

The Parishscope

Published by Arlington Community Church

52 Arlington Ave., Kensington, 94707

510 526-9146

www.acc-ucc.org

Volume 114, May 29, 2007

Pat McLaughlin, Editor



FELICITATIONS

You've heard me speak of the problems that many of us have as members of the United Church of Christ – we know what we *don't* believe (and are often willing to share that rather vehemently!) – but we do a lousy job of describing what we *do* believe. To my mind, at least, one of the critical requirements of a worshipping community is to help us find the words for stating our faith in ways that are clear without becoming rigid – words that can open the door to right thinking without shutting out people with different traditions and languages – words that acknowledge doubt while being grounded in a life-giving faith. Other religions have creeds that, essentially, become a litmus test of faith; we don't. But we *must* believe something in common, or we run the risk of behaving more like a social club than a church.

When referring to the ways of God, I often retreat to images of nature or the language of poets, using natural beauty and metaphor to describe that which is essentially inexplicable. In the process, I may have (unwittingly) given short-shrift to more analytical approaches. And so, in this little essay, my theme is simple: theology has a lot in common with building codes.

Most of you probably know about building codes – these are the local regulations that control the design, methods and materials used in construction. Most local jurisdictions have building codes, which fall under their authority to protect the health and safety of their residents. When you build or retrofit a house, you (and your contractor or architect) must comply with standards governing the frame, plumbing, electrical, and other features of the structure.

But – as I learned in the 1970's, when I was working with county and city governments to promote

energy efficiency – there are building codes and then there are building codes. Specifically there are prescriptive codes and performance codes. *Prescriptive* codes specify exactly what is required – how many inches of fiberglass insulation in the ceiling, how many in the walls, etc. They do the same for windows, walls, wiring, wastewater systems.

Performance codes don't prescribe minimum requirements; rather, they give a benchmark that must be met. Basically, they don't care whether the owner or builder uses fiberglass insulation, plastic bags, old socks, or solar energy – provided that the building meets the acceptable standard of efficiency.

So far so good. Unfortunately, local governments like different standards the same way most people like different explanations of God. Most builders and smaller, especially rural, governments typically prefer prescriptive standards, because they offer a detailed check list. You don't need a cadre of professional engineers to decide if something will work or not, you just check off each item to make sure that you're in compliance.

But architects and innovators typically prefer performance standards because they allow more creativity and flexibility. They can think “outside of the box” and come up with an exciting new solution to an old problem. To require an alternatively powered building to also comply with prescriptive criteria for a traditional building would be wasteful, prohibitively expensive, and perhaps impossible.

Local governments (which can be sued for catastrophes resulting from unsafe standards or inadequate review) are required to develop appropriate codes and to review all permit requests. They all have the expertise to oversee building permits based on prescriptive criteria but may not be able to adequately

review more innovative buildings that fall outside the norm.

Just like our understanding of God's ways: some people want the details spelled out and a checklist provided, while others want a broad framework and individual flexibility.

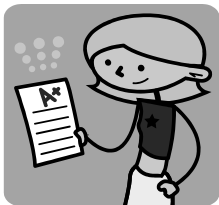
Prescriptive standards – whether they relate to places of the hearth or of the heart – are valued by those who want clear answers and guidelines. And there are times in our lives when we all want straight answers, especially during childhood and trauma. However, as we grow in faith and discernment, many of us find that we have outgrown simplistic criteria for faithful living; we want to concentrate on the big picture of God's love without falling into the spiritual quicksand of other people's sense of right and wrong. For us, it's time to move from prescriptive to performance criteria. This fact is one of many that have attracted people to the United Church of Christ, where we express more tolerance for diversity and doubt.

But that doesn't mean that we're off the hook. Local governments must develop and enforce building codes, or houses will fall down, neighbors will get into shouting matches (or worse) over unsightly monstrosities two feet from their dream house, and the building profession will be plagued by corruption and deceit. Doing nothing – living without a code of some kind – is not an acceptable response.

Thus, those of us who use performance standards to explain God must work harder than those who are satisfied with prescriptive criteria. And so, each one of us is required to come up with a statement of faith that, while not being prescriptive, is nonetheless a clear and cogent explanation for how God works in our lives and how we translate that into daily action.

This will be our challenge for the summer ... and the rest of our lives! I welcome your insights and your companionship on this most amazing and wonderful journey that we call living a life of faith.

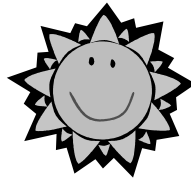
Blessings, Felicity



ECCLESIASTICAL COUNCIL OUR OWN GAIL EASTWOOD

Her council is scheduled for Saturday, June 2nd, 11:00 A.M. at First Congregational United Church of Christ in Pocatello, Idaho.

Gail carries with her our well wishes and prayers as she takes this next important step in furthering her ministerial career. Go Gail!



SUMMER PLANS

Felicity will be at the General Synod in Hartford, CT later this month, stopping briefly to see relatives before and after. She will be gone from June 18-28. Michael will be preaching on June 24, and Edie Rodman and Dudley Thompson will be available in the event of a pastoral emergency.

In July and August, we will worship again in the Social Hall, and our theme will be on "UCC Saints," looking especially at those people who have made a major difference in the life of our denomination in the last fifty years. If there is anyone that you would like to nominate, please pass your thoughts on to Felicity.

And then August brings a two-week version of the "Peace Child" summer camp.



COMING THIS FALL

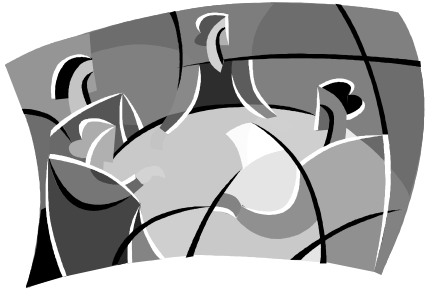
Following two very positive meetings with some of the parents of Michael's dance troupe and Shanti's choir, we have decided to embark on a more formalized, if small, effort at serving younger families. There are three major areas we are planning:

1. To continue our family service on the 2nd Sunday of each month, eventually working toward more involvement from the children.
2. Organize four public performances, e.g., Peace Child drama in the early fall; Holiday Luncheon in December; St. Patrick's or Valentine's Day effort in early spring, and a late spring concert or performance.
3. "*Spirit and the Arts*," led by Michael with help from all of us.

The sub-text of "Spirit and the Arts" is called "embracing world traditions and learning universal values." It will be a weekly program of interfaith worship, education, fun, and fellowship, running from 5:30 – 7:00. Once a month, we will have a family night to include food and a larger program.

Likely activities will include music, dance, drama, games, stories from the Bible and other sacred texts, a simplified Seder, introduction to Tai Chi, movies, discussion of interfaith traditions and universal ethical principles, spiritual practices and mystical traditions from various sources (Jewish, Christian, Sufi, Native American), and more.

If you or anyone you know is interested, please contact the church right away. One of the things we need to do very soon is decide which date of the week will work for most people.



WOMEN'S GROUP HAPPENINGS

Ruth Robinson

Thursday, June, 14:

Flag Day – come for pot luck at 6:30pm. Program will be a rousing game of jeopardy on the topic “Americana”. Lots of fun, good company. Laughter promised. Bring friends.

Thursday, July 12

Speaker: Dr. Sonia Lifshay. Dr. Lifshay is a neuropsychologist who retired from Alta Bates Herrick Medical Center. She spent the past two summers in Africa. In 2006 she worked with people in Rwanda under the auspices of the organization for Restorative Justice. Pot luck at 6:30pm. Interesting program. Friends invited.



CALLING ALL FITNESS FILLIES!

Remember our exciting evening in April with Rachel Tufunga, fitness trainer? Recall our bubbling energy to bring a fitness group to all ACC Women and our friends?

Its HERE!

We're starting this summer with a six-week session, featuring health-building activity and fun for ALL of us, guaranteed to be worth our time!

Our teacher/trainer, a colleague of Rachel, is Amanda Heikkinen. She is excited about working with us, and we have set the following introductory schedule:

Mondays, 4-5pm - June 11 – July 16/23,

In the Social Hall

Fee: \$20/session; or \$100/all six

Here's what to do.

CONSIDER this great opportunity to invest in your well-being at our own church.

INVITE some friends to come too.

CALL Edie Rodman at 524-6694 or Christy at 526-9146, to 'register'.

If you want more information, please talk with me, Edie Rodman, or Shanti Moorjani or Shirlee Bromley. Can't wait to get started!



AN OPPORTUNITY

Allan Essex

QUESTION: What Do The Smothers Brothers, Sandra Day O'Connor, Bruce Feiler, And Karen Armstrong Have In Common???

ANSWER: They, And Many Other Famous People, Are All On The Summer Program At Chautauqua!!

Allan and Gayle Essex and Charlie and Clavel Fender are going to Chautauqua in late July for a stimulating week of evening entertainment (two symphony concerts, an Albert Camus play, an evening of the opera Werther, another evening of ballet) and daylight hours filled with lectures and forums to choose from, by some of America's most engaging authors, scholars, political leaders, and global experts.

Besides superb entertainment, Chautauqua Institute has probably the leading, and broadest-minded Religion Department in the world. The Fenders and Essexes, by attending Week Six at Chautauqua, will be hearing leading Rabbis, Imams, and Christian Scholars discussing CONTEMPORARY PEACE ISSUES in afternoon roundtable forums moderated by none other than leading author, Karen Armstrong.

Bruce Feiler, the PBS film-maker of “Walking the Bible,” will also be at Chautauqua that week as will Catholic reformer Sister Joan Chittister and Rabbi Arthur Waskow discussing their latest book, “Tent of Abraham.” Pastor Felicity has asked the Fenders and Essexes to bring back to Arlington Church the best inter-faith materials they will discover there for use in ACC's fall program.

Last, but not least, Chautauqua also is THE PLACE for inspiration for traditional mainline Christians. The Sunday worship, for example, brings in America's leading preachers, followed by an afternoon concert by the New York Summer School of the Arts Choral Studies Program, followed by an evening vesper service of several thousand who usually attend the service of hymn-singing accompanied by Jared Jacobson playing the “world's largest outdoor pipe organ.”

THE BOOK TABLE NEEDS AN INFUSION!

Helen Winters



A parishioner suggested that maybe it's time to rethink the Book Table. Sales are slim (except around the holidays), and it now takes 6-8 hours of computer time to place our quarterly book order, so I seem to have lost my verve for the job. It's been fun up to now, but maybe a new buyer will not only give me a break, but also bring new vision to the Book Table.

Would you like to take over as Coordinator?

We have folks who are willing to staff the table on Sundays and special occasions (many thanks to Janet Messman and Eloise Schmidt), and Jill Bryans keeps our books and pays the taxes (yea Jill!); the Coordinator's job right now is to select, order, and price the books. Please let me know if you (or two of you) are interested, and I'll be happy to show you the ropes. Call me at home at 510.237-9705, or email me at helenkwinters@yahoo.com.

Food for thought & discussion: if no one volunteers, do you think we should we eliminate the every-Sunday Book Table and just offer it at Christmas holiday time, at least this year? (Shopping for holiday books still works for me.) My only problem with that solution is that the Book Table is the go-to place for visitors and first-timers during the social hour, so it seems counter-productive to eliminate that part of our hospitality. Please call or write me with your ideas and opinions! (We don't put up the Book Table in the summer when services are held in the Social Hall.)



From Jacci Welden, Kelly, David, Bruce and Barbara

We would like to thank all the people in the church that made Jacques' memorial service go so smoothly. Many people have commented to us what a fine tribute to Jacques it was, and how nice everyone was.

Many thanks to:

- Renate Van Vliet for handling the guest book
- Ron Yourd and Randy Laferte for ushering (and also helping in the kitchen!)
- Sara Laferte, Susan Yourd and Jill Bryans for organizing the kitchen
- Allan Gardiner for sound and pictures
- Oscar and Edie for music
- Joe Pratt and Jeanne Walpole for Jazz
- Christy for all her help with the program
- Clyde for all his work in setting up
- And Felicity for handling the service so well!!



WHAT I BELIEVE:

Pat McLaughlin

Felicity has mentioned several times, that liberal Christianity fails in that we so often state what it is we don't believe, rather than what it is we do believe. It finally struck a chord with me, and I decided to create my own affirmation of what I believe. I hope that others of you will also be moved to share "What I Believe" with us. The only rule: You may not say "I don't believe..."

A Personal Statement

I believe in an indescribable creative force, which I choose to call God. A God that can never be defined in scientific terms, but can be experienced and felt in the awesome majesty of the universe, as well as in the very personal spirit that pervades all mankind. I believe in prayer, in prayer that seeks understanding and support, prayer that expresses gratitude, prayer that expands to include my fellow man. And I know that God responds to prayer – for I have received many times during my life, the answers and support that I was seeking. I have gained strength, as well as witnessed beauty and good rise out of difficulty.

I believe that the symbol of the trinity is important – for it suggests that I embrace a God that is not simply majestic, but that participates in the true human condition, that supplies personal guidance, and that provides connection for us all in a search for kinship, truth and beauty.

I believe that the Bible truly represents "The Greatest Story Ever Told," at least within the western culture. It is the beautiful, inspired stories of man's search for God, and all the wisdom that has been gleaned along the way. It is fascinating that archeology has verified much of what we learn about the people and events in the bible. But it is not anything verifiable that I find important; it is the ideas and concepts of God, spirituality, humanity and guidance for living that the Bible provides. The biblical concept of inclusive love and forgiveness is central. I probably could not endure if I couldn't accept the fact that I am very human, that I have been granted freewill, that I often take a path of self gratification rather than spiritual direction, but that it **okay to be me!** And so it is also **okay to be you!**

And I believe that the fellowship of this church provides us with the strength, support and love that we are meant to enjoy. I am grateful that this institution has been provided for God's purposes. Now, may I have the ability to share this with others along my way.



ASILOMAR CONFERENCE

Allan Essex and Felicity participated in the annual conference in Asilomar this year. As usual, there was spirit-filled worship, exciting workshops, and business. There were no contentious issues to be debated this year, and the proposed administrative action on the Philippines and the ministry network on justice and peace for Iraq both passed, with modifications. They will become available on the website (www.nncucc.org) in the near future.

The highlight of the conference was the presentation by Rev. Kenneth Samuel, founding pastor of the 5,000-member Victory Baptist Church in Stone Mountain, GA. He led the church out of the independent Baptist denomination and into the UCC, losing over 1,500 members to leave because of the UCC's open and affirming stance. But since then, more than 2,000 new members have joined, and Victory Church is now the second-largest UCC church with over 5,500 members. In addition to being a dynamic speaker and courageous leader, Rev. Samuel has written about his "four key essential keys" to leadership: wisdom, witness, work, and worship, based on the lessons from King Solomon.

In one particularly engaging workshop, Ben Bohren, the Conference Minister of the Northern California-Nevada Conference of the Disciples of Church (our sister denomination), discussed their efforts in turning around churches that were on the brink of closure. He emphasized that the issue is church transformation, not church renewal or church revitalization, because we need to create something new, rather than just fancy-up what already exists. The image is of the caterpillar-chrysalis-butterfly, not the old building retrofit. He shared his ten key points, as follows:

1. Transformation is a **God thing**. It is spiritual work. We are not a country club or a business. Emphasis is on the spiritual nature of the church. Read Acts 2: 43-47.
2. Transformation is a **personal thing**. We say "transform *me* [not "my church"]. He used an example of 78-year-old woman in Alabama who felt called by God to go on a mission trip. She talked with four other seniors and their subsequent mission trip was the impetus in transforming the congregation.
3. It is **scriptural**. The Bible is at the heart of transformation. He encouraged people to bring their favorite passages of transformation in scripture and use these as personal images.

4. It is all about **covenant**. Change is going to be a bumpy ride. God wants to move the church to new places, so "unfasten your seat belts." Transformation teams must involve the pastor and the people, and there must be an explicit commitment. For the churches who commit to the process, it is a three-year commitment just for Phase I. True transformation takes 8-10 years.

5. It requires a **cultural shift**. The world is changing; the church has not. Consider music in the last 50 years – 78's to iPods and everything in between. Culture is passing by the church. Consider that most folks under 30 don't like organ music. Consider: is the life-giving, life-changing Word bigger than our personal antiquated preferences?

6. It is all about **process**. We are looking for progress, not perfection. Learn to trust the Holy Spirit. Ask: are we different from six months ago?

7. It is **hard work**. It's not for the lazy, faint-hearted, or lukewarm. You *will* lose some people and you don't get to decide who.

8. It's all about **attitude**. We worship a God of abundance, not scarcity. Yet, like our culture, we have been held hostage to ministers of the God of scarcity. Are we people of judgment or of grace?

9. It's all about **mission**. If we don't know what our mission is to the people in our neighborhood, transformation won't happen. The church is the only institution in the world that is not created for its members; i.e., it must "welcome the outsider" or it's not being church.

10. It's not **uniform**. One size does not fit all. Transformation will be different for every church.

In summarizing the effort, Rev. Bohren emphasized that church transformation is not about "nickels and noses." It is about the transforming of individual lives. Having said that, if we're on fire with faith, and if we're a church that's on fire with mission and vision, then our numbers will grow.

NEW MEMBERS

Kathy Gowell & Carol Latasa

6911 Manila Ave, El Cerrito, Ca 94530

Kathy Gowell Cell: 415.407.8197

Email: kathyg@gmail.com

Steve Foss

94 Rockport Ct., Richmond, CA 94804

510.620.9517

Email: Foss2024@yahoo.com

ACC Calendar - June 2007

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					1	2
3 8:45 AM Adult Study(CE) 10:00 AM Worship 6:00 PM Music & Meditation	4	5 7:00 AM Prayer Group (Kelleys)	6 5:00 PM *Yoga (SH) 7:30 PM *Folk Dancing	7 9:00 AM Senior Center (SH)	8 8:00 PM Mini Concert - BACH	9
10 8:45 AM Adult Study(CE) 10:00 AM Worship 11:30 AM Knitting Ministry	11 4:00 PM Women's Fitness 7:00 PM Deacon's Meet 7:45 PM Bell Choir Rehearsal	12 7:00 AM Prayer Group (Kelleys) 10:30 AM Duplic. Bridge 7:30 PM Church Council(FR)	13 10:30 AM Staff Meeting 5:00 PM *Yoga (SH) 7:30 PM *Folk Dancing	14 Flag Day 9:00 AM Senior Center (SH) 6:30 PM Women's Potluck & Program(SH)	15	16 "A's" Ball Game
17 Father's Day 8:45 AM Adult Study(CE) 10:00 AM Worship	18 4:00 PM Women's Fitness	19 SOUPER CENTER 7:00 AM Prayer Group (Kelleys)	20 PARISHSCOPE 5:00 PM *Yoga (SH) 7:30 PM *Folk Dancing	21 9:00 AM Senior Center (SH)	22 6:00 PM Bridge Potluck & Play(SH)	23
24 8:45 AM Adult Study(CE) 10:00 AM Worship 11:30 PM Missions	25 4:00 PM Women's Fitness	26 7:00 AM Prayer Group (Kelleys) 7:00 PM Trustees	27 10:30 AM Staff Meeting 5:00 PM *Yoga (SH) 7:30 PM *Folk Dancing	28 9:00 AM Senior Center (SH)	29	30

Arlington Community Church

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 Kensington, CA 94707

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SUNDAY, June 3	SUNDAY, June 10	SUNDAY, June 17 Fathers' Day	SUNDAY, June 24
8:45am - Adult Study 10:00am – Worship Felicity Wright preaching 6:00pm – Music & Meditation	8:45am - Adult Study 10:00am - Worship Felicity Wright preaching	8:45am - Adult Study 10:00am – Worship Felicity Wright preaching	8:45am - Adult Study 10:00am - Worship Michael Mansfeld preaching

THE NEXT DEADLINE IS JUNE 20th FOR PUBLICATION IN THE JUNE 26th ISSUE

[Send *Parishscope* email to: pat@patricia-mclaughlin.net]

SPECIAL EVENTS		
Sunday, June 3	2:00-4:00pm	Felicity's Open House
Sunday, June 3	6:00pm	Music & Meditation
Friday, June 8	8:00pm	Mini Concert – BACH
Thursday, June 14	6:30pm	Women's Potluck & Program
Tuesday, June 19	10:00am	Souper Center
Friday, June 22	6:00pm	Bridge Potluck & Play