



THE GOOD NEWS

March 2010

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

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Many people of faith say with conviction that there are no such things as coincidences. Recently a church member described unusual coincidences as “miracles in which God wants to remain anonymous”. (or something like that). Whatever phrases we choose to use, we all seem to be aware of the fact that unusual events take place that are so unique, so unlikely and blessed that they can’t be just coincidences. I call them God incidents.

Recently our daughter Robin emailed from South Korea saying that she had made a wonderful new friend named Carrie. This young lady is married to a fellow musician in her band. She is Korean American, having been adopted and raised in the USA, Minnesota to be specific. As she and Robin talked, they discovered that they had been raised in the same neighborhood in Minneapolis and were both United Methodists. The discussion continued. When they realized that they went to the same church, Robin exclaimed, “My mother was one of the pastors at that church!” Then Robin asked Carrie for her maiden name, which is Lindberg. They suddenly realized that they had been childhood playmates! They attended each other’s birthday parties, swam at the pool at the Lindberg house with all the neighborhood kids (the parsonage, unfortunately, didn’t have a pool), played with our beagle Ollie, had tricycle races around the block, etc, etc and so forth. The memories came flooding back to them from preschool days when they were best buddies.

Needless to say, when both young women called their parents to share their discovery, we just about fell off our chairs. I have already been back in touch with my friends and former parishioners Rick and Claudia Lindberg. All four of us had the same response to the news from our daughters: this is too much of a coincidence to be a coincidence! Now we have all been reunited through our daughters, and through the grace of God.

Join me on Easter Sunday morning to share God incidents, faith experiences and resurrection events in our lives. It will be an extension of our sharing and celebration time during worship. By sharing our stories, we encourage each other and strengthen our faith as a community and as individuals. From what may seem like a simple coincidence to a full blown healing and transformation experience, the power of God that raised Jesus from the grave is with us still. Praise be to God.

Shalom,

Pastor Diane Koob

SPARTA UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
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HOLY WEEK AT SPARTA UMC

Palm/ Passion Sunday Worship

March 28, 8:30 & 10:30 a.m.

Includes the Children's Parade of Palms at the beginning of the 10:30 service and an Easter Egg Hunt afterwards in the church's backyard

Holy (Maundy) Thursday Service

April 1, 7:30 p.m.

Commune in small groups around the altar table.

Twenty Four Hour Prayer Vigil

Thursday, April 1, begins at 8:30 p.m.

Sign up in the vestibule area.

Good Friday Service

April 2, 7:30 p.m.

Based on The Lord's Prayer and including liturgical dance

Easter Sunday Worship Services

April 4, 8:30 & 10:30 a.m.

The services will be identical with the choir at both services and special music.

ADULT FAITH ENRICHMENT

All the Adult Faith Enrichment classes on Sunday mornings begin at 9:15 a.m.

FEBRUARY 28 – MARCH 7, JESUS FOR THE NON-RELIGIOUS

Our new two week study will be led by Professor James Sodt based on Bishop Spong's Jesus for the Non-Religious. No preparation necessary. Just come for a short DVD and discussion.

COMING MARCH 14, Two Classes Offered

1. "Living the Questions: Jesus and the Kingdom of God"

We will have a study on "Living the Questions: Jesus and the Kingdom of God" by Marcus Borg (Biblical scholar). Journey on location throughout the Galilee & Jerusalem with world's leading Jesus scholars. No preparation necessary. Just come for short DVD and discussion. The study will be led by Bud Larson.

2. "Nuclear Disarmament"

Litsa Binder will lead a discussion on the issue of nuclear disarmament. More information to be announced.

EASTER FAITH ALIVE

There will be a special adult study on Easter Sunday, April 4th during which selected individuals will share their "Resurrection" stories. If you have a story you would like to share as a testimony to God's grace, please contact Pastor Diane.

ADULT BOOK STUDIES

The Monday Night Book Study

The book study is held in the Wesley Room on Monday evenings from 7:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. We are discussing Henri Nouwen's book Here and Now: Living in the Spirit. This is a book of meditations about how God touches our everyday lives. Rev. Diane Koob is the facilitator. Everyone is welcome to attend. Class will be cancelled Monday night, March 1st in order for people to attend the District Resource Day on Spiritual Formation.

CHILDREN MINISTRIES

Good Cheer Day for Knoll Village and Knoll Heights

One of the mission activities for children every year is a visit to senior citizens, many of whom are home bound permanently or for the winter months. We bring cards, flowers and the “joy” of a surprise, day brightening visit. Call Stephanie Coombs, Education Committee Chairperson for details. (973-726-4584 home / 973-464-7783 cell)

Parade of Palms

The annual Parade of Palms for pre-kindergarten – 5th graders will be held Sunday, March 28th at the beginning of the 10:30 worship service. Please have your children meet their teachers in their classrooms to receive their palms and line up for the parade. These children will sit with their parents/families after the parade, so leave a little room in the pews.

Annual Easter Egg Hunt

The annual Easter Egg Hunt will be held for children (pre-school – Junior High) after the 10:30 a.m. worship service on Sunday, March 28th. Again, look for information in the Sunday worship bulletin or call Stephanie. (see above)

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.

CONGRATULATIONS TO MATT!!

The Staff Parish Relations Committee interviewed Matthew Querns and then recommended him to our Church Council to become a “certified”, that is an “official” candidate for ordained ministry in the United Methodist Church. We held a special Church Conference before our monthly Council meeting to affirm that recommendation Wednesday, February 24th. Now Matt will be assigned a mentor from among the clergy in the district (Skylands) and work with the District Committee on ordained ministry. He will need recommendation from our SPRC and our Church Conference annually until he is commissioned and, finally ordained. His commissioning and ordination can be attended by as many of us as want to attend. In the meantime, a pat on the back is in order.

YOUTH MINISTRIES

I want to begin by thanking everyone again for their strong support of the youth at their First Annual Spud Bowl. With 25 youth working hard we raised \$600, and we are well on our way to sending 22 people on the mission trip this summer- FOR FREE. Winter may have added a chill to the air, but not to the power at Sparta UMC. Let no one say that there are no youth here, and let no one say that Sparta UMC does not support their youth! With more exciting events coming in March and with the level of interest rising, the youth ministry at Sparta UMC is truly blessed... THANKS BE TO GOD!

Matthew Querns, Director of Youth Ministries

4th/5th Grade Youth Event

March 6- All Church Ski Trip- See the easel in the entry of the church for more details
- While this is an event for all youth groups, all the families are invited to this all church event.



Junior High Youth Events

March 6- All Church Ski Trip- See the easel in the entry of the church for more details
- While this is an event for all youth groups, all the families are invited to this all church event.

March 20- Soup Kitchen Service Project- Details TBA

Senior High Youth Events

March 6- All Church Ski Trip- See the easel in the entry of the church for more details
- While this is an event for all youth groups, all the families are invited to this all church event.

March 21- Bowling @ Sparta Lanes- Meet at the church at 5:00
- We will bowl from 5:30-6:30
- Return to church by 7:00

MISSIONS

Prayer Chain

The prayer chain continues to lift many persons and situations to God and his grace. Currently we are in the midst of our yearly revision/additions to the links in our chain. We are a telephone/email group. If you are interested in being a part of the group who prays for those who request many kinds of prayer, please let Wilma Smith know, 973-729-4740.

Prayer

From: John Regenos (jregenos@gmail.com)

Someone has said if Christians really understood the full extent of the power we have available through prayer, we might be speechless. Did you know that during World War II there was an advisor to Churchill who organized a group of people who dropped what they were doing every day at a prescribed hour for one minute to collectively pray for the safety of England, its people, and peace?

There is now a group of people organizing the same thing here in America. If you would like to participate: Every evening at 900 p.m. Eastern Time (8:00 PM Central, 7:00 PM Mountain, 6:00 PM Pacific), stop whatever you are doing and spend one minute praying for the safety of the United States, our troops, our citizens, and for a return to a Godly nation. If you know anyone else who would like to participate, please pass this along. Our prayers are the most powerful asset we have. PLEASE FORWARD TO YOUR BELIEVING FRIENDS!

RAINBOWS

The Sparta United Methodist Church will sponsor the winter/spring session of *Rainbows*, a program supporting children (kindergarten through 8th 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 monetary 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.

UMW Spiral Leaders To Gather March 4

All UMW leaders of spirals are encouraged to save the date of March 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.

Healing Prayer Time

Healing Prayer Time – Wednesday, March 3, 11:15 a.m. – 11:45 a.m.

Healing Prayer Soup Time – Wednesday, March 3, 11:45 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

The monthly healing prayer time, held on the first Wednesday of each month at 11:45 a.m. will now be followed by soup! It is hoped that people who have joined for prayer can stay for a lunch together.

Health Kits for Haiti and UMCOR (United Methodist Committee on Relief) To Be Collected for Lent

Starting with Ash Wednesday, United Methodist Women will have a box in the narthex for items for Health Kits to be sent to Haiti, or to be sent to replenish the kits now being sent to Haiti. Please remember that all items must be NEW items. It is also important that kits contain only the requested items. Donations can also be made; checks should be made out to Sparta United Methodist Women. In the memo section be sure to write Haiti Health Kits.

Items for kits:

1 hand towel (15"x25" up to 17"x27". No kitchen towels)

1 washcloth

1 comb (large and sturdy---not pocket-sized)

1 nail file or fingernail clippers (no emery boards or toenail clippers)

1 bath-size bar of soap (3 ounces and up)

1 toothbrush (single brushes only in original wrapper. No child-size brushes)

Each kit needs an accompanying two dollars. Carry the list with you, so that when you are at the store you can pick up something and bring it to church during Lent.

UMW Book Club

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.

Upcoming readings:

March 1st - People of the Book - by Geraldine Brooks

April 5th (After Easter) - Cane River - by Lalita Tademy

Please contact Jen Randazzo for more information at jjmjsr@centurylink.net.

New Writing Group Starts Up on Saturday, March 13

No matter what you write or what you want to write, there's a place for you in the new writing group meeting Saturday, March 13, Wesley Room from 9:30 to 11:30am. Both women and men are encouraged to come. This is an opportunity to write your memoirs, stories for children, poetry, or keep a journal. Anything you choose to write will fit in this group which is designed to be supportive and encouraging.

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. Tea will be available but if you want coffee, bring your own.

*Contact Ann @ 973-383-5014 if you are interested in the group, but unable to attend on Saturday. If there are enough people, we may decide to have 2 groups meeting monthly, one on a weekday and one on a Saturday.

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.

As Christians who believe Jesus is the Prince of Peace, 2010 provides us with the opportunity to address the global concerns of poverty and war. The following is the Peace with Justice 2010 legislative and action agenda of the General Board of Church and Society. The Church and Society Committee, here at our church, will provide our congregation with timely information about each of these issues and invite you to participate by taking action.

The major interconnected issues are Global Poverty, War, and Nuclear Weapons. Hundreds of billions are spent every year for war and nuclear weapons. More than one billion people in the world live on less than \$1 a day. Another 2.7 billion struggle to survive on less than \$2 per day. Chronic hunger affects more than 800 million people in the world. By reducing expenditures for war and nuclear weapons, we can expand resources to overcome global poverty and provide true security. Legislation in the U.S. Congress intended to promote peace with justice in 2010 includes:

Ø Trade Reform, Accountability, Development & Employment (Trade) Act (HR 3012/S 2821) - The act reshapes U.S. trade policy by requiring enforceable labor, environmental, and health and safety standards in trade agreements. It calls for trade policies and agreements to contribute to people's livelihoods, sustainable development, and the alleviation of poverty.

Ø The Jubilee Act (HR 4005) - The bill expands life-giving debt cancellation to 22 additional impoverished countries left out of previous debt relief deals.

Ø Global Health Strategy and Global Food Security - The Obama administration is working on these initiatives that may require congressional legislation.

Ø Global Education Campaign - With 72 million children out of school, the world's poorest countries urgently need a global financing initiative that can deliver the resources to make education for all a reality.

Ø End the War in Afghanistan – Support a congressional resolution that requires the administration to present to Congress a plan for the safe withdrawal of all U.S. armed forces from Afghanistan.

Ø Promote Peace between Israel and Palestine - Support President Obama's diplomatic efforts to negotiate a peace agreement between Israel and Palestine.

Ø Nuclear Weapons Free World – Urge the U.S. Senate to consider legislation to ratify the START Treaty to reduce the number of U.S. and Russian nuclear weapons and a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty to ban nuclear weapons testing.

We invite your questions or comments. You are also invited to attend our committee meetings and work with us on any of these issues. During coffee hour on Sunday, January 24, twenty-two members of our congregation signed the General Board of Church and Society message to President Obama to make alleviating poverty a national priority.

Thank you!!!

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.

DISTRICT NEWS

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

R.S.V.P. to Church Office or Pastor Diane

Laity who are free are welcome to join our pastor for the day session. She will accompany laity who want to attend in the evening as well.

Monday Evening Book Study on Henri Nouwen will be cancelled and resume March 8th.

The UMW Book Study will still be held in the morning from 10:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.
(see UMW news)