

OPEN PRAIRIE UCC – January 2006 News

A NOTE FROM MARCIE

As most of you have already heard, I have resigned from my position in the church office. My last day will be January 31st. I want to take this opportunity to thank each of you for your kindness, love and support. I've been working with many of you for almost 11 years now, and consider it a blessing to have been a part of this journey. I won't be in the office, but I'll be around and will stay in touch. With thanks and prayers for you all, Marcie

YOGA CLASS

Yoga classes continue to be practiced at OPUCC on Wednesday evenings at 6 pm. This is 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!

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!

PIZZA! PIZZA!

Pizza Hut day this month for Open Prairie is Wednesday, February 1st. Be sure to pick up a form at church to take with you! This is an easy way to earn some cash for the church!

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.

VIOLIN LESSONS AT OPEN PRAIRIE

It is never too early or late to learn.

The 10 year anniversary of teaching violin in Princeton has marked my studio moving to Open Prairie. I am excited by the opportunity to extend violin lessons to more people in this community. Violin lessons are held Mondays. Lesson times are scheduled individually with openings spread throughout the day.

Since moving to Illinois in 1992, I have been blessed to learn of the desire of many to learn the violin. Lessons can begin as early as 4 years of age. At 4 this is a family activity. Parents / Grandparents / Guardians are requested to stay for the lesson. Group lessons, in conjunction with the lesson, are offered as they can be coordinated with people's schedules at no additional charge. I also have many students who begin later in their life or have physical challenges. It is never too late to learn.

If you would like further information please feel free to stop on Mondays or call me at 1-888-277-6090 home or my cell (309) 945-2637.

-Constance Deal

CORRESPONDENCE

Dear Friends,

We've read and reread the "slam book"! There is nothing remotely like a "slam", but rather warm wishes!! It reads like Open Prairie feels....warm and fuzzy! Truly...our journey with all of you was the highlight of our stay in Princeton. Something neither of us will ever forget. The journey is a part of our being. We wish you well – continued growth – God's blessings!

Love, Lynette & Bob

GOD IS STILL SPEAKING CAMPAIGN

Excerpts from an article by WAVENEY ANN MOORE, Times Staff Writer
Published November 28, 2005

ST. PETERSBURG - Even though two television networks refused to air it, a provocative commercial has won a national advertising award for a religious organization.

The 30-second United Church of Christ spot showed what appeared to be a homosexual couple and others being turned away by bouncers at a church entrance. A written message said "Jesus didn't turn people away. Neither do we."

For local and national United Church of Christ leaders, the award is a vindication for what they say was simply an advertisement based on Jesus' teachings.

"It's a pretty radical message. It shouldn't be for Christianity, but here we spell it out," said the Rev. Anton DeWet, who is white and grew up during apartheid in South Africa. "We actually say that everyone who walks into our doors will be embraced."

The spot, which is part of a five-year campaign under the theme of "God is still speaking," was test-marketed in the Tampa Bay area last year and ran nationally on cable channels including ABC Family, CNN, Fox and BET. CBS and NBC deemed the commercial too controversial. NBC said in a statement that it violated its "longstanding policy against accepting ads dealing with issues of public controversy."

Church leaders say the commercial, which won the *Association of National Advertisers* award for multicultural excellence earlier this month, has given the denomination a national identity, stirred congregations to action and brought viewers, homosexual and heterosexual, to churches across the country.

The 1.3-million-member United Church of Christ is accustomed to controversy. It was formed in 1957, when four denominations merged. The activist histories of those denominations before the union include helping to free 53 captives from Sierra Leone who

rebelled on the slave ship *Amistad* in 1839; and ordaining a woman in 1853 and an openly gay man in 1972. In 1985, the church declared itself "open and affirming" to gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender people. In July, it voted to approve a resolution endorsing same-sex marriage, making it the largest Christian denomination to do so.

"One of our gifts is that we often break new ground. We're not better, we're different," said Ron Buford, who is the director of the God Is Still Speaking initiative at the United Church of Christ national office in Cleveland.

Visits to the denomination's Web site have skyrocketed since the TV commercial aired last December, soaring from a typical 950,000 annually to 5.5-million, Buford said. More than 520,000 visitors to the site also tried to find a nearby church. "The thing we heard most often is that we didn't know a church like this existed," Buford said.

There's more to come. The church and Gotham, its New York advertising agency, have created a new commercial that is expected to air during Lent. "The next ad is going to be very funny," Buford promised. "Some of the early feedback we got is it will be controversial."

GREETER SCHEDULE

01/08	Suzie Stalter & Janis Land
01/15	Don & Barb Schiff
01/22	Ginny Martin & Cherie Martin
01/29	Al Forristall
02/05	Don Schiff
02/12	Donna Chelin
02/19	June Harmon
02/26	Janis Land & Suzie Stalter

OPEN PRAIRIE UCC – January 2006 News

Christmas Letter, 2005
John H. Thomas
General Minister and President
United Church of Christ

In 1936, amid the gathering clouds of holocaust and war that would turn much of Europe and Asia to wilderness, children's author E. B. White penned this note in *The New Yorker*.

Shopping in Woolworth's in the turbulent days, we saw a little boy put his hand inquiringly on a ten-cent Christ child, part of a creche. "What is this?" he asked his mother, who had him by the hand. "C'mon, c'mon," replied the harassed woman, "you don't want that." She dragged him grimly away, a Woolworth Madonna, her mind dark with gift-thoughts, following a star of her own devising.

This has been a turbulent year for the United Church of Christ, a year we have felt the tug of Woolworth Madonnas within and without and have struggled to know whether the stars we follow are of our own devising, or of God's. We move through this Advent season weary from the year that is passed, both amazed and unsettled. Turbulent.

Leadership transitions, some planned and gratefully acknowledged, others abrupt and painful, have challenged us. Intense debates about our commitments to Palestinians in the Middle East and to the Jewish community here, or about marriage equality, have at times led us to question one another's faithfulness and good will. The financial requirements for our enormously ambitious Stillspeaking Initiative, for Our Church's Wider Mission, for the needs of people around the world devastated by war and flood, have left many congregations feeling overwhelmed, perhaps even confused by multiple and urgent invitations to give. Turbulent.

Months of uncertainty over the viability of our UCC property and liability insurance program, the UCCIB, caused high anxiety and stretched our understanding of covenant. The loss of over twenty congregations following this summer's General Synod votes diminished us, not just financially, but also spiritually as communities with rich traditions of faithful ministry left us. Inquiries from non-UCC congregations about membership in the United Church of Christ are welcomed, but also raise challenging questions around identity and ecumenical commitment. Heightened media visibility following our commercial in December and March and our whimsical embrace of Spongebob have offered new opportunities for public witness and evangelism, but also challenge us with new responsibilities for which we do not always feel prepared. It has been a turbulent year.

Yet beneath this turbulence there is another current, steady and constant, flowing from the rich reservoirs of our reach for an extravagant welcome and call to evangelical courage. In her novel *Gilead* Pulitzer Prize winning author Marilyn Robinson, a member of the United Church of Christ, points to this current in her narrator's description of baptism. It is, he says, "to touch another with the pure intention of blessing," a blessing that does not "enhance sacredness, but acknowledges it." Amid the turbulent chapters of life this past year, the real narrative flowing through it all has been one of extraordinary efforts to bless.

Delegates and visitors to General Synod in Atlanta this past summer noted the holiness of liturgy, community, and discernment, and the sacredness of location and history in a place marked by the touch of the American Missionary Association in the 19th century and the courage of the Civil Rights movement of the 20th century. While faithful people across the United Church of Christ struggle with integrity over the vote on Marriage Equality, for millions in the UCC and beyond, this historic decision was experienced as blessing, as the acknowledgment of sacredness. There has

OPEN PRAIRIE UCC – January 2006 News

been much turbulence. But there has been profound blessing as well.

While every setting of the church has fretted over finances this year, members of the United Church of Christ have demonstrated amazing, record breaking generosity. By the end of this year we will have received nearly \$9 million in special gifts for victims of the tsunami in southern Asia and east Africa, of Katrina, Rita, and Wilma, of violence in Darfur and the Sudan, of the earthquake in Pakistan and Kashmir, and for vulnerable people struggling globally with hunger and HIV/AIDS. Few had the opportunity, as I did in southern India last February, to physically touch survivors with a hand and a prayer of blessing. But hundreds have now entered into a "Covenant of Compassion" so that we might bless in sustained and disciplined ways.

The Stillspeaking Initiative has entered our life with creative, disruptive energy. Our commercial, uncomfortable for some among us, was a gift to hundreds of thousands who came to our website looking for this unexpected source of blessing. Our red and black banners and our welcoming congregations discovered that in each of our communities there are the left alone, left out, left behind yearning for community with Christ. We have been blessed with a new commitment to evangelism, and we are actively planning for how that commitment can be a blessing in parts of the country where we have been hard to find. Designated gifts to TSI have topped \$1.5 million and while there was disappointment at not being able to show our new commercial in Advent, we are confident that we will move forward with an arresting - and delightfully whimsical - message of hope and invitation at Easter. Blessing.

Our prophetic witness focused this year on the poor amid a nation preoccupied by the agony of death and the vain deceptions of war in Iraq. The needs of hungry people lifted up at a large Bread for the World sponsored convocation in

May, the desperate need to move the minimum wage to a living wage and to support the rights of workers in low paying jobs, the devastating proposals for the Federal budget are not political questions of the left or the right, but profoundly moral issues increasingly being embraced by mainline Protestant, Catholic, and evangelical Christians together. They are about blessing the poor, acknowledging sacredness with justice and helping all to imagine that another world is possible. Blessing.

This fall's celebration in Berlin of 25 years of *Kirchengemeinschaft* - church fellowship - with the Union of Evangelical Churches in Germany reminded us of global partnerships, whether in Germany or Palestine, that break down dividing walls where walls are both disturbing memories and oppressive living realities. Closer to home, persistent efforts by conferences and national boards to restore stability to the UCCIB is really about restoring health to flood, wind, and fire ravaged congregations seeking once again to be blessings in their communities.

Our touch of blessing is not always marked by pure intentions. We do not always resist the lure of stars of our own devising. Such has been the case for the United Church of Christ, and for your leaders. Yet the yearning to bless has been at the center of our life as the currents of baptism have buoyed us amid the turbulent days. Now as we approach Christmas still in the grip of Woolworth Madonnas and dark gift thoughts, may we pause long enough to reach toward the images of Christ all around us, sighting a star that can lead us to the place where our own sacredness is acknowledged. May this be at the heart of Christmas for you.

PASTOR'S MESSAGE

“To Be Beloved”

Mark 1:9-11 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them...” (Matthew 28:19) Since Jesus was reported to have first uttered those words, the church has been doing this very thing, albeit in a variety of ways and with a variety of understandings. The practice of baptism predates even the baptism of Jesus. In biblical times, when Gentiles were attracted to the Jewish faith and wished to convert, they underwent a ritual of cleansing so that they could be reborn into their new faith and identity. This ritual was given the Greek word “baptizeo” or “baptein,” meaning “to dip, steep, dye, color.” For example, just as an ounce of dye colors a gallon of water, likewise recognition of God’s love for us colors, “dyes,” our whole lives.

So, if baptism is a sign that God’s love colors our whole lives, why is it that when we read or hear the line “You are my (child), the beloved, with you I am well pleased” we assume that God must be talking to anyone but us?

If Jesus was God in human form, and all humans are created in God’s image, and God said to Jesus, “You are my (child), the beloved, in you I am well pleased”—is not God in essence saying the very same thing to each of us? I believe God is saying exactly that, does say exactly that daily. “You are my (child), my beloved, in you I am well pleased.”

Sadly, too many of us have come to believe that we have to be on God’s good list to have a relationship with God. If we really do feel that way, then of course we don’t think that we are the people to whom God is referring with the word “beloved.” But how is it I ask you, where

on God’s green earth did we ever get the misguided impression that we had to be good for God to love us? I certainly don’t think we start out that way. It has to be something we learn...

When I am inside working, I can often hear the sound of the children who live next door running around in the driveway or singing as they swing on the swing set. This is a sound I cherish. There is something about children, they know that they are entitled to happiness. Unfortunately not all, but most children live, and move, and have their being in this world as if they are “beloved.”

What if we lived as if we knew we were God’s “beloved?” What if we were reminded by Jesus’ baptism that a personal relationship with God is ours for the asking? What if we knew deep down in our souls that God is pleased with who we are, and that whether we are good or bad, God’s love is ours to have for keeps?

What would the world be like if we lived as God’s “beloved?” It would be very different I think, because when we realize that we are God’s “beloved”—we treat ourselves differently, with a little more tenderness, a little more reverence. And what about how we treat others? If we are God’s “beloved,” and we don’t have to do anything to earn that privilege, then everyone else must also be entitled to that gift. We certainly don’t get to decide who is worthy of it and who is not, that is God’s job and God has spoken, “You are my (child), the beloved, in you I am well pleased.” Looking at the world through the eyes of baptism we see that **everyone** is a “beloved” child of God.

Rev. Curran Reichert

OPEN PRAIRIE UCC – January 2006 News

HAPPY BIRTHDAYS

JANUARY

- 2 Lori Moore
5 Brooke Fisher
10 Bill Beneke
11 Terri Zearing
19 Bill Ollila
24 Peggy Hackley
Margaret Autrey
28 Rich Hornbaker
29 Tony McCombs

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

PRAIRIE CIRCLE

Prairie Circle meets the first Wednesday night of every month to share a meal. On February 1st, 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.

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!

An Illinois Conference Special Meeting

Saturday, February 11th, 9:30 am – 3:30 pm
Morris, Illinois

How shall we shape and structure our covenant community to address the ministry opportunities of the future?

Please contact the church office for more information or to get registered.

LIVING THE QUESTIONS

Rev. Reichert strongly encourages every one to make a commitment to participating in this 12 week series. Our faith and spiritual development are dependant on the ability to access and articulate our core principles. Our development and growth as a faith community is dependant on our collective ability to communicate our beliefs to others. For more info on this series, please visit www.livingthequestions.com

Thinking Theologically

Sunday, January 15th, 12:30-2:00 p.m. or
Wednesday, January 18th, 7-9 p.m.

Creativity and Stories of Creation

Sunday, January 22nd, 12:30-2:00 p.m. or
Wednesday, January 25th, 7-9 p.m.

Restoring Relationships

Wednesday, February 1st, 7-9 p.m.

Evil and a God of Love: The Place of Suffering

Sunday, February 5th, 4:00-6:30 p.m. or
Wednesday, February 8th, 7-9 p.m.

Intimacy with God

Wednesday, February 15th, 7-9 p.m.

Social Justice and The Prophets

Sunday, February 19th, 12:30-2:00 p.m. or
Wednesday, February 22nd, 7-9 p.m.

A Kingdom Without Walls: Ruth & Jonah

Sunday, February 26th, 12:30-2:00 p.m. or
Wednesday, March 8th, 7-9 p.m.

Lives of Jesus

Sunday, March 12th, 12:30-2:00 p.m. or
Wednesday, March 15th, 7-9 p.m.

Compassion: the Heart of Jesus' Ministry

Wednesday, March 22nd, 7-9 p.m.

A Passion for Christ: Paul the Apostle

Sunday, March 26th, 12:30-2:00 p.m. or
Wednesday, March 29th, 7-9 p.m.

Out into the World: Challenges Facing Progressive Christianity

Sunday, April 2nd, 4:00-6:30 p.m. or
Wednesday, April 5th, 7-9 p.m.

MISSION TEAM

Greetings from the Mission Team,

Many thanks to everyone who participated with the Giving Tree in December. Thanks to you, our Gateway clients each received several gifts for Christmas. I'm so pleased that this is becoming an Open Prairie tradition. It is the Mission Team's hope that we can continue to strengthen our relationship with both Gateway and Freedom House in the coming year.

Speaking of Freedom House, Beth Forristall, Margaret Autrey, and I had the privilege and fun of helping sort toys and gifts for Freedom House families this Christmas. Beth and I also helped with the Freedom House Christmas Party, where Beth held sway with a roomful of wild kids playing games while I had the fun of packing bags of toys into client's cars. It was inexpressibly moving to see the tears and laughter of all the mothers as they received their turkey and presents for their kids. What joy!

I hope you have all noticed that the STAPLES food pantry box is gone, replaced with a beautiful hand woven basket which we purchased through a Fair Trade organization supporting women in Bangladesh. Your contributions have been great. Keep them coming, please. For January, the Food Pantry requests cans of spaghetti sauce.

On January 29th Open Prairie will be holding its first Jubilee Sunday. On this day we ask that you come to church at the usual time, but instead of having a church service, we will carpool out to Pilgrim Park to worship while we work. Our Mission task for this Jubilee Sunday will be to paint one or more rooms in Pilgrim Park's Conference Center. There will be activities planned for children as well, so bring them along. Since the task is painting, please wear appropriate clothing that you won't mind getting spooshed and gooshed. The plan is to work until about noon. Hopefully, the task will be completed by then. If it isn't and you would like to stay longer, that's great, but no one should feel obliged to. So come and paint, laugh, and sing together.

It is the Mission Team's hope to provide Mission opportunities on the Sundays that fall on the fifth Sunday of the month. Future Jubilee Sundays will be in April, July, October, and December.

Peace to you all, Kelly

SAFE CHURCH COMMITTEE

Your Safe Church Committee has completed our Safe Church Policies and Procedures manual. The Church Council is in the process of reviewing and adopting it. It will be a "work-in-progress" as we put the policies and procedures into effect. We will be sharing information with the congregation a little at a time, as we all need to know how this is going to effect us.

The purpose of the Safe Church policies is to ensure that all who participate in our church life, including children, adults and church workers (whether paid or volunteer), will be able to explore their relationship with God and each other as they seek to grow in their faith and faithfulness in an environment that is safe, secure, and nurturing. One of the components of this comprehensive plan, is a Youth Protection Policy. Some of the key features include the Two-Adult Rule. This means that two adults must be with a child (or children) who is not their own, or a relative at all times unless they have parental consent. However, the presence of two adults shall not apply if the circumstances allow for constant visual access and frequent observation by clergy, the Christian Education Director, or designee. The Five Year Older Rule means that all Sunday School helpers, volunteers, or babysitters must be at least five years older than the oldest child in the class or group.

After adoption by the church council, a copy of our Safe Church Policies and Procedures will be kept in a binder in the church office.

OPEN PRAIRIE UCC – January 2006 News

CHURCH INFORMATION

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

Office 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

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

01/15	10:30	am	Worship Service
	12:30	pm	“Living the Questions”
01/18	8:00	am	Prayer Group at Autreys
	7:00	pm	“Living the Questions”
01/19	6:30	pm	Choir at Autrey-Webbers
01/22	10:30	am	Worship
	12:30	pm	“Living the Questions”
	2:00	pm	Sr. High Bowling Outing
01/25	8:00	am	Prayer Group at Autreys
	7:00	pm	“Living the Questions”
01/26	6:30	pm	Choir at Autrey-Webbers
01/29	10:30	am	Jubilee Sunday – Mission project – meet at church
01/31	7:00	pm	Church Council

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