

Branching Out

Volume 29 Number 4 December 2011

MYF DINNER THEATRE BEGINS CHRISTMAS SEASON

MYF DINNER THEATRE

This evening's interactive dinner theatre production of "The Bethlehem Inn" will be presented by our MYF along with a delicious holiday dinner in the Fellowship Hall. For several Sunday School classes, this will be considered their Christmas dinner.

Proceeds from the event will be used for MYF's attendance at the Phoenix 2013 Convention.

THANKSGIVING DINNER

Approximately 130 Beech family members and friends attended the annual Thanksgiving meal Sunday evening, November 13th. The festive table decorations and favors were created by chairperson Heather Willett and her family who cut out all the leaves which diners placed on a Thankfulness Tree with messages of gratitude for all our blessings. Over 130 donated non-perishable items were taken to the Louisville Community Cupboard at Koontz Memorial Lutheran Church.

DATES TO REMEMBER

- Dec. 17-Christmas Caroling
- Dec. 24-Christmas Eve service
- Dec. 25-Christmas Day!!
- Dec. 31-New Year's Eve



The Birth of Our Savior

MISSION NEWS

Forty Christmas Shoe boxes were delivered from the Beech Church. They were dedicated by our children following the mission message from Kurt and Angie Neuenschwander who helped deliver many of these boxes to Kenyan children while serving in Africa. The Beech congregation contributed \$8,985 to the Fall Missions offering which goes to Mennonite Mission Network and Ohio Conference.

Mennonite Women Serving and Shepherd's Gate families and staff are joining Missions Commission in sponsoring the Community Christmas Mitten Tree Project for a second year. The tree has been in our foyer since November 20th and the first donations, including 14 scarves made by Hearts and Hands Serving, were taken to Trinity UCC Church for yesterday's ingathering ceremony. Items will be distributed to needy children and adults in Stark County schools and shelters. The remainder will be taken before Christmas. They are given to the needy throughout the year.

YULETIDE EVENTS

Our Advent services began with last Sunday's theme, "Learning to Pay Attention." A women's octet provided special music. Today the topic is "Changing the Landscape" and our Christmas Choir will be singing.

Next Sunday, Pastor Dan will preach on "Transforming our Sorrow." Special music will be provided by a brass group. On December 19th, the theme is "Reordering our World." Our Christmas Choir will sing and a Bell Choir will perform.

On Christmas morning, we will be "Celebrating the Savior." Again our Christmas Choir will provide special music. There will be no Sunday School classes that morning, instead, our traditional Christmas Brunch will be available in the Fellowship Hall during the Sunday School hour.

POINSETTIAS FOR SALE

Red or white poinsettias can still be ordered today in the Lobby. They will help decorate our Sanctuary and may be taken home after the Christmas service.

"What if you woke up this morning with only the things you thanked God for yesterday?"

CONGRATULATIONS

Ken Weibush and Jeanette Fleischman were married by Pastor Dan King at Beech Mennonite Church on Saturday afternoon, November 26, 2011. They will reside at 573 East Washington St., Lisbon, OH 44432.

Steven and Bethany Helmuth of Columbus announce the birth of their daughter, Clover Jay on Nov. 14, 2011. Stan and Pam Helmuth are the paternal grandparents.

On Sunday, November 20th, gift certificates were given to children memorizing Bible verses during Wednesday night classes. Gale Sommers and Patty Yoder, co-ordinators, were also recognized. Recipients are:

Learned 10 verses and received a gift certificate

Josh Schloneger
Mia Schloneger
Baylee Sommers
Brooklyn Sommers

Learned 2 verses and received prizes

Andrew Hathaway
Leah Sommers

Learned 1 verse and received prizes

Austen Black
Jared Hathaway
Brianna Owens
Kyla Owens

Afterward, the children sang two songs from their class worship.

ACTIVITIES OF SHEPHERD'S GATE

The children and staff have been very busy counting our blessings and all God has given us. November 18th was the children's Thanksgiving lunch. They enjoyed turkey, stuffing, mashed potatoes/gravy, corn, homemade rolls and cookies made with Miss Lavera, and homemade pumpkin pie (which the children made). Math and science skills are learned through cooking. The children certainly enjoy baking and, of course, eating!

The children are getting so excited for Christmas. They understand Christmas is to celebrate Jesus birthday. We will have a birthday celebration for Jesus, including a birthday cake! Be sure to peek in our classrooms and hallways as the children "deck the halls!"

Shepherd's Gate is very happy to be a part of the Community Mitten Tree Program with Beech Mennonite Church. We did quite well last year. We are hoping to collect even more hats, scarves, and mittens this year. We are also hoping to contribute to give gifts for Christmas families in need.

Please remember Shepherd's Gate before throwing out your Sunday coupons. We use coupons to make our budget stretch farther. Any coupons are greatly appreciated.

Currently Shepherd's Gate has enrollment openings for preschool ages 3, 4, and 5 year olds. We will have one toddler opening available February 2012. Beech Mennonite Church members receive a 25% discount off their child's tuition. We also have sibling discounts for full time enrollees. Referral bonuses are issued to enrolled families that recommend new families who enroll their child. Shepherd's Gate is proud to offer high quality child care in a loving, faith based atmosphere. Please tell family and friends about our wonderful facility.

May God bless you richly during this holy season.

In His Love, Janet Mangus Director SGCCC

A NOTE FROM MARILYN SCHELL

I would like to thank everyone for their prayers concerning my travel to Paraguay to see Shannon and family. It was a long and boring trip without Jim but I had no problems with airplanes and airports which is always a good thing. I had a great visit with Shannon and family. The kids tried teaching me Spanish and they had to speak to me in English. Mike's favorite new phrase was.. " I want a peanut butter sandwich" . Alma's favorite was.. " I want a bowl of cereal, just a little bit !" . Then there was Alexandra, she just talks a lot in either language , but she is a great translator. If I needed help while I was home alone I went to the neighbors with my dictionary and that was always pretty funny, but we were able to communicate..kinda ! Juan and his brother were able to cover the front and back porches on my house and it is looking pretty good, If anyone wants to go for a visit! Shannon and I went to Juan's Graduation program at a big old Church in downtown Asuncion and that was an interesting day. The school in the neighborhood, Santa Librada, is now finished with classes for the year. They are excited to do some more work on "that classroom" on the second floor. The room was used this year for evening adult classes but has had many problems getting approved for students , but it is now officially approved by the Ministry of Education. The stairs look great thanks to our Sunday School children giving their offering this year and Ohio Menn. Women having them as one of their mission projects. Also the money received from the Missions Committee this year and donations in Jim's memory have been a big help and the Principle, parents, teachers and students are excited that they can put tile on the floor that is colorful and not the cheapest tile on the market!! They send Many Thanks to all of you and appreciate all the help you have given them over the years. There are several new pictures of the stairs on the bulletin board and even more on my facebook page! Thanks again for caring!!

What is "Church Music?"

Well, this article has turned into something completely different than what I began to write several weeks ago. I had originally intended to dissect some of our opinions on the issue of voting, whether for or against. But let's be real about it - that's boring, with a humongous capital B. Not to mention a bit provocative - but that doesn't mean you won't see it later. It's a good discussion to have.

I decided instead to put pen to paper (or, perhaps, fingers to keyboard?) on a subject much more near and dear to my heart that I can speak about at length without taking a breath (much to Nicole's chagrin at times!). That subject is music. And, specifically, I would like to talk about what music is in the context of the Church. One of the best expressions of what music is within the Church comes from a hymnal I found lying around at my aunt's house. I cannot quote it verbatim, but at the core, the notes within this hymnal made the affirmation that if God's Word is God's expression to man, then the hymn is man's expression to God.

As we all know, the Mennonites have a rich history of hymns and singing together. We certainly experience some of that each and every Sunday here at Beech. Going back into history, we see the gradual loosening of restriction on what music we view as a proper vessel to praise God. In the earliest days of our denomination, most leaders were certainly against instrumental accompaniment and some were against music altogether, and hymns weren't typically set to written music. They were more like an oral tradition. More recently we've pulled in hymns and songs penned by other cultures (my personal favorite are the African-American spirituals we sing at times, especially the one from this past Ash Wednesday - they are powerful and amazing expressions of faith).

I am glad we have broken from the musical traditions that held for so long. Sometimes we, as imperfect humans, can impose restrictions on things that we deem improper for worship because of our own silly fears and prejudices. Tell me the truth and correct me if I am wrong, but are syncopated drums and rock-based rhythms really subversive to the Word? The Praise Team pulls it off very nicely every Sunday, and I can count at least three local radio stations that play "Christian Contemporary" music, which essentially means "rock music with Christian lyrics and intent."

My mother was instrumental in my finding Christian rock music, especially Christian heavy metal. That last one may be something of an oxymoron in some folks' eyes,

but there are indeed bands living the Christian lifestyle and practicing a little "kingdom infiltration" through the loudest and most powerful music mankind has ever created (yes, I admit a personal bias!), to an audience that dearly needs it. I've met quite a few folks (who fortunately I've never encountered here at Beech!) who wouldn't accept a man into their church who had full-sleeve tattoos and long hair, even if he was a baptized Christian believer. My mother taught me that this isn't a hindrance to accepting Christ when she bought me a cassette tape (kids, those were the little things where music came on magnetized tape held inside a plastic case) when I was in 5th grade that consisted entirely of Christian metal bands, and I listen to those bands to this day, many of which you'd never, ever guess played Christian music if you didn't break out the lyrics sheet.

So, why am I off on a tangent with this topic? Perhaps it was just something that bothered me and I wanted to say it out loud to an audience that would understand it. But I am, however, making a point. We shouldn't ignore any style of music for its value as our expression of thanks to God. The musical notes we play don't have anything at all to do with the message we would like to convey and the way we live. As long as they don't replace what is really important and we don't elevate the music itself to an unhealthy level, making it a sacred cow, so to speak, then we should embrace those Christians who take the Word to the "front lines," even if it's with a style of music to which we normally wouldn't care about. While loud and abrasive forms of music may not be the right thing for a worship service, they may be just what is needed to grab the attention of the right set of curious future believers. There is an expression of thanks to God out there for all of us, no matter our tastes, and I am glad that is the case!

To close, I'll let some of this music speak for itself, with a tiny bit of the lyrics from a Christian metal band called Impellitteri, from the song "Holy Man."

Carry the burden and conquer the grave
Walking through darkness on the road that was paved
Breaking the power and the shackles of death
Rising to life on the words that you said

Out in the desert you faced it alone, temptation that
comes from the foe
Blessing the weak and then healing the poor, there's no
place that you can call home
Warning the masses, the kingdom is at hand
Coming in power, the end of the age, the one that they
call "Son of Man"

--Submitted by Andrew Parrish

Don't Give Up

Times are hard, people are out of work, prices are going up on everything, politicians are acting like they don't have any gray matter, and crime and violence is all we hear on the news. What do I mean "Don't Give Up?"

I look back over my years and I'll admit I'm a senior citizen. I've paid my dues and it wasn't always a breeze.

My father was an alcoholic, he worked hard but he liked to drink and when he drank he got very mean. I witnessed many arguments and more than once my mother had a black eye. This isn't easy for a child to witness. The baffling thing was when he didn't drink he was as nice as anyone could be. And he treated me so nice when the alcohol wasn't around.

At the age of 10 my parents divorced. Being raised a Catholic and going to a Catholic school this was absolutely a no-no. My mother, my brother and I moved to my grandfathers. Everything went well for awhile. Then one of my bachelor uncles did something very inappropriate and for my safety we had to move to our own apartment in the city. My grandfather didn't want us to move and my uncle was really reprimanded but my mother insisted on moving. This was good but I never could understand why we had to move and my uncle didn't. I think I realize now that he had emotional problems and my grandfather was trying to take care of him the best way he knew. Moving to town was very difficult because we did not have a car, we walked or took the bus, my mother did not make very much money and child support was very minimal when it came at all, she never took welfare, food stamps or got help from anybody. We were on our own. My grandfather would come and see us once or twice a month. But that was it. We would visit aunts and uncles when they would come to pick us up. That was it. My father seldom came around and if he did it was only for a few hours.

Over the years I went to school and got good grades, did most of the housework and cooking and watched my brother while my mother worked. He was seven years younger than me. I know what it is like to be a child of a single parent. I think I was the original latch-key kid. My mother was always tired and grumpy. I know now that she was bitter about the whole situation. I was told by everyone that I had to help my mother because I was the oldest. I tried but I could only do so much.

When I was sixteen, my mother remarried. We moved to another city and things were okay for a short time. Then that man started drinking and/or doing drugs and things got horrible. Things got so horrible that I had to leave to save my life. I took my brother with me (my mother asked me to) and we went by Greyhound Bus to stay with an old friend of my mother who had five children of her own.

But she and her husband took us in. They were also Catholic. My mother followed us a few weeks later. We then found another apartment and her husband started stalking. I had to call the police more than once. He was killed in a car crash before the divorce was finalized. Things settled down for us then. And things went on fairly normal as we knew normal.

My mother met another man whom she married and he turned out to be a wonderful person. He helped my brother through his high school years. I was 21 by then. They were married 38 years and he's the only grandfather my children know. My father died when I was 22 about six months after Larry and I were married. I had hoped that I could get to know him after I got married. I had called him and invited him to dinner at our apartment. He said he had a cold but he would when he was better. He never made it.

The rest of the story most of you know; the brain tumor, the meningitis, Larry losing his job after 24 years. The hardest part of all that is losing my singing voice. I loved to sing. And I had a very good soprano voice. I've been singing in church choirs since I was 11; took voice lessons, sang in school choirs and was even chosen to sing in an a cappella choir in high school. To listen to a choir sing and I'm not up there almost breaks my heart. So I appreciate the opportunity that Larry Herris and the choir members give me to sing. Even if I'm not the best tenor.

What is there to be thankful for? First: I was raised to love the Lord and I know my grandmothers were praying for me. One was already in heaven but I know she was praying for me. My grandfather was also. Second: I strayed but not for long and not far and I know the Lord kept me safe during that time so that I didn't end up in the gutter. Third: I met Larry back at the age of sixteen when we moved to that new town. We kept in touch after I moved and we married five years later. God has a way of turning something horrible into something wonderful. Fourth: I graduated from nursing school and my brother became a physician. We didn't even have money for food sometimes. How could this happen! God helped us and somehow made it work in His time and His way. He always gave us what we needed. Maybe it wasn't what we wanted at the time. But we survived. God gave us courage to go on, wisdom to make right choices, discipline to keep working towards our goal. And he kept us together. God gave us the important things.

Every year at thanksgiving and Christmas my brother's and my families get together for a wonderful day. Our mother and father are both gone now but we are still together and I am so thankful for the chance to see how great things can turn out if you don't give up.

Submitted by Jean Emery

Pieces of Peace With Justice

“Do not be afraid. I bring you good tidings of great joy that will be for *all* the people . . . A Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord . . . the angel praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace” Luke 2:9 ff

We have heard the familiar story many times, but it still thrills our hearts . . . God in Christ coming to us to fulfill his promises and create a new way. But we soon leave that part of the story and move to Jesus as an adult, understanding his mission when he says “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” Luke 4:18 ff.

Jesus is understanding that His is a holistic ministry – a message of salvation which includes concern for the whole person. Andre Gingerich Stoner, director of Holistic Witness at MMN from an interview in ‘Extending God’s Mission’ says:

“The church is the body of Christ. Just as Jesus healed, forgave, served, and made peace, so the church is called to share God’s love in word *and* deed. This involves evangelism, peace witness, service and church planting. These are different parts of the church’s witness that may require particular kinds of gifts and attention, but they are all connected and part of the same mission.” He goes on to say he preached a sermon in his congregation some years ago that said, *‘We love service, flirt with peace, and are allergic to evangelism.’* Continuing his thoughts, he says, “I think in some ways this does describe us as a broader church. How do we strengthen and integrate these aspects of our witness? One thing I’d like to do is help bring together folks in our church who are passionate about peace and justice with folks who are passionate about personal evangelism and church planting: to be in conversation with each other, to learn from each other and to strengthen and encourage each other.

I believe God’s primary strategy for impacting the world is gathering people together around Jesus. The community that grows reflects a new reality, the kingdom of God. As people’s lives are shaped and transformed by Jesus, this community become salt and light and impacts the world in many, many ways. This is our calling. I am glad to be working at this with Mission Network, and am eager to see what God has in store for us.”

Some tips for a Simpler, More Meaningful Christmas:

1. Give alternate gifts. Give 25% of what you spent last year to the needy . . . individuals or groups locally or internationally.
2. Use your ‘simple giving’ pamphlet from MCC (in a Common Place) to choose contributions to various needs around the world. If you give online, you may print a gift card to give to a friend indicating their gift was given by you in this way.
3. Buy crafts made by people in developing countries at the MCC shops in Hartville or Kidron.
4. Give/use Fair Trade coffee, tea, etc. from the Hershbergers’ stock at Beech.
5. Include your children in decision making so they understand Christmas is a time for giving.

I'm Counting My Blessings! - Pastor's Corner

Our official Thanksgiving Day will be over when you read this, but I guess it's never too late to be thankful, is it? Proverbs 17:22 says, "A cheerful (i.e. 'thankful') heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones." In a recent SS class on Proverbs, I brought a glass with some water in it and we discussed the familiar question, "Half full or half empty?" (First answer is from an optimist, second one from a pessimist.) I then passed out a handout called "Count Your Blessings" with about eight blanks to fill. That was not nearly enough space as I began to think of my blessings, so I'll use the space below to create a (partial) list of my blessings....not necessarily in order of importance.

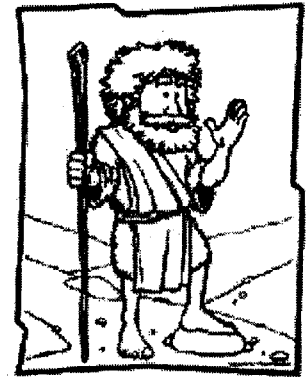
- a dry roof over my head (it's been raining much of the day)...a lovely parsonage, more than adequate for our needs. Stop in some time!
- delicious food for the stomach and adequate clothing for the body
- a wonderful wife: best friend, great cook, good conversationalist, personal nurse, etc
- two special sons with good wives....many happy memories of their growing-up years.
- good memories of parents who loved me and provided examples of godly living
- good health... I'm back to my normal running routine.
- Quiet Waters get-away....a rustic cabin on 60 acres of woodland in Harrison County
- everyone at Beech! Precious children, many talented and committed leaders, new people whom God's Spirit is bringing to us...
- each new day of life...another opportunity to serve and to learn
- beautiful sunrises, sunsets, and stargazing (when it's not cloudy) out here in the country
- a bountiful garden this summer...and dreams of a bigger one next year!
- loyal friends from yesteryear who touch base and "pick up where we left off"
- the faithful and loving presence of Jesus (through his Spirit) in all my ups and downs...
 - the hope of spending eternity with Him
- God's Word that brings light, encouragement, hope
- hard times that keep me humble and draw me closer to Jesus
- music and laughter

Have you counted your blessings lately? Would those who know you best consider you an optimist or a pessimist? Here are a few verses to consider in closing: "Be joyful always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." 1 Thess. 5:16-18

Preparing the Way

"A voice calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'" Mark 1:3

The puzzle is based on Mark 1:1-8



J Z P T V R I V E R T U W T P
 T L U S E L K X B A P T I Z E
 N B X U Y R K G Y S L Z L D Q
 M D E S E R T W J O R D A N P
 F O P S A H N I O F Y B J O R
 U H T T J W R U W R O C K S E
 E J O R J C A F V I T Z B O P
 A V H A H W O F D D L H Z G A
 S U J I O N F N L O O G Y N R
 I H I G N I I I F C C L R J E
 N X I H E E W V Y E U L I Q G
 S O A T Y P R O T K S X H I T
 B P H H I P H I L J T S Z U I
 E T K D Z V V C G T S F P I S
 F P A T H S J E S A N D A L S

HONEY	BAPTIZE	SINS	LOCUSTS	JORDAN
PATHS	RIVER	VOICE	WORTHY	CONFESS
STRAIGHT	WILD	DESERT	PREPARE	SANDALS

Branching Out is the newsletter of Beech Mennonite Church. Its purpose is to keep the members and regular attendees informed of coming events and of the church organizations' activities

The publication date is the first Sunday of every month. The submission deadline is the last Sunday of the preceding month.

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