The Herald

January 2007 • Bethany Lutheran Church • http://www.bethanyportland.org/

From Our Pastor–

"And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth,
and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn."
(Luke 2:7, NRSV)

We all are familiar with the birth narrative of Jesus. Mary, who is pregnant, and Joseph are seeking lodging for the night. The time has come for Mary to deliver the baby. In some way or form, they are told by the innkeeper "Sorry…we have no place for you."

We are not told anything about the innkeeper. Who was this mysterious person? Did he take one look at Mary, a simple, peasant woman and Joseph and quickly dismiss them based on appearances alone? Or, was the decision purely practical: There were simply no more rooms available for the night.

Scripture does not tell us anything else as to the reason behind the innkeeper's decision. Whether from a purely practical point (i.e. – all the rooms were taken) or from a more subjective point of view (i.e. – he didn't like the looks of them), there was no place for them at this innkeeper's inn.

Was the innkeeper justified in his decision? Probably. From a business perspective, when all of the rooms are full, there simply is no more "business" to conduct that day. He simply left that day and communicated some sort of message to all inquiring guests which read: "Sorry: No more rooms available."

Whatever the innkeeper's reason, he simply could not afford Mary and Joseph the time or space to host them for the night. As Scripture says, the baby Jesus was laid in a manger because "…there was no place for them in the inn." (Luke 2:7, NRSV)

How difficult it is to make more room for two or three more guests! Like the innkeeper of an inn already "full," we can find ourselves communicating messages (intentional or unintentional) which say "Sorry … I have no more room available for you." Guests seeking a place to spiritually "lodge" for a moment or for some time, to welcome the Christ child into their midst, can leave our individual and corporate lives still searching for that place where they will be welcomed, a place where soul-filled lodging will be just a few steps away.

But when God breaks into our midst, God turns the simple and ordinary into "holy places" and "spaces." An animal trough becomes the welcome place for the Savior of the world. God provides adequate shelter for Mary and Joseph and their newborn son. Angels herald the good news to shepherds who come and witness this God event for themselves and glorify God in their seeing and hearing.

Our lives, as well, are turned from the ordinary into the "God-filled" extraordinary. Our apprehension of guests or strangers is filled with a "holy" moment of welcome through a handshake or kind greeting to each other. We become more aware of ourselves and our surroundings and how they might impact our guests and their sharing Christ with us. We realize we will always feel estranged from uninvited guests until we both welcome and see Immanuel in our midst.

May we, as fellow innkeepers, find in our hearts and lives room for others as God has made room for us!

Yours in Christ-
Pastor Jeff

Third Phase of Vision Process – Council Approves formation of Vision Task Force Team

Much work has gone into coming to this third phase in our vision process – the formation of a task force to work. We could not have done it without the dedicated committed folks who chose to be involved. Thanks for your efforts and hard work in the first two phases of our vision process! As I reported to council this month, here's an overview of where we are and how we arrived at this point:

Third phase of our visioning process: **Task force** called to work with Pastor in discerning responses/God's calling for Bethany.

Recap: Here's how we arrived at this phase in our visioning process:

1. **Congregational worship service/Bible study** held for six Sundays beginning on September 10 on Acts 2, 10, & 16 during the 9:30 service.
2. Congregational members (who have worshiped with us since September) asked to participate in **focus group meetings**: six scheduled, 4 focus groups held which included 19 participants. Eighteen questions (some with four parts) were asked orally in three categories: questions about "oneself," "our congregation," and "our congregation's calling."
3. **Congregational Luncheon & Meeting** held Sunday, December 10, 2006 at Noon. PowerPoint presentation made with my summary/overview of your responses, one draft of a vision, and a review of all the questions with commonalities/insights/reflections from myself.

From our focus group participants' work, I see a great deal of commonality from which we can form a vision for our congregation for the next three years. Seven leaders have been asked to serve on the task force and we await confirmation from the final person before we meet in January.

This is a tremendous step in our vision process journey to reach this step. We ask that you keep the Vision task force team in your prayers in the coming months as we seek to follow God's leading and the vital work that our focus group participants have done. May God bless us all in this continued journey!

Pastor Jeff

Bethany Ministry News …

Pastor Jeff & family send you greetings for a Merry Christmas to all! Thanks for your beautiful cards and gifts. We are blessed to know each and every one of you!

Virginia Taylor sent a wonderful Christmas letter to Bethany.

Dorothy Parsons sends her best with a big thank you to all for all your well wishes and prayers.

We could not continue Bethany's ministries without our **tremendous volunteers.** For all of your efforts (and the friends who help us), much thanks!

“Excuse me Sir! Your Hat Please …”

Three youth along with Pastor Jeff volunteered again this year at the **The Grotto’s Festival of Lights** on December 3. Thanks to **McKenzie Meyers, Sarah Mastel,** and **Emily Bethke** for their willingness to brave the cold and humid conditions to help out a very worthwhile and timely event each Christmas season.

While **Sarah** and **Emily** volunteered at the petting zoo, **McKenzie** and **Pastor Jeff** were church greeters for all entering the cathedral where rotating Christmas choirs and hand bell ensembles gathered to share their festive Christmas music with all who gathered inside the warm cathedral.

When guests began to arrive for the 6:00pm performance, many entered into the cathedral with their hats on, coming directly from outside into the seating area. After a few individuals slipped past us into the cathedral with their hats on, we were quickly reminded by the musical coordinators that we were to ask concert goers to remove their hats before entering the church.

At first, not having adequate clarification, we directed all people to remove their hats. But after clarification with one of the “Brothers” who knew the protocol, we were simply told to say to all men entering the nave of the cathedral “Excuse me sir, your hat please!”

If I heard this phrase once, I heard it fifty times as **McKenzie** kindly and reverently said to each man entering “Excuse me sir, your hat please!” Each and every person that I asked (and that I saw **McKenzie** ask) was more than willing to remove their hat as a sign of reverence and respect for the gathering they were now a part of.

This single adventure was a good reminder for me as Pastor of what our youth are capable of doing when asked and guided and the privilege of teaching and learning as God’s people in the wider catholic (universal) church. Great job youth!

From the Women of Bethany

A **Thankoffering** of $399.50 was sent to ELCA Women’s Headquarters for distribution to projects.

A total of $1,879.70 from the **Women of Bethany Bazaar** will be distributed to worthwhile organizations. Sincere thanks to all of the hard working volunteers, many of whom have helped for many years.

Special thanks to **Lou Ostlind** for many years of volunteer work, including Circle Treasurer and Hostess Chairperson, Church Reception Chair, Quilter Chair, Packer (with Ed’s help) for Soap Drive for Lutheran World Relief, and (along with Ed) long time church teller.

Thank You Volunteers

For rebuilding our furnace blower: Bill Barrett with help from Stan Ekstrom & Bill Markwart.
For unclogging many downspout drains before installation of new front gutters: Stan Ekstrom, Donna Frey, and Bill Markwart.
For our Christmas trees provided, cut, delivered, and set up by: Victor Greb; Rob Ostlind; Phyllis Parker; Jack, Jeff, Jim, and LeDonna Schrumm; Paul Yakymi, and
decorated by: Donna Frey and McKenzie Meyers.
For Christmas poinsettia plants: Roy Gimble, in memory of Mildred; Jack and LeDonna Schrumm; and Bethany Altar Guild.
For putting up the outside Christmas banner: Stan Ekstrom, Bill Markwart, Paul Peterson, Jeff Schrumm, and Pastor Jeff.
For the wonderful Bethany Christmas potluck and party: All 24 who participated.
For delivering food & Christmas gifts for Portland Police Bureau Sunshine Division, to 36 homes: Sandie Gray, Bill Markwart, Midori Suzuki, and Pastor Jeff.
For a new presentation easel: Sandie Gray.
For taking communion to the homebound: Edith Aanderud and Wanda Joaquin.
For answering Bethany phones: Barbara Andersen, Wanda Campbell, Ruth Sleasman, Pam Thomas, and Mary Lou Yakymi.

Wish List

The church is in need of the following items:

1. **Volunteer drivers –** for the vans we have available on Sunday mornings.
2. One **grease gun**.
3. One or two **tambourines**.

Please let Pastor Jeff know if you can help!

December 2006 Council Meeting Highlights

Council met December 12 at 7pm with three members excused. Property: New front gutters have been installed and look great. Visioning Process: A motion was approved to form a Vision task force; seven potential members have been identified, pending confirmation. Transportation Ministry: We still need volunteer drivers. Financial: The eleven-month financial reports show general fund income of $58,843 and general fund expenses of $98,692. Transfers from savings were used to pay the difference. Next Council meeting is January 9, 2007 at 7pm.

Announcements

- **Annual Meeting and Luncheon** January 28, noon
- **Watoto Children's Choir at Bethany** February 6, 7pm