



THE GOOD NEWS

DECEMBER 2009

Available at spartaumc.org. or in printed form through the office (973-729-7773) of Sparta United Methodist Church

SPECIAL DECEMBER SERVICES

CHRISTMAS PAGEANT - Sunday, December 13th during the 10:30 Worship Service

BLUE CHRISTMAS SERVICE AT 7:30 PM- Monday, December 21st

TRADITIONAL CHRISTMAS SERVICE AT 6:30 PM - Thursday, December 24th

COMMUNION CHRISTMAS SERVICE AT 11:00 P.M. – Thursday, December 24th

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This is a letter of appreciation for everyone involved in the ministry of Interfaith Homeless Network. It comes from Jenni Randazzo and her family who have been our guests twice and are now worshipping with us after moving into their own home in Newton.

Thank you.....

To the entire staff at IHN,
to the countless volunteers, seen and unseen, who support this organization,
and to all the other helpers God has blessed our lives with,

Thank you.

Thank you for the things you did to help us get where we are today. Today my family woke up in our home. I can't tell you exactly how it felt. 'Amazing' doesn't scratch the surface of the myriad of emotions we feel; 'joy' isn't providing the depth.

Thank you for everything you did to support us, to uplift us, to give us strength.

Thank you for every prayer, every thought, every wish.

Thank you for giving us solid ground, so that we could stand on our own.

Thank you for giving up your own comfortable bed, for giving up your comfort zone, for giving of yourself.

Thank you for teaching the world, one step at a time, that we are all responsible for one another, without conditions.

Thank you for the gifts, material and otherwise, that made us feel less like refugees and more like guests.

Thank you for sticking up for us when we couldn't do it for ourselves, for making sure we felt safe and had the things we needed to maintain our dignity.

Thank you for seeing us through the frustration and fear that caused us to lash out, to get angry or withdraw.

Thank you for understanding us when we barely understood ourselves.

Thank you for not tying strings to your empathy, your compassion, or your love.
Thank you for helping us find God when we may have otherwise lost our way.
Thank you for being there when we needed you the most, and for making it seem like no big deal, when really, it was monumental.
Thank you for providing us with a safe haven, a place where we didn't have to keep our kids under us at all times for fear of what might happen if we didn't, for so much more than the word 'shelter' implies.
Thank you for the meals that brought us nourishment and a sense of community.
Thank you for the counsel, for letting us be vulnerable, for talking with us, not at us.
Thank you for the hugs, the smiles, the talks long into the night.
Thank you for being friends in a place where we thought we hadn't any.
Thank you for going the extra mile, for doing the things most people only think they should do, and for doing it selflessly.

Although we may not remember every name or face we encountered, we will never in our lives forget that God showed his face to us in each one of you this fall. We have been given a glimpse of the God that we were created in the image of, and we are forever changed because of it.

ADULT FAITH ENRICHMENT

Eclipsing Empire: Paul, Rome, and the Kingdom of God

A new DVD series is ongoing **at 9:15 a.m.** on Sunday mornings in the Wesley Room. You are invited to join us, whether it is your first encounter with Paul or you think that you know him well.

Preeminent New Testament scholars Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan will lead us on location in Turkey, Greece and Italy as they trace the Apostle Paul's footsteps throughout the Roman Empire. This DVD study explores fresh insights into Paul's message of the Kingdom of God, its challenge to Roman imperial theology, and the apostle's radical relevance for today. Just as Paul challenged his society many years ago, come and hear his challenge to our society today!

Monday Night Book Study

Monday Night Book Study is completing the book entitled Jesus, by Marcus Borg. Pastor Diane is now leading the study since Gerry will be away at Pearl River Saturday through late Tuesdays once a week. Book suggestions welcome. This group will not meet on Monday the 21st or Monday, December 28th. A new study will begin Monday, January 4th.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH MINISTRIES

Sunday School

Sunday School Candy Cane Sale

The Sunday School classes will be holding a Candy Cane Sale the weeks of Dec. 13th and Dec. 12th.

Christmas Pageant

The Christmas Pageant will be held on December 13th during the 10:30 worship service. Practices for the pageant will be held on Dec. 5th and Dec. 12th from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m.

Please note: There is **no Sunday School** on Dec. 27, 2009 or January 3, 2010

Youth Groups

The Christmas season has come at last, and I am looking forward to enjoying the winter wonderland that I am told Northern New Jersey will offer! So, in the spirit of the season, all of our youth events this month will help us celebrate and to get into the feeling of the season. I hope to see as many youth as possible, and if you know of someone who has not yet joined us, let her or him know that they are always welcome!

4th and 5th Grade Youth Group Christmas Party, 5:00 – 7:00 p.m. on Dec. 6th - The party will be at the Deery's house. See email for details and address. Everyone bring a holiday snack and a gift of no more than \$5-\$10 for gift exchange.

Junior High Youth Group Christmas Service Project for the Hungry on December 5th - Meet at the church at 10:00 a.m. with \$5.00. We will be collecting food and toys and delivering them for needy families in a fun game/simulation. We will conclude by 12:30 p.m.

Junior High Youth Group Christmas Party, December 13th from 5:00 – 7:00 p.m. - Check your email for location. Bring a dessert and gift of no more than \$5-\$10 for gift exchange.

Junior High and Senior High Summer Missions Meeting, December 9th from 7:00 – 9:00 p.m. All Junior High and Senior High youth and their families are invited to attend our first informational meeting about this summer's mission trip. Wednesday, December 9, from 7-8 in the sanctuary.

Senior High Youth Group Christmas Party, December 20th from 5:00 – 7:00 p.m. Check your email for the location. Bring a dessert and gift of no more than \$5-\$10 for exchange.

PASTORAL CARE AND HOSPITALITY

Committee Meetings

Our ministry committee will be moving from Monday morning meetings to evening meetings starting January 5th (see date listing) so that new members can join us. We thank Nan Van Houten and Tara DeLouise for organizing our coffee hours which will now become a responsibility of this ministry committee. Hats off to Pat Harvey who has coordinated this so successfully for so long with the worship committee.

Potluck Luncheon on December 20th

Join us for a Christmas Potluck Luncheon with food, carols, and fellowship as we celebrate Christmas. The luncheon will be after the 10:30 worship service. We will be caroling here and to some of our home bound members afterwards. Come join the fun!

What to Bring to the Luncheon by Last Name:

A – H : Appetizer

I – P: Maine Dish

R – Z: Dessert

WORSHIP COMMITTEE

New Advent Banners

This Advent season, the Sanctuary will be graced with new banners. The Worship Committee, on behalf of the entire congregation, would like to extend their deepest and heartfelt appreciation to Rich Kelley's mother, Margot Kelley and Nancy Watson for the time, effort and care spent in sewing them! They were provided the design and created two beautiful banners that will enhance our Sanctuary this holiday season and in the years to come! Many thanks to both of them for blessing our church with these new additions to our Advent season celebration!

Decorating the Church for the Christmas Season

The Worship Committee will be decorating for Christmas! We need help! Please come and join us on any of the following dates if you can:

Saturday, December 19th at 9:00 a.m. - Poinsettia set-up for Christmas

Wednesday evening, Dec. 23rd - Decorating the sanctuary for the Christmas Eve services

UNITED METHODIST WOMEN

UMW Book Group Discusses The Shack in December

On December 1, the United Methodist Women Book Group will meet to discuss The Shack by Wm. Paul Young. They will meet in the Wesley Room at 10am. On the back of the book it says, "In a world where religion seems to grow increasingly irrelevant, "The Shack" wrestles with the timeless question: Where is God in a world so filled with unspeakable pain? Come for the discussion whether you've read the book or not

Book Group of United Methodist Women Schedules Books for 2010

The UMW Book Group will continue in the new year to meet on the first Tuesday morning of every month from 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. (or so). Here's the schedule of books they will be discussing:

January 5 - Mudbound by Hillary Jordan

February 2 - Longing for Enough in a Culture of More by Paul L. Escamilla

March 2 - People of the Book by Geraldine Brooks

April 6 - Cane River - Lalita Tademy

May 4 - Three Cups of Tea by Greg Mortenson

June 1 - Sarah's Key by Tatiana DeRosnay

July 6 - Caring for Mother by Virginia Stern Owens

August 3 - Amish Grace: How Forgiveness Transcended Tragedy by Donald B. Kraybill

September 7 - Water for Elephants by Sara Gruen

Some of these books are on the UMW Reading Program, and will be ordered and kept on a special shelf of the church library for interested persons to read.

United Methodist Women Establishes Additional Groups

The United Methodist Women of Sparta Church are now sponsoring nine groups. It is the hope of co-presidents Pat Schutz and Ann Freeman Price that many people (both men and women) will find a group in which to participate. The groups are:

1. *Holy Hookers*---meets on Wednesday from 1-3---primarily knitting but open to new crafts. Call Diane Gelone.
2. *Food Certificate Distribution*---Call Diane Gelone
3. *Manna House*---First Monday of each month folks go to Manna House from 10am to 12:30pm to help cook, dice, stir, set tables or serve food. Call Laura Kempson
4. *CUMAC-ECHO Support Group*---This is a new group hoping to involve young women in the church and to increase awareness for this important mission. Contact Ashley Kempson.
5. *Healing Prayer Time*---People gather on the first Wednesday of each month from 11:15 to 11:45 to lift up those people and situations for prayer. Contact Ann Freeman Price.
6. *Children's Faith Journals*---The project is to create scrapbooks for the youth, depicting their life in our church. Contact Pat Schutz or Gale Meyer.
7. *Writing It Down*---Your Life, Your Faith, Whatever---This is a group that will start in the spring of 2010 and a chance to create your memoir or whatever kind of writing you want to do. Contact Ann Freeman Price.
8. *Kitchen Capers*---A newly forming group that will be working to make the kitchen a more workable space. Contact Linda Giammanco or Laura Kempson.
9. *Ongoing Book Group*---See other article. (above)

Sparta Church Library Has Books on Christmas !

The following books can be found in the narthex bookcase. See what you think of them and check them out:

Kneeling in Bethlehem by Ann Weems. If you like poetry and specifically if you like Ann Weems' poetry, you will enjoy this book.

The Manger Is Empty---Stories in Time by Walter Wangerin, Jr. On the back of the book, Bishop Chilstrom writes: "Wangerin opens his heart and soul to us again sharing stories out of his own story."

The Christmas Survival Book by Alice Slaikeu Lawhead. This is more of a how-to book---how to make Christmas more meaningful.

Christmas Is For Celebrating by Melvin E. Wheatley, Jr. This is a chance to become acquainted with Bishop Wheatley who died this year. In this small book he has six chapters: The Recovery of Celebration; The Physical That Is Spiritual; The Blessedness of Receiving; The Holy That Is Here; The Divine That Is Human; The Star We Never Saw Before.

The First Christmas---What the Gospels Really Teach About Jesus' Birth by Marcus J. Borg and John Dominic Crossan. The "Los Angeles Times" quote on the back says: "Borg and Crossan brilliantly chronicle the mounting tension that forced everyone in Jesus's path to pledge allegiance---either to Rome's way of power and oppression or to his way of love and equality."

Christmas Reflections by James W. Moore; Reginald Mallett; J. Ellsworth Kalas; James A. Harnish; and Nell W. Mohney. These five authors can walk with you during the Christmas season.

In honor of World AIDS Day on December 1st, this book is a blessing: Wonderfully, Fearfully Made---Letters on Living with Hope, Teaching Understanding, and Ministering with Love, from a Gay Catholic Priest with AIDS by Father Robert L. Arpin. On the back of the book Virginia Ramey Mollenkott writes, "Father Arpin's letters are direct, honest, and relevant to the living and dying of anybody who wants to be fully human and sincerely Christian."

Born of a Woman---A Bishop Rethinks the Birth of Jesus by John Shelby Spong. The jacket of the book says, "Integrating his love and respect for scripture with his keen understanding of current biblical scholarship and the needs of modern peoples, Bishop Spong explores the virgin Mary tradition and its contemporary repercussions." The Quiet Little Woman---A Christmas Story by Louisa May Alcott. This is a tiny book but rich in stories Alcott wrote and sent to the Lukens girls who had been inspired by her book "Little Women." A Book of Christmas---Readings for Reflection during Advent and Christmas by The Upper Room. Something for every day.

CHURCH AND SOCIETY

Consider Fair Trade Coffee and Chocolate for Christmas Gifts

Fair Trade Coffee and Chocolate will continue to be available each Sunday during the coffee hour after church, thanks to the Church and Society committee and their allies. Fair Trade means an equitable arrangement between consumers in North America and producers in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean. It means that small farmers get a fair price for their harvests. It means that the chocolate you buy does not involve children working in Africa's cocoa fields. It means environmental stewardship. It's a good idea for a Christmas gift. So have a cup of Fair Trade coffee in the coffee hour and then buy some for yourself and others..

Alternative Christmas Gift Cards To Be Sold Starting Nov. 29

On the first Sunday of Advent, Nov. 29 through December 20th, Church and Society will make available for the fourth year Alternative Christmas Gift Cards. This gives you the opportunity to send a card to someone you care about and let them know that in their name you have contributed money to one of three organizations: Doctors Without Borders, United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR), and UNICEF. Each card is \$5.00. Sometimes we know people who seem to have everything and this makes a wonderful gift to them.

A Quote for pondering...from Sparta Church and Society Committee:

It was late on the first night of camp. There I was in a large tent filled with fourth, fifth, and sixth grade boys. Lights had been turned out long before, but these boys were intent on getting to know one another and weren't about to go to sleep.

I was to the point of praying for God's intervention, when suddenly silence fell. They must have all talked themselves to sleep, I thought. But my victory was short-lived. One of the boys in the back of the tent, seeing light from the campfire streaming through a hole in the tent, yelled, "Look, there's a leak in the darkness!"

The reason I share this story is that though he meant his exclamation to be disruptive, which it was, by the end of the week it had developed into a motto for our group and a challenge never to be forgotten.

Into the darkness of the world God sent a child, Emmanuel to be the leak in the darkness.

As we journey through Advent toward Christmas, may we be renewed by the power of God's light in Jesus Christ. May we once again commit ourselves to be agents of that light by overcoming the darkness caused by brokenness, alienation, injustice, and oppression. May we represent God's Shalom by seeking peace with justice. May each of us be a "leak in the darkness," an agent of God's light.

---Bishop Edward W. Paup, Oregon-Idaho United Methodist Conference,
1988 Peace with Justice Advent Booklet

MISSION

The Church Mouse Thrift Shop

The Church Mouse Thrift Shop invites you to see what our mission is about on Sunday, December 6th immediately following the 10:30 worship service. If you have not had a chance to visit before, this is your opportunity! You can even buy something if you want. The shop will be closed Dec. 24th, 25th, 26th and Jan. 1st.

Don't forget to volunteer in our Church Mouse Thrift Shop over the holidays. We are always in need of volunteers, and many of the regulars are simply worn out. During Christmas, the Mouse does more to help people than ever. That means we need more staff on the floor, people sorting, cleaning and carrying things and such. One of the most important missions to which you can contribute is right under our roof. Call Wilma Smith at 973-729-4740, or Sherry Royce at 973-726-7006, to schedule time to help.

Hours of the Church Mouse Thrift Shop:

Wednesdays & Saturdays: 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Thursdays & Fridays: 1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Sunday, Dec. 6th only after the 10:30 worship service

The World Mission Gift Shop

The World Mission Gift Shop carries one of a kind items made by artisans from around the world! There are hundreds of new items: ornaments, stocking stuffers, jewelry, home décor, personal accessories and more! There is something for everyone on your list!

Hours of the World Mission Gift Shop:

Wednesdays & Saturdays: 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Thursdays & Fridays: 1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Open after the 10:30 worship service on Sundays in December!

Food Certificate Program

Thanks to Diane Gelone who has graciously volunteered to run the food certificate program, your donations have helped many families with food. With more families requiring assistance, our food certificate program is in need of ongoing support. Remember this is a fund raiser for our church, so use the coupons yourself and 5% of the expense comes back to the church. When purchasing your own grocery store certificates on Sunday mornings after the 10:30 a.m. service in Demarest Hall, please consider purchasing one (or more!) for the families in need in our area. If donating, please provide your name and the amount, for recording and credit purposes. THANK YOU to all those who continue to donate to this vital ministry.

The Giving Tree

If you would like to help out needy families by giving Christmas gifts, stop by the Giving Tree in the narthex of the church and choose a tag or two! Please bring wrapped gifts with their tags on them (so we know who should get them) and put them under the tree by Dec. 20th. If you have questions, call Laura Kempson at 973-579-0140.

Pass-It-Along Christmas Toy Shop

Pass-It-Along will hold its annual Toy Shop here in our church from Dec. 13th through Dec. 18th.

This mission helps needy families throughout Sussex County receive toys for Christmas and coats for the winter season.

STAFF PARISH RELATIONS COMMITTEE

We have had several people interested in the permanent nursery position. Staff Parish Relations is busy checking out our prospects. In the meantime, many thanks to Breanne Petrucelli for stepping up to the place and coordinating church members as volunteers. Thanks, too, to all of you who have assisted in the nursery during this period of time. Once we hire a nursery attendant, we will still want an adult from the congregation present in order to fulfill our “two-adult” rule. If you are interested in helping, contact Breanne at bree34@ptd.net. We strive never to leave one adult with a child or children for safety purposes.

CHURCH COUNCIL VISIONING DAY

Special On-Site Visioning Meeting at SUMC January 16th from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

We have drawn many new members into our congregation in the last year and many are already deeply involved in the activities of our church. We are also seeing revitalization and renewed enthusiasm in many areas. There is a strong Sunday School program for youth and adults. Our worship services are more innovative, the sanctuary decorations are creative and the music programs are exploring new styles including the emergence of the Praise Band as a more regular accent to our worship experience. Our commitment to building a dynamic Youth Ministry is very evident in the high energy, engaging approach that Matt Querns is bringing to this critical activity in our program.

Many of these advances have come about as a result of the passionate commitment of small groups of people focusing on one particular aspect of our community life that is of special concern to them. At this time, we need to pull all of our resources together to ensure that we are all aligned with a common understanding of our congregation’s mission and how we coordinate and live that out in our daily activities.

The Council has set aside **Saturday, January 16, 2010, from 9:00AM to 3:00PM**, as the time when we will review our existing mission statement, consider any updates that we feel reflect our current values and then identify the specific ways in which each of our activities can support those ministries. We are asking for the chairperson of each group within our church to attend this crucial meeting. If the chairperson just cannot attend

then another representative must be there. Also, if there are any deeply interested individuals who want to be a part of this process, you are absolutely welcome. We need ALL voices to be heard to help us identify our Vision and to commit to going back to their own group to develop their own innovative activities in response. We want every new person entering our church to see our passion and commitment and for our existing members to be drawn into the renewed vitality that is growing in our midst. If you have any questions about this important day apart, please contact either Dave Johnson, our Council Chairperson, or Curtis Clarke, Lay Leader.

LISTING OF IMPORTANT DATES

December

Dec. 2, Wednesday- Trustees Meeting at 7:30 p.m.

Dec. 7, Monday– Pastoral Care and Hospitality at 10:00 a.m.

Dec. 12, Saturday – Church and Society Meeting at 9:00 a.m.

Dec. 13, Sunday – Children’s Christmas Pageant at 10:30 a.m. worship service

Dec. 16, Wednesday – Church Council Meeting at 7:30 p.m.

Dec. 20, Sunday – Christmas Potluck Luncheon before caroling to Home Bound

Dec. 21, Monday – Blue Christmas Service at 7:30 p.m.

Dec. 24, Thursday – Christmas Eve Worship Services at 6:30 p.m. and 11:00 p.m.

January

Jan. 5, Tuesday– Pastoral Care and Hospitality Meeting at 7:30 p.m.

Jan. 16, Saturday – Visioning Day for the Church Council from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Jan. 30, Saturday – Pastor Diane and her husband Gerry begin a two week vacation in celebration of their 30th wedding anniversary.