



The Central Connection

MESSAGES & OPPORTUNITIES FROM CENTRAL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH TO YOU!

December 2009



Advent

Advent. . . the slowest season!

When I was little, as soon as my family celebrated Thanksgiving, I would begin to anticipate Christmas Eve. During December, I enjoyed the carols my Mom used to play on the piano. I enjoyed lying under the Christmas tree (yes, lying) looking up at the lights and pondering the manger scene. I enjoyed the Christmas Eve service when the dark night was illuminated by candles. But as a child, the main attraction for me was the presents under the tree.

December seemed the longest month. When school finally got out for Christmas vacation, time slowed down even more. The last 10-14 days before Christmas seemed unbearable. I felt as though I couldn't stand it—I'm sure all my sighing and longing and boredom must have gotten on my mother's nerves! I hated to wait. Delayed gratification was not something I considered necessary.

December is no longer the longest month for me. In fact, time seems to zoom by faster and faster each year. But somehow, when we honor Advent as the waiting season in the church--delaying the Christmas carols, and our celebration of the richness of God's gift of Jesus—the delay can get on people's nerves. After all, in the stores, red and green have been evident since before Halloween. In some places I've seen Thanksgiving items on sale two weeks before Thanksgiving, as other "seasonal" items take their place. The catalogues have certainly been arriving in volume! Soon, the music will begin in the stores and on the radio—and in the church we wait. And wait. And wait. Why the delay?

For one reason, church time is based on God's time, and God's time and the world's time are almost always different. The church is out of step with the world. Advent waiting is to help us remember the waiting, longing and sighing of the prophets and others who yearned for God to come into the world to set things right. We only have

(Continued on next page)

to wait four weeks—they waited several hundred years! They were hoping for a Savior, a Messiah, a King, a Deliverer—the One we know as Jesus the Christ.

If we learn to wait on God's time, instead of insisting on our own time, it will prevent many misadventures. While we wait, we can become aware of what makes us anxious, or worried, or afraid, or cranky—and we can give those things over to God who comes to us again and again in our daily lives. Things that make us frantic and out of breath are not from God. While we wait, we can discover what draws us closer to God: worship, meditating on God's promises, giving thanks for God's goodness, or savoring quiet time. We find, as we wait, that God is waiting too, for just the right time.

I hope you will wait with me,

Pastor Stephanie

CENTRAL GIVEN AWARD



Central UMC was selected by the Mental Health America of Augusta to receive their 2009 J. Lewis Gibbs Award.

This award is given to a person or organization in our community who has rendered unusual service in the area of mental health and/or who has been instrumental in securing and providing services or facilities for mentally ill persons in our area.

Central has provided meeting space for NAMI – WE CARE Augusta to meet at the Church for several years at no charge. NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) is a support, educational, and advocacy organization for individuals and families affected by mental illness. The group meets in the Fellowship Hall at Central on the 3rd Tuesday of each month, 6:30–8:00 p.m.

We thank God that we are able to offer space for those in need!

THANK YOU

Thank you so much for hosting the Love and Logic Parenting Class for the Central Shenandoah Valley Office on Youth. We sincerely appreciate your support in serving local families and our community.

This note was received from the Parenting Program Coordinator following the 7-week program which met in our newly renovated 3rd floor.

GOD'S RENEWED CREATION



Copies of *A Pastoral Letter from the Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church* are available in the Gathering Area. The letter addresses some of the needs of our world along with their responses.

The Central Connection is the monthly newsletter of Central United Methodist Church, Lewis and Beverley Streets, Staunton, VA.

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IN MINISTRY

The Mission of Central UMC is to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

Resident Bishop	Charlene Payne Kammerer
District Superintendent	Kathleen Overby Webster
Pastor.....	Stephanie M. Sault
Pastoral Assistant.....	Daniel K. Purdom
Retired Missionary Professor.....	Hunter P. Mabry
Professor MBC.....	Kenneth A. Beals
Minister of Music/Organist.....	Sherry von Oeyen

MUSIC NOTES

*Glory to God
in the highest,
and on earth peace,
good will toward all.*
Luke 2:1-20



Most of us are familiar with Henry Wadsworth Longfellow as a fine poet. He was a legend in his own time and in his later years, in many schools his birthday was a holiday. Longfellow is not usually thought of as a hymn writer, but one of his poems was set to music by an Englishman, John Calkin. This carol became very popular.

On Christmas Day, 1863, Longfellow wrote of the joys of the season:

I heard the bells on Christmas day,
 their old familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet the words repeat
 of peace on earth, good will to men.

As he came to the 3rd stanza, he began to think of the current condition of his beloved country. The Civil War was carrying on, days looked dark, and he probably asked himself, "How can the last phrase of those stanzas be true in this war-torn country, where brother fights against brother and father against son?" He continued to write:

And in despair I bowed my head:
 "There is no peace on earth," I said,
"For hate is strong, and mocks the song
 of peace on earth, good will to man!"

It seems as if he could have been writing for our present time, too. Finally his last verse turned to the One who solves all problems:

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
 "God is not dead, nor doth he sleep;
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail,
 with peace on earth, good will to men."

Let us indeed pray for peace on earth, in every corner, for every person. Lord, we thank you for our Prince of Peace in Jesus Christ our Lord!

—Sherry von Oeyen

TOY DRIVE

December 20

The children of Central are having a Christmas toy drive to benefit residents of the New Directions Women's Shelter. Please bring new or gently used toys on Sunday,

December 20. The children will collect them during the Children's Focus portion of the Worship Service.

The shelter welcomes any toy in new or good condition, excluding used stuffed animals. New stuffed toys are welcomed and encouraged. Toys for children birth through elementary school ages are needed.



Some recommendations are:

- infant rattlers
- toddler noisemakers and crinkle books
- push toys
- baby dolls
- Lincoln logs
- diaries & journals
- CD players
- handheld gaming toys.

Gender-neutral toys for children under 3 years and younger are most useful, while gender-specific toys are needed for boys and girls 4-years and older. The children of your congregation greatly appreciate your support in this effort!



ANNUAL CHRISTMAS PROGRAM & LUNCH

Sunday, Dec. 6

Elsewhere in this newsletter is an announcement about the program and lunch following the 11:00 Worship Service on Dec. 6. All are invited!

Please bring 2 of your favorite covered dishes (enough for your family and to share with our guests). Meat will be provided.

Celebrating Advent & Christmas at Central UMC

Please invite your friends and neighbors to celebrate with you during this joyful season!

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL



Advent, A Calendar of Devotions 2009, by Robert V. Dodd, is a booklet of daily devotions for Advent (the four weeks before Christmas) that can help us step back from the hustle and stress of the season and prepare our hearts and minds to rejoice in God's loving gift, Jesus Christ. Each daily devotion includes a recommended Scripture reading, a Bible verse, an inspiring message, and an uplifting prayer.

Pick up your copy in the Gathering Room or the Church Office.

MITTEN TREE



You're invited to help decorate our Christmas Tree with new hats, gloves, mittens, scarves, and socks. Let's fill every branch with an extra bit of warmth for local needy people. "What's needed?" We're so glad you asked . . All sizes, from infant through adult, any color or style!



ANNUAL PROGRAM & LUNCH

Sunday, December 6

(following 11:00 Worship)



Our annual Christmas program and lunch will follow the 11:00 Worship Service on Dec. 6. Please bring your favorite covered dishes (enough for your family and to share with our guests).

WEDNESDAY

ADVENT

SERVICES

12:05 p.m.

Dec. 2 Rev. Patricia Meadows, Preaching
St. John's UMC, Serving Lunch

Dec. 9 Rev. Bob Edwards, Preaching
Christ UMC, Serving Lunch

Dec. 16 Rev. Stephanie Sault, Preaching
Central UMC, Serving Lunch



These devotional services are provided by the Staunton United Methodist Churches during Advent (and held here at Central UMC). The timing is planned to accommodate the "lunch hour," and everyone is welcome. A soup and sandwich lunch is served at 12:35 and is provided by volunteers from the designated church. (\$2 donation) Please invite a friend or co-worker to join you.

CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE

December 24, 7:00 p.m.

Lessons and Carols
Holy Communion
Candlelighting Service

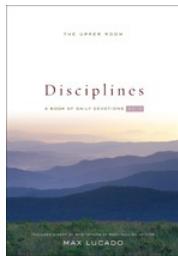


Your family and friends will want to participate in this special service and celebrate the coming of our Savior.

CHRISTMAS OFFERING

(During the month of December)
Is there any room for Jesus on your Christmas gift list? Who's getting the biggest gift on His birthday?





The Upper Room Disciplines, A Book of Daily Devotions 2010

"*Disciplines* offers you a way to make time and space for God: to still yourself, to meditate on scripture, to pray, and to listen. Each week, *Disciplines* features scriptures from the Revised Common Lectionary, a guide or table of readings used weekly in public worship. Each week a spiritual leader or writer reflects on a different set of scriptures, explores its meaning, and suggests a way to meditate and pray. This daily practice of scripture reading, reflection, and prayer is a powerful means of grace and spiritual growth.

There are countless ways to approach a daily discipline of scripture reading and prayer. Quiet time in the morning can be calming and centering for you; this may be the best time for study and prayer. Or, you may need time in the evening to pause, reflect, and pray. You may decide to read *Disciplines* just before you exercise; prayer and meditation are sometimes deepest when people swim, walk, or run. No matter what form your spiritual discipline takes, scripture is clear that God begins with you wherever and however you begin.

Begin—or begin again—today. Seize this time, now, to be with God... ."

—Helen R. Neinast
Author and Consultant, *Upper Room Books*

Now available in the Gathering Area
and the Church Office:

Regular Print	\$12
Large Print	\$15

2010 SPENDING PLAN

Included in this newsletter (the ones being mailed and handed out) is a copy of Central's 2010 Spending Plan. Figures shown on this plan are funds that have been requested for various program work areas (Worship, Music, Outreach, Witness, Nurture, Education, etc.), for operations and maintenance, staff support, district and conference apportionments.



The grand total of the requests in our 2010 Spending Plan is \$343,673. We hope to be able to fund as much of that total and as many of those requests as possible so that all ministry goals and operations costs will be honored.

Our anticipated income for 2010 includes:

2010 Pledges to date	\$168,537
Other Anticipated Income	41,500

(Other anticipated income includes: interest income, loose plate offerings, Sunday School offerings, use of building, Easter and Christmas offerings, etc.)

In case you haven't had an opportunity to indicate your financial support pledge for 2010, you may still send it to the Church Office or contact the Church Secretary.

Thank you to all who support the many ministries of your church!



Our Christmas Offering

During this most glorious time of year, Central UMC has historically offered the opportunity for our members to make a special gift to the church in recognition of the birth of Christ. Central will again provide envelopes this year so that we can give a Christmas offering. These envelopes will be in the weekly bulletins during December as well as this newsletter.

While my task is to inform the members that the Christmas offering is available, I want to be careful to emphasize that gifts should be as your heart and relationship with God allow you to contribute.

*“Each one should give what he has decided in his heart to give,
not reluctantly or under compulsion,
for God loves a cheerful giver”*
(2 Corinthians 9:7)

As you prepare to make a gift this year to the Christmas offering, please give what you believe God wants you to give. The past 18 months have been difficult economically. Some members may not be able to give what they have given in the past. Those of us who have been more financially blessed should ask how much more God wants us to do. I am sure that God will respond.

Please consider prayerfully a gift to this year's Christmas Offering.

Tom Davis, Chairperson
Committee on Finance

NEWS FROM SINGAPORE

I have been exploring different sections in Singapore while I wait to return to the States. Recently Steve and I went to Chinatown, historically an area where Chinese labourers lived during the 1820's-1870's. Today the area is a melting pot of all races and religions. When we got off the MRT (Subway) at Chinatown, I was amazed at all the construction taking place on the streets. The paths for pedestrians wound through back alleys, stacks of cardboard, and tin tunnels. Our map was useless because roads were blocked off and it appeared there was no way to get from here to there.

But we found the Thian Hock Keng Temple, thanks to a couple of tour buses we followed. Built in 1839, it's the oldest Chinese temple in

Singapore. Today people actively worship the Ma Zhu Po (goddess of the sea) and Yue Gong Niang Niang (moon goddess) in the main hall. Nearby are the ancestor tablets which list the names of people who have died. I even saw black and white photos of individuals placed on the tablets which meant there were people who honestly came here every week and lit incense for their deceased relatives. On the walls were famous Chinese philosophers, even emperors, that had been defied. As a person who studies history, I admired the gold woodwork, the artistic carving, and the unique shrines. The thought of defying humans was completely alien, though.

After touring the Chinese temple, we walked past two mosques. Steve and I entered one. As a woman in shorts, I was not able to go further than the door. I could see inside, however, and saw people moving around the great hall. Guess what, no pews!

Everything is done on the floor. There was a sign in the lobby telling us what Islam was about, emphasizing that it was a religion of peace. There was an apology for Islamic terrorists. With bombings going on everywhere in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Pakistan, I think they feel they ought to separate themselves from terrorists. There hasn't been any violence here since the 1960's. The amount of police, soldiers, warnings,

billboards, keep people ever aware that it could happen here.

Now, after our Muslim experience, we moved on to the last temple I wanted to see, the Sri Mariamman Temple. It was getting a face lift so all the 72 Hindu deities were covered by tarps. I did glimpse the sacred cow statues that lined the roof. It's the oldest Hindu temple in town, dating back to 1827 when Indian merchants came with the British to set up businesses. The temple is dedicated to Sri Mariamman, Shiva's wife, who supposedly cures diseases. The day we wandered in, they were chanting and burning offerings to numerous deities carved from wood.

There were food offerings brought by the people and then distributed to the people for lunch after all the rituals had been done. Everyone got a white and red smear on their

forehead. We looked at all the gods and goddesses before they covered them up for safe keeping. Since we were barefoot, we couldn't stay long on the pavement. I hopped between shady spots. It was too bad we had missed the walking on hot coals day. That would have been something.

The next day was Sunday and we went to church as usual at Wesley United Methodist Church. I felt right at home in the sanctuary, listening to music glorifying God. I didn't have to bow on the floor, wasn't offering food to wooden carvings, and there was no picture of some historical figure I should be praying to. Some people believe we all worship the same God, just in a different form. We use different rituals but we are all reaching out to something greater than ourselves. My trip to Chinatown didn't prove that to me. Maybe the cultural difference biased my thinking, but I couldn't help but think there was something wrong in believing that all religions are the same. Did these idols really have power over humans?

Well, obviously, the answer is personal. I know what my answer was.

Love, Donna.





Central United Methodist Church

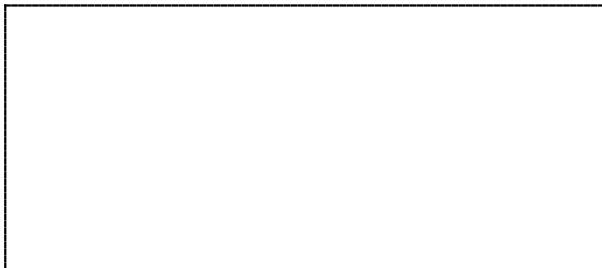
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December 2009

Return Service Requested



Merry Christmas from

Pastor Stephanie, Dan, Sherry

Janet, & Agnes