



The Seneca Valley Voice

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

Amidst the tinsel and the bells, the evergreens and the multiple re-tellings of the stories of Jesus' birth, we also hear the words of Dickens' Ebenezer Scrooge: "Bah! Humbug!...If I could work my will, every idiot who goes about with 'Merry Christmas' on his lips, should be boiled with his own pudding, and buried with a stake of holly through his heart."

Our response is often that of the nephew's: to refuse to be pulled down by another's bitterness, to continue with our plans of charitable giving and hearth-warming festivities. As far as it goes, that can be a most appropriate response. It is welcoming and accepting, devoid of judgment, keeping open the possibility that Scrooge may someday have a change of heart and join the family.

But Dickens doesn't stop with the nephew. Through the device of Christmas Past, he explores some of the contributing factors to Scrooge's sour attitude, including the year in which a very young Ebenezer was left at his boarding school, alone and very lonely.

Sadly, there are many for whom Christmas is a time in which their loneliness is exacerbated by the celebrations of the season itself. Some have lost loved ones; warm memories of Christmases past stand in sharp contrast to the realities of the present, heightening their loneliness. Others have less pleasant memories. They fear the effects of alcohol and drug abuse, which often are exacerbated during the holidays. These are not only the fears of those recovering from addictions; they are also the fears of the family members. Regardless of the reason, for many Christmas and the attendant holiday season can be an especially stressful and lonely time, even a fearful time.

But it doesn't have to be that way.

Ebenezer Scrooge discovers that even though the past has helped shape the person he has become, he is not chained to that past, but can make choices as to how he lives in the present. The same is also true for us. But it is difficult—if not impossible—to do alone.

Scrooge had the three Christmases—Past, Present, and Future, to help move his thinking beyond the denial of his bitterness and loneliness; he had an employee who wished him well; he had a nephew and his family who also wished him well and invited him into their circle.

And just as Scrooge had a community of support, so also do those within the church. Because the loss of a loved one is keenly felt at Christmas, the Deacons host a quiet Christmas Tea. In contrast to the high energies of a Christmas party, the Christmas Tea enables those who have lost a loved one during the past year to share with others who have known recent loss and offer one another the comfort of their presence.

In a similar way, the addicted individual, as well as families of those who are addicted, also need support. In addition to community-wide resources, including two Alcoholics Anonymous groups which meet at UCCSV on Sunday evenings (8:30pm, open meeting) and Tuesday evenings (8:30pm, closed meeting), spiritual support is also available. I am available during my regular office hours of course (Monday through Thursday, 10am-2pm), but during the holiday season I am also available on Wednesdays till 7pm. Should you or a loved one need someone to talk with in a confidential setting, should you or a loved one need to be connected with appropriate resources, or should you or a loved one need prayer, please call me at 301-540-3449.

Christmas *is* a time to celebrate—a time to celebrate the in-breaking of God’s presence into our lives, bringing us healing where there is brokenness, hope where there is fear, and love at all times.

May God’s redeeming presence be made known to you in a most special way this Christmas season.

Blessings,

Carolyn

The Season of Advent

We often hear the analogy that faith is a journey, and certainly this is true for the Christian season of Advent. In fact, there are few better ways to actually prepare oneself for the many gifts of Christmas than by attending to Advent.

Advent is a four-week mini-journey, with a beginning and an ending. We are most familiar with the ending—it’s the part that nudges its way into our lives sometime in late October as the reds, greens, blues, and golds of Christmas begin to vie with the colors of Halloween and Thanksgiving in stores across the nation. In fact, we’re so focused on that ending, that full-throttled celebration, that ‘instant Christmas’, that the journey itself is all but overshadowed. But the ending is always the same; it is always a manger, always a birthday.

The Advent journey begins with the words of the prophets, reminding us in myriad ways that God is not yet finished with us, that there is yet more goodness and light to break forth into the days of our lives. These prophets are not intended to be predictors of the future—though that is often how they are interpreted. Rather, the prophets hold a mirror to the realities of their times (and ours) as they call the people of God to be faithful to the covenant.

This year for the season of Advent, we are focusing on *Telling the Story* as it comes to us in the gospel according to Luke.

During the first week of Advent we will hear again the words of the prophet Jeremiah, holding forth images of restoration to a nation that has been devastated in war and exiled to a distant land. The first Advent candle will be lit, the candle of Peace.

The second Sunday of Advent will explore the stories of the angel’s annunciations to Elizabeth and to Mary as we consider the gift of Hope.

The third Sunday of Advent considers the gift of Joy as we explore the stories of Mary’s visit to Elizabeth, and the song we know as “The Magnificat.”

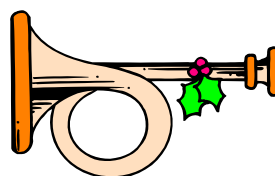
Our fourth and final Sunday of Advent brings us to the eve of Christmas itself. The gift of Love, shared with us in the birth of each child, will focus on the oft-overlooked birth of John, the son of Elizabeth and Zechariah. There will be only one service of worship on this Sunday morning, held at 10 am.

And then, the celebration itself. Christmas Eve, where we alternate the lessons and carols of the season, arriving at last to the side of the manger, where we join angels and shepherds in celebrating the good news of Jesus’ birth.

The journey is complete.

Christian Education

Sunday School for December will highlight lessons surrounding Advent. Children will be learning what Advent is all about and preparing for readings during the December 10 and 17 worship services.



Christmas Eve Instrumental Group --- Calling all people who play musical instruments (especially school age band students)!! Laura Lineberger will be rehearsing a small group of instrumentalists to perform traditional Christmas carols for UCCSV's Christmas Eve program. Please contact her if you desire to be part of this group by calling the church office at 301-540-3449.



Board of Deacons

Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve Sunday Worship Times

The Board of Deacons looks forward to sharing with you the joy of holiday worship! Please note the times of services:

Sunday, December 24 (Christmas Eve):

- **One Service** in the morning at 10:00 am. We will welcome both the choir and band as they share music, and children of all ages are invited to celebrate the lighting of the fourth candle of Advent.
- **One Service** in the evening at 9:00 pm. This is our traditional Communion and Candlelight service, with a Lessons and Carols format.

Sunday, December 31 (New Year's Eve):

- **One Service** in the morning at 10:00 am. Come celebrate the First Sunday After Christmas!

Piano Purchase Getting Closer!

The church is still accepting donations earmarked for the purchase of a piano for the sanctuary. We are thankful to everyone who has donated so far. We are very hopeful to be able to make a purchase in early 2007. If you have any questions, please ask a Deacon or email Jenfloryfuss@aol.com.

Welcome to our new Director of Music Ministry!

If you haven't done so already, please introduce yourself to Tom Rimes, our new Director of Music Ministry. Tom has jumped right in, directing the choir, leading the band, and playing the organ beautifully during worship. Tom is originally from Australia, and currently works for the Washington Opera as a vocal coach. Tom is enthusiastic about many styles of music and has even composed an opera. Beware of his contagious excitement about the possibilities for music at UCCSV!

Christmas Concert

Please come and enjoy the great Christmas music, and invite your friends to join you.



Christmas Concert

**Friday, December 15, 2006
8:00 PM**

**Featuring the
UCCSV Chancel Choir and Guest Soloists**

Free Will Offering

United Church of Christ
Of Seneca Valley
13421 Clopper Road ■ Germantown, MD
301-540-3449 ■ www.uccsv.org

Social Concerns

Christmas Holiday Baskets

Thanks to all who so generously gave to our Thanksgiving Food Baskets. The baskets were overflowing and four area families enjoyed a bountiful Thanksgiving.

And now that Thanksgiving is over, Christmas is approaching and we will again provide Christmas baskets and gifts. The tags for the gifts will be placed on the Caring Tree.

You may sign up on the bulletin board outside the church office for food items. If you would like us to do the shopping, monetary donations are most appreciated. Just fill out the memo line on the check for holiday food baskets.

Thank you for your help.

Mobile Med

On behalf of the church's outreach into the community, the Social Concerns Board has designated support for Mobile Med whose mission since 1968 has been to provide quality health care to the uninsured, low income, working poor, and homeless in Montgomery County. MobileMed currently serves more than 5,000 of the County's most vulnerable, isolated and at-risk residents.

We also will be supporting The Southern Poverty Law Center, Heifer Project International and Doctors Without Borders. More information to follow on these programs. Thank you, UCCSV for making this possible.

Adopt-A-Road

Our next Saturday Adopt-A-Road clean-up will be January 13, 2007, 9:00 am. We meet at Seneca Valley High School's parking lot at the Middlebrook Road entrance. Dress warmly (though in this area it could be 60 degrees!), including your own winter gloves. Will provide pick-up gloves, bags, and other equipment as needed, and something hot to drink and warm us up when we've finished. In case of snow, check the answering machine at church.

Many thanks to everyone who participates, Middlebrook Road has never looked better!

Recycling Used Inkjet Cartridges

Keep your used inkjet cartridges coming in! Just put them in baggies and place in the recycling box in the Narthex. (No Epson, please – the recycling company will not take them.) All money we receive goes into our Emergency Assistance Fund to help others in our community.



Equal Exchange for Christmas

The last date to get your Equal Exchange coffee, chocolate and tea for Christmas gifts and use will be during Fellowship Time on Sunday, December 10. (We always sell on the second Sunday of the month). Especially for Christmas, we have new products: dark mint chocolate, hazelnut coffee, and dark baking cocoa. All other familiar products will be in stock.



Stewardship Campaign - Loving God Back

The Stewardship Board would like to thank everyone who submitted a financial pledge card and a time/talent pledge card. If you have not submitted your pledges, please prayerfully consider what you are able to commit to and let us know as soon as possible. For budgeting purposes, we need to have the financial pledges finalized in early December. You can send your pledges in to the UCCSV office, or you can call the church office at 301-540-3449.

UCCSV Stewardship Board

From the Treasurer

As of November 17 with seven Sundays remaining, 2006 pledges need \$24,665 to meet this year's goal.

- Loose collections are short \$7,805.
- Operating income is short overall \$28,194.85.
- Piano fund has \$3,544.50 of the \$5,000 goal.

Mind, Body, Spirit Meeting

The group will meet December 12 from 7:30 to 9:00 pm. Please join us and learn to meditate or continue practicing mediation. Meditation affords many benefits including peace of mind, lower blood pressure and a closer connection to Our God. Please call the church office to let us know you are coming and to get directions.



Holiday Studio Tour

Countryside Artisan's 2006 Holiday Studio Tour will be December 1,2,3 and December 8,9,10 from 10:00-5:00.

Holiday Services

Christmas Concert

- Friday, December 15, 8:00 pm

Christmas Eve

- Sunday, December 24, 10:00 am
- Sunday, December 24, 9:00 pm

New Years Eve

- Sunday, December 31, 10:00 am

December Calendar

Please see the next page for the UCCSV December calendar of events.



December Lectionary Readings

Monthly Bible readings can now be found each week in the Sunday bulletins. Please let the church office know if you miss a Sunday and we will make sure one is sent to you.



Church Officers


For more information on the church council please call 301-540-3449.



*Merry
Christmas*



DECEMBER CALANDER OF EVENTS

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					1 6:30p – Salem Church	2 8:00a-2:00p & 6:00-8:00p – 7 th Day
3 9:30, 11:00a - Worship 8:30p - AA	4	5 10:00a –Staff 8:30p - AA	6 7:30-9:30p – Salem Church 7-9:30p – Disciples	7 7:30p - Choir 7:30p - Scouts	8 6:30p – Salem Church	9 8:00a-2:00p & 6:00-8:00p – 7 th Day
10 9:30a, 11:00a Worship Sale of Equal Exchange Coffee 8:30p - AA	11 7:00p – Property Ops	12 10:00a –Staff 8:30p - AA	13 7:30-9:30p – Salem Church 7-9:30p – Disciples	14 7:30p - Choir 7:30p - Scouts	15 6:30p – Salem Church 8p – Choir Concert	16 8:00a-2:00p & 6:00-8:00p – 7 th Day
17 9:30a, 11:00a - Worship 8:30p - AA	18	19 10:00a –Staff 8:30p - AA	20 7-9:30p – Disciples	21 7:30p - Choir 7:30p - Scouts	22 6:30p – Salem Church	23 8:00a-2:00p & 6:00-8:00p – 7 th Day
24 10:00a – Worship 9:00p - Worship 8:30p - AA	25 	26 Church Office Closed 8:30p - AA	27 7-9:30p – Disciples	28 7:30p - Choir 7:30p - Scouts	29 6:30p – Salem Church	30 8:00a-2:00p & 6:00-8:00p – 7 th Day
31 10:00a- Worship No church school						

Outside Groups Meeting Regularly at UCCSV:

- Sunday & Tuesday Nights – 8:30p – AA
- Wednesdays – 7:30p – Salem Church
- Thursday Nights – 7:30p – Boy Scouts
- Friday Nights – 6:30p - Salem Church
- Saturdays – 8:00a-2:00p & 6:00-8:00p – 7th Day Adventists

