

Glad Tidings



The Newsletter of Central-St. Matthew UCC

August 2008

Where Are We?

A Report from the St. Matthew and the Central Presidents

This is the third in our series of reports to you, the members, about what the transition team has done and where we are headed.

First of all, the team arranged an all day retreat for both governing boards on Saturday, June 28th. Because not all from the governing board and the council were able to attend, four additional persons, who are members of both Central and St. Matthew, were invited to join us. Professional facilitators from the Facilitative Leadership Institute led us through a round table process where we discussed traditions and practices from both churches that are important to preserve during the next three years. Then, we assessed our present situation and moved to forming a practical vision on what we want the Central St. Matthew partnership to evolve toward during the next three years. It was an enriching process, and the transition team is excited about sharing it with all in the congregation.

Secondly, at their last meeting the transition team clarified that we are not using the word “merger” to describe the ultimate outcome of our partnership. We are a covenant community of believers. The team also agreed to not use the term “compromise” for anything that we do. The word “agreement” more adequately describes our purpose as we talk about the opportunities and the promise that is open to us as partners. Our future is open-ended. With the help of God, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and the attitude of Jesus the Christ, “all things are possible.”

Another task the transition team has taken on is beginning the search for an interim minister. The rationale for interim ministry was presented in the July newsletter. Just a reminder that the process for selecting an interim minister is different than the one used to select a permanent pastor. The Transition Team is going to do the research: they will review profiles, email information about our church, informally talk with candidates, interview, check out references, and then, select a candidate to present to both the Central Governance Board and the St. Matthew Council. Those two boards will then draw up a contract specifying the length of the interim ministry and the financial commitment to be offered. The governing boards will then “hire” an interim. At some future time, an official



search committee will be formed to “search” for a permanent pastor. It is then that each member of the congregation will vote on the candidate of choice presented by the search committee. An official search committee will be formed during the interim period. The transition team will not be the search committee although some team members may be on the search committee. Again, just to remind everyone, an interim minister will agree in the contract NOT to apply for the position of permanent pastor.

In the past few weeks, the transition team compiled a list of qualities and skills for an interim that are important to Central and St. Matthew. We have consulted (and will continue to do so) with our Conference minister, Douglas Anders, who knows of several interested persons. Beginning on July 12, we listed our opening in the United Church Employment Opportunities bulletin on the Internet. In addition, some clergy are contacting us after viewing our website which details our partnership.

Already the transition team has received some profiles. We will be prayerfully considering each person who presents his/her credentials. The transition team will not rush the process; we realize the importance of finding someone with strong interim skills to lead us during this period. On the other hand, we need to be working toward that time when Rev. Meade informs the church he is leaving. He has agreed to give us three months notice; that arrangement can be negotiated downward if all parties agree. If we start searching now, the timing should work out pretty well. Please include the members of the transition team in your prayers to help them discern who God is calling to lead us.

In the Unity of the Spirit,
Joan and Dale

Point and Counterpoint: Applause during Worship

Some years ago, young Vanessa Etter and a friend performed an interpretive dance during the worship service. At the conclusion of her dance applause broke out. Little Vanessa held up her hand exclaiming, “Oh no, this is my gift to God.”

What we bring forth during the worship hour in readings, song, prayer and meditation is in the spirit of reverence and is, essentially, our gift to God. We may have practiced the music diligently, rehearsing for hours before the service so as to fine tune each note and offer up our best effort. However, it is not a performance for other’s entertainment but an offering to the Creator. Beautiful music or the recitation of meaningful poetry moves us to a higher plane where we can better commune with God. Applause jolts us back into our American Idol world where every act is greeted with thunderous clapping. We rob the artist of his or her intent when we reduce the loving gift to mere entertainment that requires our approval.

Of course we can show our appreciation for someone’s contribution to the worship experience by thanking them later with a kind word or written note. But during the worship service, consider how much longer that beautiful chord or insightful phrase will hang in the air for all to ponder if it isn’t drowned out by our applause. Perhaps the most heartfelt response we can offer is to sit on our hands.

Karen Wulff

“As children of God, a Resurrected people, we are all called to listen to the guide of our existence - that is the Holy Spirit.”

Giving the Gifts God has Given Us

I have always been a big fan of the television series, Mash. With the cryptic repartee of the script, the show seemed to work on all levels. Yet, when the show’s producers decided to use “canned” laughter that was pre-meditatively chosen for effect, the result was false versus real, superficial versus genuine, and intrusive versus warm.

I state this example as a means to describe my position for the discussion of whether to applaud or not to applaud during worship services, be it for a selection of choral music, solo instrumental, or at the conclusion of a sermon, that perhaps touched a heart.

As children of God, a Resurrected people, we are all called to listen to the guide of our existence - that is the Holy Spirit. Our loving God has not only given us bodies to stand in reverence, as for the reading of the Gospel, or singing to the glory of God, or sitting for an awaited message or in a posture of prayer. God has given us voices, arms, feet, hands, and our entire being to adore, worship, and glorify God.

Therefore, are we to give only a small part of ourselves? Are we to decide how much of our hearts we will spontaneously and joyfully give to God, to Jesus Christ, to Holy Spirit?

I think not! If our feeling to respond is genuine, is free from the heart, is soul-born, then that response must be given life - an amen, an alleluia, a clapping of hands, a tapping of feet, a reaching out to our Sisters and Brothers with a sign of the Passing of the Peace of God, holding hands in community, or raising our arms in supplication or adoration. That is a Holy Act—a divine response from the in-dwelling God within us all - to our God, Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer!

Alleluia!

With love in Christ,
The Rev. Maggie Snyder

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR LEADERS ON THE TRANSITION TEAM

A temporary working group with responsibility for guiding St. Matthew and Central through a transitional time has been appointed by the St. Matthew Council and the Central Governance Board. As we introduce each member of this committee, we hope you will feel comfortable talking and sharing your thoughts with them. In future newsletters we will introduce other members of the committee. Please feel free to talk with any of them: Jim Bonds, John Pecoul, Robert Perry, John Etter, Dale Bonds, Joan Fairbank, Bythelda Davis, Noel Braning, Michele D'Aquin, Andrea Gibson, and Sloan Letman and Julie Darby.

John Etter and Robert Perry

About John Etter

I grew up as an agnostic – my parents were raised Roman Catholic, but left the church when they went to college. My first contact with the UCC was attending Boy Scout meetings in the basement fellowship hall of a Congregational church in a Seattle suburb. During my college years, I was exposed to Quaker practices, Judaism, Asian religions and philosophy.

When Carol and I decided to get married, we couldn't figure out where to get married. She was Presbyterian/Unitarian and I was un-churched. Carol's mother told us that the Congregational minister would marry anyone. I went to First Congregational Church in Boulder, Colorado, to check it out before we asked the minister, Bruce McKenzie, to marry us. After the wedding we kept attending church. Several months later, Bruce asked Carol and I to join. I became a member of First Congregational UCC by confession of faith in 1981.

Carol and I went on to lead the high school youth group there, served on committees, and were co-treasurers. During that time my faith

journey continued, including contemplative practices from Christian, Buddhist, and Taoist traditions.

In 1995 we moved to New Orleans and found St. Matthew. I have served on finance, stewardship, church council, and as co-treasurer and vice-moderator. I have often been the church's negotiator and scribe in our dealings with Anthony Bean Theater and the other groups that share our facility. I continue exploring Christianity and have given three sermons.

Since Katrina, I have served on the recovery team – greeting and orienting groups and leading disaster/recovery tours. I am enthusiastic about Central St. Matthew's covenanted community. I sense the Spirit in our midst and look forward to our on-going faith exploration.

About Robert N. Perry, III

My career has been a combination of teaching, scientific research, and music. I have more than thirty years of teaching and research experience at universities and with mainstream scientific and technical companies. My graduate research and



John Etter

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Robert N. Perry, III

“I continue to have the opinion that teaching is an art and teaching physics with motivation is practicing that art at its highest level.”

some subsequent work have been in theoretical and mathematical physics. I have been employed as Department Chair and Associate Professor of Physics & Mathematics at Talladega College for three years and for ten years at Southern University at New Orleans. I was one of the creators of the Talladega College & Auburn University 2 and 3 Year B.A./Engineering Degree Program.

My teaching philosophy is based on my belief that the teaching profession is the most noble and important endeavor in which to devote one's life. More than any other activity, teaching has the most profound effect on the maintenance and progress of a civilization and culture. And in science, I feel that physics is at the very leading edge of human knowledge and understanding. It is often said that one never knows where an education will lead. I am encouraged by many of my students who have made significant contributions in their professions. Therefore, I find comfort in knowing that I am “doing the right thing.” On occasions when asked to address a group of students or teachers I have used the quotation of a few verses found in Proverbs:

To know wisdom and instruction;

To perceive the words of understanding;

To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, judgment, equity;

To give subtlety to the simple;

To give knowledge and discretion to the young.

One who is wise will hear and will increase learning,

And a person of understanding shall seek wise counsels.

Although these few lines describing the importance of education were written at least five thousand years ago, they are just as relevant today. The challenges that face educators today are probably greater than in any period in the history of the United States. And what is true of our nation has been exacerbated in New Orleans by many years of poorly funded public education and an economy largely lacking opportunities for employment of professionals and college graduates with advanced technical skills. Politicians who could lend their support to innovative educational programs seem misguided and confused. Educational programs have seldom been a priority, pre-Katrina or otherwise.

Because I am preceded in my family by three generations of teachers who have devoted their lives to education, I am not discouraged by the present level of resources invested in public education here in comparison to what is made available in many other regions, or that few seem to care. My philosophy embraces the fact that if one chooses a career in the teaching profession, the reward is in the realization of the significance of the services rendered, not in immediate monetary benefits or accolades one may receive. Therefore, I continue to have the opinion that teaching is an art and teaching physics with motivation is practicing that art at its highest level.

I am optimistic about what can be accomplished in a classroom where teachers encourage students to show-up for class and to ask questions. Teachers must show a sincere interest in student learning, conduct classes in a manner to inspire and hold the interest of students who have so many distractions, and have the ability to significantly improve the lot of at-risk students.

In addition to teaching, I have had more than ten years in industry as a Research Scientist/Engineer. In my work I designed and analyzed advanced instruments such as zoom lenses for military applications, calculated performance characteristics of large-scale solar power generating systems, and performed trade-off analyses

of proto-type optical systems.

Although I have retired from teaching and industry, I am active with several organizations and projects. I serve as the President of the Board for Hume Child Care Development Center, and am a member of the B-Sharp Music Club. I work as a consultant for the Educational Testing Service in Princeton generating test items for the PRAXIS and Graduate Record Examination. This fall I will be teaching pre-college enrichment classes at Hume. Since retiring I have been able to study my current scientific interests in theoretical physics and perform occasionally as pianist with Silk & Satin, providing jazz as smooth as the name implies.

Adult Education at Central St. Matthew

Central St. Matthew intern, Cameron Barr led a Bible study on the book of Job during July. Twelve people attended and reported that they gained new insights on the character of Job. Several said how important Bible study is to their life. It was also fun and good to be together. Here is the challenge. Who can lead a Bible study in the fall? Fred may be able to for a few weeks, but he will be leaving. Place this need on your heart and see if it is something you could do.

The People Program, Creative Lifelong Learning

There is a flyer on our bulletin board telling about one of the best kept secrets in New Orleans. The People Program is a

non-profit membership organization for persons 50 years old and over who are looking for creative ways to spend leisure time. Over 130 courses are offered including exercise, computer, dance, art, needlework, crafts, games, languages, music and more. There are three campuses: in Algiers, Metairie, and on Canal Street. Please see the posted flyer on cost and where and how to register. Registration is August 5th and 7th.

The new director for this program will be teaching a Yoga class for a very nominal fee at Central St. Matthew this fall. We will publish all the information as soon as it is firm.



Calling all Cooks!!!



Since the first months of 2006 and the beginning of our recovery efforts here at Central St Matthew, the recovery committee has been giving a dinner to each recovery team staying with us. The groups have been overwhelmingly grateful for this night off in the middle of their busy work week, and those who have been providing the food and the service feel blessed to be doing a small part in our city's recovery.

We would like to open up that opportunity for more to share in this mission. We can always use more volunteers for giving tours, greeting groups, helping with the dinners and **we especially need more cooks with their favorite recipes for red beans.** We generally need 4 to 6 lbs (dried) of beans for each dinner depending on the number of volunteers staying with us. If we can have two volunteers make 3 lbs of beans for each dinner, we have enough to feed twenty volunteers and guests, who often come by. We have had a core group of about 5 cooks who have been providing the beans for groups since the beginning, and they would welcome a little break from the hectic pace we have had over the last 6 months. During the month of August there will be a sign up sheet in the lobby for volunteers to sign up to make beans for the groups scheduled to stay with us from now till December. Please consider signing up for making a meal. The recovery committee will get in touch with each volunteer to work out the details.

You have all been so generous making things when you are asked, and we are sorry that we do not ask more often. We are hoping that this sign up sheet will help us share the blessings of this ministry. There will also be a blank for you to sign up to help with the dinner. This is a wonderful opportunity to meet those who come to help.

Sweet Treats

From the noise level of spirited conversation and happy smiles, it is easy to tell that everyone enjoys the fellowship during coffee hours after Sunday worship. Judging by the plates sporting only a few lonely crumbs, it is also apparent that everyone is also enjoying the delicious sweet treats. These treats are donated by some faithful people who either bake or buy them so that we have something good to eat with our coffee each week. We would like to invite you to join this group of "sweet treat suppliers." Any treat you wish to donate will be welcomed and much appreciated. Store bought items are just as happily received as home baked items.

If you would like to learn more about or sign up for donating Sunday treats, please see Ellen Bentz or call her at 835-0917.

World Café: An All Church Workshop to Explore Possibilities for the Future

On Sunday, August 24th all members and friends of Central St. Matthew are invited to attend the 1st in a series of workshop sessions where we will talk about the future. This date is a Sunday; we plan to hold an abbreviated worship service in Fellowship Hall followed by small group dialogue. A buffet lunch will be included and provided. We will begin with worship at 10:00 and conclude the whole experience by 1:00 PM. The same professional facilitators who led the governing boards' retreat, will provide the leadership.

We simply need you to come and share your thoughts about your church, both from the past before Katrina, and since we have been in

partnership. We really do need you to come. These well may be some of the most important church meetings you will ever attend. Our future depends on your sharing. In this first of many sessions, you will have an opportunity, in a small group, to express your feelings and thoughts about your church whether it is Central or St. Matthew or the combined partnership. Each group's work will be presented to the whole body and recorded so that nothing gets lost.

The work of ministry is nothing that is done by one man or one woman or a small group. God accomplishes God's will in and through us as the entire body of Christ. You are an important person in our body.

"We are looking for a volunteer coordinator for our Conference."

Central St. Matthew Official Records

Our church secretary, Dale, and Joan have been hard at work this summer up-dating official church records – our database. It is time for both churches to carefully go over their rolls and determine which members are active or inactive. Within a few weeks a list of inactive members will be circulated in an attempt to get information about them: have they moved away, joined another church, contact information is incorrect, etc. When that list is narrowed down, the governing boards of both congregations will send a letter to the names on the list, informing those people of their inactive status, and asking them to contact us if they wish to change their status.

One of the first questions asked of persons interested in Central St. Matthew is often, "What is your membership?" Candidates interested in applying for an interim position as pastor will ask the same question. Conference guidelines on salary recommendations are based on a church's membership. In addition, we at Central and at St. Matthew have gone through some big changes in our membership following Hurricane Katrina. And we are growing. New members are joining, and we have visitors. Praise the Lord! So now it is time for us to be as accurate as possible with our membership rolls.



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Thurs. 8 am to 4 pm

Pastor:
Call anytime, (504) 615-1634
fredmeade@aol.com
Office hours Tues to Thur.
10am to 1 pm

We're on the Web!

See us at:
www.stmatthew-nola.org

Coming Soon

World Café

Discussion Topic: Why I Love My Church

Fellowship Hall, Central St. Matthew UCC

Sunday, August 24th, 10:00am-1:00pm

Coffee and Buffet Lunch Included

Special Mission Offering

Thanks for your interest in *Strengthen the Church! Strengthen the Church*, one of four special mission offerings within the United Church of Christ, grows the UCC's future by:

- Funding **new church starts** and **invigorating existing congregations**
- Nurturing **lay and pastoral leadership**
- Building **youth and young adult** ministries
- Supporting the **God is Still Speaking Ministry** and its extravagant welcome for all within the United Church of Christ.

All gifts are directed to activities and programs of **your church's local conference** as well as the **UCC's national ministries**.

We are proud to say that Central St. Matthew contributed \$355 to this mission offering. Thank you to everyone who contributed.

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