

# 2017 First Presbyterian Church

## Advent 2017



“We Are One” is the theme of this year's Advent book. The theme honors our long-time church family member, Wendell Wendt, by reflecting the title of his column in the Newton Daily News.

The daily devotions in this book are a mixture of writings new this year, as well as others culled from past years' Advent books which we felt exemplified the “We Are One” theme. We hope each will be a blessing to you.

Our thanks go out to all of those who wrote meditations this year; to Barb Gallaher, Linda Kirchhoff and Sharon Black for sifting through past Advent books for appropriate writings; to our church secretary, Barbara Vasquez, for layout and design; and to those who helped with assembly and distribution.

Advent blessings to you all and. . .

“O Come, O Come Emmanuel.”

Linda Curtis-Stolper

Dave Stolper

12.3.17

We are one in the Spirit,  
We are one in the Lord,  
And we pray that all unity may one day be restored.

We will work with each other,  
We will work side by side,  
And we'll guard each one's dignity and save each one's pride.

We will walk with each other,  
We will walk hand in hand,  
And together we'll spread the news that God is in our land.

All praise to the Father from whom all things come,  
And all praise to Christ Jesus his only son,  
And all praise to the Spirit who makes us one.

And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love,  
Yes they'll know we are Christians by our love.

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Gary and Kay Parsons



12.26.2017

*"In a world where  
each person is  
increasingly affected  
by each other,  
the Christian concept of  
religion founded on  
love and caring  
is the world's  
greatest hope."*

*Murray Nelson (1987)*

PEACE LOVE HOPE JESUS PEACE LOVE HOPE JESUS

PEACE LOVE HOPE JESUS PEACE LOVE HOPE JESUS

12.25.2017

In this season of Advent, as we prepare our hearts for the birth of Christ, I remember the peacemakers in our church family- Geneva Hawk, Murray Nelson and Loretta and Wendell Wendt, who are now part of the heavenly choir. Since our daughter Michelle died, I have carried with me a small stone inscribed with the word "Peace."

Lately I have tried to listen to hymns, not just as musical offerings to God, but as prayers. Think of the words from Handel's Messiah, taken from Isaiah: "And a child has been born for us, a son given to us. Authority rests upon his shoulders, and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." Alleluia!

There is the familiar Advent hymn, "O come desire of every nation. Bind all people in one heart and mind. Bid envy, strife, and discord cease. Fill the whole world with heaven's peace. Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee O Israel."

And of course, another familiar song: "We are one in the Spirit. We are one in the Lord. And we pray that our unity may one day be restored. And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love. Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love."

A special one for our family: "Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me. Let there be peace on earth, the peace that was meant to be...Let this be the moment now. With every step I take, let this be my solemn vow: To take each moment and live each moment in peace eternally. Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me."

Hymn #308 may be unfamiliar to some of you. "O sing a song of Bethlehem, of shepherds watching there and the news that came to them from angels in the air. The light that shone on Bethlehem fills all the world today, Of Jesus' birth and peace on earth the angels sing alway...O sing a song of Calvary, its glory and dismay. Of Him who hung upon the tree and took our sins away. For He who died on Calvary is risen from the grave, and Christ our Lord by heaven's adored is mighty now to save."

We are one because of Christ's birth.

We are won by His resurrection.

Linda Kirchhoff

12.4.2017

"We must realize the truth of ourselves. We are one human family – one a part of the other. My old work horse, Teddy, and the fancy registered horse visiting us had no trouble eating out of the same dish. We must discover the same."

Sister Lucy Poulin



Dear God,

*At this Christmas time and the months ahead, please make this world a kinder place for everyone. Show us how to love one another as your Son instructed us to do. Show us how to forgive because none of us are free from sinful thoughts and deeds. Teach us to walk in kindness, for this world can be a lonely place for those who feel they do not belong. Help each of us find the courage and compassion to reach out and touch others with kind words and actions. Where there is division, help us fill the gaps with grace. We are all in this together, and we are all one.*

*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace and goodwill.*

Barb Gallaher

12.5.2017

Few First Presbyterians are old enough to remember that a black songstress, Ella Fitzgerald, of the Big Band era, once had a hit song entitled “Into Each Life Some Rain Must Fall, But Too Much Is Falling In Mine.”

Ella knew all about too much adversity. Before she was a star, on a cold winter night when her cupboard was bare, she went up and down a Harlem street where there were lots of night clubs, hoping for a chance to sing and receive a few coins as a tip. Fortunately for Ella, a man with some connections heard her, recognized her talent and got her a job singing on a radio station. From there she went on to stardom.

Dr. William Barclay, famed Bible scholar, tells us in his remarks about the Gospel of Luke that there was plenty of rain (adversity) in the lives of the Jews in Palestine when Jesus was born. The Romans ruled Palestine and once every seven years they took a census. For purposes of the census, every man and his family had to return to the town where he was born. Thus just before Jesus was born, we find Mary and Joseph on the road between Galilee and Bethlehem because Bethlehem was the city where Joseph was born. This was a hard journey for Mary, even though she rode a donkey. If you have ever ridden a farm horse on a country road, you know it is not a smooth ride even if you are not pregnant. So let's accept the fact that every Jew in zero AD had a hard life and be thankful that we didn't live in Palestine at the same time as Mary and Joseph.

We are all thankful that Jesus came to Earth, taught, suffered and died on the cross, returned to life and then ascended to heaven. Usually we are grateful for his life because it gives us a sure fire access to heaven when we conclude our earthly existence. But I think there is another reason we should be very thankful for Jesus' life on earth. That is because the religion he founded has led every liberal movement in the last 2,000 years.

It is because of Jesus that we no longer have slavery, because of Jesus we no longer hang people of other religions, because of Jesus we educate girls and have the right to attain the “life, liberty and happiness” that the founders of our country talked about.

Wendell Wendt (2012)

12.24.2017



“Glory to God in the Highest Heaven,” they sang, “And Peace on Earth for all those pleasing Him.” Luke 2:14

When we think about Christ's birth, one cannot help but conjure up images of PEACE and tranquility—“All is Calm, All is Bright.” But for many years I have wondered about the kind of “PEACE” that came to us that star-shot night. This Prince of PEACE insisted that we love our neighbors, share our wealth, lay down our arms, clothe the naked, feed the hungry...and this list goes on. Christ really said it's Prince of “Let's-make-some-changes - in-society.” And those changes did not necessarily promote tranquility. Certainly we can't argue with the nobleness of Christ's purpose, or deny the concepts of love that Christ taught. But in coming to us, it shook us out of our old tired selves, and presented new ideas that we have been working on ever since.

But could we agree that Christ's PEACE is a “Restless” PEACE—a PEACE crying out for justice, disarmament, loving and sharing? A PEACE that needs our minds and bodies for countless hours of service to improve an impure world. A Prince that scarcely lets us be “CALM” until His work is done.

“PEACE ON EARTH”—yes, but restless PEACE—and we give thanks for that, too.

*Dear Lord, The Prince of PEACE constantly makes me aware of a better world, a loving society, justice among nations; and I pray that I might respond to that vision and be Christ's agent. I am willing to be restless. Thanks be to God. Amen.*

John Carl (1987)

12.23.2017

“BLESSED are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” “BLESSED are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.” “BLESSED are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” “BLESSED are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.” “BLESSED are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” “BLESSED are you when MEN cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of ME.” “REJOICE, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” MATTHEW 5:1-12

For years, the highlight of our family's Christmas observance was the midnight Christmas Eve Service. It was a picturesque affair: a packed sanctuary, family and close friends in attendance, lots of music, a brass choir playing outside a Colonial Church building in gently falling snow.

One year, the holiday euphoria came to an abrupt end upon my return to work when the first phone caller of the day advised me that my dear Christian friend and employee was being held in Rikers Island Prison on an attempted murder charge. The violence and despair of the South Bronx, which was so close geographically but so distant from my life, was suddenly a reality. Of course, all of us in the office were great friends of Jim. We did what we could for him and his family, and there seemed to be precious little to do when hampered by a huge bureaucracy. Nevertheless, I could have done so much more. I still regret that I didn't.

Eventually Jim was released and all charges were dropped. He and his family were so grateful to me when I had done so little. As this Christmas approaches, I am reminded of the disenfranchised of the world, in this country, and in our locality. Our reaching out to others in their time of need may be the best gift that can be given.

*Dear Heavenly Father, Show me where I am needed this ADVENT Season. Give me the courage to serve and help me make time in my life for the dispossessed. In Christ's name, Amen.*

Carl Zacheis (1987)

12.6.2017



“With all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”  
Ephesians 4:2-3 (NAS)

I marvel at the power of the Spirit and the bond of peace that is demonstrated at our monthly Days for Girls workshops. Not everyone is able to attend every month, yet when each person arrives and participates, the “humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love” is very evident. It is such a joy to experience the oneness in the Spirit as we work to make the world a better, healthier place for women and girls with limited or no resources in their countries for their natural human cycle. Each person at our workshop has the focus of producing the sustainable feminine hygiene kit pieces as well as having a wonderful day of relationship-building with each other.

“How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!” Psalms 133:1 (NIV)

We Are One in the Spirit! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!

Marilyn McCallister

12.7.2017

“....And they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.” Isaiah 2:4b

“The Prince of Peace is born anew in every loving mind. O may this coming sanctify this restless humankind, and may His peace and love be deep within your heart and mind.”

The history of humanity is a history of wars. The promise of peace has often given way to the fear of war. After two world wars, people of all nations formed groups to liberate themselves from fear by working for peace and unity. Still individuals and nations focus too much on themselves and how to survive. Depending on nuclear weapons for protection, the nations have brought us to the brink of destruction.

How can peace be learned? And from whom? Human relationships are first experienced by a child with his/her family--the love, the care, the nurturing—the rejection. Sadly, the home is where discrimination between male and female, between Caucasian and people of other skin color is learned. By example, children learn that hatred can replace love.

Traits which are inherited are goodness and nobility but they need to be evoked. They need to be taught—not as reading, writing, arithmetic and biology are taught, but by example and experience. They can't be taught passively. They must be taught actively. Jesus taught actively by example and in his most significant teaching, “...to love your neighbor as yourself.” And the primary place to teach this is in relationships in the home. The child can move out from there to meet and love our neighbors.

12.22.2017

“But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, without uncertainty or insincerity, and the harvest of righteousness is sown in PEACE by those who make PEACE.” James 3: 17-18

Many of you know that our family has entertained foreign students. We learned so much from them about their countries, their customs and their beliefs. This also made us take a deeper look at ourselves.

A Muslim from Turkey said, “I worship one GOD, don't you? Well then,” he continued, “it must be the same GOD.” The girl from Indonesia was so kind and caring. Somewhere she had learned to be peaceable. The girls from the Philippines were so friendly and helpful, wanting to do what was right. This has been true of 27 foreigners from 17 different countries. I'm convinced GOD has a place in His kingdom for all people who try to live in PEACE, not just at Christmas time, but all through the year.

*Dear Lord, help us to understand ourselves and others. Give us the wisdom to say the right words to those who may be different from us. Give us understanding and a spirit of goodwill to help ease the frustrations of daily life. Teach us to be PEACEMAKERS with each other. Amen.*

Winifred Tiedje (1987)



12.21.2017

“Jesus said I was hungry and you fed me, I was thirsty and you gave me drink.....Whatever you did for one of the least of these you did for me.” Matt. 25:34-40

One Sunday after hearing this in church it occurred to me that if, by giving good things to the poor or different than me I was giving good things to Jesus, then when I do something mean or selfish or say something sarcastic to one of the least of these, I was also doing something mean or selfish to Jesus. By saying something sarcastic to one of the least of these, I was being sarcastic to Jesus. It is so easy when I am angry to blast out some insult or to wish a criminal dead. But when I think that I am also doing this to Jesus, it tempers my thought and speech.

I expanded this to include trees and oceans and air and land. Whatever I do to these gifts from God, I do to God. It makes me realize that everything is holy, and I am thankful for everything. Even when things are really difficult, I remember that everything is holy. I only need to wait for the holiness to present itself to me and I remember to treat everything as holy.

We are all one. Every soul on this earth and the earth itself is one. We need to remember to treat every soul and the whole earth as if we recognize that it is God's. Then we might have this home in space longer. And we might have a peaceful and loving life.

We are One.

Karen Quinn



Love should replace fear. Fear is a survival behavior which has been ingrained in us for so long that our automatic response is to gravitate toward it. The opposite of survival behavior is evolutionary behavior. That means choosing at each moment to adopt the values and attitudes—cooperation, caring, loving, forgiving—that are essential if we are not to destroy ourselves. We are driven by both survival and evolutionary instincts. The evolutionary instinct compels us to bring out the best in ourselves and in each other, to recognize our inner connectedness with everyone else.

If we can be courageous one more time than we are fearful, forgiving one more time than we are vindictive, loving one more time than we are hateful, we will have moved closer to Christ's teaching - "...love your neighbor as yourself."

*Loving God and initiator of peace, forgive us for our lack of love. We who are created good find it easy to stray from your loving care. Help us to become active peacemakers beginning at home. Amen.*

Geneva Hawk (1984)



12.8.2017

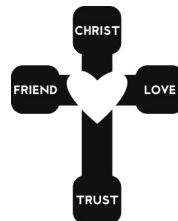
Our best memories of when we felt “we are one” date back many years ago to when we were officers in our Mariners club. We felt that it was part of our job to go to other level meetings to better serve our club. We were hooked! The people were so nice and non-judgmental; worship was enriching; programs added to our family traditions. But probably the best part: WE HAD FUN!

We attended most of the presbytery, synod and national meetings after that. We felt that we were needed; that we had a contribution to make to the group; that there was a spirit of oneness. We all had the same goals: nurture our families and strengthen our marriages; worship; bond together and have fun doing things. This oneness continued in all levels of the organization. There were annual conferences in various colleges around the country, family camps every summer, and board meetings as we progressed to being national officers.

Through these experiences, we made friends in most of the U.S., camped in all 48 states in the continental U.S. and widened our horizons. We took grandchildren to some of the events. The children each had a roommate their own age. They learned to be responsible and independent because they had to get to classes and meals without adult supervision. They too made friends.

The organization closed in 2006. Two years later, we organized a reunion and renewed those friendships. Family camps became work camps. These work weeks became a part of the Presbyterian Church Camp and Conference Association. We continue to keep in touch, feeling as one with these friends, with the camps that need our help, and with the children who will be using the camps for their spiritual growth.

John and Barb Taylor



12.20.2017

“At that time I will make a covenant with all the wild animals and birds, so that they will not harm my people. I will also remove all weapons of war from the land, all swords and bows, and will let my people live in PEACE and SAFETY.”  
“I will show love to those who were called ‘Unloved’, and to those who were called ‘Not My People’. I will say, ‘YOU ARE MY PEOPLE’ and they will answer, ‘YOU ARE MY GOD.’” Hosea 2:18, 2:23

How good it is that we celebrate Christmas, focusing our attention at this time on one of Jesus’ good works – PEACEMAKING. Jesus was a peacemaker par excellence. He healed people physically and spiritually, forgave them for sinful and/or stupid, indifferent behavior. Then they could give up violent ways and adopt reconciling modes in their lives and thus become PEACEMAKERS themselves. We recall the stories of tax gatherers, harlots, Peter lopping off the ear of a servant and Jesus restoring the ear to grow back in place.

We resolve again to be more kind and loving to our families, our friends and neighbors. We try again to reconcile differences with both our temporary and our stubborn “ENEMIES”.

*Dear Lord, we thank you for the gift of the historic and spiritual Jesus in our lives. We ask that our faith may constantly increase. Help us to heed your guidance for our lives, and to accept gracefully that which we perceive as either good or bad in our experience. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*

Loretta Wendt (1987)



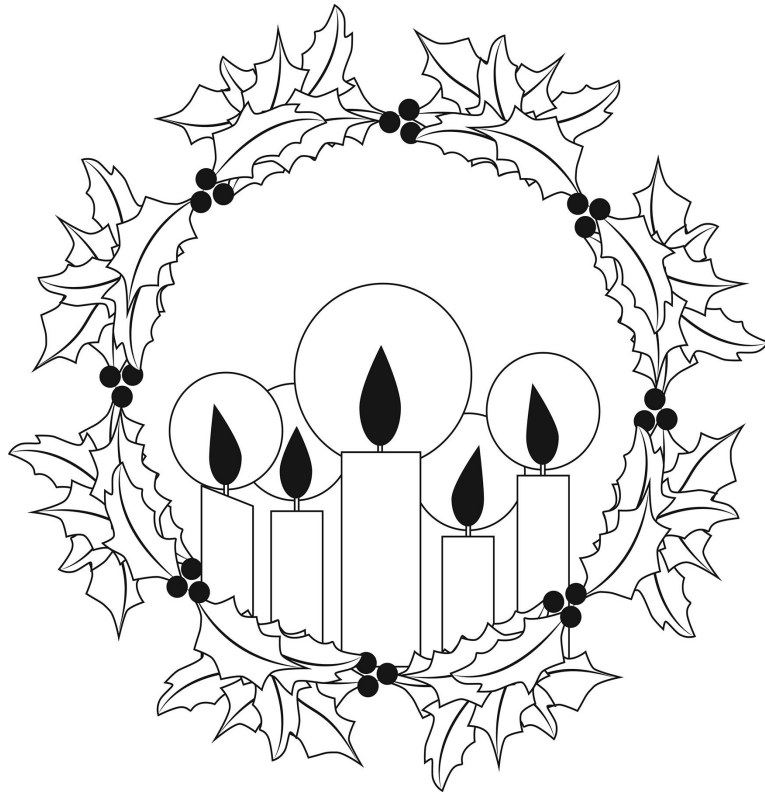


12.9.2017

On a Friday dinner at my son's, his wife lights the Shabbat candles, we break the bread and pour some wine and say the blessings. When the two families get together for a meal, we sometimes say a "Baruch Adonai ha motzie...." and follow up with "Father, Son and Holy Ghost". At Christmas time we light the Chanukka candles and they burn in the light of the Christmas tree, the Chanukka lights commemorating God's miracle of oil in the temple lasting eight days while the star at the top of the tree reminds us of the star that foretold God's gift of His Son.

Confused? Not really - we are one. We are family. We are secure in the knowledge of God's love for us and in our love for each other.

Linda Campbell

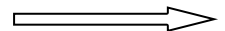


I love that the Worship and Music committee chose to honor Wendell and Loretta Wendt by using the theme of Wendell's newspaper column as the theme of this year's Advent Devotional. I'm moved not only by the desire to honor them, but even more so by the yearning for peace and unity that the statement "We Are One" evokes.

Every year during Advent and Christmas, we hear a lot about "peace." We talk a lot about peace. We are reminded of that great story (possibly apocryphal) about the troops from opposite sides during WWII (or was it WWI?) ceasing their fighting on Christmas Eve and singing "Silent Night" together over the battle field. But even if the story is factual, we all know what happened the next day. Men who sang "Sleep in heavenly peace" together one night were trying to kill each other the next day. Sometimes the "peace" and "unity" we read about in scripture seem like an unattainable fairy tale, no more likely to transpire than my puppy learning to put away her toys at the end of the day.

Even as we know that civil wars and conflicts of all kinds continue throughout the world in places we might have difficulty naming, much less finding on a map, in recent years the climate in our own nation seems to be tearing at the fabric of unity as "culture wars" and political divisiveness threaten to pull us apart. Other Western countries, too, seem to be veering away from unity toward more narrow, more self-interested, more insulated and more exclusive realities. There doesn't seem to be a "Kum ba Yah" moment anywhere in the world's near future.

*Continued*



12.19.2017

In Luke 1: 68-79, upon the birth of the child who would come to be known as John the Baptizer, his father Zechariah sings about all God has done for God's people and all that God will do through the Messiah who is to come. Zechariah's song concludes,

*By the tender mercy of our God,  
the dawn from on high will  
break upon us,  
to give light to those who sit in  
darkness and in the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the way of peace.*

One of my favorite little-known Christmas carols is the Huron Carol (#61 in our hymnal under the title "Twas in the Moon of Wintertime"). The hymn is well known in Canada, written by a French missionary and set to a hauntingly beautiful 16<sup>th</sup> century French tune, the song was originally written in native language and using imagery from the lives of the Huron/Wendat people for whom it was written. The English translation retains the reference to God as "the mighty Gitchi Manitou", Jesus is born "in a lodge of broken bark" and wrapped in "a ragged robe of rabbit skin." The song ends with the line, "Come kneel before the radiant boy Who brings you beauty, peace, and joy."

This Christmas carol, transcending culture reminds us that Christ is for all people. And if Christ is for all people then peace is for all people. And if peace is for all people we are called to follow in the path already set before us "to guide our feet in the way of peace." And following in the way of peace requires unity. Indeed, We Are One.

Rev. Meghan Davis



We are One. We are all God's children, but sometimes we just need to be reminded.

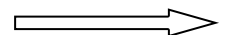
I grew up as a Methodist. I was baptized in the same church where I was married, and my parents' and grandparents' funeral services were held in that same lovely little church in New Jersey. Then I married and joined this church, where my husband was baptized, where we were married, and where his funeral was held. Along the way we had two children. They went to Sunday School and attended Youth Group and sat with us in church and, when they got older they sang in the choir. And then they married.

My son-in-law is Catholic. In the early years when they visited, he would attend Sacred Heart and Becky would go to First Presbyterian with us. They were married here but their children were baptized in the Catholic faith. Occasionally when they visited, my son-in-law would attend church with us and felt comfortable.

Sometime in there, my son met and fell in love with a Jewish girl. They were married under a chuppah and he circled her three times and then stepped on a wine glass, commemorating the destruction of the temple and remembering that though things may be apart, they can come together, just as the new bride and groom have. As my Catholic grandchildren were baptized and joined in faith, so my Jewish grandsons celebrated becoming God's people with a bris ceremony. On all occasions there was much joy and love and celebration. On some celebrations there was cake, and at others bagels and lox, and at both many shouts of "Congratulations" and "Mazel Tov."

My Catholic grandchildren celebrated coming of age with a confirmation, and my Jewish grandkids had a Bar Mitzvah. Depending on the season and how the dates fall, I sometimes celebrate Passover and participate in telling the story about how God led his people out of slavery, and sometimes I celebrate Easter with the other family and we celebrate God's gift of His Son's promise of eternal life. Sometimes I get to do both.

Continued



12.18.2017

In Christ there is no east or west,  
in Him no south or north,  
but one great fellowship of love  
throughout the whole wide earth.

John Oxenham, 1908 (Presbyterian Hymnal, #339)

It's no secret I'm more than fond of baseball. My wife, while not as passionate, enjoys a game as well. Of the times we've been to Principal Park in Des Moines, the most memorable didn't involve a grand slam or a no-hitter. It occurred prior to the ball game.

For several years, the Iowa Cubs have sponsored a citizenship ceremony on a game day close to the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. Quite by accident we were part of it one recent year. For the ceremony, men and women, young and old, from Africa, Europe, Asia and Latin America joyfully lined up along the third base line. They pledged their allegiance to the United States and were sworn in as citizens by a judge. Linda and I watched that night as they hugged each other and were cheered by the crowd.

Were they all Christians? Almost certainly not. Does the Savior Christ open His arms to them all? Yes. Jesus was there for them then as he is today and will be tomorrow. As St. Paul says, thanks to Jesus Christ we now are neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female (Galatians 3:28).

That night, people whose residences once spanned the globe came together. They became fellow citizens. They became Americans.

They were one.

Dave Stolper



12.10.2017

I have believed for a long time that God created people for a purpose. We are part of His plan. To be alive and sense that we are created for a purpose is very perplexing.

People have created reasons for their existence for a long time. Various gods have been the creation of man in explanation for their existence. God knew that man was in search of Him, and He knew that He wanted to tell the world that He was there. Man needed to know that He needed to live his life as though it was important. If man's life was a biological coincidence, what was the use in being ethical or productive?

God gave us something that changed our lives. He gave us a sign that told us who He was, and what He was about. He sent us a man who He called His Son. He sent a man to teach us how to live. It is a wonderful thing that God sent us this man because we don't have to wonder what is expected of us. We don't have to wonder if we are just a biological accident. We know that we will have life after death and that we are truly important to God.

By spreading joy, we can give hope to others, lift spirits high, and spread a feeling of well being which can have a lasting effect on those around us. By listening with our hearts, we can practice empathy, putting ourselves in the other person's place, and try to hear his problems in our hearts. Also by listening, we can make the other person know that we care for his or her thoughts and that this person is important to us.

If we meet this challenge during this Advent season, we shall come closer to knowing the true spirit of giving this year, and we shall gain much more from our giving that we have in the past.

*Dear Father, As we prepare our lives for the coming of Christ during this Advent season, please help us to rededicate ourselves to the Master's ideals of Peace, Brotherhood, and Good Will. This Christmas, help us in our quest of giving ourselves to others in love, joy and the devotion of listening. Help us to sink our spirits beneath the sparkling tinsel of the surface of Christmas and renew within us the radiance of the inner meaning of this season. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

B.J. Irwin (1982)

12.11.2017

We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord,  
We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord,  
And we pray that our unity will one day be restored.  
And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love,  
Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love .



When I first learned the title for this year's Advent booklet, the above song lyrics immediately came to my mind. In these days filled with so much uncertainty and unrest, it is comforting to know that we are a part of a family of Christians. Within our family, we pray for each other and hold each other up when we walk through valleys of darkness. Within this family united as one, we also are cheerleaders for each other when we find ourselves at the top of the great things that come along.

*May we pray that our unity will one day be restored. May we continue to live as One, worshiping God, loving each other and doing all we can to bring Peace on Earth. Amen.*

Mickey Van Baale

12.17.2017

"I am the way" John 14:6

When I was in Israel in 1983, I became aware of the Oriental influence on the people who live there. As our guide took us from Jordan to the Israeli border, he told us that the area where Jesus grew up was on the "caravan route". People from all nations and all walks of life traveled through Jesus' homeland and, it is reasonable to assume, He became familiar with their customs and ideas.

One of the prominent religions in China during Jesus' time was Taoism, from the Chinese word "Tao" – The Way. It was a religion that advocated simplicity and selflessness. Perhaps, as Jesus talked with Chinese merchants and scholars, he recognized a link between their ideas and his revelation. Perhaps as he spoke to his disciples identifying himself as The Way, he was addressing a concept that was not unfamiliar to people living on the caravan route.

Today, with airplanes and television available to us, it is as though the entire planet has become a caravan route. Jesus' example of simplicity and selflessness still points The Way as we deal with the individual and corporate challenges of our time.

*Eternal Mother/Father –*

*You give us Life that we might express wholeness.*

*You teach us Truth that we might express wisdom.*

*You empower us with Love that we might express compassion.*

*Let it be so in Your Name. Amen.*

Lou Axtell (1989)



**12.12.2017**

What is going on here? One thing I am convinced of is that there are those among our political, cultural, and even religious leaders who are using purposeful strategies aimed at exploiting and intensifying our divisions in their pursuit of power. Fear and suspicion are heightened by the spreading of misinformation. We are flooded with information, but in our technological age it can be hard to know which sources to trust.

I don't know what Wendell had in mind when he named his column "We Are One." But I suspect he was expressing his conviction that despite disagreements and divisions, the things that unite us are more important than those that divide us. This is especially true for the church, where we claim to be one in Christ. How can we act out that unity in today's climate?

I believe that our oneness as a people requires us to pursue and uphold the truth – i.e., to be honest with each other. But it also requires that we listen to those with a different point of view. We must value difference as a gift – oneness does not mean sameness. And I believe that in the current cultural climate we must oppose those who exploit division, who demonize or mock others.

Paul writes to the Philippians as follows: "If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. . . . Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus . . ."

And if you read on in Philippians 2, you realize just how costly it was for Jesus to have that attitude. It will cost us something too.

Larry Anderson

"Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud...Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at PEACE with everyone."

Romans 12:16-18

Many of us in this congregation have had the wonderful opportunity to live in the home of persons of other countries and cultures through Friendship Force or other exchange programs. Or we have had people from other cultures living in our homes—maybe for only one week, or maybe for almost a year.

We think this sharing of ourselves in our world can be one of the greatest ways for the people of this world to finally realize the ultimate "PEACE ON EARCH, GOOD WILL TO MEN."

Through these ambassador-of-understanding programs, we learn so much about each other. Don't you think that through this understanding the world will come closer and closer to the knowledge that "IN CHRIST THERE IS NO EAST OR WEST"?

In Christ there is no East or West,

In Him no South or North;

But one great fellowship of love

Throughout the whole wide earth.

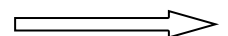
In Him shall true hearts everywhere

Their high communion find;

His service is the golden cord

Close binding all mankind.

*Continued*



**12.16.2017**

Join hands, then, brothers of the faith,  
Whate'er your race may be.  
Who serves my Father as a son  
Is surely kin to me.

In Christ now meet both East and West,  
In Him meet South and North.  
All Christly souls are one in Him  
Throughout the whole wide earth.

*Father, help us to understand and remember that people of every nation—every culture—are so much like us. The desire for PEACE is a goal of people in every nation. And, Father, bring meaning to the verse, "Join hands, then, brothers of the faith, whate'er your race may be" and help us to remember that "Who serves my Father as a son is surely kin to me." Amen.*

Pat and Jay Storey (1987)

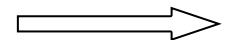


When I arrived at UNI in the fall of 1969, I was as apolitical and naïve as they come. But by the following spring, college campuses were hotbeds of unrest, to the point that final exams were canceled across the state. That got my attention, along with the very visible disintegration of my English Comp teacher's mental health, due to her being upset over the war in Vietnam.

If you watched any of the recent PBS series on Vietnam, or if you lived through it, you know our country was deeply divided. I have been told that our church was also deeply divided over the war. I know that at least one family left the church after hearing a prominent member proclaim that anti-war protesters should be shot. (Of course, some *were* shot that May at Kent State.) That family was among a group of people in our church who were vocal opponents of the war and advocates for peace. They were acting on their conviction as Christians. One couple in that group was Wendell and Loretta Wendt, and I'm told that Wendell's long-running column in the Newton Daily News, "We Are One," originated with that theme.

Almost 50 years later our society, and our church, are much different. But we are once again an extremely divided culture. Although there is no open rift within our congregation that I know of, many of us have very divergent ideas and feelings about what is going on and what is needed in our society. Within our denomination we have churches leaving over issues such as whether to accept gay marriage. When it comes to politics, it has become very difficult even for friends to have an open conversation when they are on opposite sides.

Continued



**12.15.2017**

I just happened to pick up the Des Moines Register this morning, and staring me in the face was an article written by my old high school speech/ drama instructor. Of course, I had to read it even before the sports section. And to think, after all these years she is still able to get my attention, just as she did in the classroom. Furthermore, she got her point across.

Her name is Katie Koob. Twenty years ago, not too long after leaving her teaching position at Newton High School, she was working in Tehran, Iran, for the U.S. government. Katie became one of the 52 hostages taken by a group of somewhat confused and determined young Iranians. During her 455 days in captivity, a young Iranian student gave her a Bible on her first Christmas Eve in captivity. In Katie's own words she says, "I read it regularly and studied it assiduously, looking for promises and answers from my childhood training." You see, Katie took pride in her Iowa upbringing. Not only was her immediate family a strong influence, but so were her grandparents, extended family, her community and most important, her church family. Katie goes on to say, "... one day I was hit in the face with the command to 'Love your enemies.' And this was said not once, but twice, within a short space in Luke, Chapter 6."

Katie obviously felt anger for what they had done to her and the other Americans, but she learned how to handle her emotions and believed strongly in all that had been taught her. As Katie stated, "Yes, what I learned as a child was very important. It led me to an understanding of "loving my enemies" not through approval or becoming a doormat, but by unburdening myself of things that could have a most crippling effect on my life - anger, bitterness, hatred, and lust for revenge. I am glad I am not the judge. I am pleased that 20 years down the road, I am beginning to understand just a little bit more of what I can only call the grace of God, who loves all of God's children."

Yes, Katie. You are still my teacher. You have not lost your touch.

*God grant us the strength during troubled times to see and understand your true message. Remind us that we are all your children.*

Tom Weeks (1999)

**12.13.2017**

It was just one year ago that my family was so very concerned about our cousin Roger Pendelton, a farmer from Red Oak, Iowa. Roger was taken from the Red Oak hospital to Creighton Medical Center in Omaha via air ambulance after he coded multiple times. The first night in the Omaha hospital was touch and go as his blood pressure remained very low. It was finally determined he was suffering from pancreatitis. Roger spent six months in the hospital, most of the time in the intensive care unit, before his death in March of 2017.

We certainly experienced unity through our faith. Roger's wife's sister Ann kept family members current on his condition through group texting. When we would receive her text, our group would each respond with words of encouragement and prayers for Roger and for the doctors and nurses and staff that were caring for him. Our prayers were for strength for his family. We prayed for his wife Amy, as she is a nurse and she knew exactly what was happening when he had a bad day.

On snowy days, we prayed for safe travel on winter roadways as Roger's parents and his wife drove the forty mile trip daily. It meant a great deal to each of us to have the support of all of us. Since Roger's death, we have continued the group texting. Ann's father-in law recently died after an illness. Ann's mother-in law is currently hospitalized, as is her uncle. We have shared good news also. Knowing that our family members share a strong faith in God brings us together and keeps us close in good times and in bad. Thanks to the love of our Lord in heaven "we are one."

Jane Repp



**12.14.2017**

I want to do some entertaining at this special time of the year, but when can I find the time?

I sit down and try to organize my thoughts and draw up a schedule. I think of Christmas as being such a special time – one for Protestants, for Catholics and Greek Orthodox churches. This holiday should mean more to us than any other, for as John said in 3:16, “FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON, THAT WHOSOEVER BELIEVETH IN HIM SHALL NOT PERISH, BUT HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE”.

As I continue to contemplate the season ahead, suddenly I realize how misplaced my priorities are. I would not find Christ in the crowded shops nor at dinner parties. I would not find HIM in any of the commercial extravaganzas. CHRIST is not in the rush and show.

If we find Christmas we must first think of the one for whom it was established. We cannot truly worship and serve God if we use HIS birthday as an excuse to go on an excessive buying spree of gifts. The old saying, “CHRISTMAS COMES BUT ONCE A YEAR” was not born in heaven.

We can look for Christmas and find people and places where help is much needed. How much better to be able to share with those in need than to be the one in want!

Have you made your Christmas list, thought of everyone?  
Grandpa, grandma, mother, dad, daughter, too, and son?  
Have you made your Christmas list? Giving in the air?  
Nieces, nephews, uncles, aunts, friends from everywhere.

Have you made your list? Yes, beyond a doubt!  
It is Jesus' birthday, too. Did you leave him out?  
Make his gift the first of all “Inasmuch as ye  
did it to the least of mine, ye did it unto me.”

Christmas gift to all the world – dearest, finest, first and best!

When I make my Christmas list, his name leads all the rest. (Edith G. Step)

“Look at Christmas! It is a family day, a happy day, a day long cherished, but it is also a day providing us an opportunity to do for others as He has done for us.” (From “PLEASE GIVE A DEVOTION” by Amy Bolding)

*Our Heavenly Father, you have given us so much. We ask but one thing more – a grateful heart. May we use our eyes to see the needs of others, those less fortunate than we; our ears to hear the cries of the hungry and oppressed; and our hearts and hands to respond and share our many blessings. Help me, Lord, to be more like thee. Amen.*

Jean Scott Powers (1987)

