

The Seneca Valley Voice

United Church of Christ of Seneca Valley
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Carolyn's Column

Prepare the Way of the Lord! Our new year and first Sunday of Advent began with a shout, with children running in the aisles, with tambourines tinkling and more than one head turning to see what was going on. Worshipers were not disappointed: right behind the children, the choir began *Godspell's* lively *Prepare Ye!* as they processed, inviting all of us to join in the singing. What a powerful reminder that *each* of us is called to prepare our hearts and our lives for God's living presence within and among us.

As of 28 November with the beginning of Advent, we have entered a new church year and therefore a new gospel emphasis. This year, our focus is on the gospel according to Matthew.

The worship life of the church operates on a three-year rotation of the gospels Matthew (Year A), Mark (Year B) and Luke (Year C). These gospels are similar in structure, and are called the *synoptic* gospels, which means "same." The gospel according to John is quite different from the other three, but it is not ignored. Readings from John are interspersed throughout the church year.

The Worship Team decided to *prepare the way* in worship by following the way Matthew tells the story of Jesus' birth. This is a significant departure from the lection, which begins with heavy apocalyptic readings, yet not one of the gospel writers begins the gospel that way. So why not begin as Matthew begins, which is with "An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah...."

As we reflected, we were reminded that each name is a person, and each person represents one more link in the human and spiritual chain that leads from Abraham to Jesus. This chain

includes very ordinary people—wanderers and warriors, priests and prostitutes, adulterers and tricksters—each touched by the hand of God.

Matthew is very clear: Jesus is both descendant of Abraham and David, *and* he is Messiah or Savior. Jesus is about saving lives.

Saving lives is what Roberta Bondi claims theology is all about. "It is about saving us from our false images of God, learning to know God as healer and ourselves as persons made in God's image, and imagining a future consistent with the God we have come to know."

In her short book, *Memories of God*, Bondi reflects on the God she comes to know through her own life. Through those reflections, she invites us to think carefully about our lives in a similar manner.

In this season of Advent, I invite you to prepare the way for God's living presence by reflecting on your life, and on the lives of those whom you name as your familial and spiritual forebears. Who has revealed their memories of God to you? What are your own memories of God?

If you want to consider these reflections with others, or if you want to talk about *Memories of God*, come to the Narthex Wednesday, 8 December, 7—9pm for an evening's discussion of Bondi's book and our own memories of God.

Other sources for daily personal reflection and preparation can be found at www.ucc.org, by clicking "feed your spirit," then "daily devotional." After signing up, you will receive short daily devotionals keyed to a Bible passage.

Blessings,
Carolyn

Moderator's Note

What marvelous energy our children had helping all of us usher in the Advent season on Sunday! It reflected the joy of the season in a very real and wonderful way. It also reflects the very real energy that the Christian Education Board has in revitalizing our CE program at UCCSV. We are looking forward to planning our own Vacation Bible School this summer at UCCSV.

Our Stewardship drive was very successful thanks to the hard work of Arthur Keys and many people in the congregation. Thanks so much to all who helped.

Our council is reviewing our Constitution and Bylaws and considering recommending changes to align the document with our actual practices at UCCSV. More on that to come in the New Year.

The next council meeting will be on January 10th. Between now and then, we will be working with the Trustees to develop the budget for next year. Diane Marazzi has arranged a concert by DUO Ameral on Friday, April 1 at 7PM. That promises to be a treat for our ears!

I am putting together suggestions for Nominating team members for the Council. Volunteers are welcome!

I hope the holiday season brings all the best things to you and your family. God is certainly with us.

Christie Holland
Moderator

Music Ministry

Thank you to everyone who helped UCCSV's Music Ministry acquire a new portable dry erase board. This board is available for use by all UCCSV groups. Please be sure to use ONLY dry erase markers and to erase the board completely by wiping with a clean soft cloth after each use.

We hope you will join the Chancel Choir during Advent and Christmas. Christmas music will be rehearsed 8:30-9:00pm starting Thursday,

December 2. (You'll have even MORE fun if you start with us at 7:30!)

There will be no Chancel Choir rehearsal Thursday, December 30. The choir will meet at 9:00am Sunday, January 2.

The Music Ministry Calendar for December

Thursday, December 2

6:30-7:15pm - SingFest! (ages 6 – 12)
7:30-9:15pm - Chancel Choir

Sunday, December 5

9:00am - Chancel Choir

Thursday, December 9

6:30-7:00pm - Morningstars (ages 3-5)
7:30-9:15pm - Chancel Choir

Sunday, December 12

9:00 am – Chancel Choir

Thursday, December 16 SingFest!

6:30-7:15pm – SingFest!
7:30-9:15p – Chancel Choir

Sunday, December 19

9:00 am - Chancel Choir

Thursday, December 23

6:30 – 7:00pm - Morningstars
7:30-9:15 pm – Chancel Choir

Sunday, December 26 No Chancel Choir

Thursday, December 30
No Chancel Choir Rehearsal

Sunday, January 2 Chancel Choir

9:00am – Chancel Choir

Thursday, January 6

6:30- 7:15pm – Singfest! (ages 6-12)
7:30-9:15 - Chancel Choir

Sunday, January 9

9:00 am - Chancel Choir

Thursday, January 13

6:30 – 7:00pm – Morningstars (ages 3-5)

7:30-9:15 am – Chancel Choir

Sunday, January 16

9:00am – Chancel Choir

Thursday, January 20

6:30-7:15pm – SingFest!

7:30-9:15pm – Chancel Choir

Sunday, January 23

9:00am – Chancel Choir

Thursday, January 27

6:30-7:15pm - Morningstars

7:30-9:15pm – Chancel Choir

Sunday, January 30

9:00am – Chancel Choir



Social Action

**Shaw Community Ministry
Secret Santa Gift Drive**

Each year Shaw Community Ministry sponsors a Secret Santa gift drive to provide as many as one hundred children in the Shaw neighborhood of DC with a Christmas present. UCCSV has been generously supporting this effort for many years. Beginning the first Sunday after Thanksgiving, all who wish to participate will be able to choose the name of a girl or boy to get a gift for from the Giving Tree in the Narthex. The tags this year will include each child's name, age, gender, and preferred gift. Shaw Community Ministry also has a need for all-purpose gift cards in any amount from \$25-50.

Please bring your gift or gift card wrapped and labeled with the child's name on it by Sunday, December 12, and leave it under the Giving Tree or in the church office. The party at which the gifts will be distributed will be held on December 18, so please be sure to bring your gift by this deadline. Please let John or Anne Ellis know if you are also interested in attending the party, which is always a wonderful, joyful Christmas event.

As always, the children and families supported by SCM thank you in advance for your care and concern.

**Special Christmastime Offerings
Prince of Peace Offering**

It's hard to believe but Christmas will soon be upon us. As we celebrate the birth of our savior Jesus Christ we should remember his directive to his disciples: "If you love me tend my sheep." Two thousand years later we are now the

Special Christmas Services

The **Family Service** at **5:00pm** on Christmas Eve features the opportunity to sing multiple carols and visit with the Holy Family in an atmosphere of wonder and joy.

The **Candlelight Communion Service** at **9:00pm** will be preceded by **Carols and Choir** at **8:30pm**.

Between services, participants are invited to join in UCCSV's now-traditional **Chowder Fest**, hosted by John Deckenback and David Brobst.

The first Sunday after Christmas will feature our simple service known as the **Moravian Love Feast**, which includes the service of sweet breads and hot cider, along with opportunities to sing yet more carols and to reflect on the story of Jesus' birth and infancy from the perspective of the gospel according to Matthew.

There will be NO church school on 26 December.

disciples and we should do our part to help those in need.

For this endeavor our church has established an Emergency Assistance program that through the years has given assistance to many people in the Germantown/Gaithersburg area needing help to pay rent, gas, electric, water bills, and medications. Our contributions to people needing help has been in the thousands of dollars in recent years.

The main source of funding for the Emergency Assistance ministry is obtained through the Prince of Peace offering, which is received in the two worship services on Christmas Eve. As we approach Christmas and the end of the calendar year, Emergency Assistance funds are running low but need is still great, with many calls coming in to our church every week with requests for financial aid.

We urge all members and friends who attend the Christmas Eve services to seriously consider giving a generous offering so that we can continue to give aid to those in need. Those unable to attend the Christmas Eve services but wishing to contribute to this cause may mail in contributions marked for Emergency Assistance or put properly marked contributions in a regular Sunday offering. Historically our congregation has been extremely generous. Hopefully we will all be filled with the spirit of Jesus at this Christmastide and continue this generosity.



Christmas Fund Offering

For over 100 years the Christmas Fund Offering for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund has been a way that members of the UCC can give aid to those who have served in our church and are now retired on low pensions. Recipients of this aid are ministers and some lay people who have served the church. Approximately 1600 people are currently receiving this aid.

Due to the economic downturn in our country, financial stress on those with the most limited resources is even greater now. The expectation for 2011 is that the need for aid will be greater than ever. We at UCCSV can help by being as generous as we can in contributing to the Christmas Fund Offering. This offering will be received on December 19, the Sunday before Christmas. Those unable to attend that service may contribute to this fund at the service following Christmas by designating a contribution to be for the Christmas Fund.

Let us all be generous in supporting those who gave their lives to serving Christ. Celebrate his birth with giving to others. Christ will be pleased and we'll feel really good about it too.

Fellowship



CHRISTMAS COOKIE EXCHANGE

SUNDAY DECEMBER, 12TH

Christmas and cookies just naturally go together. Those mouth watering holiday treats are so much a part of the season. Please plan on joining members and friends at Sandy Renner's home on **December 12th at 11:30** (after church service) for brunch, fellowship and some delicious cookies to take home.

Please bake **5 dozen cookies** (one kind-just double your batch) and you can go home with a great variety for the holiday. If baking isn't your thing, that's fine also; we still want you to come and enjoy our time together.

Please sign-up on the sheet outside the church office. **It will be sweet !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!**

PS BRING AN EXTRA CONTAINER TO TAKE YOUR SHARED COOKIES HOME



FAMILY CHRISTMAS CAROLING PARTY
Church Narthex
SUNDAY DECEMBER 19TH 6:00pm

Please bring your family and friends (everyone is welcomed) for an evening to singing and strolling through the surrounding neighborhoods as was done in old. We will share light refreshments and join our voices. This is a perfect family activity for the holiday season. Bring a flash light, in lieu of candles. *Amateurs are encouraged.....Snow is desired!*

Please look for the sign-up sheet outside church office.



DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS

December 3	Amie Chamberlin
December 10	Luzmarina Granada-Brobst
December 20	Heather Pelkey
December 23	Jim Russ
December 29	Jen Fuss

News from the UCC in Other Settings

Signing up for Keeping You ePosted

Want to stay UCC-connected? Sign up for Keeping You e-Posted. Anyone can sign up here:

<http://www.ucc.org/news/keeping-you-eposted/>

Feel free to share this link with those you think might want to receive KYeP, but do not. For future reference, the link is located under the top-header

“News” tab at ucc.org and reads “Keeping You ePosted.”

Thanks for helping spread the good word.

Ben Guess

P.S. An archive of all issues of KYeP can be accessed from this page, too.

Central Atlantic Conference Associate Richard Vaught to Retire

Dear CAC churches and clergy,

Richard Vaught has recently informed us of his intention to retire at the end of April, 2012.

Richard has served as Associate Conference Minister based in Shenandoah since 1994. Recently, he has also related to churches and clergy in the western portion of the Catoctin Association and served as coordinator of the Conference's Boundary Training efforts.

We receive his announcement with gratitude for his service in the Central Atlantic Conference and with prayers and good wishes as he anticipates a new phase of his life. And of course we look forward to continuing to work alongside Richard over the coming year and a half.

Sincerely,
John Deckenback, Conference Minister
Jim Bundy, President CAC Board of Directors

Our Church's Wider Mission

For many, the acronym OCWM is a mystery. It stands for Our Church's Wider Mission, but that still doesn't mean much to many. Some think of 'wider mission' as something that takes place in the heart of Africa when culturally insensitive Christians from western countries sought to impose their faith and their culture on native cultures. OCWM today is the financial support of local congregations which underwrites the work of the United Church of Christ in all its settings beyond the local congregation.

OCWM dollars support very mundane but essential services such as the maintenance of a Search and Call process which assists churches in calling pastors. It provides scholarships for seminary students and guidance for churches in strategic planning. Indeed at present 70% of your OCWM giving remains in the Central Atlantic Conference, providing staff services to churches, and providing dollars for youth ministry, mission programs, clergy support, congregational vitality programs, and training for ministers and church personnel. When a church needs assistance in dealing with discontent or conflict, OCWM dollars provide staff assistance. So OCWM provides for the infrastructure of the church.

In the same manner, OCWM is the lifeblood of our church's mission beyond our conference. Through the contributions we make, we support seminary education, the development of educational resources, ministries of justice and witness in our country and throughout the world. The networks and linkage we have make it possible for special offerings to be used directly without overhead in places of need. When disasters happen our gifts go immediately to provide assistance through churches and organizations that are already in place.

The work of our church is broad and deep. Just visit our website www.cacucc.org, or the United Church Website www.ucc.org. Look around and be amazed. You are part of a church which for nearly 300 years has sought to discern what God would have it do, and then acted. It has not been perfect in its discernment, to be sure, but it has always been serious about undertaking deeds of compassion, and justice and care.

As the economy struggles, it is easy for OCWM to get lost in the array of local priorities. We urge you not to forget the work of the church that happens beyond the places you live. Many of you know that this year we have found it necessary to cut back our services. We ask that you at least be aware of what you are doing when you choose to reduce OCWM, for this mission belongs to you.

PS. Individuals are encouraged to support OCWM through their offerings to the local congregation

where they belong, but you may make individual gifts to OCWM on the Conference website.

OTHER CHURCH NEWS

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Votes to Recognize UCC, Presbyterian, RCA and Christian Reformed Baptisms

The conference voted Tuesday (16 November 2010) during its fall general assembly in Baltimore to approve the "Common Agreement on Mutual Recognition of Baptism."

The agreement has been the result of six years of study and discussion between the representatives of the U.S. Catholic bishops and the Presbyterian Church-USA, the Reformed Church in America, the Christian Reformed Church, and the United Church of Christ.

Archbishop Wilton Gregory of Atlanta, chairman of the USCCB Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, noted Tuesday in a statement that this vote was a "milestone on the ecumenical journey."

"Together with our Reformed brothers and sisters" from the four churches, he said, "we Catholic bishops can once again affirm baptism as the basis of the real, even if incomplete, unity we share in Christ."

"Our conference looks forward to seeing all four of the authoritative bodies of the Reformed communities approve the common agreement as we have today," the archbishop said.

He explained that once it is approved by the other four denominations, the agreement will "allow Catholic ministers to presume that baptisms performed in these communities are 'true baptism' as understood in Catholic doctrine and law."

Communion

The prelate continued, "The presentation of a baptismal certificate by Reformed Christians who wish to come into full communion with the

The Rev. Sid Fowler was a member of the ecumenical committee which developed the baptism understandings with the Roman Catholics. In a recent email Sid volunteered to lead discussions on this (and, possibly, bring along one of the Roman Catholic participants.) Sid is the interim minister at Westmoreland Congregational UCC in Bethesda, MD.

Gaithersburg InterFaith Alliance Addresses Land Use Issues

Early in November, the *Gazette* carried an article, "Church's demolition permit for historic house still up for debate."

The issue in a nutshell is that Episcopal Church of the Ascension in Gaithersburg has filed a permit with the City of Gaithersburg to tear down a building on its own property in order to create much-needed parking for its worship services.

The house is over 50 years old, however, and such requests must be sent to the Historic District Commission. This Commission recommended the house be declared "historic" and the demolition permit was denied. Both sides made their cases at a recent City Council and Planning Commission hearing. The Planning Commission will discuss the issue at a meeting on December 1. The City Council will accept testimony until December 2 and will discuss the issue December 20.

Episcopal Church of the Ascension has provided a strong showing at the November hearing, and the matter now rests in the hands of the Mayor and City Council. The church is providing additional documentation of their parking needs, and the pastor is hopeful about the outcome. A video of the meeting is on the City website. The Mayor and Council must decide in favor of approving the application for the demolition of Ascension House or its designation as a historic resource, by December 13.

Letters supporting supporting Ascension's desire to remove the building at 202 South Summit Avenue so that the church can provide sufficient

parking for its religious worship services for the community may be sent to:

Mayor and City Council
City Hall
31 South Summit Street
Gaithersburg MD 20877

References to the matter would be:

"202 South Summit Avenue" or
"Application for a demolition permit for 202 South Summit Avenue."

The salutation should be:

"Dear Mayor Katz and Members of the City Council. E-mail addresses for the City Council and Mayor are: cityhall@gaithersburgmd.gov and skatz@gaithersburgmd.gov.

While historical preservation is important, we find in this special case, that it must take second place to the higher importance of providing spirituality, comfort, healing, heart, soul, and sound mind to the current and future Gaithersburg community--which Ascension's worship ministry accomplishes.

The Gazette article may be read at:

http://gazette.net/stories/11032010/poolnew195345_32699.php

Information about the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA) mentioned in the *Gazette* article can be found at:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religious_Land_Use_and_Institutionalized_Persons_Act

RLUIPA has been helpful to other churches in the area which have faced similar "burdensome" zoning law restriction issues.

Advent is BLUE, Christmas is White

The colors used for the various seasons of the church change as the season changes. The four Sundays of Advent which precede Christmas use the color blue—royal blue to remind us that we prepare our hearts for the sovereign one, Jesus.

Look for the color blue on the pulpit, communion table, pastor's stole, and Advent candles.

With Christmas through Epiphany, the color changes to white, reminding us of God's holy presence made known to us through Jesus the Christ.

December Bible Readings

Sunday, December 5

Isaiah 1:1-10
Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19
Romans 15:4-13
Matthew 1.12-17

Sunday, December 12

Isaiah 35:1-10
Psalm 146:5-10 or Luke 1:47-55
James 5:7-10
Matthew 1.18-23

Sunday, December 19

Isaiah 7:10-16
Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19
Romans 1:1-7
Matthew 1:23-25

Sunday, December 26

Isaiah 63:7-9
Psalm 148
Hebrews 2:10-18
Matthew 2:13-23
Isaiah 60:1-6
Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14
Ephesians 3:1-12
Matthew 2:1-12