

BRIDGING THE GAP

FAIRVIEW HEIGHTS CHURCH OF GOD
5500 Old Collinsville Road Fairview Heights, Illinois 62208
(618) 632-1438

Rev. Terry L. Clayton, Senior Pastor

Rev. Brian Pope, Associate Pastor

www.fhcog.org

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From The Pastor's Desk The Glory of Christmas

Is Christmas a holiday or holy day? How essential is this question to your Christmas joy? A mother went Christmas shopping with her young child. Feeling a drag on her arm she saw that her child was stopping to look at a manger scene in a store window. Impatiently she snatched him away saying, "Will you come along, we don't have time for that." Christmas is meant to be a joyous time, "Behold I bring you good news of a great joy" Luke 2:10. The Bible gives us the reason for Christmas joy, a Savior is born! It is truly a Merry Christmas only to those who know the meaning of the manger. Without the

story of Bethlehem, Christmas becomes a hollow day!

As the carol expresses it, "Remember Christ our Savior was born on Christmas Day." My prayer for all of us is that in the busy rush of the Christmas Season, we remember this: "To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord." Luke 2:11. God gave Christmas, good tidings of a great joy for all people. Emmanuel! He really is! Love came down at Christmas and we rejoice in the Savior who claims us for his own. To belong to Him is to find our true life. When we know whose we are, we know who we are. And in that understanding is our peace. Only God can give a Christmas and only as we turn to Him can we really have a Christmas today. The shepherds made their response, and it is an inspiration one to us still today. It was a "Let us go!" response, "Let us go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made know to us." Luke 2:15. Christmas is the season when God calls us to cast out our fears about what the world is coming to and rejoice over what has come to the world. Without Christ life is overcome by fear. So we look back upon that first Christmas when the Grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men and our experience of God-given new life deepens our understanding of Christmas. May we never be too busy this Christmas season to rejoice in what God has done. This is the glory of Christmas, the gift of new life through the coming of a Savior, born a babe in Bethlehem. The joy of good tidings is ours to share. The Shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. Will you be too busy this year to really see the Glory of Christmas? It is not in the presents we receive or the shopping we must do, or even in church activities. We must be able to answer the question: Is Christmas a holiday or holy day?

I pray that we can all slow down this season to really enjoy Christmas because it really is a Holy Day!

Enjoy the Journey,
Pastor Clayton

December News

Outreach Into Our Community!

Our new outreach cards now available on the welcome table. We are asking that everyone begin handing out these cards to people you meet: at restaurants, your office, people you do business with, while shopping and any opportunity that becomes available. These are beautiful cards with our message, "With God All Things Are Possible!" Our goal is to touch at least 1,000 lives with this first order and then start on the second thousand.

All Church Christmas Dinner Sunday, December 2, 2007 at 5:00 PM

Bring a covered dish and join us in a night of fellowship. The turkey will be provided by the W.C.G. (Women of the Church of God). This will be a great time to invite your family and friends to this special event. Come ready to sing some Christmas Carols and enjoy good food.

The Nativity Story Sunday, December 9, 2007 at 6:00 PM

The movie "The Nativity Story." will be shown Sunday evening December 9th as our program. This powerful and timeless story will help us prepare for Christmas. It was the cruelest of times under King Herod's torturous reign, and families struggled to survive. In the midst of utter turmoil, a young woman's faith was put to the test. You don't want to miss this inspirational film.

Family Communion Sunday, December 23, 2007 5:00:00-7 PM

This year Darla and I will be serving Communion to our church family and friends on Sunday,

December 23, 2007 from 5-7 PM. This is always a special time in the life of our church, and you don't want to miss it. You can come anytime from 5-7 PM for a time of fellowship and Communion.
Pastor Clayton

New Year's Service December 31, 2007 at 8:00 PM

Our New Year's Eve Service will be on Monday, December 31 starting at 8:00 PM to 12:00. So come and help us bring in the New Year with fellowship, prayer and praise! Bring snacks and games and invite a friend.

Facing The Giants January 6, 2008 at 6:00 PM

On January 6, 2008 at 6:00 PM we will be showing the movie "Facing The Giants" which many of you have seen. It will be a great way to start the New Year! If you have not yet seen this film, and for those who want to see it again, make plans now to attend. Who really knows what giants we will be facing this New Year as a Church? SO LET'S PREPARE FOR RAIN!

Sermon and Service Outline December 2007

Christ Birthday Observance Theme:
"Who do you say that I Am?"
Based on Matthew 16:13-17

December 2

AM Service: "Great Expectations!"
Text: Matt. 16:13-17
Pastor Clayton
PM Service: Our Annual Christmas Dinner
starting at 5:00 PM

December 9

AM Service: "The Gift of Light"
Texts: John 8:12 & Luke 8:20
Pastor Clayton

PM Service: Showing of the Film: "The Nativity Story" 6:00 PM

December 16

AM Service: "Gift of Living Water"
Texts: Luke 1:26-34, 2:1-6 & John 7:37-39
Pastor Clayton

PM Service: Children's Christmas Program!

December 23 CHRIST BIRTHDAY OBSERVANCE OFFERING!

AM Service: "Gift of Bread"
Texts: Matt. 2:1-12 & John 6:28-34
Pastor Clayton

PM Service: Family Communion 5-7 PM

December 30

AM Service: Pastor Brian will be Speaking

PM Service: "The Giants are coming, Let's prepare for rain!"
Texts: 1 Kings 18:44 & Matt. 7:24-27
Pastor Clayton

The movie "Facing The Giants" will be shown on January 6 in the evening service. This will be a great way to start the New Year!

Attention! Attention!

Everyone needs to plan ahead for a special Christmas Eve service Monday, December 24th at 10:00 PM. It will be a special "Fresh Christmas" service. Come and rejoice the birth of our Savior! Pastor Brian will be sharing the Christmas Story and traditional Christmas music will be sung together. Bring your family and enjoy a special Christmas Eve service. You will be blessed!

Thank You

To our church family,
Our family would like to share our deep appreciation for your love and concern shown to us during the week of our Mother's Homecoming Celebration.

We treasure the beautiful floral arrangement, cards, letters, and phone calls that we received. Thank you to Pastor Clayton, Darla, and Pastor Brian, Warren and Ruth Pope, Carol Pollard and Anna Rose Miler for their many visits to Mother during hospital stays and while in the nursing home. Your words of encouragement always lightened our load.

Thank you, ladies, for the beautiful and delicious dinner you so graciously prepared for our family. Thank you for caring,

Phyllis and Marshall Field and Logsdon Family

Thank You

How comforting it is to know that your church family is there without question to love and support you when you have a need. That is exactly how I felt after my grandfather passed away when I received the love from my church family though visits to the funeral home, cards, and hugs. The plant sent to honor my grandpa is very beautiful. I took it to my classroom where I can look at it all day while teaching. Acts of kindness are not ever forgotten, and I will always treasure the kindness of God's people.

Debbie Pope

The J.A.C. Class

Sunday (Nov 18th) as our class was about to have opening prayer, we were voicing our concerns and praises. We mentioned prayer for Ms. Jane and Ms. Carol because of their loss of Mr. Kenny.

Nathan said, "I remember that he would come off the elevator and see me and say," Hi there, Pumpkin. How are you?" "

Mikalah said, "If was sad and pouting and Mr. Kenny would see me, he would tickle me until I had to smile again."

Christina said, "He always had a friendly smile for me."

The girls said, "Lots of times he had suckers and would pass out suckers to the kids."

Everyone knew that our church will truly miss Mr. Kenny.

Becky Ball
Teacher

November Sermon Notes

Nov 4th. "Take Your Shoes Off!"

Pastor Clayton

Text: Exodus 3:5

Call of Moses...Burning Bush!

1. Divine Presence of God
2. Direction
3. Demonstration

God Gets Our Attention!

1. Restless Spirit
2. A word from others
3. Circumstances
4. Understanding

Ten Ways of Listening to God:

1. Listen expectantly. Jer.33:
2. Listen Quietly. Psalm 46:10
3. Listen Patiently. Psalm 7:37
4. Listen Dependently. Psalm 139:7
5. Listen Openly. Psalm 25:4-5
6. Listen Attentively. 2 Tim.4:5
7. Listen Carefully. Prov. 16:9
8. Listen Confidently. Phi. 4:13
9. Listen Submissively Prov. 3:5-6
10. Listen Reverently Phil.2:10:1

It is time to take your shoes off.

You are standing on Holy Ground!

Nov 11th The church honored God, our Country and Veterans through singing, prayers, and members sharing their feelings and gratitude.

Nov. 18th "If You Want to Walk on Water Get Out of The Boat"

Pastor Clayton

Text: Matthew 14:29 "So He said," Come." And when Peter had come down out of the boat; he walked on the water to go to Jesus."

Before you walk on water:

1. Time of reflection. Verse 22-23
2. Need to see who God is. Verse 24-26
3. Count the cost. Verse 30-33
4. Just do it! Verse 27-29

When is the last time you really walked on water?

When is the last time you really worshiped Jesus?

Nov 25th. "Relationship with God"

Pastor Brian will be preaching

Small Groups

I want to say a **BIG** thank you for our leaders of our small groups. They have put time, love, and a lot of themselves in each class. So thanks to each and every leader for all your hard work. God will reward you. I am thankful you stepped through the door of challenge and sowed the seeds!

Leaders were Becky Ball, Marshall Field, Richard Knowles, Pam Knowles, Pastor Brian, and Pastor Terry.

Darla Clayton

Biblical Financial Counseling

Well here it is—that time of the year that many of us spend way too much money on things we don't need or for people who can't use it. And for many of us, those expenses will add to the already stressed out financial condition that many of us are living in. And to top it all off soon it will be tax season time when we all look at our W-2 forms and wonder where the money went.

Are you tired of living pay check to pay check? Do you feel guilty because you want to tithe, but you don't see how you could afford to? Do you know you need a budget, but you don't know

where to begin? Do you ever wonder if there is a better way to deal with your money issues or questions? If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, then I have good news. God’s word has more to say about our finances than even love. And if God has that much to say maybe it was time e listened. I want to encourage you to seek out one of the following:

- Journey to Financial Freedom—this is a one-on-one Bible study with a Crown Financial Ministry Budget Coach who happens to be me. I can sit down with you and together with God’s word and some financial planning discover ways to achieve financial freedom.
- Upcoming financial seminar to be offered at the church. Pastor Terry and I are in the planning stages of providing a one day workshop about God’s way of handling our money. This seminar will provide practical advice based on God’s word. The date is still to be set—but look for it in Jan or Feb on 2008.

Now for my disclaimer. I can not wipe out your debt. I can not make you rich. I can not solve your problems with one meeting or one workshop. But I can share with you the principles that I learned from Crown Financial Ministries and what our family has now been following for the last 2 years. We do have a budget. We do tithe and God has blessed us with the ability to give above our tithe. Our current plan has us debt free in March 2009 (except for the house). If God can do this for us, He can do it for you too, and I would love to share with you how.

Candy Niemeyer

Crown Budget Coach

JOY SS CLASS

We have begun our study in the book Facing Your Giants by Max Lucado. This is a study of the life of King David---an unlikely hero who was

consumed with an awesome God. David's story encompasses both a life of incredible victory and of personal tragedy. We are learning that David knew God is bigger than any of the other giants he faced in life. But occasionally he focused on his giants and stumbled. If he (or we) focus on God, our giants tumble. The God who made a miracle out of David stands ready to make one out of us too. Our scripture focus begins with I Samuel 17 and will take us through II Samuel.

It's not too late to join us in this study; We are always happy to see new faces!

We have experienced some sad times in recent weeks with the passing of loved ones. Care givers are to be commended for their loving care to parents and loved ones. One thing we know for certain is that these loved ones have gone on to their home in heaven!

Some of our class members were privileged to attend Denise Droege's Honors Recital at Western Illinois University. We have heard only praises for this special time! Candy and Jim attended a Youth Workers Convention and received a blessing and a lot of good information. Matt is doing well in nursing school and each test is a challenge and a victory! Bill Beltz and Brian had a good trip to Nicaragua and have exciting things to share. Mary keeps us up to date on Jason and he is doing well. Other members have had answers to prayer regarding family matters and health issues. God is good and his timing is perfect! This is hard to remember at times!

How blessed we are to live in America! Have a great Thanksgiving and remember to give thanks for all we are allowed to enjoy!

Ruth Pope
Teacher

Youth News

In youth we have been very busy redoing our room. We have painted it green, purple, and turquoise to brighten it up. We have also rearranged the furniture and received new dry-erase boards made by Mr. Jim.

Lately we have been studying Mormonism and many other cults. Mrs. Candy and Mr. Jim came back from their youth workers convention a couple weeks ago, with some great ideas and some fun games also. We are also starting a new program where one person each week will help teach a lesson on a cult with Mrs. Candy. We are all very excited about all of this! Please remember to donate to the Tunes 4 the Troops and use your Schnucks E-script card! We really appreciate it.

Victoria Pope
And the Youth Group

Youth Fundraisers

E-Script: Thank-you all for your support through the Schnucks E-script Community Card. From Jan to August 2007 (reports are always 2 months behind) your purchases have earned the youth group \$226.53. Please be sure to show your card each time you make purchases at Schnucks especially during the Christmas season when we all are doing more shopping. If you don't have your card, it is very easy to get one and use. See any of the Jr./Sr. High youth if you have questions

Soda: Thanks for your continued support of the soda machine. Since January, your soda purchases have contributed about \$500.00 to the youth fundraiser account. Jim has "fixed" the dollar changer which has made purchases easier. If the machine "eats" your money or your soda, please let Jim or Candy Niemeyer know so that we can reimburse you

Donuts: Well, we tried an experiment in Oct. with pre-packaged muffins, rolls, etc. After much grumbling, we have returned to Krispy Kreme Donuts on a trial basis. Our profit is very low and sometimes non-existent when we don't sell all the donuts. If you would like to see this fundraiser continue, we really do need to sell all the donuts each Sunday.

National Youth Workers Convention

Jim and I want to thank the Board of Trustees for their financial support and the congregation for your prayers as we attended this four day convention in St. Louis. There were 3000 youth workers in attendance and this was the 2nd of 3 national locations for the NYWC sponsored by Youth Specialties. About one half of those in attendance were like Jim and I---lay youth leaders while the other half were either full or part-time paid youth pastors/workers. We came in all shapes, sizes, ages, and various levels of experience. But there was one thing we all had in common---our passion to help young people connect with Jesus in a deep and personal way that allows them to know the plan that God has for their life.

Jim and I each attended different conferences so that we could learn from as many different people on as many different topics as possible. We are still comparing notes and learning from each other as we share what we learned. We also attended the six general sessions throughout the four days that brought together various types of worship styles which included music, drama, skits, animation and testimonies. We had six different key-note speakers including Doug Fields (Youth Pastor at Saddleback) who cautioned us about "ministry envy". The idea that the church down the street with the bigger youth group must be better so we should imitate everything they do, or the idea that because we are small and don't have the resources of the "big" youth group than we can't possibly offer anything to our

youth. Chris Hill (has served as an urban youth pastor and evangelist) talked to us about "Monuments of Clay". He asked who or what are we building? Are we building bigger, better programs and buildings that eventually have no people because we did not invest in building warriors to carry on the gospel story?

Jim and I had our souls fed on so many levels that it is hard to tell about it in a newsletter article. We would love to share more with anyone who has a question. We did leave the convention even more convinced that for this season in our life, God has called us to minister to our youth. God has called us to help unleash the God-given potential that each of our youth has. We know we will not be perfect. We know that we will make mistakes. We know that there will be days that we will laugh and there will be days our hearts will break. But we also know that God does not call any of us to do anything that He will not help see us through. So as Pastor always says---We are going to enjoy the journey!

Jim and Candy Niemeyer

Youth Leaders

Tunes 4 the Troops

The youth group service project for the next year will be the collection and shipping of CD's and DVD's to our troops in the combat zones. We have become a satellite location as part of a national effort to send 500,000 CD's/DVD's by Christmas 2008. We are asking for your support by donating the CD's or DVD's that you don't use anymore to this cause. We can only accept originals (no copies), and they need to be in good to excellent condition. We are hoping to begin shipping soon, and we will need donations to help cover those costs. We can send about 100 in a box for about \$15.00 if we send it media mail. If writing a check, make your donation out to the church and specify that it is for Tunes 4 the Troops.

We need all styles of music as all generations and music likes/dislikes are represented in our armed forces. We also need DVD's (movies) from comedies, dramas, musicals, documentaries, cartoons, etc. We can also accept games on CD's. Basically if it can be played on a computer or DVD player, we can use it. We cannot use VHS or cassette tapes, as they do not really have any way to utilize those in combat zones.

We are also seeking your help about getting the word out. Maybe you could set up a collection drive at work, or get your families to bring their donated items to an upcoming family gathering over the holidays. Maybe you know someone who owns a business that would be willing to set up a collection box. We would be happy to supply fliers if you need them. Do you have an idea for how we can get the word out?

If you want to learn more about this project, go to www.tunes4thetroops.com

This is the poem read at Kenny Knowles' funeral. Several people have requested a copy.

Death is Nothing at All

By Henry Holland
(Adapted by Rev. Jennifer Lewis)

I have only slipped away into the next room.
I am I, and you are you,
Whatever we were to each other, that we are still.

Call me by the old familiar name.
Speak of me in the easy way that you always used.
Put no difference into your tone.
Wear no forced air of solemnity or sorrow.

Laugh as we always laughed,
at the little jokes that we enjoyed together.
Play, smile, think of me, pray for me.

Let my name be ever the household word that it always was.

Let it be spoken without an effort,
Without the ghost of a shadow upon it.

Life means all that it ever meant.
It is the same as it ever was.
There is absolute and unbroken continuity.

What is death but a part of God's plans?
Why should I be out of mind because I am out of sight?
I am but waiting for you, for an interval,
Somewhere very near, just around the corner.

All is well.

An Angel in the Post Office

(Story from an email)

This is one of the kindest things I've ever experienced. I have no way to know who sent it, but there is a kind soul working in the dead letter office of the US postal service.

Our 14 year old dog, Abbey, died last month the day after she died my four year old daughter Meredith was crying and talking about how much she missed Abbey. She asked if we could write a letter to God so that when Abbey got to heaven, God would recognize her. I told her that thought we could so she dictated these words:

Dear God,

Will you please take care of my dog? She died yesterday and is with you in heaven. I miss her very much. I am happy that you let me have her as my dog even though she got sick. I hope you will play with her. She likes to play with balls and to swim. I am sending a picture of her so when you see her, you will know that she is my dog. I really miss her.

Love,

Meredith.

We put the letter in an envelope with a picture of Abbey and Meredith and addressed it to God/Heaven. We put our return address on it. Then Meredith pasted several stamps on the front of the envelope because she said it would take lots of stamps to get the letter all the way to heaven. That afternoon she dropped it into the letter box at the post office. A few days later, she asked if God had gotten the letter yet. I told her that I thought He had. Yesterday, there was a package wrapped in gold paper on our front porch addressed, 'To Meredith' in an unfamiliar hand Meredith opened it. Inside the package was a book by Mr. Rogers called, 'When a Pet Dies.' Taped to the inside front cover was the letter we had written to God in its opened envelope. On the opposite page was the picture of Abbey & Meredith and this note:

Dear Meredith,

Abbey arrived safely in heaven. Having the picture was a big help. I recognized Abbey right away. Abbey isn't sick anymore. Her spirit is here with me just like it stays in your heart. Abbey loved being your dog. Since we don't need our bodies in heaven, I don't have any pockets to keep your picture in so I am sending it back to you in this little book for you to keep and have something to remember Abbey by. Thank you for the beautiful letter and thank your mother for helping you write it and sending it to me. What a wonderful mother you have. I picked her especially for you. I send my blessings every day and remember that I love you very much. By the way, I am wherever there is love.

Love,

God