

WANDERINGS

A newsletter for people on a journey together with a purpose

Redlands United Church of Christ An Open and Affirming Church

March 2005

Lenten Soup Suppers ~ Wednesdays, March 2, 9, & 16 ~ 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.

RUCC Rummage Sale ~ Saturday, March 5, 8:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Celtic/Communion Sunday ~ Worship Service 10:30 a.m., Sunday, March 6

Wider Ministries meeting following worship service, Sunday, March 6

Staff meeting, Monday, March 7, 9:30 a.m.

Church Board will meet Tuesday, March 8, 7:00 p.m.

Knitting Ministry Group meet March 10 & 24, 10:30 a.m. – 12:00 noon

Luncheon and Orientation for Newly Covenanting Members/Non Members
Sunday, March 13, 12:15 – 1:30 p.m.

R.U.C.C. Women's Fellowship, 9:30 a.m., Wednesday, March 16

Maundy Thursday ~ Soup Supper and Tenebrae Service, March 24, 6:00 – 8:00 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.

Middle school youth group (grades 6th-8th) will meet March 6, 13, 20, & 27

High school youth group (grades 9th-12th) will meet March 6, 13, 20, & 27



From your Pastor and Teacher, Sharon~

*“Try as we might, God will not be contained in any box.”
—one of my Bible professors*

I wish that my memory assisted me in giving credit where credit is due. These words about God and boxes have been with me for many years, but I do not remember from whence they first came. I do know that the more I study scripture and both experience and know the Divine, the truth of the statement comes more and more clear.

Perhaps you, like me, try to put God in a box—the box of agreeing with your own well-thought-out theories and beliefs, the box of your particular politics, the box of your specific hermeneutic, the box of your expectations. Certainly God is like us! Certainly, God in all God’s wisdom agrees with us. Certainly, God will act according to what we imagine and anticipate, well within the “boxes” we have created.

Friends, the one thing that resurrection month shocks us into acknowledging is that God will not be contained. The Divine—however we experience that pulsating presence in our own lives, and by whatever name we call God—simply will not remain in our neatly constructed boxes. The ancient Hebrews thought that they could successfully carry “God in a box” with them as they wandered in the various deserts...they were wrong. The first disciples—faithful men and women—expected that once Jesus was safely in the tomb, he would stay put...they were wrong. At Pentecost, when the early believers gathered to honor the holiday, they were shocked that the Spirit—which had been promised only to the chosen few as Advocate—would blow at will, refreshing everyone in its path.

And before any of these ancestors in the faith were alive, the ancients also knew that the Divine would surprise them with new life each and every season. Springtime is a poignant reminder of the power of that divine promise—within the seed there is a tree, within the bud a flower that magically turns to fruit, within each and every tomb...resurrection awaits.

Now that I am without both my beloved parents, springtime in general and resurrection in particular have taken on new meaning for me. Having experienced Mom and Dad’s presence with me on many occasions since their deaths, my previously held belief that death is the end of life has been challenged. Death certainly changes our relationship with our loved ones, but I now know that it is not the end. It is not the end of love, nor is death the end of relating.

As did the early disciples, we too experience the living Christ in ways that we cannot explain or footnote, but in ways that are nonetheless real and transformative. I pray that such resurrection will challenge us, surprise us, and even shock us during this resurrection month.

Blessings,



PRESIDENT’S REPORT

A Note from Jim Hester

One of the things that I have done over the years is try to understand how persuasion functions. What are those things in an argument that bring you to the point that you are ready to believe or act on a proposition or proposal or appeal? In other words, for some years now I have been studying rhetoric, both classical and modern.

My interest in rhetoric led me to look for general theories of rhetoric, and in one of them I discovered a fascinating way of analyzing the rhetorical formation of small groups. Put briefly, it goes like this. Groups are often formed when someone articulates a worldview and, typically, a course of action meant to enable and enact that worldview. (Think of Jesus and his proclamation that the Kingdom of God is at hand!) That expression is classified as a “rhetorical vision,” that is, a statement that can, through discourse, explain the world – or at least the participants’ experience of it – and describe ways in which things can be better through the activities of the group. The speaker creates group consciousness and, through a participant’s involvement in the group, also creates self-identity.

As the vision is enabled and enacted, consciousness grows, enhancing the identity and experiences of the participants, or group members. It also results in the growth of the group as more and more people recognize that they share in the same vision of things.

Eventually, raising consciousness is not enough; the vision must be sustained by elaborating some of its earlier aspects and exploring the implications of others, implications that might in fact, begin to change features of the vision. (An almost text book illustration of this process is the vision and arguments used to justify the war in Iraq.) The reality is, however, that no rhetorical vision can be sustained indefinitely. Attempts to do so lead to the eventual demise of the vision and the loss of group identity. There are an infinite number of examples of this in history.

We as a church have had a strong founding rhetorical vision. It created our consciousness and guided its growth and development. I am certain that aspects of it will always be a part of us. However, just as we have done before when exigencies arise, it is time to work on a new vision. In a sermon recently Sharon reminded us that Jesus’ first sermon was, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.” The semantic domain for the verb “repent” in Greek has to do with behavior. As the authors of one Greek lexicon put it, “...the emphasis...seems to be more specifically the total change, both in thought and behavior, with respect to how one should both think and act.” It is interesting to reflect on what it would mean for the members of RUCC to “repent.” If we take the presence of the Kingdom seriously, what would we do differently, what “total change” might we make to enable and enact the Kingdom in Redlands?

I know we have had these conversations before, but always in the context of the founding vision. Maybe it is time to formulate a new vision, a different language to express it, a few different programs to empower it. Is that something you are interested in trying?

Jim

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“A Reminder From the Church Board: Members who have questions about church business or programs, and can’t quite figure out where to turn for answers, are encouraged to speak with Sharon Graff, Jim Hester, Bill Buchanan, or Gal Glanville. If they don’t have answers, they will know where to go to find them!”

“Worship God!” (Revelation 19:10)

By Sharon R. Graff

Worship during this Lenten season was planned by a group of RUCC folk who accepted an open invitation to work creatively together. Through the remaining Sundays of Lent, we will experience some of the signs of God’s love. The scriptures for the season invite us to explore the theme of God’s presence in a myriad of ways—through our own free will, through risking and trusting, and through keeping our palms up. We also will experience God sitting with us even when we whine and complain, and we will feel God’s breath of life and God’s caring presence in all the quadrants of our lives, including the tombs! Please consider this your personal invitation to be inspired in worship throughout this Lenten season.

March 6 – Celtic Sunday and Communion Sunday – “Caring Presence in All Quadrants”

Psalm 23; Readings from the Celtic tradition on the four directions and corresponding elements (earth, air, water, fire, and Spirit)

This will be a very special Sunday of honoring and experiencing our Celtic Christian tradition from the isles of Britain. Ancient (yet surprisingly modern!) readings from the Bible and other sources will join with inspiring music to offer us a unique worship experience. Bring a friend!

March 13 – “Breath of Life”

Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 130; John 11:1-45

Today’s messages from scripture and from life suggest to us that God has the ability to bring dead and dying bones back to life. From Ezekiel’s valley to the tomb of Lazarus, God looks death square in the face and says, “Live!” Perhaps some our dead and dying places will feel the refreshing breath of God today.

March 20 – “Palms Up!” – Palm Sunday

Philippians 2:5-11; Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Matthew 21:1-11

Beginning outside on the patio (weather permitting), we will process into the sanctuary, singing and smiling, with our own palms up to receive what the Spirit offers! And thus begins our journey with Christ through this week called “holy.”

March 27 – “A View from the Tomb” – Easter Sunday

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; John 20:1-18; Matthew 28:1-10

The Easter morning stories are told with some consistency in each of the four gospel accounts—and the women disciples figure prominently in all accounts—leading us to wonder and perhaps to believe. Come for the music, come for the prayers, come to hear the stories once again. More importantly, come to experience the new life, the resurrected life, which God has arranged especially for you!

Worship will be richer and deeper with your presence. I especially look forward to sharing this our third Lenten season together.

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.

“Simply Divine” Lent 2005

Lenten Soup Suppers
Wednesdays, 6:00-8:00 p.m.
March 2, March 9, March 16

Covenant Hall
Facilitator: Sharon Graff

Maundy Thursday
March 24, 6:00-8:00 p.m.
Soup Supper and Tenebrae Service

For those who enjoy HGTV, you may wonder if we are spending our time in Lent remodeling a room or two. (For those who are not HGTV addicts, the phrase “Simply Divine” is the sign off of a popular home makeover show.) Well, in a way, yes we are. Not a room in our house or apartment or condo, but this season does invite us to remodel something inside of us.

In our Ash Wednesday service we joined together in a contemplative worship service that centered us around scriptures and the music of Taize, helping us look deeply and honestly, and with a lot of love and forgiveness, at what is inside us and others who choose to walk this journey. During the Wednesday evenings during Lent we will share a simple meal of soup and bread, to be followed by an equally simple experience of scripture. Using the ancient practice of Lectio Divina (loosely translated from the Latin as “a divine reading of scripture”), we will focus our souls on one of the passages to be read in worship the following Sunday. Through a creative mixture of listening, prayer, silence, and sharing, our experience of the Divine will be enriched...or so goes the theory! You are invited to come and try it on.

On Maundy Thursday, March 24, we will continue the contemplative tenor of Lent with another soup supper, followed by a special Tenebrae service in the sanctuary. With choir and congregational singing, instrumental music, thought-provoking scripture readings, and the methodical extinguishing of candles, we will be led into the darkness that precedes any resurrection.

These Lenten evenings are for all ages—from older elementary children to older adults and all in between. Childcare will be provided for the youngest among us, so all will have a place. Please bring your open spirit, a bowl and spoon for soup, and a cup for something to drink. If you need transportation, please contact your shepherd or the church office.

Wherever you are on life’s journey...you are welcome here.

CHURCH GROWTH AND ENRICHMENT REPORT

Membership and Attendance

Our church membership is growing! RUCC has approximately 125 members this year and some people may still be writing their covenants. It is deeply satisfying that so many new people have responded to our message of welcome and inclusiveness.

Our weekly worship attendance is also growing. We moved the handbell tables to the front of the sanctuary and moved the pews that were there down to the floor of the sanctuary for more seating. We also moved in pews from Covenant Hall.

On Sunday, March 13th, we will hold an orientation session. Newly covenanting members and those interested in the church have been invited. If you are interested, speak to Sharon Graff or telephone Becky Gutierrez in the church office during the week and you will be included. This is an opportunity to learn about how our church works and about the United Church of Christ denomination.

One challenge of growth in any organization is to involve and welcome all new people. At our church, growth is not just about the numbers. We want to involve newcomers, charter members, and everyone else in the life of the church. We want people who are not yet members—and those who may never become members—to feel that they too are a part of our church family. Look for Church Growth to sponsor a fun fellowship time after church on April 10th, as we all make a special effort to get to know one another better.

God is Still Speaking

The December national television advertising campaign, and the controversy surrounding the refusal of NBC and CBS to air one of the ads, created interest in the UCC. We also advertised in the *Redlands Daily Facts* in December. Now, the Still Speaking office is raising money for a March ad campaign. Our RUCC Wider Ministries Area authorized a contribution on behalf of our church. As of this writing, fundraising is continuing toward the goal of \$1.5 million. We encourage you to support the campaign.

Publicity

The Growth Area is responsible for publicity. We provide information to local newspapers about all major church events. Dr. David Hester's presentation, *Queers on Account of the Kingdom of Heaven*, was the subject of a short article in the Daily Facts on January 13th. **"An article about Dr. Jon Robertson's visit to our pulpit appeared in the Daily Facts on February 17th."** The newspaper's "What's Happening" section carried announcements about the *Beyond Belief* series and our Ash Wednesday service. Our exposure in the local media means that reporters have telephoned Sharon Graff for responses to items such as the Redlands city logo issue and the significance of Ash Wednesday. When you have an event to publicize, contact Michael Dewey.

The Church Growth Area is meeting now to plan our goals and objectives for 2005. It is not too late to join us, even if you did not include the commitment in your covenant.

Church Growth & Enrichment Area is Ruth Moses, Vern Jones, Mike Moran, Bettye Wheeler, Cindi Donald, and Michael Dewey (Area Leader).

SEEKING SINGERS OF ALL AGES!

It's not too late to join our singers for Maundy Thursday, Palm Sunday and Easter!

Treble Choir: *Children ages 5-12 and young ladies through high school.* We will sing one anthem (a fun and lively tune!) at **10:30 a.m. service Easter Morning March 27.** Rehearsals are **March 13 and 20 at 9:15 to 9:45 a.m.** in Covenant Hall, and **March 27 TBA.** Peggy McMeans has tapes and song sheets that you can get and listen to at home. Please join us for any rehearsal that you are able to attend!

Covenant Choir: *Young men and ladies 13 to adult.* If you have considered joining the choir, but are not sure about a long-term commitment, join us as you can for a season. We will sing a special Tenebrae work by Hal Hopson for **Maundy Thursday on March 24 at 7:00 p.m.,** and both traditional and contemporary anthems for **Palm Sunday, March 20 and Easter, March 27, both 10:30 a.m.** Rehearsals are **Thursdays at 7:30 p.m.** in the sanctuary and **Sunday warm-up 9:45 a.m.,** with an added dress rehearsal on **March 23.** Please see or call Peggy McMeans at 798-1474 if you are interested!

BLOOD PRESSURE CLINIC

Blood Pressure Clinic will be Sunday, March 27, 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.

RUCC WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP

RUCC Women's Fellowship will meet on Wednesday, March 16 at 9:30 a.m. at the home of Opal Inman, 24 North Center Street, Redlands.

MARCH WORSHIP LEADERS

6 Hannah McMeans
13 Katie Barton
20 Julie Phillip
27 Jim Hester

OPPORTUNITY TO SUPPORT CANCER RESEARCH

Two of our members – Deb Austin-Brecher and Sharon Graff are walking the Mayor's Midnight Marathon in Anchorage this next June, and are raising money for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society in the process. If you would like to support them and "the cause," please log on to <http://www.active.com/donate/tntors> and use the search drop-down box to contribute. Your generosity—of resources, hugs, smiles, and prayers—will be greatly appreciated!

DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOUR CANVAS BAG IS TODAY?

In a drawer? In the closet? Just missing? Last year I handed out 45 bags in the hope that you would use them for your grocery shopping. And that, if you have a family, you would be encouraged to purchase more. So, if it has been "out of sight and out of mind" I hope that you will track it down for future use.

Additional ones are available at Trader Joe's for \$2.99 and at some grocery stores.

The FaithActs Committee hopes that all of us will become aware of how our actions affect the health of the earth and that we will help in any way we can. Even little changes can make an impact. Choosing canvas bags over paper or plastic is a simple way to help.

Betty Jacobs – FaithActs member

RUMMAGE SALE

The RUCC rummage sale is coming soon!! Mark your calendar...Saturday, March 5th at 8:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. Jeff and Lani Nicholson are the chairpersons for the rummage sale this year. Please contact Jeff and Lani at 790-3828 if you have large items for the rummage sale.

You may bring small items to the church anytime, but would prefer that most items be brought in Tuesday (March 1) through Thursday (March 3) before the sale.

Church Women President, Opal Inman

“VOICES OF FAITH”

The Redlands Area Interfaith Council will sponsor a “Voices of Faith” forum Saturday, March 5th, on the subject “Church and State: Where do we draw the line?” The 7:00 p.m. forum is free and open to the public and will be at First Presbyterian Church’s Knox Hall, 100 Cajon Street, Redlands.

The purpose of the forum is to offer a variety of views on church and state relations. Participants will be John Walsh, chaplain of the University of Redlands; Kasey Haws, former mayor of Redlands; Don Wallace of Redlands, Christian Center; and Gregory Elder, professor of history and humanities at Riverside Community College and religion columnist for the Redlands Daily Facts.

Arthur Gregory, president of the Interfaith Council, will moderate the discussion, and the Rev. Tim Boyer will give the invocation.

The Redlands Area Interfaith Council represents several churches and faith communities in Redlands.

CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY *FOUNDER’S DAY 2005*

Come celebrate Founder’s Day Celebration March 12th, with Chapman University’s Disciples on Campus Community, and over 800 of your closest Disciple/United Church of Christ friends, as well as our speaker Ben Bohren, who has recently returned to California as the Transitional Regional Minister for the Northern California-Nevada Region. Who better to come home to Chapman as we celebrate: the Blessing of our new Fish Interfaith Center, Wallace All Faiths Chapel, and Wilkinson Founders Chapel, and the renewal of our covenant relationship with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Plan now to join the celebration! You won’t want to miss this special opportunity to Come Home to Chapman University! For more information, please call the Church Relations Office at 714-997-6760.

ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING

Television and the Internet allow us to have remote encounters with people, without any kind of social responsibility on our part, except to pay the cable or phone bill. We can flick the remote to cheer for the next American Idol, jeer at the last Survivor, and applaud for the successful Apprentice. We can click the mouse to talk anonymously with strangers about the latest book review or scrapbooking tips, or to book flights. More and more, we rely willingly and happily on unseen strangers to take care of our needs.

What about the strangers who we think have nothing to offer us? Do we also welcome those strangers into our lives? In Matthew 25:38 it asks, “When was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you?” Does that mean the strangers we see in media stories about war, disasters, and poverty? What is our responsibility to those strangers?

By giving to the One Great Hour of Sharing offering we respond faithfully, offering hospitality and welcome to the strangers in our world. Jesus said, “Truly, I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” (Matthew 25:40)

On March 20th, the One Great Hour of Sharing Special Mission Offering will be received during worship.

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.

Sponge Bob is welcome in the UCC! Click on the cartoon icon at www.uccredlands.org to read all about it.

TOWN HALL MEETING

Saturday, March 12th, 1:00 – 2:00 p.m. at the Feldheim Library, Sixth Street, between E and F in downtown San Bernardino. Topic: “The Pulpit and Politics.” **Rev. Graff will be one of the panelists** for this program. Refreshments will be served and lite entertainment. Free to All!

CANDLELIGHT VIGIL

Saturday, March 19th, 7:00 – 8:00 p.m. at the Plaza in the Hunsaker Student Center at the University of Redlands, 1200 E. Colton Avenue Redlands. Honor the lives lost in war and advance the imperative for peace. Since March 19, 2003, more than 1,400 U. S. soldiers have died, as well as tens of thousands of Iraqi soldiers and civilians. Gather in prayer and remembrance and advocate for lasting peace and security.

VETERANS FOR PEACE

Veterans Working Together for Peace & Justice Through Non-violence Wage Peace!

A Solemn Memorial Wreath-Laying Ceremony. Come and support our troops, Saturday, March 5th, 1:00 p.m. at the San Bernardino Public Library, 555 W. 6th Street. Veteran Leaders, Elected Officials, Gold Star Mothers, and Musicians. Free and open to everyone. Call (909) 825-8176 or (760) 324-5670 for information.

THE 18TH ANNUAL MORROW-MCCOMBS MEMORIAL LECTURE

An annual lectureship established at California State University San Bernardino
To build bridges of understanding between Jews, Christians, and Muslims

Dr. Christopher Leighton
Executive Director of the Institute for Christian & Jewish Studies - Baltimore, Maryland

will speak on
“Reaching Common Ground:
The Challenge of Disarming Religious Hate.”

*Moderator: Dr. Albert Karning
President, California State University San Bernardino*

Tuesday, March 8, 2005 ~ 7:30 p.m.
First Congregational United Church of Christ - Huskell Hall
3041 N. Sierra Way, San Bernardino

Admission is free ~ reception following the lecture ~ Open to the public.

March Scripture Readings

Celtic Sunday, March 6: *Psalm 23; Readings from the Celtic tradition on the four directions and corresponding elements (earth, air, water, fire, and Spirit)*

March 13: *Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 130; John 11:1-45*

Palm Sunday, March 20: *Philippians 2:5-11, 19-29; Psalm 118:1-2; Matthew 21:1-11*

Easter Sunday, March 27: *Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; John 20:1-18; Matthew 28:1-10*

***Happy Easter!!
From the Staff of RUCC***

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