

Western Reserve Association Lay School of the Church
Dean's Report

The WRA Lay School of the Church continued to provide learning opportunities for both lay and non-lay members of area churches during the 2010-2011 year under the leadership of its Steering Committee, whose members are:

- the Rev. Brian Burke, OCC (pastor, First Congregational UCC, Wellington, at-large representative)
- the Rev. Joan Ishibashi (WRA staff)
- the Rev. Kay Krejci (pastor, First Congregational UCC, Twinsburg, Department of Church and Ministry representative)
- the Rev. Dr. Gene McAfee (pastor, Faith UCC, Richmond Heights, dean and instructor representative)
- the Rev. Dr. Audrey Miller (at-large representative)
- the Rev. Ellen Palmer-Marsey (interim pastor, Dover UCC, Westlake, chair)
- Ms. Marguerite Parries (Mt. Zion UCC, University Circle, student representative)

After a number of years of service as dean, the Rev. Patrick Nicolino resigned in order to devote more time to his duties as an instructor in New Testament and related literatures in the Lay School, his work as Youth and Family Minister at First Congregational UCC in Elyria, and his ongoing peace and justice work between North and Central America. The Steering Committee of the Lay School accepted Patrick's resignation with gratitude for his years of service and leadership. Gene McAfee was elected by the Steering Committee to succeed Patrick as dean.

The leadership of the Steering Committee of the Lay School continues securely with the election of Ellen Palmer-Marsey, interim pastor of Dover UCC in Westlake, as chairperson for the coming year. Ellen is no newcomer to the Lay School or its Steering Committee, having been one of the architects of the present-day Lay School when it was formed in 2002. Under Ellen's leadership, the Steering Committee has begun a comprehensive review of the Lay School program, responding in part to the Ministry Issues Pronouncement from GS 25 in 2005. Of great help in that review have been the conversations organized by Ellen between Lay School personnel in the WRA and their counterparts in the Eastern Ohio Association. The first of those meetings was held on Oct. 5th at Richfield UCC, with more conversations planned.

As part of that review, a Curriculum Review Committee, under the leadership of the dean, was formed to examine the curriculum with an eye toward filling gaps, expanding course offerings, and positioning the Lay School to meet the increasing and changing needs of its constituency. That committee presently consists of Brian Burke, the Rev. David T. Hill (pastor, First Church, Oberlin), Gene McAfee, and Audrey Miller; a vacancy on that committee remains to be filled. That committee met for its organizational meeting over a working luncheon at the home of the dean on Oct. 11th and hopes to report its findings to the Steering Committee within the coming year.

As for course offerings, enrollment dictated that the only course to be offered in the fall

term was UCC History and Polity, taught, as it has been for over a decade, by the Rev. Robert T. (Rip) Noble. For the first time in several years, the course is meeting at an east side church, Imani UCC on E. 260th Street in Euclid, where a class enrollment of 19 represents one of the largest enrollments on record for any Lay School course.

With good overlap between the Steering Committee of the Lay School and the WRA Department of Church and Ministry (Joan Ishibashi, Kay Krejci, and Gene McAfee sit on both), communication between these important association instrumentalities is smooth and effective. One of the curriculum areas identified as a need during those ongoing conversations is the area of church history. The dean is in conversation now with a potential instructor to begin to fill that void. Other suggestions to expand the curriculum, in such areas as mental health issues in the church and educating ministers in the special needs and skills of hospice care, have been proposed. The dean always welcomes suggestions for new courses or ways to develop current courses and may be emailed at pastor@faithuccrhoh.org.

It is a joy and privilege to work with the Steering Committee, faculty, and students of the WRA Lay School of the Church. This report is respectfully submitted in that spirit.

Gene McAfee
Dean

19 October 2011