

# Glad Tidings



May 2009

The Newsletter of Central-St. Matthew UCC

I trust I will be forgiven for jumping in after such a short time here, but the time seems right to me. What have I observed since coming in from the outside?

I am constantly struck by how many statements and conversations begin with either, “before the storm” or “after the storm.” I assumed that Katrina and Rita were more than just defining moments, but I had no idea how enormous their impact is today. Perhaps those who went through these disasters and the terrible ordeals associated with the aftermath (which continue) will always see their lives as before and after, but I think it is healthy to recognize how much of daily church life continues to be defined and in some way limited by the storms’ impact. Without wanting at all to seem glib, I think it is important to remember that our faith recognizes only one primary before and after: before Christ and after Christ, in our history, our lives, and in the life of His church.

It comes as a surprise to me that neither congregation seems to recall a definitive meeting or vote at which the decision to worship together and to operate together in a limited way was discussed and approved. I have the sense that you fell into each other or were washed up and landed together. I know there was a plan for Central to worship at St. Matthew while termite damage was repaired at the Bienville Sanctuary, but that plan was radically changed by Katrina. Being thrown together meant that a lot of details, large and small, have had to be worked out on the fly or simply put aside for later. It is remarkable you have stayed together so long and done so well. It is too bad that there was no time for intentional and solid planning of the move towards each other. It is imperative that we do that intentional and solid planning now.

There is a lot of energy spent on holding the fabric of your union together. There is the



togetherness of worship and the separateness of a rigorous committee structure. Who decides on such things as music, mission, worship, social outreach, and the cost of the organ repair? Do we need to run everything by the Governance Board and the Church Council? Who creates new committees or disbands old ones no longer needed? If a committee is formed of St. Matthew members, Central members and those who consider themselves members of both, whose committee is it? Take a look at your by-laws. Who follows them (practically no one) and who will take on the task of re-thinking them? Dealing with these questions and the fallout from them takes energy. Not dealing with these questions and their fallout takes even more energy.

In my small group meetings (which have been wonderful!) I have heard many good things, a few critical comments and many, many comments regarding music. By music I do not mean our fine choir director/organist/pianist/vocalist or the choir. I mean the music we sing, the general music life of the congregation. It seems that no one is happy with the music. It is too old, too new, too different or not different enough. It seems that along the way almost everyone feels that the opportunity to sing the “right” or “best” music has been lost. The truth is that the music we sing is terribly important and that there is a great variety of wonderful music for us to sing. It is also true that there must be give

and take and a willingness to learn to sing different hymns and songs if music is to perform its miraculous function of binding us together. The truth is that in this church there is a variety of musical traditions and abilities that is truly a God-send. Let us learn to use what God has sent.

One of the great attractions of the church is that it is a place of freedom. We, the congregation, can experiment with music, worship, liturgy, and form. We can experiment with friendships that might never happen on the "outside". We can experiment with love. It is in the church above all other places that we can experiment with love of neighbor, love of the person sitting next to or behind us. You are free each Sunday to sit in a new pew, to sit next to someone you do not know, someone from "the other" congregation. The freedom to experiment by pushing the limits of our comfort closer to the edges of where God must want us to be is the great joy of the church. I sometimes feel a rigidity here that inhibits the great experiment. This church can be a place of safety, a place of safe haven and comfort. And it can also be a place in which great leaps of faith are taken and

the risk of love becomes the norm. That is what makes the church of Christ so attractive.

I have joked with many about all the locked doors and my constant search for the right key. At times it is funny. But it is also very serious: Why do we lock everything? When someone comes to the door and it is locked, what is the message? When they come in and see the chain holding the doors to the courtyard shut tight, what is the message? When they might want to sit in the sanctuary to pray or weep and even (heaven applaud) laugh with God and the door is locked, what is the message? I know there are lessons from the past that say, "Lock it." I know there are stories every day that say, "Lock it." But is there not also a great story of a loving and welcoming God that says, "Unlock it!"? It is easier to get into the Subway across the street, easier to get into the bank across the street than it is to enter our church. What is the message?

These are thoughts, perhaps random in nature but offered in love. You, the assembled body of Christ, know where to go and how to proceed. You know in whom you are to trust. If we can allow God to lead us, all will be well.

### Sloan Letman, Our "Minister in Training"

By Rev. Doug Moore

Some of you may have wondered exactly what is Sloan's position within the Church? He seems to be everywhere and doing everything (Transition Team, Worship Committee, worship leader, computer guru, etc.).

In April 17, 2008 Sloan Letman officially became a Minister In Training (our very own "MIT") with Central-St. Matthew. A written agreement describes what is called a "Congregational Ministry Internship" between Sloan and the congregation. Under its terms Sloan is to participate in the life of the congregation "through pastoral duties like worship leadership, teaching pastoral care, program development and implementation." Sloan is also obligated to reflect on his pastoral calling and to meet "minimally once a week" with his supervisor to receive "feedback and advice" and to "explore together the vocation of pastoral ministry and set focus for the tasks ahead."

In return, the congregation is responsible to provide Sloan with a supervisor, to "give him the opportunities to explore various aspects of ministry, including worship leadership, pastoral care, program development and implementation, etc."

Unfortunately, very little of the Agreement has been carried out in a systematic way. I have taken the Agreement on as one of my duties (a very pleasant one) as Interim Pastor to see that as much as possible can be accomplished before Sloan leaves us for Seminary at the end of summer. I believe that you, the congregation, have given Sloan some wonderful opportunities to learn and practice his calling here at Central-St. Matthew. Let us all try to help him as he moves ever closer to the ministry.

Rev. Doug Moore

## Toward a Just Peace Church By Gil Wilson

We are gradually moving toward a discussion of church designations of “Just Peace” and “Open and Affirming”. The process is a rather long one for “Open and Affirming” but “Just Peace” is a little easier because there is no process.

Why bother? Why open ourselves up to controversy over name designations? While we will be looking at these processes as a whole covenanted community, each church must separately decide if it wants these titles after its name. These designations are within themselves part of the establishment of who we are as Central-St. Matthew UCC. This period that we are now in with an interim pastor is to help us discover who we are as a church (or churches) so that we can set the direction that the church will be taking for the next pastor(s). For me this issue is more critical than determining if the two churches merge now, later, or at all. I simply want to know what we stand for as a covenanted community.



Why “Just Peace?” This is a rather old designation...the whole UCC affirmed it as a designation in the 1980s 15<sup>th</sup> General Synod. “Just Peace” has many highlights that we have listed previously but I want to highlight one that is important for any church in an urban setting and that has been an important focus of Central’s ministry for many years: “A community of solidarity with the poor, seeking to be present in places of oppression, poverty, and violence, and standing with the oppressed in the struggle to resist and change this evil.”

We see this “community of solidarity” reflected in many of the nonprofits that members of both congregations direct or work for. We see it in our sharing of food and money. We are advocates in the Jeremiah Group and Back Bay Mission. The activation of our joint Social Concerns committee is also part of this solidarity. Our web site says: “We are a church that believes in social justice.”

Yet more is required of us! The designation is a call to each member that our ministry to the poor (among other parts of Just Peace) is part of the **core** focus of Central-St Matthew. If people speak of Central-St. Matthew UCC they should easily know upfront what we are about.

I encourage everyone to seriously consider joining the task force on Just Peace and Open and Affirming. Both church governing boards have approved this task force and last fall it was listed as a priority at our joint congregational retreats.

## A Little about Our Financial Situation

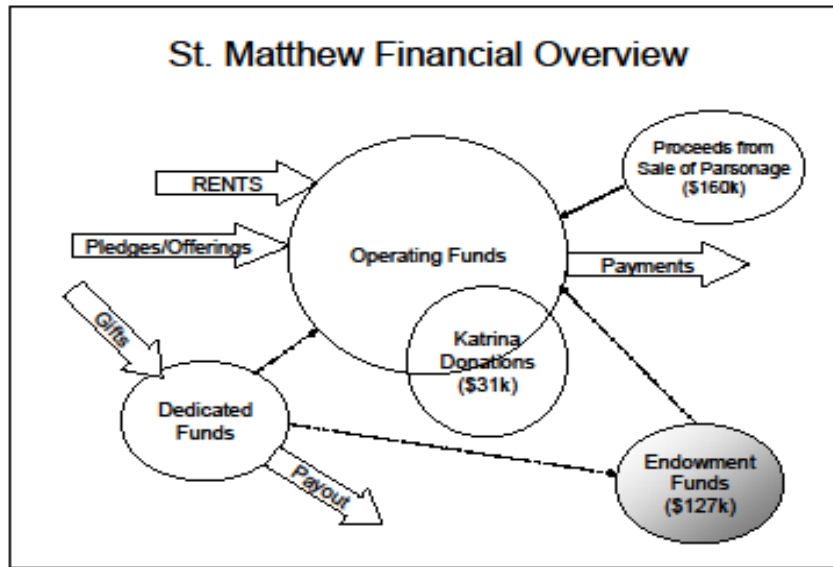
The two diagrams on the next page were put together by Carol Etter, St. Matthew's treasurer, and presented at the St. Matthew annual meeting. They are intended to be representative (not precise) of the financial operations of St. Matthew and the joint congregations. If you have questions or comments regarding the information or its presentation, please speak to Carol after church or email her at [cletter@bellsouth.net](mailto:cletter@bellsouth.net).



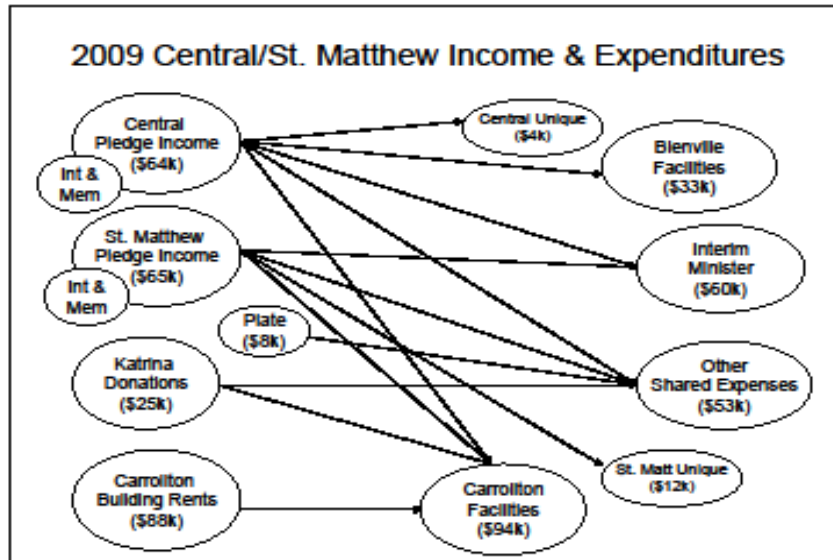
The first diagram illustrates the funds that make up St. Matthew's financial portfolio. The largest of our funds are the operating funds that take care of the day to day operation of our facilities – utilities, payroll, office & building supplies, etc. Operating funds come from pledges and offerings and from the rents we receive for use of the Carrollton facilities. We also draw from a pool of money (“Katrina Donations”) that were received after the storm. In addition to our operating funds, we are responsible for “Dedicated Funds”, money that is and has been given to the church for specific purposes – choir music, women's guild, special UCC offerings, flowers, etc. These funds can only be disbursed for the purposes they were given. We also hold funds received from the sale of the St. Matthew Parsonage more than ten years ago. These proceeds were invested with the intention of the interest paying for pastoral housing. The proceeds have never been sufficient to fully cover the pastor's housing; however the interest is received by operating funds and offsets the housing expenses. St. Matthew also holds \$127,000 (approximately) of Endowment Funds, overseen by the Endowment Committee and only useable on vote of the congregation, when the balance exceeds a trigger level. Due to the stock market downturn, we are currently well below the level were dollars could be taken from the Endowment Fund.

The second diagram is an attempt to show how the combined dollars of the two congregations collectively support the facilities and missions of Central-St. Matthew. The income sources are shown on the left: Pledge income from Central (\$64,000 budgeted) and St. Matthew (\$65,000 budgeted), dollars that will be drawn from Katrina Donations (\$25,000 to balance the budget), and building rents (\$88,000). In addition, each congregation earns interest and receives memorial gifts (the two “Int & Mem” bubbles), and we share in an estimated \$8,000 of undesignated plate contributions. On the right-hand side are the expenses – facility upkeep at both Bienville and Carrollton, the interim minister, other shared expenses (secretary, Minister of Music, office supplies, etc.), and costs “unique” to each congregation (primarily mission dollars). The arrows indicate what source of dollars goes to what type of expense. For example, both Central and St. Matthew pledge income go to the Interim Minister expenses. Bienville facility costs are paid for solely by Central funds. Carrollton facility costs are paid primarily by rents (\$88,000 towards the \$94,000 cost), with the balance coming from both pledge incomes and Katrina funds.

### St. Matthew Financial Overview



### 2009 Central/St. Matthew Income & Expenditures



## News from the Recovery Team

By Arlean Fermanis



The Recovery Committee has been staying busy greeting groups and making dinners. We have hosted 17 groups so far this year and have another 11 scheduled through December. We may have more added to the schedule in the coming months. The Recovery Office has told us that we may be hosting even more groups in the coming year, as the other denominations begin to "close up shop" here in New Orleans. Our Recovery Office is funded through 2010 and there is still so much that needs to be done. We are grateful for all those who come and stay with us and help our neighbors in need.

The Recovery Committee would like to share a letter that was written to us. We want you to know how much our efforts mean to those who stay with us. It is a joy to meet so many new friends as we welcome these groups from all over our country. Do join us for a red beans and rice dinner when you get a chance. It is a perfect opportunity to give the groups your own personal thank you.

*Dear Arlean*

*I wanted to thank you and the entire church for your hospitality during our stay in February. As before, the accommodations were "5 star" and you went out of your way to be sure we had everything we needed.*

*During each of our trips, over the last 4 years, we've had the pleasure of experiencing the great progress which has been made. It's very uplifting to witness more homes nearing completion, so we can only imagine how wonderful it is for those who've lived their own Katrina stories.*

*Thanks again for all your assistance, especially with our unexpected late arrival. Maybe we'll see you again next year!*

*Best Regards,  
Shelly Alves*

### Why We Need to Keep New Orleans Adolescent Hospital Open

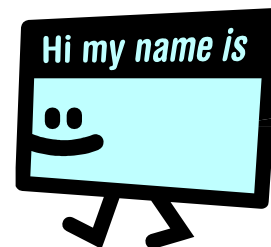
The Social Action and Mission Committee feels that we need to speak up against the governor's decision to close the New Orleans Adolescent Hospital and sending its inpatient services to the North Shore. Those working in New Orleans are aware of the increased need for mental health facilities. Besides inpatient services, NOAH also offers outpatient treatment. It thus can immediately provide its outpatient clients with hospital beds in the event of a severe mental health crisis. Staff at the outpatient clinic know local patients and can continue uninterrupted care. Medically, that makes much more sense than transferring patients to St. Tammany Parish, which takes patients' families out of the healing equation. Many of NOAH's patients come from poor families who lack private transportation and there is no public transportation from New Orleans to Mandeville.

Gov. Bobby Jindal and DHH Secretary Alan Levine hope the move will save the state money but that is not likely. "Without proper treatment and family involvement, patients are less likely to get better and will require longer-term hospitalization," NOPD crisis unit administrator Cecile Tebo wrote in a Times-Picayune op-ed. "Those unable to get proper treatment can end up in jail, part of the overburdened and costly criminal system."

On Sunday, April 19th the committee set up a table to let our members know about this plan and to take action by writing to Governor Jindal. We invite those of you who have not already done so, to write to the governor at: Governor Bobby R. Jindal, PO Box 94004, Baton Rouge, LA 70804-9004, and to write or email their legislators to let them know how they feel about this plan. You can find out how to contact your legislators at: <http://www.legis.state.la.us/>

## “Hello, my name is ...” Why nametags in church? By Carol Etter for the Evangelism & Outreach Committee

It’s a typical Sunday morning at Central-St. Matthew. You walk in the doors to the lobby, get a hug from Ellen, and give a big smile and hello to the wonderful ladies who staff the nametag table. You chat, grab a bulletin and take your name tag. As you walk up the ramp into the sanctuary, you wonder “Why do we have nametags. Everyone knows who I am, and I know everyone else. What a bother.” After service you go back down the ramp, unclip your nametag and drop it in the box. Then cup of coffee in hand, you go to greet your friends and share stories of the past week, and to say hello and chat with a visitor or two.



But when you put that name tag in the box at the bottom of the ramp, you are missing the main reason for nametags. Think about those individuals we welcome every Sunday who are visiting with us. When they go to coffee hour, they don’t know who you are, and it is much nicer to talk to someone when you can know their name. Yes, I know. You introduce yourself when you come up to them. But, believe it or not, some people (more than might admit it) are not very good at remembering names, especially when we are trying to absorb a lot of new information about, say, a possible new church home.

And once people have come a time or two and are recognized by us, we tend to stop introducing ourselves when we see them. This is the really awkward time. I’m a frequent visitor, and I know I’ve talked to this nice lady or man in the past, but I haven’t a clue as to their name, and I’m embarrassed to ask. Think how much more comfortable you are talking with someone when you can put their name into the conversation with confidence.

And then there are those of us who are just name challenged! I’ve been attending St. Matthew for close to 13 years, and there are still people whose names I struggle to remember! I am more likely to remember some other tidbit about your life, where you live, what committees you are on than your name... sorry it’s just the way I am.

So, please, key your nametags on through coffee hour and drop it in the box, in its new location by the doors, as you leave the lobby. First time and regular visitors, and even regular members who are name challenged, will thank you!

### Prayer List

#### May Prayer List

Nancy Bustilla, Melvin Chaix, LeAnn Clausen de Montes, Cliff Dahlin, James Gardner, Phyllis Maloney, Verna Sileci, Louis Lee Walker, the Welker family, Lavera Kelly, those shot in Binghamton, NY.

#### Flowers for May, 2009

- April 12 In memory of Lydia Alexander and E. J. Finnin, Jr. from Bertha Finnin  
In memory of Victoria and Charles Kerner from Bertha Finnin
- May 03 In honor of the birthday of Nancy Marks from Ellen Bentz.
- May 10 In memory of Margaret Schroeder and Marie Kordahl
- May 17 In memory of the 105<sup>th</sup> birthday of Lenna Belle Robinson from Joyce and Mike Engelbracht
- May 24 In memory of Arlou and Ervin Wulff from Karen Wulff
- May 31 In memory of Harold Ostendorf, Sr. from Yvonne Ostendorf



#### Recent Memorials

For: Emile LaBranche, Jr.  
From: Yvonne Ostendorf

For: Georgiana Gurtner

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Newsletter Committee

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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](mailto:sloanletman@gmail.com)

Fax:  
(504)861-8197

Upcoming Events

E-Mail:  
[stmatthewucc@aol.com](mailto:stmatthewucc@aol.com)

Office Hours:

Church Secretary:  
Wed. & Fri. 8 am to 12 pm,  
Thurs. 8 am to 4 pm

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

Saturday	May 9th	Maggie's Graduation
Saturday	May 16th	Philharmonic Orchestra See Nancy Marks or John Pecoul
Sunday	May 24th	Picnic after church service See Robert or Tia Perry

***We're on the Web!***

See us at:  
[www.centralstmatthewucc.org](http://www.centralstmatthewucc.org)

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