



# Pacific Northwest CONFERENCE NEWS

Mary Stamp, editor  
editor@pncuccnews.org

## iPad has become tool for pastoral visits

**A key question about ministries using technology is: Does it help connect people to community or isolate them?**

Erik Strommen has helped First Congregational UCC in Bellevue turn an iPad, his birthday gift last April, into a ministry of presence for pastoral care.

The Congregational Care Commission has found it a way keep people connected to the congregation even when they may be cut off by health or age.

Soon after he received it, he was visiting a member in the hospital as part of the Congregational Care Commission. The person asked about it and wanted to see some pictures he had on it from the church and his family. He held it on his lap and scrolled through the photos.

Seeing that response, Erik wondered what else the church could bring to people.

Continued on Page 8



Erik Strommen pleased with use of the iPad for pastoral visitation and children's education programs of First Congregational UCC in Bellevue.

Photo courtesy of Erik Strommen

## Annual Meeting has business, spiritual sides

To reflect on the theme "Connect – connecting to God, to one another and to our wider communities," Jane Sorenson, Annual Meeting planning chair, asks churches to bring "heartening, comforting or challenging" quotes, short enough to fit on a business card.

In business, delegates will discuss and vote on two resolutions at the Pacific Northwest Conference Annual Meeting—Friday to Sunday, April 27 to 29, at the Pasco Red Lion Hotel and Conference Center—that help PNC connect on spiritual and economic justice issues.

Delegates will also review PNC's budget, which dropped from \$563,000 in 2010 to just about \$500,000, said Stewardship Committee chair Edie Lackland.

"It means we won't be able to



Elizabeth Dilley



Ben Guess

bring their pledges, she said. Another business item is a resolution, "Toward a Unified Governance in the National Setting of the United Church of Christ," which changes the UCC constitution and bylaws. Each of the 38 conferences is being asked to ratify it.

Delegates will also vote on a recommendation of the Church Development Committee to accept Liberation Ministries in Seattle as a new congregation.

In addition to business, the Annual Meeting provides education through speakers, workshops and worship.

The keynote speakers are Elizabeth Dilley of First Congregational UCC in Red Oak, Iowa, and J. Bennett Guess,

As part of the worship, churches will

Continued on Page 5

# Coming election season will be heated days

## Conference Comments



By The Rev.  
Mike Denton  
Conference  
Minister

**Please  
God,  
help  
us  
make  
it  
stop!**

As I wrote this article, I was preparing for the start of Ecumenical Advocacy Days in Washington, D.C. This yearly event is an opportunity for folks across the spectrum of Christianity to gather, learn from each other, worship together and advocate for the values we share.

This year, in particular, the call is to encourage our legislators to make sure that our federal budget has room in it to protect some of our most vulnerable fellow citizens. This meeting came just a couple of days after new budget proposals have been presented that would significantly cut many social, educational and community renewal programs.

The rhetoric being shared on the news is already hot and, in many cases, cutting. As the sound bites are already collecting like leaves in a roof gutter, its clear that, instead of looking for ways to negotiate a constructive way through this, many are seeking ways to politically benefit from an already anticipated impasse.

In the meantime, our hopes for effective government get trampled beneath the shoes of those jockeying for position.

Ugh! This is script we're becoming increasingly familiar with. No wonder approval of our leadership is as low as it is. We are stuck in an awful, awful cycle with little hope for a successful solution. I confess that, even as I prepared for these days of advocacy, part of me felt like an actor in a pre-scripted play more than anything else.

The impasses, the public posturing and the strategic efforts to win scant public approval have become bigger stories than the important issues and people that are pushed off the table to make room for an increasing large pile of distractions.

Please, God, make it stop. These are

days I really want there to be that clear involvement of a deity that burns bushes and parts seas and wags a finger in a way that makes people really listen. I want to hear that clear, theatrical voice of God booming down from the heavens saying, "Stop it."

I've also learned that every time I wish for this kind of action on God's part, what it usually means is that I need to listen more closely; that the voice of God is present but speaking to my heart.

Its not nearly as clear or theatrical and that finger might be waving far more subtly and asking "What are *you* doing to change this?"

Those of us involved in church life can become stuck in the same sort of traps that those in the political world do. We get stuck in the realm of sound bites and posturing, too. We, too, get stuck in self-righteous cul-de-sacs and ignore one of those calls that's central to who we are; being in right community.

These coming days are going to be heated ones. As election politics ratchet up and controversial conversations about how we use our money and marriage equality add heat to the already boiling caldron, it's going to become increasingly important that we unite our voices around one particular call: a call to civility.

Although it seems like an increasingly quaint idea, the call "disagree without being disagreeable" is becoming increasingly important. We've moved so far in to strategizing our fights that we've forgotten how to solve our problems strategically. This dissonance is killing relationships, community and the hopeful promises we've made to ourselves.

Please God, make it stop. Please God, help us make it stop.

## Transitions announced

**Lou Taylor**, who served churches in Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan, Colorado and Oregon before coming to the PNC in 1984, died Feb. 11. He served as pastor in Forks and Wenatchee, served at Northwest Counseling and Consulting Associates and was administrator for the Lay Licensed Ministry for the PNC.

**Marj Johnston** will be installed at 2 p.m., Saturday, May 12, at First Congregational UCC in Dayton.

**Marsha Williams** was installed March 2 as pastor of the United Church of Christ in Blaine.

**Meighan Pritchard** has begun a half-time interim ministry at Prospect Congregational UCC in Seattle.

At United Churches in Olympia, **Jill Komura** is contracted as temporary associate pastor. **Mark Boyd** celebrated his last day as youth minister on March 11 to transition to be the new director at N-Sid-Sen.

**Craig Rennebohm** retires in June from his role as associate pastor in mental health chaplaincy, an ecumenical outreach ministry of Prospect Congregational UCC.

**Becky Withington**, a member in discernment, was approved for ordination and has been called to Everett United Church of Christ.

**Lauren Cannon**, a member in discernment of the Chicago Metropolitan Association, has been called as associate pastor of Keystone Congregational UCC.

## Eastside Clergy Retreat focus is on money and work

“At the Heart of It: Conversations about Money and Work” is the theme for the PNC’s Eastside Clergy Retreat from noon, Monday, May 14, to 1:30 p.m., Wednesday, May 16, at N-Sid-Sen on Lake Coeur d’Alene. Participants will consider how they as clergy live into their pastoral roles and how to look at money with new lenses. *For information, contact Tara Barber at [barbertara@hotmail.com](mailto:barbertara@hotmail.com).*

## Kate Huey leads stewardship workshops in three locations

Kate Huey, minister for stewardship, Scripture and discipleship with the national UCC Local Church Ministries, will lead three workshops in the PNC on “Stewardship in the Local Church: Stewardship as Spiritual Practice, Telling the Story, and Forbidden Topics in Stewardship.”

The workshops are from 3 to 7 p.m.,

Thursday, May 10, at Westminster Congregational UCC in Spokane; from 3 to 7 p.m., Friday, May 11, at First Church of Bellingham UCC, and from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., Saturday, May 12 at Plymouth Congregational UCC in Seattle.

Huey produces the UCC weekly preaching resource, “Sermon Seeds,” and the Bible study, “Weekly Seeds,” on [ucc.org](http://ucc.org). She has served with the national UCC since 2000. The workshops are sponsored by the PNC-UCC Stewardship Committee. *Registration will be available soon at [pncucc.org](http://pncucc.org).*

## Environmental Justice Training will be held April 20 to 22

The Environmental Justice Training will be held April 20 to 22 at the new Environmental Justice Center at Pilgrim Firs Camp and Conference Center in Port Orchard. The program will immerse participants from around the United States, and particularly the Northwest, in values of a justice-centered response to climate change and environmental equity. Those trained will return to their home communities to communicate five core values of environmental justice based on biblical and ethical principles—gratitude, humility, justice, responsibility and community.

*For information, call 360-876-2031 or visit [pilgrimfirs.org](http://pilgrimfirs.org) and [ucc.org](http://ucc.org).*

## Summer camp sessions set

At **Pilgrim Firs**, the PNC camp season begins with the Leadership Retreat, May 18 to 20; Work Camp, May 25 to 27; Spiritual Renewal GLBTQ, June 1 to 3; Young Adults, June 22 to 24.

The Senior High camp is July 1 to 7; Junior High, July 8 to 14; Intermediate, July 15 to 21; Kids, July 22 to 25, and Family, Aug. 19 to 23

At **N-Sid-Sen’s** retirement party for manager Randy Crowe is April 14.

Other retreats and camps are Women’s Retreat, May 10 to 16; Work Camp, June 10 to 16; Kids, July 8 to 11; Intermediate, July 8 to 14; Junior High Aqua, Aug. 5 to 11; Senior High Aqua, July 22 to 28; Family Camp #1, July 29 to Aug. 4, and Family Camp #2, Aug. 12 to 18.

*For information, call Pilgrim Firs, 360-876-2031 or N-Sid-Sen, 208-689-3489.*

## Global Ministries group plans visit to Germany and Poland

The PNC Global Ministries Committee are recruiting five to 15 people to join in a two-week, people-to-people partnership visit to Germany and Poland during September. Participants will connect with global partners in the Berlin-Brandenburg Synod of the Evangelical United Church.

*For information on joining the delegation should email [jim@spraker.net](mailto:jim@spraker.net).*

## State’s Faith Action Network names new co-director

Jackie O’Ryan is joining the leadership team of the Faith Action Network (FAN), Washington’s faith advocacy organization formed last year by the unity of the Washington Association of Churches (WAC) and Lutheran Public Policy Office.

She served as communication director for One America, Catholic Community Services of Western Washington, UFCW Local 21, Lakeside School and Seattle City Council. She is a member of Seattle’s St. James Cathedral. She follows retiring co-director Alice Woldt, who served almost 25 years on executive staff at the Church Council of Greater Seattle and the WAC.

*For information, call 206-625-9790.*

## Mediation training set

The Lombard Mennonite Peace Center is holding a Mediation Skills Training Institute for Church Leaders 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., daily, April 30 to May 4 at First Christian Church of Kent. *For information, visit [www.LMPeaceCenter.org](http://www.LMPeaceCenter.org).*

## Inner Journey of Aging set

Carol Scott Kassner, a commissioned UCC minister on the spirituality of aging and a certified Sage-ing Leader, is exploring “The Inner Journey of Aging” from 1 to 3, Tuesdays, from April 3 to May 6, at University Congregational UCC in Seattle. She points out that the tasks of the first half of life are about surviving and then explore conscious and healthy aging, facing life’s gains and losses, doing spiritual repairs, considering spiritual legacies and finding life’s deepest meaning.

*For information, call 206-524-2322.*

## Conference News Briefs

## Moderator focuses on building covenant in conference

Believing in the idea of the wider church since his youth, Brandon Duran has been living out that commitment as vice moderator last year, moderator this year and past moderator next year.

“Remaining connected to the wider community of faith is important to walking the path of Christ,” he said in an interview, reflecting on his year as moderator.

As vice moderator, Duran, who is director of children, youth and family ministries at Plymouth Church in Seattle, spent a year learning what he might do as moderator and how the committees work and interrelate.

“As members of the United Church of Christ, a united and uniting church, we affirm the role of covenant, the idea that each expression of the church listens, hears and carefully considers each others’ advice, counsel and requests,” he writes in his letter inviting PNC churches to the 2012 Annual Meeting.

“As moderator, I find that covenant is vital for the work of the Board of Directors and all conference committees,” he said. “Covenant feels both so fragile and so powerful.

“Covenant needs consistent attention. We can easily give just lip service to it. We need to balance giving it consistent attention without it becoming so common place that we take it for granted,” he pointed out.

Duran said one of his initial impressions of the UCC was the use of the phrase from Jesus’ prayer in John 17, “that they may all be one.”

He was drawn by this, particularly in his youth.

The prayer continues, he said, with the “so that,” connecting unity to a purpose and not as an end in itself.

“In a similar fashion, I think our covenant is critical to our identity, but I don’t think our goal should be to maintain



Brandon Duran has served at Seattle Taiwanese Christian-UCC, Keystone UCC and Plymouth Congregational UCC churches in Seattle.

the covenant for covenant’s sake. This is seen in the 1997 PNC vision statement.”

He also thinks the conference is coming to a time to ask again about its vision and purpose: “May we be one in order that we may...”

“The ideal of covenant and its significance needs consistent attention so the conference and congregations understand what it is, but it can’t be the only thing we talk about,” he said, explaining that covenant exists for helping define and shape the relationships within and among those in the conference, so “we follow the path of Christ.”

“The communication report presented last year by consultant Katherine Hosfeld said there are points of connection that work, and places they have broken down creating bottlenecks for communication.

Duran sees a major need for building connections between and among the local churches, beyond each church’s connections to the conference itself.

“Congregations connecting with each other is a way for them to connect with the life of the conference,” he said.

While the conference office has resources to share with the congregations, each congregation also has resources to share with each other, he suggested.

“The structures of the conference are the means to help them share,” said Duran, who earned a bachelor’s degree in biblical studies in 1999 at Azusa Pacific University and a master of divinity in 2004 at Fuller Seminary. He also taught English and science in China for a year and later taught theology and English two years in Caracas, Venezuela before coming to the PNC.

“As I began connecting with the conference when I first came to the PNC to serve the Seattle Taiwanese Christian UCC Church, I began to connect with the conference to find resources. Now I’m convinced the sharing is two-way, and multi-way,” he said.

**Large and small churches** each have ideas, resources and inspiring things to say to enrich other churches.

“The role of committees and the conference is to help facilitate that sharing,” he said.

As moderator, he has tried

to lift up the vision of the conference and the board of directors in the bylaws and constitution, approved in 1997.

He hopes that vision informs and inspires goals for each committee.

**Some highlights** of the 2011-12 board, committee and task force actions have been selecting Mark Boyd as the new director of N-Sid-Sen Camp and Conference Center on Lake Coeur d’Alene; arranging for the celebration of Randy Crowe’s retirement from that role, working with the Stewardship Committee on adjusting financial policies, continuing conversation on implementing insights from the communication report, and encouraging churches to participate in the national UCC Mission I Initiative to address hunger.

Administrative and program decisions have included grant requests from the Church Development Committee, personnel guidelines from the Personnel Committee, clarifying the mission of Global Ministries and the possibility of welcoming Liberation Ministries in Seattle as a new PNC church.

The board has met eight times, including use of tele- and video-conferencing to increase participation, and has held two Conference Councils.

“We have begun discussions about how to make our board and committee structure more effective, more connected and more responsible to the conference vision.

“The PNC Annual Meeting is the perfect venue for us to connect with each other and with the still speaking God,” he said about his anticipation of the gathering. “When we come together as churches as a conference we find comfort in the shared struggles and inspiration in sparks of new life God is ever creating.”

For information, call 206-622-4865 or email [brandon@teamduran.com](mailto:brandon@teamduran.com).

# Resolutions, workshops are ways to educate

Continued from Page 1  
executive minister of Local Church Ministries (LCM).

As pastor of a small, thriving, progressive church, Dilley will share how small and rural churches can change the world. With a bachelor's in educational theatre at New York University and a master of divinity in 2003 at Pacific School of Religion, she combines a love of liturgy with background in theatre to enliven church life.

She teaches about small churches at the Center for Progressive Renewal, and is involved in Red Oak on the school board, a mentoring board, the local theatre and the ministerial fellowship.

Dilley will lead a Saturday workshop on "What Makes a Vital Church of Any Size?"

**In 2000, Guess began** as communications director for the national UCC Justice and Witness Ministries. He edited United Church News and directed the UCC's Publishing, Identity and Communication Ministry, before heading Local Church Ministries.

He earned a bachelor's in journalism at the University of Kentucky, a master of divinity in 1991 at Vanderbilt University Divinity School and a doctor of ministries in preaching in 2001 at Chicago Theological Seminary. Guess, who began his career at the Bowling Green Daily News and served 12 years as pastor in Kentucky, will lead a Friday workshop on "Christian Faith Formation beyond Sunday School."

**The economic justice** resolutions delegates will consider come from PNC's Justice and Witness Ministries Committee.

**One calls for the PNC** and its churches to "divest from Bank of America and other harmful banks" because some of the largest banks act in ways that conflict with UCC social justice values. The resolution challenges Bank of America



Annual Meetings, such as 2011 at University Congregational UCC in Seattle, stir unity, relationships.

for investing in the coal industry, a "threat to public health and climate stability," and for its subprime lending excesses, its exorbitant pay of top executives, its paying no federal taxes two recent years and its acting in ways that undermine a just economy.

That resolution urges the PNC to transfer its business to an institution more aligned with "God's call to act justly" and to investigate practices of other financial institutions they use or choose.

**The second JWM resolution** says corporations should not have the same rights as people, which the U.S. Supreme Court granted in a 2010 ruling. Since then "corporations have flooded the political marketplace with their money, crowding out voices of individuals and jeopardizing the democracy we hold dear."

It calls for the PNC to urge the U.S. Congress "to pass and send to states an amendment to the U.S. Constitution establishing that a corporation shall not be considered a person eligible for rights accorded to human beings and the use of money to influence elections or acts of public officials shall not be considered a protected form of speech." The PNC is to send the resolution to General Synod.

**Dan Stern, chair** of the Church Development Committee (CDC), said the committee recommends that Libera-

tion Ministries in the Madrona neighborhood of Seattle become a PNC congregation. He said the CDC has worked with this faith community that wants to affiliate with the UCC.

**Liberation Ministries** describes itself as "a multicultural, charismatic and radically inclusive church." While its 40 members are predominantly African-American gays, it includes lesbian, bisexual, transgender and straight people diverse age, ethnic and socioeconomic groups. Members include people who are "seeking, agnostic and Muslim," but exploring Christian faith. Its ListServ includes 200 people.

The founder and pastor, Darrell Goodwin, grew up and was ordained in the Church of God in Christ. He is associate dean of students in student development at Seattle University and previously director of student life at Creighton University.

He earned a bachelor's in human development and theology from Boston College, a master's in higher education and student affairs administration from the University of Vermont, a master's in transforming spirituality from Seattle University. He is a doctoral candidate at San Francisco Theological Seminary.

**As part of connecting** with the wider community in the Tri-Cities area, delegates are to bring personal hygiene items

and school supplies for youth to deliver to My Friend's Place, Pasco Schools' Migrant Worker Outreach, Martha's Cupboard, Mesa Elementary School and other groups.

**For a worship centerpiece,** churches are sending one yard of fabric that represents them. In addition, anyone who has taken table centerpieces in previous years will bring them to share in the worship space.

Delegates will also bring Legos no smaller than six-prong "to build something wonderfully and uniquely ours," said Sorenson. After the meeting the Legos will be donated to charity.

Annual Meeting will also include commissioning of National Youth Event participants, and a dinner to celebrate Randy Crowe's 22-year ministry at N-Sid Sen.

**Workshops include** information on what pastors learn in boundary training, led by Tara Barber; "Just World—Soul by Soul," led by Tom Thresher; "Different Worship Styles," "Marriage Equality," "UCC 101" on the conference and wider UCC; "The Spiritual Practice of Retreat," "At the Intersection of Faith and Money: Oikocredit," "Justice in Action" by three local churches, "Digital Safe Church," and "UCC Young Adult Service Communities."

For information, visit [pn-cucc.org](http://pn-cucc.org)

## At United Churches in Olympia

# Volunteer webmaster helps church update

### Church's webmaster shares story of her church's redesigning its website.

Pat Sonnenstuhl, a retired nurse-midwife and hypnotherapist, took over a nurse-midwife website when the colleague doing it became ill. She learned basics and also did her own websites and one for the Presbytery of Olympia.

Self-taught in web design, she has volunteered as webmaster of the United Churches of Olympia website since 1998.

"Website work is easy, once you understand the concepts," she commented. "I seem to have a good eye for balance, color and simplicity. Gradually, I learned to do more and more."

At first, she used FrontPage and then Expression Web, gaining skills as the church wanted changes.

"Web design is more of a hobby than a career for me," said Sonnenstuhl, who grew up in Palo Alto and Orinda, Calif.

She was a Methodist before moving to Colville in 1983 after her husband Walt retired. In 1986, she moved to Tacoma and then Olympia to work with Group Health. She worked 25 years in nurse-midwifery before retiring in 1998. Now she teaches medical hypnosis for birth, weight loss and other health benefits.

Because the church is now in a pastoral search process, members wanted a major revision to add new features to move the website from being static to interactive with blog capabilities, a new look and a way to involve staff and the congregation.

They formed a task force last summer and by December had the new website online.



Pat Sonnenstuhl works on the United Churches of Olympia website.

Because Sonnenstuhl was a volunteer, the church had paid for only its domain name and internet hosting.

There was no money to pay a web designer, but seeing that the website was a way to reach the wider community to promote the church, the United Churches' UCC congregation gave a donation to cover the web designer's fees and enhancements.

"We now also have a budget line item for the website and communications," said Sonnenstuhl, "so we can make changes in the future as we want to."

The designer, Christi McGinley of Beau Designs, suggested using WordPress, which has both static and interactive elements, is free and is an accepted standard for web design.

"We transferred the site to a WordPress-friendly environment, installed the program and selected a theme," she said. "The theme provides the ba-

sic structure for the site, along with options for change and enhancement."

The church used a stained glass window in the church for its color selection, which can change for the church seasons.

"The web designer encouraged me to learn the design program, and now I update and add things," Sonnenstuhl said. "Staff can also do updates."

She worked with the web designer through the development process, accepting input from several others in the congregation.

The web designer continues to be available to the church for consultation.

In addition to pictures and highlighting what is happening in the congregation, the website uses the blog feature of WordPress as the way the congregation updates and receives information on activities. Members are encouraged to check the news and events page for updates on activities

and upcoming events. It's at [www.theunitedchurches.org/category/news-events](http://www.theunitedchurches.org/category/news-events).

The church's printed newsletter is now once a month rather than weekly and is always available online.

"Often church websites are static and out of date," she said. "For people under 40, and increasingly for those over 40, the web is the main way of communicating. People want current information.

"It's intended to be a resource for people. Many people in Olympia use computers often," she said. "My son gave me an iPad, and more people are using iPads to visit websites. We want to be attractive to young families," she said. "They want blogs and discussion on issues."

The page includes posts and RSS streams from the national United Church of Christ and Presbyterian Church (USA). Members can register and comment on posts.

A search feature helps people find articles on different topics on the website.

A secure member section has the church directory online and meeting minutes.

Staff are trained to post information. They can interact with youth and others.

"Changes are made instantly," Sonnenstuhl said. "This makes it a work in progress."

Features include a gallery of photos collected over the church's nearly 100 years—of buildings, members and pastors.

"The gallery page will grow as we add more through the year," she said.

The church keeps track of traffic behind the scenes, so they know how the site is being used and by how many people.

For information, call 360-943-8933, email [webmaster@theunitedchurches.org](mailto:webmaster@theunitedchurches.org) or visit [theunitedchurches.org](http://theunitedchurches.org).

# Partners in Education urge safe church training

By Gale Peterson  
Pacific Northwest  
Conference  
Partner in Education  
since 1999



**The PNC's three Partners in Education – Gale Peterson, Lorna Kropp and Don Schmitt – are trained by the national UCC to help local churches with their education ministries of resources and curricula developed by the UCC. They offer workshops to help churches create effective education programs.**

For information, call 425-823-8737 for Peterson, 509-448-2291 for Kropp and 425-591-7729 for Schmidt, visit [www.ucc.org/education/partners](http://www.ucc.org/education/partners) or email [gale246@frontier.com](mailto:gale246@frontier.com).

Partner's in Education have promoted developing Safe Church Guidelines since 2004.

At that time, only five Pacific Northwest Conference UCC churches had such documents in place. Today, many more have developed Safe Church or Safe Conduct Guidelines, along with PNC's two Outdoor Ministry Camp and Conference Centers.

"There is no more critical issue than managing risk connected to children, who most often cannot make judgments for themselves. They rely entirely on Christian education leaders, teachers and pastors," said Gale Peterson, a partner in education.

It is important to train staff and volunteers who regularly work with children, and to have a program of selection, screening, training, monitoring and reporting.

Awareness, guidelines and supervision will protect children, deter predators and protect a church's reputation.

Peterson calls for church staff and volunteers to be aware because it's not easy to spot a predator.

"They don't just look like scary people. The reality is much scarier," she said. "Skilled predators lurk among the trustworthy and often under a cloak of good behavior, so they are not easily distinguishable."

She challenges members, staff and volunteers to learn how to spot a sexual predator, to become aware of their own direct experience or the direct experience of peers and other volunteers.

"Our PNC churches aspire to be inclusive communities in which all can work and worship together in a trusting, nurturing place, free from harassment or exploitation of any kind," Gale said. "We strive to provide a

safe environment for all, especially the children and youth who are entrusted to our care, as well as vulnerable adults and the elderly."

Congregations develop policies to reduce the possibility of child sexual or physical abuse, or any type of misconduct or harassment involving minors or adults where there is an imbalance of power.

"This imbalance of power can occur between a child or youth, and an adult, between two adults, or between two children and/or youth," she said.

The purpose of having guidelines is to create a proactive, supportive and nurturing policy that protects children and supports staff, as opposed to one based upon compliance and reaction.

Partners in Education recommends several steps to develop Safe Church/Conduct Guidelines.

First, it is important to gain the support of the church council and pastor or pastors.

Second, a task force can develop the guidelines for paid staff and volunteers who regularly work with children and youth. The task force needs to develop a statement of purpose, definitions, processes for selection of staff and volunteers, screening and training. They need to monitor, report incidents, have a response team to respond to incidents and have forms for families, staff and volunteers, and forms to report an incident.

Third, there needs to be an education process for the congregation.

Fourth, there should be a congregational vote to adopt the proposed guidelines.

Fifth is to implement the guidelines by conducting background checks of staff and primary volunteers, to train staff and volunteers on risk manage-

ment and to make modifications to the church building.

Gale listed several resources to assist in developing Safe Church/Conduct Guidelines.

- The national UCC Insurance Board has a "Safe Conduct Workbench" at [www.insuranceboard.org](http://www.insuranceboard.org), including a free "Self Assessment Tool," its "Safety Solutions" quarterly newsletter, "The Steward." Past issues cover safe conduct and high-risk scenarios. The Insurance Board also has a 2005 publication, "Making Our Churches Safe for All."

There are also interactive webinars on a variety of topics.

The Connecticut UCC Conference's "Internet Safety Guidelines" are also available.

- As a member of the UCC insurance program, each church has access to do criminal background checks for a reduced fee at Criminal Background Checks through Praesidium Inc.

- A free online interactive video training program, AR-MATUS®, through Praesidium is available for training staff and volunteers on best practices in preventing abuse.

Cathy Green, United Church of Christ Insurance Board president and CEO said, "Not only does it teach how to keep children safe, but it also teaches churches how to protect themselves from false allegations of abuse."

Once staff and volunteers are registered by a church's safe church administrator, they can do the training at home at their own pace. Completion is monitored by the church's safe church administrator.

- United Methodist Church resources include *Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in the Church* and *Safe Sanctuaries for Youth* by Joy Thornburg Melton, a 2004 publication available through Discipleship Resources.

## New technology is useful in teaching children

He first thought of the church's beloved music program.

Being tech savvy in his work as a consultant through his company, Playful Efforts—designing interactive learning games and play for toy and media companies—he has a “jaundiced” view of typical ways technology is used to educate with a lot of flash and little content.

“I'm impressed with technology when it has unintended consequences that build integration in community, rather than isolation from community,” he said. “My number one question in looking at technology is how can we use it to connect people. Will it make people feel connected to community?”

“I want technology to add value. Part of living a life of faith is finding ways to connect people and build community,” he said. “It's also to bring comfort and joy to people who are suffering.

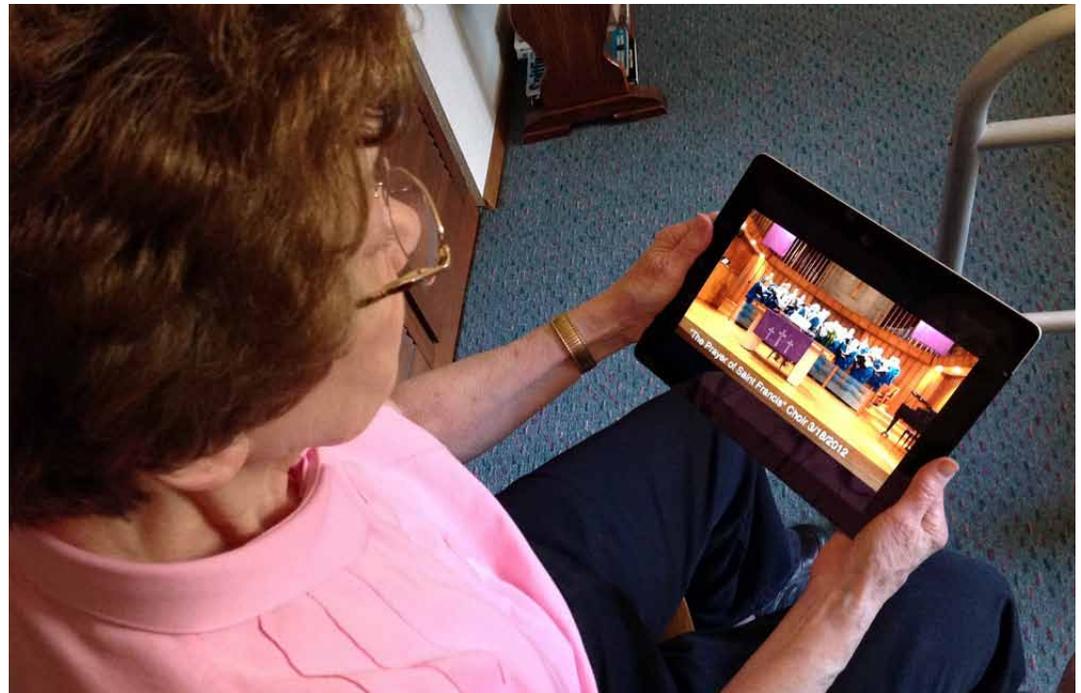
The iPad has a built-in camera, so every Sunday he records the adult or children's choir. The church's part-time lay parish visitor, Brenda Hounjet, takes the iPad with the music on her pastoral visits.

When one member fell and broke her hip, people in the church wanted to send a greeting and decided to send their wishes for her healing and express how they missed her via an iPad video.

Erik, the son of a UCC pastor who grew up in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, edited it to a two-minute get-well video to take to the hospital.

After earning a bachelor's at Cornell in 1983, and a master's and PhD in developmental psychology at Rutgers, he worked seven years as research director for interactive learning with Sesame Street. He came to Seattle to help Microsoft start an interactive toy division.

He was not involved in a



Use of iPad on pastoral visit with a shut-in, connects a church member with the church's worship.

Photo courtesy of Erik Strommen

church until coming to Seattle and joining Bellevue First—which is an open and affirming church—with his husband Dave Shulman.

Erik also uses interactive media to film children in the church school or vacation Bible school as they act out parables of Jesus, DaVinci's “Last Supper” and other Bible stories.

“When we did the Last Supper, we had eight children, but needed 13, so several dressed and posed as two apostles. I used Photoshop to combine several photos into one,” he said. “When they were acting out David being selected king, while standing in the field full of sheep, there were only sheep costumes. I took photos of children in them at different angles and made a photo with many sheep.

“Children's lives are highly mediated,” Erik said. “They see media as normal extensions of their lives, so they enjoy sharing the photos and videos with others.”

Another time, he did a one-minute video with the children

retelling the resurrection story—the women coming to the empty tomb, meeting the angel, finding no body and going to the disciples to report.

As the children create photos and videos, it makes Bible stories more relevant than writing in workbooks or sitting and talking, Erik said.

“It makes lessons more vivid and integrated into their thinking,” he said.

Erik, who is also a puppeteer, has also come to classes with puppets.

From his work at Sesame Street, he has incorporated a process for producing informal learning content.

“The iPad makes it easy,” he said. “In the old days, I had to take a video, transfer it to a computer to edit and then save it to a DVD. Now I just take the video, edit it and publish it on the iPad, which combines ease of use with portability.”

Erik is pleased with the unanticipated, positive effects of using the iPad.

“People in church see me recording something and want

to access it,” he said.

Lisa Horst Clark, Bellevue First's pastor for spiritual formation, asked him to film her children's stories so she could see herself and improve her delivery. Then she posted it online, and her grandparents in Illinois were able to watch her doing her job.

Erik loads what he captures and edits on the church's website, where he is building an archive of video, photos and recordings of church music.

“The beloved community is important in our culture, which can be isolating, judgmental and harsh. It's hard to find spaces where we can share what we have in common with others and can express that they are valued,” Erik commented.

He finds the iPad intimate. Patients in the hospital cradle it on their laps.

“With the iPad, we are able to bring people the message, our community loves you the way God loves you,” he said.

For information, call 425-454-5001, email [erik@playfulefforts.com](mailto:erik@playfulefforts.com) or visit [fcbellevue.smugmug.com](http://fcbellevue.smugmug.com).