

CONFERENCE *connection*

Alabama • Georgia • Mississippi
South Carolina • Tennessee • NW Florida



SOUTHEAST UCC Conference

March 1, 2016

Jottings from June

I am reminded of a Lenten prayer by Jane V. Doull as I write for this edition. I share excerpts below:

Restless, searching God: You call us into the wilderness, as you called the Hebrew people. As you called Jesus. Help us to be true to that call. Enable us to resist the easy answers and quick solutions that promise a false happiness. Deliver us from the temptation of putting comfort, security, and control before your will and your way.

God of the wilderness: We ask you to guide our church through this sometimes barren land. We ask your wisdom in times of testing and conflict. Deliver us from the temptation of a pat-answer faith, sheltered from the vicissitudes of life. Open us to trusting each other sufficiently that we might truly speak what we mean and feel.

The last few weeks have felt like journeying in the wilderness as we have worked on budget preparations for 2016. The Stewardship & Finance and Personnel Committees have been working hard to find a path toward a right size ministry within the Conference. Many of you know that the Southeast Conference has adopted deficit budgets for many of the past years. But the resources that have made up that difference and sustained the Conference are no longer there and we must face up to the realities that confront this ministry.



I shared with the staff in the February staff meeting that there are only three ways to address the budget deficit—find more income, reduce expenses, reduce staff. I know the realities of local churches and the challenges they face to balance budgets and continue vital ministry. Several churches have had to cut their contribution to Our Churches Wider Mission, the basic support offering that sustains the ministries of the Conference. We also tithe or pledge 10% of that amount to the national setting of the United Church of Christ to support those ministries. The more income piece is not feasible for this Conference though we would welcome additional giving if that is possible for any local churches. I am grateful that some churches have increased their giving and other are working toward a true tithe.

The Board of Directors will be looking at the budget at their meeting this month. With such a small operation, there are not many options. Unfortunately the elimination of the executive

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Coming Events

- SEC Staff Meeting**
Thu, March 3, 2016
Conference Office
- Board of Directors**
Tue, March 15, 2016
Web Meeting
- Application Deadline for Conference Grants**
Fri, March 18, 2016

Conference Staff

- June Boutwell**
Designated Conference Minister
jboutwell@secucc.org
- Sarah Kim**
Executive Director of Theological Education and Dean of PATHWAYS
skim@secucc.org

- Debbie Spearman**
Generosity Coordinator

administrator position was a result of those limited options. (Please see the article elsewhere in this newsletter honoring Gerri Ryons-Hudson's ministry.) More cuts will be necessary as we need to find an additional \$20,000 in additional income or savings to have a 2016 balanced budget. The Board will be communicating directly with churches and leaders after their meeting.

This kind of situation is not affecting only the Southeast Conference. The other 37 Conferences of the United Church of Christ are having similar conversations as we all seek ways to adapt to the reality of a changing culture of giving and relational attitudes toward organizations. It may feel like a wilderness experience right now but we recall that the people of God had to find their way through the challenges of perceived lack of abundance and leadership challenges. But God is good and provided all that was needed so that the Children of Israel could claim their place in God's great, compassionate, and merciful plan for all of creation. Can we doubt that the same is in store for our little corner of the world?

s I have been in various conversations with people the last few weeks and reminded them that Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent, falls on February 10, the common response has been, "Wow, Easter is really early this year." I was thinking about this as I began to see friends on Facebook make the posting that they were giving up Facebook for Lent to spend time in reflection and quiet personal contemplation.

The idea of giving something up for Lent does not fit with my theological perspective about the role of Jesus who becomes the Christ in his human example as he lived and moved among the people of his time. I understand the penitential nature of denying oneself and using that as the focus of reflection on the sacrifice made on Good Friday. But I think that Jesus took on a larger role in obeying the will of his Divine Parent. So I tend to add something to my life that is meaningful for Lent that will be of benefit to the world or those around me. And to be honest, many people I know give up things that seem to be a very small sacrifice. If they are giving something up to spend more time in reflection and prayer, wouldn't it be a more meaningful purpose to add that time to a busy schedule as a mark of intentionality about engaging in a sacrificial act?

I am not criticizing anyone's Lenten discipline. Any act that draws us closer to God and allows us to become more knowledgeable about our own faith values and spend more time in prayer and reflection is a good and faithful act. But I do wonder about the internal negotiation in giving up something so something can be added. I have been musing about how many people who might give up chocolate for Lent (a very common choice) will find some other thing this year so that they can still enjoy the Valentine candy they might receive from loved ones. Giving up something we love does not increase our love for God in our daily lives. So I encourage you to consider the theological foundation for whatever you deny or add this Lenten season. My prayer is that it will increase your faith and love and knowledge of the One who holds us in eternal love.

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Connect with Us!



Annual Yearbook Submissions Due on March 7 Local churches are asked to submit information such as membership numbers, financial data, and

contact information to
the UCC annually.

Thank you to all who have already submitted their annual reports. Just a reminder that these reports are due by end of day March 7. Please let the Conference Office know if you have any questions. We are trying to increase our reporting percentage as this data is important to the Conference and National setting as we look at a picture of our ministry.

From the Conference Office

Appreciating Gerri Hudson

It was with deep regret that we said good-bye to Gerri Ryons-Hudson on February 25, 2016 as the position of Executive Administrator was eliminated due to budget considerations.

Gerri served the Southeast Conference faithfully for over 18 years and saw the Conference go through many changes. She served three Conference Ministers, moved offices at least four times, was the hub of Annual Meeting, kept track of all the church and minister files, worked with the subcommittees of the Commission on Ministry to make sure information was distributed and records updated, and was the voice of the Conference to many of our churches and leaders.



She has appreciated all the expressions of concern, well wishes and prayers you have offered. We hope that she will be able to be present at Conference Annual Meeting June 10-11 so that her ministry among us can be recognized and honored. You can contact her at gpar_hudson@bellsouth.net.



We are continuing the process of praying for authorized ministers, congregations, and ministry groups throughout 2016. 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 prayer requests in your local church newsletter, share them with your prayer circle, and include them in your own prayers.

- [Click here to download the entire 2016 prayer list](#)

Highlights for this month:

- Prayers for **Rev. Debbie Douglas** and her family on the death of her father, Benjamin Taylor Welch, on February 20.
- Prayers for **Rev. Laurie Hill** as she recovers from surgery. She is serving Fairfield Glade Community

Church in Tennessee.

- Prayers for **Rev. Bob Hurst**, United Church of Huntsville as he recovers from surgery.
- Continued prayers for **Rev. Michael McCaulley**, Peace Church, Clemson South Carolina as he continues treatment for a bone marrow transplant at MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston.
- Prayers for **Rev. Dr. Tim Downs**, former conference minister, as he recovers from surgery.

Churches in Transition:

Oak Grove Congregational Christian, Pine Mountain Georgia; Church of the Savior, Alpharetta Georgia; Pensacola UCC, Pensacola Florida; Pilgrim Congregational UCC, Chattanooga Tennessee; Brookmeade Congregational UCC, Nashville Tennessee; Howard Congregational UCC, Nashville Tennessee; Beloved Community, Birmingham Alabama; First United Church, Belvidere Tennessee.

News from Around the Conference and Beyond

Two Installations in One Day

February 28 was a day of celebration for two churches and two pastors. Rev. Raymonda Speller was installed at Community Congregational UCC in Montgomery, AL and Rev. Bruce Schoup was installed at 5:00 pm at Peace Congregational UCC in Clemson, SC. [Read more...](#)

Our History, Part 3: Puritan Days

In honor of the 50th Anniversary of the Southeast Conference, we've posted on our website an essay from Mike Stroud describing the presence of Congregationalism in antebellum times in South Carolina and Georgia. [Read more...](#)

UCC 'Spotlight' Discussion Guide a Meaningful Conversation Starter

Sexual abuse of children, teens and adults by church leaders is a serious problem brought back into focus recently by the heralded film, "Spotlight." To aid thoughtful dialogue about issues highlighted in the movie, the United Church of Christ has released a film discussion guide for use by churches interested in addressing ways to ensure members of our faith communities are not vulnerable to abuse. [Read More...](#)

One Great Hour of Sharing 2016

One Great Hour of Sharing® (OGHS) is the Lenten Offering of the United Church of Christ that supports disaster, refugee, and development actions. The suggested offering date for the OGHS offering in 2016 is March 6. [Read More...](#)

Camp Beech Grove Returns this Summer to Central UCC in Atlanta

Camp Beech Grove welcomes children who want to connect with each other and nature, learn about the outdoor world in which they live, and have time to play in the forest. The small camp (max. 24) offers young children opportunities to play in and learn about the forest and its habitats. [Read more...](#)

Open and Affirming Newsletter

The Open and Affirming Coalition of the United Church of Christ provides support and sanctuary for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender members of our church as well as their families and friends, advocates for their full inclusion in church and society; and seeks to live out Christ's call to love and justice for all people. [Read the latest newsletter...](#)

Learning Opportunities

Building an Inclusive Church on March 11-12

Church of the Savior UCC-Alpharetta, GA has partnered with nearby Johns Creek Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)-Johns Creek, GA to co-sponsor an ecumenical workshop, "Building an Inclusive Church," March 11-12, 2016. [Read more...](#)

Healthy Boundaries for Clergy and Church Leaders

The Southeast Conference, in partnership with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Georgia, are pleased to offer two Healthy Boundaries training sessions for clergy and church leaders. [Read more...](#)

"Live & Learn" Lunches @ TACC

Every third Tuesday of the Month from 11:30 to 1:00 join TACC staff and community experts for lunch, and to learn more about how to explore life's difficult conversations and challenging situations. March 15: Relieving Stress and Unplugging the Mind Without the Use of Pharmaceuticals. Please RSVP by March 11. [Read more...](#)