



"Think Globally, Act Locally"



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Spring Rummage/Bake Sale

April 6, 3-7 p.m.

April 7, 9 a.m.—3 p.m.

Fellowship Hall

Items & Volunteers



BAKE SALE

NEEDED!!!



If you would like to volunteer to help organize the items for the sale, to set-up and/or clean-up, please contact Peg McCracken at 397-2252 or Norma Siekkinen at 397-4386. Bring your special baked goods, too! LOTS of help is needed! *Many hands make light the work!* This is a mission outreach to our local community and all monies made are used to support our mis-

The Closet

The Closet continues to be an excellent outreach resource for our community. The third Friday of every month, The Closet is open in the evening to accommodate those in the community who are in need of items that their Directions/Food Stamp card does not provide. Peg and Norma have directed this much-needed ministry with faithful dedication. They are asking the congregation for their continued support in the months ahead with their prayers and monetary donations. You may make your check out to Gay Street UMC, and in the memo section be sure to note "The Closet." It will be greatly appreciated.



UMW Executive Committee

- Catherine Seward co-leader, 392-3496
- Carolyn Allar co-leader, 507-9825
- Lanny McNeill co-leader, 397-3686
- Peg McCracken, Secretary, 397-2252
- Angie Richards Treasurer, 392-7904
- Norma Siekkinen Ast. Treas., 397-4386
- To be named, Program Resource

Dorcas Circle

~Catherine Seward, Chairperson

The Dorcas Circle met March 9 in the downstairs parlor of the church with nine members present. Two regular members were welcomed back after being shut in for several months by ill health. We also welcomed Kathleen Breneman back into the group. We had a lot of catching up to do with no meetings since the Christmas luncheon.

Who could help at the Spring Rummage Sale was discussed. Several ladies will help part of three days.

The Prayer and Self-Denial offering was taken. To refresh our minds where the money goes, Marietta Van Fossen read from the new program book that it is used both nationally and internationally by those retired deaconesses and missionaries who are "called to serve, serving still."

Virginia Kline had the program which was taken from "Contemplative Crochet," the book the Circle is placing in the library in memory of Ida Mae Smith. She shared several "Prayers on a String" which are Virginia's and she gave each lady a universal strand of prayer beads.

Our April 13 meeting will be with Marietta VanFossen at 207 Pine Street.

A Women's Storybook Project

~ Linda Lee Cox

Women are helping incarcerated mothers connect with their children through literature.

One sweltering day in August, I found myself sitting in the chapel at Lane Murray Prison in Gatesville, Texas, gazing at the mural covering the back wall. The scene of a vibrant garden, painted by a prisoner, invites the eye through an open gate into a sky exploding with light. I held a tape recorder and waited a moment as the offender, whom I'll call "Christina," opened her mouth as if she were ready to speak. She stopped, however, and her eyes welled with tears.

"I don't know if my son will like this book," she managed to say.

"I'm sure he'll love it," I replied. "And you know something? He'll be much more excited about hearing your voice than he will be with reading the book."

She wasn't convinced. "I haven't talked to him in seven years," she said. Her son Blake was a little over seven years old.

"Christina, I've read many letters from children, and I believe this from the bottom of my heart. You are giving your son the greatest gift you can give him by being here today. He may not let you know how he feels for one reason or another, but *there is no substitute* for what you are giving him. You are the only one who can do this."



Volunteer Jorene Williams, left, records a mother's, right, bedtime story to her child. Sandy Hain

A Woman's Storybook Project—continued from page 2

Christina pulled herself together long enough to read *Love You Forever* by Robert Munsch. After reading this classic book about the depth of a mother's love for her son and his love for her, we were both full of tears — good, cleansing tears. We both thanked each other for making this happen for Blake, and she left to go mail the book and tape to her son.

What brought me to Gatesville on that Saturday and many others is the fact that Blake, like most children with incarcerated parents, is one of the most at-risk children in America. A child whose parent is incarcerated is six to nine times more likely to become incarcerated him/herself than a child whose parent is not incarcerated, according to the Children's Defense Fund's 2007 "America's Cradle to Prison Pipeline" report. Children like Blake are often born into a cycle of poverty, substance abuse and crime.

"I just want you all to know, no amount of counseling or progressive steps can compare with this wonderful project. Just to see my grandchildren's eyes light up, the smile on their faces, to hear Mommy's voice reading the storybook...."

I didn't ask Christina for her personal history, but I can imagine what that story might be from Blake's perspective. His household was very unstable — his mother is single and never finished high school. She earned less than \$1,000 per month before she was arrested. They might even have been homeless during that last month. Blake and his brother and sister didn't really understand what was going on, but things got desperate. One day, someone came to tell them that their mother had been arrested. Suddenly, what little stability they had was stripped away, and, since there were no other relatives around to take them in, they became wards of the state. They've never been to visit Christina because they live hundreds of miles away, and their caregivers, who depend on public transportation, don't have the motivation or the money to travel to the prison. Blake was just a baby, but his older siblings were reeling from shock, humiliation, anger and depression. They all suffered from extreme separation anxiety. They may in fact be the most at-risk children in the United States.

This history of Blake and Christina is typical according to the 2008 Bureau of Justice Statistics "Parents in Prison and Their Minor Children" report.

A group of women have been quietly responding to this crisis through the Women's Storybook Project of Texas. Formed in 2003, the program helps incarcerated mothers do what mothers have always done to comfort and nurture their children — read their children bedtime stories, using the warmth and cadence of their own voices to reassure and encourage them from hundreds of miles away.

An interfaith effort

Ten years earlier, a small group of women from Lutheran Social Services in Chicago started Aunt Mary's Storybook Program. These women had the ostensibly simple idea of helping incarcerated parents read stories to their children on tape. Then the children could hear their absent parent's voice whenever they wished.

Judith Dullnig, a member of St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Austin, Texas, heard about the program and began to organize a similar program in Texas, which lays claim to the largest prison population in the Western world and some of the largest women's prisons in the country. But Ms. Dullnig found that while the program was simple in theory, it was difficult to implement. Setting up the program in Texas took almost a year of meetings and visits to the prison to build trust and iron out details. But Ms. Dullnig persevered, and with the support of her pastor, a very dedicated group of volunteers and sympathetic wardens, the Women's Storybook Project of Texas was launched. Seven years later, the program operates in women's correctional institutions in Houston and in four of the five women's facilities in Gatesville — and it continues to expand to other locations in Texas.

A Woman's Storybook Project—continued from page 3

The program was truly an interfaith effort. The Texas Baptist Women's Convention donated more than 800 books, tapes, and mailers to get the project started. A large group of volunteers emerged from the Jewish community through Temple Beth Shalom in Austin. From there, word of the program made its way to Westlake United Methodist Church in Austin through Mary Lou Batlan, a United Methodist Women member who had ties to both congregations.

United Methodist Women at Westlake United Methodist Church excelled at fellowship and had several events planned throughout the year that brought the church's women together for meals, work on spiritual formation and to raise Mission Giving funds, but unit members wanted to engage in a hands-on mission effort. Ms. Batlan and I hoped that this program could draw our church's various United Methodist Women circles together for hands-on service with a sense of purpose — and adhere to what would later become our church's mission statement of "Following One, Serving All."

In 2008, with the blessing of our church's senior pastor, the Rev. Lynn Barton, the first group of Westlake United Methodist Women piled into my van, picked up some women from other churches and synagogues, and traveled to Gatesville, a town in central Texas that's home to five women's prisons and one men's prison.

When we arrived at the Lane Murray facility, the "offenders," as they're called, were allowed to select one new book per child, and then we helped them record an encouraging message and read the book to the child. The book, signed with a loving inscription, and the tape were then sent to each child. The women in the facility were allowed to do this with other volunteer groups for four consecutive months to provide some consistency for the child. Often, this is the only gift a child will receive from his or her mother and the only time the child will hear his or her mother's voice.

The responses to these gifts were overwhelming. They and their caregivers were asked to send letters at the end of the four-week program to let the Women's Storybook Project know what they thought. One grandmother wrote:

"I just want you all to know, no amount of counseling or progressive steps can compare with this wonderful project. Just to see my grandchildren's eyes light up, the smile on their faces, to hear Mommy's voice reading the storybook. This book is so awesome. The whole project is so dynamic, and I want you to know, from my point of view, this is a blessing for my grandchildren. If you can only imagine how happy these two boys were to receive this gift. ...They came to us like showers of blessings. My boys listen to Mommy's voice every night before they go to bed. It gives something to hold on to. Thank you."

Many children carry their tapes with them to school and listen whenever they feel lonely or need encouragement. The mothers express their love on the tapes and also encourage their children to read the book on their own, often telling them how much they enjoy reading themselves. After their release, mothers in the Houston area have reported taking their children to local libraries. The Women's Storybook Project is currently developing research studies with Rice University to measure the incarceration rate among the children of offenders as they mature. But no parent needs a statistic to tell them that connecting a mother with her child is beneficial to the child. The project made such connections 2,292 times in 2009.

The Women's Storybook Project is a simple idea: women reading bedtime stories to their children. But this interfaith, intergenerational program has an enormous impact on the children, the parents and the community. Through the Women's Storybook Project, Blake and Christina have a chance at a better education and a more productive and fulfilling life than the statistics would suggest.

Linda Lee Cox, Ph.D., is a member of United Methodist Women at Westlake United Methodist Church in Austin, Texas, and serves as her unit's liaison to the Women's Storybook Project of Texas. Ms. Cox is an adjunct associate professor of philosophy at Austin Community College. *To read more on the multiple benefits of this program and the entire article go to: 1) Response magazine March 2011 issue; or see the printout on the UMW bulletin board outside the upstairs parlors. Or see the website: www.storybookproject.org/*

Glora Wysner Circle

~Shirley Workman

Maurine Scott hosted the March 9 meeting of Glora Wysner with the following ladies attending: Helen Connel, Linny McNeill, Marna Burwell, Alta Smith, Maurine Scott, Nancy Vail, Alice Bark, Bonnie Magaw, Marge Winkle, Trish Rankin, Shirley Workman, Lee Dunlop and Helen Metcalfe. It was a pleasure to have both Lee and Helen as guests today.

Marge Winkle presented our program titled, "The Blessings of Nature." The goal of this program is to consider how our spiritual quests for peace are related in being reconciled and at peace with the world around us. We should focus on making peace with Mother Earth. We use the term "Mother Earth" as a figure of speech, as a metaphor for our earthly home, through which God has brought us to life and has nurtured us. We need to be more observant of everything around us and also of what we can do to take care of our earth and environment. We can all be more diligent in keeping our surroundings free of debris and litter. Take time to enjoy nature and the changing seasons when we have our daily devotion time.

A thank you note was read from Lois Carter, Executive Director of Care Net who presented the program at our November 2010 meeting.

The UMW Reading Program 02011 list was given to all present. The Three Rivers Spring District UMW meeting will be held April 2, 9 a.m. – 3 p.m. at the Fredericktown United Methodist Church. Lunch cost is \$6.00. Reservations and money should be given to Angie Richards. The School of Christian Mission meeting/program will be held July 15 in Alliance, Ohio.

Glora Wysner circle will hold their next meeting April 13 at the home of Marna Burwell. Janet Jennings will have the program. **Special Note:** Glora Wysner members who have not picked up your new UMW program booklets yet – contact Linny McNeill.

**East Ohio Conference United Methodist Women
School of Christian Mission 2011
"ALL THINGS MADE NEW"**

Mount Union One-Day Sampler July 15

Mount Union Three-Day Event July 15-17

To pick up a copy of the registration form for these events contact the church office at 740-392-6626. We also have the young women and children registration forms for the School of Christian Mission.

Gay Street United Methodist Women Newsletter

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"Think Globally, Act Locally"

*W*itness
*O*f
*W*omen

Deadline for the next issue is:
April 21, 2011

Dates to Remember

Three Rivers Spring District UMW Meeting: April 2, 9 a.m. – 3 p.m. at Fredericktown United Methodist Church. Special program/speakers: Rev. Delaine McGhee/Terry Baker. This is close to home! Only \$6.00. Contact your Circle leader to register.

Circle Meetings:

April 13 – Dorcas Circle 9:30 a.m. at Marietta Van Fossen

April 13 – Glora Wysner 1:30 a.m. at Marna Burwell

April 20 – Sarah Circle 7:00 p.m. at the church in the Green Parlor



School of Christian Mission: One-day sampler July 15

Three-day event July 15-17 both at Mount Union

A wonderful children's program for both the one-day and three-day schools will be available. Also, a special program for young women ages 13-18 will be held at the three-day event.

Annual Celebration: October 28-29 at Churchill UMC, Youngstown, Mahoning Valley District
The theme is "A Time for New Beginnings."