

Commissioner

NOVEMBER 2009

LOOKING AHEAD

Nov 29 9:30 & 11:15 am
Folk Communion Service
10:30 TMUC Open House
10:30 UCW Cookie Walk
3:15 pm Worship at
Park Manor Care Home
7 pm Sunday Night Live

Dec 5 9—1 pm Advent Event
"In the Moment 2009"

Dec 6 9:30 & 11:15 am
Advent Band
10:30 TMUC Open House
7 pm CGIT Vesper Service

Dec 11 7:00 pm Choir Concert
"It's the Most Wonderful
Time of the Year"

Dec 13 9:30 & 11:15 am
Communion Service
Sunshine Singers, Cherubs,
Sunday School Pageant
10:30 CGIT "JOY"
Fundraiser

Dec 20 9:30 & 11:15 am
Special Music & Baptism
7 pm Blue Christmas Service

Dec 24 5 & 7 pm Christmas Eve
Family Service
10 pm Communion Service

Dec 27 10 am Worship Around the
Breakfast Table

Jan 3 9:30 & 11:15 am
Sunshine Singers

Feb 7 10 am Worship Service
11 am Annual
Congregational Meeting
and Potluck Lunch

To Renovate or Build New?

by Merlin Shoesmith

The TMUC Building Committee was formed last May to assemble enough background information in order for the congregation to decide if we should 1) undergo a major renovation of the church building as per Option 2 recommended by the Facilities Task Force or 2) build a new church and seniors' housing facility off site in a partnership with a developer/construction firm.

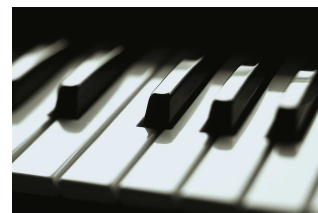
Jillmark Construction agreed to examine the gross cost of renovation of our existing building, confer with City of Winnipeg planners regarding the feasibility of such renovation and (if feasible) provide a preliminary sketch of what the renovation will look like based on our requirements for space. To date there does not appear to be any barrier to renovation based on rezoning and variances required. We will have to find 25 additional parking spaces (on or off site) in order to satisfy the requirements for increasing the sanctuary from 220 to 320. Major upgrades for fire protection and handicapped access (elevator) will be required.

The Building Committee has also met with NVR Construction regarding the building of a new building off site. We have explored a possible affiliation with NVR that would allow us to remain in our present facility until a new one was built. We are discussing location, building and space requirements in order to develop a conceptual plan. When this Committee was created by the Official Board, the property at 401 Pandora West was already for sale. The Committee prepared an Expression of Interest for the property in order to buy time so that the congregation could consider it as a possibility. However, in September, our submission was not short-listed by the City of Winnipeg. We will continue to search for appropriate properties for sale in the Transcona area.

The information will be assembled by December 31, 2009, and ready for a final decision by the congregation early in 2010.

CHOIR NOTES

by Dorothy Ross



It's the **MOST WONDERFUL TIME OF THE YEAR** and we have chosen the title of that song for our upcoming Christmas Concert on Friday, December 11, 2009 at 7 p.m. in the church sanctuary. Adults \$10.00 Children 12 and under \$5.00 Tickets on sale between services, in the church office or from a choir member. All four of our Choirs will be taking part in the concert and all proceeds will go to the Building Fund.

The choirs are all working hard to prepare their selections for the concert and also for the Advent and Christmas Services.

The Sunshine Singers (ages 7 to 12 years) are in particular need of some new recruits. We have 6 terrific girls, but they would like some help. Please have your child consider joining them and making "a joyful noise to the Lord".

We look forward to seeing you at the Advent and Christmas services and don't forget to get your tickets for the Christmas Concert.

Rehearsal times for the choirs are as follows:

- Cherub Choir (ages 3 – 6 years) Saturdays 11:00 to 11:30 a.m.
- Sunshine Singers (7 to 12 years) Mondays 5:45 to 6:45 p.m. This choir also requires a rehearsal accompanist.
- Carillon Singers (contemporary choir) Tuesdays 7:00 to 8:30 p.m.
- Chancel Choir – Thursdays 7:30 to 9:00 p.m.

WE WELCOME NEW MEMBERS IN ALL CHOIRS. For further information, please call Dorothy Ross 222-1551 or the church office 222-1331 or email tmuc@shaw.ca



***Commissioner** is the newsletter of Transcona Memorial United Church. It is published two times annually.*

Submissions, news, and other items of interest are welcome. Contributions may be edited for length. To submit articles, please contact the church.

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SECOND LINE

by Jeff Cook and Delsie Cousineau

On Sunday, October 18, a trio of Jazz musicians from the U of M's Jazz program took the TMUC congregation on a New Orleans style tour. The trio - Simon Christie (trumpet), Kevin Curtis (piano) and Karl Kohut (bass) - played such songs as "In the Court of King Oliver", "What a Friend We Have in Jesus", "Bourbon Street Parade", "Second Line" and "When the Saints Go Marching In".

The service focused on the theme of 'Second Line' a term used to describe the people who choose to join and follow a New Orleans street band. Jeff Cook used the image to reflect on the Christian invitation to discipleship.

Jazz Vespers are normally held on the third Sunday evening of the month. The next Jazz Vespers will be held on January 17, 2010 at 7:30 pm.

BEHIND THE SCENES

by Delsie Cousineau

Ariel Jentsch shares her calligraphy skills by entering the names of loved ones in the Book of Remembrance in the Sanctuary. Those who are in the book have had a donation made to Transcona Memorial in their memory.

Laurie Desautels faithfully folds the bulletins and announcements each week. Elaine Drewry stepped in to take his place while he was recovering from hip surgery last spring.

Bev Ryman has been looking after the library for many years. Kari Lee has recently joined her. Together they maintain our wonderful library.

The maintenance of our building is done by the Building & Property Committee, however, Laurie Desautels regularly lends a paintbrush to various walls when needed. Jack Senior also spent many hours sprucing up the building with his paint brush.

The church recycling program is burgeoning. Four recycling boxes have multiplied to eleven. The Environment Committee doesn't know where the extra boxes came from but they do know that they are filled a couple times a week. Since the church does not have recycling pick up, Lionel Merrick, has been emptying the recycling boxes that are situated in various places on all three floors of the church and ensuring the contents are recycled. Amber Rusnak, Bob Buchanan, and Alma Jennings have now joined the recycling brigade.



It is impossible to miss the decorations which appear in the Christian Education entrance area for Thanksgiving, Hallowe'en, Christmas, Valentines Day, and Easter. The decorations are supplied and put up by Mary Thiessen.

Twice a month Frank Favoni picks up bags of donated clothing from Mom and Children's Paradise and hauls them to the Food Bank at TMUC. Volunteers sort and display the clothes. On Food Bank Day, they are sold at a minimal price so purchasers get a bargain and the Food Bank earns a little money. Bob Buchanan makes sure that all unsold articles are passed on to some place that can use them.



TMUC Open House

On Sunday, November 29 and December 6, we are inviting the community to come and worship with us, have a tour of our building, meet with people from the different committees and groups in our church, and have some coffee/tea and cake. The building tour begins at 10:30 a.m. and all guests and congregation members are invited to attend.

Message from Chair of the Official Board *by Adrian Measner*

All successful organizations continue to evolve and plan for the future. They face adversity, overcome challenges but continue to push forward. Our Church is no different and when the congregation of TMUC approved our Strategic Plan they not only defined the future direction but developed the road map to take us there. However, there must be evidence that the map is being followed and that we are making progress.

I could spend a lot of time gathering and providing that evidence but I can also do so by focusing on a few significant activities and that is my goal in this report.

- ⇒ The Building Committee has picked up where the Facilities Task Force left off and worked through the summer to gather additional information so the congregation of TMUC can make an informed decision on the appropriate direction to follow. Many meetings both internal and external continue to provide that information with a final report expected early in the new year. It is at that time that the congregation will be asked to provide their preferred direction. In addition, terms of reference are being put together for a capital fund raising effort to enable that preferred direction to become a reality. Dealing with our current building issues was a priority set by the congregation.
- ⇒ In an effort to increase our membership base a brochure on TMUC has been put together that will be sent out to all Transcona residents informing them about our Church and inviting them to open houses at our church on November 29th and December 6th. Attracting new members helps to shape our future.
- ⇒ Our Church has become the home of the Feed My Lambs Street Mission, a ministry founded by Hilde Purdy that provides food to the less fortunate in Winnipeg. Our congregation wants to make a difference and is reaching out to the City of Winnipeg. Our purpose can be defined in many ways.
- ⇒ Our focus on youth took a huge step forward by hiring Stephanie Wright as our youth leader. In addition our Youth Committee has been hard at work and will be putting on five services next year that are designed to appeal to the younger population of Transcona although I expect its appeal will be much broader than that. The services will feature more interaction among the participants and a more modern style of music. Designing the future to include more younger members was also a priority set by the congregation. These activities make it real.
- ⇒ The Long Range Planning Committee is considering different governance models to prepare us for the evolution that is taking place. A plenary session will take place on November 28th with final recommendations expected in December of this year. The congregation will again be consulted and asked to approve any changes. Evolution is necessary for long term success.

Designing, constructing, evolving, reaching out, we are working together to define our future.

It's exciting to be moving ahead.

TRANSCONA MEMORIAL UNITED CHURCH

OUR MISSION:

As a Church we seek justice, foster and nurture growth by teaching, worshiping, through music, sharing and being welcoming to all. We value and share our gifts, protect the earth and walk humbly with our God.

OUR VISION:

TMUC is an evolving, welcoming, sharing and inclusive community church serving Christ.

Community Clean-up Day

by Laura Dowbenko



The Environment Committee organized a Community Clean-up Day on April 26, 2009. There were 47 participants who went into Transcona to pick-up litter and other items which included diapers and car parts. A total of 43 bags of garbage were collected which overflowed the church's dumpster! Thank you to all of the people who participated, as well as Tom Ethans from Take Pride Winnipeg, Murray Rougeau from the Transcona Anti-Graffiti Campaign, and City Councillor Russ Wyatt. The Community Clean-up was a success and the Environment committee looks forward to making this an annual event!

Christmas Cheer Hampers *by Brenda Wood*

Many of us could not imagine what it would be like to not have enough food for a Christmas dinner. We shudder to think of our children receiving no gifts under the tree. This is the reality for some families. That is why we are providing Christmas hampers for 15 families. Brenda LeBeau and Brenda Wood are heading up this campaign along with help from the Outreach Committee.

There are many ways that our congregation can help in this project. Firstly, by bringing in the food items requested. Each Sunday we will focus on a different food group. These will be posted in the announcements every Sunday. Please check the expiry date on your donations.

Once the Cheer Board gives us the dynamics of all the families, a sign up list will be circulated through the congregation for those who wish to purchase gifts and/or turkeys. Along with this commitment, we would ask that everyone please adhere to the price guidelines we have set up. This prevents any inequalities in our gift-giving, especially where siblings are concerned.

Lastly, monetary donations are needed as well. This money is used to buy perishables and any food items that were not received during the campaign. A tax receipt will be issued for this.

This is a project that everyone can help with. It is a great way to share Christmas with others in our community.

APPLY NOW

Apply now to the newest committee of TMUC.

The Environment committee needs conscientious members to serve on the committee. You must be concerned about our footprint on this earth.

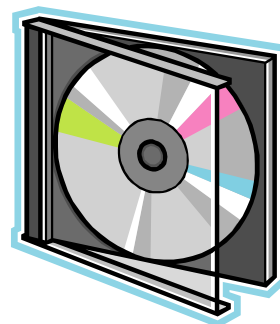
No wages offered, just the personal satisfaction of helping our church do its part.

If you are interested, please leave a message with the church office, 222-1331 or speak to any committee member.



Did you know we record our church services? *by Steve McKendry-Smith*

We have added a new component to our sound system that allows us to make digital recordings of our services.



For many years, we've been recording our Sunday morning worship services. These recordings were available to anyone who wanted to borrow them and they provided a way for shut-ins and others that couldn't attend, to hear the service on cassette tape. You remember cassette tapes, don't you? They worked great, until they stretched, or broke, or somehow exploded in your tape player and wrapped tape so tightly around the mechanism it squeaked for the rest of its life. Last year our donated tape deck finally gave up and the Worship and Sacraments Committee had to decide whether to replace it with a new tape deck, or find some other solution.

If you look hard enough, I'm sure you'd be able to buy a cassette tape recorder. However, digital recorders are easy to find, have no moving parts, make high quality recordings, and take up very little space. After reviewing the pros and cons of cassettes vs digital, the Committee decided to purchase a digital recorder. We reviewed current technology and found a reasonably priced recorder that would suit our needs. Better yet, we found a gently used one on eBay!

We installed the recorder and I did a test run in August. I was a bit (OK, more than a bit) disappointed with the result. This recorder captured absolutely everything, including some of the shortcomings of our sound system. An annoying buzz that was hidden in the general noise of a cassette tape sounded like a swarm of angry bees on the new recorder. Several hours of research and trouble shooting later we found a work-around. We can now make recordings that sound quite good.

CDs of the services will be available in the church office soon. If you don't have a CD player, we've got one you can borrow. And if you want to load up your iPod, we'll figure out a way to do that too. At some point in the not-too-distant future, Jeff and Carol's sermons will be available on the Internet so people who have ties to our church community but live far away can keep in touch too.

That's right, TMUC will be podcasting. Welcome to the digital age.

ALTERNATIVE WORSHIP SERVICES

The Youth Committee will be hosting alternative, interactive worship services in Yale Hall.

Sunday, January 10, 11:15 am "Religion in Pop Culture"

Friday, February 5, 7:00 pm "The Gospel according to the Simpsons"

Sunday, February 21, 11:15 am "Spirituality—Lent 1—a service of Ashes"

Sunday, March 14, 11:15 am "Belonging"

Sunday, April 11, 11:15 am "Caring for Creation—the Environment"

The Sunday services will run concurrently with the traditional 11:15 service taking place in the sanctuary. Come and be a part of something new happening at TMUC! All ages welcome.

In the Moment, 2009 *by Carol Fletcher*

Taking time for ourselves, to replenish ourselves so that we can help others, can be a real challenge.

Yet, taking time to reflect and study scripture, engaging with music or art, can fill us up and nurture us in ways that are rich and deep.

We invite you to take time for the blessings of God's Spirit this Advent.

We invite you to share a moment with us.

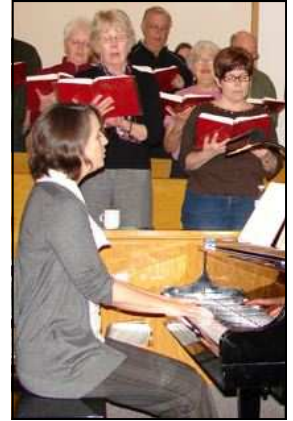
TMUC has invited three very gifted leaders to be with us December 5, 2009.

Jim Christie, the Dean of the Faculty of Theology of the U of W will speak on "In the beginning, to Bethlehem and beyond", Laura Loewen, Professor of Collaborative Piano and University of Manitoba Vocal Coach will lead the music workshop, and Deb Nickel, Art Historian and teacher at St. Mary's Academy will lead the art workshop.

We start at 9:00 AM, we break for Brunch at 10:30, and we conclude at 1:00 PM. Take four hours, for yourself, for God, for each other. The cost of the event is \$10.00 per person. Everyone is welcome. Please register at the Church office by Dec. 1st.

Taking time, sharing a moment on the journey of faith.

It might make the busy-ness of December more bearable, or perhaps, even blessed.



Laura Loewen leading the music workshop in 2008

UCW REFORMED

The TMUC United Church Women regrouped this year to form two groups. The Monday group meets on the second Monday of each month at 1:00 pm in Knox Lounge. The Saturday group meets in Suthwyn Hall at 11:00 am on the third Saturday of the month. All interested women are welcome.

UCW SATURDAY GROUP *by Cheryl Hadaller*

As usual, the UCW members have been busy this fall making many hospital, nursing home and compassionate visits. Once again our Annual Ladies Night Out held on November 13th, was a sell out. The UCW ThankOffering Service held on November 15th, featured guest speaker, Tessa Blaikie, speaking on *The Opportunities for Peace are in the Opportunities of Children*. We will be enjoying a night out for a Christmas gathering on November 28th at Maxime's Restaurant. Members will share in fun fellowship and of their preparations for the upcoming season. The next event on our calendar will be our Cookie Walk on Sunday, November 29th. This event is one that we enjoy hosting. All UCW members bake 6 dozen cookies and we have boxes which hold 2 dozen cookies. We ask all who want to come between services (10:30—11:15), to purchase a box for \$6.00 and fill it up with 2 dozen cookies. You get to take a walk and choose the kinds of cookies you want to take home with you.

Having looked ahead to our 2010 calendar, we will have many events for all to participate in and prepare for. We look forward to what is coming ahead for us and continue to serve our Lord. We wish you all a wonderful Holiday Season.

A ROLLIICKING EVENT *by Delsie Cousineau*

An overflow crowd at Park Manor Personal Care Home on October 2, enjoyed an afternoon of music and refreshments hosted by the Monday UCW Group of Transcona Memorial United Church. Toes were tapping and smiles abounded as patients and their guests listened to the lively Blue Grass music of the Harbour View Mountain Boys.

The next event at Park Manor Personal Care Home, hosted by the UCW will be a Christmas Party on December 4, 2009.

Book Group News

The meetings of the Books Groups at Transcona Memorial are ongoing and the reading schedules are set for the 2009-2010 season. If you would like to read one of the books, or the whole season's worth, you would be very welcome to join in on the meetings.

The Monthly Book Group meets at the church, on a Monday evening from 7—8:30 p.m., with the exception of the December and June meetings. The schedule is set until December.

November 23: *The Lost Symbol* by Dan Brown

December 21: *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society* by Mary Ann Shaffer and Annie Barrows



The Book Groups held another successful book sale on Sept 26th and expect to make it an annual event. Thanks to everyone who donated/purchased books.

Small Things Make a Difference

Shopping for Fair Trade items for the things you ordinarily buy, and shopping for locally produced items are two ways that we can make a difference when we shop. Once again, TMUC is making both these things available right in our own neighbourhood. At Church on Sundays, and in the office during the week, from now until Christmas, will be a selection of Fair Trade coffee and tea for sale. And, from now until November 29 there are order forms for Morden's chocolates which will be at the church and ready for pick up on December 13. The order form can be downloaded from our website, or picked up at church.

The Weekly Book Group meets on Thursdays from 7:00 to 8:30 p.m. This group usually meets in the homes of the members, and to keep everyone in the loop of where we are meeting, a blog can be accessed from the TMUC Web Links on our home page.

The list for the Weekly Book Group has been set until April 15 and includes:

My Life in France by Julia Child

The Boy in the Striped Pajamas by John Boyne

The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society by Mary Ann Shaffer and Annie Barrows.

Lives of Girls and Women by Alice Munroe

Julie and Julia by Julie Powell

The Book of Negroes by Lawrence Hill

The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye by A. S. Byatt

The Sound and the Fury by William Faulkner

A youth novel which has not been selected yet

A movie night viewing the movie of one of the books we have read

Teaching the Stone to Talk by Annie Dillard

If you would like to be a part of a reading group, you would be welcome!

Does the Future Have a Church?

by Jeff Cook

The church needs to pay attention to what God is doing in the world, Dr. Dwight Friesen said during the three lectures he presented at TMUC on October 2-3.

Friesen, who teaches at Mars Hill Graduate School in Seattle, was the featured speaker at an event organized by the congregation's Outreach Committee.

"What is God's dream for creation?" Friesen asked. "If we have a sense of this then we have a sense of what the church is all about."

He said Christians need "to realign ourselves with God's dream."

Friesen said the church's understanding of mission has changed during its history, from that of 'converting' people to sharing our experience of God with others.

He said that when you see the world through a "missional lense" you see times of conflict as opportunities for expressing the gospel of reconciliation."

Friesen said that the church is in a process of transformation. He said churches need to understand the context, the community in which they live and express God's love and dream in those contexts.

"For Christ's sake, get over yourselves," is God's message to the church today, he said. Friesen said the church has to stop worrying primarily about surviving or maintaining things as they always have been, and focus on expressing the ministry of Christ in our communities.

About 45 people attended the weekend event. On Friday evening there was a jazz café featuring Dr. Richard Gilles and other musicians from the University of Manitoba's School of Music. On Saturday, Candra Hanstead led a Yoga session. Some participants viewed a CBC documentary entitled 'Battle of the Bag' regarding the environmental threat posed by plastic bags.

Governance Workshop *by Gerry Miller*

As you may know, at the last annual meeting the congregation approved a study of the governance structure for the TMUC board and committees. This study is underway and is being done by the Long Range Planning committee. Much preliminary work has been done and an interim report prepared discussing our current situation and issues around our current structure. If you would like a copy of this report please contact Gerry Miller (gerrymiller1945@gmail.com). A hard copy is available in the church office.

A half day workshop on this issue has been scheduled for Saturday, November 28 at the church from 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM. This workshop will deal with governance models, issues and possible recommendations. The workshop will be facilitated by Nancy Wilson, Winnipeg Presbytery Minister for Evangelism, Mission and Church Development, who has had extensive experience in helping churches deal with these issues. Nancy is an expert in the field and we look forward to working with her.

The workshop is open to all. If you wish to attend we ask you to confirm your attendance with the church office (tmuc@shaw.ca or 222-1331) so we can plan for space and food. Thanks...we look forward to seeing you.

CGIT IS BACK

by Tessa Blaikie, Coordinator

Having grown up in Transcona Memorial United Church, with three generations of CGIT alumni down the family line and two sisters preceding me into the community of CGITers, I was sad to see the program fizzle out. Guess what, we're back!!!!

This year CGIT so far has participated in the 30 hour famine, hosted a fair trade bazaar, done science experiments about water contamination and laughed a lot as well as plan some future activities. I would like to take this opportunity to introduce you to our next one:

On Dec 13th we will be hosting a **Joy fundraiser** in the church basement. This will include a fitness class at 2 pm (Sweating for Cents, donations to go toward buying Christmas Hamper Gifts—class is acceptable for all fitness levels and can be completed while seated). We will be serving fair trade products for you to enjoy. We will be selling cookie mixes we make (that you just add the wet ingredients to, that are made with only fair trade, organic ingredients).



We will have Zatoun (Olive Oil) and Zatar (Thyme) from Ten Thousand Villages for sale. And, most importantly we will have a kiosk about living gifts. The official KICKOFF for LIVING GIFTS through TEN THOUSAND VILLAGES is Nov 28th. For Christmas, CGIT is going to try to send 50 kids to school through the Living Gift Program. The cost is \$26 per child, tax receipts available if a whole \$26 is donated.

In the New Year we will be making pyjama pants at a giant sleepover that all sewers and CGIT alumni are welcome to attend. Each participant will make one pair for themselves and two for a local women and children's shelter. Material accepted at the Church office or by connecting with Tessa (tmuccgit@gmail.com). Date TBA

CGIT I believe is in a time of growth at TMUC, the group is full of energetic, intelligent and social justice oriented girls. We are excited and enthused by ideas of the change we can make in the community both local and global!

We hope to see you at our next event!

SABBATICAL JOURNEY

by Carol Fletcher

I am home. I have been away, and I am home. Following Easter, I began a time of Sabbatical, my first in the 21 years here. A sabbatical is a time to nourish the 'pastoral imagination' and to set time apart, deliberately to journey with God. In planning for this time, I reflected on words preached by the Reverend Doctor Anna Carter Florence: "You have to figure out what fills you up spiritually, and then make sure you have some to carry with you every single minute of the day, because that is how often you'll need it."

A sabbatical is a time to be away, to be filled up, and then, to come home. The purpose of my sabbatical was to explore the expressions of God's spirit in places of Holy Pilgrimage. I wanted to be in places where the Spirit has moved the painter's brush or the sculptor's tools. I wanted to stand in places where the generations of faithful have stood – from the earliest ruins to great churches of today. And so, partly sponsored by our congregation (and with careful management of our own Air Miles, other points, and a few extra dollars), I embarked on a pilgrimage. I visited many cathedrals and churches, art galleries, universities, ancient and historic sites. I met people who express their faith in preaching, and found time to be alone in quiet reflection. The time was both restful and invigorating.



Sagrada Familia, Barcelona

At worship on Sundays, I have begun to tell some of the stories of my time away, and to show some of the pictures. In Barcelona, I was stirred by the work of Antoni Gaudi and church of the 'Sagrada Familia' (Sacred Family); in the remote Spanish monastery Montserrat, there was the legend of the black Madonna, in France it was walking the labyrinths at the Cathedrals of Chartres and Amiens, and spending hours in art galleries; in Rome it was visiting ancient places, and touring the Vatican gardens and art galleries; in Sicily it was staring at the erupting Mount Etna from the Greco-Roman theatre in Taormina; in Crete it was encountering the holy in the taxi driver who took us to local churches, the cathedral and on a tour of the countryside so that we might come to know his beautiful land; in Athens and in Ephesus (Turkey) it was visiting the places where the early church gathered, told their stories, preached, and spread the Gospel; in Atlanta it was listen-

ing to God's Spirit speak through Desmond Tutu, Barbara Brown Taylor, Anna Carter Florence, Anthony Bailey and others; it was visiting the St. John's Bible in Collegeville, Minnesota; and worshipping with other congregations throughout this time.

These experiences exceeded my goals. I cannot tell you how many times I embarrassed my family by weeping in holy places or before religious art. And now, home again, it is a blessing to be among the saints and in the holy place of Transcona Memorial.



Library at Ephesus

A BOLD, AUDACIOUS, SURPRISING AND LAUGHABLE CLAIM

by Jeff Cook and Carol Fletcher

"Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel" (which means, "God is with us"). Matthew 1:23

It is a bold, audacious, surprising and laughable claim.

A peasant woman and man in a small village birth a child, and this child is named Emmanuel.

The name means 'God with us.'

God – the power, presence, holy, OTHER ... is with us?

God – the mastermind, the supreme artist responsible for all of creation...is with us?

God...is with us?

It's an act of faith to claim that this God who has universe upon universe in which to be present, is somehow uniquely present with human beings.

It is an even larger act of faith to claim that this God's presence is experienced in the life of this child of peasants.

People living at the time of Jesus knew that God was present with specific people – those specific people being whomever happened to be the Emperor, the Caesar, at the time.

The emperor was God's son, God's chosen.

But this baby born to an obscure economically-strapped couple – this baby is Emmanuel?

If we dare believe this claim, then God is with us in weakness, not in power. God is with us as a companion in life's struggles, not as the distributor of perks to the best and brightest. God is with us in seeking peace, justice, food, health, clothing, well-being for all.

During Advent we again prepare for the birth of Jesus, the one who claims that God is with us!

It's a bold, audacious, surprising and laughable claim – and it is our hope and our blessing.

