

DIVING INTO THE DEEP

Ministry on a bike: time in the Hawaiian wilderness

By Russ Stevens,

First Congregational UCC, Palo Alto

The 2008 UCC Bicycle Adventure, our fourth summer ride for fun and to support God's work was 10 days of incredible cycling, fellowship, unforgettable hospitality, amazing food, beautiful beaches and lots of fun.

From Aug. 1-10, 13 cyclists and four support staff from six different UCC churches in four states traveled over 300 miles all the way around the Big Island of Hawaii.

We biked over an active volcano, swam with sea turtles at a black sand beach, biked part of the Hawaii Iron Man route north of Kona, visited a tropical rain forest and watched the sunset from the 14,000 foot peak of Mauna Kea.

We visited six different UCC churches along the way including the Church of the Holy Cross in Hilo, Kahuku Congregational in Ocean View, Mokuaikaua Congregational in Kona (the oldest church in the Hawaiian Islands), Imiola Congregational in Waimea, Laupahoehoe Congregational and the Hilo Coast UCC next to Akaka Falls. We will never forget the extravagant welcomes we received at the churches we stayed at.

Thanks to everyone who donated. We raised over \$2,700 for UCC Share and over \$1,300 for Turning Wheels for Kids, a San Jose-based organization that buys

new bicycles for children in need. We also got priceless amounts of prayers and good wishes. It was support and gifts like this that make all the UCC Bicycle Adventures such a success!

Some reflections from the riders, starting with my own.

• **Time in the wilderness:** We all need time in the wilderness, as Jesus did. We need to get away from our normal routines and habits while also challenging ourselves physically and/or spiritually and trying to connect to God.

The UCC Bicycle Adventures is sort of like the Israelites' time in the wilderness. True, we are not fleeing Egyptian armies or slavery. But we do live a rather nomadic life, traveling from place to place under our own power, getting to know God, trying strange foods and being tended to by strangers.

Jesus knew that such physical and spiritual challenges are a necessary part of preparing ourselves for the future. In the same way, each of us, before we can move forward with our lives must test ourselves to see if we are ready. Whatever miracles God has planned for us, they will likely be both difficult and wonderful. We won't will be ready for them without some prior challenges to prepare us. When we face these challenges and prevail, they build our character and they build our faith.



UCC bike riders in their God is Still Speaking shirts, in front of Kilauea caldera erupting: David Casterson, Allie Mayer (Palo Alto UCC), John Crowe (Redding UCC), Sheila Stevens (Palo Alto), Daniel Furlong (Palo Alto), Ben Gardiner (Palo Alto).

So next time you have some vacation time, consider a trip to the wilderness. God has miracles planned for you. God just wants to make sure you're ready.

• **Help and support,** from John Crowe from Pilgrim Congregational UCC, Redding.

Each night, the group would reflect and recount what was special about their day. I noticed that the particulars would vary from day to day about special treats, great downhill descents or the brilliant colors of the coral reef fish, but we always mentioned the group's willingness to help one

another and how much we enjoyed sharing time with others. The conversations and sharing that came out of those rolling times together were a beautiful experience.

• **Leading and following,** from Allie Mayer, First Congregational UCC, Palo Alto.

Every year these bicycle adventures continue to amaze me. One day we rode past lava beds on the volcano. The lava had destroyed everything in its path leaving only a barren though majestic black landscape, except for a few small chutes of green. Something thought to be so de-

structive actually acts as a great fertilizer that allows life to start over anew. This idea also applies to our lives. Sometimes a disaster can help us to start fresh. As Russ often reminds us, "What's good? What's bad? Who knows?"

As we rode through the lava beds and down the volcano, we were faced with a wicked headwind. David, a more experienced rider than I, suggested that Ben and I draft off him to form a pace line. Each of us took turns breaking the wind for each other until we were tired and let someone else take the lead.

I found that leading was hard work, especially compared with the ease of following. I was simply sucked along and did not even need to pedal. However, it felt just as good to lead, knowing that I was benefiting others and allowing them to have a great time thanks to my hard work. Also, the three of us allegedly broke 40 mph at one point, a speed none of us could possibly have clocked on our own in that wind.

On our trip Russ and Sheila broke the wind for us, leading a wonderful trip and sucking us along for the ride, but it could not have gone as smoothly as it did if the group and our hosts hadn't stepped it up and helped to break the wind. Now, that is one awesome pace line.

Every Dollar Feeds Kids serves millionth meal

by Alan Miller, First congregational UCC, San Rafael

One million meals served! That's the record of Every Dollar Feeds Kids, a program begun in 2000 by First Congregational UCC, San Rafael. More than ever today, small churches make a big difference in the lives of people all around the world.

With only 75 members, but with support from other churches, the larger community and foundations, EDFK has raised more than \$ 600,000 dollars since 2000 to support the feeding programs of our sister service program VAMOS! in Cuernavaca, Mexico.

Cuernavaca has been the summer home of Mexico's rich and powerful since the time of the Aztecs. Today, it is also home to nearly a million poor people who have flocked to the city looking for work and opportunities for themselves and their children.

VAMOS! helps communities build schools and community centers and feeds 2,500 children and their mothers per day. The minimum wage in Mexico now is US \$4 a day. EDFK provides the food.

Faced by rapidly rising increases in the cost of food and



Every Dollar Feeds Kids: Dollars from First Congregational UCC, San Rafael feed this Guernevaca boy and many other kids in Mexico. See ad Page B6 to learn how you can help.

energy, EDFK dollars only go half as far as they did just three years ago. In our early years, we provided three meals for each dollar of donations. Today, per meal

costs average 75 cents. Tortillas alone have doubled in price in the last 18 months.

EDFK board member Catharine John will join the full time

volunteer teaching staff at VAMOS! schools on Nov. 1. John's multi-lingual abilities, her teaching skills, her love of children (and her violin playing) should soon make her one of the most popular teachers with the children served by VAMOS! and EDFK.

The members of our UCC congregation in San Rafael invite other churches in the Conference to join us in helping feed hungry kids. Our work may be only a drop in the bucket of need. But to our children, those drops bring strength and hope.

Contact us at EDFK, 8 N. San Pedro, San Rafael 94903 or at 415-479-5467. Visit <www.everydollarfeedskids.org>.

CALENDAR OF PRAYER

We invite your prayers for:

- Our nation in these days of politics and choices.
- The leaders of our six Associations: Bay, Golden Gate, Mountain Valley, Sacramento Valley, Santa Clara and Sequoia.
- Conference staff: in the office, on the road, on the phone, in meetings, typing, preaching and praying.
- Leaders in our wider church.
- NCNC churches in care.
- Churches struggling for new vitality.
- Churches in the search and call time.