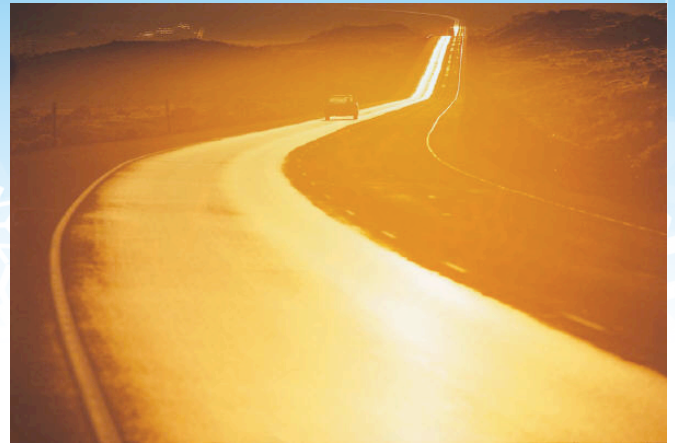


January, 2012

# High Country United Church of Christ

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



*We will open the book. Its pages are blank. We are going to put words on them ourselves. The book is called Opportunity and its first chapter is New Year's Day. ~Edith Lovejoy Pierce*

## Calendar of Events (Save these dates)

- January 15** **KIDS!** Watauga Humane Society Animal Shelter. We will leave after church and have lunch at the Pizza Hut before going. Plan to bring money or your parents to pay for your lunch. We will go to the shelter and stay until around 3:00. Remember to bring those items of food, blankets, toys, etc. for the animals. We also have a little money to donate. Bring a friend!!
- January 21** Church Council Retreat 10a.m. to 4:00p.m. at Don and Joan Brannon's home in Vilas. Outgoing and incoming council members are asked to make plans to attend. Lunch provided. Snow date is January 28<sup>th</sup>.
- January 24** 6-9 PM An Evening with Angela Davis - Shelly gives invocation . See article in newsletter.
- February 11** 6:30 P.M. F.A.R.M Café Fundraiser. Hungry Hearts Auction. High Country Press in downtown Boone. Contact Tracey Thompson [lunaseas@skybest.com](mailto:lunaseas@skybest.com) for more details.
- February 29** Applications due for course on Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction. See article in Newsletter.
- March 31** Habitat for Humanity Workday. This house in Green Valley will be nearing completion. Contact Linda Coutant [coutantla@appstate.edu](mailto:coutantla@appstate.edu)
- Mondays** Every week vegetarians meet and eat- see <http://www.meetup.com/VegBoone/>

## The Season of Epiphany – More Light



From now until the beginning of Lent in February, we celebrate the church season of Epiphany. The season begins on January 6 with the commemoration of the journey of the wise men, guided on their journey by the star that came to rest over the house where Jesus was.

The colors of the sanctuary paraments are white and gold, the decorations are stars and the spiritual search is for wisdom. It is a joyous season, this season of the wise ones, this season of appearing! It is a season of promise when we have a fresh new start to the journey, a beginning, a launch, when the creation moves from the longest, darkest nights of the winter solstice and inexorably presses toward more light and life renewed in spring.

In the 1950's an amazing spiritual community was founded on the island of Iona by a wise man named George MacLeod. He wrote these words that are the heart of Epiphany: "Follow truth wherever you find it. Even if it takes you outside your preconceived ideas of God or of life. Even if it takes you outside your own country into most insignificant alien places like Bethlehem. Be courageous. But concentrate on your search. Truth is one. All roads lead home. The seeming devious route will take you to a single star. You will find it is the morning star for you. In the end you will see the sun behind all suns. Follow the light you have been given, and pray for more light."

Each year at church in January we receive a star for the new year with wise words printed on it, words of inspiration and guidance. I think that no matter what my star words are for this year, I am going to make my mantra for 2012..."more light"...follow the light you have been given...and pray for "more light." **Happy New Year! In 2012, I expect I'll love you more! Shelly**

## Adults in Our Church Family

**James Hayes and Becca Saunders**

**(When you can match the name and the face, it makes greeting easy)**



James Hayes

James is a native of the High Country. He moved from the area after high school, but returned to stay in 1999. Some of his favorite hobbies are singing, reading, watching movies, and gardening. James enjoys following politics and he routinely participates in various peace and justice activities, including advocacy for AIDS/HIV awareness. James values our church because of the warm fellowship and all the friends he has made. He says he looks forward to being nurtured by Shelly's message on Sundays.

James has been an inspiration to many in our church as he bravely faces life-threatening illness and periodic depression. "Just getting up and going is a struggle right now," he says. "This time of year is depressing to me as the days are shorter and there is not enough sun light. This has been a particularly tough year as I have had depression swings up and down and just don't feel too well much anymore." We hold James in our hearts and thank him for how he's made a difference.

*"I get the best feeling in the world when you say hi to me, or even smile, because I know even if just for a second, I crossed your mind."*



Becca Saunders

Becca and her husband, Billy Kennedy, are new members of HCUC. They live on 100 acres in Vilas where they raise cows, goats, horses, dogs, and organic vegetables. Becca's favorite hobbies are following politics, writing, genealogy, local history, Facebook, spending time with family and friends, and hiking with Billy on their property. Becca is currently on the Advisory Council of the High Country Women's Fund and the chair of Democratic Women of Watauga County.

Becca has lived in this area full time since 1997. She and Billy have three children: Jessica, a junior at UNC-CH; Willis, a sophomore at UNC-CH; and Amber, a law librarian/lawyer in Los Angeles. Becca is a twin and the youngest of six daughters born in six years to very conservative parents. "I didn't know liberal, progressive Christians existed until I was at least 25," she says. She is glad to have found our church because, "I can be included even if I'm conflicted and full of questions. I've never belonged to a church - I'm somewhat of a contrarian or skeptic." She is pleased to be so warmly welcomed at HCUC and that "everyone is!"



**Our Church Represented at the 26<sup>th</sup> Annual MLK Commemoration, An Evening with Angela Davis**

**SAVE THE DATE:** Tuesday, January 24, 2012 - 6pm - 9pm

6pm Talk followed by 7:30pm Book Signing and Dessert Reception

Free and Open to the Public, Farthing Auditorium, ASU

Shelly has been invited to give the opening Invocation at this event!

During the 1950s and 60s, Civil Rights Movement leaders like Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. inspired millions to stand up against social injustice. The Movement's message of non-violence and civil disobedience would inspire pivotal events like the lunch counter sit-in in Greensboro NC, the bus boycott in Montgomery AL, the integration of Central High School in Little Rock AR, the freedom rides throughout the South, the march to Montgomery, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

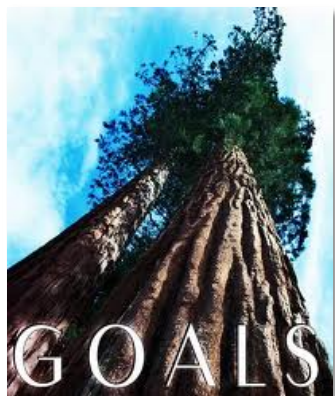
Angela Davis is the author of eight books and has lectured throughout the United States as well as in Europe, Africa, Asia, Australia, and South America. In recent years a persistent theme of her work has been the range of social problems associated with incarceration and the generalized criminalization of those communities that are most affected by poverty and racial discrimination. Through her activism and her scholarship over the last decades, Angela Davis has been deeply involved in our nation's quest for social justice. Her work as an educator – both at the university level and in the larger public sphere – has always emphasized the importance of building communities of struggle for economic, racial, and gender equality.

Co-sponsored by the Department of Government and Justice Studies, Women's Studies Program, Office of Equity Diversity and Compliance, Arts and Cultural Affairs

We'll remember Christmas – the talent, the costumes, the music and the superb group who participated in "The Drum" Living proof of the power of US.

"Through community service, I learn what it means to be a part of something bigger than myself."





## Goals for 2012

**How would you like to see the church grow and improve?** The church council will be setting goals for 2012. Your input matters! If you have ideas you'd like to share with us, please contact Chris May at 297-1496 or [cmay060994@aol.com](mailto:cmay060994@aol.com)

Farm Café is looking for a few people willing to fill dedicated volunteer positions to help coordinate volunteer workers in the restaurant. Are you retired, or do you have a little extra time this winter? Please consider serving in this capacity, which would require about 4 hours a month and could be done from your home or office. If you are interested please contact Chris May at 297-1496 or [cmay060994@aol.com](mailto:cmay060994@aol.com).

### Honoring All Those Who Made The Drum an Event to Remember

Thirty members of our church community participated in "The Drum." Many thanks to all for a most memorable performance. The members of the choir are Bobbie Willard, Elizabeth Buchanan, Melanie Childers, Jennifer Moore, Martha Johnson, Karen Caldwell, Annie Johnson, Tom Whyte, Laurie Whyte, Bernie Edwards, and Sondra Edwards. Kathleen Rowell was the director, Sondra Edwards was the assistant director, and Diane Lasley did scenery. Jennifer Moore was Music Director, and Elizabeth Buchanan was accompanist for the drama. For a complete array of photos taken by Lynne Townsend follow the link to <http://outdoorexpo.zenfolio.com/p955328893>. Password is Shelly.

Everyone has a purpose in life...a unique gift or special talent to give to others. And when we blend this unique talent with service to others, we experience the ecstasy and exultation of our own spirit, which is the ultimate goal of all goals.  
Deepak Chopra

## Why So Far?

By Chris May

As the youth plan for their mission trip to Bolivia next summer, some has asked the following very reasonable questions: "Why do they have to travel so far?" "Couldn't they be of service locally?"

Of course, they could (and certainly have) put energy into local service projects. But their trip to Bolivia presents an opportunity which working in this area cannot. A mission trip overseas will provide them with the experience of helping others while at the

same time allowing them to benefit from the unique transformation one goes through when living in another country for even a short period of time. There is perhaps no substitute for the revelations, which occur to a young person when he or she first directly perceives the differences, and (more importantly) the similarities, which exist between nations and cultures.

I was raised in a very conservative Christian family. My dear grandmother was considered to be a saint by most of us. To me, she seemed to glow as she sat at the kitchen table each evening reading the Bible. As a child, I was always struck by the earnest and joyful expression on her face when she knelt in prayer. My family taught me that our particular Protestant denomination was the single "right" one, that only Christians would find God, and that all other religions were "wrong."

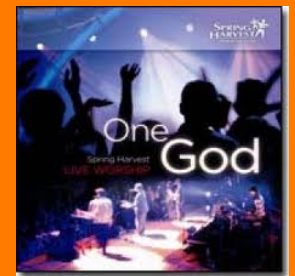
When I was 18, I joined the Navy and was sent to Japan for my first duty station. One day, because it was a tourist destination, I went to the Buddhist temple grounds in Tokyo. I walked through the Torii gateway, holding the judgment I learned from family and church that this place was false. It was a sham. It was frequented by misguided souls who mistakenly thought Buddha was real. More than that, they thought Buddha was God! I'm sure I chuckled self-righteously and observed the scene with condescension.

Then, I strolled into the main temple. Near the entrance at a small altar was an elderly Japanese woman who looked just like my grandmother. She knelt there, her eyes closed and her lips moving in silent prayer. I stopped in my tracks and stared at her. This little lady had that same glow. She had that same expression of fervent joy on her face...



that unmistakable countenance of one who is in deep communion with God. In an instant, I realized she really was praying to God... to my God. And in this country, my God went by the name of Buddha.

My perspective on life changed forever in that moment. I had seen photos in books and on TV of people in Buddhist temples. I had read about those who worship Allah or Krishna or Mother Earth. But it took this real-time, in-person experience for me to truly comprehend that people are all the same, none of us more "saved" than another. We are united by the same God... the same Oneness. On that priceless day, I gained the most accurate and genuine understanding that cultures do not divide us... cannot divide us. I traveled to many more countries during my 25 years in the military. In each one, I learned things about people, about God, and about myself that I could not have learned in America.



Now, I'm not saying that our youth will learn who God is by traveling to Bolivia. I'm quite sure most of them already have a firm grasp of that. But I am saying it is very possible that spending time in South America will affect their hearts and minds in profound ways, which could not be duplicated here. Knowing how much traveling abroad positively influenced my life, I am delighted to enthusiastically support this mission trip! I sincerely hope some of you will consider backing them, too.

## Youth of the Month- Grace Bowling



Grace Bowling is the January 2012 Youth of the Month. Grace is daughter to Chuck Bowling and Ann Kiefert and sister to Claire. Grace is an 8<sup>th</sup> grader at Two Rivers Community School. "Grace", of Latin origin, refers to "God's grace" and literally means "favor", "blessing", or "good will". Grace's middle name is Lillian, after her great grandmother on her mother's side, and, also of Latin origin, means "lily" or "flower". Grace's favorite books include "The Inheritance Cycle", a 4-book fantasy about dragons, ancient races, elves, dwarves and epic battle between good & evil by Christopher Paolini. At the time of this interview, Grace had just finished reading the fourth book in that series,

"Inheritance". "The writing is amazing and the story is just fascinating and intricate. I love the language!" Grace's favorite movie is "Better Off Dead", a 1985 American teen romantic comedy film starring John Cusack and written and directed by Savage Steve Holland. "It's hilarious. I like the mom character. She's a terrible cook, but she's cooking all the time and she makes this green goo and she puts it on those plates and then it crawls away." Grace's two favorite TV shows are "Psych" and "White Collar".

Given time & opportunity, Grace most enjoys making jewelry & crafts, reading "and sometimes just lying on the floor just relaxing." Grace is passionate about cooking (baking cookies, cakes and has just started pastries), reading and photography. Grace enjoys photographing nature using macro, close-up settings and she admires the artwork of Georgia O'Keeffe, particularly her close-up paintings of flowers. Grace describes a "great day" as "a day where I didn't have to do anything that I didn't decide that I wanted to do right at that moment." When I asked for a possible example, she described a piece of drift wood in her room that some friends had found at Watauga Lake and painted with water color pastels and sprayed with acrylic. "If I could find some more drift wood, that would be something that I would really like to do. "Regarding goals for the next couple of years, Grace is very excited about "helping some people in Bolivia" this summer and, of all the things she enjoys doing with the HCUCC Youth Group, this is the one thing she looks forward to most. She's very excited that her friend, Ruby, is going as well. When asked who she admires, Grace said, "I really admire my aunt (Beth, Ann's sister). She lives next door to me and she is just someone who is always on the run doing things for other people and she's so kind and just this amazing person. She's a fabulous cook. She's always finding something she can do to help someone else."

The things that keep Grace coming back to HCUCC are "technically, my parents. But, I really enjoy all the people there. I have a lot of friends there and it's just an amazing community to be a part of. Everyone is so supportive and willing to talk about anything. It's just amazing." Grace is an animal lover. Her family has two cats, "Red" and "Izzl", and Grace talked of how much she hopes a home is found for the dog that Jeanne Tayloe mentioned in an email a few weeks ago.

Thanks for the interview Grace! And congrats on being HCUCC Youth of the Month! ~ Alan Johnson



### HCUCC Advocates with ENC

Church members, Cath, Melanie, Chris and Joan attended the Equality North Carolina (ENC) Conference on November 12<sup>th</sup>. 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. Last month and moving forward,, this newsletter will highlight key elements from the conference as a way to inform and act on the information provided.

## This Month's Topic — Regardless of our Opinions on Same-Sex Marriage Let Us Vote Together AGAINST Restricting Constitutional Rights! By Cath Hopkins

One of the highlights for me in attending the Equality NC's conference on Nov 12th, 2011 was an appearance by the President of the NC NAACP civil rights organization, the Reverend Dr William J Barber II. In particular, I found his personal delivery of his Sept 9, 2011 "Open Letter to All North Carolinians" electrifyingly inspiring. The letter is a very strong statement urging people to **vote against** (on May 8, 2012) the NC Constitutional Amendment that would codify discrimination into the document intended to protect the rights of all people whom it also ironically defines as equal.

Rev Barber's letter acknowledges that there widely varying personal, religious, and moral beliefs on same-sex marriage, and states the NAACP is neither endorsing nor opposing the issue of same-sex marriage. The NAACP is however strongly opposing the *proposed Amendment itself*, based upon the NAACP's mission and long history of working for equality of rights of all persons. He mentions many dangers inherent in this proposal to legalize and codify discrimination, especially depriving any person of his or her inalienable constitutional rights, as would be the inevitable end result.

Consider the proposed Amendment under the lens of equal constitutional rights for all. When if ever should they be so permanently restricted for any persons? Can we forgo settling the currently divisive issue of same-sex marriage to consider equality? Existing NC law *already* bans (considers invalid) any and all same-sex marriage. But the Amendment

would restrict **ALL** valid domestic legal unions to only a man and a woman who are formally "married". Then, un-married but committed opposite-sex partnerships would be just as legally invalid as well as all forms of same-sex unions.

In addition to being permanently excluded from any legally recognized relationship status, also at risk under this amendment for both same-sex couples and opposite-sex-unmarried couples are: protection against domestic violence, child custody and visitation rights, end-of-life directives, and domestic partner benefits. Finally please let us remember, in the words of Rev Barber, "When we look at the history of our US and NC Constitutions, there has never [yet] been an amendment to narrow their protections, but only ones to expand their protections to all persons, and to remedy past injustices." It seems imprudent and shortsighted to restrict our own rights now.





## *Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction*

This eight week course offered in a group format that presents a variety of practices based on the ancient practice of mindfulness. Included in the course are meditation and movement-based practices to cultivate awareness and reduce stress.

There is a strong empirical base for the effectiveness of MBSR as a treatment for a variety of clinical disorders including anxiety, depression, eating disorders, psoriasis, and chronic pain. Mindfulness meditation positively influences aspects of health including improved immune function, and reduced blood pressure and cortisol levels.

**Group leader:** Karen Caldwell, PhD, Professor in the Department of Human Development and Psychological Counseling, Appalachian State University.

**Where?** The Marriage and Family Clinic at the Blue Cross Blue Shield Institute for Health and Human Services, 400 University Hall Drive, behind Staples off of Blowing Rock Road, in Boone, NC.

**When?** Tuesdays, Spring 2012

Orientation: March 6th 5:30-7:30pm

8 Tuesdays, March 20 - May 8, 5:30-8pm

1 Saturday, April 28th, 9am - 4pm

**How much does it cost?** \$80 for the course. Sliding fee scale available. Free to students of Appalachian State University. As a registered participant, you are invited to attend the orientation and first session of class before deciding if the MBSR program is right for you. Refunds are available if requested before the second class.

**How to enroll?** Contact Karen Caldwell at 828-262-6045 or [caldwllkl@appstate.edu](mailto:caldwllkl@appstate.edu) to request an application/information form. Your space in the class is not reserved until we have received your application form. Applications are due by February 29th, 2012.



## Great or Sudden Revelation – *Epiphany*

By Judith Kobler

I like epiphanies. There is something mystical about them and particularly at the beginning of a new year. They arrive uninvited and in a variety of ways. Sometimes a few words from someone gets the ball rolling and *presto*, a new insight gets me moving in a new direction. Sometimes it is a sense of dis-ease that stirs the pot and gives me the push I need. Sometimes “sleeping on it” or a dream is the stimulus. Sometimes when I share how I feel with a trusted friend, **we** give **me** permission to begin a new adventure. Wherever it comes from and whatever caused it, I know when it is right and know when I feel ready. I may not forge ahead right now and I may not do it forever, but still the idea of the new is tantalizing and I don’t feel disappointed if I happen to change my mind. Usually one thing leads to another and the path allows for detours. For me the best revelations come when I am most flexible, most spontaneous and most open to change. Being too comfortable is a sure sign I need a new inspiration. I deliberately avoid the word challenge because that makes it sound like punishment. But when I get too comfortable, I’m getting lazy and my brain slows down. It isn’t exactly boredom because I’m seldom bored, but too much of the same routine and I feel sluggish. The epiphany I want to share for this year

is not radical and it came to me when I realized that despite the approach of my 75<sup>th</sup> birthday (3/4 of a century), the decline I anticipated in energy, enthusiasm, interest in new opportunities has not come to pass. I confess I have had ageism as a character defect but I think it came from a fear I would lose myself and become invisible. I can’t take complete blame as I have been heavily influenced by our youth oriented culture, phrases like over 40 and over the hill and the proliferation of birthday greetings intended to be funny but which suggest it is now all downhill. In my heart I know and am grateful to have lived a long life and the consequence of longevity is old age.

Thus, therefore and as a result of this insight, I am inspired to keep the momentum going and use each day (as best I can) as a springboard, without a defined destination, but also without restriction, either self-imposed or imposed on me. I am inspired to do more, learn more, be more. NO...I won’t be exploring the Antarctic, deep sea diving, trekking to another galaxy and I won’t predict future behaviors either. It will all unfold on a “need to know” basis.

*“It is only in adventure that some people succeed in knowing themselves - in finding themselves.”*

*Andre Gide*