



### ***Pastor's Column: A Season for Growth and Change***

I have always marveled that the most significant day in the Christian calendar, Easter, comes in the spring. Of course, it doesn't always seem like spring. I remember many Easters in Vermont and New Hampshire when there would be snow on the ground. Even here, if Easter is at its earliest point at the end of March the weather outside can seem like winter.

There is nothing wrong with winter, of course. It is a season when wonderful things happen. If it is a good winter we have snow to blanket the earth and provide some of our water for the warmer months. Nature seems to sleep in anticipation of the outburst of growth in the spring. But winter is also a time when life continues for us. Most of us no longer work in situations in which the seasons dictate what we do for work. Regardless of it being winter, summer, spring, or fall, we go to work regardless, unless the weather prevents that. So, we get restless, hoping that each spring snowstorm is the last, looking forward to the warmer weather when we don't have to worry about overcoats and hats and gloves. We look forward to sitting out in the backyard and listening to birds. Spring is the season of new life. We feel better being outdoors, breathing in fresh air and looking at green grass and leaves.

Seasonal growth and change is a good thing. We are reminded that good things don't last forever. If they did, we would take them for granted. With seasonal change we can also measure the passage of time in a predictable way, although with the seeming affects of global warming the seasons seem a bit more unpredictable.

There is a deeper meaning to this too. In the spring we are reminded about the possibilities for new life and

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growth in our lives. Each new season presents an opportunity for learning. We never stop learning, regardless of how old we are. There is always more to learn regardless of how old we are. There is always more to learn.

In our faith journeys this is also true. We never get to the point where we know everything we need to know about God and our relationship with God.

When we consider new life as embodied in the resurrection of Jesus we find a model as to how to live our lives in a way that we are not burdened with the past. It is natural to remember injuries from the past, and such things help shape our lives. It is another thing to allow those injuries and wounds to weigh us down. "Baggage" is the common term in self-help lingo, and it's a good way of looking at it.

Wounds from the past come in many forms—failures, wounds inflicted by others, wounds inflicted by ourselves. We all know what our wounds from the past are. Consider the new life that Jesus offers us in the resurrection—the ability to leave those things behind as he left the past behind.

New life also involves change—openness to new ideas, new ways of living. Leaving the wounds of the past behind also involves leaving behind the patterns of thought and behavior that we have adopted to cope with the baggage we carry with us. Times change. Our ways are not permanent, unchangeable. New life brings growth, hope, change. Let's celebrate the new life we have in Christ this Easter season and remember that we are still growing in the presence of God!

In Christ,

## CHURCH CALENDAR APRIL 2007

Sun., April 1	11:15 AM	Palm/Passion Sunday	Starts in Chapel
Sun., April 1	8 PM	Harmonic Healing Concert	Chapel
Tues. April 3	6:30 PM	Church Night at the Country Store	Country Store Thrift Shop
Thurs. April 5	6 PM	Maundy Thursday Potluck	Fellowship Hall
Thurs. April 5	7 PM	Maundy Thursday Tenebrae Service	Chapel
Sun. April 8	6:30 AM	Easter Sunrise Service	Church lawn
Sun. April 8	7 AM	Continental breakfast	Fellowship Hall
Sun. April 8	11:15 AM	Easter Sunday Service	Sanctuary
Tues. April 10 – Thurs. April 12		Craig will be attending the Spring Clergy Retreat	Syracuse NY
Tues. April 17	6:30 PM	Growth Committee	Church office
Tues. April 17	7:30 PM	Church Council	Chapel
Wed. April 18	7:30 PM	Choir rehearsal	Sanctuary
Sat. April 21	6:30 PM	Ethnic Potluck: German	Fellowship Hall
Sat. April 28	1 PM	Hudson Mohawk Association meeting	Camp Medusa

### Church News

#### How We Can Minister to Each Other

For many years our bulletins each Sunday have said that the "Ministers are all the members of the congregation". At a recent Church Council meeting, we came to realize that sometimes we are not aware of what our members and friends may be going through. We cannot minister to each other, if we do not know who is hurting, ill, experiencing some type of crisis, etc. The only way we can fulfill this ministry is by sharing information. The Board of Deacons, Pastor, members of the Church Council and other members of the congregation all care and want to help. We are always ready to help in a time of illness or distress. Please feel free to let us know if you need help with anything. Help us minister to you and the community around us. Pastor Craig can be contacted by telephone or e-mail. Linda Bull, our Moderator can be contacted by telephone 782-6178 or e-mail [bull2611@yahoo.com](mailto:bull2611@yahoo.com).

#### BGUCC Choir

The choir has been reactivated with Hilarie Clark Moore as our Choir Director. The choir will be singing on Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday, and on April 22. Stay tuned for upcoming dates!

#### Congratulations!

Emily Moore has been accepted to Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland and will begin in the fall after graduating from Warwick High School. She will be majoring in Biochemistry.

### Bring Your Pennies to Church!

Don't forget to bring your pennies and pocket change to church! The "Pennies for People" milk bottle was recently emptied and needs to be refilled! Grants from Pennies for People benefit various organizations in New York State. Linda Bull is the chairperson for Pennies for People for the New York Conference of the UCC.

### Harmonic Healing Concert Sunday, April 1 at 8 PM

The next Harmonic Healing Concert is March 11 at 8 PM in the chapel. Come and spend an hour in meditation and relaxation as you absorb the healing sounds of Tibetan singing bowls. This event is free and open to the public. These events are informal--come as you are. Bring a pillow or cushion to sit on. Dates for upcoming concerts are, May 13, 2007. Dates for later in the year will be released soon.

### Ethnic Potluck Supper Saturday, April 21 at 6 PM

On Saturday, April 21 at 6 PM we will have our next Ethnic Potluck Supper in the Fellowship Hall. This will be open to the community, and will be an opportunity to share recipes and enjoy fellowship together. The supper will have a *German* theme. If you would like to come and bring a dish please speak to Anita Hawkins who will be coordinating the supper. You may leave a message for her at the parsonage at 845-496-1393.

#### Office Hours

Through May 1 Craig will not have office hours on Tuesdays. He will be teaching a class in Fishkill during

that time. Regular office hours will be Wednesday through Friday, 9 AM to 12 noon.

## **Church World Service Pickup April 23-27**

From Monday, April 23 to Friday, April 27 our church will be a regional pickup site for churches to bring their  
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### **The Mary Merriam Flower Calendar**

The Blooming Grove UCC has established a flower calendar to provide altar flowers for Sunday Worship. The calendar is named in honor of Mary Merriam who lovingly and gracefully cared for the altar and flowers for many years and is warmly remembered by members of the congregation. Sharen Casazza will maintain the physical calendar and will seek donations from members of the congregation to cover the \$50.00 cost. On the first and third Sundays of the month fresh flowers from Flowers By Joan will be placed in the church's brass vases and placed on the altar in memory of or in honor of whoever placed the donation. Please contact Sharen Casazza at Box 8, Blooming Grove, NY 10914 to place a donation. Please specify clearly for whom the flowers are donated and include a check to Blooming Grove UCC for \$50.00

## **Our 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2008!**

Next year we will celebrate the two hundred fiftieth anniversary of our church. The interesting thing is that we don't actually know when the church was founded. The earliest documentation we have is the deed for the land that the present church building stands on. This land was purchased by the congregation on November 20, 1758 from Jacob Blackwell, a land speculator who owned large tracts of land in the area. In the deed the congregation is named as the "Presbyterian Congregation of Blooming Grove," indicating that it had already been formed by that date. It is likely that the congregation had been meeting in homes for a year or two prior to their purchase of the land.



We have several things planned for next year to celebrate this significant anniversary. There will be a special worship service on the afternoon of June 8, 2008. We hope to invite former clergy and members to be present and take part.

completed kits. Hours will be 9:30-11:30 AM, and the chapel will be the site. Craig will cover Wednesday through Friday, but someone is needed for Monday and Tuesday. Please speak to Craig as soon as possible if you can help with these two dates.

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### **Sanctuary Flowers for March and April**

3/04/07 by Mary Ann Merriam Koontz in memory of Harriet O. Holloway  
3/18/07 by Sharen & Jim Casazza in honor of E. R. & Janet Steeves, Jr.  
4/01/07 by Mary Ann Merriam Koontz in memor of Walter & Mary Merriam  
4/15/07 by Sears & Phyllis Hunter in memory of Robert J. & Marian Hunter

### **Easter Lilies**

Sharen Casazza will be coordinating the ordering of Easter Lilies for Easter Sunday. Please contact her at the above address if you would like to order them.

At the end of September we are planning to have a special presentation by the Classic Choral Society which began in our church almost fifty years ago. As a part of this program there will be readings from documents related to the history of the church.

At the end of October we hope to have a special organ recital. The artist for this has not been chosen yet.

Other events will include several special worship services throughout the year with themes from the church's history. Craig is also planning to give a talk on the history of the church building, and other talks may be scheduled as well.

This will be an exciting year for us, and we hope you will plan ahead for these events. Please speak to Craig if you have any ideas about these events or others.

### **New HIV and AIDS pins support CWS advocacy and women's livelihoods**

March 16, 2007

**New York**--Designing and making crafts is nothing new to women and girls in Pakistan. But now they're using their considerable skills to help publicize and raise funds to fight a global pandemic.

The crafters are producing thousands of a new

embroidered **HIV and AIDS ribbon pin**. Church World Service - Pakistan/Afghanistan, which supports the crafts project in Lahore, Pakistan, commissioned the pins as a way of offering a new and attractive product to people concerned about the HIV/AIDS epidemic and as an income-producing venture for the women. They are marketed through Kaarvan Crafts, a non-profit organization working to improve the welfare of women and girls from low-income rural and urban households.

The pin project builds on a major victory for advocates of increased funding for HIV and AIDS.

Last month, CWS, the Global AIDS Network, and other partners, were able to claim success in their advocacy efforts on Capitol Hill when lawmakers in Washington approved funding for global HIV and AIDS work that exceeded the amount requested by HIV and AIDS advocates.

Congress authorized \$4.5 billion--an increase of \$1.3 billion--to expand efforts to combat HIV and AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria.

Says CWS Education and Advocacy Director Rajyashri Waghay, "It's a major victory. Effective advocacy takes years of work by entire networks of agencies, organizations, denominations, congregations and individuals. Even after all the hard work of educating people and mounting a campaign, results sometimes fall short of the desired outcome. So, something like this, where the response of Congress was even greater than what we asked for, is really encouraging. This shows that the policymakers we and our partners have been reaching out to have really studied the information and have really responded to the urgency in the letters, calls, and postcards from people in our advocacy network."

Waghay also credits "Dear Colleague" letters from concerned lawmakers to fellow members of the House and Senate as contributing to the decisive action in Congress. "Legislators who understand the importance of this issue actually urged their colleagues to vote the funding necessary to help some of the 42 million people in the world living with HIV/AIDS. Their support was key to moving our advocacy effort forward."

The red and black embroidered pin is attached to a card containing an advocacy statement, a description of the

program, highlights of CWS-sponsored programs in Kenya and Chile, and a quote from one of the crafters.

Crafter Zuhara Baji says she thanks Church World Service for "creating awareness on such an important issue."

### ***John 3:16***

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**Rev. Peter Sawtell**

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It is Lent, a season when many Christians commit themselves to reflect on, and re-connect with, the core of their faith. These six weeks leading up to Easter provide a beloved and historic discipline for spiritual growth.

I presume -- with little factual basis! -- that very few congregational prayer groups, and few published study guides, are calling these faithful people to Lenten reflections on the fullness of God's creation. In most churches, and in the personal devotions of most Christians, Lent is not a time to ponder ecology.

It is my conviction that the absence of ecological awareness is a serious problem to our spiritual health, our theological perspectives, and our understandings of mission and ministry. That's not a big surprise to the regular readers of these *Notes*.

This year, in particular, the absence of ecology in our Lenten reflections set us up for a problem when we finish Holy Week and Easter. In 2007, the two weekends immediately after Easter bring us (1) the Step It Up day of political action on April 14, and (2) Earth Day on April 22. For many Christians, those events will seem like odd intrusions into their newly-refreshed religious consciousness. They will experience a sharp cognitive jolt when they move from their joyous celebration of the resurrection, and then encounter rallies about global warming, and worship that pays heed to the natural world.

The problem is not with the two "environmental" events. The dissonance happens because our faith has been too narrow.

A few days ago, I was blessed by an extended conversation with a man who is part of a new "green team" in his Episcopal church. Their group is doing great work about energy efficiency and other environmentally responsible practices. But my friend raised a concern that these projects often come across to members of the church as "add-ons" to what the church is about. He spoke to me of his conviction that we need to see our

relationship with the whole creation as a matter that is at the very center of our faith.

That Episcopal congregation is not alone in seeing environmental concerns as extraneous to the faith. Last Monday, I spoke at a Lutheran "legislative day" in Denver. The ELCA Synod leadership is working to bring "the environment" into the concerns that are at the core of their advocacy work. They, too, have found that many people see this as an extraneous topic. To nudge the Lutheran advocates in the right direction, I expanded on the "voice for the voiceless" theme that I wrote about in last week's Notes.

After the luncheon, I had a short conversation with a seminary student who had recently discovered the presence and implications of an important word in the Greek text of the Bible. He learned that the word "world" in John 3:16 is translated from the Greek word "cosmos." He was delighted that this very familiar text spoke so clearly about God's love for the whole creation. In an accurate translation of John 3:13, he heard precisely what my Episcopal friend believes is so essential -- an expression of the core of our faith which claims a deep care for creation.

That familiar verse in John is considered by many to be one of the best "sound bites" about the Christian gospel. Several years ago, people who wanted to evangelize the un-churched held up signs at televised sporting events that simply listed chapter and verse. A poster at a golf match or football game saying "John 3:16" was a sufficient statement of the Christian good news.

It is good news, indeed, that God's love is for the cosmos. But if we're not very clear about what John means by "the world", then the door is open to serious problems.

A colleague has called my attention to a passage from a resolution that was approved by the United Church of Christ's General Synod way back in 1977:

*Whereas many people have committed to memory John 3:16 - 'For God so loved the world that God gave God's only begotten child' and though this verse has become one of the best known and often-quoted verses in the Scripture, we have failed to take cognizance of one of the key elements of this verse - 'world.' We have believed, rather, that God so loved the church, or the*

*well-behaved people or the Christians, but not really the world; i.e. the whole people.*

Thirty years ago, a mainline Christian denomination thought it was necessary to point out that God loves the whole world, not just the church. Unfortunately, that very basic statement still needs to be repeated often and clearly today. But there is a profound error when we equate "the world" with "the whole people."

Betsy brought that old resolution to my attention because it was quoted in the 2005 legislative briefing book of the UCC. The erroneous statement about the scope of God's love was lifted up just two years ago as a guiding perspective in that very liberal denomination -- the denomination in which I am an ordained minister.

I have been privileged, through the 20 months, to serve as a member of the "Environment and Energy Task Force" of the national United Church of Christ. As a task force, we have found it necessary to stress an awareness of the cosmos, of the whole creation, as the context for God's love. When we limit God's love and concern to "all the people", then the environment is seen as an add-on, or even a distraction from, caring for all the people.

In the United Church of Christ, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Episcopal Church -- and I'm sure many other denominations -- there is a deep-seated and widespread misunderstanding. The core of our faith, and the heart of our ethical concerns, is seen as dealing with God's love for the people, and just the people.

It is time to reclaim, and re-proclaim, that astonishing good news in John 3:16. "God so loved the world" -- the cosmos, the whole creation -- "that he gave his only Son."

If we take that good news to heart, then we'll know that caring for all of God's creation is never peripheral to our faith.

*Shalom!*

Rev. Peter Sawtell  
Executive Director, Eco-Justice Ministries

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*In this issue of The Newsleaf:  
Lots of Church News!  
Our 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
Church World Service News  
... and more!*

**Revised Common  
Lectionary Texts for  
April/May 2007**

**1 April 2007:**

Palm Sunday  
Isaiah 50:4-9a  
Psalm 31:9-16  
Philippians 2:5-11  
Luke 22:14-23:56 or  
Luke 23:1-49

**8 April 2007:**

**Easter Sunday**  
Acts 10:34-43  
Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24  
1Corinthians 15:19-26  
John 20:1-8 or  
Luke 24:1-12

**15 April 2007:**

Acts 5:27-32  
Psalm 150  
Revelation 1:4-8  
John 20:19-31

**22 April 2007:**

Acts 9:1-6 (7-20)  
Psalm 30  
Revelation 5:11-14  
John 21:1-19

**29 April 2007:**

Acts 9:36-43  
Psalm 23  
Revelation 7:9-17  
John 10:22-30

**6 May 2007:**

Acts 11:1-18  
Psalm 148

Revelation 21:1-6

John 13: 31-35

**13 May 2007:**

Acts 16:9-15  
Psalm 67  
Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5  
John 14:23-29

**20 May 2007:**

Ascension of the Lord  
Memorial Day (USA)  
Acts 16:16-34  
Psalm 97  
Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21

**John 17:20-26**

**27 May 2007:**

Day of Pentecost  
Acts 2:1-21 or Genesis 11:1-9  
Psalm 104: 24-34, 35b  
Romans 8:14-17 or Acts 2:1-21  
John 14:8-17 (25-27)