



January 17, 2016

The Top 10 United Church News stories in 2015

Written by Anthony Moujaes

To read more, visit ucc.org and enter "Top 10 News" in Search Box

... For our purposes, we define a 'top story of the year' on this list as those with the largest number of unique readers, according to UCC website analytics. So, counting down from 10, here are the UCNews stories that garnered the most interest in 2015:

10. Laying the foundation to build a church culture of risk-taking, innovation and ingenuity In his first remarks to the UCC Board after his election at General Synod 2015, UCC General Minister and President the Rev. John Dorhauer introduced five initiatives he planned to undertake as 90-day goals... Those five initiatives include strategies to build closer ties between local churches and the national setting, broadening the UCC's missional base with ecumenical and interfaith partners, and refreshing the denomination's identity....

9. Dorhauer overwhelmingly elected UCC General Minister and President The Rev. John Dorhauer was elected as the denomination's general minister and president during General Synod 30 in Cleveland in June with 89 percent of the vote by delegates....

8. Dorhauer charts course for UCC future At the conclusion of General Synod, outgoing General Minister and President the Rev. Geoffrey Black presented his successor, the newly elected Rev. John Dorhauer, with a stole, a symbol of the new leadership role Dorhauer was stepping into, reflecting his calling to do new things. The denomination's next president said he hoped the people of the UCC use the power of the church, as a progressive faith community, to speak for those who have no voice. "I want you to prepare to fail," he said. "I want you to give yourself permission to take risks and then be there to receive the risk-takers with grace when they fail, and to learn from those failures and pass on what we learn to others...."

7. 'Crazy, awesome' youth ministry in Massachusetts counts 650 members Old South Union Church counts 650 in ministry with 500 active members — and while that is an impressive membership for any church, those numbers don't describe the makeup of the entire congregation, but rather the size of its youth group. The Rev. Jennie Barrett Siegal, the church's senior pastor, explains that it took 30 years to grow a small youth group into the large organization that today draws hundreds of teens from the local and neighboring communities....

6. Charleston violence, unspeakable grief "Please keep my family, Mother

Emanuel congregation, and all those impacted by this rampant culture of violence in the center of your prayer," wrote the Rev. Waltrina Middleton, Associate for National Youth Event Programming with the UCC national offices, after losing her cousin to gun violence. Middleton wrote the reflection the day after a gunman entered a historic black church in Charleston, S.C. and opened fire on the 12 people gathered inside, killing nine of them. Middleton's cousin, the Rev. DePayne Middleton-Doctor, was one of the victims. [T]he unspeakable grief of this loss has knocked me and my family off-kilter," she continued....

5. UCC and Disciples leaders, in solidarity with Muslims, express abhorrence of hate speech The leadership of the UCC and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) were moved to condemn the growing number of comments that denigrate the Muslim community. In a December statement, officers of both churches offered support and solidarity to communities of faith standing against xenophobic and racist remarks that motivate hate speech and actions....

4. Vandalized banner will hang as conversation piece outside New Jersey church

Community Church of Mountain Lakes, in New Jersey, was left searching for answers after someone threw red paint on its "Be the Church" banner that includes several messages — from "Protect the environment," to "Care for the poor," "Reject racism" and "Embrace diversity." But the Rev. Debra L. Duke and the church council decided to leave the defaced banner up. "We hope that this might spark conversation about inclusivity and rigidity in our society," she said....

3. Traci Blackmon to lead UCC Justice and Witness Ministries The Rev. Traci Blackmon, pastor of Christ The King UCC, in Florissant, Mo., was appointed as the executive minister of Justice and Witness ministries in October by an enthusiastic and unanimous vote of the United Church of Christ Board of Directors. Blackmon begins her work with the UCC national offices in January....

2. UCC minister chosen N.Y. Times 'New Yorker of the Year' Brooklyn minister the Rev. Ann Kansfield was named *The New York Times* 2015 "New Yorker of the Year".... Kansfield was nominated for the honor for her role as the New York Fire Department's first openly-gay and first female chaplain. "I'm so honored to serve the wonderful people of New York, and to represent all of the clergy who work hard to partner with God in 'seeking the shalom' of our cities," Kansfield said....

1. Facebook removes Chicago Theological Seminary message calling out racism

Chicago Theological Seminary posted a social media message on racism on social media on Aug. 18, only to have it taken down for "violating Facebook Community Standards." The post of a graphic, which read, "If you don't think racism exists, you're white," reached more than 200,000 people in the two weeks it was seen on Facebook. Over 16,000 people engaged with it through likes, comments, or shares. CTS President the Rev. Alice Hunt said that people of faith must love enough to get angry at great injustice and call it out....



Prayers are requested for Trinity UCC in Shenandoah and Rev. Dr. John H. Reid.