

January 6, 2012
Epiphany, Dia de Reyes

Isaiah 60:1-6
Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14
Ephesians 3:1-12
Matthew 2:1-12

The Duck Man! That's what one man from Congregational UCC of Arlington Heights, IL, is affectionately called by the director of the local faith-based community food pantry. Leo, an avid duck hunter, brings back from his Wisconsin hunting trips coolers of dressed and flash-frozen ducks and pheasants which he and his hunting buddies harvest. Leo then takes them to the food pantry where they are eagerly snatched up by clients! Who says "church work" only takes place inside the church? Today's Magi bring gifts in many ways.

January 7, 2012

Exodus 1:22-2:10
Hebrews 11:23-26
Psalm 110

Take one enthusiastic youth director, add an Open and Affirming congregation that envisioned more acceptance, and you get Wayside UCC in Federal Way, WA, that offers classes on Our Whole Lives/Sexuality and Our Faith. The ministry that was created at Wayside encourages others to get involved and is spreading the word about healthy, comprehensive, spiritual sexuality education.

Weekly Prayer January 1 - 4, 2012

God of new beginnings, you wipe away our tears and call us to care for one another. Give us eyes to see your gifts, hearts to embrace all creation, and hands to serve you every day of our lives. We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen



January 1, 2012

**First Sunday after Christmas / New Year's Day
God's Economy is Not a Roller Coaster**

We've been riding a roller coaster in the financial world, and it has not been fun.

Church is the place where many of you finally get off that roller coaster. In worship, you remember that you are loved by the God who created you. The familiar hymns tell you Christ's presence is constant. In scripture, stories about troubled people remind you that God is loving you through your troubles, too. Worship is your seat in God's house, to sit peacefully and know that God is God.

You may even decide that when you leave worship, you don't have to ride that roller coaster again. You can let it pass you by. You don't have to get back on. This may be your chance to dust off your spiritual practices and spend more time in prayer. Listen to the call from God to be a servant. Examine your conscience for life lessons. Forgive others as you have been forgiven.

When our world is rocked by financial waves, we are not powerless. We can open our hearts to people more vulnerable than we are. We can pray for one another. We can still be generous, in time, talent and treasure. Most importantly, we can look around at everything in our life that does not cost money, and treasure it.

Rev. Lillian Daniel

To read more from the Rev. Daniel and others, go to ucc.org to subscribe to the UCC's Stillspeaking Devotional, a free, daily e-mail meditation.

Lectionary Citations

Isaiah 61:10-62:3
Psalm 148
Galatians 4:4-7
Luke 2:22-40

(Or the readings for Epiphany may be used)

Isaiah 60:1-6
Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14
Ephesians 3:1-12
Matthew 2:1-12

January 2, 2012

Proverbs 1:1-7
James 3:13-18
Psalm 148

How appropriate it is to hear the words of the prayer song from the new UCC song book, *"Sing! Prayer and Praise."* A wonderful prayer tune expresses a simple prayer request- "Ferry Our Prayers," p. 105.

"Ferry our prayers across the water, kindle our hopes a lighthouse. Amazing grace is so amazing. Praying for those we cannot name."

Prayers expressed silently or in various worship styles can be expressed between the repeated prayer requests being ferried by 'hands and hearts across the waters.' Indeed we may not be able to name the men, women, and children around the world bonded by God's love for all, but God calls us all by name.

January 3, 2012

Proverbs 1:20-23
James 4:1-10
Psalm 110

Why does it seem that those who have the least are the ones that give the most? Erin McKinney, a Global Mission Intern and member of Hiram (Ohio) Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) worked with children in Boca Chica, Dominican Republic. She told the story of Yunior, a 12 year old boy from Haiti who found his way to Caminante Outreach Ministry after his family immigrated to the DR. Yunior is a major breadwinner for his family making money by shining shoes. Some days he goes hungry and will go to Caminante for a meal. After the earthquake in Haiti, people in the DR were worried for their neighbors. "The week after the earthquake he came in hungry but instead of asking for food, told us that he had bought and taken canned food in to school to send to those in greater need on the other side of the island in Haiti," Erin said. His deep compassion was food for the soul.

January 4, 2012

Proverbs 3:1-12
James 4:11-17
Psalm 110

Most of us have heard of Habitat for Humanity but how many of us know about its founders, Millard and Linda Fuller? Millard's roots are deep in the UCC, having grown up in Lanett Congregational Christian Church in Alabama and later founder and president of the Pilgrim Fellowship youth organization for the Southeast Conference of Congregational Christian Churches. After traveling across the country to raise funds for UCC related Tugaloo College in the 1960s, he and Linda helped Clarence Jordan launch Koinonia Partners. In 1973, the Fullers traveled to the Democratic Republic of Congo where the seed of Habitat for Humanity took root. On a donated tract of land, they built the first 100 houses which are still standing – a testament to Habitat for Humanity's official start in 1976. Fast forward to 2005, and the Fuller Center for Housing in Mbandaka carries out the goals of this Southeast Conference prodigy who changed the way mission is done.

January 5, 2012

Proverbs 22:1-9
Luke 6:27-31
Psalm 110

In fulfillment of its stated value that worship "joyfully praise God with biblically centered worship that is spiritually fulfilling and musically alive," Congregational UCC of Arlington Heights, IL, used the five Sunday month of October 2011 to explore a variety of worship options. The first Sunday the congregation worshiped at the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in celebration of World Communion Sunday. Sunday number two featured a Taize-style service at our church led by the church's Spiritual Formation Director and a member who has much Taize experience. On Sunday number three several members offered an "emergent" style worship called "The Gathering." On Sunday number four once again the church traveled to enjoy a contemporary praise service at a nearby Presbyterian Church. On the fifth Sunday the church held its customary 5th Sunday of Sacred Conversation to discuss what it had learned and received from this variety of October Sunday worship experiences. The sentiment was that all these styles need to be used on Sunday morning. God is still speaking in our worship,

January 13, 2012

Judges 2: 16-23

Acts 13:16-25

Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18

What is a People-To-People Pilgrimage? It is an “exciting trend among Disciples and UCC congregations, regions, and conferences with respect to “hands-on” experiences in mission. In 2011, nearly 1000 UCC members participated in a mission pilgrimage. The group embarks on a journey of faith and solidarity with our international ecumenical partners.” People-To-People Pilgrimage is more about relationship and connection – working in cooperation with international partners and experiencing the work and witness of other faith communities. Being flexible and attentive to the advice and availability of our mission partners is an important part of planning a pilgrimage, As the word “pilgrimage” implies, this journey is a catalyst for change – an awakening of faith, a transforming experience that encourages participants to share themselves and God’s love in a new way. You can read about the life changing experiences of some pilgrims on the Global Ministries web site.

January 14, 2012

1 Samuel 2:21-25

Matthew 25:1-13

Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18

When a family in its community needed a new, warm, safe home, Congregational Church of Boothbay Harbor, ME, stepped in to help. The church solicited help for the family from many local organizations without any luck. One church member took a long shot and wrote a grant proposal to a local foundation asking for a new manufactured home and the home was funded. Church members raised an additional \$46,000 to help the family with its new home.

Weekly Prayer January 5 - 11, 2012

God of grace and glory, you call us with your voice of flame to be your people, faithful and courageous. As your beloved Son embraced his mission in the waters of baptism, inspire us with the fire of your Spirit to join in his transforming work. We ask this in the name of our Savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you for ever and ever. Amen.



Calendar of Prayer

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST



January 8, 2012

Baptism of the Lord / First Sunday after Epiphany

Epiphany Today

An epiphany is defined in the dictionary as “a usually sudden manifestation or perception of the essential nature or meaning of something.” As we celebrate Epiphany, we remember the Magi’s “sudden discovery” more than 2,000 years ago of the first manifestation of Christ, which changed our world forever.

Epiphany UCC, in St. Louis, MO, is changing its own corner of the world today through an essential ministry they call the Urban Mission. The church hosts youth from the Joint Neighborhood Ministry who serve for a week at a time with various missions in the St. Louis area.

The Urban Mission also involves youth groups from all over the United Church of Christ, providing opportunities to serve and educate, and perhaps even offering the occasional “epiphany” to those who come to work. This mission and the partnership it has inspired with the encouragement of UCC Volunteer Ministries, a national effort of the United Church of Christ, has been part of the revitalization of Epiphany UCC.

Lectionary Citations

Genesis 1:1-5

Psalm 29

Acts 19:1-7

Mark 1:4-11

January 9, 2012

Genesis 17:1-13
Romans 4:1-12
Psalm 69:1-5, 30-36

For more than thirty years the UCC of La Mesa in La Mesa, CA has been helping a small orphanage in Mexico. What started out as simply taking toys and food to the children has turned into providing everything the children need during the school year to get a good education as well as food, clothing and everyday essentials. This mission of UCCCLM has now gained support from the local community and around the world.

January 10, 2012

Exodus 30:22-28
Acts 22:2-16
Psalm 69:1-5, 30-36

All that was left was the front porch with a hanging old tangled grapevine. Even though the earthquake destroyed their home in Chile, the storm could not destroy their families' spirit. Elena Huegel, a missionary with the Pentecostal Church of Chile – a Global Ministries partner – remembers two little boys playing on a rope swing under that grapevine and their father's smile after love rebuilt their home through the Blessing Cabins ministry of Global Ministries. "Love of your brothers and sisters from the national Pentecostal Church of Chile who worked with you to build the new house," Elena said. "Love of the brothers and sisters of your local church who provided the clothing, furniture and kitchen utensils needed to replace what was buried in the rubble." And love of donors from the United States who prayed and supported the Blessing Cabins program. Their new home is blessed, and they wouldn't trade it for a palace.

January 11, 2012

Isaiah 41:14-20
John 1:29-34
Psalm 69:1-5, 30-36

When Old First Reformed UCC in Philadelphia, PA wanted to spread the message that "we're not the church you fear we are," it turned to the web and social networking. With the help of a social services intern who volunteered to revitalize the church's web site, the church now reaches out to those that they felt they could better serve. With the web site telling others about upcoming events at the church and spreading the word of God, Old First Reformed has a "BIG web presence telling the remarkable story of God and God's people."

January 12, 2012

Judges 2:6-15
2 Corinthians 10:1-11
Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18

Embodying its mission statement is just what First Congregational Church of Winter Park in Winter Park, FL does by helping two students from South Africa attend U.S. universities through scholarships. A partnership with Global Ministries provides financial, travel and administrative assistance while Rollins College gives full scholarships to the students. The church provides emotional, spiritual and social support as well as the supplies needed to attend school.

January 20, 2012

Jeremiah 20:7-13
2 Peter 3:1-7
Psalm 62:5-12

When a refugee family from Sierra Leone needed help, St. Peter's UCC in West Seneca, NY, stepped in to give hope to this family in need. The church helped the family find a home, jobs, and schooling for the children. They are now American citizens. The congregation is continuing its mission outreach in Sierra Leone with medical assistance and hope to others.

January 21, 2012

Jeremiah 20:14-18
Luke 10:13-16
Psalm 62:5-12

"I'm not a doctor, a scientist, or an architect with a clear path to volunteer in the recovery effort," said Sae Shiragami after the tsunami and nuclear disaster in Japan devastated the lives of friends and family. But that didn't stop her from finding her own path to help. Shiragami, a violinist with the Cleveland Orchestra, put together two benefit concerts with her Cleveland Orchestra colleagues – one at Plymouth Church in Shaker Heights, Ohio and the other at Lakewood Congregational Church in Lakewood, Ohio. The concerts raised nearly \$12,000 for relief efforts. Shiragami heard the stories of her friends and family in Japan who said things like, 'There were only two aftershocks today, but my body is swaying all the time', and 'My son is working at Reactor #1 of the plant. I'm prepared for the worst.' Shiragami said, "It is my hope that my music will serve to bring some comfort to the victims of Japan and all of us."

Weekly Prayer January 12 - 18, 2012

Perfect Light of revelation, as you shone in the life of Jesus, whose epiphany we celebrate, so shine in us and through us, that we may become beacons of truth and compassion, enlightening all creation with deeds of justice and mercy. Amen.



January 15, 2012

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

The concerns that Martin Luther King addressed back in the 1960s were not just issues of society and culture, they were issues of justice. The same is true for many of the challenges that face this country today.

The call to respect and care for each other as sisters and brothers isn't just a political or sociological statement. Remember the words of Jesus: "If you love me, feed my sheep." The greatest commandment is to love the Lord God with all our hearts and minds, but the second one is like it, to love our neighbor as ourselves. Concerns about racial equality, poverty and homelessness, war and health care, and the marginalization of the voiceless and powerless are moral issues, they are issues that people of faith must be engaged in. If this exciting moment in time is going to be anything other than a short-lived, feel-good moment, then all of us must be partners in bringing about the change we seek. And that includes those of us who are people of faith.

We don't have the luxury of sitting in church on Sundays and not taking our faith with us on Mondays. Our role as the church and as Christians is to continue to raise our voices for more just systems, for eradication of poverty, for policies that don't discriminate on the basis of race, gender, physical ability or sexual orientation, to encourage and support and pray for peace. And we are called to do this not because of a particular political perspective but because of our belief in a Still-speaking God, who is a God of love and a God of justice.

Lectionary Citations

1 Samuel 3:1-10 [11-20]
Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18
1 Corinthians 6:12-20
John 1:43-51

January 16, 2012

1 Samuel 9:27-10:8
2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1
Psalm 86

Today we celebrate the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday – many of us by making the day one of service to others. The impact of the Rev. Dr. King’s life transcends the boundaries of time, race and geography as evidenced in the profound effect his “I Have a Dream” is still having in the world today. “Roma activists in Europe are now looking closely at King’s fight for justice and are debating the value of direct action and civil disobedience in overturning the racism which has marked them as second class citizens in the countries they call home,” said Robert Rustem, head of the Secretariat for the European Roma and Travellers Forum. Rustem cites many parallels between the injustices and racist acts experienced by African Americans and the discrimination and attacks suffered by Roma people.

January 17, 2012

1 Samuel 15:10-31
Acts 5:1-11
Psalm 86

“Like many black Americans, Roma know the indignity of segregated schooling and medical experiments conducted without informed consent,” he said. “Europe’s 12-15 million Roma are politically invisible despite being the region’s largest ethnic minority. Roma suffer from widespread and deeply-ingrained discrimination. Compared to other groups, Roma people have lower life expectancy. They have poorer health and live in worse housing. Employment and education levels are abysmal and little concern to the politicians, whose commitment to change is at best weak.” Many Roma are now considering the tactics of non-violent resistance such as boycotts, sit-ins, marches and demonstrations as a way to make themselves heard. After many decades of anti-Gypsy sentiment, Roma people are raising their voices for “the riches of freedom and the security of justice” as Dr. King proclaimed in his speech at the March on Washington. The dream of freedom and justice endures.

January 18, 2012

Genesis 16:1-14
Luke 18:15-17
Psalm 86

An adjunct pastor at First Congregational Church in Stockbridge, MA, started an All Are Welcome worship service before the running of the New York Marathon - a “worship service for runners by runners.” Several clergy organize the service that includes song, stories of runners trusting God, communion in many different religious styles and ending with a prayer of dedication for the marathon, the city, our nations and world peace.

Week of Prayer for Christians Unity – January 18 - 25

January 19, 2012

Jeremiah 19:1-15
Revelation 18:11-20
Psalm 62:5-12

Getting four UCC churches in the same city to work together sounds like an easy task, but the reality was not so easy when First Congregational Church UCC in Las Vegas, NV, tried. Every church has their own “comfort zone” and getting the churches to step out took some work but it finally happen and the churches started holding regular get-togethers. All the participating churches are now stronger because of their cooperation with other congregations.

January 27, 2012

Deuteronomy 12:28-32
Revelation 2:12-17
Psalm 111

Between 1991 and 2002, the Conference Minister of NH, was responsible for the development of a global (Ukama) Partnership between the New Hampshire Conference and the UCC in Zimbabwe. Many congregations in New Hampshire were brought into relationships of sharing, serving, and praying together as delegations traveled in both directions. Conference Minister, the Rev. Ben Crosby helped to bear witness to and promote the relationship, and to celebrate that One God has used this relationship for the up-building of the global church. This conference chose to establish the Crosby Scholarship Fund as a way to honor Rev. Crosby, and to recognize the importance of the Ukama gift from the UCC in Zimbabwe (UCCZ). One hundred percent of the distributions from the principal investments are used to provide support for UCCZ students.

January 28, 2012

Deuteronomy 13:1-5
Matthew 8:28-9:1
Psalm 111

The Zimbabwe Synod is one of five synods comprising the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa. The UCCZ has been affiliated with Global Ministries since 1893. The Ukama (family) relationship of 'critical presence' continues today. The UCCZ has 47 congregations with 30,000 members. The synod supports various schools, hospitals and orphanages. The Mt Selinda Hospital is located in the area of one of the first UCCZ congregations. It is a 175 bed hospital. There is not sufficient water for crop irrigation in the drought affected area. There is also a children's home named Chirinda Orphanage- sometimes called Daisy Dube Children's home. The home cares for children living with the extreme challenges of being abandoned, or without parents. The Global Ministries Child Sponsorship Program matches sponsors and children at the orphanage.

Weekly Prayer January 19 - 25, 2012

O God, you spoke your word and revealed your good news in Jesus the Christ. Fill all creation with that word again, so that by proclaiming your joyful promises to all nations and singing of your glorious hope to all peoples, we may become one living body, your incarnate presence on the earth. Amen.



January 22, 2012

Third Sunday after the Epiphany (Third Sunday in Ordinary Time)
Ecumenical Sunday

A Bible FAQ

What is the Bible?

There is more than one way to answer this question! A good place to start may be to say that the Bible is a library. A literal meaning of the word "bible" is "book of books." It is 66 books for Protestants, 73 for Catholics. It divides into the 39 books of the Old Testament, which tell the story of God's dealings with Israel, and the 27 books of the New Testament, which tell the story of Jesus and the church that followed him.

To call the Bible "a library" means that there are different types of literature between its two covers. There is drama, history, law code, song, poetry, gospels, parables, letters and more. Key to using the Bible is knowing what part of the library you are in or what type of literature you are hearing or reading. Even more importantly, a library is defined by its owner and their purpose. This library is the library of Israel and the Church. It reminds Jews and Christians who they are and whose they are.

Bible FAQ's are written by Anthony B. Robinson and appear in *The Bible and the United Church of Christ*, a collection of short essays by UCC writers, to introduce or re-acquaint readers with the Bible.

Lectionary Citations

Jonah 3:1-5, 10

Psalm 62:5-12

1 Corinthians 7:29-31

Mark 1:14-20

January 23, 2012

Genesis 12:1-9
1 Corinthians 7:17-24
Psalm 46

Global Ministries Missionaries Donald and Maryjane Westra, serving in Zimbabwe, have learned the difference between African time and North American time. Being busy in North America is highly valued and the norm. The Westras report that when asking someone in Africa if they are busy, they look at you strangely. Try asking someone what time it is, they do not wear watches. The African culture values spending time with friends and family, and helping each other.

The Westras further explain: "In North American culture, I may have had six or seven meetings a day. A typical day in Africa consists of 'footing' to my office and waiting until someone walks in and wants to talk to me. Sometimes there is a meeting scheduled although it is rare to have an appointment. No one has a watch, let alone a phone to call ahead... This culture values discussion or consensus building. This takes time so there is no predicting when a meeting will end."

January 24, 2012

Genesis 45:25-46:7
Acts 5:33-42
Psalm 46

Again, the Westras report, "Waiting, such as waiting in line or a 'queue,' is something North Americans abhor. But it is expected in Africa. Why hurry? Americans never loiter, dawdle or linger around. We are busy. In my former life I was so busy there were never enough hours in a day. When my children were young I often missed their sporting events or dance recitals because I was busy. But here, loitering is a way to chat and connect with friends and family. (And everyone is family.) In Africa, I loiter. I meet a lot of people that way. I learn about their life, their families, and their values. Maybe we in North America have it all wrong. Maybe the joke is on us. Maybe we should loiter more often." Indeed, we all have a lot to learn from these African partners in Christ and their African friends. Let us live and learn using patience and time for building relationships.

January 25, 2012

Proverbs 8:1-21
Mark 3:13-19a
Psalm 46

Embraced by Global Ministries, seminary student interns are sometimes assigned to serve in various Global Mission program offices. Four Disciple interns, had the opportunity to visit Global Ministries sites in southern Africa as part of their internship. In a journal, seminary student, Chelsia Nickelson, spoke of the first word she learned in Zimbabwe. It was "mashuma" meaning 'thank you.' But later in journal entries she recognized that the word "ukama" resonated even more as an overarching theme of her journey, which also became a journey inward. Chelsia explains, "The word partnership cannot adequately express relationship that the United Church of Christ in Zimbabwe has with churches in the US. 'Ukama' which means family, is the more appropriate word to describe the relations because it denotes that as Christians we are bound not by a contract, not by a covenant, and not by some benevolent idea or service. We work together because our destiny is the same and because we are family, one body in Christ."

January 26, 2012

Deuteronomy 3:23-29
Romans 9:6-18
Psalm 111

In the group of young seminary students, William Almodovar was the only guy on the trip. In Chikore, Zimbabwe, William shared how the people to people group visited a primary school. Most of the teachers and hospital personnel graduated from the schools. He commented that "the kids might not have a lot, but something they have is a strong desire to learn and give their best at school, even with all the limitations they might have." As their group was shown hospitality by these new 'family' friends in local homes, there were gifts of fellowship and food. William realized that "the hosts had probably shared all the food which the hosts had left to eat for the next few weeks. For these generous children of God, sharing what they have materially, spiritually and emotionally was an important thing." William was deeply touched, "these people are doing incredible things in incredible places with an incredible lack of resources. It is clear they are not depending on the outside or local help, but rather they are depending on God, understanding that is where God wants them and where their ministry will develop."