



## THE GOOD NEWS

February 2010

*Available at [spartaumc.org](http://spartaumc.org). or in printed form through the office (973-729-7773) of Sparta United Methodist Church*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I will officiate at our Ash Wednesday service on February 17<sup>th</sup> at 7:30 p.m. I hope as many of you as possible will be there to keep the beginning of Lent as a holy season. This is the period of time in the life of the church when we bear witness to Jesus in special ways. It is also a time for deeper introspection, practicing the disciplines of our faith and renewing our commitment to God. It is the season when new Christians prepare for entrance into the community of faith.

If you are willing to have ashes imposed on your foreheads, this can be a powerful witness to others. It's a statement about the very fact that there are believers in our midst. We don't have to say anything. We are literally marked as a disciple of Jesus. These days wearing a cross is often a decoration rather than a declaration. Bumper stickers can be effective in terms of making a statement. Indeed, I have seen several I would like for my own bumper, but I never know where to find them! Ashes, however, are a very personal statement. They call others to consider where they are in their relationship with God, help them recognize their need for God, and perhaps motivate them to return to the One who loves them as no other.

Ashes are also important for those of us who wear them. When we look in the mirror, we acknowledge that we have embraced a life of humility and service; we admit publicly that we are not perfect but broken human beings who live by grace and forgiveness. In this hectic world, the ashes announce that we are mortal, made from the dust of the earth. We will return to dust....all of us. Helen Keller once said that we should live every day as though it were our last. Ashes help us do that. Whatever we think is urgent and important begins to fade in contrast with eternity against which all of our lives are cast. We are here for a short while. Knowing this helps us think about whether we are using the time, talents, energy and resources we have in the best way possible. Are we preparing for eternal life with God? Are we worshipping regularly, studying to increase our knowledge of the bible and faith traditions, are we faithful in prayer and service? As CS Lewis once asked: if we were put on trial for being Christians, would there be enough evidence to convict us?

Ash Wednesday begins the six week Lenten season leading up to Holy Week and Easter, our high holy days. During these six weeks we will be sharing Holy Communion regularly on Sundays, as the earliest Christians did. Word and table together constitute Christian worship; we often fail to include both which would dismay John Wesley! Therefore we will celebrate Holy Communion and I will include information about the sacrament in my preaching during Lent. Most of all, we will attempt to return to God with all our hearts, to grieve our unfaithfulness and draw closer to the One who upholds us daily.

Shalom,

Diane

**SPARTA UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**  
71 Sparta Ave., Sparta, NJ 07871  
Phone: 973-729-7773 Email: [www.spartaumc.org](http://www.spartaumc.org)

**WORSHIP NOTES** Pastor Diane will be away Sundays, Feb. 7<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Matthew Querns will be preaching. Pastor Diane returns on the 14<sup>th</sup> from a 2 week vacation in celebration of her and Gerry's 30<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. We will not celebrate Holy Communion on Sunday, Feb. 7<sup>th</sup>; however, we will share the sacrament every Sunday in Lent starting Feb. 21<sup>st</sup>. Our Ash Wednesday service will be held Wed. Feb. 17<sup>th</sup> at 7:30 p.m., and will include the administration of ashes for those who want to receive them. While our pastor is away, call Dave Johnson (973-729-3233) for church business. Dave Johnson, Matthew Querns (520-904-1404), and Rev. Alden Welch (973-726-0248) will be available for pastoral care.

### **ADULT FAITH ENRICHMENT**

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##### **ECLIPSING EMPIRE: PAUL, ROME, AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD**

Join us as we continue the DVD series and discussion Sunday mornings at 9:15 a.m. in the Wesley Room. Preeminent New Testament scholars Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan are leading 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! Information on future studies will be announced during the worship service and in our Sunday bulletins.

### **CHILDREN AND YOUTH MINISTRIES**

#### **Vacation Bible School (VBS) Needs You**

Our Vacation Bible School program is a fabulous time for kids to learn about God's love for one week each summer under the guidance of our volunteer staff. This year, we are looking for a new director or two co-directors to lead our dedicated group in organizing this very successful children's program. Our director for the past two years, Debbie Dickerson, is stepping down, but will remain an active volunteer and will help the organizational team in planning the event. Without the right person or people to help, we will not be able to run the program, so please contact the church office if you feel called to be a part of this wonderful event. A sign-up sheet for volunteers is also located on a table in the Narthex.

#### **Sparta United Methodist Youth Groups**

HAPPY NEW YEAR everyone!!!! The youth groups have just kicked off another exciting season here at Sparta UMC. I want to thank everyone for the warm welcome that I received the first few months that I was here. I have met so many wonderful people, and I am enjoying my time here. In this new season, the youth will have the chance to participate in a number of diverse activities: 30 Hour Famine, Lock-Ins, hiking, working at a soup kitchen, etc. I look forward to getting to know all the youth and their families even more as we march through 2010. The youth are also preparing for their summer mission trip to Washington D.C., open to all Junior and Senior High Youth. For more information about this exciting opportunity, contact Matthew.

##### **4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> Grade Youth**

**February 28-** Bowling @ Sparta Lanes- Meet at the church at 5:00

- We will bowl from 5:30-6:30

- Return to church by 7:00

##### **Junior High Youth**

**February 21-** Black History Month Movie Night and Discussion- 5:00-7:00

- We will be watching "The Color of Friendship"

**February 28-** Bowling @ Sparta Lanes- Meet at the church at 5:00

- We will bowl from 5:30-6:30

- Return to church by 7:00

##### **Senior High Youth**

**February 5-6-** Winter Lock IN\*\*\*\*- Meet at the church at 7:00

- Bring a snack to share, and dark clothes

- Leave at midnight for Laser 1, stay until 6:00

- Breakfast at 7:00, pick up at 8:00

- If time permits, we will watch "American History X - In honor of Black History Month

## MISSIONS

### **Justice and Mercy...from our basement**

The Church Mouse Thrift Shop continues to experience great growth each year. We are extending the areas of justice and mercy to our neighbors around the world. We have some figures for 2009.

The Church Mouse Disbursements through December 31, 2009, were as follows:

| Thrift Shop 2009 Disbursements                  | \$ Amount |
|---|-----------|
| Shared Ministries                               | 36,406.00 |
| Pastor Needy Fund                               | 3,500.00  |
| Furniture Ministries                            | 1,800.00  |
| United Methodist Home                           | 2,000.00  |
| Interfaith Hospitality Network                  | 2,860.00  |
| United Methodist Organization on Relief (UMCOR) | 4,000.00  |
| Sussex County People Help                       | 4,000.00  |
| Samaritan Inn                                   | 2,100.00  |
| CUMAC/ECHO (North Jersey Food Bank)             | 1,000.00  |
| Food Certificates                               | 3,600.00  |
| KEEP  | 2,860.00  |
| Sussex County Food Pantry                       | 1,950.00  |
| Habitat for Humanity                            | 1,450.00  |
| Nursery Care                                    | 2,000.00  |
| RISE (Youth Summer Mission Trip)                | 1,500.00  |
| Katie's House                                   | 1,000.00  |
| Camp YDP (Paterson after school program)        | 1,000.00  |
| Youth Ministries                                | 7,000.00  |
| Deficit Match                                   | 8,861.00  |
| Total   | 88,887.00 |

The remainder of the funds will be allocated at the next meeting of the Mission Committee and will be reported to you in the March Newsletter. During 2009 the Mouse granted a free \$20.00 certificate to those persons or families presenting appropriate documentation 375 times. This included persons shopping for clothing, household items, toys, etc. There were also members of DASI who received this service as did the IHN families who stayed at our church. We gave many items of clothing to one of our volunteers to distribute to needy in Honduras (she goes there on a mission trip each year); to the Hackettstown (Trinity Methodist Church) youth group to distribute to homeless people in Washington, D.C.; to the Sparta High School Cheer leading squad and to the High Point Midget Football program for their clothing drives; to the Regional Day School in Morris Plains for their developmentally handicapped students; and to the Apostles House in Newark. Also we shared some of our excess clothing with Project Self Sufficiency and the Bee Hive in Newton. Any excess donations were passed along to the Salvation Army and to other service agencies or areas of need. We also gave items to our own church school and church. The proceeds of this year's sales at the Mouse were \$89,577 (2008 income was \$72,238). The efforts of many people and God's blessings of our efforts have enabled the Church Mouse to be of service to God's children everywhere. Please join us in this mission. (We are in special need of some younger and some male volunteers. ☺)

### **Some Things That Happen at the Church Mouse Thrift Shop**

- Date: Jan. 7, 2010 -- This was the second day of the Bag Sale and the day of the week we give out coupons worth \$20.00 to persons in need.
- We had 11 persons getting coupons for the month for their families.
- We sold books (a bag-full or several) that are going to an inner city school in Baltimore.
- A woman came and selected some warm sweaters for a little boy who has no coat. That woman and her husband were able to get Teddy Bears free for 7 children just before Christmas.
- A woman found some dishes here to match her mother's pattern.

### **RAINBOWS**

The Sparta United Methodist Church will sponsor the winter/spring session of *Rainbows*, a program supporting children (kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> grade) of single-parent or step-parent family homes, at the Sparta United Methodist Church. Rainbows offers peer support along with the guidance of trained, caring adults who will listen and give youngsters a safe place to express their feeling about the changes in their family's dynamics. This may be a result of death of a parent, divorce, separation, or incarceration of a parent. The winter/spring session begins February 23, 2010, and ends March 30, 2010 (Tuesday evening meetings). If you would like to register your child for this program, please call Pat Johnson, 973-729-3233.

### ***HAITI EMERGENCY RESPONSE***

If you would like to make a donation to help the people of Haiti, you can make a check to Sparta United Methodist Church and mark it UMCOR Advance #418325 or just "For Haiti". One hundred percent of the gifts made to this Advance project will go to help the people of Haiti. For updates on our relief work for Haiti through the United Methodist Church check the website, <http://www.umc.org/haiti>. (UMCOR stands for United Methodist Committee on Relief)

### **UNITED METHODIST WOMEN NEWS**

The Sparta United Methodist Women Group is re-organizing. We have brought under the UMW umbrella several groups that have been functioning independently and we have created several new ones. We have deliberately called our group spirals to indicate our openness for all to participate. Please join us as much as you are able. Friends, visitors and men are always welcome.

#### **Healing Prayer Time**

Healing Prayer Time - Wednesday, Feb. 3, 11:15 a.m. to 11:45 a.m.

Healing Prayer Soup-Time, Wednesday, Feb. 3, 11:45 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Healing Prayer Time Adds Soup Afterwards

The monthly healing prayer time, held on the first Wednesday of each month at 11:15 a.m. will now be followed by soup! It is hoped that people who have joined for prayer can stay for a soup lunch together.

#### **Health Kits for Lent**

Throughout Lent UMW will be gathering the ingredients for health kits for Haiti. In future bulletins we will have the items that we need this congregation to start gathering. We are hoping you will help. There will be an ongoing need in Haiti--and even when that need is fulfilled, UMCOR (United Methodist Committee on Relief) will need replacement health kits for all the ones that have already been going to Haiti. Look in future bulletins. Look for the box on Ash Wednesday, February 17<sup>th</sup>. Be prepared to shop for the designated items. Be prepared to give from your hearts.

#### **UMW Book Group**

We meet monthly on the first Monday in the Wesley Room. from 10:00 a.m.-11:30 a.m. Please feel free to join us, whether or not you have read the entire book, for tea and conversation about these interesting topics.

Feb. 1<sup>st</sup> - Longing for Enough in a culture of More - by Paul Escamilla

March 1<sup>st</sup> - People of the Book - by Geraldine Brooks

April 5<sup>th</sup> (After Easter) - Cane River - by Lalita Tademy

Please e-mail Jenn Randazzo with questions at [jjmjsr@centurylink.net](mailto:jjmjsr@centurylink.net)

#### **UMW Spiral Leaders To Gather March 4**

All UMW leaders of spirals are encouraged to save the date of Feb. 4 from 7:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. for a special planning meeting and support for getting all the spirals off the ground.

#### **Want to Write? Come on!**

##### **Saturday, March 13**

There's a new opportunity to write your memoirs, stories for children, keep a journal or whatever you want to write. It is open to both women and men, even though it is sponsored by United Methodist Women. The leader is Ann Freeman Price who has led groups like this for the last 15 years in New City, New York and Cranford, New Jersey. The only charge is a \$5 donation each session to UMW's World Thank Offering. Come try it out from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. in the Wesley Room on March 13<sup>th</sup>.

Tea will be available but if you want coffee, bring your own. This is a supportive and encouraging group, so don't be frightened away.

### **CHURCH AND SOCIETY**

*The Church and Society Committee of Sparta United Methodist Church is connected to both the Conference and General Boards of Church and Society. It is the job of Church and Society at all these levels in the United Methodist Church to work on issues of social justice within the society.*

### **Church and Society Tackles Nuclear Disarmament**

One of the top priorities of the Sparta Church and Society Committee in 2010 is to support the call of our faith to eliminate nuclear weapons.

The United Methodist Church's Social Principles say: We believe that human values must outweigh military claims as governments determine their priorities; that the militarization of society must be challenged and stopped; that the manufacture, sale, and deployment of armaments must be reduced and controlled; and that the production, possession or use of nuclear weapons be condemned. Consequently, we endorse general and completed disarmament under strict and effective international control.

On September 24, 2009, President Obama called on the United Nations Security Council to approve a resolution to work for a world free of nuclear weapons. The Resolution was approved. For the United States, the next two steps to reduce and eliminate nuclear weapons are a new strategic arms treaty with Russia and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty---both requiring ratification by a two-thirds vote of the Senate (67 votes).

The Church and Society Committee will also advocate that significant resources that would have gone to support the nuclear arsenal be diverted to reduce world hunger.

Committee members invite you to work with them in the coming months to attend meetings, write letters, make phone calls, and sign petitions to our elected officials. If you would like to work on this issue with the Church and Society committee, please contact Ann Freeman Price, Litsa Binder or Pastor Diane.

#### Nuclear Disarmament Quote from President Obama

"The next 12 months will be absolutely critical in determining whether this resolution and our overall efforts to stop the spread and use of nuclear weapons are successful. And all nations must do their part to make this work. In America, I have promised that we will pursue a new agreement with Russia to substantially reduce our strategic warheads and launchers. We will move forward with the ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, and open the door to deeper cuts in our own arsenal. In January, we will call upon countries to begin negotiations on a treaty to end the production of fissile material for weapons. And the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference in May will strengthen that agreement."

#### Nuclear Disarmament Quote from President Reagan

"A nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought. And no matter how great the obstacles may seem, we must never stop our efforts to reduce the weapons of war. We must never stop until all --- we must never stop at all until we see the day when nuclear arms have been banished from the face of the Earth."

### **Alternative Christmas Gift Cards Support Three Organizations**

Throughout Advent, Church and Society sold Alternative Christmas Gift Cards which gave individuals the opportunity to send a card to someone and let them know that in their name you had contributed money to one of three organizations. This year 99 cards were sold at \$5.00 each and the organizations received the following amounts:

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) - \$130.00

United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) - \$205.00

Doctor's Without Borders - \$160.00

This is the fifth year that cards have been sold. The experience of people who have sent them is that their friends are surprised and flattered to be thought of in such a way.

### **Reorganizing Underway at Sparta Church Library**

Now we have a real librarian! Janice Mundi has stepped up to be in charge of the Sparta Library and she and Ann Freeman Price are working hard to put the regular Dewey Decimal System numbers on the books. When that is complete the books will all be shuffled around and re-filed according to those numbers. Feel free to keep borrowing books and we'll catch up with all of them eventually. Here are new books in the narthex:

In Search of Angels---A Celestial Sourcebook for Beginning Your Journey by David Connolly. This book acknowledges that for more than 3,000 years, angels have been an enduring presence in traditional religious texts are in secular folklore. This is an introduction to the celestial world.

Uncommon Prayer---A Book of Psalms by Daniel Berrigan. In this book Berrigan has taken 42 of the psalms and rewoven their themes into contemporary poetry and prayer. The accompanying woodcut illustrations are worth the opening of the book.

Two John Wesley related books:

Devotional Life in the Wesleyan Tradition by Steve Harper. Dr. Harper hopes with this book to contribute to Wesley Studies and also to your own spiritual formation.

John Wesley's Little Instruction Book---A classic treasury of timeless wisdom and reflection. You can dip a finger in each day and learn something about John Wesley. For instance, did you know that he wrote 7,270 hymns?

The Bible from Scratch---the Old Testament for Beginners by Donald L. Griggs.

The Bible from Scratch---the New Testament for Beginners by Donald L. Griggs. Both of these books take you through either the Old or New Testament in whirlwind fashion. Each book has both a Leader's Guide and a Participants Guide so read some of both and come out with some things you never knew before.

Kneeling in Jerusalem by Ann Weems. It's poetry and it's profound.

God Said It, Don't Sweat It---How to keep life's petty hassles from overwhelming you by Neil Clark Warren. On the back of the book it says: "(this book) helps you see things in the right light. You'll learn to put your energy where it will do the most good and discover the power of passionate prayer."

The Blessing Workbook---Your 5-step, interactive plan for finding and sharing genuine acceptance by Gary Smalley & John Trent. There evidently is a book titled "The Blessing" by the same two authors and this is the workbook. However, in my quick perusal of it, I think it can also stand alone and you can be the beneficiary.

Calmly Plotting the Resurrection by Donna E. Schaper. This is a book to read during Lent. Do it even if you have to start in the middle.

Helping a Neighbor in Crisis---How to encourage when you don't know what to say, by Charles Colson. Here you have tips of how to respond to a difficult situation and how to help and encourage.

## **CONFERENCE NEWS**

### **Summer Jobs**

Summer jobs at Aldersgate and Pinelands Camps are available. Contact Matthew Querns, program director, by phone, 520-904-1404, or his email address, [aldersgatecenter@gmail.com](mailto:aldersgatecenter@gmail.com).

## **Basic Lay Speaking Classes - Spring 2010**

Basic Lay Speaker courses are being offered again this spring. A LAY SPEAKER is a member of a local church or charge who is ready and desirous to serve the Church and who is well informed on the Scriptures and the doctrine, heritage, organization and the life of the United Methodist Church and who has received specific training to develop skills in witnessing to the Christian faith through spoken communication, church and community leadership and care-giving ministries. An applicant must be active in the support of his/her local church or charge. For more information including locations and registration visit [communications@gnjumc.org/Basic Lay Speaking Spring 2010](mailto:communications@gnjumc.org/Basic Lay Speaking Spring 2010).

## **DISTRICT NEWS**

### **Skylands District Day of Learning February 20, 2010**

The Skylands District Day of Learning will be held at the First United Methodist Church, 111 Ryerson Ave., Newton, NJ. You may pick up a brochure from the church office with the information and registration form. The registration form is due Feb. 12, 2010. You may mail it in or bring it to our church office. Please call Kristi, 973-729-7773 if you have questions. Check-in begins at 9:00 a.m. with Gathering Worship beginning at 9:30 a.m. Session I: 10:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.; Session II: 1:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m. Please bring a bag lunch.

### **Skylands District Resource Day**

***Monday, March 1, 2010***

***Clergy 9:00 am - 4:00 pm; Laity 7:00 - 9:00 pm***

***Parsippany UMC, Parsippany, NJ***

***Rev. Rebecca Laird: Spiritual Formation***