

The LCF Connection

December 2014

How We Keep **Jesus** as the Center of Christmas

I try each Christmas to find an evening for a personal worship tradition. I light a fire in the fire place, insert the complete Messiah into the CD player, and spread out on the living room floor a Bible, the Messiah score, and a book by Timothy Botts entitled "Messiah." In this book Botts "illuminates" all the scriptures found in the Messiah. He makes the words look like what they mean with expressive word pictures.



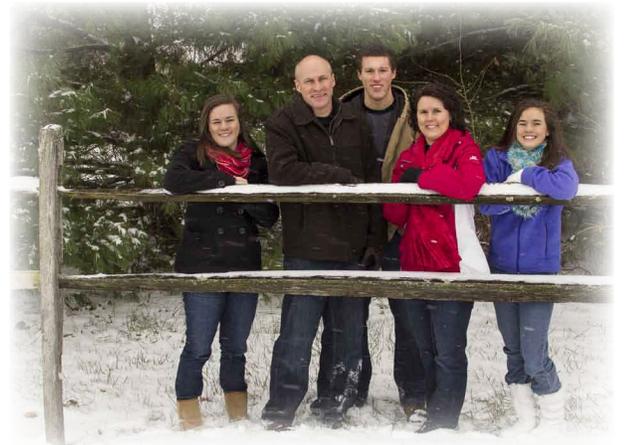
And then I worship the Messiah as I hear music, see the word pictures, and follow musical notes (which scatter all over the score, for example, when we like sheep have gone astray--everyone to his own way). The richnesses of all these experiences help me to understand a little more the depth of the sorrow and sacrifice and the heights of the victory and grandeur of Jesus Christ.

– Phyllis Swartz



I have always enjoyed simply reading the Christmas story and having a time of family worship before opening our gifts. One year we put all the Christmas cards and photos in a basket and then each evening before our dinner meal, we would pick a card/photo and pray for the people represented on that card. As we randomly pulled a card, our hope was that our prayers would be a blessing on that particular day.

–Shannon Scheffel



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My family is very traditional, and we make sure that every year it is about Jesus and not the normal hype of gifts and commercialized Christmas. We always read the story of Christmas in the Bible and do not participate in events such as Black Friday and shopping where life depends on getting the latest and greatest crockpot.



Another act that I will be doing with my family, when I have one is, each child gets three presents. One from their sibling or parents, one from Santa and one gift that is for the Baby Jesus. It will be something symbolic, like a story, ornament, or representation of some sort that symbolizes the reason for the season. I know a family that currently does this and have adapted this strategy to keep me in check.

Also, surrounding myself with a great church family that does things like giving Christmas cookies to our neighbors, is another great way to keep focused on others and on Jesus at Christmas.

– Nicole Ayers



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Body Life

A Message from the Pastor

by Rob Swartz

I need the church. (I'm talking about the people, not some structure or organization.) I would be in trouble without it. I need to learn from the wisdom and experience of the older generation among us like Dorothy and Goldie. I need to hang out with the young people to keep from getting out of touch, stuck in my ways, and just plain boring. I need people like my fellow pastor Reuben, who helps me navigate the challenges of leadership, challenges me intellectually, and is dedicated to the word of God. I need to study the Bible with people from all different backgrounds, cultures, and experiences, to see the truth of God's word through the eyes of others. Yes, I even need those who interpret the Bible differently than me, to refine and challenge my own interpretation. I need to see the "first love" of a new believer for Christ and the refined faith of those who have walked with him for years. I need the church.



Not everyone does. I get it. The church can be a tough place. My deepest hurts have probably come from the church. As a P.K., I grew up in the shadow of the pain my father experienced as a pastor. In fact, my mother was not that excited about me becoming a pastor. It can be hard to be in the church. My experience is not unique.

Yet, we are described as a body with Jesus being the head. We need each other. God's design is for us to be closely connected to one another. There is never a good reason to separate, disconnect, or remain distant from the church. To separate from the church is to separate from Christ himself.

However, I know that painful separation occurs. I have experienced it often and sometimes it is beyond our control. Why does it happen? Because we decide at some level that we don't need the church. We don't need to put up with this person. We don't need to hear this teaching. We don't need to get involved. It's too costly. It's too time consuming. It's too painful. It's too vulnerable. I get it. I've said all of those things at one time or another.

And yet, each time I step back, something dies within me. Each time I cut out part of the church, my vision gets a little narrower. I am separating from the body of Christ and I am dying in the process.

And so...I'm all in. I need you and, believe it or not, you need me. We were meant to do this together. Christ is building the church and, for all it's difficulties, it will prevail. In the end, it will be presented as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle, but holy and blameless. Even so, come Lord Jesus.

Leadership Team Retreat Summary

by Vicki Sairs

The Leadership Team enjoyed its annual retreat at the Procter Center (near Midway) November 7-8. Roger and Sharon Hazen were there too, which made conversation move right along. Roger is our overseer and pastors Pineview Mennonite church in Vassar, Michigan.

On Friday evening we discussed how to incorporate reading more of God's Word into our services and how to encourage people in our congregation to read the Bible regularly as individuals. We also spent time catching up with each other and praying for people and needs in our congregation.

On Saturday morning, Roger and Reuben walked us through an overview of elders in the Bible. A couple of highlights of this discussion: it seems that the character of an elder is more important than the tasks he performs; the word "pastor" is only mentioned once in the New Testament (in Ephesians), otherwise church leadership is designated as elder; the primary task of an elder is to guard the truth and preserve apostolic teaching—to be the one who does not compromise and who holds the church to stand for truth.

Of course, much fun was had with 1 Timothy 3:3, which says elders are "not to be given to much wine or pugnacious."

We launched into a discussion of the role of elders at LCF, in part to clarify what the elders would be doing and what they hoped the proposed LCF Council would do.

We agreed that all work is spiritual. This would include the work of the elders and the work of the Council. We spent a lot of time talking about gender roles. We want to be true to God's Word and provide women every opportunity to use their gifts and abilities.



In fact, we want everyone to be able to give input, whether they are elders or on the new Council or not. One way to do this might be to have more congregational meetings, with the larger group divided up into table groups to discuss issues and provide feedback.

We believe the Bible makes a distinction that the roles of elders is for men. Yet we like LCF's tradition of having the
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Techies on a Mission

by Bryce Swartz

On November 15th we held a free computer repair and give away day here at LCF. This was the second time we have held a day like this (the last one was about 3 years ago). I was able to help out both times and enjoy the interaction that I am able to have with the people who come.

There were 15 people from LCF who helped out in various ways. We gave away about 15 free systems and repaired about 15 computers/laptops/tablets. I enjoyed being able to teach those who came for a free computer the basics of using the system and how to operate the few programs that we loaded onto the systems. After that, I asked if I could pray for them (no one refused) and then Shepherd and I helped them carry the system out to their car.

The following week my Dad and I were at the library and saw one of the ladies that we had given a computer to. She was so happy to see us again, she gave each of us a big hug. She mentioned she wasn't having a good day because of all of the shots she was receiving because of a certain health issue she was experiencing. She just wanted to say how glad she was to receive that computer and how the prayer that I said for her helped her so much. God showed me through that experience that sometimes the littlest things (like the interactions we have with people on these kind of days) can have such a large impact on their life. I can't wait for the next computer repair day!

Leadership Team Retreat...continued

wives of pastors and elders participate in the meetings to add the voice of women. The idea of inviting other women to have a voice at these meetings was discussed, but not agreed upon.

Rob proposed that we continue with the elders team being composed of 2 pastors and 3 elders (if possible), with their wives being invited to participate in the meetings. He also proposed that we change the election process from a congregational nomination and vote to an elders team nomination and congregational affirmation. (We will inform the congregation that we're in the process of praying about and considering elder selection and invite them to share any suggestion or feedback they have with us.). This motion passed.

Next we worked on a list of elders' tasks and clarified the wording on the LCF Council Proposal. The elders' job description is a work in progress, but it reflects our desire to:

- Be faithful to the Word of God
- Develop the preaching and teaching ministry of the church
- Be intentional about congregational care
- Equip and train the saints for ministry
- Cultivate the ministry gifts of women
- Create a culture of discipleship and spiritual formation
- Elevate the priority of prayer
- Make more leaders
- Provide vision and leadership for the church

How We Keep Jesus as the Focus of Christmas...continued

It is important to our family that we keep Christ the center of Christmas. We always read the story of the birth of Jesus together as a family. We listen to Christian holiday songs while doing Christmas activities together. We wait till after the kids go to bed on Christmas Eve to put the presents under the tree. This helps to keep the focus off the gifts. The kids also help us donate food or toys to those in need for Christmas.

-Ashlie LeGrand



One thing we always try to do is have a birthday cake and sing happy birthday to Jesus on the day we celebrate Christmas. This helps remind everyone what Christmas is really about and stimulates conversation about Jesus.

-Colleen and Dave Wolford

In our family, we try to keep our focus on Jesus at Christmas-time by having a series of advent devotions, starting on December 1, and leading up to Christmas. We don't get to it every night, but when we do, we light candles, turn off overhead lights and on the tree lights, and sit near the manger scene as we read. There is such a spirit of peacefulness. We've stopped putting presents under the tree in advance of Christmas so that our kids don't become obsessed with gifts! Last year we put a basket of Christmas story books (replenished frequently at the library) under the tree and this year, we plan to set up an electric train.

- Candice Mast





LCF PRAYER FOCUS

LCF Christmas Events

Please join us in praying that Jesus would be the center of all that we do here at LCF this Christmas season.

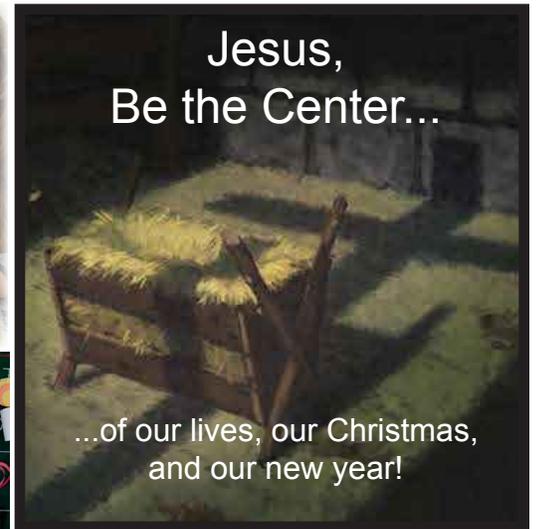
- Pray for the 100 children who will be receiving the Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes that we wrapped, packed, and shipped this past month.
- Pray for the children of LCF as they present the Advent Tree Christmas Program on December 14. Pray that the program would go smoothly and that it would help each person who attends to prepare their heart for Christmas.
- Pray for LCF Family Christmas on December 21, and for each person who has a part. Pray that it would be a special time for us as a church family and that it would be a worshipful celebration of the true meaning of Christmas.
- Pray that each of us as individuals would keep our hearts centered on Jesus in meaningful ways, and that we would not get distracted by all the hustle and bustle of the season.

You're Invited:

The Advent Tree Christmas Program Sunday, December 14, 6:30 p.m.

We hope you will all join us at LCF on Sunday evening, December 14th, for "The Advent Tree" (by Jan Brown), a program by the children of LCF. The children will share music and handmade symbols of the advent season which they will use to decorate a Christmas tree. They have been working hard on preparation, crafting ornaments each Sunday this fall in Children's Church and practicing Christmas songs with Linda. The evening will be a great way to celebrate Advent and ready your heart for Christmas, so we hope you can make it!

- Colleen Wolford and Candice Mast



Thanks to everyone who helped to organize, provide for, wrap, and/or pack the 100 Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes!

Upcoming Activities

- Dec. 1 Caroling at London's Old Fashioned Christmas, 6:30 - 7 p.m.
- Dec. 6 Men's Breakfast at Phat Daddy's, 8 a.m.
- Dec. 7 Rosedale Bible College Choir at LCF
- Dec. 14 LCF Christmas Program, 6:30 p.m.
- Dec. 21 LCF's Family Christmas & Brunch, 10 a.m.
- Dec. 31 New Year's Eve Celebration

The LCF Connection

A monthly newsletter designed to enhance communication at London Christian Fellowship

What did you think? If any of the stories in this Connection sparked an idea or opinion you'd like to share, email us at connection@lcfweb.org. Editors: Doris Swartz, Trish Eaton, Candice Mast and Amie Smith. If you prefer that we do not use photos of you in the Connection, you may opt out by emailing us at connection@lcfweb.org.