

Vermont Conference, UCC Annual Reports of Officers, Departments and Committees 2012



Annual Report of the Conference Minister

For those of us who wear glasses or contact lenses the picture to the left is a familiar one. The optometrist uses this device to help bring clarity and focus to our sight. She asks, "Which is clearer, this or this" as she switches between two different strengths of lenses.

I am reminded of the prophet, Habakkuk who, after crying out to a seemingly absent God about the pain and injustice he sees in his world says,

I will stand at my watchpost, and station myself on the rampart; I will keep watch to see what God will say to me and answer concerning my complaint.

And God answers:

Write the vision; make it plain so that a runner may read it. For there is still a vision for the appointed time. (Hab. 2:1-3a)

Yes indeed, there is still a vision. There is still Good News to share, lives (including our own) to be transformed, and the work of justice, peace and restoration to be done.

One of the ways the vision has been clarified for us has been **responding to the devastation of Tropical Storm Irene**. Our congregations responded with concrete help and compassion. Homes and businesses were mucked out, persons who lost possessions and jobs were comforted and helped, fuel bills were paid, our church buildings became meeting places, food distribution sites, and a place to rest and pray. Church World Service provided us with Clean Up Kits just weeks after we had collected over 70 of kits to be donated to other areas in need. Fifteen of our churches received \$2000.00 emergency grants from One great Hour of Sharing to help fund their outreach ministries. The conference has collected nearly \$45,000 enabling several requests for assistance to be honored. We have a Disaster Relief Coordinator and Committee now to help us respond to longer term recovery needs and prepare for future disasters. Yes, part of our vision is surely about reaching out to those in need.

In fact, this year has been a year of clarity, of finding focus. For the past few years we have talked about the need for change in our churches. We have focused on this theme in our Annual Meetings. Many of us have read numerous books on the "emerging" church. We have gathered with colleagues hungry for tools to try at the **New Keys for Old Doors** event. Many congregations and pastor are experimenting with new ways of taking the Good News out of our doors and into the community. Each of these events has gotten us closer to a vision of what God might have in store for us.

Our local churches are doing amazing and faithful things! Did you know ...

- Nearly all of our churches are involved in mission outreach in their communities and nearly one third have some form of ongoing partnership with a congregation or mission site in another part of the U.S. or overseas.
- A record number of our congregations have voted to become Open and Affirming this year.

- Last year as in past years the number of our congregations offering a Summer Lunch Program for children has increased.
- With the exception of two of our larger churches who have just overhauled their membership list, several of our congregations are showing modest growth in membership – or persons who are actively engaged in the life and mission of their congregation.
- A dozen of our congregations that I know about have tried something completely new – from beginning a worship service that meets other than Sunday to creative and ecumenical (even interfaith) youth programs to “theology on tap” nights at local pubs to free community suppers.

This has also been a year of **clarifying the purpose and role of the Vermont Conference**. Through conversation with staff and the Board of Directors, beginning conversations with our Departments and, at this Annual Meeting, with our pastors and congregational leaders, the direction and purpose of the conference is becoming clearer.

What we have done:

- Convened a Task Force to change the way we resource our small, part-time churches in times of transition. The new program is in the process of being “tested.”
- Had significant conversation with partner conferences and seminaries about our need for training of licensed pastors. We hope to be announcing a cooperative evolution of VAST this year.
- Practiced holding more meetings by conference call to cut down on travel and reduce all of our carbon footprints.
- Transitioned Jim Thomas from Business Manager to Associate Conference Minister for Congregational Vitality, Stewardship and Finance to reflect our growing commitment to support our congregations in becoming more vital, healthy and faithful.
- Put mechanisms in place to **clarify the conference’s primary role as supporting our local churches’ mission and ministry**. This change will include changes in: staff priorities, resources bought and made available in the Resource Center, and the focus and clarity for the purpose and mission of our conference Departments and Committees.

All this AND continuing great staff support for search and call, communications, stewardship resourcing, long range planning, the Resource Center and the countless administrative and hospitality details ably handled by Lynn Thomas.

Let’s continue to seek God’s vision together and ...



A Trip Down Memory Lane Leads Right Back To Present

Opportunities And Challenges!

The Rev. Pam Lucas, Associate Conference Minister

Before there was the Electronic Keeping in Touch (EKIT), before there was Keeping in Touch (KIT), long ago there was "Congregational Vermont". Eight pages printed on slick glossy paper. Looking through the March 1960 edition was a trip down memory lane where one is reminded that no matter how things appear to change, unfortunately many things stay the same. Then editor John C. DeBoer wrote, "Our Conference Paper is edited to be of maximum helpfulness to church leaders and to be a link between the local church and what is going on in the Conference and larger church. Yet at the present time most church leaders in our Conference do not subscribe." (At \$.50 a year for eight issues!) Our every Wednesday EKIT is designed to do exactly the same things. It is free to every member. However, only 500+ members of our Vermont Conference Churches are receiving it. That's out of 13,079 church members. What a difference it might make if all members of your church with email addresses received it.

It was also a trip down the same memory lane that so many churches are tempted to take. To remember the 'glory days' of the church in the 60's when pews were full and church schools were crowded. Well, the Vermont Conference had those glory days as well. In this March 1960 edition, between five and six HUNDRED young people were expected to attend the annual meeting of the Vermont Pilgrim Fellowships. There was a Christian Leadership Camp for those working with children and youth. They spent five days of Bible Study, lectures and workshops. Can you imagine?! There was a Pilgrim Fellowship Officer Training Conference with bible study and study of youth fellowship procedures, programs and workshops to train up youth leaders. Five identical Churchmen's Forums were being held in various parts of the Conference from 3:30pm to 8:30pm - on a Sunday! They began with a panel on "How can a small church have a good men's fellowship?" The film **Above and Beyond** was shown about what happened when a layman and his church began to realize what it means to live as a Christian. After supper there were four forums offered: "Right and Wrong in Daily Life", "Morals in Politics", "Succeeding as Christian Fathers and Husbands" and "New Life for Your Church through Self-Study Programs".

In the list of churches' giving to OCWM in 1959 (then called Our Christian World Mission), of the 124 churches reporting, 86 churches gave more than 5% of their local expenses, 50 churches gave more than 10% of their local expenses, 23 churches gave more than 15% - up to as high as 25%. These were not necessarily your first guesses. Marlboro gave 25%, Weybridge 24%, North Bennington 24.6%, East Brookfield 13.9%, Londonderry 15%. In 1959, the total giving for OCWM was 127,057. (In 2011, the total was 399,682. Of the 144 churches listed in the Yearbook, 98 gave something to OCWM (Now called Our Church's Wider Mission). (Some quite substantially, the least at \$34.00) Of the other 46 there was insufficient information or nothing received.

Those glory days are not going to return, but this March 1960 copy of "Congregational Vermont" also testifies to all the OPPORTUNITIES that are still ours. Camp Wihakowi has been replaced with Covenant Hills but still provides good strong camp experiences for our children and youth. It still is the place where young people return home "richer in their personal understanding and commitment to the Christian faith".

In 1960, the Ministers' Convocation was in its 44th year. In 2012 it continues to be held annually in September. (Save Sept. 17-19 in Rockpoint. Dr. Nicki Verploegen, author of Organic Spirituality: A Sixfold Path for Contemplative Living will spend the time with our Pastors.) One Great Hour of Sharing was 12 years old in 1960

and the needs of our world seem not to be diminished one iota. The Calendar of Prayer, then (and now), “is one of the most helpful and informative publications that any Congregational family could have around the house!” Each day there is a glimpse into the lives of our missionaries, pastors, institutions, churches, and mission in the United States and the world. “Why not make your prayers for those laboring on our behalf in the world mission of our church more filled with meaning and understanding by ordering a copy today through your minister.” (today, see ucc.org/worship/calendar)

Then and now church annual meetings and potluck suppers are held, pastors come and go, committees meet, worship, bible study, church school still happens, social action, outreach, mission continue – all continue to be OPPORTUNITIES for our churches and the Vermont Conference to celebrate the ties that bind us together and to proclaim the light, the salt, the yeast that we can yet be in our world.

But there are CHALLENGES. And they are not new either.

How do we help our churches understand that our giving that must go beyond our local doors.

In 1960 - “The danger that constantly besets our support of the mission program of our church is that we will see only the dollar figure of our church’s giving and will no longer see clearly what this giving does for the Kingdom. The danger is that our mission giving goals will become opaque so that we will no longer be able to see through them to the human needs which they exist to meet.”

In 1960 - “OCWM stands for the church program outside the local community which Congregationalist has undertaken and **for which they have specific responsibilities.**” “We must keep faith with those who pioneered in the various mission fields in the past by maintaining and increasing the financial support which these fields require.”

In 1960 - “An index of a church’s stewardship is not so much the **amount** it gives to Christian causes outside its own community, but **how many cents it gives to benevolences for every dollar it spends on its own program and buildings.**” (In 1920 it was \$.15 on average. In 1958 it was \$.13 ½. I don’t think I want to even figure out the present percentage. I keep thinking of the promise that “if we bring our tithes into the storehouse, the windows of heaven will open and pour out blessings upon us. (Malachi 3:10)” Just ask any consecrating steward what happens to their dollars when their first check is 10% given to God. Not the church. God.)

Our challenge is to increase our trust that when we give as individuals and churches there will be enough for what we need.

How do we help our churches catch the vision of all that they can do and be?

There is great opportunity at the times of pastoral changes. That is the time when churches still sit down and do a self-study – or visioning. They start collecting basic facts on a piece of paper. “History, Trends of Membership and Church School Enrollment, Characteristics of the Community, Characteristics of the Church Membership, Patterns of Giving, Church Leadership, A Look at Worship, Education, Mission and Outreach, Committees and Organization. Out of these kinds of conversations grow identification of immediate needs, short term objectives and long range goals.

These kinds of conversations are taking place all the time – not just at times of pastoral change. They are taking place because numbers of dollars and numbers of bodies are decreasing – conflict over how to respond begins. Our challenge is to recognize that - while this information is important - pieces of paper filled with facts, all the best ideas in the world and all the right short term and long term goals are not the answer.

Our challenge is always – in 1960 or in 2012 - to reclaim the center of who we are. We are the body of Christ. Men and women, young and old.

Our challenge is to reclaim that passion that once awaited the coming of the power from on high, the passion that answered “Lord, we are able” and never turned back, the passion that just went out to do what Jesus had done during his earthly life – love others and proclaim the good news that evil will not triumph, justice will come and everybody has a seat at the God’s welcome table. After I preached one Sunday a few weeks ago, a woman asked me how she might connect her Sunday faith with Monday morning. Then she answered her own question. “I should always ask myself what Jesus would say or do in any situation. But I have to learn about Jesus before I would know the answer, right?”

Ultimately it will always be prayer, study of scripture, commitment to Jesus Christ and a willingness to make hard choices that will gather us together in local churches, as the Vermont Conference, as the United Church of Christ. In that covenantal togetherness we will find the courage to accept the cost and joy of discipleship and to listen for the still small voice of the God who promises us a future and a hope.

Board of Directors Report

Debbie Ingram, Chair

Report written by David Durfee, Scribe

Throughout the year between Annual Meetings, the 2011-12 Board of Directors managed to do two things at the same time. It managed to devote hours of its time to reading, thinking, and engaging in deep discussion about the future of the Vermont Conference and to also find the time to deal with administrative matters and unexpected needs and crises. The limited size of the Board, and the fact that it met just about monthly with the same people present, made this possible. In previous years, with larger Boards, fewer meetings, and divisions between an Executive Committee and the rest of the Board, the needs of the present always seemed to crowd out time for thought about the future.

Despite collegiality, staff support, and invitations to the presence of the Holy Spirit., seeking a clear vision often required “seeing through a glass darkly.” There were questions about whether to concentrate on a vision for the Conference (the staff, Board, departments and committees listed in the Directory) or for the CONFERENCE (Vermont’s individual congregants and their local churches, associations, and the Conference) or for both. There were questions about extent of the Conference’s proper role as a leader in developing and achieving a CONFERENCE vision, given the polity of the United Church of Christ. There were questions about the relative values of a lengthy vision description and of a short, memorable vision statement.

In considering a vision for the CONFERENCE, a statement from National created considerable energy:

“At its best the United Church of Christ is not so much an institution as a movement; a distinct community of faith and action animated by values and a vision. This movement is rooted in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and is animated by the Holy Spirit. It transforms us, as individuals and as faith communities, into disciples and activists, who seek in God’s name (or service) to make the world a better place.”

To explore the leadership role of the Conference the Board read and then discussed J. Russell Crabtree’s The Fly in the Ointment which argues that the major purpose of all such regional religious organizations is to provide the effective training and support to help local churches be vital and successful in achieving their visions. The Board will continue to work on this beyond the deadline for this report and will bring the results of its work to the Annual Meeting.

The Board enthusiastically supported the Church Growth Committee’s September 24, 2011, workshop “New Keys for an Old Door” and continued to encourage local efforts at follow-up. The Board identified different transition areas for churches, each requiring different types of support or encouragement. A “three legged stool” image was developed and will be explained at the Annual Meeting.

By the time the gavel calls the 2012 Annual Meeting to order, the 2011-12 Board will have met 11 times. In addition to thinking about the future at each meeting, the Board found time to stay current on financial matters and make decisions when needed; encourage and authorize responses to the floods caused by Irene; remain current on developments in departments, Board committees, and, frequently, associations and local churches; find special funding for the creation of a proper conference table for the Office; authorize approval of an agreement with the newly created New England Conference of the United Methodist Church regarding Covenant Hills; and support the development of new staff position descriptions.

Once again the Board expresses its gratitude to the staff, Pam Lucas, Jim Thomas, Lynn Thomas, Sybil McShane, and its constant partner, Lynn Bujnak. The Board also thanks those of their members leaving the Board this year for their faithful and effective service.

Treasurer’s Report

David K. Damkot

Last year I wrote and spoke about the process we undertake every couple months to review the financial procedures of the Vermont Conference office, and I lauded the bookkeeping clarity and transparency of the Business Manager. I reaffirm my view that the finances of the Vermont Conference are handled with care and prudence, and applaud the consistent and thorough work of Jim Thomas. I respect and appreciate the staff of the Vermont Conference. I admire the collegiality, the concern and care, the love, the thoughtfulness, and the spiritual Christian core of your Board of Directors as they lead our VT Conference.

Last year I was also forthright in stating my concern that we are not supporting the work of the Vermont Conference with adequate income and that the office has pared expenses to the core. There is nothing left to reduce on the expenditures side.

On the investments side we were pleased to see a slow climb back for our funds as the market gained some ground. It is a slow process of growth and all indications are that such will continue for some years. Of course there will be some losses along the way and some big gains most likely, but the general consensus is that there will be slow growth and the upside potential seems greater than the downside potential

As we look back on this past year, we see once again that income to the Vermont Conference has fallen off. OCWM was at its lowest point since 1992 and Per Capita from churches was flat and fell short of expectations. As a result, the finance committee has had to adjust the 2012 budget and the Board of Directors has approved the revision. You will hear more in a few minutes about this revision from Jim Thomas and John Holme.

You will see in Document H a proposal to move assets from our unrestricted fund to pay off the mortgage on the Vermont Conference office in Randolph. Such action, if it receives your approval, will reduce our liquid assets and increase equity in our building. Subsequently there will be savings by ridding ourselves of seven years of mortgage payments. At the same time, there will be fewer assets in the unrestricted fund to earn investment returns in the future and we will reduce our annual draw. It is considered in our 2013 and future budgets.

You will also hear this day a proposal put forth by the finance committee to quickly replace the transferred money through a special fund raising effort. It is my hope and prayer that you will embrace this plan. It is important that we grow our invested funds so the diligent work and financial support that has gone before us is not diminished.

2011 Investment Committee Report

Paul Simpson, Chair

The investments of 2011 proved to be a challenging year. While the S&P 500 eked out a 2.11% return and our Growth/Income Benchmark was up 3.38% our Unrestricted Fund, on which the conference depends for a portion of its budget, was down 1.5%. The 3 year average continues to be a positive 11.44%.

TD Banknorth has developed a pooled investment portfolio for both fixed income and equities. This gives us a little more flexibility when allocating the funds. The pooled funds are broken down for us and we are able to see each individual investment of the pooled funds. The Investment Committee continues to monitor this approach and is looking favorably on the change.

The world is ever changing and we still see some concerns ahead. 2012 will continue to be a challenging time for us. A disciplined board and living within realistic budgets must prevail. Belt tightening should continue to be the mode. We again commend the boards for their vigilance and keen oversight of our assets.

We will always have ups and downs. I feel good about our direction and praise the individuals that guide our ship through these tumultuous times.

2012 Finance Committee Report

John Holme, Chair

Our committee, consisting of Lynn Bujnak, Jim Thomas, David Damkot, Robert Delaney, Rev. Mary Abbott and Rev. Richard White met four times beginning in January. Based upon our review of last year's financial results, we recommended reductions in the 2012 budget, which were approved by the Board of Directors. We also prepared the 2013 budget and submitted it to the Board, which approved it. This will be presented to the delegates for their approval at Annual Meeting.

We ended 2011 with a slight deficit, but income was \$36,736 below budget. Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM) was \$399,682 vs. the budget of \$430,000, making OCWM receipts the lowest since 1993. Friends of the Vermont Conference was \$23,800, down from \$33,683 in 2010. Total income was 5.1% below the projection.

We are cautiously optimistic about 2013 and are submitting a balanced budget, with projected total income of \$695,185, up slightly over \$10,000 from the 2011 results, and OCWM receipts at \$408,146, also representing a modest increase.

In order to submit a balanced budget and maintain our programming, we found it necessary to recommend that the mortgage on the Conference Office in Randolph be paid off with funds from the Unrestricted Fund, which was valued at \$1,139,064 as of February 28, 2012. In 2007 the delegates at Annual Meeting approved a resolution providing that we limit withdrawals from the Unrestricted Fund to an annual withdrawal of 4.25% of the four year trailing average market value of the fund. (The ten year total return on the fund is 4.13%, almost the same as the 4.25% used in the formula.) In a separate resolution, the delegates also stipulated that if the conference ever withdraws funds in excess of the formula, it should repay those funds to the Unrestricted Fund over ten years. Because the finances of the conference have fallen to such an extremely tight condition, our committee and the Board of Directors have found it necessary to seek the approval of the delegates at Annual Meeting to withdraw the funds but not repay them to the Unrestricted Fund.

The mortgage is a commercial mortgage with Randolph National Bank with a principal balance of \$155,000 due in March 2020, a 6% interest rate and monthly payments totaling \$24,817.32 per year. The building is assessed by the Town of Randolph at \$495,000, but it probably worth less than that because of the decline in real estate prices. Factoring in the negative effect on the draw from the Unrestricted Fund according to the formula, the net annual savings through 2020 is projected at \$18,017 to \$24,817.

The committee considered other alternatives to the plan we are proposing and rejected them because they did not produce enough additional cash flow. The committee does not believe that cutting expenses is a viable option. The Conference has cut expenses in recent years to the point where the only area left to cut would be in staffing. To do so would not be an acceptable option as it would impair the ability of the Conference to meet the needs of the local churches. The committee is convinced that the plan is financially sound and recommends it strongly.

The delegates will be asked to approve the following resolution:

That the BOD be authorized to transfer an amount not to exceed \$155,000 from the conference unrestricted funds for the sole purpose of retiring the mortgage on the conference office located at 36 N. Main Street in Randolph, VT no later than July 2, 2012. Because this is a transfer of assets there is no expectation that the money must be repaid to the unrestricted fund.

The committee and the board of directors are proposing a fund raising plan to replace as much of the funds withdrawn as possible. Details will be distributed to the delegates at Annual Meeting.

The budget contains an increase of \$10,500 over 2012 for Compensation of Staff, line 8000. This reflects a 3% increase in staff compensation across the board and a projected 10% increase in health insurance costs.

Department of Church and Ministry

David Durfee, Vice Chair

The Department Council devoted most of its 2011-2012 time to two efforts. It hopes that one of the two will come to fruition by action of the Annual Meeting. The second ended the year being held in abeyance.

Back in 2010-2011 the Department had gathered Association leaders to review responsibilities for church standing and standards and had called upon the associations to decide whether they wished to retain those responsibilities or to delegate them to the Conference. In 2011-2012, when the first association voted to delegate, the Council began work on an amendment to the Conference Constitution and Bylaws creating a committee dedicated to meeting such responsibilities for delegating associations. The 2012 Annual Meeting will be asked to act on this amendment.

In anticipation of the Church Growth Committee's planned September 24, 2011, New Keys event, the Department Council invited leaders of the other three departments to meet with its leaders. At the meeting department heads agreed to send teams to New Keys and then to consider how their departments might use the knowledge and enthusiasm gained there for the benefit of local churches. Meeting again, after September 24, they agreed to plan a joint activity for the fall of 2012. Before planning moved beyond that point the Board of Directors began a serious study of the Conference's role in the transformation of itself and local churches. It recommended holding off on the joint activity until it was ready to provide guidance.

Individual committees within the Department continued their good work during the year. Some will provide separate reports.

Department of Christian Education

Rev. Sandy Daly, chair

This year we continued to consider how to support our goals, as stated below. We meet quarterly with the summer meeting at Covenant Hills Campground. This year we had an opportunity to speak to leadership there

and were offered gracious hospitality. Our other meetings were focused on how to reorient ourselves to support Christian Education and faith formation in a time of change in our churches, with budget constraints and diminished membership, as well as new ways of communicating – all with a clear and continuing desire to grow in faith and understanding as followers of Jesus. We also participated in the conversations led by the Church and Ministry Department as follow-ups to the “New Keys to an Old Door” workshop. We are all exploring new possibilities for what it means to be church in the 21st century!

Goals:

Strengthen the Resource Center – This year there were over 100 new purchases and donations of books, videos, and DVDs. Many of these were purchased by request of pastors or staff, or because they were highly recommended new publications. Our resource librarian, Sybil McShane, has made these readily accessible in an online catalog. She is also very helpful in responding to specific requests and needs. While holding open houses have been less successful recently, the resource center is open and available whenever the Conference Center is open. Another important means of sharing information and resources is the quarterly e-communication (CE) E-Link. We continue to explore ways of connecting our local churches with the many wonderful resources available.

Maintain our Covenantal Partnerships – We continue our connection with NEAUCE (New England Association of Church Educators) through dues and scholarships for participation in their annual conference in Craigville, MA. This year’s theme is “Welcome to the Living Stone, the Source of Life” with presenter Dr. David Greenhaw. We anticipate about 20 Vermont educators will attend. In addition, we are working to establish more “Communities of Practice” around the state. These are cluster groups of Christian educators who can exchange ideas, and provide support and encouragement to one another. Our model group in the Essex Junction area has been successful in this, with monthly meetings for over a year, of about eight educators, both paid and volunteer.

Providing Quality CE Programs and Activities for Adults and Youth in Vermont Conference

We have developed phone interview questionnaires (“Exploring Christian Education in the Vermont Conference”) to assess both what is currently happening in our conference with regard to Christian Education and to better understand some of the needs and how we might respond to those needs. These interviews will be conducted over the next year with the hope of reaching every church. We have provided scholarships and reserved 20 spaces on the bus for the National Youth Event 2012 “Imagine” and expect all 20 spaces to be filled. This is an exciting opportunity for youth around the country to come together at Purdue University in West Lafayette, IN to learn and experience spiritual growth and leadership formation.

VAST (Vermont Academy for Spiritual Training) now in its 30th year, provides a unique opportunity for adults to deepen their spiritual journey and sense of call through classes on biblical studies and the foundations for ministry. These courses may be a first step toward licensed ministry or simply lead to personal growth. Classes are offered in two locations: Manchester and Norwich, and engage students from all over the state with teachers drawn from local clergy. The program continues to be financially self-sustaining due to a slight increase in tuition costs.

Strengthen our Commitment to Outdoor Ministry and Covenant Hills

Christian Camping experiences are so often where the seeds of faith formation and call take root in young people. For this reason we continue our support of *Covenant Hills Campground*, with members of our department serving on their board and participating as leaders, as well as our strong financial commitment, in partnership with the New England Conference of UMC. Another camping partnership we hold is with the Episcopal Dioceses of Vermont in support of *Camp Agape*, for children with incarcerated parents. We also maintain membership with NOMA (*National Outdoor Ministries Association*) as a source of information and support.

This year we are considering a restructuring of the CE Department with more active and focused “task forces”. I’d like to thank those who have served on the department and are now moving on, as well as those who plan to continue.

Communications and Resource Coordinator Report

Sybil Brigham McShane

Communications/Resource Center Coordinator

Resource Center Activities

In 2011, more than 100 items were added to the collection by purchase or donation. 304 items were borrowed from the collection in 2011 about 13% less than in 2010. Clergy borrowed 58% of the items circulated, Christian educators – 23% and 19% were borrowed by others (members of Conference committees and/or congregations, VAST students). 229 individuals are registered to borrow from the Resource Center.

The Resource Center collection is searchable online (by author, title, subject and keyword) via the Resource Center webpage:

http://www.vtcucc.org/Resource_Center.html

Communications Activities

The Conference published the following e-mail newsletters during 2011:

E-KIT (Electronically Keeping in Touch) newsletter – published weekly.

E-Event – Events from the Conference Calendar including conference, local church, ecumenical, regional, and national events of interest. Published bi-weekly on the 1st and 3rd Thursday of each month.

E-Link – a Christian Education Department newsletter was published once during 2011.

Faithful Stewards – a Stewardship Department newsletter authored by Jim Thomas, the Conference’s Business Manager/ Stewardship Associate published 8 issues during 2011.

DoM Newsletter – an occasional newsletter of the Department of Mission published one issue during 2011.

In addition, a print publication – *Vermont Conference News* – a 4-page bulletin insert was published once during 2011. The insert contains two local church articles, as well one conference and one national article.

A newsletter archive is available online at: <http://www.vtcucc.org/news.html>.

2012 Annual Report Department of Mission

Susanna Griefen, Chair

Perhaps more than any other Department of the Conference, the Mission Department was greatly impacted by Tropical Storm Irene and its aftermath. Chair of the new Diversity committee, Emily Heath was in one of the most affected areas and needed to withdraw from the Diversity Committee to do much needed work in Wilmington. Mission As Mission Department Chair, realizing that we had no Disaster Response Team in place, I offered to chair an ad hoc Vermont Conference Disaster Response Team, which meant less time for ongoing department activities, and lots of time getting training, making connections and helping churches help with recovery. I think the recovery from the storm has been a shining moment in our life together, as many church have played and continue to play a crucial role helping our communities recover.

In response to the flooding and our lack of preparedness, the Mission Department is bringing before the Annual Meeting a Resolution for a Vermont Conference Disaster Response Team (VTCDRT or Conference DiRT) and spelling out guidelines for associations and churches to help us be better prepared to respond quickly and effectively next time, whenever that next time is, God-willing long years from now. This year an ad hoc team has tried to coordinate our efforts, communicate our needs to the National Disaster Ministries office, and prepare for out of state volunteers. To host these groups that want to come and help, we need churches to prayerfully consider hosting. Details are on the Conference web-site. The National UCC Disaster Ministries office has been very supportive and generous. They sent 2000 full sets of protective gear, are funding a tool trailer, and have given excellent advice and expertise along the way—our OCWM dollars at work! Thanks to Disaster Team members Elissa Lucozzi, Peg Slater, Emily Heath, Peter Plagge, Bess Richardson and Sandy Daley for stepping in to help us find our way and guide our efforts.

Another new initiative of the Department of Mission comes out of the Global Ministries Committee with the formation of an active Global Missions Partnership Committee under the leadership of Co-Chairs Rev. Mark Mendes and Rev. Andrew Nagy-Benson. This committee is a response to the local churches who have asked for a conference-wide global partnership that will make it possible for many churches to have mission partnerships within the overall conference-wide mission relationship.

Two new committees, the Environmental Ministries Committee and the Diversity Committee, have not yet found their footing. With new leadership and added members, they hope to provide resources and support in these program areas in the coming year.

The Department of Mission continues to face the challenge of involving new members on our committees, and to allow long-serving members to retire as they reach the term limits set by the Board of Directors. We welcome new members to any of our committees or initiatives.

The Mission Department seeks to be helpful to our churches; and to identify the ways in which our local churches are engaged in mission. Having a mission representative in each congregation with whom we can be in touch with information and opportunities will help us in that effort. Through the Mission Quilt Project, building a

quilt depicting the mission work of local congregations, we hope celebrate each other's work. We are looking at ways to increase our concrete help to congregations and to support, energize, equip and share in their efforts to do Christ's work in the world. Some of the results of this continuing effort is included in the reports below.

I am deeply grateful for the Department members and all they do. Special thanks to retiring member Grace Cleary for her excellent work with the Summer Lunch Program.

I thank Jim Thomas for his work on our behalf in keeping our finances clear. Lynn Thomas has been generous and helpful in our effort to stay in touch with churches and with one another. And I especially want to thank Lynn Bujnak for her unfailing support, wisdom, guidance, energy and good humor.

I encourage all of you to prayerfully consider what God may be calling you to, and to faithfully discern what you are meant to do in our mutual mission to be Christ's church in our time and place.

Prison Justice Committee Report

Jeanne Zammataro, Chair

The Prison Justice Committee held a work day at the Blue Spruce House in conjunction with the Vermont Conference's 2011 Annual Meeting. The Blue Spruce House is a proposed transitional housing facility for women in VT. Located on land owned by the New England Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and is a project of Blue Spruce House, Inc., a not for profit corporation. When opened, the Blue Spruce will provide mental health and substance abuse treatment, employment and life skills training, onsite employment opportunities and community participation.

During the work day, members of Bethany Church, Randolph, Centre Church, Brattleboro and Second Congregational, Londonderry joined Will Hunter, lay pastor of the Perkinsville Community Church, and other friends of Blue Spruce on a variety of projects, including sorting books, planting a vegetable garden, weeding the foundation and other flower beds and planting perennials. Second Congregational Church supplied a wonderful lunch.

At last year's Annual Meeting, PJC sponsored a workshop on women and incarceration led by the Rev. Sala Nolan Gonzales, the United Church of Christ's minister for Criminal Justice and Human Rights. Both sessions of the workshop were well attended, and several attendees have joined the committee. Continuing on the theme of vulnerable women who may have experienced incarceration, the Committee is sponsoring a workshop at this Annual Meeting on mentoring such women, led by representatives of Mercy Connections and Vermont Works for Women.

Also at last year's Annual Meeting, PJC collected eighty bath towels and eighty beach towels to be included in the backpacks of children attending Camp Agape. Camp Agape is a camp for children of a parent(s) who has experienced the supervision of the Department of Corrections, either by incarceration or otherwise. Camp Agape is a joint ministry of the Vermont Conference, the New England Association of the United Methodist Church and the Vermont Diocese of the Episcopal Church.

The committee met several times, including a conference call with Sala. Sala encouraged the committee to focus on issues specific to Vermont. Consequently, PJC decided that its focus this year would be advocacy for the funding of the Blue Spruce. That project is still a work in progress. When the Blue Spruce is opened, the committee will also encourage churches to help financially and to provide volunteers to help reconcile women to society. Such volunteers might cook and share the evening meal with residents, spend social time with them or lead worship and/or Bible studies.

Several PJC members are board members of Blue Spruce House, Inc, and one of them, Will Hunter, has devoted enormous time and expense both in the renovation of the Blue Spruce and in designing the program. Also, two PJC members each lead worship monthly in the Springfield prison as well as cooking once a month at Dismas House, also a transitional housing facility. Several of the Conference's churches also provide cooks for the various Dismas Houses in Vermont.

Summer Lunch Grant Committee: 2011-2012 Report

Grace Cleary and Mary Lou DeCosta

Nine articles were published in E-Kit between March 16th and May 11th and application forms were easily accessed from each article. The application deadline was May 15th. Churches were encouraged to continue their participation in a local summer lunch program or begin one. Examples of summer lunch programs were given in each article. Churches were encouraged to contact Hunger Free Vermont for more information and help with their programs. Hunger Free Vermont aired three webinars on Summer Lunch which were helpful to those churches with actual sites. These webinars were referenced in the E-Kit articles. In several instances HFV was able to connect a church with a local sponsor defraying the cost. Several churches also contacted the Summer Lunch Grant Committee for help and requested ideas for their programs. Grant amounts were determined in consultation with Emily Glover of Hunger Free Vermont who was able to identify towns that required more financial help for their summer lunch programs. The Congregational Church of Middlebury thought they had applied for a grant but later realized they had not and were quite disappointed. Two other churches that received grants last year did not apply this year. Three new applications were received from churches that had either not applied before or not in recent years.

Seventeen Churches received grants totaling \$3600, Summer Lunch Grants – Vermont Conference DOM – 2011

CHURCH	AMOUNT
United Church of Bellows Falls –	\$200
Bradford Congregational Church UCC –	\$200
Centre Congregational Brattleboro -	\$200
First Congregational Church Burlington –	\$150
The United Church of Chelsea –	\$200
Dummerston Congregational Church –	\$250
Federated Church of East Arlington –	\$200
Malletts Bay Congregational Church UCC –	\$200
United Church of Northfield –	\$250
Pittsford Congregational Church –	\$250
Richmond Congregational Church –	\$200
Congregational Church of Rupert –	\$200
Christ's Church Saxton's River –	\$250
First Congregational Church Springfield –	\$200
United Church of Underhill –	\$250
Williston Federated Church –	\$200
Windham Congregational Church –	\$200

Global Ministries Committee

Dee and Bob Keller, Co-chairs

Members: Dr. Dorothy B. Keller and Dr. Robert S. Keller (Dee and Bob), Co-chairs; Rev. Adrienne Carr, Rev. Jordan Dickinson (Skip), Theresa Lever, and Rev. Joan O’Gorman.

The mission of the Global Ministries Committee is to help the Vermont Conference, UCC, and Vermont UCC Churches support and participate in the world wide missions of the Common Global Ministries Board, which is the collaborative work of the United Church of Christ’s Wider Church Ministries and the Division of Overseas Missions of the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ.

1. The Vermont Conference, UCC, “Global Missions Partnership” has taken a great leap forward as the vision and enthusiasm of Co-Chairs Rev. Mark Mendes and Rev. Andrew Nagy-Benson now guide the planning committee. Rev. Joan O’Gorman is also working with this committee. A possible area of the world for this Partnership could be Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, Africa or the Middle East. A special emerging focus area is work with churches and other mission efforts initiated by the late Rev. Robert Lee in South India.

2. Weaving a Tapestry of Mission Callings: Several churches have responded to the call to send us information about their international Mission commitments.

- Rev. Daniel Wright reported that joining with Rotary Hands-to-Honduras and other Honduran connections have been satisfying for the Weybridge Congregational Church.
- Martha Elliot reports that the First Congregational Church of Lyndonville has mission efforts in Uganda (pipes, gardens, pumps).
- Betty Edson sent word of Randolph Bethany church’s work with 1) Sister Church San Cristobel, Ecuador, 2) Health and Harmony work in Borneo, and 3) AIDS orphan work with Zienzele Foundation in Zimbabwe. Brattleboro Centre Congregational Church has some involvement with the Kakamega Orphan Care Center in Kenya and is deeply involved in a Sister Parish relationship with The Cristo Redentor church in Cabanitas, El Salvador.
- The Guilford Church Interfaith Youth Group has a work project trip in April, 2012 to an orphan center in Kenya. Please write us about your church’s international mission efforts. The finished tapestry will be beautiful!

3. Work on past Annual Meeting resolutions, (2009: encouraging the study of Islam, and 2010: promoting the Charter for Compassion) proceeds in many churches.

The study of Islam to build Muslim-Christian relations was the Windham Union Association’s focus for its November 6 program meeting with Marlborough College Professor, Dr. Amer Latif as keynote speaker. Dummerston, Grafton, Windham, and Centre churches have also held study seminars on Islam during the year. The “Charter for Compassion” has engaged several churches. Please let Bob and Dee Keller know how your church may have been involved in working on either of these resolutions. Please contact Bob and Dee for suggestions of possible speakers and approaches your church can use for working on these resolutions. In addition, materials are available from the Conference Resource Center. (Dee has lived for 24 years with Muslim neighbors and colleagues in Turkey, 12 of those years with Bob in educational missionary service.)

rsdbkeller@yahoo.com.

Please read the Wider Church Ministries summary in these Annual Meeting reports to learn about the changing mission structures as the UCC moves from some 260 persons serving on 5 boards to 52 persons serving on the single UCC board. Also, please read about the opportunity for you to attend the Missionworks and Mission Interpreter Training on October 25-28 in Cleveland.

We welcome your suggestions to help our work be fully relevant to your needs and interests.

The Just Peace Advocates

The Just Peace Advocates of the Department of Mission is encouraged in its work by the passage at 2011's Annual Meeting of the Resolution on Re-Affirming the Vermont Conference as a Just Peace Conference. JPA also organized and hosted the Peacemakers' Breakfasts at Annual Meeting. In addition to several local church presentations on projects that increase peace, one of our national church guests, Ben Guess, introduced breakfast attendees to Mission: 1, an excellent example of a just peace activity. In the fall, JPA supplemented the Conference staff's efforts to promote congregations' participation in Mission: 1. Our churches gathered food, contributed to Neighbors in Need and East Africa Famine Relief, and wrote letters to Congress advocating for hunger justice. JPA helped organize the annual Vermont Low Income Advocacy Legislative Day, held at the State House on March 23. For the 2012 Annual Meeting, JPA is offering two peacemakers' workshops, hosting Peacemakers' breakfasts, and providing resources to congregations to engage in just peace activities.

The Diversity Committee

The Diversity Committee has brought A Dillard University Scholarship Resolution before the Annual Meeting to seek ways to enter into meaningful relationship with the Dillard Community to our mutual benefit, education and growth in grace and wisdom. It also calls for churches to learn about and support this historic UCC Black College and for bi-annual Annual Meeting offerings to fund this scholarship. New members of the committee bring expertise and deep concern for the areas of racial and ethnic oppression, accessibility for all in our church life, mental health concerns and LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Transgendered) issues.

Members: Curtiss Reed, Director of VT Partnership for Fairness and Diversity; Rev. Emily Heath, Pastor W Dover; Rev. Margaret (Peg) Slater, formerly Minister for Diversity and Inclusion, UCC Parish Life and Leadership Ministry; Rev. Lise Sparrow, Pastor, Guilford Community Church UCC; and Wendy Baxter, Art Therapist, Brattleboro Retreat Mental Hospital.

Environmental Ministries

Are you already a Green Justice Congregation? The Environmental Ministries Committee challenges all our congregations to go to ucc.org, Green Justice Congregations for ideas, inspiration and information about how to start the process or record your efforts as a Green Justice Congregation.

VLIAC

Low Income Vermonters Have a Good Day in Montpelier

The Vermont Low Income Advocacy Council (VLIAC) is a statewide Board of individuals representing the interest of low-income Vermonters in matters of budgetary and policy issues before the Vermont State Legislature. VLIAC is committed to advancing those programs and policies that promote economic security and human rights for all Vermonters. Through the Council's advocacy, VLIAC has been giving a voice to the poor, the elderly, those living with disabilities, and low-income working families, in the policy making arena of state government. The goals of VLIAC are quite simple: VLIAC is committed to empowering the poor to speak for themselves, and to

speak for those who cannot. VLIAC believes that it is our responsibility to bring the issues of Poverty and the needs of lower income Vermonters to the forefront of the Legislative agenda

Poverty numbers are on the rise again, the country has seen tough economic times, and Vermonters have dealt with a natural disaster and four years of budget reductions.

The State has focused on the Mental Health System of Care moving toward a community based solution, implementation of Vermont's version of Health Care Reform and the recovery efforts after Irene. Many Vermonters continue to struggle to cover the basic needs of their families and are without adequate healthcare, affordable housing, stable employment and educational opportunities.

Friday, March 23, the Vermont House passed a budget for fiscal year 2013 that preserves most state services upon which low-income Vermonters depend. Behind the headline lies the persistence of VLIAC (Vermont Low-Income Advocacy Council) advocate Karen Moran Lafayette who meets regularly with legislators to champion priorities chosen by the VLIAC Board. This year's priorities fall into such categories as:

- Weatherization, Fuel Assistance
- Crisis Fuel, Electric Affordability
- Proven Strategies for Self-Sufficiency
- Economic Services for Children and Families
- Access to Oral Health, Nutrition, Legal Services
- Choices for Care, Developmental Services
- Affordable Housing Initiatives

Karen's work is supported in part by a Department of Mission grant, leading DoM member Theresa Lever to say, "When I was sitting in Room 10 (in the State House) I felt so proud and emotional about our church and Conference being part of something so important...."

VLIAC has been speaking on behalf of Vermont's poor for 40 years. It just happened that this year the House approved the budget, and sent it on to the Senate, on the annual UCC-VLIAC Legislative Day. After the vote, an obviously pleased Speaker Shap Smith told 45 UCC-VLIAC members, "We were able to keep our commitment to those who are most vulnerable." Earlier in the day, Vermont UCC Conference Minister the Rev Dr. Lynn Bujnak opened the House session with prayer and Randolph Representative Patsy French introduced to the House as her guests the UCC-VLIAC delegation.

Karen Lafayette explained her work: "So much of what we do depends on personal connections; conversations with individual legislators, testimony before committees and putting a face on poverty is an important part of what we do. If legislators know you, they listen." As a legislator and later as a registered lobbyist, Karen has worked in the State House for over 20 years, building a network. Her connections have been especially important this year because of extraordinary demands on state funds caused by Tropical Storm Irene at the same time that federal funds for supplemental heat allowances and other services of vital importance to the poor had been reduced.

The VLIAC Advocate's work is funded in part through the Vermont Conference, and in part through direct gifts from churches and individual church members, as well as support from community action organizations and other advocates. Contributions (checks payable to Vermont Assistance, Inc.) may be sent to John D.

Shullenberger, Esq., 2287 Nashville Road, Jericho, Vermont 05465. John Shullenberger is co-chair of VAI along with John Nutting, former Conference Minister of Mission.

In September, UCC-VLIAC will hold its annual Edna Fairbanks-Williams Memorial Dinner, at Bethany Church Montpelier – another opportunity to learn a lot and lobby a little. As Jesus said, the need never ends. “You always have the poor with you” (Mark 14:7).” Since many low-income Vermonters are not able to get to Montpelier and speak for themselves, they rely on Karen, who relies on our support, individually or through the UCC.

Wider Church Ministries Annual Report, April 2012

Report from Dorothy B. Keller (Dee),

Vermont representative to the Wider Church Ministries Board, WCM, 2009 to 2015

WIDER CHURCH MINISTRIES (WCM) is the United Church of Christ partner with the Division of Overseas Ministries (DOM) of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in “GLOBAL MINISTRIES” (GM), administered since the late 1990s, through the Common Global Ministries Board (CGMB). WCM is the legal continuation of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions established in 1810, and continuing until 1959 by the Congregational Church, and then administered by its successor, The United Church Board for World Ministries, from 1960 until the late 1990s.

The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), America’s first foreign mission society, celebrates that for over 200 years it, and its successor boards, have sent and received thousands of persons to teach and heal, to plant and harvest, to minister, and to be ministered to, throughout the world. Today, 125 overseas staff in 70 countries work in mutual partnership with 270 mission partners around the world, seeking to change lives through “a ministry of Critical Presence where we meet in a timely and appropriate manner God’s people and creation at the point of deepest need: spiritually, physically, emotionally and/or economically.” We share God’s love and gifts, working together for health, education, development, environmental protection, human rights, peace, and justice.

Local churches can connect with Global Ministries to learn how UCC churches can help build God’s new community around the world and right here at home. Go to www.globalministries.org/get-involved/ to learn how you can become a partner Global Missions Church. Also, learn about the many service opportunities available to your church through WCM and Global Ministries such as: Child Sponsorships, short and long term Volunteer Opportunities, Church to Church Partnerships, People to People trips and Pilgrimages, Youth Internships, and many more.

In 2011, the United Church of Christ and its Boards continued their work on the powerful project to restructure, developing Bold Inspirational Goals (BIGS), as the UCC moves to become a more efficient and effective instrument of God’s love through Jesus Christ in the future world society. The UCC will reformulate its administrative systems to design a single United Church of Christ Board with 52 members in place of the current 5 boards with 260 members. Led by our dedicated and competent WCM Board Executive, the Rev. James Moos, installed in November 2011, the WCM is working hard with the UCC President, the Rev. Geoffrey Black and

others on the “Collegium” of the UCC administrative leadership to reallocate staff, procedures, board members, and financial components for this new system.

The World needs the distinct values, vision, and voice of the United Church of Christ: “Continuing Testament – Extravagant Welcome - Changing Lives.” Please keep in touch with this growth and change by offering prayers and robust support for the WCM, the CGMB and the UNITED CHURCH of CHRIST.