

## February 15

Micah 7:18-20  
Romans 3:21-31  
Psalm 121

God's faithfulness  
Paul relates law and faith  
The Lord watches over you

The Rev. Bob Molsberry, Illinois South Conference Representative to the UCC Wider Church Ministries, was astounded by the incredible generosity of our church in donating \$10.5 million to relief work in 2005. Long after the television crews move on, our funds and volunteers remain for the long-term support needed. Unfortunately, Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM) hasn't experienced this same largesse in increased institutional giving. More donations are being retained in the local church setting and at the Conference level and less to national and global ministries. The Rev. Molsberry knows that mission has a face. While it's easy to see that face locally, we must see, in our hearts, the faces of those who are transformed through our giving even if they don't make the national news.

### PRAYER:

*God of amazing compassion, lover of our wayward race, you bring to birth a pilgrim people, and call us to be a blessing for ourselves and all the world. We pray for grace to take your generous gift and step with courage on this holy path, confident in the radiant life that is your plan for us, made known and given in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

## February 16

Isaiah 51:4-8  
Luke 7:1-10  
Psalm 121

God's word means justice for all  
Room at the table of Abraham  
The Lord watches over you

With the idea that the local church is a "mission outpost", the Kansas-Oklahoma Conference conducted a forum on Congregations Going Global, sponsored by the UCC/Disciples of Christ Ecumenical Task Force and Global Ministries. Part of the day's discussions included exploration of congregationally-based global partnerships, the keys to a successful partnership, finding a suitable fit for individual congregations, resources available and why these partnerships are important. Host church, St. Andrew (DOC) in Olathe and Community of Hope (UCC) in Tulsa shared their stories of the vital importance – spiritually, politically and economically – of the partnerships they maintain with congregations in El Salvador and Nicaragua respectively. In the words of theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, these partnerships "make room for the gospel in the world."

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## SUNDAY FEBRUARY 10

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT



# Wilderness Encounters

Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7  
Psalm 32  
Romans 5:12-19  
Matthew 4:1-11

Eating of the tree of knowledge  
Mercy embraces us  
Death come, life comes  
The temptation of Jesus

There is a huge disconnect between many Americans and the process by which their food "magically" appears at the grocery store. Julie Dawson, a doctoral student at Washington State

University and a member of First Congregational Church in Ithaca, NY, wants to change that by reconnecting people with nature – a place where she feels a strong connection to God. Julie was looking for a place where she could focus on sustainable agriculture and pursue public research to benefit people. She found that place at Washington State University in Pullman, which also led her to the Palouse Food Project (PFP).

David Gruenewald of WSU's College of Education started the project while teaching a class on how communities and schools can benefit one another. To illustrate his point, he proposed using part of Pullman's community gardens to grow produce that would then be donated to the food bank.

The fresh food was a huge hit with the food bank clients and the plot thickens from there! PFP has several sponsors including Backyard Harvest – a new project which picks up excess produce from home gardens and brings it to the food banks. Julie manages two plots for the PFP and said that in the summer of 2006, a total of 2,000 pounds of fresh produce was distributed to 516 households. The project has inspired a gardening club at a local elementary school, composting education and activities that address issues of poverty and hunger. Julie is making a difference in bringing about long-term change.

### PRAYER:

*God of mercy, your word was the sure defense of Jesus in his time of testing. Minister to us in the wilderness of our temptation, that we who have been set free from sin by Christ may serve you well into life everlasting. Amen.*

## February 11

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1 Kings 19:1-8  
Hebrews 2:10-18  
Psalm 32

An angel feeds Elijah in the wilderness  
Christ goes before us in suffering  
Mercy embraces us

**W**e can use the lessons learned from solving smaller problems to help us make strides in larger ones. The Rev. Dr. John Prochaska hopes this will be the case as Venezuela and America struggle to find a just solution in distributing the wealth and natural resources inherent in the Maracaibo oil reserves. While on a mission trip to Maracaibo, Dr. Prochaska helped renovate the office of the United Evangelical Pentecostal Church of Venezuela. He learned to tear down old walls standing in the way of progress, to seal old doorways that needed to be closed and to open new doorways to lead to new entries. He prays that the political leaders of Venezuela and America will do the same as decisions are made about Maracaibo.

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## February 12

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Genesis 4:1-16  
Hebrews 4:14-5:10  
Psalm 32

God protects Cain  
Christ was tempted as we are  
Mercy embraces us

**S**cott Nicholson has a powerful “weapon” in his fight against injustice in Colombia. He is tall and blonde, characteristics that make the paramilitary and military reluctant to take action against him in front of international witnesses. Scott serves as a short-term volunteer with Social Organizations of Arauca, Colombia and accompanies human rights workers in times of crisis. In August of 2006, he visited the Saravena Community Water Company – a community owned and managed company which supplies clean drinking water to approximately 20,000 residents. The Colombian government sees the company as a guerrilla project and wants it handed over to a private corporation. Despite murders of workers and the destruction of a water pipeline, the people of Saravena are continuing their mission to bring clean, affordable water to their community.

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## February 13

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Exodus 34:1-9, 27-28  
Matthew 18:10-14  
Psalm 32

God's revelation of mercy  
Not one of these little ones should be lost  
Mercy embraces us

**T**he mission of Dubois Center – a church camp associated with the UCC Illinois South Conference – is to provide a setting where individuals discover Christian community, feel acceptance and love as whole persons, deepen one's faith in God, and practice caring for all of God's creation. One of the ways Dubois Center advanced this goal was in the theme of their 2006 Summer Camp – “Peace Talks.” Campers met counselors from England, Croatia, Colombia, the Ukraine and South Africa who brought and shared their history and stories. During each daily devotion time, a scripture lesson was discussed that introduced various interpretations of peace. No matter the translation – aloha, shalom, agape, ubuntu, heiwa – peace at the camp was described as a picture of God's desire for humankind.

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## February 14

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Isaiah 51:1-3  
2 Timothy 1:3-7  
Psalm 121

Look to Abraham and Sarah  
Faith handed down from faithful mothers  
The Lord watches over you

**N**ot all missionary work takes place in developing world countries. Several faith-based groups work to prevent deaths along the Mexico-Arizona border and in the desert by maintaining water stations and patrolling the desert in search of migrants in distress. One group, Humane Borders, maintains 83 water stations in the desert with the help of UCC congregations including Shadow Rock Congregational, Desert Palm UCC, Shepherd of the Hills UCC and First Samoan Congregational Christian Church. The Good Shepherd UCC in Sahuarita, AZ started the Green Valley Samaritan, a migrant rescue program and members are also active in No More Deaths – a group that provides food to relief camps. All of these organizations work toward creating a humane, non-militarized border and legitimate work opportunities for migrants.

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