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# THE FIRST WORD

Volume V, Issue XXIX

First United Methodist Church of Pittsburgh

March 2009

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## ***Building Renovation Update***

*by Marcia Gruver*

Over the past month the following changes have taken place in the renovation process:

### **Basement below the Library**

- A new electrical system has been installed.
- The new concrete floor was poured (it looks great!).
- The handicap-accessible bathroom with shower is near completion as well as the coffee bar.

Now the **Outreach Work Area is coordinating volunteer work teams** to paint, clean, and organize the space so it is ready to be used. (See Outreach article on page 3)

### **Fellowship Hall Roof**

- Renovation of the education wing of the building is scheduled in stages that are interdependent, with some needing to be completed before others can begin. For example, the roof has to be finished before the new hallway next to fellowship hall can be built. Unfortunately, cold, windy weather has delayed work on the roof, so other work has been delayed.
- The contractors have instead focused on completing the basement below the library and prepared the Centre Avenue wall of the education wing to create the new entrances into the Pittsburgh Toy Lending Library and the basement storage/pantry area under the stage where the new kitchen will be.
- At the same time, church volunteers have used this time to clean off the stage in preparation for its removal and have moved forward with the de-accessioning process to move furniture and other items out of the church that are no longer needed or used. (See the article “Furniture and Other Items to Find New Homes” on page 4)

When we get a break in the weather, there will be lots of changes taking place quickly. **Some of this work will be disruptive to regularly scheduled activities and create challenges for members of the congregation and other user groups.** So, let’s work together and be gentle with each other. Our reward will be a beautifully renovated building in service to the congregation and the community through God’s love.

## **Benefit Concert for “Our Little Roses”**

For her High School Senior Project, Ingrid Frembgen Petersen is planning and hosting an evening of music and entertainment to benefit “Our Little Roses,” an orphanage in Honduras. This will be held at the Union Project (Negley Avenue) on March 28 from 6:00 – 9:00 p.m. Save the date! Volunteer help is needed. You may contact Ingrid for more information at [ingrid.Lpetersen@yahoo.com](mailto:ingrid.Lpetersen@yahoo.com).

*You can always check out our church calendar by going to the website ([www.firstumcpittsburgh.org](http://www.firstumcpittsburgh.org)) and clicking on Current First Church Events Calendar. Many events have descriptions attached to them; simply click on the event and a dialogue window will open.*

## Leadership Council News

by Sharon McCarthy

We started our February 16 meeting by sharing prayer and communion. We welcomed new member, Hannah Morris, and approved minutes for the past two meetings. We also welcomed Pastor Bob back from a restful break, and he provided us with a report from the conference-wide racial inclusion workshops. Several members of our congregation were fortunate to attend one of the workshops; feel free to speak to Lee and Betsy Shaw, Jane Way, Deb Stiokis, Melanie Hildebrandt, Sharon McCarthy, Karen Merrick, Tracy Merrick or Pastor Bob if you'd like to know more about them or the next steps the conference is taking to support racial inclusion. Deb Wells and Michele Jury provided us with a financial update, Phil Gibbons gave us details of the upcoming church-wide "Revealed" program, and Stephanie Dorgan caught us up on the work of the Outreach Committee. The Property Committee has been working hard on the de-acquisition of many items in storage at the church, and Gene Gruver gave us a report on this activity, filling in for Deb Shearer who was ill. Deb, Marcia Gruver, and Alva Barry have approached this task with determination, creativity and endurance, and have contacted auction houses, antique dealers, organists, and a multitude of other individuals to determine the best disposition for these items. The Leadership Council expressed a great debt of gratitude for their work. Lee Shaw closed our meeting with a prayer.

## Souper Bowl of Caring

by Pastor Bob Wilson

We celebrate that our youth, with the support of our congregation, raised \$1,226.10 for the *Souper Bowl of Caring*. First Food and Friends, a ministry of hospitality and sustenance, and East End Cooperative Ministry have each received 50 percent of these funds.

Our youth group is one of 12,218 groups that raised a national total of 9,573,491 dollars for the *Souper Bowl of Caring*. Along with us, the *Souper Bowl of Caring* believes that youth are not only the leaders of tomorrow, but can also be the leaders of today. It trusts that by equipping young people with knowledge about hunger and poverty, it is guiding them to a lifetime of service.

## Support the Pittsburgh Darfur Emergency Coalition

A special luncheon will be held Wednesday, March 11, 12:30 – 2:30 p.m. at East Liberty Presbyterian Church. Jerry Fowler, President of the National Darfur Coalition, will speak. Cost of the lunch is \$10, all of which will benefit the local "Save Darfur" campaign. RSVP to Gloria Knopp at 412.441.3800, ext. 22, or see Deb Stiokis or Liz Wolfskill. Last year, two First Church members were part of the local coalition's march from Freedom Corner to Market Square.

## Sacred Space for Women

A time for quiet relaxation, reflection, rejuvenation, and prayer. Won't you join us on Monday evening, March 23, from 7:00 – 8:15 p.m. in the Intergenerational Room (room behind the Kitchen)? All women are invited...come once, come every month on the 4th Monday. For more information you may contact Glenna Wilson at [glennapgh@yahoo.com](mailto:glennapgh@yahoo.com). All women are invited to attend. Hope to see you there!

### *Cinquains from the All-Church Retreat*

Retreat  
Fun, joyous  
Gathering, sharing, laughing  
Evidence of the loving, living Christ  
Community

Retreat  
Funny, inspiring  
Including, growing, laughing  
A tradition with a soul  
Youth

## **Outreach Corner**

*by Stephanie Dorgan*

In the fall, the Outreach Team informed you of its efforts to create a Volunteer Registry form. With this form, the Outreach Team plans to develop a focused list of First Church folks that have indicated a skill and/or interest in a specific outreach area. When needs arise, this database will be consulted to connect interested volunteers with the specific outreach project or activity. We are putting the finishing touches on the Volunteer Registry form and plan to distribute it to First Church folks **March 29 through April 19**. Please help us with this registration process. When the time arrives, please prayerfully consider completing and returning the form. Many thanks!

Now for the **Outreach Spotlight**:

### ***Have a Heart for Hunger – East End Cooperative Ministry*** **February 14 – March 31, 2009**

*From the EECM website...* The recent economic downturn has devastated many families in our community. Over the past six months, EECM has seen a 20 percent increase in the numbers of families coming to its Food Pantry, compared with this time last year. That's 450 new families with nothing to eat at home. It's Men's Emergency Shelter has provided an additional 500 nights of warmth and served an extra 900 meals to men who would otherwise be sleeping on the streets. And at the Soup Kitchen, an additional 774 hot lunches to hungry men and women have been served.

Our neighbors need our help. During the month of March, we will have bags and a list of needed items at all our entrances. In addition to food donations, the most immediate and direct way for you to make a difference in the battle against hunger is to make a financial contribution to East End Cooperative Ministry. All donations received between February 14<sup>th</sup> and March 31<sup>st</sup> will be matched, dollar for dollar, by an anonymous donor up to \$30,000. A gift made today will go twice as far. You can make a secure online donation at [www.eecm.org](http://www.eecm.org) or you may send a check to: EECM -- Have a Heart for Hunger, 250 N. Highland Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15206. You can also make a big impact by volunteering just a few hours of your time. EECM welcomes regular as well as "one-time" volunteers to help with its Food Pantry, Soup Kitchen, and Meals on Wheels programs. To learn more go to [www.eecm.org/volopp.htm](http://www.eecm.org/volopp.htm) God has blessed us and we can pass on those blessings to others. Be the difference in our community.

### ***Find Us Faithful Volunteer Work Teams*** **March and April, 2009**

As mentioned in the Building Renovation update (see page one), extensive progress has occurred in the basement of First Church. This March and April we will need to do a number of tasks to get this space ready so we may begin to use and enjoy this wonderful "new" area for fellowship, education and worship. Thus, we are in need of your hands, your enthusiasm, and your energy as we form **volunteer work teams** to paint, clean, and organize the space. We will be looking for team leaders as well as team members to help with the upcoming tasks. Please prayerfully consider giving generously of your time and talents to God's work and our First Church community. Contact Stephanie Dorgan at 412.241.0999 or [stephaniedorgan@hotmail.com](mailto:stephaniedorgan@hotmail.com) if you are interested in volunteering. We will be reaching out to you by phone or e-mail as well.

## **Furniture and Other Items to Find New Homes**

*by Marcia Gruver*

Under the leadership of Alva Barry, the De-accessioning Committee has organized the process for removing furniture and other items in the church that are no longer in use and have no historical value to the church. The items include miscellaneous furniture, dishes, and paintings/prints, most of which were stored in areas of the church where they were being damaged, so it was great to get them moved.

The committee obtained bids from several antique dealers and auctioneers, afforded the congregation first right to bid on the items, and have now sold or given away most of what was collected. To date, the committee has raised more than \$3,000 in support of the building renovation.

Olek Lejbzon and Company, a restoration firm in New Jersey, purchased the library table, chairs, and chandelier by way of eBay. They will be in touch with Mr. Robert Cothran, the designer and builder of the table and chandelier, to determine the best way to disassemble them for transport. We are pleased that these items will have a good new home.

We are grateful to Alva, Deb Shearer (Chair) and the members of the Property Committee, and others who have helped with this process. It is good that the items are finding a new home.

## **A Coming of Age: Our Second Graders Receive Bibles**

*by Gail Ransom*

Our rational culture has often talked away the importance of rites of passages. We think that knowing about them is the same as doing them. Celebrating the transitions in our lives in our faith communities not only affirms how far we've come, but it helps us leave where we have been. Let go of one rope; take hold of another. Through the door. Across the threshold. Up to the podium. Out to the world.

I have always admired the Jewish tradition of Bat Mitzvah and Bar Mitzvah, because I have seen how much confidence it gives to the budding scholars. Thick in the air as they read their Torah passage in the temple, are our words from the Transfiguration and Mark 1:6: "This is my beloved child in whom I am well pleased." What a boost for a child to feel such confirmation from the faith community! What congregation can refuse their hearts at such a moment?

Each Sunday during Lent, one of our second graders will receive a Bible from the church as a sign that she or he is ready to approach the scriptures as an individual scholar. I know you will not refuse your heart as each one stands before you.

March 1: Raymond Davis  
March 8: Richard Benjamin  
March 15: Jonah Shriver  
March 22: Diamond Hunter  
March 29: Ruby Gibson  
April 5: Zac Caresani

These are our beloved children in whom we are well pleased.

## **Sign Up for REVEALED Conversation Groups**

*by Phil Gibbons*

*Does God care if I own an iPhone or take an expensive vacation?  
Why is it so difficult to find time for prayer and Bible study?  
Others seem so passionate about their service; what's wrong with me?*

Come join in on the conversation! Each of us struggles with the challenges of making our lives reflect our beliefs. As a church family, we seldom share our struggles and successes in meeting these challenges. We may be feeling overwhelmed by what we are doing and yet guilty for not doing more.

REVEALED is a program (videos, study guides, workbooks) designed to bring us into conversation on these issues of stewardship of our time, talent, and treasure. It provides a step-by-step journey through the Bible as it reveals God's plan for faithful stewardship of our lives. REVEALED was developed by the same folks who created the excellent *Find Us Faithful* program we used for our capital campaign a few years back.

We will be offering REVEALED as a five session church-wide program to run April 19 to May 23 (between Easter and Pentecost). REVEALED conversation groups will meet once a week, and be offered at various times (Sunday afternoons, weekday mornings and evenings, etc) and places (church, people's homes). It is our intention that you sign up for one such group, and participate in the five-session program:

*Session 1: The Life You've Only Imagined*

- Are you looking beyond the good life to God's best life?

*Session 2: Discovering God's Plan for Your Time*

- How does your Ideal Life differ from your Real Life?

*Session 3: Discovering God's Plan for Your Talent*

- How can you mold your passions in life to be gifts to God?

*Session 4: Discovering God's Plan for Your Treasure*

- Lift your eyes to the horizon of the eternal, and learn to rejoice in sharing God's abundance.

*Session 5: Celebrating the Life God Planned for You*

- Be still and listen for God's plan for growth in your life. Celebrate the revelation!

Sign up begins March 15. Come to learn, come to share, come to celebrate. Please join us!

## **Open Table Worship Party - March 27, 7:30 p.m.**

*by Gail Ransom*

The theme of our Lenten Worship Party is nothingness; emptying ourselves to make room for trust in God and each other. Matthew Fox calls this the path of release, the Via Negativa; befriending darkness, letting silence be silence, and letting pain be pain.

So how are we going to create a party around nothingness? We are not sure....yet. But our Wednesday Worship Jammers will be gathering at 7:00 p.m. each week in March to consider the possibilities. If the last few Worship Parties are any indication, the result will be an evening of music and dance, prayer, playfulness, social engagement, and profound spiritual connection. You are welcome to join our adventure co-creation any time. Our Table is always Open.

## **InterPlay Performance Jam to Celebrate International Women's Day**

Sunday, March 8, 2:30-4:30 PM in our Chapel.

Affirming! Captivating! Fun! Join the Wing & A Prayer Players as we celebrate International Women's Day! Bring your stories of wonderful women who have inspired your life, people who have changed the world on behalf of women, and your hopes and visions for the future of women and men on the planet.

We have enjoyed the InterPlay of Pittsburgh's own Wing & A Prayer Players in our worship and education program. Now it's your turn to play along! Sheila Collins, a national InterPlay leader, will lead us in InterPlay forms of dancing, singing, storytelling and stillness to create a tribute to the women of the world. The first half - learn some InterPlay forms. Second half - join in as you feel inclined. You can perform, join in to someone else's performance, or sit back, relax and be a witness. If you play a musical instrument, bring it with you to play. Men and women of all ages are welcome. Donations of \$5 - \$15 appreciated.

## **Save March 15 for Empty Bowls Dinner**

Bring the whole family to this annual event to benefit anti-hunger programs and raise awareness about this huge problem. From 2:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. at Rodef Shalom Congregation, this program includes celebrity soup servers, live entertainment, children's activities, and a silent auction of world-class ceramic art. Rodef Shalom is at the corner of Fifth and Morewood Avenues. All proceeds benefit the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank and Just Harvest. Suggested donation per ticket is \$20. For more information and tickets, go to [www.pittsburghfoodbank.org](http://www.pittsburghfoodbank.org) or call 412.431.8960.

## Memorials Received

*In Memory of June Ross by:  
Lee & Betsy Shaw,  
Designated for Stained Glass Window Restoration*

*In Memory of Rodney Petersen by:  
Gene & Marcia Gruver,  
Designated for Choir Robe Fund*

*In Memory of Betty Fritsch by:  
Susan Petersen & Stefan Frembgen  
Gene & Marcia Gruver,  
Designated for Choir Robe Fund*

*First Folk  
Hospitalized since last newsletter:  
Evan Hammonds, Gladys Foley*

***Our sympathy to:***  
*The family and friends of Bob Moyer.  
Bob passed away on February 22;  
Bonnie Beggs, following the death of her mother Gladys Jackie Beggs;  
Susan Petersen, Stefan Frembgen and family,  
following the death of Susan's father, Rodney Petersen;  
Carolynn Schradling and family,  
following the death of Carolynn's mother, Betty Fritsch;  
The friends of Harry Burns. Harry passed away February 13.  
Harry was the week-day custodian at First Church from 2003-05,  
and a volunteer with First Food and Friends.*

***Kudos to:***  
*Many thanks to those who contributed to our display and gave of their time to help us celebrate  
Black History Month. We thank Liz Wolfskill, Nancy Kostovny, Shadrach Moon, Curtis Mitchell, David Grinnell,  
Deb Stioakis, and Lisa Lockwood.*

*While I appreciate your compliments about the new set of bulletin boards filled with 'scissor enhanced'  
photography, I must turn your attention to the photographs themselves. They were quietly and artfully taken  
by Ron Chan over the past year and have greatly increased our ability to record and share our community life with  
others. I have been inspired by his lively, colorful, clear, artful photographs knowingly taken at just the right  
moment. Thank you, Thank you, Thank you, Ron.  
Gail Ransom*

## March Birthdays & Anniversaries

*March 2      Becky Oratto  
March 4      Curtis Mitchell  
March 8      Daniel Moya-Gibbons  
March 9      Elizabeth Stroup  
March 10     Ron Arnett*

*March 14 Melissa Whiting, Jennifer Stroup, Jennifer Hann*  
*March 17 Don Hetzler*  
*March 18 Gail Ransom, Shadrach Moon,*  
*Bruce Peterson, Mary Benjamin*  
*March 20 Kevin Backoefer, Max DeFlicht*  
*March 21 Lee Shaw*  
*March 24 Jennifer Oakley*  
*March 25 Gene Gruver*  
*March 27 Kathy Maddox, Kristina Backoefer*  
*March 29 Ray Strobel*  
*March 30 Keith Gibson, Jane Turner*

*Anniversary*

*March 20 Paul & Carolynn Schradling*

## The First Word

### March 2009

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## First Church Ministries Staff

Robert A. Wilson, Pastor

Paul Schradling, Pastor Emeritus

Gail Ransom, Director of Christian Education

Timothy D. Coles, Director of Music

Nancy Kostovny, Administrative Secretary

Curtis Mitchell, Building Maintenance Manager

Sherry Kaiser, Offering Steward

Lamont Hunter, Custodian

Dawna Horton, David Huss, Emily Nordquist,

Melissa Scott, Childcare Caregivers

Clergy who claim First Church as their Charge Conference:

Paul Schradling, John Wilson, Renee Waun, Scott Peterman,

Lynn Yeso, Kathy Clark, Donna Fetterman