

THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

A Voice for Ecumenical Congregations and Christians Around the World

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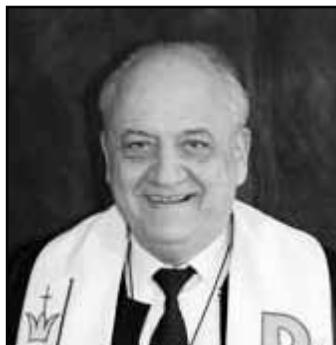
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Tiny Town(s) Providential Possibilit(y)(ies)

President's Message

Rev. Dr. Richard O. Griffith

It was many years ago, and a number of us were on a tour of the Holy Land. It was time to go to Bethlehem, where Jesus was born, and I was wondering what it would look like. Well, over the years, centuries of devotion had taken place, and it was nothing like what Mary and Joseph experienced – there was the location sanctified by tradition, of course, but very different -- surrounded by candles and a myriad of other icons of faith. A stable is a dirty, smelly, and grossly unsanitary place, and I couldn't help but think of the hymn by Phillips Brooks:

*O little town of Bethlehem, How still we see the lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep The silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark streets shineth The everlasting light;
The hopes and fears of all the years Are met in thee tonight.*



Then, some years later, I was touring the Back Bay section of Boston and I came to Trinity Church, where, in the flower of his ministry, (and after he had written the hymn that makes him famous today) Brooks had become the rector. A larger than life statue in front of the church proclaimed him, "A preacher of the Word of God, and a lover of all mankind" The lover, who wrote, after his pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1865,

*How silently, how silently, The wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts The blessings of his heaven.
No ear may hear His coming, But in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive Him, still The dear Christ enters in.*

continued on page 7



Starry Nights and Other Anticipations of Christmas

Don Ashmall
Council Minister

My only visit to the Holy Land (Israel and the West Bank) was at a time when all areas were under one political administration and in between the serial wars that have plagued the region for decades. Especially during the weeks approaching Christmas the sights and sounds of that visit steal into my memory and color my approach to the season.

There's plenty of commercialized schlock in the Holy Land just as there is in North America's preparation for Christmas. There, everything was made by the merchant's saintly grandmother. "Sure it was!" In North America it was made to exacting standards so that the "some assembly required" will be no problem. "Yeah, right!" As dependable as death and taxes is the appearance of somebody who wants to sell us something.

In the Holy Land there is much that is utter foolishness. Remember the New Testament account of Jesus' transfiguration? Remember how Peter wanted to build three tabernacles: one for Moses, one for Elijah and one for Jesus? Remember how Jesus quashed the idea? On my visit I discovered that atop the mountain there is a huge church, and inside there are three tabernacles.... I was speechless. Foolishness? In North America we read the New Testament teachings about relief for the widow and the orphan, and then hear about Neiman Marcus' offer of a 100th anniversary limited edition Maserati convertible for Christmas – and if you have to ask 'how much' you can't afford it.

And then there was the snow. Yes, yes, I know the true date of Jesus' birth probably wasn't in December, but give me a break here. It snowed during my winter visit to the Holy Land. Not much, but it did snow overnight, and the ground was brightened

by it at dawn. By mid-morning the snow had melted away and the moisture had turned the desert green. By evening, the plants had faded away just as the Psalmist wrote. (Ps. 90.) Everything passes except that which is of God, both then and now.

Every place in Jerusalem at least pretends to have something to do with the life of Jesus. To sing the hymn "I Walked Today Where Jesus Walked" seems possible there – provided one ignores the conflicting claims to ownership of various gospel locales. What struck me was that the locations were so ordinary and without any Cecil B. DeMille orchestra playing in the background. If Jesus walked in those places, he did so in the midst of run-of-the-mill locations and people. I think there's some encouragement for us average people in that.

It's not just Jerusalem; it seems that every town in the Holy Land claims some Biblical event as its own. There's the place where the Annunciation happened – maybe. And there are sites where Mary and Joseph paused on their way to Bethlehem – perhaps. And then there is the least likely looking location of all, the Church of the Nativity. Upstairs in the main church there are non-stop worship services led by three groups of ill-tempered clergy who watch the clock and are not averse to pushing their way "on-stage" and shoving the outgoing crew "off-stage" when their own appointed hour arrives. (No need to remind you of American parallels; they are all too obvious.)

Downstairs in the Church of the Nativity there is the spot where tradition says Jesus was born. It sure doesn't look like any stable I've seen: marble everywhere, and in the center of the stone floor a circular hole just large enough so that if you can make the neces-

sary arrangements it's possible to thrust your head through and kiss the original floor below – supposedly the very place.

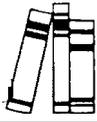
Maybe I'm too easily distracted, but as I stood there contemplating the scene, my eye was drawn to dozens of huge oil lamps hanging from the ceiling above. Crafted from gold and silver, they featured signs and symbols of their donors – emperors and kings who have since passed into history so that their gifts meant for the Christ child are perhaps their only temporal remains. I thought of the lyrics to the song: "kings and kingdoms may all pass away, but there's something about that Name."

It was near the end of my visit that I was privileged to spend a night at a kibbutz – a communal farm – far from the city lights of Jerusalem. The kibbutz was at the shore of the Sea of Galilee and there wasn't a sheep in sight. But late in the evening the stars were a river of diamonds above. I kept watch for a while there, though I had no shepherd's responsibility. The closest I've come to those moments since, are when I have been privileged to be a part of a congregation holding Christmas candles at midnight.

The reality of human division and conflict was never far removed during that Holy Land visit. The Holy Land's greatest need was and is, peace. The same can be said for the entire world. So in this season of the Prince of Peace, I invite you to pray with me for all of humanity, the inner peace that passes human understanding; and an outer peace that moves beyond tolerating differences to celebrating our God-given diversity.

Merry Christmas!

REVIEWS



Dr. Robert M. Puckett



COTTON PATCH PARABLES OF LIBERATION, Clarence Jordan
(Edited by Bill Lane Doulos), 1976, WIPF & Stock, Eugene,
Oregon, paperback, 156 pages.

This 25th anniversary Edition in 2009 of COTTON PATCH PARABLES OF LIBERATION in memory of Clarence and Florence Jordan makes Clarence's powerful rendition of the parables available once again. Bill Lane Doulos remarks in the preface "Two thousand years ago, Jesus' parables about the Kingdom of God led him to a cross. We can never over estimate the explosive power of the truth wrapped up in a familiar story." Having been made acquainted with them as a resident of *Koinonia* farm led him to dedicate his life to a radical example of Christian living.

Clarence and Florence Jordan with a few others founded *Koinonia* Farm near Americus, Georgia in 1942 as a demonstration of the Kingdom of God in an alien world. It was to be a witness to three central gospel ideas: "peace, sharing, and living as brothers and sisters." (p. 13) The Kingdom of God calls us into a new existence, and "this new existence is what the gospels and particularly the parables are all about." (p. 17)

Clarence believed that parables are like the Trojan horse of Greek history. The parables are devices in which Jesus hid dangerous life changing truth. That is what Nathan the prophet did with king David after his episode with the wife of Uriah the Hittite. Nathan went to King David and told him about a very rich man who had a lot of sheep and another poor man who had only one sheep. When the rich man had an unexpected guest, he stole the poor man's one little sheep and served it for dinner. When David heard the story he became angry and demanded to know who would do such a thing. Nathan answered "THOU ART THE MAN!" Nathan's story was a trap in which to snare the king and convince him of his guilt and bring about repentance. The parables of Jesus serve the same purpose to bring about change in all of us to understand to them.

"The true children of God are the ones who carry with them the nature of the heavenly Parent. It is impossible, therefore, to separate the parables telling us about God from those speaking about discipleship. As we look at who God is, we pick up essential clues about who we're supposed to be," (p. 46)

Clarence used the familiar parable of the Prodigal Son to reveal how far away the elder brother was from the father rather than what a prodigal the younger son was. "This older boy thought that his brother was doing what he would have been doing, if he had been out on his own. He just gave himself away. By judging his brother, he passed judgment on himself. Here is the real prodigal. The one who stayed at home. He was mentally wasting his substance living with those harlots. Every time he went down the peanut row, he was thinking about one of them." (p. 56)

Clarence used the parables about the lost son, the lost sheep and the lost coin to show the "white church people" in the segregated South who really belonged to God's kingdom. "Jesus wanted to show them they were the real outcasts--the prodigals who stayed home. So he lit a stick of dynamite, covered it over with an interesting story, and presented it to them. By the time the 'good' people got these parables unwrapped, Jesus and his disciples were a few miles down the road. Perhaps they were still able to hear the explosion." (p. 59) That's when they decided to crucify him.

Or take the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. Clarence concludes, "*The gulf between ourselves and the poor is the gulf between ourselves and God.*" (p. 70) ***He uses the parables as a gauge to tell how close we are to the kingdom of God. They reveal to us the cost of discipleship.***

THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

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Ecumenical Congregations
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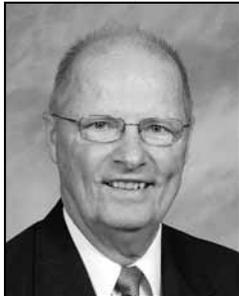
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The
Joy
of CHRISTMAS
CELEBRATE THE SEASON

The International Council of Community Churches and Support

by Harry Fooockle,
Pastor, Antioch Community Church, Kansas City, MO

The question was asked, "Why do you give to the ICCC?" Good question so the thought was to answer from our place of ministry.



We are Antioch Community Church located in Kansas City, Missouri and we are a Charter Member of the Council.

First and foremost it is what the ICCC represents. We are a diverse group of views and ethnicity that have found a common ground in the Word of God... "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28).

The truth of this Scripture manifests itself in our Annual Conference. You look at our worship service and you see a glimpse of what the Kingdom of God is like. More importantly is the Love of God expressed for each other.

Benefits abound in Annual Conference. You will see a diverse group of youth learning the cultural differences of metropolitan, small city and rural life. Youth who will bond together in an experience of worship and community aid that will forever transform their lives.

You will see young adults and others working side by side in local community mission projects that shows a respect for each place we meet.

You can attend workshops that will help your local church in ministry needs you have back home.

Outstanding Bible Study leaders who open the Word of God for the Conference.

Worship services that lift us to the Throne of Grace and outstanding preaching of the Gospel Word.

The Holy embrace of old friends and the Blessings of new found friends.

It is a place where you can see and experience the Missionary work of the Gospel around the world. Here at Antioch one such Mission is in Haiti under the leadership of Ruth Applewhite. We have come to support this effort of God's work and have been Blessed with Ruth and a number of persons coming to visit us from Haiti.

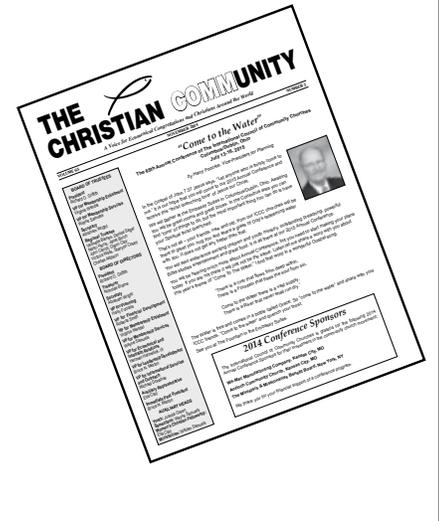
I encourage you who belong to the ICCC to support our Annual Conference and the work of the ICCC with your presence and sustaining gifts. God has called us to lead a movement of the Kingdom Place. We are a Blessed People.

The ICCC's Facebook page is open to you!

Join the group, learn what's happening around the Council, and post notices and photos of your church's exciting ministries!



Have the people of your church or ministry center seen this issue of **The Christian Community**? If you received this issue via your computer, will you print out the pages and give them to another member of your congregation and/or post them on a bulletin board? Share the good things that are happening in the community church movement! Thank you.



Mission Statement



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

Ecumeneews

*by Herman Harmelink III, Vice-President for
Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations*



Soon after the end of World War II, a group of American Protestant denominations (Presbyterian, Reformed, Methodist, Baptist and others) decided that, as a gesture of reconciliation, a new, decidedly Christian, university should be established in Japan. Among the leaders who worked to make this dream a reality were Gen. Douglas MacArthur, Mrs. Harper Sibley, John Foster Dulles, Luman Shafer, Edwin Reischauer, Jackie Robinson, and a variety of heads of communions and mission board executives. A superb 350 acre property near Tokyo was purchased for a modest sum. Because the property had previously been a research center for warplane design and production, it was a case of fulfilling the Biblical vision of swords being transformed into plowshares. From modest beginnings the Japan International Christian University is now recognized as one of the premier universities of Japan, with a majority of students from Japan but with a strong worldwide representation as well. One royal princess is a recent graduate, and another is soon to enter the student body.

It was my privilege to participate in the 60th Anniversary Homecoming observance and celebration. I have had a long interest in Japan, as an aunt of mine taught for a number of years at Ferris Seminary in Yokohama, and years later my sister taught at the same school. On a previous visit to Japan I had the pleasure of planting trees in honour of my children on the JICU campus. In the intervening years the university and its campus have changed beyond belief, but the chapel, which serves as the church for the ICU community, is at its heart, and all faculty members are baptized Christians.

The most moving part of the visit for me, though, was the journey to Hiroshima and the visit to the Peace Memorial Park. We were greeted by a survivor of the attack on August 6, 1945, who gave us almost a moment by moment description of the horror she experienced. Most people were killed instantly, and those who weren't were injured so badly by burns and radiation that they soon perished. She was a few kilometers away from ground zero and thus survived, but has had several battles with cancer. Our main speaker was the man who heads the group Mayors for Peace, an organization started in Hiroshima which has now enlisted nearly 6000 mayors worldwide to work for nuclear disarmament. Having heard and seen firsthand of the devastation which nuclear war causes have made me more than ever opposed to war as a means of settling differences. I would encourage all to urge their mayors to join the Mayors for Peace.

The Japan International Christian University in Tokyo continues to be a strong force for ecumenical and interfaith understanding. It is worthy of our support. More information can be found at the JICU website, and also that of the Japan International Christian University Foundation, located in New York.

Jordan Scholarship Fund Recipient

The Jordan Scholarship was recently awarded to Kyle Hoes. Congratulations and best wishes in his educational endeavors!



Kyle Hoes
Seneca Community Church
Germantown, MD

Kyle is pursuing a degree in Hotel & Restaurant Management.

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
or 815-464-5690

A Word from the Women's Christian Fellowship

Submitted by Sandra Roberts,
Park Road Community Church, WCF Coordinator

The women of WCF are getting ready to celebrate 65 years of service to the International Council of Community Churches.



Sandra Roberts

We are appealing for women volunteers to participate in our daily meetings at Conference. Contact Barbara Ratliff if you are interested at bratliff76@gmail.com. We continue to have the Prayer Call on a monthly basis. If you are interested you may contact our Spiritual Advisor Shyreece Pompey at pompey.shyreece71@gmail.com. Our brothers in Christ are welcomed also.

Consider bringing your handcrafted items to Conference in Dublin. Our Bazaar Coordinator, Elaine Richardson welcomes all contributions to support our giving to the Jordan Scholarship Fund. We are really excited about next year's Conference. We believe "eyes have not seen and ears have not heard what the Lord is going to do for and with our Ministry."



Sharing Joys:

- Office Administrator **DeAnn** recently changed her Facebook status to Married! She and Robert Anzaldi wed on October 12th.



Picture Caption: Over the years many conferees have met DeAnn's family. Pictured here, starting from the top row are: Barb Granahan (Mom), Carli Chatlosh (oldest daughter), Mitchell Granahan (nephew), Dean Granahan (Dad), Lydia Granahan (niece), Kristyn Chatlosh (youngest daughter), Darrell & Jean Granahan (Brother & Sister-in-Law, aka "Oops the Clown") and DeAnn and Bob Anzaldi.

Greendale People's Church Worcester MA

has 47 some odd

"Hymns For The Living Church" HYMNALS

(Copyright 1974 by Hope Publishing Co.)

to DONATE to another Church
or group who would like them.

Give us a call:

508-852-7727

or

e-mail:

revcarla@greendalepeopleschurch.org

Our prayers are with:

- The family of **Harold L. Dodds**, formerly with **Village Church**, Lee's Summit, MO. Rev. Dodds' memorial service was held on November 7th at the Country Club United Methodist Church in Kansas City, Missouri. Rev. Dodds was the Senior Pastor at Village Church until he retired in June of 2012.
- Regional Trustee **Vermelle Barnes**, **Park Road Community Church**, and her family, with the passing of Vermelle's nephew, **Jeffrey Smith**, who died November 6th.

Help the Council with an End-of-Year Endowment Fund Gift

The end of the calendar year is a good time to make charitable gifts. Many of us have been blessed by the Lord this year. One way to show our thanks is to make charitable gifts to causes and organizations we support.

With that in mind, please prayerfully consider making a gift to the Council's Permanent Endowment Fund. The Endowment Fund helps support the Council's operations. In fact it is providing over \$9,000 in earnings to the Council's General Fund in January.

Best of all, your gifts will continue to support the Council in perpetuity. That's because only the earnings from your gifts—not the principal—are disbursed.

With the Endowment Fund, making a gift that leaves a long-term legacy is easy. Just write a check to the ICCC and indicate on the front of the check that it is for the Endowment Fund. It's an excellent way to memorialize or honor a friend or loved one. Simply put your wishes on a note.

Please help us reach our goal of attaining \$20,000 in additional gifts between now and June 30th, 2015. And take advantage of the tax deductions for your charitable gift.

Send your gift to DeAnn at the Council House address in Frankfort. Thank you for your support.

Gratefully,
The Endowment Fund Trustees



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

In that small town, Providence appeared, though only a few realized it at the time, we are told. And through the years, the Providential possibilities of real life and meaningful existence have come from that place – that place *Where meek souls receive Him, still the dear Christ enters in*. The Christ that has entered our lives in all the places we inhabit.

In fact, many of us have come from small towns and intimate environments, even if we were nurtured in urban reality. Bethlehem was influenced by Jerusalem, and many of the towns that have raised us had cities nearby. Most of us, even if we think of ourselves as city sophisticates, realize that we had a small circle of close friends; most of us also came from the intimacy of (hopefully) loving, emotionally healthy and spiritually nourishing families. Even if we were not (and all families have their idiosyncrasies) here we are, all wanting to grow in maturity and spirituality, and endeavoring to deepen the quality of our character. That is part of what the journey of faith is about.

The towns where we “live, move, and have our being” are replete with Providential possibilities. It is there we learn; it is there we teach; it is there we grow; it is there we exemplify our faith; it is there, often through us, that God's Providence impacts the faithful future of untold generations.

I am told that Brooks, eventually the Episcopal bishop of Massachusetts, defined preaching as “the bringing of truth through personality.” The reality is we all preach – preach through our personalities – hopefully, more often than not, the richness of the Gospel, but also, even as we fall short of what Jesus would have us do, the Reality of Redemption, not only for us, but also for all.

May our tiny towns and centers of worship be part of the great metropolis of faith, replete with Providential possibilities, where, in fact, there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, black, white, pink, purple, gay, straight, young, old, angel or adversary, but where we all become one in Christ Jesus.

A blessed Epiphany to all,

Dick

Seeking a Senior Pastor

Community Church at Tellico Village is seeking a Senior Pastor to lead our pastoral team and congregation following the retirement of our pastor who served for seventeen years. CCTV is a 1400 member interdenominational church located SW of Knoxville, TN in a planned community on Tellico Lake in the foothills of the Smoky Mountains. The church is affiliated with the International Council of Community Churches. The ideal candidate possesses a deep personal faith in Jesus Christ and demonstrates a true desire to shape their ministry by the Great Commandment. S/he values Christian unity and ecumenical cooperation. S/he is a mature "people-person" with leadership skills who has a passion for: preaching, developing fellowship, and spiritual growth ministries. Ministers from all denominations may apply. M. Div. required. If interested, visit us at www.tellicochurch.com and post resume to search@tellicochurch.org. Otherwise mail to TVCC Search Team, 130 Chota Center, Loudon, TN 37774. The deadline for submission of application materials is November 15, 2014.

A Call to Pray!

For all those who wish to join us in fervent prayer please call **1-712-432-0175**; access code 887889 on the following dates in your respective time zones. Pacific Time is 5 pm; Mountain Time is 6 pm; Central Time is 7 pm; and Eastern Time is 8 pm.

In addition to calling in for corporate prayer, you may choose to pray during the times mentioned below on any given day. I have been led by the Spirit to pray fervently during some of these specific times on various days. The times for these individual impromptu prayers are 1:11 am, 2:22 am, 3:33 am, 4:44 am, 5:55 am, 1:11 pm, 2:22 pm, 3:33 pm, 4:44 pm, and 5:55 pm. Praying in these moments reminds me that God is omnipresent, has fresh anointing, Holy, in control, and is with me at all times. It has been absolutely phenomenal that when God beckons me to pray it is almost always within a minute of the aforementioned times during the day or night.

During our prayer phone conferences I look forward to hearing your praise reports (answered prayer) as well as prayer request. Let us never forget that God still answers prayer and tell Him "Thank You".

December 8, 2014

Scripture Focus—"Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost." (Isaiah 55:1)

Prayer Focus—Receiving and sharing the gift of Jesus

January 12, 2015

Scripture Focus—"My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?" (Psalm 42:2)

Prayer Focus—Yearning for our living God

February 9, 2015

Scripture Focus—"The purposes of a person's heart are deep waters, but one who has insight draws them out." (Proverbs 20:5)

Prayer Focus—Matters of our hearts

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.

Seeking a Senior Pastor

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