

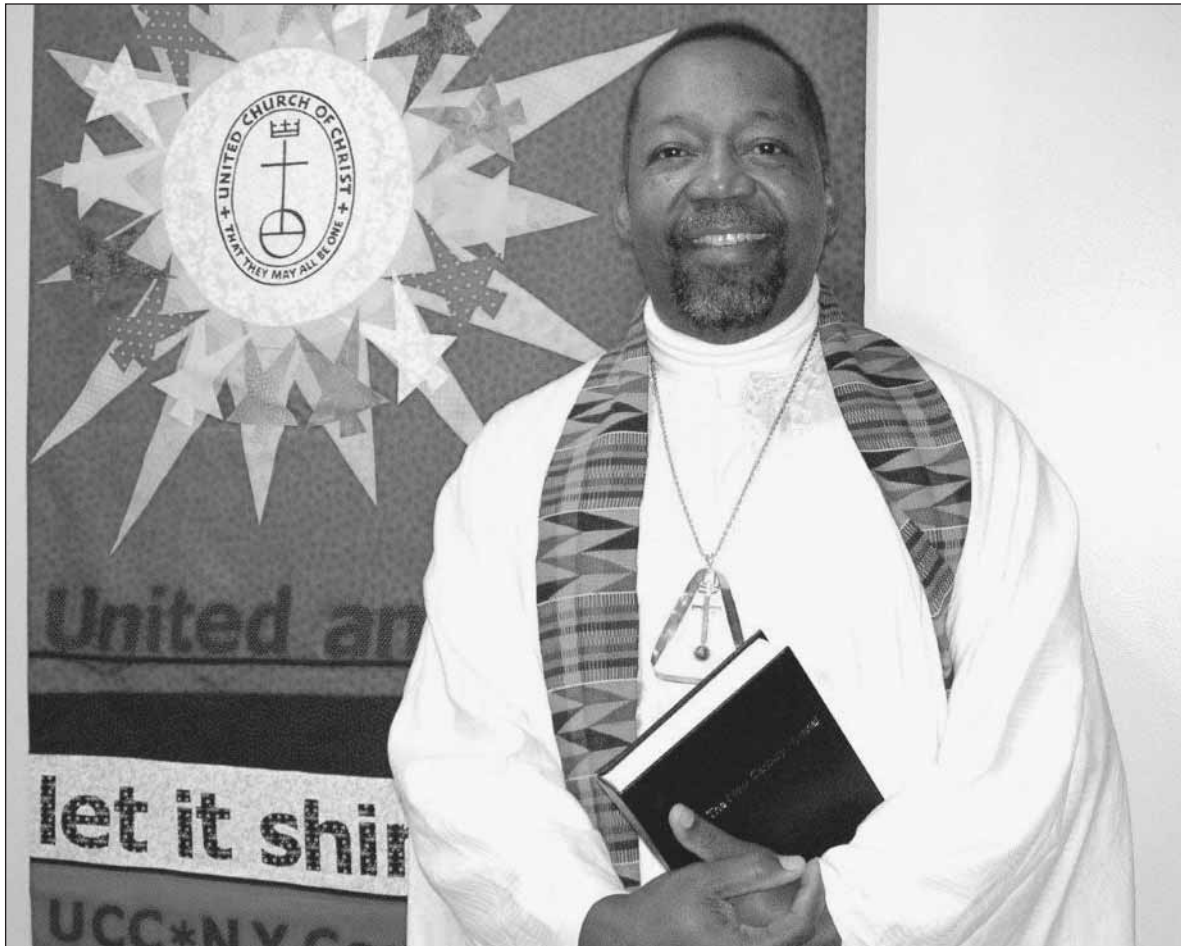


New York Conference United Church News

April/May 2009

Section B

Our Conference Minister Nominated to be the UCC's next GMP



The Rev. Geoffrey A. Black, who has served as the Conference Minister of the New York Conference for almost 10 years, was recommended by the General Minister and President (GMP) search committee to be the nominee to become the United Church of Christ's next general minister and president. The recommendation is scheduled to be voted on by the UCC's Executive Council at its March meeting, a few days following our going to press on this issue. UCC bylaws require that Rev. Black's nomination be affirmed by a two-thirds majority of the Executive Council prior to his presentation to the General Synod for call by election. If recommended by the Executive Council and elected by delegates at General Synod for the four-year term, Rev. Black will succeed the Rev. John H. Thomas, who has served as our general minister and president since 1999 and is not eligible for re-election.

Before returning to New York to provide leadership to the New York Conference as our conference minister, Rev. Black began his ordained ministry by serving as assistant chaplain at Brown University, associate minister at **St. Albans Congregational UCC, NY**, pastor of **Congregational UCC of South Hempstead, NY**, lecturer in Field Education Department of Union Theological Seminary in New York, protestant chaplain at Adelphi University and program staff in the UCC's Office for Church Life and Leadership in Cleveland. He is currently a member of the board of trustees of Lancaster Theological Seminary and he has represented the UCC in theological and ecumenical gatherings in Africa, the Caribbean and Europe.

Of his recommendation to be the nominee to serve as our next general minister and president Rev. Black said, "I am both humbled and deeply honored by the decision of the GMP search committee to recommend me to the UCC Executive Council as the prospective nominee for the office of General Minister and President. I do realize

that there are many great challenges ahead for the United Church of Christ and that as GMP I, along with the other members of the UCC Collegium of Officers, would have to address those challenges with creativity and foresight. I am encouraged that in doing so, we will also have the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the rich depth of resources that exist within and among the very vibrant and gifted membership of the UCC throughout the nation.

"As I contemplate serving in a leadership capacity in the national setting of the UCC, I am somewhat saddened by the prospect of leaving the New York Conference UCC and the State of New York. Serving the New York Conference has been an exceptionally rewarding experience for me and I am very grateful to have had this experience. Moreover, I feel that New York is home. I am a New Yorker in the broadest sense of the term."

Rev. Black's leadership in the New York Conference and through all his ministerial responsibilities is one that sincerely reflects, "no matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, (you are God's people and) you are welcome." As such the Rev. Martha Koenig Stone, Chair of the New York Conference Executive Council captured the sentiment of members of the New York Conference, "I am delighted and proud that Geoffrey Black has been nominated for General Minister and President of the UCC! The New York Conference has been blessed by his many gifts for ministry, his empowering style of leadership and his gracious spirit. Although we will miss him, we know he has a lot to offer in the national setting and we are thankful for his willingness to serve in that capacity."

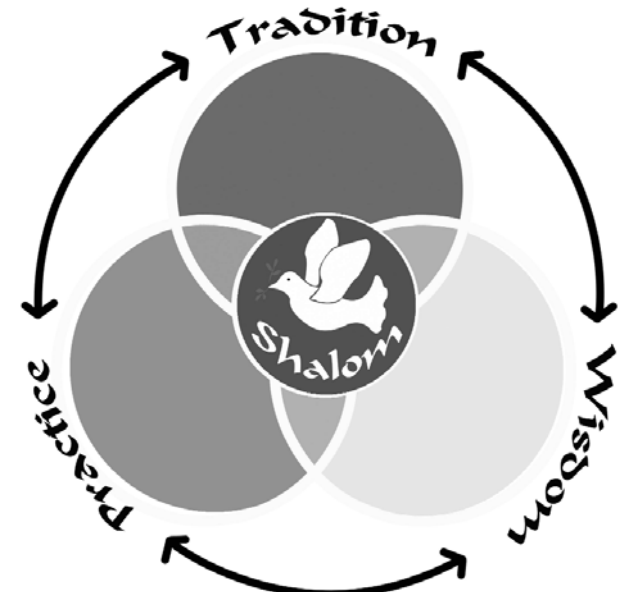
Rev. Black resides in Syracuse, he is a member of **Plymouth UCC** and he and his wife Patricia are parents to Makeda. We keep the family in our prayers.

-Claudette J. Spence, Editor

Thank you and God bless you Rev. Black
for
your empowering style of leadership
and
your gracious spirit

The New York Conference

Be Transformed!



Romans 12

NY Conference United Church of Christ
46th Annual Meeting
Silver Bay, NY
June 5-7, 2009

register at www.uccny.org

Rev. Cory Keys and band from **West Bloomfield UCC** will provide music for opening worship and worshipful work

Clergy Forum will focus on Sacred Conversation on Race led by Rev. Bernice Powell Jackson (begins Thursday evening, June 4th)

Annual Meeting Choir
Youth and Children's Programs
Children's Musical on Sunday morning

Closing Worship will be led by Rev. Maren Tirabassi and a worship team from Casting Your Nets

Diane Butler Bass — Keynote Speaker

Bikers go green to General Synod

Years ago, one of New York Conference's most progressive activists questioned my criticism of America's automobile dependency. I was protesting the way we use our cars because it is the single largest source of water pollution in the U.S. (This is not even to mention the climate change caused by the burning of fossil fuels.) This pastor responded incredulously, "affordable housing in North America is too far from our working places for there to be any alternative to single-driver transportation and our addiction to fossil fuels."

Hmm... As if our social organization is ordained by God? As if very powerful financial interests are not behind the development of U.S. society such that one in five jobs is related to our auto or oil industries?

"There are all kinds of alternatives," I exclaimed. Consider that Amsterdam, The Netherlands, offers free bikes for people to ride from one place to another, and then



leave, unlocked, for the next traveler in need. Lawrence College in Appleton, Wisconsin, with too many cars on campus, forbids first year students to drive, and instead gives them all a free bike. Munich, Germany, offers bike parking lots for tens of thousands of workers each day and subway and train cars—and discount fares—designed to encourage bicyclists. Our

own Roland Micklem from **First Congregational, Savannah, NY** has lived car-free for over 20 years (see his story in this issue). A German law requires that for every new road, a bicycle path is also created. Speaking of Germans, Rev. Peter Dennebaum, the Associate at **First Congregational, Chappaqua, NY** uses the NYC subway, the Metro North commuter railroad and his bike to commute from Long Island City, Queens to his place of work.

And next, a group of UCC cyclists will ride from Syracuse, New York, along the southern shore of Lake Erie to Grand Rapids, MI as a justice witness for more sustainable life styles. The group will be joined by others along the way from other locations. Among them Rev. John Vertigan, formerly pastor at Corning and Spencerport, will also be cycling to Grand Rapids.

The New York leg of the Bike Challenge will stay at UCC congregations in our own Conference, and Ohio and Michigan Conferences. Each evening at a community din-

ner, our cyclists will make a brief presentation, spreading good news that there are more creation-friendly ways to organize our communities, our lives and our transportation needs.

New York Conference riders, paying for their own trips, will be raising funds to create a new fund to help congregations go green. Riders from across the UCC are expected to converge in Grand Rapids by the evening of Wednesday, June 24 for a "We Did It" celebration dinner.

If you cannot ride with us, bring your bike to General Synod, and let's make Grand Rapids the **most cycled city in the U.S. from June 26-30, 2009**. Or if you can't do that, make a personal commitment: try living without your car for two weeks. See what you learn, and share your experience. At least, make a contribution to our new New York Conference "Greening Our Congregations" fund. - Rev. Michael Caine, Southeastern Regional Conference Minister

For more information, please contact Michael Caine at cainem@uccny.org.

New York Conference's Bike Hike to Grand Rapids (tentative schedule):

- 15 June: orientation; dinner and sleepover in Syracuse, NY.
- 16. June: leaving early, Syracuse to Canaduaiga, NY (60 miles)
- 17. June: Canaduaiga, NY to Attica, NY (55 miles)
- 18. June: Attica, NY to Dunkirk, NY (70 miles)
- 19. June: Dunkirk, NY to Conneaut, OH (80 miles)
- 20. June: Conneaut, OH to Cleveland, OH (75 miles)
- 21. June: Cleveland, OH to Sandusky, OH (70 miles)
- 22. June: Sandusky, OH to Adrian, MI (70 miles)
- 23. June: Adrian, MI to Charlotte, MI (60 miles)
- 24. June: Charlotte, MI to Grand Rapids, MI (40 miles)
- "We Did It" celebration dinner
- 25. June: Pre-Synod Environmental Justice Event: "Holy Waters"
- 26. June: General Synod opens

Heart, muscle and cycle can get you to Grand Rapids

Will Roland join the bike challenge to General Synod?

As a committed cyclist, there are some reflections I'd like to share. Except for hiking, no method of travel puts one more in touch with the landscape, the weather, and the natural world itself than cycling.

Enjoying God's Creation

There is something very satisfying in realizing, at the end of a very extended journey, that using naught but your own marvelous body machinery, you might have traversed entire regions of thousands of miles, from Great Plains to evergreen forests, from the Great Lakes to the Okefenokee, Georgia, from bustling centers of population to back-country hamlets. I personally feel a kinship with migrating birds, which as do I, experience the wondrous sense of freedom that is derived from using heart and muscle to traverse great stretches of this multi-faceted planet.

I live in Wayne County in a rural community about half way between Syracuse and Rochester, New York. I have been here for over thirty years and except for about ten years of that period I have not owned a car. Even as a car owner, my bike was my sole means of transport. I worked in the health food business for over twenty years and during that time I usually made the 16-mile round trip commute to my job on my bicycle. I hitched rides in inclement weather, and sometimes I drove. But most of the time the car remained in the garage.

Three years ago I moved into a senior citizen housing unit here in Savannah, a small unincorporated village located at the intersection of Routes 31 and 89. We are surrounded by agricultural fields, wetlands, and glacial drumlins, and although most of the area roads along which I do my travelling are relatively flat, many of the back country roads are draped over some very undulating terrain, in other words, enough hills to tax the cardiovascular system.

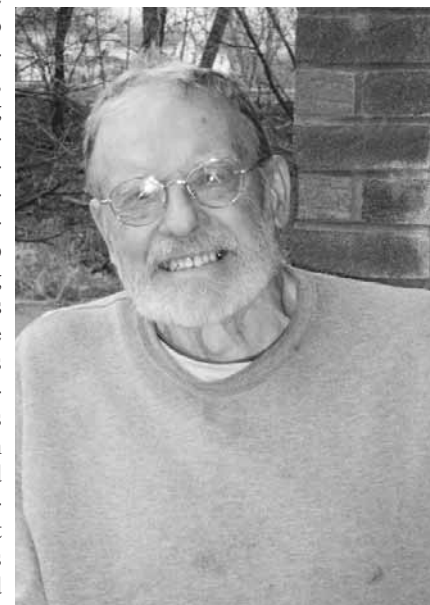
Doing Everyday Things

The nearest grocery store is in Clyde, about six miles from Savannah. As my cycling equipment includes a pair of state-of-the-art panniers and front handlebar bag, I have enough carrying capacity to bring home as much bread, bananas, and cheese as I need—plus a few DVD's

from the library. The larger villages of Wolcott, Lyons, Newark, and Port Byron are no closer than 12 miles, and since I have regular business in these places, I'm on the road for many hours during optimum cycling weather and when the days are long enough so I won't have to be on the road after dark. At other times, I rely on rides from friends who are going my way, or the barely adequate public transportation system.

Why I Ride

I ride a bike for three reasons. I want to stay healthy, I want to preserve and protect the environment and I love to ride a bicycle.



When I was nine years old, I learned how to ride, and my older brother would sometimes have to physically drag me off his bicycle if he wanted to use it for himself. Except for an extended hiatus during which I served in the military,

went to college, married, raised a family, I've spent a lion's share of my traveling time watching the world go by from the seat of my bicycle.

Some Adventures

I travelled the route between Rochester, NY and Debec, New Brunswick enough times to know the location of every suitable overnighting site along the entire stretch.

My last extended trip was to Nebraska in '92. I had an inexplicable urge to see a piece of that state. I made the foolhardy mistake of using a two-wheel bike trailer to haul a bit of my gear, and practically wore myself out dragging this new twist to my travelling rig across the Great Plains. By the time I'd reached Bay City, Michigan on the return trip, I was suffering so from back and neck cramps I had to abort my trip, rent a van, and haul myself, bike, and biking gear back to New York, in what I perceived as an inglorious conclusion to an adventure—one which I'd more or less pledged to experience using pedal power alone.

I am now 80, and have no plans for mothballing my bike and spending my remaining years in limbo. My friends surprised me with enough \$ on my birthday in October to bankroll a recumbent which I plan to procure as soon. Whatever my fate, I don't want to end my life in an easy chair or a bed. -Roland Micklem.

Let the Peace of Christ rule in your hearts

Col. 3: 15a

2009 UCC NY Women Annual Conference

April 30-May 2, 2009

Watson Homestead • Painted Post, NY

Our UCCNY Women assist women in our churches to grow to full stature as mature Christians, to develop and coordinate programs, which will deepen and strengthen their Christian witness; and to help women understand and participate in the whole task of the church.

Register on line at www.uccny.org



Steve Johnson (3rd from right) leads New York School on Ministry (NYSOM) Practicum Seminar for Word and Sacrament students and mentors on February 7, 2009 at the New York Conference Amistad Center for Leadership Development and Mission Support, 5575 Thompson Road, DeWitt, NY.

My January visit to Washington signaled hope for our weary years



Rev. Geoffrey A. Black
Conference Minister

I don't know what it was, but one day in September after the National Political Conventions were over and the campaign for the presidency was underway, I had this feeling of urgency. I needed to take care of this matter right away. So, I called my brother Mel, who lives in the Washington D.C. area with a request, "Mel, if Barack Obama wins this thing, I want to be there on Inauguration Day to witness his swearing in ceremony. I want to reserve your guest room for the occasion." That is how the planning for this day began and now the day has come and gone.

On Inauguration Day, January 20th, 2009 I was on the Mall in Washington, D.C. amidst millions of jubilant and hopeful onlookers. The temperature was well below freezing and although the mood was festive and the sun was shining, I was so cold at points that I asked myself, why am I here?

The short answer to that question is that this occasion was of such a momentous nature, that I had no choice but to be present, if at all possible. I knew in my gut back in September that if Barack Obama was elected to the Presidency, I wanted, even needed to be there as he began. Moreover, I wanted to be there even though I knew in advance that there would be millions of others like me

and that in all likelihood it would also be cold — very cold.

More than that, I wanted to be there to stand with Barack Obama that day, because in my own mind the country and the world needed to know that he was not alone. I wanted to participate in swelling the numbers of people present so that we could send a message to America and the world that as a nation we are more than the narrow minded, fearful, aggressive, greedy and unjust people that we have appeared to be over the last eight years. I wanted to be there to join with others in signaling a repudiation of the basic tenants and overt actions of the Bush Administration.

Being in Washington on Inauguration Day was a return visit for me, but I was returning to a different Washington. The Washington that I had visited on official business, at least annually, was a capital in which I had come to feel a strange mixture of struggle and alienation. The Government had embarked on such a disastrous course in so many areas of foreign and domestic policy that most of the legislators that I would visit with my New York Council of Churches colleagues would only say that nothing substantial could be accomplished on issues of concern to us until there was a change in government.

During the last eight years I also had come to Washington to protest against war. The first time, I joined with church people and others to protest was against the war in Afghanistan and then with an even larger gathering to protest against the war in Iraq. In the midst of the joy and jubilation of Inauguration Day I was painfully aware that both of these wars continued. While President Elect Obama is committed to getting us out of Iraq, I am concerned with his determination to press on in Afghanistan. This could prove to be a very big mistake.

As I stood in the vast crowd waiting to see Barack Obama sworn into office and waiting to hear how he would address the nation that day, I knew I was in a different Washington than I

had become accustomed to these last eight years. It would be an environment more receptive to change for the better for Americans and people around the world. Yet, it was also clear that there would always be a need for engagement, critique, prodding and even protest. This leads to yet another reason for being on the Mall in the cold that morning.

I was there to bear witness for all of those, who could not be there in person, but were there in spirit. There were folks at home, who in their own judgment, thought it wise to view the proceedings via television. Still they would want to know what it was like to be there. There were those who had served and sacrificed to make this day possible, but did not live to see it. Although I believe that they were present in spirit as well, I believe that they would want the crowds to be large so that all among the earthly living would take note and be inspired to press on in the struggle to make America a better, more compassionate and just nation.

Finally, I wanted to be there to bear witness to Barack Obama — to remind him that he was there at the capitol being sworn in as the 44th President of the United State of American, because millions of regular everyday people elected him to be the president to serve all the people. I thought that just maybe, if enough of us showed up that day, he would get the message. So, I was there to do my part.

The long campaign had ended and a new era in America began on that very cold, sunny day. That era got started with me in the midst of millions on the Mall in Washington, DC and in the presence of an even more vast audience of well wishers, who watched the Inauguration on television. It began with great fanfare and a simple, though muffled swearing in ceremony. With its beginning, we Americans begin the arduous and sometimes fulfilling task of advocating for the very best from government and aspiring to the very best in ourselves.

"To be inspired... to make America a better, more compassionate and just nation."

What Languages do you speak? Our ministry needs you

In the Wider Church Ministries of the New York Conference, United Church of Christ, our members are becoming more involved in many lands where English is not the primary language. NY Help always needs people who speak Spanish in the Honduran communities in which they serve. Our covenant with the Mision Cristiana church in Nicaragua requires us to have Spanish speakers too, for their members do not speak English. There will also be a trip to southern Africa next year where a number of different languages are spoken.

This June 2009 we expect 14 people from Germany to visit us. They will be divided up and staying in private homes in the New York City area a couple of days. Then they will attend our annual meeting at Silver Bay on Lake George for the weekend. After the annual meeting they will again be divided up and stay at homes in the Upstate and Western Regions of our Conference. There will be a number of opportunities to host our visitors from the Protestant Church in Germany (EKHN).

The leaders of the German church assure us that most Germans speak English and not to worry. But it would be nice to know of some German-speaking members of the New York Conference who could help visitors who may be challenged with our English. If you would like to be considered as a resource for speaking German, please let Clare Price (607) 656-9715 or the New York Conference office (315) 446-3073 now. If you want to become more involved in the German exchange, consider working with the Commission on Ecumenism, or joining the Commission on Global Church for activity in other parts of the world.

Conference creates 21st century Practice of Faith



Rev. Sprite Johnson (r) explores the Practice of Faith website for resource development with Shirley DeMartini, UC Education Consultant. Pilgrim Press and the United Church of Christ Local Church Ministries are developing a new resource on Practices of Faith. Local churches and the Partners In Education Groups are invited to join in the preparation of this new approach to resourcing that will be available by subscription in September 2010.

The first circle covered will include four areas: Hospitality, Living Stewardship, Keeping Sabbath, and Living Creatively and Playing Joyfully. This will be a web-based resource with many menu options available for a local

church to use in a variety of settings, age groups, and times throughout the year. It is not a traditional curriculum but will help churches address and enhance their current practice of faith as well as introduce new practices to our congregations.

New York Partners in Education is now introducing this project in Association meetings, with local churches, Christian Educators and pastors throughout the Conference during 2009. It is an exciting project. Contact the New York Conference Partners in Education through the Conference office to get more information on becoming a part of this project.

Vigil to protect US child citizen from trauma

The Central New York New Sanctuary Coalition Interfaith held a Prayer Vigil with Immigrant Families at the James F. Hanley Federal Building in Syracuse, NY on Friday March 6, 2009. The Vigil included speakers, activists and musicians as well as representatives of Labor and faith communities from throughout Central New York including **Plymouth UCC in Syracuse**. The event focused on the Child Citizen Protection Act (HR 182). This legislation would protect U.S. citizens children by restoring an immigration judge's power to keep families together when it is in the best interest of the U.S. citizen child.

During the vigil Freddie Mauricio Rodriguez and Bam-bilynn Towndrow Rodriguez (with their children in photo) gave testimony about their experience as their family was separated in the wake of Freddie's arrest by [ICE] US Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents and his subsequent incarceration.



The Post-Standard reported that the Rev. Craig Schaub, pastor at Plymouth UCC said, "Regardless of where you come down on the issue of immigration, there's a giant question of the children. The families have to make decisions about whether they (the children born in the United States) will have to move to a place they've never been before or will they have to live with someone else in the family or worse, be a ward of the state. The current policy threatens to break up families and create trauma and financial hardship."

Plymouth and **Judson Memorial Church, NY, NY** are two churches who participate in the New Sanctuary Movement supported by the New York Conference as delegates voted to do so at the 2008 Annual Meeting.

God's Rhythm delivers incredible worship for youth and their advisors



Our theme this year for our New York State Youth Event, held at Watson Homestead, Painted Post on March 6-8, 2009 was "God's Rhythm" and we had Rev. Corey Keyes pastor from West Bloomfield Congregational UCC (along with his band) as our keynote presenters. They were amazing to say the least. We had over 150 youth and adults from all over New York State at the event. With a wide variety of workshops and incredible worship and workshop experiences including a wonderful "Taize" worship/communion service on Saturday night. It was a very full weekend

with loads of fun good meals and free time activities as well!

-Eric Falla, Co-Coordinator, New York State Youth Committee.

The New York UCC Youth Event is one of the longest running annual events of the New York Conference. It is planned by youth for youth with the support of a dedicated contingent of youth advisors from across the New York Conference.

In photo above youth participants create music.



On the occasion of the installation of its new President, Volker Jung (front row right and left of Rev. Black) and the Farewell Event for its outgoing President, Peter Steinacker our German partner church, the EKHN also held a Partnership Consultation (group photo above) bringing together its partner churches from around the globe. The gathering included church leaders from partner churches in Ghana, Tanzania, South Africa, India, Korea, Indonesia, Poland, Russia, the Czech Republic and the United States represented by Rev. Geoffrey Black. The theme of the Consultation was "Blessed Are the Peace Makers." The consultation program included panels, workshops and presentations leading to a closing statement which reflects a renewed commitment to peace-making by the participants.

The events took place February 15-19, 2009 in Friedberg and Annelshiem, Germany.

Photo: Courtesy EKHN

The New York Conference edition of United Church News is published six times per year by the New York Conference of the United Church of Christ. Geoffrey A. Black, Conference Minister, Claudette J. Spence, editor. New York Conference, 5575 Thompson Road, DeWitt, New York 13214. Tel: 315-446-3073. Visit our website: www.ucc.org; and www.uccny.org. Send news, announcements, photos and letters to the editor to: csolutionsinfini@yahoo.com or 33-24 Parsons Blvd. #6C, Flushing, NY 11354.

