

Rosemary McCombs Maxey/
Losemale Makomps Makse cvhocefkvtos
Justice Journey

Listen to Rosemary reading her favorite Bible story
in her own language.

www.ucc.org/women/assets/maxey.mp3

1. Getting to know Rosemary/Losemalen kerrvs

Name: Rosemary McCombs Maxey

Career: Educator and Minister/Mvhayat momen
Ereknakvt vmatoketvtos

A.B. Recipient: 1997/Antwanit Blon Awlat ohrolope cokperakko
hvmken cokpe ostvpaken pale ostvpaken kolvpokaken
vmhoyites

Birthday: April 3, 1945/Tasahce-Rakko tuccenen momen
ohrolope cokpe-rakko hvmken cokpe ostvpaken pale osten
cahkepokaken cvheckvtos

Hair Color: Black/Cvekv-esse lustetos

Eyes: Brown/Cvtorwv lanetos

When by myself I enjoy daydreaming, pondering, wondering,
thinking/Nettv apuecetv, momen sufke akreckv mecetv
cvyicetomis.

Friends? Three sets: members of my nation, European
American, African Americans who were from my
hometown/Vnhessvlke tat vmestvlke, momen este hvtket
momen este luste omakemvts.

We liked to talk, laugh, write notes to each other during
school/Vnhessvlke omulkeyat apelhoget, etemponihoyet,
etenhocet fulletos

Favorite Scripture: Luke 10: 27-28 from the Parable of the Good



Samaritan: "Do this and you will live." /27 Momen vyoposket, Pucase cen Hesaketvmesen ce feke omvlkvn, cem puyvfekevcomvlkvn, cen yekeetv omvlkvn momet ccm.vkerrickv omvlkvn es *vnokecet*, cem vwolicv e vnokecetskat etvpomem vnokecv, makvtes. 28 Momen, Fvccvn vyoposikets; heyv nomecetsken ce hosakvres. kievtes.

2. Friends?¹

My grounding is in Dustin, Oklahoma. In town "it" was not a problem. They told me at integration time that whites were a superior race, Indians the second tier, and third tier was this black group. "As long as you know that, you can get along in the world."

I was glad my white friends invited me to go with them places. My family would scrape together the money. Our friendships dissolved after graduation.

Billie Summers, a little white boy, is still a good friend. We were best friends all the way through school. I learned all my bad words from him.

Rosemary's friendships formed in segregated pockets. Along the bus route were European-Americans. "Good friends on Sundays," area Creek² children met at their MVSKOKE-speaking church.

My African-American experience until fifth grade was stopping after church at Mrs. Holloway's in an all-Black town. I first had Gravette™ pop, store-bought ice cream and jaw-breakers there.

¹ Author conversation with Rosemary McCombs Maxey at her home in Dustin, Oklahoma. July 24, 2006

² "Creek was Andrew Jackson's name for our American Indian Nation. We are trying to become recognized as Muscogee, our name for ourselves. The Roman alphabet missionaries assigned us has some sounds that must have been in some other book. The spelling, MVSKOKE (say it: mus CO gy), would match our spoken language."

[Http://www.freenet.tlh.fl.us/Museum/language/muskogee_sound_s.html](http://www.freenet.tlh.fl.us/Museum/language/muskogee_sound_s.html).

Then they said, "This fall they are coming." These people that I knew became people that you don't associate with.

They were the "they." And we were the "they" to someone. But when we were on the bus and playing, it didn't matter. We played on the basketball teams and playgrounds.

A townspeople told me, a fourth grader, that it was bad enough to have "Injuns" in our schools, "now we have to have *!*@! N___s."



Her cousins went to town and got drunk. Her father went on his prayer walk.

My mother planned how she would go talk to this man. She was a gutsy woman, gentle too, but outspoken about injustice:

*Can we be like that? That hard-hearted?
Are we that unthinking that we would hurt
somebody?*

3. Oops, Can't Marry That One

Her parents participated in church and in MVSKOKE ceremonial life but moved away from ceremonial aspects the more preachers and missionaries condemned them.

Parents explained:

*This is who you are.
This is your language.
This language we use at home.*

If we use it outside, we might be made fun of or punished.

*This is clearly the line.
You are MVSKOKE Creek.*

Those people I thought were white kids had MVSKOKE ancestors and family members. When the MVSKOKE moved

out here for the allotment,³ white people swarmed eligible, marriageable people. Staying exclusive was encouraged. We do not want to lose our people.

I could claim and appreciate my identity while I was with our people. With cross-cultures and cross-races, it became difficult. When I showed interest in boys, my dad said, "You can be friends, but you can't marry anybody that wears cowboy boots."

By that time, I was conditioned to want a higher education. But, I looked. Oops, can't marry that one.



4. Variations on a Theme

Losemale Makomps Makse cvhocefkvtos, Rosemary McCombs Maxey, is the first American Indian woman to be ordained in the United Church of Christ. A citizen of the MVSKOKE (Creek) Nation of Oklahoma, she also is a member of the Fellowship UCC in Tulsa.

Her sense of what is fair began generations before her birth. She wrote in "Dream On, Sisters"⁴ that after a thirty-year absence she returned home, where

in the 1910's, itinerants, hobos, horse thieves, and traveling merchants had jumped off trains behind my grandmother's house for a good meal and a night's rest in the field sheltered by scrub oak and persimmon trees. They chopped wood, carried water or left gifts in exchange for Grandmother's hospitality.

Today, Rosemary and Paul share a round, modern, two-story log home that reminds visitors of the traditional MVSKOKE mound center.

We offer our food, beds, dreams and visions, and look for rainbow connections where justice and peace might emerge and merge. Dustin has 300 citizens. Sometimes I see their faces and eyes three generations of MVSKOKE people who observe, shake their heads solemnly, and say, "The Trail of

³ The Five Civilized Tribes (Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creeks and Seminole) resisted the General Allotment Act of 1887. See <http://www.naaprograms.org/history/allotmentact.htm>

⁴ Common Lot, #105 Fall 2005.

Tears from Georgia was long. We're not moving anywhere else."

Since MVSKOKE settlement in the Southeastern United States anywhere from 20,000 to 80,000 years ago, the sophisticated culture and progressive democracy has continued. The hospitable people welcomed Africans and Scottish Highlanders into southern homes. Following matrilineal descent, all with a MVSKOKE mother have all rights and privileges of MVSKOKE citizenship.⁵

5. Missionary to Her People

My cultural upbringing gave me identity, history and vision. It influenced the holistic way I think about myself and my relationship to God and to the universe.

At the age when American Indian youths are encouraged to have vision quests, Rosemary "felt and knew" that God was calling her to a helping profession. She struggled with many contradictions and inconsistencies around her. Heaped upon that was learning from strong Southern Baptist evangelism that American Indians were the worst of sinners.

Somehow, I absorbed the dominant culture's idea that we Creeks were indeed an inferior, miserable people.

Caught between knowing who Christ was and who Rosemary wanted to be, she decided to become "White." She could no more become White than perfect.

She escaped to a "Christian" university for answers. She met there more questions and more racism. Each time she returned home, she knew with greater strength that she wanted to be a missionary among her own people.

6. Bilingual Spirituality

Her mother had taught her clan ways. Her grandmother and mother had been empowered to enter into legal negotiations and look after government matters.

⁵ From Rosemary's Ordination Paper. Catoctin Association, Central Atlantic Conference, UCC, March 17, 1987.
[Http://www.muscogeenation-nsn.gov/](http://www.muscogeenation-nsn.gov/).

Her father taught her religion, both tribal and Christian. Rosemary said, "A strong influence, my father is a man of prayer and spiritual insight."

In the colonization process, education declared a two-road journey into eternity. One is heaven-bound and the other is bound for hell. Rosemary said that most American Indian congregations in the United Church of Christ are still at that point.

We still have another generation or so to go in this two-choice path. The spiritual that is present is embedded in us and that brings us from the ceremonial realm into the church.

A recent Bible School about ancestors included a treasure hunt to find cemetery markers for past leaders.

The cemetery is where our spirituality is. There is a colonized part and a part that is free. I showed the Bible School a power point about Hawaii then talked about the importance of language preservation, cultural transmission and spiritual grounding. We still are talking about that, remembering who we are.

Rosemary co-teaches the MVSKOKE language in the Oklahoma State University system. She serves at the Eagle Butte Learning Center, a ministry of the UCC Council for American Indian Ministry in South Dakota.⁶ This voice for Native Americans in the United Church of Christ communicates to the whole UCC the issues of justice that affect American Indian life. Rosemary served as CAIM's Interim Director.

At a nearby country school, she coaches students for an academic Creek challenge bowl with questions about MVSKOKE history, culture and language.

I don't want to be the last Creek speaking person on the planet.

⁶ Visit http://www.c-eb.com/mission_statement.htm and <http://www.caimucc.org/faqs.html> and </documents/pronouncemet.html>.

7. Differences as Uniqueness

In order to get along, we need not get rid of people's differences but honor them as uniqueness. Rosemary described this in the MVSKOKE creation myth:⁷

In the beginning, two clan groups, the Red and the White, were created. Deciding to wage war on each other, they got together to plan how they would fight. They discovered they spoke variations of the same language. They used the same herbal medicines. Instead of fighting, they chose to learn from one another and to learn about the healing properties of their medicines. In the future, they would settle disputes between the two clans by playing a stickball game called "the little brother of war."

After the ceremonial season, we still play stickball to indicate that all disputes are settled. We shake hands with one another to say all is well between us.

As the country expanded and developed, the MVSKOKE people were uprooted many times before the United States government assigned them to Oklahoma.⁸ This separating began with early Spanish explorers, who viewed them as savage heathens. The Indian removals slammed into the progressive nation in 1540. It brought many levels of oppression and injustice. The disease of racism came to tribal towns and into lives, "afflicting and permeating us externally and internally."⁹

8. Role Models

Rosemary once saw no role model except an image of poverty existed among her people. She was elated to discover that author Joy Harjo¹⁰ is MVSKOKE.

⁷ From "Being in the Right Place at the Right Time," Rosemary McCombs Maxey's address at the Convocation on Racial Justice, Portland, Oregon, November 2005. [www.cpcucc.org/McCombs Maxey address.pdf](http://www.cpcucc.org/McCombs_Maxey_address.pdf)

⁸ Time line of changes, early 1700s to 1889.
<http://www.rootsweb.com/~itgenweb/itprojects/timeline-maps.htm>

⁹ "Being in the Right Place at the Right Time"

¹⁰ <http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/60>

Rosemary's great-great-grandfather and great-great-uncle started Bacone College. Her grandfather built her mother's school. Her father followed two generations of tribal religious leaders as well as local church pastors. Both sons claim their identity and clanship. The younger son participates in the ceremonial ground and serves as family medicine person.

As tribal "faith keeper," my paternal grandmother, who spoke no English, came one summer to teach me to read in our language and to pray. She taught me to be responsible for telling the stories of the tribe, to see visions and how to be a faithful "faith keeper."

Church gave her missionaries and preachers. Her confidant, the gentle-spirited Dr. B. Frank Belvin told her she could find fulfillment by marrying a minister. "That was hard to take," she said. A woman's leader said, "Oh, that's a hard, hard life. You are better off being a teacher."

My grandmother said, "We need missionaries to European-Americans, just as they were to us." That lesson stuck.

9. College: Exposure to Rebellious

At college, discrimination was everywhere. I learned about ideals. It was the Viet Nam era. I learned how to protest. I was involved in some destructive, acting out behavior.

I didn't know why I didn't fit. It's because I'm poor. It's because I'm Indian. It's because I don't know. Everything was brand new. Nothing was working. I didn't do well.

She had little use for her earned degrees at home. She took a Southern Baptist position in Pennsylvania as a religious education specialist. She also met her life mate.

In a new land, I shed layers of self-defense and got to the business of using my education, talents and skills. I discovered I was good at what I did.

10. Suddenly Life Made Sense

Her questions of adolescence found answers when she worked in New York City for the Presbyterians. People from many national and Native American origins knew how to advocate their causes before church and state.

The Presbyterians addressed social justice issues from the perspective of those who were hurting. Rosemary discovered Liberation Theology that seeks to bring social justice for the poor, oppressed or marginalized.¹¹

I could see that the God of the Creeks and the God of the White church is the same God. Love and justice became the same thing. Love means fighting for justice. I still feel the sense of relief wash over me. My anger and suppressed hostility could turn into a positive expression. But I was in the wrong denomination.¹²

11. This Was Better Than Anything I Have Seen

By chance, she found the right denomination. Rosemary, Paul and their three- and four-year-old sons moved to Maryland. After they visited a Baptist church, a church neighbor said exactly the wrong thing:

"We don't have any darkies in our congregation. It's just plain white people. You would be welcome. You will fit right in."

By chance Elizabeth Hambrick-Stowe, a United Church of Christ minister, preached at the Presbyterian Church the next Sunday. They shared lunch and began a friendship.

We started attending St. Paul's. Charlie, her spouse, was a scholarly preacher and thorough in his explanations. All I had to do was read the UCC's social justice paper. This was better than anything I have seen, and – said Charlie,

"YOU CAN BE ORDAINED."

She was. Seminary study begun earlier had culminated with a divinity degree from the Lancaster Theological Seminary.

12. The Pastorate

I just knew nobody was going to call me. The associate conference minister sent me to the Mt. Tabor church in

¹¹ Search Liberation Theology, <http://www.religion-online.org>.

¹² Ordination Paper

Rocky Ridge, Maryland, knowing it was a church with many young people. He told the church, "Will it be an American Indian woman or an 80-year-old man?" I was selected.

She stayed twelve years, also teaching Religious Studies courses at Western Maryland College. All the while "there was this call" to include American Indians. After a thirty-year absence, she returned home.

13. Justice Ministry

The inclusive nature of her heritage continues to shape her sense of justice. Speaking about the inward journey, she said that even while we are the product of a colonized system, we can turn that around:

The justice issue seeks you out. You have to do something about it. I think I am with a group of strong people and I end up being the stronger one.

One day in town she saw the newspaper headline:

STATE OF HAWAII NEGOTIATING
WITH MUSCOGEE NATION

Her people had learned well the lesson of separating people with differences into little boxes. Now they were doing it.

I was aghast. Our MVSKOKE Nation was thinking about building a private prison and contracting with Hawaii to load up and bring native men here 3000 miles from family and homeland. We would look after them but not in a good sense. We can be as brutal as the early European-American colonists.

She looked after them – in a good sense. Hawaiian prisoners were moved to a private prison. She contacted a United Church of Christ official. She and Japanese American Hawaiian, Ronald Fujiyoshi, a "reliable, forward thinking activist," contacted one another. They protested.

Rosemary and Ron, along with "Uncle Sam" Kaleiliki, visited with Native Hawaiians. Not long after, one prisoner, Kaleihau Kamauu, wrote to request sponsors for practicing traditional religion as a way of promoting healing among the pa'ahao (Hawaiian for prisoner).

A letter arrived:

You were here in 1999 with 'Uncle Ron' and 'Uncle Sam.' We need help. We cannot practice our religion like the other religious groups. We need to find sponsors.

The new Watonga chaplain wanted only Christian services, "none of this other jipperish." She and other prison officials denied visitation and the congregating of prisoners. Native Hawaiian prisoners struggled more than six years to get on the chapel schedule. Local UCC clergy and supporters joined the struggle.

In Hawaii, others supported free exercise of religion. Through the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and the Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978, Hawaiians and Alaska are guaranteed freedom of religion.¹³ That should have covered the Hawaiians at Watonga.

Others, among them Kamaiki Anakalea and Kekapa Lee for resolution writing, joined in. The new Kansas-Oklahoma conference minister, David Hansen had strong Hawaii connections. He supported the General Synod 2005 resolution.¹⁴

14. Chicken Skin and Goose Bumps

On the traditional Hawaiian celebration of Makahiki,¹⁵ three men from Hawaii would be allowed to chant with prisoners in the morning. At least they thought so. They were refused.

We went anyway, offering prayer in the four directions. At 5:30 a.m. with 20 degree weather, Sam, Ron, Tyrone Reinhardt (UCC Council for Racial and Ethnic Ministries), Sala Nolan from the national church, Oklahoma UCC supporters and I chanted across the way. While we chanted, there was movement in and out of the dining hall. All of a sudden the men were chanting in response to us.

¹³ <http://www.naaprograms.org/history/freedomact.htm>

¹⁴ The "Religious Freedom for Native Hawaiian Prisoners" resolution at <Http://ucc.org/synod/resolutions/gsrev25-13.pdf>

¹⁵ See <http://www.k12.hi.us/~gta/hawaii/makahiki/makahiki.htm>

In the afternoon prison officials let our men meet inside with the men, who had been told nothing was going to happen. When the Hawaiian guests were allowed in, the men inside cried. What a glorious moment.

That began the journey. Eventually the chaplain resigned, the chief of security moved on and a law suit was settled. Rosemary and others could enter.

We know very little about each other's life ways. Yet I feel so at home and at one with them. I joined them in the struggle for religious freedom.

We share a common world view, a set of values derived from our original teachings, reverence for land and creative life forces, and our legacy. Without our relationship to the lands of our ancestors, we are nothing.

So, I make the weekly three-hour drive. On Mondays we sit together in the chapel of a private prison praying, singing, talking, laughing, complaining, and know we share more. Through our relationship with our Creator, struggling to find and maintain our cultures and languages, we are at home together even in our respective confinements. Together in our prisons, we liberate ourselves, albeit momentarily, from colonial oppression.

15. A Shred of Evidence

For Rosemary, Avery and Marsh's "We are the Church" sums up the United Church of Christ and her "most basic conviction. Since the beginning, God has always called the whole people (and creation) to be God's own."¹⁶

After reviewing her 1987 ordination paper, she said, "It still is for me that justice journey."

Other reluctant prophets with different backgrounds, like Amos and Paul, had made "the church" interesting to her. They too had encountered "the Holy One who impels, were willing to put their life on the line and boldly declared God's love for humankind."

¹⁶ Ordination Paper

She wrote later in the paper,

The United Church of Christ mission is to serve others by working for love and justice for all and to establish God's rule in the world. We believe each generation is responsible for re-thinking its beliefs as God's word unfolds and conditions change. . . .

Today, our church is at the forefront of social justice issues around the world. Having declared itself to be a Just Peace Church means it is serious about transforming an unjust order. . . .

When we say "there is unity in diversity" we quickly look for the shred of evidence that unites us rather than celebrate each uniqueness.

16. A Theology of Differences

Rosemary walks the inward journey of all who would greet others "in the spirit of peace with justice," knowing that "justice heals, equalizes and stabilizes." Her responsibility "in the sacred web of life" is to speak and act boldly regarding issues that make for peace with justice.

For all our forward looking and naming of injustices, she believes our United Church of Christ has yet to develop a theology of difference, a theology of interracial/interfaith tolerance.

Have we done our best to promote understandings and compassion for our particularities while making relatives of one another?

Rosemary had been studying Jeremiah (4:22), who, she said, "shows us the foolishness of nations of people who made wrong choices, left behind the wrong models for problem-solving." When 9/11 happened, "the movement from viewing the way God's world ought to be to the way God's world really is was swift and fearsome."

How may I join with others of my faith to denounce the terrors of evil?

How may I bring myself to participate in acts of justice so that healing and peace may become real?¹⁷

17. Prayer of Thanksgiving

*Creator, Great Mystery, Holder of Life's
Breath,
Grandmother, Grandfather,
Our God of many names and understandings:
We come simply to give you thanks
And ask for direction.
We thank you for this day
—A new day that has never been.
You have loaned us this day
To use in healthy and creative ways,
To be mindful of your goodness,
To share resources you have given,
To care for your creation.
We thank you for this day
And ask for your blessing. Amen¹⁸*

18. So What about You?

- If you are an American Indian woman exploring a call to the ministry,

What might be of help to you from other American Indian women who are pastors?

- Rosemary speaks about injustice and oppression.

How do you define injustice? Oppression?

Give examples in your community, school, work place.

How do you talk yourself into action for another's sake?

¹⁷ "Being in the Right Place"

¹⁸ American Indian Ministry Sunday, September 22, 2002. UCC *Worship Ways*.

- Tell about a personal oppression -- as a child of divorce, person with a disability, of color or gender difference, a youth.

How are you trying to melt misunderstandings by being "a missionary to" the people who separate you as "they"?

- Tell what you treasure about your culture's worship and spiritual life.

Who are your cultural heroes?

- Rosemary told how some among her people who were colonized responded to this oppression by oppressing others.

What are your identified prejudices?

What are you doing about them?

Name a specific action you could take to melt one prejudice into an understanding.

- Look at a situation of injustice from the eyes of the person who is being oppressed; then from those of the oppressor.

How well can you as a person "from the outside" understand another's situation?

Suggest ways that you might grow in understanding.

- Read a favorite First Testament from the point of view of the people/person being oppressed.
- In the justice fight for religious freedom, Dr. Maxey said, "Our brand of Christian says to be respectful of another's faith; we always honor [persons] in their religious tradition. That is where healing comes from."¹⁹

Share with someone your thoughts about this.

¹⁹ In Mary Adamski, "Makahiki allowed for Hawaii inmates on mainland" *Honolulu Star Bulletin*. February 8, 2005.

19. Church Family Project

- A. Find out the names of American Indian Nations in your state.
Learn how your congregation or your conference is relating to American Indians in your congregation or community.
Share your research with your youth group.
- B. With your pastor, arrange for a youth group exchange, alternating between two American Indian and non-American Indian congregations. Talk about and celebrate each community's unique gifts. Talk about how each worships.
- C. If you are an American Indian Community, talk with your pastor about arranging to adopt a non-American Indian church and be a missionary for a gathering.

20. Still Curious?

Council for Youth/Young Adult Ministries at
<http://www.ucc.org/youth/council.htm>

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