

DIVING INTO THE DEEP

One delegate's report on UCC General Synod

By Paul Clay

Editor's note: Paul Clay was one of 11 delegates from our Conference to General Synod this summer in Grand Rapids. He is pastor of First Congregational UCC, Oroville, and represented the Sacramento Valley Association. He also served as coordinator of our delegation. Another 150 NCNC folks NCNC attended General Synod.

My 18-year-old daughter Kara and I attended UCC General Synod this summer.

"Immerse Yourself" was the theme for the worship and for the meeting: lots of water!

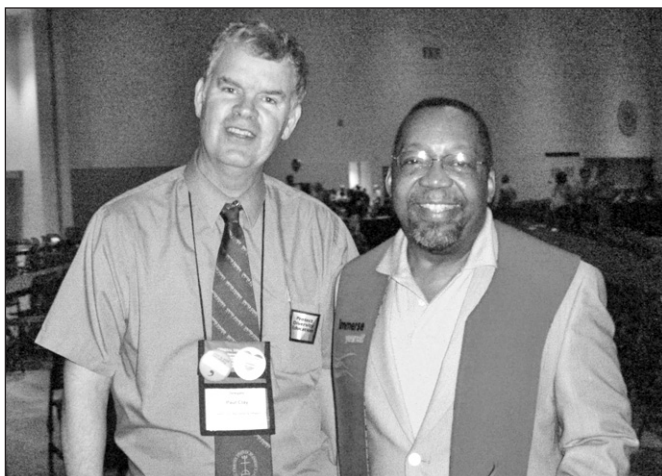
We met in a huge convention center. Following the water theme, the stage/worship area included a pool, a running stream, and a small waterfall, designed by NCNC's own Alexandra Childs. Next to the convention center was the Amway Grand Hotel, built by the founders of Amway, more meeting rooms, all appropriately grand and fascinating. Our delegation stayed at the Day's Inn, a short walk away across a bridge over the very full Grand River.

General Synod started on Thursday with a multicultural family event, co-hosted by our NCNC PAAM group (Pacific Islander Asian American Ministries.) Saturday's River City Day included worship, major speakers, and wide range of workshops, presentations, and special events. I particularly enjoyed a restful hour in the afternoon, listening to Paul Winter play soprano sax. Kara saw a dance company that included several people in wheelchairs.

Each delegate was assigned randomly to an 80 member committee to consider and revise one or more resolutions. At the big plenary sessions Tuesday and Wednesday 800 voting delegates, seated at tables by Conference, considered and voted on resolutions. Two thousand visitors observed.

The most important item of business was the decision to move toward unified governance for the UCC. We currently have several major boards, each overseeing its own non-profit corporations and in charge of its own ministry: Local Church Ministries, Wider Church Ministries, Justice and Witness, Offices of General Ministries, and the Pension Boards. Though deeply rooted in our history, this division of leadership makes it difficult to define a collective vision for the UCC, set priorities, and move forward together.

The proposed new system will have one board which oversees all of the corporations and coordinates the work of all of the ministries. The decision was



NCNCers had fun at General Synod, whose theme was "Immerse Yourself" (lower left.) Among the 150 Conference folks were Paul Clay, pictured with incoming UCC President and General Minister Geoffrey Black; a group photo around the baptismal pool on the stage (pretend you can see they're all wearing red shirts;) and young adult delegate Alex Peters with Alexandra Childs, stage designer. Photos by Alexandra Childs.



broadly supported, with the exception of various justice oriented groups that were concerned about their ability to remain adequately represented. A detailed proposal with bylaw revisions will come to the Synod in 2011.

Delegates acted on many other resolutions. We amended the Constitution and Bylaws to support multiple paths to ordination. The economic situation prompted several resolutions regarding economic justice, the global food crisis, revision of NAFTA, ecological concerns, and response to the needs of those who are struggling in the troubled economy.

We passed a resolution calling attention to human trafficking, and others in support of diversity education in the schools, HIV prevention, equity in health care, and continued conversations about race. We expressed concern for Iraqi refugees and for the people of Iran.

The diversity education resolution came from our Conference, based on work being done by Eden UCC, Hayward and First Congregational UCC, Alameda. The Iran "Axis of Friendship" resolution came from First Congregational UCC, Berkeley.

A highlight of worship was the closing sermon by Pat de Jong of First Congregational UCC, Berkeley, who grew up in Grand Rapids.

In the UCC, General Synod does not speak for the local churches or tell them what to do. Instead it speaks to the local churches. The delegates vote their faith and conscience, and invite

the local churches to consider the issues and act on them.

In some cases, General Synod invites local churches to make a commitment. Congregations may look at the issue and see if this might be a part of their vision, or even a focus of their ministry. For instance, a local church may declare itself to be a Still Speaking Church (dedicated to evangelism), a Just Peace Church (working for peace with justice), Open and Affirming (open to all, including gays and lesbians), or Multi-racial/Multi-cultural.

This General Synod passed resolutions that invited churches to consider two more possibilities: to be a Global Mission Church (to support mission in other countries) or to enter into an Economic Justice Covenant (to seek justice for all).

Please see <www.ucc.org> for photos, videos, and complete texts of the resolutions.

I attended Synod as a voting delegate and I coordinated our Conference's delegation, which meant chairing our caucus meetings at 6:30 each morning, arranging for dinners, and setting up photos. My daughter attended as a visitor, and received support for the trip from the association and our congregation.

We immersed ourselves in worship, learning, fellowship, public witness, and the business of the church. Thank you to all for the chance to participate in the 27th General Synod on your behalf.

NCNC musicians featured in new UCC praise song book

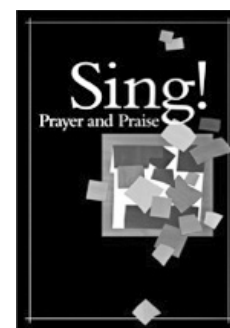
Editor's note: Paul Clay, a fine musician himself, singles out the new UCC praise song book, released at General Synod.

The one event at General Synod that I think has the most potential to help revive and transform local churches was the introduction of a new song book called Sing! Prayer and Praise.

Many new songs were submitted by UCC song writers; over 200 were selected. Five composers from our own Conference made the cut: Conference Minister Mary Susan Gast has 3 songs; Annual Gathering and General Synod music coordinator Mark Unbehagen has 5 pieces; Interim Guild member Ruth Sandberg wrote 5 songs; Sean Tai of First Congregational UCC, Santa Cruz has one and Barbara Hamm, Community Congregational UCC, Benicia music director has 6 songs in the book.

Most are in the style of praise music, interesting and not difficult to sing, with lyrics that are meaningful and appropriate to our approach to faith. The songs could be used to supplement a traditional service or as the main source of music for contemporary worship intended for youth, younger adults, and/or the boomer generation. The song book includes words, tunes, and chords.

It is now available at <www.ucc.org/music-arts/sing-prayer-and-praise/> for \$15 per copy, with 25 percent discount for five copies or more. The accompaniment version with full music will cost \$75, and will be available soon.



Mark Unbehagen