

# Vermont Conference, UCC Keeping in Touch

EQUIPPING CONGREGATIONS FOR CHRIST'S  
MINISTRY AND MISSION TODAY AND TOMORROW

E-Kit

September 27, 2017

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**Vermont Conference  
News**



**At the end of this week, Jim Thomas transitions to a new call - pastor of the Atkinson Congregational UCC in Atkinson, NH. We are grateful for the many**

## Greetings!

Well, here it is, friends, my last e-kit article.

It's ok, you can cheer, I can't hear you!

When I began at the Vermont Conference more than 13 years ago, my then position description contained lots of things I was supposed to do - and that list barely overlaps with my current call agreement. It's amazing to me how my position has evolved over the years. As I reminisce a bit, however, the evolution makes sense.

When I went to interview for the position of Conference Administrator (thanks Pam!) I entered a room with no less than 15 people assembled to conduct the interview. Well, isn't this interesting, I thought. I learned something about how the staff (there were 10 of us then!) and the leadership communicated and understood trust. It was a fun interview for me - I had no plans to accept the position, and thus felt rather, umm, unrestrained in my responses. I'll be darned if that didn't seem to play well.

Here are some of the things that weren't in my original position description: Stewardship, Church Growth, Church Vitality, Governance, preaching in churches, and leadership retreats. How they came to be part of my work can be attributed to a single word: covenant.

I made it my mission to raise up the bond between local church and wider church. If the local church didn't see any 'value added' in a relationship with the Conference, why have one? We were well past the time when the Conference and national setting of the church could 'expect' financial support because 'it was the right thing to do' or out of some sense of obligation. I thought (and continue to think) we need to earn it. So when a local

gifts Jim and Lynn have shared with our Conference that have strengthened the vitality of our congregations and ignited a passion for God's new vision for the Church. While sad to see them go, we send our thoughts and prayers with them to this new place of ministry. As Garrison Keillor says, "Be well, do good work and keep in touch." Blessings on your lives, on your ministry and on the important work you will continue to do for the Church of Jesus the Christ.

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### Webinars for ONA and not-yet ONA churches this fall

Is your ONA church looking for ways to strengthen your Open and Affirming mission? Is your UCC congregation taking its first steps towards an ONA covenant? We've a webinar for you! ONA 101 and ONA and the Bible help non-ONA congregations design a plan for their church that will build consensus and reduce the danger of conflict. ONA 201 is for congregations looking for the best practices for church growth, including tips on marketing, communications, advocacy and personal evangelism. And don't miss our new webinar: Trans 101! We'll help you understand the trans experience, and share ways you can stand with your transgender neighbors and members when their rights and human dignity are under attack. We've kept the cost of these informative webinars low so you any church can afford them, and there are discounts when multiple participants gather around a single computer.

[Learn more >>](#)

church asked for help with Stewardship, I worked to become well versed enough on the subject to share something with others. As an old mentor of mine once said, "If you think you know a subject well, try teaching it to others. That'll tell you something." I found churches hungry for help, and saw that an in-person visit with a local church giving assistance was the quickest route to improved relationship and covenant.

As time passed other skill sets evolved, eventually working their way into my actual position description. I owe a debt of gratitude to leadership that was willing to indulge my extracurricular activities and embrace them as part of my portfolio when it was found to be something our churches needed and fit the mission of the Conference.

Forgive me for what, as I read it, sounds a bit self-indulgent. The point I'm trying to make is this: In a time when churches as a whole have become more insular, the wider church needs to ensure that its efforts provide something the local church actually wants and needs. Mutual covenant and support grows from a symbiotic relationship in which each side contributes and benefits. The current buzz word is inter-dependence, which I guess is fine, but I think covenantal still works well too.

A few years ago Carole Carlson and I developed and taught a UCC polity course which focused on polity from the local church's perspective - and the tug of war between autonomy and covenant. Our churches tend to be more familiar with the autonomy part ("You're not the boss of me!") than they are the covenant aspect. But from the very beginning the mostly unchecked power of the local church inherent in congregational polity was balanced by an understanding of mutual support, relationship, and responsibility with other churches and a wider structure. That relationship needs to be continually exercised to remain strong and vital.

My friends, let me leave you with this thought. Local churches - nurture your relationship with your association, conference, and the United Church of Christ. There are things we can do together that no



[UCC News and Updates](#)

2017 Digital Stewardship  
Materials...

[read more here!](#)

UCC poised to offer long-term  
assistance in Puerto Rico

UCC's White Privilege curriculum  
gets ecumenical audience in  
Rhode Island

Brooklyn church takes a knee to  
call out racial injustice

Wisconsin church to donate fall  
festival proceeds to hurricane  
recovery

Colorado UCC church to celebrate  
30 years of ONA

Commentary: Rising Up for  
Equality

Mass. Conference selects interim  
minister to succeed Jim Antal



Click image for more information.



Food for Thought  
Focus Reading:  
Exodus 17:1-7

Albert Szent-Gyorgyi, 20th century

"Water is life's mater and matrix,  
mother and medium. There is no life  
without water."

church can do alone, and skill sets you require  
that won't be available in-house. And my dear  
Vermont Conference, always be listening,  
always be responsive, always seek to provide  
the churches what they need - free of the  
institutional quicksand that can make you  
slow to grasp and evolve.

Many of you have reached out to me with a  
personal note. I have, alas, not been able to  
respond to them all. Please know that I  
cherished each of them. It's been a wonderful  
13 years. Thank you all for your love,  
encouragement and support. I return to the  
local church from whence I came, answering a  
call to return to parish ministry. But a piece  
of my heart will always remain with you.

Peace,

Jim

Rev. Jim Thomas

Associate Conference Minister for  
Stewardship, Church Vitality, and Finance

Saturday, October 28  
First Congregational Church, UCC  
39 Main Street  
Essex Junction, VT 05452

A Worship & Song Leading Workshop with Paul  
Vasile, Executive Director of Music that Makes  
Community

Nepalese Lunch provided by The Vineyard  
Nepali Fellowship

Cost: \$15 person payable at the door, for all  
coming from churches outside the Champlain  
Association UCC

Please RSVP at:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/workshop-songs-of-transformation-reformation-and-liberation-tickets-37928359745>

\*\*\*\*\*Registration Is Now Open\*\*\*\*\*  
**Fall Vitality Event 2017**

Presented by:  
Vermont Conference, UCC &  
Partners for Sacred Places

William Langewiesche, 20th century  
"So much of who we are is where we  
have been."

and  
"You should not see the desert simply  
as some faraway place of little rain.  
There are many forms of thirst."

Frederick Buechner, A Room  
Called Remember: Uncollected  
Pieces, 21st century

"To be commanded to love God at all,  
let alone in the wilderness, is like  
being commanded to be well when  
we are sick, to sing for joy when we  
are dying of thirst, to run when our  
legs are broken. But this is the first  
and great commandment  
nonetheless. Even in the wilderness--  
especially in the wilderness--you shall  
love [God]."

Francis of Assisi, 12th century  
mystic

"Be praised, My Lord, through Sister  
Water; she is very useful, and  
humble, and precious, and pure."

Catherine of Siena, 14th century

"Nothing great is ever achieved  
without much enduring."

Annie Dillard, 21st century

"I come down to the water to cool my  
eyes. But everywhere I look I see fire;  
that which isn't flint is tinder, and the  
whole world sparks and flames."

and  
"I alternate between thinking of the  
planet as home--dear and familiar  
stone hearth and garden--and as a  
hard land of exile in which we are all  
sojourners."

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### **Resources from WorshipWell**

Be sure to check out the worship  
resources available at:  
[worshipwell.church](http://worshipwell.church)

Join us on October 14, 2017 for a special  
Vitality event at which we will  
explore: Growing a congregation's  
membership, ministry, financial stewardship,  
leadership and vision through community  
engagement and outreach!

Take this opportunity to learn from other  
congregations about their innovative outreach  
and community partnerships, large and small  
including:

- **Creating new ministries**
- **Leading conversations on major local issues;**
- **Launching a major "community-wide" capital campaign;**
- **Or just asking your neighbors how you might work together.**

Keynote speaker [Tuomi Forrest](#) is the Executive Vice President of [Partners for Sacred Spaces](#). He has offered technical advice and consultation to thousands of congregations of all faiths on the care and active community use of their historic religious buildings since joining Partners in 1997.

These topics and more will be shared and discussed in this interactive day-long educational program.

Registration is \$25 per person (which includes lunch!) and you can sign up by clicking the Registration button below.

**We look forward to seeing you on October 14th in Montpelier!**

[Register here...](#)

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**Vermont Interfaith Power and Light**

P.O. Box 209

Richmond, VT 05477

[info@vtipl.org](mailto:info@vtipl.org) 802-434-3397

[www.vtipl.org](http://www.vtipl.org)

Vermont Interfaith Power and Light (VTIPL) will hold it's annual conference, Building Local Resilience - Inspiring Climate Action!, on Saturday, Oct. 21, 2017, 10 am - 4 pm, at



First Congregational Church in Manchester, VT. It's going to be great - please come!

Deb Markowitz, former Secretary of Vermont's Agency of Natural Resources will be the Keynote Speaker. She has long been speaking out about the climate crisis and the need for quick and effective action to address global climate change. Her bio and much more about the conference is on the event page on VTIPL's website: [www.vtipl.org/node/364](http://www.vtipl.org/node/364).

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**Employment Opportunities**

(If you have a job listed, please try to remember to let me ([Charri](#)) know if it has been filled!)

Tyson Congregational church - located on the Ludlow/Plymouth border. Part-time organist needed to job-share with our current organist for some Sunday Morning Worship services. Please contact Ann Rose at [gms@tds.net](mailto:gms@tds.net) if interested.

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Music Director  
Second Congregational Church, Hyde Park, VT

We are an active and friendly congregation of people who love our church and our music. We are looking for an individual with a love of music, and a musical background, to lead our music program. We are blessed with a beautiful pipe organ, baby grand piano and vibrant choir. Our ideal Music Director would be proficient with, and enjoy playing the organ and piano, be able to sight read music and direct and grow our Choir and music program. Part time, paid position.

If this sounds interesting, we would love to talk with you about our program and what we can create together. Please email: Second Congregational Church [2congo@myfairpoint.net](mailto:2congo@myfairpoint.net)

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Organist/Choir Director Needed!  
Application  
Email:  
[welcome@fccej.org](mailto:welcome@fccej.org)

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**Church Bulletin Board**

**The Wells River Congregational Church, UCC, Main Street, Wells River VT. has 110 like new hymnals "United Church of Christ" Contact Marion Zambon:(802)-584-3857**

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Ideal for start-up church: over 100 year old Steinway upright piano in very good condition- Pay to move from Groton \$500.00 plus/minus- piano mover out of Barre, VT Contact Marion Zambon in Groton, VT (802) 584-3857

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The Bradford Congregational Church is seeking to buy used copies of the New Century Hymnal. If your church would like to meet their need please contact Marcia Tomlinson at [m3site@charter.net](mailto:m3site@charter.net)

Job Description/Offer: First Church of Essex Junction, U.C.C. seeks PT Organist/Choir Director. Church is GLBTQ friendly. Job includes coord. music program, directing adult choirs, and playing organ & piano @ 2 services [beautifully refurbished 1928 Estey organ / Young Chang baby grand].

Email cover letter and resume to [FCCEJmusicsearch@gmail.com](mailto:FCCEJmusicsearch@gmail.com) or mail to FCCEJ Music Search, 1 Church Street, Essex Junction VT 05452.

Church office 802-878-5745.  
First Congregational Church of Essex Junction  
Website: [www.fccej.org](http://www.fccej.org)  
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# Farewell



**Thank You for Reading**  
**An Open and Affirming Conference**  
[For the E-Kit Archive](#)

