

DIVING INTO THE DEEP

Barbara Broadbent commissioned to ministry of education

Barbara Broadbent became a UCC commissioned minister in a worship service June 5 at her local church, Foothills UCC, Los Altos, when the Santa Clara Association affirmed her ministerial covenant between her local church and the Conference, where she serves as Associate Conference Minister for Outdoor and Education Ministries, and Search and Call Coordinator.

Commissioned ministry is a form of authorized ministry in the UCC for lay persons. They are commissioned to a specific church-related ministry rather than ordained to the ministry of word and sacrament. Although specific training and skills are required, a seminary degree is not. Like ordained ministers, commissioned ministers have ministerial standing in the UCC.

Broadbent joins other Northern California Nevada Conference commissioned ministers: David Bergman-Hill, Associate Conference Minister for Stewardship, Finance and Administration; Phil Porter, Commissioned Minister for Liturgical Arts, First Congregational, Berkeley; and Betsy Woodward, Commissioned Minister for Education, Congregational, San Mateo.

Broadbent's account of her journey to commissioned ministry includes these reflections:

"I firmly believe I am called to ministry, as I believe all lay people are called by God to walk a particular path.

"My sense of call as a layperson has developed slowly. As a layperson, I align myself with all the laity. I witness to the responsibility each of us has, not only the ordained, to see what we do with our lives as our part in the fulfillment of God's plan.

"I am called to a ministry of relationships. My primary concerns are the relationship between each person and God and the relationships that form among people when we seek companions on the faith journey and offer ourselves as channels of God's love and care.

"Another term I sometimes use for 'Christian education' is 'faith development' because it more accurately describes what we must be about in the church in addition to worship: encounters with one another that shower us with God's love, that encourage us to go a step further in exploring the nature of God and our grateful response. Small groups in the church are therefore essential for adults, youth, children and mixes of all the generations, because in intimate sharing of our faith and our wonderings we discover our commonalities and give each other

courage to grow and change.

"James Fowler's theories of faith development have been essential to me. Fowler writes, 'Just asking the question throws a person into transition.' This sentence forms the heart of my perspective and my passion for religious education. We are stressed out constantly by the questions the world asks and the answers demanded of us on a daily basis. But the faith questions with which we nurture one another cause us to go deeply inside, experience the darkness, and discern the prayer of the Holy Spirit dwelling there, expressing that prayer in sighs too deep for words.

"Religious education in faith traditions such as the United Church of Christ is not so much learning facts about doctrine, theology or faithful works as it is being willing to ask questions of one another, to listen to one another's struggle and enlightenment, to be willing to live with the questions and go deep inside ourselves to discern what the Holy Spirit is telling us and what God is calling us to be and do.

"These thoughts about my theological perspective are not complete, and not entirely defensible. I intend to spend the rest of my life re-examining, unfolding, sorting, shifting and transitioning. There is yet more light and truth to break forth from God's holy word.

"Rather than trying to figure it all out, I seek the wisdom of living with the questions. I continue to learn the value of humility, of looking for questions and clues in the life experiences, woundedness, and serenity of those around me. I struggle to not allow a judgmental attitude to turn that which is insightful for me into 'shoulds' for others. I am tentative about most things.

"The work of the laity has been lifted up by the United Church of Christ in many ways. Our great reliance on the volunteerism of the laity at all levels of church life is one way of honoring this work. Affirmation of the call of certain lay people to commissioned ministry is another. Commissioned ministry is an acknowledgment that it takes many and varied gifts to be the Body of Christ and perform the ministries of the church. It also acknowledges the variety of covenant relationships God seeks to have with God's people and the church.

"I am convinced that my ministry includes ministering to other lay people who seek to discern God's call for them, individually and collectively as the local church. That is why Search and



Newly commissioned Barbara Broadbent and NCNC Board of Directors Vice President Roy Mosley listen as UCC General Minister and President John Thomas brings greetings from the wider church. Thomas had been in Northern California for an ecumenical retreat with a broad range of Christian leaders, and then spent the weekend visiting Eden UCC, Hayward; First UCC, Palo Alto, First UCC, San Jose and Foothills UCC, Los Altos, meeting with clergy and lay people.

Call feels so right as part of my ministry at this time. I am a facilitator in the process by which pastors and search committees find one another and seek to discern the match that God intends for the future ministry of a congregation.

"I am inspired by Paul's words describing the Body of Christ: Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. (1 Cor. 12:27) I am likewise inspired by stories of congregations who had faith to believe that God was calling them and that God was providing them with all the resources they needed to respond to that call. The Body of Christ is complete and whole in each local church. We have but to believe, to focus on that wholeness, rather than on what we perceive is lacking, to respond faithfully to the purpose for which God intends us.

"As I work with churches in search of new leadership, I keep this vision of the Body of Christ always in my mind. This helps me to be a non-anxious presence with both search committees and candidates.

"In my work with the Conference Outdoor Ministries program, I likewise accept my role as spiritual leader as well as worker. Each year our Outdoor Ministries Committee reflects on the work and outcome of our previous year's program. By this reflection, the energy and expressed interests of our members, and prayers of discernment (which could lead us in

a new direction entirely!) we determine our priorities for the coming year and beyond. We meet for an extended period of time each fall to do this essential work of direction setting.

"I also serve as a Partner in Education for our local churches. I answer questions, meet with local church educators and committees, and refer people to others with expertise in areas where advice is needed. Our local churches struggle with decreasing numbers of families with children and declining budgets, while desiring to meet the challenge of providing opportunities for faith development for all ages in our diverse communities. I believe God calls me to be an instrument of empowerment to these congregations.

"I have come to see my life as a journey down a path. Over the years I have learned to rely on God more intentionally to show me the path on which She would have me travel. I pray on a daily basis for the ability to continue to discern wisely where God is leading me.

"Along the road I have, at key times in my life, come to areas where the way has been difficult to discern or the path so faint I've lost my way. At other times I've come to distinct crossroads where I needed to stop, spend focused time in prayer and reflection, and consult with others whom I trusted to help me discern the way God was calling me. I witness to the realization that even when I wan-

dered off the path and was lost, God was always with me, beckoning me back to where the way is easy and purposeful.

"I have taken a long, difficult, and at times dangerous journey from my conversion experience at age 20 when I first was introduced to Christian Education, to my decision to embrace Christian Education as my life's work at age 46. Every step of that journey was necessary. Every step contributed to the call I seek to acknowledge more completely now at age 58 by becoming a commissioned minister.

"I give thanks that my church, the United Church of Christ, provides a place at the table for me, as a commissioned minister, to answer God's call to service."

For more information about commissioned ministry, or to read the full text of her ministry paper, contact Broadbent at <bbroadbent@ncncucc.org>. Consult also the Manual on Ministry at the UCC website, <ucc.org>.

CALENDAR OF PRAYER

Please hold in your prayers the churches of the Sequoia Association:

United Japanese Christian UCC UMC, Clovis

College Community Congregational UCC, Fresno

First Congregational UCC, Fresno

Zion UCC, Fresno

Grace Community UCC, North Fork

First Congregational UCC, Porterville

First Congregational UCC, Tulare

God
is
Still
Speaking