

On the Way

February 2, 2009

CENTRAL PACIFIC CONFERENCE * UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

*Extravagant Grace * Generous Hearts * Renewed World*

In the January 22nd issue of *On the Way*, I talked about the Obama inspired YouTube video collage, *Yes We Can*, created and performed by rapper will.i.am, lead singer for the group Black Eyed Peas. If you're a fan of Dr. Seuss, it's a natural jump from "will.i.am" to "Sam-I-Am," the central character in the Seuss favorite, *Green Eggs and Ham*."

I googled the two names, and found a blog, *The Utah Amicus*, which claims proof of the connection, straight from the artist's mouth!

I asked him about his name. He explained that he loved Dr. Seuss as a kid and one day he showed his mom that his name William spelled out Will-I-Am like Sam-I-Am. Later, his mother told him that if he was going to use will.i.am as his stage name he better do something substantial because the I Am had a deeper meaning.

Of course! I AM. The name of God. When the shepherd, Moses, heard the voice of God in the burning bush, he asked for verification of identity!

But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': This is my name forever and this my title for all generations." (Exodus 3:13-15 NRSV)

The NRSV Oxford Annotated notes add, "Or *I AM WHAT I AM* or *I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE*. The word "Lord" when spelled with capital letters stands for the divine name, YHWH, which is here connected with the verb hayah, "to be."

I AM. The essence of life. Paul Tillich's name for the divine mystery: "The ground of being." I AM.

The writer of the Gospel of John uses this sacred name to introduce seven metaphors for Jesus as the anointed one of God.

- "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35)
- "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12; 9:5)
- "I am the gate for the sheep" (John 10:7, 9)
- "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:14)
- "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25)
- "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6)
- "I am the true vine" (John 15:1, 5)

All of this “I am” sent my mind spinning, and I heard the past echo “I am somebody.” I confess, I couldn’t remember the speaker. Thanks be for google! I quickly discovered the litany of a young Jesse Jackson. Here’s what Wikipedia says about the poem:

According to The Reader's Companion to American History, the poem was written as part of push-Excel, a program designed to motivate black students. [Jackson] recited the free verse poem on Sesame Street in 1971, geared to fulfilling Sesame Street 's initial curriculum for serving under-privileged city children, as well as promoting cultural understanding. On Sesame Street, lines of "I am/Somebody" or "But I am/Somebody" were recited in a call and response fashion by Jackson and the children. During the segment children of all races were scattered all over the Sesame Street set, on the street, benches, fire escapes, and led by Jackson in the poem. This performance is included on the 2006 DVD release Sesame Street: Old School 1969–1974.

I Am – Somebody

I Am
Somebody
I Am
Somebody
I May Be Poor
But I Am
Somebody
I May Be Young
But I Am
Somebody
I May Be On Welfare
But I Am
Somebody
I May Be Small
But I Am
Somebody
I May Make A Mistake
But I Am
Somebody
My Clothes Are Different
My Face Is Different
My Hair Is Different
But I Am
Somebody
I Am Black
Brown
White
I Speak A Different Language
But I Must Be Respected
Protected
Never Rejected
I Am
God's Child
I Am
Somebody

OK. Are you ready? The circle starts to close...

In the “Cultural Reference” notes of the Wikipedia article cited above, I was surprised to read about a Jackson appearance on the comedy show, Saturday Night Live:

About a month after Dr. Seuss died in 1991, Saturday Night Live paid tribute to the book Green Eggs and Ham, by having Jackson appear on the "Weekend Update" segment and recite it in the same oratative fashion he performs his own poem.

You can paste this in your browser to watch the performance:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PPxPciXcJvc&feature=related>.

One more step to bring us back to where we began...Another “Cultural Reference” note:

"I Am - Somebody" also inspired a similarly titled song on Carlos Santana's 2005 album, "All That I Am", which featured the American rapper will.i.am of the Black Eyed Peas.

will.i.am not only performed the song, he wrote it together with George Pajon, Jr.

So. What’s the point of this confusing mixture of silliness and sacred? Two weeks ago, I had no idea who will.i.am was. A little on-the-road listening to an NPR interview started me down an unexpected path. By the time I stopped, I heard sacred voices from my own burning bush...

- will.i.am and his rap video rendition of the inspiring words of Barak Obama
- Paul Tillich’s awe-filled whispering of God’s name, the *ground of being*
- Jesse Jackson’s call-and-response affirmation of diversity, *I am – Somebody*
- A “try something new” tribute to one of my favorite theologians, Dr. Seuss

The way I see it, I AM, the essence of life, weaves in and through our daily lives in ways beyond our ability to count. We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses to the sacredness of life. All we need are ears to hear and eyes to see as we follow Jesus *On the Way*.

Face-to-Face Ministry Team Meetings

Administration Ministry Team - Saturday, February 7, from 9 a.m. to noon at Cedar Hills UCC, 11685 SW Park Way at Cedar Hills Blvd., Portland 97205.

Spring Assembly set for May 1st & 2nd in Eugene, OR

The Spring Assembly of the Central Pacific Conference will be held at Eugene First Congregational UCC on May 1-2. The theme is: "*Holy Habits: Faith Practices for Transformation.*" If you have a proposal for a workshop or a request for display space, now is a good time to contact the planning committee. Email Dick White at richard.a.white@netzero.net.

Spirituality Retreat – February 20th-22nd ~ Janet Scott

Come away and rest in the beautiful sanctuary of Shalom Prayer Center at Mt. Angel. You are invited to take a weekend to nourish your spirit. “Bread For the Journey” is a retreat facilitated by UCC ministers and is a feast of spiritual practices and opportunities- lectio divina, contemplative prayer, breath prayer, yoga, taize, hiking, reiki, labyrinth, and community. This is the seventh annual retreat for the Central Pacific Conference supported by the Spirituality Ministries Working Group. If you have questions, contact Janet Scott 541-345-8741 or janets@fccc Eugene.org.

You are invited to the Ordination of Catherine Rolling – Sunday, February 15th

The Central Pacific Conference of the United Church of Christ and Ainsworth United Church of Christ invite you to celebrate the Service of Ordination with Catherine Rolling.



February 15th at 3:00 p.m.

at a gathering of community at
Ainsworth United Church of Christ
2941 NE Ainsworth, Portland, OR 97211

Clergy are invited to robe and process.

Covenants Ministry Team Actions – Saturday, January 31st

Mark Roberts (Hillsdale Community UCC & Eden Seminary) is recommended to an Ecclesiastical Council for approval for Ordination Pending Call.

Dale Bowman(Beavercreek UCC & CPC webmaster) is approved for transfer of standing to the CPC.

Anne Dunlap (Bridgeport UCC) is approved for ordination following her call to serve as pastor of a Spanish speaking congregation, Comunidad Liberación, in Denver, CO. Her congregation is hosted and nurtured by Mayflower UCC.

We hold these colleagues in our prayers. May God bless them in their ministries.

Are You Going to Synod? Grand Rapids, MI – June 26th-30th, 2009

The Central Pacific Conference has four delegates elected to General Synod. I know that some of you attend Synod as representatives of National boards, and others attend as visitors. If you are going to be at Synod in Grand Rapids, please let me know so we can include you in our plans.

A Documentary Contribution to our ongoing UCC Sacred Conversation on Race

Here is a good opportunity to learn about racism in Portland, OR. Next Thursday evening, February 5 at 9:00 pm, Oregon Public Broadcasting will air their 1991 documentary entitled "Local Color." This program repeats Sunday February 8 at 3:00 AM and 11 PM. According to the OPB Member Guide, this documentary "chronicles the little-known history of racism in Oregon and the moving story of people, both black and white, who worked for civil rights . . .This historic documentary preserves stories that might otherwise be lost and forgotten."

Lake Oswego UCC leads the way in support for One Great Hour of Sharing

Congratulations and Thanks to Lake Oswego UCC! In the February/March 2009 issue of UCNews, our Lake Oswego church is recognized for their high per capita contribution to OGHS. They came out #5 of 12 churches recognized, with a giving rate of \$35.82 per member in 2007. LO has traditionally been at or near the top in OGHS giving for the Central Pacific Conference.

Clergy Clusters

Idaho Clergy – Wednesday, Feb. 4th, 10:00 am, First Cong. UCC, Mountain Home, ID

Portland Metro East/West – Thursday, Feb. 19th, 12:00 pm, Hillsdale Community UCC, Portland, OR

Camp Adams Mid-Winter Retreat for Middle-High Youth is Cancelled

Faced with low registration numbers, the planning team decided to cancel the Middle-High Mid-Winter retreat, scheduled for February 6th – 8th at Camp Adams.

EMO (Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon) Media Alert

Interfaith community advocates for climate stewardship at Oregon state capitol

WHAT: “Interfaith Climate Stewardship Advocacy Day.” The event will include reflections on global warming as a moral issue, advocacy training, briefings on climate and energy legislation, panel of citizens and legislators, and keynotes by Bishop David Brauer-Rieke, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Oregon Synod, and a representative from Governor Ted Kulongoski’s office. After lunch, participants will visit with their legislators and return for a debriefing.

Individuals and groups from congregations are encouraged to participate. The registration fee is \$15 before Feb. 20, and \$20 after that date. Look for more information and download a registration form at www.emoregon.org or call (503) 221-1054.

WHEN: Wednesday, March 4, 2009, 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

WHERE: Hudson Hall, Willamette University, Salem, Ore.

WHO: The event is being sponsored by Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon’s Interfaith Power & Light in partnership with Office of the Chaplains of Willamette University and the Center for Religion, Law and Democracy, Willamette University. Co-sponsors include the Oregon Jewish Committee, Muslim Educational Trust, Eco-Justice Team of the Presbytery of the Cascades, Douglas County Global Warming Coalition and First United Methodist Church in Portland.

WHY: Global warming has become a key moral issue for people of all faiths. The 2009 Oregon Legislature presents outstanding opportunities for helping Oregon become a leader in global warming solutions. This workshop will equip people of faith to make a difference through the legislative process. The key legislative priorities that will be highlighted on advocacy day include: setting a cap for global warming pollution, boosting energy efficiency, and investing in clean energy and more efficient transportation.

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon’s (EMO) Oregon Interfaith Power & Light project engages the faith community to strive for accountability in our individual and collective energy decisions in an interdependent world. EMO is a statewide association of Christian denominations—including Protestant, Roman Catholic and Orthodox bodies—congregations, ecumenical organizations and interfaith partners working together to improve the lives of Oregonians through community ministry programs, ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue, environmental ministry and public policy advocacy.

Central Pacific Conference Establishes Educational Partnership with The Center for Spiritual Development

Through our Local Church Ministry Team, the CPC is now a partner with The Center for Spiritual Development, a program of Trinity Episcopal Cathedral in Portland, OR. Members of CPC churches can attend Center events at Trinity member rates. This is typically \$10 for lectures, \$35 for workshops and 10 – 15-percent off classes and retreats. Tickets for lectures and workshops and registrations for classes are available online at www.center-for-spiritual-development.org. Just enter coupon code “UCC” at checkout to receive the discounted rate.

In a welcome e-mail, associate director Ellen Yarnell says, “*We are delighted that the UCC has partnered with us in our effort to increase Biblical and spiritual literacy in our region. As one UCC pastor said of our Summer Seminars, ‘this has become my new PSR.’ Thank you for your support.*”

Use the discount mentioned above to hear Diana Butler Bass

After Jesus: Enacting the Great Command

**Weekend Presentation with Internationally Known Religion Scholar
Diana Butler Bass**

Evening Lecture: *Spiritual Amnesia: How We Lost the Insights of Regular People*

Friday, March 27, 2009, 7:30 – 9:00pm

Trinity Episcopal Cathedral

147 NW 19th Avenue, Portland, OR 97209

Cost: \$15 general, \$5 students

Saturday Workshop: *Remembering Anew: Becoming a Community of Memory, History and Story & Finding Hope: The Accumulated Human Experience of God*

Saturday, March 28, 2009, 9:00am – 3:00pm

Trinity Cathedral – Kempton Hall

Cost: \$50 general, \$15 students (includes lunch)

Portland, Ore. – The Center for Spiritual Development is honored to present an evening lecture and Saturday workshop with **Diana Butler Bass**, religion and culture scholar known for her work on the revitalization of the church, **March 27 & 28, 2009 at Trinity Episcopal Cathedral**. Bass will introduce her audience to her latest research on the history of Christianity in America. In the same spirit as Howard Zinn's groundbreaking work *The People's History of the United States*, Butler Bass' weekend presentations bring to life the movements, personalities, and spiritual disciplines that have always informed and ignited Christian worship and social activism.

For too long, the history of Christianity has been told as the triumph of orthodox doctrine imposed through power and hierarchy. In her weekend presentations, taken from the research for her new book: ***A People's History of Christianity***, historian and religion expert **Diana Butler Bass** reveals an alternate history that includes a deep social ethic and far-reaching inclusivity: "the other side of the story" is not a modern phenomenon, but has always been practiced within the church. Butler Bass will persuasively argue that corrective—even subversive—beliefs and practices have always been hallmarks of Christianity and are necessary to nourish communities of faith.

In these presentations, Bass authenticates the vital, emerging Christian movements of our time, providing the historical evidence that celebrates these movements as thoroughly Christian and faithful to the mission and message of Jesus.

Diana Butler Bass is an author, speaker, and independent scholar specializing in American religion and culture. Her six books including the best-selling *Christianity for the Rest of Us*, *The Practicing Congregation: Imagining a New Old Church* and her most recent, *A People's History of Christianity*, a history of Christian spirituality and social justice, scheduled for March 2009 release from Harper One. From 2002 to 2006, she was the Project Director of a national Lilly Endowment funded study of mainline Protestant vitality—a project featured in Newsweek, U.S. News and World Report, the Washington Post and the Los Angeles Times. She serves on the board of directors of the Beatitudes Society, and participates as an advisor for Emergent Village and Synagogue 3000. She is part of Sojourner's Red Letter Christians and is a regular contributor to the God's Politics blog on Beliefnet.

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The Center for Spiritual Development is a program and ministry for learning and spiritual development at Trinity Episcopal Cathedral. The mission of The Center is to offer ways to deepen relationships with God, explore issues of faith and practice rooted in the Christian tradition and in the world's great faith traditions, encourage journeys of transformation that increase compassionate commitment to others, and open and inform our daily lives through the workings of the Spirit. We provide learning opportunities for five program areas: Public Lectures, Spirituality Courses, Spiritual Practice, the Ministry of Healing and Wholeness, and Pilgrimage.

“Faithful to Oregon’s Future” – 2009 Interfaith Advocacy Day in Salem, OR

Date: Thursday, February 19, 2009

Location:

Morning events take place at St. Mark's Lutheran Church, 790 Marion St. NE, Salem.

Registration: \$15 per person (includes lunch), \$10 Students. Optional parking permit: \$6.

Registration deadline is Tuesday, February 17.

Registration form: http://www.emoregon.org/pdfs/2009_IAD_Registration%20Form.pdf

For more information: Call EMO at (503) 221-1054 or e-mail kfinney@emoregon.org.

Agenda:

8 to 9 a.m. – Registration and Appointment Assignments with Coffee, Tea and Bagels/Pastries

9 a.m. – Welcome and Invocation. *David Leslie, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon • Associate Pastor Shelley Willem, St. Mark Lutheran*

9:15 a.m. – "Advocacy from the Religious Perspective"

9:30 a.m. – Music to Lift the Spirits and Change the World

9:45 – 11:15 a.m. - "Advocacy 101" and "Issue Briefings Panel."

Moderated by *Bob Horenstein* and Featuring:

- Health Care and Human Services – *Cathy Kaufman, Children First for Oregon and the Human Services Coalition of Oregon (HSCO)*
- Affordable Housing – *Michael Anderson, The Housing Alliance*
- Hunger — *Stephanie Tama-Sweet, Oregon Food Bank*

11:15 a.m. – Break

11:30 a.m. – Lunch and Keynote Address by *Speaker of the House Dave Hunt*

12:45 p.m. – Blessing and Procession to Capitol

1 p.m. – Welcome on Capitol Steps and Greetings from the Legislature

1 – 4 p.m. – Legislative Visits

4 p.m. – Benediction (State Capitol, Room 50)

A Personal Note . . .

This is the first *On the Way*, on the road! I'm sending this to you from Boise, ID. I flew in today, and am spending the night at the home of past CPC moderator Steve Scanlin. Tomorrow I'll have lunch with Larry Crist, Regional Minister in southern Idaho for the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ. Tomorrow night, I'll meet with the search committee at First Congregational UCC, Nampa, ID. On Wednesday, I'll drive down to First Congregational UCC, Mountain Home, ID. to meet with the Idaho clergy cluster. Tuesday and Wednesday nights, I'll be the houseguest of Ed and June Robertson from our Nampa church.

I'll be back in Portland on Friday, to join the Camp Adams Board of Governors as they continue their search for a director. On Sunday, I'll preach at First Congregational UCC, Astoria, OR. On March 1st, you'll find me in the pulpit of Cedar Hills UCC, Portland. The following Sunday, I'll be the guest preacher at Riverside Community UCC, Hood River, OR.

The week of February 15th, I'll be at the UCC Church House in Cleveland for the consultation for Conference Ministers.

Yours in Christ, walter john

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