

First Congregational United Church of Christ in DC

GABRIEL'S HORN

January 2011

(10 Gabriel Horn editions left until our move into 10th/G)

**A Just Peace, Open
and Affirming,
Multiracial and
Multicultural
Congregation
Intentionally
Inclusive...Expect
the
Unexpected**

Inside this issue:

*2011 – A Historic Year for
First Church*, page 1

*News From Around the
Parish*, page 2

Experiencing Beauty,
page 2

Second Sunday Offering,
page 4

Service Project, page 4

Centering Prayer, page 5

*2011 Covenant
Conversations*, page 6

The Road to Emmaus,
page 7

*B-Days, Coffee Hour
Hosts & Calendar for
January*, page 8



2011 – A Historic Year for First Church

by Peter Dennebaum

When we vote for our new officers at our Annual Meeting on January 30th, we will know who will lead us into our new building on our historic site.

I am very pleased that, starting in February, representatives of all our church groups will sit and work together on the new church council, weighing issues and representing the needs of all our groups. **One body, one Christ; many gifts and talents.**

We all are called to help those who are elected. We stand and march together to accomplish the challenges we will face during the year. How much work, anxiety, ups and downs have you gone through! Now all your work will come together. The building is already built. The glass front grows and grows. The interior work has started, and models of our sanctuary and office chairs will be displayed in Fellowship Hall for your viewing all this month.

2011 will be a year of UNITY and cordial JOY! None of you shall remain outside! Come in, grab the hand of your sister or your brother and ask: “Where can I help?” Forget looking at the sliver in your neighbor’s eye – start this special year with forgiveness and a purged heart! When you were busy last year outside of the church – come now back, and help to build the church – come with us on the Road to Emmaus!

As our building gets covered with glass, we need to open our windows. We will start now to change into a neighborhood church. With each week and month, we will get a deeper sense of our next missions – they will come with the people we will meet in our old/new neighborhood. Who will we meet again and who will we meet anew – to enrich our lives as we may be able to enrich theirs?

Seek God in the people around you, First Church!

God bless you all, people of God!

Peter

Please see Peter’s second article at the end of this GH

Website: www.fccuccdc.org; Email: fcc@fccuccdc.org
Phone Office: 202-628-4317; Phone Peter: 202-441-6950
Office Hours: Monday-Friday, 8:00 am – 2:00 pm



NEWS FROM AROUND THE PARISH

by Joan King

Many of our Christmas celebrations included visitors and visiting. **Peg Lorenz** was delighted to have son Jim and his family here for Christmas, traveling all the way from California.

Nancy Withbroe reported that she and the boys spent part of the holiday in Minnesota with her family, playing in the snow and with the cousins' new puppy. **Mike** and **Tobey Slagenweit-Coffman** spent the holidays in Minnesota and completely surprised Tobey's family by coming home for Christmas. **Peter Byrne** reports that their family assembled in Winslow, Maine to attend midnight Christmas services in **Karen's** church, then drove to Davenport, Iowa, to visit Karen's 88 year-old mother for New Year's. It was great to have all five of us together for more than a week! Long distance car travel encourages a lot of sharing, with a variety of "tones and topics," as Chris put it.

Faith Brightbill receives our award as champion traveler. She left December 11 for California where she visited friends and family before leaving on the 15th for a 28-day cruise through the Panama Canal, stopping in Mexico, Costa Rico, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras, Belize, and Panama. Faith's brother-in-law will be lecturing on the ship, so several family members also will be on board, along with an exciting guest -- Archbishop Desmond Tutu. She will visit friends in Florida before returning home on January 7. What a trip!



Nick Benton was voted onto the board of the newly-formed Stonewall Caucus (representing LGBT constituents) of the Democratic Party of Virginia this month. **Ginny** and **Hugh Bushmiller** have lots of firewood to give away, and anyone who wants some can call them to make arrangements to pick it up.



IN OUR PRAYERS: We send our condolences to **Randy Jones** and his family for the death of his father who succumbed recently to congestive heart failure. **Phyllis Evans** is finished with chemotherapy and is slowly regaining her strength, but a new development is that she fell and broke her arm. She is out of the hospital and back at Riderwood and is feeling much better now that she had blood and platelet transfusions. Her broken arm will be in a sling for 4-6 weeks. She still needs lots of rest, and we pray for her speedy recovery.

Anne Griffis writes: "I want to personally express my deep appreciation to the members of the Worship Commission under the leadership of **Nancy Withbrow** for the beautiful and inspiring Advent worship services. The year-long worship theme based on the road to Emmaus story was skillfully woven into each service providing thoughtful reminders and challenges of our commitment to diversity. Special thanks also goes to **Suzie Hayward** who wrote the Advent litanies for each service interweaving the Advent candle themes of hope, love, joy and peace with FCC's 2003 Multiracial and Multicultural Statement."

EXPERIENCING BEAUTY



*"Through art we are sometimes sent-indistinctly,
briefly-revelations not to be achieved by rational thought."*

Alexander Solzhenitsyn

What is a topic that philosophers write about, people talk about, and students in the academy love to theorize about but which most of us, myself included, fail to see? The answer to this inquiry would be: beauty.

Though a basic human instinct, beauty often alludes us as we spend our days habitually rising in the morning only to fall into bed at night wondering, “What was that day all about?” It has been said that human beings are made for beauty and that our soul seeks beauty in all of its elusiveness. Yet most of my days are spent in checking off “to do” lists, while planning what I will eat next, or who I have forgotten to call. Is the nature of beauty too much to consider for the first month of the year 2011? Yet it is beauty which I ponder this cold day late in December, as I invite you to ponder along with me, wrestling together with its meaning.

Some say that as long as beauty exists, life is worth living. Others explain that beauty, when giving way to kitsch, ostentation, and vulgarity demeans great art into plastic replicas, a sign of the chaos of the human spirit. These questions, though important, manage to keep beauty stuck in the realm of the mind and not in the experience of contemplative insight. How does beauty in the mind become not just an idea but an experience? In order to experience beauty, I realize I must be shocked by its presence, as if beauty intrudes in the night, finding me unaware and completely helpless.

I remember a time, when my youngest child was three years old, that I sang the words to the spiritual, “Angels Watching Over Me,” to her sleepy restless self. I watched her cheek touch the pillow, my words circling her head, as her eyes drooped, welcoming sleep. When I sang, “All night all day, angels watching over me my Lord,” my heart was pierced with the thought, *she won't always be this small person. She will grow and move and leave me with this memory. She may never come home again.* At that moment I was struck with the impermanence of life in all of its beauty. Paralyzed with a sense of foreboding, I knew beauty as a gift from God that was fleeting yet important, lifting my inner self beyond the hum drum of what I took for granted if only temporarily.

Pablo Casals writes, “Beauty is all about us, but how many people are blind to it?” Beauty when experienced exists all around us. In the middle of human degradation the people of Haiti, living in tent houses, some ill with cholera, manage to raise children as they sleep in filth and live in rags, barely existing on the scrounged food for each day. Yet in the midst of this crisis called life, the art of the Haitian people is bright with color as stunning scenes are depicted of a laughing, loving, and alive community. Haitian arts reflect detailed carved faces, painted bowls made from coconuts, as drums are played throughout the day and night to communicate the cry of the human condition. Beauty manages, though art, music, and communication to intrude though the squalor, giving rise to hope and possibility in a seemingly endless downward spiral of despair.

In order to recognize beauty, I know it helps me to turn to good art, to listen to great music, and to read great literature while asking myself what are the feelings which each of these experiences excite? “Art,” the philosopher Raissa Maritain explains, “proceeds from a spontaneous instinct like love and it must be cultivated like friendship.” It dawns on me that it is possible for us to cultivate the experience of beauty in our lives and community right now, starting today. As we begin today, we can also ponder together how we can recognize and cultivate beauty in our new church location at 10th and G, as we investigate the details of our move.

Perhaps one of the goals of our new ministry lies in the very hope which inspires possibility. Our hope can be expressed through our diverse music offerings, by what we exhibit as art, and through the spoken and written word. We need not create a new ministry designed to replicate what church is “supposed” to be. We need not be a “plastic replica.” Rather we can follow an instinct for simplicity and truth, preserving a sense of harmony in a central location that can radiate outwardly to a city in great need. We can cultivate beauty and share the hope and possibility, God’s gift to us, right in Washington, D.C.



So for this first month of 2011, I have decided to bring a place of beauty to my home, plan for flowers in the yard, and think about what would make a simple welcome office space. As I encourage myself to notice and contemplate God’s gift of beauty, I wonder if I could invite you to do the same? As we pursue beauty in the daily, we together can be lifted out of our intellect, if ever so briefly, to provide an atmosphere

of fresh air to the spirit and hope for the heart. Our souls can be lifted beyond the humdrum to the realm of angels in the process. In experiencing beauty, we can continue to become what we hope to be, exquisite expressions of God's creating love.

Grace and Peace,
Bonnie



The Social Action and Awareness Commission advises that the Second Sunday offering for January is dedicated to Springvale Terrace in Silver Spring. Springvale Terrace is run as a partnership with The Potomac Association (UCC) and Seabury Resources for the Aging (Episcopalian). Springvale provides affordable housing and services where older adults can live with independence and dignity. Aside from affordable independent living and a range of assisted living services, they also provide meals, housekeeping, and a wide range of activities. Your generous donation will help provide much needed cultural and educational enrichment



SERVICE PROJECTS

by Kim Darling

The Homecoming Celebration Committee in conjunction with the Social Action and Awareness Commission is planning a series of service projects on Saturdays for the first six months of 2011. Each project will be followed by a brown bag lunch and a time to reflect on the work we've done. We encourage each member of our community to participate in as many as possible. We hope by June that 100% of the church will have participated in at least one event. All events are open to people of all ages, and a couple of the events have ways to participate even if you can't make it to the site.

The schedule:

- **January 15th**, 9am, First Trinity Lutheran Fellowship Hall. Prepare snack bags for DC Central Kitchen.
- **February 19th**, 10am, Armed Forces Retirement Home. Visit and hand out valentines.
- **March 19th**, 9am, help clean up a park through Washington Parks and People.
- **April 9th**, 9am, celebrate Earth Day by participating in the Anacostia Watershed Cleanup
- **May 21st**, 9am, help DC Schools via Hands-on-DC
- **June 18th**, we don't know yet! Let us know if you have an idea for a way we can serve together in June.



Join us on January 15th at 9am to Serve the City. We will gather in Fellowship Hall to put together individually-packaged snack bags for DC Central Kitchen's Healthy Returns program. I have their handout on the types of snacks they're looking for. We're planning to make and package S'mores Campfire Crunch trail mix. Depending on the number of people who sign up to attend, we may make sandwiches as well. Besides packaging up the snacks, you are also invited to prepare homemade quick breads (zucchini, banana, or pumpkin) for slicing and packaging. We will need at least 10 loaves of bread but will package as many as people deliver.

Please RSVP either via the First Church facebook page or directly to Kim Darling. If you're going to bring bread, let me know how many loaves. I have a list of other supplies that we'll need, so if you're able to bring something let me know, and I'll send you the list. We will have a brown bag lunch and a time to reflect on service in general and this type of service in particular afterwards.



CENTERING PRAYER

*“Silence is that place just before the voice of God.
It is the void in which God and I meet
in the center of my soul.”
Joan Chittister*

On January 23 we will hold an Adult Nurture to learn about and experience the spiritual practice of Centering Prayer. If you already participate in this practice, I invite you to come and pray and share your personal experiences.

Centering prayer is the opening of mind and heart, or our whole being, to God whom we call the Ultimate Mystery. We open our awareness to God by preparing a place of silence within, to listen to and be aware of God's Holy Presence. We call this conversation or awareness of God, “Centering Prayer.”

We will spend our Centering Prayer time with a brief introduction, then some basic instruction. After this we will pray silently for 15 to 20 minutes. At the conclusion of the silent prayer time, you will be invited to share your experience. In a few months, you will be invited again to a Centering Prayer Follow Up Nurture where we can discuss and fine tune our practice.

Many communities use Centering Prayers as individuals and in a group. The Center for Prayer and Pilgrimage at the National Cathedral has such a room for this practice. I work in this center several days a month, encouraging people of all faiths to welcome the silence within. Praying together with others in silence can be a profound act of hospitality. Setting aside language and sharing silence promotes creation of a deeper peace like no other experience I know.

Meeting God in silence is not for everyone. However the benefits of silent prayer are numerous to the spiritual life and even to one's health. People who regularly practice centering prayer have lower blood pressure, reduced anxiety, and experience a greater sense of well being. For more information, you can view on line:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3IKpFHFndnE>.



All are invited to teach, listen, and learn together on January 23rd after the coffee hour. We will meet in the classroom downstairs, right next to the coffee hour area. I look forward to sharing a time of silence with all who desire to experience God's presence more fully.

Grace and Peace,
Bonnie



On February 6, the **Green Action Committee** is sponsoring a nurture. Joelle Novey, Director of the Greater Washington Interfaith Power and Light (GW IPL), will be guest in the Nurture on February 6. She will speak about how faith communities are strong forces, over time, for addressing climate change. She will report the extraordinary efforts of GW IPL among hundreds of congregations in 2010. **She will also challenge FCC to decide how we will focus our mission with our new LEED certified church facility.**

Joelle is well aware of FCC, and the Green Action Committee is kept current on what GW IPL is doing.

2011 COVENANT CONVERSATIONS



Theme: What kind of Christian are you? What is the UCC? Why does church matter?

When people join our church we ask them to participate in a three session mini-course about Christianity, the United Church of Christ and First Congregational UCC in Washington. The sessions, however, are for everyone. We all need to talk with each other about what we believe and don't believe and what it means to belong to this church. This year, as we anticipate returning to our new building at 10th and G Streets, these conversations are especially important.

To prod our thinking we will use a controversial book by Brian McLaren entitled *A NEW KIND OF CHRISTIANITY: Ten Questions that are Transforming the Faith*. McLaren, who is rooted in conservative Evangelical Christianity, argues that a new kind of Christian thinking is emerging among Christians in many different denominations and traditions. All types of people (conservative, liberal, Roman Catholic, Protestant, church members, agnostics and seekers) are challenging classic Christian ideas about authority, God, Jesus, church, sexuality and religious diversity. We may not agree with all of his views, but his questions will help us focus and push the edges of our thinking. When we affirm the COVENANT of this church, what do we mean? We say,

"In grateful response to the call of Jesus Christ, we covenant with God and with each other to be a Church of Christ. We bind ourselves, in God's redeeming Presence, to walk together in ways revealed to us by the Holy Spirit in sacrament and Word, study and prayer, fellowship and mission."

Jesus says to his disciples: "You have heard it said, but I say to you ..." So what are we hearing? What are we thinking?

SESSION ONE 2:30 pm Sunday, February 13 Theme: Our Kind of Christianity

How should the Bible be understood? Who is Jesus and why is he important? What do we believe? How do we relate to non-Christians?

SESSION TWO 2:30 pm Sunday, February 20 Theme: Our Kind of Wider Commitments Why connect with any church? What is our responsibility in the world? How does the United Church of Christ strengthen or weaken our commitments?

SESSION THREE 2:30 pm Sunday February 27 Theme: Our Kind of Local Church

What is the history of this church? What does it mean to be "congregational"? How can we be faithful to our heritage? What do we need to recover? What do we need to leave behind?

Sponsored by Outreach and Membership Commission and led by Barbara Brown Zikmund

Our text for 2011: THE ROAD TO EMMAUS

(Luke 24: 13-35 / 36-49 / 50-53)

by Rev. Peter Dennebaum

On Easter Day two disciples were walking the 7 miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus. One of them was Cleopas.

They discussed what happened in the morning: how the women found the tomb empty, how “two men in dazzling clothes” appeared to them, reminding them that all this happened according to the word: that Jesus would be handed over, crucified, and would rise on the third day. And the women returned to the apostles, who couldn’t believe what they heard. (verses 1-12)

While the two disciples were walking, Jesus joined them, but they didn’t recognize him. They told him what happened, and Jesus finally said: “Oh, how foolish you are and slow of heart.” – and beginning with Moses and the prophets, he interpreted everything that was said about him in the scriptures.

In the late afternoon Jesus went ahead, but they invited him to stay with them. When Jesus took the bread at the table, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them, they recognized him, but he vanished. Then they got up and returned to Jerusalem, where they shared what happened with the eleven and their companions.

That is the beginning of the story of what happened on the Road of Emmaus (verses 13-35). But the story goes on. In the next part (verses 36-49) Jesus appeared to the apostles. It seems it is still the same day, probably at night. Jesus said “Peace be with you!” He showed his friends his feet and hands, inviting them to touch them. And then he asked for food, showing very earthly hunger. Again Jesus interpreted the scriptures. His preaching ends with verses 48/49: “**48You are witnesses of these things. 49And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high**”

Sometime last fall, BBZ proposed this text as a chance to help us find our way back to 10th and G – what a great idea! And she challenged us to read the Road to Emmaus text from verse 49, to which I only want to add the verse before, as both seem to form a unit.

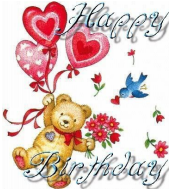
The “Road of Emmaus” story invites us to undertake on our way back to 10th and G, a journey into our Jewish-Christian heritage, to search for God's promises for us, to examine what it means to be witnesses in the city, and to explore what it might mean to be “clothed with power from on high”.

Over this year you will find many references to this story – in sermons, prayers, nurtures, and programs. Watch for them, bring yourself in, become part of the journey, search with all of us for God’s promises, seek for truth – so that we all can become God’s witnesses in this city for his/her saving and restoring promise: A new world!

Blessings *Peter*

P.S. The story of the Road to Emmaus ends in verses 50-53 with Jesus’ resurrection. Jesus walked with his followers to Bethany. He blessed them with uplifted hands and withdrew from them when he was carried up into heaven. After worshipping him, they returned to Jerusalem. We also will have to think and talk more about the last verse: That we can bless God and how we can do this...

JANUARY BIRTHDAYS



Lucas Cacoza, Christine Evans-Klock, Michael Joseph, Patrick Summers, Oscar Olson, Matt Dodge, Faith Brightbill, Phyllis Gillie, Rebecca McConnell

COFFEE HOUR HOSTS FOR JANUARY

- 2 Peg Lorenz, Byron Adams, Bob & Jennifer Dinkelmeyer
- 9 Faith Brightbill, Priscilla Waters, Anne & Tom Mascolino
- 16 Grace & Don Bassler, Gail Sonneman, Stacy Pace
- 23 Karen Pence, Peter Tracey, Sandy Sorensen, Fredda Sparks
- 30 Marie Rietmann, Susan Peacock, Jamey Moore, Dwan Reece



CALENDAR FOR JANUARY

WEEK 1

Saturday, January 8

9:00 am – Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. 24th Annual Prayer Breakfast at Peoples Congregational UCC, 4704 13th St., NW., WDC 20011.

WEEK 2

Sunday, January 9

12:00 pm - Bible Workbench
12:15 pm – Choir Rehearsal
1:00 pm - Worship Service
Preaching: Peter Dennebaum
Worship Leader: Jamey Moore
2:00 pm - Fellowship Hour
2:30 pm – Budget Hearing

Monday, January 10

6:30 pm – Finance Commission

Tuesday, January 11

6:30 pm – Council

Wednesday, January 12

7:00 pm – Personnel Committee

Thursday, January 13

5:45 pm – Outreach & Membership Commission

7:30 pm – Choir Rehearsal

Saturday, January 15

9:00 am – Service Project: Prepare snack bags for DC Central Kitchen

WEEK 3

Sunday, January 16

11:00 am – Care of Parish
12:00 pm - Bible Workbench
12:15 pm – Choir Rehearsal
1:00 pm - Worship Service
2:00 pm - Fellowship Hour

Wednesday, January 19

7:00 pm – Homecoming Task Force

Thursday, January 20

7:30 pm – Choir Rehearsal

Saturday, January 22

Service Project: Meeting on Missions

WEEK 4

Sunday, January 23

11:00 am – Christian Education
12:00 pm - Bible Workbench
12:15 pm – Choir Rehearsal
1:00 pm - Worship Service
2:00 pm - Fellowship Hour
2:30 pm – Nurture: “Centering Prayer”

Monday, January 24

Deadline to submit articles for the Gabriel’s Horn

Thursday, January 27

7:30 pm – Choir Rehearsal

WEEK 5

Sunday, January 30

12:00 pm - Bible Workbench
12:15 pm – Choir Rehearsal
1:00 pm - Worship
2:00 pm - Fellowship Hour
2:30 pm – Annual Congregational Meeting

Please note that the first *Sermon After Talk* is on January 9th, led by Peter Dennebaum, in the Fellowship Hall. This new opportunity will be offer to you on a regular basis.