

HILLTOPPER

United Methodist Church of Parsippany

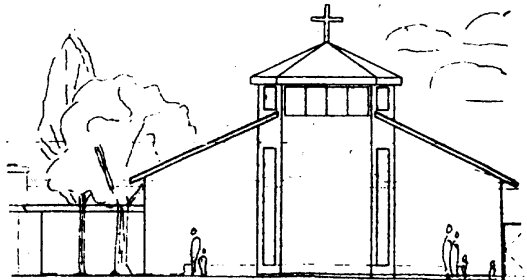
903 So. Beverwyck Road, Parsippany, NJ 07054 (973) 887-4657

<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"



MAY, 2011



A sermon preached on April 10th, 2011 based upon Ezekiel 37:1 – 14 and Romans 8: 5 – 11, entitled "Cramped Spaces."

After church last Sunday I took Bobby to one of his soccer games. As his coach had requested, I got him there well before his game, and having done so I set up the chair I'd brought with me by the field where the game that preceded Bobby's was still taking place. I sat some distance away from where the majority of the parents were watching at midfield. Since my kid wasn't playing in this game, I sat back a bit from the field, free to relax without worrying about the game's outcome. Having rushed to get there on time, and with my Sunday morning duties over, I could now breathe easily. The sun was shining. The goodness of life was evident and I was free to take in the sights and sounds around me.

There was only one man in my vicinity – a father who stood in front of me -- watching his son's game. Soon however, the man's wife came to stand with him, making a comment about how she couldn't bear any longer to be in the company of the other parents. I was sitting quietly behind them, and they seemed oblivious to my presence. I could not help but hear everything they said, and so for the next twenty minutes or so I had the peculiar experience of listening in on their largely unfiltered conversation.

I was struck by how **negative** they sounded. They complained about the rough play of the boys on the other team, and of the refs' ineptitude for failing to call the fouls that were so obvious to them. They complained about the poor passing of their son's team. At one point the father yelled loudly criticizing his son's play, and when parents from the midsection turned their heads to see who was hollering so stridently, the man's wife complained about the parents' inability to mind their own business.

Their body language expressed **perpetual annoyance**. From their point of view, I'm sure they were simply "calling it as they saw it" – naming the endlessly irritating flaws of humanity, the presence of which are a perpetual burden for them to bear. From my perspective, however, without personal involvement in what I was watching, it seemed pretty obvious that the problem wasn't really with the imperfect people they were critiquing. The problem was with them – in the small-mindedness in which they were trapped that tainted everything they saw.

Their small little lives seemed pretty miserable. All they could see was were the flaws and failures. I wondered if they were able to see themselves from my angle – watch a movie of themselves talking – whether it would become obvious to them as well? Would they be able to recognize that the problem wasn't out there -- that it was inside them? Would it occur to them that their misery was their own making – that they were choosing to live in this cramped, self-absorbed place, and it didn't have to be that way?

I know hardly anything at all about this couple. Maybe there were just having a bad day, and suffered the misfortune of having a preacher nearby who would put their behavior into a sermon. Or maybe this is what their lives are perpetually like. Only God knows for sure.

It occurred to me that there are plenty of times in my own life when, if somebody was given unfiltered access to listen in on my inner monologue the way I was listening in on this couple's dialogue -- well, it wouldn't sound much different -- maybe a lot worse.

To some extent, the measure of our lives comes down to how much time we spend in such cramped spaces. To get stuck in such a space is to lose one's soul -- one's life.

In the passage we heard from the apostle Paul, there is some awkward language to get past. Paul speaks of "living according to the flesh" vs. "living in the Spirit," which can easily lead us in the direction of a disdain and mistrust of the bodies God gave us. Unfortunately, Christians have often lived as though it's a bad thing to have human flesh, and that in order to be "spiritual," we have to suppress our bodies.

But the Bible tells us that creation is good -- that our bodies are good. And the New Testament arises in wonder of God's choice to take on human flesh in the incarnation. We have a savior who seemed truly at home in his body, comfortable with human touch, happy to enjoy good food and drink.

And although I think Paul has a tendency to lead folks astray in this regard, I think that what he is really getting at involves the difference between living in the kind of stuck, miserable space occupied by the couple I observed, and a life lived open to the Spirit, in the eternal expanse of the Kingdom of God. The narrow life leads to death, Paul says, but life in the spirit leads into a love so great love it could never be measured.

There is a wonderful NPR program on the radio called "Speaking of Faith", where the host, Krista Tippet, interviews a range of people from a variety of traditions about their experience and understanding of spirituality. I recently listened to an interview of a Yoga instructor who described how in embracing her body through the practice of yoga -- she found a means by which she could come closer in touch with the Spirit of God in her life.

She describes how early in her life she suffered from what she would later have diagnosed as OCD -- Obsessive, Compulsive Disorder. OCD is a condition that compels a person to obsessively think certain thoughts over and over, and to compulsively behave in reaction to these thoughts, in the process of which a great deal of anxiety is generated, narrowing the perception of life considerably. In this woman's case, her OCD involved a great deal of terror at the thought of her death. Though most of us wouldn't be diagnosed as having OCD, I think most of us can recognize obsessive-compulsive tendencies in our own lives.

At the woman's very first yoga class at the age of 19 she experienced a significant breakthrough in her life. She described working very hard to do the yoga postures correctly, only to discover that despite her best efforts she couldn't get her feet to line up perfectly. (They shouldn't, because it turns out, our bodies aren't perfectly symmetrical.) She felt the familiar anxiety of her OCD raging up inside her, narrowing her world down to this tiny prison cell of obsession, at which point the instructor said to her, "Breathe, and everything changes." Which she did -- and as she focused her attention back on her breath, breathing deeply, her anxiety broke. Suddenly, the dimensions of her life expanded.

I was reminded of the significance of breath in the Bible. God is described as breathing the breath of life into some dust in order to create a human being. In this morning's Old Testament lesson, Ezekiel is given a vision of a valley of dry, lifeless bones. The question is asked: "*Can these bones live?*" Ezekiel answers, "*O Lord, you alone know.*" To which the Lord declares, "*Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life.*"

In the Gospel of John, the resurrected Jesus appears to his frightened, despairing disciples, huddled together in a cramped room behind a locked door. What does Jesus do? He breathes the holy spirit upon them.

Returning to the yoga instructor's story, after that first session she practiced yoga regularly, but it took a couple of years to realize that the practice was leading her into a communion with God. She describes how, like many young people -- and older people, for that matter -- during this period of time her life was what she called an endless little "drama." A perpetual series of overblown "crises" consumed her, narrowing her life to a miserable little prison cell that she kept recreating moment by moment in her mind, though she lacked the perspective to realize she was doing this.

One day she was walking down the street when she became aware of a strange feeling she said she'd never felt before, and as she thought about it, she realized what she was feeling was happiness. The narrow confines of her personal drama had lifted, and underneath she could see her life for what it truly was -- a gift -- a blessing.

From that point she began to realize that her yoga instructor had been speaking all along about a spiritual dimension to the practice of yoga, but that she had just tuned it out, because her focus had been exclusively on her body. Suddenly, however, God simply made sense to her. When she got out of the cramped little confines of her soap opera drama the presence of God was unmistakable. She recognized an underlying love and grace, and death no longer terrorized her.

In CS Lewis' series of children's book about the land of Narnia, there is this scene in which a group of dwarves sit huddled together in a tight little knot thinking that they are in a pitch black stable when the truth is that they are out in the midst of an endless grassy countryside with the sun shining and blue sky overhead. The unbeknownst to the dwarves, Aslan, the great golden Lion stands near, watching over them.

In the end, Paul wants to say something reassuring to us. He knows how easy it is to fall back into that narrow, oppressive space. We get tired, stressed, and the big picture is lost, and life becomes once more a little prison cell in which we're just doing time. Fear not, says Paul. You have been given the Spirit of Christ. It was breathed into you. It cannot be lost. Sooner or later, you will be led back to expansive green pastures of God's kingdom. Soon enough the grace of God will awaken you once more to wonder of it all.

"If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in 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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Joe Mohan, the young Julliard student who has played piano for us during worship several times, will be performing a **concert at our church on Saturday, May 14th at 7:00 p.m.** Joe's concert will include music from all different genres, as well as things that are very kid friendly. The concert should last approximately 1 hour.

Joe's "opening act" will be Barb Bradley and Darryl Sokolowski, performing a few songs.

Please come out and enjoy an evening of wonderful music.

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The day time men's reading group with Pastor Jeff will resume for six Fridays at 1 p.m. beginning **May 6th**. Short readings will be discussed during the 90 minute sessions. Any men available in the day time are invited to join us.

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The UMW will be holding a spring mini-bazaar on Saturday, May 21, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. They will feature jewelry and other items for sale that day. Come out to help, or to buy!

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Blessings and congratulations go to Jimmy Sakelakos and Sophia Perez who joined in marriage on April 16th.



United Methodist Women

Looking back...Ladies' Night Out at Annabella's was fun – Good fellowship and conversation and laughs. And, of course, delicious food! ALL WOMEN of the church are invited to join us here....

Wednesday, May 4th – 7:00 p.m.
PROGRAM: TBD
REFRESHMENTS will be served
Bring a friend!

- May 6 – Nat'l Day of Prayer
- May 6 – May Fellowship Day (Fellowship of the Least Coin)
- May 8 – Mother's Day
- May 21 – UMW Mini-Bazaar, 10-3
- May 30 – Memorial Day

Get well wishes to those of you who are ill, and HAPPY BIRTHDAY to those of you celebrating this month with Anna Weiss, Lyn Krisa, Doris Bradley and Lois Kelshaw.

God Bless,
Doris Bradley

Prov. 17:17 “A friend loves at all times.”

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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.

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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Anyone who is interested in serving from time to time as a **liturgist** in the Sunday worship service is invited to speak to Pastor Jeff.

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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, June 9th**. 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.



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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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.

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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



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

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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 MAY

<u>May 1</u> Acts 2:14a, 22-32 1 Peter 1:3-9 John 20:19-31	<u>May 8</u> Acts 2:14a, 36-41 1 Peter 1:17:23 Luke 24:13-35	<u>May 15</u> Acts 2:42-47 1 Peter 2:19-25 John 10:1-10	<u>May 22</u> Acts 7:55-60 1 Peter 2:2-10 John 14:1-14	<u>May 29</u> Acts 17:22-31 1 Peter 3:13-22 John 14:15-21
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1 st Beth Cogan	15 th Garin Roelefs
2 nd Alison Cogan	18 th Kayla Hook (Beckler)
3 rd Anna Weiss	19 th Doris Bradley
5 th Joshua Christian	19 th Lyn Krisa
6 th Henry Isaacks	20 th Susan Elbin
7 th Dawn Colletto	22 nd Zak Jernstrom
8 th David Brodock	23 rd Georgia Zibura
10 th Michael Smith	25 th Darlene Miller
10 th Paul Larsen, Jr.	26 th Lois Kelshaw
11 th Erika Gripp	28 th George Haeussler
12 th George Hawkins, Sr.	29 th Darren Yacenko
12 th Katie Rose Milhalko	29 th Lois Pongo
14 th Kaitlyn Sklow	31 st Diane Anderson
14 th Michelle Hess	31 st Nichole Raier
15 th Leigh Colletto	31 st Jessica Maclay

MAY ANNIVERSARIES

20th Ted & Bekki Schnetzer

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**:

Joanne Karr

This is what I found here. Love, COMPASSION, and acceptance. These words are heard in every testimony given here!

After a 20 year hiatus from church, my daughter Julianne became the impetus for my return. By the time she was 5 I decided she needed a spiritual upbringing that I was not capable of giving. I had her baptized at a little Episcopal church. As the choir sang I began to cry with joy. How I missed this! Although the people were nice, I was surrounded by families consisting of a mother and a father and a kid or two. I was a single mom. I felt as if I didn't fit in.

When I came to Parsippany UMC, the first sermon I heard involved Jeff sharing his experience of having been a young pastor going through a divorce. He described feeling a great emptiness one Sunday in which he was scheduled to preach at a local nursing home in the afternoon. In the faces of the elderly residents he saw the love of God, and his heart was filled with peace. Jeff's sharing touched my heart and soul; I knew this would be my home. I found others in similar life circumstances as mine, as well as others quite different, but among everyone I found acceptance.

I knew this would be my home. I found others like me and others who were not, but accepted me anyway!

And I found out I COULD sing! Early on I joined the church's praise band where I not only found my voice, and was blessed with a family within a family! How great it was to share God's praises with such God-loving and lovable people! It was six years of my life that I will forever be thankful for.

As I said at the beginning, it was my daughter Julianne who led me here. It has been so wonderful to share this church's love with her. Although she is in that young adult phase where everything is questioned, she respects me and my faith and I respect her. She often says to me how well she has learned about loving people and being kind by being part of this church family. **And for THAT and for you all I am so very thankful!**

Rebecca Morrison

I've been with the United Methodist Church for 10 years now and there are a lot of reasons I am grateful to the church. I will start from the beginning:

In June 2001, Drew (my husband) and I went to an HIV spiritual retreat. I remember as I walked from the dining room towards the chapel that I saw Drew walking in between Pastor Jeff and his wife Sarah. My first thought was -- what a blessing. At this point of his life Drew had recently gone through a number of surgical procedures and he was in so much pain. It brought joy to my heart to see him talking at length with Pastor and Sarah.

Afterwards, Drew and I spoke and he mentioned how nice the pastor was and what a sweet wife he had. Pastor invited us to visit the UMC and we hesitated, because at the time we were attending a Lutheran church in Mountain Lakes. One Sunday we woke up and decided to visit PUMC &... Wow – what a delight! We immediately felt welcome and right at home. We did not hesitate and became members in October of 2001.

Drew was passionate about music and he joined the church band called Reconstruction. He played the bongos and conga for several years. Also thanks to UMC he got a job at the Morris County nutritional center and served with them for five years and then with Little Blessings school right after that.

In June 2004 we applied for the position of sextons and we were hired. We moved into the parish home behind the church and although we had primary jobs, we enjoyed keeping the church immaculate. At that time we continued to develop a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. I am grateful for those four years, which helped us get closer to the church members and to our Lord and savior Jesus Christ.

When I lost Drew this past year, Pastor Jeff has been there for me in my most difficult time. He's even visited my home several times and with Sarah as well. The numerous phone calls Pastor has always answered and he has been "all ears" to my crying, sobbing and screaming. What a compassionate individual he is as a leader, my Pastor and my friend.

There are many reasons why I am truly grateful:

1. For Drew & I being at the right place at the right time -- first and foremost the HIV spiritual retreat. What a great spiritual experience it was each and every time we were there during its 6 years. It was inspirational every time.
2. For the warm, caring members here whom I consider my brothers and sisters in Christ.

3. For the opportunities Drew and I had with the church, such as when we were Sunday school teachers with activities such as babysitting and enjoying the Gripp children, Erika, Kelsey and Anna, while Amy and Billy ran the youth group.
4. The amazing play called Wit that Drew acted in and when he also played the Angel of Gabriel. All of these events continued to give us the will and zeal for life.
5. For Pastor Jeff who has been there for us and continues to be for me no matter what time of day it is.
6. For the peace and serenity I continue to find every time I walk into PUMC.
7. For the innocence of our children in our congregation. For all the love that the Cogan children give me every time they see me, including the times both Beth and Marissa Cogan said to me, "Rebecca, I miss Drew so much", and when they surprised me with this beautiful heart they made for me. Thank you Justin and Allison for having beautiful compassionate children, not to forget Cassie, Eddie and TJ.

Our church mission statement has always meant very much to me so I'd like to conclude by reading it to all of you:

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 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.

Thank you Pastor, Sarah, Fred Coleman, David, Barbara, Terry and the choir and my entire church family for being part of my life!

Greg and Susan Elbin, April 17, 2011

(To a rap beat)

Came up to Par-Troy in Ninety-five
 Lookin' for a church where our faith could thrive
 Service began and to our surprise
 The man up front said you're Jesus in disguise.

Playin' at work, workin' at play
 Followin' Christ to resurrection day
 Drinkin' coffee, laughin' so hard
 Oops, time to buy that Shoprite card

We soon found out their game was on
 These cats dug Matthew Mark Luke and John
 Methodist spirit is kind and gentle
 God is love, yeah that's fundamental

So many ways to serve the Lord
 At PUMC, we're never bored
 Whether it's roast beef, whether it's spaghetti
 Come to the table, for all things are ready!

Helpin' you up when you're feelin' down
 It's even OK to be a clown
 Gifts of grace and open mind'ness
 Lead to random acts of kindness

Room in the circle for all to pray
 White and black, straight and gay
 Amazing grace, we never left
 Still thank God for Pastor Jeff

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.

~ Weekday Night at the Movies ~



- WHAT:** A small gathering of friends & members of our church to watch two short, enjoyable “mini-movies.” This will be followed by a discussion, led by David Turner, about how the films relate to our faith and our everyday lives.
- WHO:** For Adults & Teens (age 14 and older)
- WHEN:** Tuesdays, Wednesdays, or Thursdays, 7-9 pm, during July and August.
- WHERE:** In the homes of members of our congregation.
- WHY:** Enjoy an evening out that offers: FUN, FELLOWSHIP, time for thoughtful conversation with FRIENDS—and a great excuse for not cleaning the garage.

Weekday Night at the Movies: Q & A

- **I might like to host a Movie Night in my home. How would that work?** If you are able to welcome 3 or more guests into your home, you may sign up to be a Movie Night host. Hosts will decide how many guests they can accommodate and which night(s) they would like to schedule the event in their homes. All you would be asked to provide is a TV, DVD player, and enough space for your guests.
- **I'd like to attend a Movie Night. How does that work?** We will also have signup sheets for guests. Sign up for a night that is convenient for you. Write down the phone number of your host(s) so you can call them to ask directions—or for any other reason.
- **How many different Movie Nights will be offered during the summer?** David Turner has a selection of 12 mini-movies. This is enough for 6 Movie Nights, each one featuring 2 short films, different from all the others. Come to as many as you like!
- **How will I know when and where Movie Nights will be held—and who the hosts will be?** These and other details about the summer Movie Night schedule will be publicized as they become available.
- **As a host, would I be expected to serve refreshments?** No. But if you wish to, that's entirely up to you.
- **As a host, would I be expected to provide a separate play space and supervision for the younger children of parents who might want to bring their kids with them?** No. All hosts will decide whether or not they are able to provide a separate play space and supervision for younger children. If you wish to do so, you certainly may.
- **It sounds like fun but I have children at home. May I bring them with me?** That depends. Talk with some of the Movie Night hosts ahead of time and ask them. If they are able to accommodate your children, then bring them with you. Please keep in mind that the movies and discussion are intended for youth (age 14 and older) and adults.
- **Who do I talk to if I have questions or want to host a Movie Night?** Please speak to David Turner at church or contact him at: (973) 759-7850 or psalter103@aol.com.



Mother's Day is right around the corner, and the UMW will be sponsoring their annual special Mother's Day insert to appear in the bulletin on May 9th. The UMW offers you the opportunity to honor or memorialize your mother, grandmother, aunt, etc. by placing her name on a special bulletin insert. \$1.00 donation per name is requested. **Please use the form below and give it, together with your donation, to Doris Bradley by May 1st**

.....
In HONOR of:

Placed by:

In Memory of:

Placed by:

Total Names _____

Total Amount \$ _____



May 2011

United Methodist Church of Parsippany

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday																																																																																				
1 10:30 AM Worship	2	3 7:00 AM Men's Prayer Breakfast	4 10:30 AM Healing Prayer 7:00 PM UMW	5 7:00 PM Bell Choir 7:45 PM Adult Choir	6 1:00 PM Men's Reading Group	7																																																																																				
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