

PASTOR'S MESSAGE

What do the Island of Misfit Toys, the Apocalypse and Christmas Caroling have in common? Open Prairie of course! Happy December good people, this is an exciting season in the church and there are lots of ways to get involved.

I will be facilitating a three part small group on "The End of Times" during the first three weeks of Advent, not a common theme for Christmastime, but one that is prevalent in the scriptures of Advent -come if you have ever wondered about the topic, come if you have questions about the topic, come because these groups are always revelatory and inspiring!

One of the great joys on my heart is that so many of the Community Life Teams are stepping forward to offer tasty treats to enhance this holy season. The Christian Education Team is hosting an Advent Workshop and Cookie Sale, the Mission Team will host a showing of the movie "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" to celebrate OPUCC's first billboard, the Worship Team is excited about its second annual Christmas Concert...and there is much, much more. What a thrill it gives me to see so many people taking leadership and getting involved; it seems to me there is something for everyone.

On Christmas Eve, which happens to fall on a Sunday this year, the Worship Team has decided to offer one family friendly Worship Service with caroling at 7:30 pm and worship at 8:00 pm. Additionally, I would like to issue a personal invitation to those of you who might like to engage in a contemplative moment, during what can be an overcrowded season, join me at 10:30 am at Pilgrim Park to walk the beautiful stone Labyrinth. We will meet at the entrance to the chapel and walk to the Labyrinth together. There will be warm beverages to warm our hands when the walk is done.

This is a great season to spread the word about the welcoming embrace of this church

community. Be sure to invite friends and loved ones to join you for worship and all the other offerings being made available.

I leave you with a quote and a question for your consideration: "*We see in the world what we carry in our heart.*" - Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

What will you carry in your heart this Advent Season?

Blessings of Peace and Love,
Rev. Curran Reichert

HAPPY DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS

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

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

CORRESPONDENCE

Dear Curran, Ron, Angie, Kelly, and Pam,

Your spirited performance last Friday at our annual Thanksgiving dinner at the Methodist church was a great treat for all of us connected with Gateway. Thank you for contributing your time, energy and wonderful talents to making this event so uplifting for all who attended.

This is the first time that our musical entertainers did double duty – singing *and* helping serve the meal!

We appreciate Open Prairie's generosity and support for Gateway and the many individuals who use our services. We give thanks that collectively and individually you are helping to build a better community for all.

Sincerely, Paul Kautz

STEWARDSHIP AND FINANCE

Fall is an active time for the Stewardship and Finance Team. In addition to planning and implementing the Annual Stewardship Drive in October and projecting the 2007 budget, we encouraged gifts to the Neighbors in Need special offering in September.

Persons serving on this team have been diligent in their responsibilities and continue to actively seek methods of clarity to help you, friends and members of Open Prairie understand the importance stewardship has in the mission of our church.

I am continually amazed at the generosity of our congregation. The special offerings have increased dramatically and about 72% of 2007 pledges have been returned which includes new contributions and increased contributions. Approximately 40% have take advantage of the new electronic contribution option offered this year.

Thanks to each of you who have thoughtfully and prayerfully returned your pledge cards. Your gifts are an expression of joy and gratitude to a loving God.

On December 17th, we have an opportunity to participate in the last special offering for 2006 – The Christmas Fund. This offering has a direct and dramatic impact upon the lives of clergy and lay employees, active and retired, who serve the UCC. Your gifts provide the primary source of funding for pension and health premium supplementation, Christmas checks to low-income retirees, and emergency grants in time of crises.

Contributions to the annual Christmas Fund Special Offering work throughout the year, not just during the Christmas Season.

Hope to see you in church,
Patricia Wilson

SPRING 2007 WORK PROJECT TRIP

Hurricane Relief Mission Trip
Biloxi, Mississippi
APRIL 22-28, 2007

A sign-up sheet is available in the church office or contact Steve Gunning for more information.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

12/03	9:30 am	Confirmation Class
	10:30 am	Worship
	6:00 pm	Youth Group Round Table
12/05	6:00 pm	Prairie Circle
12/06	8:00 am	Prayer Group at Autrey's
	7:00 pm	Advent Small Group
12/07	6:00 pm	Greening of the Church
12/10	10:30 am	Worship
		Youth Group Road Trip
12/13	8:00 am	Prayer Group at Autrey's
	7:00 pm	Advent Small Group
12/14	6:30 pm	Choir at Webber's
12/17	9:30 am	Confirmation Meeting
	10:30 am	Worship followed by
		Soup Lunch/Advent Fair
	6:30 pm	Movie : Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer
12/20	8:00 am	Prayer Group at Autrey's
	7:00 pm	Advent Small Group
12/21	6:30 pm	Choir at Webber's
12/23	7:00 pm	Caroling Concert
12/24	10:30 am	Labyrinth Walk at Pilgrim Park
	7:30 pm	Caroling
	8:00 pm	Christmas Eve Worship
12/31	10:30 am	Jubilee Sunday
		Worship outside the walls

HOLIDAY CONCERT

A COMMUNITY CAROLING CONCERT has been planned here at Open Prairie for Saturday, December 23rd at 7:00 p.m. The OPUCC choir will perform favorite traditional and seasonal solos pieces and the audience will be invited to join in on a number of traditional carols. A free will offering will be accepted. Cider and coffee will be served following the concert and there will be a cookie sale with proceeds to benefit the OPUCC youth mission trip.

GREETINGS from the MISSION TEAM

This past week the Mission Team had the pleasure of helping with the entertainment for Gateway's Thanksgiving luncheon. Ron, Angie, Curran, and Kelly first helped to serve the meal and then sang some rousing happy selections ably accompanied by Pam Gonigam. A good time was had by all.

The Open Prairie billboards are up and we hope you will have a chance to see them. One is located on the road heading from Tiskilwa to Princeton while the other is located on Peoria Road behind the Peru Mall, a well traveled road. Hopefully, our message will bring a smile and pique some curiosity.

Our December film selection will be "Rudolph, the Red Nosed Reindeer" to back up the Rudolph billboard. So, on December 17th at 6:30 come dressed as your favorite misfit toy or favorite character from Rudolph, eat popcorn, and sing along with the songs.

Thanks to everybody who agreed to write letters of encouragement and hope to the women of New Orleans. This is a wonderful outreach and lets these folks know they are not forgotten.

We will be offering more opportunities to contact our elected officials with letters and e-mails with updates from the UCC's Justice and Witness action alert network. This is a wonderful service provided by the UCC and is a most helpful resource to help us keep abreast of current issues and ways in which we can make a difference.

This month we will be celebrating our annual Christmas Giving Tree which provides gifts for our Gateway neighbors. On the first Sunday in

December we will have paper ornaments with the gift item written on it. Please take one and return the gift wrapped and ready to go by December 10th to the church. We'll take it from there. Remember to be sure to attach a tag with the identifying number or letter (e.g. A, B, C, or #1, #2, #3) to each package and include that it's from an Open Prairie friend.

Susan, Jim Jarvis, and I have been attending workshops hosted by Gateway on how we might be more accessible, welcoming, and inclusive to people with disabilities. They were most helpful and we will let you know soon what we learned.

Please remember the Food Pantry as the weather gets colder. They have asked us to contribute paper products (paper towels, napkins, paper plates, etc...) for the month of December.

Peace, Kelly

JUBILEE SUNDAY

We will be celebrating a Jubilee Sunday on December 31st. We use any 5th Sunday of the month for an opportunity to "worship outside the walls" and take part in local mission work. During our usual time of worship on December 31st, we will be preparing a meal to deliver to several Gateway homes. Please join us for fun, fellowship, and help spread some joy.

CORRESPONDENCE

Perry Memorial Hospital Auxiliary's Tree of Lights campaign is underway. The "Tree of Lights" is a special tree on the East lawn of the hospital displaying lights each representing a contribution, memorial, or honorary donation. Each light is \$10 and a "special" light on the star is \$100. This year the "Tree of Lights" has pledged to purchase a treatment chair for Ambulatory Care and a patient transport cart for the Emergency Department. Forms are available in the hospital gift shop, at the Prouty Building, and at various locations around town. Donations can be mailed to Nancy Smith at 301-5L Hideaway Drive, Princeton, Illinois 61356. For more information or to request brochures contact: Nancy Smith at 875-2279 or Debbie Kirley at 875-6565.

CHRISTIAN ED

Christmas Cards for Sale!!! For the first time ever, the Sunday School youth have designed their own Christmas cards that have been professionally printed and packaged in sets of 12 with envelopes for you to purchase. All proceeds from the sale of the cards will be used for the Heifer Project which the youth contribute towards every year at Christmas. Last year the youth were able to purchase a pig and a goat. This year they hope to be able to purchase several animals. Please show your support by purchasing the cards that are available at the church office and at worship on Sunday mornings until they are gone. It is first come first served so don't miss out!!!

Mark your calendars for December 17th!!! Remember how much fun we had last year decorating the sanctuary for Christmas? Well, this year we will have even more fun. Your CE Team is working hard to plan an Advent Fair that is sure to be fun for all ages. We will be hosting a lunch immediately following worship on the 17th and then we will gather to make ornaments for the tree, decorate and of course eat sugar cookies, have a cookie exchange, create cards and gift baskets for the shut-ins, play games, sing songs, reflect, and much more. Watch for further details! We hope to see you there. The more people the merrier!!!!

Confirmation is scheduled to meet on December 3 and 17. Confirmands will also be asked to assist with the Christmas Eve Service. Further details will be given out on December 3rd during class.

Sunday School Teachers for December:

3rd Kathy
10th Wendy
17th TBA
24th Christmas Eve service there will be no Sunday School
31st : TBA

PRAIRIE CIRCLE

Prairie Circle gathers to share a meal and fellowship on the first Tuesday of the month. Join us at Hazel Crain's (658 E. Central) on December 5th at 6:00 pm. Pizza will be provided! All women of the church are invited. See you there!

LOOKING AHEAD

With the 50th Anniversary of the United Church of Christ approaching, the 26th General Synod is sure to be a special celebration. Hosted by the Connecticut Conference in Hartford, General Synod will begin on Friday afternoon June 22 and conclude on Tuesday evening June 26, 2007. Check out the bulletin Board for more information about what will be happening on each day of the event.

CORRESPONDENCE

Dear Church Council Members,

It was so nice of you to remember me with that beautiful basket of fresh flowers. It was a joy getting to know all of you and a pleasure to work with you. I truly will miss each and every one of you!

Peggy Walley

YOU'RE INVITED!

Happy Holidays from Donna Chelin! Please come to my house at 664 East Central Avenue in Princeton for a Holiday Open House:

Friday, December 15th 1-9 p.m.
or
Saturday, December 16th 1-9 p.m.

REFLECTIONS FROM BILOXI, MISSISSIPPI WORK TRIP

A special thanks goes out to the 11 other people who placed their hearts on their sleeves for the week and many of whom stepped outside of their comfort zone to reach out and help others in need. I cannot even begin to tell you how proud and honored I was to be able to be working with these 11 individuals on a project that meant so much to the homeowner.

The homeowner's name was Norma Grace and I can tell you that without a doubt she, like many others in Biloxi, is still trying to come to grips with what happened 15 months ago. She came for a brief time on Wednesday afternoon and walked through the house. She told us this was the first time that she had been back in her house since that fateful storm. Her face in many ways remained expressionless throughout her visit almost subdued however that did not stop the group from showering her with affirmations and affection.

The group seemed to be running on an adrenaline high all week and when Norma came by it simply heightened our awareness as to why we were there and affirmed our work even more. We sang songs, we laughed, we poured our heart and soul into every square inch of that house, and some even shed tears but all the while doing the work that our Lord Jesus Christ would want us to do. The last day when we were trying to finish things up -- when many times work groups have hit that proverbial wall and are exhausted and ready to quit -- not our group. We continued to work and every time someone would say we should probably begin cleaning up now, someone else would say oh but we just need to finish this one more thing. That one more thing, in every instance helped to make a difference.

I had the privilege and opportunity to watch as everyone grew in their faith and many in their skills. Open Prairie you should be very proud of Rich, Roger, Rick, Al, Mitch, Brian, Kathy, Mimi, Karen, Patricia, Angie, and myself as I truly feel they represented you on the highest of highs. They worked to continue the

justice that was begun in Princeton, Illinois and now stretches to Biloxi, Mississippi.

THANK YOU!

Special thanks goes out to all of the individuals who donated food and other groceries for the Biloxi mission trip. Also to those who financially supported us. And finally, to Charlie Gonigam who donated nail aprons and carpenter pencils which we were able to leave behind for other groups in the future to use. It is through your kind donations that helped to offset the cost for the group. We could not have done it without your support and dedication! Thanks OPUCC!!!!

From: All the members of the Biloxi Work Trip

REPLACEMENT CHECKS

If you're among the unlucky folks whose checks were lost in a particular deposit in August 2006, we encourage you to write a new check for that offering. Again, we apologize for the error.

Also, if you'd like an update on where you stand on your 2006 pledge for local budget or wider mission, please contact our Financial Secretary, Becky Sapp, for an update.

A SPECIAL CHRISTMAS PRAYER

*God of wonder and delight,
Warm us with your love.
Embrace us with your presence.*

*Remind us that no matter who we are,
Or where we are on life's journey,
You welcome us.*

*Fill us with comfort and joy,
That we might reflect the hope of the
Christ Child.
Because all the earth cries out for peace
with justice,
We pray for all the people! Amen.*

HOLIDAY SHOPPING IDEAS

A Note From Church World Service:

Find a meaningful way to honor friends and loved ones by using our new gift catalog. For the holidays or any important occasion, give a gift that can save lives, build communities, open doors of opportunity...change the world!
Visit: www.cwsbestgifts.org

The Heifer Project:

Visit: www.heifer.org

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