

the **Visitor...**

. . . bringing into your home the news and ministries of
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Vallejo

Thoughts Shared
from the pastor's keyboard

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. Matthew 5:43-45

I've been thinking . . . about Being Repossessed!

A couple of weeks ago Fred and I were driving down the freeway to Fairfield, and I glimpsed a huge sign over a tent in a parking lot. "Repo Furniture and Household Goods Sale". I was stricken with a feeling of sadness and puzzlement. There it lay sprawled under the tent and into the parking lot—couches and chairs and tables and boxes of goods, the debris of broken lives, of failed businesses and lost hopes. I know people often think of these things as the goods of people who are dead beats, people who refused to pay for what they had bought. And of course, some of them were dishonest. But many, I know, were just people who had hopes and dreams, people who believed in the future. And the future failed them. Naturally, the sellers wanted their goods back. We see the ads all the time—repossessed houses, cars, RVs, furniture. And in our legal system we lock up people who have failed to observe the system, failed to obey the laws, we repossess portions of their lives, and in the last extremity, for the most serious crimes, we repossess their lives altogether, and put them to death.

There has been a lot of controversy over the death penalty. It was a controversial issue when I was in high school, and took part in a debate on the subject. It was controversial when California decided to re-enact the death penalty. Conversation and debate at our own Annual Meeting on the subject was passionate. And it rises again in controversy every time someone is put to death. Recently two men have died at the hands of the state. One man who had killed, had turned his life around in prison and made a significant contribution working to help kids avoid life in gangs. Some members of our congregation stood outside the gates of San Quentin taking part in a candlelight vigil for the condemned man. The other was a man who had killed, and

then ordered the killing of two witnesses against him. By the time he was executed, he was blind, in a wheelchair, and had to be carried into the death chamber.

There are many parts of the question of the death sentence. Does it truly act as a deterrent? (The man who had the witnesses against him seems to indicate not.) Isn't it actually a more expensive drain on society than life in prison? What do we do about the possibility of error, since we have discovered DNA testing and it has proved a number of condemned people innocent? As Christians, we are directed by Jesus to love our enemies, not to seek "an eye for an eye." A more recent philosopher, J.R.R. Tolkien put it very well. The Hobbit Frodo is angry because the evil creature Gollum has escaped from his prison. "You should have killed him. He deserved death!" cries Frodo in fear and anger. The wise wizard answers that yes, Gollum did probably deserve death, many times over. But, he went on, there are many people who deserve to live, yet die. "Can you give them life? If not, perhaps you shouldn't be in too much hurry to deal out death." Beyond all arguments, we come down to this. It's not a matter of deserving death or life. We do not create the divine spark of life, and it is not ours to destroy no matter what the crime, just because we can. People may recover from repossessed goods. They may rebuild dreams and hopes, especially with the love and support of their friends and community. A life repossessed, however, cannot be newly acquired. This issue is not going away anytime soon, but it persists in nagging at our Christian consciences. Or it should. What are your thoughts?

Shalom,
Judith

Judith on leave

Pastor Judith will be taking a two-week sabbatical beginning on February 1st. We will have guests in the pulpit the two Sundays she will be gone, one from outside our congregation and the other from within: John Collister on the 5th, and Helen Mezzera on the 12th. Please make them feel welcome with a good turnout!

first Fifth Sunday celebration is here

The Fifth Sunday celebration of freedom (January 29th, 10:30 a.m.) will feature a performance of drummers - Matu Feleciano and Michael Doran - and hymns old and new that speak of freedom. A special offering will be taken for Disciples Mission Fund, which seeks to fulfill the worldwide mission of the church. So come to worship Sunday the 29th with an expectant spirit and with receiving and giving hearts and hands.

still have your blessing box?

If you keep forgetting to bring your blessing box to church, that's ok - but try to get it in as soon as possible. No doubt we're all anxious to learn how successful this first-time endeavor was.

attend a progressive Christianity discussion group

Our study/discussion groups on progressive Christianity are already underway, but that doesn't mean it's too late to attend the sessions! Just get the discussion materials and then choose from one of three sessions: Saturday mornings (10:30 at Mugg's coffee shop in the ferry building), Sundays right after church, and Sunday evenings (7:00 p.m. at Viona's). The groups are scheduled to run through the third week of February, but if they go well, maybe we'll have an opportunity to continue the discussion in the future.

still time to sign up for annual meeting

Is this the year for you to attend your first CCNCN annual meeting, or for you to make it back to the beautiful Asilomar grounds in Pacific Grove? With Rev. Sharon Watkins, the new General Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), as the featured guest, this would be a great year to go! Annual Meeting will be April 28th-30th, and several of our members will be going. The deadline for reserving housing is February 20th. For more information, see Judith, Carl, Jeanne, or Helen.

spring yard sale in the works

We're already thinking about having a church yard sale sometime this spring, and we can collect items to sell any time you want to bring them in. So when you start your spring cleaning, and find all those unwanted items buried in the back of your closets or up in your attics, keep the church in mind.

outreach spotlight

As we continue to look for new avenues for outreach, I would like to spotlight in the Visitor events and organizations which the congregation may not know much about. Here's my first spotlight!

This past November our church supported Indian People Organizing for Change and the Vallejo Intertribal Council by hosting some of the participants in the peace walk that began in Vallejo. Now, a similar event is being planned on a much bigger scale. It is the 28th Annual International Sacred Run, which leaves from Alcatraz on February 11th and runs to Washington, D.C. - a distance of about 4,000 miles. The 70 day run covers 12 states, arriving in the nation's capital on Earth Day, April 22nd. Runners will swing through Gulf Coast territory to be with those who are rebuilding after the hurricanes.

The theme of every sacred run is "All Life is Sacred." Along the way, runners will engage each other in conversations about clean air, soil and water; sacred sites and burial sites and other issues of concern to Native Americans; and the ways of people in peace and war.

Once again, our congregation can be supportive by keeping the runners in our prayers. Also, sponsors are needed! To sponsor a runner, or to just learn more about the Sacred Run, visit sacredrun.org.

FCC showers baby gifts far and wide

Our joyful Christmas morning celebration produced enough baby items to fill several mangers! Thank you to everyone who donated these gifts to help mothers in need; we were able to assist families at the Christian Help Center, victims of the Napa flood, young mothers through Life Abortion Alternatives Ministry (LAAM) here in Vallejo, and Native American families living in poverty on a reservation in South Dakota. What a gift!

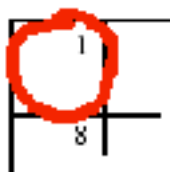
Christmas potluck . . . start of a new tradition?

Six guests joined eighteen folks from our congregation at our Christmas day open house and potluck. We were thrilled to be able to provide a meal and fellowship for so many of those in attendance for whom this was their Christmas dinner and celebration. The event was so well-received, let's plan on hosting it again next year, yes?

Epiphany Dinner thanks

Jeanne and Allison Cordes send out a big "thank you" to all who helped make the Epiphany Dinner a success: Thanks to Ted, Glenda, Dave, Janice, Helen, Ruth, Carl and Jon. It was really appreciated.

The dinner truly was a pasta extravaganza! We were sorry that several of our new members were unable to be with us that day - but we look forward to welcoming them at a future gathering.



mark your calendars

February

- 6 - Peace Prayer Service. 7 p.m. in the sanctuary.
- 28 - Shrove Tuesday celebration. Details to follow!



*Finished with the **Visitor**? Don't forget to recycle!*

