

OPEN PRAIRIE UCC – April 2004 News

WORSHIP TEAM

PALM SUNDAY is April 4th with 10:30 a.m. worship at the Prouty Building. The celebration of Jesus riding triumphantly into Jerusalem is traditionally celebrated with a processional with palms. We ask that people bring their own live greenery as a symbol of praise to wave for this event. We will share communion and receive new members at this service.

HOLY WEEK

Maundy Thursday at Pilgrim Park. Potluck Seder supper at 6:00 p.m. A healing service will be led in the chapel at 8:00 p.m. The traveling cross vigil will begin immediately following the healing service. There is a sign up sheet available at church. We ask you to include your address and telephone # and check if the cross needs to be picked up or delivered.

Easter Services will be at Pilgrim Park at 7:00 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. The Sunrise service at 7:00 a.m. will be a combined service for Open Prairie and the Sheffield U.C.C. The service will be followed by a pancake breakfast. After breakfast Open Prairie will have an Easter Egg Hunt and, weather permitting, a hike to the cross. The 10:30 a.m. service for Open Prairie will follow.

Our next meeting is scheduled for April 27th at 7:00 p.m. at the Pastor's Place.

PUBLICITY

Kelly Autrey-Webber has been appointed "publicity chair" by the Church Council. If you or your team has anything you feel is newsworthy, please contact Kelly and she will write up an article!

A SPECIAL EVENT

The Installation Service for Rev. Curran Reichert as our Pastor is set for Sunday, April 18th at 3:00 p.m. at Pilgrim Park.

What is an Installation Service? In the United Church of Christ, the relationship between a church and its pastor is actually a THREE way relationship, with the partners being the church, the pastor and the association. The association bears witness to the relationship and celebrates it with a worship service of celebration and promises.

Special music! Special prayers! Special guests! Special words of support! This is a very special day in the life of our new church family and for Curran and Katie. The Fellowship Team will host a reception immediately following the service. See you there!

PRAIRIE CIRCLE

Prairie Circle was formed early this year for two purposes: to provide a social group to meet monthly and to serve as a liaison to Princeton Church Women United. All women in OPUCC are members of this Circle, participating as they choose. We will meet on the first Wednesday of each month for supper at 6:00 p.m. Our next meeting will be April 7 at 6:00 p.m. at Monical's Pizza. Please sign up at church or call Lynette Ivey to make a reservation.

PRAYER GROUP

A contemplative prayer group gathers at 8:15 a.m. on Wednesday mornings at the home of Hal and Margaret Autrey. We share a reading or prayer, listen to a Tibetan singing bowl, and meditate quietly for about 25 minutes. We close our group with a circle prayer. If you are interested or would like more information, talk to Kathy Hornbaker or Margaret Autrey.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Community Coffee!! The first UCC of Sheffield announces their coffee hour on Saturday, April 3rd from 7-10 a.m. at the parish hall. Stay a minute. Stay for the morning. Featuring Krispy Kreme Doughnuts!

Coming In May...

I am excited to announce a special guest preacher for May 2, 2004. Dennis Zehr of Coneflower Farms has agreed to come and speak on the topic of "Setting the Table." He and his family run an organic farm in Tiskilwa which offers a wide variety of organically grown produce for every season.

FYI...Through their Community Supported Agriculture program you can receive a box of fresh produce each week from mid-May through October. The produce selected for you is based on your "Preference List" which you or your family complete as part of the plan.

Katie and I have placed our order and if there is a critical mass from Open Prairie interested, we can establish our own drop off dates to be delivered directly to Open Prairie. If enough of us become involved, we can plan to gather and have some fellowship each week around drop off time. You know swap out vegies with each other, trade recipes and have a good prayer over the food that will nourish us and our families.

To learn more call Dennis Zehr or Ellen Davis-Zehr at 646-4809 (email: asledz@udnet.net). Dennis says, "We produce food in the way that we do because of a sense of spiritual call, this is our vocation." We will look forward to welcoming Dennis on the 2nd. -Curran

MISSION TEAM

Our Mission Team invites your support of our local Food Pantry. For the month of April we will collect pancake mix and syrup. Please bring your donations to worship on Sunday mornings. Thanks for your support!

The Mission Committee is trying to make the members aware of what the committee is about, where we are going and how we work with OCWM (Our Church's Wider Mission). Our Church's Wider Mission is the name used to describe the work done as the United Church of Christ beyond the local church-through our Conferences, national ministries, and UCC-related institutions. Our Church's Wider Mission is also the name we give to the financial support given by UCC members and congregations that makes this broader mission possible. In March we had a collection for One Great Hour of Sharing. This is above and beyond our regular giving. This offering goes to OCWM and from there it is divided out to different programs. Some of these programs include health education, agricultural development, emergency relief, refugee ministries and both international and domestic disaster response. These programs are handled in cooperation with Global Ministries, Church World Service, Action by Churches Together and hundreds of local partners around the world. One Great Hour of Sharing is part of a remarkable network of service and caring that is efficient, effective and faithful.

AN IMPORTANT MEETING

Church Council encourages members and friends of Open Prairie to attend the April 13th city zoning meeting. Because the building we are planning to rent at 535 S. Main is zoned for retail, we must get approval to use it for our church. The meeting will be at 7:30 p.m. in the City Council Chambers of City Hall at 2 South Main Street. We will gather as a group at 7:00 p.m. across the street in Veteran's Park. Please plan to attend to show your support!

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FELLOWSHIP TEAM

✂ There is NO need for anyone at Open Prairie to cook on Tuesday, April 27th, 2004. It is Open Prairie day/evening at Monical's Pizza! Monical's will donate 20% of each dining room check accompanied by the flier (you will be getting those at church) to our church. All proceeds will be given to the youth for their summer mission trip. Mark this date on your calendar now!

✂ Plans are underway for a newcomers evening. Watch for further announcements in the church bulletin.

✂ OPUCC will host the June birthday party at Prairie View as part of our work with Church Women United. OPUCC will provide refreshments, gifts and entertainment for the party. This is a great opportunity to showcase our talent..young and old! Please contact Lynette Ivey or Becky Perkins if you'd like to be involved!

✂ Thanks to all the people who have helped with the "coffee times". It has provided us with a time for fellowship both before and after the church service. If you have not helped and would like to do so, please contact either Becky or Lynette.

UPCOMING COFFE HOUR SCHEDULE

April 4: Janis Land
April 11: Easter
April 18: Volunteer Needed
April 25: Terri Zearing

✂ A mentoring program for new church members is in the works. The program is designed to offer the newest members of our church family a guide through those first few weeks of feeling like the new kid on the block. Mentor duties include but are not limited to: Introducing the new member to the congregation the Sunday after joining, help filling out the blue form for the church records, greeting and sitting with the new member in

church, guiding the new member through coffee hour, making introductions, calling or sending a note or two and checking in with the new member when he/she is unable to attend church. Serving as a mentor is a 2-3 month commitment. The fellowship team feels this is a wonderful way to extend our hospitality and enrich our church community. Please consider serving as a mentor. Watch for a sign up sheet on the coffee hour table.

✂ Please let Curran know if you, or someone you know, needs to hear from her, i. e. in the hospital, has a personal crisis etc...

✂ Upcoming events:

Easter Sunday at 7:00 AM
Sunrise Service and Pancake breakfast
at Pilgrim Park

April 18th at 3:00 p.m. at Pilgrim Park
Rev. Curran's installation and reception

✂ Our next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, April 21st at 7:00 p.m. at the Perkins' home.

CHURCH INFORMATION

Temporary Church Office:
22937 1140 N Ave
Princeton IL 61356
(815) 659-3432
mail@openprairie.org

Marcie Jagers, Secretary

Rev. Curran Reichert
308 Park Ave W
Princeton, IL 61356
(815) 872-1661 church phone
(815) 872-1515 home phone
revreichert@openprairie.org

Church Web Site:
www.openprairie.org

CHRISTIAN ED

ANNOUNCING.....

The first annual Open Prairie Festival of the Arts will be held at Pilgrim Park on Sunday, April 25th from 4-7 p.m.

A silent auction will be held with church members offering unique and priceless items for sale. A **LIVE** auction will also take place during the evening. If you have an item, large or small, for either the silent or live auction, please contact Kathy or Marcie at 659-3432 or e-mail mail@openprairie.org.

Church members and friends will provide musical entertainment throughout the Festival. A list of the performers will be released in the near future.

A delicious baked potato bar will be available with numerous toppings, served and provided by the Sr. High Youth Group. A variety of desserts will also be served.

All donations will go to the Sr. High Youth Group's 2004 summer mission trip to the Cheyenne River Indian Reservation in Cherry Creek, South Dakota.

CAN YOU HELP?

Anyone who is interested in performing at the Festival or Arts.....this can be a skit, a mime, a reading, singing, music, or any other creative idea you might have.....please call Kathy or Marcie at 659-3432 or e-mail mail@openprairie.org

SR. HIGH NEWS

Thanks to everyone who supported our barbecue luncheon after church last Sunday. We raised \$502 toward our summer mission trip! Thanks to all the youth and their families for donating the food and working together!

The Sr. High will have a Round Table Talks this Sunday, April 4th at 6:30 p.m. at the Pastor's Place.

CONFIRMATION NEWS

March 21, 2004, Confirmation Trip to Trinity UCC in Chicago. Rich & Kathy Hornbaker and mentor Paul Goble traveled to Chicago with Abby Beneke, Sallee Zearing, Olivia Bettasso, Payden Aronson, Evan Hale, and John Zearing. We arrived early and still had trouble finding seats in church! Some comments from the kids: "lively singers, emotional with their singing, crying, drummer & guitars were good, friendly, liked the music, all Democrats, against Bush, lots of music, and everyone sang the Lord's Prayer". It was a wonderful day!

On March 17th, the Confirmands and Kathy visited Father Dom at St. Bede Catholic Monastery in Spring Valley. Father Dom is a Dominican Monk with a lot of energy! He took us on a tour of the church and answered questions. We attended Mass at 5:00 p.m. Reflecting about Father Dom on the way home were the following comments:

- Teaches drama and religion
- He owns nothing
- Give all away
- Has no idea how much he makes (\$)
- Has 2 weeks vacation
- Taking a cruise to Alaska – How to Make Bread
- Has tv show
- Dust mops the whole 3rd floor
- No vows of silence

A trip to Lou's LaGrotto Pizzeria filled our bellies.

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PRAIRIE ASSOCIATION MEETING

The 12th Annual Meeting of the Prairie Association of the Illinois Conference will be held Saturday, **April 24, 2004**, beginning at 8:30 a.m. We will be hosted by First Congregational UCC of Pecatonica.

Voting delegates are all Ordained and Licensed Ministers with standing in the Association, all Volunteer Program Staff approved by the Executive Committee of the Association, plus 2 adult representatives and 1 youth representative elected by each congregation, and all persons serving on the Prairie Association Council.

The speaker for our meeting will be Lori Wilbert, speaking on Restorative Justice." Wilbert is a deaconess in the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod. She teaches Prison Chaplaincy and Restorative Justice at Lutheran School of Theology, Chicago, and Wartburg Seminary, Dubuque. In addition, Wilbert does weekly chaplaincy work and teaches at Stateville Correctional Center, Joliet. Restorative Justice focuses on the offender's need to be fully aware of the harm that the crime has done to others, to take full responsibility for it, and even to make amends to the victim in so far as that is possible.

Registration forms are available by contacting the church office or you may register online at www.prairieucc.org. Registration (including the noon meal and all materials) is \$20.00 for adults and \$10.00 for youth. Retired clergy/spouses and in-care students are free.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Sunday Mornings

- 9:30 am Sunday School at Prouty Building
- 10:30 am Worship at Prouty Building

- 4/03 10:00 am Scripture Discussion Group
- 4/04 6:00 pm Sr. High Round Table Talks
- 4/07 8:15 am Prayer Group
6:00 pm Prairie Circle @ Monical's
- 4/08 4:30 pm Set-up for Maundy Thursday
6:00 pm Potluck Seder Meal
8:00 pm Maundy Thursday Service
- 4/11 7:00 am Sunrise Service @ Pilgrim Park
10:30 am Easter Service @ Pilgrim Park
- 4/13 7:30 pm City Zoning Meeting
- 4/14 8:15 am Prayer Group
7:00 pm Church Council Meeting
- 4/15 6:30 pm Choir Practice
- 4/18 3:00 pm Rev. Curran's Installation
- 4/21 8:15 am Prayer Group
7:00 pm Fellowship Team @ Perkins
- 4/22 6:30 pm Choir Practice
- 4/24 8:30 am Prairie Association Meeting
- 4/25 5:00 pm Festival of Arts & Potato Bar
4/27 Open Prairie eats at Monicals!
7:00 pm Worship Team
- 4/28 8:15 am Prayer Group
- 4/29 6:30 pm Choir Practice

PASTOR'S MESSAGE

Greetings in the name of Christ. Much has happened this past month in our lives as a church, in our lives as a community and in our world at large. One of the more significant issues of this past month was related to the issue of marriage and people in same gender relationships. I have received phone calls from local newspapers asking for my position on the matter, my decision was not to respond to newspapers before we had addressed the topic as a community. I see this column as a place to begin the conversation.

As many of you know, my partner Katie and I had a Holy Union in California in the year 2002. Over one hundred and fifty of our closest friends attended and the event was presided over by more clergy than are usually assembled in one location for such an occasion, even the rafters were full up with clergy. The service was held in a Presbyterian Church and we were formally entered into the records of the church under the heading of marriages held in the church that year. While the event represented to us a marriage and for all intent and purposes to those who gathered it was understood to be a marriage, legally we were not married.

We at Open Prairie have not had any official discussion regarding the topic of Gay Marriage, I would not hasten to assume that we are all in agreement on the issue. It seems however, important that I create an opening to speak in some way to the issue at hand in a timely manner. Understand that I do so out of my own social location and as one who is deeply effected by the decisions that are being made in our country regarding marriage in general. I hope you will see this as an open invitation to further dialogue.

Included you will find two letters in support of same sex marriage and one opposing the proposed Constitutional amendment, that I thought were written exceptionally well. I hope, while this column is longer than usual and may need to be read in several sittings, it will nonetheless be of value to you.

The first letter is from The Coalition, the organization within the UCC which exists to support concerns of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Christians. The second is from a woman with whom I had the pleasure of being in a movie and also shared the same voice teacher in New York. She is none other than Bette Midler. I think both letters shed much needed light on the arguments at hand. The third is written by the President of the first Seminary I attended, Union Theological Seminary in New York.

In addition to the letters, here are some facts that are helpful to know as you form your own opinions regarding this debate.

- There are hundreds of benefits currently extended to heterosexual couples that are not extended to same gender couples.
- Civil unions confer only a fourth of the legal protections of civil marriage.
- Civil unions are a unique legal status recognized only in Vermont and are not portable from state to state like civil marriages.
- Using different language to describe gay families and straight families stigmatizes gay families as second-class citizens.

My prayer is that our hearts and minds continue to be open to the radical hospitality to which we as people of faith have been called. Regardless of where you stand on this particular issue, we stand together as one united by the questions, brought closer by serious consideration of the issues, and growing in faith as we honor the humanity of each of our members. May God bless each of you richly as we embrace Spring and the many wonders it will bring.

Peace in Christ,
Rev. Curran R. Reichert

Editors Note: The letters will follow in a separate e-mail.