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United Methodist Church of Parsippany

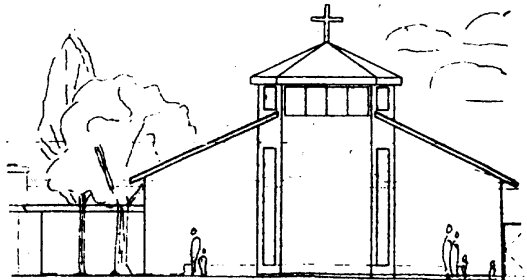
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Sunday Worship Celebration: 10:30 a.m.

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"



MARCH, 2011



Lent begins on **Ash Wednesday, March 9th**. You are invited to begin the Lenten journey with your church family with a worship service at **7:30 p.m.** The imposition of the ashes will be available.



A sermon by Pastor Jeff entitled "Sitting in the Land of Deep Darkness" preached on January 23rd, 2011.

First, the Gospel lesson, Matthew 4:12 – 23.

"Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the lake, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

'Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles — the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.' From that time Jesus began to proclaim, *'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.'*

"As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, 'Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.' Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

"Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people."

Matthew is unique in emphasizing exactly where Jesus began in his ministry. When he came forth from his time in the wilderness Jesus goes away from Judea — the very heart of Israel — and goes to a land Matthew defines as being "of the Gentiles" — the outsiders — the people who — unlike the Jews — are not the 'chosen' people. He relies on an ancient prophecy of Isaiah to interpret Jesus' choice of location:

'Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.'

Jesus goes not to the insiders who presume they are walking in the light, rather he goes to the outsiders — the people who are sitting in darkness, dwelling in the region and shadow of death. He comes to bear light — a light that is easily missed by those who assume they are already in the light.

Prior to his baptism by John at the River Jordan, we don't know anything about Jesus' adult life. Was their hardship? Suffering? We just don't know. What we do know is that immediately after his baptism, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to spend an extended stay in the deep darkness himself. For forty days he fasted and withstood the temptations of the Prince of darkness.

We tend to imagine this time as having been something of a cake walk for Jesus. Hey, he was the son of God, right? No sweat. But it wasn't a cake walk at all. He suffered it all: hunger, doubt, fear, despair.

That's what darkness feels like. It was necessary for Jesus to go into the deep darkness in order for him to grow into the authority that had been given him at his baptism, when he heard the voice of God declare him to be the beloved son." If you're going to speak good news to people who dwell in deep darkness, you need to have first hand experience of the darkness yourself. Otherwise, they'll just ignore you.

Life inevitably brings us into the land of deep darkness. There are various pathways to the deep darkness – things like grief, or loss of our health or job, the breakdown of an intimate relationship upon which we've relied. To some degree, we've all been there. Some of us are right there now.

Naturally, we would prefer to stay in the sunshine, but the darkness comes, nonetheless. And yet Jesus begins his ministry not in the sunshine but in the darkness, which means there must be some value to the darkness; one readily overlooked. It is in the darkness that the great light shines.

My all time favorite sermon illustration that comes from a book comes from Rachel Naomi Remen, a medical doctor who has acquired a great deal of wisdom and light having spent a good deal of time herself in the land of deep darkness. She records some of her wisdom in lovely stories that can be found in books like *My Grandfather's Blessings*. Rachel describes a middle-aged woman named Sara who she got to know who told her how as a young woman she suffered from the eating disorder known as now as bulimia.

At the time, little was known about such psychiatric ailments, and she went to ten different doctors before she found one who took her seriously as being afflicted with something more than simple adolescent rebellion.

"Rachel," said Sara, "I was just so alone, I could not stop myself, and at the worst of it I was not sure that it was possible to survive this. I was very afraid. I remember thinking that somewhere there must be someone else who had this problem, someone who has been able to heal from it. If they could live, maybe I could live too."

Sara never did meet such a person, but she did end up hospitalized for nearly year, which saved her life, as slowly – she knows not how – she made her way back from the edge into a full recovery.

Rachel concludes the story as follows:

A few years ago, she was reading her evening newspaper and came across an announcement for a meeting of a bulimia support group. Sara is a middle-aged woman and has not suffered from this problem for many years, but the idea of a support group intrigued her, and she decided to attend a meeting to see what it was like. It had been a powerful experience. The desperately ill young people there had touched her heart, and while she felt unable to help them, she cared about them and so she continued going back. Other than saying that she had bulimia as a girl she had not revealed a great deal more about herself but had simply sat and listened to the stories of others.

As she was about to leave one of those meetings, she was stopped by a painfully thin young girl who thanked her for coming and told her how much it had meant to know her. Her eyes had been filled with unshed tears. Sara had responded with her usual graciousness, but she had been puzzled. She could not recall ever speaking to this girl and did not even know her name. As she drove home, she wondered how she could have forgotten something so important to someone else. She was almost home before she understood. Her husband, who met her at their front door, was surprised to see that she had been crying. "Sara, what is wrong?" he asked in concern. "I have become the person I needed to meet, Harry," she told him and walked into his arms.

Because Sara had dwelt herself in the same deep darkness that these young women were in, she was able to bear light to them.

Here at the Parsippany United Methodist Church we say there is always room in the circle. We are one big fellowship circle into which all are welcome.

If truth be told there are several smaller fellowship circles within the bigger circle of our fellowship. They are sort of secret societies. Even though we may have some vague awareness of their existence, if we don't belong we don't really understand what it means to be a member. At times we might even feel a bit envious of the strong bond the members share, but the initiation rites are a bear, and nobody would willingly choose to undergo one of the rites.

One of those secret societies is made up of women with names like Doris, Lois, Grace, Betty, Ruth, Trudy, Hwa and Rebecca. It's the fellowship of women who have endured the death of their husbands. It is a beautiful thing to see them reach out to the women who find themselves suddenly initiated. They have a unique capacity to bear light in the darkness.

There are other secret societies.

The fellowship of those who have endured the death of their parents. (It has a pretty broad membership, though I myself am not yet a member.)

There is a smaller fellowship of parents who have endured the death of their children.

But there are other fellowships as well; more than I can name.

There is the fellowship of those who have dealt with cancer.

There's the diabetes fellowship.

There's the fellowship of those who have suffered divorce, or the breakup of some other deeply intimate bond.

There's the fellowship of those who have struggled with addiction.

There's the fellowship of those who have suffered the peculiar darkness of depression.

There's the fellowship of parents who have watched helplessly as their children suffered in profound ways.

There's the fellowship of those who have lost their jobs and stay awake at night wondering how they can pay their bills.

There's the fellowship of those who grew up feeling as though they didn't fit in a world where everybody was assumed to be straight — they were gay and assumed they were all alone and didn't belong here until they finally met others who shared what they had experienced.

And there are fellowships of people who seem to have so much going for them, and yet suffer with a profound emptiness that makes them feel all alone. For instance the fellowship of young stay-at-home moms (or dads) shut up all day with their ever-demanding and often cranky children.

There are more of these secret societies than we can number, but if we learn the lessons brought about by the darkness endured in our particular secret society, we realize that in truth there really is just one big fellowship after all, because all these varied initiation rites express the suffering that is part and parcel of being a human being. To be humbled and instructed in the lessons the darkness of any kind of suffering has to teach — as Jesus did out there in the wilderness — is to realize that in the end we are connected to every other human being, no matter how the form our suffering has taken.

The Church is the great fellowship circle of Jesus' love. Until you've gone through an initiation rite that brought you low and forced you to sit for a time in the deep darkness, you may not really "get" what the Church is ultimately all about. But life has a way of bringing us to the initiation rite.

It was the great good fortune of the fishermen Simon and Andrew, James and John to meet the person they most needed to meet as they dwelt in the land of deep darkness. And Jesus in turn called them on a path in which they would become "fishers of people," which is another way of saying a path in which they intentionally sought to become the sort of persons others in their darkness need to meet.

In the fellowship of AA, a key component of the healing journey of each recovering alcoholic is to be involved in supporting those who are likewise on the journey — particularly those who are newer to the journey than themselves. It's right there in the twelve steps.

The light that shines in the darkness leads us on a path where we are given opportunity to bear light to others who are suffering from the darkness with which we are personally well acquainted. The middle-aged woman Sarah finds herself called to reach out to the young women locked in the darkness she once knew so well. The widow called to bring healing balm to the newly grieved sister.

The voice of Jesus calls to us in the darkness and bids us come and follow; do you hear the voice calling you?

In the kindness of Jesus,

Pastor Jeff

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Check out our website, and Pastor Jeff's posted sermons and other reflections, at www.parsippanyumc.com. You'll also find the church on Facebook. Pastor Jeff invites us to submit questions and topic suggestions for him to write reflections on, as well as to preach about. You can place suggestions in the offering plate, or give them to Pastor Jeff directly. JEdwards14@juno.com

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Pastor Jeff is holding a **day time men's book reading group** that meets on **Fridays at 1 p.m.** We meet for 90 minutes, share our stories and discuss the book "Adam's Return: The Five Promises of Male Initiation" by Richard Rohr. Any man who is available and interested in attending should speak to Pastor Jeff.



United Methodist Women

Looking back...Luckily we decided not to meet in January and February because in this very snowy winter we didn't have to worry about people driving! Now we'll pray for good weather from now on...

ALL WOMEN of the church family and your friends are invited to join us on..

Wednesday, March 2nd – 7:00 p.m.
PROGRAM: Connie Keller: Up, Up and Away
Refreshments

March 4 – World Day of Prayer
March 9 – Ash Wednesday
March 13 – Daylight Savings Begins

March 17 – St. Patrick's Day
March 20 – Spring Begins
March 30 – Homemade Cakes for Morris View

Get well wishes to those of you who are ill, and
HAPPY BIRTHDAY to those of you celebrating this month with Angela Nolan and Karen Wilk.

God Bless,
Doris Bradley

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

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A **Church Dance** for all ages will be held on **Saturday, March 5th, 7:30 to 11 p.m.** with the band the "Outsiders" who feature music from the 50s, 60s and 70s. The quartet has it covered, with favorites from Elvis to Sinatra and everything in-between -- Motown, blue-eyed soul and more! Suggested donation: \$10 for adults; \$5 for students; children with adults are free.

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We are hosting a concert by the **Watoto Children's Choir** from Uganda on **Tuesday, March 22nd at 7:30 p.m.** Admission is free- A love offering will be taken to support their mission. Watoto Children's Choirs have traveled internationally since 1994 as advocates for the estimated 50 million children in Africa, orphaned as a result of HIV/AIDS, war, poverty and disease. You can see videos of their wonderful music of praise on YouTube.



If you would like to help with the organization of the event, please speak to Bob Keller. The choir consists of 31 people; we are looking for homes to host 3-4 children and a chaperone on the night of the 22nd. If you can are interested in hosting, please speak to Amy Gripp. Admission is free- A love offering will be taken to support their mission

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Sunday, **March 6th** is **Girl Scout Sunday**. All girl scouts of the church (and their Girl Scout friends) are invited to attend worship in their uniforms.



Josh Romine is our youth leader, assisted by Dawn Barhite.

Youth Group Mission Project: Youth Group to raise green to make it clean!

Overview of Project: More than 1 in 6 people in the world don't have access to safe drinking water. The Parsippany United Methodist Youth Group is trying to help. During the Fall of 2010 and the Spring of 2011, the Youth Group will lead a project to raise \$2000 to build wells in Kenya to provide clean water to an entire community. The Youth Group will be working with an organization called The Water Project whose goal is to provide clean water one village at a time to the 1 billion people around the world who don't have access to clean water.

Overview of The Water Project Organization: The Water Project is an organization who has a very simple mission: Provide Clean, Safe Drinking Water by 1) Matching donors to proven partners who are drilling fresh water wells and constructing other sustainable water projects, 2) Sending up to 100% of public donations to fund these efforts, ensuring your gifts provide clean water where you choose, 3) Showing every donor the specific impact of their gifts through photos, short stories and GPS map coordinates.

In just a few short years, The Water Project has already completed over 200 projects and served over 100,000 people who prior to the wells being built, did not have access to clean water. Go to <http://thewaterproject.org/wells-for-kenya.php> to learn more about The Water Project.

All donations large and small are welcomed and greatly appreciated. If you want to contribute, contact Josh Romine (jromines@gmail.com), Dawn Barhite (Lilgems4me@yahoo.com), or see Pastor Jeff.

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COTTON PATCH GOSPEL: Rediscovering the Good News of Our Faith -
A 6 Week Small Group Experience

HAVE YOU EVER WISHED that the familiar stories of our faith would jump off the pages of the Bible and come to life right before your eyes? If so, "Cotton Patch Gospel," may be just what you've been waiting for. This award winning musical drama retells the gospel story of Jesus with extraordinary vibrancy,

humor, tenderness, and joy.

During the season of Lent, David Turner will lead 6 small group gatherings to watch, enjoy, and discuss the Cotton Patch Gospel movie. You are invited to join us. **Beginning on March 15th**, we will meet in the sanctuary on **Tuesday** evenings from **7:00 to 8:30**. The group size will be limited to 15 members. If you have questions or want to sign up, please speak to David at church. Or contact him by phone (973-759-7580) or e-mail at psalter103@aol.com.

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On the second Thursday of every other month our congregation provides dinner for the families at **Homeless Solutions**. Our next scheduled dinner is **Thursday, April 14th**. If you would like to take a turn in helping with this outreach, or if you would like to donate money towards the expenses, please speak to Laurie Wilken or Connie Wallace.

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Anna Egorova and the **New Jersey Blood Center** would like to thank the 24 people from our church who showed up last Sunday do donate blood at the drive we held in our parking lot. This was an excellent turnout, and many people will be helped through this sharing.

On February 16th Al Booth departed this world to be with the Lord after a year-long battle with leukemia. Al held a very special place in our hearts. He served as chief cook for our church dinners, as chief fisherman on his annual expeditions with our Sunday School children, as Santa Claus in Christmas plays and pageants, as pitcher for our church softball team, as murder mystery instigator, as youth group leader ... Mostly, Al will be remembered for his loyalty and friendship; his gentleness and good humor. We share the sadness of his absence with his beloved wife Gail and his beloved children Tracy and Tim, but we rejoice in the knowledge that one day we will be reunited with *Al in the joy of God's eternal love in heaven.*



Al never got a chance to give a moment of gratitude. He did, however, share something of what coming to church meant for him back in 2007 when he had the opportunity to preach the sermon:

"Coming to church on Sunday morning is like filling your gas tank before we start on our weekly journey. We seek fulfillment for our spiritually empty tank. Listening to the word of God each

weeks is a vital part of this fuel, though it alone is not enough to get me through the week. The real additive is those who worship with me who provide the rich mixture necessary to create the spiritual fuel to get me through my weaknesses. I am humbled and highly flattered to think that in some small way my gifts may somehow help to fuel someone else's spiritual needs, but I am greatly indebted to those who fill mine. My own Mary and Martha syndrome is calmed and soothed by the fact that I have come to a place where everyone is not like me, but is unique and different as God willed them to be."

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Pastor Jeff leads worship at **Troy Hills Nursing Center** on Reynolds Road on the third Thursday of every month at 10:30 a.m. Anyone who would like to share in this ministry on is invited to join him.

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Sunday Morning alert: We've all become dependent on all of our electronic devices. Please take note of the announcement in the Sunday bulletin about your cell phones. Please remember, as a courtesy to those worshipping with us on Sunday mornings, to mute or turn off your cell phones. A random ring tone is not nearly as cute as a baby's cry. Thanks for your help!

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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.



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 Bell Choir – rehearses every Sunday after worship. All children and youth in 3rd grade and up (including junior and senior high school) are welcome. Directed by Aimee Letsch (973-585-7634).

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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.

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A **small gathering of men** from our church meet together every Tuesday at 7:15 a.m. at the Empire Diner with Pastor Jeff for breakfast, conversation, and a concluding prayer. All men are welcome.

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The **UMW** is selling **Food Certificates to benefit the General Budget** for ShopRite 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

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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



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. Wes Stigreaves takes the food over as the bin gets filled up. 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.

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SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR MARCH

March 6

Exodus 24:12-18
2 Peter 1:16-21
Matthew 17:1-9

March 13

Genesis 2:15-17;3:1-7
Romans 5:12-19
Matthew 4:1-11

March 20

Genesis 12:1-4a
Romans 4:1-5, 13-17
John 3:1-17

March 27

Exodus 17:1-7
Romans 5:1-11
John 4:5-42



2 nd	Evan Nichols	20 th	Len Bostwick
5 th	Michael Weiss	20 th	Alexa Taylor
7 th	Ian Crawford	20 th	Rachel Weiss
7 th	Christina Sakelakos	21 st	Myrna Labis
7 th	Kristopher Hawkins	22 nd	Jared Gropper
9 th	Ryan Laux	22 nd	Briana Laux
10 th	Anna Gripp	23 rd	Jim Simmons
10 th	Maya Roelofs	24 th	Karen Wilk
12 th	Alex Hawkins	24 th	Angela Nolan
12 th	Sue DeJessa	25 th	Nancy McAllister
14 th	Debbie Mortensen	26 th	Kate Eiring
16 th	Paul Larsen Sr.	28 th	Arlene Sklow
17 th	Julia Sklow	29 th	Sarah Roberts
17 th	Daniel Wallace	31 st	Ron Gounaud
20 th	Andy Klekanos		

We've begun a new tradition. Each Sunday right before the offering, a different member of the church takes a turn to speak for a minute on the theme of "I am grateful to God for our church because..." Below are our recent **moments of gratitude**:

Maidie Erikson 1/16

*I am definitely grateful for the church. The moment I came in I felt so welcomed, and I really do love you guys. "Family" is seeing each other for who we are. It's where we don't put up airs, and where we're just as imperfect as we are but we know Jesus loves us. As Jeff always says, 'newcomers are Jesus in disguise.' You guys saw me as this imperfect person and yet you loved me like I was Jesus coming through **the** door.*

I experienced rejection at my old church when the elders found out that I was gay. They asked me not to participate in the service. It was really hard because I'm a born again Christian, and I've been Christian since I was 13 and I love Christ. And the fact that I was rejected was fairly hard, and Parsippany United Methodist Church you guys didn't ask -- didn't go through my life and determine what makes me God's child. But you loved me because you knew we had one common bond and that's Christ, and the love of Christ, and I thank you guys so much, and I love you, and that's how I'm grateful.

Justin Cogan 1/23

I am grateful for the way that Parsippany United Methodist Church supports families. Sitting around the dinner table last night, I asked the Cogans what they liked most about Church. I think their answers were pretty insightful, so I thought I would share them with you today.

My youngest, Marissa and TJ, both zeroed in on Children's Sermon time:

Marissa said, "I like when we get up in front of church and talk about Jesus."

TJ said, "I like the stuffed animals that Pastor Jeff uses to tell us stories."

My older girls, Cassie and Beth, spoke about other aspects of worship:

Beth said, "I like how everyone prays and cares for everyone else."

Cassie said, "I really like it when the Church sings." She was talking about the whole church, by the way. Not just the choir. (Grin)

Edward's observation came a bit from left field, but made perfect sense if you know him:

Edward said, "I LOVE the food at Coffee Hour!"

My wife Alison summed the theme up here best with her observation:

Alison said, "I like how the Church welcomes our family." I'd change that to 'kooky' family, because so much of what we seem to go through together, especially with the boys, seems to push us to the fringe of what anyone would consider 'normal'.

We Cogans are a strange bunch, but the beautiful thing is that we seem to fit right in here at the Parsippany United Methodist Church. It feels like a Family Reunion when we come here each week – getting the chance to see so many friends and familiar faces; laughing a lot and sometimes even crying together; eating together; watching the kids run around and play with one another.

That's the kind of stuff you feel completely comfortable with doing in front of 'Family', you know? I think it recharges our family's spirit to be surrounded by a supportive 'Family' here at Church, and I think that's at least one of the reasons why we are blessed to be part of its Circle.

Terry Germann 1/30

I was raised in a Jewish home; my father was orthodox, my mother wasn't, but she went along with it. My mother survived the holocaust, and after the war a matchmaker set her up with my father, also a holocaust survivor, in Czechoslovakia. They married and moved to Israel, where I was born along with my brother and sister. We moved to America when I was six years old and whenever I would go to the synagogue with my parents, my mother and I would sit with the women upstairs and my father would sit downstairs with the men. The Rabbi would come around with the torah and the men would kiss the torah. I never really felt connected going there. So I was brought up Jewish and I married a Jewish man.

Much later, when I was in my thirties, I went to a singing teacher, who happened to be a born again Christian. I told her a little about my marital problems (with my first husband) and she told me that we needed to pray about it. Pray? I never prayed about anything in my whole life so this concept was very new to me. We prayed both before and after the singing lesson. She invited me to her Bible study, and I went, where I learned about the Book of Luke which I really enjoyed. She invited me to her church, it was the Free Evangelical Church, and I went. It was the first time in my life that I had been to a church and everybody was so friendly and we sang such nice songs, I loved it. I learned that I could pray and have a personal

relationship with God -- that was a fantastic feeling that I had never experienced before. I continued going to church and started to read the bible. I prayed to God to tell me if Jesus really existed and I kept praying. One night I had a dream, a very vivid dream, that I was making my daughter's bed, kneeling, and this man came in right through the window and he was wearing a white robe and his face was glowing. He stood before me and I got this incredibly good feeling that from now on, he was going to be there in my life and take care of me. Jesus came to me in a dream and I was so happy.

Years later, after I got divorced, I went to born again Christian Church in Netcong. I loved going there. I love acting and I became one of their main actors in their drama team. There were three services and three dramas to do, so I had to stay longer, but I didn't mind, I enjoyed it. I was living with Oscar at that time and I knew that living together unmarried - was frowned upon so after six years of living together, we decided to make it official and get married.

I went to the pastor and asked him to please marry us, in the church of course, and told him the truth that we had been living together for six years. Roy insisted on speaking with Oscar alone. After their talk, Roy met with me alone and told me that Oscar and I were not equally yoked and that this marriage would never last. He told me that I should tell Oscar to leave my house, end my relationship with him - and that I could no longer do drama at the church because I represented the church when I was acting up there. Since I had been 'living in sin,' I could no longer do drama.

I was shocked, I was the best actress they had there, I had been going to that church for nine years, I got baptized there and he was kicking me out?! I was devastated. I felt like I was no longer welcome in that church and so I left. I was churchless and heartbroken. On Sundays I would go to different churches, looking for one to belong to, but I couldn't find one that suited me.

Then one day at bowling, Tom Zibura, asked Oscar and me if we wanted to see a play in his church. I perked up, I said, play, what play? What church is doing a play? He told me the United Methodist Church of Parsippany, I never even thought of going to a Methodist Church.

Oscar and I went to see the play and everybody was so nice to us, I couldn't believe it and I told Oscar it was a fluke, that if I came back for service on Sunday, they wouldn't be that friendly, no way can they be that friendly.

So I came here the following Sunday and again, everybody was so nice and friendly and warm!! Louis Kelshaw, especially, came right over to me and welcomed me and introduced me to everybody. It felt so right, I told Oscar "I think I finally found a church!!"

That was twelve years ago and you know, if you're straight or gay, if you're changing your gender, if you make a mistake and end up in jail, we have love and compassion for everybody here, everybody is accepted here. This church is such an amazing place. And I want to tell you, if I'm excited about something, like my daughter in law is going to have a baby and I'm going to be a grandmother, I can come here and get all excited and people are happy for me. If I'm worried about my daughter who suffers from depression and she's talking about suicide, I can come here and talk to Pastor Jeff and talk to you guys and everybody cares. Next to my immediate family, this church family is the most important thing in my life and I'm so very grateful and blessed to have a wonderful church like this to come to every week. I love you all very much. Thank you.

Anita Baldwin 2/6

When I first heard the idea of sharing a moment of gratitude, I knew right away what I would say...

Several years ago, I agreed to play the piano for 4 summer services when Barb takes a well deserved vacation. As I tried to prepare all the music that is required, I struggled a lot, as I do not read music well, and I hadn't played the piano regularly in a long time. But, knowing how understanding this congregation this, I kept working.

It occurred to me that, if I wrote a prelude or an offertory on my own, and practiced it a lot, I might make fewer mistakes! So I began to write short pieces, and I received so much positive feedback from all of you, especially from Pastor Jeff, that I continue to write original music when I can.

The lesson here for me is: What began as a challenge and a chore: well, it's still a challenge, but it is no longer a chore. It is now something I enjoy doing, And, given my limited piano skills, I don't think I would have this opportunity anywhere else. And I know that there is nowhere else where I would feel comfortable enough to try. And, for that, I am very grateful.

If you'd like to schedule a turn to share your moment of gratitude, please speak to our lay leader, Bob Keller or to Pastor Jeff.

March 2011

United Methodist Church of Parsippany

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday																																																	
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6 10:30 AM Worship Girl Scout Sunday		8 7:00 AM Men's Prayer Breakfast	9 10:30 AM Healing Prayer 7:30 PM Ash Wednesday Service	10 7:00 PM Bell Choir 7:45 PM Adult Choir																																																			
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