

ONE TABLE

A PUBLICATION OF THE CAPITAL REGION ECUMENICAL ORGANIZATION

VOL. XIII No. II

FALL 2012

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A Word From Our Co-Presidents

“In the midst of all this” - The deeper invitation of Advent

The season of Advent, this space in the Christian year, invites us to anticipate the coming of Christ. Jan Richardson, in her writings (“Through the Advent Door: Entering a Contemplative Christmas”) challenges us to look differently at our intense schedules and attempts at slowing down to contemplate the wonder of this season. She says “perhaps the preparation and expectation to which Advent calls us are not to be found solely in the spaces we set aside during this season... perhaps Advent is what happens in the midst of all this. We enter the heart of the season, the invitation of these weeks, amid the life that is unfolding around us, with its wildness and wonder and upheaval and intensity.” Or another way to see it is to recognize the interruptions and distractions of daily life as unexpected places where we just might encounter God moving among us.

As a covenanted community, the Capital Region Ecumenical Organization enters the advent season wondering how we, together, anticipate Christ’s presence. How do we participate and get ready for this? Yes, we have been preparing. Preparation has included the respect of core values underpinning our relationship together – God is with us, especially as we wrestle with organizational identity and mission. This process of rethinking who we are and what we do need not be seen as a sign of weakness, but of strength. We recognize that nearly all councils, state and national; faith based service organizations, even denominational structures are in a process of visioning: rethinking their membership, structure, and focus. This is driven, in most cases, by financial crisis, but it needs to happen anyway since the ecclesial landscape has changed so dramatically in recent years. It is a sign of a healthy body when it asks “What new thing is God doing in our community and how can we be part of it”?

CREO is getting ready – consultations have led us to a clear concise mission statement; the CREO Board has taken on the persona of a working Board, birthing a strategic plan that includes structural renovation and visioning that includes conversations with ecumenical and interfaith partners, leading us to new ways of being church together.

“In the midst of this” we find ourselves standing together watching and waiting – not wringing our hands, nor sitting on them, but holding one another’s hands and lifting them up in watchfulness, anticipating God’s presence guiding us into

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(Disciples of Christ)

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United Church of Christ,
Hudson Mohawk Association

United Methodist Church,
Upper New York Conference

Prepare the Way of the Lord By Rev. Dr. Robert Loesch

Advent is a season during which we look forward to the coming of Jesus Christ into our lives. The prophet Malachi regarded sin against other people as God's highest concern. He emphasized the wickedness of those who exploit the weak and helpless declaring, "I will be swift to bear witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired workers in their wages, the widow and the orphan, against those who thrust aside the alien, and do not fear me, says the Lord of hosts." (Malachi 3:5, NRSV) John the Baptist, "the one who cries in the wilderness" declared, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." We need to listen to these messengers of God who speak out with the passion of mission and their calling. They bring us the hope, peace, love and joy of this season.

This message is appropriate for our time as we prepare for the coming of the judgment and blessing of God.

We know about the problems in our nation and world: economic, social, political, wars and threats to peace, the lack of trust and confidence in institutions and people; and we believe our faith is important in facing these problems. How do we, individually and as the church, behave in times of crisis? The Advent theme is be awake, be alert, see things as they really are, read the signs of the times, be loyal to God's teachings, and don't be misled by false idols or leaders. We believe that God rules and that true justice will be done. We know that we serve God, and the needs of God's people, every day.

Advent is also the blessing of the coming of the Lord and the fulfillment of God's promises. It is a time for transformation, aware of Christ's presence in our lives. We welcome God into our homes and our lives, into the crises of all the people and nations of the world. We awaken from sleep, restored and renewed to serve God each day. We put our values and our lives back where God first put them. This is how we, and all the world, will receive the love and mercy and blessings of God.

As Christians we are called to face the wrongs and injustices in this world, active in revealing and applying God's love and power to overcome. This is the judgment and the blessing of the Advent season.

The prophets cry out for blessing and salvation. They summon us to the greater power of transformed lives and converted hearts which will confront and overcome the evils and the wrongs in our lives and in the world. They cry out to lead us to be better persons, and guide us to a better world. May we hear the witness of Malachi and John the Baptist and all others who call us to awake and be changed by God. Amid the destruction, desolation, and delusion of our times, God works through the prophets and those around us to bring judgment and blessing in the form of Jesus the Christ.

**Come, Thou long expected Jesus
Born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us,
Let us find our rest in Thee.
Israel's Strength and Consolation,
Hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear Desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart.**



**Born Thy people to deliver,
Born a child and yet a King,
Born to reign in us forever,
Now Thy gracious kingdom bring.
By Thine own eternal Spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone;
By Thine all sufficient merit,
Raise us to Thy glorious throne.**

For Just Such a Time as This

Excerpted from a sermon preached by Rev. Phillip Grigsby at Schenectady's Emmanuel Friedens Church on the Sunday following the retirement of its pastor, Rev. Larry Phillips, following 29 years of service. Rev. Grigsby, in addition to his position with SICM, now serves as Moderator of Emmanuel Friedens Church in its transition time. The message is based on Esther, Chapter 4.

This meditation reflects a message inspired by the Rev. Jon Lord of the Carrolton UMC in New Orleans, host church for my wife and the students she takes each year to do recovery work from Hurricane Katrina. His sermon called me to look again at the book of Esther.

Esther was written to explain why the Jewish people celebrate the festival of Purim. It describes life in the Persian period when, once again, the Jewish people were ruled by others.

King Ahasuerus tires of his queen and appoints commissioners to gather all the beautiful young virgins of his kingdom to the harem. Mordecai, a Jew, had raised his cousin Esther, who the scriptures say was 'fair and beautiful.' She was taken into the King's harem, but as instructed by Mordecai, she does not reveal that she is a Jew. Esther becomes a favorite, and eventually is crowned Queen. If this were a Disney tale, the story would end here and leave us thinking all will be well.

But all is not well. The King promotes Haman, one of his officials, to a position of authority. Haman despises Mordecai because Mordecai does not bow down to the King. Haman plots to destroy all the Jews of the kingdom and then casts lots, or Pur, to decide when.

Mordecai learns all this and puts on sackcloth and ashes and goes out through the city, wailing. When Mordecai sees his cousin, the Queen, he says, "you need to talk to the King. You need to tell him you are a Jew. You need to save your people!"

Esther is not sure; she hasn't seen king without invitation you die. fears.

Mordecai tells the staff to reply to ace you will escape any more than such a time as this, relief and deliverance, but you and your father's you have come to royal dignity for



the king for a while. And if you go to the She sends her staff to tell Mordecai her

Esther: "Do not think that in the king's palace all the other Jews. For if you keep silence at deliverance will rise for the Jews from another family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps such a time as this." (Vs. 13-14).

The rest of the book relates how Esther intervenes to save her people: she was there for such a time as this.

Most of us are not called to save our people. But we are called. What are we called to do and be at such a time as this?

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Our church is in transition. We celebrate Larry and Faye's ministry. You will probably tire of me saying that 'change is inevitable...but transformation is optional'. But look at Esther. She could have gone the other way. She faced a great risk. If she barged in to see the king without an invitation it meant the end for her. Mordecai tells her that salvation will come; but it is your choice whether it comes with you.

What is **our** call 'for such a time as this?' What is **your** call 'for such a time as this?'

The late Rev. Howard Thurman was the prophet, guide and mystic of the civil rights movement. He once reflected on 'such a time as this' when he challenged each of us to discern what is most genuine in each of us. He wrote:

"There is something in every one of you that waits and listens for the sound of the genuine in yourself. Nobody like you has ever been born and no one like you will ever be born again - you are the only one.

If you cannot hear the sound of the genuine within you, you will never find whatever it is for which you are searching and if you hear it and then do not follow it, it was better that you had never been born. You are the only you that has ever lived; your idiom is the only idiom of its kind in all the existences, and if you cannot hear the sound of the genuine in you, you will all of your life spend your days on the ends of strings that somebody else pulls...

The sound of the genuine is flowing through you. Don't be deceived and so thrown off by all the noises that are part even of your dreams (and) your ambitions that you don't hear the sound of the genuine in you. Because that is the only true guide you will ever have and if you don't have that you don't have a thing. Cultivate the discipline of listening to the sound of the genuine in you."

What does that say for you, for us, at such a time as this?

Dear God, you call us for such a time as this. We know that you walk with us towards the future you call us to. Thanks be to God!

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something new. Because we affirm God in Christ is present with and working amongst us, our Advent encounter "in the midst" of all that lies ahead of us can be faced in confidence and without anxiety. The invitations of the prophet (Zeph. 3:14-20) and the apostle (Phil. 4:4-7) of hope call us to our task as those freed to respond joyfully and mindfully with our collective presence, passion and perseverance.

So just maybe, even in the midst of all this, Christ's coming will be known to all of us.

In Advent anticipation,

Rev. Debra Jameson and Rev. Mark Chaffin, Co-Presidents



Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Phil. 4: 4-7

Capital Region Ecumenical Organization

The Covenant

“Believing ourselves to be under God’s direction through the Holy Spirit, we feel the need for an ongoing regional, ecumenical structure as a vehicle of cooperation for and among those bodies accepting the sole lordship of Christ.

We are aware of the richness of our varied religious traditions, we purpose to work together for the good of all people and to strive for reconciliation among all groups and ideologies.”

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A Publication of the Capital
Region Ecumenical
Organization

FALL 2012 VOL. XIII NO. II.

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Zeph. 3:14-20

A Song of Joy

Sing aloud, O daughter Zion;
shout, O Israel!
Rejoice and exult with all your heart,
O daughter Jerusalem!
The Lord has taken away the judgements against you,
he has turned away your enemies.
The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst;
you shall fear disaster no more.
On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:
Do not fear, O Zion;
do not let your hands grow weak.
The Lord, your God, is in your midst,
a warrior who gives victory;
he will rejoice over you with gladness,
he will renew you in his love;
he will exult over you with loud singing
as on a day of festival.
I will remove disaster from you,
so that you will not bear reproach for it.
I will deal with all your oppressors
at that time.
And I will save the lame
and gather the outcast,
and I will change their shame into praise
and renown in all the earth.
At that time I will bring you home,
at the time when I gather you;
for I will make you renowned and praised
among all the peoples of the earth,
when I restore your fortunes
before your eyes, says the Lord.



One Table is published quarterly by the Capital Region Ecumenical Organization. Circulation: 600 via Constant Contact. *One Table* serves as an ecumenical voice in our region and is supported by CREO members and *One Table* readers. Only motions duly passed at Board meetings reflect the official actions of the entire Capital Region Ecumenical Organization. Opinions expressed by contributing writers are not necessarily those of CREO.

Articles, news items, and announcements are invited. Publication cannot be guaranteed, but all submissions will be reviewed for use. The Coordinator reserves the right to edit material to conform to editorial policy, style and length. Unless otherwise attributed, articles are compiled and/or written by the Coordinator.

You may request a copy at CreoBoard@gmail.com.