

# THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

*A Voice for Ecumenical Congregations and Christians Around the World*

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## President's Message

**Rev. Dr. William H. Samuels  
(Rev. Bill)**

### "Jesus and Journalism:

### The Lead Sentence for the Holidays

Journalism makes distinctions in this day and age which make you go "hmmmm." Now Journalism is not, apparently, what it used to be. The first distinction, I was taught, is the difference between "objective" truth—a news story, versus "subjective" opinion—an editorial. These days, subjectivity is certainly not limited to the editorial page; it shows itself in the name of the media outlet, the periodical identification or even the "by-line." You come to expect what is in an article by identifying the network, the newspaper heading or the "anchor" person bringing the story.

CNN, for example, journalistic rendition of "breaking news" of the birth of Jesus would be different from FOX—and you would expect it to be. CNN identifies with the "left" political opinions and will certainly find people and stories that lean that way. FOX, on the other hand, leans toward the "right" and will certainly defend or encourage right wing ideology. The question remains, "Where can you get objective truth—or is there such a thing?"

Can you identify, for example, the news outlet which would record "breaking news" in this way?

"Late last night, 2 refugees from the town of Galilee, made their way into Bethlehem, a suburb of Roman-held Jerusalem. The refugees were rightly turned away from lodging in the area—they were told that there were no rooms available—but if they would go around to the back, they might find some comfort and space amongst the animals. Later that evening, the female refugee gave birth amidst claims of her new-born son being some sort of Messiah. A few paid witnesses came forth (some slightly intoxicated—claiming to have recently talked to angels) who told them to go quickly and find the child wrapped in loose clothing and care for it, because lives matter."

Let's hear more now from King Herod, a local, unbiased leader of the Jewish cult. Mr. Herod, what do you think of all this talk concerning a new king being born to your people? Herod: "Well, I hope they find out where he is—I want to worship him myself—I want to be the first to test this idea of a man having to being born again."





## Saying Something Nice About the Baby Jesus

**Don Ashmall**

*Council Minister, Emeritus*

Some time ago, during Advent, a friend told me that he had been doing some reading in a religious journal. Whatever he had read, he didn't like. It wasn't that he particularly disagreed with the content. He just thought that since the material was produced for consumption at this time of year, it should "say something nice about the baby Jesus." In response to that, and since I'm writing this screed for you to read just before Christmas, I have decided that I should say something nice about the baby Jesus. I've been looking through the gospel accounts of the birth of Jesus in order that I could do just that. But I have run into some problems in my reading.

First of all there's the expectation of the blessed event. Matthew tells us that Mary did just fine with it. So did her cousin Elizabeth. Joseph – not so much. Joseph wanted to slip-slide away from the process, though he was decent enough to want to do it quietly. It took a vivid dream in which he received orders, to get him into line. That wasn't nice at all.

Then there's the business about the stable, where Luke reveals that Jesus was born. Come on people, a barn is no place to have a baby. What kind of selfish folk couldn't manage to find some sort of indoor space for Mary? They sound too much like 21st century people – us – with all of our greed and self-absorption and lack of compassion. As a male I am unable to relate directly to the pains of childbirth, but I did serve for a time during seminary days as chaplain on a maternity ward. From that experience I can tell you "guys" who are reading this that giving

birth is extremely painful and completely exhausting, as well as demanding an environment that's much cleaner than any stable could ever be. Shoving the soon-to-be mother out to the barn was certainly not nice.

And the shepherds: whooping it up and praising God in a makeshift maternity ward? Of course they were happy about centuries of prophecies fulfilled but – silent night? I don't think so.

Back to Matthew and we discover all sorts of attempted government interference. King Herod was murderously insecure, to the point that he lied to visitors, looked for a way to kill the infant, and ended up slaughtering who knows how many children, sending the infant Jesus and family into exile for a time. Nothing nice about all of that.

But wait. None of the foregoing says a thing about the baby Jesus – just about those around the infant. So what do we know about the child from the gospel accounts?

We know from both Matthew and Luke that the words of the ancient prophets had not been forgotten, and that there was an urgent hope that Messiah would come and change things. The prophets did not convey a clear vision of when and where and how. But that mattered less than that there would be a fulfillment of the prophecies through a suffering servant who was yet king.

We know that the shepherds reported an angelic visitation and a fulfillment of the prophetic promises through a baby

newborn in the home town of David. The angels did not give instructions for the shepherds to make the trip to Bethlehem. They didn't need to. The shepherds went on their own, and gave witness to what they had seen, and who they now saw lying in a manger.

We know that the magi reported the sighting of a star, and that they followed the star to where the child was, because in their words he had been born "king of the Jews."

Messiah. Fulfillment of prophecy. King. Those are not "nice" claims. They are audacious. They are startling. They are life challenging and life changing.

So I'm sorry, my friend. You wanted me to say something nice about the baby Jesus. Instead I have to proclaim that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto God's own self. That's not nice. That's revolutionary!

Merry Christmas!



Sharing Joys:

- October 22, 2017: Members of the religious community who conducted the Celebration of Installation of **Rhonda Blevins**, new Senior Pastor, **Chapel By The Sea** are Rev. Ray Johnson, Coordinator, Co-operative Baptist Fellowship of Florida; Rev. **Don Ashmall**, Council Minister, International Council of Community Churches; Rev. **Marty Singley**, Pastor, **Community Church at Tellico Village** (Tennessee), 1996-2014; Rev. **Herb Freitag**, Pastor, **Chapel by the Sea**, 1981-2017.



- Jana Cole** was ordained as youth pastor at **Speed Memorial Church** on Sunday, Oct. 15, by Rev. Dr. **Michael Donahue**, senior pastor. The ordination was conferred following her successful schooling in youth ministry. Jana has served as Speed Memorial Church's Director of Christian Education for several years. At the end of the service Jana was presented with her ordination certificate, business cards, clergy robe, liturgical stoles and a stole with children of the world on it, from the church's DIVA group (DIVAs is a women's group made up of women who work during the day). After the presentation of the gifts a reception was held for Rev. Cole in the Fellowship Hall.



- Emmanuel Baptist's** church council, Ridgewood, NJ is excited to announce Rev. Arturo Lewis will serve as Associate Pastor beginning Jan. 1, 2018. Rev. Lewis will focus on youth and family ministry and discipleship, assisting Senior Pastor Kenneth Gill with preaching and serving as a representative and advocate for Emmanuel's ministry and outreach into the larger community.

- October 29th, Bishop **Thomas Burns**, along with the **Second Community Church** congregation, Columbus, OH, had the joy of reminding those gathered where he serves as associate minister to give thanks for their pastor, Rev. Dr. **Charlene Watkins**. "So often those of us who serve alongside others forget to express our thanks for those we serve with. You are one of those I thank God for!" ~Bishop Burns.



- Rev. Gary Harris** was installed as Senior Pastor at **Havenscourt Community Church**, Oakland, CA on October 1st. Council Minister, Emeritus **Don Ashmall** and Regional Trustee **Charles Addison** were at the event.

Our prayers are with:

- It is with great sadness that we share the news of the passing of **Frank Sanders**. Frank passed away peacefully with his family by his side on November 7, 2017. Frank W. Sanders and his wife Blanche devoted their lives to the leadership of **The Center** in Palos Park, Illinois. Frank served as Assistant Director there from 1958 – 1964 and as Executive Director of The Center from 1964 – 1973. In 1973 Frank, Blanche, and their two sons moved to Colorado where Frank became a successful realtor, residing in Longmont, Colorado. In 1983 the Board of Trustees of The Center asked Frank and Blanche to consider coming back, as The Center was going through extremely difficult times. They agreed that this was their true calling in life and moved back in 1983. Frank served as Executive Director of The Center from 1983 – 2000 and as Spiritual Director of The Center from 1983 – 2008. He was well known for his tremendous hugs and welcoming spirit. He was a giant of a man in personality, stature, determination, and loyalty to his family and all who knew him.
- ICCC VP for Informational Services and Outreach, **Rev. Mike Donahue**. Here is a note from him:  
*"Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Recently I shared with my congregation something I have been battling for 23 years. On November 17, 1994 my world was changed with the diagnoses that I have Multiple Sclerosis (MS). I have had only one "bad" exasperation when I lost my ability to walk and see for a month in 1995. Since that time I have done well. Until June my MS was classified as relapsing/remitting...in June the diagnoses changed to secondary progressive. This was due to tremors, slurred speech, and having to concentrate to walk. At the Cherry Hill conference I tried to hide any symptoms I was fighting. I have a very aggressive neurologist, who decided to move me to a very new drug. It is given by infusion for five hours every six months. I had my first infusion the week I came back from conference and the results have been encouraging. My tremors have lessened, my constant pain has left and walking is not such a chore. My wife and I were made aware in prayer that I was not demonstrating to my congregation what I was asking them to do...tell me when they have a health issue or struggling so I can pray for them. The reaction of the congregation to my announcement has been nothing short of amazing." Please keep Mike in your prayers.*
- Jim MacVicar** and his family. **Nancy**, Jim's wife, passed away November 22, 2017. She was a member of **Roser Memorial Community Church** in Anna Maria, FL, Senior Pastor **Robert O'Keef**. Many of you know Nancy from conference. She attended each year until her health, a few years back, didn't allow anymore. She was a WCF active member, and very involved and a faithful believer in the Jordan Scholarship. Nancy was a big supporter of the ICCC and what we stand for. She will be missed.





## Annual Conference 2018 in St. Louis, Missouri

Submitted by Harry Fooockle

Under the banner of "Gateway to Glory", using Psalm 24:9-10, we will gather in the great city of St. Louis July the 16th through the 19th of 2018.



I can tell you the Annual Conference Planning Committee has put together a spectacular God centered experience for the ICCC. An outstanding Black Gospel choir and band will lead us on Monday evening. Our Bible leader will be the president of Eden Theological Seminary. Of course, great preaching by our own ICCC preachers. High quality workshops with help and hope ideas for you to take back home.

Children, youth and young adult ministries that will make an impact on our Annual Conference and the greater St. Louis area.

A gathering at the old court house (the exact place where the Supreme Court rendered the Dred Scott decision). There at the court house will be a time of prayer and leadership to make a statement about the need to move beyond those things that separate us as God's children. To let our world see this hope and love in the presence of our ICCC movement.

More information is on the way. Watch your Christian Community newsletter and the ICCC website.

Mercy, I am excited for you! Glory!!!

### ICCC Endowment Fund Status As of November 22, 2017

Gifts Goal by 30 June '18: .....	\$15,000
Gifts since 7/01/17: .....	\$4,085
Help us meet our goal, need: .....	\$10,915
Total Endowment Gifts to ICCC since inception: .....	\$46,373
Current Fund Assets: .....	\$326,872
Current Investment Mix: 50% stocks, 48% bonds, 2% Cash	

## 2018 Inclusive Pulpit Submissions Welsome!

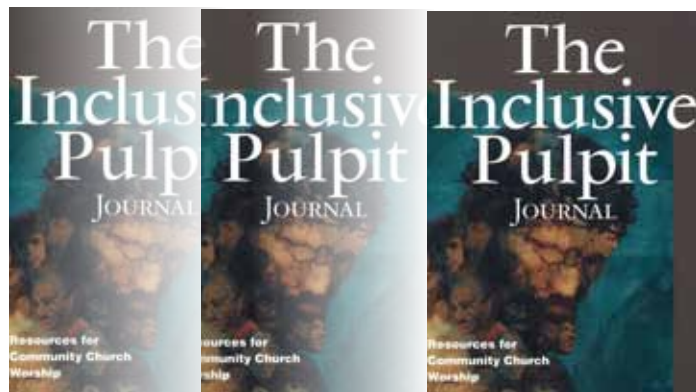
Submitted by David Dismas, 2017 co-editor

**Preached any good sermons lately?** "The Inclusive Pulpit" – an annual publication of the International Council of Community Churches – would love to hear from you and publish your sermon in our upcoming edition.

**Challenged by a good sermon?** "The Inclusive Pulpit" would love for you to recruit the preacher to submit that wonderful sermon for publication in our upcoming edition.

**Inspired by any good reflections, poems or worship material?** "The Inclusive Pulpit" welcomes those submissions as well.

Seasoned pastors, senior saints, new pastors, seminarians, youth group leaders? Help us celebrate the working of the Holy Spirit in the many ministries of the ICCC.



## Seeking a Director of Music

The Church at Litchfield Park is seeking a Director of Music to oversee the music program of a historic growing and dynamic interdenominational community church in Litchfield Park, AZ. The director will be responsible for leading and rehearsing the 30+ member Chancel Choir for two Sunday worship services, leading and rehearsing a "blended" choir for a third service, and oversee the directors of the bell and children's choirs. Qualified candidates should have a demonstrated ability as a director and work well with musicians, pastors and staff. The position is half-time and compensation will be based on qualifications and experience. Interested applicants should send a cover letter, resume, and list of references electronically to [info@clp.church](mailto:info@clp.church).

## WCF Information

Submitted by Carol Nichols  
cs83nick@aol.com

Greetings Ladies,

First, I would like to thank the members of the WCF for the opportunity to serve in the capacity of President. It is an honor. The Executive Board members of the WCF are meeting and making plans for next year's conference in St. Louis, MO., July 16-19.



I am extending an invitation to each of you to consider attending our meetings. I would also like to encourage you to be a part of the program. If you would consider being a presenter contact me. You may also contact Connie Fitch-Blanks (conneer.fitch@gmail.com), or Sandra Roberts (robertssandra1951@gmail.com).

The meetings are early, but what a way to start your day, with women joined together in one faith, on one accord!

Again, the WCF is looking forward to a great conference and that can only happen if you make plans to join us!

On behalf of **your** WCF, we wish you a wonderful, Christmas Season and may the blessings of our Lord and Savior be with you and your families!

## President's Message *cont'd. from p. 1*

Left? Right? Objective? Is there reason to believe that some bias may be implicit in the reporting? This is the form of information that is now available to us—How do we receive it? As we approach the holiday season, will it be free from selective subjectivity intended to sway opinions rather than provide the truth—or better stated by Pilate—“What is truth?”

We get the Christmas stories from the Gospels of Luke and Matthew. A thorough reading of the early chapters of each book will provide enough information for healthy religious discussion concerning this marvelous time of the year. Though the stories are challenged by “objective” history, our job as Christians is to repeat the stories, send the greeting cards, revisit the icons, say our prayers and do all of the fun things that are Christmas.

The real truth of the season is the combination of nostalgia and hope. Remembering things that never were—but how we wanted them to be—hoping for things beyond our reach but nonetheless—hoping. Recreating, structuring, decorating and expecting—because “unto us, a child is given—unto us, a son is born, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and he shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.” (Isaiah 6-9)—Special thanks to Handel.

700 years before this prophecy was fulfilled, the subjectivity of Isaiah was informed by “a small still voice.” Isaiah's subjectivity is informed not by political considerations, but by an unquenched yearning for truth and information. His “alternative truth” was the kind of subjectivity (virgins giving birth), which modifies objectivity.

## Seeking a Senior Pastor

St. Timothy Community Church, a non-denominational church, has been blessed to praise and worship God for 91 years. We are currently seeking a committed and innovative full-time Senior Pastor. With a servant's heart, this Senior Pastor will faithfully and to the best of his or her ability, experience, and talents serve as the spiritual leader of this 600-member congregation. In addition, he or she must have the capacity to support our mission and maintain the highest level of spiritual commitment, theological literacy and integrity possible. Passionate, visionary leaders who feel God's call to this ministry are asked to please visit our website at [www.sttimothychurch.org](http://www.sttimothychurch.org) to learn more about our church, the position and the application process.

## Seeking a Music Director

Norris Religious Fellowship (Norris, TN) is seeking a Music Director. Salaried, part-time position. The Music Director works in initiating programs, rehearsals, special music, etc.; provides piano and/or organ accompaniment for the hymns. Ability to lead a choir and congregation, directing and inspiring others through a ministry of music. Excellent vocal skills a plus. Please provide a resume and cover letter along with recording demonstrating your skill set via audio CD, DVD, or link to digital materials online (YouTube, Vimeo, professional website). Submit via email to [norrisreligiousfellowship@comcast.net](mailto:norrisreligiousfellowship@comcast.net). More information about NRF [www.NorrisRF.org](http://www.NorrisRF.org).

## *An End to Racism*

*Submitted by Don Ashmall*

In November the General Board of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA (NCC) committed to an unprecedented action and process. The thirty-eight communions of the NCC will, individually and collectively, engage in a “truth and reconciliation” effort. The goal is to seek an end to racism in the USA. The effort has precedent in the truth and reconciliation process in South Africa, but will require additional effort and dedication since the history and position of Christian communions in the USA is so deeply intertwined in and with the “powers and principalities” that affect life so deeply in the nation.

**This new action and process will be launched in an event on the National Mall in Washington DC on Wednesday, April 4, 2018.** That date is the fiftieth anniversary of the death of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The NCC General Board has challenged each of the thirty-eight member communions to enlist a minimum of 500 people to be present on the Mall that day.

The previous evening, April 3, an ecumenical worship in the District of Columbia will prepare attendees for the launch event. Other groups both secular and faith-based are being asked to endorse the truth-telling process, and to participate in the launch event as well as follow-through actions. The General Board has committed \$300,000 to the action and process and has directed NCC staff to seek additional funding from foundations and other sources.

The ICCC became a member of the NCC in 1957, after participating informally since shortly after both were formed in 1950. Ever since then our representatives on the General Board and in other bodies within the NCC have been tireless in our witness for justice and reconciliation as well as Christian unity. When the NCC General Board took on this historic commitment, I was overjoyed and so very grateful that I could represent you as the NCC board voted unanimously to move forward. Our Board of Directors and Board of Trustees have both endorsed the NCC action and are urging all within our fellowship to support and participate as we are able.

The launch event will require a great deal of work. Happily, NCC staff are already working with consultants who have organized other large events on the Mall. The broad outlines are already emerging, with nineteen committees needing to be staffed by volunteers. Some volunteer work can be done at a distance, but much of the burden will of necessity fall on congregations within 100 miles of the National Mall. Thank you in advance to the ICCC folk who will take the lead!

The biggest challenge will begin after the launch event. The process will not be easy. Customary processes and long-held assumptions will be revealed to be inadequate and morally deficient, and will need to be changed. Change is always threatening, and when privilege is challenged, the threat is all the greater. Yet if justice is to be served and reconciliation achieved, change will be required. Beginning now, please pray that the ICCC can and will, both within the NCC and beyond it, take our customary place as a change agent and as a leader in Christian work and witness.

Will you be there for the launch? Will your congregation, area or region arrange for one or more buses to take you and others to DC April 3 and 4? Will you be willing to serve on one of the nineteen launch committees? Please contact Council House as your plans advance so that we can share the word with the entire fellowship

