

Circle of Mercy Congregation *2009 Highlights from Our Common Life*

- 18 January: Commissioning four of our members— Mark Siler, Kiran Sigmon, Linda Mashburn and Joyce Hollyday—for their visit to our friends at Iglesia Getsemani in Camagüey, Cuba. The group carried \$12,000 to assist the church in purchasing its own meeting facility.
- 19 January: Supporting the annual Martin Luther King Jr. Annual Breakfast in Asheville.
- January-February: Intensive “Our Whole Lives” classes for our children on healthy sexuality. Parallel training for adult leaders using the “From Darkness to Light” curriculum.
- 25 January: Commissioning Matthew Kupstas for a six-month assignment at Jubilee Partners in Comer, Ga.
- 6 February: Welcoming the arrival of an Asheville office of the N.C. Coalition Against Domestic Violence, with offices at St. George’s Episcopal Church.
- 8 February: Our children create Valentine’s Day cards for prisoners.
- Support for the Global Baptist Peace Conference in Rome, Italy (9-14 February).
- 21 February: The inaugural “Circle of Mercy Prom”!
- 7 March: Our congregational “planning retreat” for long-range visioning.
- 27 February: Formation for the new Pursuing Peace mission group. We now have two ambitious proposals on the table from that mission group: (1) that we declare ourselves a “peace” church, and (2) that we establish a “Peace Pilgrimage” fund to assist our young people in taking on significant boundary-crossing service learning projects as part of their faith formation.
- Ongoing support for Christians for a United Community.
- 6-7 April: Peace Pilgrimage: Central America advocacy.
- Quarterly food drives for MANNA Food Bank.
- 9 April: Provided dinner for 20 participants in Just Economics’ economic literacy training for low-income residents.
- 11 April: MercyMovers™ successfully relocate Jo Hauser to a new home. (Later, on 4-5 September, the same for Joyce Hollyday.)
- 12 April: Leading the annual Easter worship service at Marion Correctional Institution.
- 26 April: Earth Day celebration, including our annual “blessing of the animals” ritual and commissioning of Maggie Ullman in her work as the City of Asheville energy coordinator.
- 2 May: Sheep shearing day at Swan Mountain Farm.
- 10 May: Commissioning Megan Cornett as she graduates from college and heads toward a career in agriculture.
- 19 May: COM members lead a city-wide prayer vigil on the eve of Troy Davis’ scheduled execution.
- 20 May: Kiran and Ken interviewed on David Durand’s WCQS radio program regarding Cuba.
- 24 May: Commissioning of Sophie Mullinax, on her college graduation and new job in Washington, D.C.; and Mary Anne Tierney, on her graduation from nursing school.
- 31 May (Pentecost Sunday): Ordination of Mark Siler to the Gospel Ministry, for his work as a chaplain at Marion Correctional Institution.
- 5-6 June: COM yard sale raises money for our Cuba Partner Mission fund.
- 22-25 June: Co-sponsorship of our annual cooperative Vacation Bible School (“Marketplace”) at First Presbyterian Church.
- 28 June: Commissioning of Greg, Susanne, Caleb and Ascher Walker Wilson prior to their leaving for a three-year assignment in Colombia with Mennonite Central Committee.
- 2 August: Commissioning of the pastors and members of Land of the Sky United Church of Christ, a new congregation in Asheville. COM pastors provided ongoing counsel and encouragement to Amanda Hendler-Voss and Sara Wilcox throughout their planning process.
- 30 August: Dialogue sermon with member Greg Yost following his participation in a civil disobedience action opposing mountaintop-removal coal mining in West Virginia. (Later the church approved a mission grant to help cover a civil fine Greg received. See below for more about COM mission grants in 2009.)
- 11-13 September: Our annual Family Retreat, exploring the theme “Disarming the Heart: The Gospel of Nonviolence.”
- 20 September: Initial discussion of our proposed “safe church policy.” (Numerous folk working on the initial draft of this policy during the previous year.)

- Children's education classes January-May and October-December. Jessica Mark leads an adult ed series on "body wisdom."
- This fall several of our members have been involved in dialogue with Buncombe County Sheriff Van Duncan re. arrests of immigrant workers in the area.
- 14 October: co-sponsorship of the "Women of Jerusalem" tour stop in Asheville.
- October-November: Eight persons in our "Discovery Class" for new members.
- Many initiatives throughout the year by the Pastoral Care Committee (cards, letters, phone calls, visits, food preparation, yard-cleaning assistance—to convey our community's prayers and blessings).
- November 22: Several members on the program for N.C. Council of Churches' 75th anniversary celebration in Asheville.
- 29 November: COM Anniversary Sunday—our 8th birthday!
- 5 December: Annual "St. Nicholas Day" activity, with our children delivering food baskets.
- 13 December: Children make cookies for prisoners.
- 16 December: Annual Christmas program at Marion Correctional Institution.
- Over the past 18 months COM co-pastors have been consultants to four new church starts: in Biloxi, Miss., Columbus, Ohio, here in Asheville (Land of the Sky UCC) and now another in Waynesville.
- On top of these initiatives—and many others via other organizations—members devoted literally hundreds of hours to some of the most basic forms of spiritual discipline/discipleship. To name just a handful of such commitments: nurturing children (your own and/or others); recycling; keeping informed about a variety of public policy issues; Bible study and prayer; writing letters to the editor; integrating faith-values into the fabric of our work lives; providing hospitality in our homes (both to friends and strangers); volunteering time to a wide range of nonprofit organizations; being patient with others' failures (not to mention your own); planting gardens and cultivating flowers; learning how to love "enemies" (even when it's uncomfortable or inconvenient); paying attention to energy use; taking specific steps to encourage others; making conscientious choices about the use of money; active resistance to bigotry and injustice in daily life; being faithful in relationships; incarnating mercy and forgiveness; refusing to let work demands steal playground time; generally keeping hope alive that another world is possible; and practicing resurrection everywhere we are and everywhere we go.

2009 Mission Grants

- Christians for a United Community \$500
- Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America \$200
- North Carolina Council of Churches \$150
- Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists \$200
- Mennonite Central Committee \$300
- United Church of Christ Coalition for LGBT Concerns \$100
- Just Economics of WNC \$350
- Center for Participatory Change \$300
- Children First \$300
- Pisgah Legal Services \$300
- Yokefellow Prison Ministry of NC \$100
- Contribution to Greg Yost's civil fine for resisting mountaintop removal coalmining \$300

And to our two denominational partners
 The Alliance of Baptists (\$1,650) and the United Church of Christ (\$1,650)
 through which we connect and cooperate with the larger Body of Christ for the ministry of reconciliation