

ROCKY MOUNTAIN CONFERENCE  
*Reflections*  
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

www.rmucc.org

September 2010

## Working for Justice

*“God has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” -- Micah 6:8*

When the North Carolina-based textile manufacturer Pillowtex declared bankruptcy, it shut down five NC factories and laid off 5,500 people. Without notice, workers lost their incomes and health insurance. Some faced foreclosure on their homes. Many laid-off workers could not find comparable jobs in their area.

The ripple effects of the plant closures devastated local economies. But the effects did not stop there. Local churches were impacted as well. Congregations wanted to help. Prayer services, food, and emergency funds were generously offered. But everyone realized these efforts were inadequate. Congregations could not provide families with health insurance or on-going mortgage payments. Nor could they restore lost jobs to a hard-hit community.

Economic hardship is not a rare event. Around the country, millions of people are unemployed and millions more work part time when they need and prefer full-time work. One-quarter of all jobs pay a wage so low that a full-time worker cannot keep a family of four above poverty. Some 45 million people, predominantly low-wage workers and their families, lack health insurance.

What is the role of the church in the midst of unemployment and joblessness? When jobs pay too little? When housing, childcare, and health care are too expensive?

The church is called by God to act with kindness, to care for those in need. Congregations respond faithfully by feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, and helping workers who lose their jobs.

But God’s people are also called to do justice. The Biblical vision of justice requires us to move beyond charity and works of mercy. We are called to create the economic conditions and institutions that will begin to put an end to the hardships God’s people face.

As followers of Jesus, we are called to care for the immediate needs of the unemployed and to lobby Congress for better international trade policies and an improved unemployment insurance system. We are called to give food to the food pantry and to ensure that every worker has a living wage. We are called to reconfigure social programs to provide a wholesome life to those who rely on them. We are called to care and to help. We are called to be informed, to demonstrate, to organize, to lobby, and to vote.

Workers need jobs with good wages and benefits. Everyone needs health insurance and affordable housing. The country needs a strong safety net to provide income, retraining, and other services for the unemployed. Let us be about the work of living into God’s reign. With God’s help, may we create a new, more just society within in the midst of the old one.

*This article is part of the UCC.org worship resources package for Labor Sunday, Sept. 5.*



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## What A Summer!

*By Rev. David K. Popham*

This summer's camping season was certainly one for the books:

- Due to the persistent presence of the norovirus (stomach flu), MADD camp concluded 24 hours early.
- Due the same virus and concerns for exposing a younger and older population, Grandparent and Me Camp was cancelled.
- Due to our shrinking camp numbers (in turn due to our shrinking number of youth and children in our churches), Pioneer Camp was cancelled and Pioneer age children folded into the Explorer Music Camp.
- While both Voyager Music and Explorer Music had fantastic campers and great programs, the reality is that both music venues have experienced a severe drop-off in attendance and so the decision was made not to continue them for the summer of 2011.

This news of a decline in camp registration may be surprising to some people, but it should not be. Let's start with a wide lens. You are floating above the world and below you is the United States of America (with Hawaii and Alaska to the west and north). As you hover you notice that all the states appear orange except for Utah, which is green. The orange indicates those states with a majority of their population at age 40 or above. Utah – the one green state – has a population where the majority are 39 or younger.

Now we focus in a little closer and see the United Church of Christ. The average age of our church members is 68. Now we come in even closer and focus on the Rocky Mountain Conference. In 1995 the churches of this Conference confirmed 335 youth into full church membership. In 2009 the churches of this Conference confirmed only 85 youth into full church membership.



“The times,” as the song states, “are a changing.” So also do we need to change and adapt for the new reality of youth presence (some may say absence) in the Rocky Mountain Conference. Your Faith Nurturing Ministry Team is on the ball. Just last month we hosted the second annual EYE on Youth (Exemplary Youth Emphasis) gathering at Keystone. This event brings the latest and best youth ministry research and practices together with those churches seeking to improve their youth programs.

Next month on November 13, your Faith Nurturing Ministry Team will host a visioning summit for camps titled “La Foret for the Next Generation!” Each congregation is invited to send someone to the summit not only for the purpose of hearing all voices, but for the purpose of building on the collective wisdom of this Conference.

Yes, the times are changing, and with the co-creative God walking with us, we too can change and become the centers of meaning-making that contemporary youth are longing for both at camp and in your congregation.

*Rev. David Popham is Associate Conference Minister for RMCUCC, a role that includes oversight of camp offerings.*

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## Summer Anytime Reading

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*Editor's Note: Peter Sawtell publishes Eco-Justice Notes every week, but Reflections uses just one a month. Sometimes his articles are outdated before we can print them but nonetheless interesting and relevant. You can subscribe to his weekly article or read back issues at this website: <http://www.eco-justice.org>.*

The mythology about summer is that it is a time to slow down and relax, an occasion for a leisurely read. Most people that I talk to don't see many placid days of vacation. Whether or not your summer had the opportunity for vacation and literary afternoons, good writing can be re-creational as it touches our spirits and expands our minds.

Leisure reading can be most enjoyable when the stories and values inform and reinforce our best values. Fiction and history can support our eco-justice view of the world.

Over five years ago, I suggested six books that are "enjoyable reads that ... have some tenuous connection to the eco-justice cause." It is time to add a few more to the list!

***Jayber Crow*** by Wendell Berry

This novel about a small-town barber explores choices about simple living, the value of community roots, and the decidedly mixed benefits of "progress." One section explores a family's sharp disagreement about their farmland -- is it a heritage to be treasured, or a resource to be exploited?

***An Elegy for Easterly*** by Petina Gappah

Most of us are oblivious about the privilege of affluent societies. This collection of short stories provides remarkable insight about life in the failing nation of Zimbabwe, with its dramatic contrasts between poverty and wealth, and the devastation of the AIDS epidemic. In a dire setting, Gappah shows us that people are resilient in their universal search for love, joy, community, and meaning in life.

***Farewell My Subaru: An Epic Adventure in Local Living*** by Doug Fine

Doug Fine replaces his Subaru with a bio-diesel truck as part of his attempt at self-sufficient living on a New Mexico ranch. There are plenty of laughs as this urban man stumbles his way through misadventures with solar panels, irrigation systems, goats and used cooking oil. As the dust jacket says, "Both a hilarious romp and an inspiring call to action, Farewell, My Subaru makes a profound statement about trading today's instant gratification for a deeper, more enduring kind of satisfaction."

***A Heron's Balance***, by Cathy Barker

A grieving young widower spends two months canoeing and camping in the Boundary Waters wilderness on the US-Canada border, and finds transformation and healing by being so thoroughly steeped in God's creation. Written by a United Church of Christ pastor, the book is explicitly religious, but without being "preachy."

***All Over Creation*** by Ruth Ozeki

A prodigal daughter returns to rural Idaho, and a batch of gentle radicals ("Seeds of Resistance") protest about genetically modified potatoes. The "quirky" novel blends good storytelling about family relationships with discussions about important issues in modern agriculture.

***Impossible Things*** by Conni Willis

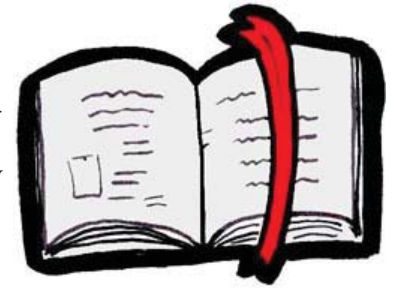
In this collection of science fiction stories, the novella that sticks with me is "The Last of the Winnebagos", about the time in our future when gasoline shortages mean that there are no more big recreational vehicles. That's a side point, though. The story really addresses grief in a world where all domestic dogs have died from a rogue disease. The other stories are delightfully odd.

***The Animal Dialogues: Uncommon Encounters in Wild*** by Craig Childs

These short vignettes of Craig's encounters with animals at times push the boundaries of prudence, but offer distinctive insight into creatures great and small -- bears and ravens, wasps and sharks, coyotes and humans. He wrote, "The life of an animal ... is far beyond the scientific papers and the campfire stories. It is as true as breath. It is as important as the words of children."

***Natives and Exotics*** by Jane Alison

Alison tracks both plants and people by following three generations of an Australian family as they scatter around the world. Questions of place and belonging run through the novel. *Publisher's Weekly* called it "a lush evocation of the way people love and alter (and are altered by) the environments they inhabit."



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## The Silver Lining

By Kathy Leftwich



his month marks a momentous time in my life, one I had never really contemplated until it came closer. On Sept. 14, I will have been married to the same man for 25 years.

My first reaction is that it seems like such an “old” thing –remembering my own parents’ 25<sup>th</sup> and not knowing anyone else celebrating the same landmark both make me feel as if this is not something that happens to people my age. But that’s all part of the denial of aging, I suppose. You never quite feel as old as you are.

The deeper emotion, though, is one of wonder. Outside of family, only two people have been a part of my life longer than my husband, and we rarely communicate, haven’t seen each other in at least five years. How is it that people remain close over the many hills and valleys of life?

As some old song says, “It must be love.” But what is that anyway?

This reminds of an answer I once gave to a Sunday school kid’s question of “what is God?” I replied, “God is love.” Not so much an ephemeral man in the sky, but the feeling one has of being taken care of and taking care of another.

Of course, I came to this realization in my UCC church, thinking that **we**, the congregation, were the embodiment of God. Working

together to support a person in crisis, to keep the grounds clean or to provide holiday dinners for the less privileged, we were love.

Now the people of my home congregation (and most other UCCers I’ve met) are a disparate group for the most part. There are lawyers and doctors and teachers and clerks spanning the ages from newborn to nearly 90 in all types of relationships. We have one thing in common: wanting to live our lives as Jesus would have, or at least our best understanding of that. We generally care for others and our planet. And that’s what keeps us together, showing up most Sundays at 10.

The same, I’ve come to realize, is true of my husband and I. We are not the same people we were 25 years ago. The starry-eyed, heart-fluttering flush of new love rarely lasts, being replaced by the monotony “what should we have for dinner tonight” or “whose turn is it to get up with the baby.”

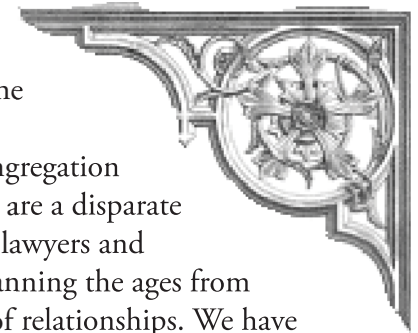


God may have created the world in six days, but its evolution to a finely functioning society has taken thousands of years. The world of relationships, similarly, never stops changing.

Though none of us would wish for a return to the Garden of Eden (or the primordial soup), we should try to remember what got us in this mess to start with: Love, the sense of caring for and being cared for.

Whether it’s a partner or the rest of society, our love should grow and change to fit the situation. To quote another old song, “getting better all the time.”

*Kathy Leftwich is communications director for the Rocky Mountain Conference.*



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## The Bad 3

Three measures on the November ballot -- Amendments 60 and 61 and Proposition 101 -- promise tax relief, but the fine print delivers a reckless package of deceptive proposals that will destroy Colorado's already struggling budget.

These proposals will kill jobs and will hammer our small businesses. Seniors, families and communities will pay the price.

Colorado Republican and Democratic leaders unanimously opposed to 60, 61 and 101:

- Senate Minority Leader Josh Penry, Republican-Grand Junction
- House Minority Leader Mike May, Republican-Parker
- Senate President Brandon Shaffer, Democrat-Longmont
- House Speaker Terrance Carroll, Democrat-Denver

"Look at Anschutz medical facility. Look at that massive science building that used to be a hole in the ground on the Auraria campus. Look at my alma matter, Mesa State College, which has just exploded with growth... All of those projects were done without raising taxes thanks to the creative financing structures that (Amendment) 61 would ban." -- Senate Minority Leader Josh Penry (R- Grand Junction)

Proposition 101 -- would reduce funding for State government by 25%, causing huge cuts to state human services programs, education, higher education, and health care programs.

Beginning January 1, 2011 the ownership tax for new vehicles would be \$2 and all other vehicles would be \$1. There will no longer be a state or local tax on rental cars. Also, all registration, license, and title charges shall total \$10 per year per vehicle.

Also under Proposition 101 the income tax rate shall be at 4.5% in

2011 and decrease 0.1% yearly until reaching 3.5% in the first ten years that the income tax revenue net growth exceeds 6%. Finally, beginning January 1, 2011 no telecommunications fees, except for 911 services, shall be assessed.

Proposition 101 is expected to reduce state revenue by at least \$1.7 billion a year. An important aspect of this ballot measure is the language stating "added charges shall be tax increases" meaning the legislature's hands would be tied and any attempt to restore this funding to the state would have to go to a vote of the people.

Amendment 60 -- would amend the state Constitution to make sweeping changes to Colorado's property tax laws. These changes would significantly impact funding for public education and local services. This measure would set stricter limits on property taxes than currently imposed by TABOR. It would cripple local governments in their ability to raise revenue and apply a 10-year limit on all property tax increases.

Amendment 60 would also put in place a system where taxpayers could petition for tax cuts to be on the local ballot in every election. It also requires local school districts to cut their mill levy rates in half by 2020 with state aid replacing the revenue.

Amendment 61 -- would amend the state Constitution to make sweeping changes to Colorado's property tax laws, and would prevent any local government or public entity from any projects that would create debt including school or recreation center expansions or improvements, road and bridge repair. The intention is to change the way the state currently issues debt stating; "the state shall not contract any debt by loan in any form."

Higher education, corrections, judicial, human services, health care and most other state departments will be nearly eliminated if 60, 61 and 101 pass. ---Non-partisan state economists, Colorado Legislative Council, July 2010

*This information is provided by the Colorado Council of Churches. More information is available on the website [www.cochurches.org](http://www.cochurches.org)*

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