

PASTOR'S MESSAGE

I have always thought of Christmas time, when it has come round, as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable time; the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys. ~Charles Dickens

Greetings Dear Ones and Happy New Year, It occurred to me when I preached this sermon in December, that the congregation was flooded with so many emotions the words seem to have gotten lost somewhat. Because I really do want these words to reach each of you, I have chosen to print the sermon from December 16, 2007 in this month's newsletter. I hope they are of comfort to those who wished to hear them, but could not at the moment- or those of you whom for whatever reason were not in worship the third week of Advent. Many Blessings of peace and love,
Rev. Curran Reichert

Walking the Way

Nothing evokes fear like a good dose of change. Although it is the only certainty in life- as a rule human beings do not like change. Personally, I have a certain kind of milk I like to drink and when I can't find it at the store- I get annoyed. I sleep on the same pillow every night, when I roll over and Katie has taken it by mistake- it makes me mad. I have certain socks I wear with specific shoes; I like putting up the same Christmas decorations every year. I know the world is constantly in flux, and the way I cope with it, is by keeping certain things as consistent as possible. I bet you are the same way.

None of us woke up this morning and thought, *boy today seems like great day to have my life upended*, but here we are in Advent- a season of upending, on a Sunday that will surely change life as we have come to know it at Open Prairie.

I knew the last Sunday we were together (December 2nd); that by the next time were together (today December 16th) everything would be different. On

one hand, I dreaded it, and on the other hand I was excited about it. How is it that change can elicit such a complicated range of emotions, sadness, anger, frustration, hope, joy, and anticipation?

Today's scripture speaks to that dichotomy, and it is about the kind of change we come to expect when we follow the *Way of God*. The passage from Isaiah is full of opposing emotions; gladness in the wilderness of fear, vengeance and recompense coupled with salvation, speechless tongues singing for joy and the list goes on. And lest we presume no one could possibly understand the feelings we go through in the face of change, we need only remember our ancestors the Israelites, who railed against Moses when he led them through the dessert to the Promised Land. Or the disciples of Jesus who questioned at every turn if Jesus really knew what he was doing when he asked them to drop their nets and follow him. Or the prophet Isaiah who, in this passage, promises that following *God's Way*- sorrow and sighing will give way to great joy and gladness. Indeed there is great precedence for the difficulty of change in our common ancestral story.

I will wager a bet though, that that was not the first thought that sprung to mind when you got the news that I had accepted another call. I have to admit it wasn't of much comfort to me either this week as I awaited your responses to my letter of resignation. Between the weeping and gnashing of teeth, both yours and mine, it was hard to believe that God was working God's gift of transformation, but sure it was and sure it is, that when we follow *God's Way* the truth ultimately leads us to freedom.

Here is my truth Open Prairie. I love you with every fiber of my being. For the past four years, I have loved you with the fierceness a mother lion has for her cubs. I have fought for you, and you have defended me. I have laughed with you, cried and struggled with you. As I have challenged you, I have been challenged by you. You have grown me into the pastor and person I am today. I would not trade one minute of the love we have shared for anything on this earth. Together we have followed *God's Way*. Trusting in abundance to lead us- we have become a church, we have built a church and we have established ourselves in this community as

a church. Each of those acts required tremendous faith, courage and a willingness to endure great change together. I think we can all agree that we are richer for the experience.

And now the time is upon us, once again, to lead out of our abundance. To trust that as we continue to follow *God's Way* the truth will lead us to an even greater freedom. But if we are honest, sometimes we do not feel quiet ready for the truth...perhaps in another week or another year we would be ready, but experience tells us that isn't how truth works. Truth comes when truth is ready to come and it has a way of floating right to the top whether we are ready or not. Listening to the truth of our lives is what it means to follow *God's Way*. We have taught each other well beloved, and as always, I must listen to my truth and you must listen to yours. My truth tells me that it is time for me to go home, to serve another community, and to trust that as well as I could- I have prepared you for your future. That doesn't mean it isn't hard, that doesn't mean we know what it is all going to look like, it just means we continue to trust, as we have always trusted, that God is with us and will equip us for what will come next.

This is the third Sunday in Advent, it is called Gaudete Sunday; from the Latin word "Rejoice!" a day to be joyful even in the midst of long waiting. Again, this may seem like a contradiction in terms, but what is the Christmas season if not fertile ground for conflicting emotions.

My Dad had a rough go of it growing up and as a result of his childhood, for the first twenty or so years of my life- it appeared to me that my father hated Christmas. It clearly brought up really bad memories for him. So as my mother and I chirped our way through the season- my father would grumble, kick and curse until about the 15th of January when the tree was gone and the decorations stored away for another year.

I remember the first time I watched the movie *The Grinch Who Stole Christmas*. I thought; *oh my God it is a movie about my father*. Well, it turns out it is movie about a whole lot a folk- who find the whole Christmas season anything but cheery. Sorrow and joy exist along side of each other, and now that I am grown I realize that my father didn't hate Christmas, it was just hard to hold the two realities together. None of us move through this season

filled with only joy or only sorrow, there is usually a fair mixture of both. Today is no exception, it is a day of deep sorrow and it is also a day for rejoicing. Certainly joy is an appropriate emotion to be connected with the coming of Christ into our world. Of course, joy must not be confused with happiness – the two can be the same, but they need not be. Joy runs much deeper, carrying a sense of contentment, inner peace, serenity, security, and faith.

It is with sorrow that I begin to let go of my role as pastor at Open Prairie, but it is with rejoicing in my heart that I release you to a continued life in *God's Way*, for I know that way will always lead you to the truth, and I know that in God's truth we will always be a part of each other.

In closing I share with you a poem by Nancy Wood.

*Hold on to what is good.
Even if it is
a handful of earth.
Hold on to what you believe
even if it is
a tree which stands by itself.
Hold on to what you must do
even if it is
a long way from here.
Hold on to life even when
it is easier to let go.
Hold on to my hand even when
I have gone away from you.*

~I will always love you Open Prairie

Rev. Curran Reichert

~~~~~If you are interested in a *one on one* session with Rev. Reichert prior to her departure please sign-up on the calendar sheets in the church office. Please only take one slot.

### ***mission news***

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Greetings from the Mission Team, Happy New Year everyone! Thanks to all of you, the Gateway Giving Tree was a tremendous success. Dad and I had the great pleasure of carrying armloads of presents into Gateway. Everyone there looked very happy.

This has grown to be a most joyful Open Prairie tradition. Last Sunday was our Jubilee Sunday. Over twenty of us gathered together to prepare a delicious meal and New Years Eve party baskets for our Gateway neighbors. We chopped, stirred, cooked, wash, ate, and had a most jolly time. What fun. Eight year olds and eighty three year olds all covered with flour together. Ron deserves a big pat on the back for finding jobs for all of us and never getting outwardly flustered. Thanks Ron. Following our meal together we delivered the boxes filled with party hats and good food to seven houses. They were thrilled and so happy to receive them. I love Mission! Thanks everyone for sharing your time to spread some joy. Our next big project will be on the last Sunday of this month on Jan. 27th. After church we will be heading out to Pilgrim Park to paint five rooms in the upper Conference center. Debbie and Jim Jarvis said if twenty people showed up the project could be completed in two hours. I must tell you that Jim was most complimentary of the work Open Prairie has done for them in the past. So pat yourselves on the back. Please let Susan or me know if you can come and help that day. Early in December we took a break from SERIOUS matters to gather at Ami Chamberlain's beautiful home for a "Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer" sing a long. We sang all the songs as we watched the movie and ate delicious Christmas treats. What a great way to kick in the Christmas season. Thanks Ami and Rex for opening your cozy home to us. Our next film showing will be on February 3rd at 6:30. We will be showing "The Real Dirt on Farmer John", an award winning documentary concerning eccentric organic Illinois farmer John Peterson. Peterson started Angelic Organics, one of the largest Community Supported Agriculture farms in the U.S. located not far from us in Caledonia. We hope you will join us for popcorn and a movie. Thank you for all your contributions this past year to the Food Pantry. We've done really well. They have requested spaghetti and sauce for the month of January.

*Thanks everyone.  
Peace,  
Kelly*



## January CALENDAR OF

### EVENTS

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|                |         |                           |
|----------------|---------|---------------------------|
| Jan. 8         |         | Church office closed      |
| Jan. 9         |         | Church office open        |
| Jan. 9         | 8:00 am | Prayer group @ Autrey's   |
| Jan. 9         | 6:00 pm | Prairie Circle            |
| Jan. 10        | 6:30 pm | Choir @ Webber's          |
| Jan. 14        |         | Church reserved-Red Cross |
| Jan. 16        | 8:00 am | Prayer group @ Autrey's   |
| Jan. 17        | 6:30 pm | Choir @ Webber's          |
| Jan. 20        | noon    | Confirmation meeting      |
| Jan. 21        | 6:00 pm | Youth Group meeting       |
| Jan. 22        | 7:00 am | Church Council            |
| Jan. 23        | 8:00 am | Prayer group @ Autrey's   |
| Jan. 24        | 6:30 pm | Choir @ Webber's          |
| Jan. 26        | 7:30 pm | Coffee House              |
| Jan. 28-Feb. 1 |         | Church office closed      |

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### ☺ HAPPY JANUARY BIRTHDAY ☺

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|         |                 |
|---------|-----------------|
| Jan. 2  | Lori Moore      |
| Jan. 5  | Brooke Fisher   |
| Jan. 10 | Bill Beneke     |
| Jan. 11 | Terri Zearing   |
| Jan. 16 | Sarah Criner    |
| Jan. 19 | Johnna Jacobson |
| Jan. 19 | Bill Ollila     |
| Jan. 24 | Ami Chamberlain |
| Jan. 24 | Peggy Hackley   |
| Jan. 24 | Margaret Autrey |
| Jan. 28 | Rich Hornbaker  |
| Jan. 29 | Tony McCombs    |

*Note: if you have any additions or corrections, please let Ami know.*

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### FOOD PANTRY FOR DECEMBER:

## Spaghetti & Sauce





**Have you borrowed any books from the Open Prairie Library? If so, please return them when you are finished so others may check them out!**

## **Christian Education**

### ***SS Teachers for January:***

Jan. 6: OYSS/YYSS-Wendy

Jan. 13: OYSS-Becky Perkins  
YYSS-Dawn Rudolph

Jan. 20: OYSS/YYSS-Wendy

Jan. 27: OYSS-Kathy Hornbaker  
YYSS-Nikki Kromphardt

***Senior High Youth Group:*** We will meet on Jan. 21st at 6:00 p.m. for round table talks. Bring your cell phones we will be calling folks for Super Bowl Sub Sandwich orders.

***Confirmation:*** The final Confirmation Meeting will be held on Sunday, Jan 20th immediately following worship in Pastor Curran's Office. The meeting should conclude by 1:30 p.m. Feel free to bring a lunch. Confirmation Sunday has been scheduled for Feb 3rd.

***Christian Education*** is still looking for folks who would be interested in helping out with Sunday School. Even if you don't want to teach but are available to be a second adult in the Sunday School room your help is greatly needed. Please let Wendy know if you are interested in helping or subbing.

***A Special thank you*** to Nikki Kromphardt who has agreed to teach Sunday School one Sunday month. You Rock Nikki! Thanks for stepping up!

***Super Bowl Sub Sandwich Orders*** will begin being taken Sunday January 13th. Watch for more info. The sandwiches will be made by the youth of OPUCC and will be available for pick-up immediately following worship on Sunday Feb 3rd. Or if you would like the older youth are happy to deliver as well. All proceeds from the sale of the subs will go to support the youth program funding throughout OPUCC including but not limited to the mission trip for the Senior High and the mission trip

for the 4th-6th graders as well as other fun activities for the younger youth.

***Just a reminder.*** We are continuing to recycle ink jet cartridges. All proceeds are used to help fund the younger youth going to camp.

Peace, Wendy

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## **Prairie Circle News**

The next Prairie Circle meeting will take place at the home of Kelly Autrey-Webber on Wednesday, Jan. 9th, 6:00 p.m. Please bring a covered dish to share. All ladies of Prairie Circle and their friends are invited!

## **Health Ministry tips**

### **Health Tips for Surviving the Cold and Flu Season**

The holidays are over and the cold and flu season is upon us. Below are some suggestions to help avoid colds and flu.

1. Hand washing is the best way to prevent the spread of colds and flu. Wash your hands often. When washing be sure to wash for 15-30 seconds, about as long as it takes to sing happy birthday or say the alphabet slowly. Be sure to use soap and water, wash between your fingers, rinse and dry thoroughly. When using a public bathroom, use a paper towel to shut off the faucet and open the door.
2. Instead of using your hand to cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze, use the bend of your elbow.
3. Avoid touching your face.
4. Drink plenty of fluids, eight 8 ounce glasses per day.
5. Get plenty of rest.
6. Avoid smoking.
7. Relax now that the holiday season is over. Relaxing helps boost the immune system.

If you are ill, stay home.

The attached table shows the difference between cold and flu symptoms.

## Cold & Flu Symptoms at a Glance:

| SYMPTOM          | COLD                      | FLU                     |
|------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| Fever            | Rare                      | Usually present         |
| Aches            | Slight                    | Usual, often severe     |
| Chills           | Uncommon                  | Fairly common           |
| Tiredness        | Mild                      | Moderate to severe      |
| Sudden symptoms  | Appear gradually          | Can appear in 3-6 hrs   |
| Coughing         | Hacking, productive cough | Dry, unproductive cough |
| Sneezing         | Common                    | Uncommon                |
| Stuffy nose      | Common                    | Uncommon                |
| Sore throat      | Common                    | Uncommon                |
| Chest discomfort | Mild to moderate          | Often severe            |
| Headache         | Uncommon                  | Common                  |

May each of you have a healthy 2008.

Peace,

Mimi and the Health Ministries team.

## Church Council News

1. Please remember that the Church Council will meet immediately after worship on Sunday, Jan. 6<sup>th</sup>. Kathy Lawes will be here to discuss the interim pastor process.
2. The next regular Church Council meeting will be Tuesday, Jan. 22, 7:00 pm.

### PLEASE NOTE

⇒ *Jana Allott is collecting and recycling aluminum cans and is donating the proceeds to Heifer International. You may bring your cans to church on any Sunday or she will pick them up.*

⇒ The back table in the church office has Lost and Found items on it. Anything not claimed by the end of January will be donated to the Closet.

⇒ *Mark your calendar for the next Coffee House on Feb. 23, featuring Blues/Gospel performer Rev. Robert Jones.*

## Stewardship and Finance

Thanks to each of you that supported The Christmas Fund special offering in December. Our contributions work throughout the year and not just during the Christmas season. Many retired and active UCC clergy and lay employees will receive the benefit of our generosity.

I am aware that there is some confusion regarding our support of Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM). When Open Prairie received the "5 for 5" recognition 2007 from the UCC Local Church Ministries Office in Cleveland, Ohio, there were congratulations, but also questions as to why we were honored. Perhaps the following information will help answer some of your questions.

First, the Constitution and By-Laws of Open Prairie UCC state that one of the Mission Goals includes "...promoting the goal of being a 5/5 church and contributing at least 10% of church budget to Mission." (D, 2a, pg.8).

"5 for 5" congregations fully support OCWM. They give to Basic Support and all four Special Mission Offerings – One Great Hour of Sharing, Strengthen the Church, Neighbors in Need, and The Christmas Fund.

**UCC Basic Support** (known at Open Prairie as OCWM) provides funding for Conferences and the national ministries of our Wider Church Ministries, Justice and Witness Ministries, General Ministries and the Pension Boards. Basic support (OCWM) may be indicated on the Pledge Sheet that members and friends receive during the Stewardship Campaign.

**One Great Hour of Sharing** channels resources for international programs in health, education, and agricultural development, emergency relief, refugee ministries, and both international and domestic disaster response, administered by Wider Church Ministries, Global Sharing of Resources. This special offering is received in March.

**Strengthen the Church** supports leadership for new and revitalizing congregations, programs for youth and young adults, and leadership development for the whole church. These ministries are carried out by UCC Conferences and Local Church Ministries. This special offering is usually received in May.

**Neighbors in Need** supports ministries of justice and compassion throughout the United States and Puerto Rico, including the Council

for American Indian Ministries (CAIM), justice and advocacy, and direct service projects supported by Justice and Witness Ministries. October is the month designated for this offering.

**The Christmas Fund** helps provide pension and health premium supplementation to low-income retired church workers, emergency assistance to clergy families in need and Christmas checks to hundreds of annuitants, administered by the Pension Boards. This special offering is received in December.

Again, congratulations to Open Prairie members and friends who generously support these ministries of the United Church of Christ.

***New Year Blessings to you all.***  
***Patricia Wilson***

### ***A Note from Margo***

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Your G-Spot

As I write this, I am enjoying one of my favorite "God spots." I am sitting on a beach in South Carolina watching children play, couples walk hand-in-hand, and the setting sun. Everything seems right in the world from this vantage point, and only the setting sun reminds me that time is passing at all.

I refer to this place as a "God spot" because it is a place where I feel closest to that enigmatic and divine spirit that touches us all, despite our differences. My mind is quieter here, and I am better able to listen to the messages of my heart. The sky seems nearer; the air is fresher. I feel closer to every stranger I meet just by virtue of sharing this peaceful and sandy sanctuary. This is a special and profound sense of fellowship for me; one quite different than any other I've known. We all share a degree of anonymity, yet our hearts are known to each other.

This feeling makes me wonder a few things. First, I wonder what my other G-spots are. And I find that while concerts also provide this sense of divine fellowship, most of my spots are in nature. Regardless, the connectedness I feel in such places is supreme to any other

feeling, which makes returning home, and to the everyday, pretty undesirable.

Next, I wonder where all of your spots are located. Have you ever thought about it? Have you told others you love where these places are? Have you taken them there? For, if we are a community that shares God's love with others and wants to stir the spirit in everyone, shouldn't we be sharing *all* our sanctuaries?

Finally, I reconsider the divine connectedness I feel with nature and the people around me as I sit here alone. I wonder: What would it take to bring people who are at odds to feel this divine presence, too? Even if one is a non-believer, it seems impossible to me to sit in a place like this and hold a grudge with anyone. We are all so small, but we make (or perpetuate) such big messes. How long will it take us to realize what sociologists have been telling us for years: When it comes down to it, we all need the same things. Among these are safety and togetherness.

Perhaps as we greet the new year we can look for our common ground in God and address the conflicts we have not been able to escape. Happy New Year, everyone,

***Margo***

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## **January**

Again I reply to the triple winds  
running chromatic fifths of derision  
outside my window:  
Play louder.  
You will not succeed. I am  
bound more to my sentences  
the more you batter at me  
to follow you.  
And the wind,  
as before, fingers perfectly  
its derisive music.

***~William Carlos Williams***

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## **CHURCH CONTACTS**

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