

PSEC *Communitas*

PENNSYLVANIA SOUTHEAST CONFERENCE + UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Burning of the Church House Mortgage

A celebration rare in the life of **Pennsylvania Southeast Conference** took

place two weeks ago. During the bi-annual Fall Meeting held at Immanuel UCC in Shillington, delegates and visitors

joined in **burning the mortgage** on the Conference Church House in Collegetown. Members of the original Building Committee, chaired by the late Dr. Earlin Lutz, joined Conference Minister Russ Mitman in the ceremony (above L-R: Merrill Yoder, Alice Antrim, Dr. Mitman, Vernon Stoop and Mary Ann Cope.) This event brought closure to the project which began more than fifteen years ago, when the Church House was built in Collegetown (then called the "Conference Center.") Resources to complete the building were borrowed from the Conference Endowment Fund. Over the years, in-



dividual and congregational gifts continued to lower indebtedness to \$60,000. The final payoff was made possible by the sale of ¾ acre of unneeded land to a neighbor, Collegetown

Professional Center. The proceeds from this sale, after closing costs, amounted to \$198,000. After repaying the \$60,000 owed to the Endowment Fund and settling approximately \$19,000 in legal and engineering fees, the remainder will be set aside as a reserve for capital improvements needed in the future. It will also enable the Conference to honor a commitment made in 1988—to build sidewalks along Second Avenue. We are sincerely grateful to all who have worked hard to help us reach this goal.

Prayer Partners

Remember in your prayers this week...
Calvary UCC
Reading, PA
Rev. Stephen Ohnsman

Job Opportunity Administrative Program Asst.

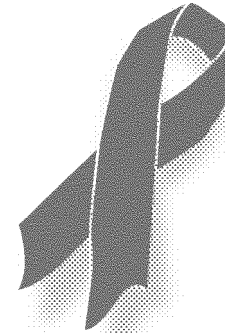
Pennsylvania Southeast Conf
Full-time Position beg Jan '03
For more information:
Contact Connie Griesemer
Conference Administrator
610.489.2056

Word & Sacrament

Tues, Dec. 10 at Church House followed by seminar
"Through Middle-Eastern Eyes"
with Charles Gosselink

Today is 'World AIDS Day'

Have you ever known anyone, personally, living with AIDS? Did you know that over 40 million people worldwide are infected by HIV—the majority of whom are young and middle-aged adults? Since its identification in the early 1980's, HIV/AIDS has resulted in more than 22 million deaths, and has left as many as 13 million children orphaned. Africa has borne the brunt of the disease, but China, India, Russia and other countries have rapidly increasing infection rates. The UCC/Disiples **Global AIDS Ministries** initiated a special disaster appeal in mid-November declaring the HIV/AIDS pandemic an international disaster of catastrophic proportions. The goal of this appeal is to contribute to worldwide efforts to stem the spread of the disease by community-based prevention, care and treatment efforts. On this World AIDS Day,



there are ways that each of us can help. We can pray for all individuals, families and communities who are struggling with HIV/AIDS; we can attend a World AIDS Day service; and, we can support this critical mission with a financial contribution. You may even consider joining the annual AIDS Walk in Philadelphia next October. To learn more visit the UCC webpage at www.ucc.org/ucnews/nov01/appeal.htm. Financial contributions may be made through your local church. Mark your checks: "Global AIDS Ministries." Your church will forward these to the Conference.

What's Happening this Week

- Tue 9:30 am Quiet Day at Mensch Mill
- Wed 2:00 pm Justice & Witness Msn Team, CH
- Thu 9:30 am Morning Prayer/Worship, CH
- Fri - Sun Youth Min Steering Cmte, MM

Always check our website for latest calendar listings

"Blue Ribbon" for Peace

Since 1985, the UCC has proclaimed itself as a "just peace" church, one who consistently seeks nonviolent solutions to conflicts. In pursuing this goal, the UCC Collegium of officers recently called upon President Bush and members of Congress to "seek truly global coalitions and solutions to the forces of division and violence in our midst." The PSEC Justice and Witness Mission Team invites all UCC members, who wish to express similar feelings, to do so by wearing a blue ribbon. Any blue ribbon will do. If you can't find a blue ribbon, extra ones are available from Rev. Charlotte Gosselink.

This year shop for 'gifts that make a difference'

SERRV
INTERNATIONAL
at the Church House

Made possible by your OCWM support
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Pennsylvania Southeast Conference
Box 26400, Collegetown, PA 19426
Rev. Joseph H. Irwin, Jr., Editor
Send news to one of the Conference
Ministers or to: irwin@psec.org
Tel 610.489.2056 Fax 610.489.4058



New Initiatives for a New Century

The Year 2003 will mark a time of transition and new initiatives in the life of Pennsylvania Southeast Conference, a time for **New Century Initiatives**. As Rev. Merlin Getz and Rev. Charlotte Gosselink retire from the pastoral staff, the search process for two new Associate Conference Ministers will conclude. Hopefully, these new staff members will be on board early next year. Also, our Outdoor and Retreat Ministries Director, Rev. Dr. Gary Halstead, will assume new responsibilities for youth ministry development. This change is the result of a task-force recommendation from several years ago, calling for the Conference to assist congregations in developing and strengthening youth ministries. All these transitions and changes, along with other staff reassignments, will open the door for the Conference to offer a new level of support to congregations and their ministries. These **New Century Initiatives** will involve direct services to congrega-

tions not previously available—services which, if contracted independently, would cost more than most churches could afford. They may include on-site services in the area of youth ministry, church development, website, technology and computer support. Obviously, many of these new services are beyond the scope of the normal Conference budget, yet they could be of immense value to churches and their ministries. Therefore, congregations will have an opportunity to help make these **New Century Initiatives** become a reality. These “second-mile” gifts are totally voluntary and will go exclusively to underwrite the enhanced services to congregations of the Pennsylvania Southeast Conference. For more information on **New Century Initiatives**, keep reading *Communitas* and watch the Conference website at www.psec.org.

NCCI

NEW CENTURY INITIATIVES

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Word & Sacrament

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“Through Middle-Eastern Eyes”

with Charles Gosselink

Next Sunday at 4:00 pm
Philadelphia Association's

Advent Vespers

Old First Reformed UCC
4th & Race Streets, Phila
Service includes live nativity

Prayer Partners

Remember in your prayers this week...

First UCC

Quakertown, PA
Rev. Daniel T. Moser

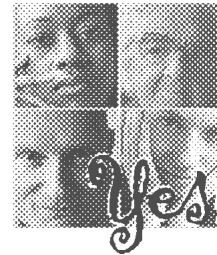
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The Christmas Fund

Remembering Those Who Served

In spite of the recent economic downturn, most of us are still abundantly blessed and secure in our lives. As people of faith, we are even more aware of these blessings during the holy seasons of Advent and Christmas. Yet, not all among us are as fortunate—even those who have served the church for much of their lives. While most churches try to pay their pastors and staff adequate salaries, many have lacked the financial resources to contribute toward their employees' retirement. This is where **The Christmas Fund** comes

You Can Help Us Say



in. The Christmas Fund assists those who served the UCC and who, in retirement, struggle with low incomes and financial needs. It supplements pensions, offers emergency grants for financial crises and helps with some health plan costs. The Christmas Fund, managed by the UCC Pension Boards, has made a huge difference in many lives. Testimonies and words of appreciation are constantly received. It should be noted that The Christmas Fund is not a duplicate of the PSEC All Saint's Day offering, received in November. That offering goes specifically to assist retired PSEC clergy, spouses, widows and widowers with health and dental expenses *not* covered by the Christmas Fund. Much has been accomplished over the years in helping provide for a secure and comfortable retirement for those who served the church, and a great need continues for The Christmas Fund. So, when The Christmas Fund offering is received in your church, please contribute prayerfully and generously. To learn more about The Christmas Fund visit the UCC website or contact Rugene Caldwell (rugene@psec.org) at 610.489.2056.

What's Happening this Week

- Tue 9:30 am Serv of Word & Sacrament, CH
- Wed 9:00 am Profile/Placement Team, CH
- Thu 9:30 am Morning Prayer/Worship, CH
- Thu 10:00 am Clergy Spiritual Formation, CH
- Thu 1:00 pm Spiritual Life Mission Team, CH
- Sat 9:00 am Ministry Council, CH

The Perfect Gift

For A Young Person

Looking for that perfect last minute gift for a special young person? Why not give something with lasting value — a **Gift Certificate to summer camp at Mensch Mill**? A week at summer camp makes a wonderful gift for your child or grandchild. This summer our theme will be “Under God's Roof,” giving youth an opportunity to explore how we all must live together in God's creation, as God's own family. Summer camps have been proven to be most effective in developing emotional intelligence, and Mensch Mill has the added advantage of developing spiritual intelligence as well. For more info on gift certificates, contact Gail at 610.845.7013 or camp@psec.org.

Job Opportunity

Administrative Program Asst.

Pennsylvania Southeast Conf
Full-time Position beg Jan '03
Contact Connie Griesemer
610.489.2056

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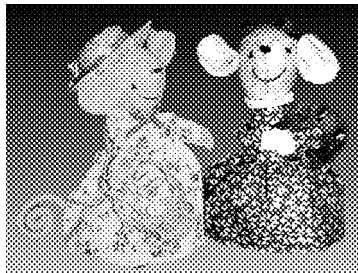
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"Mouseketeers" Active at St. Paul's in Kutztown

Every fall "Mouseketeers" can be found working away in Kutztown, Pennsylvania. But, these Mouseketeers are not from Disneyland, they are from **St. Paul's UCC**. They are busy making lots and lots of church mice. Almost 30 years ago, two St. Paul's women created six church mouse ornaments for the annual Christmas Bazaar, which occurs on the first Saturday in December. The mice sold almost immediately, and more were requested. Other members of the Women's Guild were recruited to help with the project, and the mouse ornaments soon became the most popular item at the annual event. The St. Paul's Church Mouse is a costumed creature about 4" tall. It may be either male or female, dressed as an angel, a nurse, a clown, a golfer, a skier, or whatever the designer desires. The body of the mouse consists of ten pieces of gray felt which



are lovingly hand sewn together. Then the costumes, hats and accessories are added. Profits from the sale of church mice and the Bazaar go toward the mission projects of St. Paul's. These include: Berks Women in Crisis, Reading-Berks Emergency Shelter, Berks Literary Council and others. Some of the funds are also used for capital improvement projects at St. Paul's. Today, hundreds of church mouse ornaments are made every year and some people have begun collecting them. On the day of the Bazaar, many of these collectors may be found at the church waiting for the doors to open. Not only has the sale of the mice been a profitable venture, it has nurtured much Christian fellowship as the Mouseketeers come together for their weekly meeting. For more info on the church mouse project contact St. Paul's in Kutztown at 610.683.3393.

Stop, Look and Listen

by Rev. Wanda D. Craner

A 'Blue Christmas'

The Longest Night Service

One of my "vices" is going into bookstores. I could spend hours looking, reading and browsing. Also, there are those times when I spontaneously jump into my car and the car somehow "finds its way" to the bookstore parking lot. One of these mysterious times recently occurred. As providence would have it, my attention was drawn to a Christmas selection—a tiny little book adorned in red, white and green entitled, **Giovanni's Light: The Story of a Town Where Time Stopped for Christmas**, by Phyllis Theroux. I was intrigued ... "stopping for Christmas" is definitely not the way of this world. As I read on, several truisms poured from the pages of this little book, "... life can be sad and beautiful, lonely and dull, but it is never unimportant or without mystery. What Will Campbell saw encouraged other people to look long enough to see it all." As we make our way through these holidays ("holy days") my prayer is that we each realize anew the importance and mystery of life; and, that we look long enough to see what God is saying to us—especially this year. It may require us to stop ... even as if time itself would stop ... and look, listen, taste, feel, and breathe in the mystery of God all around us.



The Christmas season is a time of joy and good cheer—but, not for everyone. Because of loved ones who recently died, or once-happy relationships which no longer exist, the holiday season can be lonely and painful for many. Also, there are those living with uncertainty, about their job, or health, or family, and that anxiety can rob them of joy in the midst of gaiety and celebration. In response to this difficult time, the "Blue Christmas" or "Longest Night Service" has become a tradition within the Christian community. It is a service of sharing, scripture, music and prayers held on or near the actual longest night of the year—December 21. At least two PSEC congregations are planning special Longest Night Services this year. **First UCC in Royersford** will hold a service on Friday, December 20, at 7:00 pm and include the sacrament of Holy Communion. **First UCC in Quakertown**, in conjunction with the Quakertown Ministerium, will sponsor a Longest Night Service on Saturday, December 21, at 5:00 pm focusing on the 'Light of Advent Hope.' Both churches extend a warm invitation to all who wish to join them in this meaningful service of worship.

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Conference Administrator
610.489.2056

This afternoon at 4:00 pm
Philadelphia Association's
Advent Vespers
Old First Reformed UCC
4th & Race Streets, Phila
Service includes live nativity

Prayer Partners
Remember in your prayers this week...
Brownback's UCC
Spring City, PA
Rev. Bernard C. Hinckley

What's Happening this Week
Mon 9:30 am Worship Mission Team, CH
Thu 9:30 am Morning Prayer/Worship, CH
Always check our website for latest calendar listings

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DSE Communitas

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When the Real Work of Christmas Begins

In his wonderful hymn, "I Am the Light of the World", Jim Strathdee reminds us that once the Christmas celebration is over, the last carol sung, and decorations put away for another year, the real work of Christmas begins. We see the meaning of this in Epiphany—the church season

that follows Christmas—when Christ is made manifest as Savior of the world. During Epiphany, we are called to reflect this vision of the Incarnation



through our worship, mission and Christian education. And, there are many resources to help us as individuals and congregations to continue the "work of Christmas" throughout the Epiphany season. If your congregation uses the *Seasons of the Spirit* whole church curriculum resource, you already have in hand a treasure trove of resources.

Epiphany is a great time to use the suggestions

for multi-faith, ecumenical and Christian unity study and worship. Two children's books which could be used in both educational and worship settings are *More Than Anything Else* and *The Yellow Star*. Also, Pilgrim Press has published two

books, *These Twelve Days* and *Sacred Seasons: A Journey Through the Church Year* which are helpful in continuing the work of Christmas through all the days of our lives. A brand new worship resource, *Prayers to Share, Year B*, published by Wood Lake Books, was written to enhance worship throughout the year by using responsive prayers of

confession, assurance, offering and commissioning. All of these resources are available for previewing at the Conference Resource Center in Collegeville. For more information on Epiphany and other resources, contact Mary Sicher, Resource Center Director, at 610.489.2056 or mary@psec.org. And, let us remember that the real work of Christmas begins when the tree comes down.

Prayer Partners

Remember in your prayers this week...
Christ UCC
Trumbauersville, PA
Rev. Debora K. Gifford

Winter Youth Event

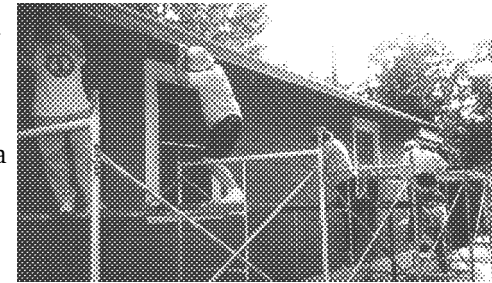
Don't Dare Miss It!
Jan. 17-19 Mensch Mill

Pilgrimage to Germany II

May 24 - June 2
Info 610.489.2056

St. Paul's Sellersville Travels to Mississippi

Mission projects are nothing new to members of **St. Paul's UCC in Sellersville** (below.) They have volunteered in homeless shelters and free lunch programs in Philadelphia. However, their recent trip to Back Bay Mission in Biloxi, Mississippi, was a new and eye-opening experience. Most of the 18 individuals



who made the week-long trip were surprised at the diversity of age, race and economic circumstances they encountered. "Surprising to me, a lot of the people were young, not just the elderly," one member said. Another commented on how some recipients came to the mission still wearing their shrimp-boat gear, indicating that some had jobs but still could not make ends meet. Each volunteer spent at least one day serving in the free lunch program, but the majority of their time was spent helping repair homes for the

needy. Most group members were shocked at the stark contrast between the wealthy casinos and the surrounding neighborhoods. Casinos had been touted as an economic boom for the area, but those who needed the jobs most seldom received them. Some volunteers visited the Biloxi beaches during their

free time, but they were unable to swim due to pollution from the casinos. Eleven of the volunteers were St. Paul's members, with the remainder coming from Frieden's UCC and other churches. "I got the feeling those people we helped really were appreciative," stated member Janet Dunlap, "As Jesus said in the Bible, 'Give unto the least of these and you give unto me.'" For more info on the trip, contact the church office at 215.257.7268 or see their pictures at www.stpaulsucc.net.

Notice to all Congregations

The Conference books for 2002 will close at noon on **January 17**. Any moneys received at the Church House after this date will be credited to 2003. (If you wish to send money for 2003 before January 17, please indicate clearly that it is for JANUARY 2003.) Thank you for your cooperation.

What's Happening this Week

Tue 12:00 pm Church House Closed
Wed MERRY CHRISTMAS
Thu 9:30 am Morning Prayer/Worship, CH

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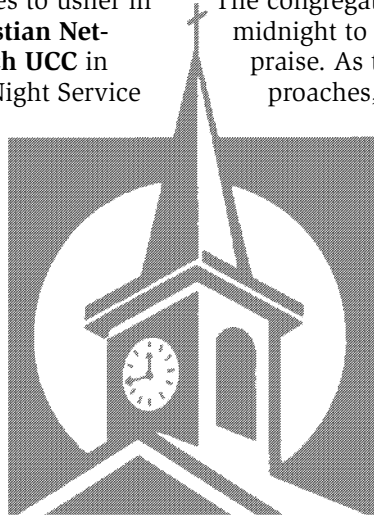
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A Prayerful Response to the New Year

On Tuesday, we will mark the end of the calendar year. While this passage will be observed in many different ways, some churches will hold prayer vigils or special services to usher in the New Year. At **Christian Network Outreach Church UCC** in Norristown, a Watch Night Service is held that is part of an historical tradition begun over 140 years ago within African-American congregations. On the night of December 31, 1862, African-Americans gathered in churches and homes across the country, anxiously awaiting news that the Emancipation Proclamation had become law. When the clock struck midnight signaling the start of the new year, all slaves in the Confederate States were declared legally free. As the news was received, prayers, shouts and songs rose up and people fell on their knees to thank God. The Rev. Bruce Allen,



pastor of Christian Network Outreach Church, reports that the congregation's New Year's Eve or Watch Night service follows this historical pattern. The congregation gathers long before midnight to join in worship and praise. As the midnight hour approaches, the worship becomes more prayerful. They seek to pray in the new year and rededicate themselves to Christ's ministry in the new year. The practice of "praying in" the New Year also stems from the early Methodist tradition of renewing one's covenant with God at the beginning of the new year. The history of "Watch Night" services and other resources for faithful New Year's Eve celebrations may be found in the "Congregational Life" component of the new *Seasons of the Spirit* whole church curriculum resource. For more information contact Mary Sicher at 610.489.2056 or mary@psec.org.

Winter Youth Event

January 17-19 @ Mensch Mill
(and by the way)
What are you doing this summer?
Summer Staff is needed at Mensch
Email halstead@psec.org

Prayer Partners

Remember in your prayers this week...
Bethel United Church of Christ
Philadelphia, PA
Rev. Alberto Filomeno

see the other side

Youth Get Paid to Have Fun

Summer Staff Needed at Mensch Mill

There is no other job quite like working on the staff of a summer camp ... being a part of an intentional community that cares about how you ... living and working with campers ... watching them grow. It creates friendships and memories that last a lifetime. Every year Mensch Mill hires high school and college students ranging in age from 16-30 to fill positions as program coordinators, counselors, lifeguards and rotating staff in maintenance and food services. The benefits include leadership training, life-skill and employment training in a developmentally safe environment, living on site for the eight weeks, financial

remuneration (salary or college scholarship) and many great memories. This year we are looking for 25 youth college-age or older, and eight 16-18 year olds for the Mensch Mill summer of 2003. If this sounds like something of interest to you or someone you know, contact Gail at 610.845.7013 or email camp@psec.org. You can also download an application from our web site www.psec.org. Interviews are scheduled while students are home on break, and a rolling enrollment period continues until all positions are filled. Remember that early birds not only get the worm, they also get a good job.

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Wed HAPPY NEW YEAR!
Thu 9:30 am Morning Prayer/Worship, CH

Always check our website for latest calendar listings

Lay Women

Celebrating the Gifts



Who would YOU nominate for "Lay Woman of the Year"? At every General Synod, the UCC celebrates the gifts of lay women around the country. Each Conference is entitled to name three women whose dedication and service deserve to be celebrated. The PSEC Women's Mission Team needs your help in finding three outstanding lay women from our Conference to be honored at next summer's General Synod, July 11-15, in Minnesota. Contact the Church House for a nomination form.

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