

Glad Tidings



April 2009

The Newsletter of Central-St. Matthew UCC

"So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

Mark 16: 8

In these words Mark gives us Easter. Not the words we want or expect to find in the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. But these are the words Mark first set down to conclude this earliest of the Gospels. The ending is so harsh and unpromising that over the years first one "better" ending (v. 8b), and then a longer, better ending (vv. 9-19) were added.

But if we are true to Mark and to ourselves as well, we are stuck with the women at the tomb who were struck dumb with fear and who said nothing to anyone about what they had seen and heard. What kind of Easter is this? What do we celebrate? What do we do?

Mark clearly wants the hearer of this Gospel to do something. The young man dressed in a white robe is very specific in his direction to the women: *"Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him just as he told you."*

We are always there, standing and staring into an empty tomb. We have been raised or brought into the family of people who hear the words, "He has been raised; he is not here." We have been taught or we have come to believe or at least hope that these words mean something extraordinary: Not that a dead body has been stolen or a grave looted. We know these simple words mean "Resurrection."



They mean God has the final word, not the tomb. They mean that the great grave robber and stealer from death is God.

What is our response? There is a whole range of possibilities, and Mark recognizes them all. There is fear; there is incredulity, disbelief, silence, and confusion. There is the desire to flee this claim of Resurrection. There is the real possibility of all of us standing there, hands in pockets, kicking the dirt, awkwardly looking at each other wondering who will be foolish enough to tell anyone what we have been told.

Mark gives us the Good News and then leaves us to decide what we will do with it. Someone present on that first Resurrection morning must have told someone what they had seen and heard or else we would not be celebrating Easter. Now, one of us must decide to tell the story again. Mark's ending does not end the Gospel. Mark's ending asks us to decide in the face of fear, confusion, and insufficient proof to share the Good News. Mark asks us to keep the Good News of the Resurrection alive.

Judy and I thank you all so very much for the wonderful welcome we have received. We have been fed, entertained, hugged and blessed in so many ways since our arrival at Central-St. Matthew. We are impressed with your warmth and your graciousness. We have quickly realized what an amazing group you are: There is an abundance of talent, commitment, education, passion and faith within Central-St. Matthew. We look to the future with great anticipation and excitement.

My role is actually quite simple. I am here to help you decide how and when to call a new, permanent pastor. As your interim pastor, my job is to work myself out of my job. The primary question that we all must address together is: Will you be calling a single pastor or will the call be for two pastors? Will the call be to pastor a single, merged congregation or will the search committee or committees be seeking leadership for two separate congregations?

During the past four years, you have accomplished much. The Transition Team, made up of members from both congregations, has worked hard on several critical tasks. With input from many of you, there is now a broad plan of action that will carry Central-St. Matthew forward for a long time to come. There is joint financial accountability, a recently formed joint mission and social action committee, there is a combined music and Christian education effort and every Sunday there is joint worship. Perhaps the most important achievement to date is that so many of you from the two congregations have become friends. A great deal of very good work has been accomplished.

Still, the choice remains open. The primary question of who you all shall be must be addressed and answered before a meaningful search process can begin. You have enjoyed a long and fruitful engagement. Now, the vows must be prepared. How shall they read?

In order to move closer to your decision, two efforts have been put in place. One will be well underway by the time you receive this newsletter. Over the next six weeks, I will meet each of you at a gathering in your neighborhood (zip code cluster meetings!). In addition to getting to know you better and you each other, I hope to hear your hopes and dreams for the future of the two congregations.

I also want to set up three larger discussions to learn as much as I can about your real desires. Without in any way trying to foster division, I believe it is appropriate that these gatherings be based on current membership. There will be a gathering for Central Congregational, one for St. Matthew, and a third for those people who have joined both congregations. There will be no votes taken, just open and honest discussion. Time and place will be announced soon.

It is my sincere hope that out of these meetings, there will emerge a clear consensus. I know we will not resolve all of the issues such as facilities and financial, but we should all have a clear idea of how you will move forward: as one church or as two or some long term combination of the two.

The Transition Team and the Heads of the Central Governance Committee and St. Matthew Church Council have agreed with this approach and will do all they can to offer suggestions and thoughts on how best to proceed. To me, what is critical is that you all come out of this time knowing that you have been heard, that your concerns and joys have been listened to and taken into account, and that no matter what happens, you remain the good and trusted friends in Christ you have become.

May the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ bless us all.

Our Shared Histories

In the months ahead we will continue to present stories of Central's and St. Matthew's history in the newsletter. A part of the Vision Statement includes preserving the heritage of both churches. This month we continue a historical sketch of Central Congregational UCC.

Continued from our February Newsletter ...

The new structure was a small one and a half story brick veneer building with a 350 seat sanctuary on the first floor and a parish hall on the second. It was dedicated on November 18, 1945, with Superintendent J.T. Stanley presiding and Dr. Ernest M. Holliday, General Secretary of the Church Extension Board of the Congregational Church, preaching the sermon. The Memorial Bell, sole relic of the Old Church, was placed on the front lawn and dedicated to the thirty-two original members and the seven incorporators.

In 1958, under Dr. Nicholas Hood, a major renovation of the structure, inside and out, was done at considerable expense and provided many needed improvements. The church site was enlarged by buying two adjoining houses on North Tonti Street; later five small apartments were acquired for rental purposes. During the following pastorate, that of Rev. George A. Williams, a Wicks organ was bought for \$16,000, and the interior of the Sanctuary took on the appearance it has today.

The Rev. Henderson H. Dunn started the first day-care center for Negro children in New Orleans in 1911 in the basement rooms of the Old Church to meet the needs of the community. When the church moved in 1934, the New Orleans Colored Day Nursery, as it was called, went to the vacant Daniel Hand School of Straight College, 118 North Rocheblave Street. Renamed Isabella Hume Child Center and, by that time, an agency of the Community Chest, it offered nursery, kindergarten and primary training to children from two to seven years of age. When the Hand School was sold by Dillard University in 1951, the Center was relocated at the Church on the North Tonti Street properties.

The new Educational Building would provide for the needs of the Sunday School and house Hume Center. It was dedicated at the Centennial observance on Sunday, April 23, 1972, at which time Rev. Roland Pantermuehl, D.D., President of the South Central Conference United Church of Christ, was the guest speaker.

Always a small congregation with a membership that probably never exceeded 400 active adults, Central Church has been a power for good in the community, motivated by a deep sense of commitment. This may be attributed, in large measure, to the high type of leadership given by its pastors – all well educated and everyone, without exception, holding a baccalaureate and a graduate degree in theology.

For more than one hundred years, Central has enjoyed a close association with its church related school, Straight University and its successor, Dillard University. The first five ministers were professors of theology at Straight (1872-1890) and Dr. Holmes (1929-1949) was professor of Philosophy and Religion at Straight and Dillard for more than twenty-five years until his retirement in 1957. Miss Isabella Hume, associate pastor (1892-1896), (for whom the Child Center was named) and Rev. Virgil Mayne (1929) also taught at Straight. Dr. Walter S. Alexander, third pastor (1876-1884) was president of the University for seven of those years.

The Rev. M.C. Cole, Dr. Alexander and the Rev. George W. Bothwell, second, third and fourth pastors respectively were white as were Miss Hume and the Rev. Mayne.

Five members entered the ministry: James E. Smith, ordained 1892; Homer McEwen, 1943; Andrew J. Young, Jr. 1955; J. Knighton Stanley, 1962; and Archie Allen, 1965. All but Dr. McEwen were ordained at Central.

Six members have been honored for their dedicated service to the community and to Negro education. The Orleans Parish School Board named schools for Mrs. Florence E. Chester, Miss Mary D. Coghill, the Rev. Henderson Dunn and Dr. L.B. Landry, while Dillard University named a women's dormitory for Miss Fannie C. Williams and the new Health and Physical Science Hall for its former president, Dr. Albert W. Dent. (Since the original writing of this history a school was named for Miss Fannie C. Williams.)

Central has carried three denominational names: Congregational, Congregational Christian (1931) and United Church of Christ (1957). It is an active member of the New Orleans Association and the South Central Conference of the United Church of Christ and of the Greater New Orleans Federation of Churches. The church holds a life membership in the NAACP.

The closing words of an earlier Statement of Faith seem singularly fitting at this time. "Depending, as did our fathers, upon the continued guidance of the Holy Spirit to lead us into all truth, we work and pray for the transformation of the world into the kingdom of God and the life everlasting." With such a faith, pastor and people expect to meet the challenge of the future.

A Little about New Member Marsha Quick



I was born and raised in suburban Detroit (GO RED WINGS!), the youngest of three girls born to a family of educators. Mom taught speech and later was a librarian, while Dad taught special ed. and later business supervision at the local community college. I decided about age 9 to follow in their footsteps and be a middle school teacher (that alone makes me sound sort of crazy!), but it turns out that God had different plans for me. I first felt the call to ministry at age 12, which led me to some extensive consideration. After much prayer, I decided at age 19, feeling God's blessing, to continue with my initial plan to prepare to become an educator while remaining involved in the church on a secular level. Rather like having my cake and eating it, too ☺

God came calling again in August 2002, at a time when I was without a church home. My mother's family has been Presbyterian for over 300 years, while my father's mother attended a Congregational church near their home in Detroit. Dad joined the Presbyterian Church when he and Mom married, and I did as well as a teenager. In May 2002, I officially resigned my membership in a large church in Tucson, due to theological differences with the leadership at the time. Thirteen weeks later, God came knocking at my door a second time. As I did the first time, I spent extensive time in prayer and meditation, and felt that this time professional ministry was my goal. Thirteen months later, I left my job, my home and my family in Arizona and moved 2,000 miles across country to attend seminary in South Chicago, a city I came to love so much that it's like a second home to me.

Only a year into my studies, I began having serious issues with the polity that is currently enforced in the Presbyterian Church, USA. I felt that I could work it out, and in fact was promoted to Candidate for Ordination in April 2006, shortly before I graduated from seminary. However, a year later, it was decided by mutual decision between my ministry committee and me to withdraw my candidacy. I have spent the time since in serious preparation for ministry on a personal level. At the end of the first portion of my year's residency as a chaplain at Ochsner Medical Center, I realized what was missing for me: I am a member of the Reformed Tradition at heart, but as an avid seeker of social justice for all, I find that the Presbyterian Church, USA is not where I am called to serve. Instead, I will be seeking ordination through the United Church of Christ to parish ministry.

From the very start, I have felt more welcome at Central St. Matthew than any church I've ever attended; the hospitality and fellowship in evidence among everyone is heartening. Honestly, it felt as if I'd come home the first Sunday I worshipped with everyone. I'm excited by all the possibilities I see for the congregation in the months to come under new leadership, and look forward to assisting, as a fellow congregant, in the continued transitional period.

Bind Us Together

By Karen Wulff

The worship service is almost at a close. Now comes, for me, the most emotional part of the worship hour. As we gather in a circle around the sanctuary, sometimes a small, tightly knit group and other Sundays a wide, meandering wave of congregants, I am taken by the intimacy of holding hands and looking into one another's faces. Faces so hopeful, caring and committed, and faces that seem to ask, "Can we do this? Can we create something new and exciting here at Central/St. Matthew?"



It took me awhile to learn the song and for weeks I held my crib sheet from the bulletin as I gingerly sang along, "Bind us together, Lord, bind us together with cords..." I pictured luxurious silken cords wrapping around each of us, keeping us intertwined. Or is it chords? Chords of music and the joy of singing that we experience in the choir under Beth's skillful and loving direction is, perhaps, what binds us.

"There is only one God, there is only one King." We feel wrapped in His arms to go out and face the world for another week. I find the touch of my neighbor so reassuring; its memory stays with me. What a comfort this song has become, a perfect entree to the benediction, to the week ahead. Bind us together in Love.

News from the Social Action and Mission Committee

By Arlean Fermanis

On Sunday, March 1st a group of members from St. Matthew and Central congregations got together at the home of Karen Wulff to discuss the forming of our new Social Action and Mission Committee. We discussed the many possibilities for events and opportunities for mission in our community and globally. One item of business was the Lenten offering, One Great Hour of Sharing, and we planned a minute for mission on Sundays during Lent leading up to the collection of this offering on March 29th. We will try to continue to give a minute for mission on the 2nd and 4th Sundays of the month in order to bring attention to opportunities in the community where help might be needed as well as to keep the congregation up to date on what the committee is doing.



We have identified several areas where we might like to put our efforts. We will be checking with various social agencies to identify individuals or families who might be in need of help as well as their need for volunteers. We will also be looking into activities which could benefit the young men living in the Bienville area, boy scouts or a boy's club type of activity. Second Harvest will be contacted and there may be a regular collection for food items other than the food we already collect for Belle Reeve. In the future we would like to prepare and publish a list of volunteer opportunities in the community that individuals might like to participate in. We have more ideas than people so we will be spending much of our next meeting zeroing in on those activities we feel called to pursue. Of course the Recovery effort will continue to be one of our mission activities. We also would like to pursue becoming a Just Peace Church as well as Open and Affirming and that discussion will be continued with the guidance of the boards of both churches.

Hungry



In “Food for Thought,” the latest newsletter from Second Harvest Food Bank of Greater New Orleans and Acadiana, we learn that, according to the 2008 Health Rankings published by United Health Foundation, Louisiana has fallen to 50th in its national health ranking. Spelled out, the rankings reflect that 20% of our population is uninsured, we have the highest infant mortality rate, 22% of our children live in poverty, 30% of our population is obese, and we have the highest rate of cancer deaths. And “the data indicates that diet-related illnesses (diabetes, hypertension, and obesity) are a major contributor” to those rankings. “These indicators, coupled with the current economic crisis, paint a dismal picture for the population Second Harvest serves.” In a word, the numbers of hungry persons in our area who need nutritious food are growing.

How can we make a difference? We can contribute food, and we can volunteer at the food distribution warehouse on Sams Ave. in Harahan. Your Social Action and Mission Committee (SAM) wants to organize a task force to figure out the best ways to organize Central St. Matthew’s response. One idea is to publish a Food Calendar so that members know what commodities are to be donated each month. Would you like to help organize the effort? Contact Ellen Pecoul, 866-8874, epecoul@yahoo.com, or Janice Markland, 833-2609, jmarkland16@hotmail.com.

In the meantime, we want to continue to support Belle Reve on the third Sunday of each month. Vicki Weeks, director, suggested that we might want to focus on specific items and commodities each month. With that in mind, we ask that on April’s third Sunday you bring personal items, toothpaste, toothbrushes and so on. And if that Sunday slips your mind, Belle Reve would be happy if you put a cash donation in the basket

School Kits for Church World Service



Since the need continues to be great, South Central Conference again challenges us to participate in a service project which involves putting together school kits for impoverished children, to be delivered to the Conference Annual Meeting in June for distribution by Church World Service.

Here are the components:

- One pair of blunt scissors (rounded tip)
- Three 70-count spiral or tape-bound pads of 8x10 ½ ruled paper or pads with 200-210 sheets of ruled paper. (No loose-leaf)
- One 30-centimeter ruler (12”)
- One hand-held pencil sharpener and one large eraser
- Six new pencils with erasers
- One box of 24 crayons (only 24)
- Two dollars to cover processing/shipping**

Bring the items to church in a cotton cloth bag with handles which you may purchase or sew, dimensions 12” x 14” to 14” x 16”. If you have trouble finding or making a cloth bag, you may bring the contents to church, and we’ll see to it that a bag is made for you. Please bring the completed kits to the church office **no later than Sun., May 24** so our conference delegates may take them along. Questions? Ellen Pecoul, 866-8874 or epecoul@yahoo.com.

Southern Regional Meeting of the UCC Women

It seems a long while ahead, but it is time to start thinking about traveling to Texas in October. This year, the South Central Conference of the UCC is hosting a meeting for women on October 16-18, 2009, at the Heartland Country Inn and Retreat Center in Brenham, Texas. This meeting offers an opportunity for spiritual renewal through worship, Bible study, music workshops, service projects, sightseeing, fellowship and more. Brenham is located 70 miles west of Houston in Washington County. It is best known as the home of Bluebell Ice Cream. Set amongst gentle rolling hills, this beautiful country setting offers a great spot for "time away," rest, reflection and rekindling of spirit. Flyers and registration forms are available in the church office.

Prayer List

Melvin Chaix, Cheramie Hebert, Jesse Jackson, Cliff and Dorothy Puderer,
Barbara Smith Tasker, Mary B. Tipton, Brigit Stahr, Melba Wieland's family.

Flowers for April, 2009

April 05 In memory of Georgie Leber from Ellen Bentz
April 12 In memory of Eddie Gebhardt, Sr. from the Gebhardt Family
April 19 In honor of the anniversary of Lloyd H. Smith from Helen Smith
April 26 In memory of Arlin Behler from Arlean Fermanis

Recent Memorials

For: Jesse Adams
From: Shirley Adams

For: Grace Raffield
From: Shirley Adams

For: John W. Apffel
From: Shirley Adams

For: Georgie Leber
From: Eileen Koob

For: Clarence Weiser, Sr.
From: Melvin Chaix

For: Georgiana Gurtner
From: Melvin Chaix



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Wed. and Fri. from 8 am to 12 pm,
Thurs. 8 am to 4 pm

Pastor:
Call anytime, (802) 299-6152
DSmoore66@yahoo.com
Office hours Tues to Thur.
10am to 1 pm

We're on the Web!

See us at:
www.centralstmatthewucc.org

Newsletter Committee

Do you like to write, edit, do layouts, or would you like to learn how? We are forming a Newsletter Committee. If you are interested please contact Sloan Letman (773) 704-4936 or sloanletman@gmail.com

Holy Week Services

Sunday, April 5, 10:00 A.M. Palm Sunday
Thursday, April 9, 6:30 P.M. Maundy Thursday

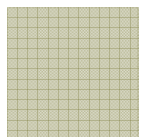
This reflective service is held in Fellowship Hall and includes a simple meal of soup and water and the reading of scripture.

Friday, April 10, 12:00 Noon Good Friday Service at Central, 2401 Bienville Street, 70119
Fish Fry following the service

Sunday, April 12, 10:00 A.M. Easter Morning Service

The Living Cross. Please bring stems of fresh flowers to decorate the cross which will adorn our sanctuary and then be placed outside on Carrollton Avenue following our service.

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