

HEIRLOOM

of the Union Church of Bay Ridge
Ridge Boulevard and 80th Street

email: unionchurch@earthlink.net

The Parish House/Office
(718) 745-0438
8101 Ridge Boulevard
Brooklyn, New York 11209

website: www.ucbr.org

December, 2008/January, 2009

Rev. Mary Barrett Speers, *Pastor*
Jody Levine, *Administrator*



MESSAGE FROM OUR MINISTER

Dearest Union Church family,

Can you believe this is our eighth Christmas together? Advent begins early this year, on the 30th of November. As usual, there are lots of ways to get in the Christmas spirit at Union Church.

This year, the Program/Mission Committee invites all of us to pray with candle lighting on each of the four Sundays in Advent for the “four elements” of the Middle Ages: Earth, Air, Fire, and Water. New members are particularly encouraged to take this part of the service! Maryellen and Aidan Van Royen will light the first Advent candle on November 30; Jennifer, Ben, and Jack Segna will take the second Sunday, December 7th; and the Vuignier family will light the candles for the Manger Service on December 21. Please call the office to sign up for the 14th (Gifts Sunday) and Christmas Eve services.

Thursday, December 4 is our special Advent Taizé service at 7pm in the Sanctuary. This service is growing, and Lynn Penney and Vince Peterson have some special Advent chants planned. This is a lovely time to come and experience Taizé worship and prayer.

Saturday, December 6: wreath-making and hall-decking, from 9 to 1; childcare will be provided for those “helpers” with shorter attention spans. Bring shears and work gloves!

This year as last, instead of trimming the tree with store-bought ornaments, you will find in your bulletin on December 7 an “ornament” on which you will be asked to write an offering of a dream, hope, vision, or prayer for God’s world. An angel is a messenger, and I hope that this Christmas we’ll have a tree full of angels, bringing messages back and forth between heaven and earth.

Gifts Sunday, December 14: the third Sunday in Advent. Gifts Sunday is “gift-giving” day. We’ll trim the tree, dedicate our gifts to the children of

Gethsemane Church, (children whose parents are in prison) and bring to the Lord’s Table our financial commitments for the coming year.

Then, at 4pm December 14, our Christmas concert: a newer, brighter version of Conrad Susa’s *Carols and Lullabies: Christmas in the Southwest*, with favorites from Handel’s *Messiah* to round out the eclectic program, which features our section leaders Erika, Sara, and Scott, our faithful choir and “extras”, harp, marimba, and this year an excellent guitarist. Several of you expressed the wish that you could have told your friends what this piece was all about, and now you can! It’s a “musical piñata party for the Baby Jesus,” an arrangement of traditional carols from the Spanish Diaspora, sung in English, Spanish, and Catalán. (Susa’s *The Wise Women*, our original plan, will be our Christmas piece for next year.)

December 21 is the Fourth Sunday of Advent, this year the day of our annual Manger Service, with youngsters and oldsters of all species gathering to prepare a nest for the coming Christ Child. All pets are welcome: they seem to know to behave themselves! (I learned this year that it was St Francis who first brought the manger scene, based on the lives of the people of his village, into the church. I had no idea how fitting and Franciscan it was to bless animals while we sing “Away in a Manger!”) Then on December 21, after worship until 5pm, you are invited to open house at the Manse, with buffet, carols and conversation to celebrate the season, followed, weather permitting, with caroling in the neighborhood.

December 24, Christmas Eve, falls on a Wednesday this year, and we are planning just our traditional “midnight” communion service, beginning a little earlier at 10:30 pm this year. There will be candles and carols and, this year, CHOIR, at this always-popular service.

May you find joy and peace this Christmas season and always,
Christmas blessings, Mary

COME TO THE LORD'S TABLE

Our worship services are every Sunday at 11am (10am in the summer), followed by refreshments. Communion will be served on December 7. Christmas Eve at 10:30 pm service, and Sunday January 1st.



THE BOOK OF REMEMBRANCE is located at the back of the Sanctuary and is open to the memorial page of a different dear departed member every Sunday. Upcoming in the Book of Remembrance: 12/7—Jean Dangman; 12/14—Andrew Stutz;



12/21—Josephine Coury; 12/28—Friends of Union Church; 1/4—Olive Buerk; 1/11—Emma Kirk Beck; 1/18—Edward Norstrand; 1/25—Leinda Mouacdie.

WREATH-MAKING AND DECORATING

On Saturday, December 6th -- at 9AM we will meet in the Sanctuary to make wreaths for the church, making it festive and welcoming for Advent and the birth of Christ. It's important, but it is fun too. If you've come before, you know what a convivial time it is – complete with bagels, coffee, and Christmas music. If you have not done it, lots of people are there to help, and soon you are easily making a wreath. For \$8 you may make one for yourself after making one for the church. You will see the church transformed before your eyes and know that you helped make it happen!



Do sign up on the sheet at church and join in (or call the church office at 718.745.0438) – as it helps to have an idea of how many are coming. If possible, bring clippers and gloves. Any leftover greens will be sold on Sunday, December 7th for \$5 a bunch.

Come join in and set in the Christmas spirit!

ROSTER OF ELDERS TO SERVE COMMUNION

Coordinator: Coordinator: Mary Cusack 718.680.3441. If the date or dates you have been given does not suit you, please exchange them with a fellow elder, or if a replacement can not be found, please call Mary.



GIFT SUNDAY DECEMBER 14TH

Traditionally at Christmas time Union Church members and friends like to give gifts to children who would not



otherwise receive any presents. This year, we shall again be giving children's books for the children of Gethsemane Church whose parents are in prison. You choose the book, in a bookstore or on the Internet; just keep in mind that most of the children are African-American. Please don't wrap the book, just bring it on December 14th. Because children grow up, you can even give the same book as last year. Also on Gifts Sunday, we bring our pledge cards and place them on the communion table.

If you are unable to come to church and would like to participate, call the office 718.745.0438. Thank you for your pledge and for helping to make Christmas special for a child!

CHRISTMAS JOY OFFERING, 2008

By Bruce MacIntyre

Once again Union Church will be collecting for the Christmas Joy Offering during Advent. This offering has been a Presbyterian tradition for more than 65 years and is one of the four special offerings designated by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to provide congregations direct ways of supporting specific causes that help those who need assistance.



The Christmas Joy Offering assists retired church workers in need. It will be taken both from the loose offerings collected each Sunday in Advent as well as from the Special Joy Offering envelopes available on the back table in the sanctuary.

CHRISTMAS POINSETTIAS

Red or white poinsettias to decorate the church for Christmas will again be available for purchase as memorial gifts. Please call the office to make your purchase. Orders are being taken from November 30th to December 14th. Envelopes and sign up sheet are available at the back of the sanctuary. Envelopes should be left in mailbox marked for Jody, or you can call the office at 718.745.0438. The cost is \$10 for each plant. The poinsettias will be in the sanctuary for the December 24th worship service, and can be taken home at midnight on December 24th or after the service on January 1st. If you are homebound and would like them delivered to you, please let the office know.



CONTINUE TO PRAY FOR

All living in the midst of war, poverty, natural and economic disaster; for prisoners and all who watch

and pray for them, especially the Church of Gethsemane. Continue to pray for/stay in touch with: Paul Douglass and the Van Royen family, Diget and Ginny and the Moore family, Theresa and the Attara family, Vince and the Peterson family, the Cleary family, Art Samuel, Mary Chamberlain, Iris Norstrand, Emile Serposs, Milford Anderson, Nazik David, Barbara Briggs, Amanda Silverman, Bill Louisa, Helen Kretiv; also Mark and Audrey, Helen, Wendy, Sally, Kevin. Please call the office to make changes to the prayer list.

OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER FLOWERS

Chancel flowers were dedicated to the glory of God and given by: November 16th – Rev. William Tolley, from Olive and Dan Reich and Family.



PLEDGE BOXES



Please pick up your annual pledge box at the back of the church in December. If you do not find one with your name on it, and would like envelopes for your church donations, please let the office know. If you are unable to come to church, call the church office to have them sent to you. Pledge cards can be found at the back of the church also, or you can call the church office at 718.745.0438 to receive one.

UPCOMING BIRTHDAYS

If you worship with us and would like your birthday listed in our newsletter, fill in the birthday calendar at the back of the sanctuary with your name and birth date or call the office.



December

5 – Joyce Smith
14 – Connor Hennessy
25 – Dan Reich

January

4 – Ruth Ward
9 - Donna Haubrich
30 – Katie Haubrich
Shoukralla

UNION CHURCH PLAYGROUP

Play Group is a spacious place with lots of interesting things for a child to do, such as painting, blocks, trains, housekeeping, doll house, dress-up, puzzles, books, puppets, crafts, etc. A snack is provided along with a Story Time and Music Time, which includes songs, and musical instruments. Play Group is for children ages 2 to 4 years old with a caretaker, and meets Tuesday & Thursdays from 9:30 – 11:30 and Monday & Wednesdays from 10:00 – 12:00 in the basement of the church (the corner of 80th Street and Ridge Blvd). There is now a new 12-week session: 3 sessions per calendar year.

YOGA by Kristin Miller

Yoga continues! Classes are every **MONDAYS and Wednesdays 6:45 - 8:15pm** downstairs in playgroup area: in the Union Church basement located on the corner of 80th Street and Ridge Blvd. Please bring a mat and a towel and arrive a few minutes early. **NO EXPERIENCE NEEDED** for the gentle, restorative class. Open to all; cost is \$15.00 per session – call Kristin at 718-745-6594 no pre-registration required.



SUNDAY SCHOOL



Children from the 1st through the 8th grade are welcome to come. It meets in the sanctuary basement at 11am every Sunday morning. Childcare is also provided during the 11am worship service.

WARREN GATTO is engaged! Letters of congratulation may be sent to him and Shin Oh Kang, his fiancée, at 6614 17th Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11204 or wgatto@aol.com.

NEWS FROM DANNY FORGER

Danny Forger, our friend and former organist, sends greetings and news. He is still living in Ann Arbor, Michigan, where he is up for tenure this year with the University of Michigan. A couple of years ago, he joined the 2,000-or-so-member First Presbyterian Church of Ann Arbor, where he has since been ordained an elder; he is teaching Sunday school and serving on the session, and the biggest news of all is...Danny is engaged to Rev. Deborah Knott, a Presbyterian clergywoman now serving in a Lilly Fellowship at that church. They plan to be married in late April (after Easter), and are still making plans for where they will be after that. Union Church members can best write to Danny in care of his parents, Daniel and Chantal Forger, at their home in Brooklyn. Letters of congratulation may be sent to him and Rev. Deborah Knott, in care of Daniel and Chantal Forger, 2336 East 29th Street, Brooklyn, NY 11229.

GIVE FOOD FOR FREE ON LINE by Jill Stoler www.freerice.com and www.thehungersite.com are fun, interactive sites where you can take a vocabulary quiz and donate rice for each correct answer (no charge), or just keep clicking repeatedly, not even a quiz, and give food for free that way.

NEXT NEWSLETTER DEADLINE IS JAN 12!

The newsletter belongs to the church community! The best articles come from the church family: YOU!

HOLIDAY FOOD BANK: canned goods, especially tuna fish and plastic-jar peanut butter, are most welcome. The food banks are empty this year and really need our support! Think portable, easy to store, not requiring pots and pans (or even can openers). The food collection box is on the table in the Sanctuary vestibule.

HOLIDAY TOY SWAP A GIFT TO ALL

Union Church friend and former choir section leader Kelly Baxter Golding joined with Bay Ridge parent Jenny Pollack to organize a Holiday Toy Swap on Saturday, November 22, upstairs from our playgroup room in the back of the Union Church Sanctuary. Many parents brought many like-new toys, and many small children now have “new” toys that are easier on family finances and public landfills. One participant wrote: “What a great morning it was! No crowds, no long lines, sunshine streaming through the stained glass windows and lots of great toys everywhere as well as lots of happy, smiling people! What a stress-less experience! ;o)” Thank you, Kelly and Jenny, for thinking of this new opportunity for creative stewardship, for thinking it would be good to do at Union Church, and for coordinating everything so well.

FALL REFLECTIVE SATURDAY: GREAT SUCCESS

Six Union Church members and friends gathered in the Parish House for the fall Reflective Saturday. Led by Lynn Penney, Reflective Saturdays have grown grace-fully into mini-retreats, Saturday mornings every two or three months, childcare provided. The next Reflective Saturday will take place in early 2009 before Lent, and the focus will be on the healing arts.

UNION CHURCH CONCERT IN JANUARY

Sunday, January 18th, 2009, 4pm
Duo Nova Antigua
Guitarist, Lutenist and Mandolinist Dennis Cinelli and Flutist Mary Cherny perform a concert of Baroque and other works.
Freewill offering at the door supports music at Union Church.

HOW TO DONATE FLOWERS

If you would like to offer memorial or celebratory flowers to grace our altar any Sunday, please fill in the date and who or what the flowers are for on the flower chart at the back of the church, and put \$30 in a marked envelope or check into the collection plate. You can also call the church office at 718.745.0438 with the information.



SUPPORT GROUP FOR PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS



meets the first Monday of the month. If you or a friend are interested call **Isabel Morales 800.405.8818**. The next two dates will be December 1, 2008, and January 5, 2009—check the website calendar or call Isabel as the dates are flexible according to the schedules of the group.

RENDER UNTO GOD by Ruth Ward

“In God We Trust, All Others Pay Cash”, was the irreverent title of a book by my favorite long-ago radio raconteur, Jean Shepherd. Or as Jesus succinctly put it: “Render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.” Religious thoughts aside, facts are although the church is the guardian of, and the place to share, our spirituality; it too needs money to exist. A quip by George S. Kaufman came to mind: Moss Hart bought a lavish country house in Bucks County. He zealously set about rearranging nature to suit his desires. He uprooted and moved trees, shrubs, and other flora. Kaufman remarked when he visited, “It’s what God would do if he had money.”



This topic was up most recently with lately the recent (and still crisis during which financial pundits tossed the word billions around with frightening casualness. My childhood as a “Depression kid” surfaced. Strangely it was for us an era to be cherished. Only recently a friend and I thought back to those oh-so-gentle days, a carefree time of simple pleasures: listening to our one radio as a family, children playing out on the street every day. Money? There was virtually none, certainly none to spare. I told my five-year-old grandson I’d watch him on the computer, declining his offer to teach me. To emphasize my illiteracy in this I said when I was his age there were none, nor televisions, air conditioners or cell phones. His response was a stare insinuating this could in no way be true.

Parents undoubtedly had worries, but one could live on very little. Children lived on nothing. But deprived? Not at all. We had many small joys, not least of which was following the horse and wagon down the block as the ice man delivered ice to each house, having all the free ice chips we could suck. I’m sure my perspective has not kept pace with the increasing need for “things” including luxuries which advertisers with minimum effort reinvent as necessities. It was not just young people, but adults who thronged lines when a new wonder of technology was offered. I would like to shout “it is

not important”, but my voice goes unheard; I am a distinct minority.

My heart goes out to anyone who has lost a home, job: dire situations. Inside I can't help thinking (again it would be unheard or unheeded) we the people enabled these big corporations to become giants, then fell prey to the lure of loans, credit cards that somehow well-meaning, deserving people didn't seem to think would come due sooner than they wished. Or those companies would not last give the abuses of powerful by CEO's (not always of course).

I always bristle on a drugstore or supermarket line when a bunch of us stand while someone whips out a card and we wait while it clears, is checked and signed. I am in no hurry, just can't fathom this behavior since the bill will be paid with real money in due time. Yes—I own a credit card and an old cell phone, but rarely use either.

I feel fortunate in having had the depression era experiences; it grounded me later as an adult in caution, saving for trips or other extras until we could afford them. Though I suppose there came an era of growing desire of “wanting kids to have more than we did,” which in turn led to the extremes so visible today. The truth is “MORE” is actually “LESS”. Having more things doesn't necessarily equate with richness—but more often the opposite: neglect of our spiritual outlook. As the minister at our marathon Sunday worship reminded us: the Beatitudes' first word can be translated as “happy”, adding God wants us to be happy. He also said the Ten Commandments are not meant to be stern “Orders” from God, but rather a path to happiness and union WITH God.

A truth we might do well to live by.

OUR MISSIONARIES RETURN HOME

by Ruth Ward

There is exciting news from the Hastings family, this time more personal than Presbyterian; (their July letter arrived after our newsletter was printed). This amazing family dedicated and committed to spreading Christian faith in Japan had been there for 20 years. During those years we have read conversions to Christianity, seminarian inspired, and Japanese Christians newly dedicated to preaching the Gospel. Finally, this past summer they felt strongly that the hand of God was guiding them, quietly leading them to return to the United States.

A big step, and cause for wonder as to “whether it is prudent to step out in faith so boldly.”



God's hand became obvious: twelve days after deciding to return, the Reverend Dr. Tom received a call offering him a position at the Center of Theological Inquiry in Princeton.

This is even more exciting as it encompasses Tom's own expertise in mission, teaching, and administrative experience. He began this in August. Since Princeton is just two hours from the Reverend Jo Tolley it strengthened their feelings that this was really God's will.

Carol graduated in May from Princeton Theological Seminary with her master's in Christian Education. Carol adds more happy news: Paul and fiancée, Debbie Wissel, were married in August in a ceremony performed by (grandma), the Reverend Jo Tolley. Daughter Sarah is engaged to Matt Churchill, a fellow graduate of St. Olaf College. Plans are for a next summer wedding. Daughter Rose is beginning her own new adventure working for H & M, a Swedish clothing retailer opening two stores in Tokyo. They have sent her to Oslo, Norway to train for the position. Katie, now 13, spent July in Cape May with Jo. It was difficult for her to say goodbye to all her Japanese friends, but she, too, will have a new beginning in Princeton.

One comforting, impressive thought is that finally Tom's involvement in the translation project “Young Children and Worship” is finished and at the publisher's. More good news is that a new missionary has come there, certified to teach and train teachers, insuring that the Hastings's influence will continue to be nurtured, carrying Christianity to the Japanese.

Though Tom's colleagues and student at Tokyo Union Theological Seminary will greatly miss him, he, Carol, and family have left a vibrant, lasting, and purposeful legacy in Japan. Carol adds she will be available for mission interpretation till the end of November.

We offer them all thanks for a job superbly done, and a warm welcome back to America.

DEAR BASKETBALL PLAYERS

The Parish House gym has 2-hour time slots evenings during the week, and all time periods on weekends. Call Jody for details at 718.745.0438.



NOTARY PUBLIC SERVICE



available MTWT 12:00 – 2:00. at the Union Church Parish House located at 8101 Ridge Blvd. Calling first is best: 718.745.0438 ask for Jody (it's free to UC members).

Union Church

Manger Service

For all ages and all species



...away in a manger...

11 am Monday, December 21

pets, children, families

Come as you are (because Jesus did)
and...good behavior is optional!

The Union Church of Bay Ridge
8101 Ridge Boulevard
Brooklyn NY 11209

Address Correction Requested

On the night Jesus was born,
the innkeeper only showed the travelers
to the stable door.
It was the animals who shared their home
with Mary and Joseph and the newborn baby Jesus.
They shared their straw and their manger
and the warmth of their bodies
and the softness of their fur.
And as the baby was born,
they gathered round the mystery
of Emmanuel: God With Us.

The church is the Body of Christ,
where all find shelter and warmth,
singing and laughter, wonder and awe,
help and sustenance, for this our eternal life.

Please come give thanks for families
for the animals who share the world with us
and for the wondrous gift of life

Please come to pray for peace
and wholeness and health and plenty
for all God's creatures
in this world God so loves

as to come that first Christmas,
and every Christmas,
to dwell among us, full of grace and truth.

Wishing you the joy of peace
and the strength of love
this Christmas season and always.

Your Union Church family