

A nondenominational Christian congregation



for persons of all faiths and of uncertain faith
meeting in historic St. Peter's Church
346 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011

www.chelseachurch.org

(212) 886-5463

THE CHELSEA COMMUNITY CHURCH NEWSLETTER

Spring 2007

Holy Week Services

Palm Sunday, April 1

Rev. Lisa Hill (Presbyterian) will be our Palm Sunday speaker. She is director of quality care for the West Side Federation for Senior & Supportive Housing and was previously director of the Frederic Fleming House in Chelsea. She holds an M.Div. degree from Union Theological Seminary. *Special Music*: William Safkow and Debbie Karpel, vocalists; Jerry Scott, pianist.

Thursday A **Maundy Thursday** service will be held at 6:30 p.m. at a member's home.
April 5 Please call 212-886-5463 for details.

Easter Sunday, April 8

CCC pastoral counselor, Rev. John Magisano (Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches), will be our Easter speaker. John is director of training and client services at Nonprofit Connection, a firm that provides capacity-building technical assistance to nonprofit organizations in New York City. He earned his M.Div. degree at New York Theological Seminary and has served as assistant pastor for development at the Metropolitan Community Church of Hartford. *Special Music* surprise; Jerry Scott, pianist.

Pastoral Reflections

In the Christian tradition, one does not generally wish other people a “happy” Lent. The season of Lent is characterized by the practice of fasting, of giving up some kind of worldly pleasure. Some people give up chocolate, some give up coffee. People give up all manner of things during this season. The idea is that you feel the empty space that pleasure you give up would normally occupy.

I’ve often joked that I generally give up fasting for Lent. It’s a cute way of playing with the concept, but it misses the point. The lectionary text for this coming Easter is from the prophet Isaiah, where God speaks of the Hebrews displaced from Israel and held captive in Babylon, “They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.” The operative word in this



Pastoral Reflections, cont'd.

passage is “shall.” In this passage, God’s people are still held captive in a foreign land. God is feeding them on the hope of restoring them to their home in the future. But they must experience hunger in order to be fed on this hope.

In the Tao Te Ching, the author writes that the essence of a vessel or cup is not the wall but the empty space that the water occupies. In the Jewish tradition, a place at the table is left empty for Elijah. The practice of Lenten fasting is also about leaving a place empty so that God can enter in.

As we move toward Easter, let us practice keeping a place empty so that when the Holy Spirit moves in our lives, we will have room for it.

Blessings to all,
John Magisano
Pastoral Counselor

Strategic Planning Process Progress Report

Last year the congregation participated in a survey in preparation for a strategic planning process about their participation in Chelsea Community Church, and since October we have been meeting monthly to work on a plan for the future of the church. So far, we have accomplished a great deal, including identifying core operating principles, articulating what has made Chelsea Community Church vital, and coming up with our wishes and hopes for the future.

Some of the key “operating principles” that have emerged during the life of Chelsea Community Church are:

- The principle of lay-leadership;
- The focus on the Chelsea community;
- The establishment of a safe place for doubts and questioning through the welcoming of people of “all faiths and of uncertain faith;”
- Compromise in establishing and evolving a worship style;
- The fact that individual initiative can result in key changes and contributions to the worship community (e.g. the addition of the welcome of people of uncertain faith and the addition of joys and concerns to the order of service);
- The church is a place where one can get help and support for large and small issues;
- We maintain our identity as a Christian church, even while we make clear that we are “wide open” to all beliefs or none, welcoming all people looking for a spiritual home.

Participants were asked what they valued about Chelsea Community Church.

Among the answers were:

- * The welcoming, comfortable and caring atmosphere;
- A place for personal and spiritual growth and honesty about faith experiences;
- The diversity of people and beliefs and inclusive atmosphere;
- Intellectual stimulation and challenge and the quality of the guest speakers;
- Freedom from judgment;
- The high quality of the music program, both the soloists and the “singable” hymns;
- Creative worship, simplicity and spontaneity;

Strategic Planning, cont'd.

- Church provides a safe and supportive atmosphere for individual creative and social justice work;
- The sense of walking into God's Temple;
- The evolution of the Communion service over time.

We also spent several months articulating our wishes for the future of Chelsea Community Church, finally coming up with a comprehensive list of wishes in four broad areas; outreach, organization/congregation, spiritual growth and worship. We have developed some initial goals, objectives and strategies for these areas, and will spend the next four months taking one of these areas each month and fleshing these out some more. The idea is to develop a work plan with a time line so that we can later measure what we accomplish against that work plan.

This has been an exciting process with attendance at each of these meetings ranging from 12-15 every month. Many thanks to all who have participated by contributing time, thought, wishes for the future and your love for the church.

The Worship Service

A Personal Message from Virginia Pfeiffer

The wonderful thing about Chelsea Community Church is that we are a community of people who all know each other. It's a nice feeling to come to the worship service and see all those familiar faces. However, there's a flip side to that, which is that we sometimes lose sight of the fact that we are at a worship service. It seems to me that we can make the worship service more meaningful to visitors and regulars alike if we all attempt the following:

- Not talking too boisterously when greeting people before and after the service so as not to disturb people who are sitting in meditation.
- Remaining at the back of the church if we arrive during the prayer, taking our seat only after the prayer is finished.
- Limiting announcements to things pertaining to our church or, on occasion, St. Peter's, and keeping them brief.
- Giving a brief summary of our joy or concern at the service, leaving the details for conversation at coffee hour.
- In general, keeping in mind that it is a worship service when choosing what to say and how to say it.
- For those of us not taking communion, moving our conversations over to coffee hour as soon as the summons to communion is given.
- Keeping a respectful silence during the communion service if duties require us to remain in the church at that time.

All these things will help us be a church in both senses: a fellowship of believers (and searchers) and a place for worship.

Book Club



The Book Club is currently reading Paul's letter to the Romans in the New Testament. The next meeting will be April 1st at 10:30 am in the Rectory Chapel. We will finish Romans that week, reading chapters 13-16. Following that we will read Paul's letter to the Galatians and will follow that with a book about Paul and his life to help us understand his works.

Book Group, cont'd.

It is not necessary to read the book to come to the book group. We always have wide-ranging discussions and all are welcome to join. We meet three times a month. For more information, email John Magisano at jmagi@aol.com.

News Notes

Exodus Transitional Community Film Screening

Many of our speakers come to us from Exodus Transitional Community, which helps former inmates to build stable lives after leaving prison. Portions of a new documentary on the organization, "The Hard Road Home," were filmed during services at Chelsea Community Church, and many of our congregation were interviewed on camera. We are now invited to the private screening of "The Hard Road Home" at Rye Presbyterian Church in Rye, New York, on Thursday, May 3 at 7:30 pm. The film, by award-winning director Macy Alston, is powerful and enlightening and will help all who see it to develop a better understanding of issues surrounding reentry. A crew from Greenhouse Pictures had filmed at our service Memorial Day weekend. They were following, Sharon White, who spoke for us for the first time that day, as a story element. Since this was the first time Sharon had preached, they were particularly interested in capturing the event.

A group from CCC is organizing to attend the screening. Public transportation to Rye is available, and we have an offer for a ride from the train station. Details will be available at a later time. We also hope to be able to host a New York City screening in the near future.

31st Annual Christmas Carol Service



Approximately 400 neighbors and friends attended CCC's 31st Annual Candlelight Carol Service on Sunday, December 17th at 6 p.m., followed by homemade cookies and cider, eggnog and coffee in the rectory. The twenty-three member volunteer choir, left, was rehearsed, directed and accompanied by CCC Music Director John Eggleston, and harp music was provided by Maura Valenti. Chelsea neighbor, actress and author Susie Mee (below) was this year's reader of *A Visit from St. Nicholas*. (Photos by Robert Mitchell, Jr.)



CCC "Retirement" Celebration for John Eggleston



On Sunday, January 31, 2006, CCC honored Music Director John Eggleston with a retirement party in the rectory at coffee hour after church. John had submitted his resignation effective that day, and CCC members and friends took the opportunity to present John with tangible and intangible evidence of gratitude for his many years of service and friendship. We presented John with a framed certificate of thanks and a couple special gifts for him to remember us by, and a delicious cake and remarks by those attending rounded out the festivities.

News of Friends

Alice Frazier, one of our soloists from Erie, PA, will present a cabaret show, *Broadway Without Boundaries*, at Helen's on Eighth Avenue, 7 p.m., May 9 & 17.

John Eggleston is in Room 1019, 10th floor hospice unit, Cabrini Medical Center, 227 E. 19th St. NYC 10003 and welcomes cards and visitors.

Joanne Downes's quilt "Our Colorado" won 1st prize in the pictorial quilt division in the Empire Quilters quilt show at FIT March 24-25th. (Photo, next page.)

Merle Lister and Betty Samuels perform with the drama company at Sirovitch Center in a piece called "Getting Bolder," Friday, March 30th at 2:30 p.m., at 331 East 12th Street (between 1st & 2nd Avenues). No admission charge.

Thad McGar has returned home following a brief hospitalization.

Virginia Pfeiffer just returned from a study tour of Vietnam sponsored by Christian Children's Fund. The highlight of the tour was a visit to two schools in a rural area southeast of Hanoi that are supported by CCF's affiliate ChildFund Vietnam. Virginia's sponsored children are not in Vietnam but she enjoyed meeting the children sponsored by other study tour participants as well as other children, teachers, community members, and ChildFund staff. She was very impressed by the work that is being done there.

Several friends of **Lynn Ramsey** joined her and **Rick Carrier** on March 24 to hear nephew Charles Ramsey perform at Kenny's Castaways on Bleeker Street. It was his third appearance there and featured his own compositions, including songs for a new CD. (Photo, next page.)

David Robinson has returned to the neighborhood and our CCC community following an extended period in the Midwest caring for his parents.

Peterson Toscano, our speaker on February 25, was recently interviewed on the Montel Williams television show. A Quaker with a varied background in radio production for a Christian mission and as a teacher of young offenders, Mr. Toscano spent 17 years and \$30,000 attempting to become heterosexual. Coming to accept himself fully as a gay man, he now presents in various venues as a theatrical performance activist (see www.petersontoscano.com). We hope he will return to address us again soon. (Photo, next page.)

CCC Committees

Benevolence (Kathy Reid)
Music (Joanne Downes)
Publicity (Alana Atterbury)
Worship (Hilda Regier)

Hospitality (Wayne Kammerer)
Newsletter (Kathryn Buck)
Website (Robert Hickey; Robert Mitchell, Jr.)
Strategic Planning (John Magisano,
Pastoral Counselor)

Virginia Pfeiffer puts together the roster of ushers, lay leaders, and hospitality hosts on a quarterly basis.

If you are interested in contributing in any of the areas above, please contact us.

The submissions deadline for the next newsletter is Tuesday, May 15th.

Send submissions to blsspks@aol.com or call (212) 243-0273.

Chelsea Community Church Statement of Mission

An independent, non-denominational, lay-led Christian congregation, Chelsea Community Church is a people not a building. We offer a supportive environment for people of all faiths and of uncertain faith. Our mission is:

- ❖ to enable each individual to define personal religious beliefs,
- ❖ to worship in prayer, music, reading and interpretation of Scripture with speakers from a variety of backgrounds,
- ❖ to nurture each other in spiritual growth, while respecting and accepting a diversity of beliefs,
- ❖ to share with and support each other in the daily and extraordinary events of our lives,
- ❖ to help those in need both inside and outside our congregation.

We welcome all to worship with us and become part of our extended Christian family. Services are at 11:45 a.m. each Sunday (except during August) at St. Peter's Church, 346 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011 (212) 886-5463, www.chelseachurch.org

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Joanne Downes with her prize-winning pictorial quilt "Our Colorado" at the March show at FIT.



Peter Toscano speaking at CCC on February 25th. (Photo: Bruce Colin)



Charles Ramsey & Paul Weinstein performing at Kenny's Castaways.

SCHEDULE of SPEAKERS

Our **special music program** for Sunday services is on hold until we have a permanent pianist. Special music is planned for Palm Sunday (see below) and a special surprise for Easter. Jerry Scott will play both Sundays.

Palm Sunday

April 1

Rev. Lisa Hill (Presbyterian) is director of quality care for the West Side Federation for Senior & Supportive Housing. She was previously the director of the Frederic Fleming House in Chelsea, which is operated by the same agency. She holds an M.Div. degree from Union Theological Seminary.

Special Music: William Saffkow and Debbie Karpel, vocalists; Jerry Scott, pianist.

Easter

April 8

Rev. John Magisano (Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches), Chelsea Community Church's pastoral counselor, is director of training and client services at Nonprofit Connection, a firm that provides capacity-building technical assistance to nonprofit organizations in New York City. He earned his M.Div. degree at New York Theological Seminary and has served as assistant pastor for development at the Metropolitan Community Church of Hartford.

Special Music: See note above

April 15

Teresa McGee (Episcopal) is director of the Transforming Trauma Initiative at the Garrison Institute in Garrison, N.Y. She is the author of four books, the latest being *Transforming Trauma* (Orbis, 2005). She received a Christopher Award in 2003 for *Jim's Last Summer: Lessons for Living from a Dying Priest* (Orbis, 2002). A former Maryknoll lay missionary in Peru, she earned an M.A. in theology at Loyola University in Chicago and an advanced professional diploma in spirituality and pastoral counseling at Fordham University.

April 22

Rev. Claudio Carvalhaes (Presbyterian) expects to receive his Ph.D. in theology and art from Union Theological Seminary this spring and will become associate professor of worship and preaching at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary in the fall. He was a pastor in his native Brazil where he earned a master's degree in theology and literature at a graduate center associated with Methodist University. After study with the World Council of Churches in Switzerland, he worked with immigrants in Fall River, Mass., for more than four years.

April 29

Dr. Mary Ann Cejka (Roman Catholic) is founder and director of Roll Away the Stone, a program offering formation in spirituality and nonviolent direct action to bring about gender justice in the Catholic Church. She is co-editor of *Artisans of Peace: Grassroots Peacemaking among Christian Communities*, which received the Pax Christi Award in 2004. She earned an M.Div. degree at Yale Divinity School and a Ph.D. in psychology at Purdue University.

May 6

Michael Wilcher (Protestant Baptist Society) was the inside coordinator of the Rising Hope program at Woodbourne Correctional Facility until his release in December 2006. The program, in which he also taught English and homiletics, grants certificates in ministry and human services after a year's intensive study. He earned a master of professional studies degree in the New York Theological Seminary program at Sing Sing. He volunteers with Project Earthquake at Ossining High School, working to find funding for students to continue their educations.

Schedule of Speakers, cont'd.

- May 13 **Victoria Ramsey** (United Methodist) will receive her M.Div. degree from Union Theological Seminary on May 18. She hopes to become a chaplain for emergency responders such as the police or fire fighters. Before enrolling at the seminary, she was a full-time piano teacher in Denton, TX.
Mother's Day
- May 20 **Rev. Dr. John Nuessle** (Methodist) is executive secretary for mission support services at the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church. He has pastored a number of churches in Upstate New York and was district superintendent of his denomination's North Central New York Conference. He holds M.Div. and D.Min. degrees from Drew University.
- May 27 **Rev. Sylvia Shirk Charles** (Mennonite) is pastor of Manhattan Mennonite Fellowship. Previously campus minister at Goshen College in Indiana for 10 years, she earned a master of theology degree at Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Mass.



With her breath

Breathe in God's breath child
to become big and strong
and to foster growth in others.

Make a good impression
and use your breath
to lead in positivity,
for those who follow
might look to you for direction.

Stand with conviction
knowing that one is never alone;
all she must do is use her God-given breath
to ask for assistance
and a clear path will be made
for her to nurture
and lead the way

-Jeffrey Richardson