes?"

"We are being called to the living church, not to the dying church," said Jennifer Castle of Seattle's Plymouth UCC, in a presentation to assist in moving toward a process of creating BHAG goals. She outlined the concept of Appreciative Inquiry, which she described as a tool for connecting to the transformational power of the positive core.

It involves systematic discovery of what gives life to a living system when it is most alive, most effective, and most capable. It is a process that was developed by David Cooperrider, a doctoral student at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, as an alternative to traditional problem solving approaches by focusing on what works well in organizations, rather than what does not.

For example, Castle said, when a satisfaction survey of an organization indicates 90 percent of those surveyed are satisfied and 10 percent are not, the focus too often becomes centered on those who are not satisfied, rather than asking the 90 percent what made them satisfied. Appreciative Inquiry flips usual problem solving on its head.

"It assumes that what we focus on becomes reality. The language we use creates our reality, and people have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future (the unknown) when they carry



Jennifer Castle introduces appreciative inquiry.

forward the best parts of the past," she said.

Comparing problem solving and appreciative inquiry approach, the emphasis is "what might be," rather than analyzing causes of the problems or possible solutions, Castle explained. The emphasis shifts to what should be. A basic assumption of a problem solving approach to resolving issues is that an organization is a problem to be solved. The basic assumption of an appreciative inquiry approach is that an organization is a mystery to be embraced.

The latter first invites organizations to agree on what the current state might be, then establishes if there is a preferred future state different than the current one.

To maximize the probability of achieving a different future state, Castle said, that goal must be valued and positively presented. The future goal cannot be valued less than the current state.

Bellingham UCC pedals faith in Bike-to-Church Sunday

By Rob Olason

For Krista Hunter, riding a bike to church on a Sunday morning was an act of faith. It meant committing to a 30-mile round trip, but she found it fun and inspirational, “even with the aches and pains.”

“There was something motivating about coming together as a community and making a faith statement that we are willing to commit joyfully to healing God’s creation,” said Hunter, who joined with more than 20 other members of First Congregational Church of Bellingham (FCCB) on May 22 for the church’s first “Bike2Church Sunday.”

Church members have been exploring their role as caretakers of God’s creation since forming their “Green Team” on October 10, 2010. The date, 10-10-10, was chosen to coincide with 350.org’s day of worldwide environmental activism.

The Green Team is exploring how the church and its members can reduce their impact on the environment through educational events, such as an “Eco-faith” information series in February. Films with speakers from the state and local faith community discussed efforts to bring a faith component to environmental efforts.

One outcome of this focus is that FCCB Green Team member Sherry Pryde encouraged church members to reduce their fossil fuel consumption by using alternative means of transportation. She was aided by a local program, Smart Trips, that promotes reducing single-person car trips through carpooling, public transit, biking or walking.

At several coffee hours, Pryde enrolled members into the program, listing FCCB as their “work organization.”

When members record trips on the Smart Trips website, not only can they chart their own



Some of more than 20 Bellingham UCC members who rode bicycles to church in May.

Photo by Dick Porter

progress, but the accumulated miles and trips of all FCCB participants begins to show the impact of this collective effort, replacing hundreds of miles of single passenger car trips with a lower fossil fuel alternative.

Pryde was thrilled with how “our first Bike 2 Church event went and surprised by the turnout of people of diverse ages and cycling abilities.” She added, “Biking is an all inclusive and intergenerational activity that is good for the individual body, the family and the church community.”

Another participant, Janet Ott, spoke of the spiritual nature biking holds for her, equating it to a form of body prayer.

“I bike for the usual reasons: exercise, exploration, and saving gas. It is also a spiritual discipline where I can calm my ‘monkey mind’ and am in conversation with Spirit,” she said. “What a great way to start a morning of worship!”

Evan Ritchie turned the event into a family bike ride to church.

“Bike to church Sunday was indeed an act of faith,” he said. “We are charged to be good stewards of God’s creation, and this was an invita-

tion to consider how to put that charge into practice even on a Sunday morning.

“Riding requires greater intentionality than driving. No hurrying out the door with minutes to spare,” he said. “It requires preparation the night before, ensuring each bike for our family of four was in proper working order, that helmets, gloves and jackets were laid out and ready to go. On the morning of the ride, the energy around the breakfast table was heightened. The conversation during the ride was also energetic. I felt that each of these elements added to my mindfulness that morning.”

Ritchie appreciated the opportunity.

“Upon arriving at church, I was enjoying the endorphin rush and found myself to be more attentive despite the fact that I was not dressed in my ‘Sunday Best’,” he said.

He suggested he would continue this practice, “I plan to ride to church more often, and will encourage my family to join me. Maybe one of my daughters will suggest it.”

On completing her 30-mile round trip, Hunter still found joy in her personal commitment

“to healing God’s creation.”

Aware that a single bike ride will not erase the massive volumes of carbon our industrial society injects into the atmosphere, she still sees the positive nature of such an act.

“While we may not heal God’s creation with one bike ride,” she said, “doing so can raise our awareness and that of others that our carbon-intensive lifestyle is damaging the earth to the point it will not be able to sustain life.”

As she pedaled her bike, Hunter found this simple act “brought home once again how I can make even greater efforts in my life and to engage in joyfulness along the way.”

After the service, bike riders gathered for cookies and lemonade and conversation at the church bike racks.

Then Pastor Tara Olsen Allen blessed the bikes and riders. Sufficiently refreshed, the group embarked on a “bike parade,” circumnavigating the church grounds.

Asked if FCCB would host a future Bike 2 Church Sunday, organizer Pryde responded; “Without a doubt.”

For information, call 360-734-3720 or visit www.fccb.net.