



God is still speaking,

at Lakeview United Church of Christ

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

INSTALLATION DATE SET FOR NEW MINISTER AT MAINEVILLE PROGRESSIVE CHURCH

Evolving Attitudes About Church and Religion Presents a Challenge for Minister/Young Congregation

One of Maineville's youngest mainline congregations - under 30 years old - will install its third permanent pastor at a special service on Valentine's Day, February 14 at 3:30 p.m. in the church sanctuary. Rev. Jennifer Bannerman was elected to minister Lakeview United Church of Christ in July of last year.

Rev. Bannerman was formerly senior minister of Birmingham UCC in Pittsburgh, PA. She received her Masters of Divinity at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary in Berkeley, CA and is expected to receive her Doctorate in Divinity this May through the Luther Seminary of St. Paul, MN.

Pastor Jennifer, as she is often referred to by church members, says that her last four years of ministry and her study for her doctorate has given her the opportunity to learn in-depth how current trends and shifting paradigms are shaping congregations. She admits that no one yet has discovered the solution to declining attendance in mainline churches, but her studies and experience offer insight to the process of how to adapt to modern times.

She sees the membership of the church and their fear of change directly relating to the struggles and hard times experienced by Moses in the desert with the Israelites. "Many church folk I have talked to feel as if they are lost in the wilderness, not knowing anymore what to do to bring people to church or to God." says Bannerman. "They can long for the good old days as much as they want, but if they do not start making changes, they will not last for long." She adds, "We need to somehow help our people understand that being open to the changing world can be a way to go deeper into our core convictions. . . . If we never let anything challenge our beliefs, then how do we really know what we believe?"

The United Church of Christ itself models Bannerman's attitudes about adapting to the times. It is a congregation that

No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here.

establishes its mission statements based on lay leadership for the most part, in contrast to other church denominations that rely on a pastorate hierarchy to instruct and dictate to the congregation. Lakeview United Church of Christ has as part of its Mission Statement: “We are a people that continue to discern and be inspired by a still speaking God. We are a church that takes the Bible seriously, but not literally and invites all to the communion table.”

In early 2009, after much conversation and consternation, Lakeview voted to become an “Open and Affirming” church following the UCC Synod recommendations made back in 1980. The term “Open and Affirming” means that a church does not discriminate, and in fact welcomes, those for whom sexual orientation and gender identity have meant exile from a spiritual community.

The process of discussion for this decision was not without the agony of losing members and the pain associated with the loss of years-long relationships. Donna Wyatt, who was Council Moderator for 2008 and 2009, says that “The leaders of Lakeview at that time felt we needed to handle this conflict within our congregation prior to hiring a new minister. We felt that we had no chance of hiring a minister to a church still tottering dangerously on the edge of the fence on this issue.” She adds that “Our congregation painstakingly listened and invited our members to dialogue at every opportunity.” Wyatt feels that Lakeview UCC has come through the ordeal and is stronger for having done so.

Council 2010 Moderator, Bob Sandman, says of the future of Lakeview UCC with Pastor Jennifer, “Our goal as a church is to involve people into a community of love and hope. We want to serve others and we want to learn where God is leading us both as members of the local church, members of the larger church and as individual who follow Christ.”

Members of UCC clergy from southern Ohio and northern Kentucky congregations are expected to attend the Installation Service on the 14th as well as clergy and administrators of the Ohio Conference of the United Church of Christ located near Dayton. The United Church of Christ’s national headquarters is in Cleveland, Ohio.

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