

## For Ministers, Religious Educators and Leaders



### June, 2009 – The Caican Water Project A Story for All Ages

Tapestry of Faith lifespan faith development curricula are published online by the UUA for our congregations to use, at no charge. The soon-to-be-published multigenerational program, Gather the Spirit, will include this story about a UU Partner Church relationship which nurtured a local project to secure healthy, flowing water for the community of Caican in the Philippines. The story is based on information provided by the Rev. Mike Young of the First Unitarian Church of Honolulu.

See Tapestry of Faith programs for children, youth and adults: [www.uua.org/tapestryoffaith](http://www.uua.org/tapestryoffaith).

### The Caican Water Project

Sometimes, the moment you meet someone, you know they will be a very important friend in your life. Other times, friendships start slowly. You might not know how important the friendship is for many years.

The partnership between a congregation in Honolulu, Hawaii, and a Unitarian Universalist Church in Caican, Philippines began slowly, with children exchanging letters and pictures.

After some years, Mike Young, minister of First Unitarian Church of Honolulu, had a chance to visit the Philippines, and he went to Caican. He met many generous, wonderful people at the partner church. But, it was the Caican children he fell in love with. One time a whole crowd, all ages, came swimming with him in the ocean of their coastal village.

The next year, Rev. Young went back to the Philippines and again, he spent a few days in Caican. Again, he swam in the ocean with the children. This time, one of their ministers came swimming too. Mike let the children use the dive mask he had brought. It was too big for them. Some water leaked in, but the Caican children did not mind because the mask helped them see their ocean fish, up close and personal!

Back on land, a Caican minister, Rev. Tirso Ponca, took Mike to one of the village's hand-pumped wells to wash off the salt water. The fresh water felt good. Rev. Young cupped his hands to take a drink.

Rev. Ponca sounded angry. He told Mike, "You must never do that! The water is not safe!" Later, Mike learned why Rev. Ponca had tried to protect him. For 20 years, the children of Caican had been born with yellow eyes. They had a condition called jaundice, a sign of a disease called Hepatitis A. Hepatitis germs were in the well

water—the water he had wanted to drink. Caican’s simple septic tanks and shallow aquifer could not adequately filter and recycle the village’s water. Water used for bathing and washing came back again through the public hand-pumped wells. The village of Caican had no safe drinking water.

Mike Young decided right then that babies in Caican would no longer be born with yellow eyes! Now he knew their congregation’s partnership could be so much more than letters, photographs, or even visits and playing in the ocean together. In his heart, Rev. Young had already begun the Caican Water Project.

In a true partnership, partners make plans together. Rev. Young had to find out if the people of Caican wanted to work on getting clean water for the village. Maybe there was something else more important the Honolulu congregation could help them get done.

So the people of Caican had community meetings. They talked about what was good about life in Caican, and ways they could make life even better. They listed problems they had tried to solve in the past and what had worked to solve them. For problems that were not solved yet, the people talked about what they could do differently to reach a solution. They talked about the time, the money and other resources they already had, which they could use to create solutions. They talked about ways local organizations or the government could help.

Because some people don’t like to talk at big meetings, community members went around to each person’s house to talk with them individually. Everyone had a chance to give their ideas to make life in Caican even better.

And the result of all this talk? The people of Caican agreed that clean water was the top priority to work on with their partner, First Unitarian Church of Honolulu. After Mike Young went home to Hawaii, the Caican people elected a committee to lead the water project. They started looking for sources of clean water.

They looked upstream of their aquifer and upstream of the recycling septic system. They found a clean, flowing spring that seemed to produce enough water for the village! The owner of the land agreed they could drill a well and put a pump there. When Mike returned to Caican, a happy parade of children, teenagers and adults took the American minister to see.

At first it seemed getting water from this spring would be a lot of work. They had to dig a well, get the pump and a tank and lay almost two miles of pipe to bring the water to Caican. They had to provide ways for people along the pipeline to get water, set up another tank and build faucets. But sometimes we get ahead of ourselves with what a big job we’ve got. Rev. Young remembered the first step was just to drill the well and make sure the water would really be clean to drink.

Drilling the well cost \$385, a fortune in the Philippines but not so much for the American congregation to raise. First Unitarian Church of Honolulu sent the money. The well was dug and everyone waited for test results. Would the water be safe to drink?

The new well was polluted. Not with hepatitis, but with a common bacteria, E. Coli. The people cleaned the well head. They pumped more water. This time the tester said, "Clean!"

Plans went ahead to lay pipe and build six faucets so the village would have drinkable water. Soon, maybe there will be a tap in every home. And Caican babies will no longer be born with yellow eyes.

It sounds like a happy ending: A partnership that started out as letters and photos, and became very, very important. But there have been two surprising results. One is that just as the Honolulu partners helped Caican's Unitarian Universalist congregation bring their village clean water, the Caican congregation has helped other villages in the Philippines. Caican villagers now teach people in other communities to organize the meetings and interviews that bring good community solutions to real community problems.

Another surprise—and not so happy—is that the water improvement in Caican may worsen the village's sewage problem. More water means more flushing. Mike Young knows the partnership's work is not finished. The next project is inevitable: a sewage system for Caican that works. Everything is connected.

## ***Connecting with Our Lives***

### **In Our Faith Communities**

- Does your congregation have a Partner Church? Learn more about international Unitarian Universalist Partnerships on the Unitarian Universalist Partner Church Council website, [www.uupcc.org](http://www.uupcc.org).
- Water justice is a global issue, affecting rural and urban communities in the U.S. as well as in developing countries. What are the water supply issues in your community? In your region? The Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of California engages in water justice activism in their own state and provides educational workshops about water in a time of climate change and the human right to water. Perhaps some of their work will translate well to your congregation:  
[www.uulmca.org/programs/water](http://www.uulmca.org/programs/water).

### **At Home**

Offer all ages a way to act in faith by sharing home water conservation tips with your congregation. Find ideas for saving water at home on the California Urban Water Conservation Council website ([www.h2ouse.org](http://www.h2ouse.org)), the College of New Jersey's Water Conservation web pages ([www.tcnj.edu/energy/water/conserv\\_e\\_home.htm](http://www.tcnj.edu/energy/water/conserv_e_home.htm)) and the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority website ([www.mwra.com/04water/html/watsav.htm](http://www.mwra.com/04water/html/watsav.htm)). The Australian national government offers detailed ideas ([www.thinkwater.act.gov.au](http://www.thinkwater.act.gov.au)) as does an American sustainable living firm, Eartheasy ([www.eartheasy.com/live\\_water\\_saving.htm](http://www.eartheasy.com/live_water_saving.htm)).