

June 2008

Volume 1, Issue 4

Reaching Out

Albany United Methodist Church

Serving the Community for 100 years



Special Articles

- Pastor Sam Park shares about his trip to the Middle East
- Members of AUMC share personal testimonies
- Cheryl Dawson describes worship services in women's county jail.

Table of Contents

Beyond the Walls	1
Added Inspiration	2
Family of God	2
St. Thomas'	
Evangelism in India	3
A Revival Behind	
the Walls	4
Insert:	
What's Going On? Marjorie	
Keck	
God's Unchanging Grace,	
Hae Wan Lee	

Beyond the Walls

By Pastor Sam Park

One of the most vivid memories that I have from my trip to the Holy Land last October is of the two Walls: the Western Wall in Jerusalem, which is often called the "Wailing Wall," and the "New Wall" in the West Bank, which was recently built by the Israeli government in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

The Western Wall is the only remaining part of the (second) Jerusalem Temple which was rebuilt around 516 B.C and destroyed in the year of 70 A.D. To Jewish people, the Temple was not just a place of worship; it was believed to be *the* place where God dwelled. Its destruction was considered to be much more than just losing a building. It is therefore understandable for many Jews still to come and mourn at the Wall.

It was a very emotional experience for me to visit the Western Wall. Any person who loves God would feel the same. Though our faith is not based on a place, a place

like this reminds us of where we come from and what our ancestors went through in history. Kneeling and putting my hands on the Wall, I thought of the excitement that King Solomon may have had 3000 years ago when he dedicated the first Temple on that very site, and the joy that the people of Israel may have had on their rededication of the second Temple after their return from exile in Babylon. Above all, I could feel the unbearable pains and sorrows that the nation has experienced during the past 2000 years not only over the loss of the Temple building but also over what they had gone through until recent history.

But little did I know that this 60 meter long stone wall is a symbol of the great tension between Israel and the Islamic world. For Muslims, the Wall is also considered one of the most holy sites. It is part of the huge platform which forms the foundation of the Aqsa

Mosque and the Dome of the Rock and is also believed to be the gate through which Muhammad was carried when he arrived at Jerusalem.

However, in Israel there is a New Wall in the West Bank, which is even bigger wall than the Wailing Wall and is dubbed "Berlin Wall" by Palestinians. The wall is causing hardship to tens of thousands of Palestinian people who live in Jerusalem and their immediate neighbors in the surrounding West Bank. To many Christians and Muslims in the area, life is miserable. Just imagine if there were 24 feet high concrete walls alongside Marin Ave here in Albany. Some of the children on this side would have to go through check points to go to school on the other side of town every day. Some trucks from the other side would have to come through the same check points to deliver milk and bread to their customers on this side every morning. I know terrorist attacks and suicide bombings sometimes occur. But all of us who visited the New Wall agreed that the fence would never solve those problems.

Beyond the Walls continued...



The walls are not just in Jerusalem; they are all over the world including the Bay Area in California. If we intentionally do not open our hearts and reach out our hands to our neighbors we can easily set up walls between us and others. Ironically, church can be a place of more walls of many sorts.

Albany United Methodist Church welcomes all God's people; we welcome anyone regardless of who they are; we exist for the community; we want to open our doors; we

want to be the community's spiritual home; we are eager to reach out our hands to needy families; we want to work with the community to tear down any wall of injustice and set up a wall of peace here in the community and beyond. I sincerely welcome our brothers and sisters in our community to the loving fellowship of Albany United Methodist Church.

An added inspiration in my journey with the Lord...

By Prashant Isaac



I am an engineer hailing from Chennai, the capital city of the state Tamil Nadu in southern India. I belong to a Christian family. On a work assignment from India, I came to the Bay Area in 2005. I lived in downtown San Francisco for a couple of years. I attended church there at St. Mary's Cathedral but longed for a true Christian fellowship.

Moving into the surroundings of El Cerrito in April 2007, I still wanted a Christian fellowship that I was longing for. On a Sunday morning, I was walking along Marin Avenue in Albany in search of a church

which I had earlier found on the Internet. Though *Albany United Methodist church (AUMC)* wasn't the one I saw in the Internet, it was on my way and it was almost 10am when the Sunday service of AUMC was about to begin. I felt as if I had to get into this church building and I did. And I am extremely happy and blessed for doing so.

The brothers and sisters in this church are so loving and caring that it almost feels like a family. This family prays for all the concerns that each one of the congregation members has. The sermon is relevant to

today's world and is a blessing every week. AUMC fills my heart with songs of deliverance, through both the old time hymns and the contemporary music. I have the opportunity to sing for the church choir, that I always longed for. Even when I am not feeling well and want to stay home, there is something that always draws me to this loving Christian fellowship. I thank the Lord for allowing me to be part of this loving community that is always there to listen and prays for me enriching my journey with the Lord.

I'm so glad I'm a part of this family of God...

By Janet Coffman

"At Albany UMC, I have found a group of caring Christians from diverse backgrounds."

I came to the Albany United Methodist Church (UMC) at an especially difficult time in my life. Over the previous six years, I'd been through a series of emotionally draining experiences and felt very much alone. Although

I'd been raised as a Christian, I had wandered away from the church in my twenties. I still went to church when I visited my family, but I was focused on my career and not on God. At Albany UMC, I found a

group of caring Christians from diverse backgrounds. People welcomed me warmly and made me feel at home. They accepted me as I was and didn't ask nosy questions about my struggles. I found

Janet Coffman continued...

the love and support I needed to renew my relationship with God and make a difficult transition. I now have an inner peace that I never had before. My life certainly isn't perfect, but it's much richer because I have a church family with whom I can share my joys and who will pray for me and comfort me when the going gets rough.

Another aspect of Albany UMC that is important to me is the congregation's commitment to helping people in need. One of my frustrations with some Christian leaders is that they seem more interested in condemning people who don't share their beliefs than in following the Good Samaritan's example of caring for those who are suffering. For many years, Albany UMC has given

generously to organizations that help needy people in our community and around the world, such as the Alameda County Community Food Bank, Elizabeth House (a transitional home for women and children), Church World Service, Heifer Project International, and the United Methodist Committee on Relief. Our pastor delivers meals for Albany's Meals on Wheels Program. We recently collaborated with other churches to distribute Bibles and conduct two worship services for women in the San Francisco jail. (See Cheryl Dawson's article for more information about those events.)

I'm so glad to be a part of a church that nurtures my faith and helps me to put it into action.

St. Thomas' Evangelism in India

By Prashant Isaac

Before finally ascending to Heaven, His original abode, some 40 days after resurrection, Lord Jesus commanded the disciples to stretch out and preach the Good News to the ends of the Earth.

Knowing that his Master wanted him to go to India at any cost, the Apostle Thomas landed at Cranganore in Kerala, in the western coast of Southern India, during the year 52 A.D. He established seven churches in Kerala.

After completing the seven churches in Kerala, St. Thomas crossed over to the Coromondal coast and landed in Madras. He lived for some years here. His home was a cave on a small hillock. This cave is preserved till date at a place called Little Mount.

In addition to sharing the good news with

thousands of people, St. Thomas also built a chapel with his own hands in Mylapore, which is about 3 miles from Little Mount. After his martyrdom, the Apostle's body was buried here. Today a big church with Gothic architecture called "San Thome Cathedral" stands on St. Thomas's tomb.

The spread of Christianity in a Hindu dominated society of Madras was indeed a matter of jealousy for many. One day, during the year 72 A.D., a Hindu Brahmin chased the Saint from his Little Mount cave-home along the road and pierced him to death with his lance when the Saint ran the distance of 1.5 mile to the hill. And thus it was named as "St. Thomas Mount", the spot where St. Thomas was murdered. His body was taken to Mylapore and buried in the chapel he built.

St. Thomas Mount remained a simple hill feature for several centuries. Diego Fernandez, a Portuguese priest, built a



**San Thome Cathedral,
Mylapore, Chennai**

small chapel on it in the year 1523 A.D. By then St. Thomas Mount had become a place of pilgrimage and as the number of pilgrims increased, Father Gaspar Goelho converted the chapel into a big church in 1548 A.D.

If you plan a journey to India, do include Chennai (Madras) in your itinerary and while there, don't forget to visit Little Mount, St. Thomas Mount, and the San Thome Cathedral. During this sojourn, which could be titled also as 'pilgrimage', the Christian history of some 1960 years would unfold itself right before your eyes.

Albany United
Methodist
Church

Phone:
510-526-7346

Web:
www.albanyumc.com

E-Mail:
albanyumc@sbcglobal.net

*Open hearts.
Open minds.
Open doors.*

A Revival Behind the Walls

By Cheryl Dawson

During Holy Week our church sponsored two worship services for women in County Jail #8 which is located in San Francisco. This county jail presently houses almost three hundred women. The numbers of women who are incarcerated have spiraled in recent years giving pause to many community care providers. Who are these women? From whence have they come? What do they need? And finally, what is required for them to change their lives?

While this article cannot begin to address the myriad circumstances which have led the women to this unhappy intersection in their life, we can look at an evangelical outreach effort our church made, in cooperation with members of ministries from other congregations, to help these women confront the distress in their lives.

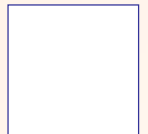
The services were held on two

nights to reach as many women as possible. We obtained the full support of Captain of the facility, Ms. Jona Pecot, who deserves incredible appreciation for her belief in our effort, and her willingness to move the agency on behalf of the event. Truly God was working in our midst. Our Pastor, Dr. Sangyil Park, supported this effort in it's entirety from the onset and worked tirelessly to bring it to fruition. Together with other members of our outreach team, the support of the general congregation, and the unmitigated Grace of God we carried two spirit filled worship services to over two hundred women.

Our outreach ministry was a vigorous spirit led event. We understood that the perils and persistent maladies in the lives of the women we served create great despair. We understood that hope is short supply as the

women face the consequences of poor decision and missed opportunity. However, we sought to share the good news of Jesus in an effort to teach the women how to overcome their present situation. We brought the promises of God to bear on an unbearable situation. As the women raised their hands to God asking for prayer to stand against the present plight and current predicaments, we ministered to them. We prayed with them and for them. As a final blessing we donated 127 Bibles to them to assist them in finding a true direction in Christ for their lives. We invite you to become a part of our next Revival *Behind the Walls*.

Albany United Methodist Church
980 Stannage Ave.
Albany, CA 94706



God's Unchanging Grace

Hae Wan Lee

Since I came here from Korea last summer, I've been staying here with my family as a visiting scholar at UC Berkeley. My main research subjects are peace making, conflict resolution, and social justice.

Formerly, I had worked as a judge in several district courts and Seoul High court in Korea. During that period, I loved my job and felt happy and peaceful even if it required very hard work and continuous study. But in the innermost of my heart, I wished I could contribute to society in a more creative and pioneering way. In 2000, seeing new opportunities new millennium had brought, I decided to depart from court and establish a new legal enterprise that will engage in the legal information providing and on & off line practical legal education, etc. It was not an easy decision, but, in the prayer of early mornings, I found it was God's will and came to believe God's love and protection would be always with me. And just at the time, a large Korean law firm decided to fund my venture.

Before long, I found it had been a very incautious attempt in a human view (but not in God's view). In the process of making a brand new company profitable enough to sustain on its own, I faced a lot of difficulties which were beyond my imagination and original estimation. Sometimes I lost my inner peace and sometimes I became a sleepless man.

But, God's love and protection have been always with me unerringly. Thanks to God's amazing grace, eventually I was able to

overcome all the difficulties, and now my company (LawnB) on the stable growth is acknowledged as the best Korean company in the field of legal information, legal software system, and practical law education. Even though my job as a CEO of a legal venture company has been giving me much less income than ordinary law firm lawyers could get, I've been very happy that I could make creative social contributions I really wanted.

God also gave me a lot of opportunities to participate in the worthwhile activities that would be impossible without the humanly incautious decision of the year 2000. Based on my special experience, assisting Korean government agency I drafted a lot of important Korean laws, and participated even in helping Cambodia and Vietnam governments make information industry related laws. Especially, I thank God that with my wife I could participate in the establishing of Korea Peace Institute (KPI) which is engaging in research and education for preparing for the peaceful unification of Korean peninsula.

Of course, it was also by God's grace that both I and my wife were able to take a sabbatical year and come here with two daughters. Here in this beautiful American town, God's grace is unchangingly guiding us. Above all, every member of my family was convinced of the amazing grace God showed us in the early stage of settling here. Without Pastor Sam's warm, kind and loving help, we would've had much more difficulties in the early time. We believe that the seemingly accidental meeting with Pastor Sam in a little restaurant was not by chance at all, but by God's grace. My family rented a

good home thanks to Pastor Sam's help, and met Albany United Methodist Church.

I am very grateful that I could be a member of this church with my family. It is not as big as the Korean church I belonged to. But I find it to be a strength rather than a weakness. All the members are building a real, living community of God's people as a family. Really, this community is very warm and full of love, and very open-minded to diversity and really earnest in the outreach towards the people on the margin. I also love the pastor's sermons; they are full of genuine enthusiasm and strong inspiration of God's love. And Tuesday Bible meetings are helping me to grow strong in faith, find God's purpose towards my life, and realize how to love people unselfishly. I'd like to express special thanks to all the members of the Bible meeting, including Cheryl and Janet. And I expect that Charlie's interesting ESL class will help me and my wife a lot in improving our English skills.

Even after going back to Korea (It's supposed to be on the end of July this year), I will forever remember the warm hospitality, genuine love and great teaching that this wonderful community gave me. May this community grow into a more powerful and influential one in the unchanging grace of God. Thank you!