

February 10, 2012

Leviticus 14:1-20  
Acts 19:11-20  
Psalm 30

When Morningside UCC in Inglewood, CA, needed extra income and a stewardship project the congregation decided to open its doors to others in need of a space to worship or hold gatherings. It currently has four congregations worshipping in its space, a pre-school during the week and numerous community groups using the space all week long. The church tries to open its doors to as many groups as possible so it can show God's love.

February 11, 2012

Leviticus 14:21-32  
Matthew 26:6-13  
Psalm 30

After First Congregational UCC in Eureka, CA, attended a workshop about church vitality, a Vitality Task Force was started to increase the number of people actively participating in the church. The task force created a church web site, created in-church activities for Sunday services, decorated the social hall to show its work flowing beyond the church walls, made repairs to buildings and held workshops to train members on how to be effective ministry participants. It then focused on being more active in the community and showing what the congregation stands for - acceptance for all.

**Weekly Prayer February 2 -8, 2012**

*Everlasting God, you give strength to the powerless and power to the faint; you raise up the sick and cast out demons. Make us agents of healing and wholeness, that your good news may be made known to the ends of your creation. Amen.*



**February 5, 2012**

**Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany (Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time)**

**It's Cold Outside**

This winter, food pantries and homeless shelters in many parts of the country are serving increased numbers of people. Homelessness and hunger are crises any time of year, but in winter the situation is acute—especially for families. UCC churches across the country are mobilizing and focusing on what they can do in these uncertain financial times. Certainly many churches are cutting back expenses, but they are also looking deeper at what they are able and equipped to do for others—and it's a lot. Congregations are offering all kinds of assistance, to community members and church members alike.

At St. Mathews UCC in Wheaton, IL, the youth group volunteers at the People's Resource Center, a local food pantry. The youth work hard to get their jobs done, but it isn't until they see the people coming in that they realize just how important food pantries are. That's when they realize that not everyone gets to wake up from a warm bed and eat a hot breakfast before leaving the house to spend a short time in the cold. Some people may be in the cold all the time, and without the sustenance of three meals a day. It's humbling to see the many people in need, but also good to know that the food pantry has a good stockpile of food at the moment. Projects like this provide defining moments in fellowship and service for church members. This winter, UCC congregations are stepping up to the plate and seeking opportunities to serve the vulnerable among us.

**Lectionary Citations**

Isaiah 40:21-31  
Psalm 147:1-11, 20c  
1 Corinthians 9:16-23  
Mark 1:29-39

**United Church of Christ Women's Week – February 5-11**

February 6, 2012

2 Kings 4:8-17, 32-37  
Acts 14:1-7  
Psalm 102:12-28

When the earthquake in Haiti hit, a five-year-old girl from First United Protestant Church UCC in Hilo, HI, asked her congregation to save its change and help buy shoes for the children in Haiti. The Sunday School children collected the money and were amazed at how much they received. When an earthquake hit Chile the little girl did the same thing again and showed her congregation that one person can start something.

February 7, 2012

2 Kings 8:1-6  
Acts 15:36-41  
Psalm 102:12-28

Preparing the way for future faith leaders is part of what the newly established Lee and Jacquelin Brummel ISEDET Education Fund hopes to accomplish. The Brummels served in Argentina for more than 15 years with Global Ministries at the Superior Evangelical Institute of Theological Studies (ISEDET) in Buenos Aires and the Disciples of Christ Church of Argentina. An ecumenical institution with involvement from many Protestant churches, ISEDET provides training in theology to prepare students as pastors, teachers and researchers. Drawing upon the diverse traditions, values and beliefs in Latin America, ISEDET is better able to respond to the needs of a community rich in faith. All donations to the Brummel ISEDET Education Fund will be sent annually and used for the most pressing needs, with priority given to scholarship programs at the seminary.

February 8, 2012

Job 6:1-13  
Mark 3:7-12  
Psalm 102:12-28

It is hard to imagine having to walk miles for a pail of water or that a young woman would have to sacrifice her education to provide water for her family. This is the situation in Machaze District – one of the driest and poorest sections of Mozambique. Bringing water to the residents of Machaze District became part of the mission of the United Church of Christ in Mozambique and Global Ministries. A borehole was dug and three dams were built along the Vusi River to help supply the village and surrounding areas with more accessible water. More than 200 people have had the distance they need to walk for water cut in half and there are plans to dig three more boreholes in nearby communities. The Machaze District Well Project is just one way the UCCM and Global Ministries are attending to the needs of people – physically and spiritually.

February 9, 2012

Leviticus 13:1-17  
Hebrews 12:7-13  
Psalm 30

Walk into any department store or drugstore this month and you will see signs of “love”. The hearts and cupids representing St. Valentine’s Day are everywhere. But the members of St. John’s UCC in Red Lion, PA know that the best part of love is relational – spending time together, talking, sharing and helping one another. The congregations’ medical mission trip to the Emuhaya Disabled and Mercy Home Orphanage in Kenya represents that same kind of relational love. The church’s first trip in March of 2011 completed a needs assessment tour. The second trip, planned for this year, endeavors to provide medical and orthopedic care for those at Emuhaya, and clinical care for the girls living at Mercy Home. St. John’s continued mission partnership with Emuhaya and their outreach in Kenya is, as their Outreach and Mission Committee describes, “love personified, love incarnate.”

February 17, 2012

1 Kings 14:1-18  
1 Timothy 1:12-20  
Psalm 50:1-6

It is nearly impossible to imagine the grief and pain that follow a disaster such as the 2011 tsunami in Japan. Even those who deal with death daily as part of their work have reported being overwhelmed and faced with situations with which they have never before dealt. The Rev. Jeffrey Mensendiek, director of Emmaus Center in Sendai Japan for the Northeast Conference of the UCC in Japan, wrote of a mortuary worker who said, "The other day a first grade boy came, he was the only survivor in the family. This little boy had to be the one to confirm the death of his parents and siblings." The worker had no idea what to say to this child, how to comfort him. "I stood beside him completely at a loss for words," he admitted. Sometimes there are no words. "Each day we gather at church and share these stories of a reality too heavy to bear," Rev. Mensendiek said. "God is our only comfort."

February 18, 2012

1 Kings 16:1-7  
Luke 19:41-44  
Psalm 50:1-6

After the minister of Webster UCC in Dexter, MI, visited a UNHCR refugee camp in Ghana, West Africa, she shared the story with her congregation and it wanted to help. Twelve members of the congregation, along with the pastor, traveled to Ghana and started the Ghana Ministry. The congregation developed a scholarship program for young people in the camp and helped to start micro-economic projects to help the refugees earn money. The church raised funds to build fresh water wells for 11 villages and a new water system for a twelfth. The ministry is still helping refugees and visits to Ghana are continuing as well.

**Weekly Prayer February 9 - 15, 2012**

*Divine Physician, healer of bodies and souls, stretch out your hand and touch us. Cleanse our hearts from the sin that separates us from you and one another. Recreate us in your own image, and restore us in Christ, so that we may run the race and receive the prize of everlasting life. Amen.*



February 12, 2012

Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany (Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time)

We give thanks for the continuing transformation of individual hearts and for the difference one person can make in the lives of many. One place where the UCC builds on Dr. King's legacy of love's healing power is the Franklinton Center at Bricks in eastern NC. Managed by staff members of Justice and Witness Ministries, Franklinton Center nurtures transformation. One year after participating in an African American Women's retreat, a woman returned to Franklinton Center and announced that she had quit smoking, initiated a healthier life style, and improved relationships with family members. One change led to another, and a new sense of wholeness emerged.

After attending a youth conference at Franklinton Center, a young woman organized others in her church and school to boycott Taco Bell in support of migrant farm workers. Similarly, a Grinnell College student was impressed by grass roots leaders who taught at Franklinton Center about environmental justice issues involved with hog farming. He left Iowa to volunteer with a local community group in North Carolina. With a new passion for justice advocacy, these two people have initiated change.

Franklinton Center itself has been transformed over the years, from a plantation to a Christian college, and then a school. It is now a conference center focused on leadership development and justice advocacy for the marginalized, the oppressed, and the poor. Fundamental concerns such as rural justice, community development, environmental racism, and workers' rights are woven into programs throughout the year. All of the transformative efforts of Justice and Witness Ministries are supported by congregations' gifts to Our Church's Wider Mission.

**Lectionary Citation**

2 Kings 5:1-14  
Psalm 30  
1 Corinthians 9:24-27  
Mark 1:40-45

**Racial Justice Sunday**

February 13, 2012

2 Chronicles 26:1-21  
Acts 3:1-10  
Psalm 6

All the ingredients are there – a good book, a cozy quilt, a comfortable chair. But the recipe might not be quite what you'd expect. The Mission Committee at Pilgrim Congregational Church in Harwich Port, MA, put together a raffle with prizes of a hand-made quilt and a pair of Adirondack chairs. The quilt was donated by Bayberry Quilters' charity Quilt Bank group of Cape Cod and the chairs were constructed by mission committee member Chet Berg. The fundraiser brought in a total of \$1,450. So where does the good book come in? The committee submitted their proceeds to Global Ministries and requested that the funds be sent to CONASPEH and used for either nursing school tuition scholarships or nursing textbooks. Gifts from the hands and heart provide the means for others to be a healing presence.

February 14, 2012

2 Kings 7:3-10  
1 Corinthians 10:14-11:1  
Psalm 6

SARA – Sharing America's Resources Abroad – is an ecumenical ministry associated with the Ohio Conference of the UCC. The non-profit organization distributes medical equipment and supplies to under-served regions across the world. SARA media director Andrew J. Tonn accompanied the SARA team to the Val de Marne Clinic in El Salvador in 2011 where the group brought over \$3,000 worth of over the counter medicines and supplies. In his blog, Tonn writes, "John Gilberg of New Bremen, Ohio, SARA Director for El Salvador took a moment from unloading the cases of supplies and explained, "This clinic was built by a French organization and SARA has been involved here since 2004. At that time the CRD (A Salvadoran Non-Governmental Organization) asked us to support two doctors and two health care workers to be here several days a week. The only hospitals are at least 30 miles away in Usulután and there is no good transportation there. This provides some good basic services but there is no advanced care anywhere nearby." More than \$18 million of medical equipment and supplies have been sent to more than 10 countries through SARA's efforts since the beginning.

February 15, 2012

Job 30:16-31  
John 4:46-54  
Psalm 6

The United Church of Christ's web sites, [www.ucc.org](http://www.ucc.org), and [www.globalministries.org](http://www.globalministries.org) used the power of the internet to connect the faithful in prayer after the devastating tsunami in Japan in 2011. Here is a prayer offered in that forum as we continue to pray for those still suffering:

A Prayer for Times of Disaster (2011 Earthquake and Tsunami in Japan):

O God, In the wake of such senseless suffering, we ask wisdom.  
For those who have lost everything, we ask your presence,  
For those who rescue and heal in the midst of death, we ask courage.  
For us and for all who watch at a distance, we ask compassion.  
Together, may we embody faith, hope and love in this time of terrible disaster, In the spirit of the Crucified and Risen One, we pray. Amen.

February 16, 2012

1 Kings 11:26-40  
2 Corinthians 2:12-17  
Psalm 50:1-6

Flight attendants instruct passengers traveling with small children to put the oxygen mask on themselves first in case of an emergency. The idea is that the caregiver must help themselves before they can help others. Pastors are caregivers that need to learn that lesson as well and thanks to funds from Global Ministries, a group of pastors and their spouses were treated to some much needed R&R. Pastors of the Pentecostal Church of Chile spent time with members of the Shalom Center staff at a regional retreat in Temuco to come to terms with the effects of "compassion fatigue" following the major earthquake there in 2010. Many pastors experience physical, emotional, relational and spiritual symptoms from not taking time to recognize their own needs. The Shalom Center retreat allowed the group to de-stress, even though many agreed that it would still be a challenge "to change our habits and recognize that God wants us to take care of ourselves, too."

February 24, 2012

Daniel 9:15-25a  
2 Timothy 4:1-5  
Psalm 25:1-10

Church of the Good Shepherd UCC in Boyertown, PA, decided to take a leap of faith and shake up its usual VBS by using the “God is Still Speaking” VBS curriculum. The goal in switching to a new curriculum was to spiritually feed all attendees, celebrate/educate its upcoming 200-year anniversary, increase attendance, get more members and the community involved and spread the word about the church. It was met with financial constraints, the need for lots of volunteers and doing something different from the way it was always done. With God’s help, Church of the Good Shepherd UCC is touching many people’s lives this summer.

February 25, 2012

Psalm 32  
Matthew 9:2-13  
Psalm 25:1-10

Whether it’s from the tap, a drinking fountain, or a well, most of us have easy access to clean, safe drinking water. The Central Pacific Conference of the United Church of Christ wants that to be a reality for the people of Haiti, too. Congregations in the conference were urged last year to participate in the “Drink Water for Life” Lenten Practice to benefit Zabriko Project. Susan Smith, member of Salem UCC, founded Zabriko Project – an organization that works with health workers from the Peasant Movement of Papay in Haiti’s Central Plateau and engineers to get clean drinking water to remote areas of Haiti. The Drink Water for Life project asked participants to give up drinking soda, coffee, tea and other costly beverages during lent and then donate the money saved to Zabriko.

**Weekly Prayer February 16 -22, 2012**

*Holy God, mighty and immortal, you are beyond our knowing, yet we see you in the face of Jesus Christ, whose compassion illumines the world. Transform us into the likeness of the love of Christ, who renewed our humanity so that we may share in his divinity, the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*



February 19, 2012

Last Sunday after the Epiphany / Transfiguration Sunday

**Helping with Healing**

If you or your family has ever provided in-home health care for an elderly or sick relative, you know how difficult it can be and how much time and energy it requires. Adding to the burden can be the financial cost of necessary medical equipment, which is often expensive.

Some parish nurse programs in United Church of Christ congregations have found a way to help by loaning this equipment to families in need, free of charge. Equipment can include walkers, wheelchairs, canes, crutches and bathroom accessories such as hand rails and shower chairs. If your church has a wellness program, this might be a service to consider, or, if you already provide this service, don’t forget to donate items to keep available equipment at the ready.

What a Christ-like gesture when we reach out to those in need of healing and help those who provide tender loving care. Jesus taught us love and compassion through his healing hands and heart. We pray for those gentle souls who reach out to the sick and the dying just as Christ taught us to do.

**Lectionary Citations**

2 Kings 2:1-12  
Psalm 50:1-6  
2 Corinthians 4:3-6  
Mark 9:2-9

February 20, 2012

Exodus 19:7-25  
Hebrews 2:1-4  
Psalm 110:1-4

Helping the unemployed get jobs is a mission that Mt. Zion UCC in Cleveland, Ohio, has taken on with Jobs Partnership. The program pairs churches and businesses together to train, mentor and get the unemployed working. Since its start, over 750 students have graduated from the program and about 90 percent of them have jobs when they graduate. The program is completely volunteer run and mentors follow-up with their students for the first year to help them stay on track.

February 21, 2012

Job 19:23-27  
1 Timothy 3:14-16  
Psalm 110:1-4

They say home is where the heart is, but what if your home and your heart are in an occupied territory? In February of 2011, leadership of the United Church of Christ and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) joined other Christian leaders committed to a just peace between Israelis and Palestinians. The ecumenical group signed a letter urging U.S. support of a pending UN Security Council resolution on Israel settlement construction. The letter says, in part, "the expansion of Israeli infrastructure into the West Bank continues despite U.S. requests for restraint and generous U.S. offers of security and political assistance." The resolution refers to past agreements on settlements which Israel, the Palestinian Authority and the United States worked out but never implemented. The letter asks for support of the resolution, "in the interest of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace." As you know, the vote was vetoed by the US and the issue put down for the time being.

February 22, 2012

Ash Wednesday

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17 or Isaiah 58:1-12  
Psalm 51: 1-17  
2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10  
Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Working as a missionary in San Cristobal de Las Casas in Mexico, the pastor of United Church of Byron, IL, wanted to do more for the people there. He enlisted eight members of the church and three more from a neighboring UCC church to join him on a mission trip to Mexico. Fund-raising was started and a grant was awarded to fund the trip and the supplies needed. The group went to help construct a building that would be used as a health center. Their trip was a blessing for both the community and those that attended. The congregations hope to make more trips in the future.

February 23, 2012

Daniel 9:1-14  
1 John 1:3-10  
Psalm 25:1-10

Philippus UCC in Cincinnati, Ohio, sits in the middle of a neighborhood plagued by poverty, crime and prostitution. People come to the church every day hoping for a better life and the pastor prays with them and offers them lunch. Many prostitutes began asking the pastor for help getting off drugs and so Rahab's Roses was started. Philippus UCC began collaborating with other groups in the community to offer a safe place for prostitutes to come have breakfast and learn how they can have a better life. The program hands out "love bags" to prostitutes, which include water, personal care items and granola bars. Philippus is imagining a new life for these women.

March 2, 2012  
World Day of Prayer

Genesis 16:1-6  
Romans 4:1-12  
Psalm 22:23-21

The Rev. Felix Carrion, director of the UCC's Still Speaking Ministry helped the effort by placing full page ads in Arizona newspaper ads which said 'God's love knows no borders.' "The gospel of Jesus Christ is about welcome and the United Church of Christ is about that welcome. We are here in opposition to the Arizona Senate Bill 1070 because we find that it is in opposition to the gospel", Carrion said. "We want to send the word out to those communities that will suffer from the hurtful legislation that we stand with you, we will struggle with you, and we will fight with you until this law is repealed." On this world day of prayer we pray for our own nation.

March 3, 2012

Genesis 16:7-15  
Mark 8:27-30  
Psalm 22:23-21

Restoring Bristol Hill Congregational UCC in Fulton, NY, to the way the founders had built it - with a bell tower atop the building - was something the congregational felt was important for the rich history of the church. Bristol Hill UCC had a hand in helping fleeing slaves during the Civil War. The congregation felt having the church recognized by the State and National Register of Historic Places might help them with this and another hardship the church was facing. The government placed a landfill directly behind the church years ago and the church was battling to have it shut down. Unfortunately, the landfill still exists but the bell tower is back on top the church, paying tribute to the ancestors who built the church.

**Weekly Prayer February 23 - 29, 2012**

*God of our salvation, your bow in the clouds proclaims your covenant with every living creature. Teach us your paths and lead us in your truth, that by your Holy Spirit, we may remember our baptismal vows and be keepers of your trust with earth and its inhabitants. Amen.*

**February 26, 2012**  
**First Sunday in Lent**

Many of us will fast this Lent. We will give up chocolate or red meat or American Idol, so that when we feel the craving for these things, we will be reminded of God's craving for us. The prophet Isaiah, writing long before the first Lent, says that while this kind of fast is OK, it just isn't enough.

He suggests a different kind of fast: one from all injustice and oppression. Oh, sure, Isaiah! No problem. For most of us, the only injustice we're part of is systemic: it's in the institutions and cities and countries where we live. How are we supposed to give up that? Move to Antarctica?

It's not simple, but maybe we can just start. Maybe there's a way to take a "journey-of-a-thousand-miles-begins-with-a-single-step" approach. What if we began with fasting from just one piece of injustice: from non-fairly-traded coffee, from stores that don't compensate their workers fairly, from driving when public transportation is available? What if we just start? What change might we create in the world, or in ourselves, with such small steps? Would it be enough? For Isaiah, who is known for being unyielding, probably not, frankly. But for God, who is known for being merciful and loving? Almost definitely.

*--A selection, by Quinn G. Caldwell, Associate Pastor, Old South Church, Boston, from The Stillspeaking Lenten Daily Devotional*

**Lectionary Citations**

Genesis 9: 8-17  
Psalm 25:1-10  
1 Peter 3:18-22  
Mark 1:9-15

Seminary Sunday / Church Vocations Sunday

February 27, 2012

Job 4:1-21  
Ephesians 2:1-10  
Psalm 77

Scott Nicholson, a volunteer with the Border Links at Nogales, AZ and Nogales, Mexico talks about the two countries separated by a 'Wall' since 1994. The length of the wall was designed to block impoverished Mexicans and Central Americans from entering the U.S. in search of work. It is fourteen feet high and guarded by the Border Patrol. When US agricultural corporations flooded Mexico with subsidized corn grown in the U. S., the price of that corn was less than what it cost small farmers in Mexico to grow the corn that been used for tortillas. The farmers couldn't compete with U.S. agribusiness and more than two million of them lost their lands. At that time, displaced farmers and others crossed into the U. S. to seek employment. Now the wall is guarded by 3,300 Border Patrol agents and 500 National Guard soldiers stationed along the Arizona border. During the last year, 253 people died in the desert of southern Arizona while attempting to migrate into the U.S.

February 28, 2012

Job 5:8-27  
1 Peter 3:8-18a  
Psalm 77

Scott Nicholson speaks of the contrast of U.S. corporations being able to freely cross the border in search of profit. Applebee's, Blockbuster Video., Burger King, Dairy Queen, Domino's, Kentucky Fried Chicken, McDonald's, Office Depot, Papa John', Subway, and Wal-Mart all operate in Nogales, Sonora, Mexico. Sixty five U.S. companies, including General Electric, Master Lock, Otis Elevator, and Xerox, have assembly plants in Mexico with approximately 25,000 workers. The minimum wage on the Mexican side is \$4.63 a day. "I have been in Nogales for 20 years", said Eugracia. "There used to be just a chain link fence and we could see through to the other side. But the wall blocked our vision and now we can't see each other." A variety of images and messages have been painted on the wall, including "Borders are scars on the earth," and "Walls turned on their sides are bridges."

February 29, 2012

Proverbs 30:1-9  
Matthew 4:1-11  
Psalm 77

Good Shepherd United Church of Christ Church in Sahuarita, AZ is just 65 miles from the Mexican border at Nogales. This congregation and other community members have chosen to take a proactive stance regarding the immigration issues of their neighborhood. The Rev. Randy Mayer reports, "We have been working on the border with these issues for ten years and it's painful to see the hate and discrimination moving deeper into our communities. What we need to be doing is creating comprehensive immigration reform." Various congregants work with Humane Borders and Border Links. One group, Samaritans, meets in this UCC church twice a month to coordinate humanitarian outreach to migrants in this region. This group points out that it is legal to provide food, water, and first aid to those in need, but it is not legal to provide transport for migrants. These Samaritans provide humanitarian aid to anyone in need.

March 1, 2012

Genesis 15:1-6, 12-18  
Romans 3:21-31  
Psalm 22:23-21

In late May 2010 members of the Southwest Conference, UCC, joined over 20,000 protesters marching in opposition to the Arizona state's immigration law that, according to critics, targets Hispanics and leaves the door open for racial profiling by law enforcement agencies. In response to passage of the new law, the Southwest Conference, UCC, published a call for a more humane US immigration policy, as an end to migrant deaths and for support to immigrant communities. The Conference letter sent to key individuals in their state and nation states, "We are profoundly disturbed by the passage of the harshest anti-immigration legislation in the country by the Arizona Legislature. It is legislation such as this that codifies racial profiling and creates an atmosphere of suspicion, hatred, and scapegoating of immigrants and U.S. citizen." Rev. John Dorhauer, Conference Minister of the Arizona Conference reports that the Southwest UCC Conference was the first organization to call for a boycott of Arizona because of the immigration law.