

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

December

| | |
|----|------------------------|
| 01 | Lee Greene |
| 02 | Vi Engelking |
| 03 | Grant Neptune |
| 03 | Susan White |
| 05 | Donna Green |
| 05 | Allen Marble |
| 06 | Bill Martin |
| 08 | Gloria Medina |
| 08 | Charles Grosshans |
| 10 | Floyd Kerr |
| 10 | Georgia Bachmann |
| 11 | Lillian Larson |
| 18 | Sandy Selzer |
| 18 | Betty Walker |
| 20 | Jack Collins |
| 22 | Bob Wogrin |
| 23 | Mildren Edlun |
| 23 | Deborah Contreras |
| 23 | Ryan Matthew Applegate |
| 27 | Nathan Otsuka |
| 29 | Mark Pleuss |
| 29 | Jeremy Shaver |
| 29 | Michael Larsen |
| 30 | Don Kennedy |

CALLER

DECEMBER
2007



CHRIST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH



United Church of Christ
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We are sorry if your name was omitted; please call the church office so that we may add your information to our Birthday List.

Christ Congregational Church Identity and Mission Statement

Christ Congregational Church is a progressive, caring, and celebrating Christian Congregation of the United Church of Christ. We are a serving, learning, and worshipping community of faith. We welcome and care for one another. We desire to be diverse, justice-promoting, tradition affirming, future directed, and multi-generational. The focus of our ministry is on our neighborhood and to the larger Metro area, with ongoing attention to the needs of the global community.

From the Desk of Jerry Eslinger.....Dealing with our Christmases

One of the realities of the Christmas season for me has often centered around the word, “survival.” Despite whatever beliefs, hopes, receptivity and enthusiasms I bring to it, it seems, more often than not, that I get “run over” by a juggernaut of customs, costs, obligations and expectations that are relentless. Far from nourishing spiritual truth, I too often settle for surviving the experience.

And it is not that there isn’t much about the way in which Christmas is currently celebrated that is quaint, charming, and cheery. Obviously there is.

What is there to criticize, for example, about Santa, the jovial, red-suited, international grandfather-figure who flies around the world getting into our homes through the heating system and leaving gifts under an artificial pine tree?

Frosty the Snowperson, Rudolph with the chronically inflamed nose, sugar-plum fairies and toy soldiers, the little percussionist and his command performance on his drum; the fable about the grinch whose evilness is washed away in a Christmas Eve bath of sentimentality, all that which make up endearing children’s material.

True, the case is sometimes made that to a certain extent the season tends to fan the flames of envy, acquisitiveness and greed in children –an elementary course in materialism.

But by far the majority of December’s carryings-on are good-natured, somewhat more so than most of the year. But what is important, at least to me, is that there really is NO CONNECTION between the birth stories in Matthew and Luke in the Bible, and this giant, amorphous, retail-driven holiday that happens in December. I find it hard to blend Christmas parties, decking the halls with boughs of holly, the annual gift exchange, and ordinarily intelligent people sitting in front of a dead tree in the living room and eating candy out of their socks. In no way

does that reconcile with what the birth stories hoped to proclaim about God personally touching human life with light, hope, reassurance and good will.

GEORGIA BACHMANN & MARK PLEUSS have graciously provided the recipe for their Grandma's soup which was served on Stewardship Sunday.

BARNSTEIN CHILI SOUP

Ingredients needed:

| | | |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1 lb. ground beef | 4 large stalks celery – diced | 1 medium onion-chopped |
| 2 cans tomato soup | 1 can tomato pieces | 1 can kidney beans |
| elbow macaroni | | |

Start by browning meat, season with salt and pepper to taste. Cook celery and onion in with meat as you brown it.

Next you need a large soup kettle:

Soup base: 2 cans tomato soup + 2 cans water, 1 can tomato pieces + 1 can water. After meat is completely browned, add to the soup mix; be sure to rinse frying pan with a little water and add this to kettle.

Add these spices – chili powder (add about 1 tbsp.) + 1 tbsp. sugar
Dash cayenne red pepper (add more if you want more punch)

Simmer the above for 1-2 hours. This is a good time to taste test and add more chili powder or cayenne.

Meanwhile: 1 heaping cup of macaroni, add after simmer time is done. Also add kidney beans and again rinse can and add to soup. Serve and enjoy! Call Georgia (303-797-888) if you have any questions.

More from the Desk of Jerry.....

The Bible stories, if you think about it, far from dazzling with other-worldly sensationalism, describe a time when things were not going well in a certain oppressed, impoverished, abused little country. Even religion there had become strident, divisive, and self-serving.

In answer to that, it says (the Bible) that a very human baby was born to a run-of-the-mill couple who had no extraordinary qualifications for being the caretakers of God's presence or word or action.

And yet, for all of its earthiness, the bottom-line message of those stories is the claim that around and amidst this common, unadorned mixture of earthy humanity, of uncertainty, of vulnerability, of grueling circumstance God was not only at work, but managed to bless human life in a totally unprecedented way. But as far as sensation, vindication, revolution, or anything else of the sort around which human beings have created holidays to celebrate, it just wasn't there. No valleys were lifted up, no mountains brought low, the rough places were not turned into plains. Tears were not wiped from the eyes of all people.

Instead, the point which God seemed determined to get through to us human beings, was that God overwhelmingly works from WITHIN human beings rather than from without to bless, transform, heal or renew.

What does that mean? To me, it means that IF babies are still today being born under horrible circumstances with inadequate prenatal and post-natal care, IF there are Joes and Mary's who are homeless and hungry, sleeping in a broken-down car that's worse than a livestock shelter. IF Herod-like tyrants and bureaucrats are allowed to abuse power and corrupt justice, if mountains of neglect, of exploitation, of self-interest are getting steadily larger, APPARENTLY that isn't merely a signal to go pray for God-off-in-heaven to come and intervene and make it all better.

So among the stories of stars, angels, songs in the night sky, let us entertain the possibility that God would actually single out a person like you and me to be God's presence in a concrete way. So no matter how impractical or terrifying things become, do NOT squelch your personal vision or sense of calling. Pursue new kinds of distant light. And DO NOT GET RUN OVER by this season.

Christmas Eve Service Features Carols, Candle Lighting

Christ Congregational Church's Christmas Eve service will be held at 5:30 p.m. The candle-light service will feature a variety of lessons and traditional carols.

You are invited to join us for this special service and are most welcome to bring family, friends, and neighbors.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Advent Devotionals Available For Seasonal Meditation

Christ Congregational Church is pleased to provide two different Advent devotional guides to lead you through this season of waiting and anticipation of Christmas. You may pick up a devotional booklet on the back table in the Sanctuary. There is no charge for the guides.

Youth, Chancel Choir, Owd Dabar Present Christmas Program!

The Christ Congregational Church Chancel Choir, Owd Dabar praise band, and children and youth are working together this year to present the Christmas program, "Las Posadas: On the Road with Mary and Joseph." The program will be presented during worship on Sunday, December 16. After worship, the children are invited to break a piñata and hot chocolate and Mexican pastries will be served for coffee hour.

Las Posadas, which means "The Inns," is a traditional Advent and Christmas celebration in Latin America, particularly Mexico, and among many Mexican Americans. It dates back more than 400 years to Spain, when Catholic priests found they could best teach many of the biblical stories to illiterate believers by using drama. Las Posadas traditionally is celebrated for nine nights from December 16 through December 24, culminating in the Christmas Eve worship service. It is designed to reenact the story of Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem and search for lodging.

Our version of Las Posadas will incorporate the stories of people throughout history who have been denied safety and lodging. A variety of hymns and carols will be sung and a joyful, Latin-style song led by Owd Dabar will culminate the program. You are invited to attend this special presentation and to invite your family members, friends, and neighbors to join us for this celebration!

KING SOOPER GIFT CARDS will now be sold in place of the current paper Gift Certificates (although we do have a few of the paper Gift Certificates still available). We plan to offer the Gift Cards in denominations of \$50 and \$100. This change to Gift Cards (rather than paper certificates) was necessitated by a decision of King Soopers.

Southwest Community Ministry Food Bank

The food bank has asked our church to donate to the Community Ministry Holiday Food Drive for the month of December. Food lists are available. Of course, any other donations (food, children's clothes, children's undergarments, personal care items) are always appreciated.

TREASURER'S REPORT. Our total income for January 1 through November 26 was \$197,084 and our expenses for the same time period were \$193,872. Our pledges paid as of Nov. 26 were \$179,446. The budgeted amount for the same time period was \$190,143 – a shortage of \$10,696. If you have fallen behind in your pledge payment, please help us provide the resources needed to support our many church ministries and programs. Thank you for your gifts and generosity to Christ Church!

DECEMBER MISSION OFFERING – The Social Justice and Missions Ministry has selected the Community Ministry Holiday Food Drive as part of our December mission offering. Food lists are available.

Another part of our December mission offering is the Christmas Fund Offering (formerly the Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross). This is one of four Special Mission Offerings of the United Church of Christ (UCC) and is an important way of sharing our joy at God's renewing and life-giving grace. The Offering, which is administered by the United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance of the Pension Boards on behalf of the UCC, is an expression of joy and gratitude to, and for, those who serve the church.

Gifts to the Christmas Fund help provide pension and health premium supplementation to low-income retirees, emergency assistance to the families of clergy and lay employees and Christmas Gift Checks to hundreds of annuitants. Facts taken from a 1953 publication indicate that: "In 1902, a little money was collected and special Christmas gifts were sent to ten older ministers." The same article also reports that \$121,054 was received for the Christmas Fund in 1952. A little more than 50 years later, in 2006 the Christmas Fund received \$1,438,000 and nearly 1,500 families were assisted. Our goal is to be able to provide at least \$1,500,000 in assistance from the 2007 appeal.

Your gifts are needed more than ever to help the growing number of retirees whose low income annuities make it difficult to meet increasing living costs. This is your opportunity to participate in God's promise of renewal by enabling this ministry of compassion and care.

Family and Seniors Homeless Initiative (FSHI)

A mentoring team from Christ Congregational Church is working with a single mom and her 2 children, the 4th family assigned to us by FSHI. Tricia, Taylor (12) and Hailey (1) were homeless until about a month ago but have now moved into their own apartment in Lakewood! Many of you have asked how you can help but, unlike our previous families, this family has all of the furniture and household goods that they need.

One of the tasks of the mentor team is to help the family set a work goal, a family goal, a personal goal and a long-term goal. Together, Tricia and Taylor have set a family goal – they have opened a savings account and would like to save enough by the time that Hailey turns 5 to make a trip to Disneyland. For Christmas, we would like to invite members of our church to contribute \$1.00 – no more – and sign a Christmas card for the family. We will have the card available during the first 4 Sundays of December, through the 23rd and will give the card to them on Christmas Eve. If you would like to donate, please see one of the team members. Thanks! Carolyn Anderson, Virginia Black, Sandy Maben and Mim Willyard, the CC FSHI Mentoring Team.

GLOBAL PARTNERS 2008

Venezuela and the United States

Join a mission trip to Venezuela with the Global Partners program. The purpose of these trips is to provide cultural exchanges between the Evangelical Pentecostal Union of Venezuela (UEPV) and the United Church of Christ and the Disciples of Christ in the United States. There are three trips a year, with each trip centered on a project. The process of relationship building, however, is more important than what we do. Therefore, you do not need specific skills for any of these trips. Please fill out an application for one of the following trips. YOUR LIFE WILL NEVER BE THE SAME!!!!

Now taking applications for:

Intergenerational Construction trip ---- April 13-20, 2008. Rev Jeff Scott and others will lead. This team will work to enlarge the existing kitchen and library at the Pacto Offices in Maracaibo. The UEPV are hoping that as usual we'll provide some funding for this project as well as labor. The funding for the project comes from a grant written to the Global Ministries in Indianapolis. Apply ASAP for this trip.

Youth trip (for ages 15-18)---July 20-28, 2008. Rev Chris Gilmore, Nathan Thrasher and others will lead. July 21 the youth will work in Maracaibo on a project with their youth and do a cultural reality exchange. Tue July 22 they will travel to Barquisimeto for a National gathering of the UEPV Youth. The UEPV know that our youth like to do work projects while there and they plan to start construction on an auditorium at the UEPV camp in Barquisimeto. This youth experience will also include music, sports, reflection, and worship. They will return to Maracaibo on July 27.

Medical mission trip ---October 12-20, 2008. Diane Otsuka and Dawn Nottingham will lead. This team will work with the Wayuu one day. The remainder of the time they will go to Portuguesa, a medically underserved state further south and conduct clinics with the people there. Possibly an eye specialist could be included, as many people have poor vision. *Spanish translators are needed on all trips!* For an application and contact information with the leader of a given trip, go to rmcucc.org/outreach/globalpartners/gpapply.htm or contact Alice Silver, 9845 Poppy Ct, Highlands Ranch, CO 80129, 720-344-6947 home, 720-219-0316 cell, agsilver@pair.com.

This global partnership between UCC, DOC, & UEPV started in 1998. *Our church's Wider Mission* donations supported the creation of this relationship and

continues to fund technical and coordinating assistance.

The Rev. John H. Thomas, General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ, reported in a letter dated Oct. 18, 2007, that nearly 64,000 UCC members had co-signed the Pastoral Letter of UCC's Collegium of Officers indicating public commitment to joining protest to prayer to end the Iraq War. He and the Rev. Linda Jaramillo delivered this statement to the offices of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reed, House Minority Leader David Boehner and the White House. The UCC campaign will not end until the war ends; therefore, he requests that you add your signature to this petition in support of legislation before the U.S. House that could affect hundreds of thousands of refugees now fleeing war-torn Iraq by adding your signature. They are still actively collecting signatures and would like to reach 100,000 by the end of the year. To add your signature on the UCC website, go to www.ucc.org and then place the cursor on the category "Big Things" at the top of the page. A menu will appear and you can select "100,000 People for Peace," which will guide you through the steps.

DINNERS FOR 6/8 will kick off with a Christmas Party at the home of Renee & Randy Marble, 12637 W. 6th Dr., on Dec. 9 at 12:00 noon. Please RSVP by Dec. 7 to Rhonda Overman. Those people whose last names begin with A-G please bring appetizers and H-W please bring desserts. You should have received your schedules in the mail. If you have not, please contact Rhonda Overman at 303-232-1861.

Social Action Ministry

Visions – a workshop on recognizing, understanding, and valuing differences among people. This will be presented in four days, one Saturday a month, from January to April. Dates: January 5, February 9, March 1, and April 5. Lead facilitator will be John Ferguson. To read more about this go to www.visions-inc.org, click on Resources and then articles and read the article by Valerie Batts on Is Reconciliation Possible? This workshop is not a typical workshop and to register, call me at 303-979-0046 and leave a message or email me at al_ots@hotmail.com. The registration for this event will be \$50 for the four days.

Alvin Otsuka

Owd Dabar Update

Owd Dabar would like to thank you for your prayers as we came together for our annual retreat in October. We felt God's presence and teaching over the weekend especially in the realm of anointing. I would like to share with you some thoughts.

Understanding the power of song is a compelling influence in worship. I am referring to the burst of melody that accompanies the announcement of words which, with understanding, are declared in praise to God.

Ephesians 5:18-22. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

God's people have reason to sing for joy as this scripture indicates; it is how we sustain and uplift each other. Speak to one another in spiritual songs, making music in our heart; giving thanks at all times, even in trials and afflictions, and for all things; being satisfied of the loving intent of Christ himself. This is the power of song. I pray for our Church home that we develop a hunger, a craving to know the anointing power of God in all our music.

I believe that every one of us is a human vessel through which God wants to display His power. I believe there is a mighty call of God and an anointing upon you and the ministry of music. I believe the Holy Spirit wants us to walk in the fullness of His power in everything we do and that He wants to manifest His miracle-working power through us for the benefit of others and to the praise of His wonderful name.

It's no small wonder Paul says, in Acts 16:25-34, something of his experience with song—shattering the bondage of a Philippian dungeon and introduced salvation to an entire household. Thus Paul discovered: We are not called to sing merely with gusto—but with Holy Spirit-enthusiasm, understanding and energy. That kind of anointed singing shattered chains of bondage and broke open prison doors for Paul setting him physically and spiritually free. Think what a song in the name of Jesus Christ might do for you.

We rejoice that God is still speaking to each of us every day.

Rev. Nick Nicholson

YOUTH GROUP CORNER

ATTENTION YOUTH! JOIN US FOR OUR ANNUAL CHRISTMAS PARTY

The annual Christ Congregational Church Youth Group Christmas party will be held after the Christmas program and worship on Sunday, December 16. We will meet from 11:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m. for a pizza party and viewing of a movie on the big screen. Plan now to attend and invite a friend!

CHILDREN, YOUTH VOLUNTEERS NEEDED AS ACOLYTES

One of the most important and visible ways our church's children and youth participate in the worship service is to serve as acolytes. Acolytes light our altar candles at the beginning of the worship service to remind us that we have entered into a sacred time and space. The act of candle-lighting also reminds Christians that we are each called to be a light in the world. Two volunteers are needed each Sunday morning to serve as acolytes. Children ages seven and older, as well as high-school age youth, are invited to volunteer. If you are interested, please sign up on the acolyte chart located on the Education Bulletin Board outside of Fellowship Hall. Thank you in advance for your help and participation!

Helpers Needed For Christmas Program

The Christ Congregational Church children and youth, Chancel Choir, and Owd Dabar Praise Band will team up this year to present the All-Church Christmas Pageant, "Las Posadas: On the Road with Mary and Joseph," on Sunday, December 16. Volunteers are needed to help with staging, costuming, and meal preparation for an evening rehearsal on Thursday, December 13. If you can help in any way with this program, please see Jeremy Shaver, Director of Education and Family Ministries. Thank you!

CE DIRECTOR RESIGNS FROM POSITION AT CHRIST CHURCH

Jeremy Shaver, Director of Education and Family Ministries, will transition out of his employment with Christ Congregational Church on December 31, 2007. Jeremy has served Christ Church since August 1, 2003. He will pursue opportunities for full-time, ordained ministry in the United Church of Christ. In his resignation letter, Jeremy wrote, "I count it as one of my greatest privileges and blessings to have worked with the children, youth, and families of Christ Congregational Church. Thank you for the opportunity to serve the Christ Congregational Church Community. My work at Christ Congregational Church will stand out as a highlight of my ministry in the United Church of Christ and

beyond. I will hold the leaders and members of Christ Congregational Church in my heart and prayers."

WHAT IS A WILL?

What do you think of when someone asks you if you have a Will? Do you conjure up the scene of an old black and white movie where the ruthless father has disinherited his wayward son? As much as we view that as only drama the will that we write does tell a story about us. It is so fascinating in our current society where there is so much emphasis on the accumulation of possessions, we tend to put off the inevitable of thinking about how we want to dispose of our assets when we are no longer on this earth to enjoy them.

The statement that "you can't take it with you" is true. With that in mind, how we leave behind what we have been blessed with is ever so more important. What is a Last Will and Testament? Simply defined, it is a legal document disposing of our property after our death. It is important that we take the time to make our statement of what our possessions mean to us and how we want them to be utilized when we are no longer here on this earth to enjoy them.

Do we want to share them with our children? Will that be good for them? Are they too young to handle it? Is the amount I am leaving them more than they need? Will what I leave them empower them to be the best they can be, or instead, take away their motivation to achieve their goals on their own? What about charity? Are there those who are less fortunate that I should be sharing my possessions with? What about Christ Church? What has it meant to me and my family? Do I want it to continue to be there for others in the future to continue to preach about an open and loving God, a God who is still speaking? How will God speak if churches like ours cease to exist?

The members of Christ Church Foundation would like to thank you for your gifts this past year and would like to encourage you to think about the legacy you will leave. Whether or not it includes the church or the foundation, we only encourage you to be deliberately thoughtful about what God's blessings have meant to you. Please prepare wisely for that inevitable day we will all face someday. Think about that old black and white movie and decide what story will be told when you die. You can be the author if you choose to do so. Don't leave such an important decision to chance.

Diana Bern