

December
2011
&
January
2012

The Good News



SPARTA UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, 71 Sparta Ave., Sparta, NJ 07871



“Not Ordinary”

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Christmas is meant to alter the way we view life. We step out of our ordinary routine and time schedule in order to do things in a different way. We bring trees into our houses, decorate inside and out at the coldest and most inconvenient time of the year, buy and exchange presents, see friends and family, give gifts to strangers, and forgo our regular diets. In our worship life we have a period called "ordinary time". Christmas season is not ordinary time. It is sacred, special time. We wear silly hats or clothes, sing carols, and generally grant ourselves permission to step outside the daily norm in order to celebrate the birth of Christ. This helps us return to the ordinary or commonplace with refreshed spirits and see things from the vantage point of eternity.

It is a little like being young and climbing trees or lying on the ground just looking at the trees or the clouds. This exercise transports us to another place by changing our perspective. The clouds can take on various shapes, like animals or other objects.



They continue to transform themselves in a never ending spectacle of surprise. This simple observation can go on for hours with no sense of the passage of time. It's a little bit like visiting an imaginary planet. Afterwards we need to stand up, reorient ourselves and walk about as usual, but we always take a part of the change of view with us.

Many people like to sail for long periods of time, altering their entire relationship with the land. Since the sea is so expansive, and reading sea maps so different from road maps, it is easy to develop a different orientation, rhythm and way of walking that involves being in constant motion. We grow sea legs. Coming back to land, everything feels a little strange; finding our balance can take some time. All that has happened is that we became sea creatures rather than land creatures for a while. We bring a bit of the sea world back with us, however. We don't forget that other life we have experienced.



So it's healthy to experience life differently every so often. That's why I think Christmas needs to be celebrated to the fullest degree possible. It provides us with one of those opportunities to look at everyone and everything with fresh eyes. When we hear the stories we remember that human history will never be the same because of Christ's coming. When we slow down enough to recognize that our personal lives will never be the same because of His coming. We acknowledge this by changing things around a bit as I mentioned already. We crawl on the floor with babies and talk silly babble; we set up train sets or small villages and play with toys becoming like children once again. Personally I always like to lie under the Christmas tree at least once every Christmas season in order to take the cat's point of view on things. The sight, if you've never seen it, is a splendor of light dancing off of ornaments in a kind of fairy tale forest. Like looking at the clouds, we can be transported temporarily. Lighting candles in church, singing the carols and turning things upside down a bit teaches again that we are creatures of wonder, that life is beautiful no matter what, and that God is God. Hopefully we live and act differently the rest of the year because God in Jesus Christ has changed everything with what we call Christmas.

Do something silly or different this year; surprise yourself and others.

Merry Christmas



Pastor Diane

Upcoming Worship Events

December 11th — Christmas pageant then Pot Luck Luncheon after the 10:30 AM worship service

December 21st — Blue Christmas Service at 7:30 PM

December 24th—Christmas Eve Candlelight Service at 6:30 PM includes our hand bell choir, carols and lessons.

December 24th—Christmas Eve Candlelight Service at 11:00 PM includes music from our choir, carols and lessons.

December 25th—ONE service at 10:30 AM, Christmas Carol sing

(more information inside newsletter)



CHRISTMAS HAPPENING AT SPARTA UMC!

SUNDAY SCHOOL CHRISTMAS PAGEANT



WHEN: Sunday, December 11th

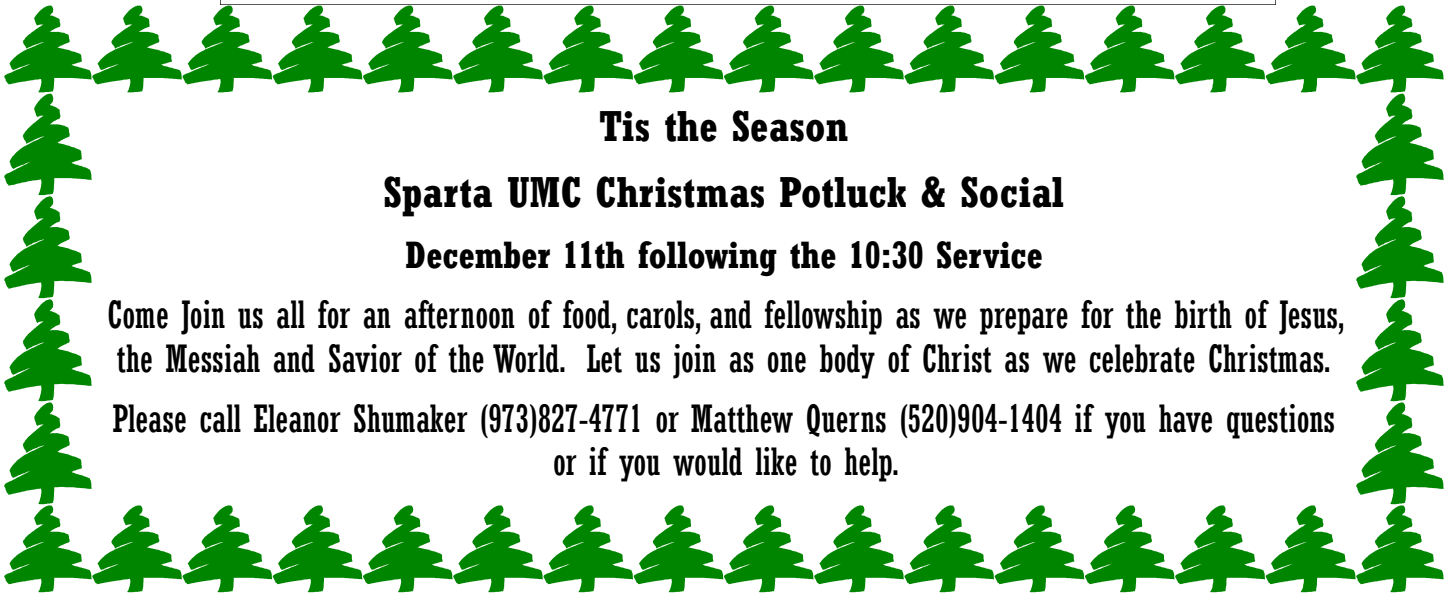
TIME: 10:30 AM

DIRECTED BY: Laura Kempson

All are cordially invited to this years Christmas Pageant entitled "Twas The Night Before" by Rachel Olson. This service uses the familiar poem to tell the story of Jesus' birth and the meaning of salvation. Our children have been working hard to perform this wonderful play. Come enjoy this wonderful day!

PAGEANT REHEARSAL on Saturday December 3rd at 9:30 AM and on December 10th at 9:30 AM

NO SUNDAY SCHOOL on December 25th and January 1st



Tis the Season

Sparta UMC Christmas Potluck & Social

December 11th following the 10:30 Service

Come Join us all for an afternoon of food, carols, and fellowship as we prepare for the birth of Jesus, the Messiah and Savior of the World. Let us join as one body of Christ as we celebrate Christmas.

Please call Eleanor Shumaker (973)827-4771 or Matthew Querns (520)904-1404 if you have questions or if you would like to help.

CHRISTMAS MORNING DECEMBER 25TH

ONE SERVICE AT 10:30 FOR ALL.

We will hold an old fashioned Christmas carol sing-along during one service at 10:30 a.m. Bring goodies from home to share following the service at coffee hour. The Pastoral Care and Hospitality Committee will make sure we have coffee and beverages; YOU supply the carbs! (or healthy snacks if any exist at Christmas)



ADVENT

Our Advent services will focus on
HOPE, LOVE, JOY AND PEACE
as we light the candle each week.



BLUE CHRISTMAS SERVICE

Wednesday, December 21st 7:30 p.m.

The constant refrain of radio and television in shopping malls and churches about the joy of Christmas and getting together with family and friends leaves many people feeling left out. There are many among us who know the anguish of broken relationships, the insecurity of unemployment, the weariness or anxiety of health problems, the pain of isolation and the loneliness of no longer having a spouse or loved one with them. All of these things can lead to feeling blue while everyone around us seems to be happy and enjoying themselves.

Every year at Sparta United Methodist Church we hold a special service to acknowledge and comfort those people who cannot join in the usual light heartedness of the season. Come yourself or invite friends and neighbors who are blue this holiday season to remind them that God is present and still a light for their future.



MOUSE THRIFT SHOP NEWS

The Mouse Thrift Shop will be closed on December 24th & 31st.

NJ CONSERVATORY PRESENTS

HANDEL'S 'MESSIAH'

On Sunday, December 18, 2011 NJ Conservatory presents the Christmas portion of Handel's 'Messiah' featuring its Baroque Orchestra, Symphonic Chorus, Advanced Youth Chorus and Adult Chamber Choir. Included on the program are folk carols from around the world and Christmas hymns by such notable composers as Corelli, Schiedt and Mendelssohn. Venue: Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church, 246 Woodport Rd., Sparta, NJ at 4:00PM. \$30 preferred seating, \$25 general admission, 30% student discount. Please call **973-402-2004**.

Youth News by Matthew Querns



Greetings all!

There is chill in the air; yet, our youth march on with the warmth of the Spirit of God intact. October and November were very successful and exciting months. Beyond our usual service, discussion, and social events, this fall, the youth collected over \$150 dollars worth of canned food for the Ecumenical Council Food Pantry. Their gifts were appreciated! We now move into December and our annual Christmas party fun: food, gifts, and everyone's favorite movie- "A Christmas Story." Below are our scheduled events as well as conference events available to youth. Anyone interested in any event should talk to me, and if your youth has yet to join us, contact me, and we will get then connected! I will be finalizing our Winter/Spring schedules over the Christmas break. They will be ready in the first week of January as we kick off another new season. Until then, enjoy the season; the holidays are here!

4th/5th Grade Youth:

- **December 4** - Christmas Party @ the Coombs House- Address TBA
- 5:00-7:00, Bring a snack to share and a gender neutral \$10 gift

Junior High Youth:

- **December 11** - Christmas Party @ the Keener House- Address TBA
- 5:00-7:00, Bring a snack to share and a gender neutral \$10 gift

Senior High Youth:

- **December 18** - Christmas Party @ the Vrabel House- Address TBA
- 5:00-7:00, Bring a snack to share and a gender neutral \$10 gift

Conference Wide Youth Events: *

- **Taize Pilgrimage 2012**- July 27-August 6-
- Go to www.gnjmyp.org for more information/registration. Deadline February 15
- **Conference Trip to Russia**- Go to www.gnjumc.org for more information/registration
- **Youth Lay Speaking**- March 9-10, 2012- www.gnjmyp.org

* Even though these events are not on our regular schedule, anyone interested should contact me.



PUTTING FAITH INTO ACTION

Opportunities from the Church & Society Committee

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.

National Day of Action Against Guantanamo

January 11, 2012 – Guantanamo Bay Anniversary

The National Religious Campaign Against Torture will be part of a broad coalition of groups, including Amnesty International, Witness Against Torture, Center for Constitutional Rights and other organizations, preparing for a National Day of Action Against Guantanamo this January.

January 11, 2012, will mark the 10th anniversary of the arrival of the first prisoners at Guantanamo Bay. It will also be three years since President Obama pledged to close the detention facility.

The coalition is organizing a massive public witness in Washington, DC, that will include the formation of a human chain extending from the White House to the Capitol. To achieve this goal, more than 2000 people (representing the estimated number of prisoners still held at Guantanamo and Bagram) are needed to converge upon the nation's capitol and send the message to the President and the Congress that this is "10 Years Too Many."

If you are interested in joining the group going to Washington from this area contact Litsa Binder litsa@embarqmail.com 973 726-3245

For more information visit <http://www.nrcat.org/gitmo2012>

Write For Rights— Amnesty International

This holiday season give the gift of hope. Join Amnesty International's **Write for Rights Global Write-a-thon** – here in Sparta. Thousands of people around the world are marking International Human Rights Day this December by taking part in the Write-a-thon, the world's largest human rights event. Through letters, cards and more, we take action to demand that the human rights of individuals are respected, protected and fulfilled. We show solidarity with those suffering human rights abuses, and work to bring about positive change in people's lives.

Please join members of the Local Amnesty International Group on Saturday December 3, 2011 10:30am

We will have all that is needed to write one or more letters.

Sparta Public Library – Quiet Room

RSVP: mikejaloi@gmail.com



'Tis the Season for Giving

So Buy a Christmas Card



Beginning on the first Sunday in Advent, November 27th, and for the following three successive Sundays, the Church and Society committee will have alternate Christmas cards available in the narthex and fellowship hall following the worship services. For a minimum \$5 donation to UMCOR, Doctors Without Borders, or the Foundation 4 Orphans, you can purchase a holiday card. One hundred percent of all funds collected will be sent to your choice of one of these three charities.

UMCOR and Doctors Without Borders are probably familiar charities, but what is the Foundation for Orphans? Dr. Wayne Lavender, a Methodist minister and friend of SUMC who has preached and taught in our church, is working to build orphanages around the world. One facility is currently in progress in Mozambique, the poorest nation in the world; the efforts to help orphans will then move to Honduras, the Dominican Republic, back to Africa, and finally to India. In the Methodist tradition, the Foundation 4 Orphans is dedicated to supporting the physical, spiritual, and emotional needs of the Orphan by providing safe housing, education, and the development of life skills, as well as spiritual guidance. For more information, please explore Wayne's website at HYPERLINK "<http://www.F4O>" www.F4O. Please be sure to stop at the Church and Society tables on one of these four Sundays.

United Methodist Women Go in Many Directions

Come Join Us!

UMW Book Worm

List for 2012

We hope you will join the Book Group for lively conversation and fellowship . We will be covering the following books in 2012. Please see Ann Freeman Price with any questions.

January 9, 2012-----Laugh Your Way to Grace by Susan Sparks

February 13, 2012-----That Used to Be Us: How America Fell Behind in the World It Invented and How We Can Come Back by Thomas L. Freedman and Michael Mandelbaum

March 12, 2012-----'Tis: A Memoir by Frank McCourt

April 9, 2012-----The Slave Next Door by Kevin Bales and Ron Soodalter

May 14, 2012-----It's Easier to Reach Heaven Than the End of the Street by Emma Williams

June 11, 2012-----The Wednesday Letters (fiction) by Jason Wright

July 9, 2012-----God's Big Table by Elizabeth Caldwell

August 13, 2012-----New York: The Novel by Edward Rutherfurd

September 10, 2012-----Why Women Should Rule the World by Dee Dee Meyers

October 15, 2012-----The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks by Rebecca Skloot .

November 12, 2012-----The Speed of Darkness (fiction) by Elizabeth Moon

December 10, 2012-----(Still to be decided)

As You Plan Your Gift Giving

Think On This Story

There was a missionary teaching in Africa. Before Christmas, he had been telling his native students how Christians, as an expression of their joy, gave one another presents on Christ's birthday. On Christmas morning, one of the natives brought the missionary a seashell of lustrous beauty. When asked where he had discovered such an extraordinary shell, the native said he had walked many miles to a certain bay, the only spot where such shells could be found. "I think it was wonderful of you to travel so far to get this lovely gift for me," the missionary exclaimed. The native answered, his eyes brightening, "Long walk, part of gift."

---Source unknown

UMW Healing Prayer

Prays Around the World



UMW Healing Prayer Group will meet next on Wednesday, December 7, from 11:15am to 11:45. We pray for people who are part of the Sparta UMC family, for people affected by disasters, for leaders of the world, and for situations around the world. Join us.

UMW Writing Group

Takes a Sabbatical

It's called a winter break. And that's what the UMW Writing Group is taking. They will meet again next on Saturday, March 3 at 10am.

Call Ann Freeman Price (973-383-5014) if you are interested.



UMW Book Worms Discuss

Jimmy Carter Book in December

Monday, December 12, at 10am is the gathering time for the discussion of Jimmy Carter's book, "Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid." Come for a good discussion---it hardly ever fails---whether you've read the book or not.

At the November meeting the Book Worms picked the books for 2012. Please see list above.

Check Out Christmas Books From the Church Library

The narthex book holder will have special holiday books during the season. Be sure to check them out.

Work continues on organization of the library in the Wesley Room. It's a solid collection and continues to grow. (Ann Freeman Price wonders if the organization of it will ever be done---but completion in 2012 is the goal.)

Sparta Ecumenical Christmas Assistance Needs Our Help

The Ecumenical Food Pantry has estimated they will assist approximately 950 families this Christmas. Each family will be provided two bags of food, a turkey and a toy for each child.

We are seeking monetary donations, as well as food and new toys. Your gift of time is also precious, please consider volunteering for the following:

Place: First Presbyterian Church of Sparta

Dates: Monday, December 12, from 9 am to? (packing bags)
Tuesday, December 13, from 9 am to 7 pm (packing bags and distribution)
Wednesday, December 14, from 10 am to 3 pm (distribution)

OPERATION WINTER MONTHS

Each month of November, December, January, and February we will be collecting a different item for our team of workers to take with them to Manna House to hand out to each of the patrons. These are items that are needed and are usually not covered with food stamps. Please help us by donating an item or two in the box in the narthex. If you would like to make a monetary donation please drop it in the offering plate or office marked for 'Operation Winter Months'.

December- soap and/or shampoo

January- toothbrush and/or toothpaste

February- toilet paper



GIVING TREE

The Giving Tree has been decorated! On the tree will be tags for adults and children who need a little help with Christmas this year. How can you help? You can help by taking a tag from the tree. There will be a suggestion on that tag of what kind of gift to get for that person. After purchasing a gift, please wrap and return the gift with the tag attached by December 18th. Don't worry. After we check all of the gifts, they are retagged so the person does not know what's in it. We thank you for this great mission for families throughout our community.

Any questions, please contact Laura Kempson at (973)579-0140

Odds and Ends



HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

Muriel Godbersen December 7



If you would like your birthday in our newsletter, please let Linda in the office know:
Linda@spartaumc.org or (973)729-7773



Jesus Was Born in Bethlehem---

Where Were You Born?

That's the title of the Christmas Program for United Methodist Women. It will happen at 9:30am on Saturday, December 3rd. We will sing some Christmas songs, Kaisa Juan will tell us about Christmas in Poland, and we'll create a map of where all of us came from.

The take home Christmas treat will be an envelope of recipes from all of us, so be sure not to miss it.

We will also light candles for those persons who died in this past year.

It's bound to be a good start for the season of Advent. Won't you show up?



Humor for January

It was after Christmas and the pastor was taking down the manger scene and noticed that the Baby Jesus was missing. She wondered about that. After a while she left the church and noticed a little boy walking down the sidewalk pulling a red wagon, and inside the wagon was the Baby Jesus.

She asked the boy "Where did you get that?" and pointed to the Baby. He said, quite honestly and quickly, "In the church." She asked, "Why did you take him." He said, "Well I prayed to Jesus at Christmas time for a red wagon, and I told him that if I got one, I'd give him a ride in it."



SPARTA UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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Phone: 973-729-7773

Fax: 973-729-8703

We're on the web!

www.spartaumc.org

Please note our WINTER HOURS:

THRIFT SHOP HOURS

Wednesday 10:00—2:00

Thursday 1:00-4:00

Friday 1:00—4:00

Saturday 10:00—2:00



World Mission Shop Hours

for the Christmas Season

Thursday 1:00 to 4:00

Friday 1:00 to 4:00

Saturday 10:00 to 2:00

Sunday 11:30

Come browse gifts from our Fair Trade Shop



The Good News

You can reach Ann Freeman Price, co-editor at 973-383-5014 or at annfreemanprice@embarqmail.com or Linda Kristiansen, co-editor at the church office (973)729-7773 or at linda@spartaumc.org

The next Newsletter will be compiled for February

The DEADLINE for all articles is:
January 16th



SUNDAY SERVICES

Sunday 8:30 am & 10:30 am
followed by fellowship
In Demarest Hall

CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICES



6:30 p.m. Candlelight service with Hand bell choir. A traditional service of lessons and carols

11:00 p.m. Candlelight service with chancel choir, lessons and carols