

The Season of Lent

It seems strange that just when the Christmas season is behind us we have to begin to look forward to Lent, but there is a good reason for it. Lent is always a month-and-a-half-long period before Easter, which is tied to the lunar calendar. Consequently Lent can begin anytime from February 4 to March 10. This year Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent, will be on February 6, just two days shy of the earliest possible date.

Our word *Lent* is from the Anglo-Saxon word for spring, *lencten*. It is the time of the year when the days slowly grow longer, shifting from gloomy winter to bright spring. It is a forty-day period because Jesus was tempted in the wilderness for forty days, but the forty days of Lent are spread over forty-six days because Sundays, traditionally the time to celebrate the resurrection of the Lord, are not included.

Lent is traditionally a time of fasting and self-restraint; and it is also a time for introspection and penitence. It is the time when Christians try to take a hard look at their lives and ask fundamental questions. Is my relationship with the Lord all that it should be? Is my devotional and prayer life vibrant and growing, or has it become routine or even moribund? Am I sharing my wealth as well as the Good News with others? Are there things in my life that need to change – sins, relationships, unhealthy habits? Am I a thoughtful, loving, patient person with others, or am I easily frustrated and irritated by those around me?

In the French tradition, Lent is preceded by Mardi Gras (“Fat Tuesday”) or Carnival (“farewell to meat”), a time to celebrate before the somber season preceding Easter. In the British tradition we have Shrove Tuesday, which is also popularly known as Pancake Day or Pancake Tuesday because in the Middle

Ages the cook of the house would try to use up all the eggs, milk, sugar and fat, which were not allowed during lent, by making pancakes – in other nations it might be crêpes or even doughnuts. Hence Shrove Tuesday is a mini celebration before Lent, but it also has its serious side. Shrove is the past tense of *to shrive*, which means to confess one’s sins and seek pardon. It is a time in which we might strive to clear the decks of our lives so that during Lent we can focus on setting things right.

Because Lent is a time for serious self-examination, it is also the time of the year when new converts are usually baptized and all of us attempt to renew our Christian lives and commitment to Christ. However you choose to observe Lent this year, may God bless and guide you during this time so that you may draw closer to Him.

Yours in Christ,
Michael Parker

EASTER POEM

Whatever your cross, whatever your pain,
There will always be sunshine, after the rain...

Perhaps you may stumble, perhaps even fall;
But God's always ready, to answer your call...

He knows every heartache, sees every tear,
A word from His lips, can calm every fear...

Your sorrows may linger, throughout the
night,
But suddenly vanish, dawn's early light...

The Savior is waiting, somewhere above,
To give you His grace, and send you His love...

Anonymous



Christmas Pageant '07

The children and youth of our Sunday school presented a Christmas pageant, "Remembering that Night which Changed the World," on Sunday December 16, 2007. Dressed in costumes and representing key characters of the Bible, the youth and older children talked about their "remembrances" of that unique and extraordinary day of the Messiah's birth.

The participants were Alex Busch as the prophet Isaiah, Thomas Clyde as the prophet Micah, Will Voorhies as the priest Zachariah, Mary Busch as Mary, Robby Munnelly as Joseph, Conor Yates-Gregory as the innkeeper, Dieudonne Takwih as a shepherd, and Caitlin Farrell as an astrologer. During these talks, the younger children, dressed as Mary, Joseph, angels, shepherds, and wise men, pantomimed the nativity scenes and gathered at the manger. The pageant closed with the children singing carols. It was a pageant with a message that reminded each one of us the supreme significance of our Savior's birth.

Later, the children handed out colorful foam boxes, decorated with the manger scene cut-outs, to the church families. Thus the children and youth experienced Christmas joy first-hand by sharing the story of Christmas and giving out gifts to others.

Nikki Hillary



An Update from the Pastor Nominating Committee

The UPB Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC) continues to receive resumes from new prospective pastor candidates while we view videos and conduct phone interviews with other candidates that have been in the evaluation process longer. One candidate was invited to our area in November for a face-to-face interview and a chance for the committee to observe the candidate preach at a neutral pulpit. We are continuing to dialogue with this candidate, answering and asking questions as we mutually try to discern what is best for everyone.

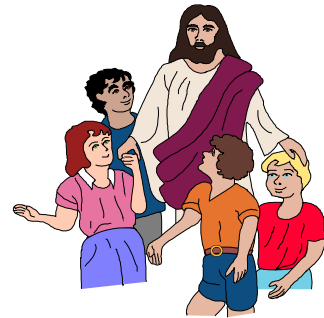
Once the committee decides that a candidate is the right person to be our permanent pastor, a call will be extended, and, if the candidate accepts the call, the candidate must get final clearance from the Presbytery Committee on Ministry (COM). This process could take a month or two depending on the timing of the call and meeting schedule of the COM. As a "Union" Church (Presbyterian/United Church of Christ), we are following the local practice in which one of our denominations takes the lead in the selection process on an alternating basis as pastor vacancies occur in the area. The National Capital Presbytery has the lead for our pastor search and selection, so we are following the Presbyterian process, but the PNC and the Presbytery are working closely with the UCC Central Atlantic Conference, and all viable candidates from both denominations are being fully considered.

After the COM approval is received, the selected pastor can be introduced to the congregation, preach a sermon and be presented for a final approving vote at a congregational meeting. Prior to the vote at this meeting, all members will receive a report prepared by the PNC describing the search process, the number and kinds of resumes reviewed, a biographical sketch of the prospective pastor and the terms of the call. This report will be sent to all members along with the official notice of the congregational meeting. Members of the committee will be available to answer all questions about the process and the candidate.

The PNC was pleased to hear that our Parish Board has extended Michael Parker's contract as our Interim Pastor through June 2008. We are hopeful that by then we will have a candidate who has completed the process and been approved by the congregation, but, if not, our Presbytery will supply a replacement interim pastor when Michael moves on to his next position.

Please keep the PNC in your prayers as we search for the right candidate to lead the UPB as pastor into our next chapter of Christian mission and service.

Gene Barbato and Diane Eades
PNC Co-chairs



Adult Education

The spring schedule will begin on January 20 with an eight week class on Christian Faith and the Environment coordinated by Doug Snyder; next will be a two-week historical review of the United Parish led by Patty Keys; Michael Parker will follow with a five-week class on the church during the Enlightenment; Mike Mehl's class on Jeremiah will complete our schedule. Please join us.

Doug Snyder

SOTI Report

by Josi Hillary

I would like to inform the congregation why I went to Lombok, Indonesia in November 2007, what I accomplished there, and the results for the whole year made possible by the donations received by the Sarojini Orphanage Trust Inc. (SOTI), a non-profit organization formed in March 2006.

SOTI's goal is to empower poor high school graduates by providing them with university educations in South India, where I was born, and in a small island in Indonesia called Lombok. Before Nikki and I were married and immigrated to India, I worked in Indonesia for two years.

Our sponsorship of four students in India is monitored by our friends who are deeply involved in helping poor students. One friend recently retired as the Principal of Women's Christian College in South India. The other is active in Indian Missionary Society activities. With their voluntary assistance, we are able to ensure the donations are used for the designated purposes.

The first student sponsored by SOTI in India graduated with a BS nursing degree in November 2007 and started working as a nurse in December in a rural hospital in South India.

SOTI's work in Indonesia requires more energy and effort compared to India because of higher levels of poverty and a backward educational system. We have so far sponsored four students there. Two of these will become teachers in 2008 and will work in the schools in their villages. A third started her five-year nursing degree program in 2007 and is doing well.

Most of the three million residents of Lombok island are poor, living on less than \$2 a day. According to the latest reports of the World Health Organization:

Neonatal mortality rate (per 1,000 live births) in Indonesia is 17 (4 in the USA). Maternal mortality rate (per 100,000 live births) is 230 (14). Nurses (density per 1,000 population) is 0.57 (9.37). Laboratory health workers (density per 1,000 population) is 0.04 (2.28). Other health workers (density per 1,000 population) is 0.04 (2.28).

During my November visit, I spent most of my energy on working with friends of SOTI to recruit two high school graduates to become nurses. One friend is from the UK and a long-time resident, working as a head teacher in an international school in Lombok, and the other is a young Australian teacher with six years of experience in Indonesia working in the same school. A third friend of SOTI, a retired naval engineer from California who settled in Lombok, has volunteered to be a channel for disbursing funds through his account in a US bank.

Indonesia is a cash-based society and a wire transfer will cost \$45 at this end and another \$20 at the receiving end. So far, each student supported in Indonesia costs approximately \$2,500 per year, with funds being disbursed at different times in a year.

With their help, a few days before I returned to USA, two students (Ruani and Amroeni in the photo below), who will graduate from high school in April 2008, were recruited for enrollment for the five-year nursing degree course. They will enroll in August 2008.



One lives with her widowed mother and the other's father, a day laborer, broke a limb in a fall while plucking coconuts and is now disabled.

On a personal note, I had two meetings with them and, when I asked the Australian teacher who speaks Indonesian why they did not say much, I learned that they were so overwhelmed that people living far away would care to make a commitment of support for five years that they were speechless. She went on to explain that the poor in Indonesia don't even dream about university education because it is not within their reach and it is pointless.

I want to say again how grateful our family is for your annual support. Even before SOTI was formed, you donated funds to help a children's home in South India. That home provided food and shelter for Florence to complete high school. Now, with your support through SOTI, Florence (shown below) is a nurse in India.

Florence lived with her widowed mother, who eked out a living by working as a cook in a school. Florence attended a nursing school in Bangalore, India where she came across quite a few students with Christian backgrounds. She started a prayer group that grew in size during the four years she was there, and she proudly told us in a recent telephone conversation that several Hindu students had joined her group.



I want to conclude with the words of a proverb in our mother tongue, Tamil: "One knows the

value of shade only when he suffers in a hot sun."

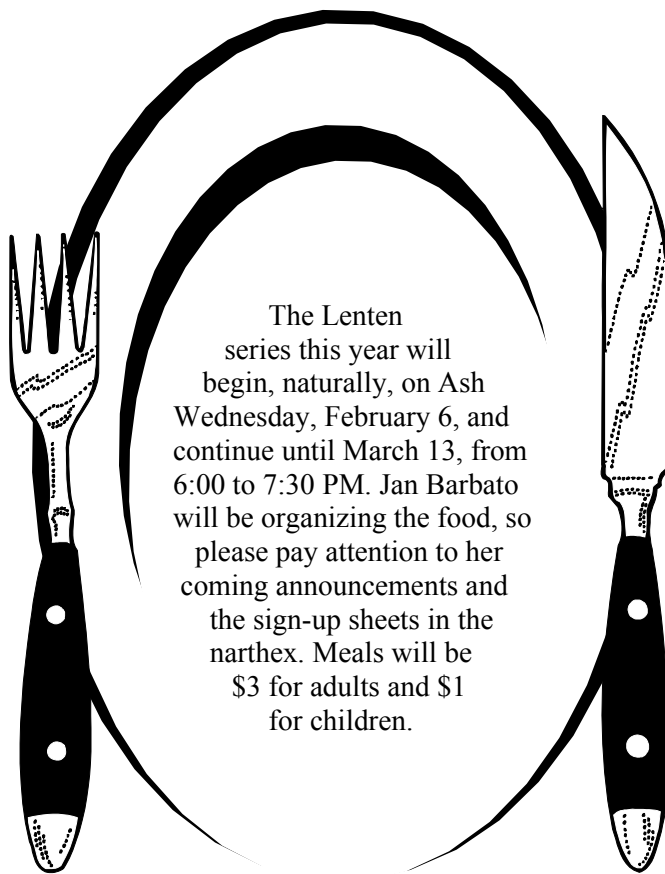
We have immense blessings in the USA. When we share some of these with the poor in other countries, you should see their faces light up when they convey their gratitude.

Men's Fellowship Group

You're invited to join the Men's Fellowship group and enjoy breakfast at Bob Evans Restaurant (located on 301 in Bowie) any first and third Tuesday of the month. We meet for fellowship at 7:45 a.m. to discuss world events. See you there anytime.

Herb Sheppard

The Wednesday Evening Lenten Series



The Lenten series this year will begin, naturally, on Ash Wednesday, February 6, and continue until March 13, from 6:00 to 7:30 PM. Jan Barbato will be organizing the food, so please pay attention to her coming announcements and the sign-up sheets in the narthex. Meals will be \$3 for adults and \$1 for children.