

CELEBRATION NEWS

THE GREATEST STORY EVER SUNG

One of the greatest opportunities we can engage in each year at this time is the chance to examine anew our relationship with the Christ child. And one of the best ways of doing this is to listen to the music that surrounds His story. It is my opinion, and I believe the opinion of many, that the Christmas celebration allows us to bask in much of the greatest music ever written.

Everyone who celebrates the birth of this child has a favorite. What is yours? I can't really choose and stick to one choice. It changes with my mood and my thoughts. I like both the sacred and the secular, but especially the sacred. I am admittedly not an overly serious person, but in this season I lean heavily toward the music that gives us pause to think on the gift that is this child.

Away In the Manger (both tunes), *Silent Night*, *Little Jesus Boy*, *O Come, O Come Emmanuel*, *Do You Hear What I Hear*, *I Wonder As I Wander*...and so many more all bring our thoughts back to this wondrous gift.

I hope as we celebrate Christmas this year, we will all take time to savor the melodies and the words that so many of God's composers have provided for us. Let us never take for granted the gift of music as it enriches our lives like nothing else quite can. It can sooth us; it can comfort us; and it can inspire us in ways we cannot measure!

Jim Deering



Imagine for a moment what it would be like to be a child whose parent or, in some cases, parents are incarcerated. Holidays and birthdays come and go without seeing their loved one. Often these families struggle to make sense of their circumstances.

We have been offered an opportunity to be the bridge of Christ's love between those children and their parents. Through the **Angel Tree** project, we will purchase gifts on behalf of the incarcerated parent, add the prepared greeting from the parent, and go in teams of two into the homes to deliver the gifts. While there, we meet with the family, listen, talk, and pray with them. This is an opportunity to share the gospel and invite them to come and worship with us if they do not already attend church.

The Angel Tree project is a wonderful opportunity to reach out to children and families here in our community. A tree with the children's names and gift suggestions will be found in the Fellowship Hall. All gifts must be new, unwrapped, and in the \$15 - \$25 range.

If you wish to be a home visit team member, please contact **Larry Bell**. We are excited about this project and look forward to making it an ongoing ministry. This year we have chosen 10 children; maybe next year we can reach out to even more!

Ginger Robertson, Outreach Ministries



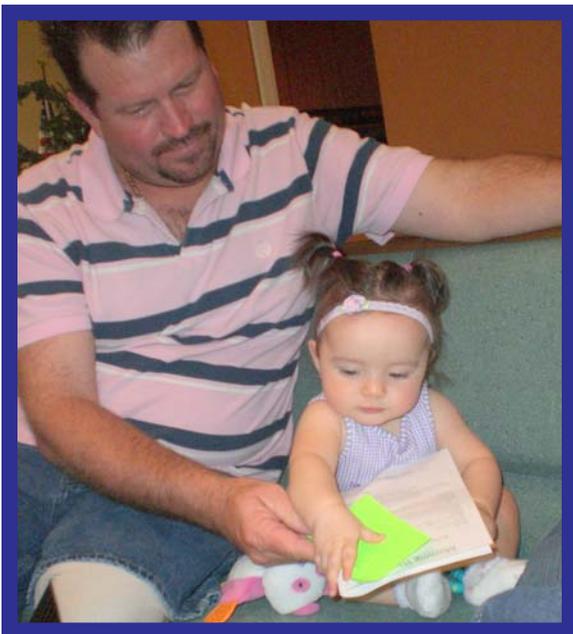
2011 Budget to be Considered

Please make note of our upcoming **Business Meeting on December 12 at 9:45 AM**. At this time the 2011 Budget will be presented and accepted or amended by your vote. This is your opportunity to see and hear the explanation of any line item on the budget. Your vote is needed. Copies of the 2011 budget are on the bulletin stand. Please take one and review it carefully.

Winter Reunion is Coming

The theme for the **2011 Winter Reunion** to be held **January 22 - 28** at Deerhaven Retreat Center is *Sharing in Community of Christ*. The week includes worship services, fellowship, singing, classes, a talent show, and good food. A variety of optional classes will also be available.

Guest ministry includes President Stephen Veazey, Cathi Cackler-Veazey, Barbara Walden and Pat Spillman. Register at www.cofchristfmc.org and do it soon!



Love, Joy and Peace

Of all the Spirit's gifts to me, I pray that I may never cease to take and treasure most these three: love, joy and peace, love, joy and peace.

This Christmas will be one of sadness as well as happiness for me. With the loss of my father, the holidays won't be quite the same. My sadness, however, will only be for my own selfishness as I know that my Dad could not be happier, being in the loving arms of His Heavenly Father. What a wonderful blessing that is for us; to know with assurance that He waits to welcome us home when this life is over! Those that have left us are enveloped with the gift of peace; free from the burdens and cares of this earthly life to a "peace that passes all understanding." I prayed to God to give my mother the "peace" that my father now felt. The night he died, my mom decided to be alone, and she sat in my dad's chair until she fell asleep. She told me the next day that she went into such a deep sleep, and when she woke up, she felt this tremendous "peace." I thank my Heavenly Father for answering that prayer.

The fourth verse of the above hymn goes like this: *Though what's ahead is mystery, and life itself is ours on lease, each day the Spirit says to me: go forth in peace, go forth in peace.* I will make this my theme as never before. No one knows for sure what lies ahead, but we do know that we don't have to fear the journey because He walks it with us and has prepared the way. Life really is short, and I will do my best to live it as the Lord intended me to; treasure the gifts that are mine because of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, and go forth in peace.

Carolyn Deering, Editorial Staff



All Children Are Mine

All Children Are Mine is a book published by the church in the late 1960's. It challenged us, as a body of Christ, to think of all children as being our responsibility. The book emphasized the theme that what is commonly known now as it takes a village to raise a child. At a recent worship service **Brad Martin** seemed to be taking that to heart as he cared for **Meah Rodriguez**. They shared the order of worship and a card that was given out to be used in the service.

At this time of year when we celebrate the birth of a baby who came to show us love for one and all, may we share the same with those all around us. Let us remember our babies and young children and rejoice that they are in our lives as well as the baby we know as Jesus.

December has arrived and with it all of the wonderful opportunities to meet God. Look for God in all of your celebration activities. You can find God in the crowded stores, in the bell ringer standing by the red kettle, in your home as your family decorates, and when you exchange gifts with family and friends. During the Advent season, as we wait with anticipation the coming of the Messiah, open your eyes and look for God everywhere you go.



Isaiah 11 verses 6-9 tell of a time when the wolf shall live with the lamb and *A Child Shall Lead* them. The church seal for the *Community of Christ* reminds us of this time as described by Isaiah. On December 5 Priest **Ginger Robertson** will preside over the Communion service with Evangelist **Bob Slasor** bringing the message. The Advent theme is Hope.

Rejoice! for God is coming among us. The Advent theme is Joy as we prepare with singing and joy at the prospect of God coming to earth. We actively wait for the transformation that will take place when God comes into people's lives. Elder **Bona Lee** will speak and Elder **Marcia Brougher** will lead us in this service on December 12. The ordination of two Priesthood members will also take place during this service.

The theme on the fourth Advent Sunday is Love. God actively calls ordinary people like Mary and Joseph to participate with God in God's purposes. When we accept God's call for us, God promises *Emmanuel: God With Us*. Elders **Elaine Gregg** and **Jim Deering** will lead us in our Christmas worship service December 19.

Join us for worship on Christmas Eve. Hopefully, the hustle and bustle in your lives will be over, and peace will momentarily reign. Spend time with us worshipping the birth of our Savior on Friday night, December 24 at 6:00 PM. Teacher **Nancy Skene** and Elder **Jerilyn Gregg-Chlebina** are planning this meaningful service.

The theme on the last Sunday of the year, December 26, is *Get Up and Go*. Priest **Charlie Walker** and High Priest **Nanette Dizney** will share with us how we can meet that challenge.

Intentionally preparing for the celebration of the birth of Jesus will enrich your lives. Use the above opportunities as well as the 7:00 PM Wednesday evening services to prepare yourselves for Christmas. May your December be filled with the Christmas Spirit.

Jo Fenn-Martin for the Worship Team

Potlucks Are Moving

Beginning in January 2011, our potluck dinners will be moved from the first Sunday of the month to the **second Sunday** of the month. This change has become necessary due to the multiple use of the kitchen on Communion Sunday mornings. Our deacons must use the kitchen to prepare the communion sacraments. This takes both time and counter space. The kitchen becomes too congested with fellowship and potluck preparation also taking place at the same time. Many of our priesthood members are also busy and distracted by food preparation and unable to attend the early priesthood worship. Reminders of the change will be in the worship bulletin and sent out via e-mails and the telephone tree.

Update Your Smile

If you are new to our church family or just want to update your photo for the **Our Church Family** board in the Information Center, please see **Elaine Gregg** before or after the worship services on **December 5th or 12th**.

The Best Gift

A king sat on his throne on Christmas Day as many of his subjects presented him with gifts: jewels, gold, artwork, handmade treasures and food galore.

One man stayed back until all the people had given their gifts. Eventually, the king asked if the man had a gift we wished to give. The man said he had only one thing to present. He had nothing of material value, just a heart that was free of malice and full of best wishes for the ruler.

The king told the man he'd brought him the best gift of all: friendship and goodwill. How can you present those to someone this Christmas season?

A Time for Everything

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven. Thus begins the third chapter of Ecclesiastes. Idyllic as this well known passage may seem, what it really implies is that we are all just a small piece of a big puzzle called life. The older I get the more I understand the Teacher's writings. The things I once believed were significant in my younger days are no longer what really matters most.

As I look back on this year, I can only smile as I think of the beautiful babies whose fussy cries and squeals of delight have brought untold joy to our congregation; the thunder of little feet down hallways; a grateful thank you from the hungry who were fed; the splash of the water in our baptism font; prayers spoken softly through tears of joy and sorrow...these are what has mattered most.

Looking ahead to 2011 we will be blessed with more babies, laughing rambunctious children, baptisms, food for the hungry, and prayers for one another. It will be a time to heal, a time to build, a time to embrace, a time to mend, and a time to love. I look forward to what God has in store for us as we welcome the new year with the heart of Jesus.

Ginger Robertson, Outreach Ministries



*You are Invited to the
Christmas Eve Worship
on Friday, December
24th at 6:00 PM.
Be of good cheer:
The Lord's birthday
celebration is very
near!*

The Annual **Hanging of the Greens** was held the last Saturday in November. People gathered to bring down boxes of Christmas decorations from the attic and to bring Christmas to our church facility. Christmas music was played over the sound system, and snacks could be found in the Fellowship Hall.



Heather Devine puts the finishing touches on the white poinsettias in front of the stone wall.

Nancy Peters and Jeanette Harris are shown decorating the Fellowship Hall's Christmas tree.



The chancel awaits a growing manger scene. For the First Sunday of Advent an angel anticipates a wonderful event that will soon be celebrated.



2011 Congregational Directory

If you have changed your address, home phone, or cell phone, please send or give **Elaine Gregg** the changes so the 2011 Congregational Directory will have the correct information. Make sure any corrections that need to be made from this year's directory are given to Elaine. There will be a list on the bulletin board. Please look up your name and make the corrections. If the information is correct, place your initials by your name to indicate that your information is current. It will take a little time to do this, but it will eliminate the need to send out corrections right away. Your cooperation will be appreciated.

The Christmas Cactus

One Christmas several years ago, a co-worker gave a gift to each one in the office, a small Christmas cactus. We each cared for our cactus in our own way. One watered it almost every day; another kept it under a fluorescent light; and others, like me put it on a shelf and forgot about it most of the time. Periodically, my cactus would get so dry that, when bumped, it would topple off the shelf.

Each year around Christmas time, a competitive spirit would emerge in me. I would carry my cactus to the other offices for comparison, secretly hoping my cactus would be inspired by the flowers on some of the other plants. My idea didn't work, however. Most years my cactus produced no flowers at all. One year two flowers appeared but not at the same time.

When the office was moved to another part of the state, I brought my cactus home to stay. I was hoping that in a new environment it would do better. The cactus was placed on a shelf on the patio beside a dying basil plant and was soon forgotten.

In 2008 my husband, David, was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor, and the whole family was focused on caring for him. The year he lived after his diagnosis was stressful and full of ups and downs. But it was also a year full of blessings. We all were able to express our love and thankfulness to him for all that he had done for us. Zoe and Cole, his youngest grandchildren who adored him, were able to assist in his care as they gently came to realize that Papa would be leaving them. God generously cared for us and David during that difficult year.

David died in February 2009, and we began the process of adjusting to life without him, as a family and as a congregation. As Christmas approached, a beautiful thing began to happen. A salmon-colored blossom appeared on the cactus plant. And then, miraculously, another began to bloom. Soon the puny and neglected cactus was almost covered with flowers, and none of them were falling off. There were nineteen total when the last one appeared. It was a beautiful sight to behold!

I took the blooming of the cactus plant very personally. I believe that God was showing his love for me by placing something of beauty in my path, something totally unexpected. I thank God for the reassurance this amazing act brought to my life. I felt God's arms wrapped tightly around me.

Needless to say, I have taken better care of the cactus since last Christmas. It was given a new home, a larger pot to allow its roots to have more room. It sits in the center of the patio table now where the sun can warm it. I check its soil frequently to determine when it needs a drink. Many, many new leaves have sprouted, and it seems content.

Soon it will be time for it to produce flowers again. How many flowers will appear this year? Will it go back to the old ways? Will it exceed nineteen this year? I wait eagerly to see. I find joy, excitement, love, and comfort in the waiting.

Jo Fenn-Martin

P.S. Look for yourselves what God has done. The Christmas cactus can be seen in the Narthex during the Christmas season.



If you are struggling over what to get that person who has everything or that you would like to do something special for, please consider **Outreach International**. For the last few years they have been offering "ordinary gifts that make an extraordinary difference". You can give \$40 and a pig will be provided to a family. This pig can provide an invaluable source of protein for children and their families, and future litters can be sold at market to cover school fees, medicine, and other basics. Two chickens for just \$25 can provide a family with a steady supply of protein-rich eggs. There are sheep, goats, roosters, fishing kits, school supplies, meals for a month for an orphan, carpentry tools, clean water bucket filters, and many more. There are gifts for under \$20 up to \$6,500!

Spread your joy of giving around the world this Christmas. Go to OUTREACHSHOP.ORG or call 1.888.356.7777 (24 hour toll-free line) for more information. There is also a Sustainable Gifts Catalog on the bulletin board in the Information Center.

The Giving of a Shawl

Twenty women have expressed a desire to be a part of our **Prayer Shawl Outreach Ministry**. We are just a small part of this ministry worldwide. In 1998 two graduates of the Women's Leadership Institute at Hartford Seminary began this person-to-person grass roots ministry. At the end of the Institute they answered the challenge to find a way to reach out to people in their lives with their own talents and gifts.



Shawls have been made for centuries and worn by people everywhere. They enfold, comfort, cover, give solace and warmth, mother, hug, shelter, and beautify - symbolic of the mothering qualities of God's inclusive and unconditionally love. People who have received these shawls have been uplifted and affirmed as if being given

wings to fly above their troubles. Many people who have heard of this ministry have been enthused and inspired by its purpose. The outreach has taken on a life of its own and goes where it will. The ripple effect has spread around the world as other Prayer Shawl groups form, and shawls are given.

Before our handwork starts, the yarn is dedicated for the purpose of offering our love and concern and with prayers that God's grace be upon the shawl, warming, comforting, enfold-ing and embracing the one who receives it. As we work on our shawls, we are encouraged to be in a spirit of prayer, but also to be sharing in conversation and laughter with each other.

We enjoy our meetings on the second Saturday of each month. Some of us are learning to knit or crochet from those more experienced. Praying together, sharing ways to do things, and exchanging ideas is all part of our ministry. Our next meeting is at the church in classrooms 5 & 7 on **December 11th at 2:00 PM**. You are invited to join us.

Bona Lee, Coordinator

Yes, We Are Open!

Our Father's Cupboard food pantry is now open again. Thanks to a team of organized and talented volunteers, our pantry has been remodeled, restocked and reopened! Under the direction of **Jim Brougher, Brad Martin, and Dave Robertson**, volunteers came in, cleared out the pantry and built sturdy attached shelving around the perimeter. Another crew came in and scrubbed and disinfected the entire pantry. After a successful inspection and training session by Meals on Wheels Plus, Brad Martin picked up the food and another team of volunteers unloaded the truck. Still another group came in and packed the paper bags full of nonperishable food. As planned, we were able to open on Saturday, November 20 at 10:00 AM.

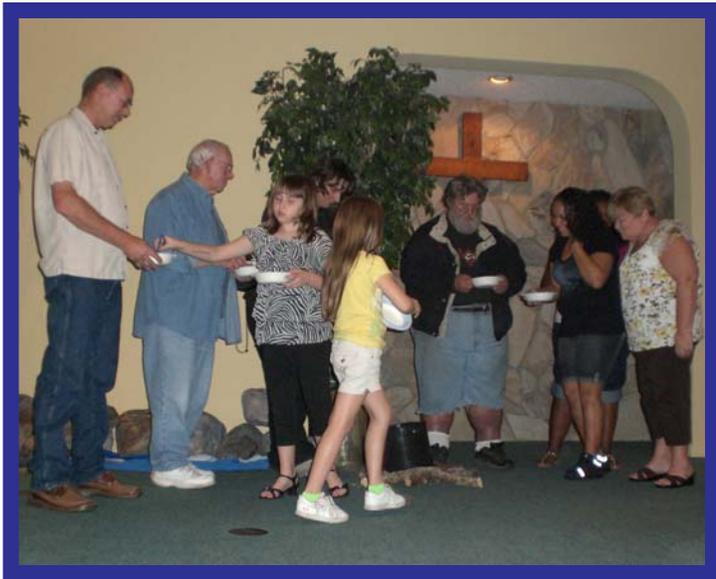
We will continue to open **Our Father's Cupboard** on the third Saturday of each month. According to our Meals on Wheels Plus liaison, we are one of 93 food pantries in Manatee County who purchase food from that agency. We will continue to serve this area of the community with everyone's help. The pantry still needs non perishable items such as cereal, peanut butter, jelly, macaroni and cheese, canned goods, boxed meals, and canned meats. We will accept large paper grocery bags only. The food wagons will once again be placed in the Information Center to accommodate your donations. Please remember that the pantry is financially self sustaining, which means your money donations are crucial to its success.

After 20 years **Our Father's Cupboard** is still going strong to reach out to the hungry in our community. Beginning in January, we will be offering Spiritual Food in the Sanctuary and practical information in the Fellowship Hall to our clients. Volunteers will entertain the client's children with stories in classroom 4. Everyone's talents are needed to expand this ministry into a "whole person" outreach. Everyone in this *Community of Christ* congregation is being asked to pray about your place in this ministry. A list of jobs with times and dates will be available on the bulletin board in the Information Center. Let's become the open door ministry to which we are being called.

Ginger Robertson, Outreach Ministries

Don't forget the Spaghetti Dinner being held in the Fellowship Hall following the December 12th Worship Service. Your donation for this dinner sponsored by the Youth will go towards the Deerhaven Campground swimming pool. Our Youth need your support.





Those attending the **Stone Soup Fund Raiser** in November were treated to a drama based on the story of *Stone Soup*. The lesson learned from the drama presentation was that we have so much more when we share instead of hoarding what little we may have. After the drama, those attending could choose between many delicious soups made and donated by people who were willing to share what they had.



Youth Receive and Give

On December 11th, the youth will be attending a Christmas Program put on by the Tampa youth in Zephyrhills at 5:00 PM. We are looking forward to seeing our friends from Tampa and Zephyrhills and enjoying their fellowship.

Come to our **Spaghetti Dinner** to be held right after church on December 12th. The money we raise at this dinner will be going towards the Deerhaven Campground pool, which we are all excited about. Finally, we will have a pool during summer camps and retreats! We hope you will come and support us in this endeavor.

More shoeboxes are ready to be sent to The Family Resource Center. Donations of items and money are still being accepted and are needed. If you would like to donate, please see the list of items on the green box in the Information Center.

Thank you for all your love and support.

Heather Devine, Youth Coordinator

New Address:

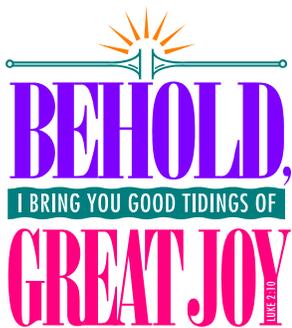
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Address Correction Requested

We wish a Merry Christmas to:



May each one feel the love of the Christ child during this Christmas Season.

As we move toward the celebration of Christ's birth, we welcome all to worship with us.

Merry Christmas to All!

