

# The Pilgrim



**T**hough the liturgical calendar reminds us that it is Christmastide, a lovely

12-day season extending to Epiphany in January, you cannot live in this culture without experiencing how the air is let out of the holiday balloon on December 26. The Magi may not arrive in Bethlehem until January 6, but the culture abruptly drops the whole matter practically before Christmas Day is over.

I like the way W. H. Auden describes this moment in *For the Time Being*:

Well, so that is that.  
Now we must dismantle the tree. . . .  
Once again as in previous years we have  
seen the actual vision and failed  
To do more than entertain it as an agreeable  
Possibility.

Almost anybody can be touched emotionally by the birth of a baby. But the church knows and remembers that the baby grew up and became a man who taught a revolutionary ethic of unconditional love and practical forgiveness and who overturned cultural convention by welcoming the marginalized and excluded. The church remembers that the baby grew up and got into trouble with the authorities for living out his notion of what God's kingdom looks like—a new social arrangement without all the old barriers and boundaries, an arrangement in which all are loved and welcomed at the banquet table. The church remembers that the baby grew up and challenged social convention by forgiving enemies, turning the other cheek, responding to violence not with violence but with love.

The church also remembers a part of the story in which the culture has no interest at all—that the shadow of a cross falls over the nativity scene.

## Christmastide

by John M. Buchanan

The birth is a sign, for people of faith, that God is alive and at work in the world. Christ comes again, is born

again, when lives are transformed by his love, when forgiven and restored men and women begin to live new lives in a world that is suddenly new because he was born into it. The culture may drop Christmas like a hot potato, but for faith it is a beginning, not an end.

A remarkable thing happened this year in the weeks before Christmas. A letter was written to Christian leaders by 138 Muslim clerics and scholars representing every branch of Islam. "A Common Word Between Us" stated that the peace of the world depends on peace between Muslims and Christians, and that love for God and neighbor is a central tenet of both religions and common ground on which we stand. "Our eternal souls are at stake," the Islamic leaders wrote.

Yale Divinity School's Center for Faith and Culture put together a response that was published in the *New York Times* on November 18, expressing gratitude for the letter, asking forgiveness for historical Christian hostility toward Islam and promising dialogue with Islamic and Jewish leaders that "seeks the good of the other" and that asks how God "would have us fulfill the requirement that we love God and one another."

So there is Christmas work ahead of us. Peace work. As Auden wrote:

Music and sudden light  
Have interrupted our routine tonight  
And swept the filth of habit from our hearts.  
O here and now the endless journey starts.

*John M. Buchanan is pastor of 4<sup>th</sup> Presbyterian Church in Chicago, and editor and publisher of the Christian Century.*

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## SPIRITUAL FORMATION

**“Hearing is Believing:  
Rediscovering Our Oral Traditions”  
January 13, 20 & 27  
in the Bird Room  
Led by Gerry Hendershot**

**S**cripture began as oral tradition—story telling. Around a camp fire, at a table in the home, or during worship at Synagogue, the Word began as the spoken word. People *heard*--and then they *believed*. In this series we will listen to and view biblical story-tellers such as Mark Twain and Bill Cosby, and tell our own stories of life, love, and loss. Resources include YouTube, This American Life, Studio 360, and other NPR programs. (R-rated for violence, sex—and life.) †

**Sharing Our Light with the World:  
Setting New Year Intentions.  
January 13 & 20  
in the Upstairs Education Room  
Led by Ashley Goff**

**H**ow will your light shine this year? What do you want your intentions or priorities to be this year? How can we enhance and grow how we are living in God's way? How can we step into the new year with a sense of purpose and vision? In this two week class, we will set our “intentions” for the new year by reflecting on 2007 and envisioning 2008. †

**A**bout 20 Pilgrims gathered on December 8 for an Advent prayer retreat led by the Reverend Margee Iddings. [Jean Stewart and Kathy Keler pictured.] Iddings, now retired, founded and operated the Phoenix Rising retreat center in western Maryland for many years, and is a nationally known leader of spiritual retreats.

The Advent retreat began at 10 AM and ended at 2 PM. Each of the four hours was planned as a stand-alone spiritual exercise so that participants could come and go as their schedules allowed. (Nearly everyone stayed for the full four hours.) The four parts were named “Darkness,” “Light,” “Nourishment,” and “Adventures in Dreaming.”

*Advent Retreat at Pilgrims*  
“Praying Out the Old, Praying in the New”



“Darkness” focused on dark times experienced in 2007. “Light” focused on “star light” times in 2007--small, but significant experiences of the Good. “Nourishment” was physical nourishment (lunch in the Bird Room), but also reflection on sources of spiritual nourishment during the past year. Finally, in “Dreaming” participants explored their visions for the New Year. Many spiritual practices were used during the retreat, including sitting meditation, walking meditation, sharing the inner life with another person, sharing the inner life with the group, walking the labyrinth, journaling, silence (lunch was eaten in silence), and group hugs! Participants later reported that the retreat gave them both inner peace and renewed energy. †

## Friday Club in January

**T**he Friday Club, for adult members, friends and visitors, will meet for lunch at noon on January 11 in the Bird Room. There will be a viewing of the DVD, “Exploring Costa Rica” following the lunch.

The Friday Club meets on 2nd Fridays monthly at noon for lunch and a program. Call the church office if you're interested in participating. †

## “Spirituality and Practice”

**Start the Year Off Right:** Is taking on new spiritual practices one of your New Year's resolutions? If so, this may help. Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat, on their website “Spirituality & Practice,” are offering four new 21-day “e-courses,” *Beating the Blahs*, *Dealing with Disappointment*, *Fear Busters*, and *Letting Go*. You can sign up at <http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/> †

## PILGRIMS' CORNER

### *Dreaming of a World Made New*

“100 Members,  
100 Folding Chairs,  
and a Piano”

In 1955, Dr. Andrew Reid Bird was honored on the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his pastorate at the Church of the Pilgrims, and the Washington Post published a story about it. [Thanks to Nancy Lee Head for supplying a copy.] The Post reported that in the 1920's, “[Dr. Bird] was almost without resources. His Church of the Pilgrims numbered 100 members. It had a 100 folding chairs and a piano. The neighborhood around the church was a rocky soil for a spiritual harvest. ‘All my life,’ a missions superintendent wrote, ‘I have felt that [name withheld] County, Kentucky, was the neediest home mission field in America, but after examination of the neighborhood around the Church of the Pilgrims, I am unable to say where the spiritual destitution is the greater—in that Kentucky County or around the Church of the Pilgrims.’” That did not deter Dr. Bird from pursuing his vision of a church that would bring the Gospel to Southern Presbyterians who were in Washington to visit or serve in the Federal government. With his leadership the present church building was completed in 1929, and membership grew to over 600 members by the 1950's. Today Pilgrims again has about 100 members and limited resources (although it does have *several* pianos *and* an organ!), and recent demographic studies show that the community around Pilgrims is still “rocky soil for a spiritual harvest.” Such conditions did not deter the Pilgrims of the 1920's--and they do not deter today's Pilgrims--from dreaming of a world made new. †

## MISSION & COMMUNITY

### Pilgrims Hosts Homeless Shelter

During the week of December 9, a dozen Pilgrims and members from Dumbarton Methodist Church provided hospitality to 9-10 homeless people each night. Guests were served a hot, plentiful, home-cooked dinner in the Pilgrimage, and then spent the night accompanied by staff of the Georgetown Ministry Center, which operates the rotating shelter program. The conversations between guests and volunteers around the dinner table were thought-provoking; and the appreciation expressed by guests was profound.

As host church, Pilgrims organized the week's activities, prepared dinners and breakfasts, cleaned, kept order, and transported the guests' gear to the next shelter site (Holy Trinity Roman Catholic Church in Georgetown). Pilgrims volunteers were Jack Womeldorf, Betty and Michael Rudolph, Cameron Desfulian, Stacy Purvall, Nancy Daugherty, Pat Goeldner; Anne Womeldorf, Tari Gregory, Tsehai Gemaneh, Jeanne Mayer, and MaryLib Pate. Paul Reuther, Pilgrims' Sexton, was always there to help, and Rolando Quintanilla, Building Engineer, scheduled building renovation work to accommodate the shelter. †

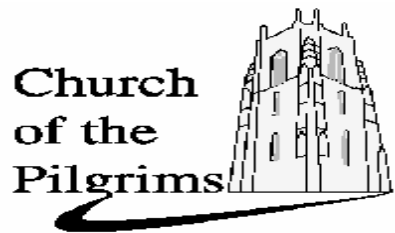


#### PASTORAL CONCERNS/PRAYER REQUESTS:

- Kelly Jenkin's mother, Jo Clifford, who worshiped with us several times over the past year or so, passed away just before Christmas from pancreatic cancer. Kelly's email address is: [KellyBDesign@aol.com](mailto:KellyBDesign@aol.com)
- Charlotte Floyd's sister, Nannie Evans, a Colonel (ret.) in the United States Army, passed away in November in San Antonio Texas.
- Jonathan Mertz is moving home to Kansas in early January, at least temporarily, perhaps permanently, to help care for his aging parents, especially his mother, who suffers from Parkinson's Disease. The loss of Jonathan's leadership to our congregation is incalculable. We will miss you, Jonathan! You can send a note to Jonathan at [kstodc@earthlink.net](mailto:kstodc@earthlink.net).
- Please remember in your prayers: Mary Cain (mother of Mary Josie Blanchard), Diana Bruce's mother, Jean Gilpin, Charlotte Floyd's family, Olive Holbrook, Jack Noble, Jeff and Penny Sandora, Virgil Smith, Charles Van Gorder's mother. †

**WELCOME** Our new Pilgrimage Program Manager, Matt Boote will begin work on January 3rd. You can send Matt a note of welcome at [pilgrimage.manager@verizon.net](mailto:pilgrimage.manager@verizon.net). Welcome, Matt!

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*"Where all are Pilgrims, but none is a stranger."*  
[www.churchofthepilgrims.org](http://www.churchofthepilgrims.org)  
*If you no longer wish to receive this newsletter please e-mail,  
fax or call in your request to the church office.*

Join us  
on Sundays for  
Worship, 11:00 A.M.



Pilgrims  
on the  
Journey . . .

Christmas may be over as far as our culture is concerned, but liturgically the season of Christmas does not end until the day of Epiphany, January 6 (the "twelfth day of Christmas") which Pilgrims will mark this Sunday with a special service of worship and buffet lunch following (including a "King Cake," one of the staples of "Twelfth Night").

As in Advent, the four weeks leading up to Christmas, we will continue to focus on the texts from the prophet Isaiah in the season of Epiphany, the four weeks following Christmas Day. If the four weeks of Advent were about waiting for the light, Epiphany (which from the Greek means "shine" or "appear") is about celebrating the light. The first lection, from Isaiah 60, captures the mood of the season: "Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you."

In keeping with this subtle shift, we will continue to share stories from Pilgrims in Epiphany, but will move from "Dreaming of a World Made New" to "Sharing Our Light with the World. †