

# HILLTOPPER

United Methodist Church of Parsippany

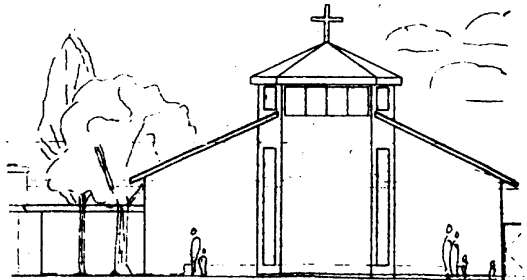
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*Sunday Worship Celebration: 10:30 a.m.*

*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"*



**JANUARY, 2012**



**A sermon preached on December 4th, 2011, the second Sunday in Advent, based upon Mark 1:1 – 8, entitled, "A Call from the Wilderness."**

Like most of you, we lost our power back when the unexpected ice storm struck in late October. In our case, it was only for less than 24 hours which began in the late afternoon. As evening fell, we countered the absence of electrical lights by lighting candles, but there was nothing to be done about the fact that the TV, the internet, and the phones wouldn't work.

At first there was that sinking feeling of, "Oh no! How will we live without our usual distractions?!" But before long the candle light became enchanting, and the silence of the house went from being distressing to being peaceful. There was a stillness that I wouldn't have chosen for myself, but once I embraced it, I discovered it was, in fact a blessing, something I had needed but couldn't choose for myself.

The next day when the electricity came back on we were glad to be able to get back to the TV, internet, and phone. But it made me wonder, how often do I really know what it is I need?

*"A voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'"*

John the Baptist appears in the wilderness. In light of what I experienced the night the power went out, the setting of the wilderness makes sense to me. The wilderness is that place where, when we enter into it, we give up our mastery of our environment – we give up our distractions. We aren't in control. That's why traditionally the wilderness is a place to listen for the voice of God.

But experiences of wilderness are very uncommon these days. One author coined the expression, "Nature Deficit Disorder," to speak of the experience most kids these days miss out on as they grow up: extended time out in nature, away from all the human technologies by which we attempt to distract ourselves and master our environment.



Out in the wilderness, and looking back at the life that we human beings come to consider normal, John recognized that we've all lost our way. We're all headed in the wrong direction. We need to repent, he says. To repent is to turn around. To go from the direction we've chosen for ourselves, and instead go in God's direction. To walk with God.

It turns out that the path we've been choosing is a crooked path. It goes this way and that, pulled in a thousand different directions. Like racing through the channels with our TV remote, or endlessly surfing websites on the internet. So many things calling to us, but nothing truly satisfying us.

Father Albert is one of the monks that leads St. Benedict's, the school my son Bobby attends. He tells a story of being out on the streets of Newark and seeing a mother coming out of a Rite Aid, pulling her little two year old boy by the hand, who is pulling for all he is worth in the opposite direction, trying to go back into the store where he saw a Pokemon toy he wants to have. The mother has said no. He explodes into a loud, outraged wail.

Writes Father Albert, *"He's making the awful discovery each of us makes at his age: you can't always get everything you want. Lately, the humiliations have started piling up... You could say that he is discovering the basic but devastating truth that he is not God."*

The boy is in the terrible twos. He won't give up the battle without a terrible fight. His mother begins to lose her patience. "Douglas Michael, you just cut that out! You keep carrying on, I'm gonna give you something to cry about!" Father Albert describes his reaction to this scene:

*"I'm not exactly sure why, but something about this scene is making me very uneasy. As soon as the light changes I dart onto the crosswalk leaving little Douglas still tugging at his mother's hand. By the time I reach the other curb I think I've figured out why this little drama has unnerved me: as I watch Douglas doing his little power plays back there, I got the eerie feeling that I was watching myself in a mirror!*

*"The self-centered two year old inside me has been pushing me around pretty persistently lately, trying to run the show. It's been hard for me to say no to a piece of candy or dessert—a little voice inside keeps screaming, "But I want it!" Just this morning my own version of little Douglas abruptly cut off a discussion with a brother instead of hearing him out, because my Godlike control of the situation seemed threatened." (Street Wisdom: Connecting with God in Everyday Life, by Farther Albert Holtz.)*

So we all go through the terrible twos, and hopefully we come out on the far side civilized to some degree, but that doesn't mean that we have resolved the battle about wanting to be God. To some degree, we just get more crafty in our self-absorption. And in times of stress and the mindlessness it induces, our self-centeredness takes over. The world provides no shortage of objects to stroke our desires, and we wander a crooked path in pursuits of all these desires, but none of these objects of our desire are what we most deeply desire.

But we've wandered so far a field that we've lost touch with our deepest desire.

So contrary to the pull of the secular Christmas rush, Advent invites us to seek out our own wilderness experiences. This may not mean literally going out into the woods, but it can mean consciously turning away from the many things with which we habitually distract ourselves.

To enter into the stillness where we hear the voice of God, who knows what we truly need, calling us to follow.

The serenity prayer is helpful.

*God grant me the serenity to accept that which I cannot change...*

When the pokemon toys of the world aren't there for us, let us pray for the serenity to accept that we can, in fact, live without them, and to move on, without the burden of resentment and frustration that our inner two year feels obliged to carry.

*The courage to change that which I can...*

When the voice of God gives us something to do that seems unpleasant, but is in fact something we need to have done, to avoid the tantrum, and the demand that someone else do it for us, and get to work doing it ourselves.

*And the wisdom to know the difference.*

In the wilderness, in the stillness, the difference becomes evident.

In the kindness of Jesus,

Pastor Jeff



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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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United Methodist  
Women

Looking back...the Christmas Gift game, announcing 2012 officers, delicious refreshments and great decorations made for a wonderful evening, enjoyed by all... And next, time for some fun on....

**No January Meeting**  
**Due to uncertain weather**

Jan 1 – New Year’s Day

Jan 16 – Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Get well wishes to those of you who are ill, and  
HAPPY BIRTHDAY to those of you celebrating this month with Ruth Freerks this month.

God Bless,  
Doris Bradley

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

For the third Christmas in a row, our church produced an original Christmas play by Pastor Jeff. This year's piece, "Cul de Sac" was produced over three nights: December 9 – 11. The following is an article that appeared in the Parsippany Life about the production.

### **'Cul de sac' drives home the message of Christmas season**

By ELizabeth Martin

While it's no secret that the stress-filled holiday season can turn you into a Scrooge before you know it, figuring out what to do about the problem is less clear. Even religious leaders aren't immune from December Grinch-itis, as Pastor Jeff Edwards of United Methodist Church of Parsippany admits.



"I find Christmas to be somewhat burdensome," said Edwards, though he has come up with a way to bring some jolly back to the holidays.

For the past three Christmases, Edwards has written, directed and produced plays about the real meaning of Christmas in hopes of alleviating his and his congregation's holiday woes and fostering community. This year's play titled "Cul de Sac," follows the lives of neighbors on a cul de sac for several months.

"Suburban living has been thought of as the American dream, and yet oftentimes it is characterized by a profound sense of isolation, in which people feel little sense of connection to, or responsibility for, their neighbors," explained Edwards.

"I got the idea of setting a play in a suburban cul de sac, imagining what it might take for a heavy dose of isolation and hostility to be overcome in that neighborhood in the course of one season, culminating in Christmas Eve."

In past seasons, Edwards has written a play and then cast it, but this year he decided to reverse that process, putting out a call for volunteers to act before he wrote his play. And, "to my delight and distress," 34 adults, teenagers and children answered the call.

Many of the people had no experience acting before, but for Edwards, that's part of the joy of what he does.

"I find great pleasure in taking people with little experience of theater and giving them an opportunity to experience creating something beautiful in a communal context that is greater than the sum of our parts," said Edwards.

The experience of being in a play in and of itself fosters the sense of community that Edwards is trying to show is possible in "Cul de Sac." All of the participants in the play have a relationship with the congregation, but by the end they can feel a stronger bond to their fellow parishioners.

Edwards is also hopeful that his audience gets a sense of community spirit from the productions. In past years, he has been approached afterward by those who saw it saying that they really "get the meaning of Christmas" after seeing his plays.

Though Edwards' admits he could just recycle plays from previous years, creating something new each year is part of keeping with the spirit of what he is trying to accomplish.

"The [theatrical] process becomes a lesson in faith, because the chaos that prevails as [we] inch towards opening night can easily tempt us to throw up our arms and give up all hope," said Edwards. "In my experience, the Holy Spirit ultimately has its way, and we lose ourselves into a shared expression to the love of God that is hidden in everything we do."





Join us at Temple Beth Am on Friday night, January 13, for an evening celebrating Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The service begins at 7:30 p.m. and will feature local choirs, including ours. This night has always been very meaningful for those of us who have attended. If you have any questions, speak to Barb Bradley.

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On behalf of my mother, Grace S. Agre and our family, I would like to thank members of our congregation for rushing to my mother's side during the house fire that occurred on November 10, 2011 in our family homestead. I am especially grateful to Bobby Edwards, who immediately following the extinguishing of the fire, entered our home to collect personal belongings to ensure my mother's comfort. We appreciate the continued prayers during the laborious process of insurance adjustor appraisals, recurring building inspections, mitigation and restoration. We are forever grateful for the faith and hope we share at United Methodist Church of Parsippany. Peace and blessings to all in the new year,

Yours sincerely, Lynn and The Agre Family

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**Something New:** **Our church calendar is now available on the church's website.** If you are planning an event and need to book the church or a particular room, please check the calendar on the website, then call Gail Booth or Wes Sitgreaves to confirm availability and reserve your time. (Fred Coleman will also have a hard copy of the calendar here at the church that you can also check for date availability.)

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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 day time men's discussion group** with Pastor Jeff is meeting on **Fridays at 1 p.m.** at the church. We listen to short audio tapes and discuss what we hear during the 90 minute sessions. Any men available in the day time are invited to join us.

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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, February 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.

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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.

## Time for God

People Seeking Connection with One Another and with God  
Through Fellowship and Prayer



*This month meetings will be held on January 10, 17, 24, & 31.*

*No meeting is planned for January 3.*

**TIME FOR GOD** are “come as you are” gatherings, led by David Turner, offering an opportunity for us to open ourselves to God’s presence in our midst. There will be time for quiet reflection, discussion, and the sharing of prayer concerns. Everyone is welcome to participate—or to simply sit back and listen.

Meetings will be held on **Tuesday evenings** in the chapel, **from 7:00 to 8:30.**

**How do I sign up?** Not necessary. If you want to come, just show up.

**May I bring a friend?** Absolutely. Everyone is welcome.

**Got questions?** Please contact David by phone (973) 759-7850 or email [psalter103@aol.com](mailto:psalter103@aol.com).

**PLEASE NOTE: All cell phones, radios, etc.**  
will need to be turned off during our time together

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**FLOWERS FOR THE ALTAR ON SPECIAL OCCASIONS** – If you want to remember or honor a special occasion in your life by putting flowers on the altar, please get in touch with Connie Keller. Flower arrangements are currently being purchased at Shop Rite for varying costs depending on what you want. You are certainly welcome at any time to place flowers on the altar. If you want an announcement in the bulletin, please call Connie Keller or send her an email with the dedication. Contact information:

Connie's cell: 973-568-5404: home: 973-887-4384: email: [connie@mhmlender.com](mailto:connie@mhmlender.com)

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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](http://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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The **UMW** is selling **Food Gift Cards to benefit the General Budget** for ShopRite as an *ongoing Fund Raiser*. The church will receive 5% of all purchases (you buy \$100 of gift cards, the church gets \$5). Gift Cards 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 ShopRite Gift Cards. Checks should be made payable to The United Methodist Women.

Thank you, The UMW



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

**Bell Choir** – rehearses Thursdays at 7:00 p.m. If you are interested in joining us, please speak to Barb Bradley or Aimee Letsch - 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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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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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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**SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR DECEMBER**

Jan. 1<sup>st</sup>  
Isaiah 61:10-62  
Galatians 4:4-7  
Luke 2:22-40

Jan 8<sup>th</sup>  
Genesis 1:1-5  
Acts 19:1-7  
Mark 1:4-11

Jan. 15<sup>th</sup>  
1 Samuel 3:1-10  
1 Corinth 6:12-20  
John 1:43-51

Jan. 22<sup>nd</sup>  
Jonah 3:1-5,10  
1 Corinth 7:29-31  
Mark 1:14-20

Jan. 29<sup>th</sup>  
Deuteronomy 18:15-20  
1 Corinth 8:1-13  
Mark 1:21-28



1<sup>st</sup> Harold Gantert  
3<sup>rd</sup> Barbara Bush  
5<sup>th</sup> Barbara Anderson  
5<sup>th</sup> Gene Lange  
11<sup>th</sup> Jim Sakelakos  
13<sup>th</sup> Olivia Evans  
16<sup>th</sup> Marissa Cintineo  
19<sup>th</sup> Dominick Pesquera  
20<sup>th</sup> Pauline Rich

20<sup>th</sup> Jim Cochrane  
22<sup>nd</sup> Heather Weiss  
23<sup>rd</sup> Ruth Freerks  
25<sup>th</sup> Jennifer Collins  
25<sup>th</sup> Chris Salink  
25<sup>th</sup> Kathryn Montecuollo  
27<sup>th</sup> Darryl Sokolowski  
29<sup>th</sup> Michael Weiss  
30<sup>th</sup> Chris Payne

**JANUARY ANNIVERSARIES**

12<sup>th</sup> Fred & Grace Schlosshauer  
25<sup>th</sup> Ruth & Charles Faulend



**A very Happy New Year to all of you from all of the dancing angels of PUMC!!**



# January 2012

## United Methodist Church of Parsippany

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday																																																																																																		
<b>1</b> Worship 10:30AM	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b> 7:15 AM Men's Breakfast	<b>4</b> 10:30 AM Healing Prayer	<b>5</b> 7:00 PM Bell Choir  7:45 PM Adult Choir	<b>6</b> 1:00 PM Men's Discussion Group	<b>7</b>																																																																																																		
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