

WANDERINGS

A newsletter for people on a journey together with a purpose

Redlands United Church of Christ An Open and Affirming Church

December 2004

Covenant/Communion Sunday - Worship Service 10:30 a.m., Sunday, December 5

Wider Ministries Area meeting, Sunday, December 5, 11:45 a.m.

The Inman-Barton Shepherd Group Luncheon after worship service, Sunday, December 5

RUCC Staff Christmas Party Luncheon, Monday, December 6, 12:30 p.m.
at the home of Kristen Cameron

“Begin Your Week ... Praying for Peace”
Every Monday Evening in our sanctuary 7:00 – 7:30 p.m.

Celebration Ringers Rehearsal on Thursdays, 6:30 p.m.
Jubilee Ringers Rehearsal on Sundays, 11:45 a.m.

Covenant Choir Rehearsal on Thursdays, 7:30 p.m.

The Covenant Choir and Handbell Choir present “*Feastings*”, Friday, December 10, 7:00 p.m.

Church Board will meet Tuesday, December 14, 7:00 p.m.

R.U.C.C. Women’s Fellowship will meet at 9:30 a.m., Wednesday, December 15
at the home of Shirley Marks

Middle school youth group (grades 6th-8th) will meet December 5, 12, 19, & 26
(check bulletin for times)

High school youth group (grades 9th-12th) will meet December 5, 12, 19 & 26
(check bulletin for times)

Christmas Eve Candlelight Service, Friday, December 24, 7:30 p.m.



From your Pastor and Teacher, Sharon~

*“...Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord...
that God may teach us the divine ways and that we may walk in God’s path...
Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your God is coming...”
--from Isaiah 2 and Matthew 24*

Welcome to the Advent path! This year, the wisdom of the lectionary creators has us walking together with the prophet Isaiah and the late first-century author of the book of Matthew. Both from the Middle East...both express concern about their countries...both are poetic and relevant and blunt about walking God’s path. Yet these two present decidedly different pictures of what it means to walk God’s path.

For Isaiah, the walking part is our job. As we walk, presumably with other travelers, God teaches us the ways of cooperation, of compromise, of compassion, of understanding, and of peace. Isaiah’s dream is of a world without war and conflicts, a world in which lamb and lion can lie down together as comrades rather than as dinner. In Isaiah’s world, wisdom and instruction pour forth and wash over all who come near to God. The values by which decisions are made in Isaiah’s world are the values of righteousness and equity. According to the readings from Isaiah during this Advent season, those who come near to God will be strengthened, their blindness will cease, they will hear things they never heard before, and they will dance and sing for joy. Sounds ideal, doesn’t it?

For Matthew, words and phrases like “unexpected,” “watch,” “stay awake,” “be ready,” “prepare,” and “repent,” suggest that our job during Advent is much more proactive than simply walking and standing in the presence of the divine. We are to work harder and to be more acutely attentive. I am reminded of the bumper sticker that made its appearance a few years ago, “Jesus is coming...Look busy.” In Matthew’s world, there is a heightened sense of alert, perhaps an orange or even a red on the current scale. You just never know when the end will come, so you’d better be ready when it does. Sounds realistic, eh?

I imagine that we each stand more firmly and comfortably in one or the other of these worlds. While Isaiah calls us from out of our joy, Matthew appeals to our basic fears. To those who stand with Isaiah, the Matthew folk may seem unduly pessimistic. To those who align more with Matthew, those who walk with Isaiah appear naïve and unprepared. Yet our scriptures offer both images, both worlds for us to ponder during this Advent season. I suggest to you that both are ideal, depending on where we stand. Both are also painfully realistic in our daily lives. By presenting and illustrating both types, Matthew and Isaiah nudge us to move beyond stereotypic categories and to see life from a different perspective.

During this particular season of Advent, when our country and we as citizens are healing from a painful and divisive election, it can help us to walk with Isaiah and with Matthew. Try on a new perspective and learn from it. Find comfort from your fellow travelers. Take time to enjoy, really enjoy, these weeks of experiencing the path of God as it unfolds before you.

Blessings,

Sharon

Sundays with the Body
By Sharon R. Graff

December 2004

Worship is seasonal—that is, our spiritual cycle as a community follows a calendar based on seasons of the church year. While December is the end of the traditional calendar year, it marks the beginning of our spiritual year. This month of Sundays is called Advent—the beginning—when we contemplate the meaning and significance of a little child born among us yet again. Here at RUCC, December is the month of covenants—making and bringing our promises to God and to one another for the next year. Let’s begin this new year...together, following the quiet and thoughtful pace set by the little child born in Bethlehem. Our worship themes for Advent are:

November 28 – “Knock Knock” – First Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 2:1-5; Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:36-44

This year’s walk through Advent is an invitation to enter into a realm where lions and lambs rest together, where little children are leaders, where the lame walk and the blind see again, and where warfare is replaced by peace. Isaiah’s words remind us that such a world is possible, and that’s the good news. Matthew’s words offer practical ways for us, yes us, to realize such a world in each moment, and that is the divine invitation. Here’s hoping you accept!

December 5 – “Do You Hear What I Hear?” Covenant Sunday; Second Sunday of Advent – Communion

Isaiah 11:1-10; Romans 15:4-13; Matthew 3:1-12

On this most inspiring day, we bring forward our covenants and receive communion, nourishment for the journey ahead. In preparation for this service, each of us are invited by God to hear the Spirit’s voice, and to consider what we believe and how we want to live out those beliefs in this faith community during 2005. Bring your covenant to place on the altar, and together God’s many blessings will be experienced!

December 12 – “Patience or Patients?” – Third Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 35:1-10; James 5:7-10; Matthew 11:2-11

Both patience and patients figure prominently in the readings today. Depending on the day, time, month, year, or even decade, we are both kinds of patient. Especially by this time of the season, we may long for both kinds of patient—that is, to have some, and to be one! Let’s laugh together today, remembering that we are not alone.

December 19 – “Born in Bethlehem” – Fourth Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 7:10-16a; Matthew 1:18-25

Today, our congregation’s children and youth lead us in the dramatic presentation of the Christmas story, as written by our own youth! Special appearances by the wise guys, the shepherds, the angels, and, of course Mary, Joseph, and Jesus, will inspire us with the relevance of these ancient narratives. Come and enjoy the story through the eyes, and the words, of youth!

December 24, 7:30 p.m. – Christmas Eve Candlelight Service, Lessons and Carols

Once again, the magic of candlelight and the mystery of the darkened night will intersect as we celebrate the return of the light of God’s love into the world. Come ready to hear, to see, and to reflect.

December 26 – Guest Speaker

Isaiah 63:7-9; Hebrews 2:10-18; Matthew 2:13-23

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Forgive me but I must again share a recent experience with a close friend. I have had some free reading time recently so I went back to "The Chronicles of Narnia" by C. S. Lewis. In the first book, "The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe", the four children save Narnia, with the help of the Lion, from the evil Witch and then serve as Kings and Queens. After many years, they then return to their home in England. They left behind a saving legacy and also a special whistle if Narnia ever got into trouble again. In the next book, "Prince Caspian", the children are on a train station platform waiting for their train to take them away to school for the fall semester. As with most train stations there are lots of sounds but this time the four children hear a different whistle and suddenly are transformed back to Narnia. Narnia was in trouble again and the two Kings and two Queens were only a remote legend not allowed to be spoken about. Again they save Narnia with the help of the Lion.

To me this sounded like a calling of the Spirit to service. Three years ago I was getting ready to write my covenant for the next year. For several years I had served on several different committees, commissions, and delegations with our Association and Conference. I felt it was time to return to RUCC and serve on a local committee. I had had a good idea where I wanted to serve for several months prior to writing my covenant. But what I wanted was not what the Spirit wanted. I resisted the idea of being President again and felt that there were many very capable individuals already available. After I consulted with several who were closely involved with the leadership of RUCC, I agreed to seek election as President.

Our Covenanting process is very unique and affords an opportunity to hear the whistle, the Spirit, and to be transformed into service where we did not know we were needed. For the most part I have enjoyed serving as your President but more important, I served where the Spirit wanted me. As you write your covenants for next year, open your hearts, your minds, and your souls to the Spirit. If you do not hear the Spirit, or whistle, do not feel that you are not needed. I do not usually hear the Spirit so clearly so I am left to my heart and mind to seek direction. We are not called to check our hearts and minds at the door but to use them. May we all be with the Spirit as we each write our covenants this time.

Eric Naftzger

Minister – Rev. Dr. Sharon R. Graff

Choir Director – Peggy McMeans

Organist & Handbell Director – Kristen Cameron

Youth Director – Craig Colclough

Seminary Intern – Jeanne Favreau-Sorvillo

Administrative Assistant – Rebecca Gutierrez

Sunday Child Care – Mariana and Mina Ryan

Custodian – Jay Grayson

Church office hours: 9:00 a.m.-1:30 p.m., Monday - Friday

Wanderings is published monthly by R.U.C.C.

GOD IS STILL SPEAKING

Redlands United Church of Christ is one of more than 2,000 UCC churches that chose to join the God is Still Speaking initiative. You will see more information about the campaign on the inside back cover of each Sunday's bulletin.

At the national level, preparation for the campaign revealed some important information which the campaign seeks to address.

1. Focus group data found "un-churched" people to be extremely alienated from the church. Typically, the un-churched in these focus groups spent hours to unpack their anger and hurt.
2. Baby-boomers, unlike previous generations, did not return to church as they began to have children. As a result, many children of boomer parents have never been to church and know too little about church to seek it out.
3. Progressive mainline churches are virtually absent from public perceptions about church. Many people reject church, not knowing about the existence of churches like the United Church of Christ.

One key to the Still Speaking Initiative is a national television campaign. The "bouncer" ad will air on broadcast and cable television December 1 – 26, 2004, in every media market. The goal is that 60 percent of the population will see the ad at least three times. We do not know the dates and times that the spots will air. (You can view the ad each Sunday after church.)

In December, it is up to those of us in the pews to show the open welcome that the TV commercial promises. As new people enter the life of our church, let's be mindful that we have promised, *"No matter who you are, or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here."*

THE CHRISTIAN COUNSELING SERVICE

The Christian Counseling Service is now a provider of the Listening Ears/Loving Hearts Parent Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT) program. Toys are needed as part of this interactive therapy. Since Christmas is near, I thought I would put out the wish list of toys and ask that our church members provide whatever they could. The toys needed are: Bristle Blocks, Fisher-Price Little People, Crayons/Construction paper, large Legos, Mr. and Mrs. Potato Head and small toy animals. If you could provide any of these toys, or the dollars for me to purchase them, please bring them to me at church by Sunday, December 19th and I will see that the Christian Counseling Center gets them in time for Christmas. Thank you so much for your kind generosity. Bonnie Killpatrick, CCS board member, 793-6284.

HELP INCREASE OUR COMMUNITY

Here's a very worthwhile goal for each of us in 2004: Bring at least one new guest to our church. Let them discover how much we have to offer!

Church Growth Committee

FFLAG MEETING

Families & Friends of Lesbians and Gays (FFLAG) meet on the first Wednesday of every month at the First United Methodist Church on the corner of Cajon and Olive at 7:30 p.m. Mary Belle Carter represents RUCC. For more information please contact Mary Belle at (909) 795-6369.

BLOOD PRESSURE CLINIC

Blood Pressure Clinic will be Sunday, December 26th following the worship service. Come in for a check up before you have your coffee. The blood pressure clinic will be held in Covenant Hall.

DECEMBER WORSHIP LEADERS

5 Angelynn King
12 Jacob Fiske-Phillips
19 Sandy Peavler & Family
26 Charles Wheeler

CHURCH WOMEN UNITED

Church Women United will meet at 10:00 a.m. on December 3rd at First Baptist Church, corner of Olive and Cajon. We will be collecting school supplies for the Central City Lutheran Mission Project in San Bernardino. Our Guest speaker will be Joyce Briggs of the Mission Aviation Fellowship who lives mostly in the Congo.

FEASTINGS

It is time to add RUCC's special holiday tradition to your calendar! The Covenant Choir and Handbell Choir will present their annual Feastings event on Fri. December 10 at 7:00 PM. This is a time for you to sit back and be served an elegant meal, be entertained by the choir and musicians, and revel in the spirit and music of the Christmas season.

This year our evening will return to a theme of Our Favorite Christmas Carols: Part II. Two years ago we heard stories behind some of the carols we've sung every Christmas season and that have become such a part of our celebration. Now we will learn about others as well as offering a reprise of everyone's favorite, Silent Night. The choir will be accompanied by several instrumentalists, and our evening will feature readings, skits, and a chance for you to sing along.

Our dinner will be prepared by a favorite local caterer and served to you by our choir members. The menu offered will be that most favorite of elegant meals, a sumptuous traditional turkey dinner. We will gather at the Wassail Bowl at 7:00 PM, then will be seated and served at 7:30.

Tickets are priced at \$20.00 for adults and \$10.00 for children 10 and under, and a portion of any proceeds will be donated to help local needy families. Tickets are available and may be purchased after church on Sundays. Reservations may also be made with Becky during office hours through December 6. Childcare will be provided if needed--please specify when making reservations. Join us for this festive occasion!

RUMMAGE SALE

The next Rummage Sale is coming soon. Start collecting things at home. Please don't bring anything to church now!

CHRISTMAS FUND OFFERING

In Isaiah 35:1-10, God's promise to strengthen and renew us is rendered in beautiful poetry: "The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus, it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing." (Isaiah 35:1-2)

Our joy at Christmas is also a response to God's promise of new life through the birth of Jesus. It is a joy we are called upon to share widely, through our witness and through our gifts, both to loved ones and to distant neighbors.

The Christmas Fund Offering (formerly Veterans of the Cross), one of the four Special Mission Offerings of the United Church of Christ, is an important way of sharing our joy at God's renewing and life-giving grace. The offering, which is administered by the Pension Boards on behalf of the UCC, is an expression of joy and gratitude for those who serve the church. Gifts to the Christmas Fund help provide pension and health premium supplementation to low-income retirees, emergency assistance to clergy families in need and Christmas gift checks to hundreds of annuitants.

Last year, the generous gifts of UCC congregations and individuals to the Christmas Fund enabled the Pension Boards' Ministerial Assistance Program to disburse:

- \$225,000 in Christmas Grants
- \$145,256 in Emergency and Disability Grants
- \$450,730 in Pension Supplementation
- \$450,530 in Health Plan Supplementation

On December 12, 2004, The Christmas Fund Offering will be received during worship.

LENT FOLLOWS CHRISTMAS...

Though our minds and spirits are cycling around Christmas, the calendar marches on towards Lent...and your creative juices are needed! Our intern, Jeanne, and I are inviting any who wish to join us in planning the worship services for the Lenten season. Lent begins with Ash Wednesday (February 9) and concludes on Easter Sunday (March 27). Ponder, pray, think if you'd like to participate in the creative process. Our first meeting will be on Sunday, January 9th, from 12:30 - 2:00 p.m.

-- Sharon Graff

RUCC WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP

RUCC Women's Fellowship will meet at 9:30 a.m. on Wednesday, December 15, at the home of Shirley Marks, 707 Esther Way, Redlands.

DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS

- | | |
|----|--------------------------------|
| 3 | Richard Hodson
Bill Whitmer |
| 9 | Briano Planeta |
| 14 | Emily Barton
Wayne Milloy |
| 18 | Craig Wesson |
| 21 | Phil McMeans
Kimberly Arth |
| 23 | Eleanor Ruiz |
| 25 | Nathan Campbell |
| 30 | Omar Moran |

SHEPHERD GROUP MEETING

The Inman-Barton Shepherd Group will meet on Sunday, December 5 at the church following worship service. It will be a luncheon. Please bring a gift for the White Elephant exchange.

***HAPPY HOLIDAYS FROM THE
RUCC STAFF!!***

December Scripture Readings

November 28 – 1st Sunday of Advent: *Isaiah 2:1-5; Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:36-44*

December 5 – 2nd Sunday of Advent: *Isaiah 11:1-10; Romans 15:4-13; Matthew 3:1-12*

December 12 - 3rd Sunday of Advent: *Isaiah 35:1-10; James 5:7-10; Matthew 11:2-11*

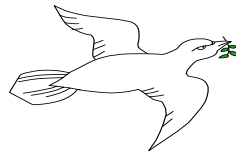
December 19 – 4th Sunday of Advent: *Isaiah 7:10-16a; Matthew 1:18-25*

December 24 – *Christmas Eve Candlelight Service, Lessons and Carols*

December 26: *Isaiah 63:7-9; Hebrews 2:10-18; Matthew 2:13-23*

BEGIN YOUR WEEK PRAYING FOR PEACE

Our sanctuary is open each Monday evening from 7:00 – 7:30 p.m. for quiet prayer and meditation. Please join in the hope and faith that our nonviolent and consistent actions will help to change the direction of many governments from their tendency toward retribution and vengeance towards working for more peaceful solutions. All ages are welcome. For more information, please contact Sharon Graff.



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