

WANDERINGS

A newsletter for people on a journey together with a purpose

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

December 2010

Contemplative Worship Service and Communion – 8:00 a.m.

Worship Service – 10:30 a.m.

Sundays, December 5, 12, 19 and 26

Communion - Worship Service 10:30 a.m.

Sunday, December 12

The Prayer Group will meet Mondays, December 6, 13, 20 and 27

at 10:30 a.m. in the Choir Room

and also on

Tuesdays, December 7, 14, 21 and 28

at 5:00 p.m. in the Choir Room

Christians for Equality Committee will meet

Monday, December 6 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 23 or 30)

Stewards meet on Tuesday, December 14

at 7:00 p.m. in the Church Office

The Sandwich Group will meet on Tuesday, December 21

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

Candlelight Christmas Eve Service, Friday, December 24

5:30 p.m. in the Sanctuary

Church Board Meeting on Tuesday, December 28

at 7:00 p.m. in the Church Office

Middle school and High school youth group

December meetings ~ Rev. Leif Lind is coordinating leaders

From your Pastor and Teacher, Sharon~

“...and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means ‘God is with us.’”

—from Luke 1:23

I love the Christmas season! I love the color and the carols. I love the way that people smile more broadly and laugh more heartily. I love the generosity that appears like a brilliant star in the night. I love Christmas Eve twinkling candles and choir programs and lighting the Advent candles in preparation. I even love decorating (most years, at least!), and often keep the red and green up long past the season’s natural ending (one year our decorations stayed up until Easter, but that’s another story for another day...!).

I also become melancholy at Christmastime. I worry about those who have no families and no food. I become aware that the days literally are shorter, leaving less time to do more things. I miss those whose presence is no longer part of the family traditions of Christmas Eve and Christmas Morning. I, like many of you, become weary and short of energy as I try to prop up long-standing traditions single-handedly. This was laughingly apparent to me several years ago, when I was talking with our son on the phone about whether or not to buy and decorate a tree for the holidays. In preparation for his holiday visit, I was remembering how much Will enjoyed stringing the lights and hanging the ornaments when he was a young child. Wanting to recapture that magic, I asked if he would like to repeat the tradition again. In amazement, our now young-adult son responded, “Mom, you live in the middle of a forest, why would you want to decorate a tree?! Just look outside!” How right he was!

This season invites each of us to ponder, like Mary. It invites us to sing like the angels. It invites us to walk in faith, like the shepherds and the magi. Nowhere in the holiday scripture message are we implored to over-schedule or over-burden ourselves...recall that the Christmas narratives span a period of two years, not two weeks! Nowhere are we nudged to fill every minute of every day with some extra task or some self-imposed expectation. This may sound crazy, but I encourage us this season, as individuals and as a community of faith, to relax. Yes, RELAX! Relax and enjoy the moments that we live together. Relax and enjoy the preparation for various programs. Relax and enjoy the mistakes and the miracles, for with Emmanuel, God with us, we will experience both. Let us relax, be present, and enjoy it all...God is with us!

Blessings,

Sharon

Worship Themes for Advent 2010

“But we, because of your great love, will enter your house,
we will worship in your holy temple in awe and reverence...”
—from Psalm 5:7

Advent...again! We hear our own voice exclaim, “Where has the year gone? I can’t believe it’s almost Christmas...” We see decorations and hear the familiar carols. We prepare our homes and our hearts for the repeated celebrations, as if history can be lived again just so. But it cannot. Try as we might, the old and familiar celebrations will have a taste of newness, the carols heard with new ears, and the twinkling candlelight of Christmas Eve seen anew. Advent suggests a beginning and in our case, “beginning AGAIN...” It is a promise from God-With-Us, wrapped each year in the past year’s grief, regrets, joys, and growth. Advent is a promise fulfilled as God whispers to each of us, “It is NEVER too late to have a new beginning...catch hold of my hand...I am the God-Who-Is-With-YOU...Emmanuel is my name...!”

November 28 – First Sunday of Advent – “Coming, Ready or Not” – Rev. Leif Lind, preaching
Isaiah 2:1-5; Romans 13:11-12; Matthew 24:36-44

After a lengthy period of “ordinary time” in the church calendar year we now proceed to what some see as the most joyful phase, Advent. Advent, however, is not merely a period of looking back with nostalgia at the babe in Bethlehem, nor is it merely a time of passive anticipation, but rather one of active decision-making. As Christians we each have a calling to make this world a better place than we found it.

December 5 – Second Sunday of Advent – Covenant Sunday – “Are You Crazy?!”
Isaiah 11:1-10; Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19; Matthew 3:1-12

On this most inspiring day, we bring forward our covenants and place them on the altar for blessing. In so doing, we participate in an oft-perceived crazy 35-year-old spiritual practice of discerning the Divine One’s hopes for this church’s life. In preparation for this service, each of us are invited by God to hear the Spirit’s voice, to follow in the footsteps of the One we call Christ, and to consider what we believe and how we want to live out those beliefs in this faith community in 2011. Come, with covenant in hand and in heart!

December 12 – Third Sunday of Advent – Communion Sunday – “The Sacred Path”
Isaiah 35:1-10; Psalm 146:5-10; Matthew 11:2-11

Having placed covenant on the altar, we now turn our focus to the pathway ahead by looking back at a prophet, a songwriter, and a grateful cousin. These family members show us a path of faith (that means we *don’t* actually see the way ahead!) that promises (and delivers!) joy and singing, strength and courage, water in the desert, and a guide or two along the way. A sacred path? Unbelievably so!

December 19 – Fourth Sunday of Advent – Christmas Sunday – “God With Us”
Isaiah 7:10-14; Matthew 1:18-25

In a bit different form than in years past, our youth will lead us in worship by sharing their own images of “Emmanuel...God with us.” Patterned after school children in Hawaii, who upon hearing that their religious school was closing due to financial instability, took matters into their own hands and created a book of photos and writings, detailing the presence of God throughout their island home, so will our young people help us see images of the Divine through their own eyes and ears. Come, for Emmanuel is certainly with us this day!

December 24 – 5:30 pm – 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 the Light of Life illuminating any shadow you can imagine...

December 26 – First Sunday after Christmas – “In the Lap of God”

Isaiah 63:7-9; Psalm 148; Matthew 2:1-23

On this morning after—still shuffling through wrapping paper and sifting through memories of holidays long past—we gather to hear the scripture writers describe God as mother, as One who speaks to us through dreams, as protector and nurturer, as defender and liberator and creator of all that is good. While we're not always certain to receive support from our human families, we gather today to sit together in the lap of One Parent who always loves us...no matter what!

Worship will be richer and deeper with your presence.

—Sharon R. Graff

From Your President

"There is no evidence of any kind regarding the date of Jesus' birth. His nativity began to be celebrated on Dec. 25 in Rome during the early part of the fourth century (AD 336) as a Christian counterpart to the pagan festival, popular among the worshipers of Mithras, called *Sol Invictis*, the *Unconquerable Sun*. At the very moment when the days are the shortest and darkness seems to have conquered light, the sun passes its nadir. Days grow longer, and although the cold will only increase for quite a long time, the ultimate conquest of winter is sure. This astronomical process is a parable of the career of the Incarnate One. At the moment when history is blackest, and in the least expected and obvious place, the Son of God is born..." - Joe E. Pennel, Jr.

Are you ready? Advent is more than a time to start the countdown to Christmas. It's a time for us to prepare ourselves for the coming of the Christ. Time to open our hearts and minds while pushing away the hustle and bustle of distractions that would call us away from the manger.

Do you know what it feels like when you find an unexpected surprise? Something that causes your eyes to widen and your jaw to drop? Such times are amazing and wonderful, and yet, we also love the anticipation of knowing that something exciting is coming. Enjoying the slow passing of time, wanting the pleasure of the ticking clock to go on forever.

Valuable things are often a bit of both. We look forward to this time of year, when the familiar hymns come around, the beautiful decorations come out and people seem to get nicer by the day. And yet, when we finally hear the cry from the Baby, we know that this is just the beginning ... the best is yet to come!

Every part of Redlands United Church of Christ is buzzing with excitement as the choir practices for Feastings, the pastors plan the various worship services, and the youth prepare for their annual Christmas presentation. All of this while we are writing covenants, planning for new leadership, preparing next year's budget, feeding those less fortunate, as well as praying and studying the Bible.

Nothing makes us feel more nervous in a situation than being unprepared. By contemplating what will happen, considering all the possibilities, and considering how we will feel, we begin to place ourselves in the moment, knowing the more familiar it is, the better we will be able to deal with it.

This season comes but once a year, but it comes every year. How can it continue to be fresh and alive? The same way walking along the path in the labyrinth feels refreshing, even though the stones are well worn from our own passage. The same way the touch of a loved one feels like a flower has just bloomed. The same way the laughter of a child sounds like a new song.

The still, small voice of the Baby speaks to us again. Fresh ... new ... exciting, and yet, familiar ... comfortable ... peaceful. Let us take up the challenge to ready ourselves for both the old and the new as we travel along the path of Advent 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 and Tuesday evening, 5:00 to 6:00, 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

We will meet in the church office on Tuesday, December 7. We meet at 7:30 p.m. We are currently studying the book of Acts. Everyone is welcome to attend."

Inman/Wilson Shepherd Group

The Inman/Wilson Shepherd group will meet on Sunday, December 5 for a potluck and gift exchange. They will meet at 12:30 p.m. in Covenant Hall.

Christmas Eve Service

Our traditional service of lessons and carols – with lots of singing and twinkling candlelight. **Friday, December 24th at 5:30 p.m.**

Christmas Stockings For Step By Step Parolees

It's time for RUCC's elves to don their night caps and help make Christmas bright for our parolees and their families. We will be filling stockings with small gifts; buying \$25 Target gift cards for each family member; buying a \$50 gift card for the family; and

putting together a box with decorations, a throw, homemade treats, candy, and cookies. We will put up a tree with gift tags on Sunday, November 26th. At that time, you can select the children and adults for whom you want to buy gifts. If you'd like to avoid the crowds and traffic of holiday shopping, Rosemary Tuohy, Beki Hill, and Vickie Wilson are happy to do your shopping for you. Cash gifts are always welcome, especially since they help us purchase gift cards. See Rosemary or Beki in Covenant Hall for more information.

Photo Directory for Redlands UCC

Is almost complete...really! Wendy Hunt has been working very consistently to complete this long-anticipated project. In the midst of the project, we have decided that, for the safety and security of your personal information, **the directory will not be posted online.** Instead, a few paper copies will be prepared for those who prefer it, and CD copies will be available for all others with computers. We ask only that you agree to not post any of the information to the Internet. If you would like to have your photo included, please see Wendy at church, and she'll be happy to accommodate! But hurry...**you only have until the end of 2010 to provide her with a photo.** Bright and early on New Year's Day, Wendy puts the final touches on it and begins

the copying... :-) Thanks all, and a special thank you to Wendy!

December Worship Leaders

5 Julie Phillip
12 Keith Osajima
19 Jim Gilman & Joe Kles
26

December Birthdays

3 Richard Hodson
Bill Whitmer
4 Pat Meagher
6 Bryan Favreau-Sorvillo
10 Jackson Shamp
Carlos Samaniego
11 Lillian Norton-Brainerd
13 Ofelia Morales
14 Emily Barton
Wayne Milloy
15 Trish Edwards
18 Craig Wesson
19 Jerry McBurney
21 Phil McMeans
Kimberly Arth
22 Lisa Brandt
23 Eleanor Ruiz
25 Nathan Campbell
28 Janet Wilson
Jim Gilman
29 Reid Norton-Brainerd
30 Omar Moran

December Scripture Readings

December 5 *Isaiah 11:1-10; Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19; Matthew 3:1-12*
December 12 *Isaiah 35:1-10; Psalm 146:5-10; Matthew 11:2-11*
December 19 *Isaiah 7:10-14; Matthew 1:18-25*
December 26 *Isaiah 63:7-9; Psalm 148; Matthew 2:1-23*

Minister – Rev. Dr. Sharon R. Graff
Associate Minister – Rev. Leif Lind
Organist/Choir Director – Dr. Taylor Ruhl
Education Director – Jennifer Hawley-Zechlin
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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