

December, 2011

High Country United Church of Christ

No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here



Calendar of Events

December 4 & 11
December 14

Rehearsal for "The Drum" after church
Blue Christmas Service – meditative quiet service 6PM,
readings, silence, carols, candles

December 18

Two events:

(1) The Drum Presented by members of choir and
congregation during worship. The story of the Little
Drummer

(2) The Christmas party for the church at Tom and
Jennifer's

December 24
December 25
January 1

Christmas Eve Service at 6PM

No Sunday school, Worship service at usual time

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Nov. 1-11, 2011... ONE UNITED CHURCH on a shared mission for 11 powerful days to feed the hungry and confront food-related injustice. This is MISSION: 1

The soul is awakened through service
~Erica Jong



Letters to Congress on Hunger Issues – 126 letter signed and sent



Food for Hungry People

Food for Animals -- \$220 plus tons of food to take to the Humane Society



WHAT A GREAT YEAR! Thanks to everyone who made 2011 so productive and fun! Check out what took place!

- Celebrated our 9th anniversary! Thank you Shelly for your outstanding leadership and guiding spirit.
- Welcomed 13 new members.
- Established a Youth Pastor position on staff and hired Allan Johnson to work with our teens.
- Built a church garden.
- FARM Café raised \$50K, announced its location, and helped provide monthly meals to the community.
- Helped a Mountain City family with tornado clean-up after their house was destroyed.
- Assisted 4 families with housing / food during snowstorms, sickness, and when they were homeless.
- Hosted a worship event and silent auction for Karma Krew's work in Haiti.
- Provided a presence of peace and justice at the International Day of Peace, the Boone Fourth of July parade, and the Candlelight Vigil for Bullied GLBT Youth.
- With the Unitarians, provided Our Whole Lives Sexuality program for our middle high youth groups.
- Offered a multitude of recreational and educational opportunities for toddlers, preschoolers, elementary, middle high, high school, and adults on a variety of topics.
- Provided leadership for and participation in a region-wide youth work camp at Johns River Valley Camp
- Updated the church constitution and bylaws.
- Began youth-of-the-month and adult-of-the-month features in the rejuvenated church newsletter.
- Formally recognized as open and affirming by the UCC Coalition for LGBT Concerns.
- Hosted a group from our partner church in Germany, the Evangelical Church of Rhineland.
- Celebrated over 50 services, including Sundays and special events that featured creative and beautiful music and artistic contributions each and every time!
- Developed a small-group study schedule, which will begin this month.
- Began raising funds for a Bolivia youth mission trip in 2012.
- Held the Eighth Day of Creation, attended by 75 people who participated in 10 arts expression classes.
- Began Eat Less Meat group, which has become community-based and called VegBoone, providing fellowship, health, and potlucks for those seeking to live a vegetarian/vegan lifestyle.
- Conducted a food drive for local schools.
- Mission 1 resulted in \$207 to Neighbors in Need, cookies to Hospitality House, \$220 to Humane Society, 126 letters to Congress, 111 canned goods, 111 hygiene kits for disaster relief, and \$2,700 to FARM Café.
- Participated in 3 Habitat for Humanity workdays.
- Coordinated provision of meals once a week to volunteers at the Community Care Clinic.
- Thanks to Stacy and Susan for conducting a very successful stewardship campaign.
- Thanks to the nurture team for all the meals, household moves, and other support provided to those in need.
- Constructed a back porch and step.
- Held a picnic at Wildcat Lake, attended by about 50 people.
- Formed a task force to defeat the anti-gay marriage amendment proposal to the state constitution and attended Equality NC advocacy training
- Held a church workday, attended by about 40 people who cleaned inside and out.
- Innumerable opportunities to engage in civic issues thanks to notices put out by the Brannons.
- Provided comfort in sorrow, fellowship for the lonely, prayers for the sick and imprisoned, nourishment for the hungry, acceptance for the outcast, challenge to injustices, and hope to the downhearted.
- Held a Father's Day picnic on the Parkway, attended by about 60 people.
- Thanks to Susan Calamai, Chis May, Don Brannon, Lori Watts, Stacy Reagan, and Susan Sage who served as the church council officers.
- Thanks to Teri Cleavenger, Steve Figlow, Kathleen Rowell, Joan Brannon, Jennifer Moore, Elaine Gray, Sondra Edwards, and Allan Johnson for serving on the church council.



Hanging of the Greens

Special thanks to Diane and Kathleen for decorating for Advent/Christmas, to Graham for donating the tree and greenery and to all our musicians who work hard all during the year to make our worship services so beautiful! You are loved, Shelly!



Alternative Christmas Ideas by Shelly

If you want to change Christmas giving in your family, then here are a few suggestions for how you may give meaningful gifts this year!

- Global Mamas for hand-dyed batik clothing, made in Ghana www.globalmamas.com
- For jewelry, pottery & miscellaneous: www.shop.thehungersite.com
- For chocolate: www.dagobachocolate.com, For soaps and body care products: www.drbronner.com For crafts and textiles from all over Latin America: www.coloresdelpueblo.org
- For coffee, tea, sugar, cocoa, and chocolate bars: see the UCC Coffee Project info or go to www.equalexchange.com
- Give a micro-loan to help small business leaders in other countries through Kiva (www.kiva.org)
- Buy books written by our own folks:
 - Poetry and novel by Joseph Bathanti
 - Poetry by Kathryn Kirkpatrick
 - Non-fiction by L.A. Nicholson
- Give a gift of honor or in memory of someone to:
 - High Country UCC
 - Mission Bolivia (HCUCC youth)
 - F.A.R.M. Café
 - Hospitality House



- Buy and give things our members make/do/have
 - Loretta Link: pottery
 - Lynne Townsend: matted, framed photos
 - Cath Hopkins: matted, framed photos, notecards
 - Lauti Whyte: massage
 - Several youth groups: jewelry
 - Kathleen Rowell: The incredible Toy Co.
 - John Buford: The Stone Cavern
- If you make/sell handmade items, send them out to everyone via list serve at highcountryucc@googlegroups.com
 - Buy gifts only at locally owned shops, if you decide to give gifts at all
 - GIVE LOVE—remember, as the Grinch realized, Christmas does not come from a store
 - What other ideas do you have? Send them out to the congregation via the list serve! highcountryucc@googlegroups.com.

Let's help one another

High School Youth of the Month- Justin Reagan



As one might guess, “Justin” literally means “just” or “fair”. Justin’s middle name, Paul, comes from his grandfather, Paul Reagan, who also happens to be someone whom Justin particularly admires “...just because he’s done so much in his life, from fighting in the war, to helping with the first usages of nuclear energy, to designing and building his own house.” Justin was born in Crossville, TN and now he and his family (parents, Jason & Stacy Reagan, and sister, Shelby) live in the Parkway School district. Justin is currently a junior at Watauga High School. I asked Justin if he has a favorite book, movie or TV show. He responded, “Well, *Inception*’ is a pretty great movie” and particularly mentioned “the crazy dream stuff”. (“[Inception](#)” is a 2010 Christopher Nolan movie

starring Leonardo DiCaprio.) Although Justin does not have a favorite author in particular, he generally likes science fiction. As far as TV, Justin enjoys the CBS sitcom, “How I Met Your Mother”.

When he has time & opportunity to do whatever he wants, Justin often chooses to “sit around and eat whenever I have a chance.” It is apparent, however, that Justin balances his down time with running. Justin has been a member of the WHS Cross Country Team for three years, and running is one of the things about which Justin is passionate. One of his goals, in addition to finding a good fit for college, is to break five minutes in the mile. For fun, Justin likes to run, read and listen to music. Justin describes a ‘great day’ as “getting up without having to be woken up by an alarm clock, ...pretty much just not having to do anything all day... just kinda sitting around, watching TV or reading or any of that stuff. I’m pretty lazy when I get the chance.” Considering Justin’s schedule and knowing the kind of grades he makes, between school, running & work (at K-Mart), it doesn’t appear that he gets all that many chances to be lazy.

When I asked Justin what keeps him coming back to HCUCC, he talked about “the community... meeting new people and getting to know them”. Justin’s favorite thing to do with the Youth Group is “anytime we just go out to someone’s house or something.” The HCUCC Youth Group often spontaneously decides to do something together, often after church on Sunday. Justin would also like the youth group to go to another retreat, similar to the one at the Brannon farm back in May. Justin thinks it would be cool if our youth group grew in size. “It’s good that we’re small, but, at the same time, I think it might be easier to get certain things done if, maybe, we had more people... plus, it would just be more fun.” Justin also thinks it would be cool if our church “had more cookouts”.

Thanks for the interview, Justin, and congratulations for being an HCUCC Youth of the Month!



Middle School Youth of the Month- Rachel Harmon



Rachel is a Blowing Rock 8th grader and plays wing for the 8th grade girls basketball team. She was actually born in Avery County but has attended Blowing Rock School since 2nd grade. Rachel will turn 15 in January and she has one brother, Garrett, who is 9. You'll most often see Rachel & Garrett at church with their "Nanny", Conley Stegall. Rachel's middle name is "Elizabeth", after Conley and Conley's grandmother & so on. Rachel did not know the meaning of her name, but I looked it up and, from Hebrew origin, "Rachel" means "little lamb" or "ewe". From an Old Testament perspective, Rachel was said to be "lovely in form and beautiful". "Elizabeth", also from the Hebrew, can be translated as "God's promise". Rachel's favorite TV show is the reality series, "Cake Boss". She likes that show mostly just because "they make cool cakes." When Rachel has time and opportunity to do whatever she wants to do, she plays basketball. Rachel started playing basketball in

the 2nd grade when a friend encouraged her to do so and has been playing ever since. In addition to the Blowing Rock school team, she has played Parks & Rec and travel ball with "Watauga Storm." Rachel is passionate about sports, in general, and basketball and soccer in particular. Rachel describes a "great day" as one with "not a lot of homework and just having a good day with friends and teachers." Rachel went on to talk about how important her friends are to her and also her goals for continuing with basketball in high school. Rachel is "ready for high school" and is looking forward to meeting new people. I asked Rachel who she admires and what it is she admires about them and her answer revealed that she values perseverance and a competitive spirit. "I admire LeBron James" and then, laughing, adds, "That's a little weird," and then goes on to say, "because he's a good basketball player and he never gives up." Then, Rachel goes on, "I also admire my mom because we're very competitive." Rachel's mom, Ashley, was also a soccer player. The thing that keeps Rachel coming back to HCUCC is "the people" because "they're fun and they're always happy." One of her favorite things to do with the HCUCC Youth Group is "going out and helping others." In terms of one thing she'd like for our church to do, Rachel said, "If we all went on a big mission trip." Thanks for the interview, Rachel, and congratulations for being a Youth of the Month!





HCUCC Advocates with ENC Church members, Cath, Melanie, Chris and Joan attended the Equality North Carolina (ENC) Conference on November 12th. The conference was dense with information much of it applicable to a variety of initiatives. The attendees from HCUCC attended a variety of break out sessions and were able to gather important and actionable information. During the next several months, this newsletter will highlight key elements from the conference as a way to inform and act on the information provided.

This month's topic: Using Social Media to Promote Our Cause

Social media has become full of *"noise and clutter."*

To make the most of it:

1. Make sure posts are consistently relevant.
2. Keep posts to no more than two sentences of no more than 14 words.
3. Add your own opinion to "shares," telling why you think it's important.
4. Use words that will attract and stand out to your audience.
5. Moderate your posts if people's comments take them off the subject.
6. Get as many groups as possible to "like" your page

Find out where your audience is:

[Facebook](#) has become about photos

[Twitter](#) is good to announce upcoming events

[LinkedIn](#) is good for businesses and non- profits

[Share](#) allows presentations to be shared

[Flickr](#) is for visual effect

[MeetUp](#) is becoming popular for events and discussion

[Blogspot](#) promoted by WordPress

[Readit](#), [StumbleUpon](#), [Mashable](#). [Bing](#). [Constant Contact](#), [iContact](#)

Websites:

Partner with other sites to link information.

Have a blog on your site and update it regularly. Word of mouth is still number **one** way to spread information. Personal email is **two**.

People want to be asked in person/by phone

Some people don't want to hear about politics: If you want them to vote simply remind them: When, where, time, how

AND,

the words "it's important to me", go a long way!





Is it true? Is it honest? Is it Kind?

By Judith Kobler

We had been in a genuine dilemma about Thanksgiving and were trying to tell a good friend, who has hosted Thanksgiving for well over 15 years, that we would not be attending this year. We were breaking with a very nice tradition but a tradition that has had us locked into one way of celebrating for too long.

What I mean by too long, is longer than is comfortable. It stopped being something we eagerly anticipated. We felt duty bound. How could we risk hurt feelings and still keep a friendship that we treasure? It is a conundrum that held us captive about five years beyond the fun stage.

Over the years we have wanted to say yes to other invitations and from time to time we have wanted to host Thanksgiving ourselves, but with a different mix of people. Sometimes we wanted to travel to Joyce's family. Sometimes we wanted to be with friends I have held close since childhood. Each year we have bowed to tradition in order to avoid the potential for hurting the feelings of very good friends.

I don't think this is a new problem and I know there are lots of people who do what they should do instead of what they really want to do. Several years ago we realized we were living up to other people's expectations but the real pleasure was diminishing with every passing year. Why is it so hard to change the script without hurting people you care about?

I try to examine what I say to people in light of: (1) Is it true? (2) Is it honest and (3) is it kind? and usually get stuck on number three. I know that honesty can hurt and sometimes saying nothing is

just as bad because it leaves us open to the question of why are we abandoning a wonderful tradition and why now, after all this time? You try to think of a positive approach and in our case we were told it felt like we were distancing ourselves from our friends and it felt rejecting. After many back and forth interactions, and the potential for ending in anger, the answer came back "because we will miss you." Somehow the diffused anger and the honesty worked. It made us feel better and cared for and I hope it helped our friends to think through their feelings and realize it was as simple as "we will miss you." In the end, I think we will miss them too but the wiggle room feels good right now. We have already made plans with them outside that Thanksgiving tradition. The old Khalil Gibran quote still holds "If you love somebody, let them go, for if they return, they were always yours. If they don't, they never were." I do have a little quibble with that last line, but maybe I am just over thinking it. What else is new?

So in the spirit of the holiday season, we are giving ourselves the gift of being flexible and being open to new experiences. Our hope is that we can do this and remain kind and honest with friends we hold dear.

I waited to add a post Thanksgiving commentary on how it all went. The new experiences were delightful and we got to meet some neighbors from the area we had not previously known. Open houses are full of surprises, spontaneous and welcoming. There was music provided by our friend Steve who sang protest songs I remembered from the 50's or 60's. The notable song was very timely for today "The Banks Are Made Of Marble." Everyone was upbeat. It was authentic neighborliness, stress free and fun. As always, I like to credit lessons learned at HCUCC so that I manage change in more positive ways.

January 8th -- "Why Do I Hate The Bible?"

On January 8, Frankie Kelly and Renee Boughman will facilitate a Sunday School discussion centered on the theme, "Why Do I Hate the Bible?" In a 6 – 8 week course Frankie and Renee hope to explore the issues often expressed in emotional rejections of biblical language. Please join the discussion as we hope to find a path to discovering how our spiritual journey can be liberated with biblical wisdom while understanding criticism as a secondary tool of learning. The "course" will take place during the scheduled Sunday School hour (9:45 to 10:45 a.m.) in the annex.

Please join us in the New Year!



*Never place a period where
God has placed a comma.
God is still speaking.
~Gracie Allen*

*No man ever believes that
the Bible means what it
says: He is always
convinced that it says what
he means.
-George Bernard Shaw*