

Central Southeast NEWS

Central Southeast Ohio Association

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Comments and suggestions are welcome. Please send copy to the Association office by the first of the month for publication the following month.

India travel adventure

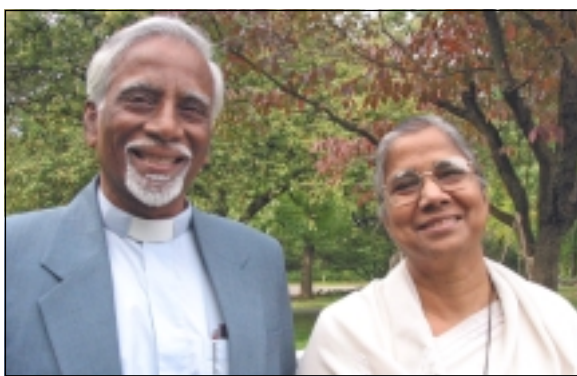
Join other Columbus UCC members on a January 2009 tour to exotic India that will culminate with a firsthand inspection of the Deep Griha mission in Pune, India. The tour may include Rajasthan (a living museum), a boat ride at dawn on the sacred Hindu River Ganges in Varanasi, a morning safari, and the Taj Mahal in Agra.

The India tour and visit to the UCC-supported mission is a joint venture of members of Columbus' **First Congregational UCC** and **First Community Church**, who have supported Deep Griha since 1975, when it began as a medical dispensary which Neela Onawale operated from a room of his home. Neela and Bhaskar Onawale will be our guides in Pune. They spent a year at First Congregational and First Community churches in 1972, then returned to Pune and formed Deep Griha, which means "lighthouse."

Although Neela was the only staff person in 1972, no patient was ever sent away because of their creed, nationality or lack of money. In 2006 Deep Griha had over 100 employees, and the organization served 46,500 persons at a cost of less than \$6 per person.

Deep Griha is devoted to child welfare and development. Thousands of children have received

nutrition, immunizations, medical checkups and other services through numerous child care cen-



Neela and Bhaskar Onawale will guide the tour in Pune, India.

ters. Family education and training for employment, such as tailoring and embroidery, were added. The Women's Empowerment Program provides education, literacy courses, social awareness, and micro credit cooperatives.

Deep Griha was accredited and opened a technical vocational school and since 1998 has offered nurses' aide training classes. The organization provides AIDS awareness and eye health programs. It is funded by the Gates Foundation for a maternal health program.

City of Child, an orphanage, became a reality in 2000.

In 2007-2008 the Columbus churches raised \$125,000 to begin the construction of a primary school in a rural area near City of Child. Construction of the school will begin June 1, 2008.

For more information, contact Valerie or Phil Stichter (614-855-0730) or Barbara or Sandy Wood (614-486-0827).

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Mission trip dream comes true for group from North Congregational UCC

Have you ever dreamed about going on a mission trip? For 15 individuals, ages 13-60+ at **North Congregational UCC** in Columbus, this dream became reality.

On March 20-28, under the leadership of Student Pastor John Cramton, the group flew into Managua, stayed in the town of Masaya and visited various locations including Tipitapa, Ticuantepe and Granada.

During the week the group worked with Project Chacocente, visited several churches that are part of the Iglesia Mision Crisitana (new CSEOA partnership), visited the home of a potter who is part of a women's pottery co-op started with a micro-loan, ate



native Nicaraguan food and visited several sites of interest including Masyan Volcano National Park and Apoyo Lagoon.

Project Chacocente is a program that incorporates housing, farming, job skills, education, social skills, parenting, problem-solving, small business and values awareness into a single effort to transform the lives of the poorest of the poor.

The project moves families away from the garbage dump where they were existing and gives them the chance to start a new life. Our group had the pleasure of working with the families of Chacocente to help build an additional room on two of the families' homes as well as play with the children, speak with mothers and learn about some of their hardships, joys and their culture.

Chacocente was a vision of hope in a country where half the population is considered to live in poverty so extreme that they do not know when they will eat their next meal. It was truly an experience of a lifetime.

If your congregation or group would like to learn more about Project Chacocente and/or our time in Nicaragua, we would be happy to provide a presentation.

Contact Kim Heimlich at 740-726-2052, 614-915-7335 or chirms@aol.com for more information. You can learn more about Project Chacocente at www.outofthedump.org.

Don't ever stop dreaming about that mission trip, because it is well worth the effort when your dream comes true!



A lasting commitment to extravagant welcome

By Eric Williams, Pastor
North Congregational UCC

When the UCC began the God Is Still Speaking (GISS) campaign several years ago, **North Church** was immediately drawn into its message of extravagant welcome. We have been an ONA congregation in central Ohio for twelve years and have attracted many persons,

couples and families who had experienced either cold rejection or deep connection at previous congregations.

North Church today enjoys being a faith community of many different personal theological, spiritual and social experiences and expectations. This diversity works so well because we covenant to worship, study, work and be together as God's children who daily

look for and listen to the God Who Is Still Speaking in, through and among us all! When we look and listen for God, we discover with delight that we often see and hear God right here, right now!

The short history behind adopting the GISS slogan as a permanent part of North Church's message to our neighbors includes having a large red and black banner torn from the building. In

response we put up two banners, and shortly after that we began considering what you now see in the photo above. The permanent GISS sign is one of many artistic expressions of our extravagant welcome.

Wherever you are in your journey of faith, you are always welcome at North Church and every congregation of the United Church of Christ!

