

Circle of Mercy Congregation *2008 Highlights of Our Common Life*

- 6 Jan: Two commissionings: 1) Travelers (Tracey and Graham Whitehouse, Beth Maczka and Kenzie Bell, Susanne Walker Wilson, Kiran Sigmon and Joy Sigmon-Siler, Marc Mullinax, Jim Miller, Ken Sehested) for a 10-day trip to visit our sister church, Iglesia Getsemani, in Camagüey, Cuba. 2) Jessica and Rich Mark in the anticipation of the birth of Sydney Abigail Mark.
- 27 Jan: Cuba travelers tell their stories to a packed room in the Cathedral of All Souls. (In the coming weeks, four members of the group wrote stories published in various national media. Members also spoke to several church and civic groups about the trip.)
- 3 Feb: Our last Sunday at the Episcopal Cathedral of All Souls.
- 10 Feb: COM cancels its worship service to attend the annual worship service of Christians for a United Community.
- Prior to Valentine's Day, our children created greeting cards for prisoners at Marion Correctional Institution.
- 16 Feb: Two pickup trucks load our Circle's worldly goods to move from All Souls to St. George's Episcopal Church.
- 17 Feb: Our first Sunday at St. George's.
- 24 Feb: Approval of an open letter to President Bush and congressional leaders regarding the forthcoming "economic stimulus" bill he signed into law, granting tax rebate checks to most citizens. The letter indicated members' intent to give away part or all of their rebates to organizations that foster justice. News about this action was carried by United Church of Christ and Alliance of Baptists publications, along with more than two dozen daily papers.
- 17 Feb: Our first foot-washing ritual, during the service where our Cuba travelers told stories, including the story about the foot-washing ritual celebrated with Iglesia Getsemani leaders before leaving Camagüey to return home.
- 9 Mar: First reading/discussion of a proposal for funding to support our sister congregation's acquisition of a church home in Cuba.
- 13 Mar: Circle of Mercy is recognized by Just Economics as being among the first business in Asheville to be certified as providing a "living wage." (In fact, we were the very first to be certified as such.)
- 23 Mar: Circle of Mercy members travel to Marion Correctional Institution to lead the Easter morning worship service. In the evening service, we held a blessing of Sydney Abigail Mark, second child born to COM parents. (Eily Rule was the first. Before that, Nazaret Moose Nolan was the first adopted child in our Circle.)
- 29 Mar: The Alliance of Baptists, meeting in New Orleans for its annual Convocation, unanimously approves a "Resolution in support of community investing" drafted by Ken Sehested, with recommendations modeling our Circle's decision to invest our contingency funds in microlending institutions.
- 12 Apr: Family and friends Cuba program: 70 come to see slides, hear stories, and ask questions about the Cuba trip.
- 19 Apr: Circle of Mercy pastors meet to consult with the pastor and lay leaders of Peace Congregation Church, Clemson, S.C., a new church start.
- 20 Apr: Our annual "blessing on the animals" liturgy.
- In the spring, and then again in the fall, members helped with First Congregational UCC's hosting of Room in the Inn, a traveling women's shelter.
- 1 June: Commissioning of Anthony Martinez, on the occasion of his graduation from high school.
- 25-27 June: "Marketplace," cooperative Vacation Bible School hosted by First Presbyterian. Colleen Burnet represents COM on the planning committee.
- 28 June: UCC Southern Conference approves the "Resolution in support of community investing."
- End of June: We celebrate the ministries of Terri Farless (Coordinator of Pastor Care and Christian Education) and Mark Siler (Music Coordinator), who resign their staff roles.
- 12 Aug: Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents raid the Mills Manufacturing plant in Weaverville, arresting 57 undocumented workers. Several COM members are part of the emergency response network.
- 17 Aug: Annual "bagmitzvah" service for Joy Sigmon Siler and Cory McGowan.

- Summer-November: Tracey Whitehouse coordinates a fundraising effort to subsidize the cost of travel to Vietnam for Sara, Isabel and Hoa Mlo.
- 1 Sept: Tamara Puffer assumes responsibility for editing MercyNotes, our e-newsletter.
- 12-14 Sept: Annual family retreat, Hinton Rural Life Center, Hayesville, NC. Theme: "Surely Goodness and Mercy." Nancy Sehested is guest leader, leading Bible study on "mercy." Our children add artwork to "mini-frisbees" to send to Iglesia Getsemani in Cuba.
- 5 Oct: Joshua Shelton begins his role as our music coordinator.
- 19 Oct: A revised Cuba proposal is unanimously approved: \$12,000 (\$6,000 from designated gifts, \$6,000 from our 2008 budget surplus) to help our sister church in Cuba purchase their own facility.
- 23 Oct: COM members prepare meal for 20 participants of the Just Economics training on economic literacy for low income residents.
- 26 Oct: First meeting of "Our Whole Lives" training to help our children understand healthy sexuality. Led by Kiran Sigmon, Jamie Whitehouse, Sara Naff-Mlo and Susanne Walker Wilson, training continued into 2009.
- 2 Nov: Anne Morrison Welsh, author of *Held in the Light: Norman Morrison's Sacrifice for Peace and His Family's Journey of Healing* (with Joyce Hollyday) is our guest preacher. That same evening we commissioned Sara, Isabel and Hoa Mlo for their trip to Vietnam.
- 9 Nov: Rabia Harris, director of the Muslim Peace Fellowship, is our guest preacher. This is the second time a Muslim leader has spoken in our Circle. Imam Kahlil Akbar from Charlotte preached on Sunday, 18 November 2007.
- 16 Nov: Our children write cards to Fr. Roy Bourgeois, founder of School of the America Watch, who is threatened with excommunication for his support of women's ordination.
- 30 Nov: Our seventh anniversary celebration! As part of our renewal of vows, COM welcomed several new members into the life of our congregation: Larry and Jane Wilson, Marvin Schrock, Matthew Kupstas, Joshua Shelton, Maggie Ullman & Chris Berthiaume. During the fall we instituted our first "Discovery Class" process for integrating new members.
- 6 Dec: Annual St. Nicholas Day activity—anonously delivering boxes of food to those in need, this year specifically to families of those arrested in the Immigration and Customs Enforcement raid on Mills Manufacturing.
- 7 Dec: First "Darkness to Light" training—child sexual abuse prevention education—led by Kiran Sigmon for COM parents and staff. Plans to share this same program with the wider community are set for spring 2009
- 14 Dec: COM kids (and adult helpers) bake cookies for the annual Christmas program at Marion Correctional Institution.
- 21 Dec: Children carol at the Baptist Retirement Home.
- 21 Dec: Commissioning of Matthew Kupstas for his 6-month internship at Jubilee Partners.
- Ongoing support for Blan and Carol Minton. Including several service days at the Minton house—cleaning gutters, yard work, planting bulbs in garden. Providing support was the first major crisis to which our pastoral care team responded, following Carol's serious car crash injury.
- Children's Christian education classes expand to three, with as many as 20 children present: Jeanne McGowan and Mark Siler teaching our middle school youth; Terri Farless teaching our third-fifth graders and Colleen Burnet (with Beth Maczka assisting) teaching our 4-yearolds through second graders.
- In the fall Louis Parrish led an adult education class study of the book of Revelations.
- The parents' group met several times during the year to discuss topics of mutual interest, including various ways to cultivate spiritual growth in our young ones.

Contributions directly from our mission grant line item

500.00 – Christians for a United Community
 150.00 – Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists
 100.00 – People of Faith Against the Death Penalty
 500.00 – Nuestro Centro (to support families of arrested Mills Manufacturing workers)
 125.00 – NC Council of Churches
 200.00 – Chaplaincy program, Swannanoa Correctional Facility for Women

300.00 – Chaplaincy program, Marion Correctional Institution
70.00 – To purchase food in support of Asheville High School students doing voter registration with low income folk in Asheville
200.00 – Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America
250.00 – Grocery store gift cards for families receiving St. Nicholas Day food deliveries
200.00 – Global Baptist Peace Conference scholarship fund
1,500.00 – Alliance of Baptists
1,500.00 – United Church of Christ

TOTAL: \$5,595

Other missions support

- 12,000.00 – Gift to Iglesia Getsemani in Camagüey, Cuba. Half the money came from COM surplus funds from 2007; the other half, from designated contributions by members and others.
- 14,000.00 (approx.) – At least a dozen nonprofit organizations were recipients of funds donated by COM members from last spring's tax rebate checks.
- 240.00 (approx.) – Potential interest on our contingency fund investments with microlending institutions. Our investments are at 0% rate of return. The interest not gained is plowed directly back into capital funds of the three institutions with whom we invest.
- 300.00 (approx.) – value of food donated in our food drives to support MANNA foodbank and Lilies of the Hill food pantry.