

FROM THE PASTOR

*Remember the gift,
the one from the manger,
it means only this:
You can dance with a stranger.*

-W. H. Auden

Beloved Community,

As I sit to write this article it is yet 2006, still my spirit bristles with anticipation as I look to the possibilities of 2007. I wonder what it is about the turning of the year that brings such hope of freshness, such promises of newness? For most of us the New Year doesn't change much about our lives. Most (and I realize that does not mean all) of us have the same families, the same jobs, the same homes we had the year before, but from this side of December looking just over line to what lies on the other side of the holidays, into January and beyond...my heart skips a beat with what might be yet to come. If I squint, I can see the gray of winter turning slowly into green, I can taste the sweetness of the peaches spring will bring, and hear laughter on the breath of the wind that comes with the first sunny day in May when we kick off our shoes and run barefoot into the grass. The new life of 2007 is as close as my own heartbeat, and this year as with every turning of the year, I am aglow with the idea of tomorrow. In making preparations for this season I came across a story that touched on this concept of stepping into tomorrow, it offers some grist for the mill and food for the soul. What follows is an excerpt taken from, "A CHRISTMAS MESSAGE" by the Rev. Gwin Pratt, Co-Founder and Board Member Christian Alliance for Progress. Bite into it with an open mind.....

Among the many legends and stories about the great missionary from the last century, Albert Schweitzer, is this one. He was a doctor, author, musician. He went to Africa to build lepers' hospitals, and pre-natal clinics, and schools. He lived there many years, and loved the people there, and they loved him.

It came time for him to leave. He had grown older, and was going home for good. A ship had come to take him away. The people carried his things down to the brilliant white sand beach, and with great sorrow loaded them onto smaller boats to be taken out to the ship. He would depart in the morning.

He rose early the next morning. He dressed and headed for the bridge of the ship. He wanted to look one last time on his beloved Africa. He knew it would be the last time. He climbed the bridge, and looked toward shore.

But, something was different. He cleaned his glasses, and looked again.

The white sand of the beach had changed. It had turned black. The beach was black. Black lepers who would have been dead or despised, but for him...black children who would have died, but for him...black mothers whose arms would have been empty but for him. The great mass of people stood mute...still. Had they been there all that silent night? What were they waiting for?

Schweitzer must have seen there the Ultimate Thing, the Christ who calls us to follow him, and find our true life in him. For he climbed down, and called for his things, and went back. He went back to step into the tomorrow that is the Savior's gift to each of us. (cont.)

I love the idea of New Year's because it offers a simultaneous invitation to look back and to move forward. Allow me to offer another example similar to the one about Albert Schweitzer. In the timeworn classic "It's a Wonderful Life," George Bailey has the opportunity to see the ways in which the world has been impacted for the better during his one wonderful lifetime. Enviously, he also has the chance to see how the world would have suffered without his presence. An important invitation is provided in these two examples. They prompt us to look back at the difference our lives; both individually and collectively, have made over the past year and propel us to ask ourselves how we will continue to make a

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difference in the year to come. I pray that you will take a moment to reflect on this question and furthermore that you will keep it at the forefront of your minds as you make important decisions in the coming months. Together let us celebrate the new life the Christ Child brings, the new beginnings of a New Year and the differences yet to be made in the name of a loving God, who unites us all in the body of Christ.

JOIN US FOR LUNCH

The Open Prairie Youth Group has planned a delicious lunch to be served following worship on January 21st. Please plan to join us for Café Italiano – a delicious variety of pastas, warm bread, salad, and dessert. A free will offering will be accepted. The proceeds from this luncheon will benefit our summer mission trip to West Virginia. See you there!

A NOTE FROM THE OFFICE

After settling into our wonderful office space here at 25 E. Marion for over a year, we have put together a wish list of items we'd like to add:

- Electric Stapler, \$40
- Heavy Duty Paper Cutter 12"x18", \$94
- Scanner (music could be scanned and put directly into the bulletin), \$99
- File Cabinets: ideally, a row of file cabinets along the west wall of the office with a counter to top them off.

Please contact the church office at 872-5150 for more information.

FROM THE MODERATOR

I would like to thank everyone who attended Open Prairie's semi-annual meeting on Sunday, November 19th. We heard a good overview from the hard-working teams. The new budget was passed with a deficit. We will all need to work to meet this challenge. Barbara and I wish you a blessed Christmas and look forward to a great new year.

Bill Ollila, Moderator

HAPPY JANUARY BIRTHDAYS

02	Lori Moore
05	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 the church office know.

CORRESPONDENCE

Dear Curran,

Receive a warm and fraternal greeting in the name of our Creator and Still Speaking God. I want to inform you that our Illinois Conference Council approved a recommendation from the Local Evangelism, Envisioning and Planting Board to fund Open Prairie United Church of Christ with a grant in the amount of \$20,000 for calendar year 2007.

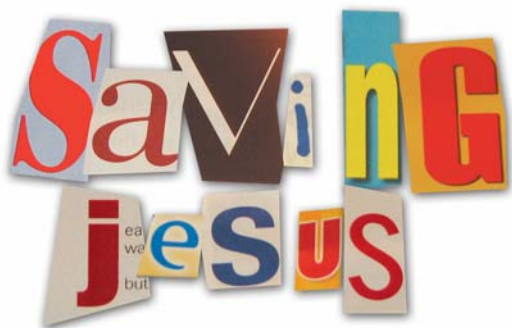
The funds are to be used as stipulated in your grant request application to help subsidize pastoral salary and the staffing of evangelism/outreach work, marketing, Christian Education and church growth.....

In the Illinois Conference we give thanks for the ministry of Open Prairie UCC and for all that the church has been able to accomplish in a relatively short period of time. We give thanks for your leadership, all the gifts you bring to ministry and for being in partnership with you and the folk of Open Prairie as witnesses to God's liberating and empowering Spirit.

You, your ministry and the members of Open Prairie United Church of Christ will continue to be in our prayers for continued success.

*In Christ,
Rev. Jorge L. Morales
Associate Conference Minister*

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY



Ever feel like Jesus has been kidnapped by the Christian Right? Saving Jesus is a revolutionary dvd-based small group exploration of Jesus Christ for the third millennium. Rev. Reichert will lead our exploration of this contemporary program featuring leading religious voices of our day. The format for each 1–1½ hour session includes conversation around the readings, a 20-minute video segment and guided discussion.

Reading materials are available in advance in the church office.

CALENDER & WEEKLY TOPICS

Most weeks, there will be two opportunities to attend class -Sunday afternoon (bring a bag lunch)or Tuesday evening at 7:00 p.m.

1. Introduction: Jesus through the Ages

Tuesday, January 30th only

2. Who was Jesus?

Sunday, February 4th

Tuesday, February 6th

3. What Can We Know About Jesus?

Sunday, February 11th

Tuesday, February 13th

4. The World into Which Jesus Was Born

Sunday, February 18th

Tuesday, February 20th

5. Jesus' Birth: Incarnation

Sunday, February 25th

Tuesday, February 27th

6. Teachings of Jesus: Wisdom Tradition

Sunday, March 4th

Tuesday, March 6th

7. Jesus' Program: The Kingdom of God

Sunday, March 11th

Tuesday, March 13th

8. Jesus' Ministry of Compassion

Sunday, March 18th

Tuesday, March 20th

9. Killing Jesus, Part 1 Who Killed Jesus?

Sunday, March 25th

Tuesday, March 27th

10. Killing Jesus, Part 2 The Atonement

Sunday, April 1st

Tuesday, April 3^d

11. The Resurrection of Christ

Sunday, April 8th only

12. Why Jesus Is Worth Saving

Sunday, April 15th

Tuesday, April 17th

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SPRING 2007 WORK PROJECT TRIP

Hurricane Relief Mission Trip
New Orleans, Louisiana
APRIL 22-28, 2007

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

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

01/02	6:00 pm	Prairie Circle at Hazel's
01/03	8:00 am	Prayer Group at Autrey's
01/04		Bloodmobile Workers
	6:30 pm	Choir at Webber's
01/07	9:30 am	Confirmation Class
	10:30 am	Worship
	6:30 pm	Youth Group Round Table
01/10	8:00 am	Prayer Group at Autrey's
01/11	6:30 pm	Choir at Webber's
01/14	10:30 am	Worship
	10:00 am	Youth Group Chicago Trip
01/17	8:00 am	Prayer Group at Autrey's
	7:00 pm	Church Council
01/18	6:30 pm	Choir at Webber's
01/21	9:30 am	Confirmation Class
	10:30 am	Worship followed by Café Italiano Luncheon
01/24	8:00 am	Prayer Group at Autrey's
01/25	6:30 pm	Choir at Webber's
01/28	10:30 am	Worship
01/30	7:00 pm	Saving Jesus, Week 1
01/31	8:00 am	Prayer Group at Autrey's

A NOTE OF THANKS

Curran wishes to extend a hearty thanks to the women of Prairie Circle and to the members of Church Council for their generous Christmas gifts. She promises they were put to good use!

THE ROGUE'S DINNER!

The Worship Team announces Open Prairie's newly instated Annual Fundraiser:

"The Rogues' Dinner!"

What's a Rogues' Dinner? It's a medieval-style feast with "period ambiance" and entertainment ranging from the hilarious to the sublime.

When's a Rogues' Dinner? The date is Friday, 16 February at 6:30 pm. Perfect post-Valentine's Day night out!

How Much Does a Ticket Cost? Well, an evening as marvelous as this one will be priceless, but for you...the cost for one will be \$16, buy 2 save \$2.00 making it \$30 per couple, buy a table for 8 and get one ticket free.

Tables seat 8-10 people, so bring a group of friends (we particularly encourage you to invite folks who haven't had a chance to visit Open Prairie)!

Advanced Reservations Are Required; contact the church office by Sunday, February 4th.

What to Wear? Wear something for goodness sake we do have a reputation to keep up! Period garb (or suggestion thereof) is optional, but welcome! Don't know what period garb is? Ask Ron.

What Does One Eat at a Rogue's Dinner?

Come hungry, the tables will be plentiful. Non-alcoholic beverages will be provided, but guests are welcome to bring their own bottles, if they would prefer ale or wine with their meals.

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MISSION TEAM

Greetings from the Mission Team,

Many thanks to all of you who participated in our Giving Tree tradition. We were welcomed warmly at Gateway as Fern, Fox, Dad and I delivered armloads of presents for our Gateway neighbors. I love doing that!

We had a wonderful time at our screening of "Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer". There were about twenty-five of us dressed as Abominable Snowmen, a train with square wheels, misfit dolls, a puffin, Yukon Cornelius, a puzzle with a piece missing, Charlie-in-the-box, presents, and a host of reindeer. LuAnn, from Green River Books, likened her experience to "The Rocky Horror Picture Show". We sang along with the songs, booed and hissed and cheered as the mood took us. What fun! We'll keep you posted on our next film offering.

Please join us for a Mission opportunity on New Year's Eve. During our usual worship time we will be preparing a meal to deliver to one or more Gateway homes. It should be great fun and a chance for Open Prairie folk to do what they do best--work together to spread some joy for others.

When you see Susan Hale, give her a big thank you for all the work she has done to provide Open Prairie with Free Trade coffee. This is a wonderful opportunity for Open Prairie live into its mission to step lightly on our beautiful earth.

Please remember the food pantry this month. They have asked us to provide spaghetti sauce for the month of January.

We give our thanks for all the help and encouragement we have received this year and wish you all a joyful Christmas.

Peace,
Kelly

REFLECTIONS

The Advent small group on "The End of Times" was an amazing experience for those who participated. The following is a reflection from this small group experience, written by Marnie Swanson:

*What do I believe happens to me,
after I die?*

*How might you accept me...
when cursed was your name,
the only one I so did blame.
Paralyzed my voice now, you see...
my soul is unable to speak,
and now you are the one I seek.*

*How might you accept me...
when belief has been bitten,
Ignored the everything you had written.
Listening to the music now, you see...
can their be a tomorrow, without you today,
and yesterday gone, would you let me stay?*

*I believe what happens to me...
left over emotion and after the rain,
blending in and around, a spirit gain.
Upon my steps, a wild open field, you see...
watching God in a swift winds pleasure,
dancing my soul, in a rhythm I treasure.
~Marnie*

YOUTH GROUP HAPPENINGS

January 7, 6-7:30 p.m.

Round Table. Bring your cell phone as we will be calling folks to order Super Bowl subs!

January 14

Chicago Road Trip!

January 21 Café Italiano

Sr. High Lunch Fundraiser following worship

February 4 Super Bowl Subs!

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SUPERBOWL SUBS!

Open Prairie Sr. High Youth are again selling sub sandwiches for Super Bowl Sunday on February 4th. We are making a tasty sub of ham, salami, and cheese with bread we order from our very own local Spaghetti Express!! These sandwiches freeze great, so stock up your freezer! All proceeds will go toward our Mission Trip to the Appalachian South Folklife Center in July of 2007. Sandwiches/bread will be ready for pickup following worship that Sunday. Delivery will be made if requested. Order forms are available at church on Sunday mornings or call the church office at 872-5150.

CHURCH CONTACTS

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