

March, 2006

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

I've been thinking . . . about Hidden Promise

A clever poster once proclaimed: *Those Who Sing, Pray Twice*. I am often amazed by the wonder of words, and many times have found just the perfect phrase or image to express my feeling of the moment in the words of a hymn. Hymn 638 in the Chalice Hymnal is familiar to most of us as "In the Bulb There Is a Flower." It is in the section entitled "Death and Eternal Life," and was written by Natalie Sleeth, composer of many choir anthems. This hymn was originally an anthem called "Hymn of Promise." Of it Natalie Sleeth wrote: "[I was] pondering the idea of life and death, spring and winter, Good Friday and Easter, and the whole reawakening of the world that happens every spring...I worked on the words very carefully, choosing just the right 'pairings' to get across the idea of something inherent in something else even though unseen."

The words of this hymn provide our theme during the Lenten Season: A Hidden Promise. And it is particularly touching to me at this moment in time because we have, as a congregation, recently touched the hidden promise of God's love and the mystery of life and death through the loss of two of our Christian family, Don Fleenor and Sandy McIver. Don and his wife Marchia were members here for only a few years, but they were both loving and generous and we missed them when ill health caused their move to an assisted living facility in Petaluma. Since Marchia's death, Don lived alone and experienced a continuing loss of memory and health. Yet even through the darkening of his memory the "real Don" would occasionally peek out and smile, and shake his head at the challenge life had become. You knew the bright intellect was there, hidden most of the time, waiting to be freed. His faith remained strong and his hope unshaken. When he was finally released to new life, I know his spirit soared. He will be missed by all those who had the chance to know him.

Sandy McIver, most of you may remember, came to us at the invitation of Milton and Sylvan during our Evangelism program of outreach to the LGBT community. Sandy was an amazing person who somehow had the ability to laugh at the hardships of life,

still finding joy in living no matter what the cost. She suffered from many illnesses of the body, but her spirit was strong and amazingly courageous. I will never forget the joy I felt when she walked down the aisle to join this congregation on an Easter Sunday morning. Her sister Wynona thanked me for our church's embracing and welcoming Sandy, and being family to her. I was humbled, because I feel the debt is on our side. She taught us so much about living with courage and humor and determination. Finally, however, it was time to go home, go to glory and be free. I find it impossible to believe, even now, that I will not be taking Sandy for any more rides in the "Bird."

Easter is about transformation. It is the story not of more life but of new life. Transformation is not about rearranging what is. Transformation is about emptying out and making space for something new. Transformation is about the hidden promise of God's ability to make all things not just better, but *new*. As we enter the Lenten season of this year of our Lord 2006, you will receive a booklet published by the region entitled "Transforming Darkness." It contains readings by many Disciples you know and is a rich gift of prayerful insight and comfort. Let us enter the journey together with hope, knowing that the hidden promises will, in their season, all be revealed. Alleluia!

Spleeth, Natalie. Quoted in the Chalice Hymnal, Chalice Press, 1989.

Shalom,
Judith

count your blessings!

There is just one more month for you to share your blessings in the "blessing carton." On the first or second Sunday of April, a representative of the Redding First Christian Church will be coming to our service and accepting the carton. So let us remember that we are blessed by the grace of God and that the money we place in the carton will be used for God's work.

share your thoughts on progressive discussion groups

By my count, twenty-six different members of the congregation have attended at least one session of the progressive study/discussion, with most of them attending one of our three groups regularly. What a positive response, and I want to thank all of you for your participation. Everyone I've spoken with seems to feel that the discussions were positive, at times challenging, but helpful in getting to know each other and who we are and what we believe as a church community.

The next step will be for all the groups to get together and share their feelings about the discussions, the materials we used, and what our next steps might be. How do we answer these questions: Do we think we are a progressive church? Do we feel that we can call ourselves that as we try to reach out to people without a church home? Are we comfortable with the definition for "progressive Christianity" as laid out by the Center for Progressive Christianity, and do we want to list ourselves in their online directory? We'll begin this process after church on Sunday, March 5th. Bring your lunch and come prepared to share your thoughts on where we go from here.

FCC members head to Gulf Coast

From March 18th to 24th, Ted Goode and Carl Cordes will be part of CCNCN's Gulf Coast Mission Trip. Keep them - and the people whom they will be helping in that devastated area - in your prayers. We are excited for them, and can't wait to hear all about their experience when they get back!

new California waste laws affect all of us!

In February, a new law went into effect in the state of California prohibiting individuals from throwing away certain types of ordinary household waste: all types of batteries, fluorescent light bulbs, and electronic goods are just some of the items which are banned from landfills due to potentially dangerous chemicals which they could release into the environment. Note: that includes the energy-efficient compact fluorescent bulbs many of us use in our homes, as well as in the church. Don't throw these in the trash! All of these items must be disposed of at a proper household hazardous waste facility.

Remember: we collect batteries - along with used ink and toner cartridges - in our recycling station just inside the front doors of the sanctuary; so you can bring these to church to dispose of. Other waste products can be taken to the Vallejo Garbage Service, the Devlin Road transfer station in American Canyon, or special e-waste collections held periodically throughout the year. If you want to know what you should do to dispose of these waste items, call the Vallejo Garbage Service, or our friends at VALCORE (645-8258). Or you can check out information online for the State of California at www.dtsc.ca.gov/HazardousWaste/UniversalWaste/index.cfm or for Solano County at www.co.solano.ca.us/SubSection/SubSection.asp?NavID=245.

opportunities for FCC

I want to invite FCC members to two events being planned by Solano Peace and Justice Coalition. The first is the film "Independent America: The Two Lane Search for Mom and Pop," which will be shown in our sanctuary on Thursday, March 16th at 7 p.m. This film explores the state of small businesses across our country, and how large corporate retail stores affect communities. This is a great film to see if you are a supporter of local and small businesses, or if you are trying to decide how you feel about the possible expansion of Wal-Mart here in Vallejo.

The second is a peace march that will be held on Saturday, March 18th beginning at 10:30 a.m. at the corner of Redwood and Sonoma Boulevard. From there we will walk to Georgia Street and then on to the peace pole at the ferry building. The theme of this event is "Dollars for Social Justice, Not War" and we are inviting nonprofit organizations and social service agencies who no doubt could use our federal tax dollars that have instead been spent on the war in Iraq. Please join us for the march; bring signs, identify yourself as a Christian who believes in peace, or even show your affiliation with FCC. And encourage your friends to participate, especially any contacts you have at local nonprofits.

what is “Oasis”?

Oasis began in 1999 at the beginning of Judith’s ministry here in Vallejo in response to a request for “more spirituality.” It is a small group which has ranged in number from two to seven. Although we have changed over time, our basic structure is a brief sharing time, a study of a book or theme, and a time of prayer. The group is named Oasis because its purpose is to provide a mid-week time of refreshment and rest among all the busyness and stresses of our everyday lives. We come together to explore our own spiritual concerns and ideas. This group is open to anyone who would like to come. It is currently being held at Judith’s home on Wednesday evenings at 6:00 p.m. Please join us as you will be mightily welcome!

outreach spotlight

The Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) is the largest, oldest interfaith peace organization in the U.S. and is dedicated to the promotion of nonviolence. The U.S. FOR was founded in 1915. It has become an interfaith and international movement with branches and groups in over 40 countries and on every continent. The Disciples Peace Fellowship is a member. FOR has a great online store full of books, bumper stickers, buttons, cards, and other resources.

Here is FOR’s mission statement: “FOR seeks to replace violence, war, racism, and economic injustice with nonviolence, peace, and justice. We are an interfaith organization committed to active nonviolence as a transforming way of life and as a means of radical change. We educate, train, build coalitions, and engage in nonviolent and compassionate actions locally, nationally, and globally.” Donations to FOR help this vision become a reality. For more information, visit www.forusa.org.

blessing box tally is in

This message is for everyone who contributed a percentage of your nonessential spending to our Blessing Box campaign: Great job! When we counted the funds in the boxes, which were collected from late October until Epiphany Sunday, there was \$724 in them! Thank you to everyone for your generous gifts. Just think what we could accomplish if we followed this practice year-round.

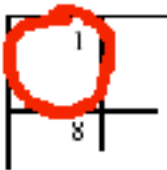
new year’s (peace) resolutions

At our December peace prayer service, we wrote down some ideas for what those of us in attendance would be willing to do to work for peace, rolled up the slips of paper, and tucked them away to await the New Year. Then at February’s service - the first one of 2006 - we took them out and read them aloud. Here are some of the ideas, which you can consider adopting as your own:

- ✧ Help others find peace within themselves, attend peace meetings, talk about peace!!
- ✧ Writing letters (not via the internet) to Congress and upper government
- ✧ Giving donations for the poor because joy reinforces personal peace

- ✎ Change my 401(k) to a socially responsible investment, and call my elected representatives on at least one issue
- ✎ Raise funds for victims of torture
- ✎ Writing to Gov. Schwarzenegger about inmates on death row and to write to our local newspaper about peace issues
- ✎ Speaking with friends whom I don't normally talk to about peace
- ✎ Asking people I meet to pray with me for peace in the world
- ✎ Including peace for the whole world in my daily prayer and donating to causes promoting peace for all parts of the world
- ✎ Research issues on news/internet to bring a well-read conversation to family/friends, and dealing with small stuff better
- ✎ Asking for peace in our family when there is discord brewing

In 2006, each service will focus on a different part of the world in need of our prayers for peace. We began in February with the Sudan, and our thanks go to Mary Ewart for sharing her understanding of the issues facing that troubled country. We collected \$20 to send to New Sudan Generation. Join us for our March service: Monday, March 6th at 7:00 p.m.



mark your calendars

March

- 5 - Progressive Discussion wrap-up session. After worship. Bring a lunch!
- 6 - Peace Prayer Service. 7 p.m. in the sanctuary.

April

- 3 - Peace Prayer Service. 7 p.m. in the sanctuary.
- 9 - Palm Sunday
- 16 - Easter. Pancake breakfast before worship.
- 28-30 - Annual Meeting at Asilomar.
- 30 - Fifth Sunday Celebration worship!