

PILGRIMS PROGRESS MARCH 2010
PILGRIM CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
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REVEREND SALLY BALMER, PASTOR AND TEACHER



Padilla Bay - ©Marcia Neu

Message from Sally

As we sink into these middle days of the season of Lent, I find myself with few words.

The temptation is to push aside such a thought....to get newsy or chatty or something that is not really what I'd like to say. Or not say. For one thing, I've just rearranged my living area. I told someone about this, and she said, "oh, I LOVE doing that!" I can't say the same. Re-arranging furniture (including bookcases) and consequently pictures on walls does not tend to radiate excitement for me. What happened was that I finally finished the academic paper I was working on for my class of last semester. After some hard slogging with such linear matters like sentences that roll into paragraphs that roll into page upon page (with footnotes, remember those?). . . it all stopped. The paper was sent in, right on deadline, no sooner, no later.

And then there was . . . a full day off, a little bike ride. . . space. Something in me wanted more, so why not just unplug the little television set and sequester it elsewhere? The space grew. I had no idea a 13" screen could take so much space. It appeared to be one of those literal AND metaphorical moments. Really now, words just don't do justice to things that say: it's time to breathe. The space. The moments of Lent that have an oddly spontaneous yet deliberate feel.

I call them “moments of Lent” because I have regard for setting aside particular days or seasons to listen. To listen in on an old story, and a man and a message, with followers, politicians, and a murderous death. To listen in, as we hear of yet another earthquake, ongoing war, the ache of our planet. To listen in as birdsong grows and children play outside amidst daffodils and lengthening daylight. To listen in as I scribble a few words in a journal. To listen.

Lent invokes a deeper listening to the ache and beauty of the mix of life. Lacking sentimentality, the stories old and new alike need space -- sacred space “to have and to hold” -- that old phrase of love and commitment.

For the Sundays of Lent, I am leaning into this spaciousness -- in the quiet in our prayers and other moments. **Communion** this first Sunday -- **March 7th** -- offers possibilities as the literal and metaphorical join in our sharing together. With my latest studies on “imagination,” I’m also intrigued with Isaiah’s words -- for this Sunday and later on **March 21**. We’ll look at Luke’s gospel for **Palm Sunday, March 28th**. This month we’ll be graced twice with our own Bill Malcomson, who will preach on **March 14th** and will lead the **Maundy Thursday service** on **April 1st**.

Also, consider “making space” for a light-hearted, meaningful movie this month. We’ll show **the Pixar animation movie “Up”** in the sanctuary on **Thursday, March 11th** at **7:00 pm**. Bring popcorn, your drink of choice, etc.--all ages most welcome.

It seems I have used plenty of words. Must be time to listen. In this, Spirit is ever near.

Yours in the journey,
Sally

Words from Our Moderator

I thought this would be a good time to talk to you all about what I think about our church. I have been associated with this church for over 12 years. I came when we had no called minister and averaged around 10 people at Sunday services. I worked with our interim minister, Tom Carson, for four years while he led us through the renewal process and taught us what a progressive, open and affirming church should look like. I participated in the search process that found and called Hollis. Hollis showed us that church can be an enlightened fun place to be while still leading us forward. I also participated in the search process that found and called Sally.

During the past 12 years I have seen our church move from a small group of people waiting to close the doors to an enlightened group of people seeking knowledge and discovery. During this time our annual budget has gone from \$12K per year to \$75K per year. Our membership has grown from around 12 people to 66. During this time we have adopted a new set of by-laws that has brought us out of the past into the future. We have also adopted a forward-thinking vision statement and an open and affirming statement. We have built a handicap accessible ramp, installed two new furnaces, built a wildlife habitat garden and installed a new flag pole. The message is that we have done a lot of things in the past few years but there are a lot of things that still need to be done.

To address the future, the Church Council has formed a Long Range Planning Committee to work on our future. This committee will be headed by our former Moderator Bill Malcomson. The members of the committee will be appointed by the Moderator after consulting with Bill and Pastor Sally.

The point I'm trying to make is that our church is a covenanting congregation. We are responsible for our future and the direction we go. If we are members of this covenanting congregation we have certain responsibilities to the congregation. Each of us should consider how we can contribute to our church, whether it be physical, intellectual or monetary. Each of these are required to make our congregation viable.

This month the Church Council will meet in an all-day retreat to discuss and set guidelines for the Long Range Planning Committee and to set priorities for the coming year.

--Tom Miller, Moderator

Upcoming Events

Maundy Thursday – April 1, 7 p.m. – Pilgrim UCC

We will have a Maundy Thursday service on Thursday, April 1, at 7 p.m. This service promises to be a mix of very interesting elements, including music from 1st Century Palestine, interspersed with readings by two Pilgrim members from scripture passages that lead up to the crucifixion of Jesus. There will be communion in the middle of the service. Our own Bill Malcomson is facilitating the service. This Maundy Thursday service has been a very meaningful service in the last few years, and everyone is invited to attend.

New UCC commercial set to 'spiral' on April 16

The United Church of Christ will launch its next "God is Still Speaking" commercial on April 16, utilizing the church's best broadcasting arsenal: its own members. "Yes, a new Stillspeaking ad is coming," says the Rev. Felix Carrion, coordinator of the UCC's Stillspeaking Ministry, "and what makes this debut so significant is that we are counting on the moxy of our million-plus supporters to spiral this viral message around the world. We're asking people to set aside that morning — April 16 — for unparalleled texting and emailing." For more details, go to <http://www.ucc.org/news/tech-savvy-outreach.html>.

"Dinner at the Brick" Organizational Meeting – April 17 – Anacortes Library

Janet & Tom Miller and Nancy Chapman have participated in two "Dinner At The Brick" last year. These dinners are held on Sunday afternoon at the Presbyterian Church and hosted by various groups throughout Anacortes. Pilgrim was invited to participate with a group that includes the Bahia, Buddhists, Catholics and the Center for Spiritual Living. We would like others at Pilgrim to participate, so if you are interested, please call one of us. There is an organizational meeting on April 17 at the Library. Our two dates for the dinners are June 6 and September 26. Contact Nancy Chapman if you have questions.

News from the Pilgrim Community

Anacortes Family Shelter

Nancy Chapman wonders if there are ways that Pilgrim might be of service to the Anacortes Family Shelter. Activities at the Shelter itself are limited due to confidentiality issues and a lack of gathering spots. Karen Yost, Volunteer Coordinator, says that the clients have almost completely "turned over" since their opening in December 2009. Our first dinner was not a success with no participants from the Shelter, although I guess it was fun for the Pilgrim participants. We might try that again. We could wait for warmer weather and have a outside the church. We could try cookies. Joan Bissell suggested sack lunches.

Maybe we want to do something that doesn't involve fellowship or food. They are organizing an auxiliary group which I hope to be part of. They also have a website: www.anacortesfamily.org. Anyone who is interested in participating for the first time or again (we had lots of help with the dinner) or has ideas, please contact Nancy Chapman (293-8436 or 333-1389).

--Nancy Chapman

Children's Corner

March Children's Program

"DRESS FOR MESS"

On Sunday March 7 the kids will be spray painting Spring designs for later use upstairs. On Sunday March 10 and/or March 17 the kids will be planting in the garden. Appropriate painting and planting clothes are advised.

--Nelle Jacobson

Will participated in the NW Regional Science Olympiad in Seattle this last weekend. He and his lab partner won GOLD in the Physical Sciences category. They were the only students from La Conner to medal (and this was against 9th graders!). We are so very proud of him!

--Christi Malcomson

News from the Community and UCC

Important New Step for the North Sound Alliance

The North Sound Alliance has recently moved into a new orbit with the commitment of representatives of member organizations to adopt September 1, 2010, as the target date to have hired a professional organizer. North Sound Alliance (NSA), to take a step back, is the current name of what was originally called the Skagit Community Alliance.

The NSA turf is not just Skagit, but also Whatcom and Snohomish Counties. That expanded scope is one of the factors that will enable us to move forward toward employing an organizer.

Another factor is something called Sustainable Works (www.soundorganizing.org/sw/). This is a non-profit organization that was established by our two sister community

organizations in the state of Washington: the Spokane Alliance and the Sound Alliance (covering King, Pierce and Thurston Counties). They are both a few years ahead of NSA in the organizing process, and both have had their Founding Conventions where they took action on the first issues that have been brought forward from the members. One of those issues was affordable, green job-producing home construction. A number of us were at the Founding Convention of the Sound Alliance when Governor Gregoire and the leaders of the state House and Senate pledged their support for this goal, which became SB5649, a groundbreaking bill championed by Sound Alliance Members which will bring living wage green jobs, energy retrofits and savings, and help to reduce carbon emissions and improve our environment in our communities.

The Bill passed and was signed into law, and on October 9, 2009, Governor Gregoire announced that SustainableWorks will receive a \$4 million grant as part of the Community Energy Efficiency Pilot Grants program funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

SustainableWorks is now organized as a separate non-profit organization, and it is still associated with the Alliance groups. They have chosen 7 neighborhoods in Washington state in which to do their initial work. One of them is in Everett. That work requires the leadership of a experienced community organizer. With that job providing a big part of the financing needed to hire an organizer, the North Sound Alliance is already close to having enough to put together a package for a full time organizer and the support s/he will need. We still need to get a few of the potential member organizations to sign up, and the work on that objective is underway. Some 200 homes in a specific Everett neighborhood will qualify for and receive home energy audits and retrofits as a result of SustainableWorks. And the process by means of which the specific homes and homeowners will be identified will be a form of pre-community organizing with institutions that have members in the neighborhood selected.

We have taken steps in our organizing for action for the common good in the public arena. In our Listening Season we identified areas of concern. In the planning process in which Pilgrim will be engaged, we'll have an opportunity to focus our concerns and begin some of the research that will make our action effective. By the time we are ready to act, I hope we'll have the experienced organizer on deck to help us.

--Roger Ridgway, for the Organizing Core Group



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the fact

when spring comes on
it's time to face the fact:
life, the gift we seek.
we now are sharing with the earth
and one another,
inhale the air,
rebreathe it to the trees,
tidy up and dress the soil
making ready for new seeds,*
give alleluia to the body
that encloses each iteration
of our limitless being.
this is it:
there is no prize greater
than knowing we are the vessels
of the zenith of infinite spirit unfolding.
earth awaits as the garden and the cradle,
the cauldron, and the furrow for our ash.
then will be then.
the rest is now. rejoice.

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Hope rides a high train
hitching itself to the green
of a thousand anxious buds

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Newsletter Editor's Note

Please submit news, etc. for the April issue of Pilgrim's Progress by March 31, if possible, to neuvue@gmail.com.

--Marcia Neu, Newsletter Editor