

"Christmas Angels" A Memory of Christmastime in Africa, 1995

The Harmattan winds were blowing down from the Sahara, as they always do around Christmastime. They brought great clouds of red dust. It settled, fog-like, out over the canopy of lush green rainforests. The Harmattan winds were scorching, unrelenting, and before them flew the silent flocks of snowy white cattle egrets. These strange birds always presaged the holidays in those parts. They followed the nomads and their cattle herds—ox-like zebus—coming down from the north. The birds looked like storks. They made a shameless living by lunging on manure to feast on bugs and worms.

Rosette, my housekeeper, called these egrets *les oiseaux de la paix*, "peace birds." And the herdsmen were Fulani nomads from the wild regions up along the Sahara. They always marched their great herds of zebus 500 miles south when the long Harmattan winds blew. These wanderers had Arabic features and purplish-black skin. They were tall and gaunt, like desert scarecrows. With their faces decorated in scars, their heads wrapped in turbans, and swords dangling from their belts, it was hard to believe that they (or their attendant birds!) loved peace. They would sit, uninvited, on my verandah, allowing their cattle to graze on my front lawn. If I politely asked them to leave, they would smile, and nod, and pretend not to understand French. They looked fierce and ghostly. They slept under the stars. They spoke to their cattle in whistles and clucks. They faced Mecca five times a day. I didn't know it then, but our yearly visitors from the north did love peace: the egrets, and the zebus, and the herdsmen alike. They were Africa's version of Christmas angels, heralding good things to come.

On Christmas Eve, I went to the missionary cemetery, which was neglected in a tangle of equatorial underbrush. I was hoping to find some long-forgotten pine tree that had been imported from North America and planted in decades past. But, alas, in a land of endless summer, all the trees are "ever-green," and none are conifers. So I cut some palm branches and fashioned them into an ersatz Christmas tree, decorated with paper snowflakes and paper cutout angels.

I was envious of the Africans for their deep sense of belonging to a place, to a tribe, to a set of traditions and customs. Since it was my first Christmas in Africa, I felt the need to observe all the old Pennsylvania German traditions, as best I knew them. In fact, I knew only three things about my ancestors: they used to make cornhusk dolls; they used to paint hexes on barns; and they used to wait until Christmas Eve to put up the tree. But when you're a foreigner in a far-away place, your heritage suddenly starts to matter. So, in far-off Africa, I groped after holiday traditions to give myself a sense of "place" in the world, creating a heritage for myself out of paper snowflakes and cutout angels.

On Christmas Eve, I hurried into Ebolowa, the nearest town, to purchase everything I needed to celebrate an American Christmas. A family of hardy Greeks maintained a so-called "deli" there, and though it didn't carry turkeys or ham, it did have some acceptable substitutes: a whole frozen chicken, canned peas and string beans, Edom cheese, and long, crusty loaves of French bread. I had never liked canned vegetables, but I felt a special kinship with them on Christmas Eve, since both they and I were so far from the places where we belonged. The guests had been invited, and I would be laying a Christmas feast which, if not exactly "American" in content, would at least be American in size and extravagance.

Oh, those maddening Harmattans, scorching and drying everything they touch! There was an outdoor kitchen just behind my bungalow, a concrete hotbox with a metal roof and no ceiling. As I was out there hovering over a kerosene burner, preparing the next day's feast, I began to feel an intense pressure in my forehead. My face drew tight. A sudden dizziness came over me, and I had to crawl across the rear verandah to my bedroom. Francois, my adopted African son, ran to my office and brought back an old electric fan. Fortunately, the electricity was working that day! I feebly drank large cups of treated water, and I splashed it around my head and face. I had suffered my first and only heatstroke on Christmas Eve. As I lay panicked and nearly delirious beneath my mosquito nets, I spent a long moment wondering if it were snowing back in my native place, and if the river had frozen

over. In a far-off land of steeples, and bells, and carols, was anyone thinking of me? Later, I would learn that it doesn't work to be too sentimental at Christmastime in Africa. By my fifth Yuletide among the palms, I learned to accept my angels as they were sent. And they were sent not as paper cutouts, but on snowy wings, pecking for grubs in little heaps of manure.

But on that first Christmas in Africa, I still didn't quite grasp the concept of "incarnation." Everything was still so strange and foreign. The Harmattans, and the cattle egrets—those strange "peace birds"—and the herds of zebus, and their fearsome-looking Muslim herdsmen. The Harmattan winds were whipping the parched Christmas world. It was a new wind blowing, one I had never known before, stinging the eyes with red dust, searing the lips, chafing the hands. It was a time for changes, a time for new births and rebirths, and all the living world (and every dung-eating bird) stood ready to declare the great good news: *God is not far, but near. God does not stand above us, but with us and in us. God is known in human flesh.*

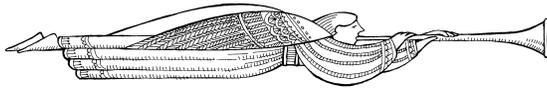
Merry Christmas,
~Brian



God is not far, but near.

*God does not stand above us,
but with us and in us.*

God is known in human flesh.



December

COMMUNITY NOTES

Want to be included on this page?
 Submissions are due the 15th of every month
 for the next month's publication.
 412-561-4114 or office@bhccml.com

RECYCLING AT BHCC

Many members have asked about the church's recycling effort, so here is the current status. The township can't/won't do anything on this matter since their present service is only for residential customers. That is regrettable, but understandable. We have renegotiated our garbage collection schedule with Waste Management to reduce the costs and have asked them to collect recycle materials. The problem is that they would require another enclosure & dumpster and our costs would increase back to the previous level. We are also not sure that we generate enough recycle material to justify the costs. That entire situation can change at any time, but until it does here is a way that we can be responsible to the environment. One of our members is taking care of recyclable office paper and another is going to do cardboard. That leaves the kitchen as the next most likely area to generate these materials. So, to keep it simple...if you have items after coffee hour or some other activity, please take them home with you to recycle. You can take cardboard to the decons' closet downstairs if you don't want to deal with it. Thanks for your help with this important matter; working together we can keep this material out of a landfill.

Your Buildings & Grounds Committee

CHRISTMAS EVE FAMILY SERVICE

This year's Christmas Eve Family service will be held at 6:00 p.m. and will again include all of our children who will tell and portray the story of the birth of baby Jesus. We hope that this service will be both meaningful and exciting for our little ones...and big ones alike! Practice for the Christmas pageant/service will take place in the Sanctuary each Sunday in December after the church service and will last no longer than 30 minutes. All children of all ages through high school are welcome to participate.

SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHERS

We are still looking for a few good people who would like to be involved, on a rotating basis, with our Sunday School program. Help is always needed with all age groups. Our teachers work in teams so feel free to also volunteer a friend. Please contact the BHCC office or Susan Hicks at 412-833-7753.

BOOK DRIVE FOR THE NEIGHBORHOOD ACADEMY

We just delivered another 10 boxes of books to TNA, bringing our total to 17 boxes or approximately 350 books. They are most appreciative as we help to build their in-school library and get books into the homes of students so they can read to their younger siblings. This is an important project for us and TNA. As Rev. Tom Johnson, Head of School at TNA puts it, "reading is the key, the foundation to learning." This is an on-going project, so please continue to bring your gently used, age appropriate books to the church office. Thanks for all that you've done to date-our congregation is the best!

Your Mission Committee

SENIOR MEN'S BREAKFAST CONTINUES

Senior men's breakfast will meet on the first Wednesday of each month December through April. The next meeting is on December 1. The group convenes at 8:00 a.m. at King's Restaurant on Rte. 50, Washington Pike near the end of Greentree Road, in Scott. We normally have eight to twelve men attend. There is no agenda other than good fellowship and interesting conversation. No invitation or reservation is needed. We meet in the room to the left of the cashier.

BOOKWORMS

Bookworms is our ladies' book discussion group. It meets on the third Tuesday of each month at 7:30 p.m. in the home of a member, for fellowship and discussion of a chosen title. There is no meeting in December. The January book is *Breakfast with Buddha* by Roland Merullo. Hostess for January is Carolyn Phillipe.

COFFEE HOUR HOSTS ALWAYS IN DEMAND

If you haven't done coffee hour hosting in a while, please consider signing up on the poster in the Friendship Room. On our web site, www.bhccml.com click on Ministries, click on Worship and you will find guidelines and complete instructions on how to do it. Donna Williams or Glenn Child will be happy to show you where everything is located.

“Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence”

~An Advent Journey into Spiritual Practices~



Do you find it hard to pray? Do you get bored or distracted when you try to pray? Many people simply do not pray because they're unaware that there's more than one way to do it. Early Christians used many different forms of prayer, some of which are being rediscovered by spiritual seekers today.

There is a type of prayer for nearly everyone, and there's probably one for you, too. Rev. Snyder will lead three 45-minute sessions in the spiritual disciplines that were practiced by our faith ancestors.

WHEN

7:00-7:45 p.m. on Tuesday evenings in Advent (except Christmas week): Nov. 30, Dec. 7, and Dec. 14.

WHERE

In the chapel. Please park in the upper parking lot and enter through the Memorial Garden.

This is not a history class!

This is a hands-on guide to the types of spiritual practices available to you. Each session will begin with a short time of discussion; then we will move to a “spirit exercise,” and we will finish with a brief time of fellowship.



Once again this Christmas, members of Bower Hill will have the opportunity to share with those less fortunate or in need of encouragement through the tradition of our “Angel Trees.” This year there are three options for giving.

Our first tree will feature red, white and blue stars and the gift items specified will be mailed to our troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. We are partnering with Operation Troop Appreciation, a non-profit organization located in Mount Lebanon that collects and sends items to our troops throughout the year. We will do the purchasing and collecting of gifts...they will do the mailing. The most popular gift ideas are current movie and TV DVDs, music CDs, large and XL tee shirts, and healthy snacks such as trail mix, granola bars, dried

fruit, or beef jerky. If you are interested in participating, simply take a star from the tree, purchase the gift idea that is indicated, and return it to the church office or place it under the tree by December 26th.

Our second tree will feature the beautiful girls from Hekima Place in Kenya. Kate Fletcher and her work in Africa have inspired many of us. Today, the boarding school she founded in 2005 houses girls who were orphaned by HIV/AIDS and are now living in a stable and loving environment and are receiving an education. Donations are needed to help cover a variety of annual expenses and capital costs. For example, a \$10 donation will cover the cost of school supplies, \$20 will pay for a fruit tree to start an orchard, and larger amounts will help start a college fund for those girls who have graduated high school and successfully passed the university entrance exams. To participate, please select an ornament from the tree. Take it home, hang it on your tree and smile as you think of the gift that you are giving. Then, write a check payable to Bower Hill Community Church, indicate Hekima Place in the memo, and return it to the church by December 26th.

Our final tree is new to BHCC this year. BHCC members have been so generous with their donations of gently used books for The Neighborhood Academy! The Mission and Outreach Committee thought we could brighten the expanding library with new books for the children! The committee suggests purchasing Barnes and Noble or Borders gift cards in an amount of your choosing so that the staff can purchase books according to their need. If this is the outreach for you, place your card in the basket under the tree. Thank you in advance for your generosity and sharing!



~THE SNYDERS' CHRISTMAS OPEN HOUSE~
Brian and Michelle are hosting
a Christmas "open house" in their home.
All church members and friends of the congregation
are invited to come and go as they please
between the hours of 5:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m.
on Saturday, December 11.

DIRECTIONS

3524 WASHINGTON PIKE, BRIDGEVILLE, PA 15017

Go south out of Bridgeville on Washington Pike approximately two and half miles.

Pass Boyce Rd. on the left, then look for "Valleyfield Apartments" on the right.

It's the redbrick farmhouse immediately after Valleyfield Apartments, also on the right.

If you arrive at Country Meadows Home, you've gone too far!

Enter by way of the driveway and park in the side yard to the left (aka, "the south field").

WE HOPE TO SEE YOU THERE!



~OFFICE OPEN HOUSE~

Have you ever folded a newsletter?

Mowed the lawn?

Answered the phone?

Are you a member, friend and/or volunteer at BHCC?

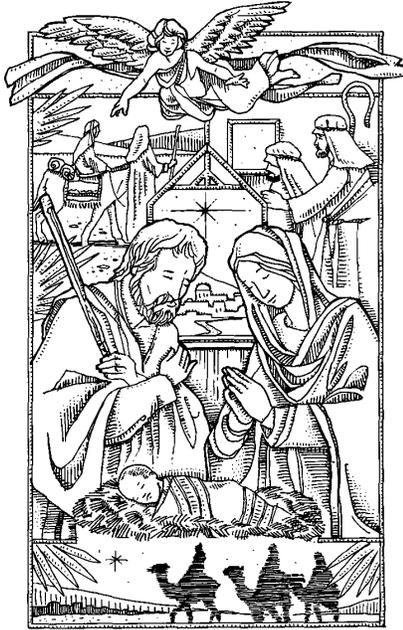
We want to thank you!

Come and visit the office staff

***Wednesday, December 8th
from noon to 2 p.m. in the lounge***

for cookies, cocoa and fellowship.

~WORSHIP IN ADVENT AND CHRISTMASTIME~



Christians celebrate Advent as a season of waiting. It's a time to pay attention to those familiar longings that haunt your life, a time to stop and listen to your soul's great yearning for a better world. As the winter closes in around us, as the days get darker and colder, Advent reminds us that no darkness lasts forever. After life's cold seasons, warmth and light return...to those who wait. Advent is an exercise in anticipation. We sit in the dark, waiting for the light. There's wisdom in accepting the seasons of life as they come to us, and there's great wisdom in waiting patiently for light to rise out of darkness. This is the promise of Advent and the joy of Christmas. Use this wintertime to ponder the yearnings of your soul: What are you longing and waiting for? Bring those dreams and visions with you to church as we celebrate the Advent and Christmas seasons.

~SPECIAL SERVICES~

The four Sundays of Advent are: November 28, December 5, 12, and 19.

December 5

“Repeat the Sounding Joy: a Service of Worship through Music” This special Sunday morning worship service combines the choir's annual Christmas concert with music from the hand bell choir, a short sermon, and the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

*Joy to the World! The Savior reigns: Let us our songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains
Repeat the sounding joy, repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat the sounding joy!*

December 24

On Christmas Eve, Bower Hill Church offers two services of worship:

“**The Family Service**” takes place at 6:00 p.m. This short service is designed especially for families with children, though all are welcome to attend. The highlight of this Christmas celebration is the annual children's Christmas pageant.

“**The Christmas Eve Candlelight Service**” begins at 7:30 p.m. with a concert of Christmas music by visiting brass. The service itself starts at 8:00 p.m. and includes carols, a full reading of the Scriptural narrative of the birth of Jesus, and “sharing the light of Christ” (the lighting of the candles).

DECEMBER WORSHIP VOLUNTEERS

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LECTORS

Dec. 5: Phil Johnson
Dec. 12: Abby Waine
Dec. 19: Susan Nilsen
Dec. 26: Joan Zakor

ADVENT READERS

Nov. 28: Mary Beth, Michael and Abby Waine
Dec. 5: Dawn, Tyler and Nicholas Kane
Dec. 12: Darendra, Tim and Jaime Lease
Dec. 19: Kiri, Jason, Ellie and Nathan Rising

GREETERS

Dec. 5: Graham and Carol Knox, Keith Mason
Dec. 12: Chuck and Mary Laufer, Beth Wilson
Dec. 19: Tim and Darendra Lease, LuAnn McNickle
Dec. 26: Mike and Jen McDonough, Lisa Schwallon

USHERS

Marian Brannan, Jim Corbett, Lucille Heckman, Earl Kennedy

SOUND BOARD OPERATORS

Bill Andrews, Glenn Child

COMMUNION SERVERS DEC. 5

Dave and Susan Hicks, Jason and Kiri Rising, Phyllis Yohe



ADULT EDUCATION ADVENT SERIES THEME IS "PEACE, GOODWILL"

The Nativity Story proclaims peace and goodwill. What does that mean in our time?

Adult education for Advent begins on Sunday, December 5, with a look at how Mt. Lebanon has promoted peace and goodwill through its Community Relations Board. Created in the mid-sixties with considerable input from Bower Hill Church members at the time, the Board initially dealt with racial and ethnic discrimination in the community. The presentation by Susan Morgans, Mt. Lebanon public information officer and staff liaison to the Board, with volunteer board member Stacey Reibach, will update us on the Board's work.

The December 12 program is by the Brother's Brother Foundation Vice President Karen Dempsey, a Mt. Lebanon resident. The mission of Brother's Brother Foundation (BBF) is to promote international health and education through the efficient and effective distribution and provision of donated medical, educational, agricultural and other resources.

"The Ethics of Peacemaking" will be presented by The Rev. Dr. Dierdre King Hainsworth of the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary on Sunday, December 19. Dr. Hainsworth is assistant professor of ethics and director of the seminary's Center for Business, Religion and Public Life.

Adult education sessions are held in the church library at 10:45 a.m. each Sunday .
Dave Green is chair of the adult education committee. Phone 412-531-2205.
Email: davegreenpgh@aol.com.





THE DEBUT CONCERT OF THE THREE RIVERS RINGERS!

Looking for something different this holiday season? Come to the Three Rivers Ringers' debut concert on December 10th at Bower Hill Community Church at 7:30 p.m. The Three Rivers Ringers, under Artistic Director Nancy Lutz, is Pittsburgh's premier community handbell ensemble, and will perform many of your holiday favorites, including *Sleigh Ride*, *Greensleeves*, and many more. Sing along with the Three Rivers Ringers on *Frosty the Snowman* and *Jingle Bell Rock*, and watch out for some surprises! Please join us for this memorable concert. It is the perfect way to "ring" in the holiday season! Concert admission is free, but donations will be accepted.

WHEN: FRIDAY, DECEMBER 10TH, 7:30 P.M.

WHERE: BOWER HILL COMMUNITY CHURCH; 70 MOFFETT STREET, PITTSBURGH, PA 15243

COST: FREE; DONATIONS WILL BE ACCEPTED

FOR MORE INFORMATION: ANDY SEAY, MANAGING DIRECTOR, 412-657-8161

WWW.THREERIVERSRINGERS.ORG.

*Thank
You*

Ugandan Water Tank Update

A check totaling \$10,500 (\$2,900 from Rotary and \$7,600 from BHCC) has been mailed and three 10,000 liter water collection tanks will be installed at three locations in Uganda. These tanks will provide much needed clean drinking water for hundreds, if not thousands, of our neighbors in Uganda. Something that many of us take for granted, something that is hard or difficult to find in many parts of our planet, is going to be available thanks, in part, to the generosity of this church. You will be hearing and seeing more about this once the tanks are in place and functioning. There will be pictures and videos, probably in a month or two. Until then, thanks again for making a difference in the lives of folks that really need our help.

Your Mission Committee

HARVEST



FOR THE NEEDY!

Produce to People has become an integral part of the Northside community in only one year's time.

In September, BHCC helped manage the program with 472 families and over 23,000 pounds of food being served.

We will again coordinate the distribution of fresh produce and staples on December 18, together with members of our sister congregations from Mosaic and Sewickley.

This ministry, once a vague dream, is now a reality. Please join with us as we seek to serve those at risk with Christ's love and compassion. All ages above 12 are welcome. Physical prowess is not necessary, just a commitment to live the Gospel.

We will meet in the north lot at 8:00 a.m. on December 18 and proceed to the Martin Luther King School at 50 Montgomery Place in the Northside.

Remember,

"Our love for Christ is only as true as our love for our neighbor".

Please join us!



Dan Getkin
 can be reached
 via email at
 da@bhccml.com

It seems a little strange to say, but thank you for leaving your trash in my office! The youth and I very much appreciate your assistance in gathering up the materials for our new luminary project. It wouldn't have been possible without your help.

While I'm at it, thank you *again* for buying wreaths for this summer's work trip. Both of these activities require your participation and when so many of you step up, great things happen! I'm very proud of the way that this congregation rallies around its causes. I feel blessed to be a part of all this work. As we continue to find our way through the planning phase of our work trip, please hold our ministry in prayer. The students and I are excited to see where all of this preparation will take us.



Christmas flowers will be \$11 this year,
 with proceeds supporting the Youth Work Trip.

You may complete and mail this form or place it in the offering.

Deadline for orders is December 12.

Name: _____

Phone: (____) ____ - _____

of Plants _____

Check # _____

In Memory of _____

In Honor of _____

Please deliver this order form with payment
 to the Church Office or leave in the Offering tray.

Order Deadline is December 12th.

Flowers can be taken home after the second service on Christmas Eve.

BOWER HILL COMMUNITY CHURCH

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

70 Moffett Street
Pittsburgh, Pa 15243

Phone: 412-561-4114
Fax: 412-561-2252
E-mail: office@bhccml.com
www.bhccml.com



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OUR CHURCH STAFF

Rev. Brian Snyder, Pastor
br@bhccml.com

Company of Pastors
Rev. Grafton Eliason
Rev. Susan Shira Nilsen
Rev. John Yohe

Jessica Baier, Director of Music Ministries
je@bhccml.com

Dan Getkin, Youth Director
da@bhccml.com

Dianne Scott, Financial Secretary
di@bhccml.com

Emily Kerr, Secretary
em@bhccml.com

Jim Askins, Custodian

THE CHURCH OFFICE

[412] 561-4114

Monday - Friday 9:00 a.m.— 2:30 p.m.

CARE LIST

Margie Beatty, 1300 Bower Hill Rd., Pittsburgh, PA 15243

Matt Dunfee, 966 Worthington Woods Blvd, Worthington, OH, 43085

Kenn Fetterman, 2236 Kingridge Rd, Pittsburgh, PA 15237

Peggy Craig, 714 Bower Hill Road, Pittsburgh, PA 15243

Catheryn Deemer, 300 Kane Blvd. Room 314, Pittsburgh, PA 1524

Tooie Sharkey, Asbury Heights, 700 Bower Hill Rd, #7338, Pittsburgh, PA 15243

Evelyn Mason, Health center at Friendship Village, 1290 Boyce Road, Upper St. Clair 15241

Barbara Prunchak, c/o Crestwood Commons, 100 Crestwood Court #223, Wheatfield, NY 14304