



WATCHING THE CHANGES

Views From A Pastor's Study

WATCHING THE CHANGES

By Michael Bausch

I never really understood the importance of a monthly church newsletter until I visited with one of the shut-ins of our congregation. As I walked into her home, she greeted me with an exuberant, "I am so glad to meet you. I just love your punctuation!"

On the woman's dining room table sat a recent issue of the Chronicle, our newsletter, and she told me how important it was for her to read the news of her church, and how she appreciated the monthly reflections which I wrote.

That woman paid me a wonderful compliment, and over the years I have been in Williams Bay, I have heard other such comments. I enjoy writing the front page of our newsletter, and have found this to be a way to focus my thoughts and feelings about how God's love and grace is at work in our lives.

After seven years of this monthly discipline, I think some of the messages bear repeating. As a way to share my choices of the "best" of these messages, I offer you this collection.

In these pages you will find a chronological presentation of "Front Page" messages from our newsletter. You will find seasonal reflections, personal thoughts about the life of our congregation, and some messages that appear and reappear over a period of time.

When you read through all of these, I think you will discover a picture of these seven years of our ministry together.

It is for our life that I am grateful, and it is to that life that I dedicate these pages.

Michael Bausch

Advent, 1986
Williams Bay, Wisconsin

JANUARY, 1980

On New Year's Eve, millions of people across the globe "counted down" the last seconds of 1979. Day by day, minute by minute, second by second, the year passed before our eyes. The Greeks used the word "chronos" to describe this sequential ticking away of time. Our word "chronological" comes from that Greek word.

Greek-speaking Christians, however, often used another word to describe time, "kairos." This kind of time was "fruitful" and filled with opportunity. To experience "kairos" was to feel a special depth to one's moments.

Our United Church of Christ in Williams Bay has experienced both "chronos" and "kairos" in its life. Week by week, we have seen increased participation in all areas of our church life: worship, stewardship, committee work, special events, and the care of each other. Christmas Eve brought us more people than communion cups, and eight of us shared the common cup at the altar. This provided a special depth to the service for all who attended.

The decade of the 1980's will do what every decade has done for aeons---it will slip away, day by day, minute by minute, second by second. I have great hopes that those of us in the Christian community will, in the midst of the chronological passage of days, find moments of deep fulfillment.

Our church will expand its ministry and mission as we come together and experience the fullness of life that comes in our covenant relationship with God and each other. Rather than "counting down" our moments together, may we be watchful for opportunities to increase the significance of our time together in the coming days.

OCTOBER, 1981

There is much for which I am thankful. Each Sunday morning when I "survey" the congregation, and during the week when I see you in different settings, I find diverse individuals of all ages--infant into the nineties--who are eager to learn more about Christian faith, willing to take a look at their spiritual journeys, able to open their minds to new and exciting thoughts and possibilities. Every day I give thanks to God that I am here, learning and growing with you in our mutual adventure in faith.

Our "mutual adventure" brings much to be thankful for: steady worship attendance, more new faces, a large and active Sunday School, youth participation in confirmation and fellowship activities, competent church school teachers, creative children's story-tellers, exciting music by the choir and special singing groups, individual members who look after one another in time of need, the hours of volunteer labor in committees as well as in cleaning and maintaining the facility, the stalwart "regulars" who unswervingly attend every church function, the "newcomers" with fresh ideas and enthusiasm, the outpouring of gifts by scores of people to keep the church functioning physically and spiritually, maintaining pastoral services and the preaching ministry. The point is, I am thankful!

For thousands of years, religious communities have given thanks to God by returning to God the fruits of their labors. In Deuteronomy, we read how God requires "some of the first of all the fruit of the ground you harvest." With more and more people taking vocations other than farming, the "fruits" have changed, and have been transformed into gifts of time, and into our medium of exchange, dollars. As we enter the new season of the church, we know we expect more in the way of engaging worship experiences, pastoral visits to the sick and the dying, counseling, and a smoothly functioning ministry. In exchange, God requires that we return the love shown by the church by generous support of our church and its ministry.

For this, we are all thankful!!

NOVEMBER, 1980

October has been a busy month in the life of our congregation. November's calendar looks even busier, and before the month is over, we will celebrate both Thanksgiving and the first Sunday in Advent (Nov. 30). As Hymn #1 in our hymnal reads, "Time, like an ever-rolling stream..." bears all things into the future.

The days seem to fly by so quickly that we wonder what we have accomplished with our time. I often wonder about that in my work. The past week has been very busy. I have visited people in the hospital and in their homes. Cathy and I attended a one-day conference on "The Ministry of Volunteers." A worship service needed to be developed and a sermon researched and written. A couple planned their wedding service with me. The Walworth County Clergy group met for a short program on how people handle pain. A friend of the church died, and I was asked to officiate at her funeral. The choir had a potluck at our home, and the youth had a Hallowe'en party that same night. The Chronicle needed to be prepared. Certain ongoing matters required attention. The Lay Academy completed its fifth week of classes.

This list of activities says something about me and you. It says that many people are touched by your ministry as a church, and that many folks depend upon your support for it to continue.

Each of you can come up with your own list of how you live your faith each day---visits with people, phone calls, notes, volunteer efforts, everyday work situations, your approach to daily life. Thank God we are each endowed with special gifts, and that we are given the chance to share them with one another. And thank God for the gift of time.

NOVEMBER, 1981

One of the joys of the ministry is meeting with persons who are interested in joining the church. What intrigues me the most are the stories about what attracts people to this church. Invariably our new members speak of the warmth of feelings they receive from our worship experience and from the various members of the congregation; how people are interested in who they are; how each worship experience leaves them feeling that they have gained something by attending; how our little church fosters a sense of unity in the midst of great diversity, making us feel like one big family.

I am excited when I hear these comments, and I know that you, too, are interested in hearing them.

But moving beyond the mere hearing of this good news, it's time we encouraged more of us to attend worship services more regularly so we can experience first-hand what our new members are expressing! With summer behind us, many of you who haven't been here yet in the last two years might want to attend and renew faith through corporate worship.

God has granted our church many blessings over the years, and I think the finest blessing is your association with this family of believers. Won't you extend the blessing and worship with us soon?

NOVEMBER, 1982

Autumn's splendor is now upon us. Everywhere we turn our gaze, we see the reds and yellows of oak and maple. We see the silver-tipped poplar against the deep blue sky. The newly green winter wheat shoots lie adjacent to the bone-bleached corn stalks. Golden fields rustle in the wind.

Along with the season of contrasting colors comes the cooling down of the earth and the lengthening of the night. It's time again to bundle up and to turn on the lights earlier in the day. While the days are magnificent with beauty, the cold and darkness surely follow.

Yet November, with its shortening days, is also a month when the eternal optimism of the human spirit prevails. For in this month, we give thanks to God for all that we have, and we also prepare ourselves for the birth of the Christ child beginning with Advent on November 28.

During these days, we gather as a church to rejoice together. In spite of darkness and cooler days, we know that Christ's light is ever seeking to break into our hearts to brighten the world.

"Come, ye thankful people come,
Raise the song of harvest home."

FEBRUARY, 1983

WE DID IT!! When Treasurer Carol Ann Lothian closed our books for 1982, the record showed we paid all of our obligations, including our commitment to Our Christian World Mission, and ended up with a few hundred dollars with which to begin 1983!! This represents an outstanding effort by our members and friends to provide for a financially healthy church.

I want to thank each and every person who has contributed to the welfare and ministry of our congregation over the last months. Your diverse and unique efforts are building a vital and vigorous ministry in our community.

1983 offers, as it should, an additional challenge. This is the year in which we can be self-supporting after several years of receiving assistance from the UCC Wisconsin Conference. To attain this goal, we must set new challenges for ourselves.

The success of 1982 can take us several directions: we can hold steady, we can slide backwards, or we can move to higher levels of church "wellness." Those who watched "Monday Night Football" on January 3 know an illustration of this. Both teams playing were already successful: each was assured a berth in the playoffs. One team played this last game without spirit because they had "made it." The other played exceptionally well, showing high team enthusiasm, displaying group pride, improving their skills, and demonstrating a will to do even better for themselves individually and as a team.

We, too, have "made it" in 1982. And the challenge of 1983 is upon us. Will you join in our "extra effort" to fulfill our ministry with cooperation, enthusiasm, skill, andlove?

APRIL, 1983

It's that time again. The stores have stocked their shelves with chocolate bunnies and marshmallow chicks. The widows display brightly colored eggs, ducks, and basket-carrying rabbits. And once again, we hear the familiar refrain:

"Here comes Peter Cottontail,
Hoppin' down the bunny trail,
Hippity, hoppity, Easter's on its way."

It's the time of year when we celebrate Easter in all its dimensions. We join with ancient peoples and rejoice in the fecundity of spring. Fertile eggs and prolific rabbits provide us with our happy symbols. Bright colors and plenty of candy heighten our joy.

But what of the Christian Festival of Resurrection? Unlike Christmas with its manger, Easter mystifies us with its cross and tomb. We know about birth in our own experience. But resurrection is something not as easily known or understood.

Maybe this is why our church family reunites in great numbers for Easter worship.. We come to hear about mystery and to proclaim its truth. We come to learn about death, and life. We come seeking new life, meaning and purpose.

We come because Easter does arrive, "hippity, hoppity" into our lives. This image brings a chuckle, I know, and rightly so. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ, after all, proclaims that laughter and rejoicing conquer the darkness of death. That every human fear, prejudice, ailment, anxiety, weapon, or system passes away into triviality when judged against God's Eternal Love and Life.

"CHRIST IS RISEN"

NOVEMBER, 1983

There is a lot being written and said about stress and "burnout" these days. Individuals and families are taking notice of busy schedules, work tensions, school pressures, and family changes. Warfare in the Middle East and Caribbean, coupled with the continued buildup of nuclear weapons by large and small nations, produce further stresses in our lives.

As I write this, a string of dreary, gloomy days has ended with the onset of warm, bright, and sunny days, and the beauty of the season is clear again. I am reminded to take a few moments to appreciate my surroundings, my family, and to simply rest.

Taking time to rest and to appreciate the beauty of nature and loved ones is one way to begin to cope with the stresses of daily life. Our Judaeo-Christian tradition offers each of us a weekly opportunity to rest: the Sabbath. This period of rest is one of the Ten Commandments, "six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh is a sabbath to the Lord your God..."

Regular worship, relaxing time with friends and family, and quiet time for the self are essential ingredients to a healthy and fulfilling life. Abraham Joshua Heschel has written, "On the Sabbath, we especially care for the seed of eternity planted in the soul." Paying attention to that "seed of eternity" just might help us face our many tensions, and could even lead to that "sabbath peace" our world so sorely needs.

JANUARY, 1984

Christmas '83 will long be remembered as one of the coldest on record. Because of sub-zero temperatures and high winds on the 24th and 25th, many churches cancelled their worship celebrations. Not so with us, as some sixty brave souls joined together in carols, communion, and candlelighting on Christmas Eve. Another brave group gathered on Christmas morning to sing and to listen to Christmas stories.

We are now beginning our new year, 1984. New Year's Eve and New Year's Day offer opportunities to "mark time" and its passage. The New Testament spoke of time in two ways: "chronos" or chronological, day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute, time, and "kairos," or time known not for its quick passing, but for its fullness and importance. The rabbis often spoke of how one moment can be worth seventy years of life. Life can take on new richness when we understand time to be a gift, and use our time to appreciate that gift.

Recently, I read ten suggestions for a "more abundant life," and I want to share them with you:

- 1) Turn off the television
- 2) Read
- 3) Eat with others
- 4) Pass on the good news
- 5) Set aside one day of rest each week
- 6) Tape letters to distant relatives and friends
- 7) Play games that stimulate the imagination and active participation
- 8) Make one friend who holds beliefs different from your own or lives in a different environment
- 9) Give all year long
- 10) Discover silence.

The ten suggestions can enrich personal family life, and encourage better relationships with others within the community. May 1984 be a year of fullness and enrichment as we live our days together.

FEBRUARY, 1984

On February 8th, I leave for a two-week trip to Israel and Egypt. This special tour is arranged for clergy, and is in part subsidized by the sponsoring group, Educational Opportunities for Clergy and Laity of Florida. The Southeast Wisconsin Association of the UCC is also providing a small scholarship, and I am using professional development funds provided in our own church budget.

We fly from O'Hare to Amsterdam and then to Amman, Jordan. From there we cross the Jordan River and head to Galilee to visit the historic sites of the Bible. Following visits to Nazareth, Capernaum, and Bethlehem, we stay a few days in Jerusalem. Jericho, Masada, the Dead Sea, and other sites will offer glimpses of biblical history.

After nine days in Israel, my group will continue to Egypt to visit the Pyramids, the Valley of the Kings, the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, and sites along the Nile River.

Upon returning February 22nd, I expect to be filled with wonder at having visited the sites I have read and heard about since my youngest days. My understanding of the Bible will be significantly altered, I suspect, as will my awareness of current problems in the Middle East. I am very excited about this trip, my first outside the United States.

Thank you for this opportunity to deepen my understanding of biblical lands and peoples.

MARCH, 1984

It was a sunny sabbath afternoon. Families had laid blankets on the ground and were preparing the cooking fires. Children were running and laughing, teenagers holding hands, and parents relaxing in the shade. The smells of herbs, spices, and roasting lamb filled the air. A rushing stream headed towards the Jordan River and the Sea of Galilee.

This beautiful scene was at a point on the border of Lebanon, Syria, and Israel, some 55 miles from Beirut, 35 miles from Damascus, and 110 miles from Jerusalem. No matter that the USS New Jersey had been shelling near Beirut during the week, or that the great governments were slowly playing their game of international intrigue. Here were Christians, Jews, and Muslims, Palestinians, Israelis, and Americans, sharing an afternoon outing at a beautiful park.

No hatreds here. No fighting, shouting, or gunfire. Only laughter, the sharing of food, basking in the sun, the relaxation of families in love.

As I watched these families, and as I saw many more just like them in places like Amman, Tiberias, Jerusalem, Cairo, and Luxor, I couldn't help but breathe a prayer for their security: from terrorist attack, from invading armies, from governmental policies which ignore the problems of the poorest and saddest.

In these days of complicated international problems, may we join with other families and pray for peace--in every home, every nation, and across the whole earth.

JULY, 1984

I recently read of a basketball coach who was trying to improve the performance of one of his players. He asked the player what he did when he practiced. The player replied, "dribble and shoot." The coach told him to add up the total number of minutes he dribbled and shot during a scrimmage game, to find out how long he had the ball. "Three minutes in all," came the reply. The coach pointed out that this meant the player practiced for what he did only three minutes out of every 40 in a game. This meant that 37 minutes were played away from the ball.

That story got me thinking about the ministry. Many people think the main function of the minister is fulfilled in the one-hour worship on Sunday, and that the 15-minute sermon is the heart of the service. They are right to think that worship is central to a minister's job.

But what does the minister do for the 59 or so other hours "away from the ball?" Worship preparation takes some time, yes. So does office administration, letter writing, phone calls, etc. And then there are committee meetings in church and community. A few public events like weddings, funerals, commencement prayers, etc. There are also moments for reading, thinking, and personal meditation.

But really, most of the time "away from the ball," or from worship, is with you. Yes, I make house calls. Yes, I visit in the hospital, any time of the day or night. Yes, I listen if you need to talk. No, I am not too busy for you. And I am especially privileged to be invited into your life, to share in your public joys and private sorrows.

I am here to lead worship, yes. And I am here to share in your life when you need me. Thank you for that privilege.

SEPTEMBER, 1984

Nearly 88 years ago, our church came to life in Williams Bay. From the beginning, we had a unique and special ministry to offer. In 1896, there was no English-speaking worship service in the Bay, and so a small group of people organized the First Congregational Church. While our name has changed since then to the United Church of Christ (Congregational), we still remain as the oldest continuous congregation in Williams Bay.

Over the years, our church has opened its doors to people of all religious backgrounds. This self-conscious decision has meant that we are an historically "open-minded" church, that is, accepting of divergent opinions. We seek unity out of diversity, and as such, follow the ancient biblical practice of forming a community from a "mixed multitude."

With God as our Creator and Guide, we are called into the Church of Jesus Christ to accept the cost and joy of discipleship, to be God's servants to humanity, and to proclaim the Good News of God's love and justice to all the world.

We hear that call, and come together as a church in Williams Bay. I believe we have a special mission and style that distinguishes us from any other church in our area. Do we dare to thrive in that mission, or merely survive?

Your participation in our worship life, your gift of time to the church and to each other, your gift of dollars in support of this church, are what makes our church flourish. Apart from us, the vision of our forebearers will not bear fruit. It is up to us to faithfully carry our church's uniqueness into the future.

OCTOBER, 1984

September marked the completion of five years of ministry with you. Five years ago seems like a different world! Anica was six months old, we lived on Parkhurst Place, and Cathy and I hardly knew a soul in this community. There was excitement as we began ministry here, and some lonely feelings as we got settled in a new community.

Starting a sixth year now, the changes are obvious. Anica has begun kindergarten. Brianna is nearly two. Cathy has served two interim pastorates at Walworth, and has been involved in church and community life. Our social life has picked up considerably.

As for me, well, there is a little more gray and a few more pounds. More importantly, my relationships with you have deepened and grown over the years. In my first sermon to you, I spoke these words: "I expect to meet you and to know and love you...I will change because of what you will teach me and how you will open me to your life and your faith."

This has clearly happened. I have learned much from you, and know how you have helped me become a better pastor. I have watched you change, too, and have seen members and friends spend countless hours thinking, praying, talking, giving and working to strengthen the ministry here. We are now an "established" congregation, offering worship, fellowship, teaching, learning, outreach, and loving care.

Five years ago, I said, "I can affirm that God has brought me to this time and place." Thanks be to God who has brought us together, and who beckons us into a future in which we may continue to grow and thrive as the United Church of Christ (Congregational) in Williams Bay.

NOVEMBER, 1984

Several church members recently encouraged me to become a bit more involved in our community, and before I knew it, I was a referee in the local soccer program. There seemed to be several advantages to this: I would fulfill a needed community service, (not many "refs" to be found), would get some exercise, and would learn a new game.

Unfortunately, as I soon discovered, learning a new game while officiating that game is not very comfortable. Everyone else knew my job better than I did! This situation encouraged my inner sense of responsibility, so I have been studying the rules and gaining referee experience. Fairness and justice require knowledge. With more study and experience, I'll probably become a decent referee. The hard part, and the exciting part, is the learning process.

Through this experience in the soccer program, I think I have learned something more about Christian faith. To make fair and just decisions in our life, we need to know as much as we can about our "playing field," and the rules and guidelines that apply. The sources of this knowledge are varied: reading biblical texts and devotional guides, sharing conversations with trusted friends, observing others, and simply learning while doing.

It is exciting, and sometimes uncomfortable, to learn our faith by living it. Personal experience, reading, and reflection offer us some ways to become more faithful people.

MARCH, 1985

Changes are a normal part of life. Many natural changes are slowly making themselves known to us: patches of green appear in the grass, geese are heading north, buds appear to be expanding on the trees. When we pay attention to our surroundings, we see these changes.

The same is true of our personal lives. There are many changes occurring in physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual processes. During this season of Lent, we are given a special gift: the time to reflect upon all the changes occurring in our lives. As with any gift, we appreciate it more when we respond with some sort of thanks.

Lent becomes a period of reflection in our lives, and a commitment to offer thanks for the gifts.

A leper came to Jesus, bringing his uncleanness, and asked for healing. Given this gift, he was instructed to make a generous and appropriate offering, as a spiritual discipline.

In a recent sermon, I suggested that story to be an appropriate Lenten discipline for us: to bring to God our personal uncleanness through regular prayers and corporate worship, to bring to the altar 10% of our income during these forty days as an appropriate gift of thanks, and to spread the Good News of God's Love.

Lent is a time to pay attention to the changes of life, and to nurture the spiritual changes so necessary to our well-being. Awareness of these changes, and response to them through the Church, bring us to a fuller and closer relationship with God.

APRIL, 1985

"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." (John 1:5)

We made it! Winter is done. Over. Finis. Sure, there will be some cold days and snowy nights, but the light has overcome the darkness. On March 20, the vernal equinox made sure of that. On that date, the hours of night and day were equal. Subsequently, the day is overtaking the night. There is increasing warmth, a growing green, and an approaching summer.

For Christians, this natural battle takes human form in the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Darkness has its say, but not the final word. The Light shines. Easter overcomes Good Friday. Life emerges victorious.

There is still a lot of darkness in the world. The crucifixion is re-enacted daily in parts of the Middle East, Central America, Asia, and Africa. Our own tax dollars support the distribution of weapons to various warring factions, and allow a continued and immoral buildup of nuclear weapons. Family divisions, substance abuse, and catastrophic illness burden our hearts.

Yet the One who says, "I am with you always," calls us to be children of the Light. Through prayer, generous support of people and projects seeking to alleviate the world's darkness, and our own personal commitment, we become witnesses to the Resurrection. Believing, thinking, acting that "the Light shines...and the darkness has not overcome it."

JUNE, 1985

The most recent issue of the Wisconsin Magazine of History, (Vol. 68, No. 2), features an article about the dedication of the Yerkes Observatory in Williams Bay the third week of October, 1897. This account of the dedication, and the simultaneous first national astronomy meeting in the United States, offers a colorful picture of Williams Bay in its early days.

As the new Observatory was being dedicated, a new church was also beginning its work in the community. Founded in December of 1896, our own Church, then called the Congregational Church, had as its goals to provide an English-language worship service, and to "better carry on the religious work in our town."

Just as the Yerkes Observatory has faithfully and effectively carried on the work of astronomy all these years, our Church has provided a unique and progressive ministry to the community. Promoting such qualities as patience, understanding, open-mindedness, perseverance, and giving, our Church has sought faithfulness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Both science and religion, in their better moments, "inspire us with a new zeal for the quest." As one clergyman of the period writes, "the shackles of superstition fall off, and the soul, unfettered, revels in the boundless universe of truth, beauty, and love."

JULY-AUGUST, 1985

One of the contractual agreements you have made with me is to provide up to two weeks professional development/continuing education time, plus funds for necessary expenses such as registration fees.

This July, I will be attending a Clergy Development Institute at Moravian College in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Sponsored by the Alban Institute of Washington, D.C., a research and resource group for clergy and congregations, the institute is designed to assist ministers in deepening their own faith and further developing essential ministry skills.

Six areas of focus will be the agenda for the ten days of the Institute: Biblical Revitalization; Parish Development; Managing Stress and Avoiding Burnout; Spiritual Disciplines for Busy Living; Managing Conflicts and Differences; and Group Process and Human Interaction Skills.

By Labor Day, I will have completed six years of ministry with you, and I have the sense that this workshop will help me reflect on this time, and offer some insights and skills for deepening and strengthening our ministry in Williams Bay. The Pastoral Relations Committee is also at work on some special fall events that will bring the congregation together for some celebrating and planning.

This next year should be exciting, and I am grateful for the opportunity you have given me to relax, reflect, and plan for our future together.

OCTOBER, 1985

A recent issue of the Walworth Times featured this comment about small towns: "A small town is where city folks say there is nothing to do, but those who live there don't have enough nights in the week to make all the meetings and social functions."

We know how true that comment is! School activities, social clubs, youth sports, community events, volunteer service projects, and seasonal leisure activities fill our calendars. Sometimes it seems like life is too busy in our small town. There isn't enough time in a day or a week to accomplish all that we want or need to accomplish.

Without tiring you further, I want to remind all of us that our church is a place for meaningful activity and learning, and that its schedule and program can and should be a priority in our lives. And I want to remind us that the church is also a place for rest and renewal. Sometimes taking a morning out of the weekend for worship seems like just another commitment: I hope it can become a source of renewal for you.

Jesus reminds us that our frenetic activity can lead nowhere, and that for the unprepared, death itself makes a mockery of our busy schedules. Take time to give thanks for the precious gift of life. Take time to worship God who gives us this life. Take time to recharge and renew your energy. The promise to us is that life will become simpler, healthier, and more joyful.

JANUARY, 1986

My family and I discovered that December can be a very busy month. We finally had to schedule a few commitments and gatherings after Christmas as a way of taking control over so many of the opportunities available to us. I am sure you found the same thing happening---December and the holiday season are very busy times.

January offers us a chance to slow down a bit. There is no event that is so important that the weather can't cancel it. Cold and snowy conditions often result in a chance to simply stay home and relax. There is nothing like an unanticipated gift of a few hours, or even a day, as a result of January weather.

When time is slowed for us by such a gift, we have the rare opportunity to look at our normal schedules and think about what really matters to us. Some observers of busy American life are noticing a spiritual hunger at the heart of a lot of our chasing around. Have you identified that hunger in your own life?

I believe the Church, this Church, your Church, can offer those who spiritually hunger, a nutritious diet. When Jesus spoke of being fed "at my table," he knew what spiritual fulfillment his Church could offer.

The next time you have some "breathing space" because of personal choice or circumstance of weather, won't you monitor your need for spiritual sustenance? Listen to what your heart tells you. And if for some reason you don't see what you need at your Church, mention it and we can work together to see that it is offered.

APRIL, 1986

I have been noticing a lot of changes lately. The days are getting longer and the sun is shining more warmly. Green shoots are breaking through the ground, and the trees are showing their budding new life. The hibernation of the long winter is now over, and animals and birds are reappearing. Human hibernation seems to be at an end, too, as snow, ice, and mud give way to easier walking and driving.

Every April, I marvel at these changes. No matter how severe the winter, no matter how dark and dreary it has become, no matter how much snow and ice has covered our part of the world, the changes inevitably come. Spring comes, ever so slowly at first, one step at a time, from the ground up, until its lush growth is all around us.

It has been a joy to see the changes spring has brought to our life as a church, too. Our attendance has significantly increased, as has our giving. The more positive mood of the new season has resulted in stronger participation in many areas of our church life. The forces of the Resurrection are at work, not only in the natural life of the Creation, but in the human community as well.

The Bible teaches us that God is seen in the faces of our loved ones, and in the daily events of the historical process. How we make sense of the major and minor occurrences of human and natural life is how we attempt faithfulness to God's word and work.

Spring's changes are pretty amazing!

JUNE, 1986

A few weeks ago, I was discussing the United Church of Christ "Statement of Faith" with our Confirmation Group. We came to the line, "God promises...the presence of the Holy Spirit in trial and rejoicing..." I began our discussion of that statement by saying I thought it would be hard for them to understand how to know God's Spirit in time of trial.

Immediately, they corrected me. "No," they told me, "we find it harder to remember God's Spirit in time of rejoicing." As we talked, we discovered that looking to God is sometimes easier when facing a difficult time, and that we often don't think about God in the more wonderful moments.

I was grateful for their insight, and we talked a bit about how important it is to take just a few seconds in the middle of a joyous moment to give thanks to God. When catching the scent of a fresh flower, breathe a word of thanks to God. When sitting at a table with family and friends, enjoying a bountiful and delicious meal, breathe thanks in the instant when you feel the beauty of the moment. During a conversation with a loved one or friend, when you feel a new closeness occurring, breathe a prayer of gratitude.

In time of rejoicing, we take part in the bounty of God's universe. One rabbi has suggested, "Whoever enjoys any worldly pleasure without benediction commits a theft against God." Stated in a positive way, when we breathe thanksgiving for earthly pleasures and experiences, we witness the Holy Spirit in our midst, and are offered a glimpse of eternity.

Thanks to the Confirmands for their insights!!

NOVEMBER, 1986

One precious and balmy October night, I stood out on my front steps to feel the warm air one last time before November's chill. As I stood there beneath the star-studded sky, I became aware of the sound of leaves falling from our birch tree. There was no wind, not even a breeze; these leaves had fulfilled their time and were simply letting go.

They made gentle sounds as they brushed by branches, and seemed to sigh as they joined others already on the grass beneath the tree. By the next morning, the golden birch leaves covered the lawn, and the once full tree stood skeletal against the blue sky.

Columnist Melvin Maddocks, reflecting on the falling leaves, wrote how autumn "is the gift of outline, of clarity. Winter softens all the sharp edges of snow. Spring and summer decorate--gorgeously disguise. Autumn is the great reductionist."

With trees bare, one can see things more clearly: houses that need paint, buildings you didn't know were there, yard that now seem cluttered, or stark. Autumn offers a clearer view of our environment.

This opportunity to see more clearly may be turned inward in days like these. In which directions do our lives move towards the future? What does the change in seasons tell us about changes going on deep inside ourselves? In the face of time's continual flow, how do we live with meaning and purpose, with joy and thanksgiving?

May God fill our hearts with praise when we watch the changes, and live through them on a daily basis.

APRIL, 1980

It's hard to believe that we're already into the first week of April. Preoccupied with dismal headlines about growing inflation and increasingly complex international problems, we may have missed the change of months, as well as the simple and ordinary signs of rebirth that are appearing every day!

The snows (however slight this year) have melted, the ground has thawed, small patches of dark green are seen in the lawns, and bright green shoots are bursting through the damp earth. The blue skies, strong winds, and warmth of the sun's rays remind us that life flourishes.

Just as the earth seems to be undergoing a rebirth, we might recognize that we are too: a renewed appreciation for life brings new insights, revived faith, and new relationships. Our souls stir to proclaim life's rebirth.

Easter tells us something about an eternal truth: that out of chaos comes creation, out of bondage comes freedom, and out of death comes resurrection. This natural pattern of life leaves us awed and mystified---and our only response is Alleluia!

May this Easter season find you in the midst of rejuvenation and renewal. May it find you steadily living a new life filled with joy and commitment, rejoicing in God's gift of eternal life.

JULY, 1980

This little church newsletter is a very effective means of communication. Many people have told me how they read it avidly---and carefully---to catch up on the news, to find out what worship and special events are coming, and to be informed of important decisions in our life.

Another value of this paper is how it connects us one to another. Have you, the individual reader, ever wondered who else reads this newsletter? On our mailing list are eight different churches, ten ministers, two nursing homes, two newspapers, 102 homes in Williams Bay, 56 homes in the Geneva Lake area, 20 more homes elsewhere in Wisconsin, and other homes in fourteen states stretching from California to Virginia, Minnesota to Florida!

Many people in many different places know what's going on in this church! And all of us have something in common---a relationship to the United Church of Christ in Williams Bay.

Those of us who worship regularly here are often unaware of those of you outside our sanctuary who hold us in prayers and send financial support. Those of you who cannot be with us to worship---please know that your prayers and gifts are appreciated!

We are growing in joy and discipleship---and feel the strength of being connected with people in this community---and beyond us as well. Praise God that we are functioning members of the Body of Christ.