

# WANDERINGS

*A newsletter for people on a journey together with a purpose*

## ***Redlands United Church of Christ*** ***An Open and Affirming Church***

*November 2008*

Contemplative Worship Service – 8:00 a.m.

Worship Service – 10:30 a.m.

Sundays, November 2, 9, 16, 23 and 30

Communion Sunday - Worship Service 10:30 a.m.

Sunday, November 2

The Prayer Group will meet Mondays, November 3, 10, 17 and 24  
at 10:30 a.m. in the Choir Room

Bible 102 will meet the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Mondays

7 p.m. in the CE area

Church Board will meet Tuesday, November 11

at 7:00 p.m. in the church office

The Sandwich Group will meet on Tuesday, November 18

at 12:00 p.m. in the Pastor's office

Stewards will meet on Tuesday, November 25

at 7:00 p.m. in the church office

Celebration Ringers rehearsal on Thursdays, 6:15 p.m.

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

(No rehearsal on November 27)

Brown Bag/Game Day

Sunday, November 30 at 12:00 p.m. in Covenant Hall

Middle school and High school youth group

November meetings ~ check [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com) ~ RUCC Youth Group

From your Pastor and Teacher, Sharon~

*“Be still  
 Listen to the stones of the wall.  
 Be silent, they try  
 To speak your  
 Name.  
 Listen  
 To the living walls.  
 Who are you?  
 Who  
 Are you? Whose  
 Are you?...  
 Do not  
 Think of what you are  
 Still less of  
 What you may one day be.  
 Rather  
 Be what you are...”*  
 —From *On Silence*, by Thomas Merton

*“...like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house,  
 to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”*  
 —From 1 Peter 2:5

Several weeks ago in worship, the children and youth of our congregation surrounded me by standing and lying down and kneeling in a VERY familiar arrangement—Stonehenge! Then they invited me to sit in the middle of their self-made sacred “stone” circle. As I looked up at their silent faces—filled with wisdom and love—I felt like I was back on Salisbury Plain, but this was even better. These were living stones, with hopes and dreams, hugs and smiles, talents and gifts. My heart was filled and my eyes brimming with tears of joy! As if that weren’t enough, they also presented me with a model they had made themselves of my favorite place on earth—I am so very grateful to all the youth, children, and adults who brought this Living Stonehenge to Redlands...thank you, Thank You, THANK YOU!

In the poem above, Christian mystic Thomas Merton parrots the author of 1 Peter, suggesting that stones—living stones—actually help us identify who we are. By listening to their silence, by imagining their view of life, by seeing them as an organic part of our own journey of faith, these seemingly inanimate objects can take on a life of their own. Listening in the silence and being attentive to who we are *at that moment* seem to be the keys, according to Merton, to learning from these living stones. The author of 1<sup>st</sup> Peter takes this line of thinking one big step further by saying that WE are to become the living stones, ourselves built into a spiritual home, dedicated to the service of God through Christ...what a great metaphor describing the annual covenant process of Redlands UCC!

Covenant season, which is now upon us, is a time in the annual lifecycle of our congregation in which we are each invited to reflect on our spiritual journey and, in response, to offer our time and talents and resources to improve the ministry of this spiritual home. To use the images of Merton and Peter, we here at RUCC embark on a “building project” each and every year through the writing of our annual covenant statements. To be sure, some of the construction workers among us opt out of building for a variety of reasons...others enthusiastically pick up hammer and shovel to help wherever needed... others promise to show up for work periodically, and when they do, they are a breath of fresh air.

I encourage each of you reading this to reflect honestly and prayerfully on the ways you will be a “living stone” as we build together the spiritual home that will be Redlands UCC in 2009.

Blessings,

*Sharon*

***“Give us understanding...in your righteousness give us life...” Psalm 119: 34, 40***

November 2008

November reminds us that it is Covenant Season! This is the time when covenants grow in the darkness of the spirit's soil, and begin to sprout just in time for Covenant Sunday. This is the season when we think to the future, but keep grounded in the present and past...when we ponder our gifts of time and talents and resources, when we pray for guidance from God and Spirit and Christ, and when we promise the Divine and Human companions on our journey that we will, indeed, accompany them for yet another year. Welcome to this sacred season...may it be refreshing, stimulating, and inviting all at the same time!

November 2 – “Up & Down Covenants” – All Saints’ Day and Communion Sunday

*Psalm 34, selections; Revelation 7:9-17; 1 John 3:1-3; Matthew 5:1-12*

Covenants are promises born at the intersection of intentions and hopes...intentions to offer our gifts, our time, and our resources; and hopes that we are listening accurately to where God, Spirit, Christ are leading each one of us for the coming year. The cross is an apt metaphor to illustrate these covenant promises. In Christian life, the vertical line in the cross is often typified as the relationship between us and our Creator God, and that it is. Could it also be, on this All Saints’ Day, a symbol of our ongoing relationship with those saints whose body is no longer but whose presence fills us still? Come and draw a line together...to God...to others...in love.

November 9 – “Side to Side Covenants”

*Joshua 24:1-3a, 14-25; Wisdom of Solomon 6:12-16; Amos 5:18-24; Matthew 25:1-13*

Ah, this is the part of the covenant promise that is most tangible...the horizontal line representing our relationships, human to human. Scriptures about this part of covenant abound...biblical authors write about justice and equality, about caring for the poor and ill, about compassion and love for self and neighbor. On this Sunday after the national election, let us reflect together on where our very tangible ministry pilgrimage might lead us as Christ’s covenanting body on earth.

November 16 – “The ‘M’ Word”

*Isaiah 55:1-3, 6, 8-9, 12-13; 1 Timothy 6:6-10; Matthew 25:14-30*

For over 6 years, I’ve been silent about that dreaded word, money. It’s kind of humorous that it took a sabbatical, an enormous government bailout, and our nation’s current economic recession to unlock my tongue about money matters! Yet here we are, some several years down the covenant road together as pastor and congregation, and a substantially different group of worshipers than when we first began our relationship. So, it is time, friends, to talk money...and stewardship...so that we may learn from one another how to better build our ministry road together. Don’t stay away...I promise it will be pain-free!

November 23 – “A Pricetag on Faith?”

*Ezekiel 34:11-24; Ephesians 1:15-23; Acts 8:14-24; Matthew 25:31-46*

Redlands UCC is unique in so very many ways, not the least of which is our budgeting process. From the beginning of our congregation in 1975, members have insisted on that proverbial budget-balancing tool, “the faith line item.” Yet, to be fair, around here this faith line item is much more than an accounting tool. It is, as its name suggests, a matter of faith...of believing...of trusting...of hoping...of knowing...that God will provide, just as God has provided in the past...that all will be well, even if all is not completely funded...that by working together, and creatively, we will find ways to do whatever ministries the Spirit is calling us to do...that in connecting to one another through Christ, we really can accomplish great service. So, does our faith at RUCC have a pricetag? You bet it does! Year after year...!

November 30 is the First Sunday of Advent, and will be included in the December newsletter...stay tuned...the birthing holidays are upon us!

Worship will be richer and deeper with your presence. Come and be refreshed for the journey...

—Sharon R. Graff

## *Covenants: Blessing and Bane!*

*By Sharon R. Graff*

(This article is edited and reprinted from November 2005 Wanderings.)

Since I began serving as your Pastor and Teacher in April 2002 and even during my initial conversations with the Search Committee, the topic of “covenant” has been the center of many lively discussions! My rather unscientific research with members and friends of Redlands UCC has netted a diversity of opinion about the form of covenant (no surprise!) as well as a remarkable agreement on the function of covenant.

The comments that follow represent the diversity of opinion about our process of covenanting derived from several pastoral conversations with over 60 people who are members and friends of RUCC:

- writing a covenant, however long or short, however complicated or simple, is an effective way of clarifying one’s own thoughts and beliefs, and therefore should be required (unless one is physically or mentally unable so to do)
- it is not necessary for covenants to be in writing (covenants may be expressed verbally or artistically, such as through painting, music, etc.)
- from the founding pastor onward, it has been the norm for covenants to be written; however, each pastor has also received verbal covenants from those who were opposed to writing their covenant
- making a written commitment is too binding, too concrete, and appears inflexible
- the whole covenant process needs to be thrown out; it inhibits the growth of RUCC; we must be open to alternative forms of expressing membership
- the annual covenant may be expressed to the shepherd leader
- the annual covenant is to be conveyed only to the senior minister

By contrast to these divergent and sometimes contradictory opinions, the most repeated shared understandings I have heard are that:

- Covenanting is an essential part of the life and ministry of RUCC because it both creates and nurtures in members a deeper, unique level of commitment.
- The annual practice and discipline of covenanting holds us together as community; it gives us a way of annually assessing and reaffirming our relationship with one another and our relationship with the divine.
- The common practice of putting a covenant in writing has been suspended through the years both for those physically or mentally unable to complete a written covenant, and for those who just do not want to commit their covenant to writing. Most, but not all, people with whom I’ve talked agree that this flexibility is a positive reflection of our general flexibility on most matters of faith and practice.

I heartily concur with each of these shared understandings, and I want to add one of my own. Written covenant statements—of whatever length—provide me with invaluable information that helps me be a more effective pastor for you. I can better serve you by knowing something of your growth, struggles, hopes, and needs, and together we can better serve the God we love. From a practical standpoint, my own preference is for our annual covenants to be in writing. Those who, for a variety of reasons, cannot or do not wish to write their covenant, are welcome to talk confidentially with me about their intended commitments, and I will take notes that they can sign. Pragmatically, such a written document makes it possible to plan a budget, to select leaders, to create an accurate and informational membership directory, and to pastorally interpret the direction of the church body.

In addition to these rather practical matters of “running the church”, I believe that there is great spiritual value in written covenants. In writing an annual covenant (of whatever length or content) and in the thoughts, prayers, and quiet reflections that precede such writing, a person participates in important spiritual disciplines that provide creative and dynamic ways of learning about oneself in relationship to this particular faith community and to God. For those reasons, I join you in writing an annual covenant.

Though the 34 years of this congregation’s life have not brought agreement on a specific form of the covenant, there is widespread agreement that our annual covenanting functions to make this faith community stronger, more cohesive, and more committed to God and to one another.

November is the month for covenant writing. Your covenant form is available from your shepherd leader. If you are not in a shepherd group, and want to covenant, please contact Carla in the church office and a form will be mailed to you. Please complete your covenant form prayerfully. Bring it with you to worship on **Sunday, December 7<sup>th</sup>—Covenant Sunday—and we will bless the covenants on the altar.**

And remember my office is open—and my ears ready—for any conversation you wish or need about covenanting.

## President's Message

In just a few days, we're going to decide who is worthy of marriage in California. If each voter had to look their LGBT friend, neighbor, or relative in the eye as they pulled the lever, Proposition 8 would fail by a huge margin. Unfortunately, ballots will be completed in the privacy of a dining room or voting booth. It's in those dark recesses that the mind runs to fear and misunderstanding.

I believe it's important to remember that the opposition is not full of hatred. There are some, no doubt, that hate, and they exist on both sides of the argument. But the vast majority of people fall in between the extremes and are motivated by fear of differences, fear of changes, fear of the unknown. Sometimes these emotions masquerade as hate.

We need to help our fellow travelers along their journey, not by telling them they are bad people, but by helping them understand a broader range of people, thoughts and situations. For several years, I taught diversity classes as work. At first, I thought, "How can you teach someone to appreciate diversity? Either they do or they don't." I soon realized that talking through their fears and misunderstandings helped them travel from one place to another.

We are on a positive trajectory in our understanding and acceptance of each others' differences. We have made significant progress and there is still a long way to go. But seeing the "other side" as moving along a continuum should help us deal with them where they are. We might not get them on the interstate today, but maybe we can get them across town. Or maybe just get them to back out of their parking space.

As Mark Twain said, "Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness." Let's all get on the road.

With optimism and hope,  
Loring Fiske-Phillips

Tuesday, November 5<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 p.m. – "Election Reflection" – In the grand RUCC tradition, all are invited to a post-election "party" in Covenant Hall. A gathering for food and drink, laughter and tears, reflection, discussion, and prayer to help us begin a process of healing from whatever wounds we have incurred in the past several weeks and to seek strength for the future as we continue to work for peace and justice in our land. All are invited to this time of healing and hope for our future.

As you prayerfully consider your covenant for 2009 and your financial commitment to the ministry of RUCC, the Stewards would like to share some information with you regarding our church budget. We are currently working on preparing our budget for next year.

During this time of economic uncertainty, many of us are experiencing personal financial challenges. Similarly, our church is facing budgetary challenges, in part, due to recent declines in the stock market, since some of our budgeted income comes from investments. Additionally, our church family continues to grow, increasing our church's needs. When you meet with your shepherd's group regarding covenants, you will have the opportunity to ask questions and discuss these needs and challenges further.

We also wanted to let you know that RUCC has several special designated funds that supplement our budget. Donations can be made to any of these funds at any time. Ultimate oversight is the responsibility of the Church Board. Following is a list of the funds along with their purpose.

- **Building Fund: monies designated to add to or improve the physical plant**
- **Campership Fund: monies designated to assist children/youth in attending Pilgrim Pines Summer Camp (annually) and Confirmation Camp (bi-annually)**
- **Replacement and Maintenance Fund: monies designated for future larger-priced building repair and maintenance needs (i.e. air conditioner, heater, roof)**
- **Choir Fund: monies used to purchase additional vocal and handbell music, and to provide for guest musicians**
- **Memorial Fund: monies donated in memory of a loved one, and used for long-lasting capital improvement projects at the Board's discretion**
- **Piano/Organ Fund: monies donated to purchase new sanctuary baby grand piano, and eventually, a new organ**
- **Sabbatical Fund: monies designated for future pastoral sabbaticals**
- **Scholarship Fund: monies designated to assist members in college or graduate school with the purchase of books**
- **Speakers Series Fund: monies designated to support the RUCC Speakers Series**
- **Youth Fund: monies designated to support the youth program (middle and high school youth)**
- **Reserve Fund: monies undesignated; to be used at the Church Board's discretion**

God is certainly still speaking at Redlands United Church of Christ and we are looking forward to hearing what is planned for 2009!

Blessings,

Beth Kolpien  
Area Leader of Stewards

## *Events at RUCC...*

### **Prayer Group**

The Prayer Group meets every Monday morning, 10:30 to 11:30, in the choir room. The first twenty minutes is a beginner/refresher workshop time followed by meditation and silent prayer. All are invited!

### **First Friday Film**

First Friday Film Series presents "Sustainable Table". It takes an unadulterated look into the food you eat. What's on your plate? Where does it come from? What effects does it have on the environment and your body? What can you do to help? Friday, November 7<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m. in Covenant Hall.

### **Beyond Belief**

Their husbands were murdered. A colleague was kidnapped and a nation on the other side cries out for help. Now, two 9/11 widows fight their own war on terror. They discover a powerful bond with each other and a kinship with widows halfway around the world. Citizens' Action for Peace presents this moving and beautiful film. Sunday, November 9<sup>th</sup> at 1:30 p.m. Redlands United Church of Christ, Covenant Hall. Admission: Free.

### **Church Women United Salad Luncheon**

World Community Day. Theme: "God's Wisdom Set us Free" Salad luncheon on Friday, November 7<sup>th</sup> at 10 a.m. at Redlands United Church of Christ.

### **Alpha Bible Study**

Alpha Bible Study Group will meet on Wednesday, November 5<sup>th</sup> at the home of Jane Arnegard. We will then resume our normal schedule after the election.

### **NOVEMBER WORSHIP LEADERS**

- 2 Julie Phillip
- 9 Ken Hurley
- 16 Loring Fiske-Phillips
- 23 Floyd Orr
- 30 Sandy Peavler

### **NOVEMBER BIRTHDAYS**

- 1 Janet Greenfield
- 5 Abraham Campbell
- 10 Duncan Campbell
- 12 Jill Kirchner  
Mike Moran
- 15 Vickie Wilson
- 16 Carole Wesson  
Sara Schoonmaker  
Patrick Wiedlin
- 20 Kerry Dunn
- 23 Luther Austin-Brecher  
Ross Thrasher
- 26 William Badgley  
Charissa Wiedlin

## STEP BY STEP

### A COMMUNITY REENTRY COALITION

To help our parolees reenter our community in Redlands, we are starting a new project at this time, assisting children of parolees by providing school supplies to be used at home or at school. We depend on donations to achieve this goal, and would very much appreciate any of the following items:

#### **ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

Pencils  
Erasers  
Rulers  
Crayons  
Markers  
Colored pencils  
Pencil sharpeners  
Glue sticks  
Scissors  
Pads of lined paper  
Pads of unlined paper  
Tissues  
Back packs

#### **SECONDARY SCHOOL**

Lined or graph paper  
Pencils/extra lead  
Erasers  
Pens  
Notebooks  
Binders/folders/tab dividers  
Crayons/colored pencils  
Calculator  
Protractors  
Compasses  
Rulers  
Pocket English dictionaries  
English to language dictionaries  
Tissues  
Back packs

For more information or if you need something to be picked up, please call Peggy Power at 909-792-9676. Please leave a message and I will return your call.

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The San Bernardino County Department of Public Health will offer flu shots for \$5.00 but no one will be turned away if they cannot pay. Seniors (50 years and older), people with heart disease, diabetes or other chronic medical problems, all children six months old through eighteen years of age need a flu shot every year!

Carousel Mall  
Main Entrance 2<sup>nd</sup> St., San Bernardino  
**Wednesday, November 5, 2008**  
**2:30 – 4:30 p.m.**

Hutton Community Center  
660 Colton Ave., Colton  
**Friday, November 14, 2008**  
**9 – 11 a.m.**

## *...and around town*

### **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.

### **10<sup>th</sup> Annual Arts and Crafts Fair**

San Bernardino FCUCC. Browse and shop! Homemade Goodies, Jams and Jellies Candles and Quilts. Great Food! Lunch from 11:00 a.m. on Saturday and Brunch from 11:15 a.m. on Sunday. Homemade Desserts too! Saturday, November 8, 9 a.m. – 3:30 p.m. and Sunday, November 9, 11 a.m. – 2 p.m.



### **Pilgrim Place 60<sup>th</sup> Annual Festival**

Craft faire & bazaar. Lots of goodies, popcorn, cotton candy, snow cones and food court, too. November 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>, 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. 660 Avery Road, Claremont, CA

### **Love Walk for Peppermint Ridge**

Come join the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Peppermint Ridge Love Walk. Saturday, November 15, 2008. Check-in: 9:00 a.m. Walk begins: 10:00 a.m. Location: Crossroads Church, 2331 Kellogg Ave., Corona. Registration Fee: \$10 per walker. Collect \$50 or more in donations and registration fee will be waived. All walkers receive a FREE Love Walk T-shirt. Donate or register online. [www.LoveWalk.org](http://www.LoveWalk.org)

### **November Scripture Readings**

November 2:	<i>Psalm 34; Revelation 7:9-17; 1 John 3:1-3; Matthew 5:1-12</i>
November 9:	<i>Joshua 24:1-3a; 14-25; Wisdom of Solomon 6:12-16, Amos 5:18-24; Matthew 25:1-13</i>
November 16:	<i>Isaiah 55:1-3, 6, 8-9, 12-13; 1 Timothy 6:6-10; Mathew 25:14-30</i>
November 23:	<i>Ezekiel 34:11-24; Ephesians 1:15-23; Acts 8:14-24; Matthew 25:31-46</i>
November 30	<i>Included in the December Wanderings</i>

Minister – Rev. Dr. Sharon R. Graff  
 Organist/Choir Director – Dr. Taylor Ruhl  
 Handbell Director – Craig Colclough  
 Youth Director – Craig Colclough  
 Education Director – Amanda Colclough  
 Administrative Assistant – Carla Becerril  
 Sunday Child Care – Leah Lane  
 Custodian – Jay Grayson  
 Church office hours: 9:00 a.m.-1:30 p.m., Monday – Friday  
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Pastor Emeritus – Rev. Richard Blakley



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