

**Annual Meeting Report  
Central Atlantic Conference  
United Church of Christ**

**John Deckenback  
Conference Minister  
June 10, 2016**



There she is, our first granddaughter, Lillian Rose Deckenback. Carolyn and I were blessed to participate in her baptism at the First Congregational United Church of Christ in Palo Alto this spring. Lillian's proud parents, Jeffrey and Emily, live in San Bruno, CA and are members of the Palo Alto church where Carolyn was initially called to ordained ministry. Lillian joins our three grandsons – Will, Charlie and John.

**Our new Ministry Team**

Rev. Marvin Silver arrived in August 2015 to complete the re-design and re-staffing of the Conference's Ministry Team. Rev. Silver joined us after several years as pastor of Jubilee United Church of Christ in Lanham, MD.

The retirements of three Associate Conference Ministers over the last several years created the opportunity for the Conference to refocus the work of our team. Following the input received from several staffing studies, we chose to implement new job descriptions, which provide much greater emphasis on congregational

renewal/new church development and our social justice ministries. To accomplish these changes, we modified the way in which we relate to Association governing bodies and Church and Ministry Committees.

Associate Conference Ministers Marie Bacchiocchi and David Popham join Marvin in relating to churches in geographic regions, and all three have unique Conference-wide responsibilities.

- David Popham: Search and Call; Church and Ministry Committees
- Marie Bacchiocchi: Boundary Training and Association Councils
- Marvin Silver: Social Justice Ministries

We have been fortunate to have two additional Ministry Team members – Kendal Brown and Alex Vishio. Kendal is our New Visions! (Congregational Renewal/New Church Development) Associate, while Alex works with Marvin to coordinate our social justice initiatives.

Kendal has given renewed energy and focus to our growing list of potential new churches. One of these, New Hope Baptist UCC was voted into the Potomac Association earlier this year. Alex, working closely with Marvin, has tracked legislative initiatives and helped translate our resolutions into the format used by General Synod—a significant and valuable accomplishment.

We are striving to focus our social justice initiatives around implementation of actions taken by previous Conference Annual Meetings/General Synods – for example, the resolutions calling for Dismantling the New Jim Crow and Peace with Justice in the conflict between Israel and Palestine. Participants in this year’s Annual Meeting will see these themes built into the Annual Meeting agenda.

In Maryland, significant strides were taken toward Dismantling the New Jim Crow through the Criminal Justice Reinvestment Act passed by the legislature and signed into law last month. It is only a start, but I was honored to attend the signing ceremony and am very pleased that the Act’s chief architect, the Hon. Chris Shank, will be with us at Annual Meeting. Marvin and Alex were instrumental in arranging for a variety of CAC representatives to speak at each of the hearings held throughout the state as the legislation was being developed.

New UCC General Minister and President John Dorhauer has honored our long-term efforts to promote Peace with Justice between Israel and Palestine by asking the Conference to consider providing nation-wide assistance throughout the United

Church of Christ to coordinate implementation of the 2015 Synod resolution. With the support of our Palestine-Israeli Network (PIN) and the Board of Directors, we have agreed.

Kendal Brown's New Visions! Ministry continues to be supplemented by our on-going partnership with the Center for Progressive Renewal. CPR consultants work with churches and clergy in a variety of settings throughout the Conference.

The arrival of the new team has allowed me to focus more on providing coordination and oversight; as a result, I am not working directly with as many local church pastoral search committees.

### **Our other big news! General Synod 2017 is coming!**

Jill White, Robert Ziegler, and Sia Barbara Kamara (with staff support from Arnetta Jones and myself) have been providing key leadership as we plan to host the UCC's General Synod next summer in Baltimore's Inner Harbor. A nation-wide UCC planning group plans the Synod program.

Our goal is to facilitate that program by sharing our Conference's extravagant hospitality with the thousands of delegates and visitors. More than two dozen committees have been identified with responsibilities ranging from providing directions to helping people register.

There are even plans for a crab feast and a late night cruise on the Inner Harbor.

Plan now to attend the Sunday, July 2, public Synod worship in the Convention Center, tentatively scheduled for 2:30 PM.

You will hear more about this during the Planning Committee's presentation during Saturday's Annual Meeting lunch.



**United Church of Christ General Synod  
Baltimore's Inner Harbor  
June 30 – July 4, 2017 (with special events before and after)**

## **National UCC Changes**

Since we last met, there have been numerous changes in the national offices of the United Church of Christ.

Last summer, John Dorhauer moved from being the Conference Minister of the Southwest Conference to the General Minister and President's Office in Cleveland. In his first months, John has provided spirited and energetic leadership. Last fall, his presentation on "white privilege" at St. Paul's UCC in Westminster, MD was powerful, timely and relevant.

Rev. Traci Blackmon from Ferguson, MO, has become the Acting Executive of the UCC's Justice/Witness Ministries, while Rev. Jim Moos' executive minister tasks have been expanded to include global ministries, chief financial officer and local church ministries responsibilities. At the same time, budget constraints have led to significant staff reductions.

It is anticipated that new programmatic and staffing design proposals will be presented to the 2017 General Synod. (The proposals presented in 2015, and opposed by our Conference, were not affirmed).

## **United Church Insurance Board**

In the early 1980's, I was one of the initiators of the United Church Insurance Board. The Insurance Board (IB) has grown over the years and now helps provide insurance coverage for nearly 4000 UCC, Disciples and Presbyterian churches nationwide.

A staff of two dozen are based in Cleveland. They work closely with four dozen agents spread across the county. Our own agent, Linda Senez, is a familiar participant at Conference Annual Meetings.

I am delighted by the growth and development of this ecumenical program. This Spring I was elected to a final three-year term on the IB's Board of Directors, which I chair.

It's been a great year. Thank you for your support of our ministries.

*John*