

Central Atlantic Conference, United Church of Christ 2007-08 Annual Report

Last June, more than 300 persons from the Central Atlantic Conference, including a good-sized contingent of youth, attended the 50th anniversary General Synod of the United Church of Christ. We were inspired by the stories of our collective past while remaining clear-eyed about the daunting challenges of the future. This short report is designed to highlight for the congregations, clergy, lay leaders and friends of the Central Atlantic Conference the good work that we have accomplished together since the 2007 annual meeting, as well as some of the long-term goals to which we remain committed.



Strategic Planning

A continuing challenge for both the CAC board of directors and its staff is to keep focused on important long-term goals while having to respond to unanticipated crises in our congregations, conference and denomination. In 2005, the CAC board and staff began working on a new strategic plan for the conference—and many of the accomplishments that are detailed in this report were a direct result of that process. In November 2007, the CAC board devoted one of its board meetings to a strategic planning retreat,

facilitated by Rev. Ed White of the Alban Institute. We discussed a wide range of issues, including youth ministry, leadership development, stewardship, improved use of technology and promoting more spiritual connectedness.

At last year's annual meeting, delegates approved funding to begin an adjustment in the salaries of the ministerial team, designed to eventually bring them closer to the compensation levels of their peers in other denominations and within the United Church of Christ. The board has also reviewed the duties and compensation of other members of the conference staff and made some adjustments to better align skills with responsibilities, and compensation with job descriptions.

The board will continue to make use of the strategic retreat and the conference's strategic plan over the next months and years as we move forward in ministry together.

Budget and Stewardship

Our congregations' gifts to Our Church's Wider Mission increased again in 2007 over the previous year and we thank you for your continued generous support. For the 2007 calendar year, CAC churches contributed more than \$1.212 million, which represented about a 1 percent increase over the previous year. Thirty-five percent of this amount is forwarded to the national settings of the church, based on the budget that was approved at the 2007 CAC annual meeting. In a letter earlier this year, Rev. John Thomas, president and general minister of the UCC, thanked the conference for its generosity. "The gifts from your churches enable significant mission—mission that belongs to God and that all of us do together. I believe and know that only together—as congregations, Conferences, and National setting—can we be the United Church of Christ that the future will demand." Over the past year, more conferences around the country joined the CAC in increasing their gifts to OCWM—a positive trend for the national church.

Members of the Board's Budget and Finance Working Group, under the leadership of Bob Ziegler, Treasurer Jeanne Boone and Associate Treasurer Rev. Craig Sparks, have worked closely with the staff throughout the year to monitor the Conference's finances. The conference's overall financial picture continued to be helped in 2007 by growth in income from its investments, including the new CAC Endowment Fund, which was created the previous year. For instance, in

calendar 2007, the Conference's Core Fund alone increased in value by more than \$68,000, helping to offset a substantial portion of the Conference's operational deficit. All of these funds are invested in funds managed by United Church Foundation. Here is a brief overview of the major funds that the Conference draws on in addition to its operational budget:

Name of Fund	Value (as of 12/31/2007)	Designated Purposes
Conference Operating Reserve (CORE)	\$1.216 million	CAC operating expenses
Church Development	\$736,206	75% to support new church starts; 25 % to support congregational vitality
Clergy Assistance	\$303,006	Grants to support ministers
CAC Endowment	\$434,170	(see below)
CAC Youth Endowment	\$76,942	Designated endowment in support of staffing for youth ministry

Meanwhile, the Trinity Trust, created by the sale several years ago of Trinity Reformed UCC in Takoma Park, MD, provides support for a wide variety of activities in the areas of church and clergy development and congregational vitality, under the review of a separate board of trustees. This endowment now totals nearly \$1.65 million, of which about \$80,000 will be distributed in 2008.

Under the current terms of the CAC Endowment Fund, no funds can be expended from the undesignated portion of the endowment until the fund totals \$1.5 million. In June 2007, St. Paul's United Church of Christ in Westminster, MD, designated a portion of a gift it received to create a designated fund in support of staffing for youth ministry in the conference. This gift has already had an impact on our ministry, and has encouraged persons to come forward with additional gifts in support of this important goal. We encourage congregations or individuals who may wish to consider making gifts to the Conference's endowment funds to contact us for more information.

Youth Ministry

With seed money from the CAC Youth Ministry Endowment Fund, the conference hired Kristen Curlee, a seminarian at Lancaster Theological Seminary, as its part-time youth ministry coordinator for 2008. Youth leaders from around the conference held their first gathering March 29 to share information and make plans for future joint activities. These will include programming at the CAC annual meeting and a CAC presence at the UCC's National Youth Event July 24-28 at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville (see <http://www.ucc.org/youth/nye/>). Plans also under way for youth ministry leaders to meet again in October, with a focus on engaging young people in building multi-generational worship.

Congregational Vitality and Church Development

As a result of a May 2006 Conference consultation on church development, the CAC board created a new working group devoted to Congregational Vitality and Church Development, and specified that 25 percent of the funds in the Conference's Church Development Fund be designated for church revitalization and vitality purposes and 75 percent for new church development. Edd Sewell serves as chair of the working group, and Revs. Rob Peters and Harry Taylor have served as chairs of the Congregational Vitality Committee and the Church Development Committee, respectively.

Last summer, a philanthropic foundation solicited an application from the Conference for a grant designed to support struggling congregations in small towns. The Conference staff and board moved quickly to take advantage of this opportunity and we were successful, receiving a \$75,000 grant, which will be used to make grants of up to \$10,000 to support a number of our congregations, to provide additional staff development to help the Conference ministry team meet the needs of small congregations and to underwrite a special two-day event to help address the needs of small congregations. That event will take place March 27-28, 2009, and will feature Rev. Dr. Anthony Pappas, an author and recognized expert on the challenges facing small congregations. Because so many congregations applied for these grants, we are taking steps to secure additional funding so that grants can be extended to more of our congregations than was originally possible.

In October, 2007, many of us gathered in Cambridge, Maryland, to celebrate the dedication of a new church building for Immanuel United Church of Christ, the result of many years of visioning and hard work on the part of the congregation, supported by the Conference and national staffs. We were blessed that Rev. John Thomas, general minister and president of the United Church of Christ, was able to join us for this special day in our life together.



We were grateful that John was scheduled to return in June as the keynote speaker for our 2008 annual meeting, as he begins his final year as leader of our denomination. The annual meeting, under the theme “IMAGINE—A New Church Is Possible,” was designed to help support our congregations in the real-world challenges they face. Our thanks to Rev. Linda Holzbaaur, ACM Sherry Taylor, the New Jersey Association and other members of the Annual Meeting Task Force for their work on the planning of this event.

Boundary Training

At the 2006 annual meeting, delegates approved a resolution calling for the Conference to work with its associations to promote boundary training for clergy and lay leaders. At the same time, insurance carriers and the national church were urging churches to take steps to help ensure their ethical integrity, particularly in the areas of sexual misconduct and financial management. Over the past two years, Conference staff, in particular Revs. Richard Vaught and Patricia Barth, and representatives of association-level Church and Ministry Committees and Commissions have worked to develop an approach under which congregations will be encouraged to adopt “safe church” policies and clergy would be required to take part in association-sponsored boundary training sessions. The CAC Board affirmed this approach, and an initial “train-the-trainers” seminar was held May 16-17, 2008, to support our associations as they work with their congregations and clergy to help them understand these issues. Conference staff will continue to support this initiative to provide associations, congregations and clergy with the resources they need.

Conference Governance

In early 2007, the Conference board began a process of reviewing the Conference’s bylaws and personnel policies. A board committee solicited input from across the conference and met face-to-face six times over the course of the next year to draft and review changes. The board itself devoted additional time to reviewing and discussing proposed revisions. Proposed revisions to the bylaws will be considered by delegates at the annual meeting; it is anticipated that additional changes to the Conference’s Personnel Policies will be approved by the board in final form by that time. Our thanks to Glenn Patterson, Conference Moderator and chair of the board’s

Operations and Personnel Working Group, for his leadership of this initiative.

Social Justice and Advocacy

The 50th Anniversary General Synod, meeting in June 2007, adopted three resolutions that originated, in whole or in part, in the Central Atlantic Conference. One of these, related to immigration policy, was particularly timely as many communities within the region wrestled with laws and policies related to legal and illegal immigrants. In particular, churches and clergy in Northern Virginia and the Frederick, MD, area spoke out in public meetings and organized events to help community members understand the issues involved.

We continue to try and build on relationships fostered through our international partnerships. Under the leadership of Rev. Kenneth Daniel, we have strengthened our ties with our German partner churches. Last summer, Thomas Vesterling of the Church Province of Saxony (Germany) completed a two-month pastoral internship with us, visiting our annual meeting, General Synod and churches around the Conference. In February, Associate Conference Minister Jerry Foltz represented the CAC at a joint meeting of the Saxony and Thuringia Synods, which will merge next January into the Evangelical Church of Middle Germany. Ricardo Esquivia, our partner from the Mennonite Church in Colombia, attended General Synod and led a Synod in the City workshop. Ricardo returned in May for meetings in Washington, and Rev. Barbara Gerlach will return to Colombia later this summer. Michael Joseph, a member of First Congregational UCC in Washington, DC, was commissioned as a missionary to Colombia last summer, and has been assigned to us by the UCC-Disciples' Global Ministries. These persons are further supported by advocacy efforts in Washington that many in the conference support. Finally, our partnership with the United Congregational Churches of Southern Africa (UCC-SA) continues to develop, under the leadership of Rev. Adora Iris Lee, a former missionary to that region. Revs. Prince and Cheryl Dibeela of the UCC-SA attended General Synod and stayed on to visit CAC congregations in New Jersey and Washington. John and Dawn Barnes, missionaries in East Cape, South Africa, have been granted ministerial standing by the Potomac Association, and have forged a relationship with Glen Ridge Congregational UCC in New Jersey, which will be sending a delegation to that country later this summer.

The Conference has fulfilled the last year of a three-year commitment it made to support the minister at Central Congregational UCC in New Orleans. Rev. Kwame Osei Reed has continued to work with national UCC staff on establishing a community outreach center in New Orleans. Evangelical Reformed UCC was among the CAC congregations who organized or supported work trips to the Gulf Coast, leading a group from the Catoctin Association this spring to help build homes in Biloxi, MS.

The Conference is providing some leadership and infrastructure support to Tents of Hope, a grass-roots initiative that aims to build a tent city on the National Mall in Washington next fall to raise funds and awareness of the humanitarian crisis in Darfur. More information is available at www.tentsofhope.org.

This area of our life together is overseen by the Board's Mission, Vision and Communications Working Group, under the leadership of Rev. Paul Bryant-Smith. We recognize that Conference churches continue to do much good ministry on their own, or in partnership with others at the local level. Glade UCC in Walkersville, MD, has continued its long-standing work with a community in Honduras, building homes and raising funds for the education of young people there. Greenbelt UCC in Maryland was recently recognized for raising more money for Church World Service's 2007 CROP Walk than any other UCC congregation in the United States. These

are but two examples of the kinds of ministries that churches throughout the conference engage in and for which we are grateful.

Ecumenical Activities

The Ministry Team continues to participate in a wide variety of ecumenical activities. John Deckenback has joined in Muslim/Christian/Jewish dialogues regarding peace in the Middle East and meets regularly with ecumenical counterparts. In early May, John joined eight other denominational representatives for a meeting with Maryland Gov. Martin O'Malley. Kwame Osei Reed serves as co-convener of the Interfaith Conference in Washington, DC. In April, John and Kwame were invited to participate in the Mass celebrated by Pope Benedict XVI at Nationals Stadium in Washington. In late April, Kwame helped facilitate the design of a two-day gathering, "The Prophetic Witness in the African American Religious Experience: Crisis, Calling, Critique and Community," sponsored by the Samuel Dewitt Proctor Conference in conjunction with the Howard University School of Divinity. John spoke at the ecumenical service at Shiloh Baptist Church that was held in conjunction with the event. Jerry Foltz has represented the conference on ecumenical and community-level coalitions dealing with disaster preparedness. Representatives of the Shenandoah Association continue to meet regularly with their counterparts from the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ.

Dealing With the Expected and Unexpected

Over the past year, the Conference staff and board have worked hard to keep moving forward on our mutual ministerial goals. At the same time, the staff has been forced to respond to crises both within the national church as well as within our local congregations. Sadly, the latter has included an unusually large number of clergy disciplinary matters this past year, situations that test the faith and energies of church members, the members of association Church and Ministry Committees and Commissions and the Conference ministry team. We are grateful to those who have devoted time and prayerful attention to these situations in recent months, particularly when the previously scheduled sabbaticals of members of the Conference ministry team further stretched our available resources. This work, of necessity, is often not very visible to the rest of the Conference. Nevertheless, one of the Conference's essential roles is to provide the infrastructure to help support our congregations in challenging times, including the search for new pastoral leadership. To that end, the Board's Operations and Personnel Working Group devoted specific attention this year to reviewing and updating the Conference's Clergy Compensation Guidelines to try to address more of the real-world challenges our congregations face as they try to provide fair and equitable compensation to our clergy members.

In Closing

All in all, it has made for a busy year. We regret that space does not permit us to name and thank all of those who have given of their time and talents to strengthen the wider United Church of Christ, whether at the national, conference or association level. Inevitably, there is always more that we wish we could accomplish. Still, we look forward to the coming year, as we aim to build on these initiatives, working together, in covenant, to discern God's will and further the ministry of Jesus Christ. We remain grateful for both your prayers and your generous financial support, and invite your ideas and feedback as we continue to move forward together.

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