

# The Common Thread

A monthly publication of Church of the Open Arms, UCC

Volume 12, Issue 1

January 1, 2008

## MINISTER'S ROUNDTABLE

The new year begins with both reflections and anticipation. Last year at this time we were thrilled to approach the ten year anniversary of our church's beginning. Now we are trying to comprehend the reality that we are beginning the year 2008! Remember how much anxiety there was eight years ago about the new year? There was lots of fear about the beginning of a new millennium. Some people honestly thought the world might come to an end. Some were stock piling water and supplies fearing a massive computer crash and disruption of society functioning – "Y-2K", remember? Now all that seems silly, doesn't it?

I have heard it said that most of us try to accomplish too many things in the next few months, but we don't set enough goals for the next five or ten years. In this season of resolutions and intentions to change our lives, let's carefully consider our longer term plans. It is great to live in the moment and be spontaneous. We don't want to get so rigid about a goal that we fail to stay alert to signals of life and change. However, there is a need for expansive, deliberate long-term thinking about the direction of our energy. Instead of worrying about how much we can accomplish in the next few months, what if we contemplated our plans for the next five to ten years?

On Saturday, January 19<sup>th</sup>, leaders of our church will spend a full day discerning long-term plans for our congregation. You are invited to join in that dialogue. All are welcome to put in motion plans to change our church, our community, and our world in light of our calling to justice and compassion. Let's be the change we want to see.

I'm excited!  
Kathy McCallie

## **Pictorial Church Directory**

**Pictures taken by appointment**

**\*\*\*\*DATE CHANGED\*\*\*\***

***January 8th Tuesday & 9th Wednesday***

**Receive a free 8 x 10**

**See story on page 3**

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## **OUT WITH THE OLD AND IN WITH THE NEW**

Well 2007 has proven a very exciting and challenging year to be President of Church of the Open Arms. The year included great moments of celebration, transition and absence. This congregation truly “stepped up to the plate” and embraced all that the year had to offer. It has been an honor to be President. For me personally, this year has been a wonderful opportunity to get better acquainted with a lot of the congregation and to find out some very interesting things about myself. Thank you all so much for being there and making this year at COA a wonderful success!

As always at COA there is never much time to rest on our laurels. 2008 is quickly approaching and plans for the new year are already in full swing. The leadership council at the November meeting elected Officers and Team Leaders for 2008. What a great and capable roster of volunteers.

**President – Melinda Norton**

**Vice-President – Connie Martin**

**Past President—Mike DeArmond**

**Treasurer – Jeff Fuller**

**Inclusivity Advocate – Robyn Lemon Sellers**

**Financial Secretary – Carol Fasol**

**Finance Team – Carl Parsons**

**Education Team – Maria Watkins**

**Worship Team – Gloria Weiss**

**Building Team – Hugh Doherty**

**Shalom Team – Conna Wilkinson**

**Community Life – Bo Bass**

**Staff and Leadership – Nathaniel Batchelder**

**New Growth – Rev. Loyce Newton-Edward**

**Care Team – Vacant**

Thank you to all who are continuing their commitment to leadership and an extravagant welcome to those for whom this is your first time. If anyone is interested in volunteering on any of the ministry teams at Church of the Open Arms, Please contact the Leader for that team.

## **A Word From Your New President, Melinda Norton**

It was just three short years ago that Pam and I began attending Church of the Open Arms. And now, I find myself holding the position of President of the church for 2008. As president, I am asked to act as the lay leader of the congregation. I'm still trying to find out what that means but I feel this is a great opportunity and an awesome responsibility. I have some good examples to follow. Batch, Mindy Hellwege, Mike DeArmond, Jim Craig and others have all been very exciting and capable leaders and I know I will draw on their guidance and help. Connie Martin is serving as Vice-President and I am excited to work with her and Mike, as Past-President, as we strive to lead this congregation for the next year. Please feel free to talk to me about any of your concerns, praises, ideas, etc....and yes, I really mean that. I have found such peace and joy in my association with this congregation and this church. And I know that together, we can continue to share our message of Peace, Acceptance and Justice.

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## Batch Wins Award!

On Friday, Dec. 7<sup>th</sup>, at the State House of Representatives Chambers in the state Capitol building, Nathaniel Batchelder was presented with the Annual Oklahoma Human Rights Commission Award. This is a tremendous honor, and we are all proud to know Batch. His work on behalf of justice, peace, and compassion is an inspiration. Batch is the second person from our congregation to receive this award. Dr. Boyd Shook received the award last year for his work with Manos Juntas. What a great group of people we have in our church!

**Please don't groan,** just go to you calendar and mark **January 8, 2008 "as busy doing important work."** The Building Committee, chaired by Hugh Doherty, will meet to design a maintenance plan for the Church. Our Church is a very valuable tool for our ministry so we must keep it safe, clean and attractive. On January 8<sup>th</sup> we will begin to list projects and place them in an immediate, short term, and long term category. After we identify the work, we will start recruiting volunteers to do special projects. One of the goals of the committee is that not just a few do all the work. If every member gave just four hours per year doing building projects, we would have the equivalent of a full time person for six months. That's incredible. Here's the pertinent information.

Tuesday, January 8, 2008

Church Hall

7:00 PM

Soup and Sandwiches served at 6:45

Adjourn, 8:30 PM

Contact Hugh Doherty at 208-1733 for questions.

## NYP News

From the brand new meeting room to the arrival of the new curriculum, the New Youth Project is well on its way. But, before the group even meets for the first time, I would like to use this time to thank everyone for their overwhelming support and continued prayers during the forming of this group. It's been a fantastic journey to get to where we are now and I look forward to the coming times.

The New Youth Project will be meeting for the very first time on Friday, January 4th from 6-7 pm, downstairs in the youth room. Ages 12-18. Bring your friends... spread the love!

## Dr. Khepra Nura Khem January 20<sup>th</sup>

The spirituals and their history are exciting and inspiring. Don't miss our Sunday morning service at 10:45 on January 20<sup>th</sup> when we welcome Dr. Khepra Nura Khem. His powerful voice and presence augments his teaching and preaching. You will be glad you invited guests to share this memorable event in the life of our church. Black history month will be coming up in February, but this is an opportunity to learn from a well-respected professor in that field. We are blessed to look forward to his visit.

## Wednesday Nights

Every Wednesday night at 7:00 p.m. we are celebrating and singing in a mid-week worship time. All are welcome. This spiritual lift in the middle of the week is relaxing and fun.

## Church Directory

Did you ever want to call a friend from church, but couldn't find their number? Did you ever wish we had a pictorial directory to help put people's names with their faces? On Jan. 8th and 9th we will have photographers from Olan Mills at our church to take professional photographs. Every individual or family who comes for a sitting will receive a free pictorial phone directory for our church and also a free 8 x 10 photograph. This project will be a great benefit to our church for increasing community and belonging. The photographers will try to sell you photographs of yourself, too. But, there is absolutely no obligation to buy anything at all. Please make time in your schedule to participate to help our church grow.

## Deciding the Future of Open Arms

Do you have any good ideas for growing our church? You are invited to participate in a gathering at church on Saturday January 19<sup>th</sup> that will explore how our church will move forward together into an exciting future. Everything that we have accomplished over the past ten years as a church started out as someone's good idea. The purpose of our meeting on January 19<sup>th</sup> will be to pull together lots of good ideas, formulate a vision and make decisions about our priorities as a church. If you are new to the church or if you have been around for a long time, your ideas are needed and wanted. Join us as we dream together, examine current challenges we face and develop strategies for spreading the Good News of God's love for all people.

## Sunday Morning Discussion Group Meets Weekly at 9:30

Are you looking for a New Year's Resolution? How about showing up for church an hour earlier each Sunday to be a part of group of friends who explore the meaning of our Christian faith? In an informal setting we share our lives and discuss various aspects of our faith. You are invited to join us.

## Budget Shortfall Covered!

We will be able to start the new year with a clean slate. We received enough gifts and offerings in December to catch up despite the ice storms. We've got a lot to do in the coming year, so it was important that we start out in good shape financially. With all the new activity in the church our expenses are increasing, as well. Thank you everyone for your support of our church and its ministries.

Happy New Year, Jeff Fuller

## New Men's Group to Start on Wednesday Nights

All of us need a chance to stop and reflect with others about the state of our souls and the state of our lives. The men of COA are invited to form a group that will meet immediately after our Wednesday night worship service at 7:30 p.m. starting on January 9<sup>th</sup>. The purpose of the group will be to support one another in our spiritual growth as men active at Church of the Open Arms. This is a good opportunity to meet new people and form lasting friendships. For more information call Jim Stovall at 204-0811.

## Open Arms opened it's doors

to the community to stand together against the violence that led to the death of Steven Domer. Steven was a gay man who was abducted from 39th and Penn, and then brutally murdered by two members of a white supremacy gang. For friends of Steven, this was their only chance to gather and remember his life. Thanks to all who helped pull together this time of community, mourning, and call to action.



Above: lighting candles in remembrance of all those lost to hate and violence. Far Left: Clergy stand together to proclaim religious support, denouncing hate. Near Left: All join hands as we sing "We are a Gentle and Angry People."

In an exercise in leadership training, the church leaders were asked to write an article in which in the year 2012 Church of the Open Arms is selected as Time Magazine's "Person of the Year." The following is the article written about our future.

## **PERSON OF THE YEAR 2012**

### *Church of the Open Arms*

*Dear Readers,*

*In past years the person of the year has been a famous (and sometimes infamous) person that has had a significant affect on the world scene. Politicians, educators, religious leaders, scientists, entertainers, Nobel Prize winners, and ordinary people like you and me who have made a contribution to humankind have graced the front cover of our **Person of the Year** issue. This year, a group of people have sent a message to the world that peace, equality, and inclusion are attainable in a loving and nonjudgmental world. Following is the story of a strong willed United Church of Christ that truly makes a difference.*

*The Editors.*

Church of the Open Arms, a United Church of Christ located in Oklahoma City has been selected as the 2012 Person of the Year.

Spreading like wildfire across the plains of North America, the mountains and glens of Europe and easing into China and the Mideast, Church of the Open Arms brings new life to dying congregations everywhere. The story begins in 1997.

A small group of Christians, led by the courageous Reverend Dr. Kathy McCallie, embarked on a journey with a vision that a church could be for all the people - people of color, people of a different sexual orientation, people with their families, people that lead the community and its businesses, people that are disabled, people of different races, and people that are discouraged. This small spirited band of people came together and created a place where all people could worship in a welcoming and inclusive environment. As time passed, this small Christian congregation in Oklahoma grew to become the model for the world.

Outreach, using modeling behaviors, collaboration, and kindness created strong programs and activities at the church and the Church of the Open Arms became more than one pillar of the community. Any individual who needed to be included, be treated with the dignity and respect they deserve, be fed and be welcomed with no judgments quickly learned of this significant body of people.

Music, the language of all people, is used at each and every time of worship. The music on Sunday is traditional and many times original. The musicians create an incredible accompaniment to a gifted choir who lead the congregation with a lively beat and joyous voices that lifts the spirits high. This liveliness of spirit spread quickly throughout the congregation and flows into the larger community. The Church on Pennsylvania rings with laughter and activity most days. The Sunday service brings sounds of music booming from the Sanctuary. "Mixed Company" a small musical group, performs frequently and is seen and heard throughout the community. The group represents the diversity of the congregation. "We rock the flock." Conna Wilkinson

Youth programs began in earnest in 2007. After looking for a few years "Godly Play" was introduced to the younger children. The talented instructors are helping the children learn the true meaning of God and Christ's teaching. The play fosters the values of inclusivity, acceptance and openness. Older youth began meeting in 2008 in an organized manner. They organized themselves, set goals and became the beacon of the Church. Recognized nationwide as a provider of selfless acts, this group is truly the future of the Church.

As part of its commitment to social welfare and justice, Church of the Arms sponsors the largest food pantry in the state of Oklahoma. Beginning with just 80 people the program has grown so large that 18 area churches assist with the distribution of food to over 1800 individuals. The new Open Arms Market is open three days per week and is located in a former grocery store in the heart of Oklahoma City. On two days a week local farmers and artisans sell their products at the market.

If any groups of people need representation to fight for justice, Church of the Open Arms is willing and able to help. Whether its vigils, marches or legal representation with their staff of qualified legal advisors and attorneys, and networks everyone can be assisted if their cause is just and inclusive.

All who catch sight of this ever evolving Church readily notice there are no big campaigns, no glorious monuments, no big TV shows and grand exposure. These are just people who want to make a difference and their message is catching on around the world. Slowly and wisely Reverend McCallie has guided her congregation to justice and inclusion. Their arms are wide open to everyone to join them come to the aid of others. They are a haven for the healthy and the wounded. They are responding to the times with love and compassion

Following Jesus involves loving and honoring everyone who crosses the Church's path. They are welcomed for who they are as they are. They will each know that they belong at the Church of the Open Arms. In turn, they know they are there to care *for* everyone who has real needs. The Church is a mixture of races, ages, sexual orientation, theologies, men and women, regardless of financial status.

Time *magazine*, its editors and advertisers salute the Church of the Open Arms for opening the world to compassion, love and inclusivity.



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## **New Wednesday night Class**

On Wednesday January 9th a new class will begin at Open Arms. The class will be led by Sharon Doan and based on Gary Zukav's national best-seller, "The Seat of the Soul." The class will meet from 7:00 until 8:30 and will include a weekly presentation followed by class discussion. Books may be purchased new for \$14.00 or from online used booksellers for \$1.99 up. Initial plans are for a two month class, although length may be adjusted according to the enthusiasm and energy of everyone involved!

Gary Zukav, winner of the 1979 American Book Award in Science for "The Dancing Wu Li Masters" and a frequent guest of Oprah's, published "The Seat of the Soul" in 1990. In simple yet elegant language, Zukav convincingly offers the vision that humanity is on the cusp of evolving into a species capable of 'authentic power,' based on the values of the spirit and accompanied by multisensory perception. In Zukav's words, "An authentically empowered person is one who is so strong, so empowered, that the idea of using force against another is not a part of his or her consciousness....The multisensory human is able to perceive, and to appreciate, the role that our physical reality plays in a larger picture of evolution, and the dynamics by which our physical reality is created and sustained. This realm is invisible to the five-sensory human."

Crediting Zukav as her 'first and best new consciousness teacher,' Sharon brings to the classroom a long career in teaching along with a passion for learning, especially with other open and compassionate minds. Please join her in this exciting class as we explore the joy and hope of an earth and heaven at long last merged through the creative intentions of intuitive, loving co-creators. Anyone desiring further information are most welcomed to call Sharon at 282-8125 or 833-4105.

## **Godly Play – Fall Update by Maria Rubino-Watkins**

Godly Play is a HUGE success! We began our new children's worship program in October and by the 6<sup>th</sup> week, we had outgrown our original room, increasing from 4 children on the first Sunday to 13 by the 6<sup>th</sup>. We have now moved to the third and largest room available. The children have responded as predicted... They LOVE it! They are learning about the church, about Christianity, and to be in fellowship and community with one another as Jesus taught. They have taken turns as child of the day, bravely taking on the responsibilities of bringing and serving the feast (fruit and water or juice), guiding first time visitors through the worship morning, and collecting the offering. They have engaged in response time with their whole hearts, learning how to use the materials and exploring some of the many ways we can "respond" to a bible story. They are learning to work with paint, to create forms from clay, and to use music and prayer, all in the activity called worship. They are learning how to focus their energy on the lesson in order to engage in the spiritual process of Godly Play.

In the past 10 weeks, the children have learned how the church marks time in its own calendar, the story of Creation which the congregation was also able to hear and see during the Children's Moment, the stories of The Flood and the Ark, The Holy Family, The Great Family, The Exodus, and The 10 Best Ways to Live. A few weeks ago, they were able to read the holy scripture for the first time and this was an amazing experience for many of them. Now that we have entered Advent, they grow in understanding each week why we need so much time to prepare for the Great Mystery of Christmas. In all their Godly Play they are becoming a community, each on his or her journey to finding meaning and purpose through exploration of the Christian faith.

We are so grateful to all who have supported Godly Play in thoughts, words, or deeds. Namely, we are grateful to all who have volunteered for Godly Play story telling and door person duties including: Robert Watkins, Winston Lewis, Kenny Wright, Steve Ross, Jay Johnson, Raye Monroe, Melinda Norton, and Shelley Alonso. We are grateful to those who have donated money to help purchase our upcoming stories which will enable our ministry to continue through this year and for many years to come: Mark Parsons and Carl Friend, Kyler and Ashlynn Mellen, Tim Lewis, Al Wise and Marshall McElveer, Jeffrey Vogle and Troy Milligan, and Curtis and Neel Abbott. We are additionally grateful for the anonymous donation of frozen popsicles! Thank you to Pat Webb for volunteering to assist in training volunteers and to work with our children to use art in Godly Play. Thank you to Chris Long, Melinda Norton, Pam Norton, Troy Milligan, and Robert Watkins for helping to paint our new Godly Play room – it was a huge job and looks really beautiful as a result of their labors. Lastly, much thanks is extended to the Leadership Council for their ongoing support and encouragement. We continue to be in need of additional labor and materials including: art supplies such as clay, paint, paper, and plastic work trays for each child (which can all be purchased at Lakeshore Learning on May and 6<sup>th</sup>). We need headphones for our music area. And we need specific books for our Prayer Rainbow. Please assist us as you are able by donating in cash or kind. You can leave a cash donation in the offering basket and write "Godly Play" in the memo area. Or you may contact Maria Rubino-Watkins at any time for more information on how you can help 528-2199. For those interested in volunteering, there are training dates scheduled on an ongoing basis. In addition, if you are a parent or care giver of a child age 4-12 and you would like to know more about Godly Play, there are parent participation events scheduled for twice per quarter. Please call Maria for more information.

# WEDNESDAY NIGHT SERVICES

**Every Wednesday Night  
7:00 PM**

**SEE ARTICLE ON PAGE 3**

*“Never place a period where God has placed a comma.” -Gracie Allen*

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