

PASTORAL NEWSLETTER – January, 2011

“2010. This one flew by.” Those were the opening words of our family Christmas letter this year. I blamed it on the fact that Susie and I both turned 60, but really it’s more about the pace of change in our lives, our culture, and our world (more than the momentary change Susie and I will see when we land in Philly this New Year’s Eve after enjoying five days here in sunny south Texas with our family, from where I’m writing this newsletter).

Our Gethsemane church family certainly experienced change this year, as we transitioned from two long-time staff members, Janice Holz and Karen Winters, to our *new church secretary, Juanita Reyes, and our new Preschool Director, Sue Galloway*. We made significant improvements with the *repaving of our church parking lot*, and the addition of relatively *new furniture in the church offices*, with the *dedication of new Easter paraments, new banners, a new wedding candelabra, and new handchimes*.

Beyond that, our *giving to missions increased* considerably to over \$8500 this past year, thanks to so many of you making that part of your pledge. And now we have *added Missionary Jim Buckman to our pledged support* (\$3000), beyond the \$8500 to District and Synod missions. We praise God for generous hearts! Indeed, the *overall giving was up over 30%* in 2010, a testimony to your commitment in spite of a weak economy. Our *“First Sunday in the Pews”* has resulted in more SS children in worship with their parents. Our *church leadership is expanding*, and we are considering new ministries. We *received new members* last November. And finally, although still incremental, our *worship attendance increased*, averaging 91 on Sundays this past year, plus we had our highest Christmas Eve attendance in six years.

All positive changes, and signs of spiritual growth in our church family. All credit to our God, who continues to invest His constant love and truth in our hearts and minds for His purposes of reaching the lost, of making disciples, of growing a close and deep relationship with each of us. If Jesus could grow in wisdom and strength, surely we can!

So, I’m excited about the prospects for spiritual growth here at Gethsemane in 2011. At our last elders’ meeting, we concurred in focusing on our prayer life, as individuals and as a church family. To “pray daily” is one of those marks of discipleship, including worshiping weekly, reading your Bible, and being a Christian friend, servant, and giver. (Please see the article that follows on a new adult study of prayer we will offer).

Even as we grow spiritually, and with all the improvements I listed earlier, we are mindful that God’s mission has always been about connecting the lost to Jesus Christ, and not about survival or church maintenance, to see the needs in our community, and do something about them in Christ’s name.

It has been a real joy to be your pastor these last 2 and ½ years, and I look forward to all the good things God wants to do through us, with us, and for us in the future!

God keep you, Pastor Terry

(over)

PRAYER: DOES IT MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE?

That's the title of a Philip Yancey book I started reading on our flight to south Texas on Christmas Day (and should be finished with by the time you read this) Yancey asks what many of us have wondered: is God listening? does prayer really help us with physical healing? Why do so many prayers go unanswered? If God knows everything, what's the point of prayer? And finally, does prayer change God, or change me?

So, for Lent this year, you are very much invited to join a special study on prayer, using Yancey's book and a six-session DVD teaching series by Yancey, meeting on Sunday mornings, 9:15 – 10:15am. *Starts Sunday, March 13*, the first Sunday in Lent. We hope to organize our Lenten midweek services around prayer, and perhaps offer this same series for home Bible study groups.

OUR CHRISTIAN PRESCHOOL is now enrolling for the 2011 Fall session. Please invite any prospective family with younger children to come to one of our two January open houses: Saturday, Jan.22 (10am-noon) or Wednesday, Jan.26 (6:30-8pm). We offer classes for both 3 and 4-year olds. Contact the church office or Preschool Director Sue Galloway for more information.

NEW BIBLE STUDY ON HEBREWS STARTS THIS JANUARY 9

Pastor Terry will begin a new 9-week study of the Letter to the Hebrews on Sunday, Jan.9, 9:15am in the church nave.

On Christmas Eve, we heard from this letter how "long ago God spoke to our ancestors....by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son." (Hebrews 1) The Old Testament is quoted 29 times and alluded to over 50 times as God spoke originally to Jewish-Christians needing strong encouragement not to give up their faith, and that Jesus Christ is the only One who fulfilled every prophecy. All 13 chapters speak to this truth of the superiority of Christ. Some of the best-known passages of Scripture come from this book, including the great "Hall of Faith" in Hebrews 11. Plan to join us.

CHRISTMAS CAROLING, 2010: "I had forgotten how much fun and replenishing of joy can come from Christmas caroling. Although we were the basic 12 in number (like the original disciples), it was more than enough to share the Good News through song and visiting with the residents of House of Good Shepherd, and our in-town widows. We each had a handchime or two, which added some extra depth to the music-making. And we discovered some hidden talents, including two members who can sing a "dead-on" Alvin the Chipmunk. Thanks to Maria Tonno and our Youth for planning this outreach, and to the carolers: Gina and Vicki Tonno and two of their friends, Maria Tonno, Charlie Stackhouse, Steve and Mia McLelland, Juanita Barna-Providoshin, Dave Davenport, and Susie and myself. Please plan to join us next Christmas: your heart will be better for it!"----Pastor Terry

JANUARY MEETINGS/EVENTS

4- Elders, 6-Bd of Ed, 4pm; 8-Women's Guild, 2pm; 9- New Sunday Bible Class begins; 11:Circuit Pastor's mtg, 10am;/ YOUTH meet, 7-9pm; 18-Social Ministry,5:30pm, 22-Preschool Open House (10am-noon);25-Church Council, 7:30pm; 26-Preschool Open House(6:30-8pm)

OUR YOUTH GROUP WILL MEET NEXT ON TUESDAY, JAN.11, 7-9PM.