

What an amazing and complex week this has been!

I have one more day of meetings here in Cleveland at the Convention Center. The General Synod 2015 of the United Church of Christ will conclude on Tuesday evening with a celebratory worship service. The theme this year is: UNEXPECTED PLACES.

This week has been one of celebration, hard work, tears, laughter, play, getting reacquainted and meeting new people from all over the world. Following are one paragraph descriptions of much larger events. The URLs are provided for further reading.....

There was one amazing God-incident:

"How tremendously exciting that we can celebrate this huge historic moment together, as a gathered denomination here at General Synod, at the same time we are also commemorating the 10-year anniversary of our early support for marriage equality and our 30-year Open and Affirming UCC movement," said the Rev. J. Bennett Guess, the first openly-gay UCC national officer, whose marriage is now legal in the state of Ohio. "We've been at this a long time, and when the final story is written on how marriage equality came to this country, it will be impossible for anyone to ignore the significant leadership that the United Church of Christ, our churches and leaders, contributed toward making this victory for LGBTQ families possible.

Read More:

[http://www.ucc.org/news\\_general\\_synod\\_marriage\\_equality\\_06262015](http://www.ucc.org/news_general_synod_marriage_equality_06262015)



Serving on the committee responsible for reviewing and preparing the Resolution: *“Calling on the United Church of Christ to Recognize the Actions of Israel Against the Palestinians as Apartheid”* was soul wrenching as I was required to attend an educational intensive to learn the historical context for the issue from an objective historian and then having Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb, a Palestinian Lutheran Pastor, who serves Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem since 1988 in the room to help us understand the dynamics of being born in Bethlehem and living in Bethlehem today under the occupational politics of Israel. Today Bethlehem is a walled city and the people’s lives are severely limited by the Occupation.



Rev. Raheb stated in his sermon at worship this evening that he and Jesus have two things in common: They were both born in Bethlehem and like him, Jesus lived in an occupied land. Jesus was subject to the Romans and Rev. Raheb, a Palestinian, is subject to the Israelis.

Rev. Paul Raushenbush is the Executive Religion Editor for the Huffington Post. His message to us yesterday was titled: *“Struggle for the Soul of the Church.”* After a stirring message he challenged the church to extend into two “unexpected” places: Campus ministry and the Internet Social Media.

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[http://www.ucc.org/news\\_general\\_synod\\_a\\_struggle\\_for\\_the\\_soul\\_of\\_the\\_church\\_06292015](http://www.ucc.org/news_general_synod_a_struggle_for_the_soul_of_the_church_06292015)



“It is within our power — in this unexpected place at this unexpected time — to change the damn world,” the Rev. Dwayne D. Royster charged the capacity crowd at the General Synod Sunday community worship service.

“Will we?”

A mountain of a man, draped in Joseph’s coat of many colors, the bishop of Living Water United Church of Christ in Philadelphia chose to title his sermon *Change the Damn World!* “I’m not cussing — or maybe I am — but this is a theological statement. “Far too many people in this country wake up every day feeling like they’re already living in hell.”

Read more:

[http://www.ucc.org/news\\_general\\_synod\\_its\\_within\\_our\\_power\\_to\\_change\\_the\\_damn\\_world\\_06282015](http://www.ucc.org/news_general_synod_its_within_our_power_to_change_the_damn_world_06282015)



In mixing with folks and in meetings I heard frequently about places where our presence is sorely missing and sorely needed; one of these unexpected places is the Military. One of the Women Chaplains addressed the Synod during a Speak Out session telling us that the Military is desperate for UCC Clergy who are equipped to work with the diverse people's needs especially the LGBTQ population who have no one for counseling.

The GALA "A Place Like This" dinner Saturday evening to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the beginning of the UCC here in Cleveland featured a keynote address from noted director, screenwriter, author and film producer Antwone Fisher, a native Clevelander, who told his life story from a young abandoned street child and youth to his Hollywood success. The GALA benefits the literacy ministry.



[http://www.ucc.org/general\\_synod\\_gala\\_antwone\\_fisher\\_02062015](http://www.ucc.org/general_synod_gala_antwone_fisher_02062015)

There is so very much richness in being together 3000 strong; singing, praying, discussing, discerning, disagreeing and voting. The musicians were outstanding and we had the opportunity to experience a variety of music. On Saturday evening after the Gala Dinner some of us walked over to the Church House at 700 Prospect and participated in a Jazz Vespers service. The Amistad Chapel was maxed out with people filling all of the chairs and leaning against the walls. General Minister and President Geoffrey Black led the narrative reflections.

I have been serving UCC churches for 10 years and this was my first General Synod. What an incredible experience of prayer and solidarity.

For full information: [www.UCC.org/synod](http://www.UCC.org/synod).

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