

CHOIR NEWS

A SPECIAL CHOIR REHEARSAL, in preparation for the community concert, is set for Saturday, December 17th from 4-5:30 p.m. at the church.

CHRISTMAS PARTY. Following the rehearsal on December 17th, Curran & Katie will host a Christmas party & dinner for the choir at their home.

A COMMUNITY CAROLING CONCERT has been planned here at Open Prairie on Sunday, December 18th at 6:30 p.m. The OPUCC choir will perform favorite traditional and contemporary seasonal music and the audience will be invited to join in on a number of traditional carols. A free will offering will be accepted. Refreshments will be served following the concert and there will be a cookie sale with proceeds to benefit the OPUCC youth mission trip.

TEAM MEETING

Our next Team Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, December 13th at 7:00 p.m. at the church. Instead of having meetings four Tuesday nights of the month, all teams meet together once a month for two hours. I look forward to seeing all the teams represented on the 13th. Thanks, Rev. Reichert

YOGA CLASS

Beginning Wednesday, November 30th, yoga will be practiced at OPUCC on Wednesday evenings at 6pm. This will be a relaxing, modified Ashtanga class led by Karyn Vaughn. The class focuses on breathing techniques and gentle stretches which relieve stress and help to gain flexibility. Cost is \$20/month with all proceeds going to OPUCC. If interested, call Karyn at (815) 866-4787 or (815) 646-4511. We will have a mat for you to use!

ADVENT SMALL GROUP

Curran continues to lead an Advent Small Group Series on the theme of Wonder at 7:00 p.m. at the church. Please note the December dates in your calendar:

- 12/7 An age that both longs for the transcendent and fears it
- 12/14 Outside the safe enclosure of what we know

LUNCH AFTER CHURCH

The Youth Group plans to serve a delicious Mexicali Café luncheon on Sunday, December 11th following worship. A free will offering will be taken to benefit next summer's mission trip.

YOU'RE INVITED!

What is Christian Education? The answer to this question is anything but short and sweet! Sunday School for children through junior high, high school youth group, mission trips, adult education studies, intergenerational programming, special interest groups, children's choir, children's moment during church and many seasonal events fall under this umbrella. Christian Education can offer amazing opportunities for personal growth and for growing together as a church family. The Christian Education Team would like to expand its offerings but needs help (the current team has operated with just two members since summer!) in doing so. If you feel a "tug" at the mention of even one of the areas encompassed by Christian Ed, please contact Kathy Hornbaker, Angie Hughes or Becky Perkins. All ages, sexes and ideas for future programming are welcome!

PASTOR'S MESSAGE

The Snow Man by WALLACE STEVENS

*One must have a mind of winter
To regard the frost and the boughs
Of the pine-trees crusted with snow;*

*And have been cold a long time
To behold the junipers shagged with ice,
The spruces rough in the distant glitter*

*Of the January sun; and not to think
Of any misery in the sound of the wind,
In the sound of a few leaves,*

*Which is the sound of the land
Full of the same wind
That is blowing in the same bare place*

*For the listener, who listens in the snow,
And, nothing himself, beholds
Nothing that is not there
and the nothing that is.*

Listening to NPR on the way to my piano lesson last night, I heard this poem. The languid baritone on the radio described it as simply the “best poem ever written!” Why is it the best poem ever written? Why, it is because of the “And,” of course. Look at it again, notice that just when you think the thought is over, there peaking round the corner is that pesky “And.” By the end of the segment I had to agree, that this poem certainly has that special something. More than just a whimsical winter reflection, this poem captures the essence of what it means to be completely empty and completely full all at once. A snowman is nothing more and nothing less than the very thing of which he is made...snow. And being made of the very elements that surround him he is devoid of the harsh judgments we who are not made of snow often have towards winter. Instead, he is one with winter. For surely, the voice mused over the sound waves, “it is not the snow itself that is cold, but the person who is standing in it.”

This got me thinking about Advent and Christmas. It is the time during the church year that seems to be the most at one with itself. In and of itself, this cycle makes perfect sense. It is a complete story from beginning to end, resplendent with additions that have become comfortable over time- like an old friend we meet up with once a year. Advent is a time of preparation and waiting in the dark that we know precedes the birth of the Light of the World, our friend and Savior, the Prince of Peace, Jesus the Christ. Advent is a seasonal ritual of making peace with the darkness that surrounds us, the darkness that is both metaphoric and real. And because we know that the Advent story ends with the Christmas story, we too become willing- for a time- to become one with it.

The Christmas story, sometimes referred to as the “greatest story ever told,” like “the greatest poem ever written,” has some surprising “Ands” of its own. Becoming one with the darkness is just the beginning...if we are really honest becoming one with the darkness is often easier than befriending the Christ light, which is ultimately what being a part of this story requires of us. Like *The Snowman*, comfortable in his empty yet full surroundings, we are not as shocked by the darkness as we once might have been. We have gotten used to the cynicism, sarcasm and doubt that linger in the shadowy forests of our minds. Comfortable almost to the point of numbness, we become frozen in apathy, self-criticism, and angst. It will take some mighty “Ands” to chip off the icy aperture to which we have become accustomed. Fortunately, mighty “Ands” this story delivers. Among them are surprising birth announcements, mysterious angels, radiant stars and wise travelers. But the greatest “And” of all is indeed Christ the newborn King. As if the infant weren’t “And,” enough. Jesus’ 33 years of life and ministry have provided the catalyst for generations upon generations to be catapulted into new understandings of reality for thousands of years. Emanuel, God with us, that is an “And” that packs quite a wallop.

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While we may look upon the world as something we can scarcely understand, there is something life transforming that comes in standing with Christ in this bleak and barren, war torn world. Something comforting that comes from knowing God has always been and will always be there, long after we have come and gone. This special something enables us like *The Snowman* to embrace this earthly landscape with lenses that are able to perceive the "Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is."

May God Bless us with greater understanding of this season as we journey through it together.

In Christ,
Rev. Curran Reichert

HAPPY BIRTHDAYS

DECEMBER

5 Stephen Stumpf
11 Al Forristall
15 Sallee Beneke
18 Frank Bettasso
Beth Forristall
20 Adam Webber
21 Courtney Sapp
23 Daniel Kuhnert
27 Janis Land

Note: if you have any additions or corrections, please let Marcie know at the church office

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

12/01	6:30	pm	Choir at Autrey-Webbers
12/04	4:00	pm	Hanging of the Greens
	5:00	pm	Meal
	6:00	pm	Contemplative Worship
12/07			PIZZA HUT DAY
	8:00	am	Prayer Group at Autreys
	5:30	pm	Prairie Circle at Pizza Hut
	7:00	pm	Small Group at church
12/08	6:30	pm	Choir at Autrey-Webbers
12/11	10:30	am	Worship Service
	12:00	pm	Sr. High 'Mexicali Café'
	1:00	pm	Sr. High Cookie Baking
12/13	7:00	pm	Team Meeting at church
12/14	8:00	am	Prayer Group at Autreys
	7:00	pm	Small Group at church
12/15	6:30	pm	Choir at Autrey-Webbers
12/17	4:00	pm	Choir rehearsal at church
12/18	10:30	am	Worship
	5:30	pm	Sr. High Round Table
	6:30	pm	Community Caroling Concert
12/21	8:00	am	Prayer Group at Autreys
12/22	6:30	pm	Choir at Autrey-Webbers
12/24	7:30	pm	Refreshments
	7:45	pm	Caroling
	8:00	pm	Christmas Eve Worship
12/25			No Worship Service

GREETER SCHEDULE

12/04	Ray & Carol Kuhnert
12/11	June Harmon
12/18	Freida Anderson
12/24	
01/01	
01/08	Suzie Stalter & Janis Land
01/15	Don & Barb Schiff
01/22	Ginny Martin & Cherie Martin
01/29	Al Forristall

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SR. HIGH NEWS

Upcoming Scheduled Events:

December 4th

4:00 p.m. Hanging of the Greens. A meal will be shared after the decorating. A contemplative Taize worship service will follow the meal.

December 11th

Back by popular demand – the Sr. High will serve a Mexicali Café as a fund raiser for our summer mission trip. Worship is at 10:30 a.m. and we will serve the meal following the service.

1-3 p.m. Cooking Baking with Mary Jane in the church kitchen! Please bring a batch of your family's favorite cookie dough or holiday treat.

December 18th

5:30 p.m. Round Table Talks at the church
6:30 p.m. Community Christmas Caroling Concert - we will be selling plates of the cookies we made

PIZZA! PIZZA!

Pizza Hut day this month for Open Prairie is Wednesday, December 7th. Be sure to pick up a form at church to take with you!

OH NUTS!

One pound bags of tasty pecan halves are available for sale! You can pick up a bag or two anytime at the church office or Sunday mornings. Cost \$8.00.

CORRESPONDENCE

To our loving church family,

Thank you so much for the plant at my mother's funeral. Love, Lori & Trishia Pettee

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

The closet in the church office reception area has mailboxes for each team, the pastor, the treasurer, the moderator and the choir. If you need to communicate anything with these folks, feel free to drop off your information in their mailbox. Those folks who represent teams are asked to remember to check your mailbox frequently!

CHRISTMAS WORSHIP TIME

The worship team announces the following schedule on Christmas Eve:

7:30 pm	Refreshments
7:45 pm	Caroling
8:00 pm	Worship Service

There will be no worship service on Sunday, December 25th.

MEMBER NEWS

Shawn Klingel is graduating on December 11th from Northern Illinois University College of Engineering and Engineering Technology with a degree in manufacturing technology. Several days a week, when not attending classes, last year and currently he is working as a lab/teacher's assistant in the metrology lab at Northern and at Auto Meter as quality assurance engineer in instrument assembly and testing in Sycamore.

CORRESPONDENCE

What a wonderful time we had when we joined you for your special dedication service on September 18, 2005! Thank you for being so warm and welcoming to us! We especially enjoyed the music and the food! ☺ On the way home we all decided we would like to worship with you again. Special thanks to Roger Perkins & Freida Anderson who talked with us after worship! -Granville UCC Confirmation Class

HURRICANE NEWS

Since Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast, churches of the Illinois Conference have been more than generous in the creation of "Personal Hygiene Kits." Along with "Clean up Kits," about 10,000 kits were created, and for that the Disaster Ministry is most grateful. We were able to send over 1,500 hygiene kits to the Red Cross, which they were able to use in helping Katrina Evacuees get settled as they came into Illinois. Another 3,000 are being used for fires and crises that occur within the state. There are, on the average, 5 house/apartment fires in Chicago alone each night. The kits are a valuable and needed resource for those families suffering loss.

In addition the Disaster Ministry Team took 100 clean up kits to Newburgh, Indiana, for use with families reclaiming their homes and lives after recent devastating tornadoes.

Thanks goes out to all the churches who assisted in the creation of these kits. The Disaster Ministry will continue to use them in all disaster situations as they occur. Should your community suffer losses from any kind of disaster, minor or major, we stand ready to offer assistance.

However, since we had such a tremendous response of kits the past 4 months, we now have more than enough and must urge churches to place their emphasis elsewhere.

We have already begun compiling a list of churches willing to send work groups to the coast. Work groups are also needed in 4 locations in Florida as a result of hurricanes both this year and last. In addition, work groups will also be needed for the Indiana and Iowa clean ups. If your church is interested in forming work groups, please contact either Bob Tripp at rjtripp@ameritech.net or Ben McNeal at aandbmc@msn.com or go online to the UCC website and click on the Disaster Ministry link.

If your church has individual members desiring to help, we can join them up with other members, so groups from 1 to ?? are all needed.

Thanks for all that your church has done. Peace and blessings on your ministries and our continued efforts to make life better where a crisis exists.

PRAIRIE CIRCLE

Prairie Circle meets the first Wednesday night of every month to share a meal. On December 7th we will gather at Pizza Hut at 5:30 p.m. This is open to all the women of Open Prairie and their pals. For more information call Donna Chelin at 875-2060.

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Spring Valley UCC invites our church family to their "Cookie Walk" on December 3rd from 8 am to Noon at their church. This is a "select your own" from a wide variety of cookies and candies sale. Peanut brittle will also be on sale at \$5 per bag.

TREASURER'S REPORT

November 2005 General Operating Fund

Total Income	\$13,760.72
Total Expenses	<u>6,518.98</u>
Net	\$ 7,241.74

OPPORTUNITY FOR PRAYER

A contemplative prayer group gathers every Wednesday morning at the home of Hal & Margaret Autrey from 8:00-8:45 a.m. We open our prayer time with the reading of a prayer, poem or Scripture. We then begin 25 minutes of contemplative prayer & meditation with the sound of a singing bowl. We conclude with a time for joys and concerns. We extend an invitation to anyone interested to talk to Margaret Autrey or Kathy Hornbaker, or stop by on a Wednesday morning to join us!

MISSION TEAM

Greetings from the Mission Team,

This past month the Mission Team sponsored the independent documentary film, "Wal-Mart; The High Cost of Low Price". About fifty people came to watch the film and take part in a discussion. I was really pleased with the turnout and with the interesting mix of people of all ages and walks of life. At least half of the folks who came were not part of our congregation. It was great to see our church living into our commitment to provide a sacred space for many different purposes. The social justice issues surrounding Wal-Mart are heavily charged and evoke strong emotions and I was very pleased that the discussion following the film was conducted with respect and consideration for other's differing viewpoints. In true Open Prairie fashion, we encouraged the assembled company to sit in a circle for discussion and face one another. I noticed an interesting shift during the course of the evening. When people first arrived, they seemed uncertain and a bit uncomfortable choosing to sit in isolated pockets apart from one another. By the conclusion of the evening, there was a marked change in mood. At the end we stood together in a circle holding one another's hands and prayed together. Afterwards, people chose to linger and share more experiences with one another.

This Sunday, on December 4th, the Giving Tree will make its seasonal appearance. Like last year, ornaments with a gift wish of a Gateway client will hang upon the tree and we will invite you to take one, or more if you wish. We ask you to wrap the gifts with a tag including the Gateway person's code on it and a salutation from Open Prairie. For example, "To G8 from your Open Prairie friends" or something of that nature. We need the wrapped gifts delivered to the church by December 13th.

Freedom House has asked for our help this Christmas season. Monday, December 12th

through Thursday, December 15th, they will be wrapping gifts for their clients and have asked for volunteers to help. Also, on December 15th, they are holding a Christmas party for which they need help. If you would like to be involved in one or both of these projects please get in touch with Kelly Autrey-Webber.

We have ordered a lovely basket from a Fair Trade Organization to be our official Food Pantry basket. Until that comes we have our not so lovely Staples box located in the Foyer. Thank you for continuing your donations. And, thank you Margaret Autrey for driving all the donations to the Food Pantry each week.

Peace to you all, Kelly

STEWARDSHIP

God is still speaking to Open Prairie....do you hear it?

During the month of October we emphasized stewardship and the abundance given to us from God. The result is that Open Prairie is a generous congregation. Our giving will enable and encourage our mission to continue to grow. Thank you for your faithful response.

This thriving spirit of generosity goes far beyond the dollar support for next year's plan. You can see it in the smiles and the hugs, the laughter and the tears, the work of the committees and teams, the worship services on Sunday. Open Prairie is a place of inspiration, and generosity is within our hearts.

We are about to enter the Christmas season and celebrate the gift of God-with-us. I believe God is moving through Open Prairie....do you feel it?

Patricia Wilson, Stewardship Chr

WORSHIP TEAM

If you haven't already, please plan to bring a candle and a candleholder (preferably something with a big enough base to catch drips) to one of the remaining Advent Sunday services. We will include an opportunity for the congregation to "bring light" to the altar as part of our Advent rituals and want to include as much diversity in the forms of light as we exhibit in our wonderfully varied faith community.

Please put your name on the candleholder. We would like to accumulate candleholders through Christmas Eve, when we will use them as part of our candlelight service (you can take them home with you then--but we'll need to be able to identify them if you don't attend Christmas Eve!).

FELLOWSHIP TEAM

Upcoming Events:

The Fellowship Team is organizing refreshments for the Choir Christmas Concert on Sunday, December 18th. The concert will be open to the public and hopefully we'll need lots of cookies to serve our guests. We need your help! Please consider donating two or three dozen cookies for this event. There is a sign-up sheet on the back table. Come listen, sing, enjoy (and bring cookies) to this wonderful event!

Reminders:

The Christmas Eve service will begin with a brief fellowship time before the service at 8:00 PM. Plan to arrive at 7:30 for refreshments, carols and the opportunity to wish each other a joyous Christmas.

Yes, our first Sunday 4:00 pm service is on New Year's Day. Yikes! Take a break from all the football for a time of worship and a hearty soup supper provided by the Fellowship Team. What a great way to usher in a new year!

Candy, candy, candy!

Stuck for a gift for that hard to buy for person? In need of just the right sweet to spice up your holiday table? Need a little something extra to put out with Santa's cookies? Prairie Kitchen Candies are just what you need. A variety of flavors are available for just \$3.00 a half pound. Contact Donna Chelin and she'll be happy to bring your candy to church next Sunday.

Calling and Caring

Carol Mazzaro (home: 872-0814, cell: 815/922-8182) has volunteered to serve as coordinator for our church's Calling and Caring Ministry. Please contact Carol directly if you know of someone in need of a visit(s) or in need of having a meal(s) brought in. She will contact and coordinate volunteers to make all this happen. Thank you, Carol, for volunteering your time and telephone talents for this important ministry.

Carol will do the calling and coordinating, our church family will provide the manpower, woman-power, kid power to make all this happen. Please call Carol or sign up at the back table if you are willing to visit those in need of a visit, if you're willing to provide a meal (you don't have to be a cook...think take out!) or are willing to do both. This is an awesome way to help us care for each other. If you're willing to participate but would like to work with someone just let Carol know that and she'll set you up with a partner.

GET YOUR ADVENT SEASON STARTED

Come join with our church family as we decorate our sanctuary for the Advent season. "Hanging of the Greens" will be this Sunday, December 4th at 4:00 p.m. Following the decorating we will share a simple meal together and our worship should take place around 6:00 p.m. See you there!

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CHURCH INFORMATION

Church Office:
25 E. Marion St
Princeton, IL 61356
(815) 872-5150 mail@openprairie.org
(815) 872-5160 fax

Marcie's Hours:
Tuesday & Thursday 8:30 – 3:00 p.m.
Wednesday 1:00 – 3:00 p.m.

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

Church Web Site: www.openprairie.org



*Many wishes for a wonder-filled
Christmas and prayers for peace
in the coming year.*

Open Prairie United Church of Christ
25 E. Marion Street
Princeton, IL 61356