

September 2011

Coalition has a new look, vision for the future

by Andy Lang

National Gathering in June resulted in two decisions that will give the Coalition new focus and direction: the election of a leadership team who will serve under new by-laws, and a commitment to a two-year “envisioning process” that will allow the Coalition’s membership to shape its future.

At the same time, the Coalition decided on a bold plan of renewal and growth for its primary ministry: the church’s network of Open and Affirming congregations.

The two-year conversation on the future of LGBT ministry and advocacy in the church will take place on many platforms—including social media and regional gatherings. The conversation begins this month in the “Discussions” section of the Coalition’s Facebook page at facebook.com/ucc.coalition.

The Coalition is strengthening its support for ONA congregations, beginning with a series of regional convocations of ONA churches in Connecticut, Texas and other states. At the same time, the Coalition is focusing on six states—Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, North Carolina and Oregon—where important votes are scheduled on marriage equality or LGBT civil rights. In these states, the Coalition will help ONA congregations work with ecumenical allies to build strong Christian coalitions in defense of the LGBT community.

In 2012, the Coalition will reach two milestones: we will welcome ONA congregation number 1,000 and celebrate the 40th anniversary of Bill Johnson’s ordination, which is also the Coalition’s 40th year. The Coalition has a proud past, and a strong future. ▼

The Coalition’s new Leadership Team



Yvette Flunder

Bishop Yvette Flunder is a third generation preacher with roots in the Church of God in Christ and an ordained minister of the United Church of Christ.

She founded the City of Refuge UCC in San Francisco in 1991. A graduate of the Ministry Studies and Master of Arts programs at the Pacific School of Religion, she went on to receive a Doctor of Ministry degree from San Francisco Theological Seminary. In 2003, Bishop Flunder was consecrated Presiding Bishop of The Fellowship, a multi-denominational fellowship of 110 primarily African American Christian leaders and laity representing 56 churches and faith-based organizations. ▼



Julie Kilmer

The Rev. Dr. Julie J. Kilmer teaches at the Ecumenical Theological Seminary in Detroit. She is also a hospice chaplain. She

is the Coalition representative to the UCC Executive Council and previously has represented the Coalition on the board of the Office of General Ministries. Julie and her partner, Cheryl, live in Eagle, Mich., with their three children. ▼



Phil Porter

Phil Porter is the minister of art and communication at First Congregational Church of Berkeley, Calif. He has been active in the Coalition for over 30 years.

He was a member of the search committee that recommended the Rev. Geoffrey Black for the post of General Minister and President. He is the cofounder of InterPlay, a global social movement dedicated to ease, connection, human sustainability and play. In the Coalition’s new structure, Phil serves as moderator of the Leadership Team. ▼

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**Ammon Ripple**

Ammon Ripple works with local and regional ecumenical and interfaith communities at the National Council of the Churches. He was a faculty librarian and library administrator at the University of Pittsburgh for 13 years before answering a call to ordained ministry. He earned an M.Div. from Union Theological Seminary in New York City in 2010 and is discerning ordination as a member of Broadway UCC in Manhattan. Ammon preaches part-time at First Congregational Church of Woodbridge, N.J., and was chair of the UCC Coalition Nominating Committee. He is the Coalition's treasurer. ▼

**Enzi Tanner**

Enzi Tanner is a Black American transgender spoken-word artist. He's a student at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities where he is pursuing an M.Div. with an emphasis on peace and justice. Enzi is currently seeking ordination in the UCC. As a street-based outreach worker for Lutheran Social Services of Minnesota, Enzi connects at-risk and homeless youth with resources. He has committed his life to community organizing in areas of intersections, in particular where issues of race, gender, sexuality, faith and economic justice collide. He is steward of intersectionality for the UCC Genderfold Alliance and a leader in TransSaints, a ministry of The Fellowship. ▼

**Rebecca Voelkel**

The Rev. Rebecca Voelkel is Faith Work Director for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and director of the Institute for Welcoming Resources and. Previously, she was the Coalition's interim national coordinator, pastor of Spirit of the Lakes UCC in Minneapolis and program staff for the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence. She is a trainer in faith-based community organizing. Rebecca and her partner, Maggie, are parents of Shannon MacKenzie, their four-year-old daughter. ▼

**Barbara Mason Rathbun**

The Rev. Barbara is co-chair of the Southern Conference's Re/Structuring Action Team. On the Leadership Team, she serves as transition adviser. She is a contributing writer for the UCC's "Faith Practices" resource. Her career as a pastor has included posts in Indiana and North Carolina. She is an avid quilter, reader and musician. ▼

**Michael Schuenemeyer**

The Rev. Mike Schuenemeyer is minister for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Concerns in the UCC's national office and executive for health and wholeness advocacy in Wider Church Ministries. His leadership helped secure passage of General Synod resolutions supporting marriage equality and international human rights for LGBT people. Mike was executive producer for the film, "Call Me Malcolm," and serves as executive director for UCAN Inc., the UCC HIV and AIDS Network. He is national staff representative on the Coalition's Leadership Team. ▼



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