

Trinity Times

"Growing in Christ, Sharing in Love"

A publication of Trinity United Church

A joint congregation of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the United Church of Christ

118 King George Road • Warren, NJ 07059 • Phone (732) 469-5044 • Fax (732) 469-5106

www.trinityunitedchurch.org

Elsie Armstrong Rhodes, Pastor

Cyndy Reames, Editor

Volume 7 Issue 1

January 2004

From the Pastor's Pen:

By The Reverend Elsie Armstrong Rhodes

A new year; a new resolve...

Several years ago, about this time of year, I read the book *Tuesdays with Morrie*.

Tuesdays with Morrie is about a young man -- the author, Mitch Albom -- who reconnects with his favorite college professor in the last months of the teacher's life.

It is his "stumbling upon" an interview of Morrie Schwartz by Ted Koppel on "Nightline," that compels Mitch to get in touch with his former mentor after 16 years. In the interview, Morrie talks about living with Lou Gehrig's Disease--

"When all this started, I asked myself, 'Am I going to withdraw from the world, like most people do, or am I going to live?' I decided I'm going to live -- or at least try to live -- the way I want, with dignity, with courage, with humor, with composure."

And so Mitch Albom enrolls in one last "course" with his old professor. "The class met on Tuesdays. No books were required, yet many topics were covered, including love, work, community, family, aging, forgiveness, and finally, death."

Reading about Morrie's brave and passionate embrace of life, brought me to my knees in gratitude to God -- for each new morning, for the opportunity to feel love, anger, joy, grief, commitment and resolve.

I thank God for all of you -- for Trinity United Church -- the church that has become home for me and my family. I thank God for the opportunity which the new year brings all of us *to resolve anew* to live each day in praise of God, to tell people how much they mean to us, to accept each moment of our life as an occasion to learn compassion, to grow in wisdom, to deepen in faith.

May the words of this beautiful hymn be our prayer to God for the year ahead --

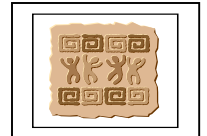
"God of our life, through all the circling years,
we trust in Thee;
In all the past, through all our hopes and fears,
Thy hand we see.
With each new day, when morning lifts the veil,
We own Thy mercies, Lord, which never fail."

Amen and amen.

With deep gratitude and great anticipation --

Pastor Elsie

Pastor Elsie Armstrong Rhodes can be reached at home, 732-748-3370, on her cell at 908-304-3605 or via email at thereverend@trinityunitedchurch.org.



A Word about Sunday, January 4 from Pastor Elsie:

Epiphany closes the Christmas season with the story of "wise men from the East" seeking the Christ child in Bethlehem.

Epiphany -- from the Greek, *Epiphania*, meaning "manifestation, revelation" -- is the day when Christians celebrate the manifestation that Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior.

As the wise men followed the light of a star in search of the peace and power of God -- may we, too, follow even the pinpoint of starlight to seek the blessing of God and to explore the manifestation of Christ -- God with us -- in our lives.

So let us come together Sunday, January 4 to celebrate Epiphany and this good news: the Messiah -- the Light of the Word -- is come! *Let earth receive her King!*

Notes from the Covenant Board

Gary Pratt, Clerk

The following are highlights from the December meeting, moderated by Pastor Elsie Armstrong Rhodes.

- An elder retreat has been scheduled for February 20-21, 2004 for the purpose of Elder training, group building, and setting priorities for the coming year.
- A motion was made and passed to approve that the Capital Funds letter be sent to the congregation and for the Administrative Team to seek volunteers for a Capital Funds committee.
- A motion was made and passed to approve, with regret, the resignation of TyraLynn Ceccato as elder.
- A motion was made and passed to approve the proposed 2004 budget.
- A motion was made and passed, as amended, to approve that, effective 1/2/04, the TUC budget and chart of accounts include separate accounts to accommodate the flow-through of employee-related taxes that TUC will be remitting to state and/or federal governments on behalf of the employees; and associated expense accounts for employee-related tax expenses that TUC will be paying. This motion was amended to require the establishment of an escrow account for the purposes of payroll.
- COMMUNION was served to 33 people on 12/7/03.

MEMBERS OF THE COVENANT BOARD – 2003

Outreach:

Bob Hurd	732-560-9209
Don MacGregor	732-469-2012
Harry Morgan	732-469-5994

Ministries:

TyraLynn Ceccato	732-560-0889
Sue Coslick	908-719-7515
Bonnie Dagnall	732-968-4018
Lorraine Kimsey	908-580-9761

Administrative:

George Curtis	908-630-0646
Gary Pratt (Clerk)	908-647-6094

Members of the Pastoral Relations Committee

Greg Hoover	Yun Negri
Phil Krieter	Gary Pratt
Linda Mobus	Cyndy Reames

PORTRAIT OF PASTORAL MINISTRY: December (as presented at the Covenant Board Meeting) Advent-Christmas planning; worship preparation; pastoral visitation; preliminary planning for January-February Sunday am worship and for our mid-week program during Lent; participation in the Interfaith Thanksgiving Service and in the Presbyterian Women's Christmas dinner and worship at Watchung Ave. Presbyterian church; ecclesiastical meetings (Presbytery, UCC Pre-Ordination Commission meeting); participation "behind-the-scenes" of the "Simple Christmas Pageant" and in the holiday festivities of TUC; evangelism and outreach.

Field Education Intern for TUC

Along with her other responsibilities, Pastor Elsie found time to investigate the possibility of an intern from Princeton Seminary working at TUC. During the December Covenant Board meeting she shared a job description for the seminary intern and what that person would be able to learn while serving among us. For the program year (September through May), the church will pay the field education student \$2800, which includes a stipend of \$2400 and \$400 for travel expenses. TUC would also be responsible for providing lunch each Sunday afternoon.

Financial Report:

Ralph Pratt, Financial Secretary; Carol Krueger, Treasurer

The Total Operating Income received through tithes, pledges, and offerings in November 2003 was \$7,012.23. For December 2003 the total was \$14,969.96.

Stewardship Report

Greg Hoover, Stewardship Chairperson

The 2003 Stewardship Campaign results are in. In all, 38 pledges were received totaling \$112,052. The Administrative Team, who is responsible for capturing all church costs, have turned over the results and submitted their recommendation for the 2004 budget to the Covenant Board, who will in turn present it to the congregation at the Annual Meeting scheduled for January 25, 2004.

Upcoming TUC Events & Meetings:

- Jan. 6 (Tuesday 7pm) – Website meeting
- Jan. 7 (Wednesday 7pm) – Choir rehearsals resume
- Jan. 8 (Thursday 7:30pm) – Administrative Team Meeting
- Jan. 10 (Saturday 10:30am at the manse) – Advent/Christmas/Epiphany Reflections
- Jan. 20 (Tuesday 7:30pm) – Covenant Board Meeting
- Jan. 25 (Sunday after worship) – Annual Congregational Meeting
- Jan. 26 (Monday, 7:30pm) – All-Teams Meeting (see special article on page four regarding All-Teams)

What are you giving up for Lent?

Catholics and Protestants alike ask each other this question every year. For most people it is something external, like chocolate, red meat, smoking, or coffee. But, Lent is more than just what you give up – it's more important why you are giving it up and what you are replacing it with. At TUC, we, as a church, are giving up meetings. That's right; from February 25 through April 11 there will be no scheduled church-related meetings. What we are offering instead is an opportunity for people to explore their own spiritual walk through personal devotions and small group interaction. The Lenten Planning Team will be sharing more on this in the weeks to come. Check the February issue of Trinity Times for details on how you can participate.

A Christian Education Minute

The **Sunday Morning Adult Bible Study** resumes the Genesis study on Sunday, January 4.

Words from Worship

Sue Coslick, Elder, Worship Commission

The month of January promises to be another filled with meaningful worship services. On January 4, we will celebrate the Magi by choosing a guiding star for the year to come. January 11, Baptism of the Lord Sunday, we will remember our own baptism in a unique service combining water and blessings, just as Jesus received prior to His ministry on earth. On January 18 we will again be treated to the glorious voice of Gordon Kaslusky, son of Karen, as he ministers in song. January 25 will focus on community and mission, preparing us for the annual meeting following the service.

You may never know exactly what will happen during Sunday morning worship, but you can always count on it's focusing us toward God in a unique way.

Looking ahead to LENT...

A Brief History of Shrove Tuesday

Submitted by Tom Teel

In 2004, Lent begins on Wednesday February 25. The four days prior to Lent are known as Shrovetide: Egg Saturday, Quinquagesima Sunday, Collop Monday, and Shrove Tuesday. Shrovetide was celebrated with games, sports and dancing. And of course feasting. Traditionally, this day is one of the moveable feasts in the church calendar and is directly related to the date on which Easter falls. The name Shrove comes from the old word "shrive" which means to confess. On Shrove Tuesday, in the Middle Ages, people used to confess their sins so that they were forgiven before the season of Lent began.

Shrove Tuesday is also called Pancake Day, or Mardi Gras in France, which means Grease Tuesday. Pancakes are eaten on this day because they contain fat, butter and eggs, which were forbidden during Lent. In Old England, they even held Pancake Races, the object being to be the first to the finish line carrying a frying pan with a cooked pancake in it whilst flipping the pancake a pre-determined number of times. The skill was not so much in the running as in the flipping and catching of the pancake, which had to be intact at races end.

On Tuesday February 24, TUC will be celebrating Shrove Tuesday, with a Pancake Supper. While we may not have the pancake races, you can be assured there will be plenty of food, fun, and fellowship.

Watch for details on this and other Lenten Season activities and events now in the planning stages.

A lot of kneeling
will keep you
in good standing.

OUTWARD BOUND ~ mission at TUC

Kay Hurd, Missions Chairperson

In 2003 the Mission committee committed the Mission monies to 1/3 to PCUSA, 1/3 to UCC and 1/3 to local missions following the guidelines we set up early in the year, which were:

- an opportunity for active physical service for members of TUC;
- an opportunity for giving of our monies; and
- an opportunity for prayer for each of the missions we serve.

It was decided that our local mission giving should be distributed as follows:

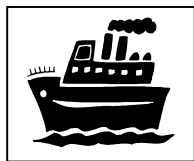
- *The Homeless:* Raritan Valley Habitat for Humanity \$1000.00
- *Prison Ministry:* The Somerset Jail Chaplaincy- \$1000
- *A Healing Ministry:* The Resource Center For Women and Their Families- \$855
- *Local Ministries:* \$100 each to the Warren Rescue Squad and to the Town of Warren to be distributed to the fire departments.
- Since we dedicate a Hunger Offering once a month to the Somerset County Food Bank Network, no additional donations will be made. So far this year we have given over \$3000.
- Special offerings were taken for:
 - The Heifer Project
 - Elizabethport Center, a mission started by the Presbytery of Elizabeth. (The Executive Director spoke to our congregation in October 2003.)
 - The Jail Chaplaincy serves to spread the message to those incarcerated in the Somerset County Jail. Along with mission funding to this ministry, we also collected toys for the inmates to give to their children.
 - The Samaritan's Purse: Operation Christmas Child; filled shoe boxes sent to those in need

On **Saturday, January 24, 2004** at the Liberty Presbyterian Church our church will participate in the Presbytery of Elizabeth's Mission Fair with all of our mission projects displayed along with our Ark Plaque. We will be handing out bookmark ribbons with our Bible verse from Matthew 25, "Lest you do it to the least of these..." Our church logo will be stamped on the ribbon. We hope you will be able to join us at the Mission Fair. It will also be an opportunity for you to see some of the projects that we serve as well as what the other churches are doing in mission in the Presbytery. Come and see!

Visit-A-Church

When in Phoenix, Arizona, check out Historic First Church (PC/USA) or Shadow Rock Congregational (UCC). In the meantime, you can visit these dedicated churches on their websites: www.historicfirst.org/ and www.shadowrockucc.org.

SECOND ANNUAL TUC ARK HAS SET SAIL



Once again TUC family and friends have reached deep into their hearts and pockets and raised \$5000 toward an Ark for the Heifer Project. Each week during the Advent/Christmas season Merl Coslick shared how far our dollars could be stretched when purchasing cows, pigs, chickens, and rabbits, even bees to provide income and resources for families throughout the world. We laughed and moaned (sometimes simultaneously) at his "antics," but no one could dispute his genuine love for this project and compassion for the people it helps. It was his enthusiasm that spurred us on to give when it seemed we had nothing left to give; knowing that together we could make a difference...and, with God's help, we *could* build an ark.

**When there is nothing left but God
that is when you find out that
God is all you need.**

All-Teams

At TUC, the functioning of our church is divided into three main areas – Ministry, Administration, and Outreach. The Teams, comprised of ruling elders and volunteer members, who oversee each area, have one thing in common: all those participating in the Team care deeply – have a definite passion for – the area they are working in. That, and a willingness to work toward the vision God has given TUC, are the only prerequisites for being part of a team.

Within each Team, the participants tend to gravitate toward even more specific groupings. For example, the Administration Team is broken down further into areas such as finances, maintenance, and personnel. The sub-divisions for the Ministries Team include weekly and seasonal worship and events, People Care Network, hospitality/fellowship, and performing arts events. The Outreach Teams includes subgroups involved in distributing the mission monies of TUC, exploring hands-on mission activities for our members, advertising and evangelism.

On the last Monday of each month, the Teams hold a joint meeting. Beginning January 26, the format of the meeting will change slightly, as we take the next step in developing interaction between the Teams. In addition to the joint devotional time and after one hour of individual Team discussion, we will again come together to discuss how we can best help each other accomplish the activities and events coming up.

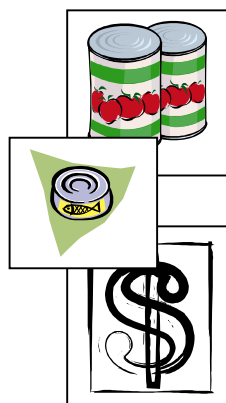
To be part of a Team, ask any elder listed on page 2. They are divided into the Teams they work with and will gladly help you become involved. OR just come to the meeting on January 26, 7:30pm, at the church. We guarantee a niche will be found where your gifts and interests can be put to use!

Nurse's Prescription

Kay Hurd R.N., Parish Nurse

Greetings in the name of our newborn King! Have you developed your New Year's resolutions yet? Whether we write them out, or just think about them, most of us cannot help but consider the fresh beginning a New Year brings. This is also a new time in our church. Change is always difficult and change also feels like chaos. But change is the only constant we have in our lives. Thank you, Jesus! We are not "stuck" forever in the same old pattern. Change brings tension until we understand the new "stuff". The stress is not always bad and how we handle stress is our choice. We are all on a faith journey; in fact we are never off the journey even when we think we are. God is always working, showing us the purpose for our lives. Often our lives get so hectic that we can't hear God's calling, but that doesn't mean he isn't calling. This is also the time of winter; the earth is sleeping, gathering strength for the new life in the spring. What a great time to turn inward and reflect on our own personal journeys. Lent will be coming and we will have an opportunity to go even further into ourselves and meet our God. Coping with stress is a choice you make. Gather your strength. Turn inward. Breathe deeply. Be still and listen to the still small voice of God. ***But don't forget that you are turning inward, gathering your strength, so that you can turn outward, and serve.***

FOOD BANK NEWS



During the singing of the final hymn on Sunday, January 18, we will bring forward our **Hunger Offering** for the Food Bank Network of Somerset County. Please bring non-perishable items, such as stews, soups, tuna, pastas and sauces, rice, cereal, vegetables and fruit, peanut butter, canned meat, and powdered milk that are the 'staples' at the Food Bank. You may also write a check to "Trinity United Church," earmarked "Hunger Offering."

Trinity United Church Annual Congregational Meeting

January 25, 2004

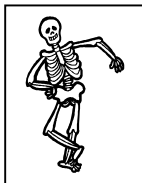
Following the morning worship service, the annual meeting will be held in the sanctuary, the first to be moderated by Pastor Elsie. Be in prayerful consideration as we approach this yearly recounting of what is and what will be.

Reports to be included in the Annual Report presented at the Congregational Meeting are due to the secretary by January 9. Emailed versions would be appreciated.

What we do in life echoes in eternity

“Project Healthy Bones”

If you thought exercise was boring, hard, individual work, you have never attended a Healthy Bones class at TUC! Greeting one another enthusiastically, the participants come in, ready to work. Some could almost be said to be racing to get to their place around the big circle – hard to imagine these are men and women suffering from various bone related disabilities. Yet, when they start the actual “work” that brings them together each week, they are all business, counting out the movements that help them to stay limber and mobile. Laughter is said to be the best medicine, and there is plenty of that mixed with the exercises. Thanks go to Laura and Don MacGregor for bringing this important ministry to TUC and the community and for faithfully serving as it’s leaders.



The group meets at 10am each Wednesday and Friday at TUC. If you are interested in joining this active, joyful exercise group, contact the MacGregors at 732-469-2012.

Parents’ Support Group

And Jesus said, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest,” (Matt. 11:28)
A support group meets on Sunday evenings from 7-8:30 PM in the sanctuary at TUC for those who are struggling with the emotional and spiritual dimensions of being a parent of an adult child who is suffering from mental, addictive, or emotional pain. You are welcome to join others in our community of faith to share burdens and challenges and to gain new insights and hope. The facilitator is the Reverend Dan Lundquist, UCC pastor and licensed therapist.



A CapPals

The next rehearsal for this a cappella vocal group will be Saturday, January 10, at 10am. It has been said that comedy is as much a part of this mixed group as their love of singing. For more information on becoming a member or if you have an opportunity for this group to perform, contact Harry Morgan at 732-469-5994.

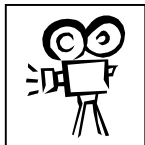


Knitters and Crocheters Unite

A bright orange sweater was proudly displayed in church recently, the first one completed by this group of needle-ers for *The Guideposts Sweater Project*. If you knit or crochet, this mission opportunity is tailor made for you! To pick up copies of the patterns or to learn more about this unique Mission Project established in 1996, contact Carol, care of the church at 732-469-5044 or by email at thesecretary@trinityunitedchurch.org.

CineMinistry

Have you ever seen a movie that seemed to have some interesting theological implications, but there wasn’t



any one around to discuss them with?

Because we love good movies, we at TUC are starting a once- or twice-monthly program we’re calling “CineMinistry.” On Sundays at 5 p.m., we’ll turn the sanctuary into a mini-movie theater by watching a film, followed by conversation and snacks.

We’ll provide the movie and popcorn; you bring whatever non-alcoholic beverages you’d like, and a favorite movie munchie (not required) and thoughts for future movies to screen (“Bruce Almighty,” for example).

The program commences **January 18**, with a screening of “The Straight Story,” starring Richard Farnsworth and Sissy Spacek. The G-rated, Oscar-nominated movie is based on the extraordinary true story about a man who rides his John Deere riding lawn mower hundreds of miles from Iowa to Wisconsin to visit his ailing and estranged brother.

The idea for CineMinistry is to watch a fun, thoughtful or provocative movie and have a spirited discussion. The movies screened might not always be for the entire family, but we’ll let you know in advance if the contents might be a little iffy.

For more information, call Thom Rhodes at 732-748-3370.

There’s a new kid in town!

Or at least, a newly formed “team” called People Care Network” (PCN), a part of the broader Ministries Team. The coordinator is Joyce Pratt with Shirley LeBoeuf acting as her back-up.

The PCN is set up to help our own members at TUC and their families when the burden gets a little heavy. The church community at TUC is such a caring one and it is refreshing to see so many people sharing their time with others. They say that charity begins at home...this includes our “Home Church.”

The process starts at the church office when someone calls or speaks to Pastor Elsie on behalf of a member of our church that needs assistance in the areas of meals, flowers, visitations, transportation, or any other type of personalized help.

Some recent examples of the PCN in action include:

- Phone calls, visitations, and meals to lighten the burden after a hospital stay.
- Phone calls, meals, transportation, and visitations after breaking a leg.

A greeting cards ministry is still being coordinated by Linda Mobus...as she does such an awesome job caring for our members in this special way.

If you are willing to make phone calls, make visitations, or prepare a meal when called upon, contact Joyce at 908-647-6094 to be put on her “go-to” list. To put the PCN into action for you or someone you know of at TUC, call the church office at 732-469-5044. If you cannot get someone at the church, call Joyce directly at 908-647-6094. **Help us to help YOU!**



Denominational
News



and Events Calendar

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE
597TH STATED MEETING OF
THE PRESBYTERY OF ELIZABETH
ON NOVEMBER 25, 2003 AT
THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
BERNARDSVILLE, NJ

Submitted by Harry Morgan

1. The Rev. Chester Kim of the First Presbyterian Church in Bernardsville was the host Pastor. He said that when he first started there about a year ago, attendance was approximately 38. Attendance has steadily grown in the past year and at worship on the previous Sunday before the Presbytery meeting there were 150 people in attendance. Also, leading the worship portion of the meeting were two Praise Choirs from the host church, a Contemporary Praise Choir and a Spanish Praise Choir. To me, the 1-Year attendance increase and the combined Praise Choirs were impressive.
2. The Rev. Charles Baier, former pastor of Trinity United Church, was received into the Presbytery to serve as Interim at the Springfield Presbyterian Church.
3. The Committee on Ministry approved the Rev. Diane Curtis for the position of Interim Pastor for one year at the Osceola Presbyterian Church.
4. We voted on a number of Proposed Amendments to the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church including several that were proposed to accommodate implementing biennial meetings of the General Assembly instead of annual meetings. As a voting delegate to the Presbytery meeting I voted my conscience where I felt I understood the proposed amendment and abstained when I did not understand the amendment for which we were voting.
5. There was a Celebration of the Ministry of the Rev. Pedro Rivera who is leaving his Presbytery position of Interim Executive Presbyter.
6. Two excerpts from "Sister Act" were shown to illustrate how enthusiasm and a change in attitude can bring about transformation in a church.

The next scheduled meeting of the **Elizabeth Presbytery** will be the Mission Fair on **January 24, 2004**. (see the box on this page for more information.)

Mission Fair

Celebrate how Presbyterians are
"Equipping Disciples to Disciple for Christ"

January 24, 2004, (9:30 am – 3:30 pm)
At Liberty Corner Presbyterian Church,

The Presbyterian Women of Watchung Avenue Presbyterian Church

Cordially invite the women of TUC to attend their

January Retreat at the House of Prayer

January 31, 2004, 9 am – 3:30 pm

More details to follow.

"Taboo"

(Talking About Money in the Church)

Workshop

Saturday, Jan. 24, 9:00 am – 2:30 pm

Christ Congregational, Silver Spring, MD 20901

Excerpt from the United Church of Christ Central Atlantic Conference Newsletter:

"The UCC is doing amazing things! In this Christmas season, the UCC will celebrate this holy time in hundreds of places around the work...such places as impoverished villages in Africa and South America, homeless shelters in American cities, mission outposts in Southeast Asia and ministries of reconciliation in the Middle East.

The Stewardship Task Force of the CAC is asking each congregation to become informed about the work of our church. Learn more about what is accomplished through Our Church's Wider Mission in the Association Conference and national settings."

(Access information on the mission work of the Central Atlantic Conference at www.cacucc.org)

The Winter Meeting for the **New Jersey Association of the UCC** will be **February 7, 2004** at the Community Church of Cedar Grove.



**Spirit of
Christmas Past...**

If no one reviews a great performance by an actor or musician, how do you know it's great? On Saturday,

January 10, 10:30am-12noon, Pastor Elsie will be hosting, at the manse, a reflection meeting on the Advent/Christmas/Epiphany season just past. The purpose is to share those things that helped make this season meaningful for you and to consider what things we might do differently next year. While space at the manse is somewhat limited, if you would like to participate in this discussion, contact Pastor Elsie. In the meantime, here is one reporter's "review" of the many activities planned and unplanned that marked 2003.

On November 30, the first Sunday of Advent, Sue Goodwin began a series of Children's Chats explaining the pieces of the Crèche by talking about the stable itself, reminding us all of the lowly circumstances in which Jesus was born.

The TUC devotional booklets, published so lovingly by Kay Hurd, were distributed. The contributors provided words of encouragement; snippets from songs, poems, games, and memories, all based on Scriptures chosen for the season. The booklets created a focus for personal and family devotion and reflection throughout the season.

Following a delicious potluck luncheon also on November 30, TUCers gathered around tables and made Advent wreaths to use in their homes. Even using the same materials, the wreaths were as individual as those creating them.

Ever resourceful Pastor Elsie adapted the Hanging of the Greens service, intended to include greenery and pre-made decorations that were still just bits and pieces due to a snowstorm that left our area reeling. The blowing of the Shofar called the service to order and Cyndy used it during the Children's Chat, as she reminded us just whom the shepherds were that came to see Jesus. Nancy Irwin shared her lovely alto voice, singing "He Shall Feed My Flock" from Handel's *Messiah*.

Following the service, many hands made light work of creating the decorations and dressing the sanctuary so that it was glowing with lights and smelling of pine for the Advent Jazz Vesper service that evening. Despite the cold, snow, and ice, the church was filled with the uplifting sounds of **Band du Soleil** as they presented their unique blend of piano, trumpet, and French horn, interspersed with reading from Scripture and literature.

Fifteen children from TUC and the surrounding community showed up for the casting call for the Children's Simple Christmas Pageant. With only one rehearsal, the children (and their adult helpers) presented the Christmas story in a delightfully interactive way, cheering the hearts of all who attended on December 20. Kudos go to all those who gave the children the opportunity to dress up in costume, sing, act and experience the joy of telling the Christmas story, especially coordinator, Sue Goodwin, who sacrificed precious time during finals to do so.

Thanks to the generosity of TUC members and friends, 75 gifts were delivered to the Elizabethport

Center. The gifts are sold at a reduced rate, allowing low-income families to share the joy of giving as well as receiving.

The music of our worship service on December 14 hailed us back to old England, as the Madrigals from Franklin High School performed, in costume, during and after the service. Fifteen singers, their jester, director, costumer, and parents braved yet another snowstorm to join us for a truly memorable Advent Sunday. Sue again led the Children's Chat, telling of the angels who sang the first lullaby to Jesus. Kay Hurd, Merl Coslick, Kit Bebbington, and Carol Krueger of the Mission Team presented ornaments for the tree, representing eight of the missions that TUC supports both financially and physically. Their passion for and commitment to Mission is most evident!

Due to the threat of more snow and ice, the Community Carol Sing, scheduled for the evening of December 14, was canceled. But bright weather and loud voices made the Pre-Worship Carol Sing on December 21 a fun-filled way to begin the service. On the final Sunday of Advent, Sue's Children's Chat focused on Mary and Joseph, as did her sermon, which reminded us that they were real humans faced with enormous decisions and ultimate responsibility.

Pastor Elsie's first Christmas Eve at TUC blended traditions from her past and ours, creating a beautiful service filled with music, memories, and mystery as we welcomed the birth of Jesus, and remembered the reason for His coming as we celebrated Communion.

The dedication of Jesus as found in Luke was brought to life vividly as Merl Coslick and Pastor Elsie became Simeon and Anna in moving monologues. Combined with special music by Pastor Elsie's sister, Ellen, and her sons, Gray and Ryan, this service completed the season in a powerful way.

Following the service, members shared their family crèche scenes in a display in the sanctuary. The very simplicity of the display made the detail in and beauty of each set that much more striking.

Many helpful hands and loving hearts contributed to making the season just past one filled with poignant moments and treasured memories. From the children who read the Advent Candle Lighting pieces each week and acted as Acolytes to the members of the choir leading in songs of praise, from the behind-the-scenes people making certain the greens were kept watered and the candles in the windows operating, to the meaningful sermons delivered by Pastor Elsie and Sue Goodwin, from Sue Coslick's careful choice of music, to those who provided refreshments on Sunday mornings and for our other events...to **you all**, we say "**Thank You!**"

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Reflections...

Growing up, "church" started at 9am with a time of singing and announcements before

Sunday School at 9:30. Worship started at 11:00 and was over promptly at 12noon – except when the preacher got really fired up, then it might go until 12:15. At 5:45pm we were back at church for Young People’s Hour and then worship at 7pm. Wednesday night services started at 7:30pm and lasted just an hour.

“Church” during college was very different. Sunday School started at 9am. Pre-service prayer started at 10:30. The first hour of worship service was spent singing and praising. The second hour was spent in the Word, listening to various preachers expounding on what God was saying to us through the Bible. At 6pm we were back in worship, once again sharing together the presence of God in services lasting two hours or more.

For some people, “church” means 15 minutes of music, 15 minutes of announcements and offerings, 15 minutes of prayers and readings, and if the preacher is really good, 15 minutes of sermon. Some people fill 90-minutes with the “busy-ness” of church, including music, communion, and homilies. Others, as in my college years, are not satisfied with less than two hours of singing and pastoral sermons. And for still others, it is as much as four hours of prayers, readings, music, and rabbinical mediations.

But is any of it Worship? Are we just going through the motions of “church” or are we worshipping? What is the real reason we gather together? Is it to perform a duty and be counted as “present” on the attendance charts? Is it to meet up with friends, catch up on the latest gossip and news? Or is the reason to pay homage and honor to a King?

acts of reverence to a deity.” In Old Testament times it was modeled after the homage paid to human rulers, the giving of offerings and sacrifices, the presentation of gifts. But for the Israelites and later the early followers of Christ, worship was more...it was an internal as well as external act of supplication, honoring God not just with gifts and sacrifices, but with their very beings.

What is our expectation for worship? Are we confined to the one-hour “oil change” sort of experience or are we willing to expand ourselves and our expectations so that we are listening and experiencing God’s presence instead of looking at our watches, being time-keepers. We have undergone many changes in recent years...are we willing to embrace more? Are we willing to let go of pre-conceived notions of what Sunday morning is all about and begin to truly worship God, no matter what shape that worship takes? We have opened our hearts and homes to a new pastor; can we also open our minds to share her ideas and her vision of worship? Even if it means that “church” may extend beyond 60 minutes?

Recently, during worship service, Merl Coslick became Simeon, the old priest/prophet who blessed Jesus as an infant. As he began his monologue, he stood and removed his watch, his wedding ring, and his suit jacket – removed the trappings that marked him as a 21st century person. Maybe we, too, need to remove the trappings of our fast-paced, always-on-a-schedule lifestyle and simply be present in the act and attitude of reverence. To worship.

Our way leads
to a hopeless end –
GOD’S way leads
to an endless hope.

What does it mean to *worship*? *Harper’s Bible Dictionary* describes it as “the attitude and

Sermon Notes

January 4: "Home by a Another Way"

Isaiah 60:1-6; Matthew 1:1-12

The Rev. Elsie Armstrong Rhodes, preaching
Celebration of the Lord's Supper

January 11: "Belonging to God"

Baptism of the Lord Sunday

Isaiah 43:1-7; Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

The Rev. Elsie Armstrong Rhodes, preaching
Renewal of Baptismal Covenant

January 18: "Gifts in Abundance"

I Corinthians 12:1-11; John 2:1-11

The Rev. Elsie Armstrong Rhodes, preaching
Hunger Offering will be received

January 25: "The State of Our Union"

I Corinthians 12:12-31a; Luke 4:14-21

The Rev. Elsie Armstrong Rhodes, preaching
The Annual Meeting of the Congregation will
follow worship

A Word about Sunday, January 11

Baptism of the Lord Sunday

From The Reverend Elsie Armstrong Rhodes:

In the church calendar January 11 is Baptism of the Lord Sunday - the day we celebrate the baptism of Jesus. Like Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost, it is a time to look back and celebrate what God has done for the world in Jesus Christ. But it is also an opportunity to witness to what God is doing among us now in the year 2004. During worship at Trinity United Church on January 11, there will be an opportunity for people to reaffirm their Baptismal Covenant, and for those who so choose, an opportunity to receive a blessing through the laying on of hands. Please join us for this very special, powerful worship experience.

Trinity United Church

118 King George Road

Warren, NJ 07059

"Growing in Christ,
Sharing in Love"

**January
2004**