



**WISCONSIN
CONFERENCE**
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Sacred Texts: My Damascus Project Experience

by Ole Olson, Buffalo, Minn.

I was very excited when the Minnesota and Wisconsin Conferences announced last fall that the next Damascus Project course would be "Returning to Sacred Texts and Finding Stories You Can Live In." As a UCC Licensed Minister, I know that one of my shortcomings is a lack of Biblical training and interpretation. This sounded like an excellent opportunity to expand my Biblical knowledge and understanding and I was NOT disappointed.



Instructor Pam Shellberg did a great job of getting us to read, see, and understand the Bible from many different, new perspectives. Using the Anne Robertson book "New Vision for an Old Story" as a starting point, we were challenged to re-think how we saw the words and stories of the Bible. Many different techniques such as scrap booking, timelines, visio divina, and reading through different "lenses" were all used to get us to think "outside the box" when it comes to reading Bible passages. One of the methods, relating stories through art and literature, moved me to the point where I crafted a Sunday sermon around a classical piece of music and a tragic story related to it. I even played the music in the background as I explained how this story of tragedy changed into one of transformation and healing. Based on comments from our congregation, it was very effective.

In all my years of professional training, I have always found "in-person" training to be the most effective. However, given individual's personal time constraints and widely scattered locations (we even had one class member in New England), this would not have been possible. Modern technology gave us the next best thing. Using the "Moodle" platform allowed us to still retain the capability of "real-time" interaction with our classmates but gave us the flexibility needed to bring 24 people together.

I am anxiously looking forward to additional Damascus Project courses like this and would highly recommend "Sacred Texts" to anyone looking to deepen their understanding of the Bible, regardless of whether you are a lay- or clergy-person.