

## Join us for Advent and Christmas Activities



Our December calendar is full of activities that we hope you will join us for. Here are some dates for our activities:

- **December 5 – Holy Communion.** Along with our regular worship, we will have Advent Candle lighting ceremonies at the beginning of each worship service to remember the hope and the promise of what God is doing through Jesus. All will be welcome to partake of Holy Communion as we remember Jesus' acts of sacrificial love for us.
- **December 12 – Cantata Worship.** During the 10:55 a.m. worship hour our chancel choir will perform special music designed to enhance our worship and illuminate God's word. We hope that you will make special plans to invite friends and family to be with us.
- **December 19 – Church-wide Christmas Brunch & New Member Sunday.** We will be skipping our normal 9:45 a.m. Sunday school classes to meet in our Family Life Center for our annual Christmas brunch. Bring your favorite breakfast foods and treats for a time of fellowship and sharing. After we dismiss for worship, we will also be welcoming New Members into our church during the worship service.
- **December 24 – Christmas Eve Candlelight Communion.** Join us and invite family to come and celebrate the birth of Jesus our Savior. We will have special music and Holy

Communion together, and all will be welcome to participate. In addition, we will be taking up our **Annual Christmas Fundraiser**. We continue to raise funds for a future youth worship center at our church and funds for continued upgrading of our Sanctuary. I hope you will make prayerful consideration of a special gift that will help move us into a future where new disciples of Jesus Christ are nurtured.

- **December 26 – Worship with Purpose Sunday.** When so many people will be celebrating the gifts they have received for Christmas, what better way to celebrate the season of Jesus' birth than to take special time for the dedication of our own lives as living gifts to be used by God? Let's gather to rededicate ourselves to being the children God intends us to be.

### **I am Thankful!**



One measure of true thankfulness is the ability to use what you have been given to bless the lives of others. Our church uses its space and resources to host the Ministerial Alliance Thanksgiving Day Meal each year. Nine churches participated with us to feed approximately 230 people a hot meal that might have not otherwise been so blessed. I want to thank Marilyn Shay for volunteering to coordinate this year's meal volunteers. In the pictures above (left) are Ann Moore, Justin Sheets, Mamie Carter and Jill Sheets. (Right) are pictured Zabdy Méndez, Matthew Bean, Ester Burgos and Tommy Shay. Thank you to all who gave of your time to make a difference in our community!

### **A Matter of Time**

How many of us are making plans for later? Most of us are planning for retirement, saving for our next vacation, or have plans for what we will do whenever (you fill in the blank here.) We work diligently planning to enjoy ourselves for some date in the future when we have completed our saving and planning. The sad thing about this general plan is that most people will never get to enjoy their plans. One thing or another will come up, or ill health or even death

will intervene. The main problem with this type of plan is that life was never supposed to be put off until we 'have it made.'

God gives life so that we might savor it and enjoy it to its fullest potential. That means living life all along the way. The man or woman who works 10 or 12 hours a day to really "make it," will discover one day that the time they were saving for their kids or spouse was squandered away while they worked. In the meantime, kids grew into adults, spouses grew tired of waiting and their dreams failed.

One reason I feel it is important to be in church each week with my family is that I will never have this time again. Never again will I have this unique opportunity to show them how important I feel faith in God is to living. They may never have the opportunity to again learn the lessons impressed in the way they were today. We may never again have such a blessed opportunity to worship God together and build family ties this strong. I want to look back 'when I have it made' and say, "I'm glad we took that time together."

I also feel that God wants us to spend our time worshiping and reflecting each week growing stronger in our relationships with Jesus. If we spend it some other way we will never get that time back either. I hope that you will use these holidays to begin living along the way with your family and with our God. Who knows? We may never pass this way again.

## **What Cannot Be Removed From Christmas**

So many Christians today bemoan the fact that Christmas has been stolen from the Church and turned into a shopping holiday complete with its red fur and satin trimmed spokesman. So we want to reform Christmas and clean it up do we? A little history lesson is in order.

Four hundred years ago the Puritans thought that people were ruining Christmas with all their 'pagan rituals.' They especially objected to the fact that the holiday usually came on a week day, therefore distracting people from the Lord's Day of Sunday. But they did more than annually complain about it as we do. They took action and got rid of the celebration of Christmas altogether. In Puritan settlements across 17th century America a law was passed outlawing the celebration of Christmas. The market places were ordered to stay open for business as though it were no special occasion and all violators were prosecuted. It was against the law to make plum pudding on December 25th. The celebration was referred to not as Yuletide, but as fool-tide. Christmas would be a spiritual celebration only, not a festival!

Well, is this how far we want to go? Do we really want to be rid of our extravagant celebration of the holiday altogether? If so, then Christmas will be as the Puritans wanted--saved from us and our sinful ways. So what if we spend \$40 billion annually on presents. Can you think of a better way of spending all that money than on gifts of love? And that is what most of them really are. So what if all the lights and tinsel does create a fairy tale setting that soon disappears soon after the presents are ripped open. At least it lets us know, if only for a fleeting time, what life can be like if we only try.

So let the message go out beginning today, not that we are bent on destroying this holy day, but rather, that we can never destroy this special day. ***"Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be for all generations. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a savior who is Christ the Lord."***

For you and your family I wish a blessed Christmas day. May you share the real gift of Christmas by opening your hearts and your love to others around you as we celebrate the advent of God's kingdom work among us.

Wishing you God's peace and joy, Bro. Jim