

UNITED CHURCHES' NEWS

Published Monthly by the

United Churches of Lycoming County

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Rev. Gwen N. Bernstine, Executive Director and Editor

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Deadline to submit articles - First of each month.*

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WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

At least once a year – traditionally from January 18-25 – many Christians take time to become more aware of the great diversity of ways of adoring God. Hearts are touched and people realize that their neighbors ways are not so strange.

This year the theme is *“One in the apostles’ teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer”* It was chosen by Christians in Jerusalem, calling us back to the origins of the first church in Jerusalem; it is a call for inspiration and renewal, a return to the essentials of the faith; it is a call to remember the time when the church was still one.

In our community there are a number of opportunities to get to celebrate this Week of Prayer...

1/18-25 - *Special Devotions* for each day will be available on our Telephone Devotion Line, reachable 24 hours a day at 322-5762.

1/20 - *Ecumenical Lunch* program at Noon at Pine Street UM Church. Revs. Danesta Whaley and Gwen Bernstine, President and Exec. Dir. of United Churches will help us know each other better.

1/21 - *Service of Prayer at Holy Cross Orthodox Church*, 1725 Holy Cross Lane (Next to St. Ann’s Catholic Church on Northway Rd. And Sheridan St.) At 7:00 p.m. All are invited to attend. A fellowship time follows.

29th ANNUAL ECUMENICAL LENTEN SERVICE

7:30 P.M., Sunday, March 13, 2011

Speaker: Bishop Robert L. Driesen
Bishop, Upper Susquehanna Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church of America

Sunday, March 13th will be a wonderful opportunity for each of us to witness to the love of our Lord Jesus Christ, who calls us to renew our faith and unite as people of God, with one another. Mark the date on your calendar and plan to join us for this ecumenical celebration. Watch for details in our February newsletter.

Visit us at the following web site - www:uclc.org

CAMPUS MINISTRY *

Sharon Comini, Coordinator,

Contact at: 419-5376 or ucm@uclc.org

The semester is beginning and our Monday evening Faith Talks center around our spring break Mission Trip to Washington D.C. March 6-9. We'll be staying with the Star of Bethlehem Church of God in Christ and having the opportunity to experience first hand the many needs of the poor in that area. We'll work at *Brother's Keeper*, *So Others Might Eat*, and *Martha's Table*.

Our next fund raiser for the trip is a soup sale at Sam's Club in Muncy on Sunday, February 13 from 12-4 p.m. If you are there that day please stop by our table and stock up on some homemade soup.

As we start this new year, please keep the students in your prayers. We thank you for your past support and look forward to working with you again this semester.

2011 UNITED CHURCHES BOARD MEMBERS

- President Rev. Danesta Whaley
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WEDNESDAY ECUMENICAL LUNCHESES*

Join us from 12 to 1 p.m. and you are always assured of a tasty \$6 lunch, warm, ecumenical fellowship and a thoughtful program designed to enrich your life mentally, physically, spiritually and socially. The parking is free in the Pine Street lot north of the church from 11 to 1:30 p.m. No reservations are necessary. (Call Gwen at 419-1464 to check for snow cancellation.)

JANUARY:

- 12- **Ms. Peggy Reichenbach**, Executive Director of Big Brother, Big Sisters of the Central Susquehanna Valley, *"Partnering with Children and Youth Here in Lycoming County"*
- 19- **Revs. Danesta Whaley and Gwen Bernstine**, President and Executive Director of United Churches of Lycoming Cty., *"Getting To Know Each Other Better During this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity"*
- 26- **Rev. Tom Reeder, Rector**, Christ Episcopal Church, Williamsport, *"Making a Difference in Our Community - One Church - One Meal - at a Time."*


FEBRUARY:

- 2- **Rev. Larry Waltz**, President, Blooming Grove Historical Society, "Our Lycoming County Historical Societies and Museums Resource and Encourage Each Other"
- 9- **Rev. Glenn McCreary**, Pastor, Resurrection Catholic Church *"St. Valentine - The Reason Behind the Holiday"*
- 16- **Mr. Hank Mitchell**, Executive Director, The Center, *"Hope, Help and Healing"*
- 23- **Mr. Robert and Rev. Gwen Bernstine**, Presidential Hobbyists , *"Our Amazing Presidents"*.

This is a ministry that everyone in our congregations and community is welcome to participate in. Make plans to join us and you're welcome to bring a friend!

DIAL - A - DEVOTION *

Have you called yet?
The number is 322-5762.
It's available 24 hours a day.



Devotions are three minutes or less, change weekdays and once on the weekend, and are designed to lift your spirits and help you to have "A Closer Walk with God." The devotionalists this fall include:

1/10-16 Rev. Kathleen Ehksam 1/17-25 Rev. Gwen Bernstine
1/26-30 Mrs. Sandy Grier 1/31-2/6 Revs. Jim & Kathy Behrens
2/7-13 Ms. Amber Shuman

Listen today and tell others about this ministry!

SHEPHERD OF THE STREETS*

J. Morris Smith, Th. D.,
Contact at: 322-6538

THE POOR IN THE DAYS OF JESUS

The emphasis on the nativity during the Christmas celebration each year causes us to refocus on the poor. This seems to be one of the facets of the incarnation that shoots its brilliance into our hearts, to give us an epiphany that we should never forget.

In the Greco-Roman world of the first century the poor were treated with little regard. It is clear from the Law, the Psalms, the Proverbs, and the Prophets that the poor of Israel's culture were regarded as having special divine protection and the care for them a place in true obedience. But, by the time of the captivity, this had been lost. Indeed, the disregard for the care of the poor was cited by the prophets as a major reason for the fall and enslavement of both Israel and Judah.

In the days of Jesus there were rabbinical writings that claimed poverty as a curse because of sin (a return to the days of Job), and certain sayings exhibited a haughtiness and contempt for the poor. (After the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., rabbinical writings cite the piety of the poor.) To give alms to the poor was a way of showing one's own righteousness, rather than a morally good thing to do (Mt. 6:1-4). If one had no means whatsoever, he could always sell himself and his family into slavery.

It is to be noted that Matthew fashions this saying as the first of our Lord's teaching: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for there is the kingdom of heaven." Using the poor (*ptochos*) as illustration of the beatified, whose spirit has been crushed by the socio-economic environment, and the rejection of upper class, Jesus establishes from the beginning a superiority of the poor whose need and oppression is a sign for anyone to enter the Kingdom. The beatitudes that follow: *mourning*, the *meek* shall inherit the earth, *hunger and thirst* for righteousness, the need for *mercy*, the *heart* that is dependent on God, the seeker of *peace*, the *persecuted* for the sake of righteousness...all allude to the example of the poor (Mt. 5:3-10). Jesus is not saying that only the poor will enter the kingdom, but that even the poor will enter because it is their spirit by which entrance is made.

The passage Jesus used in His hometown when He read from the scroll of Isaiah (61:1), *The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; to bring glad tidings to the lowly, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and release to prisoners*, claims the equivalence of the Spirit of God and the spirit of the poor. Until one accepts his poverty of spirit, crushed by sin, he cannot presume to enter the kingdom.

Luke is much more emphatic: "Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours. Blessed are you who are *hungry, weeping, hated, excluded, insulted, denounced as evil.*" All these descriptions are the religious, social, and economic conditions of the poor. In the psyche of the first century, afflictions, diseases, accidents, mental illness were all considered as the result of sin (remember the man born blind: "you were born totally in sin"). Though these may be the effects of sin, allowing demonic possession, Jesus proved that such was misguided theology. Repeatedly, it is emphasized that Jesus went about preaching the good news, healing the sick, and casting out demons, all of which are tied together as the Gospel of the Kingdom, the Way of Truth and Life.

Holy poverty is shown to be best illustrated by the poor. Christianity is the only movement in the Roman world that has its origins and its growth in the lower classes. Christianity conquered society not from overt power, but from covert endowment. The example and the teachings of Jesus established a Church where the poor are the proclamation of the Gospel, where the richest and the poorest must have the same poverty of spirit, the same meekness, the same passion, the same attitude to find the peace proclaimed by the angels to the poor shepherds: *Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom His favor rests.*

Many thanks for the outpouring of monetary and material gifts during this Christmas season. We continue to need: hygiene items, baby needs, bedding and blankets, money for prescription assistance, work clothing and shoes, glasses, medical transportation, utility help, documentation, and medical transportation, money for general administrative needs so our office can be open to help those in need five days a week instead of only four, and most of all your prayers on our behalf.

Souper Bowl Sunday is one way to help people in need. It is an effort to glorify God and care for "the least of these" by each worshiper giving a can of food or the cost of a can of food (\$1) on Super Bowl Sunday (February 6, 2011). Be part of a modern day miracle by getting your church on board. More information go to: www.souperbowl.org or call 1-800-358-7687.

POVERTY - A FAITH-BASED RESPONSE**from our Christian Social Concerns Committee*

On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. (Matt 2:11) The Epiphany holds rich significance for Christians. May we have a deeper “ah-ha” moment regarding what we will do in charity and in justice for those experiencing hunger and poverty in our communities and the world. What talents and other gifts will we bring?

Lycoming County Unemployment Rate Increased - The preliminary rate of unemployment for Lycoming County (Williamsport Metropolitan Statistical Area) for October 2010 was 8.3%. This figure was slightly higher than September's rate.

The Faces of Hunger - In 2005, the latest year for which data are available, 1.4 billion people in **developing countries** lived in extreme poverty—on less than \$1.25 a day—down from 1.9 billion in 1981. **In the United States**, 14.6 percent of households struggle to put food on the table. Nearly one in four children is at risk of hunger. **In Lycoming County** in 2008, the latest year for data, 13.8% were living in poverty. That figure is above the state average of 12.1%. We can **end hunger** in our time. Everyone, including government, must do their part. By making our voices heard in Congress, we make our laws more fair and compassionate to people in need.

Central PA Food Bank - Williamsport Branch: The Williamsport Branch of the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank opened in November 2002 to address hunger relief issues in north central Pennsylvania. The facility began serving member agencies from its original 6,500 square foot warehouse facility.

In December 2009, the Food Bank moved into its new 17,000 square foot warehouse on Wahoo Drive. Currently, the Williamsport Branch serves more than 100 member agencies in these north central Pennsylvania counties—Bradford, Centre, Clearfield, Clinton, Columbia, Lycoming, Montour, Northumberland, Potter, Snyder, Sullivan, Tioga, Union. If you are interested in donating to the Williamsport Branch, or volunteering, please contact the Williamsport Branch at 321-8023.

Millennium Development Goals – Time to Have an Epiphany about Malnutrition

1. **Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger** – Reducing malnutrition increases economic growth.
2. **Achieve universal primary education** – Reducing malnutrition increases child cognitive development.
3. **Promote gender equality** – Promoting better nutrition practices empowers women and reduces discrimination against young girls.

4. **Reduce child mortality** – Increasing nutrition reduces child mortality.
5. **Improve maternal health** – Improving maternal nutrition reduces maternal and child mortality.
6. **Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases** – Reducing widespread diseases improves maternal and child health.
7. **Ensure environmental stability** – Caring for the environment enhances overall health.
8. **Global partnership for development** – Addressing hunger and malnutrition requires a global effort and benefits all people.

Source: Our Common Interest: Ending Hunger and Malnutrition, Bread for the World 2011 Hunger Report.

UNITED CHURCHES FOOD PANTRY **Gail Burkhardt, Coordinator 322-1657*

Our Food Pantry provides a three day supply of food to many in need in our community. This December we helped 174 households, including 209 adults, 118 children, and 72 elderly, totaling 399 people.

We hope you all had a wonderful, safe and blessed holiday season. It's too early yet to tell us where we'll be in terms of people served, but we don't see any real bright news on the horizon in terms of the economy, so I'm thinking we'll see about the same or maybe more households needing our assistance during the year of 2011.

Having said that, it's such a wonderful blessing to have the support that you have shown the Food Pantry in the last few years. As our numbers have increased you have been there helping us to help the folks of Lycoming County. It's so satisfying to be able to tell the frantic person on the end of the phone to “come on in”, or to give a three day supply of food to a family that just moved to the area, or to assist someone who feels that they have no hope when they lose a job. You make that possible! So from all of us at the Pantry, **thank you** for all that you do to keep us in a position to help those families and individuals who come to us. They may not know it at the time, but everyone who comes for help is watched over by angels and you are the angels!

The items we currently need are..

<i>Tea Bags</i>	<i>Spaghetti Sauce</i>	<i>Chunky Soup</i>
<i>Sugar</i>	<i>Oodles of Noodles</i>	<i>Canned Fruits</i>
<i>Hot Chocolate</i>	<i>Peanut Butter</i>	<i>Snack Bars</i>
<i>Canned Veggies</i>	<i>Mac-n-cheese</i>	

Your donations are best brought Monday mornings from 9:30 - Noon. Persons needing food should call and leave their name and number on the answering machine to make an appointment to receive food on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10 - 3 and at other times by appointment.

CREATION CORNER

from our *Christian Social Concerns Committee*

Conservation Resolutions for Creation Care-Keepers

As we resolve to re-commit ourselves to the Biblical command to "keep the earth" (Genesis 2:15), our ethic of stewardship may be informed by the following quotations. As we strive to keep God's word, we also strive to keep God's work, the creation, with conservation.

This seems especially appropriate now here where a regional extractive economy based on exploiting a non-renewable fossil fuel, the Marcellus Shale natural gas, begins another year, and as newly-elected state and federal legislators promise a more conservative approach.

- Nothing is more conservative than conservation (**Russell Kirk**).
- The purpose of conservation: The greatest good to the greatest number of people for the longest time (**Gifford Pinchot**).
- Conservation is a great moral issue, for it involves the patriotic duty of insuring the safety and continuance of the nation....The conservation of natural resources is the fundamental problem (**Theodore Roosevelt**).
- Since natural resources are finite, increased consumption must inevitably lead to depletion and scarcity (**Paul Ehrlich**).
- Energy conservation is the foundation of energy independence (**Tom Allen**).
- We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.... Having to squeeze the last drop of utility out of the land has the same desperate finality as having to chop up the furniture to keep warm (**Aldo Leopold**).
- We'd find more energy in the attics of American homes (through energy conservation measures) than in all the oil buried in Alaska (**Amory Lovins**).
- If a man walks in the woods for love of them half of each day, he is in danger of being regarded as a loafer. But if he spends his days as a speculator, shearing off those woods and making the earth bald before her time, he is deemed an industrious and enterprising citizen (**Henry David Thoreau**).
- The long fight to save wild beauty represents democracy at its best. It requires citizens to practice the hardest of virtues---self-restraint (**Edwin Way Teale**).
- The future belongs to those who understand that doing more with less is compassionate, prosperous, and enduring, and thus more intelligent, even competitive (**Paul Hawken**).
- A true conservationist is a man who knows that the

world is not given by his fathers but borrowed from his children (**John James Audubon**).

- In our every deliberation, we must consider the impact of our decisions on the next seven generations (From **The Great Law of the Iroquois Confederacy**).
- God bless America. Let's save some of it (**Edward Abbey**).

From **The Book of Green Quotations**, edited by James Daley, Dover Publications, 2009.

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Leadership Conference: The Northumberland Presbytery has scheduled Rev. Dr. Charles Arn to be our special speaker at their Leadership Conference for 2011. The topic will be "Welcome to the Family" (How to assimilate Newcomers into your Church family). This one day seminar will be held at Montoursville Presbyterian Church on Saturday April 9, 2011, from 9:30-3:30 with registration and refreshments from 9:00-9:30. This workshop is open to all Clergy and Lay Leaders. Cost: \$20.00, this will include your lunch and your workbook. Invite other clergy or lay leaders in your community to participate. For additional information about the workshop or to register, contact the Northumberland Presbytery office at 368-3906 or presbynorth@comcast.net.

Girls on the Run is coming to Messiah Lutheran Church! *Girls on the Run* is a character development program for girls in grades 3-5 that incorporates running into a variety of lessons designed to prepare young girls to face the challenges of adolescence with confidence. The program provides girls with the tools they will need to make healthy choices and emphasizes self esteem and concern for the community while maintaining fitness. Messiah will offer the faith-based version of Girls on the Run. A prayer and devotional has been added to each session to help the girls connect their faith to their everyday life, and the girls will have an opportunity to make new friends with whom they can share their faith. The ten-week program will be held on Mondays and Wednesdays from 3:30 to 5:15 PM from February 7 - April 13, coached by Kathy Wither and Becky Swinehart. If you're not a runner, don't let that scare you away! You can walk, skip, whatever you like as long as you are moving, and most of all, having fun! To register or for more information, contact Kathy at 326-9171 x203 or by email at wither15@comcast.net. *Girls on the Run International* is not affiliated with any particular faith. *Friends and family members of all faiths are welcome to attend! Registration is limited to the first 15 girls who sign up, so don't delay!*

YOKEFELLOW PRISON MINISTRY*Rev. Danesta Whaley, Council Director - 326-6868***CHANGE FOR THE NEW YEAR
THE BEST IS YET TO COME!**

Just think dear friends another year has rolled in and we have the opportunity once again to implement CHANGE desiring God's very best. Change that will make help to make a difference in the lives of people for the good! At Yokefellow Prison Ministries, we are in awe of the changes that we are constantly seeing in the lives of those behind the prison walls.

This past week, a young man attended a Bible Study who had never read the Bible before. He was stepping into the unknown and didn't know what to expect as he came to the study. A few of the other inmates had taken him under their wing and were helping him find his way as he opened the Bible. He was not ashamed to admit that it was his first time he had really opened the Bible to find out about the necessary changes he desired to make in his life. This was certainly all new for him. Although it may seem to him like a long journey, he is making the transition to CHANGE. He will need all the help available as he takes the necessary steps day by day into this new way of life. As he is committed and with the help of others and the Lord Himself, that CHANGE will come!

In this new year of 2011 at Yokefellow Prison Ministries we desire to reach out to even more men and women behind the walls helping them to desire the Lord's best in their lives. Thank you to all who are helping us make a difference to see CHANGE instituted.

We need your continued prayers, volunteering and financial contributions to help us to move forward making the necessary CHANGES along our journey. One need we currently have are Life Recovery Bibles. In the past, we have been able to give some of these Bibles to Lycoming County Prison. Paperbacks can range from about \$15-25/each. These Bibles have been such a blessing to the men and women, helping them to make the necessary CHANGES in their lives. Please contact our local Yokefellow office at 326-6868 if you are able to help us with this need.

CHANGE FOR THE BETTER...THE BEST IS YET TO COME!

*United Churches is your church
e - x - t - e - n - d - e - d
in ministry!*

OPPORTUNITIES IN OUR COMMUNITY

Singers Needed: The Williamsport Civic Chorus is looking for singers for their April presentation of Bach's St. John Passion which will be held on Palm Sunday in the afternoon. All singers, high school age and older, are invited. Music will be provided and dues are reasonable. Rehearsals begin on Monday, January 10 at 7 p.m. at St. Mark's Lutheran Church, Market St., Williamsport. Please use the rear door on the Mulberry St. side. Parking is free.

Drivers Needed: Everyday there are cancer patients in our community in need of a ride to a medical facility for treatment. You can help save a life by volunteering your time as a driver. To become a volunteer driver for the American Cancer Society you must:

- Own a safe and reliable vehicle
- Have a current, valid drivers license
- Have proof of adequate automobile insurance
- Have a good driving record
- Attend a Road to Recovery volunteer training.

Contact Karen Maurer at the Am. Cancer Soc. 326-4149 x 3003 for more information about how to help someone along the road to recovery.

Polar Bear Plunge: The Williamsport Salvation Army's Polar Bear Plunge will be held Saturday, January 29 at Haywood's on the Water (formerly the Antlers). Check-in begins at 9:00 and the plunging begins at 10 a.m. The entry fee for each participant is \$25 and sponsorship forms are available. Proceeds support our local Salvation Army. To register, get a sponsor form, or receive more information, contact Craig Shoff or Jeremiah Eisley at 326-9187 pr craog_shoff@use.salvationarmy.org or jeremiah_eisley@use.salvationarmy.org.

Blanket and Coat Collection: The New Covenant Assembly of God Church in Montgomery will be collecting new and gently used coats and blankets for those in need during this cold time of year. Drop off and distribution will be at the church, 1270 Pinchtown Road on Sundays, Jan. 16, 23, 30, Feb. 6 from 11:45 - 12:30 and on Thursday, Feb. 3 from 5:30-7:30 p.m. Distribution will be Saturday, February 12 from 10-12 in the church gym. Anyone in need of a blanket or coat is invited to stop by. Blankets that are left over will be donated to the Shepherd of the Streets Ministry and coats will be donated to Sojourner Truth Ministry.