



Merry Christmas!



We pause in the midst of our many preparations to share the hope you will experience all the blessings of this holy season, as the love of the new-born Christ grows in our hearts and world.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!



<i>Craig Stapert</i>	<i>Yris Saenz</i>	JIM BELL
<i>Jane Johnson</i>	<i>Darlene Lane</i>	<i>Verne Arens</i>
<i>Kenyon Erickson</i>	<i>Sylvia Koch</i>	NANCY HUDDLESTON
	<i>Ginna Minasian Dalton</i>	

Gifts for Homeless Women

The Dinner program for Homeless Women in Washington is asking once again for gifts of warm outerwear. It has long been our tradition to donate hats, gloves, scarves, and socks for those in need. Please leave them in the box in the narthex. Thank you!

Christmas Offering

The Christmas Offering will be received at both evening services December 24. Half will benefit the Christmas Fund (for retired UCC clergy in need) and half will be split between Food for Others and the Dinner Program for Homeless Women. Make checks out to Little River UCC with memo Christmas Offering.

Healing Service

The quarterly Healing Service for those who are seeking healing of body, mind, or spirit will take place at 4:00 **Sunday, January 4** in the sanctuary. This informal service includes the ancient rite of the laying on of hands as well as communion.

Christmastime Events

December 21 *Fourth Sunday of Advent*

Worship with Carols (9:30 & 11:00) Joyous worship to anticipate the Nativity!

December 24 (Wednesday) *Christmas Eve*

Family Pageant (5:00) A warm-hearted look at the Bible's different Christmas stories, "Matt and Lucy's Version Births" features the talents of Little River's most enthusiastic actors and singers!

Candlelight Worship (9:00) A mood of joyful wonder on Christmas Eve with lessons, carols, and reflection.

December 28 *First Sunday after Christmas*

Worship at 11:00 only: Joyous worship for all ages rings in the new year. Care will be available for infants and toddlers; church school will not meet.

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Next deadline: Thu. January 1, 4:30

Schedule: lruc.org/lrnsched.htm

Retirements Postponed

Dear Friends,

I have surprising and exciting news about our pastoral leadership team. In a meeting December 7 with the Pastoral Relations Committee of the Board of Deacons, Verne and Ginna agreed to extend their time at Little River for two years beyond their earlier announced resignation dates. This decision has mutual, obvious advantages for the congregation and for our pastors. We will continue to enjoy Verne's and Ginna's ministries as we confront the economic recession that has already brought difficulties to several of our members and possibly to our congregation. And we will postpone for two years the need to invest time, energy, and finances in a pastoral search process. (However, our newly commissioned planning committee will proceed to examine the long-term direction of our ministries.) For Verne, postponement of his retirement will have financial advantages, allowing time for an anticipated recovery of the UCC pension fund. For Ginna, the extension of her call will give her time to explore new dimensions of her ministry as well as providing financial advantages.

Based on this agreement, I intend to ask the Church Council at its next meeting to rescind its acceptance of Verne's and Ginna's resignation requests. I expect they will join me in a joyful response to the opportunity to keep our beloved leaders with us for an additional two years.

Barbara Lowrey
Moderator

Meet Our Newest Members

On November 16, Little River welcomed three friends into full membership. If you haven't met them yet, read our introductions in our printed or e-mail editions.

Christmas Prayers for Bethlehem

Since 2000 a new Christmas tradition has been taking shape: sending peace messages to people in Bethlehem. Individuals and communities organizations worldwide e-mail Advent and Christmas wishes to the beleaguered Christians in Bethlehem and prayers for justice and peace to for Israelis and Palestinians there.

Messages will handed out as personal greetings, school materials, prayers in worship, and outreach from the new peace house of the Arab Educational Institute.

People greatly appreciate receiving these personal and spiritual gestures of Christmas comfort and hope.

Please send yours **before December 25** to the Arab Educational Institute (*aei [at] p-ol [dot] com*). You can visit www.aeicenter.org/ChristmasMessages2008-09/ to read prayers that AEI has already received.

Have a Multi Multi Christmas!

This is the time of year when celebrations converge for the three Abrahamic religions—along with their cultures, traditions, and family dynamics. We have Christmas, the Christian celebration of the birth of Jesus; Hanukkah, the Jewish Festival of Lights commemorating the rededication of the Second Temple; and the Islamic feast Eid-al-Adha, honoring Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son at God's command.

These celebrations are filled with traditions coming from many cultures, families, and individuals. From each we have the specific days, the stories, the gifts, the foods, the ceremonies, the gatherings, the music, the decorations, the customs, the superstitions, and the memories. Some of these we inherit, some we adopt, and some we let go.

Such diversity. Such opportunity.

Dorothy Ogilvy-Lee
Little River Multiracial Multicultural Initiative

New Planning Committee

A committee to discern our direction over the coming years was commissioned December 14. Members are Mark Prell (chair), Dee Cardiff, Anne Holmes, Nathanael Key, Robyn Lingo, Claire Peterson, and Steve Wheelock.

Meet International Students

Imagine how you would feel if you lived in your present home without a car. That is the situation for many NVCC international students. Please consider inviting Welcome Center students to your home for a meal or a holiday celebration or to join you for a weekend outing. Whether you plan to go hiking or skiing, to Pohick Bay or Bull Run holiday lights, to the Lorton Workhouse Arts Center or the Frederick Douglass house, to Annapolis or Fredericksburg, if you have empty seats, students would appreciate the ride and your guidance around the unfamiliar place. At the same time, you would meet these delightful students.

Please take a form from the narthex, briefly write down your activity and contact information, and slip it into the Welcome Center box in the office. Or call the church office by any Thursday noon and students will see your form that afternoon.

Lois Wyatt

Flower Donations for 2009

The 2009 flower donation chart is posted in the social hall. You are invited to sign up to give flowers on any unclaimed Sunday. Details are posted by the chart.



Quarterly Calendar Deadline

The deadline for the Education and Enrichment Opportunities calendar for March-May 2009 is **Thursday, January 2**. Ongoing events listed in the annual brochure, such as the Men's Lunch Group, will automatically be included, as will specific dates already listed there, such as the Holy Week worship schedule.

Chairs and officers: Please forward this to board or committee members as needed.

End-of-Year Business

Financial contributions for which you wish to receive tax credit for 2008 must be placed in the offering plates or church office by **Sunday, December 28**.

Bills and vouchers for 2008 disbursements must be given to comptroller Mark Holm before the year's end.

Annual reports should reach the church office, preferably electronically, by **Sunday, December 28**. Church groups use annual reports to list all who served in 2008, summarize the year's business for the record, suggest future directions, give financial reports on any separate accounts or funds, and make the congregation aware of the group and its activities.

Currents is on a tri-weekly schedule until late January. The next deadline is **Thursday, January 1** for publication January 6. *This will be the last issue to appear before the Annual Meeting.* The normal schedule resumes with the January 22 deadline.

Film Explores Detainee Abuse

As part of its ongoing effort to deepen our understanding of the moral challenges relating to counterterrorism, the Christian Social Action Committee invites you to join us on **Sunday, January 11** at 11:00 for a screening of "Taxi to the Dark Side." This film, which won the Academy Award for Best Documentary in 2007, begins and ends with the story of a man named Dilawar, a taxi driver who was mistakenly identified as a terrorist and killed during a torture session conducted by US troops in Afghanistan. The film soberly and methodically explores the origins of this and other cases of abuse at US detention facilities. It includes remarkably candid interviews with military personnel.

Our hope is that understanding these matters can contribute to identifying preventive measures.

Young Adults: "Saving Jesus"

You are invited Sundays **January 11, 18, 25** and **February 8, 15, and 22** at 2:00-4:00 to explore questions raised by "Saving Jesus," a part of the *Living the Questions* series. Video and written material from leading voices in Christian thought encourages thoughtful group discussion, which Chris Weakley will

lead at his home. Please sign up in the atrium by **Tuesday, December 30**.

Women's Groups

The **Women's Book Group** will be reading three very different books in the coming months.

For March they have chosen *The Story of Edgar Sawtelle* by David Wroblewski (HarperCollins, 2008). This story of a young mute boy growing up in rural Wisconsin is hard to put down. For generations the family has raised a special breed of dogs. What happens when an uncle reappears and Edgar's father dies creates a riveting family saga.

In May the group turns to Kathleen Norris's latest, *Acedia and Me: A Marriage, Monks, and a Writer's Life* (Penguin, 2008). She "demystifies the forgotten but utterly relevant concept of *acedia*, a term that often has been understood as spiritual sloth, but really signifies the serious malady of being unable to care."

The Glass Castle, by Jeannette Walls (Scribner, 2006), chronicles the author's experiences growing up in a dysfunctional family as the family wandered from place to place, finally ending up in a small West Virginia mining town. Ms Walls tells how she and her siblings weathered their alcoholic father's betrayals and mother's neglect until she was able to find the resources to leave home. *The Glass Castle* is scheduled for July.

A **new Women's Covenant Group** is for women of Little River who are seeking candid, confidential, committed conversation with others in a small-group setting. The first eight to sign up by **Tuesday, January 20** will form the initial group, which will meet each Thursday at 1:00-2:30 beginning January 22. Others who have signed up will be encouraged to form additional groups. See Ginna for more information.

Reminder: Beginning in January, the afternoon **Women's Agape Group** will meet only once a month—on the fourth Tuesday. The time remains 1:30-3:00. The Agape group offers women a time drop in for sharing and discussion around topics that require no preparation.

Keeping Posted from the UCC

The United Church of Christ offers almost a dozen e-mail subscriptions to keep you informed about news and concerns of our church-wide ministries. "Keeping You e-Posted" features weekly news, resources, worship materials, and concerns. The feature for December 9 highlighted the UCC's "Spare Kids the Ads" campaign, aimed at the growing intrusion of embedded advertising in young people's entertainment. It even features satirical holiday family, friends, and legislators. (How about a manger scene with Fischer-Price convert-a-creche, and the angel Oprah hovering above?)

Visit www.ucc.org/subscribe to sign up for "Keeping You e-Posted" and other e-mail publications.



Stewardship: What We Are Doing!

In the midst of economic uncertainty, members and friends of Little River are stepping up to the plate so to speak, and making financial pledges for 2009. Thank you for reflecting on all that our faith community means to you—for understanding that Stewardship is What You Do—and committing nearly \$600,000 via 175 pledges in support of our ministries next year. Nearly half of those pledges increased over last year. What good news!

When we gathered in October to learn about the plans for 2009 that our boards and committees have proposed, the visions for ministry totaled more than \$800,000, including the estimated costs of ministerial transitions. In the coming weeks we will decide as a congregation how best to accomplish our goals.

If you have not yet made your pledge for 2009, please do so as you are able. Pledge brochures are available in the church office and in the literature racks. Or call the office to ask that a brochure be mailed to you. Return your pledge card to the church office or place it in the offering plate on Sunday.

This is an extraordinary time—in many senses. Together we will create our path forward. Thank you for coming on the journey.

Jan Curtis

Inclement Weather

Now that we've sighted our first snow, let's review how we announce weather-related cancellations:

- **By e-mail.** The easiest and most timely way to stay informed is to sign up for Alerts by sending an e-mail to [getalerts \[at\] lrucc \[dot\] org](mailto:getalerts[at]lrucc[dot]org). Watch for confirmation of your request and, of course, alerts.
- **On our web site,** lrucc.org.
- **By answering phone calls** to the church office.
- **Over WTOP radio** if it's a major church event such as worship. Listen (103.5 FM, 820 AM) or check their web site (WTOPnews.com).

Smaller church groups and committees generally have their own means of communicating a cancellation.

Charles Schafer Remembered

In the life of every congregation, there are individuals who make unique contributions that set them apart from the rest of us. Charlie Schafer was, without a doubt, one of these. For one thing, we see his wood-working skills every time we enter the sanctuary: in the cross, communion table, pulpit, lectern, offering-plate tables, baptismal font, and the memorial organ-donor plaque and ushers' shelf at the rear. In the narthex stand the literature table (whose real purpose is to house the organ blower), the frame for the mural, and the memorial book stand by the sanctuary door. Tripod candlesticks used for weddings and many other projects he worked on are scattered throughout our building.

Charlie was the bass-baritone soloist and backbone of the intrepid ensemble that was our one and only choir when the church was founded—an association that ended only recently, when eyesight problems forced him to give up the singing he so dearly loved. He also found time to be a deacon and a trustee.

Blessed with a prodigious memory and a matching store of knowledge which he enjoyed sharing, he was admired by the many who engaged him in conversation. To Bible class he brought a lifetime of study of the Bible and related subjects. Both of his parents were Congregational ministers, and his deep interest in religious matters never ceased. Yet he didn't wear his faith on his sleeve, but made it the guiding light of his life.

Be it judging a fine wine, taking hundreds of interesting pictures, cooking a delicious meal, baking tasty bread for our communion, making cookies for our student Welcome Center, working as a Smithsonian docent or a twenty-year volunteer at Fairfax Hospital (he was likely to be your first visitor if you were a patient), he did it willingly and effectively.

Wonderful raconteur, member of a matchless punning duo with Mark Holm when the Thursday night sandwich project was in operation, and quiet performer of many kindly acts, he left a lasting imprint on all who really knew him. And at a time when Christian beliefs are subject to constant skepticism or blind dogmatism, it helps to consider that human beings like Charlie, with seemingly inexhaustible knowledge and abilities, can embrace the concepts of God and Jesus and live accordingly and abundantly, knowing what the doubters know, yet never abandoning their faith.

Thanks, Charlie.

Tom Hill





Links: Events, People, News

- **Calendar:** Find out about church events at www.lrucc.org by clicking on Calendar, or pick up a printed copy of *Currents*.
- **Passages:** Pick up a printed copy of *Currents*, or subscribe to the e-mail edition, to share the latest celebrations and concerns in our church family—as well as the latest address, phone, and e-mail updates and changes in our church organizations.
- **UCC news:** Read the latest news from the United Church of Christ and learn about our denomination at www.ucc.org.
- **Currents by e-mail:** See the *Currents* web page (www.lrucc.org, click on *Currents*) or write webteam@lrucc.org.

LITTLE RIVER UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

*welcoming diversity, independent
thought, & faithful action*

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Submissions: Include your name and phone or e-mail address (not for publication). Please submit electronically if possible (MS Word, Word Perfect, or plain text; e-mail to currents@lrucc.org), or on paper. Submit notices 3 weeks ahead of events if possible.