

# The Spire

## In-SPIRE: Are you Listening?

God is still speaking. Are we still listening? What do we hear? How do we discern the Voice of God from our imagination or desires? Or, worst, how do we know God is speaking and not the Adversary?

Listening to God requires a discipline of silence. "Be still and know that I am God." (Psalm 46:10) That instruction reminds us of the constant presence of God. Yet, if we busy ourselves too much and fail to slow down, we can miss God.

A few months ago, a very dear friend and I talked about the slogan used in the United Church of Christ: "God is still speaking." We agreed God continues to address humankind and responds to our needs. God is revealed with every breath in every moment. Yet, there is the question, "What is God saying?"

How can we hear God? With so many issues pressing on us, how can we be still? How can we truly know God? Do we want to know God?

The prophet Ezekiel experienced God in deeply personal ways. In fact, he conversed with God openly and was commanded to go inside his house where he could wait and listen for the still-

speaking Voice of God.

The Word from God can be painful and difficult. In one instance, Ezekiel was told he would be bound by cords, unable to move his body and his tongue would become stuck to the roof of his mouth so that he could not speak to the people.

Humankind became so rebellious the Word of God stopped. Then God said to Ezekiel, "But when I speak with you, I will open your mouth, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord

God'; let those who will hear, hear; and let those who refuse to hear, refuse."

(Ezekiel 3:27)

It is hard to imagine anyone would willingly and knowingly refuse to hear God's Word; yet, that is so common. In the ancient days, humankind

was developing its relationship with God. Today, many centuries later, we seek to renew Covenant with God. Some of us still refuse.

Jesus comes to help us listen carefully to God's Still-Speaking Voice. Jesus says, "Watch me. Do what I do." However, his living example of listening to God is still dismissed and ignored by too many of us. God is deter-

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***"Jesus informs us about the precious gift of community and positive human relationships. Jesus reminds us we are interdependent; we need each other."***

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mined to bring people closer so we can hear what God is saying.

These days we witness episodes of inescapable events that call our attention to what is going on. We see people struggling to stay alive amid the debris of horrendous disasters like the recent earthquake in Haiti or the floods of Katrina and the tsunami that washed over the islands in the Indian

Ocean a few years ago. Our humanity depends on our ability to listen and respond.

Closer still, people are suffering as they lose their jobs and homes with our nation facing

its worst downturn in the economy.

Children are discouraged from attending school because of street crimes and domestic violence. Wars, greed, and political expedience take precedence over the welfare of honest, hard working folk who earnestly provide for their families. What is God saying to us about what is happening?

We have numerous opportunities to listen. In order to hear what God is saying

we must turn down the volume on our radios, iPods, televisions, and computers. We have to find that quiet space where we can meditate on God's Word.

In these days of social chal-

lenges, we need to sit together, explore Sacred Texts, and join conversations that invite diverse peoples to share where they are on life's journey.

Jesus informs us about the precious gift of community and positive human relationships. Jesus reminds us we are interdependent; we need each other.

Through prayer and compassion, we can hear God speaking. In our dreams and through our silent tears we can know God. With our ears we hear. With our hearts we feel. With our minds we experience. With our bodies we become a living testament of God's presence with us.

Will you accept God's offering or will you refuse? It is your choice. God still speaks. Are you listening?

-Rev. Dr. Art Cribbs



## Concern, Caring, Compassion

The congregation's concern, caring and compassion was very evident on Sunday, January 17th in support of the people of Haiti after the devastating earthquake in their country.

Under a special "One Great Hour of Sharing - HAITI" a total of \$2,074 was collected with the opportunity to continue to give in the coming weeks.\*

In addition, during 2009 the congregation raised the following amounts in support of special offerings:

- ◆ One Great Hour of

Sharing: \$1277

- ◆ Neighbors in Need: \$642
- ◆ Strengthen the Church: \$433
- ◆ The Christmas Fund: \$659

The Church also did a special offering for "Computers for Ghana" after hearing from Pastor Art of the tremendous need for technology in that



country. A total of \$1,191 was collected that was supplemented by Sarah Coe designating gifts in memory of her mother Emma Baker be given to this fund.

Each of you is to be commended for your caring and generous giving.

-David Crist  
Board of Trustees Chair

*\*Editor's note: An additional gift of \$1,500 from our 2009 Mission monies was designated by the Deacons to be given to the OGHS: Haiti campaign as well.*

# Understanding the Endowment

In recent months I have become acutely aware that many in our congregation do not know the background of the Endowment Funds that both bless and possibly curse this church.

In the difficult financial times that have been presented the church in recent years, we as a church have become overly dependent on the use of Endowment monies. Whenever large sums of money are expended, there is bound to be both support and disapproval (often unspoken) on how the funds have been used. My hope is that in the coming year I can do a better job of communicating the background of the endowment funds and how those funds are being used.

The church is uniquely blessed to have been the recipients of two gifts in the last 20 years by individuals that were part of the church in the 1950's. The Norma Brown gift was known of for 25 years before actually becoming available to the church in 1993. Norma Brown left \$300,000 to the church under the stipulation that the money become available only after the passing of a beloved caretaker who would receive support until her passing. Well the caretaker lived another 25 years, but in the meantime the trust had grown to \$900,000. The church under the direction of the Trustees set aside 20% of this amount for identified capital improvement projects and debt elimination. (The church has the distinction of having paid off both a denomination loan to start the

church in 1948 and a bank loan to build the current sanctuary).

Ten years later, as the church was facing difficult financial times a "gift from Heaven" came from Edythe M. Zeman upon her death in the amount of \$1,727,340.

The original goal of the Trustees was to finance the expenditures of the church with one-third member giving, one-third rental fees, and one-third endowment income.

Under the Endowment Bylaws, a capital sum (principal) was designed at \$2,100,00 that would remain un-

touched. Since the Zeman gift, the church was able to come close to expending the "profit margin" off the endowment but in the last four years with a combination of declines in member giving and rental income and the collapse of the financial markets we have reduced our endowment monies by approximately one million dollars and our capital sum sits at \$1,500,000.

The philosophy in the last several years has been that we needed to run a dynamic (and

often expensive) program if we were to grow as a church. This philosophy and the subsequent expenditure of monies was always done after much conversation on the part of the Trustees and voted on at the Annual Meeting by the congregation. However, that does not mean that there is not the feeling by some that the Trustees have mispent at times on certain projects and I respect those feelings and hope to learn from them.

While we are growing as a church and many of our programs are deeply appreciated by the congregation we cannot continue to expend monies at the rate that we currently are and have long term financial stability.

Consequently, in the coming year the Trustees will look for ways to increase member giving, increase rental fees and seek less dependence on the use of endowment funds which may mean scaling back on some of our programs.

I welcome your questions and thoughts.

David Crist  
Board of Trustees Chair



## Every Food Has a Story to Tell

You are invited to take a culinary tour of France with Chef Sunny Kim on **Saturday, February 6, 2010, at 10:00am** in the kitchen of San Marino Congregational United Church of Christ.

Chef Sunny will teach us how to bake his Aunt Helene's French Pear Cake. As a bonus, he will teach in the French language! He also will share stories about his stay in France

and his passion for French cooking.

A light lunch will be served along with café au lait to go along with freshly baked pear cake.

Bring your appetite and prepare your tongue for delectable



treats prepared for your enjoyment. The fee is \$10 per person or \$15 per couple; so, come with your friends or family.

To sign up or for more information, please contact Kana Cribbs at (626) 234-2007 **no later than February 3.** Bon appetit.

-Kana Cribbs

## Preschool News

January brought us back to school to welcome several new students. A few days of crying was followed by a smooth adjustment to preschool. We have enjoyed the variety in the weather during the month from 80 degrees and sunny to 48 degrees and raining like crazy!

We had our traditional mitten days with ice shapes brought by the children which are combined to make an ice sculpture. We add color to it with eye droppers and food coloring. We explore the properties of ice and observe what happens to it during the day. Mitten Days were especially good this year because Mitten Days were actually on days that were fairly cool unlike last year when it was in the eighties!

Avelinda and I participated in a Preschool Fair in Pasadena on Saturday, January 9th



where about 50 preschools participated with a table for preschool information and pictures. We were able to talk to many prospective families about our school. There were several hundred parents and children who came to get information about preschools for their children. The event was sponsored by the MOMs Club of Pasadena. We have already had many calls from parents who saw us at that event and would like to take a tour of our school. We felt like it was a very worthwhile event.

I look forward to the annual Director/Pastor conference which will take place the end of the month in Garden Grove. It is sponsored by the Church Related Early Childhood Educational Fellowship. The theme for this year's conference is "How to Lead and Still Have a Life" with Dr. Dale Burke, Senior Pastor from Evan-

gelical Free Church in Fullerton and author of several books.

February will bring lots of LOVE to preschool with our Valentine's Day celebrations, stories and crafts. We will also celebrate the Chinese New Year. Our "Science Guy", Patrick from High Touch/High Tech Science will be here to do a special lesson for the children. We look forward to some drier weather as the children get a little restless without outside time. February is also when I give many tours to prospective students and their families. If you know anyone looking for a preschool, please let them know we are registering for a fun-filled summer program and an educational, creative, nurturing and developmental fall program tell them to give us a call. You may want to check out our website created by Holly Burns at

[www.sanmarinopreschool.org](http://www.sanmarinopreschool.org).

## Have a Little Tea With Us: A Scripture Social

On Sunday, February 7, 2010, we will launch “Scripture Social” or “Have a Little Tea with Us” immediately after the morning worship service. We will read Scriptures and share our thoughts while sipping tea and nibbling finger foods.

This will be a great opportunity to get to know each other better... beyond just our names and faces...through personal conversations and Bible discus-



sions. The best part is that you do not need any knowledge of the Bible to participate.

Pastor Art often says, “We don’t just read the Bible, but the Bible reads us.” Learning what happened in the stories of the Bible is not as important as knowing how we feel and think about them. Whether we agree or disagree, we will seek a deeper understanding of God and us.

Our first “Scripture Social” or “Have A Little Tea with Us” will

be based around the theme, “Be an Encourager” and will focus on Judges 4-5. We will explore the story of Deborah, a judge and prophetess, who encouraged a young man named Barak to lead his people into battle against the powerful Canaanite army.

Looking ahead to March, we will continue our conversation by reflecting on the theme, “Be Obedient,” from Judges 6 and 7.

We hope you will come and “Have A Little Tea With Us.”

-Kana Cribbs

## RETREAT: Save This Date-March 20 (a Saturday)

Our all-church, inter-generational retreat will be held on Saturday, March 20, at the Monrovia Canyon Park. As usual, it will be a low-key time to get together in the great outdoors – indoors, too, in a beautiful Great Room setting.

Opportunities for activities include worshipping, playing

indoor and outdoor games, socializing, hiking, crafting, eating, just hanging out, and otherwise celebrating the glory of the mellow, Southern California lifestyle.

Mark your calendar now to join us. More details will follow in next month’s SPIRE.

-Rev. Cathy Kotowski



## Have a Heart

Valentines of every size and description adorn store windows and other places of business this time of year. The holiday has become a time for love to be enthroned as a virtue, with the heart symbolizing the romance of our lives.

But the heart symbolizes not only love, but life itself! With-



out a heart, our bodies cannot survive.

Consider God’s words to Samuel: “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7, NRSV).

The heart — that inner coun-

tenance — shows what we really are. Samuel was to seek one of the sons of Jesse to be the new king. David, even though he was the weakest physical specimen, was the one selected. His heart was great.

Love looks deeper than outward appearances, and we can thank God for that. Don’t be swayed by mere valentines — have a heart!

-Newsletter Newsletter

## Writing the Sacred - Workshop offered Feb. 21st

Come play with words. Come and discover ways to unlock your creativity and give expression to your own spiritual journey through writing.

On **Sunday, February 21, from 2pm to 4:30pm**, author Ray McGinnis, will show you some of the timeless poetic forms present in the Hebrew Psalms. Alongside the Psalms, he'll draw from a splendid range of spiritual seekers who wrote poetry from St. Francis of Assisi to Rumi to Mary Oliver. He'll offer selected Psalms, poems and journal writing exercises as prompts to help you to express your own longings and experiences of the sacred in the ordinary on paper.

In an open and hospitable

setting Ray invites you to write down what is on your heart: whether gratitude, lament, trust, wisdom, vision, forgiveness, loving-kindness or other emotions in your unfolding relationship with the God.

Whether you are a seasoned writer

or have never put pen to paper, you'll be expertly guided, step-by-step, to a place where you'll emerge with your own new psalms/sacred poems.

You'll emerge from this workshop with ideas for how to use poem-making as a tool to write

your own new Psalms, and as a companion on your own spiritual journey.

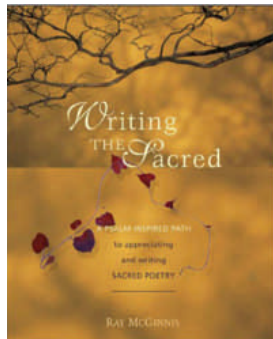
Ray McGinnis is a poet and has written in journals all his life. He has taught over 9,000 people how to write prayers, poetry, and

all the while guiding them to bring their whole heart, mind, and spirit to the process.

His book, *Writing the Sacred* is in it's third printing. He lives in Vancouver and attends Canadian Memorial United Church.

**To register, please contact Donald at the church office: (626) 292-2080 or [donaldshenk@sanmarinoucc.org](mailto:donaldshenk@sanmarinoucc.org).**

A \$15 class fee will be collected at the door.



## The Spirit & The Screen: The Secret's Out!

I'm very excited to announce a bold new experiment in our evenings of screen-ings. Many enthusiastic Spirit and the Screen fans have approached me over the years

with title suggestions, and, borrowing from the successful format of Turner Classic Movies, we're going to sprinkle our 2010 screenings with fare selected by **special guest programmers**.

Join me and Kim Van Horsen

as we screen the 1994 film, *The Secret of Roan Inish*, written and directed by independent filmmaking phenomenon John Sayles and lovingly photographed by master cinematographer Haskell Wexler.

*The Secret of Roan Inish* is an all-ages-

appropriate period tale of a Selkie, a magical character out of Celtic legend, and the family that learns of her secret. Trust me when I say that this is one film that definitely has

the approval of a seal!

Kim and I will have a conversation and group discussion, and we want you to join in on the fun.



Mark your calendars, because St. Patrick's Day comes a little early this year when we'll visit the Irish seacoast at **7:00 p.m. on Saturday night, February 27th**, in the Still-speaking Theatre. And who knows what tasty food we'll be enjoying? It's a secret! Don't keep this event a secret, though—bring a friend!

-Warren Scherffius



# February 2010



Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1	2	3	4	5	6
		7pm Soul Food		7pm Choir Rehearsal		10am to Noon: <b>Every Food Has a Story to Tell</b> in our Crist Hall kitchen
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
10am Worship <i>All God's Family Inter-generational Sunday</i> "Have a Little Tea" Bible study meets after worship		7pm Soul Food		1pm Staff Mtg. 7pm Choir rehearsal		
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
10am Worship 		7pm Soul Food	<b>ASH Wednesday</b> 6:00pm Potluck 7:00pm Service at Glendale UCC: Glendale, California	7pm Choir Rehearsal	<b>SPIRE deadline</b>	
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
10am Worship 2pm to 4:30pm: <b>"Writing the Sacred"</b> workshop with Ray McGinnis		7pm Soul Food	6:45pm Trustees			7:00pm Spirit & Screen presents "The Secret of Roan Inish" in Still-Speaking Theatre
28						
10am Worship <b>Joint worship with Refiner's Fire cong.</b> Pastoral Relations Team meets after social time				7pm Choir rehearsal		



- 02 – JACOB VILLA (Pastor Art's grandson)
- 12 - ELSIE STANLEY
- 14 – CATHY BURKDOLL
- 24 – JEFFREY JAMES
- 28 – TANYA SAMUEL

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We're on the web

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