

People

News in the [April 7, 2009](#) issue

The supervisor of New York congregations for the United Church of Christ has been nominated to become the denomination's next general minister and president.

Geoffrey Black is expected to be presented to the UCC General Synod this summer as successor to **John H. Thomas**, who has served since 1999 and is not eligible for reelection. Black is particularly concerned about equal justice and black empowerment and cofounded the Amistad Cultural Center of Long Island, according to a church announcement. He would be the UCC's second African-American president. Black was previously a program staff member in the UCC's Office for Church Life and Leadership and is currently a member of the board of trustees of Lancaster (Pennsylvania) Theological Seminary.

Anglican priest **Gideon Byamugisha**, a Ugandan who in the 1990s became the first known African cleric to declare publicly that he was HIV-positive, breaking stigma-induced silence that often hampers combating the illness, has been awarded the Niwano Peace Prize. The award, often seen as a Nobel Peace Prize for the faith communities, is awarded by the Japan-based Niwano Peace Foundation. Byamugisha will receive the prize May 7 in Tokyo. "Gideon broke a huge barrier of silence and denial when he announced publicly that he was living with HIV," said Linda Hartke, head of the Geneva-based Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance, which focuses on HIV and AIDS. Previous prize recipients include former World Council of Churches leader Philip Potter, the World Muslim Congress, theologian Hans Küng and Rabbis for Human Rights.

Robert E. A. Lee, the Lutheran film executive behind the Oscar-nominated films *Martin Luther*, which stirred Catholic-Protestant tensions in the 1950s, and *A Time for Burning*, a mid-1960s civil rights documentary, died of cancer February 27 at his home in Baldwin, New York. He was 87. *A Time for Burning* told the story of a Lutheran pastor who urged his all-white Nebraska church to reach out to African Americans. Fred Friendly, former president of CBS News, once said the documentary was "the best civil rights film ever made." From 1954 to 1988, Lee directed a pan-Lutheran organization now known as Lutheran Film Associates.

Catholic-dominant Peru, Brazil and the Philippines tried to ban the Luther film. After Chicago's WGN-TV canceled its showing, 30 prominent Protestant leaders denounced the station.

Leon Howell, 73, the last editor and publisher of the journal *Christianity and Crisis*, which folded in the 1990s, died February 26 at his home in Silver Spring, Maryland, according to his family. A Presbyterian and holder of an M.Div. degree from New York's Union Theological Seminary, Howell was an active layperson in ecumenical circles. Known for his sharp wit and analysis, Howell conducted social policy research and wrote articles for magazines, including the *Century*. As author or editor of eight books, he spanned topics from the civil rights movement in Mississippi to the energy crisis as seen from Singapore. He lived for years in Asia and in recent times was an active board member of International Relief and Development.