

God
is still
speaking,

penn central connection

The Newsletter of the Penn Central Conference United Church of Christ

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German Minister Stays Busy in Penn Central



In October, **Matthias Ratz** came to Penn Central Conference from Germany as an exchange minister for six months which will end in March. In Germany, Matthias' job-title is Vikar. This means, that he has finished his academic theological education with a degree more or less equivalent to the Master of Divinity. In the German church there is a second phase of education, which is more practical and lasts 2 ½ years called Vikariat. During that time a Vikar (probationer in ministry) works in a congregation together with a mentoring senior pastor and gets paid for that. About every three months he or she goes back to a seminary-like institution for two or three weeks, reflecting on their work in the parish and learns how to improve it. After a second exam at the end of the Vikariat, the new pastor is ordained and open to look for a call in a church.

For Matthias, his Vikariat started here in Penn Central Confer-

ence during these six months. When he returns to Germany, he will continue his Vikariat. Although he is not ordained yet, he has received a call to ministry by his Landeskirche (comparable to a UCC conference), which allows him to preach and administer the sacraments.

The German Union of Evangelical Churches (UEK) has a partnership with the United Church of Christ. One of the UCC's predecessors, the Evangelical & Reformed Church, has its roots in the predecessors of the German UEK. His Landeskirche, the Evangelical Church in the Rhineland (EKiR), is Penn Central Conference's partner. Matthias' host congregations are St. Pauls Stoverstown, Spring Grove with Pastor Dennis Weidler and the Cashtown/McKnightstown Charge in the Gettysburg Association with Pastor Austin Chinault. He also accompanies Austin when he serves as chaplain at Homewood retirement facilities in Hanover. In addition, the Chinaults are providing a place for Matthias to stay.

Matthias says, "The two congregations, Homewood, York and Gettysburg Associations, and the Conference have kept me busy and entertained. I try to alternate between St. Paul's and the Charge for the Sunday worship services. I preached in both congregations, read scripture, took

over parts of the liturgy and participated in Sunday school. One highlight was playing the with the praise band at St. Paul's and the York Association Annual Meeting."

During the week, he tries to attend some committee-meetings and other events. The Cashtown/McKnightstown Charge has a growing youth group he attends regularly. Two or three days per week he usually spends at Homewood visiting the residents, leading devotions and taking part in other activities such as the Pennsylvania German Group or the very important Ping-Pong exercise on Friday morning. He has also spent some time at Hartman Center.

He has enjoyed some sightseeing and said the weather provided some surprises too as he got to shovel snow and chop wood in October.

"People are very friendly and welcoming. I am very glad to be here and enjoy every day, never regretting my decision to come. I'm so very thankful for this great opportunity," Matthias said.

Interested in the Penn Central Conference UEK German Partnership? Be part of the bi-annual colloquy from July 1-6, in Penn Central Conference. Build relationships with pastors from Germany and wrestle with relevant issues affecting the world-wide church. Contact Sheresa Simpson-Rice (sheresa0928@comcast.net or 717-764-7933).

A message from marja



Dear Partners in Mission and Ministry,

What's green and black and red all over? Okay, okay, it's a hokey take off on an old joke--but really it's not a joke at all. It's the beginning of a newly identified commitment in the Conference to become more ecological, to commit ourselves in the name of the gospel to the integrity of creation. So let me take the colors and use them to talk about this exciting possibility for our congregations.

First, of course the "red" should be "read". There are wonderful resources available free on the internet to help churches begin to study the issues of global warming and the depletion of natural resources. For example, the National Council of Churches has a very good web site just devoted to these subjects and containing a many [really---dozens!] of free resources that you can print and use in your adult church school classes. Their website is www.nccusa.org. Our own UCC website also has articles and links that will prove invaluable. Start at www.ucc.org/environmental-ministries/. And there are secular websites like www.350.org that will tell you about specific issues, like ozone and air particulates.

"Black" is for being "in the black." Most of our churches are feeling the crunch of increasing costs, including energy costs. We hope that as you join in this commitment, you will begin to make changes at church that will positively affect your bottom line. For instance, you might put motion sensors on your bathroom lights. At a loss for ideas of where to start? Almost every en-

ergy company will send someone out to your church to perform a free "energy audit," and make suggestions.

"Green" is for the direction we'll be moving. Wouldn't it be great to be a "green" Conference, full of "green" churches? To that end, you are invited to come to our Growing Stronger Churches event on Saturday, March 10, 2012, at Colonial Park United Church of Christ in Harrisburg. We are so excited. It will be different than anything we've ever done before. We're going to begin together with a very special film called *Renewal*. Then a team from the *Interfaith Coalition for the Environment* will help us process what we've seen and how we can use it. After lunch, there will be a host of workshops, both by our own Ministry Teams and by visiting experts [including one where you can find out about energy audits].

I hope you'll begin work now to gather a team of people from your church to attend Growing Stronger Churches: *Renewal*.

A final note is to say how much we are looking forward to the arrival of Rev. Dr. Thom Webster on our staff. Thom will begin work on Feb. 15. We hope you and your church will participate in helping us make him welcome.

Many blessings,

marja

Connection

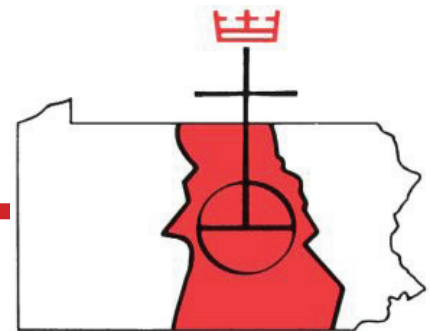
Marja Coons-Torn, Conference Minister

Brenda B. Waleff, Editor

Penn Central Connection is published four times a year (February, June, October, and December) to inform local church members about the mission and ministry of Penn Central Conference and its local churches. Subscriptions are available for an electronic edition or mailed version by contacting the conference office. News items and photos should be e-mailed to the editor by the 1st of each month prior to the publication date.

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Conference Transitions

new positions

Sara Aker, Pastor, St John's, Markelsville
Tom Degnitz, Designated Pastor, St Paul's, Herndon
Paul Gehris, Interim, Zion, Blain, Sandy Hill, Loysville
Joe Lingenfelter, Interim, First Middleburg
Elmer Scofield, Bridge Pastor, St

Paul, Shrewsbury
Denise Smelley, Supply, St Stephen's, Upton

goodbyes

Lois Martin, Interim, Faith, State College
Sally Maxwell, Supply Pastor, St Matthew's, Spring Glen

ordinations

Haan Phelps, 1/15/12

churches

Penbrook, Harrisburg voted to become Open and Affirming on Sunday, November 20, 2011.

York Association participates in MLK's Day of Service

The paint froze almost as quickly as it was brushed on Monday, January 16 in downtown York but that didn't deter a group of volunteers honoring Martin Luther King Jr. The United Way of York County marked King's birthday this year as it has in the past, with its annual Day of Service. Several York association clergy, spouses and youth were part of the group.

2012's service project, Downtown Positive Art Initiative, started back in mid-November with students and artists creating images that were to be displayed either on banners or by being painted on the windows of stores. On Martin Luther King Jr day, volunteers hung the banners downtown, as well as painted store windows. No artistic talent was necessary, only the ability to fill in the artist's image with paint.

"It's not a traditional service project, but the art beautifies the city's downtown and spreads the word about what community service

means, said Kristen Clineburg, youth volunteer initiative coordinator for the United Way.

Original works of art were created in 15 schools across the county.

Rob Brown of Grace, York said, "It was very interesting to see the various artistic interpretations of Martin Luther King's hopes and dreams of justice and equality for all people created by students in York area schools."



Steve Zorbaugh, a member of Dover UCC, joined members from other York UCC congregations to hang art in the window of Marketview Arts on West Philadelphia Street in York Monday..

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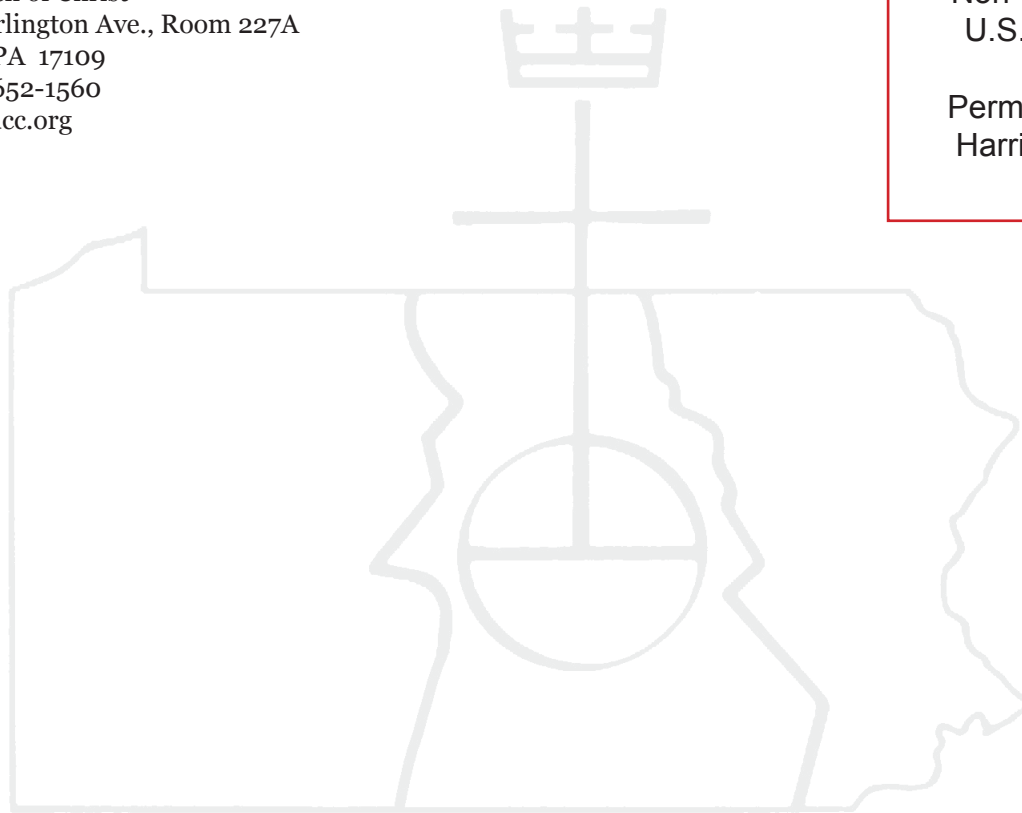
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Hartman Center Unveils New Family Camp

The schedule is out for the 2012 Hartman Center camp season. Favorites are back like Music and Drama, CSI Milroy and Grandparents camp. There are also some new camps including a brand new experience in family and Christian living and fellowship.

The week of July 4 is a time for families to go on vacation so bring your entire family to Hartman Center that week. There will be all kinds of fun activities for your family (and extended family) to do together, even fireworks for the 4th of July! Plans include crafts, games, swimming, offsite trips and time for just relaxing. Enjoy singing around the campfire and roasting hotdogs and smores. There will be options for all ages for Bible

study and spiritual practices. Every night we will have the opportunity to worship together.

Come for the entire week or just half of the week. You can bring your own camper or tent and use one of our camper pads (there is water & electric hook-ups); stay with family or a few friends in one of our cabins or Michaux Lodge; or share a room with young adults in the Stone House.

The cost to attend all camps this year has been lowered For this holiday week which includes three meals a day, no family will pay more than \$850 for the week long experience and \$500 for the half week. It's even less if you bring a camper or tent.

What a great summer holiday vacation for the family - no worries, the freedom to enjoy different types of activities and all your meals taken care of right in your own backyard! Check out www.hartmancenter.com or pick up a brochure at your church. Questions, contact Bruce Druckenmiller (bruce@hartman-center.com; 717-667-2431)

