

Reflections on ministry: God nudges, calls, and we serve

Editor's note: As I read church newsletters each month and teach the class at Pacific School of Religion for people considering ministry in the UCC, I hear lots of folks talk about ministry. Here are just a few examples. Where is God calling you?

Commissioned ministry — and giving back

By Bill Coye

Director of Music, Congregational UCC, San Mateo (Bill is also a facilities manager for Adobe Systems in San Francisco.)

After considerable prayer and discernment, I have the desire to become a person-in-care and prepare for commissioned ministry in the United Church of Christ. As a director of music for more than 35 years, serving in three UCC parishes, I have felt a number of "nudges" to pursue ministry. So why now? It is said that everything happens in its own time. As I reflect back, I believe I have been on a journey to deepen and weave together three key aspects of my work: music, community and ministry.



Bill Coye

I have been asked, "What do you get out this?" In truth, besides a little more recognition within the UCC, outwardly not much... nor do I expect much. Rather, it has more to do with giving.

As a commissioned minister I feel, for me, there will be the recognition of our partnership and the leadership I have been exhibiting in UCC churches as both a professional church musician and active member.

Setting out on this journey as part of Congregational UCC, San Mateo, completes a circle for me. My parents were married there. I was baptized there more years ago than I'm willing to admit, and Lynn and I were married there.

This is a way for me to deepen my spiritual commitment and enhance my abilities to minister through music, and whatever other ways I may be called upon, by the denomination and my congregation.

Thanks to my church for support on this journey.

Interim ministry: unpack your suitcase of dreams

By Melinda McLain

Interim Minister, Island United UCC/UMC/PCUSA, Foster City (Melinda is also an associate pastor at City of Refuge UCC, San Francisco)

I'm excited to begin serving among you and I relish the opportunity for us to get to know each other better. We all have some special reflection work to do this summer. We need to begin our listening to where the Spirit is leading this congregation. This is the first step toward preparing a church profile, forming a search committee, and beginning to look for a new settled pastor.



Melinda McLain

This is not simply a revisiting of the mission statement or an evaluation of program and budget priorities or writing a pastoral job description. In many ways it is like opening an old trunk or suitcase from the attic where almost-forgotten dreams, visions and diaries have been packed away. And as you begin to show one another your dreams, we will call upon the Holy Spirit to knit us together within a clear common vision of where you want to go next as a church.

So start unpacking your suitcase full of dreams! God is calling you to a new and glorious future.

The ministry of cards and prayers

By Renie Stamm-Kirk

Pastor, Community Congregational UCC, Benicia, who had serious health issues this winter.

When I pray, every day, I remember to "chat" with God. I call this chatting prayer.

In the morning I give thanks for another day and ask for God's will to be shown in my life. In the evening hours I make time to "chat" again. I always give thanks for another day, for my wife, Allison, for our precious daughter, Katie, for my church and all that comes with it.

Until recently, I never thanked God for our health. It seems I just took that for granted; I never thanked God for the ability to walk, stand, run, drive, take a shower by myself, dress myself, enjoy food, see clearly, and even recognize myself in the mirror. As I regain these skills, these luxuries of everyday life, I no longer forget to give thanks for my health.



Renie Stamm-Kirk

It's been over four months since all this started and many of the things I so took for granted have returned. I am told that all of this is a small miracle, a miracle for which I

am very grateful each day. There are several things that I believe aided in my recovery:

- First, the power of prayer. There were more than 100 churches praying for me, and I knew this and could feel it.

- Second, the cards from our church. The daily notes, letters and cards were a daily powerful reminder that you all were still there. One particular card from Super Bowl Sunday with all your shiny bright faces on it was positioned on the wall in my hospital room so I could see it whenever I awoke.

My vision was affected by my inability to focus but I could see this card. At times it made me laugh out loud. I could envision you all and it gave me hope, the push I needed. All the nurses would ask me where this card came from. I managed to get out the words, "Those are my people. It's from my church, the church I'm going back to, the church God called me to. See their faces, aren't they beautiful?"

I've missed you all so much and look forward to being back among you. Having time to heal without pastoring helped my recovery and allowed me to heal faster.

Well, one thing is for certain, I will never take good health for granted again. Each day is a gift and life is way too short to worry about the small stuff. Each day I wake with a new sense that this day, this very day is a gift, a blessing. Yes it is a miracle that I survived all this, It is my belief that we (you and I) have so much left to do together.

Thanks for mentors in ministry

By Frank Baldwin

Pastor, Community UCC, Orinda

Dr. Browne Barr, one of my greatest pastoral mentors, died a month ago. (See April Pacific for an obituary.) I've been thinking about him a good deal and reflecting on the role of a mentor.

Like hundreds of others he mentored over the years, I read everything he wrote and studied all his sermons. Browne was a profoundly evocative and moving preacher, often ranked among the best of the 20th century. He was literate, insightful, witty, urbane, self-deprecating, original, a master of metaphor and allusion, and the deftest expositor of scripture I've ever heard.

As a young preacher, I quickly realized that I would not be playing in Browne's league, but that never kept me from learning from him and aspiring to his grace in the pulpit. But the thing that has most affected me as his mentee was Browne's lifelong passion for the community of faith; he loved the local church.

In my recurring role as mentor to new generations of pastors and preachers, I hope that someday I might be remembered for the same thing.

Pastors launch ships for growth

By Rev. Karl Fung

Pastor, Chinese Community UCC, Berkeley

Thank you for your special effort to welcome my family and me on the Super Sunday. The inspiring worship, the delicious food, the delightful Chinese music, and the exciting lion dance and the 160 smiling faces will always stay in my fond memories.

I have been your pastor for almost a month now.

I have said that I will launch six ships to help the church grow. They are Worship, Fellowship, Membership, Discipleship, Leadership, and Stewardship (facility and finance).

I began with the ship of worship. We will soon have two services. The Cantonese service will start at 9:30 a.m. and the English 11. The reason for the decision is not to please our own members but to provide the best for the people who are looking for a place to worship God.

The second ship I am launching is Membership. We have set Easter as the day for baptism and receiving new members. All my sermons before that date are essential doctrines needed by prospective new members, although I hope old members will also find that refreshing and renewing.

There is a lot of work ahead of us. We need to be in focus and set our priorities right. You need to help me and pray for me.

We are BCCC, a Biblical Christ-centered church. We are the best in care, commitment and cheer. May God richly bless you and may your dreams come true. Remember: fulfill God's purposes first and serve only the Lord.

Listening to the burning of our hearts

By Sonsiris Tamayo

PSR student, in-care of the NCNC and serves on the UCC Justice and Witness board of directors and the Council for Hispanic Ministries. Originally from New York City, she is a member of First Congregational UCC, Oakland.

My sense of call to ministry came about through a heartburn, like the disciples on the road to Emmaus feeling their hearts burn within them. There were circumstances in my life that were challenging and devastating to go through. During this time, my life with God took a turn for the better, and my awakening to God's love brought about a heartburn in me. I felt it and others saw it in me, and it led me all the way to seminary. This heartburn has not gone away, and it is what I go back to time and again when I shake my head and think, what I am doing in seminary?

Before entering seminary, I was in a psychological counseling graduate program with the goal of becoming a mental health therapist. This goal ties into my pastoral sensibilities. I believe that my innate instincts in this area will be a great tool when I become an authorized minister in the UCC. In fact, there are many ways in which that is true now with friends, strangers and others I encounter on the journey. I look forward to gaining more experience in this area, either through a CPE (Clinical Pastoral Education) residency or finishing the psych degree I left behind to attend seminary.

Integrity is a huge part of my call also. I am the kind of person who brings all of who I am to the table. In other words, I am willing to go really deep when necessary and appropriate.

Part of what makes me who I am is my courage and ability to speak out when I feel there are actions and behaviors that are unjust.

Having integrity is challenging because it means that I work very hard to be aware of and work on parts of myself that need to evolve and transform in the midst of everything else that life and school demands of me. In the end, I love it because I get to be a better and more authentic me with each passing day.



Sonsiris Tamayo

