

THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

A Voice for Ecumenical Congregations and Christians Around the World

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President's Message

Rev. Dr. Bruce N. Merton

Thanking Clement Moore for his inspiration found in "The Night Before Christmas," I chose to share the story of Jesus' birth in a new and different way at the Christmas Eve Service of 2010.

*'Twas the night before the morn of Christ's birth;
Soon the glory of God would shine full on the earth!*

*Animals ate, in the cold of the stable,
From a manger trough – their dinner table.*

*After saying, "Goodnight" with baas, neighs and moos,
They settled themselves for a long, quiet snooze.*

*Then startled awake by the barn door's latch squeaking;
They watched as the door opened wide – groaning, creaking!*

*With eyes filled by wonder from a star light's bright glow
They saw a man and woman with donkey in tow.*

*The woman collapsed on the straw bed the man piled
And the animals saw she would give birth to a child.*

*They drew close around the family to be
And in the warmth of shared presence slept peacefully.*

*They woke in the morn, as darkness gave way,
To the sound of a babe crying out a new day.*

*On the hay was a child, so new to the world.
His hair was still damp; in a ball he was curled.*

*Wrapped warmly in rags, in his straw manger bed,
The glory of God encircled his head.*

*His face glowed with love and they heard mother exclaim,
"Jesus! Jesus! Yes, that is your name."*

*An angel chorus was heard proclaiming the birth, singing:
"Glory to God and peace on the earth."*

*Shepherds left fields and flocks to adore him.
They offered their praise and bowed down before him.*

*And the animals, too, knowing Love was full-born,
Worshipped the babe on that first Christmas morn.*

*Rev. Dr.
Emanuel Cleaver, III
2014 Annual Conference
Keynote Speaker and
Preacher*

Dr. Emanuel Cleaver, III is the oldest of four children born to Dianne and Reverend Emanuel Cleaver, II. The accomplished graduate of Philander Smith College received his B.A. in political science; accepted his calling into the ministry in 1995; and is now an ordained elder in the United Methodist Church. He earned a Master of Divinity degree at the Methodist Theological School in Ohio in May of 1999, which school recently recognized him with its highest alumni award. Cleaver served as pastor of Longview for three years and was then appointed to St. Andrew, both United Methodist Churches in Kansas City. In 2004 Dr. Cleaver became the pastor of Centennial United Methodist Church. During his tenure at this congregation, he received his doctorate of ministry from Saint Paul School of Theology. Under his leadership this church, located in the historic 18th & Vine Jazz District of Kansas City, Missouri, made renovations to its facility, and started a weekly Saturday evening hip hop worship celebration. On July 1, 2008 Dr. Cleaver joined his father as the co-pastor of the 2,500 member St. James UMC in Kansas City.

The dynamic clergyman is involved in several organizations and has served on numerous boards in Kansas City including the Concerned Clergy Coalition where he currently serves as vice-president. Dr. Cleaver is a member of the Board of Ordained Ministry for the Missouri Conference of the United Methodist Church, serves on the Philander Smith College Board of Trustees, and is an adjunct professor at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. In addition to frequent preaching, teaching, and lecturing engagements he has also had several works published. Dr. Cleaver is married; he and wife Sharon and are the parents of two boys and one girl, Emanuel IV, Isaac and Alayna.

Below is an article featured in the *Who Are They? Serving the People Within Your Reach* (Nov/Dec/Jan 2013-14) issue of Circuit Rider by Dr. Emanuel Cleaver III.

Our Charge: Know and Serve Young Adults

A friend of mine invited me to go fishing with him. I'm not a fisherman. In an effort to show that I was not clueless, I bought my own equipment. My friend used crickets and worms as bait; I used French fries. The reason I used French fries is because I love French fries. At the end of the day my friend had caught a bunch of fish. I'd caught none. I asked him, "Why did you catch so many while I caught none?" He replied, "Because you were using bait that you like and I was using bait that they like."

The North American church has a problem when it comes to reaching the young adults who are missing from our congregations. We want to use the bait that we like instead of methods and practices that speak directly to them. Young adults get bored when staying in one place for too long. They have grown up in a world where things are constantly changing, where technology is advancing daily. A new Apple product comes out, and people stand in line to be among the first to have it. Most of our congregations, on the other hand, find a worship style and way of operating that they like, and they want to stay right there. In the church, we do not want change. When young adults encounter our change resistance, their relationship with us is short-lived.

But consider this for a moment: The young adult culture of upgrade and change is a natural fit for the pastor. Pastors must look for and lead their congregations to the next pasture, where the sheep can be fed and satisfied spiritually. We may find ourselves feeling unstable in this strange and ever-changing culture. But as pastors we should also see the opportunities inherent in this new world and be inspired. The pastor's task is all about upgrade and change.

The story of King Kong was first made into a movie in 1933. The filmmakers used clay animation to create the great ape. In 1976 the classic film was re-made, but this time the filmmakers brought the story to life with trick cinematography and a robotic King Kong. King Kong appeared on screen again in 2005. This time, rather than using old methods, the filmmakers created a digital King Kong. This Kong looks much more lifelike than his predecessors.

Each King Kong was created using the technology and tools that were available at the time. Had the 1976 film used clay animation like in the original, it

would not have done well. Had the 2005 film used the technology of the 1976 film, it would have been a box office flop. Each filmmaker told the story of King Kong in a way that spoke to that particular generation. The story itself remained the same, but the way it was told was new each time.

Sharing the gospel in new ways doesn't mean changing the gospel or watering it down. It does mean that our methods must be different. As pastors, we must understand the people we are aiming to reach. We must determine how they are most likely to be reached. We must adapt our old methods and adopt new ones. My first ministry appointment was a predominately older white congregation in the center of a predominately black neighborhood with young families. By the time I arrived, the community already had a negative perception of the congregation, and it was very difficult to shift that perception. The church clung to old models of ministry while the world around it had changed drastically. We so often fail to adapt to changing times, misguidedly hoping to reach twenty-first-century people using twentieth-century methods.

When we invite into worship young adults who did not grow up in the church—which increasingly is most of them—it is like a blind date. Christian scriptures and church culture are strange to most young people today, just as the gospel message was strange to the Gentiles when Paul shared it centuries ago. Our congregations don't appear to know a lot about young adults, and young adults don't know a lot about the church. We use words they are not familiar with, like narthex, doxology, communion, and sanctification. United Methodists use acronyms that mean nothing to our guests, like UMM, VBS, UMW, UMYF, and GBOD. We assume that our listeners know this strange language, our customs, and the stories from our scriptures.

Pastors, we must live into our biblical job description. That is to lead the sheep within our reach to nourishing green pastures. We must always be looking for ways to bring along new sheep, to expand the ministry. We must attend to the tasks inherent in the true role of pastor. We must prioritize our own spiritual lives. We must remain focused on our

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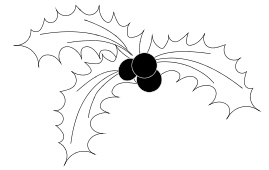
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Good News!

Don Ashmall
Council Minister



Have you noticed how much bad news is brought to our attention each day? With rapt attention to detail the mass media and internet bloggers recount stories of sorrow. It seems that they are fixated on their A-B-C's and D's: Atrocity, Bloodshed, Conflict and Disaster.

Good news!

In contrast to all of that, can there be any news that is truly good – any news that reveals joy, peace, justice and love? Even the most cynical agree that in the midst of life's challenges some people enjoy "success," however that word is defined. But there is a notion abroad that success and even life itself are zero-sum games. If you win I lose, and winner takes all.

Good news!

Even in the church we keep hearing bad news. Statisticians and pollsters gleefully tell us about falling numbers and reduced resources. Accounts of faith found and sacrifice shared take second place to tales of gossip, backbiting and self interest.

Good news!

A child is born. You will find him wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger.

Good news!

To the world's darkness the child brings light. To the world's chaos the child brings love. To the world's oppression the child brings liberation. To the world's failure the child brings hope.

Good news!

Because the child is born, we learn that every one of God's children is precious. Because the child is born, we discover the truth that we too are God's children, beloved by the Creator.

If you've heard this memory, forgive the repetition. Years ago I was privileged to tour the Holy Land. Visiting the Church of the Nativity, I descended into the grotto preserved beneath the sanctuary. It was in this very place, declared the Emperor Constantine's mother Helena, that Jesus was born. Ever since then there has been a church on the site, and the grotto has been preserved. Hanging from the ceiling of the grotto I saw numerous oil lamps fashioned from gold, silver and precious jewels. There was a lamp displaying the double eagle symbol of imperial Russia. There was another lamp from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and more from kingdoms whose names only a historian or a trivia buff might recall. Unbidden and unexpected, the words from the poem "Ozymandias" by Shelley came to mind:

....on the pedestal these words appear --

"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"

Nothing beside remains. Round the decay

Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare

The lone and level sands stretch far away."

In the two millennia and more since the child was born, countless pretenders have sought to be "king of kings." Only the child remains, and will remain.

Bad news comes and goes. The good news is eternal.

Good news!

May the blessings of the Christ child be yours today and always.

REVIEWS

Dr. Robert M. Puckett

THE WARMTH OF OTHER SUNS, *The Epic Story of America's Great Migration*: Isabel Wilkerson, Random House, New York, 2010, hardback, 538 pages, \$30.00

The Rev. Dr. Marion C. Bascom recommended this important book to me shortly before he died. It was his parting gift to me. It is about the largest migration within the United States that involves a drastic shift in political and cultural demographics. It involves the migration of millions of people within our borders; the importance of which is often largely ignored or not fully realized. It traces the exodus of African Americans from the South to the North to escape the bitter persecution and oppression left over from slavery after the Emancipation Proclamation. They were in search of freedom and opportunity and their share of the American Dream.

The author, Isabel Wilkerson, is the first black woman to win a Pulitzer Prize in Journalism and the first African American to win awards for reporting. She has given lectures at Harvard and was a professor of journalism at Princeton University and presently at Emory University. She is also currently Director of Narrative Nonfiction at Boston University. Her parents were part of the Great Migration moving from Georgia and southern Virginia to Washington, D.C. where she was born and reared.

Wilkerson uses the lives of three individuals caught up in the important demographic upheavals of the past century beginning shortly before the first World War to the dawn of the 21st century to understand the making of modern America. They were ordinary people reflecting the diversity of all those who left the south in order to find freedom and a better life in the North. Ida Mae Gladney left a sharecropping plantation

in Mississippi with her husband and two children for the South side of Chicago in 1927. George Starling fled for his life after being threatened for fighting to organize fruit pickers in the Eustis Florida orange groves. He landed in Harlem in 1945 and got a job as a porter on the railroad which took him back and forth from New York to various destinations in Florida throughout a long career. Robert Foster left Louisiana in 1953 to pursue a successful career as a medical Doctor in Los Angeles. His thriving practice was largely among patients who came from back home just as he had. Each of them were seeking to escape the Southern caste system which placed limitations and hardships upon them.

After the Civil War most blacks in the South were no better off economically than before. Sharecropping became a replacement for slavery which revived the former caste system. Blacks lived with the stark reality that none of them were safe from lynching. Someone was hanged or burned alive every four days throughout the South from 1889 to 1929

THE WARMTH OF OTHER SUNS brilliantly portrays the great migration of millions of black people which profoundly changed America. Few Americans were left untouched by it. It changed the political, economic, cultural, and social landscape.

It laid a foundation that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. used to develop the Civil Rights movement. "The exodus forced change in the South, albeit a slow and fitful one, almost from the start: the number of lynchings in the South declined in each decade of the Great Mi-

gration as the number of black departures went up." (p. 533)

Each of the first black mayors in the major centers of population in the North and West were participants of the Great Migration. Carl Stokes (Cleveland), Tom Bradley (Los Angeles), Coleman Young (Detroit), Wilson Goode (Philadelphia), David Dinkins (New York), Willie Brown (San Francisco).

The Migration transformed American music. The family of Miles Davis migrated from Arkansas, Thelonious Monk migrated from North Carolina. People like Louis Armstrong and Aretha Franklin all had roots in the South. They became the soundtrack of the 20th Century.

Cotton farming was changed as cheap slave labor left, speeding up the invention of mechanical cotton harvesters. Eventually the harvesters could pick 15 to 20 bales of cotton a day compared the very small amount that could be picked by hand.

"A central argument of this book has been that the Great Migration was an unrecognized immigration within the country." (P. 536) Those involved were to become immigrants in their own land just to secure their freedom. "The South may have acted like a different country and been proud of it, but it was part of the United States, and anyone born there was born in America." (p. 537)

The Great Migration left an imperfect but far different landscape. The movement of millions of African-American southerners "Altered the course of their own, and all of America's history" (P. 538) This book gives readers a better understanding of America and its future.

Sharing Joys:

- October was Breast Cancer Awareness Month and Domestic Violence Month. On Sunday, October 20th, **St. John Methodist Church** released pink and purple balloons in recognition of these two



very important matters. **Senior Pastor, Roderick Boles**, led the ceremony and many members called out the names of family and friends that are survivors and those that are gone to be with the Lord. The shedding of tears was a way of release and remembrance.

- **Rev. Dr. Michael Donahue**, senior pastor at **Speed Memorial Church**, Sellersburg, IN, has been named the NFL/Colts High School "Coach of the Week" for the state of Indiana. Rev. Donahue is also the head football coach at Silver Creek High School in Sellersburg. With this honor comes a \$2,000.00 check given to the high school's athletic department in his name; guest to a Colts practice and team dinner on Dec. 13 and on Dec. 15th he and seven other people will be guests of the Colts at their game against the Texans. During half time of that game, Rev. Donahue will be present a plaque at mid field signed by the commissioner of the NFL, the owner of the Colts and the head coach of the Colts.

- On November 10th, **The Center** in Palos Park, IL, where **Rev. Christine Hopkins** is the Senior Pastor, celebrated its 85th year! In 1932 **Rev. Paul Sanders** and family moved into a rustic cabin on 9 acres of cow pasture in Palos. No electricity. No plumbing. An act of faith: faith in the miracle of God's love, selfless love, the goodness of the human spirit, and the acceptance of all. From a dream and a vision that started in a one-room cabin, The Center has grown greatly in ministry, fellowship, program and facility. "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." Matthew 6:33, one of Rev. Paul Sanders favorite bible verses.

- **Rev. Steve Boggan** was recently installed as Senior Pastor at **Lakewood Community Church**, Long Beach, CA. Council Minister **Don Ashmall** congratulates Pastor Steve as he and the church begin their pilgrimage.



- **Bishop Serge Theriault** led clergy and representative members of the **Christian Catholic Rite of Community Churches** welcoming Peggy and Council Minister Don Ashmall to worship in Ottawa Canada this fall. During worship the Council Minister was



honored by being admitted as an honorary member into the church's Society of the Precious Blood of Jesus. (**The Rev. Jeffrey Newhall** was similarly honored during his term as ICCC Executive Director.) During the visit the **Rev. Willard Dionne** of the church, recently retired as chief ethics officer of the Canadian Parliament, interpreted his work during a visit to a parliamentary session.



Our prayers are with:

- **Rev. Jimmy Burton**, Senior Pastor at **Bethel Independent Methodist Church**, Birmingham, AL with the passing of his mother **Mattie Burton** on November 3rd at the age of 102! Please remember the Burton Family in your prayers.

KNOWLEDGE IS GOLD

Would you like to go further with your education?
 Apply for a Jordan Scholarship
 Contact the Council Office for an application.
ICCC60423@sbcglobal.net of 815-464-5690

ICCC GENERAL FUND - JAN THRU OCT, 2013

Total Cash Balance as of January 1, 2013: \$ 70,529.66
 Total Income year to date as of October 31:..... \$175,514.17
 Total Expenses year to date as of October 31:.. \$186,608.18
 Total Cash Balance as of October 31, 2013: \$ 59,435.65

Non-Denominational Church Seeks Full-Time Pastor

Roser Community Church (www.roserchurch.com) is a Lay-Led 400 member church. We seek an energetic Pastor with post-graduate congregational experience. Ability to work within our traditional worship format along with the skills to build on our youth and adult Christian education programs. Applicants must be a graduate of a divinity school recognized by the American Association of Theological Schools and an ordained Christian minister of the Gospel. If interested send resume, salary requirements and recent sermon to Search Committee - Roser Community Church, P.O. Box 2141, Anna Maria, FL 34216.

Ecumenews

Herman Harmelink, III

As Adam left the Garden of Eden he was heard to say to Eve, "We live in an age of transition." Much the same can be said of the life of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA. The term of the transitional general secretary, Peg Birk, comes to an end with the end of year 2013. The new General Secretary/President, Dr. James E. Winkler of the United Methodist Church, takes office on January 1. Under Peg Birk's leadership the Council has been drastically restructured. Instead of the five commissions which have done the work of the Council, we will have "Convening Tables" responsible for all of the functions previously carried out by the commissions. Whether this will be truly revolutionary, or only a distinction without a difference, only time will tell. The size of the Governing Board has been drastically reduced, and will now be composed only of the Heads of Communion of the 36 member communions. The hope is that, when full responsibility lies on their shoulders, the Heads of Communion will be more careful to see that the National Council is properly funded. Again, only time will tell. We can only hope and pray for greater stability and success for the Council in the years to come. After all, if it ceased to exist, we would merely have to re-invent a similar organisation for the mainline Protestant, Anglican and Orthodox communions of our country to exhibit their unity in faith and in action together.



The other major ecumenical development in recent days has been the Tenth General Assembly of the World Council of Churches, which was held in Busan, Korea, from October 30 to November 8. The theme of the General Assembly was "God of Life, Lead us to Justice and Peace." Noteworthy among the actions of the Assembly was the election of Dr Agnes Abuom, an Anglican from Nairobi, Kenya, as the first African and the first woman to be Moderator of the Central Committee, the 150-member governing body of the WCC between general assemblies.

Seeking a Senior Minister

Emmanuel Baptist Church of Ridgewood, NJ has an opening for a Senior Minister. We are a progressive church which emphasizes inclusiveness and social justice as our understanding of Christianity. We are interested in pastoral candidates who are supportive of this philosophy and theology.

The community of Ridgewood is known for its excellent schools, community services, transportation facilities to NY City, the arts, and quality of life. Our church is a member of the American Baptist Churches, and maintains affiliation with the International Council of Community Churches and the Center for Progressive Christianity.

Please contact search committee chair Brent Saardema at 973-427-7310 or profbrent@juno.com with expressions of interest.

Women's Christian Fellowship

By Ella Clay, President

As we joyfully enter into this Christmas season, we have much to be thankful for! We have been granted another exciting year to celebrate the birth of Jesus. Many people enjoy Christmas festivities by attending social events, visiting family members, and exchanging gifts. Whether you celebrate Christmas with merrymaking and the exchange of gifts, you are still blessed. After all, the most precious gift that we will ever receive is the gift of salvation. The experience of salvation is priceless and an eternal gift that will last forever. Consider this, when someone receives a special present, they are compelled to share the gift with others. Yet, how many times do we take the opportunity to share the most precious Gift? As we approach this holiday season let us remember that the true meaning of Christmas is to share love, peace and joy with humanity. By realizing the greater purpose of celebrating Christmas, more love will be experienced and less stress will be encountered. Moreover, we don't have to wait until Christmas to celebrate Jesus' birth. For when we receive Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we celebrate and rejoice daily of the goodness of God. Let us take the same exuberance of the holiday season into our daily lives so that our Gift will be seen and experienced by all. Merry Christmas from WCF!



Seeking a Senior Pastor

"I am come that they might have life and that they may have it more abundantly." – St. John 10:10

People's Community Church is a Singing, Praying, Tithing, Serving and Loving congregation, seeking a spiritual and energetic pastor. People's Community Church was organized in 1954 and is a charter member of the International Council of Community Churches. In response to God's call and through the Power of the Holy Spirit, it is the mission of People's Community Church to be a Community of Faith through which the Kingdom of God might be revealed. The Pastoral Search Committee request your resume along with a video, CD or recording of a recent sermon.

The candidate must be an ordained minister, a graduate of a university and an accredited theological seminary with a divinity degree or its equivalence.

He/she must also have actively pastored for at least three years in a congregation that is recognized by the International Council of Community Churches. Must have the love of the gospel; demonstrating qualities of strong leadership in the areas of preaching, teaching, administration, community relations and be able to relate to all generations of the congregation. He/she must demonstrate the ability to stimulate positive church growth in the inter-city area of Detroit.

Interested candidates may submit requested documents to the attention of the Search Committee for Pastoral Leadership, People's Community Church, 8601 Woodward Ave., Detroit, MI 48202 – Carolyn Ford, Chairperson. Initial interest may also communicate via email at personaltouch_22@att.net.

A Rare Opportunity... Seeking New Leaders For ICCC

*Submitted by Roberta Smith,
Transitional Nominating Committee Moderator*

Think back to the creation of the United States of America. Influential delegates from all the areas of the newly settled country met in Philadelphia. They each brought their knowledge, their wisdom and their valuable personal experiences to create a new nation. They thought, they deliberated, they argued ... and eventually agreed on the basic principles that would guide the fledging sovereign nation. "We hold these truths to be self-evident – that all men are created equal."

The International Council of Community Churches stands at an exciting threshold. Our organization has existed since 1950 and since that time has fulfilled a valuable mission. From our website –

"the Biennial Council of the Peoples Church of Christ and Community Centers led by Dr. Joseph M. Evans (until then all Afro-American) and the National Council of Community Churches led by the Rev. Roy A. Burkhardt (until then all Caucasian) joined in a historic merger. At the time, their joining represented the largest interracial merger of religious bodies in America. The new creation was the International Council of Community Churches. Member churches united to be a fellowship of ecumenically minded, freedom-loving congregations cooperating in fulfilling the mission of the Church in the world."

That core under-taking is not going away. Many would say that in this age of social media mingling but individual isolation, the passing of a couple of generations more interested in Sunday soccer

matches than family time at church, and the in-fighting occurring in the offices of major denominations that the need for ecumenical spiritual nurturing is greater than ever before. In order to operate more efficiently and effectively, a task force led by Rev Herb Freitag met and suggested a reorganization of the ICCC. This proposal was adopted by the delegates at the 2013 Conference in Grand Rapids, MI and it created some new positions that need to be filled to lead our Conference into the next century. Offices such as Vice President of Financial Development, Vice President of Membership Services, and Vice President of Leadership Development – to name a few - need to be filled. For the full listing of available offices and a nomination form contact Roberta Smith at RobertaICCC@aol.com or call her at (908) 419-8860 and that information will be sent to you immediately. The Senior Pastor of your ICCC member church and your Key Lay Leader have also received these forms.

This is your opportunity to have a significant positive impact on the future of the International Council of Community Churches. Are you willing to bring your personal talents to fill these leadership roles? Are you blessed with specific leadership, technical and/or management skills that you can use in the service of Christ? You may be a lay person or a member of clergy. You may nominate yourself or have someone else nominate you. A nomination form has been devised that requests a brief bio to tell enumerating your qualification and references are requested. If you have any questions, you can contact Nominating Committee Chair, Roberta Smith or any member of the

Transition Nominating Committee (names appear at the conclusion of this article). Please submit candidate names to Roberta by email or snail mail no later than Friday, January 31, 2014.

Take a moment to open yourself to examine your role in your church, in the ICCC and in your own faith journey. Many of you may have the desire to fill an office but your work and family responsibilities may be such that you would not be able to serve. However, I am certain that there are some – perhaps, many – who have been seeking an opportunity to contribute more to our communion and to the church of Jesus Christ in the world while receiving fulfillment and developing their own skills. There are some of you ready to write on the blank slate of a new leadership role and make a significant impact on our new venture. There are some of you ready to say, "Here I am, Lord – send me!" We welcome your leadership for this new age.

Transition Nominating Committee members:

Roberta Smith, Chairperson (RobertaICCC@aol.com); Myrtis Brame (myrtisjb@aol.com); Rev. Shirley Cooper (revshirleybcooper@verizon.net); Rev. Michael Donahue (revdonahue@yahoo.com); Rev. Herb Freitag (pastor@chapel-bythesea.net); Bob Harris (raharris@windstream.net); Rev. Leroy McCreary (leroy.mccreary@att.net); Rev. Charlene Watkins (pastorchar@att.net); Rev. John Woodcock (jwoodcock@lovingshepherd.org)

Mailing Address: Roberta Smith, 1105 Park Terrace, Plainfield, NJ 07062.

President's Message *cont'd. from pg 1*

Let us **ponder** once more the nativity story. As we wonder anew at God's love, grace and glory! The theme of the service that night drew itself from the poems words: "Let us ponder once more the nativity story."

Check your dictionary and you will find that "ponder" means to "think deeply about," "consider carefully," and/or "meditate."

We are pushed through Christmas. Before Halloween arrives stores are already marketing their wares and, if you listen above the shopping din, you can even hear secular "holiday" music creeping into the stores broadcast systems. The parties, the busyness at church, the rush to get the gifts, to make the list and check it off twice, often prevents us from taking the time to **ponder** the miracle of Christmas!

The Advent Season with its call to focus on hope, peace, joy and love is a beautiful framework that allows and encourages us to **ponder** what Jesus' coming means to us and the world of which we are a part.

Luke recounts Mary's response to the coming of her firstborn son: "Mary treasured these words and pondered them in her heart." (Luke 2:19)

My prayer for you, your family, your church and our world is that we will make the time to join Mary as we treasure these words and ponder them in our hearts:

HOPE

*"For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope!
For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see,
we wait for it with patience."
(Romans 8:24-25)*

In our day, in our circumstance, in the topsy-turvy world that swirls around us we have **hope!** We ponder that hope. We meditate upon it. We consider its implications carefully and we respond:

*"You are my hiding place and my shield;
I hope in your word." (Psalm 119:114)*

PEACE

*Jesus said, "My peace I leave with you;
my peace I give to you.
I do not give to you as the world gives.
Let not your hearts be troubled, and do not be afraid." (John 14:27)*

Ponder this: our peace is assured in the midst of all life's fragility and chaos. We have, through Christ, the very peace of God to sustain us and encourage us in our mission. Claiming and practicing the call of Christ in our world we realize this truth:

*"How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of the messenger who
announces peace,
who brings good news, who announces
salvation, who says to Zion,
Your God reigns." (Isaiah 52:7)*

JOY

*"But the angel said to the shepherds,
"Do not be afraid; for see –
I am bringing you good news of great joy
for all the people;
to you is born this day, in the city of
David, a Savior, who is the Messiah,
the Lord."*

Think carefully! Ponder this: In a world that often draws circles to keep people out and builds walls that imprison and exclude, God sent Jesus as the Savior, the Messiah, the Lord **for all the people!** That's radical inclusion! That is truly a miracle! This is not an event for Christians only! This coming is for all the people! Ponder the beauty of this reality: God in Christ reconciled the world to himself and does not count their sins and trespasses against them! Let us raise our voices:

*"O come, let us sing to the Lord;
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of
our salvation! (Psalm 95:1)*

LOVE

*Paul writes, "I am convinced that neither
death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers,
nor things present, nor things to come,
nor powers, nor height, nor depth,
nor anything else in all creation, will be
able to separate us from the love of God
in Christ Jesus our Lord."
(Romans 8:38,39)*

Meditate on this! Think deeply about its impact on you and our world. Ponder this: through Christ Jesus our Lord, you and I cannot be separated from God's love no matter the circumstance or time!

Through Advent, Christmas, New Year and all years to come:
*"Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever.
O give thanks to the God of gods,
for his steadfast love endures forever.
O give thanks to the Lord of lords
for his steadfast love endures forever."
(Psalm 136:1-3)*

Now and Forever:

*"What has come into being
in Jesus was life,
and the life was the light of all people.
The Light shines in our darkness, and
the darkness does not overcome it."
(John 1: 3b-5)*

During this Holy Season and in all the days of our lives, may the richest blessings of God be on you, your family and our world.

*"Let us ponder once more
the nativity story,
as we wonder anew at God's love,
grace and glory!"*

Our Charge *cont'd from pg 2*

mission. We must "own" our role as risk-taking leaders. And we must teach, equip, and encourage our congregations to see their pastors in a new light.

There are sheep outside our church walls, and they are looking for meaning and purpose in life. We are meant to lead them there, to discover the sustenance of new pastures together. Are we ready to change our bait, to live into our true roles as pastors, to forge a way into this uncharted territory?

Dr. Cleaver's book *Pastor on Track: Avert Crisis and Claim Your True Role* will be published in the spring of 2014 by Abingdon Press.

Mission Statement



*"As people devoted to
following Christ
we are committed to
community,
to treasuring diversity,
to living our faith in
service and love."*