

Conference Connection is the monthly eNewsletter of the Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ. You're receiving this email because you have expressed an interest in the work of the Southeast Conference. Don't forget to add clwaldron@secucc.org to your address book so we'll be sure to land in your inbox!

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Open Table in Mobile Hosts Fundraiser for Couple Fighting for the Right to Adopt a Child



Open Table UCC in Mobile, Alabama held a successful fundraiser on January 3 in support of a local lesbian couple fighting for the right of second parent adoption of their child. The couple, Kim McKean and Cari Searcy, were legally married in the state of California in 2008, but their marriage is not recognized in the state of Alabama. The couple decided to pursue Cari's right to adopt Khaya after being denied the opportunity to administer care to him in the hospital after an open-heart surgery required shortly after his birth. The couple has amassed almost \$40,000 in legal fees in a case that is currently being heard in the



Federal Circuit Court in Mobile, and may eventually go to the United States Supreme Court. Open Table partnered with a local LGBT support organization, Wave of Hope, to plan the fundraiser which involved a wine and cheese reception followed by the screening of the 2011 film "Cloudburst" starring Olympia Dukakis and Brenda Fricker. The event was well received with 55 in attendance and \$1742.25 raised for the couple.

[Reverend Ellen Sims was interviewed for an article that appeared online in the local paper, al.com](#), and a supportive article also appeared in Mod Mobilian, an online magazine. Event organizers felt sure that the event would have had more participants and donations if it had not poured rain all afternoon, but were pleased with the results and the opportunity to raise public awareness about the issue of marriage equality and about the presence of Open Table UCC in Mobile. Ellen Sims commended the lay leadership of Open Table for meticulous planning, a joyful synergy among all the volunteers, and the spirit of Love that pervaded the entire event.

Jottings from June

As we enter a new year, I am always captured by the theme of Epiphany. An epiphany (from the ancient Greek meaning manifestation or striking appearance) is an experience of sudden and profound realization. Generally the term is used to describe scientific breakthrough, religious or philosophical discoveries, but it can apply in any situation in which an enlightening realization allows a problem or situation to be understood from a new and deeper perspective. Epiphanies happen unexpectedly but generally follow a process of significant thought about a problem. Often they are triggered by a new and key piece of information, but importantly, a depth of prior knowledge is required to allow the leap of understanding.



The journey the Magi, the Wise Men, the Kings from the East, took to find the Christ Child was the result of study of the stars, reading the writings and ponderings of others, and preparation for a long journey to an unknown place where they really were not sure what they would find. Our search for the presence of Christ in our lives is always a journey inwardly and sometimes outwardly. But our awareness, our startling moment of conviction of God with Us, Emmanuel, comes about because we have thought about God and Jesus and Spirit, have read scripture, and talked to others and reflected on our own experiences. Then suddenly comes a moment when we realize that we are not alone, that we don't need to depend on our own sometimes meager personal resources, but that a loving God, compassionate Redeemer, and guiding Spirit are manifest in our lives in unexpected ways.

The next General Synod, the biennial national meeting of the United Church of Christ, is centered upon the theme of "Unexpected Places." It will take place in Cleveland, Ohio, home of the UCC national offices. During this year of 2015, I hope that the hard work, loving thought, and creative reflection you all have been doing over the past year or two will create moments of epiphany for our life together as the Southeast Conference and for each of our congregations and for the world we are called to love and serve. May blessings abound for each of you in this new year.

Blessings, June

CARING COMMUNITY

We are beginning a process of praying for authorized ministers, congregations, and ministry groups throughout 2015. Each month, we will publish a weekly list for the month and post them weekly on our Facebook page. We encourage you to include these prayers requests in your local church newsletter, share them with your prayer circle, and include them in your own prayers.

[You can download this month's prayer list here](#)

This week:

January 18 Pensacola UCC-Pensacola, Florida
 Dwight Andrews
 Thomas Eckert
 Dorothea Lotze-Kola
 Harold Schoup

Please hold Rev. Susie Smith (retired from Peace Congregational UCC in Clemson, South Carolina) and her family in prayer. She lost her mother, Doris Brannon, on December 28.

Betty Buttrick, wife of Rev. David Buttrick died on Saturday, January 10. Services will be held at Brookmeade Congregational UCC on Sunday, January 18. Condolences may be sent to the family at 68 Brookwood Terrace, Nashville, TN 37205.

Bessie Yarborough Samuel, Reverend Kenneth Samuel's mother, went home to the Lord on January 12. Services will be held in New York City and Darlington, South Carolina. Reverend Samuel serves Victory Church in Stone Mountain, Georgia.

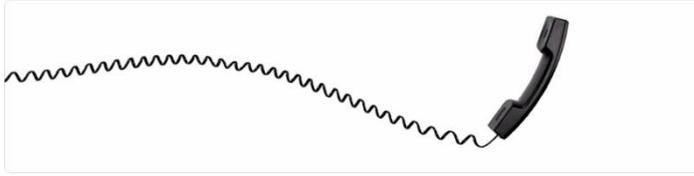
Rev. Glenna Shepherd has accepted a call to Pleasant Hill Community Church UCC in Pleasant Hill, Tennessee. She will begin her ministry on February 15.

Rev. Patrick Rogers, who has been serving Pensacola UCC, has accepted a call to First Congregational Church, Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

June Boutwell sends a note: "Thank you so much for all your prayers, presence, and support as my family said goodbye to my mother on December 13. I am also grateful to the Personnel Committee for granting me two weeks of family medical leave as my son underwent spinal surgery in Portland Oregon on December 31. And my gratitude to marvelous, competent staff and leadership who make sure that fruitful ministry happens despite the challenges before us. The Southeast Conference is truly a

caring community and your love and care has meant the world to me and to my family."

Churches in transition- Community Congregational UCC, Montgomery Alabama; Oak Grove Congregational Christian, Pine Mountain Georgia; Pilgrim UCC, Birmingham Alabama; Church of the Savior, Alpharetta Georgia; United Church, Cookeville Tennessee; Decatur UCC, Decatur Georgia; Peace Congregational UCC, Clemson South Carolina; Pensacola UCC, Pensacola Florida; Pilgrim Congregational UCC, Chattanooga Tennessee.



The Conference office is currently in transition to a new phone system. Please note that reflecting changes in the standards of communication we have removed our fax line and 800 number. Our primary office number remains the same.

Generosity Corner



Transforming Churches • Transforming Lives
SOUTHEAST CONFERENCE
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Capital Campaign Grant Applications

Starting today, January 15 through March 15, 2015, any Southeast Conference UCC church can make application for a church grant from the

Transforming Churches - Transforming Lives Campaign Fund. Each church was sent a packet of information the end of December. This packet contained a paper application and general guidelines for applying. If you did not receive yours, please contact Debbie Spearman.

All applications will be reviewed by a review committee with grants being awarded in May, 2015. The next cycle for grant applications begins October 1, 2015.

The online application is available today, January 15, 2015 by going to the [Southeast Conference website here](#).

Any questions can be directed to Debbie Spearman at dspearman@secucc.org.

Debbie Spearman, Generosity Coordinator



Please mark your calendar with the following events!

2015

January 16-19 *Winter Youth Retreat, Blowing Rock Conference Center, Blowing Rock, NC*

February 21 *Commission on Ministry, Pilgrim Congregational UCC, Chattanooga, TN*

April 18 *MID Committee Interviews, Pilgrim Congregational UCC, Chattanooga, TN*

June 11-13 *Pre-event and Southeast Conference Annual Meeting, Piedmont College, Demorest GA*

June 26-30 *General Synod in Cleveland, OH*

August 8 *Commission on Ministry, Pilgrim Congregational UCC, Chattanooga, TN*

October 16-18 *Southern Regional Women's Conference, Sumatanga Retreat Center, Gallant, AL*

2016

July 26-29 *National Youth Event Orlando, FL*



Biennial Southern Region UCC Women's Retreat "Celebrate the Lord of the Dance!"

October 16-18, 2015

Sumatanga Conference Center, Gallant, AL
for Women from UCC Conferences: Southern, Southeast,
South Central, Florida

The 2015 biennial Southern Region United Church of Christ Women's Retreat, to be held Oct 16-18 at Sumatanga Conference Center in Gallant, Alabama, planned by volunteers from Southeast Conference and a representative from each conference in this region, is open to lay and clergy women from UCC Conferences: Southern, Florida, South

Central and Southeast. This event will strive to enlighten, inspire and uplift attendees through refreshment, renewal, relaxation, reconnection and rejoicing while "Celebrating the Lord of the Dance!" Mark it on your calendars and watch for more information and registration details soon.

Help With Research into LGBTQ Clergy

The following is a message from Tommie Simon, who is looking for participants for his study of LGBTQ Clergy.

I am a graduate student in the Department of Sociology at the University of West Georgia. I am currently recruiting people to participate in a research project that I am conducting to fulfill the thesis writing requirements of my department. I intend to explore identity formation among LGBTQ Christian Clergy.

I am seeking 10 ministers of the gospel who identify as LGBTQ to take part in one, 60 minute interview. Each participant will be interviewed separately and in private, and all interviews will be kept confidential.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me at the home phone number or email address provided below. Please indicate the best time to reach you.

Thanks in advance for your help.

God's peace,

Tommie Simon

tsimon1@my.westga.edu

(770) 412-2621



Winter Youth Retreat January 16-19, 2015

Join us in prayer for this weekend's Winter Youth Retreat! Youth from all over the Southern and Southeast Conferences will be gathering for fellowship, fun, worship, and connection. Look for a recap here soon!

Upcoming Training Opportunities

Emotional Training

If you are looking for some continuing education options for 2015, please take a look at this program. It is headed by Roy Oswald whom some of you may know from his work with the Alban Institute.

[Click here for a link to the training](#)

"Our Whole Lives" Facilitator Training

Looking to become an OWL facilitator for your congregation? OWL is a comprehensive sex education course for different ages from young children to adult developed by the UCC and the UUA. High Country UCC in Vilas, NC is hosting training in April. [Click here for more information.](#)



General Synod 30
Cleveland Ohio

June 26-30, 2015

Registration is now open for General Synod 30, the biennial national meeting of the United Church of Christ. It is exciting to have this General Synod in Cleveland, the location of the national offices of the United Church of Christ. Please go to this link to get more information. <http://www.ucc.org/synod/>

The Southeast Conference is exploring the possibility that we may charter large buses to take people to General Synod for the whole meeting or perhaps for the community worship on Sunday afternoon. There would be a charge for this transportation. Visitors to General Synod must pay a registration fee. The Sunday afternoon worship is free and open to the public. Please contact the conference office if either of these options would be of interest to you.

And the Children Shall Lead Them

**An inspiring model of ministry
February 21-22 in Chapel Hill, NC**

Are you looking for ways to dynamically involve children in your congregation? Rev. Susan Steinberg, Associate Pastor for Children's Ministries at United Church of Chapel Hill, has been a strong voice for the inclusion of children in all church faith formation events and for finding ways to minister with children not just provide ministries for them. This event will give you the chance to hear from her about her pioneering efforts, experience two ways United Church faithfully forms children, and brainstorm ways to develop similar practices in your own congregations.

[Click here to download a flyer for the event.](#)



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Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ



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