

May 29, 2009

Before Hurricane Katrina hit in 2005, New Orleans' Beecher Memorial UCC was not unlike many churches – modest in size, but significant in mission – with a century long tradition of providing educational and community development programs, and a vibrant gospel music ministry reaching 90 people a week.

Then the levees broke. Its building drowned; its people displaced, and no endorsement to draw on. Meeting in a nearby church, attendance hovered at about a dozen. They began to worship among the studs of their building. Their large former choir became a praise team. Their Bible study group met in a FEMA trailer. They began a quilting ministry and reached out to the homeless. Every Saturday, they “walked” the community, greeting people, passing out flyers, praying.

And as they re-built, people returned – both those they expected and those they didn't. This historically black church now draws on a much broader demographic – justice-seeking, spirit-filled, music-loving people of God who believe that God is still speaking and working amid the chaos and pain of New Orleans. Beecher Memorial's renewal has been supported by funds from Strengthen the Church special mission offering.

Job 37:1-13 The powerful breath of God
1 Corinthians 15:50-57 The dead will be raised
Psalms 33:12-22 Our help and our shield

Our Church's Wider Mission: Changing Lives

May 30, 2009

On Easter Sunday, two new women came with 6 and 9 year old girls; they came because they heard the radio ads. One of the women said, “As soon as I heard the word ‘divorced’ on your ad, I said, ‘Oh, I’ve got to go there.’” Allie (name changed) went on to explain that since her divorce, she has not felt she would be welcomed in churches, and once she heard the ad, she believed that she would be welcomed at Edgewood. Her friend, Lisa (name changed), also added that she has many lesbian friends, and going to a church where LGBT folks are welcomed and affirmed was very important to her; so they decided to come to Edgewood UCC in East Lansing, MI.

They began coming not only to worship, but also to the weekly Thursday supper, and the two girls, began singing in the children's choir. They completed the new members' class, and all four were baptized and joined the church. It happened on Pentecost, as we celebrate the way that the spirit moves among us. From this one radio ad, they are now a part of our church family.

Exodus 15:6-11 The breath of God rescues Israel
John 7:37-39 The living water of the Spirit
Psalms 33:12-22 Our help and our shield

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2009 A Calendar of Prayer for the United Church of Christ

Guided in Prayer

May 24, 2009
Seventh Sunday of Easter



Bruce Van Voorhis, missionary with the Asian Human Rights Commission in Hong Kong, believes in the power of prayer to unite our world. These are excerpts from his *Prayer of Intercession*.

We ask you today, God, for respect for those who are different than we are in our world that constantly creates walls of separation, a world where we never cease to find ways to divide ourselves by our race, our ethnicity, our nationality, our religion, a world where we regularly strive to find the differences in our identities instead of how much we are alike.

We ask you today, God, for sanity in our world that consumes the environment you created to support us, a world where we defile the pristine water and the pure air and call it development.

We ask you today, God, for nourishment in our world fighting for food, a world where we can afford to go to the moon but far too many people cannot afford to go to the market, a world where immense wealth can reside next to immense poverty.

In this world of our making, God, our world of war, discrimination, environmental degradation and hunger and poverty, we ask you to guide us out of our present state of confusion with its misguided priorities and values. Teach us again, God, the lessons of love and compassion that we continue to stubbornly reject.

It is in this spirit that we pray today, God, for the Burmese asylum-seekers ... for the asylum-seekers detained in Hong Kong and for the asylum-seekers in our midst... Be present in their lives, Lord, and quiet the anxiety that they feel.

It is in the spirit of love and compassion that we pray today, God, for China's farmers, for the elderly and the poor, for our brothers and sisters in Eritrea and Ethiopia, people who have known too much war and too much poverty. May we discern your will from that of our own. Now in silence we lift up to you the joys and concerns in our hearts. Amen.

Acts 1:15-17, 21-26 Matthias added to the apostles

Psalms 1 The way of the righteous

1 John 5:9-13 Life in the Son of God

John 17:6-19 Christ's prayer for the disciples

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2009 A Calendar of Prayer for the United Church of Christ

May 25, 2009 –Memorial Day

Gracious God, on this Memorial Day, we remember and give thanks for those who have given their lives in the service of our country. When the need was greatest, they stepped forward and did their duty to defend the freedoms that we enjoy, and to win the same for others. O God, you yourself have taught us that no love is greater than that which gives itself for another. These honored dead gave the most precious gift they had, life itself, for loved ones and neighbors, for comrades and country – and for us. Help us to honor their memory by caring for the family members they have left behind, by ensuring that their wounded comrades are properly cared for, by being watchful caretakers of the freedoms for which they gave their lives, and by demanding that no other young men and women follow them to a soldier's grave unless the reason is worthy and the cause is just. Holy One, help us to remember that freedom is not free. There are times when its cost is, indeed, dear. Never let us forget those who paid so terrible a price to ensure that freedom would be our legacy. Though their names may fade with the passing of generations, may we never forget what they have done. Help us to be worthy of their sacrifice, O God, Amen.

Exodus 28: 29-38 Aaron prayers for the people
Philippians 1: 3-11 Paul prays for the church at Philippi
Psalms 115 God's blessings on the chosen ones

CENTERING PRAYER (May 21—27, 2009)

Gracious God, in the resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ, you have given us eternal life and glorified your name in all the world. Refresh our souls with the living streams of your truth, that in our unity, your joy may be complete. Amen.

May 26, 2009

They Said It Really Loud... They said it on the air, on the radio. You may not remember Donna Summer, but you can't argue with the fact that getting your message on the air is a good way to get noticed. Journey UCC, a new church in upstate New York, thought the same thing. Just four months old, holding worship in the converted bar of a defunct restaurant, Journey UCC needed to be heard. And people needed to hear them. Studies estimated that nearly half of all people living in the area were not affiliated with any faith. Journey – as its name implies – had a lot to offer them: a spiritual home where the path is as important as the destination, questions are as important as answers, and actions are as important as words. Using ads produced by the God is Stillspeaking Ministry, Journey entered the world of DJs, "Drive Time" and Top 40 radio – buying 36 ads on local radio and reaching nearly 60,000 people! Not bad for a church too young to blow out its first birthday candle. Journey UCC's media purchase was supported by Media with a Mission, a Stillspeaking grant program that receives funding from Strengthen the Church.

Numbers 8:5-22 The Levites consecrated for service
Titus 1:1-9 The ministry entrusted to Titus by Paul
Psalms 115 God's blessings on the chosen ones

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2009 A Calendar of Prayer for the United Church of Christ

May 27, 2009

A: First Congregational UCC in Santa Rosa, California, the vision is simply "Making God's Love Visible." "Warm and welcoming, dynamic and diverse, we come together with open arms... to renew our spirits, challenge our minds, and to celebrate Christ in our midst. Excited and enlivened by the Holy Spirit, we are transformed. Reaching out, we become what our hearts can see." *Unbinding the Heart* groups encourage and equip disciples to "just say yes" to engage their talents in ministry... working at the ecumenical food pantry, an area homeless shelter, a shelter for women and their children and with Habitat. Open and Affirming, they are looking to extend "Beyond Belief: Meditation and Spiritual Enrichment" services to their local historic Santa Rosa Junior College Neighborhood. Youth have participated in the last three National Youth Events. A "5 for 5 Church," they expect to give a full tithe (10%) of church operating expenses to Our Church's Wider Mission by 2010. A Strengthen the Church Revitalizing Church grant supports all this. The Northern California Nevada Conference is excited about the potential for Santa Rosa First Congregational UCC to become "a beacon church" as a model of growth and vitality.

Ezra 9:5-15 Ezra prays for the people
John 16:16-24 Sorrow turned to joy
Psalms 115 God's blessings on the chosen ones

CENTERING PRAYER (May 28—June 3, 2009)

Creator Spirit and Giver of life, make the dry, bleached bones of our lives live and breathe and grow again as you did of old. Pour out your Spirit upon the whole creation. Come in rushing wind and flashing fire to turn the sin and sorrow within us into faith, power, and delight. Amen.

May 28, 2009

Life is a spiritual journey, but it can be tough to find time for your soul in the craziness of life. Get out of the fast lane once a week. Take the Journey." This invitation is offered by Journey UCC, Prairieville, Louisiana, a new church start supported by Strengthen the Church. Pastor Malcolm Richard notes, "This is now the largest and most conservative city in Louisiana. Few churches exist that are progressive and evangelical." Thus the mission statement: "We exist to communicate a caring God to a contemporary culture and establish a practical, optimistic, grace-filled church that focuses on encouraging people." Here Journey Church is the sole UCC church. Its vision, "to reach the unchurched, broken and hurting people in its' city with God's unconditional love, acceptance and forgiveness," is bearing fruit. A biracial couple with three children felt ignored in five churches before coming to Journey. A single mother who never felt accepted in other churches because of her tattoos, former drug use and prison record, is now an involved member. People are reached by their FEMA trailer park ministry of visitation care packets.

Genesis 2: 4b-7 God breathes life into humankind
1 Corinthians 15:42b-49 We bear Christ's image
Psalms 33:12-22 Our help and our shield

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