

The Fellowship Post

Mira Vista
United Church of Christ

December 2013

Pastor's Corner

I woke up this morning thinking that the movie "**It's a Wonderful Life**" illustrates our **Advent** theme very well. Let me explain.

Advent (the four weeks before Christmas) is another of those thin places in which it is possible to perceive all time, all people, all spaces and all places as openings for the holy to shine through. We journey to the places where earth and heaven meet, to the place where the baby Jesus became flesh.

This year your Worship Team suggested "Pilgrimage of the Heart" for a theme that would help us find the *wonderment* along the journey. George Bailey in "It's a Wonderful Life" longed for years and years for the adventure of faraway places, but the journey that changed his life was a pilgrimage of the heart.

On the **first Sunday in Advent, December 1**, our focus is on *Longing*; you will recall that George Bailey illustrates what longing looks like as he looks forward over and over to the fulfillment of his dreams.

On the **second Sunday in Advent, December 8**, our focus is on *Door Number One*, which is a way of saying "pick one!" When you engage, you choose something, you commit; it's such a difference! In George's case, he committed to marriage to Mary and recommitted to working at the bank. His and Mary's commitment rewarded not only them but all the people of his community.

On the **third Sunday in Advent, December 15**, we focus on *The Pilgrim's Way*. This is where we keep on keeping on as the path presents obstacles and the only way out



is through. We set a steady pace amidst whatever obstacles come up. George illustrates this well as he and his wife help people build homes in tough times. Early on George's journey of the heart, there's a bank crisis and people are demanding to take their money out of the bank he runs. To resolve the crisis he uses his own honeymoon money; Mary shows him how a

honeymoon can take place in a broken-down house nearby.

On the **4th Sunday of Advent, December 22**, we will consider the *Turning Point*. This is both a reward for the journey and the beginning of a new journey. Think of Mary saying yes to God's dream and of Joseph saying yes to his night dream. Think of George Bailey finding his way back home after jumping in the water to save his angel. Nothing will be the same from now on.

On **Christmas Eve, Tuesday, December 24**, our focus will be *Arrival*. George arrives home finally open to receiving love and support from the whole town. It's not all up to him, and what he was looking for was right there all the time. Joseph Campbell said: "Where we had thought to travel outward, we will come to the center of our existence. And where we had thought to be alone, we will be with all the world." Welcome Jesus!

Even though a pilgrimage is always an *inward* journey, around the world people on pilgrimage take arduous travel to a distant geographic location. A trip with a clear beginning, middle and end can help us pay attention, and there will be unusual difficulties, to which we hope to respond with openness, attentiveness, and equanimity. We get to practice yielding to what is not in our control;

from those who have preceded us on this path, we draw resilience. George wanted adventure; implicitly he wanted to be changed by his travel.

Whether your pilgrimage is of the heart or of the feet, pilgrimage implies choice: whether or not we are enduring extraordinary events and experiences not of our choosing, **our intention and attention make it a pilgrimage.**

On Sunday, **December 1** we will celebrate the **first Sunday in Advent** and the beginning of our pilgrimage of the heart. For a record of your pilgrimage we have the **Advent Journal/Passport**. It is yours to choose – you are invited to set down your own words or symbols, a record of the walks you took, a photo or image, or many pages of daily writing in answer to the **questions of the week**. Each Sunday we'll have a table with **passport stamps** and other materials for adding visual interest to your pages. At this table we can also **share the journey** of the previous week and look forward to the next week.

Second, receive a **scallop shell** to mark this month of December as a pilgrimage. The shells, symbols of baptism, have journeyed to join your pilgrimage from shorelines all over the world. Scallop shells are the symbol for the Camino de Santiago (the Way of St. James), a pilgrimage route with many origins that ends at the tomb of St. James (Santiago de Compostela in north-west Spain). To read a poem written by a pilgrim on the Way of St. James: http://www.santiago-compostela.net/en_poem.html. To watch a film of a pilgrimage, try "The Way." This movie tells the story of one man on the Camino de Santiago, who follows in the footsteps of his deceased son. (You can rent this movie, and if some of you express interest, we can show it December 1 or 8 after church.)

Won't you walk with us this month?

a very merry Christmas to you all!

Pastor Susan

DEPRESSION GLASS FOR ADVENT

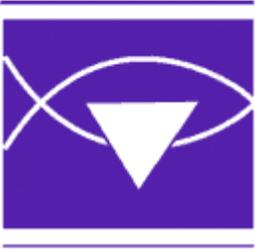
This year's Advent altar features green "Depression glass" that belonged to Michael Wisely's greatgrandmother. Depression glass was distributed free around the time of the Great Depression by Quaker Oats and other firms; they put a piece of glassware in boxes of food. Movie theaters and businesses would hand out a piece when you came in the door. The glass that seems precious to us now was a giveaway of marginal quality back in the day.



We on the worship team believe you will enjoy its lovely shine in the candlelight as well as its symbolic meaning as pure gift from a time when hope was hard to come by and ordinary families had no extra money for something pretty. May the wonderment of this very old Depression ware bless your giving and receiving during this Advent and Christmas time.



Thank you note from the
UCC Coalition for LGBT Concerns



Dear friends ~
Thanks to your support, we
shared 14,000 scarves with visitors
and delegates at General Synod and,
now UCC churches around the
Country are taking action to
protect LGBT youth from bullying
and suicide.
You made this happen!
Thank you from the UCC Coalition
for LGBT Concerns for your expression
of love.
Sincerely,
UCC Coalition



These are the scarves
Mira Vista sent.

Grace Notes

December 2013

Dear Mira Vista Friends and Family,

As most of you have heard by now, I will be stepping down from my position as Music Director at MVUCC at the end of this year. It's been a decision that has not come easily, but it's time for me to start a new chapter in my life. I am starting up my singing and acting career again, so look for me soon in theatres and jazz bars near you.

The Amazing Graces and all past choir members have sustained, supported, challenged, and loved me through the years, and I can never thank you all enough. Laughter, tears, joy, and astonishment have been our "measure" since the beginning. Our families, visitors, and friends have been deeply moved by our sound and our sensibilities, and I have been honored to lead you on that journey. You are a choir worthy of any stage. Thank you for giving your time, talent, and commitment. Now, it's time for you to do the same for the next director.

I will miss this choir!

Advent has arrived and the Amazing Graces will be singing every Sunday in December. As usual, it will be a mix of old and new. Our hope is that you hear something that touches you, and brings you closer to the Spirit of the Season. This is the Glad Time, the Jubilee Time, the Realignment Time.

In harmony,
Amy

"Without singers
our drum will wither away.
Without singers
our culture will wither away.
Without singers
our children will wither away."
a Native American song

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Rev. Susan Meeter, pastor

December Birthdays

4th Sylvia Sugg

9th Nancy Lemon

21st Matt Kavanaugh-Lynch

30th Andrew Noble

30th Benjamin Noble

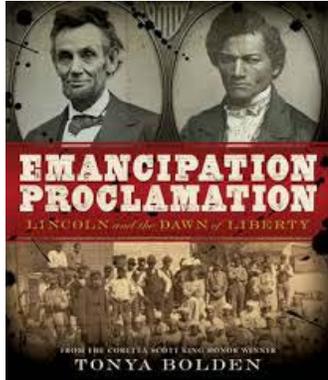


MARK YOUR CALENDARS

Dec. 31st, 2013 — 151st Watch Night

From the African American Civil War Memorial & Museum website:

Frederick Douglass wrote that December 31, 1862 was “a day for poetry and song, a new song. These cloudless skies, this balmy air, this brilliant sunshine, (making December as pleasant as May), are in harmony with the glorious morning of liberty about to dawn up on us.” President



Lincoln had promised a proclamation emancipating slaves in the states in rebellion 99 days earlier; and on “watch night,” Americans of African descent faithfully “watched” for his proclamation to be issued on the 100th day. In Boston, Douglass reported that “a line of messengers was established between the telegraph office and the platform at Tremont

Temple,” where Douglass and many others gathered on “watch night.” With great expectations, African Americans looked to January 1, 1863, as the day of *jubilee*. Many of their faithful elders who had ascended such as Reverend Absalom Jones had admonished those oppressed by the Great Houses of America to believe that God had indeed heard their cries and would deliver them from their taskmasters. The believers congregated in churches in the North and around “praying trees” in secret locations in the South on the evening of December 31, 1862, to “watch” for the *coming* of the Emancipation Proclamation, evidence that God had heard their cries; thus, the tradition of “watch night” was born.

As you stand in “watch” for the New Year, possibly around your own “praying tree,” remember that we stand on the shoulders of our brothers and sisters who struggled for freedom, for the right to love whom they loved, and in faith that all will be well someday.

SOCIAL ACTION FUNDS

Bishop Reuel Norman O. Marigza, General Secretary of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, wrote the prayer excerpted here:



Most gracious and merciful God, amidst the din of howling winds, above the noise of rampaging waves, atop the earthquakes and the shaking of the

earth, we hear your voice: “Be still and know that I am God.”

...In times like these you (God) assure us that we are not alone; that we have sisters and brothers who are moved to walk the lonesome valley with us. We thank you, for in times like these, your love and care is made more manifest and incarnate, made alive in concrete deeds of lovingkindness and compassion.

To you (God) we return all glory and praise. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Your church Council has decided to dedicate the remainder of the Social Action Funds (15% of your 2013 pledge) to two special causes: for our UCC dedication to **Recovery in the Philippines** and for the **Portola Middle School Band**.

You are most welcome to give an additional offering for the Philippines by writing a check to Mira Vista UCC with “Philippines recovery” in the memo line. Also, you are most welcome to give directly using your credit card at [UCC International Disaster Relief](#). You may designate “Philippines” in the comment section.

United Church of Christ Disaster Ministries has already reached out to our partners in the Philippines and have sent relief from our annual OCWM (Our Churches' Wider Mission) offering. The UCC is working to raise another \$250,000 in response to the terrible damage left by Typhoon Haiyan.

CHRISTMAS PROJECT

At Mira Vista UCC we give a little something extra at Christmastime for people living in our own area who are struggling to find food and shelter. The rest of the year we advocate for change on behalf of and alongside our citizens who are forced to live without knowing where food or shelter will come from for today, let alone tomorrow. And we make and serve lunch at the Richmond Souper Center every first Tuesday, year round. Now we're inviting you to pour a little of your Christmas cheer into the BUY A BAG project.

Did you know that 1 in 4 of your neighbors are at risk of hunger, are dealing with food insecurity? Every \$1 you donate provides multiple dollars of good food.



Every Sunday in Advent you are invited to bring a little extra cash or a check to church. For every \$10 you put in, your name will be put on a "grocery bag" decal that will go up on our felt Christmas tree, right inside our front door. The cash will go directly to the Food Bank of Contra Costa & Solano Counties, which supplies the Souper Center and the Richmond Food Pantry, as well as a lot of other places. Let's see how many bags we can buy – if each bag is worth \$10, can we buy 20 bags?

As is true for every other day of the year, you are also welcome to bring non-perishable food offerings to the food barrel at church.

HOME TEAM NEWS



Members of the Home Team were recently shown several pieces of property for lease in the El Cerrito area. As one of those properties has possibilities, church members were invited to take a look at it on Saturday, Nov. 23rd. It was exciting to look and imagine what it could be

transformed into! Whether or not this is the building for Mira Vista, the good news, I think, is that there are properties in the area for lease and we will certainly find one suited for us. If you didn't get a chance to see this particular property, it's located at 11858 San Pablo Ave. Drive by, peek in the window, see what you think.

Sylvia Sugg



WORSHIP FOR DECEMBER 2013

Sunday, December 1, 2013, 12 noon
Holy Communion
First Sunday in Advent: *Longing*
Isaiah 2:1-5

Sunday, December 8, 2013, 12 noon
Second Sunday in Advent: *Door Number One!*
Matthew 3:1-12

Sunday, December 15, 2013, 12 noon
Third Sunday in Advent: *The Pilgrim Way*
Isaiah 35:1-10; James 5:7-10;
Matthew 11:2-11
Rev. Paul Honigs, presiding

Sunday, December 22, 2013, 12 noon
Fourth Sunday in Advent: *Turning Point*
Matthew 1:18-25, Joseph and the Dream

Tuesday, December 24, 2013, 8 pm
Christmas Eve Candlelight Service: *Arrival!*
followed by reception in the fellowship hall
Luke 2:1-20

Sunday, December 29, 11 am
(an hour earlier than usual)
Cosmic Praise!
Christmas carol service with Christ Lutheran
Matthew 2:13-23

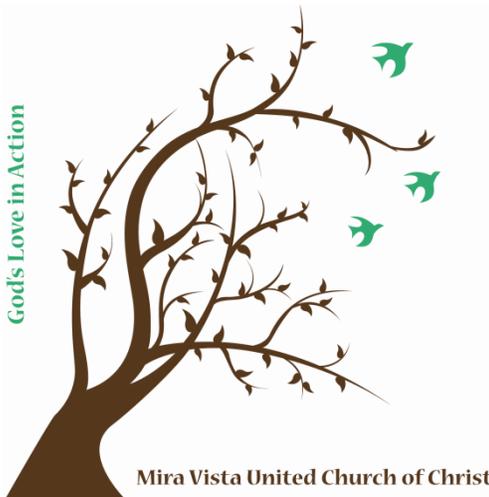
Advent - *roger wolsey*



it isn't about waiting for baby Jesus to be born again,
swaddled in a sty;
and it isn't about waiting for Jesus to return again
from a cloud in the sky;
it's about us deepening into God's kingdom,
-- liberated life for you and i

Address Change Requested

Dated Material
December 2013



Mira Vista United Church of Christ