



THE GOOD NEWS

MAY 2010

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

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

I received a cold call from someone named Sandra last week. It was one of the more interesting calls that have come into the office as of late. Kristi was gone for the day, so answering the phone meant interrupting my concentration on a project. Something (the Spirit) nudged me to take this particular call even though it's often easier to finish my task, check for messages and call back later. I answered the phone.

On the other end of the line was a very frustrated woman calling because she had tried to reach someone at every other church or self help organization in the area. No one had been available to listen or even take a message. I regret to say that my first reaction was to be suspicious. I assumed this would be another long, sob story from someone who wanted money and would push or manipulate to get it without providing a verifiable story. Unfortunately, there are cons who work the churches.

Sandra's concern was finding help in order to help someone else! She and her husband wanted to help a young woman for whom they could provide room and board while she worked to complete her education. They had already taken in a number of people who were sent to them by word of mouth, or whom they discovered by contacting different agencies. They had had positive and negative experiences, but they continued to feel led by God to offer this kind of assistance.

It all started when they decided to help someone their daughter met while waitressing over the summer months before leaving for college. This young co-worker could not afford college but dreamed of getting an education and making something of her life. Sandra and her husband took her in and have continued doing this ever since. Their latest house guest graduates this spring and has landed a job already. They started making calls a few weeks ago. They even tried Project Self Sufficiency, but to no avail. I promised to call the director myself and let her know about Sandra's situation. Obviously she had fallen through the cracks. I will share the story with other clergy at our clergy fellowship gatherings. First of all, however, I want to share this news with you as God's faithful people.

When someone reaches me and our church with a genuine need for assistance, I believe we must do our best to respond. I think God was reminding me of that in no uncertain terms! With a vast number of calls and church activities going on, I believe it is still important to stop, listen to a stranger, and heed a plea for help. One of my mentors told me repeatedly that ministry is in the interruptions. It would have been easier not to pick up the phone, not to take the time to listen, and not to follow up. I would have missed an opportunity and an inspiration.

Please pray and mention Sandra's story to others. You may know someone, who knows someone, who knows someone,..etc. We just never know how God will use us. By the way, I have forgotten what project was occupying my attention that afternoon. It couldn't have been so very important after all.

Shalom,

Pastor Diane

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WORSHIP

NATIONAL PRAYER DAY HOSTED BY THE SPARTA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH THURSDAY, MAY 6TH AT NOON

In recognition and in honor of the National Day of Prayer, there will be a gathering around the flagpole in the courtyard at the First Presbyterian Church of Sparta (32 Main Street) on Thursday, May 6 at Noon. The Blessed Beginnings Kindergartners will lead us in song. Please come and pray with us for our town, our state and our nation. All are welcome.

MOTHERS' DAY YOUTH SERVICE

See notes from Matt in the youth news. This is something new for our congregation. All the women of the church will receive carnations in thanks for the nurturing and mothering they have done either with their own children or others.

PENTECOST AND NEW MEMBERS' RECEPTION May 23rd DURING THE SERVICES

Remember to wear red and to stay for refreshments following the 10:30 a.m. service on this special day.

ADULT FAITH ENRICHMENT

SUNDAY CLASSES

New Member Classes – 9:15 a.m. will continue on Sunday, May 2nd, (focusing on Spiritual Gifts) and Sunday, May 16th (focusing on the meaning of membership). There will be NO class on Mother's Day, May 9th.

“Living the Questions: Jesus and the Kingdom of God” by Marcus Borg (Biblical Scholar) in Room #8 led by Bud Larson and Jim Sodt.

BOOK STUDY

Monday Night Adult Book Study, 7:30 PM in the Wesley Room – We will begin a new study May 3rd on the book Original Blessing by Matthew Fox.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH MINISTRIES

Well, the summer is nearing, and Youth Group will soon slow down; however, before then, we still have a few things left to do. I want to thank everyone for helping to make the Winter/Spring season of Youth Group exciting. Our events of fellowship and service have caused a lot of good things in this community to happen. Our goal has been to not just to read the gospel, but to live it! Our next Mission Trip fundraiser will be a dinner out on Wednesday, May 12 at Applebees in Newton. Applebees will donate a portion of their final bill to us that night from anyone who eats there and tells them that they are there to support Sparta UMC's Mission Trip. **SPREAD THE WORD AND JOIN US FOR DINNER!!!!**

Also, I am excited to announce the beginning of what I hope will become a Sparta UMC tradition. On Mother's Day, May 9th, we will have a Youth Sunday: a worship service led by our youth. The goal of this service is to show them that the pulpit, worship, and ministry is a call very much given to youth as well as adults. Youth will greet, usher, worship lead, serve communion, and much more. I hope you will join us for this special day when we celebrate mothers and our youth!

4th/5th Grade Youth Event

May 23- End of the Year Pool Party

- Location TBA

- Bring yourself, a friend, and snacks to share as we say hello to the summer season.
- Bring games, soccer balls, footballs, and anything else to enjoy the outdoors
- 5:00-7:00

Junior High Youth Events

May 9- Youth Sunday

May 22- End of the Year Pool Party

- Location TBA
- Bring yourself, a friend, and snacks to share as we say hello to the summer season.
- Bring games, soccer balls, footballs, and anything else to enjoy the outdoors
- 3:00-5:00

Senior High Youth Events

May 9- Youth Sunday

May 22- End of the Year Pool Party

- Location TBA
- Bring yourself, a friend, and snacks to share as we say hello to the summer season.
- Bring games, soccer balls, footballs, and anything else to enjoy the outdoors
- 5:30-7:30

“GALLACTIC BLAST!” **July 19th – July 23rd, 2010**

Come join us for “Galactic Blast!”, our Vacation Bible School program this year. It 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, Jen Randazzo will lead our dedicated group in organizing this very successful children's program. Our director for the past two years, Debbie Dickerson, is stepping down; she will remain an active volunteer and will help the organizational team in planning the event. Many thanks to Debbie for her hard work and devotion to this ministry. If you feel called to be part of this wonderful event, a volunteer sign-up sheet is located on a table in the narthex.

MUSIC MINISTRIES

Music and Food: What more could anyone want? 4:00 p.m. Saturday, May 15th at Newton UMC

Nourish your soul and body with the best Methodist combination known to humankind: MUSIC and a POTLUCK! With all the tragedy in the news lately, The Sparta and Newton United Methodist Churches are anxious to help those who are facing the greatest challenges. Our combined choirs will present a concert of sacred music at 4:00 p.m., Saturday, May 15th in Newton UMC. The concert will be followed by a pot-luck supper. Musical selections will include works of traditional and contemporary composers, colorful instrumentation and the vocal power of forty singers under the direction of Rich Kelley and Richard Harley. You can expect to hear our bell choirs, hymn-singing, solos, and anthems interspersed with scripture readings that follow the seasons of the year. The entire free will offering will go to UMCOR, which will see that it does the most good in Haiti.

United Methodist Churches are connectional, meaning we are in ministry together. Our churches share Matt, our youth director, and combined youth activities at which any youth are welcome. Now our music directors have begun to collaborate in order to reach more people with the rich and evolving music tradition of the Christian faith. You do not need to be a member of either church or any church. If you love good music, come.

We hope to see all of you Saturday, May 15th at 4:00 p.m. in Newton UMC. Potluck details will be in future Sunday bulletins.

SAVE THE DATE! MAY 8TH ALL CHURCH CLEAN-UP DAY, 9:00 AM

The Trustees are coordinating the all church clean-up day. Call Vinnie Castaldi (973-729-1720) with project ideas and Tom Ingala (973-729-9909) our interim Trustee chairperson with your R.S.V.P. so we will have a head count.

UNITED METHODIST WOMEN

United Methodist Women Celebration on May 15th with guest speakers from CUMAC ECHO

There will be a United Methodist Women celebration on May 15 at 9:30 a.m. We will be celebrating the work of the various UMW spirals. "Spiral" is the word we are using at Sparta UMW to indicate the outward movement of the various UMW groups. There are nine spirals---Book Spiral, Food Coupon "Spiral", Writing Spiral, Manna House Spiral, Holy Hookers Spiral, Children's Faith Journal Spiral, Healing Prayer Spiral, Kitchen Spiral, and CUMAC-ECHO Spiral. (largest UMW food pantry and collection center for the poor) Our guest speakers, Lynne Bruger, CUMAC Development Director and Stephanie Ames, Volunteer Coordinator from CUMAC-ECHO, will be present to talk about that organization in Patterson, NJ and how we might be involved. So come for some good food, fine fellowship, and intriguing information.

Writing Group Meets Saturday, May 8 To Read Writing

The Writing Group, sponsored by United Methodist Women, will meet for the third time on Saturday, May 8 at 9:30 a.m. in Room 8. There still are a couple of open spots so try us out. The group is open to both women and men and is a chance for you to write what you want to write. Some are writing family histories, some are writing because they feel better if they write. Some are writing because they can't help it. Ann Freeman Price is the leader of the group and has led similar groups for fifteen years in New City, NY; Nyack, NY; and Cranford, NJ. The charge is a \$5.00 donation each session to the World Thank Offering for United Methodist Women---which funds mission programs for women and children all over the world. Tea is available but if you want coffee, bring your own. If you have questions call Ann at 973-383-5014 or email her at annfreemanprice@embarqmail.com

UMW Book Group Meets Monday, May 10 To Discuss Three Cups of Tea

You may not actually drink three cups of tea at the book group on May 10 but you'll certainly enjoy the discussion about this book by Greg Mortenson. At the end of each discussion we collect change that goes to Mortenson's group for building schools in Afghanistan. That collection is called "Change for Change." Join us at 9:30 a.m. whether you've read the book or not.

The June book is Sarah's Key by Tatiana DeRosnay on Monday, June 14.

Library Column Again Check These Out !

Who Switched the Price Tags---To get the most out of life we must put first things first by Tony Campolo. Check this one out just for the heartwarming stories.

Here and Now---Living in the Spirit by Henri Nouwen. On the jacket it says, Henri Nouwen shows in a personal and insightful way that God is much closer to us than we usually realize.

Love Poems from God---Twelve Sacred Voices from the East and West translated by Daniel Ladinsky. Try to get this one before I do---it has poems from Rumi, St. Francis of Assisi (did you know he wrote poetry?), St. Teresa of Avila, and nine others.

FaithWalk---A Daily Journey Through the Bible by Woodrow Kroll and Tony Beckett. If you're looking for a "daily" book---something to read each day, try this one out. But maybe not keep it for the whole year.

Oneness---Great Principles Shared by All Religions by Jeffrey Moses. Ever wonder when it comes to speaking truth what Christianity, Judaism, and Buddhism have to say? And there are quotes from more religions than just those three.

Out of the Ordinary---Prayers, poems and reflections for every season by Joyce Rupp. You don't get any more dependable for inspiration than Joyce Rupp.

A Bucket Full of Miracles---Preaching the miracles, Cycle A by Jeff Wedge. You may not be preparing a sermon, but it's an interesting read anyway, and you might just try putting a sermon together.

Two Curriculums are featured this month. You can do them on your own.

1. Voluntary Simplicity by Northwest Earth Institute. This study book may help you do your spring cleaning.
2. Capital Punishment---A Faith-Based Study by Hunter P. Mabry. If you're not sure where you stand on this issue, this study may help you find out.

UMW Thanks You For Your Health Kit Contributions

During Lent we collected health kits and donations. Last week we successfully sent off 28 complete kits to UMCOR, via the Conference UMW Spring Meeting. We also sent to the UMW General Assembly six knitted baby blankets which will be added to the more than four thousand that have come in. All thanks to you.

CHURCH AND SOCIETY

2010 the Crucial Year for Nuclear Disarmament

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.

Our denomination says: We support initiatives in every part of the world that move toward the goal of disarmament. ... We affirm the prophetic position of our bishops who said in their statement *In Defense of Creation*: "We say a clear and unconditional 'NO' to nuclear war and to any use of nuclear weapons." ... Possession [of nuclear weapons] can no longer be tolerated, even as a temporary expedient ("The United Methodist Church & Peace," #6094, 2008 *Book of Resolutions*).

The good news:

- President Obama and Russian President Medvedev recently signed a new *Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty*. The United States and Russia own 95 per cent of the world's nuclear weapons. If ratified by the Senate, the treaty will reduce the number of deployed nuclear weapons in each country's arsenal. 67 Senate votes are needed to ratify the treaty.
- President Obama has said he will ask the Senate to ratify the *Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty*. This treaty would prohibit the US and every other signatory from conducting test explosions of nuclear weapons anywhere on planet. The treaty was signed in 1996 by 182 countries. However, it needs to be ratified by 44 specific countries to go into force. 35 of the 44 countries have ratified it. The countries that have not ratified it include: China, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Israel and the United States. 67 Senate votes are needed to ratify the treaty.
- May, 2010 - The *Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty* prohibits countries from transferring or acquiring nuclear weapons. It is coming up for review in May at the United Nations. This gives President Obama another opportunity to advance nuclear disarmament.

Nuclear Disarmament is a nonpartisan issue. Key Republican and Democratic statesmen, such as Henry Kissinger, George Schultz, Collin Powell, and Sam Nunn are working together to promote nuclear disarmament. These statesmen are featured in the recently release documentary "The Nuclear Tipping Point" which we will show at our church in May.

On May 2, thousands of people from around the world will come together to New York City to demand a world without nuclear weapons. The Mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki will lead a march from Times Square to the United Nations where a peace and music festival will be held. Millions of people around the world have signed a petition asking for the abolition of nuclear weapons.

Our Church and Society Committee has been working on this issue with the August 9th Saving Lives Task Force, a partnership of faith-based, interfaith and secular organizations. We have met with Senators Menendez and Lautenberg and Congressman Frelinghuysen. We will also meet with Congressman Garrett. Sometime in May, we will ask you to call your senators on this issue. If you would like to work with our committee on this issue, please let us know.

We thank all of you from our congregation who signed and collected signatures on the petition. Imagine the billions of dollars spent on nuclear weapons being spent on humanitarian, social and environmental needs.

Quote for your thinking-----from Sparta Church and Society Committee:

In the late 1970's there was an Episcopal bishop from the Midwest who was pleased to be invited to a national symposium on world hunger. It was being held in Westchester, New York at a posh conference center. The bishop found himself conflicted. He wanted to attend the symposium and have input on some of the recommendations for action. And yet he objected to the setting and felt it to be at odds with the subject matter. Finally, he decided to go and sent in his registration, indicating that he would not need housing. Instead he took a tent and pitched it on the grounds of the conference center as a visible sign of the inconsistency.

MISSIONS

Our church supports missions of every sort and kind, both local, and across the country and world. We provide special opportunities for the congregation to provide additional giving whether it is for Haiti or any other emergency. As the year continues, the Missions Team will be sharing more information about our church's participation Shared Ministries (giving that is automatically shared with all other United Methodist Churches), Advanced Specials (a variety of specific missions which any church may choose to support in addition to the Shared Ministries), and VIM (opportunities for church members to participate in missions through the United Methodist General Board of Missions). Look at the Missions/Church and Society bulletin board on your way to coffee for information about our giving as a church. Recently we have donated to local, community programs and to our United Methodist Homes. We have received thank you notes from UMCOR (United Methodist Committee on Relief) for Haiti, Nothing But Nets, and the Heifer Project. We also received a personal thank you from someone who really appreciated one of our afghans. As the "thank you" notes and letters come in, we will post them. See all the good we are able to do together!

PS Thanks to everyone who participated in the IHN (Interfaith Hospitality Network) effort the beginning of April. Some of our church members got together and even threw a birthday party, complete with cake and presents, for an eleven year old girl who was staying here with her family. It may well be the only birthday party she has ever had.

FINANCIAL UPDATE

Saturday morning, April 24th, the Church Council met with our Finance Chair, Bud Larson, to review end of the year figures for 2009 and to give final acceptance for a budget for 2010.

The good news is that, facing a \$48,000.00 deficit, we ended the year with a \$5,200 deficit, and we have a good balance in the church account for general expenses. The challenge will be to do as well or better next year. Per force, we have had to adopt another budget with a deficit for the current year unless we want to cut program or staff. We are going to explore fund raising effort. We are expecting the installation of solar panels will lower our energy expenses and we will continue to work with groups that use the building to increase their donations or contribute in some other way, like assistance with classroom cleaning and gardening/landscaping work. Although we continue to grow in numbers, pledges overall are lower. We are rebuilding the evangelism committee which will explore church growth dynamics and continue to try to correct the deficit cycle as best we can.

Many thanks to Bud, our finance chairperson, to Diane Gelone, our treasurer, Martha Berghan, our finance secretary, Steve Magnotta our stewardship chairperson, and to all of our church members and friends who helped us come through 2009 financially stable and healthy. Let's have a repeat performance in 2010!

Pastor Diane

**DISTRICT CONFERENCE ON SATURDAY, MAY 22nd 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM.
Newfoundland United Methodist Church**

Pastor Diane invites church leaders and members to join her for this conference to learn about the issues to be discussed at Annual Conference in June. This is an opportunity to become better informed about the workings of the larger church, and a chance to mingle with clergy and lay people from our sister congregations here in the Skylands District. Please call the pastor if you would like to attend with her.