Pastor’s Reflections: Joy to the World!

Last year during the Advent/Christmas season we celebrated the 300th anniversary of “Silent Night”. I know that many people are anxious but we will have to wait about 250 years for the 300th anniversary of “Jingle Bell Rock.” We will just have to be patient.

However this year we will have opportunity to celebrate the 300th anniversary of “Joy to the World.”

A Little Background

1 Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King!
Let ev’ry heart prepare Him room,
and heav’n and nature sing,
and heav’n and nature sing,
and heav’n and nature sing.

2 Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns!
Let men their songs employ,
while fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

3 No more let sins and sorrows grow,
nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
far as the curse is found,
far as, far as the curse is found.

4 He rules the world with truth and grace,
and makes the nations prove
the glories of His righteousness
and wonders of His love,
and wonders of His love.

2019 marks the 300th Anniversary of the lyrics composed by Isaac Watts in 1719! This very well-known carol was set to several different tunes and finally to music by Lowell Mason (1792-1872) which became the most popular. It was not originally written as a Christmas Carol however its theology lends itself to the Christmas celebration. Isaac Watts based his lyrics on Psalm 98 (particularly verses 4-9), 96:11-12 and Genesis 3:17-18

Stanza 3 is not based on the Psalm, which is why many leave out this verse. The “curse” is a reference to Genesis 3:17 “As a part of five-point Calvinism, the total depravity of humanity, the curse is a significant part of classic Reformed theology, Isaac Watts’ theological perspective.”

The hymnal of the United Reformed Church in the UK, Rejoice and Sing (1991), altered the stanza as follows:

No more let thorns infest the ground,
Or sins and sorrows grow;
Wherever pain and death are found
He makes his blessings flow.

So I encourage all of us this Christmas to “let Heaven and nature sing!”

Pastor Steve
The Work of the Greater Good Moves at Its Own Pace

Thank you to the SJAMCC Family for allowing me to represent you as one of your Lay Delegates for the past two terms. A number of exciting and challenging events have taken place in the life of the MCC Global Church over the past six years. Perhaps the most noteworthy of those was the formation of two complete Moderator Nominating Committees. The formation and work of the 1st MNC began with the announcement of the committee members in April of 2013. Their labor intensive process vetted multiple candidates to present those qualified nominees during General Conference XXVI in 2016. This process provided four viable candidates to stand for election by the Lay and Clergy delegations in Victoria, British Columbia. That election, which now seems like ancient history, became challenging as round after round of votes could not bring a candidate to election. The field of four, narrowed to three and then finally to two, with no election. As a member of the clergy house stated to the delegation following a number of failed rounds, the will of the people have spoken, none of these candidates is to be elected - Our Creator had the plan and the delegation was not yet privy to God’s plan. I came away from my 1st General Conference feeling as if we failed, as if I did not accomplish what SJAMCC sent me thousands of miles away to do.

As a result of General Conference XXVI, the Governing Board sought out individuals that felt called to act as Interim Moderator to lead us in moving forward with the greater good of the denomination. Reverend Elder Rachelle Brown was appointed and with the help of Reverend Doctor Nancy Wilson, Retired, began to put together the loose ends and move MCC forward.

Fast forward to May 2018, the 2nd of the two Moderator Nominating Committees was formed and began their work to put together an electable slate of nominees to present to the delegation in Orlando at MCC General Conference 2019. Again, prospective candidates were vetted - the broad field of participants grew narrow as the MNC diligently worked throughout MCC’s 50th Anniversary year to provide a strong, compassionate leader to follow in the footsteps of our founder: Reverend Troy Perry and his protégé and successor, Reverend Doctor Nancy Wilson. Arriving in time for the opening Conference Sunday Worship service, I was anxious and able to sense an expectant yearning from the body that we were here in Orlando, on a mission from God, to do the work of the church.

The three Moderator Candidates traveled in a cluster while at Conference, they described the pact they formed with one another to support one another and MCC as a whole throughout the election process. Their unity brought unity to the conference. As we progressed to the vote, prayers were offered and the 1st round did not bring election. At that moment in time the three of them put pact in place and the lowest achieved vote of the three immediately withdrew and encouraged the body to move forward. As the second round of voting took place almost all of the withdrawn party’s votes went to the next Moderator of MCC: Reverend Elder Cecilia Eggleston, Our 1st international Moderator! This leg of our collective mission had been accomplished. Again, I am so pleased to have represented SJAMCC these past 6 years, and I wish the future Lay Delegacy Godspeed in their journey doing the work of the greater good for MCC.

Jack Lewis, Lay Delegate
THE HOLIDAYS
By Deacon Bonnie Moore

While pondering what to write for this issue, I realized that this time of the year is full of “holidays”. Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, Hanukkah, Kwanza, New Year’s Eve and New Year’s Day are the big ones during the last of the year and the beginning of the new one. So I Googled “holiday”; (yes, I did and yes, I’m so not a yuppie!). Seeing the Google page was amazing in the content. The description of holiday: the definition of a holiday is a day where business is suspended in celebration of a specific event. An example of a holiday is Christmas. The page also included a large ad for Yeti gift guide, a listing of holidays in the U.S. for 2019, a number of holiday calendars, “Cheap Holiday packages’, images, holiday deals and related searches for holidays.

So what caught my eye or what on this page related to my concept of these holiday events? Actually, nothing! Call me a traditionalist or just an old lady but when I think of these holidays, they all have something in common: a spiritual force that causes me to “Dance On The Inside”; something that touches my spirit and causes me to know I have a common bond with my fellow humans, regardless of our faith backgrounds or traditions and a strong understanding of the gifts God has given us through The Holy Spirit, redemption through Jesus Christ and the Loving Presence of God in our lives.

One of the ways we grow in our spiritual lives is being thankful. It’s a force that teaches us to draw near to the Holy One by giving thanks for God’s presence in all of our life; the valleys and the mountains, the trials and the joys. Phil. 4:6 “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God”. Thanksgiving is only one day to celebrate the gift of being thankful. It is a lifestyle that lifts us into the presence of the Most High God; it is the strength that daily, even momentarily changes our lives. Simply being thankful not for all things, but in all things!

Christmas Eve is a time of awe, a time of wonder to realize the depth and width of God’s Love. Love enough to come into the world as a newborn baby carrying all the gifts of this Holy Sea-son. The gifts of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love are celebrated each week during Advent. Hope, “a golden cord binding us to heaven”, Sarah Young, Jesus Calling; Peace that “passes all understanding” Phil. 4:7; Joy, “joy unspeakable and full of glory” 1 Peter 1:8; and above all Love. “For God so loved the world that he gave the one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16.

Hanukkah and Kwanza are also holidays celebrating God’s goodness in the world, faith building remembrances to encourage the people to come together to be strengthened and go into the world sharing grace and faith.

As we approach a new calendar year we also celebrate with holiday. New Year’s Eve has become a major time to celebrate the past year and welcome the new one. It’s a time of recommitment and resolution. Families and friends gather New Year’s Day to watch their favorite sport and share the first meal of the New Year. It’s a time of letting go of the past and grasping onto the future with hope and expectation.

There is opportunity to get lost in the worldly distractions of these holidays. Unbelievably Christmas ads are out before we’ve put away the pumpkin/Fall decorations and we’ve just turned the clocks back! So how do we focus on the real meanings of these special days? Dancin’ On The Inside means knowing beyond the outside noises and listening to our spirit. It means remembering the real purpose of these “holidays”. It’s not what gifts we receive, or did we remember to thank those who’ve been generous, kind or loving. It’s not whether we get to Black Friday, or the special sales events; it’s not how many decorations we got up.

So what is it to you? Is it those with whom you shared the “holiday”? Is it how wonderful it was to have enough to share with others? Is it being thankful in and for all things, knowing “whose you are”? Is it time to pause and really remember the purpose of what the holiday represents?

Is it really playing a song in your heart that lifts your spirit so there is no way you are not “Dancin’ On The Inside” and sometimes even letting it out so your feet cannot help moving and you cannot help smiling!
Food for Thought…
from the Kitchen of Adam Janowski

“If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it!” The Libby Pumpkin folks must have followed that mantra—the pumpkin pie recipe on their cans of pumpkin have not changed in over seventy years. Until this year. This year debuts a new pumpkin pie recipe to accompany the old one on the can label. I took the challenge and tried it out and I and my guests gave it eight thumbs up! The new recipe has a little more ginger, no granulated sugar, but sweetened evaporated milk instead, and comes out a little bit creamier. I found the cooking time to be a bit longer as well and be sure to put a foil cover on the crust to prevent overbrowning. This will now be my go to pumpkin pie recipe!

LIBBYS NEW FASHIONED PUMPKIN PIE

INGREDIENTS
15 ounces (1 can) LIBBY’S® 100% Pure Pumpkin
1 cup NESTLÉ® CARNATION® Evaporated Milk
1 3/4 cups (1 can) or 14 oz. NESTLÉ® CARNATION® Sweetened Condensed Milk
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon ground ginger
1/2 teaspoon ground cloves
2 large eggs

INSTRUCTIONS

POUR into pie shell.

BAKE in preheated 425°F oven for 15 minutes. Reduce temperature to 350°F; bake for 30-40 minutes or until knife inserted near center comes out clean.

COOL on wire rack for 2 hours. Serve immediately or refrigerate.

RECIPE SOURCE: https://www.verybestbaking.com/recipes/147629/new-fashionable-pumpkin-pie/?recipeSortBy=Relevancy&keywords=new+pumpkin+pie#

St. John the Apostle MCC Christmas Schedule

Sunday, December 22nd
Regular church service

Tuesday, December 24th
Christmas Carol Sing 6:30 p.m.
Christmas Eve service, 7 p.m.
(Coffee and holiday treats in the Church Hall prior to and after the Christmas Eve service)

Wednesday, December 25th
Christmas Day
No Service

Sunday, December 29th
Regular Church Service

Wednesday, December 25th through Wednesday, January 1st New Year’s Day
The Church and office are closed.
5 Tips To Spending Time With God
5 Consejos Para Pasar Tiempo

Jesus regularly demonstrated the importance of spending time alone with God. Whether it was getting up early to start His day with prayer, or going to His God in the midst of incredible stress and uncertainty – Jesus believed in the importance of putting His God first. And if Jesus did it, so should we. But, where do we start?

PRIORITIZE: If tomorrow you had an important meeting with your boss, wouldn’t you make every effort to show up? So why do we regularly ignore or postpone our appointments with God? Is it because we are too busy, easily distracted or maybe just lazy? I love what the late Justice Scalia said to his clerk when he invited him to church. “I’m just too busy,” his clerk said. Scalia replied, “Well, I’ll tell the creator of the universe that you were too busy to see Him.” As Jesus said, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” (Matthew 6:33) Ask God to give you a desire to show up and meet with Him.

TIME & PLACE: For Jesus, the time was in the morning before the day even got underway. For many with young kids, the mornings can be chaotic. Maybe the ideal time is during nap time or in the evenings. Choose a place that is quiet and free from distraction: maybe an office, study, or bedroom.

PLAN: Choose a devotional guide to get started. Think of it like a spiritual warm-up – to help you focus. Check out a book by Christian authors like Oswald Chambers, Sarah Young, Tim Keller or Max Lucado.

PRAY: Prayer is simply pouring our hearts out to God. The Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13) is a great model to get started: it involves praise, praying for others, confession, telling God our needs, and asking for forgiveness and strength in the face of temptation.

LISTEN: Are you listening? Or simply doing all the talking? If we want to hear from God, we have to listen. God speaks to us through God’s Word.

Now what? Take the ‘30 Day Challenge.’ Beginning today, commit to a daily time with God for the next month. Don’t let distractions or responsibilities get in the way; make God your first priority and see what God has to say. It can literally change your life!

Jonathan Hollander, Deacon St. John the Apostle.

Jesús demostró regularmente la importancia de pasar tiempo a solas con Dios. Ya sea que se levantara temprano para comenzar su día con oración, o para ir a su Dios en medio de un estrés e incertidumbre increíbles - Jesús creía en la importancia de poner a su Dios en primer lugar. Y si Jesús lo hizo, nosotros también debemos hacerlo. Pero, ¿por dónde empezamos?

PRIORITIZAR: Si mañana tuvieras una reunión importante con tu jefe, ¿no harías todo lo posible por presentarte? Entonces, ¿por qué ignoramos o posponemos regularmente nuestras citas con Dios? ¿Es porque estamos demasiado ocupados, fácilmente distráidos o simplemente perezosos? Me encanta lo que el difunto juez Scalia le dijo a su secretario cuando lo invitó a la iglesia. “Estoy demasiado ocupado”, dijo su empleado. Scalia respondió: “Bueno, le diré al creador del universo que estabas demasiado ocupado para verlo”. Pidele a Dios que te dé el deseo de presentarte y encontrarle con Él.

HORA Y LUGAR: Para Jesús, el tiempo era en la mañana antes de que el día comenzara. Para muchos con niños pequeños, las mañanas pueden ser caóticas. Tal vez el momento ideal sea durante la siesta o por las tardes. Elija un lugar que sea tranquilo y libre de distracciones: tal vez una oficina, un estudio o un dormitorio.

PLAN: Escoja una guía devocional para empezar. Piensa en ello como un calentamiento espiritual - para ayudarte a concentrarte. Echa un vistazo a un libro de autores cristianos como Oswald Chambers, Sarah Young, Tim Keller o Max Lucado.


¿Y ahora qué? Acepta el “Desafío de los 30 días”. A partir de hoy, comprométase a un tiempo diario con Dios para el próximo mes. No deje que las distracciones o responsabilidades se interpongán en el camino; haga de Dios su primera prioridad y vea lo que Dios tiene que decir. Puede literalmente cambiar tu vida!

Jonathan Hollander, Diácono San Juan Apóstol.
Christmas Eve Toy Drive 2019

St. John the Apostle Metropolitan Community Church in partnership with ICAN.

You: pick up a ‘gift wish list’ for a child. (Available 11/24/19)
You: use that list to select your gift purchase for that child. It could be all the items on the list or not, depending on their cost and your budget.
You: wrap that gift purchase placing the provided ‘gift tag’. identifying the child and their case ID information onto it.
You: return the wrapped and tagged gift to SJAMCC by Dec. 15th.

That is how easy and wonderful it can be to keep the Christmas spirit alive among all those concerned about our community at this celebration of the birth of our savior Jesus Christ.

The children you are helping to have a happy and wonder filled Christmas are part of our community that are affected or infected by H.I.V. or A.I.D.S. and the related problems arising from it.

Thanking you in advance for your participation in this endeavor of sharing and caring about the larger community of SJAMCC.

PEACE – LOVE – FAITH – JOY

For questions or additional info, call the church office: 239.344.0012.

We are located at: 3049 McGregor Blvd., Fort Myers, Florida. 33901

Bob Schneider - Program Committee Chair

Christmas Eve
Altar Dedications
(Poinsettias)

The Christmas Eve sanctuary dedications can be in honor or in memory of someone special. The cost will be $15 each. The deadline for dedications will be December 15th. Fill in the information below and drop it in the offering plate with cash or your check marked “CHRISTMAS DEDICATION”

NAME(S)________________________________________
________________________________________
PHONE #________________________________________
In Honor/Memory (circle one) of
________________________________________
________________________________________

Christmas
Toy Drive
2019

Poinsettia Sign-Up
Poinsettia Sign-Up

Poinsettia Sign-Up
Poinsettia Sign-Up

NAME(S)________________________________________
________________________________________
PHONE #________________________________________
In Honor/Memory (circle one) of
________________________________________
________________________________________
Our Developing Landscape: A Work in Progress

Phase I of the landscaping plan was approved by the Board of Directors at their meeting on September 22, 2019. Phase I changes will be focused primarily upon five of the seven foundation gardens, which are those gardens located along the walls of the church building, and upon three gardens adjacent to these foundation gardens.

The major purpose of all foundation gardens is to provide an attractive covering of the base of the building wall. These gardens had been developed by previous gardeners and each contains some mature healthy plants that will be retained. But in general, gardens adjacent to the building appeared unfinished and neglected due to some plants requiring removal and to many large, empty spaces.

The plans for the foundation gardens on our property also had to take into consideration the characteristics of our church building. Because our roof is flat, large rectangular openings called scuppers are located all around the building just below the level of the roof. When it rains, large quantities of water rush out of the scuppers, hitting the ground beneath with great force.

Originally, to protect our property from damage due to roof drainage, a deep trench was dug around the building and filled with gravel. Barrels filled with gravel were buried beneath the scuppers to direct the flow of water downward. This work, which has been quite effective, was carried out by volunteer members of our church shortly after the building was purchased. This drainage system is still functioning, but is now insufficient to prevent soil erosion and standing water in some areas.

The foundation gardens will soon have pieces of rock installed to slow the flow of roof drainage and further direct the water away from the building foundation. In some areas, the rock will be located near the building and in other places it will appear as a strip of rock running from the building toward the outer part of the garden.

The rocks will average six inches in diameter. Using rocks of this size will prevent them from being washed downhill with the water, will be most effective in slowing the flow of water, and will increase safety by reducing the temptation of people to walk on them.

In addition to use of rocks to control water, plants which have roots that absorb water are being installed. These plants include certain varieties of bunch grasses, lilies, iris, and trees. Planting has begun in all of the Phase I garden spaces and may be complete by next summer. Volunteers who are currently doing the planting include Bill Mount, Dale Weddle, Julie Hover, and Wayne Stachurski.

As the planting proceeds, enjoy walking around the building and seeing the changes that are being made almost every week. Are you able to identify plants whose major function is to cover some of the lower part of the building or to absorb water or to provide interest or beauty to the space?

Fall Yard Sale Success

The church raised $3,715 through the 2019 Fall Yard Sale.

According to coordinator, Richard Schaffer, “I would like to say of course appreciation for the fine work done by all those who know that they did their best to make the yard sale successful. I’d like to say it is not only the amount of money we bring in with the fellowship that is developed.”
Dean’s Pantry

Listed below are items the Pantry can always use. We accept other items as well as cash or checks to replenish the shelves:

As always, know you will be blessed by your donations of food, money, and time to the Pantry.

—The Food Pantry Staff

We Need the Following:

- Pinto Beans
- Mac and Cheese
- Pasta Sauce
- Spaghetti
- Canned Vegetables
- Box Cereal
- Fruit Cups
- Jiffy Cornbread Mix
- Any toiletry items
- Paper towels/TP
- Canned Meats

Marsha Stevens-Pino
Holiday Concert
Order Tickets Online
https://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/4427451

December 6, 2019
6:00 pm Dinner $25.00
7:00 pm Christmas Concert $25.00

Saint John the Apostle, MCC
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239.344.0012
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During this busy time of year, please take a moment to evaluate a couple of quick housekeeping items. Did you remember to change your smoke detector batteries when you set your clocks back for daylight savings time, a few weeks ago? Do you have a good fire extinguisher available in the event a holiday meal goes wrong? Did you pay your 2019 property taxes, to take advantage of the discount rate? Is your 2020 Homestead Exemption valid? Are you eligible for any other property tax exemption, as a result of a life changing event during this past year? Have you kept the receipts for any improvements you’ve made to your property in 2019 that your tax professional may be able to use to prepare your income tax return? Have you reviewed your homeowners/liability/flood insurances to be sure they are sufficient for your current needs?

Too often in our hectic everyday lives, these simple but important tasks are overlooked. And, if your holidays are as busy as mine, you want to be sure that your home is the safe haven it is meant to be, at the end of those fun filled days and nights. Please Access Jack, if you need some help with any of the above mentioned tasks! I may not have a ladder tall enough to change the smoke detector battery at the top of the stairs, or be able to evaluate your current flood insurance policy, but I know people that can help. Please allow me to be your Real Estate resource for all of your Home’s needs.

Holiday Blessings from my family to yours, Jack

Please AccessJack at: 239.839.5927
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