



from the April 2010 issue of *The Spire*

The Happening Church in Town

by Rev. Douglas S. Stivison, Pastor

The most important part of the entire newspaper is the front page. And the most highly-prized space on the front page is the area called, “Page one, above the fold” — meaning the space below the name of the newspaper at the top of the page and the middle of the page where the paper is folded to fit into your mail box. It does not matter if the newspaper is the smallest circulation weekly newspaper or The Wall Street Journal. For every newspaper, the space on page one, above the fold, is where editors place the stories, headlines, and photos which are, in their opinion, the biggest story of the day, the most eye-catching photo, or the story that should catch the interest of the largest number of readers.

This week, in the **Press-Journal**, our church appears on page one, above the fold. Taking up nearly a quarter of the entire page, the newspaper ran an eye-catching photo of many of the members of our congregation gathered in front of the bus at this year’s Stuff the Bus mission event.

An editor of a community weekly newspaper is inundated with hundreds of announcements of routine events taking place in the community. School plays, sporting events, anniversaries, fundraisers, dedications, public meetings...the list is nearly endless of the range of events that make their way onto the desk of the editor. He or she is always looking for the events that stand out from the ordinary — that intrigue the editor personally and that promise to appeal to the widest range of readers.

It is a wonderful testament to our church that the local editor decided that the Second Annual “Stuff the Bus” Community Food Drive sponsored by First Congregational United Church of Christ was the single most important, eye-catching, original event with the widest possible interest to the entire community. Among all of the events of every church, school, club, and public body that took place in our community, Stuff the Bus was considered the one single event with the widest possible news value and appeal.

During my 35 years in the newspaper industry, I worked with hundreds of community newspapers. In that time I cannot remember ever having run a church fundraiser on page one above the fold. Not ever. This truly is an exceptional compliment to our church. It speaks to how our total ministry to the wider community including Vacation Bible School, our concerts, our hosting the Community Thanksgiving Worship Service, and Stuff the Bus have cemented the sense that this is a vibrant church, an outward-looking church, an engaged church, a public-spirited church, an innovative church. Take a look at the picture and you see, also, a church in which people are clearly having a good time while helping others.

This level of recognition in the wider community does not happen by accident. Certainly everybody involved with Stuff the Bus can be proud of their individual contribution to this wonderful coverage. We also need to all give a special thank you to Associate Pastor, Hyo-Jung

Kim, who has worked tirelessly, month after month, event after event, to create and send out the photos, articles, and press releases to all of the local newspapers.

There is now no question at all — the First Congregational United Church of Christ is the happening church in town. What a wonderful public affirmation as we celebrate the Easter season together.