

A Gospel Story Pilgrimage – The Summer of 2007

A ‘road trip’ is an American ideal. It’s part wagon train ‘Westward Ho!’ and part Jack Kerouac. It’s also a Christian tradition such as ‘pilgrimages’ of the faithful or the apostolic adventures that first brought the Good News to the world.

Next summer, I will be making a road trip from my parish in Florida to go to the General Synod of the United Church of Christ in Hartford Connecticut (where I will also perform during the “Synod in the City” events) and back. It is my belief that “God is still speaking” through the stories of the Bible and I am called to share them on a pilgrimage of art & the Spirit. It is with the blessing of my church, my conference, and the national setting of my denomination that I am sent – including an endorsement by John H. Thomas, the General Minister & President of the UCC:

"I hope many of our congregations will welcome Drew as an ambassador of the United Church of Christ, as a compelling narrator of the Biblical stories, and ... be connected to the church family as we celebrate our 50th anniversary."

I have been asked what my purpose is for doing this? It is my intention to do God's work by literally sharing the Good News of God's Beloved Community through art & story. Along the way, I hope to promote the United Church of Christ, stressing the ideals that hold us together by telling the stories of Jesus Christ – which transcend political debate and provide a common ground for all of us who are passionate about making this a better world.

And this effort includes presentations at churches and organizations not directly affiliated with the UCC – in keeping with its tradition of ecumenical outreach and cooperation. I am encouraging the places I visit to use this as an opportunity to do fundraising as well as enjoy an entertaining way for having fellowship.

This will also be an opportunity to demonstrate the importance of art and storytelling programs not only for children, but for adults as well. In the process, I hope to encourage churches to have patience for developing new ideas and creative programs by modeling one.

I also plan to make an illustrated log of my journey including portraits of the pastors, church members, seminarians, and other folks I meet. And I will be doing some listening, too, taking their responses back to the national setting of the UCC.

Willard, p.2

The trip will take three and a half weeks as I drive from Florida to Connecticut for the UCC General Synod and then on to Massachusetts. I will return by way of upstate New York and Pennsylvania to Washington, DC where I will catch the Autotrain back to Florida. There will be 17 places that I visit to do a story concert in addition to General Synod – where I will tie in with my friend Rev Chris “Doc” Anderson at the “God Is Still Creating” booth. My presentation includes three sets of stories that can be told together as an epic telling or with breaks to allow for music or other presentations. When I visit friends from NOBS (the Network of Biblical Storytellers) in Delaware, I will be just one storyteller among others, tailoring my presentation accordingly.

I will be telling stories that I have translated from the Greek and paraphrased with the Revised Standard Version of the Bible as another principal reference. The Synoptic Gospels edited by Kurt Aland and Bauers Greek-English Lexicon were indispensable tools in this process.

The use of ‘inclusive language’ is intended and does not stop with gender, but allows for cultural considerations (ie, “Judeans” as the politicized “Jews” of the First Century CE). Another example is the unpacking of labels to get past the crust of tradition and touch on deeper meaning, like “True Heir of Humanity” for “Son of Man”.

I have also taken some other liberties for the sake of dramatic license (such as portraying Mary Magdalene as the “beloved disciple”. The woman with the hemorrhage as Jairus’ daughter’s “mother” is another flagrant example). So this is a work of art that is inspired by the sacred texts as well as the “Drew Willard Version” or DWV, if you will.

The first set of stories is called *The Prologue* – a sample from each of the Gospels that describe the beginnings of Jesus Christ’s ministry from his baptism up to his transformation as a great teacher and wonder-worker. This will be about 15 minutes in length. The second set is about 30 minutes and is titled *The Sabbath*. It is a day in the life of Jesus – a day filled with wonders that happens to be a Sabbath day. The third set, *A Lovesong to God*, is also a half hour and describes Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem – and a love story featuring enemies (the Samaritans) and friends (Mary Magdalene).

I am asking for gas and pizza money and figured \$50 (a nice round number, considering it’s the UCC’s 50th Anniversary) per stop was reasonable, along with a safe place to spend the night. I suppose there could be a book come out of this – or how about a movie? I’ll encourage folks to take videos of my presentations so long as I get a copy – after all, fair’s fair.

Willard, p.3

But I'm doing this for the adventure of sharing the Faith through Art. I'm doing this for a world that has become disenchanted by spiritual poverty and violent retribution. The places that I am visiting are associated with people who have been part of *my* story and it is as much a pilgrimage to celebrate these *angels*, these *messengers of God* who continue to influence my life and guide me to *the One Who Is*, our true and beloved friend, Jesus.

And I'm doing this for others whom I hope will do something even better for the generations yet to come. It is my hope that other people will say, "I can do that!" and go off on their own Spirit journeys to share their art, or music, or dance, or drama, and even humor with others – just like Jesus did.

Drew Willard

Holiday, Florida

Autumn 2006

	The Pilgrimage Sites
6/11	Tallahassee United UCC Tallahassee, FL
6/15	NOBS Wilmington Chapter Westminster Presbyterian Church Wilmington, DE
6/16	East Goshen UCC West Chester, PA
6/18	Plainfield Congregational UCC Plainfield, NJ
6/19	1 st Congregational Church UCC Montclair, NJ
6/20	1 st Church of Christ UCC Groton, CT
6/21	1 st Congregational Church UCC Griswold, CT
6/22-26	UCC General Synod "God Is Still Creating" "Synod in the City" Hartford, CT
6/27	Canton UCC Canton, MA
6/28	1 st Congregational UCC Auburn, MA
6/29	Blooming Grove UCC Blooming Grove, NY
6/30	Touch the World Youth Ministries Kunkletown, PA
7/1	Phoebe Berks Health Care Ctr Wernersville, PA
7/2	Lancaster Theological Seminary Lancaster, PA
7/3	The Potter's House Coffeehouse Washington, DC
7/5	Holiday UCC Holiday, FL

Holiday United Church of Christ

<http://www.uccholidayfl.org/>

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The Florida Conference

<http://www.uccfla.org/indexsite.htm>

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