

DECEMBER 2017

Shepherd's Voice

The monthly parish newsletter of
Good Shepherd



WHAT WE BELIEVE...

We believe in God, the Eternal Spirit, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and our Father, and to his deeds we testify:

He calls the worlds into being, creates man in his own image and sets before him the ways of life and death.

He seeks in holy love to save all people from aimlessness and sin.

He judges men and nations by his righteous will declared through prophets and apostles.

In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth, our crucified and risen Lord, he has come to us and shared our common lot, conquering sin and death and reconciling the world to himself.

He bestows upon us his Holy Spirit, creating and renewing the church of Jesus Christ, binding in covenant faithful people of all ages, tongues, and races.

He calls us into his church to accept the cost and joy of discipleship, to be his servants in the service of men, to proclaim the gospel to all the world and resist the powers of evil, to share in Christ's baptism and eat at his table, to join him in his passion and victory.

He promises to all who trust him forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace, courage in the struggle for justice and peace, his presence in trial and rejoicing, and eternal life in his kingdom which has no end.

Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto him. Amen.

FROM THE PASTOR'S STUDY

NEW BEGINNINGS

Here we are in December! The end of this month marks the end of the secular calendar year while the beginning of the month marks the start of a new Church liturgical year (beginning on the first Sunday of Advent, December 3).

Our lives are filled with beginnings and endings. In fact, the only thing in the universe without a beginning or an end is God—the Alpha and the Omega.

This month, Good Shepherd not only begins a new Church year, but begins a new chapter in her history. For forty-one and a half years, Good Shepherd was a member-congregation in the United Church of Christ. The coming together in 1976 of two historically Evangelical & Reformed Churches, Good Shepherd was founded as a UCC congregation. Since that time, Good Shepherd regularly professed the UCC Statement of Faith (found for one last month on the left sidebar of this page). Sadly, many UCC congregations no longer profess a statement of faith as a part of their worship services and of those who do, a tiny minority still use the original statement authored at the founding of the denomination in 1957, opting instead for a "modernized" and "politically correct" version that has stripped away terms like "Lord" and purposely removed any reference to the masculine pronoun vernacular for God.

At Good Shepherd, when you walk into our sanctuary, your eyes are almost immediately drawn to the three wooden icons hanging above our Lord's Altar. This is particularly true of the center one, which has engraved at its bottom the words "Christ is Lord" and portrays the detailed agony of the Cross. That carving of our Savior Jesus Christ the Lord, crucified on the Cross of Calvary, seems to almost intuitively draw one's gaze to it. It is both a stunningly beautiful work of art and simultaneously, an unavoidable reminder of the suffering and death our Lord took upon himself that the world might be saved through Him.

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The suffering, death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord are facts. For some, they tend to be pesky facts that are not worthy of catechizing new disciples, but rather, facts that need to be covered over—buried if you will—so that a kinder, gentler, more politically correct and socially acceptable version of the faith can be forwarded. One major problem with such a thesis is this: such a version of the Christian faith is simply NOT the Christian faith.

For two-thousand years, Christians have stood for and even died for “the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3, ESV). This faith is pointed to by the Old Testament Law and Prophets, and codified by Saint Paul as “the gospel” in his first letter to the Corinthians when he calls it “of first importance” and defines it as: “that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve” (1 Corinthians 15:3-5, ESV). Without the death of Jesus on the cross, we have no resurrection. Without the resurrection, we have no faith. The Christ Jesus of our faith IS the Lamb of God, the King of Kings, and the Lord of Lords (see Revelation 17:14). He IS “the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End” (see Revelation 21:6). He IS the Word made Flesh (see John 1:14). He IS God. And everything the Scriptures say about Him is Truth. And any attempt by humans to try to “recreate His image” is blasphemy. Any attempt to discredit His sacrificial death on the cross (see 1 Peter 3:18) is also blasphemy.

On November 12, Good Shepherd, by an overwhelming vote of her congregation, chose to disaffiliate with the United Church of Christ. Truth be told, we didn't leave the UCC; the UCC left us—a long time ago. When the UCC chose to rewrite the original Statement of Faith, they left Christianity. When the UCC chose to vote certain sins out of existence, they left Christianity. When the UCC began to allow their ordained ministers to baptize and bless in the non-Trinitarian but politically correct formula of “Creator, Christ, and Spirit One,” they left Christianity. When the UCC began ordaining Unitarians, they left Christianity. When the UCC began to encourage prayer to “mother god,” they left Christianity. When the UCC chose to replace their motto “That they may all be one” (a prayer Jesus offers in John 17:21), with a quote by Gracie Allen, they left Christianity. When the UCC chose to remove the Cross of Christ from the denomination's emblem and replace it with an artsy comma to coincide with the Gracie Allen quote, they left Christianity. Sadly, I could go on with more examples.

The Conference Minister of our former denomination found it necessary to editorialize on our congregation's departure from the UCC. He treated the story of our departure much the way he treats Scripture—repeating untruth as mantra enough times so that even he, himself, comes to believe the fallacy. In that recent column, he implied that Good Shepherd was “planted” and “supported” by the denomination, and in 2005, rebuilt by the denomination following Hurricane Katrina. The reality is, Good Shepherd was planted by two churches that were originally Evangelical & Reformed churches and every penny that went into building Good Shepherd in 1976 came directly from members of Bethany and St. John church members and their local fundraising efforts.

And while Good Shepherd enjoyed the company and support of other UCC churches who came to our area, (joining with scores of other Christian denominations, faith traditions, and non-profits dedicated to the rebuilding efforts of post-Katrina New Orleans), we also graciously renovated our property and facilities to house these teams of workers for almost 8 years, all while taking out an SBA loan in excess of \$300,000—a loan that we still, to this day, make payments on.

Whether the Conference Minister knows this truth or even cares to know this truth, is beyond me. I do know that on October 1, in our church, he actually preached that social activism is the gospel of Jesus and declared Matthew 21:12 as his proof text for this erroneous and heretical assertion. Matthew 21:12 (ESV) reads: “And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons.” Sadly, had this minister actually read the very next verse, he would have learned that the reason for our Lord’s righteous indignation was not for a lack of “social activism” by the people. Ironically, our Lord’s righteous indignation was due to the peoples’ turning away from being true to the Word of God. You’ll notice Jesus says “It is written” not “Let’s incite a protest!” Read for yourself: “He said to them, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you make it a den of robbers.”” (Matthew 21:13, ESV).

As I mentioned earlier in this column, the True Gospel of our Lord is codified by Saint Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:3-5 and it is quite simply this: Jesus Christ was crucified, dead, and buried for our sins and resurrected for our eternal life, just as Scripture says. Yet as Paul tells the Galatian church “Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse!” (Galatians 1:7-8)

Let me be clear: there are many good people in the UCC. But sadly, many of those good people go to church every Sunday and believe they are receiving Biblically sound, Christian teaching. Yet, all across the UCC, they are not. Instead, they are being exposed to politically correct non-sense that actually blasphemes the Blessed Trinity—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and purposely teaches against 2,000 years of Christian Scripture and Tradition; teaches against 4,000 years of Jewish Prophets and the Law; and teaches against a collective 6,000 years of Judeo-Christian thought ethic and morality.

I do not grieve that Good Shepherd voted to disaffiliate from the United Church of Christ. I grieve that the United Church of Christ left the authentic, historic, Biblical, orthodox, Christian faith and I grieve for those poor souls who don’t know Truth because of that denomination’s worship of the god of leftist political activism.

I ask you to join me in remembering those innocent souls in prayer, that by the mercy and grace of God, they may, by the power of the Holy Spirit, have the wisdom to discern Truth and the courage and strength to walk away from the darkness of distortion and into the Light of authentic Christianity and the saving grace of the True Gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Until next month, let your light shine!

The Reverend Randall M. Graf, Pastor

TWO SPECIAL MUSIC-THEMED SERVICES SCHEDULED

Make sure you're in church on the following two Sundays and invite family and friends to join you. We're looking for full houses for each of these special events!

10am Sunday, December 10: Annual Sounds of the Season service featuring performances from church musical groups and talented individuals plus lots of Christmas music.

10am Sunday, December 17: The Secret of Snowflake County, a Christmas musical will be presented by the Youth of the congregation. (See separate article)

Spread the word and see you in church!

Jordy Luff
Music Director



CHRISTMAS MUSICAL ANNOUNCED: THE SECRET OF SNOWFLAKE COUNTY

REHEARSALS CONTINUE ON SUNDAYS FOLLOWING 10:00 AM SERVICE

Our Youth have been hard at work throughout November preparing for this year's Christmas play, The Secret of Snowflake County, a musical including both original songs and traditional carols. It will be performed for the congregation during 10am worship on Sunday, December 17. We have a cast of 10+ children and I'm sure you'll enjoy both the message and the various songs. As this newsletter goes to press, Debbie Volk and I are pleased at where we are at this point in the rehearsal period. The kids have a pretty good grasp of their lines and characters as well as the music. We'll be focusing on the details and staging in early December practices.

As always, Debbie and I looking for volunteers to help with various tasks such as scenery, props, prompting, publicity, dress rehearsal refreshments, etc. If you are able and willing to help out in any of these areas, please let us know. To date, no one has stepped forward yet and we need extra hands!

Finally, here is one other important date to keep in mind moving forward:

Saturday, December 16 (10am-12 noon): Final Dress Rehearsal in the Sanctuary. (While the kids practice, it might be a great time to get in some last minute holiday shopping)

Please let me know if you have any further questions or comments. Both Debbie and I looking forward to staging another memorable show.

Jordy Luff
Music Director



PROPS AND SCENERY NEEDED FOR THE YOUTH CHRISTMAS MUSICAL

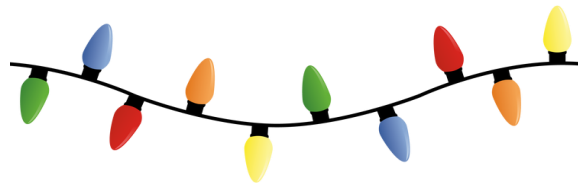
Take a look at the following list Good Shepherd and let Debbie Volk or I know if you can provide some of these needed materials for the upcoming play.

- Artificial snowflakes of all sizes for decorating the sanctuary - the bigger, the better
- Artificial candy canes of all sizes for decorating the sanctuary
- Exotic perfume containers/bottles (for the Wise Men)
- Bedazzled notebook or clipboard
- Red wagon
- A shoebox with the word manger clearly printed on in a child's writing
- Homemade yellow star hanging from a coat hanger
- Small wooden canes (like you'd see in a tap or soft shoe dance routine)
- Medium to large teddy bear

We're also looking for a volunteer or volunteers to create Powerpoint slides with appropriate imagery to project on the wall as our scenic/mood-setting backdrops.

Thanks for your consideration.

Jordy Luff
Music Director



SHEEP IN THE NEWS

I can't believe it's December already. Christmas will soon be upon us. I hope everyone is being nice so Santa will be generous with you. Congratulations go out to Madison Verbest and Gabe Legarde for making the all "A" honor roll at John Curtis. Keep up the good work! We are very proud of you.

I also want to reminder everyone that the children are hard at work on their Christmas play music already. They will be performing "The Secret of Snowflake County" on December 17th. Please mark your calendars and plan on attending.

Please let Debbie Volk or the church office know of any accomplishments by our young people. We are so proud of them and want to acknowledge their successes.

Thanks,
Debbie Volk

WOMEN'S GUILD CHRISTMAS PARTY

The Women's Guild will have their Annual Christmas Party again this year on Thursday, December 7, 2017 at 11:30 a.m. in the Fellowship Hall.

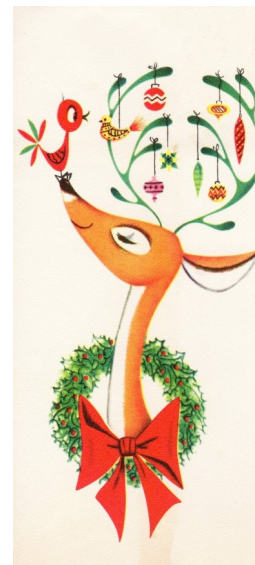
You, (ladies and gentlemen) are cordially invited to attend. All you have to do is bring a covered dish to share. Also if you want to participate in the "gift swap" kindly bring a wrapped \$5.00 gift.

We look forward to seeing you there!!

There will be a sign-up sheet on the bulletin board.

Please sign your name if you plan to be with us.

We always have a good time!



HANGING OF THE GREENS

Good Shepherd's annual Hanging of the Greens will be held on Saturday, December 2 at 10:00 AM. This is a wonderful chance to enjoy a fun and festive time with your church family.

All are invited, no matter how young and no matter how old, to participate as we bring some Holy Days Cheer to our sanctuary in advance of the Advent and Christmas seasons. Hot chocolate, coffee, and donuts will be provided!



SERVICES SCHEDULE FOR DECEMBER 2017

Sunday, December 3 @ 8:30 AM & 10:00 AM—Sunday worship with Sacrament of Holy Communion

Thursday, December 7 @ 6:35 PM—Midweek Service of Holy Eucharist

Saturday, December 9 @ 11:00 AM—Monthly Service of Intercessory Prayer

Sunday, December 10 @ 10:00 AM—Sounds of the Season

Thursday, December 14—Join us on Thursday, January 4 for the return of Midweek Holy Eucharist

Sunday, December 17—8:30 AM Liturgical Service; 10:00 AM Children's Christmas Play

Thursday, December 21—Join us on Thursday, January 4 for the return of Midweek Holy Eucharist

Sunday, December 24 @ 5:00 PM—Christmas Eve Candlelight Service

Thursday, December 28—Join us on Thursday, January 4 for the return of Midweek Holy Eucharist

Sunday, December 31 @ 10:00 AM—Sunday Worship

DECEMBER: SPECIAL SERVICES, DATES, AND TIMES

The month of December is busy and packed full with a ton of activities. Please make note of some special dates and times on your calendar.

On **Sunday, December 3**, we enter into a brand new Church year with the first Sunday of Advent. We'll celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Communion at both our 8:30 and 10:00 AM services that morning.

On **Sunday, December 10**, the second Sunday of Advent will feature our Annual Sounds of the Season Service at 10:00 AM. This always promises to be an Advent/Christmas-time favorite!

On **Sunday, December 17**, we'll hold our regular liturgical worship service at 8:30 AM for the third Sunday of Advent, while at 10:00 AM, we'll welcome the Youth of Good Shepherd as they perform their Christmas musical *The Secret of Snowflake County*.

On **Christmas Eve, Sunday, December 24**, we will not hold morning services but invite you to attend our beautiful and spiritual moving Christmas Eve Candlelight Service at 5:00 PM.

Finally, our Midweek Service of Holy Eucharist will be held on **Thursday, December 7** before going on winter break until its return on January 4, 2018 at 6:35 PM.

THANKSGIVING BASKETS UPDATE

Good Shepherd Church and Metairie Baptist Church partnered to provide Thanksgiving baskets to 13 families this year (GS: 5, MBC: 8). Five families were in the Metairie community and eight families were students at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Twelve families had children in the home. Because of the generosity of Good Shepherd, each basket had a Walmart gift card enclosed.

Helen Brister

CHRISTMAS BRUNCH WITH SANTA

After the annual children's Sunday school Christmas program on December 17th please plan to come over to the gym for a Christmas brunch. It will be a time of Christian fellowship with our Good Shepherd families along with good food. We plan to serve eggs, ham, grits, fruit, muffins and other assorted breakfast foods. We will also have a special visit by Santa Claus for pictures. Please feel free to invite your friends and neighbors to celebrate Christ's birth.



JASPER
the



CHURCHMOUSE says...

You do not need a calendar to tell you that the end of the year is fast approaching. Just open your eyes and ears and your hearts and you can tell Veterans Day, Halloween, Thanksgiving and a few other important days have come and gone. Christmas is almost upon us!

Sure, we Churchmice, like all of you, are getting ready for the celebration. First, the preliminaries, getting the decorations out of storage and then having a lot of discussions about what to use and what would make this years celebration special.

The vote taken last month regarding the future of Good Shepherd was quite decisive and we, Churchmice included, have a wonderful opportunity to show our love for Good Shepherd and to pitch in and help make the Congregation's decision successful.

I'm looking forward to an impressive future that includes additional members and maybe even a few new Churchmouse friends.

...With Love of the Best Kind, I am,

Jasper



Good Shepherd Church

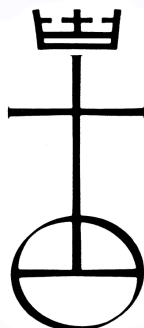
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The Rev'd Dr. Randall M. Graf, Pastor



Sunday Services

10:00 AM every Sunday

8:30 AM 1st & 3rd Sundays

Midweek Services

6:35 PM Thursdays

Intercessory Prayer

11:00 AM

2nd Saturday of the month