

WANDERINGS

A newsletter for people on a journey together with a purpose

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

December 2008

Contemplative Worship Service – 8:00 a.m.

Worship Service – 10:30 a.m.

Sundays, December 7, 14, 21 and 28

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

Sunday, December 7

The Prayer Group will meet Mondays, December 1, 8, 15, 22 and 29
at 10:30 a.m. in the Choir Room

Bible 102 will meet the 2nd and 4th Mondays

7 p.m. in the CE area

Church Board will meet Tuesday, December 9

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

“Feastings” will be held on Friday, December 12, at

7:00 p.m. in Covenant Hall

The Sandwich Group will meet on Tuesday, December 16

at 12:00 p.m. in the Pastor’s office

Stewards will meet on Tuesday, December 23

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 December 25)

Brown Bag/Game Day

Sunday, December 28 at 12:00 p.m. in Covenant Hall

Middle school and High school youth group

December meetings ~ check www.facebook.com ~ RUCC Youth Group

From your Pastor and Teacher, Sharon ~

“Be still, and know that I am God...”

—From Psalm 46

Ha! Whoever wrote that verse obviously never experienced the holiday season! With the lists of things to do, the tasks around the house to be completed, the cleaning, cooking (ok, not for me, but for someone!), the gifts to be purchased, wrapped, and mailed, and on an on... Well, all I can say to the ancient psalmist who urges us to be still is “HA!”

Yet, even as I (and perhaps you, too) laugh in the face of this advice, I wonder about it. Would it be better use of my time (and yours), for example, to sit in my favorite chair with a cup of tea for a few minutes, instead of completing one more thing on that list that itself will be forgotten by next month? Would I become a better person, perhaps, by reading a chapter of a good novel—or even of the Bible, for heaven’s sake!—than by shopping for one more gift for one more person who doesn’t need one more thing? Would the proverbial “meaning of the season” penetrate my soul (and yours) if we were to leave a few emails unanswered for the moment, and instead carve out a few minutes for a quiet walk or a meditative silence?

Thanks to the suggestion of several of you, I am currently reading *The Shack*. It is a novel, in more ways than one. In a novel manner, the author tells the story of a man who has a life-transforming experience with the trinity...yes, THE trinity! God (who in the story is a black woman named Papa), Jesus (a youngish Jewish man who is a bit self-conscious about his large nose) and Spirit (a rather hard-to-pin-down being that is transparent yet huggable). As I write this article, I’m about half way through, and so far, one of the main points is just what the ancient psalmist above has suggested. Be still. Be silent. Listen and through that listening, you will become closer to the Divine...in whatever form She/He takes!

Ah, yes, perhaps the psalmist has a point after all. Silence...blessed silence...joy-filled stillness... Those of you, who have, through the years, joined me on silent retreats, know that with silence comes attentiveness of soul. With stillness of body comes presence of mind. It doesn’t have to be days of silence or even hours of stillness. As the ancient commercial for hair-care products used to claim, “just a little dab will do you...!” So it is with silence, with stillness.

Especially during this season, when we are tempted to gauge our actions and plan our schedules around the hype engendered by advertisements and all-things-commercial, perhaps the psalmist is indeed a better friend and guide...perhaps. I’ll give it a try, at least. How about you?

Blessings,

Sharon

Worship Themes for Advent 2008

*“On your feet now—applaud God!
Bring a gift of laughter, sing yourselves into God’s presence...”
—From Psalm 100:2 (The Message Bible)*

Advent is traditionally a time of thoughtful reflection, a time to consider the effect of light’s appearance on the shadows of the world. For centuries before Christ, people found this season to be an inspiring metaphor of the power of light in the world, as they celebrated the return of light through the steady lengthening of daylight hours. Fast forward several thousand years to our congregation, where Advent is also the time of expressing our promises, our hopes, and our needs, as we write our annual covenants. During this season, I trust that our worship will nudge us toward the light—toward seeing the light even when we are surrounded by shadows, toward stepping into and dancing in the light, and toward basking in and resting in the light when we are tired. Pace ourselves in the light, my friends—during this month and in worship together.

November 30 – First Sunday of Advent – Rev. Bill Maury-Holmes, preaching
Isaiah 64:1-9; Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:24-37

Our annual walk through Advent begins with thoughtful candlelight and readings from Rilke, seasonal prayers and inspired preaching by one of our own members, and singing...lots of singing! Come to be loved and healed and surrounded by your family in faith.

December 7 – “Hearing Voices” Covenant Sunday and Second Sunday of Advent – Communion
Isaiah 40:1-5; Mark 1:1-8

On this most inspiring day, we offer ourselves in covenant—to God, with God, to and with one another! In preparation for this service, each of us is invited by God to consider what we believe and how we want to live out those beliefs in this faith community during 2009. Bring your covenant to place on the altar for blessing, bring yourself to be nourished at the holy meal, bring your open spirit so that you might give and receive God’s many blessings!

December 14 – “Look Busy...Jesus is Coming!” – Third Sunday of Advent
Isaiah 61:1-4; John 1:6-8, 19-28

There is much work for us progressive Christians to be about. So much, in fact, that it may seem overwhelming at times. Not only must we finish our shopping lists, decorate our houses, and cook those holiday meals, but, according to the Prophet Isaiah, God calls US “to bring good news to the oppressed, proclaim freedom to the captives, and repair the devastation of many generations.” That’s a tall order for our already-busy holiday season! Must we really do it all and be it all? The author of John’s Gospel suggests a more sane way to notice and accomplish the work of this season...come and hear all about it.

December 21 – “Follow That Star!” – Fourth Sunday of Advent
Birth Stories from Matthew and Luke

Today, from their own unique perspective, our congregation’s children and youth lead us in the dramatic presentation of the Christmas story. Shepherds, angels, and the various animals who first populated that stable in Bethlehem...here in this service, they each have a voice. Come and enjoy the story through the eyes and minds and spirits of the young!

December 24 – Christmas Eve Candlelight Service

Isaiah 9:2, 6-7; Micah 5:2-5a; Luke 1:26-38; Matthew 1:18-23; Luke 2:8-20; Matthew 2:1-11; John 1:1-14

On this holy night, we look through candlelight to catch a glimpse of the miracle of God being born among us. Come to sing, stay to pray, listen to hear the familiar stories of light illuminating the shadows...no matter what!

December 28 – “A Little Bling”

Isaiah 61:10-62:3; Luke 2:22-40

Firstborn sacrifices...Old man holding the newborn and older woman blessing him...Faithful parents following the law and receiving in return hearts-full of joy...Baby growing to strong toddler to favored child... With jewels in crowns, and sprouts in gardens, there is a surprise picture of “bling” awaiting you on this last Sunday of 2008.

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

—Sharon R. Graff

President's Message

As we near Covenant Sunday on December 7th, I have so enjoyed the excitement that has been building in our congregation. It seems everyone is thinking about their covenants and listening for guidance from family, friends and Spirit. Our church's covenant process, itself a process of listening, speaking and committing, brings us together in each other.

I recently had the pleasure of sharing my covenant thoughts in Sunday worship. Here's an excerpt:

First used in the year 1297, "covenant" has Latin roots meaning to agree, meet, or in the meaning of the root word "convene," "to come together." That describes a covenant for me. To come together. To think about my place in the community. To think about my place in relationship to God. What gifts and talents can I bring to this community, this family ... what can I give to my brothers and sisters as we come together in Christ? And not only what can I do, but what *will* I do? Before I make such a sacred promise, I have to ponder what ... the Lord ... requires ... of me. What will I do to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with my God?

There are as many answers to those questions as there are people in this church. For me, my time is finite, my talents are finite, my money is finite. But God is infinite. And therefore, my relationship with you is infinite. I will not underestimate God and I will not underestimate you.

These words have been on my mind as I've been preparing to write. My covenant has taken different forms each year and I know others have varied theirs as well: a prayer, a poem, a story, a song, a picture ... the possibilities are endless ... but the main thing is to go through the process. Go through the process of talking about it, praying about it, and finally, doing it. Don't miss out on the culmination of the process, the moment when it becomes real. I have spoken to people in the past who have "missed the deadline" to covenant and it has begun to gnaw at them. The process became an end in itself. They were waiting for something, some special time or inspiration, but ended up uncomfortable instead.

My advice: Sit down and do it. Take pen and paper, or computer, or paintbrush, and sit down and do it. If nothing comes, sit there and wait. Pray. Start. Start again. Finish. Even if it's not perfect, put it in the envelope and take it to church on December 7th. You will feel a special power from having it done and the community will surround you with a sense of shared accomplishment.

We will convene. We will come together.

With optimism and hope,
Loring Fiske-Phillips

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!

Alpha Bible Study

Alpha Bible Study Group will meet on Tuesday, December 2nd at the home of Gal Glanville and on the 16th at the home of Fred and Christine Nicoloff.

Inman/Wilson Shepherd Group

The Inman/Wilson Shepherd group will meet following the 10:30 a.m. worship service on Sunday, December 7 for a potluck and gift exchange.

Shepherd Leaders

Will meet Thursday, December 11 at 4:30 p.m. in the Church Office.

Christmas Eve Service

Our traditional service of lessons and carols – with lots of singing and twinkling candlelight. Wednesday, December 24th at 6:30 p.m.



DECEMBER WORSHIP LEADERS

7	Paul Family
14	Shamp Family
21	Hawley-Zechlin Family
28	Janet Wilson

DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS

2	Dennis Wolbert
3	Richard Hodson Bill Whitmer
6	Bryan Favreau-Sorvillo
10	Jackson Shamp
13	Ofelia Morales
14	Emily Barton Wayne Milloy
15	Trish Edwards
18	Craig Wesson
21	Phil McMeans Kimberly Arth
22	Lisa Brandt
23	Eleanor Ruiz
25	Nathan Campbell
28	Janet Wilson
30	Omar Moran

Christmas Stockings project for parolee families:

For the last three years, we have filled Christmas stockings for parolee families. Steve Starr of PACT (Police and Corrections Team) identifies parolees who are making a sincere effort to successfully complete their parole and who are in need. We have an opportunity to show our support to those who are trying to turn their lives around by remembering them at Christmas.

On Sunday, you will see a Christmas tree in the Gathering Area. On it will be tags identifying parolee family members by first name, age, and sex. Please take one tag for each item you wish to buy for their stocking (it takes about 10 small items to fill a stocking). There are also tags for Target gift cards and Stater Bros. cards. We hope to give one Target card to each family member and \$50 worth of Staters cards to a family. If you prefer to give in this way, or would like to donate cash, please take one of the red or green tags.

Finally, we hope to give a basket of items for the family: a fleece throw, homemade cookies or breads, a Christmas wreath and Christmas lights (many of the families cannot afford Christmas decorations). Please see me if you would like to help with the family basket. If you would like to help fill the stockings (tentatively on or around Dec. 19), please let me know. A list of guidelines and suggested

stocking items is available near the tree. The greatest joy of Christmas is in the giving - thank you for participating in this meaningful and joyful project. - Dianne Landeros (909) 792-4839; ddlanderos@att.net.

Personnel Committee Report

The personnel committee is happy to report that part time employees Amanda and Craig Colclough will be able to stay at RUCC for another year. Craig's primary position at the LA Opera is such that he can commute to LA when needed for opera gigs. However, this requires that the schedule with the Youth Group continue to be flexible as well. Fortunately, we can be flexible with meetings and still comply with our contracts with both of them for children's and youth group activities. Information about these ongoing programs is readily available in the weekly View, the monthly Wanderings, and on the special youth group Facebook page. With Craig and Amanda's leadership, the growth in both the Sunday school program and the youth groups has been extremely good and the young people have been learning and having fun at the same time. Well done, to Amanda and Craig – we are glad you can stay for a little longer!

...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.

Church Women United

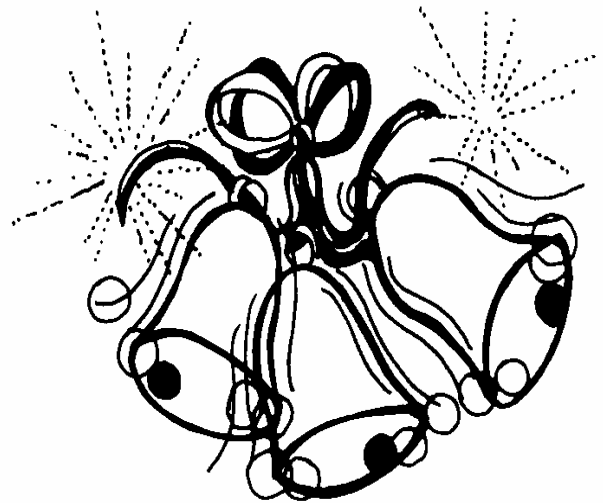
Church Women United will be celebrating Christmas at Family Services Association in Redlands on December 9, at 10 a.m. Donations of unwrapped toys are welcome. Entertainment will be provided by the Redlands Recorders. Refreshments will be served.

Celtic Christmas Concert

The Redlands Community Music Association will present "A Celtic Christmas" at 3 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 14, at the University of Redlands Memorial Chapel.

"A Celtic Christmas" will feature performances from Celtic Spring, the Kevin R. Blandford Memorial Pipe Band and pianist Eddie Gao.

Tickets are \$50 for preferred seating, \$35 for general seating and \$15 for children 12 and younger. For information or tickets, call the University of Redlands events office at (909) 748-8116 or visit www.redlands.edu/events



December Scripture Readings

November 30	<i>Isaiah 64:1-9, Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:24-37</i>
December 7:	<i>Isaiah 40:1-5; Mark 1:1-8</i>
December 14:	<i>Isaiah 61:1-4; John 1:6-8, 19-28</i>
December 21	<i>Birth Stories from Matthew and Luke</i>
December 28	<i>Isaiah 9:2, 6-7; Micah 5:2-5a; Luke 1:26-38; Matthew 1:18-23; Luke 2:8-20; Matthew 2:1-11; John 1:1-14</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
 Wanderings is published monthly by R.U.C.C.

Pastor Emeritus – Rev. Richard Blakley



Redlands United Church of Christ
168 Bellevue Avenue
Redlands, CA 92373-4978
(909) 793-3520 Fax: (909) 793-5418
E-mails: pastor@uccredlands.org
 office@uccredlands.org
 youth@uccredlands.org
Web site: www.uccredlands.org