

AM 2004

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to OCWM (Our Church's Wider Mission) so we can do the work we are called to do."

Generosity was in abundance. A surprise gift of \$3,500 to Our Church's Wider Mission came from Beneficio Coffee, a new project promoting "more than fair trade" coffee. Pioneer UCC, Sacramento, members Tom Angus and Jinxi Allen sold 700 one-pound bags of their Heavenly Blend coffee at Asilomar and gave 100 percent of their profit to OCWM. (See Page C2 for more on this new project.)

First Congregational, Palo Alto's Russ Meyer rode his bicycle down the aisle of Merrill Hall to promote his "Bike Around the Bay" project this August. Pledges per mile will benefit OCWM.

First Congregational, San Jose, chipped in by paying the cost of John Thomas' Asilomar expenses, freeing that money up for youth scholarships.

Speakers opposed the budget because they wanted it to be more generous, with more for mission, more for staff. "Think of the budget with a comma after it. If it's more, we could do more. Accept it with a comma and pledge to make it bigger," said Becky Luther of Parkside, Sacramento.

• The comma as whirlwind, "Visually, the comma is a whirlwind or a tornado. It is sure to whip us up," said Conference Minister Gast.

Keynote speakers John Thomas and Art Cribbs whipped the crowd up with passionate calls to hear the still-speaking God's word of love and justice for the vulnerable.

"Our own increased sense of vulnerability — job loss, health care, violence, terrorism, illness, environmental degradation, can make us want to cower, complain and seek to control others," said Thomas, president and general minister of the UCC.

"Rather, we must go to places of vulnerability and reach out to vulnerable people. Like Ezekiel we must preach good news to what seems dead. Like Elijah we must leave our caves of safety. Like Esther, we must recognize that our privilege won't save us, that God calls us to use our positions of privilege on behalf of others."

Art Cribbs, former Bay Area television reporter, former UCC Office of Communications director and now pastor in San Diego, imagined God still speaking to governmental leaders today in love and challenge. "Love is a call to action. I will never forsake you. I want you to reach out and embrace one another."

Public ministry must challenge the powers that be, Cribbs said, calling it "troublemaking 101."

A whirlwind of song and inspiration was the Transcendence Choir from City of Refuge, San Francisco. Rev. Laura Rose said of this first transgendered choir in the nation, "Their boisterous spirits and bold presence were in the spirit of Jesus' broad welcome. I was proud that they were warmly and lovingly applauded and accepted. We felt their love and they felt ours!"

• The comma teardrop, "The comma looks like a teardrop," said new Conference Moderator Rev. Tauoa Head of Kalavaria Reformed, San Mateo, "and God is also still speaking through our tears."

The opening worship service by the NCNC Earth Stewards recalled Paul's words that "all of Creation has been groaning in labor pains" and invited confession for human abuse and waste of nature. The Dancers' Circle from Community, Orinda, danced a response of hope in the face of sorrow.

• The comma means more is to come,

Youth delegates announced they intend to introduce a resolution next year to increase the number of delegates each church is allowed to include one youth delegate.

Closing the final worship service, Head said, "We're not done yet! The benediction is a comma; this is just the beginning."

Next year Annual Meeting returns to its usual third weekend in May, 19-22. Start getting your commas ready now!

More happy faces: clockwise from right: New Conference Board member Alex Peters with outgoing Board President Louis Knox: A new Annual Meeting feature, God is Still Speaking merchandise. Angelo Hannal from City of Refuge, San Francisco checks out a shirt. The Dancers Circle, from Community UCC, Orinda, moved with grace and power at several worship services; Old friends from UCC Office of Communications George Conklin and keynote speaker Art Cribbs. (Thanks to George for many of these photos.)

