

SYNERGY

The Newsletter of the *Eastern Ohio and Western Reserve Associations*

Synergy: "The interaction of two or more agents or forces so that their combined effect is greater than the sum of their individual effects."

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GENERAL SYNOD

Tampa, Florida is the site for the United Church of Christ's Twenty-eighth General Synod, July 1-5, 2011. This is the national biennial meeting of our denomination, and is a time of worship, celebration and education. The theme for this Synod is



"Imagine What's Possible. God is Still Speaking," with a focus on the life and vitality of our local churches. Delegates, friends and families are all welcome.

In addition to electing three officers of the Collegium, deliberating on a number of resolutions and formal motions, and experiencing inspired worship, there will be "Suncoast Saturday" which will give all attendees a wide choice of speakers and programs for personal growth and tips for nurturing the local church. There will be music, dancing and entertainment. There will be a program specifically for youth.

Resolutions being considered include:

- U.S. Ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty
- To Form a Theological Commission
- A Covenant for Church Youth Ministries
- All Children Deserve Loving Parents
- Putting Our Money Where Our Values Are
- Affirming Health Care Coverage for Clergy Families
- Mindful and Faithful Eating
- Support Effective and Constructive Peacemaking between Palestinians and Israelis Through Positive Investment in Palestine
- Support of Release of Puerto Rican Political Prisoners
- Application of Human Rights Principles in Relation to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity
- A Call for a Reflection and Advocacy on Behalf of the Democratic Republic of Congo
- Common Agreement on Mutual Recognition of Baptism
- Bylaws change on the frequency of the meetings of General Synod
- Proposal for a unified governance of the national setting of the UCC.

Meet old friends and new at General Synod 28 in Tampa. For more information, go to www.ucc.org/synod !

OHIO CONFERENCE ANNUAL GATHERING – June 10-11, 2011

This year's event will be held at Heidelberg University in Tiffin, Ohio. Anthony Robinson, UCC minister, author and coach, will be the keynote speaker. He will also lead a Church Professionals Day on Friday entitled "Leading Change and Living to Tell the Story," as well as an evening workshop entitled "Church Vitality Basics for Lay Leaders. To find out more about the Ohio Conference Annual Gathering, visit the website at www.ocucc.org. Online and paper registration forms are available there!

LIVING INTO NEW LIFE

A reflection shared by Rev. Carol Barth, EOA Interim Association Minister

As I write this reflection for this issue of Synergy, we are still journeying toward Holy Week. By the time you read this reflection we will have celebrated the joy of the resurrection into new life. All of creation joins this celebration, as evidenced in green grass springing up, the bright yellow of daffodils and forsythia opening to the warmth of the sun, buds opening into leaves on the trees. Even the robin's bright song opening our spring mornings reminds us of resurrection and new life.

This kind of opening up is at the heart of the Easter story. It begins with a wide open tomb, and continues with the opening of hearts and minds to the surprising good news of the resurrection. In a sense, this kind of opening is also at the heart of our story in EOA and WRA. New paths to shared mission and ministry are open before us. New and surprising ways to partner are flowering. God is opening to us new understandings of who we are called to be.

As we enter into the resurrection stories and into the new story of these two associations, let us hear God coaxing us to be open, the way a welcome rainfall coaxes green out of dormant earth. Joyce Rupp, in her book entitled *May I Have This Dance*, writes words that may be helpful for us in this context.

*Let us hear God saying to us:
open up your mind and your heart
put aside your strong expectations
lay down the arms of your inner violence
give up your set ideas
turn away from your winter worries
let go of your oppressive fears
be willing to be insecure for a while
allow surprise to take over your heart.*



Easter is about openness, about God coaxing growth from the dormant soil of our spirits. God waters the gardens of our hearts. Are we open and ready to receive the seeds of grace? Christ is risen. He is risen indeed.

THANK YOU JAMES...

Saying goodbye is never easy. And so it will be difficult to say farewell to James Ferguson, staff person for Communications and Administrative Support in the EOA/WRA Support Center Office since October, 2006.

James has submitted his resignation which will take effect June 1. James is leaving us with sadness and regret, because he has truly enjoyed his work with us. However, he also leaves with a sense of excitement because he now has the opportunity to do full-time ministry with his congregation, Ekklesia.

He decided that trying to do his job here, along with full-time ministry, plus being a new father, was a bit more than he could easily manage. Go figure!

James' last day in the Support Center Office will be Tuesday, May 31. There are plans in the works for an open house that day for folks to drop in and share their goodbyes and good wishes with James. E-Pistle and Netweaver will have more details about that opportunity.



| Date | 2011 YOUTH CALENDAR |
|------------------|--|
| May 5 - 7 | Young Adult Justice LED Training, Cleveland |
| May 7 | EOAWRA Spring Gathering – Trinity United Church of Christ, Canton |
| May 15—21 | Young Adult KY Work Camp - Lotts Creek Community School, Hazard KY |
| June 8 – 9 | Ohio Conference JUSTICE LED TRAINING – Heidelberg University, Tiffin |
| June 10 – 11 | Ohio Conference Annual Gathering |
| June 28 – July 7 | EOAWRA OPEN TO OHIO CONFERENCE Youth@Synod — it's getting close and it's time to let me know of interest. See related article. |
| July 30 – Aug. 6 | EOAWRA OPEN TO OHIO CONFERENCE Kentucky Happening - Work and Mission Immersion! |
| November 18 – 20 | Ohio Conference Sr. High Fall Youth Event - Pilgrim Hills – Theme: "Let Justice Roll" Musicians and Keynote Leaders - Andra Moran and Stephen Daniel King |

For more information on any of the above, contact Margaret at mmills@wraucc.org or millsm92445@gmail.com

YOUTH@SYNOD Again there will be a program for youth at the 28th General Synod of the United Church of Christ in Tampa, FL. EOAWRA will be taking a group of youth and young adults to Synod and to the youth@synod program. While the official youth@synod event is for Sr. High youth, EOAWRA will be offering the opportunity for young adults to join the program by traveling together, staying together, and sharing the synod experience together. We'll be leaving the Cleveland area EARLY on Tuesday, June 28th and returning LATE on Thursday, July 7th. It's now time to let me know if you have an interest!! Please contact Margaret for a packet of information at mmills@wraucc.org or millsm92445@gmail.com or 440-487-2549. The cost will be around \$600.00.



TIME TO SIGN UP FOR SUMMER CAMP! 2011 Camp Registration is available now online at www.ocucc.org. Go to the Camp page and look to the right of the page for details.

GLAUCE: The DNA of an inclusive church!

(Great Lakes Association of United Church Educators)

October 11-13, 2011 at Potawatomi Inn at Pokagon State Park in Angola, Indiana

The **goal** of this event will be:

- To explore the integration of hospitality in the teaching ministry
- How do we understand the community's story?
- How can we impact the local church to understand its role as teaching ministry?
- How do we assimilate and deepen the relationships of adults, youth, and children into congregation life?
- And more!

Questions and Registration: Call Jan Davis @ 920-499-6901. To learn more or become a member of GLAUCE, visit <http://auce-uwcc.org>

SPREAD THE LOVE

That's the theme for this year's Strengthen the Church Offering. Strengthen the Church is one of the UCC's four special mission offerings. This offering, generally received by local churches on Pentecost Sunday, grows the UCC's future by:

- Funding new church starts and invigorating existing churches
- Nurturing lay and pastoral leadership
- Building youth and young adult ministries
- Supporting the God is Still Speaking Ministry and its extravagant welcome for all within the UCC



Be watching for Strengthen the Church promotional materials in your local church and please support it generously. One half of the gifts from this offering stay right here in the Ohio Conference, and through those gifts we support the ministry of Jim Oates, Coach for Church Development and Congregational Renewal. Jim is working directly with the churches of our own EOA and WRA in church development, renewal and vitality.

JUSTICE LED EVENT TO PRECEDE ANNUAL GATHERING



Prior to the Annual Gathering there will be a special justice leaders training session, June 8-10 for lay and clergy persons interested in becoming facilitators of the Justice LED program in their congregations.

The training is open to groups of two to eight church members who, with the endorsement of their pastor, wish to use the Justice LED (Leaders Engaging and Developing) program within their congregations. It will also be held on the Heidelberg campus.

Registration for this event, offered by the UCC Justice and Witness Ministries, is due by Friday, May 20. Cost is either \$75 per person for meals and two nights' lodging with a shared (double) dormitory room, or \$85 per person, which covers meals and a single dormitory room. Registration forms can be requested from Ferne or Kelly Burd at burdk@ucc.org or 216/736-3714. A minimum of two persons per church is required. For more information visit: <http://www.ucc.org/justice/training/>.

CHURCH DEDICATION!

You are invited to share in our congregation's joy as the restoration of St. Peter's United Church of Christ, Apple Creek is dedicated to God's glory on Sunday, May 22nd. Activities for the day will include a special worship service at 10:30 a.m. followed by lunch.



The church will have an Open House with refreshments until 4 p.m. Come view our beautiful sanctuary and other improvements made after the roof collapsed in 2009.

St. Peter's United Church of Christ
68 W. Main Street
Apple Creek, OH 44606

Rev. Candy Thomas
Interim Pastor

HEIDELBERG UNIVERSITY CONCERT CHOIR

On Sunday May 22 at 7 pm, the Heidelberg University Concert Choir will perform a free concert at Brecksville United Church of Christ, located at 23 Public Square in downtown Brecksville, OH. This will be the final program in the Choir's 2011 spring tour.

A free will offering will be received and a light reception will follow the concert. Parking is available off Route 82 or one block south of Route 21 off Arlington Rd. The church is handicapped accessible. For more information, call 440-526-4364.

Brecksville United Church of Christ
23 Public Square
Brecksville, OH 44141



JAPAN RELIEF: by Joan Chiaki Ishibashi



One day not too long after the multiple disasters hit Japan, I sat down to coffee with my friends Eriko Shinohara and Sae Shiragami. We shared our grief and concern for our family and friends in Japan and wanted to do something to bring our Japanese friends together to support each other and also raise some money for relief efforts. One week later Sae, a violinist with the Cleveland Orchestra, played a benefit concert with eleven of her colleagues from the Orchestra. Plymouth Church in Shaker Heights was the host for this event. A few days later, Lakewood Congregational Church hosted a violin recital featuring Sae, violinist Takako Masame and pianist Mayumi Kikuchi. Over 400 people attended the two events. We had a rich time of fellowship after each magnificent concert, and raised nearly \$12,000 for relief efforts.

“Feeling helpless as I listen to the voices of my Japanese family and friends, I was moved to do something for them and in their names.

‘There were only two aftershocks today, but my body is swaying all the time.’ / ‘There are no bags of rice at the store.’ / ‘A strong wind was blowing from the direction of the nuclear plant, so I closed all the windows and stayed in.’ / ‘My son is working at Reactor #1 of the plant. I’m prepared for the worst.’

These are but a few examples of the stories of those affected by the earthquake, tsunami, and ongoing nuclear disasters in Japan. I’m not a doctor, a scientist, or an architect with a clear path to volunteer in the recovery effort. I am merely a violinist. As such, it is my hope that my music will serve to bring some comfort to the victims of Japan and all of us.” ~Sae Shiragami

Thank you, United Church of Christ, for your support through Our Churches Wider Mission, One Great Hour of Sharing, and the generosity and hospitality of local churches like Plymouth Church and Lakewood Congregational Church.



VITAL SIGNS



EOA Vital Signs

As of March 31, 2011:

Total actual income for operations:
\$139,753.82

Total actual expense from operations:
\$153,728.05

Difference: (\$13,974.23)

WRA Vital Signs

As of February 28, 2011:

Total actual income for operations:
\$69,783.05

Total actual expense from operations:
\$100,041.72

Difference (\$30,258.67)

*We wish to thank you for your continued giving to **Our Churches Wider Mission!***

Churches in Transition:

(reflects churches who are receiving profiles)*

Eastern Ohio Association

- St. Peter’s UCC (Apple Creek)
- Atwater Congregational UCC (Atwater)
- * Bethel UCC (Beloit)
- * St. John UCC (Bolivar) *Part Time*
- * Trinity UCC (Canal Fulton)
- * Grace UCC (Canton) *Part Time*
- St. Paul’s UCC (East Canton)
- * Zion UCC (Hannibal)/Immanuel UCC (Clarington)
- * First Congregational UCC (Hudson) AP



- Richville UCC (Navarre)
- St. Paul (Port Washington)
- Edinburg UCC (Ravenna)
- Suffield UCC (Suffield)
- Grace UCC (Uniontown)

Western Reserve Association

- * Bainbridge Community UCC (Bainbridge)
- * First Congregational UCC (Berea)
- * Burton Congregational UCC (Burton)
- * Pilgrim Christian Church (Chardon)
- West Park UCC (Cleveland)
- Claridon First Congregational UCC (Huntsburg)
- * First Congregational (Lorain) *Part Time*
- Community UCC (Shaker Hts.)
- Strongsville UCC (Strongsville)
- Dover Congregational UCC (Westlake)
- Fellowship UCC (Wickliffe) *Part Time*

MISSION PRIORITIES: WRA

One of the ways the Western Reserve Association supports local mission is through small grants awarded by our Mission Priorities Committee. The agencies who receive funds must meet at least one of the four priorities established by the “Beyond Band-Aids” initiative. These include: nurturing healthy families and support systems for parents/seniors, life skills training; nurturing development of the next generation; hunger and homeless initiatives; and engaging political structures, service organizations, involving local community resources.

Awardees for 2011 are Family Promise of Lorain County, InterAct Cleveland, Interfaith Hospitality Network of Greater Cleveland, Lake County Church Network, Inc., New Life Community, Old Stone Education Center, St. Paul’s Community UCC, Senior Citizen Resources, Inc., Transitional Housing, Inc., United Protestant Campus Ministries, and West Side Ecumenical Ministry.

We encourage churches to learn more about our Mission Priorities partners who are doing wonderful work in our local communities. There is going to be at least one that will fire up your mission imagination and vision. All of them are willing to come and speak with our churches about their important work.

We thank Myron Kushner of Church of the Redeemer for ably leading the Mission Priorities Committee. He will be turning over the chair to Madeline Brookshire, also of Church of the Redeemer. Other members are Lenore Marken, Sue Kelly, June Yost, Jim Marsey and outgoing members Bob Gross, Joyce Raymond and Nate Parries.

To learn more about our mission partners, go to www.wraucc.org and click on “Mission Priorities.”

MODERATOR’S MUSINGS: WRA

Sisters and brothers,

In the short six months that I have had the honor of serving as Moderator I have found myself much more involved in the Association than I had ever expected, and I am happy to report that I think this is good news! I have admired the way that our staff and our elected leadership not only work through issues, but have a fire and passion for the renewal of our Association as well. All this is very encouraging to me as I look to the months ahead and the work remaining to be done.

At the last Association Council meeting, I introduced two items that are in the forefront of my mind: a visioning process that will bring new life to the Association, it’s churches and its members; and the rewriting of the by-laws of the Constitution so that it addresses and supports the new vision. Council will be spending a great deal of time with these two items, and is looking forward to engaging you all as we move into a more hopeful future together.

Meanwhile, I am eager to meet with Program Districts or other groups so that I can hear your hopes and your ideas and I encourage you to email me (pastor@oldsouthchurch.org) or call me (440) 256-3329 with them as well.

Thanks for who you are and for all you do.

Mark Suriano
Moderator



MODERATOR'S MUSINGS: EOA

Glad we had that conversation! During February and March several people gathered to have conversation with Carol Barth, Interim Association Minister, concerning the changes in Association Staff that was approved at last fall's meeting. The focus of the conversation was on expectations of the association, association expectations of the local church and members and how the staffing changes will impact how we do ministry will continue to be in ministry together in with WRA. It's an exciting time.

The springboard for the discussion was the staffing proposal in which WRA and EOA will call a General Minister and the "pyramid" that has been developed to help prioritize the ministries of the associations. In each of the four "conversations" common concerns and thoughts were expressed. What is meant by "face of covenant" and who is responsible for "face of covenant" reminded us that staff is often the face and voice of who we are and what we are about. But really we all are "the face of covenant". The challenge before us is to be more intentional in covenanting with one another to build stronger relationships with each other and among churches. As we work side by side in mission, encouraging one another there's nothing we won't be able to accomplish. We've barely begun to tap the abundance of resources and gifts among us. What are we being called to do? And how are we going to do it? (PS: Those are not just questions for staff to answer.)

The proposed model is not written in stone but rather lays the ground work and sets us on our way. That means that we are on the beginning of a journey that is going to change us and how we understand what it means to be the church and how we understand the ministry of the association. Yes, we look to the new General Minister as a spiritual leader and visionary but the ministry of the association is still with the people. There is concern that there will be adequate staff. And concerns that current ministries, such as Christian Education and youth, stewardship, might be forgotten. The proposal is a working document!

It is not possible to talk about where we are "moving" without acknowledging that decreased financial resources are a reality. It means taking seriously how we support the ministries of the local church, the association and the wider church ministries that are dear to us. Again it comes back to what it means to be in covenant with each other and how can we do it together. Relationships! Relationship! Relationships!

Thank you to those who were able to attend. However, the conversation is not finished and we are not done listening to one another. And this brief article does not reflect everything that was shared or suggested. A joint personnel committee (3 members from each association) is in the process of formulating a job description and is appreciative for the notes from our "conversations" along with notes from "conversations" held in WRA last fall.

What an exciting time this is in the life of WRA and EOA...and Christ's church!

Sandra Hutchinson
Moderator

GERRY'S HOUSE RESOURCE CENTER: WRA

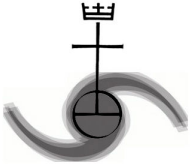
Meet Jenei Grigg – New Director of Gerry's House Resource Center

Jenei Grigg comes to us with ten years of Christian education and Youth ministry experience. She has a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration as well as a Master's of Divinity degree and Master's of Sacred Theology. She is a nationally licensed Residential Care/Assisted Living Administrator and Michigan Certified Assisted Living Administrator.



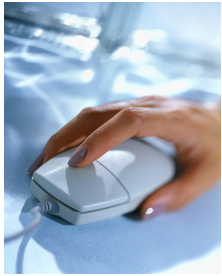
She has done extensive research to advocate for the unique and historically invisible needs of LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) older adults and lectured in 2010 in Michigan on these concerns. She and her partner are the parents of three wonderful children, two cats, and a pug and have recently moved to Cleveland where her partner has been called as the settled pastor at Archwood United Church of Christ. Jenei is currently enjoying teaching Bible study at Archwood and offering her skills to local ministry efforts. Jenei is passionate about justice issues and her love is teaching. This combination has led her to many fascinating areas of research towards completing her PhD. While serving as the director of Gerry's House, she will also be completing a year long ACPE residency with St. Vincent's Charity Hospital. Jenei is excited about the unique opportunity to work with Gerry's

House and the Western Reserve Association and hopes to see the resource center continue to be valuable and needed supply of information for our churches. You may stop by to meet Jenei (pronounced – Jen I) at Gerry's House, located within Lakewood Congregational Church, or call her at 216-749-3116 Ext 100. Her hours are 2-6 on Tuesdays and 2-5 on Wednesdays and Thursdays.



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Canton, Ohio



Visit us online!

Eastern Ohio Association - www.eoaucc.org
Western Reserve Association - www.wraucc.org
Ohio Conference - www.ocucc.org

HEALTH CARE REFUND and HOW YOU CAN USE IT!

If your church contributes to its employees' federal employment taxes and contributes at least 50% toward its employees' health insurance premiums, it may be eligible for a federal tax refund. This is worth up to 25% of a church's share of the premium costs. It is scheduled to increase to 35% in 2014.



REFLECTION ON "THE REFUND", from REV. STEPHEN GIFFORD: "A couple of weeks ago, we were all informed that our Eastern Ohio Association operated at a \$20,000 deficit in 2010. About the same time, an accountant in our congregation informed that congregations were eligible to file a tax return that would reimburse a proportion of health insurance expenses. I hope that all of our congregation's were informed of this unexpected benefit to the Affordable Health Care Act. Trinity, Canton's reimbursement is going to amount to nearly \$8000. On Tuesday night, the Consistory voted to forward 50% of the reimbursement to the EOA. While this may be late notice to file for this benefit, I am writing this note to urge congregations who did file to use this "found money" to help our association address its deficit issue." NOTE: Deadline to file for this refund is May 15, 2011

Links to help file: <http://www.gbophb.org/thewell/root/HFLX/4182.pdf>

<http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/i8941.pdf>