

DIVING INTO THE DEEP

Eden congregation blesses bikes and bikers

Motorcycle riders may not be a huge demographic in UCC churches, but at Eden UCC, Hayward they have a strong advocate in pastor Arlene Nehring. In February she led a "Bike Blessing" at the church of over 30 motorcyclists and 15 other wheeled vehicles.

"We're blessing the bikes and bikers of Hayward, Castro Valley, and San Leandro for safety and because biking is a healthy, fun, and environmentally-conscious way to get around the Bay Area," said Nehring.

The request to bless the bikes came from Kevin Casey, an Eden Church member who is Vice-President of Pathfinders, a clean and sober motorcycle club active in the Bay Area promoting healthy living and an active life-



Arlene Nehring of Eden UCC, Hayward blesses riders and motorcycles from a group in the church that promotes clean and sober living and active health through bike riding. Earlier that day she preached on "Biker Jesus," (see story below).

style through motorcycling.

The blessing came after Sunday worship, where Nehring preached on "Biker Jesus." After the blessing, and, of course, a reception, the bikers rode away a bit more connected to God.

CALENDAR OF PRAYER

Please hold in your prayers:

- Successful completion of the 100K run.
- People facing life threatening illnesses and their families.
- Churches in care of our Conference.
- John Thomas and Geoffrey Black as the UCC transitions into new leadership at the national setting.
- High school seniors
- Planners of Annual Gathering.
- Association moderators leading meetings and councils.

Biker Jesus: What if itinerant 12-stepper came to town?

by Arlene Nehring, Eden UCC, Hayward

Editor's note: Arlene Nehring preached a longer version of this sermon Feb. 8 before the "Biker Blessing" of motorcycles and riders. (see accompanying story.)

What if Jesus, living today, were a biker? The itinerant teacher and healer, not in ancient Mediterranean dress but in leather and boots, on a Harley, leading a 12-step group. Biker Jesus.

Imagine Jesus taking his message of a Higher Power on the road, driving out the demons that feed people's addictions, and teaching step-by-step how to work the program, so that addicts might one day enjoy the blessings of life that God intended.

This Jesus would be seen as suspicious and as a novelty.

Imagine people with long histories of addiction, who have tried many times to get off of booze or dope, who have fallen off the wagon not once or twice,

but multiple times.

This man is not only concerned about these addicts, but about those who are entangled in the addict's addictions, those whom 12-steppers call "co-dependents."

Jesus has come to your town - to our town - to tell us life doesn't have to be like this. He also shows us how our own behavior might be a deterrent to another getting well. Changing our behavior could make our whole family and community healthier.

Along the way, Biker Jesus bumps into numerous people who resist the program:

- Those who love their addiction too much to give it up, and have lost their capacity to choose a different way of life.
- Those who don't believe they're worth saving, who want their miserable lives to an end.
- Those who have tried other cures — and those who have supported persons in recovery before

— who have bought into other programs (literally or metaphorically) only to have their hopes raised, their fortunes spent, and their hearts and pockets left empty.

These examples remind us of why folks are cautious about new guys in town like Jesus.

Still Jesus comes to our town, and he heals people, because that is what he came out to do. He comes despite the resilience of our diseases and doubts, and he preaches and teaches the same message that he delivered in the last town.

The message is a simple one, but oh so hard for us to believe. The message is this: God loves you.

That's it. That's step one in Jesus' treatment plan - hearing and believing the good news that God loves you.

It takes years for this message to sink in. Don't expect to believe it instantly. We will need to hear

it for the rest of our lives. But at least today could be a start. Today could be the first day of the rest of your life. Today could be the first day that you dared to let yourself believe that you are God's beloved child, that you are loved just the way you are, and that God wants oh so much better for you.

When we can begin to hear these words and dare to begin to trust them in our heart of hearts, then everything else that God would hope for us becomes possible. We become able to take a hard look at our addictions, and our co-dependencies, and to begin to imagine and learn new behaviors that keep us from enjoying the fullness of life that God intends for us.

Oh, and there's one more thing. Notice how Jesus' healing restores people to community. In biblical times, sick people were considered unclean and were barred from the Temple, and from

all religious services, so in a sense they were barred from mainstream access to God, who would be a source of healing in their lives.

Today, addicts and their loved ones — and persons with a wide range of health issues — often experience a sense of isolation or even ostracism from the rest of their community on account of the disease that plagues them or those dear to them.

So imagine how remarkable it is that this Jesus, Biker Jesus, comes to their club meetings, and rather than telling them to get out of town, he invites them to be his traveling companions. He shows them - shows us - the path toward freedom and healing, and invites us to return to our community, and to lead and heal where we have been banished.

Imagine that. Imagine Biker Jesus has come to your town. Do not let him pass you by.

Browne Barr, preaching, education giant dies

Browne Barr, minister emeritus at First Congregational UCC, Berkeley, and dean emeritus of San Francisco Theological Seminary, died Feb. 1 at age 91.

Barr came to Berkeley in 1960 and led the congregation through the turbulent '60s and '70s. In 1977 he became professor of preaching at SFTS and then dean in 1978. He retired in 1983.

Dr. Jana Childers, current SFTS dean, said Barr "was one of the most influential, effective and literate preachers of his generation. His preaching in Berkeley's 'tall steeple' church throughout the '60s and '70s helped to shape an important moment in American culture."

A graduate of Grinnell Col-

lege and Yale Divinity School, he served three churches in Connecticut and taught preaching at Yale from 1953-1960.

During his Berkeley years, Barr was a member of the adjunct faculty at Pacific School of Religion and served two terms on the board of trustees.

A noted author, his books included "Parish Back Talk," Yale Divinity School's Lyman Beecher Lectureship on Preaching (1964), "The Ministering Congregation" with the Rev. Mary Eakin in 1972, "The Well Church Book" in 1976, and High Flying Geese" in 1983. In 1996 he published a personal memoir, "Never Too Late to Be Loved."

Barr wrote 17 articles for the



Browne Barr

"Christian Century." One, "Bury the Parish?" in 1967, was one of the most often reprinted articles in the magazine's history. According to a seminary

colleague, "It revealed a fresh understanding of the local church that neither killed it off nor permitted its former irrelevance." When he retired, Barr and his wife Leigh moved to their ranch in Calistoga. For years he collected fruit, vegetables and other

food items (many from his ranch garden) and drove them in his pickup truck to Raphael House in San Francisco, a center for persons without homes and jobs.

Barr is survived by sons, John Barr of Berlin, Germany, and Maury Barr of Colville, Wash.; daughters, Holly Barr of New York City, and Leigh Barr Sher of St. Louis, Mo., and six grandchildren and five great-grandchildren. Condolences may be sent to John Barr in care of First Congregational UCC, 2345 Channing Way, Berkeley, CA 94704, and donations may be made to the church's Seminary Internship Fund. A memorial service for Barr was held there on Feb. 8.

Annual Gathering
May 28-31

Asilomar
Conference Grounds,
Pacific Grove

Check out <www.ncncucc.org> for information and to register. Call Joy at 510-247-8995 to register by phone.

There's still room, and one day visits are open also.