



The Seneca Valley Voice

The United Church of Christ of Seneca Valley
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Carolyn's Column

I make a serious effort not to succumb to impulse spending, whether in the grocery store or elsewhere. We are registered for the "Do Not Call List", not just because I hate having my time at home interrupted by phone solicitations—especially the automated variety, but also because it's yet another way to keep a handle on impulsive commitments. However, one of my notable failures was in the appeal of a young door-to-door magazine salesperson sent to canvass our neighborhood on a blisteringly-hot summer day. That's how I ended up with a magazine I'd never heard of...that bit the dust long before my subscription ran out...and how I ended up with a substitute magazine called *Body + Soul*. I may even renew my subscription.

One of *Body + Soul's* articles contrasts the sprint of time in our overly-planned, tightly-executed lifestyles, with time's reclaimability.¹ A companion article in the same issue cites the nearly 11% increase in work hours absorbed by American families over the past 30 years.² We Americans "spend more time earning a living than people in most other industrialized countries...about 30% more than those living in places like France, Germany, and the Netherlands."² And we are paying the price in health-related costs. Even Japan's notorious early-to-work, late-back-home black-suited corporate salarymen are finding that failed marriages and vulnerable pensions add an additional cost to spending too much time at work, followed by late-night drinking with their buddies.³

¹ "On Your Side", Victoria Moran, *Body + Soul*, October 2006, page 85.

² "Take Back Your Time," Jennifer Barrett, *Body + Soul*, October 2006, pages 87-92.

³ "Learn to Be Nice to Your Wife, or Pay the Price," Blaine Harden, *The Washington Post*, Monday, November 26, 2007, page A-1.

We can all add to the list of time thieves: too many choices at the grocery, department store or specialty shop; e-mail, cell phones, Wi-Fi; television; and the biggie: the pleasure-mobile of material acquisition that is accessed by more acquisition, which is supported by more work.

We can all bemoan the pressures of our Jetson-paced, consumer-driven culture. But the reality is that even with all of these realities, we still have choices we can make. We can even take back our time. And what better opportunity than in the season when we often feel the most 'crunched'?

This doesn't mean using our time more efficiently so that we can create pockets of unstructured time; most of us are PhD's in multi-tasking. If we value everything by an efficiency-meter, anything not on our 'to-do' list makes us feel guilty, and we set it aside.

So first and foremost, reclaiming time begins with reflection. In a purely secular evaluation, the question is, 'does the pace of your life make you feel happy, or exhausted and unsatisfied?'² That's not a bad question.

But we Christians also know that each 24 hours is a gift, time we receive not just for *doing*, but also for *being*. *Way to Live*⁴, one of the books our Confirmation Class uses, makes this important distinction as one of the practices of our faith. Our confirmands are reminded that *everything* takes time, including a time to rest daily in God's presence. Unlike the demands for us to 'do,' this resting in God's presence allows us to 'be,' to step outside the patterns of production and consumption, and be renewed, through prayer,

⁴ Dorothy C. Bass and Don C. Richter, ed., *Way to Live: Christian Practices for Teens*, Upper Room Books, (c) 2002

through meditation, through even brief moments of silence.

In this Advent season of preparation for the indwelling of the Christ, I invite each of you to reclaim your gift of time.

Blessings,

Carolyn



On the Way to Bethlehem...This Season of Advent

Advent is the four-week season within the life of the church in which we prepare ourselves to receive the indwelling Christ. It is a season marked by special readings, by special music (that is not-yet-Christmas music), by special practices (such as lighting the candles on the Advent wreath), and by special decorations. Each of these preparations helps us to mark the importance of Jesus' birth and helps us to be ready to celebrate that birth when we finally arrive at Christmas.

Because the first Sunday of Advent marks the beginning of the Christian year, it also marks the change in our ecumenical three-year lectionary cycle. This cycle emphasizes one of the three synoptic gospels, Matthew (Year A), Mark (Year B), and Luke (Year C), as well as readings from the epistles (letters in the New Testament), and from the Psalms and one of the other books of the Hebrew scriptures. The gospel according to John is interspersed with the other gospels all three years. During the special seasons of the year, such as Advent, Christmas, Lent and Easter, the readings from all four groups are chosen to relate thematically. During "ordinary time," the readings from a given book are continuous, so the relationship between the readings is happenstance.

Traditionally, Advent begins the fourth Sunday prior to Christmas. Each Advent, the words of prophets are part of the lectionary readings, beginning this year with

the prophet Isaiah. Actually, Isaiah is included each year at some point in the Advent readings because of his themes of waiting with joy and expectation for God's salvation.

Of course Isaiah wasn't writing to fit neatly into our worship cycles; he was speaking God's word to his own generation. But because Isaiah understood the nature of God's love and hope so clearly, his words speak to us as well.

The first 39 chapters of Isaiah were written mostly in the 8th century BCE (Before the Common Era), when Israel was under siege from Assyria. Isaiah reminds the people of God's promise that the throne of David would always be a source of salvation, and that one day someone even greater than David would come to bring *shalom* to the whole nation. Our readings this Advent all come from the first 39 chapters of Isaiah.

Isaiah wasn't writing for Christians, nor was he predicting Jesus' coming; he was speaking to his own time, assuring the people that they could trust God. Just as God had been with David, God would be with them in the present and in the future. One or two other prophets, disciples of the first Isaiah, wrote the rest of Isaiah about 100 years later.

In addition to readings from the prophets, two weeks of Advent also focus on the prophetic ministry of John the Baptizer. Incidentally, a biblical prophet was not some sort of predictor of the future (such as a fortune teller), but one who interpreted present realities within the framework of God's covenantal relationships and God's activity in human history.

This year we begin the lectionary cycle anew, so most of our readings will come from the gospel according to Matthew. Written after the destruction of Jerusalem in CE 70, and using the gospel according to Mark as a resource, scholars believe this gospel is dated some time between 80 and 90 CE. Because there is such a split with the Jewish community by this stage, the Pharisees are usually identified as Jesus' major opponents, suggesting that the author is part of a group of Christian Jews no longer in communion with Pharisee-led Judaism. Matthew's vision of Jesus as the healing Messiah from the house of David is framed as a fulfillment of the Torah and the prophets.

Matthew also is the first to give us a story of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem and the story (Epiphany story) of the magi.

Stewardship

“Together We Can”

UCCSV Members and Friends Urged to Pledge for 2008

Over the past several weeks, UCCSV has been conducting its annual pledge campaign. The importance of pledging as an act of stewardship has been discussed over the past few weeks in Carolyn’s sermons and by Mission Moments from Kasey Kaseman, Heidi Harmon and me.

As of Sunday, November 25, a total of \$151,000 in pledges has been received from 43 members and friends of UCCSV. Out of these pledges, there are 4 new pledges totaling \$3,055. Of the 39 who pledged last year, 35 have increased their pledges. Many thanks to those who have pledged for 2008.

The pledges received so far represent a significant financial commitment on the part of many church members and friends. However, the total falls short of the anticipated 2008 operating expenses of slightly more than \$200,000.

Several members and friends who either pledged last year or who have been attending regularly have yet to submit a pledge for 2008. Please submit your pledge as soon as possible by either mailing it to me; mail it or drop it off at the Church; put it in the collection plate on Sunday. With thanks,

Chair of Stewardship



Church Nursery

The church nursery is in need of a volunteer on Sunday, December 16 and Christmas Eve. Please call the church office at 301-540-3449 if you can help.



Christmas at UCCSV

Social Concerns

Christmas Baskets We will be providing Christmas baskets for our two families. If you would like to help, the sign-up sheet is located on the bulletin board outside the church office. If you would like to contribute towards Giant gift cards for the families, please make your check out to UCCSV and mark the memo line – *Emergency Assistance – Christmas*.

Please have all food items into the church by Sunday, December 16. Our Youth Group will deliver the baskets to our families during the week.

Thanks Youth Group!!!

Shaw Community Ministry: The *Giving Tree* gifts for the Shaw Community Ministry should be returned by Sunday, December 9. The party will be on Saturday, December 15. If you would like to participate in the party or have questions about the *Giving Tree*, please let call the church office..



Fellowship

Deck the Halls... with balls of cookie dough?

We need your help, if you’re willing. The fellowship committee needs oodles of Christmas cookies and goodies to serve after the Christmas concert on December 14 and more for fellowship gatherings after worship services on Sunday December 23 and Christmas Eve. Please sign up to share something – even if you buy it (which is totally fine and much appreciated). But if you are one who likes to bake for the holidays, why not bake twice as much and share some with our congregation and our visiting friends and family during this warm and rich holiday season. Look for the sign-up sheet in the hallway at church.



Christmas Concert - December 14

Be sure to invite your family, neighbors and friends to UCCSV's annual Christmas Concert to be held on Friday, December 14, at 8:00 pm. Our chancel choir and special guests will perform traditional Christmas carols and anthems. Hope to see you there!



Christmas Eve Chowder

Join us on Monday, December 24, before worship for a hot bowl of renowned chowder. We will serve it between 6:30 and 7:15 pm.

No need to bring anything – just yourself and family/friends. So that we may plan accordingly, please sign up on the bulletin board outside the church office.

Poinsettias: If you would like to place a poinsettia in the sanctuary for Christmas please fill out the form found in Sunday bulletins and return no later than Sunday, December 9. The cost for each 6" plant, 5-7 blooms, will be \$10.00. Just make the check out to UCCSV and mark the memo line – poinsettias.



December 24, 2007
CHRISTMAS EVE WORSHIP
8:00pm

Cyclone Sidr

From United Church of Christ

November 18, 2007

GENEVA, -- Responding to communities devastated by Cyclone Sidr, members of Action by Churches Together (ACT) International, of which the UCC is a member, are beginning emergency support for more than 35,500 people in southern Bangladesh.

Initial reports indicate that at least 2,200 people have died as a result of the cyclone, with the number expected to rise in the worst storm to hit Bangladesh since 1991 when nearly 143,000 people died.

UCC partners and ACT members in Bangladesh, Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh (CCDB), Lutheran Health Care Bangladesh (LHCB) and Social Health and Education Development Board (SHED) are assisting families through emergency food support including rice, pulses, salt and oil as well as oral rehydration salts.

The initial assistance, supported by the ACT Rapid Response Fund, which the UCC funds, will ensure two meals a day for at least five days, targeting particularly vulnerable groups of people including widows, children, the elderly, disabled and those without land in the districts of Bagerhat, Barisal, Gopalganj, Khulna and Madarapur.

UCC partner and ACT member, Christian Aid, is also planning assistance through its local implementing partners and has already allocated funds to cover the first two weeks of their response. Initial expectations for assistance include medical support and food followed by shelter and small cash grants.

Over the next seven days, UCC partner and ACT member, Church of Bangladesh (CoB), will be assessing early recovery and rehabilitation needs and is planning to move directly into interventions likely including housing and livelihood support.

Prior to the storm, CCDB reported that people on the island of Moheshkali were evacuated to cyclone shelters, including 44 shelters constructed by CCDB following the devastating 1991 cyclone.

Through its local partners, Christian Aid had also already been working in the cyclone-affected coastal

areas through a community-based disaster preparedness project.

ACT members are coordinating their efforts with other humanitarian responders and local governments, and will be submitting an appeal proposal to the ACT Coordinating Office in the coming days. The United Church of Christ will make an initial response to the anticipated appeal with funds from the One Great Hour of Sharing Offering. Additional funds will be greatly needed. Your generous contribution is welcome.

HOW YOU MAY HELP:

1. Please pray for the people of Bangladesh and the disaster responders.
2. To assist displaced Bangladesh families, you may, send gifts payable to your congregation marked for "International Disaster Fund - Bangladesh" with the request they be sent through your Conference office on to Wider Church Ministries.

December Scripture Readings

Sunday Scripture Reading in bold print.

Sunday, December 2

Sermon Title: *Prophets of Peace*

Isaiah 2:1-5

Psalm 122

Romans 13:11-14

Matthew 24:36-44

Sunday, December 9

Sermon Title: *Dare to Hope*

Isaiah 11:1-10

Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19

Romans 15:4-13

Matthew 3:1-12

Sunday, December 16

Sermon Title: *God Comes to Save*

Isaiah 35:1-10

Psalm 146:5-10 or Luke 1:47-55

James 5:7-10

Matthew 11:2-11

Sunday, December 23

Sermon Title: *Signs of God's Love*

Isaiah 7:10-16

Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

Romans 1:1-7

Matthew 1:18-25

Monday, December 24

Christmas Eve & Day

Isaiah 62:6-12

Psalm 97

Titus 3:4-7

Luke 2:((1-7), 8-20

Sunday, December 30 – Moravian Love Feast

Sermon Title: *Guided by the Light*

Isaiah 60:1-6

Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14

Ephesians 3:1-12

Matthew 2:1-12

First Bible Readings in January

Isaiah 60:1-6

Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14

Ephesians 3:1-12

Matthew 2:1-12



DECEMBER CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						1 8:30a – 2 7 th Day 4-8p – <i>Hanging of the Greens/Potluck supper</i>
2 4-7p - Confirmation 8:30p AA	3 7p – Prop Ops 7:30p – Social Concerns	4 10:00a – Staff Mtg 8:30p - AA	5 7p – <i>Saving Jesus</i>	6 7:30p – Choir 7:30p – Boy Scouts	7 Pearl Harbor Day	8 8:30a – 8p 7 th Day
9 4-7p - Confirmation	10 7:30p - Council	11 7:30-9p – Mind, Body, Spirit 8:30p - AA	12	13 7:30p – Choir 7:30p – Boy Scouts	14 8p – Christmas Concert	15 8:30a – 8p 7 th Day
16 4-7p 0 Confirmation	17	18 8:30p - AA	19 7p - Trustees	20 7:30p - Choir 7:30p – Boy Scouts	21	22 8:30a – 8p 7 th Day
23 No church school	24 6:30- 7:15p – Chowder 8p - Christmas Eve Worship	25  8:30p - AA	26	27	28	29 8:30a – 8p 7 th Day

Outside Groups Meeting Regularly at UCCSV:

Sunday & Tuesday Nights – 8:30p – AA

Thursday Nights – 7:30p – Boy Scouts

Saturdays – 8:30a-1p & 4:30-8:30p – 7th Day Adventists