

Calendar of Prayer

LARGE PRINT

DECEMBER 2009

First Congregational Church
United Church of Christ
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December 1, 2009

Scripture:

2 Samuel 7:18-29

Revelation 22:12-16

Psalm 90

"Seasons of the Spirit" Theme: Sign of Things to Come

Liturgical Season: First Sunday of Advent

Story:

"Changing Lives, that's Our Church's Wider Mission." [OCWM](#) is often described as "Who We Are" as the United Church of Christ – and that's true. We might even say that OCWM is "Who We Are – Together!" Because UCC churches give faithfully and generously to OCWM through Basic Support and the special mission offerings, hunger and homelessness and world health are being addressed. Victims of war, famine, and natural disaster are helped. Churches are started and nurtured, church buildings are made more accessible, and ministries are growing and giving glory to God, all over the place. Native American pastors are supported in their long and arduous drives across many hundreds of miles, and congregations and pastors are supported in the process of listening to God's call and find each other. Through Our Church's Wider Mission, we are changing lives – thanks be to God!

Prayer:

O God of all the prophets, you herald the coming of the Son of Man by wondrous signs in the heavens and on the earth. Guard our hearts from despair so that we, in the company of the faithful and by the power of your Holy Spirit, may be found ready to raise our heads at the coming near of our redemption, the day of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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December 2, 2009

Scripture:

Isaiah 1:24-31

Luke 11:29-32

Psalm 90

"Seasons of the Spirit" Theme: Sign of Things to Come

Liturgical Season: First Sunday of Advent

Story:

Begun as an orphanage in 1858 by the pastor of [St. Peter's Evangelical Church](#), the [Evangelical Children's Home](#) strives to achieve its mission to "assist children, youth, and their families in their quest for health and wholeness through faithful, professional services." The work and ministry of the ECH reaches the lives of many children who have suffered severe physical, sexual, and emotional abuse and neglect. Many are suicidal or severely depressed. They need love and support, just like children 140 years ago, but they also need something more. They need a new beginning to help offer ways to heal the traumas they have suffered during their young lives.

Prayer:

O God of all the prophets, you herald the coming of the Son of Man by wondrous signs in the heavens and on the earth. Guard our hearts from despair so that we, in the company of the faithful and by the power of your Holy Spirit, may be found ready to raise our heads at the coming near of our redemption, the day of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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December 3, 2009

Scripture:

Malachi 3:5-12

Philippians 1:12-18a

Luke 1:68-79

Theme: Make Ready

Liturgical Season: Second Sunday of Advent

Story:

There is an oil industry in Timor which is helping to increase some small towns' local economy. It's not fuel oil but coconut oil being processed and sold through a program administered by a group of Canossian sisters in Baucau. Wider Church Ministries volunteer Tom Liddle brought women from Triloka (where he and his wife Monica served for a few months) to learn about the project and to help them buy two processing machines so they can begin their own oil production. USAID is also helping the micro-credit venture to succeed – the kind of assistance Liddle wishes was typical of United States' foreign policy. Healthcare education was an important part of Monica Liddle's ministry in Timor – treating illnesses caused, in large part, by unsanitary conditions.

[Baptist World Aid](#) has proposed a mobile clinic for medical outreach to people in remote areas – a much needed service in Timor. Now Global Ministries missionaries, Tom and Monica returned in August to serve in East Timor.

Prayer:

Out of the embrace of mercy and righteousness, you have brought forth joy and dignity for your people, O Holy One of Israel. Remember now your ancient promise: make straight the paths that lead to you, and smooth the rough ways, that in our day we might bring forth your compassion for all humanity. Amen.

[WCM: Timor](#)

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December 4, 2009

Scripture:

Malachi 3:13-18

Philippians 1:18b-26

Luke 1:68-79

Theme: Make Ready

Liturgical Season: Second Sunday of Advent

Story:

One of the most distinctive features about [Emmaus UCC](#), Vienna, VA is their caring for themselves and others. [Emmaus Cares](#) is the heart of the ministry of the church, an extension of the pastoral ministry to include everyone. [Pastoral Care](#) — available at all times from the pastor. Links of [Love Prayer Ministry](#) — a group of people committed to praying for weekly joys and concerns of members and friends. [Health and Wellness Ministry](#) — offers opportunities to learn more about the connection between body, mind, and spirit. [Helping Hands](#) — provides meals to people in time of need. [EmmausCaregivers](#) — a group of people who have been trained to provide confidential one-to-one care and listening to people in all kinds of circumstances and needs.

Prayer:

Out of the embrace of mercy and righteousness, you have brought forth joy and dignity for your people, O Holy One of Israel. Remember now your ancient promise: make straight the paths that lead to you, and smooth the rough ways, that in our day we might bring forth your compassion for all humanity. Amen.

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December 5, 2009

Scripture:

Malachi 4:1-6

Luke 9:1-6

Luke 1:68-79

Theme: Make Ready

Liturgical Season: Second Sunday of Advent

Story:

In December of 2006 God called the people of [Bethlehem Church](#), Evansville, Indiana to serve over 150 meals at a Sunday evening dinner. Since that time, this monthly ministry has involved over 75 different people, who have had the pleasure of preparing meals for the homeless at the [United Caring Shelter](#). It is inspiring to see how the homeless people of the United Caring Shelter have the spiritual gift of gratitude in great abundance. Every cook and assistant cook who helps out always say they go away feeling love and appreciated by those they are blessed to serve. In addition to the monthly meals, several church members have been cooking weekday meals for years.

Prayer:

Out of the embrace of mercy and righteousness, you have brought forth joy and dignity for your people, O Holy One of Israel. Remember now your ancient promise: make straight the paths that lead to you, and smooth the rough ways, that in our day we might bring forth your compassion for all humanity. Amen.

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December 6, 2009

Scripture:

Baruch 5:1-9 or Malachi 3:1-4

Luke 1:68-79

Philippians 1:3-11

Luke 3:1-6

Theme: Make Ready

Liturgical Season: Second Sunday of Advent

Story:

Each month, from December through March, [Holy Covenant United Church of Christ](#) in Charlotte, North Carolina, hosts eight homeless "Neighbors" overnight as part of the citywide program, "[Room at the Inn](#)." On Sunday evening, this compassionate community of church members brings the neighbors from a homeless center to a church supper featuring healthy foods. After supper and fellowship, they prepare air mattresses and blankets, and give their guests towels, washcloths, and a toiletries packet with personal hygiene articles. The Neighbors are free to relax, sleep, watch TV/DVD in a separate room, or talk with the church folks. Two church members spend the night at the church, preparing breakfast around 4:00 a.m. – delicious food provided by other church folks. The meals are both nutritious, like a casserole, and delightful, with North Carolina's own Krispy Kreme doughnuts. Later, church members take the Neighbors to a downtown transportation center to go to their jobs or to the [Urban Ministry Center](#). Meanwhile, other church members put away mattresses, do laundry, and prepare for next month's visit. Youth and children participate, too. It's a teaching moment about the humanity of all, even though we may be separated by life circumstances. In fact, some volunteers from the church have had their own personal experience with poverty. Engaging in this marvelous ministry, says one member, "helps us to be braver about mission, about using our building for outreach and hospitality in the name of the gospel."

Prayer:

Out of the embrace of mercy and righteousness, you have brought forth joy and dignity for your people, O Holy One of Israel. Remember now your ancient promise: make straight the paths that lead to you, and smooth the rough ways, that in our day we might bring forth your compassion for all humanity. Amen.

Southern Conference

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December 7, 2009

Scripture:

Isaiah 40:1-11

Romans 8:22-25

Psalm 126

Theme: Make Ready

Liturgical Season: Second Sunday of Advent

Story:

Historically serving immigrating, first and second generation Filipinos,

[Moanalua](#)

[Community Church UCC](#), Honolulu, is in transition. What does it mean to be a predominantly Filipino congregation worshiping in the Pearl Harbor Memorial Chapel located on U.S. Naval property surrounded by military family housing?

When you believe vital, healthy churches welcome all peoples from all walks of life because God is God without limit, you seize your strategic location by welcoming all from a very diverse and transient military population. Members of Moanalua draw on their rich history of strong extended families, to create a place that can assist the faith and strengthen the family structures of military members and families far from home.

Prayer:

Out of the embrace of mercy and righteousness, you have brought forth joy and dignity for your people, O Holy One of Israel. Remember now your ancient promise: make straight the paths that lead to you, and smooth the rough ways, that in our day we might bring forth your compassion for all humanity. Amen.

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December 8, 2009

Scripture:

Isaiah 19:18-25

2 Peter 1:2-15

Psalm 126

Theme: Make Ready

Liturgical Season: Second Sunday of Advent

Story:

The stable where Jesus was born may not have been the accommodations that Mary and Joseph expected, but they were warm and dry and safe from harm at the hands of Herod. [Inanda Seminary](#), a mission high school for black African girls in Durban, South Africa, provided refuge for a family from Zimbabwe who escaped the tyranny that prevails in the country. The father of this family was a leader in the opposition party and was slain in front of his two sons. The mother, a math teacher, left everything behind to make a new life for her four children in South Africa. Once hired by the seminary, she and her family were reunited and, through the support of Global Ministries and other donors, the children were outfitted for school, and their home was equipped with essentials. May we all welcome the stranger in our midst and provide a haven from the storm.

Prayer:

Out of the embrace of mercy and righteousness, you have brought forth joy and dignity for your people, O Holy One of Israel. Remember now your ancient promise: make straight the paths that lead to you, and smooth the rough ways, that in our day we might bring forth your compassion for all humanity. Amen.

[WCM: South Africa](#)

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December 9, 2009

Scripture:

Isaiah 35:3-7

Luke 7:18-30

Psalm 126

Theme: Make Ready

Liturgical Season: Second Sunday of Advent

Story:

[Parkside Community Church, UCC](#), in Sacramento, just happens to be right next door to an elementary school. For years, members watched the students cross the church campus, stopping for a drink from the water fountain. "You know, we ought to be doing something for these kids," a retired teacher said one day. That led to a discussion with the Health Ministry Team, and that led to an after school program that has received the blessing of the school. They provide reading, tutoring, and snacks, and there is also enrichment activities including music, movement, visual arts, and gardening.

Prayer:

Out of the embrace of mercy and righteousness, you have brought forth joy and dignity for your people, O Holy One of Israel. Remember now your ancient promise: make straight the paths that lead to you, and smooth the rough ways, that in our day we might bring forth your compassion for all humanity. Amen.

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December 10, 2009

Scripture:

Amos 6:1-8

2 Corinthians 8:1-15

Isaiah 12:2-6

Theme: Look Forward

Liturgical Season: Third Sunday of Advent

UCC Related calendar item: Human Rights Day

Story:

Since 1987, [First Church Shelter](#) has provided a work of mercy to the homeless of Cambridge, MA and surrounding communities in Massachusetts. Every evening, 14 men are provided with a safe and comfortable place to stay. Guests are served two meals, can shower and use storage space for their belongings. The shelter also offers assistance with identifying and securing resources they need to move out of homelessness into transitional or permanent housing. Much of that assistance comes in the form of referrals to other agencies and service providers, but shelter staff is available to help guests negotiate the frequently difficult and intimidating process of applying for public benefits or subsidized housing.

Prayer:

O God of exiles and the lost, you promise restoration and wholeness though the power of Jesus Christ. Give us faith to live joyfully, sustained by your promises as we eagerly await the day when they will be fulfilled for all the world to see, through the coming of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

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December 11, 2009

Scripture:

Amos 8:4-12

2 Corinthians 9:1-15

Isaiah 12:2-6

Theme: Look Forward

Liturgical Season: Third Sunday of Advent

Story:

What is the most essential skill in mountain climbing? According to [Global Ministries](#) missionary Dale Nafzinger who served in Nepal, it is the ability to wait. While climbing Meera Peak, Nafzinger was faced with the realization that our natural tendency to resist waiting is constantly challenged on a climb. The mountain forces one to wait – wait for the clouds to clear, wait for the wind to subside, wait to catch one's breath, wait to adjust to the altitude. And in the waiting, he says, we can become more aware of the essentials – in touch with the true needs of our physical bodies and in touch with our Creator.

As we enter another Advent season, we are called to our own mountain-top experience – to wait, to listen and hope for the breathtaking encounter to come.

Prayer:

O God of exiles and the lost, you promise restoration and wholeness though the power of Jesus Christ. Give us faith to live joyfully, sustained by your promises as we eagerly await the day when they will be fulfilled for all the world to see, through the coming of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

[WCM: Nepal](#)

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December 12, 2009

Scripture:

Amos 9:8-15

Luke 1:57-66

Isaiah 12:2-6

Theme: Look Forward

Liturgical Season: Third Sunday of Advent

Story:

The connection between [Defiance College](#) in Defiance, Ohio and the United Church of Christ is more than just historic. When UCC youth groups visit Defiance, the college gives them an opportunity to reflect on their relationships with God, on how they make decisions, and where their lives are headed. During their visit, they are then given decision cards that include questions such as, "Is this really my decision to make?" "What, if anything, does the Bible say about this particular decision?" And, "What are the pros and cons of each side of this decision?" What do they learn from this? They learn that practical decisions have a spiritual basis and that Defiance encourages them to develop a faith that will serve them well.

Prayer:

O God of exiles and the lost, you promise restoration and wholeness though the power of Jesus Christ. Give us faith to live joyfully, sustained by your promises as we eagerly await the day when they will be fulfilled for all the world to see, through the coming of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

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December 13, 2009

Scripture:

Zephaniah 3:14-20

Isaiah 12:2-6

Philippians 4:4-7

Luke 3:7-18

Theme: Look Forward

Liturgical Season: Third Sunday of Advent

Story:

Boni was an inpatient at the [Samaritan Care Center](#) in South Africa for a little over a month. She had been turned away at a local hospital because they could not do anything for her. HIV/AIDS had ravaged her body. She was not on anti-retroviral medicine because she was "too far gone" and as the weeks went by, Boni was in constant pain as she fell in and out of consciousness. Rev. Dawn Barnes, a missionary in the Kei Region of South Africa, prayed daily that God would take Boni out of her pain and suffering. Her prayers were answered on April 3, 2008. But Boni did not die in a bed at the Samaritan Care Center. She died in the back of a truck with her mother beside her on their way to collect Boni's monthly grant. Because of fraud, these grants must be collected by the disabled person, no matter what their physical condition. Boni's mother was filled with grief and pain at the loss of her daughter. What must her thoughts have been, knowing that her situation was so desperate that she had to take her dying daughter to a pay point so she would have enough money to survive the months ahead. Rev. Barnes questions and prays about these issues. Why must the terminally ill be put through this ordeal? Aren't there other options for the government to use in distributing grants? Why are there no pain medications available for people like Boni? How can hospitals send patients home to die? How can we make young people understand the dangers of HIV/AIDS and address the root causes of this disease? Rev. Barnes' solace comes from God – knowing that God is a God of peace and that Boni is now at peace with God. She also is grateful to the women at the Samaritan Care Center who volunteer endless hours caring for patients like Boni with love, patience and concern. May Boni rest in peace.

Prayer:

O God of exiles and the lost, you promise restoration and wholeness though the power of Jesus Christ. Give us faith to live joyfully, sustained by

your promises as we eagerly await the day when they will be fulfilled for all the world to see, through the coming of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

[WCM: South Africa](#)

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December 14, 2009

Scripture:

Numbers 16:1-19

Hebrews 13:7-17

Isaiah 11:1-9

Theme: Look Forward

Liturgical Season: Third Sunday of Advent

Story:

[The Community Church in Vero Beach](#), FL is dedicated to supporting missions that make a difference in our community. Christmas is a special time of joy for Community Church members, they are filled with the spirit of giving in celebration of the season. Community Church members have granted Christmas wishes to many Indian River County children since 1996. The congregation sets up an annual wish tree so every child experiences the wonder of the season. This enables needy families to experience the joy of the holiday season regardless of their economic means. For many area families, however, Christmas puts an extra strain on already stretched finances. To be sure that area children in need have joy-filled holidays, Community Church sets up an annual Wish Tree. Community Church broadened their spirit of giving by offering the Alternative Gifts Marketplace. Through this program, people can purchase livestock, medicine, education, and other needed gifts for people throughout our world. As people think of what to purchase for friends and family, this gift is given in honor of the receiver in order to be a blessing to families deeply in need.

Prayer:

O God of exiles and the lost, you promise restoration and wholeness though the power of Jesus Christ. Give us faith to live joyfully, sustained by your promises as we eagerly await the day when they will be fulfilled for all the world to see, through the coming of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

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December 15, 2009

Scripture:

Numbers 16:20-35

Acts 28:23-31

Isaiah 11:1-9

Theme: Look Forward

Liturgical Season: Third Sunday of Advent

Story:

[Hurricane Katrina](#) left more than destruction behind – and [UCC volunteer](#) Joseph Conn is living proof. Joe, and many volunteers like him, was inspired to become a long-term volunteer after helping with disaster relief in New Orleans in 2007. UCC Volunteer Ministries matched the Florida Conference's needs with Joe's background and experience. The Conference appointed Joe as Volunteer Coordinator with [Lake and Sumter Emergency Response \(LASER\)](#) – an organization that addresses long-term recovery needs from hurricanes and tornadoes in Sumter and Lake Counties in Florida dating from as far back as 2004. Joe's work with LASER is made possible through a collaborative effort with national UCC Volunteer Ministries and Disaster Ministries – part of Wider Church Ministries – and funded by Our Churches Wider Mission. Partners in Service volunteers like Joe Conn help disaster survivors look to the future and work to rebuild their communities and their hope.

Prayer:

O God of exiles and the lost, you promise restoration and wholeness though the power of Jesus Christ. Give us faith to live joyfully, sustained by your promises as we eagerly await the day when they will be fulfilled for all the world to see, through the coming of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

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December 16, 2009

Scripture:

Micah 4:8-13

Luke 7:31-35

Isaiah 11:1-9

Theme: Look Forward

Liturgical Season: Third Sunday of Advent

Story:

[The United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance](#) was established in the 1880s to provide aid to clergy who were experiencing financial difficulties. The scope of the board's work has been expanded to include lay employees of the United Church of Christ. The board's most visible work is its "[Annuitant Visitor Program](#)." The more than 140 persons serving as visitors call on over 6,500 UCC retirees thanking them for their years of service, reminding them they are not forgotten and providing a connection to the benefits programs of the [Pension Boards](#)—United Church of Christ. The board is also responsible for the Christmas Fund Offering which provides approximately \$1.3 million annually for programs of pension supplementation, health benefit premium supplementation and emergency grants for active and retired clergy and lay employees.

Prayer:

O God of exiles and the lost, you promise restoration and wholeness though the power of Jesus Christ. Give us faith to live joyfully, sustained by your promises as we eagerly await the day when they will be fulfilled for all the world to see, through the coming of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

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December 17, 2009

Scripture:

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Hebrews 10:10-18

Psalm 80:1-7

Theme: Moving With Mary's Song

Liturgical Season: Fourth Sunday of Advent

Story:

The women at [St. John's UCC](#) in Brighton, Illinois, assessed their talents and harnessed their skills by making "Comfort Bears" for children in the emergency room. For the last few years, they have made 40 stuffed bears each month. "It is amazing how a little bear lets them know they are in a place where people care about them," writes the Rev. Mike Southcombe. "And when they leave, they take the bear with them, a lasting reminder of God's loving care for them where ever they go."

Prayer:

O Shepherd of Israel, you gently support the one who is with child and call forth the Lamb who dances in the womb. Stir our hearts to recognize Christ's coming, as Elizabeth recognized his presence in Mary's radiant obedience to your desire, and open our souls to receive the one who came to love your flock. Amen.

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December 18, 2009

Scripture:

Isaiah 42:10-18

Hebrews 10:32-39

Psalm 80:1-7

Theme: Moving With Mary's Song

Liturgical Season: Fourth Sunday of Advent

Story:

The [Pension Boards](#) is an Affiliated Ministry of the United Church of Christ that provides for the security of UCC clergy and church workers. UCC health insurance, for example, is provided through the Pension Boards. As one plan participant wrote, "I thank you for your oversight of insurance. I didn't use a penny of all that coverage for the first 23 years of my ministry, but in these last four years I've had four artery heart attacks and brain surgery—costing a whole lot more, I'm sure, than the church has paid for me over the years." In a time of escalating medical costs, the Pension Boards remains committed to living out our church's spirit of covenant. Together, we will seek new ways to provide the highest quality benefits on a cost-effective and financially sound basis to those who so faithfully serve the UCC." Michael Downs, executive vice president of the Pension Boards.

Prayer:

O Shepherd of Israel, you gently support the one who is with child and call forth the Lamb who dances in the womb. Stir our hearts to recognize Christ's coming, as Elizabeth recognized his presence in Mary's radiant obedience to your desire, and open our souls to receive the one who came to love your flock. Amen.

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December 19, 2009

Scripture:

Isaiah 66:7-11

Luke 13:31-35

Psalm 80:1-7

Theme: Moving With Mary's Song

Liturgical Season: Fourth Sunday of Advent

Story:

When a church seeks a pastor, and when a pastor seeks a church, both depend on [Local Church Ministries](#). Its [Profile](#) Operations Team sends ministerial profiles to Conferences and Associations. They are then forwarded to church research committees. It is this team that clergy work with when they update their profiles with new letters of recommendation and accomplishments. The team keeps confidentiality, maintains a regular format for all profiles, and knows that it is through their team that the call of clergy and congregations find common ground. The team is also concerned with lay leadership, ministerial standing, and the concerns of parish life.

Prayer:

O Shepherd of Israel, you gently support the one who is with child and call forth the Lamb who dances in the womb. Stir our hearts to recognize Christ's coming, as Elizabeth recognized his presence in Mary's radiant obedience to your desire, and open our souls to receive the one who came to love your flock. Amen.

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December 20, 2009

Scripture:

Micah 5:2-5a

Luke 1:46b-55 or Psalm 80:1-7

Hebrews 10:5-10

Luke 1;39-45 [46-55]

Theme: Moving With Mary's Song

Liturgical Season: Fourth Sunday of Advent

Christmas Fund Special Mission Offering

Story:

We don't know much about the hardships Mary and Joseph experienced on their way to Bethlehem. Scripture tells us that once they arrived, there was no room for them at the inn. If that same journey were made today, there is a good chance Mary and Joseph wouldn't make it to Bethlehem at all.

Checkpoints, a dividing wall and restricted travel make journeys for ordinary Palestinians a very real hardship. In 2007, [Christian Peacemaker Teams \(CPT\)](#) – an ecumenical initiative to reduce violence around the world – sponsored a No Way to the Inn Campaign to call attention to the plight of Palestinians, Christian and Muslim, unable to travel within their borders. CPT encouraged participants in the campaign to build walls around personal nativity scenes to illustrate the barriers experienced every day by those in and around cities like Jerusalem and Bethlehem. These demonstrations show, through the example of Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem, how their passage would be restricted in the current political climate. Local churches were also encouraged to make the same statement with lawn crèches, perhaps placing Mary and Joseph outside the wall, unable to arrive at their destination. These displays provide a dramatic illustration of the parallels between modern-day policies and the Roman occupation during Jesus' time, which forced the Holy Family to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem. The lesson of the gospel, however, illustrates a very different point – one that assures us that despite restrictions, physical boundaries and political agendas, God continues to move.

God of wonder and light, just as you led the magi with a bright star to that humble stable so long ago, we pray that your light will lead us past all the boundaries we have constructed. These boundaries are made of brick and stone in some places, and of ignorance and hate in others. We pray for tolerance, for humility, for the peace that this joyful Advent time promises in the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Prayer:

O Shepherd of Israel, you gently support the one who is with child and call forth the Lamb who dances in the womb. Stir our hearts to recognize Christ's coming, as Elizabeth recognized his presence in Mary's radiant obedience to your desire, and open our souls to receive the one who came to love your flock. Amen.

[WCM: Israel Palestine](#)

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December 21, 2009

Scripture:

Genesis 25:19-28

Colossians 1:15-20

Psalm 113

Theme: Moving With Mary's Song

Liturgical Season: Fourth Sunday of Advent

Story:

[Family Promise](#) – began in 2006 when [Pilgrim Congregational UCC](#) in Bozeman, MT participated with other area churches to house and feed homeless families in their church for one week at a time. Family Promise of Gallatin Valley in Montana is a network of local congregations organized to help Gallatin Valley's homeless families with children. Each congregation provides shelter and meals, while each family is assisted by a professional social worker in finding and implementing lasting solutions to their unique situation.

Prayer:

O Shepherd of Israel, you gently support the one who is with child and call forth the Lamb who dances in the womb. Stir our hearts to recognize Christ's coming, as Elizabeth recognized his presence in Mary's radiant obedience to your desire, and open our souls to receive the one who came to love your flock. Amen.

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December 22, 2009

Scripture:

Genesis 30:1-24

Romans 8:18-30

Psalm 113

Theme: Moving With Mary's Song

Liturgical Season: Fourth Sunday of Advent

Story:

Robin Raudabaugh, pastor of [Pilgrims UCC](#) in Maple Grove, MN, who along with her partner Gigi Nauer run the [Nitty Gritty Dirt Farm](#). Nitty Gritty Dirt Farm is a 15 acre Community Supported Agriculture farm providing over 100 varieties of fresh organically and sustainably grown vegetables and fruit as well as lamb, pork, turkey and chicken for shareholders. On their website they write that "Our goal is to provide a variety of fresh produce, meat and other products, all grown with your health, our health and the health of our animals and the land in mind. We are intentional about our organic and sustainable farming practices including maximizing soil health through green and animal manures, compost, mulch, cover crops and crop rotations, using Organic Pest Management to naturally monitor, prevent and control insects and other pests, and maintaining animal health and well-being through the use of loose housing and pasture rotations. We are also intentional about creating community and personal well-being through our connections with the land and its abundance, and we invite you to share in that with us."

Prayer:

O Shepherd of Israel, you gently support the one who is with child and call forth the Lamb who dances in the womb. Stir our hearts to recognize Christ's coming, as Elizabeth recognized his presence in Mary's radiant obedience to your desire, and open our souls to receive the one who came to love your flock. Amen.

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December 23, 2009

Scripture:

Isaiah 42:14-21

Luke 1:5-25

Psalm 113

Theme: Moving With Mary's Song

Liturgical Season: Fourth Sunday of Advent

Story:

A mother's love is a force to be reckoned with – nurturing and loving on one hand, but also fierce and protective when necessary. In Zimbabwe, motherless children and families headed by children are all too common as a result of HIV/AIDS. [The United Church of Christ in Zimbabwe](#) initiated the Ruwadzano Mother's Union Council – an organization helping to address the problems of unemployment, healthcare and long-term support. Four income-generating projects have been developed -- garment-making, goat rearing, mushroom growing, and cultivating crops used in soap making, cooking oil production and nutritional supplements. These projects include raw materials and instruction, planning, management and implementation. In addition, the Council offers courses in HIV/AIDS prevention and in development of skills to encourage self-reliance, spiritual freedom and dignity and hope for the future.

Prayer:

O Shepherd of Israel, you gently support the one who is with child and call forth the Lamb who dances in the womb. Stir our hearts to recognize Christ's coming, as Elizabeth recognized his presence in Mary's radiant obedience to your desire, and open our souls to receive the one who came to love your flock. Amen.

[WCM: Zimbabwe](#)

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December 24, 2009

Scripture (morning):

Micah 6:6-8

Hebrews 10:5-10

Luke 1:46b-55

Theme: Who is This Child?

Liturgical Season: Christmas Eve

Story:

[Project Love](#): Christmas gifts are provided each year for students (K-6) at the Hopi Day School in Kykotsmovi, Arizona, through Project Love. Located in the Second Mesa of the Hopi nation, Kykotsmovi is a village of families who have blended their Native American traditions with the Christian faith. The Project Love Foundation is administered by the Boeing Corporation, providing gifts for over 9000 impoverished Hopi and Navajo children, with the help of many service organizations and faith communities. [United Church of the Valley \(UCV\)](#) Murrieta, CA is glad to participate in this outreach program, and members from our church have visited with the children on several occasions, delivering the Christmas gifts and school supplies. UCV families provided gifts for 48 children this year.

Prayer:

God of all ages, in the birth of Christ your boundless love for all people shattered the power of darkness. Be born in us with that same love and light, that our song may blend with all the choirs of heaven and earth to the glory of your holy name. Amen.

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December 25, 2009

Scripture:

Isaiah 9:2-7

Psalm 96

Titus 2:11-14

Luke 2:1-14 [15-20]

"Seasons of the Spirit" Theme: Who is this Child?

Liturgical Season: Christmas Day

Story:

[Trinity UCC](#), Lexington, MO seeks to care for, nurture, and empower its members to make an impact on the community in which they live. The Sounds of the Heart ministry raises funds to purchase (and provide training for) automatic external defibrillators (AEDs) in schools, the police station, and most recently, the Margaret Gray Senior Center. In 2009 their annual Sounds of the Heart Concert raised more than \$3,000 for the Jill Thompson Healthcare Scholarship! Thanks to all who support them in them this mission to provide this life-saving equipment and scholarships! Thanks to God for God's gift from the heart, Christ Jesus our Lord.

Prayer:

God of all ages, in the birth of Christ your boundless love for all people shattered the power of darkness. Be born in us with that same love and light, that our song may blend with all the choirs of heaven and earth to the glory of your holy name. Amen.

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December 26, 2009

Scripture:

2 Chronicles 24:17-24

Acts 6:1-7; 7:51-60

Psalm 148

"Seasons of the Spirit" Theme: Who is This Child?

Liturgical Season: First Sunday after Christmas Day

Story:

The mission of the [Social Justice Task Force](#) at [Country Club Congregational United Church of Christ](#), Kansas City, MO is to do justice, seek peace, and build community. Their goal is to build a more just, compassionate and inclusive world through leadership and advocacy. They seek to train new leaders, identify issues that inspire their passions, and mobilize the people and resources of their congregation, their affiliates, and our denomination to act against injustice, marginalization and oppression in Kansas City and around the world.

Prayer:

From our mother's womb you have known us, O God. You call us to follow you through all our days and seek us even when we wander. As we advance in years, clothe us with your love, that we may grow in grace and find favor in your sight; through Jesus Christ. Amen.

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December 27, 2009

Scripture:

1 Samuel 2: 18-20, 26

Psalms 148

Colossians 3:12-17

Luke 2: 21-52

"Seasons of the Spirit" Theme: Who is This Child?

Liturgical Season: First Sunday after Christmas Day

Story:

Sometimes when the Rev. Craig Schaub, [Plymouth Congregational Church](#), Syracuse, NY thinks of "lepers colonies" in the contemporary context, he thinks of a building on the edge of his downtown where the parole department tries to place so many of those who are released from prison after serving a sentence for a sex offense.

"Several years ago, a man who was released from prison came to us as staff before coming to worship to tell us of his background as one charged with a sex offense and his deep desire to be in a worshipping community. He met with leaders of the church; we created a covenant with him about his involvement and our commitment to accompany him. He shared his story with the entire congregation one Sunday after worship. It led to education, study, prayer, and deepening awareness of the isolation that so many are faced with after they have been charged with such a crime, the very isolation that can often heighten risk of re-offending. But the real story isn't about the congregation deciding to do that. The story is that he and his wife had a vision one Advent. They invited us to come as a congregation to sing Christmas carols on each of the 6 floors of their building, a building that has constant attention as a marked building. It was an "adult's only event." We were joyfully received. People came out of their apartments to join us, to sing with us, to wish us a blessed Christmas. We shared carols around a karaoke machine in the hallway. We shared donuts and coffee. We shared a glimpse of the breadth of God's love which we celebrate in the incarnation. That really was Christmas for me that year."

Prayer:

From our mother's womb you have known us, O God. You call us to follow you through all our days and seek us even when we wander. As we

advance in years, clothe us with your love, that we may grow in grace and find favor in your sight; through Jesus Christ. Amen.

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December 28, 2009

Scripture:

Isaiah 54:1-13

Revelation 21:1-7

Psalm 148

"Seasons of the Spirit" Theme: Who is This Child?

Liturgical Season: First Sunday after Christmas Day

Story:

Members of [Peace Church](#) Fort Wayne, IN consider missions and outreach to be their greatest calling. They look both near and far for opportunities to do God's work. The church supports the local Rescue Mission by providing food and serving the evening meal on the fourth Sunday of every month. Members also donate items to the local Food Pantry on a regular basis. Members give new and gently used items to needy families through the Fort Wayne Christmas Bureau and have provided Christmas gifts and a holiday meal for an adopted family. Peace UCC is a partner congregation of the Samaritan Counseling Center of Northeast Indiana. Church members also participate in an ecumenical community-wide program to help families who are moving from welfare to self-sufficiency and independence with Faith Based Mentoring.

Prayer:

From our mother's womb you have known us, O God. You call us to follow you through all our days and seek us even when we wander. As we advance in years, clothe us with your love, that we may grow in grace and find favor in your sight; through Jesus Christ. Amen.

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December 29, 2009

Scripture:

1 Chronicles 28: 1-10

1 Corinthians 3: 10-17

Psalms 147: 12-20

"Seasons of the Spirit" Theme: Who is This Child?

Liturgical Season: First Sunday after Christmas Day

Story:

We are told in Isaiah, "a little child shall lead them." Because of Mary's resounding yes to God, that prophecy became manifest. If you are ready to say yes to the children of the world, [Global Ministries Child Sponsorship Program](#) is a way to share comfort and show compassion just as Christ taught. This ministry partners with private centers and works in collaboration with agencies who have long been linked to UCC and Disciples partners to provide things such as food, health care, school supplies, and clothing to children in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East and the Caribbean. There are 12 centers and approximately 800 children in the program with more than 3,000 low income and poor children having benefited from sponsors' generosity. The cost of sponsoring a child varies from \$25 - \$35 monthly and goes 100% to help provide for a child in need.

Prayer:

From our mother's womb you have known us, O God. You call us to follow you through all our days and seek us even when we wander. As we advance in years, clothe us with your love that we may grow in grace and find favor in your sight; through Jesus Christ. Amen.

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December 30, 2009

Scripture:

2 Chronicles 1:7-13

Mark 13:32-37

Psalm 147:12-20

"Seasons of the Spirit" Theme: Who is This Child?

Liturgical Season: First Sunday after Christmas Day

Story:

[Columbia United Church of Christ](#), Columbia, MO (CUCC) volunteers are involved in Columbia's own [Personal Energy Transportation \(PET\) Project's mission](#) is to provide appropriate mobility for all of God's children in need. They help to manufacture and assemble three-wheeled devices that provide mobility for those in the greatest need and with the least resources in poor or underdeveloped countries. The PET Project is an ecumenical ministry of Jesus Christ, whose disciples said, "In the name of Jesus Christ, arise and walk." (Acts of the Apostles 3:6)

Prayer:

From our mother's womb you have known us, O God. You call us to follow you through all our days and seek us even when we wander. As we advance in years, clothe us with your love that we may grow in grace and find favor in your sight; through Jesus Christ. Amen.

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December 31, 2009

Scripture:

1 Kings 3:5-14

John 8:12-19

Psalm 147:12-20

Liturgical Season: First Sunday after Christmas Day

Story:

Non-Violence and Social Justice Mentorship, is a collaborative ministry provided through [First Congregational UCC](#) in Berkeley, CA and the [Metta Center for Nonviolence Education](#). It places college students with East Bay (Berkeley/Oakland) community partner organizations that address poverty, racism, immigration, environmental degradation and violence prevention. This 9-week internship with \$1000 stipend includes a weekly education forum and prepares students to effectively apply nonviolence and social justice skills to actual societal needs and deepen skills in the practical utilization of nonviolence and social justice approaches to community work.

Prayer:

Gracious God, you have redeemed us through Jesus Christ, the first-born of creation, whose birth we celebrate as the child of Bethlehem. Bless us with every spiritual blessing, which we may live as your adopted children and witness to your glory with unending praise and thanksgiving. Amen.

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