

HILLTOPPER

United Methodist Church of Parsippany

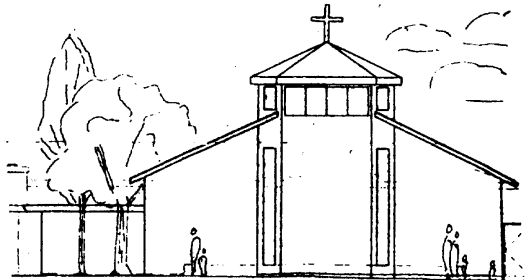
903 So. Beverwyck Road, Parsippany, NJ 07054 (973) 887-4657

<http://www.parsippanyumc.com> E-Mail: jedwards14@juno.com

Sunday Worship Celebration: 10:30 a.m.

In a hostile, hurting world we reach out to share kindness and laughter. Our spirituality is based on Jesus and his love and compassion. We provide a community of support and healing where all are welcomed and valued regardless of race, age, sexual orientation, disability, gender, or economic status. In a world where people feel they can love only those who are like themselves, we seek to celebrate the uniqueness of every human being.

"Making Room in the Circle"



DECEMBER, 2009



Hanging of the Greens – We will be decorating the sanctuary and Fellowship Hall for the Christmas season on Saturday, Nov. 28. We are planning to start at 10:00 am. Refreshments will be provided. Everyone is welcome. If you have questions, speak to Connie Keller.

Annual Christmas Pageant: On Sunday, December 20th our worship service will include a Christmas cantata by our choir and a pageant performed by our children. All children who would like to be a part of the pageant are invited to come to the Church on Saturday, December 19th at 10 a.m. for a rehearsal.

Christmas Eve Service: Our **Christmas Eve Candlelight Communion Service** will be at 7 p.m. Join us as we celebrate in worship the birth of Christ.



"How Angels Like to Party", an original Christmas comedy written and directed by Pastor Jeff will be produced in our fellowship hall on Saturday, December 12th at 7:30 p.m. and Sunday, December 13th at 7 p.m. With a cast of a dozen adults, seven youth, and a handful of children, the forty minute performances are guaranteed to be both highly entertaining, exceedingly funny as well as heartwarming. The play will also be produced on Friday, December 11th for the Christmas Party of the Skylands District Clergy and Spouses, also held in our fellowship hall. Anyone interesting in helping with these productions is invited to speak to Pastor Jeff.



Christmas poinsettias - This year I will be taking orders for poinsettias until Dec. 13. Order forms will be included in the bulletins for those weeks. The poinsettias will be placed on the altar Dec. 20 and traditionally stay on the altar until after the Christmas Eve service. If you would like to make a monetary donation (instead of ordering poinsettias) that will be used to provide flowers for the Christmas season, please call me. Connie Keller 973-887-4384.



Volunteers are needed to help serve the dinner to our guests on Friday, December 11th when we host the clergy and spouses of the Skylands Districts, and our district superintendent, Rev. Renee McCleary for their Christmas dinner. If you can help, please speak to Pastor Jeff.



Since the Hilltopper is now electronic, we cannot send your annual Christmas Offering envelope. If you would Please consider making an additional donation this Christmas to help our church do the Lord's work. Envelopes will be available at church, but you do not need one to make your Christmas offering. Please bring your envelopes to church any time during the holidays and put it in

the collection plate.



“A Christmas To Remember” 2 years ago Barb Bradley and Darryl Sokolowski recorded a Christmas music CD. The CD features 21 of Barb and Darryl's favorites in solo performances and duets. The CD is once again available for you to purchase for \$10.00. All of the proceeds will be going to our church. Speak to Barb, Darryl, or Connie Keller if you would like to purchase a CD.



The Hilltopper is now being delivered electronically, through our church website. If you are receiving this newsletter via regular mail and have access to e-mail and the internet, please contact Barb Bradley at singingbarb@verizon.net and your e-mail will be added to our Hilltopper notification list. You will be notified via your e-mail that the next month's newsletter is now available on the web site. Thanks for helping us save paper and money by reading your Hilltopper on line.

Barb Bradley, Hilltopper editor



Our **youth group** meets approximately every other Sunday evening from 7 to 8:30 p.m. All 8th through 12th graders are invited. Josh Romine is our youth leader, assisted by Dawn Barhite. This month the youth will be meeting *December 6 and 20.*



United Methodist
Women

Looking back...2010 Officers were nominated, budget presented, pledges made and programs planned. And snacks....

ALL WOMEN are invited to our Christmas meeting to start the season, so join us for fellowship and bring a friend.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 2nd, 7:30 p.m.
**PROGRAM: Office Installation, Christmas Party and
Gift Exchange Game**
Bring a wrapped gift, approximately \$5
Put YOUR NAME on the outside so the recipient
Can pray for you all year.
Refreshments

Dec. 1st – World AIDS Day
Dec. 7th – Pearl Harbor Day
Dec. 21st – First Day of Winter

Dec. 25th – Christmas Day
Dec. 31st – New Year's Eve

Get well wishes to those of you who are ill, and
HAPPY BIRTHDAY to those of you celebrating this month with Ann Hawkins, Terri Ferriss and Helen Miller

God Bless, Doris Bradley

Prov. 17:17 "A friend loves at all times."



A sermon preached on November 1, 2009 entitled "A Bowl of Goat's Milk," based upon Mark 12:28 – 34.

One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, 'Which commandment is the first of all?' Jesus answered, 'The first is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.' Then the scribe said to him, 'You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that "he is one, and besides him there is no other"; and "to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength", and "to love one's neighbor as oneself",—this is much more important than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices.' When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God.' After that no one dared to ask him any question.

On one level, this passage seems to express an exquisite simplicity. We human beings have this compulsive tendency to make life overly complicated, which is one way to see the confrontation that took place between Jesus and the religious authorities. The passage we read describes the final argument that took place between Jesus and the teachers of the law. What is the most important commandment, Jesus was asked. In reply he said that it was to live out a two-dimensional love: love of God and love of neighbor. We don't need 614 laws and the complicated religious system human beings had concocted with the elaborate temple sacrifices. The truth in the end is simple.

It is a truth that I think we know in our hearts to be true. It is a truth that the teacher of the law who challenged Jesus that day couldn't help but acknowledge, and one that all great religious traditions, at their best, lead us to: Love of the holy that is beyond everything, and love of the mortal, flesh and blood that is close at hand.

And yet, when I begin to ponder what it means to love God and love neighbor, my mind gets all tied up in knots. The love of neighbor part is hard enough. Who is my neighbor? What

exactly must I do? How far do I need to go? When have I done enough? There are enough questions here for a whole lifetime of sermons.

But it's actually the other dimension that leaves my brain most baffled: Love God with all you soul, and heart and mind and strength. What, pray tell, does that mean? God is invisible, wholly other. The Ten Commandments begins by prohibiting any "graven images" of God, because as soon as you try to conjure up an image of God, you end up reducing the mystery of God and creating an idol. God is not a "being" next to other "beings"; God is the ground of all being, the source.

Tell me to love my wife, my child, a member of the church or even a stranger I meet out in the world, and I have my senses to draw upon. I can see, hear, touch and smell them. I can carry the memories derived from my senses around with me and ponder the possibilities of how I can express love to them. Not so with God.

There's a dilemma here, and one way we can try to solve this dilemma is to work it through in our heads this way: well, the way to show our love to God is to keep ourselves busy doing the work in this world that God wants done, which, of course, is to sing various renditions of the same old song "Love your neighbor as yourself." And there is something to that.

But there is a problem with this solution, and it is the fact that this one-dimensional focus on the love of neighbor has an inevitable frustration built into it. What happens when we try to love people and our best efforts seem to bring about, as far as we can tell, nothing enduring, or in fact seems to make things worse? And what about the fact that human life exists in a state of perpetual decay, and so sooner or later every neighbor we seek to love is taken from us by death?

And then there's the undeniable fact that sometimes the people we try to love can seem downright unlovable. Remember what Charlie Brown said? "I love humanity; it's human beings I can't stand." And what about those times when we ourselves seem rather unlovable, which pretty well screws up the whole "love your neighbor as yourself" equation?

Pour ourselves out in loving our neighbors as ourselves, and it can seem we destine ourselves to become bitter and burn out. So the love of neighbor needs to be rooted deeper — in eternity, in that mystery for which we have the inadequate word "God."

I believe that deep down within all of us, the love of God resides, waiting to find expression. It is there within us as children, but as we grow up, our words, our ideas, our minds get in the way, and the love gets blocked.

There is a story I read long ago that has stayed with me over the years. It involves a poor shepherd and an early "desert father." In the centuries following Constantine's embrace of the Church, there was a tradition of people retreating from the world to devote themselves to prayer and contemplation of God, known as the "desert fathers", and in some instances, "desert mothers." Often they were deep thinkers – theologians – from which much spiritual wisdom was passed on.

In the story I heard a desert father is in the company of a simple shepherd as a day comes to a close. The desert father notices that the shepherd takes a wooden bowl filled with goat's milk, and carefully places it on the ground in a location that is raised up higher than the surroundings. He inquires of the poor shepherd why he has done this. "I am so grateful to God," says the shepherd. "In my love for God I set out this bowl of the richest cream for God to enjoy."

The desert father feels compelled to correct the shortcomings of the shepherd's conceptions of God. "My friend," he says, "don't you realize that God is pure spirit, and as such, has no need for your bowl of cream?" The shepherd replies, "Well, I don't know about the pure spirit business, but what I do know is that every night God comes down from heaven and drinks the milk, for in the morning the bowl is always empty." The desert father answers smugly, "There will be moonlight tonight. We will watch together to discern the truth regarding what happens to your bowl of milk."

They sit together where they can observe the bowl, and sure enough, shortly after nightfall, a little fox comes trotting along very intently, laps up the milk, and disappears into the wilderness. The shepherd is crestfallen. "How foolish I have been! You were right. God has no need for my little bowl of milk."

That night, the desert father had a restless night sleep. God appeared to him in a dream – in a blaze of light, perhaps? “What you did to my child the poor shepherd was cruel,” said God. “I always appreciated his offering of a bowl of his goat’s milk. You are right. I am spirit, and since I had no need for the milk myself, I shared the milk each night with my little friend the fox.”

There is this deeper love within us – this sense of awe and wonder at the miracle of being alive — of simple, pure gratitude, and it needs to find expression. The shepherd’s nightly offering gave him a means by which to express that love. We must find such means as well, or else we will wither in our attempts at loving our neighbor.

I read an article recently about a woman who experiences the gift of tongues in her prayer life. I have never received such a gift, and like many “sophisticated” Christians, have tended to look askance at such strange practices. I was struck, however, by what the woman said. She has no idea how, without the gift of the tongues that pour out of her, how she would express the innate gratitude and love for God that is within her. Without it, she says, her mind perpetually gets in the way, worrying about having the right words, the right concepts. She’s right. Like the desert father, we can get trapped in our intellects, unable to access the depths of our hearts.

Vladimir Lenin, the father of 20th century communism, once said something to the effect that he had stopped listening to great music, or contemplating masterful works of visual art, because he found that doing so led to a distracting softness of his heart in which he wanted to go around and pat people on the head. Lenin’s ideology involved a militant atheism, but he had his own god in the doctrine of communism. In his mind any thing that distracted him from devotion to his inflexible ideals was to be avoided. Lenin would have done well to listen to the love hidden in his heart that arose within him when he came into contact with beauty.

Eight years ago our congregation broke ground to build a new sanctuary. In a way, our sanctuary is like the shepherd’s bowl of milk. God is everywhere; so on one level there is no need to put all this money and energy into building a beautiful sanctuary. You can worship God anywhere; in your living room, for instance, or out in the woods.

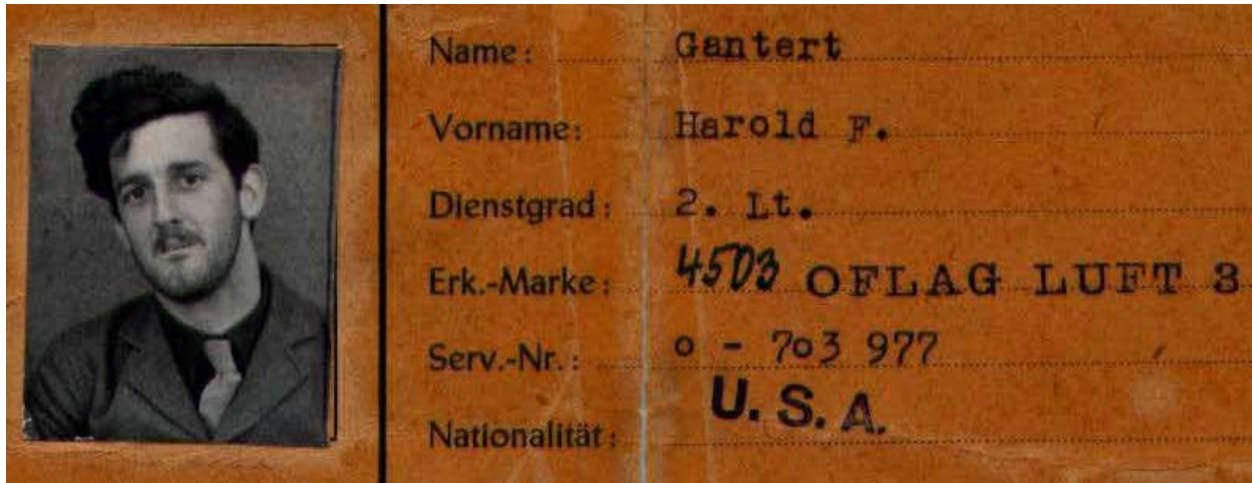
But the fact of the matter is that we are creatures who depend upon the gift of our five senses to open ourselves up to God. We rely on things like a well-designed worship space in which much consideration has been given to light and color and sound, and inspired, well-rehearsed music, and words hopefully well-crafted, and the taste of bread and wine. In the perception of our senses these things help transport us to that place where our hearts are opened up and the love that resides deep within, rooted in heaven rather than earth, may find expression.

Later in our service we will once more take bread and wine and evoke the memory of a time two thousand years ago when Jesus did the same with his friends in an upper room in Jerusalem. In the eyes of the world, the love he had come to share for all his neighbors would soon seem woefully unsuccessful. Rejected, he died like a common criminal upon the cross. We reenact this last supper with a desire to find with Jesus the love that is rooted not in time but in eternity – that love which alone can sustain us for the journey.

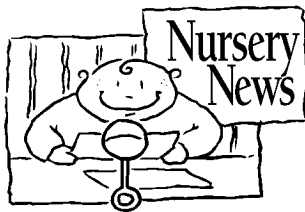
In the kindness of Jesus,
Pastor Jeff



Anyone aware of a **Prayer Concern** is invited to contact Grace Agre at 539-3855 who will put the **Prayer Chain** into action. If Grace cannot be reached, please contact Pastor Jeff. If you would like to add your name to the people who receive the prayer chain, please speak to Betty Polen



Our church is publishing a book about the experience of our own **Harold Gantert** during World War II. Harold was serving as the navigator on an American bomber in mission over Germany when his plane was shot down. Parachuting to the earth, Harold was captured four days later, and spent the last year of the war as a prisoner of war in a German prison camp. Using interviews of Harold, as well as his journal and photos, letters and drawings he kept from his time of captivity, the book tells the gripping and inspiring story of the year. Describing choices Harold made regarding how he would use his time of confinement, the importance of the attitude a person takes in the face of adversity is emphasized, as well as the value of a good sense of humor. The book includes a recounting of a grueling march the prisoners of war were forced to endure before their final liberation by allied troops. Co-written by Pastor Jeff and Sandy Bostwick, with editing by Connie Keller, you can pre-order your copy of the book. The book is free, though a donation of \$20 is invited to help with the costs of publication.



Our new Children and Families Ministries Committee is pleased to announce the return of our **nursery** for any parents who would like to have their baby or toddler cared for while they attend worship. The nursery is open for all children ages 0-3 and will be open at 10:15 for any parents who would like to drop off their infants/children prior to the beginning of church, and will stay open through the end of church.

There is a sign up sheet for any volunteers who would like to work in the nursery on any particular Sunday. We are hoping to have volunteers from both the senior high youth group, as well as adults. The nursery is located in the Little Blessings Infant room, which is at the end of the hallway (the hallway with the men's and women's restrooms). Please see Alison Cogan, Sarah Jernstrom, Aimee Letsch or Ankita (last name???) for information.



Parents of young children, check out our new **Children's Lending Library** in the foyer with fifteen books to share with your child that invite conversations about the presence of God in your lives.



Our church website has been revised and updated. If you haven't seen it lately, check it out at Parsippanyumc.com. At the website you will find a link to all of Pastor Jeff's sermons, as well as his occasionally bloggings.



Healing Prayer sessions are held every Wednesday morning from 10:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. in the prayer chapel. All are invited to come and be a part of this time of prayer -- for yourself or for others.



A **Men's Breakfast** is held every Tuesday at 7 a.m. at the Empire Diner on Rt. 46. It's a relaxed time with many jokes and laughter and conversation about whatever we care to talk about, concluded with a prayer. All are welcome



The **UMW** is selling **Food Certificates to benefit the General Budget** for ShopRite and PathMark as an *ongoing Fund Raiser*. The church will receive 5% of all purchases (you buy \$100 of certificates, the church gets \$5). Certificates are available in \$5, \$10, \$20, \$25, \$50 and \$100 denominations. Please see Betty Polen at the beginning of Coffee Hour if you would like to purchase Food Certificates. Checks should be made payable to The United Methodist Women.

Thank you,
The UMW



Consider becoming a part of one or more of our Musical Groups here at church:

Bell Choir – rehearses Thursdays at 7:00 p.m. The Bell Choir has been shrinking over the last few years and we sure would like more people to join us! Speak to Tom Smith or Barb Bradley - or just show up on Thursday and see what happens!

Choir – rehearses Thursdays at 7:45 p.m. We always have an "open robe" for anyone who loves to sing. We sing in 4-part harmony, so if you've sung in your high school chorus or any other equivalent, you have a great start! Speak to any choir member or Barb Bradley if you're interested.

Kids Choir – rehearses after Sunday service in the sanctuary. Children of all ages are invited to join Sarah Jernstrom and Barb Bradley as they teach your children songs and signing.



Parsippany Food Pantry - Wes Sitgreaves has called to our attention the ongoing need of the Emergency Food Pantry in Parsippany in these difficult economic times. There are more and more families turning to the food pantry for help. You can bring your donations of non-perishable food items to the church any Sunday. Our church has been collecting non-perishable food for the Parsippany Food Pantry for many years. There is a bin outside of the sanctuary for contributions. Wes Stigreaves takes the food over as the bin gets filled up. They have given us a list of items that they can use: Canned fruits, vegetables, meat, fish, poultry and soups; dry goods: cereal, pasta, rice, dried potatoes, peanut butter and jelly, tomato sauce, tea, coffee, hot chocolate, fruit juice, powered or evaporated milk, salad dressings, mayo, mustard, ketchup. Supermarket gift cards are also welcome - buy them from Betty Polen and raise money for the church at the same time!!! This is a very easy way to give back to the less-fortunate in our own township. Please consider buying some of these items every week as you shop for your own groceries.



SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR DECEMBER

<u>Dec. 6th</u> Luke 1:68-79 Philippians 1:3-11 Luke 3:1-6	<u>Dec. 13th</u> Isaiah 12:2-6 Philippians 4:4-7 Luke 3:7-18	<u>Dec. 20th</u> Luke 1:47-55 Hebrews 10:5-10 Luke 1:39-45	<u>Dec. 27th</u> 1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26 Colossians 3:12-17 Luke 2:41-52
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2 nd	Fred Davis	20 th	Marissa Raier
3 rd	Ann Hawkins	24 th	Linda Winz
4 th	Fred Coleman	24 th	Deana Larsen
5 th	Andrew Edwards	25 th	Keith Sakelakos
8 th	Tom Zibura	25 th	Helen Miller
14 th	Gloria Gounaud	26 th	Jean Sakelakos
14 th	Claudia Bartek	30 th	Marian Steen
16 th	Jessica Colletto	31 st	Flora Dierbach
20 th	Jennifer Savarin	31 st	Kassie Dadian

