

Religion

■ Call Donna Abramczyk: 1-734-246-0853

Program at APPC will focus on a peace theme

In remembrance of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States, the Presbyterian Women of Detroit's annual gathering will have a theme centered on peace when they meet at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday at Allen Park Presbyterian Church, 7101 Park Ave.

The program will feature a large screen viewing of "Dona Nobis Pacem," or "Give Me Peace," a major work by Ralph Vaughan Williams that was performed by a chamber orchestra, soloists and a 60-voice choir under the direction of James Parker during Grosse Ile Presbyterian Church's annual Lenten concert in March.

Vaughan Williams chose three sources for the lyrics of his 1936 work — verses from the Bible, poet Walt Whitman and John Bright, a member of the British Parliament.

Known for his anti-war sentiments, Vaughan Williams drew upon his experience as a soldier fighting in France in World War I, and it has been said that he created in music what artist Pablo Picasso depicted in his 1937 painting, "Guernica," the bombing of a small Basque village in northern Spain.

The bombing, a collaboration of Franco, Spain's dictator, and Germany's Adolph Hitler on the effectiveness of aerial bombs, lasted three hours, reducing the village to ruins.

A copy of the painting done by Paul Showalter, a retired art teacher who sang in the concert, will be on display. Showalter also will introduce the taped concert and offer background on Picasso's painting.

There is no charge for the program; however, a free will offering will be taken. For more information, call 1-313-386-1985 or 1-313-382-7502.

Making a difference in Africa

Brownstown woman heads drive to provide dresses for Africa's little girls

By SHEILA R. MCAFEE
THE NEWS-HERALD

Anyone who has ever witnessed the wide smile of a little girl trying on a new dress — a smile that tells the onlooker the dress fits just right and makes every inch of her being feel beautiful — will understand the growing excitement surrounding a nationwide humanitarian effort started Downriver.

Rachel O'Neill of Brownstown Township has spearheaded a project called Little Dresses for Africa that transforms pillowcases into colorful dresses for young girls in the African village of Ntcheu, Malawi.

"The little girls are so precious and so innocent, yet they face such oppression," O'Neill said. "We want to plant the seed in their hearts, for possibly the first time, that they are worthy."

O'Neill wants to have 1,000 dresses to distribute to the villagers by January. And, although there are nearly 700 dresses completed, she wants to keep the bobbins spinning.

Throughout the Downriver area and across the country, sewing groups are helping O'Neill meet her goal. Satellite groups have formed throughout Michigan, as well as in Tennessee, Kentucky, Missouri and California.

"There are a million rea-

sons this is good," O'Neill said of the project, adding that she sees no way that it can get too big.

"The sky's the limit! When we meet the goal of 1,000, we will just set another goal."

The dress idea began to unfold in November, when O'Neill traveled to Malawi, Africa, as part of a mission trip with Hope Endeavors in Marysville. Working in conjunction with Save the Orphans, the group built a hostel, held Bible camps and distributed health supplies.

O'Neill said she was so taken by the little girls in the village and thought how nice it would be for them to have new dresses.

Sitting in the dirt under the hot African sun one day, she shared her vision with Megan Zann of Jeddo, northwest of Port Huron. During this brainstorming session, the name Little Dresses materialized. At the time, it was just a dream.

When O'Neill returned home, she couldn't get out of her mind the little girls she met, and kept thinking about what she could do for them.

"It kept gnawing at me, and I told myself, 'I gotta do something for them,'" said O'Neill, who is executive assistant to the chief executive officer of AVL North America in Plymouth.

While she knew in her heart that the dress idea was great, O'Neill considers herself a novice sewer, so she



Photo by E.L. Conley

After noticing the ragged clothing worn by little girls she saw on a trip to Africa, Brownstown resident Rachel O'Neill has dedicated herself to sending them simple dresses made from pillowcases.

turned to friends, family and fellow church members at Trenton Church of Christ, for assistance in making this dream a reality.

Sometimes, she said, simple is good, so efforts turned to finding an easy dress pattern, which resulted in the pillowcase idea discovered by Jema McCardell of Wyandotte.

"We all realized we have old pillowcases sitting on a closet shelf that are still in usable condition," O'Neill said.

Already hemmed, the pillowcases simply have to be

cut for neck and arm openings. The group decided to use elastic to form a gathered neck and seam binding to finish the arms.

The beauty of the project is that anyone can help, O'Neill said. She welcomes folks to cut the dress pattern, sew, iron the finished pieces or size and bag the garments. Pillowcases in king, queen and standard are needed to dress girls of various ages.

O'Neill's sister, Barbara Ingram of Taylor, estimates she has sewn 150 dresses, some with the assistance of students in her class last year at Shelters Elementary School in Southgate.

"It is so easy and (working on this project) makes you feel so good," said Ingram.

She said she sews most of her dresses at home, delivering them to monthly gatherings at O'Neill's home, where the sewing, ironing, sizing and packaging continues.

"Many of us work on the dresses at our homes and turn them in each month," Ingram said. "Each month when we meet I am encouraged to continue making more dresses."

The project has become a community builder for church groups, neighbors, residents of local retirement complexes and families.

O'Neill's husband, Michael, orchestrated the couple's first visit to Africa for Rachel's 50th birthday two years ago. They visited Uganda, and the trip mixed sightseeing and humanitari-

an efforts, as they provided dental care and education for villagers there.

"I am not sure why, but I feel I have always been called to Africa," O'Neill said.

Last year, she encouraged a friend and her son to take part in a mission trip to Malawi by suggesting she go with them. That trip has changed her life.

As is the case with all grass-roots efforts, O'Neill has received help from her husband and their children, Casey Gardner of Wyandotte and Michael O'Neill of Flat Rock. Gardner's daughter, Abigail, also has gotten involved.

For the trip next year, the dresses will be shipped to Africa with other donations for the village, including an ox plow and bicycles collected by Hope Endeavors.

The cost to ship the crate is estimated at \$6,000. O'Neill is accepting monetary donations to cover the cost of shipping.

Once the items are shipped, O'Neill will journey to the village, meet the shipment and personally present each little girl with her new dress.

She said she is looking forward to seeing the smiles on their faces.

For information about getting involved in Little Dresses, contact O'Neill at Rachel.oneill@sbcglobal.net for a free CD about the project. Or, you can call her at 1-734-637-9064 or 1-734-783-0066.



Photo by Rachel O'Neill

Volunteers, many from the Trenton Church of Christ, which Rachel O'Neill attends, display the dresses they made for the Little Dresses for Africa project.

UNDER DOWNRIVER SPIRES

Puppet ministry

Puppets for Christ, a ministry group from St. Lorenz Lutheran Church in Frankenmuth, will help lead today's 9:30 a.m. worship service at Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, 9601 Pardee Road, Taylor.

Creation and life

Grady McMurdy of Creation Worldview ministries will speak on the topic of life and creation at 8:30 and 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. today at Woodland Church, 24101 Van Horn, Brownstown Township. For more information, visit the church Web site, www.woodland-church.com.

Christian concert

Christian folk singer Angela Josephine of Traverse City will lead a workshop for teenagers on being Christians at 9:15 a.m. today at Rockwood First Congregational Church, 22600 Mather St. She also will sing during the 10:30 a.m. worship service.

Songs will be from her two CDs, including her latest release, "Grace Exhaled."

After the service, a meal will be served in the fellowship hall, and two inflatable bouncing rides will be available for children in the early afternoon. The public is invited to attend the free event. For more information, call 1-734-379-3711.

Celebrating women

The Women's Day Ministry of Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church will present its annual Women's Day Celebration next Sunday at the church, 2936 12th St., Ecorse.

Speaking on the theme of "Women In Step With God" will be Deloris

White of Mount Zion at the 7:30 a.m. service, followed by Linda Darden Lee of Greater Bethlehem Baptist Church speaking at the 11 a.m. service.

White with red accents will be the day's color theme, and the Women's Day Choir will provide the music. All are welcome to attend. For more information, call the church office, 1-313-383-1069.

Remembering

A memorial service for the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States will be held at 7 p.m. Tuesday at the First United Methodist Church of Wyandotte, 72 Oak St.

Saving marriages

Pastors Jeff Meyers and LeRoy Sullivan of Kansas will share the marriage-saving techniques that have curtailed divorce and cohabitation in their congregations at a special Marriage Resource Center presentation Friday at the Burton Manor, 27777 Schoolcraft Road, Livonia.

The free event will be held from 10 a.m. to noon and include a continental breakfast. To reserve a seat, call Pamela Hudson of the center at 1-313-278-4400.

Buddhism talk

Leonard Drouillard will present a free talk on "Buddhism and the Three Vehicles of the Path to Enlightenment" from 6 to 8 p.m. Tuesday at the Flat Rock Public Library, 25200 Gibraltar Road. To learn more, call 1-734-782-9137 or 1-505-670-8352.

Time to rally

Faith United Methodist Church, 2530 Charlton, Trenton, will hold its rally day next Sunday. The day will

begin with a continental breakfast at 8:30 a.m. and worship services at 9:30 and 11 a.m. Coffee fellowships will be at 10:30 a.m. and noon. For more information, call the church office, 1-734-671-5211.

Comedy show

St. Paul Lutheran Church will present "Laugh All Night" with comedian Paul Aldrich at 4 p.m. Sept. 23 at the church, 2550 Edsel St., Trenton.

Aldrich, who has been called "100 percent clean, 100 percent funny," has spent the last 20 years performing in comedy clubs, theaters, churches and on TV, including "At The Improv" and on the Showtime network. As a recording artist, he has 13 projects to his credit, including the award-winning CD "Mock 'n' Roll."

Complimentary tickets can be reserved by calling the St. Paul Concert Series office, 1-734-676-2942 or online at www.SPLCOnline.com

Saintly show

"The Confessions of Saint Augustine," a one-man dramatization performed by actor/filmmaker Leonardo Defilippis, will be presented at 7:30 p.m. Oct. 12 at Davidson Middle School in Southgate.

Tickets for the program, which is suitable for children 12 and older, cost \$8 a person or \$25 a family. Send a self-addressed, stamped envelope with a check payable to St. Luke Productions to The Confessions of Saint Augustine, c/o Debbie Bloomfield, 1811 Superior, Wyandotte, MI 48192, or e-mail confessionsofaugustine@gmail.com.

Celebrations set at churches

Members of St. John African Methodist Episcopal Church in River Rouge are planning a weekend of special events to celebrate the 90th anniversary of the founding of their church.

A semi-formal dinner dance is planned for 6 to 10 p.m. Friday at the Red Fawn Banquet Hall in Allen Park. Tickets cost \$40 a person.

Saturday, a Pioneers' Day luncheon to honor members who are 80 years old and older will be served from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. in the church fellowship hall at 505 Beechwood St. Tickets are \$5.

Next Sunday will be "Church Anniversary Day" with family and friends attending an 11 a.m. worship service. A meal will be served afterward.

For more information about any of the events or to reserve tickets, call the church office, 1-313-386-2288, or fax, 1-313-386-5986.

The congregation of Angelica Lutheran Church in Allen Park will celebrate the 60th anniversary of the church's founding at a special service at 11 a.m., followed by a family picnic, next Sunday. Bishop David Stechholz of the English District office in Farmington will deliver the sermon. All members, past and present, are invited to attend.

The celebration will continue on Sept. 23. Tom Trenney, director of music and award-winning organist at the First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham, will perform a musical accompaniment of the 1920 silent film classic "The Mark of Zorro" on the church's newly restored pipe organ. The concert is set for 7 p.m.

For details on any of the events, call the church office, 1-313-381-2080.