

The Common Thread

A monthly publication of Church of the Open Arms, UCC

Volume 15, Issue 4

April 1, 2011

MINISTER'S ROUNDTABLE

Sum up our church's mission in 5-8 words. What a task! Words like: "unconditional love," "justice-seeking community," "spiritual discovery," "transforming power," "celebrating diversity..." all these are great words – and yet, how can we convey the unique, particular embodiment of Christ's spirit that is reflected in our midst?

I believe our church has a profoundly specific calling that involves our peculiar time in history and an individual identity as unrepeatable as a fingerprint. The blend of personalities, interests, talents, and longings that make up our congregational personality depends on the contributions and participations of each member. Each of us comes with hopes and dreams, expectations, and assumptions about what it means to be a church. Together we live toward a vision that we are revealing as we journey together. Sometimes we step on each others' toes or hurt one another's feelings without meaning to at all. Over time we learn and grow and our developing congregation matures.

This is a time in the life of our church for us to reflect together about the future and how God is changing lives through our congregation. Let's consider how to tell the stories of overcoming, becoming, and coming to believe. We have something special that lots of people don't believe is possible. Think and pray about how to share that good news in our hurting world.

With Easter Joy,
Kathy McCallie

EASTER FAMILY PICNIC IN THE PARK

Swatek Park, 30th & Youngs

Easter Sunday—April 24, 2011

12:30pm - 3:00pm



MESSAGE FROM SCOTT, ASSOCIATE PASTOR

How appropriate, I thought, that my first Sunday as associate pastor at Church of the Open Arms would be the first Sunday of Lent. For me, the journey of Lent, that period from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday, is the most important time of the church year. I love the idea of a journey, both as a metaphor and more literally, as it relates to my faith. You see, I never had a big “spiritual conversion” or even a real ah-ha! moment. Instead, it’s been a journey of ups and downs, of left turns when I should have turned right, of lush gardens, mountain peaks, and dry deserts.

Although I didn’t realize it then, my spiritual journey began as a small child. It was important to my parents that we worship together as a family, and every week we went together to a small Presbyterian Church. The people were friendly and I enjoyed being in church. I still remember Mrs. Honeycutt, my nursery attendant when I was 3- or 4-years old. I loved the nursery because we got to play with felt animals and “cook” on the plastic stove. (That could also explain my fondness for church suppers...or suppers in general!) I was later blessed in Sunday school to have Mrs. Himes as my teacher. She was kind and patient and very encouraging as we struggled to memorize Bible verses. It was at Mrs. Himes’ urging that I preached my first sermon at the age of 11.

Attending college, I had the opportunity *not* to go to church. That’s exactly what most of my friends did. But somehow that didn’t seem a viable option for me; I still went to church. Although the church changed (the Methodist Church), I still found the people warm and inviting, and the general atmosphere a balm to a struggling college student.

Sometime after my days at OU came to an end, a friend asked me why I went to church. Why, after all these years, would I want to hear the same old sermons? As I began to really consider her questions, I came to admit that I had never been truly inspired by a sermon. Try as hard as I might, I could not recall one time when I’d felt my faith deepen as a result of a sermon. It made me sad and more than a little disillusioned. But still I went to church.

Not long after that conversation with my friend, I began a new life in New York. My first Sunday (a very hot, humid day in July), I went to church. The next week I visited another church and then another. All the while, I prayed with increasing urgency that I would find the right minister for me, the person whose sermons would inspire and uplift me. My journey through Manhattan churches would eventually take me to the Collegiate Church, the parent church of the Reformed Church in America (RCA). The oldest church in the nation, I expected a really stuffy congregation. Instead, I found a progressive, loving group of people, each on their own journey.

It was within the Collegiate Church that I found my NY home. (It was also the place where my husband Wayne and I had our first date.) I would become ordained as a Deacon, then an Elder, and finally, a Preaching Elder in the Reformed Church in America. It was also where I really began to feel driven to even greater service in ministry. After preaching at a number of Reformed Churches, my journey took me to New Jersey. (Not a stopping place most of us would ask for on our journey.) There I had the privilege of pastoring two yoked United Church of Christ congregations (the same denomination as Church of the Open Arms). For eight years, I rarely had the opportunity to sit and listen to another preacher. It was also there that I came to fully understand why I’d never been away from church.

For a long time, I thought it was the search for that ever-elusive inspiring pastor who could move me every week to great service in Christ. That’s why I was always in church. Wrong. The reason I never left the church is because I saw the love of Christ lived out in the lives of the people who sat in the pews. They were the ones who inspired me, who moved me toward more noble living. They challenged me and lifted me and made me question—in the best possible way—my own faith journey. And that’s why I’m at Church of the Open Arms today.

I’ve had the privilege of celebrating worship with Dr. Norman Vincent Peal, hearing Riverside Church’s Dr. James Forbes lift the roof off a service, been awe-struck by Harvard’s Pastor Peter Gomes, and been on the receiving end of a fire-filled sermon by Rev. Al Sharpton. I’ve also been deeply moved by the preaching of Pastor Kathy.

But none of those can compare to the spirit of overcoming I’ve witnessed in the lives of my church friends. Not a single sermon preached from a pulpit has moved me as much as seeing the commitment of individuals, couples, and families to simply be in God’s grace. And that’s what I’ve found in the people of our church.

I take very seriously my responsibilities as your Associate Pastor. And I’m honored to serve in ministry with each of our church members and friends. You see, every single person who worships at Church of the Open Arms is a minister. You minister to me and to that first-time visitor. And you minister to each other. What joy I find in joining in *your* ministry of sharing God’s love. I’ve come to believe that Church of the Open Arms is far more than the name of our church. It is the way we strive to live. What an awesome journey to share together.

Easter Events

Good Friday Service, April 22 , 8:00 p.m.

Don't miss this opportunity to reflect on the final approach to Easter. We will sing the songs, read the scriptures, and pray together with Christians around the globe and throughout history, contemplating the death of Jesus and his outpouring of unconditional love regardless of the consequences. The cross may be a reality we might wish to avoid, but only through facing our darkest fears and questions can we experience the freedom and power of resurrection. Come on April 22nd, forgiven and unafraid, ready to accept yourself and others unconditionally.

Sunrise Service

Easter morning at 6:30 a.m. a small group of faithful seekers will gather to greet the dawn with prayers, singing, and scripture reading.

Join us at Swatek Park, 30th and Youngs, for this simple celebration of joy as we mark the mystery of the risen, power of unconditional love.

Death is not the last word.

Easter Family Picnic in The Park

Swatek Park, 30th & Youngs
12:30pm - 3:00pm

Join your church family on Easter Sunday for a picnic at Swatek Park, 30th and Youngs. Pack a picnic lunch for you and yours. Ice down the sodas and head to the park after Church.

An Easter egg hunt will be provided for the kids.
Good visiting and lots of love for everyone!

Frisbees and other outdoor group fun is encouraged. Seating opportunities at the park are limited, so lawn chairs and other portable seating is a good idea!

The park has been reserved for our use so plenty of space is available.

Sandwiches, chips and drinks will be available for visitors, so invite friends and family to Church of The Open Arms for Easter.

This will be a great time to get better acquainted with each other and make new friends. If you have questions or need additional information do not hesitate to contact the church office or Mike DeArmond at 405 850 0099

A Lenten Reflection

From Bruce Saunkeah

Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love. 1 Corinthians 13: 8-13 NRSV

A few years ago, when I was in seminary, I had an interesting phone conversation with my dad, who is a retired minister. We were marveling at the divergent spiritual paths taken by members of our family since our early Southern Baptist beginnings. The older of my two brothers is what one could call “spiritual but not religious,” with no particular denominational affiliation, while the other was recently ordained as an Episcopal deacon. Our younger sister converted to the Roman Catholic faith when she married over 20 years ago, and my mother, who attends an Episcopal church, has been known to describe herself as a “closet Methodist” (one of her grandfathers was a Methodist circuit preacher, who traveled around Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas and Missouri, preaching at churches with no called pastor.) My partner, Jeff, and I had discovered the United Church of Christ just a couple of years before this conversation took place, so you could say that, theologically speaking, my family was pretty much all over the map.

When I asked my dad what his own theological perspective was, he thought for a moment, then said, “I am a Native American Christian existentialist mystic.” In the silence that followed, I said to myself, well, that’s a pretty complicated point of view, but if anyone can pull it off, he can. Then he broke that silent moment by saying, “and I think you may be one, too.”

Wow. I have to admit that I was kind of blown away, but the more I thought about it, during that conversation and since then, I realized it’s not so far-fetched as it seems. I’m Native American by birth; I’m Christian by upbringing. I studied quite a bit of existentialism in college, and found that a lot of it makes sense, in particular regarding free will, reason, self-awareness, and the “unknowingness” of life. But it was that “mystic” part that stumped me. The word always brought forth images of medieval hermits in mountain caves, experiencing visions of God through fasting and physical deprivation. That is not my dad, and it’s definitely not me.

However, the more I think about it, the more I’m convinced that we are *all* mystics, because each of us shares in the mystery of life, death and resurrection. It’s true that, of these three, we only know the reality of life, but who can deny having experienced some kind of *metaphorical* death and rebirth? Looking back on my life, I can clearly identify moments of transformation, milestones that mark a definite before and after. Discovering the UCC was one of those transformative experiences for me.

No matter how “real” this existence may seem, the fact is that the human experience is defined by uncertainty. Against the backdrop of the mystery of life’s big questions, we constantly make decisions without knowing what the results will be. We may use God’s gifts of our senses, our reason and our intellect to make informed choices, but in the end, there’s always the chance things won’t work out the way we hope or plan. And so we act in mystery and in faith, with the promise of ultimate understanding. I think that’s what Paul is trying to say when he writes:

For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end[...]. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.

So, this Lenten season—indeed, every day, but especially during Lent, when we walk with Jesus on the road to the cross and beyond—I invite you to embrace your inner mystic. Lean into and live with your unknowingness, and wrap yourself in the greatest mystery of all: the love of God.

Full-moon drumming to be held at the Peace Education Institute

Friday, April 15—7:30 p.m.

HOW TO FIND JOY - A PERSONAL STORY

Marie Kizzia

I want to share my secret ingredient for creating joy in your life. I have to say "secret" because it seems that not very many people have discovered this ingredient. I am aware that there are many ingredients in the soup of life that will bring a person joy but the one I am talking about is like the spice that is such a small ingredient but without it the soup is bland.

This ingredient is called SHARING and the definition is basically what mothers say to their kids all the time – "Share that _____ with your brother/sister". She meant to literally take some of what you have and give it to someone else and like it. We lose a lot of good qualities when we grow up and this one in particular falls by the wayside by the time we are adults. Maybe it is because there are so many people in our adult lives and how do we choose who to share with.

I have given money to numerous worldwide causes and often end up feeling a little let down when I learn that my money did not go to who or what I intended. While I may still donate to far away places, I have decided to start sharing with the people who are closest to me. It could be my birth family or friends, people I work with or my church. Any of these brings me great joy. However, I have found a unique place to share some of my "wealth" that brings the most immediate joy to me. It is the Open Arms Food Pantry. My wealth includes donating my time by volunteering at the pantry and donating money to feed the people who are in great need.

I would like to invite you to SHARE in my joy by volunteering at the Food Pantry where you will get to meet the recipients of your wealth and see how your gift affects their lives in monumental ways. They may only get a small amount of food each week but you would never know it because they give back a huge "Thank You" and "God Bless You" and never ending hugs and smiles. If you can't volunteer, I would invite you to put a few dollars in the church envelope and mark it "Food Pantry". This money is spent only on food - no administrative or overhead costs. **REMEMBER – IF YOU ARE LACKING IN JOY, SHARE YOUR**

The Food Pantry not only feeds the body, it feeds the soul. We have thoroughly enjoyed the company of all whom we have met there once a week, for about a year. The people who work at the pantry show love, compassion and friendship to all who come.

The Food Pantry supplements the gap between food stamps and going without. Thanks to the Food Pantry, we are able to eat EVERY day!

Not only does the Food Pantry provide food once a week on Fridays from 4-6 p.m., but there is also a clothing closet for those in need of clothing.

It is a blessing to our bodies and our souls to be able to participate in the Church of the Open Arms Food Pantry!

Ellen Barnes and Debbie Hall

GRATITUDE

From the Youth: “The Youth Mission Trip Benefit Concert with Mixed Company raised over \$2000! Thank you so much for your support!”

From Debbie Hall (Community Life Team): It is amazing to me how fast time can fly! Thank you to EVERYONE who brought food to the March potluck! Space does not allow me to thank each of you individually. As always, it was delicious and made more memorable because of the fellowship we all participate in each month at shared mealtime.

From Ellen Barnes: “I would like to thank the Church of the Open Arms for all the donations that made my new house a home! A special thanks to Gene & Scott for the furniture and for delivering it and setting it up. Also to Mr. & Mrs. Wiedemann for the new mattress and box springs, the furniture and the quilt. Thanks to Ron and Mike for the skillet and household items. Thanks to David and Terry for the dishes, to Laura for the quilt, and to Bo and Kenny for the TV.

Thank you for everything and especially for being my family!

GRATITUDE DINNER

May 6

Friday night, May 6th at 6:30 p.m., our church will celebrate faithful financial stewardship during a dinner to thank those who have made monetary donations to the church. Last fall at the Hope Dinner we celebrated volunteers and the many ways that everyone contributes through participation. However, this dinner, in contrast, is designed to thank those who are financial givers. Letters to each person who has recorded contributions to the congregation during the last two years will be mailed inviting them to the dinner. Please mark your calendar now and plan to join in the fun that evening.

ALSO COMING IN MAY.....

Oklahoma Association Meeting

Saturday, May 7th

Mark the date on your calendar and plan to attend this meeting of all UCC congregations in Oklahoma.

More details on time and location will be available soon.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

* If you need to update your **DIRECTORY** page with a new email address, new mailing address or any other type of directory information, please write it on a piece of paper and put it in the New Growth box in downstairs office. See Gene Wiedemann for additional information.

* There will be no COA-OP in April so as not to interfere with Easter celebrations!

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	
				10AM Food Ptry. set 3:00 - 6:00 Food Pantry Servers	
3 Parent's Offering	4	5 7PM Book Study <i>The Hope: A Guide to Sacred Activism</i> 7:30 Peace Café @ Picasso's	6 5:30 Youth Group 6PM Choir Rehearsal 7PM Lent Service 7PM Spanish Class 7:30PM Mary Daly Group	7 1:45 Food Pantry drop-off 6:30-8:30 Dave Ramsey-Financial Peace--1st Class	10AM Food Pantry se up 3:00 - 6:00 Food Pantry Servers
10 arsal <i>Animal</i> Book Study roup	11 10:30 AM Sr. Rink Coffee	12 7PM Book Study <i>The Hope</i> 7:30 Peace Café	13 5:30 Youth Group 6PM Choir Rehearsal 7PM Lent Service 7PM Spanish Class 7:30PM Mary Daly Group	14 1:45 Food Pantry drop-off 6:30-8:30 pm Financial Peace Class --see insert	10AM Food Pantry se up 3:00 - 6:00 Food Pantry Servers
17 arsal <i>Animal</i> Book Study roup Council Meeting	18	19 7PM Book Study <i>The Hope</i> 7:30 Peace Café @ Picasso's	20 5:30 Youth Group 6PM Choir Rehearsal 7PM Lent Service 7PM Spanish Class 7:30PM Mary Daly Group	21 1:45 Food Pantry drop-off 6:30-8:30 p.m. Financial Peace Class--see insert	10AM Food Ptry. set 3:00 - 6:00 Food Pantry Servers 8:00PM Good Friday Service
24 r Sunrise Service arsal <i>Animal</i> Book Study roup C IN THE PARK! (m)	25 10:30AM Sr. Rink Coffee	26 7PM Book Study <i>The Hope</i> 7:30 Peace Café @ Picasso's	27 5:30 Youth Group 6PM Choir Rehearsal 7PM Spanish Class 7:30PM Mary Daly Group	28 1:45 Food Pantry drop-off 6:30-8:30 pm- Financial Peace Class--see insert	10AM Food Pantry se up 3:00 - 6:00 Food Pantry Servers

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Good Friday Service, April 22 , 8:00 p.m.
Sunrise Service, Easter morning at 6:30 a.m.
Easter Service at 10:45 a.m.
Family Picnic & Easter Egg Hunt After Church

The graphic features a light blue background with a white cross, a basket of eggs, and the words "Happy Easter" in a decorative font. The entire graphic is enclosed in an orange border with decorative corner elements.

"Never place a period where God has placed a comma." -Gracie Allen