



C SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA NEVADA CONFERENCE

UNITED CHURCH
NEWS

**BE SURE
TO NOTE THE
EARLY DATES**

Southern California Nevada Conference
Annual Gathering 2007

*Salt & Light:
Shiny Spicy Faith
(Sal y Luz:
Fe Brillante y Picante)*

June 1–2, 2007
Community Congregational UCC
276 “F” Street, Chula Vista, CA 91910

Dr. Randi Jones Walker Ph.D., keynoter

Meet Maria Rosario Ibarra, newest staff member of Southern California Nevada Conference

With the task of working primarily with the emerging **Latino Ministry** of the Conference, **Rev. Maria Rosario (“Charo”) Ibarra** has become the new **Pastoral Assistant for Building Community in Diversity**. Beginning her duties on February 1, she is faced with the goal of equipping both lay and clergypersons for ministry in and with Latino communities in response to the priority of the Conference of Building Community in Diversity. The specific duties are enabling new Latino congregations, working with established churches desiring to reach out to the Latino community and helping established churches seeking to begin new congregations in Latino communities.



The Rev. Maria Rosario Ibarra

Ibarra is already at work conducting **Spanish language classes** for clergy and interested laypersons, which include an emphasis on understanding Latino culture. She will be teaching polity in Spanish on the history and program of the United Church of Christ and conducting adult education classes on leadership development within Latino congregations.

She is fully bi-lingual in Spanish and English and understanding of the Latino culture in the United States. She was ordained on March 4 at Centro Familiar Cristiano, where she has held membership and had worked as administrative assistant to Hamleth Terrones for six months.

Ibarra was born in Lima, Peru. After studying economics, she worked in banks and different financial institutions as a financial supervisor, giving mortgage loans and tracing credit lines. After coming to the U. S. in 2001 she became involved in a Hispanic church coordinating their small group ministry, training tutors and preparing teaching materials. In 2003 she began her studies at Fuller Theological Seminary and graduated with a Master of Divinity degree in 2006, also receiving the Hispania Award 2006 from Fuller. She became an in-care student in 2005 while a member of Centro Familiar Cristiano. Her Ecclesiastical Council was held October 2006, and her new position as Pastoral Assistant for Building Community in Diversity began on February 1, 2007. We welcome her into this Conference.

Rev. Randi Walker, Ph.D., keynotes Conference Annual Gathering

Southern California Nevada Conference will hold its Annual Gathering at an earlier date than usual this year, to give more time to prepare for the National UCC Synod gathering and celebration of the UCC’s 50th birthday. On **June 1–2, 2007**, delegates and visitors will gather at the **Community Congregational Church, UCC, in Chula Vista**.

Rev. Randi Jones Walker, Ph.D. will keynote the gathering. Her latest book, *The Evolution of a UCC Style* is the study book for the SCNC this year. She will address the gathering regarding our Conference and churches’ future. In this respect she says, “Leaders of emerging faith communities

need to know how we got where we are, about painful moments of arrogance and pride, about grace-filled moments. We got here step by step, we change step by step. As a historian, I work to restore a sense of contingency to humanity.”

As Associate Professor of Church History at Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, CA, Dr. Walker is also ordained in the United Church of Christ and has served as a pastor in the Southern California Nevada Conference. If you wish to attend, ask your pastor about registering for the annual gathering.

Miracles In Progress sets theme of Church Vitality Conference

By Rev. Heather Miner, Associate Minister
Community Congregational UCC in Corona Del Mar

Over 150 registrants representing 80 churches in the **Southern California Nevada and Southwest Conferences** gathered near the Ontario Airport on February 2 to 3 to hear keynote speakers and to share stories and resources aimed at encouraging congregations to do “church” in new ways.

In the two **Success Stories** shared by Rev. Briget Nicholson, pastor at **First Congregational UCC in Tucson, Arizona**, and Rev. Angel Toro, pastor at **Chapel on the Hill UCC in Seminole, Florida**, leaders learned about how two churches, which were thought dead, were transformed. Rev. Nicholson told a story about claiming land for God, the miracle of its being given, and the use and celebration of the gift. She spoke of creating a welcoming atmosphere in the building and worship with very practical suggestions, modeling what she preached by sharing the leadership with some of her key church leaders. These stories, dubbed “**miracles in progress**,” formed the heart of worship in this “Equipping Your Church for the Future” event.

In the three **Big Ideas** workshops people came away

knowing more about the work of others in three areas—Church Vitality, Children’s Sunday School, and California’s Latino/a population. The 18 Special Subjects, including starting a small group ministry, evoking creativity, widening your welcome, Still Speaking training, children’s program, building maintenance, open and affirming paths, youth programs and financial support added to this resource pool with some honest, heartfelt sharing from leaders and participants. These conversations continued over the dinner table where ideas were shared and innovative visions were born.

As we closed together with thanksgiving, the voice of a woman who has struggled with her affiliation to the UCC, called out “thank you for this large family.” It was an expression of the connection she felt. In one night and one day, those who were once strangers, had experienced enough spirit filled testimonies, that **we had become Church, a community of grace**. Where grace abounds, so does the willingness to risk acting on fresh vision.

Thank you to all the national and local staff, pastors, and lay people who stepped forward to lead. I am looking forward to next year!



**BE THERE
IT’S WHERE THE ACTION IS
The UCC at 50 years!**

Let It Shine!

Hartford, Connecticut
June 22–26, 2007

www.ucc.org for information

**God
Is Still
Speaking**

Empowering and Launching Vital and Diverse Churches



Rev. Dr. Jane Heckles
Conference Minister

The evaluations from participants in our **Church Vitality** event last month have been studied, tabulated and celebrated—the message was clear—for the 150 folks who participated, that 24 hour training event exceeded their expectations! Everywhere I looked people were energized by new ideas and inspired by positive stories—the Good News was indeed being told. For almost half the folks there, this event was their first experience of the wider United Church of Christ and they clearly relished meeting others who are working hard to strengthen their congregation and mission. Our **Strategic Plan** calls for **annual training events for church revitalization**. We don't have enough staff time to work one-on-one with every church that would like to revitalize. But we are committed to providing a high quality training opportunity to those who attend.

We joyfully announce the **birth of our next new church start, Fiesta Cristiano UCC in Moreno Valley**. Located in the Eastern Association on the site of the former Cong'l Church, the Conference has called the Rev. Cesar Gramajo to plant a new congregation this year. The Eastern Association will celebrate this new start at their spring meeting and will meet Cesar and his wife Miriam. Much work will be done in this community before the first public service of worship. Our **Strategic Plan** calls for at least **one new church plant each year**. We have received the legacies of assets from churches that have concluded their ministries. Our stewardship opportunity is to convert those assets into living UCC communities of faith.

Your church might be challenged by a changing neighborhood and declining membership. Here in the SCNC, about half of our churches are located in neighborhoods that are radically different than they were when the original church was planted. Some of you have expressed the desire to learn how to extend an **“extravagant**

“*We have received the legacies of assets from churches that have concluded their ministries. Our stewardship opportunity is to convert those assets into living UCC communities of faith.*”

welcome” in your new community. Our **Strategic Plan** calls for the Conference to assist churches in this outreach. The Conference Board of Directors has called a new staffperson to teach our churches how to reach out and **“Build Community in Diversity.”** The Rev. Rosario “Charo” Ibarra has begun her ministry among us. She is teaching a Spanish class for pastors who want to expand their neighborhood welcome. She is teaching UCC polity in Spanish to deepen the understanding of the United Church of Christ in our Latino churches. Charo is now developing a curriculum for study and planning for churches that want to build an intentional program for neighborhood outreach. She will be testing that curriculum in the coming months.

We adopted a **Strategic Plan** in the Year 2000. See how it is coming to life!

One last celebration: **At least two congregations added 50+ new members during the year 2006!** Congratulations to Redlands UCC and Mission Hills UCC in San Diego! Any others to add to the list?

Peace Pole Dedicated at Bakersfield UCC

By Nancy Bacon, member,
First Congregational, Bakersfield

Aware of world-wide and local violence, youth at **First Congregational Church of Bakersfield, CA**, decided to erect a monument to peace and invite people from the community to participate in the dedication. They found a movement already underway, at worldpeace.org, which has planted peace poles at the North Pole, ground zero of the World Trade Center, Hiroshima, Sarajevo, Pilgrim Pines Camp and Conference Center, and thousands of other places. They chose eight languages to be engraved on the pole stating the prayer, “May Peace Prevail on Earth”. A Braille plaque was also added.

In preparation for the dedication ceremony, youth and church members were encouraged to fold white, origami, peace cranes. The goal was to fold 1,000 and to say a prayer for peace with each crane folded. The story of the Japanese girl, Sadako, was printed on the church's website along with the request for cranes and prayers.

On December 10, the day of the dedication, the cranes were strung in the church narthex, and part of the song “White Christmas” was played, along with John Lennon's song, “Imagine” and Ben Harper's song, “With My Own Two



Bakersfield Peace Pole is dedicated.

Hands”. The advent candle for peace was lit during an interfaith ceremony that included readings from the Qu'an, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Margaret Mead. Guests came and read the brief prayer aloud in Spanish, Hebrew, Arabic, Swahili, Chinese, Punjabi, Cherokee, and Braille. The city's mayor, Harvey Hall, dedicated the pole,



1,000 Cranes adorn Bakersfield First Congregational UCC.

linking Bakersfield to this world-wide peace project. All in attendance placed slips of paper, with their own prayers for peace in the hole dug for the pole.

The monument now stands as a reminder to pray for peace and invites people from different faiths to come together offering up this common prayer.

Conference Mid-Month Mailer Deadlines

| Issue in 2007 | Deadline | Issue Mailed |
|---------------|----------|--------------|
| May/June | Apr. 20 | May 1 |
| July/Aug | June 22 | July 2 |
| Sept/Oct | Aug. 17 | Sept. 1 |
| Nov/Dec | Oct. 12 | Nov. 1 |

Please submit your flyer or article by the deadline dates to:

Virginia Arroyo
Southern California Nevada Conference
2401 N. Lake Ave., Altadena, CA 91001
Phone: 626-798-8082 FAX: 626-798-6648
arroyo@sncucc.org

2007 WOMEN'S SPIRITUALITY RETREAT

Friday May 4–Sunday May 6

Pilgrim Pines Camp and Retreat Center

“Creating Sacred Spaces Where Our Faith Shines”
Rev. Lisa Maddox, facilitator

Join in for a weekend of fun, sharing, spirituality,
healing and relaxation

Registration and fees due no later than April 20

Scholarships available

Please call the camp office for further information and registration form
800-616-6612 or
909-797-1821

www.pilgrimpinescamp.org

Still Speaking Theatre announces dates

San Marino UCC has a treat in store for all. With its Theatre Advisory Board, the Still Speaking Theatre has chosen dates around Independence Day 2007 for a premiere production of "Independence".

The production will have two preview performances at 8 pm on July 6 and 7 and then open on Friday, July 13 and run for three successive weekends on Friday and Saturday nights at 8 pm through July 28. Two matinee

performances will also be offered during the run at 3 pm on Sunday, July 15 and again on July 22. Watch for announcements coming up in the next months.

Editor's Note: The comments above were excerpted from an article written by Donald Shenk, Artistic Director of the Still Speaking Theater, appearing in The Spire, newsletter from San Marino UCC.

Some Activities of interest coming up...

- **Eastern Association** holds its next meeting on **April 21** at **First Congregational Church of Santa Ana**. Registration and fellowship begin at 9 am. The program is entitled "New Ventures" and three workshops will be presented. Lunch follows.
- **Central Association** holds its next meeting on **April 28** at **Church of Christian Fellowship in Los Angeles**. Registration begins at 9 am. The meeting will include election of officers for 2007-2008 and some business. Lunch follows.
- **Mandatory Boundary Awareness Training for Clergy** continues with training on **Saturday, April 28** at Disciples Seminary Foundation in Claremont, and again on **Tuesday, September 18** at the Disciples Center in San Diego. Register with the SCNC office, through Loletta Barrett, 626-798-8082.
- **Coalition for Ministry in Daily Life**, an ecumenical organization, will be hosted by the United Church of Christ in Cleveland, Ohio on **April 13-15, 2007**. This is the 15th Annual Consultation of the Coalition. More information may be obtained through www.dailylifeministry.org.
- An **Earth Day Art Exhibition**, an interfaith event, will be held on **April 22** in Murrieta. Please contact Rev. Randy Leisey, pastor at **United Church of the Valley** by phone at 951-698-1520 for time and directions.
- Planning ahead? Please note that the **Western Christian Educators' Conference**, partially sponsored by the **Association of United Church Educators (AUCE)** will be held in Lake Tahoe **October 14-17, 2007** with a full program and music. Contact www.lessonsfromtheshepherd.com/wcec.htm for further information.



Panel presenters at one workshop "When the Song Changes" were From left to right: Rev. Marcia Hoffman, UCC; Rev. Mary Jo Bradshaw, DOC; and Ms. Megan Guy, DOC.

DOC and UCC Women's Convocation serves to unite efforts

By Elsa M. J. Seifert

Every other year, the women of the Disciples of Christ, Pacific Southwest Region, hold a convocation in association with United Church of Christ women in this Conference.

Dancing Through Life...the Rhythms of Grace as the theme of this year's gathering, brought together women who are leaders in their churches in both denominations. Held on March 3 and 4 at the Holiday Inn in La Mirada, the convocation featured a marketplace where a large bookstore and hand-crafted art from around the world allowed for purchase. In addition, there were displays of fair-traded coffee for purchase and body treatment products which were free of irritants, etc. Four worship services were scheduled for Saturday afternoon, Saturday evening, Sunday morning and Sunday after lunch, with music provided by a small band led by Patsy Meyer, who is a hand drummer and vocalist, and Tyana Parr, vocalist, both professionals in the music world and mem-

bers of the First Christian Church of North Hollywood. A special song for the event was composed by both of these women. The music enlivened the entire weekend, as did the three women who were keynote presenters from DOC/Christian Churches in this area.

A full program of 15 workshops was scheduled so that four could be attended by each participant. These included workshops on "What Happens when the Song Changes" led by a panel of three women of differing ages, including **Rev. Marcia Hoffman, UCC/DOC**, "Massage and Movement", "Dancing through Conflict", "Healing Touch", "The Ministry of Presence", and others. Wonderful food was served at tables assigned so that some women would know each other and some not. Information on the convocation to be scheduled in 2009 can be obtained from the Disciples Regional Office at 2401 North Lake Avenue in Altadena, CA 91001, 626-296-0385, or by contacting Liz Moore (UCC) at 909-624-8618 or at eandsmoore@aol.com.

Alternative Marketplaces becoming more numerous and easy to access

By Elsa M. J. Seifert

Those shopping places that carry wonderful artifacts as well as useful items that support the people who make them are springing up in many different locales.

There are two right here in Pasadena: El Pueblo in Old Town Pasadena, where wonderful works of art and other items can be seen and purchased, is a nonprofit which sup-

ports people within the United States for affordable housing and other necessities. Another is the Ten Thousand Villages Store, on South Lake Avenue, which carries works from around the world and essentially supports those villages where the items are produced.

Please let me know if there are places like this in your area. I hope to do a highlighting article on this area in the next issues.

Deadlines for SCNC News in 2007

Please send in any articles or call with information about events to (626) 798-8082 and ask Virginia for my phone number, or email to: eseifert@pacbell.net by the following dates:

| | |
|------------|---------------------|
| April 26 | for June/July issue |
| June 20 | for Aug/Sept issue |
| August 28 | for Oct/Nov issue |
| October 28 | for Dec/Jan issue |

YUM!

**Calling All Youth
6th through 12 grades**

**Youth Uniting in Mission
Saturday, April 28—9 am to 4 pm
San Dimas Community Church UCC**

**"Caring for Creation:
A Special Program for Communities of Faith"**
Juana Torres, Sierra Club, leading
and coordinating service projects
in the national forest

Further info: Phil Jenkins 626-798-8082 or
Jenkins@scnuc.org

AROUND THE CONFERENCE...

If you have an event you wish to share about, please send it to me by email at eseifert@pacbell.net and place SCNCNews item in the subject line.

■ **San Marino Congregational UCC** welcomed **Rev. Arthur "Art" Lawrence Cribbs, Jr.** as its new senior pastor on April 1. Rev. Cribbs was the Senior Pastor at **Church of Christian Fellowship in San Diego** and has served in the communications area of the national UCC. He will be **installed on Sunday, May 20 at 3 pm.** A celebratory catered dinner will follow the service.

■ **Rev. Mitchell Young**, pastor at **Plymouth Congregational UCC in Montebello**, remains tirelessly at work matching pastors with pulpits for the Central Association Pulpit Exchange taking place on April 29. Is your pastor taking part? Rev. Young can be reached at 323-721-5568.

■ **Ray Gibbons**, retired pastor, celebrated his 104th birthday on February 10! He is thought to be the oldest person ever to reside at **Pilgrim Place**, where he has lived since 1977. He usually takes a morning walk around the campus, and thinks maybe that is the reason he has lived so long. Happy Birthday, Ray!

■ **Rev. Gail Geisel**, who most recently was interim pastor at **Los Altos UCC in Long Beach** and has been active on Central Association Executive Council, and at her home church of **Mount Hollywood UCC**, has accepted a call as pastor at **Friedens UCC** in Marissa, Illinois. She began her pastorate

there on February 7 and will be installed on April 15. We will miss you, Gail.

■ **Rev. Libby Tigner**, Associate pastor at **First Congregational UCC of Long Beach**, has shared that members' spiritual journeys or stories were encouraged during a three-session class held last fall. Participants write and then share what they have written. Feedback is received and there may be many uses for these stories, including sending them to children or grandchildren. What was it like growing up where you were and when you did? Perhaps these are valuable memories of some lifestyles that no longer exist. Perhaps they will impact close friends and relatives in some positive ways. Want to try it?

■ **Progressive Christians Uniting** held its 10th Annual Gala Benefit for Courage, Strength, Joy: Social Transformation from the Heart of Christianity on February 19 with many UCC people in the mix. Major talks came from Marcus Borg and Tom Hayden

■ The SCNC has been registered on GoodSearch, a search engine with a unique social mission, which donates 50% of the profits from advertising revenue to non-profits. Download the GoodSearch toolbar at <http://www.goodsearch.com/toolbars.aspx>, then type in United Church of Christ-Southern California Nevada Conference-UCC in the charity selection box. Every time you use GoodSearch to search the Internet, SCNC receives a direct donation! [Information excerpted from Conference email news delivery dated March 1, 2007]



Stillpoint's new program for Spiritual Exploration

September 2007 through June 2008 registering now

Stillpoint, the Center for Christian Spirituality, continues its program of Spiritual Exploration with classes in West Los Angeles, Santa Barbara, Ventura, Pasadena, San Luis Obispo, San Fernando Valley, Valencia-Santa Clarita, Glendale, Long Beach, Bakersfield, Orange County, Redlands, and Palm Desert. Many of these classes are held in UCC churches in these areas.

Spiritual Exploration is a ten-month program that supports participants exploring their spiritual lives in a small group setting. The program is open to people of all denominations and faiths rooted in the Christian tradition and welcoming of a diverse and inclusive learning community. Classes meet once each month and include group discussion of assigned readings, and practice in forms of prayer and contemplation.

Registration will remain open until classes are full. Application by **May 15** is highly recommended. Registration forms can be downloaded at www.stillpointca.org. Print and fill out the form, follow the instructions on the form and mail directly to Stillpoint. For further information visit the website or contact office@stillpointca.org or phone 323-340-8036.

Revisiting the E-Word

By Gary Roberts, Conference Associate for Church Development and Renewal

I recently attended an ordination service where the preacher, who was not UCC, reminded us that **Christendom has created two gospels; the gospel of conversion, and the gospel of justice. And his observation was simple: there is one gospel.**

I have spent my adult life in UCC churches that have been more committed to the gospel of justice than the gospel of conversion. Evangelism was defined as something people did on street corners, or by shouting at others, or even by being obnoxious. Evangelism was, in short, not a polite activity, just not something that liberal or progressive Christians did. We were the people that addressed the injustice in the world, in God's name. We left the Good News of what God could do in a person's life to those other kinds of Christians.

But it seems to me that something interesting is happening. There are signs that this **dichotomy between liberal and conservative Christian is slowly breaking down.** Our differences remain, of course. But how else to explain the movement in evangelical Christianity to embrace issues like global warming, hunger, and the spiritual pain that war brings to everyone involved? How else to explain the Still Speaking campaign, the Congregational Vitality initiative, and the participation in SCNC's recently-completed church development gathering? Or the UCC's recent declaration, fully supported by this Conference, that **"Now is the Time"**, to develop and welcome 250 new congregations by 2011, and 1600 new congregations by 2021. What else are we to think of a church culture where both Jim Wallis from Sojourners and Rick Warren from Saddleback Church would identify themselves as "liberal evangelical Christians?" Can this be anything less than the Holy Spirit at work, changing God's church?

Of course, the efforts of other denominations to address justice issues can sound weak, halting, and immature to those of us steeped in the UCC's culture of being early with God's truth for the world. Evangelical Christians have much to learn, and can learn from the UCC and other progressive Christian voices, about the gospel of justice. And the UCC can also learn from Evangelical Christians about how to tell the Gospel's Good News to a much more diverse culture than existed just half a lifetime ago. The UCC and other mainline denominations have been working at this, making mistakes and learning from them, and continuing to experiment with new ways that can allow our understanding of the Gospel to reach people.

One of the most thoughtful of these efforts, a 4-year study financed by Lilly-Endowment that focused on the motivations for evangelism and effective examples in mainline churches, has recently been published. The book is called **Unbinding the Gospel** by Martha Grace Reese, available through Chalice Press. It manages to be insightful of the condition of mainline churches, descriptive and entertaining about the nature of our evangelistic challenge, with a practical guide for congregations to assess how they are doing and see where they can go from there. If you missed the **Church Vitality Conference** in February, or if you attended but are looking for a way to follow up at your church, I would recommend it highly. And over the next few months, please let me know how this experiment in Evangelism is playing out in your church. We're in this together.



Global Mission Church initiative offers many challenges

Many congregations already actively pursue a global mission ministry through education, advocacy, stewardship and activities. For others, the Global Mission Church initiative presents a challenge. Wherever your congregation fits, this program can work for

you as a new direction or milepost on a path already being traveled.

For mission resources and ideas contact the Office for Mission Education and Interpretation at 216-736-3209 and take a look at their webpage: www.globalministries.org.

The *Southern California Nevada Conference News* is published six times each year for churches, friends and related organizations of the Southern California Nevada Conference of the United Church of Christ.

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