



UNITED INTOUCH

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December 2008

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YOU ARE INVITED TO STEP OUT OF THE CHAOS!

It's hard to believe that we are entering into the Christmas season! With Christmas come the parties, the shopping, baking, cooking, Christmas cards, decorating and more! With all of the *busyness*, we can sometimes forget to breathe and reflect on the true meaning of Christmas. This week we enter into the Advent season, a time of preparation, anticipation and waiting for the birth of the Christ child!

You are invited to step out of your hectic schedule and take a break to reflect on and prepare for the celebration of Christ's birth. On December 5th, 12th, and 19th from 11:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m., there will be an Advent study over lunch at the church.

Be sure to bring your own lunch with you, as we enjoy lunch together and time to step out of the chaos and focus on the true meaning of Christmas.

"CHRISTMAS CHICK CHALLENGE"

The Outreach/Mission Committee is asking the congregation to join us in a "Christmas Chick Challenge." It is our hope that, in lieu of sending Christmas Cards to fellow members, you will donate what money you would spend on cards and postage towards this project. Through Heifer International, the gift of a flock of chickens to families in need around the world can provide these families with nourishing life-sustaining eggs. A good hen can lay up to 200 eggs a year---plenty to eat, share or sell. Please join us in this worthy project. We ask that donations be in by December 5th.

JAIL CHAPLAINCY CHRISTMAS GIVING

The Jail Chaplaincy program has asked United for assistance in providing toys for Christmas to the children of inmates. If you would like to help make a child's Christmas a happier one, please bring **unwrapped** toys (\$10 - \$25 a gift) to the church office on or before Sunday, December 7th. Money can be donated, in lieu of a gift, and a *personal shopper* will purchase a gift on your behalf.

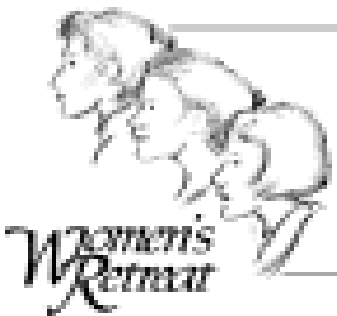
WASSAIL PARTY/BASKET AUCTION

The annual Wassail Party/Basket Auction, hosted by the Parish Life Committee, will be held on December 7th beginning at 7:00 p.m. in Fellowship Hall. The evening will include chime ringing, carol singing, the basket auction with Col. Tom Dibble, auctioneer, wassail, and refreshments. If you would like to create/donate a theme basket, please contact Jane Huck (908/725-0233 or janehuck@msn.com). Proceeds from the sale of the baskets will go toward the Youth Group's mission trip in June. Those who plan to attend the Wassail Party are asked to donate a holiday confection – cookies, cupcakes, etc.

POINSETTIAS

The Christmas Memorial/Celebration Flower envelope is included in this issue of InTouch. If you would like to participate in this special Christmas remembrance or celebration of a loved one, please have your request to the church office by December 14th. PLEASE CLEARLY PRINT ALL YOUR INFORMATION. Following worship on Christmas Eve, The poinsettias will be delivered to those in our church family who are unable to worship with us on a regular basis. Please plan to take one to deliver to a shut-in. Letters to accompany the poinsettia will be available when you pick up the poinsettia. Thank You!

WOMEN'S RETREAT



Relax, unwind, take a nap, sip hot cocoa or beverage of your choice by the fire at the Women's Retreat January 23-January 25, 2009 at the Church Farm in Kingwood Township, NJ.

Please contact Sharon Thompson at the church office for details and for meal plans by January 16, 2009. Deborah Ogden-Ditmars will be joining us for the weekend. She looks forward to reconnecting with her friends at United.

So, no excuses and just come as you are and bring your favorite book or cross-stitch.

A MESSAGE FROM THE PASTOR

Dear Friends,

Whose birthday is it, anyway?

That's the actual title of a newspaper distributed at this time of the year by Alternatives for Simple Living. Published annually since 1980, 'Whose Birthday is it, anyway?' fashions itself as a protest against the commercialization of Christmas. Readers are encouraged to challenge a consumer society that has reshaped Christmas into a season of spending and consider activities that reflect the real Reason for the Season. Lord knows we should!

Just as the full scope of the current economic crisis became evident, a radio reporter was heard interviewing a person in an economically depressed area of Ohio. With a trembling voice this person told the reporter that 'Christmas used to be huge in our house, but this year it's not going to be much at all.' While I can empathize with this person's financial worries, it certainly underscores the emptiness of a commercialized Christmas. To think that 'Christmas won't be much at all' because we don't have extra spending money is to ignore the very heart and the promise of the Christmas Gospel.

So whose birthday is it, anyway? In this season of economic hardship people of faith would do well to focus on the One who comes to bring true joy and authentic happiness. After all, we celebrate EMMANUEL – GOD WITH US. And isn't that the greatest gift of all?

Your pastor and friend,

Pastor Paul

PS: For those of you who might like to check out the resource mentioned above the link is www.Alternativesforsimpleliving.org

VANCLEEF FUND

Many in the congregation will remember the VanCleeef Fund, founded in 1980 through the gift of the late Mary VanCleeef, to provide for educational opportunities between United Reformed Church and residents of South Africa. We are pleased to report that this Fund is once again being used for its intended purpose in support of Precious Tshaka as

she begins her studies for an MSW (Master's of Social Work) at Ashford University.

GROWTH AND PRESERVATION CAPITAL FUND

The Growth and Preservation Capital Fund Drive was started in 2005-06. Of the \$500,000 goal, \$250,000 was pledged and \$125,000 collected. With the difficult and uncertain times we at URC experienced, many members declined to pledge, reduced what might have been possible, or abandoned pledges made.

The enclosed color brochure describes the original aspirations. The new carpet and the front steps were paid from funds collected.

Be assured that any money, which has been donated or will be donated, is solely reserved for capital expenses as each project is approved by Consistory.

As we, as a congregation, recover from the difficult times of the past, it is important for us to preserve our facility. In this way, it will be attractive and inviting to all of our community and a focus of growth in our mission to serve the glory of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

I ask that everyone revisit this issue to make or fulfill their pledge,. Sylvia and I will.

This is the time of the year that last minute tax deductions are real. Perhaps the tax deduction could be useful.

This in no way detracts from the need of the operating budget. In these difficult financial times there is a tendency to cringe at the thought of more money requests. I personally find solace in the knowledge that **God will provide.** Bill Anderson

DO YOU HAVE A CONCERN?

If you have a concern, please let the Church Administrator, Sharon Thompson know. We want to remember them in our prayers and mention their name in the "In Your Prayers" reminders for the week in our Sunday bulletin.



Bible Readings *for the Month* of December, 2008

- Sunday, December 7th Isaiah 40:1-11;
Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; II Peter 3:8-15a;
Mark 1:1-8
- Sunday, December 14th Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11;
Psalm 126 or Luke 1:47-55; I
Thessalonians 5:16-24; John 1:6-8,
19-28
- Sunday, December 21st II Samuel 7:1-11,
16; Luke 1:47-55 or Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26;
Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38
- Wednesday, December 24th Christmas Eve
Isaiah 9:2-7; Psalm 96; Titus 2:11-14
Luke 2:1-14, (15-20)
- Thursday, December 25th Christmas Day
Isaiah 62:6-12; Psalm 97; Titus 3:4-7
Luke 2:8-20
- Sunday, December 28th
Isaiah 61:10-62:3; Psalm 148;
Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:22-40

YOUTH UPDATE

On June 28, 2009 some of our youth will be heading to Kentucky with the Colt's Neck Reformed Church on a mission trip! We are excited about this opportunity to go outside of our comfort zone to walk alongside and serve other people from a different community! We will keep you posted as we get closer to our trip!

The youth group would like to say a big THANK YOU for your support over the past few months as we have begun to raise money for our mission trip! Thank you for all of your donations and support.

On another note...

The youth group has begun to meet on a bi-weekly basis, meeting the 2nd and 4th Sunday's of each month from 6-7:30pm at the church! We ask you to pray for this group of students as we meet to grow and have fun together!

SHIP'S GALLEY 2008

It has been a good year for those of us who have worked at SHIP's Galley on the 4th Friday of every month. We have had an enlightening experience with our fellow volunteers as we have provided nutritious and delicious meals while sharing many good and thoughtful moments with our guests. United continues to be known as "the good lunch bunch" to many regulars who make it a point to attend the galley when it's United's day to serve lunch.

This year, our dedicated volunteers have included Nancy Aliberto, Bill & Sylvia Anderson, Helen Cantlay, Larry Carey, Barbara Ciamperero, Katherine Cole, Jane Coleman, Dee Davall, Carol Lane, Nancy Maggio, Lois Mason, Toni Moore, Freddie Oakley, Ruth Reader, Marge Rowell, Jeannette & Don Seip, Janni & Lincoln Shimomura, Jim Thompson, Kendra VanHouten, and Paul Walther. Grateful thanks for all our wonderful volunteers who have contributed their time and delicious culinary offerings.

As would be expected in light of the down turn in the economy, the number of people attending the galley luncheons has grown in recent months. We now serve 65 or more people in an hour, often serving seconds. It is expected that the number of people seeking a good meal will continue to increase. We can use help in preparing food for the galleys. If you would be interested in assisting our efforts by preparing a casserole, soup, or dessert ahead of time and delivering it to United's or to St. John's church kitchen before 11:30 a.m. on the 4th Friday of the month, please contact Jane Huck at 908/725-0233 or janehuck@msn.com or Sylvia Anderson, 908/722-7988 or sylander58@comcast.net.

Jane Huck

SUNDAY SCHOOL NEWS

By Amy Stires

The theme for the current unit in Sunday School has been "Making A Difference". This month they were very busy making a difference in the world by having their Christian actions match their Christian words. They showed their love for our church family as well as their community through a variety of activities. Many participated in the Crop Walk,

which raised money for food both locally and abroad. They did chores for money and earned \$119.00, which was donated to our local Red Cross. On November 16th the Sunday school children and their parents assembled fruit and baked good baskets that were distributed to senior members of our church and to those who can not regularly attend Sunday services. (see pictures on last page) They also made beautiful Thanksgiving cards that were distributed to the congregation on November 23rd. The children have learned how they can show God's love by sharing the gifts/talents He has given them. A gift may be a smile, a hug, a kind word, a card, or a helping hand that can nurture their faith in themselves and others. It is through sharing these gifts that our faith grows.

Looking ahead we have many wonderful activities planned as we enter into the Advent season. Watch for the Christmas Story as the Sunday school children bring it to life on December 21st during worship.

THANK YOU, DR. TSHAKA!

On November 23rd, Christ the King Sunday, Dr. Rotheny Tshaka spoke on 'God's Power for Living' during morning worship at United. A native of South Africa and currently a Global Scholar at New Brunswick Seminary, Dr. Tshaka used as his text Ephesians 1:15-23. In this passage, St. Paul witnesses to a faith that had spread far beyond anything the disciples could have imagined and calls upon the church to serve as a community of faith and love. Dr. Tshaka closed his challenging sermon with four things the Apostle wants us to know:

1. In Christ we have hope (vv. 17-18)
2. In Christ we have power (vv. 19-20)
3. In Christ we have victory (vv. 21-22)
4. In Christ we have fullness

The Tshakas have been regular visitors to United Reformed Church since their arrival at New Brunswick Seminary in January 2008.

UNITED INTOUCH DEADLINE

If you have information that you would like included in the January, 2009 issue of INTOUCH, please contact Sharon Thompson at (908) 725-4545, e-mail her at sharon.thom@yahoo.com, or put your article in the INTOUCH mailbox..

The “**must have**” **deadline** for articles is Monday, December 22, 2008

OUR SUNDAY SERVERS for DECEMBER, 2008

	Ushers**	Counters	Fellowship Hour**	Altar Guild	Nursery Care*
7	Deacons Serving Communion Carol Lane Charlie Lane	Cathy Stires Lois Mason	Michelle Lane	Alice Gunzelman	
14	Elizabeth Fowler	Jane Coleman Toni Moore	Joe Nemes Della Nemes	Toni Moore	
21	Toni Moore Barbara Schwarz	Eileen Davall Dee Davall		Millie Moore	
24	Christmas Eve		No Fellowship Hour		
28	Elizabeth Fowler	Tom Dibble Jocelyn Eckardt	Barbara Schwarz Toni Moore Alice Gunzelman	Dee Davall	

***Volunteers are needed to care for our youngest members during worship. Can you serve in this ministry to our youngest members? Give the church office a call if you would like to help care for our children.**

**** If you can volunteer to usher, or prepare coffee, please call the church office and add your name to the list or sign up during Fellowship Hour.**

USHERS NEEDED FOR SPECIAL SERVICES

United Reformed Church is holding special concerts and our Christmas Eve service during the month of December and we need ushers for these events.

If you can volunteer to usher for any of the following, please call the church office.

December 5th at 7:30 p.m.
Peter Mayer’s “Stars and Promises 2008

December 6th at 8:00 p.m.
Whitehouse Winds Symphony

December 14th at 7:30 p.m.
A “Deer Ridge Singers” Christmas

December 24th at 8:00 p.m.
A Candlelight Service of Lessons and Carols

DATES TO REMEMBER IN

Tuesday, December 2	7:30 p.m. Whitehouse Wind Symphony Rehearsal
Wednesday, December 3	7:00 p.m. Decorate Sanctuary (Worship Committee) 7:00 p.m. Decorate Fellowship Hall (Parish Life Committee)
Thursday, December 4	7:30 p.m. Chancel Choir
Friday, December 5	11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. Bible Study (Lounge-see article pg. 1) 7:30 p.m. Peter Mayer Concert
Saturday, December 6	8:00 p.m. Whitehouse Wind Symphony Concert
Sunday, December 7	9:00 a.m. Sunday School/ Mothers' Time 10:00 a.m. Worship (Holy Communion) 1100 a.m. Fellowship Hour
Tuesday, December 9	7:00 p.m. Wassail Party/Basket Auction 7:30 p.m. Deer Ridge Singers Rehearsal 7:30 p.m. Administration and Finance Committee (Lounge)
Wednesday, December 10	7:00 p.m. Decorate Sanctuary (Worship Committee)
Thursday, December 11	7:30 p.m. Chancel Choir
Friday, December 12	11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. Bible Study (Lounge) 3:30 p.m. Somerville High School Christmas Caroling Festival
Sunday, December 14	9:00 a.m. Sunday School/Mothers' Time 10:00 a.m. Worship 11:00 a.m. Fellowship Hour 12:30 p.m. – 2:00 p.m. Ignite 2:00 p.m. Farm Christmas Party 6:00 p.m. Youth Group 7:30 p.m. Deer Ridge Singers Concert
Wednesday, December 17	6:00 p.m. Ship's Annual Children's Christmas Party
Thursday, December 18	7:30 p.m. Chancel Choir
Friday, December 19	11:30 a.m.- 1:00 p.m. Bible Study (Lounge)
Sunday, December 21	9:00 a.m. Sunday School/Mothers' Time 10:00 a.m. Worship 11:00 a.m. Fellowship Hour 12:30 p.m. – 2:00 p.m. Ignite 7:30 p.m. Reflection Ringers
Monday, December 22	INTOUCH DEADLINE
Wednesday, December 24	CHRISTMAS EVE 10 :00 a.m. Collate Intouch 7:40 p.m. Pre-service Music 8:00 p.m. Candlelight Lesson and Carols Service
Thursday, December 25	CHRISTMAS DAY/OFFICE CLOSED 10 :00 a.m. – 3:00 SHIP'S Annual Christmas Dinner
Friday, December 26	OFFICE CLOSED/NO SHIP'S GALLEY
Sunday, December 28	No Sunday School 10:00 a.m. Worship 11:00 a.m. Fellowship Hour 12:30 p.m. – 2:00 p.m. Ignite

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9:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
Lunch Hour: 12:30 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.

HALLOWEEN AT UNITED

Halloween afternoon, United joined with the businesses on Main Street in handing out treats to Somerville area children in costumes. Kendra an Houten, Doug Young, and Elizabeth Fowler (in costume), passed out wrapped candies to several hundred children who passed by United as they walked Main Street in their many and colorful costumes.



Pictured: Left to Right, Queen Kailey, King Mikey and Princess Jazzy, joined by Elizabeth Fowler.

THANKSGIVING BASKETS



The Sunday School assembled Thanksgiving baskets for the senior members of United and shut-ins on November 16th.