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FROM YOUR ASSOCIATION MINISTER

During Holy Week I received this message sent to me from a retired pastor as a word of encouragement. Read on from Rev. John Thomas....

A Word to Sustain the Weary

The daily lectionary invites us to read these words from Isaiah's Song of the Servant on Wednesday in Holy Week,

The Lord has given me the tongue of a teacher,

That I may know how to sustain the weary with a word.

Morning by morning he wakens – wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught. (Isaiah 50.4)

On Wednesday, March 19, as we mark the fifth anniversary of the beginning of the war in Iraq we seek works to sustain those who have grown weary with the drumbeat of destruction and the cadence of injury and death that have accompanied us and the people of Iraq over these long years. We listen for words that can call us beyond our weary lament to action, wakening us to commitment, rousing us from resignation, calling us to hope. And we dare to claim the vocation of God's Servant, sustaining a weary world with a Word that speaks and acts for justice and for peace.

The betrayals, deceptions and moral compromises of this war weigh heavily upon us. With the disciples, we have felt the urge to run away from the courageous word and witness against the war. We have tried to wash our hands of complicity in the crucifixion of Iraq and its people. Here and in Iraq we have buried the dead, sometimes in dignity and honor, often in frightened secrecy. We have wept for all who have slaughtered in this conflict, but have shrunk from bearing the burden of the cross. This Holy Week the "judgment of the cross falls steady, clear, and sure." Is there a word to sustain the weary?

A prayer written by the Rev. Yousif al Saka, an elder the Presbyterian Church in Baghdad, offers one word full of poignancy and promise:

We beseech You, we humble ourselves for the name of our Savior Jesus Christ, to send your Holy Spirit to shade the land of Iraq, so that peace may prevail in its dwellings and the acts of violence, kidnapping

and persecution may cease; so that the displaced may return to their homes, the churches may reopen their gates without fear from shells and explosions; so that smiles may be seen again on the faces of children that have been stolen from them here in this difficult time; so that elderly may lean back on their chairs in comfort and tranquility saying farewell to their children when leaving for school or work without anxiety or fear; so that mothers think only of happy, prosperous, and peaceful futures for their daughters and sons. O Lord, have pity on us, we Iraqis. Let the light of your face shine on us, bless us, strengthen our belief, and bestow patience upon us.

Can this word keep alive an imagination born of God's promise, free from the grip of the world's imperial projects? Can this be a word to sustain us?

Amid our weariness on this sad anniversary day, and in the midst of our Holy Week pilgrimage, may we be confronted once again with a messenger telling us "Do not be afraid!" May we turn from our vigil over the dead and the dying to a courageous witness to life and peace in the Risen Christ. May our lights, reflecting the light of Christ, dispel the shadows, that morning by morning our voices may sing and our deeds proclaim, "The powers of death have done their worst, but Christ their legions has dispersed; let shouts of holy joy outburst. Alleluia!"

With Great Hope,

Bob

DISTRICT MEETINGS RESUME

Clergy gather in Districts in April. We'll be discussing the paper given by Mark Yurs at the Clergy Retreat, "Preaching the Resurrection." You will be receiving a copy by email. We will gather again in April: District IV Evansville April 15 9 a.m. District I Dodgeville April 16 8 a.m. District III Portage April 23 Noon District II Madison April 23 8 a.m.

SOUTHWEST WISCONSIN ASSOCIATION

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

VOLUME XXVI I, ISSUE 4, APRIL 2008

SPRING MEETING THEME....RENEWAL

On April 26 the Association will gather for its Spring Meeting at Zwingli UCC in Monticello. The theme of the meeting is Congregational Development and Renewal.

Rev. Joanne Thomson of the Wisconsin Conference Staff will be our Keynote Speaker. Her address is "Supporting Renewal... What we need to hold on to and what we need to let go." In addition, we hear stories from folk who experienced or are in the middle of renewal.

We will have our Business Meeting with election of officers. Middleton Community UCC will lead us in worship at the end of the day. The agenda follows:

9:00 a.m.	Registration and Refreshments
9:30 a.m.	Welcome Roll Call of Churches About the Local Church Hymn Sing
10:00 a.m.	Rev. Joanne Thomson Presentation
11:00 a.m.	Stories of Congregational Renewal
12:30 p.m.	Lunch
1:30 p.m.	Business Meeting
2:15 p.m.	Worship
3:00 p.m.	Adjournment

IN OUR PRAYERS (Please add these petitions to your daily prayers)

Jacki Mitchell as she recovers from treatment for cancer
Barbara Dunlap Wolfe and the congregation at Woodman as she is installed
The Spring Meeting of the Association
The Search Committees at Darlington and Mineral Point
Our Congregations at:
South Wayne – Sonja Heiser, Pastor
Steuben – Jen Johnson, Pastor
Verona – Mark Yurs, Pastor

HERITAGE AND CALL DVD VIDEO

An excellent DVD video put together to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the UCC will be available free of charge at the Spring Association Meeting on April 26th. The video is an historical look at the 50 years of the Southwest Association, UCC. It's filled with images of ministry and congregations that date back to the mid

50's and move to the present. The technical work was done by Paul Hedges of Orchard Ridge UCC, in cooperation with a number of clergy. Rev. Phil Haslanger of Fitchburg Memorial had a major hand in writing the script. The DVD was shown as part of the 50th anniversary celebration on Oct. 14th at First Congregational UCC, Madison. If you are unable to attend the Spring Meeting, and would like a DVD, contact the Association Office and we'll send you one.

WISCONSIN CONFERENCE PROGRAM OFFERED

The Conference has a number of excellent programs to offer this spring and summer. Contact the website www.wcucc.org for further information.

The Plunge Retreat for High School & College, April 11-13, Pilgrim Center
Spring Training for anyone interested in the Teaching Ministry, Saturday, April 5, 9-3:30, Pilgrim UCC, Fond du Lac

National Youth Event, July 23-28, U of TN, Knoxville – contact Lisa Hart at lhart@wcucc.org

Bring 'Em In...Church Growth Skills Training – November 14-15
Stewardship Workshops in Watertown and DeForest, April 11 & 12
Partners in Education...Human Resources for Educators

And place on your calendar: the 46th Annual Meeting of the Wisconsin Conference,
June 6-8 at Green Lake Conference Center.

A SOURCE OF ENCOURAGEMENT

In response to the generous contributions of the congregations of the Southwest Wisconsin Association toward a mobile Medical Unit for injured civilians in Iraq we received the following letter from Dr. Jacob Kellenburger of the ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva:

"I wish to express my most sincere thanks for the generous donation of USD 39,970 made by the UCC Southwest Wisconsin Association to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) for its activities in Iraq.

It is thanks to its donors and to their determination to translate compassion into concrete action, that

The ICRC is able to alleviate the suffering of many victims of armed conflict worldwide.

The UCC Southwest Wisconsin Association's contribution is a source of encouragement for the ICRC in Geneva and its delegates in the field.

Kindly transmit my heartfelt thanks to all that participated in this donation. I greatly appreciate your gesture of solidarity and remain, yours sincerely,
Dr. Jakob Kellenberger"

CONGREGATIONS SEEKING:

Darlington Immanuel – Sue Strickler, Interim
Mineral Point – Beryl Melcher, Interim

CHECK OUT THE ASSOCIATION WEB SITE

The Division on Lay Life and Leadership has taken the Association website as their project and have done a great job. We now have a new page where people can sign up to receive Nancy's Association E-News. You can go to the home page and follow the link or just copy this one, <http://www.swwisconsinucc.org/ecommunications.htm>

If you wish to receive the Association Newsletter, Shalom, by e-mail or would like to start on or improve your church's website, check this link so they can let us know of your interest. Contact Nancy Potter for suggestions and critique.