

MISSIONARY DEVOTIONS

ADVENT 2002



"Fear not; For behold, I bring you
good tidings of great joy,
which shall be to all people."

Luke 2:10

Covenant Relationship for a Better World
California-Pacific Annual Conference
Board of Global Ministries of The United Methodist Church

Covenant Relationship for a Better World

Each year for the past eight, we have asked your missionaries to contribute to this little booklet so that we can be in touch with each other at this time of rebirth of the spirit. And so greetings and blessings of the season are brought to you from them through their written words of hope, promise and, yes, reality. Each devotional message will speak to you in light of your own perceptions of life, your view of the world and your personal interpretation of the scriptures.

We are using devotion to signify “a spiritual message” but the word itself denotes “dedication, commitment and loyalty” which embodies the truth of the matter. We thank each missionary who has gifted us with not only an Advent meditation, often written amidst great turmoil, but gifted the planet with his or her dedication to a ministry to and for those whose lives can be better because of that commitment.

These missionaries are grateful to you who join hearts and hands with them in our mission together.

*When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone
When the kings and the shepherds
have found their way home,
the work of Christmas is begun.*

(‘lifted’ from Eunice Arias’ message)

Dale and Miriam Smith

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Appreciation to those churches who underwrite the printing of the devotional booklet; to Bishop Mary Ann Swenson for her message; and to the 224 churches who faithfully provide missionary support. Note: In some cases, the meditation had to be edited to honor the word limit requested!

ELMA JOCSON, M.D. in NEPAL

Devotion sponsored by:

Honolulu, Harris; Pomona, Trinity;

Riverside, Jurupa; San Dimas;

West Los Angeles



What is the one thing that will make anybody's Christmas tradition complete? For us Filipinos, a brightly colored lantern graces almost every house. People from the west might go for a turkey dinner, fruitcake and family reunions. But what about the Christmas tree?

I remember my first Christmas here in Nepal. I was apprehensive. It was my first in a non-Christian environment, away from families and friends. I was living in a house together with fellow missionaries, who were on Language and Orientation Course, as I was. Everyone felt different but was determined to make it a good Christmas, if not the best. We were surprised to discover that Christmas decorations are in fact available here, even in a small enterprising store. We decorated the house to give it an ambiance. From our garden we brought in a spruce and dressed it as our Christmas tree.

The tradition of the Christmas tree is a source of confusion for some Hindu. Christians profess faith in Jesus Christ. But why are the Christians worshipping the tree? The hanging of colorful decorations and bright lights is just like the Hindu's form of worship. They know foreigners go to a lot of trouble finding the right tree, put it in a nice spot, decorate it perfectly it and put gifts under it. Now, that is worship! We might have some violent reactions to this. I know its absurd to think of it as idolatry. But can you see the similarity? For us here, we are reminded that in everything that we do we must direct their attention to the only true God. It's a different ballgame when you're celebrating Christmas with so-called Christians. But we must be ever so mindful that in our actions our tradition doesn't rob God the glory and honor that is only His. ☆

Monday, December 2

LUIS and JANET GARCIA in CHILE

Devotion sponsored by:

La Jolla; Pomona, Trinity; Ramona;
San Diego, San Carlos; San Diego, St. Mark's;
Sherman Oaks; Ventura, First



Ecclesiastes 3:9-13

It's Christmas in the Andes. It's December in the Andes and summer vacation is beginning. Many of our Kusayapu students and many those from other boarding schools are leaving and returning to their villages. At last they can be reunited with their families. But for these kids, summer vacation also means time to work, to help their families with llamas and alpacas or crops. It is summer in Chile and every afternoon rain falls high up in the Andes Mountains. That water makes its way down to the desert canyons and provides water for the area. At night when the sky is clear, the kids can see the stars traveling freely in the vast sky.

It's Christmas in the Andes, but Santa Claus is not a popular name. More common is "Viejito Pascuero" (Old Man Christmas). The Government provides a present or two for the children in the Andean Villages, but the families don't have the ritual of gifts for Christmas.

But it's Christmas in the Andes, even without gifts. God gives his gift of rain to the mountains that will nurture the land. He gives the gift of new livestock that will provide wool and meat. He provides the gift of crops that give food to eat. For the families and communities of the Andean areas, the agricultural activities will bring work but also interaction, cooperation, partnership and joy. For the Andean people, the important things in life, mean things that enable us to live, love, are a family and a community, and these things come from a higher Being.

It's Christmas in the world. Let's look for God's gifts of life. ☆

Tuesday, December 3

TIM and JUJI BOYLE in JAPAN

Devotion sponsored by:

Glendale, First German;
Ontario, First; Pacific Palisades, Community;
Redlands, First; Simi Valley



Santa Claus is big in Japan. Christmas decorations imported from the West have been decorating Japanese stores since early October. No need to wait until after Thanksgiving Day as in the US. For many Japanese, the trappings of Christmas are almost entirely di-

voiced from its true Christian origins and meaning. We overheard one elderly lady showing her surprise upon observing some Christmas decorations at a church; “Even these Christians celebrate Christmas!”

While also a vitally important task for American Christians as well, bringing the true meaning of Christmas to Japanese as they enjoy holiday festivities is our primary task in this season. December marks the time of year when we enjoy by far the most opportunities for Christian witness in this land. As you remember your brothers and sisters in Christ in prayer, please pray that this Christmas many Japanese will accept God’s “Christmas Gift” to the world through Jesus Christ, who is “the reason for the season.” ☆

Wednesday, December 4

PAUL JEFFREY and LYDA PIERCE in HONDURAS

Devotion sponsored by:
La Habra; Pomona, Trinity;
Rolling Hills Estates, Rolling Hills



Central America has been officially at peace for several years, yet for most of the poor majority the suffering is worse today than when the fighting raged. A chronic drought coupled with dismally low coffee prices means hunger and malnutrition plague much of the countryside. Accelerating globalization means huge profits for northern companies and local elites and greater impoverishment for the majority. Even though the region is formally at peace, injustice makes genuine peace impossible. The few who get rich from today’s global economy, however, maintain the myth that all is well. Ezekiel’s diagnosis of Judah fits our context: “...they have misled my people by saying: Peace! when there is no peace.”

As we once again await the coming of the Prince of Peace into a world torn by injustice and violence, we understand so clearly the words of the ancient hymn: “O come, desire of nations, bind all peoples in one heart and mind; bid envy, strife, and quarrels cease; fill the whole world with heaven’s peace.” It is a timeless prayer, for Central America, for Iraq, for southern California. And like any serious prayer, it pushes us out of our comfort and into a world where we are the ones who will incarnate heaven’s peace. ☆

Thursday, December 5

BILL and JIMMYE WHITFIELD in TANZANIA

Devotion sponsored by:
Capistrano Beach, Palisades;
Lompoc, First; Pomona, Trinity;
San Gabriel, First; Valencia



A friend “burned” us a CD of mixed music from his laptop a couple of weeks ago. When we dropped it into our player Louis Armstrong’s vintage vocal cords sent soothing words and melody from the speakers, spreading a feeling of calmness and remembrance throughout the room. We quickly pressed the “repeat” button to stretch a two-minute recording into an ongoing piece. *“I see trees of green—red roses too. I see them bloom. For me and you; and I think to myself what a wonderful world!”*

Truly this world was made for all of God’s creation, if we only stop to ponder the ONE-ness of our existence. That we and all others are ONE, sharing the same Consciousness -is a level of knowingness, which we have yet to attain. We pride ourselves in creating high tech this and that, but advanced technology without advanced thoughts creates NOT advancement, but our demise.

“The color of the rainbow so pretty in the sky, are also on the faces of people going by. I see friends shaking hands, saying, ‘How do you do?’ They’re really saying, ‘I LOVE YOU!’” During this season as we celebrate and acknowledge the birth of our Christ, let us try to look deeper beyond the surface and acknowledge the preciousness in all births. This is what Jesus taught and lived and wants us to be. “Yes, and I think to myself....what a wonderful world!” ☆

Friday, December 6

LUCY BARTON in ALASKA

Devotion sponsored by:
La Canada; L.A., West Los Angeles;
West Los Angeles, First; Oceanside,
Pacific Beach; Pearblossom;
Upland, First



I just returned home from three days of jury duty. The defendant was a young man, just eighteen years old. While very drunk, he was accused of attempting to sexually assault a young woman who was passed out from drinking—a woman who had been a friend. In the two days of testimony we heard of under age drinking, bars that don’t card, a police officer that talked to the young man, noticed he’d been drinking and did nothing. Unfortunately, in Nome and most of bush Alaska these sorts of things are common practice.

I also serve on the Board of our local shelter for victims of domestic violence. Again, we constantly see women and children who live in fear of their lives and/or fear of sexual assault from husbands, boyfriends, fathers, brothers, uncles, and others. Most offenses are alcohol related. How desperately the people of this region need to hear the message of hope that is at the heart of the season of Advent. Everyone knows about the physical darkness that is so much a part of living in Alaska but in the midst of physical darkness we always know that the light of summer is coming. Not so with the darkness of the soul that pervades so many who live in this part of the world. We covet your prayers as we seek to be a place of hope in this spiritual darkness. ☆

Saturday, December 7

MARTIN and MELIKA FINAU in FIJI

Devotion sponsored by:
El Segundo; Fallbrook;
L.A. Westchester;
Newhall, Friendly Valley



“Behold, a virgin shall bring forth a son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.” ISAIAH 4:7

During the second week of October, the abandoned girls of the Dilkusha Children’s Methodist Home, where Milika serves, busily prepared for a big celebration! It was the 97th year anniversary of its establishment. Each girl of different races such as Fijian, Rotumans, Indo-Fijians, and part Europeans does a chore of preparation for the only week throughout the year where people across Fiji visit the Home, provide delicious meals or donate clothes and gifts. Christians around the world are anticipating in the coming of the Son of God. Some might buy gifts for love ones, while others will be decorating their homes with colorful lights to mark the joy of Christmas. A celebration of God’s coming into human flesh, through Jesus Christ, is the Highest and the Holiest entering at the lowliest door. Our Lord’s birth was an advent! Just as our Lord came into human flesh, He must enter our lives. Have we invited Him in to our personal human life? Have we made our life to be a “Bethlehem” for the Son of God? The characteristic of the new birth is that I should commit my life to God so that Christ can be born in me.

Many of the abandoned, abused, and poor children of the Dilkusha Children’s Home will celebrate God’s incarnation through praising. “Joy to the world the Lord has come, let earth receive her King.” They may not have luxurious ways of celebrating God’s precious gift, but will truly appreciate the birth of His Son to the lowliest of the Fiji Islands in the South Pacific. ☆

Second Sunday of Advent, December 8

EUNICE ARIAS and LUIS ARAMAYO in ECUADOR

Devotion sponsored by:

Aiea, Hawaii; Glendora;
Pomona, Trinity; San Diego, First;
Santa Maria, St. Andrew;
Santa Monica, First



Christmas time... Christmas time? So the windows of the clean, beautifully illuminated, luxurious malls in Quito are telling us while they invite us to buy our presents with credit cards and “for three or six months without interest”. Christmas time? So the factories and flower plantation owners are telling us while they encourage the parents’ committee of the Centro Educativo Comunitario, “El Sembrador” with whom we work, to send letters asking for a gift of cookies and sweets for the children that assist there. Christmas time? So it seems for it is time to write letters, cards, Advent meditations and think of special activities at our churches. Christmas time? Is it really Christmas time? Can it be really Christmas time while so many efforts are being done to “punish” the violent no matter the consequences toward the non-violent people that are the majority of the world population? Christmas time? For whom? For what? For how long? Where?

We can’t but wonder when almost everyday a boy or a girl comes to the office with a “headache” and we know it comes from an empty stomach. Something that can’t be solved with Christmas cookies or sweets. We can’t but wonder when we are faced with so many children that can’t read or write after two or three years of school. With the fact that so many good, committed people of the community and local churches didn’t finish school and can’t go on developing “formally” their skills and gifts no matter how many words and letters and cards we write. Christmas time? Yes, it is Christmas time as it has been for more than two thousand years.

Christmas time? Yes, it is Christmas time because at playtime school children share what they’ve brought from home: a banana carefully cut in five or six pieces, a cooked egg that helps at least four of them, a plastic bottle with oats beverage that passes from mouth to mouth or a dish of rice that looks as if washed after everyone eats from it. Christmas time? Yes, it is Christmas time whenever a child works hard to write something nice about his/her classmate; it is Christmas time when children, slowly but without dismay, read the Bible aloud at a community worship service; it is Christmas time whenever we receive a letter or a drawing from your children and youth telling us that you are praying for all of us.

Christmas time? Yes, it is Christmas time the whole year: every time we say to one another “May God’s peace be with you” and we mean it and we work for this to be true, not only in our lives but in the lives of all humanity. Yes, it will ☆

Monday, December 9

SANDRA OLEWINE in JERUSALEM

Devotion sponsored by:

Aiea, Hawaii; Atascadero; Corona Del Mar, Newport Center; Fallbrook; Fontana, First; L.A. Centenary; Honolulu, Kilohana; La Mesa, Foothills; Pomona, Trinity; San Diego, St. Mark's Ventura, College; West Los Angeles



Seek peace and pursue it. Psalm 34:14

This past year in Bethlehem, we lived under 'house arrest' for five months and were prohibited from worshipping one fourth of the Sundays. Children lost ten weeks of school and spent their summer locked inside. We buried tens of people and had houses destroyed from F-16 bombings. We lived with tank explosions and heavy machinegun fire. We were subjected to surprise house searches in the middle of the night and watched as a barbed-wire fence was put up and a trench dug around the city. We live in anticipation of another war and fear the outcome for people everywhere.

In this season of anticipation and preparation, what are we to say about such things? What is Christ's call in a world reeling from trauma, fear, hatred, mistrust and anger? After the last two years, I am convinced there is but one response worthy of the Reign of God – to be peacemakers. Not a peace that is merely an uneasy calm, but a true peace constructed on the foundations of justice, compassion, contrition and forgiveness.

This Advent may God grant us the courage to pursue peace! ☆

Tuesday, December 10

TERRY and MURIEL HENDERSON in MEXICO

Devotion sponsored by:

Arcadia, Church of the Good Shepherd; Escondido, First; Fallbrook; La Mesa, First; Pasadena, First; Redlands, University; Yucaipa



During Advent we prepare to receive God's son and his gifts of forgiveness, salvation and eternal life. As God reaches out to us through his gift of Jesus Christ, so Christians reaches out to others through mission gifts. The development tools of training and education enable people to discover the gifts within and around them. The Quevedo Family discovered they could raise animals to improve their diet and income. Villagers realized that the manure contaminating their courtyards could help solve the problem of unproductive fields. The progress of twenty-five families in Tlancualpican convinced others to construct inexpensive and ecologically-safe composting toilets. The community-based health workers

discovered that their teaching of nutrition and hygiene impacts neighbor's lives. The Gethsemane church youth realized their teaching brought children to Christ. Seminary students found they could serve as agricultural technicians as well as spiritual leaders. God calls each of us to be in mission and through our service we are gifts to one another. ☆

Wednesday, December 11

TOM and NANCY HOFFMANN in RUSSIA

Devotion sponsored by:
Encinitas, San Diego;to;
Kaneohe, Parker;
Los Osos, Trinity;
Pomona, Trinity



During Advent in Russia there is perhaps no more recognizable icon than that of the Madonna tenderly holding the Christ-child. In this icon one notices that Mary looks preoccupied, perhaps even worried. And with good cause! She has just been told by a prophet that the journey ahead will be full of woundings and piercings. None of us will doubt it: evil always seems to mount up as God's Peace draws near.

Recently we saw another icon: it was of the final moments of Mary's life. As she is taking her last breath, there in the corner, unobserved, is the Ascended Jesus. And in his arms, in a wonderful reversal of things, he is tenderly holding a tiny Mary.

And so the truth about Advent comes out: if we dare take the Christ-child into our arms, and keep him there throughout all of life's ups and downs, we will discover at journey's end that in fact it is Jesus who holds us all along the way. ☆

Thursday, December 12

LAMBERTO and ANGIE VALINO in JAPAN

Devotion sponsored by:
L.A. Wilshire, Filipino;
Santa Ana, Grand Avenue



The influence and the destructive power of darkness are continuously being felt around the world. War, famine, adversities are occurring simultaneously. Undeniably, people have fear in their hearts. Biological, chemical and weapons of mass destruction are cause for people to become more apprehensive. The tactics of evil have not changed, taking from us the blessing we should richly enjoy. This is because of the unbelieving and hardness of our hearts. Like the Apostles, we are terrified and frightened.

“Peace be unto you”, words of encouragement for the disciples whose hearts were be-

wildered and confused because of the loss of their leader. We turn the image of God into illusion and powerlessness. We forget that the Prince of Peace is bigger and mightier than any destructive man-made influence. The birth of Jesus Christ has proven this. He was also in crisis during His early days and survived.

Jesus didn't come among us as an angel—someone who had never lived a life like ours. Jesus, the child came among us and died a death like the deaths we die, and then he was raised to sit at the right hand of God, the place of honor and inheritance in an Advent feast. This is what makes the incarnation the central idea of our faith. Our relationship with Him is secured because He always understood us. When He said “Peace be with you” let us take it with confidence and trust because Jesus really meant what He said, “What is now our position?” ☆

Friday, December 13

**TOM and SHARON CROWE
in D.R. CONGO**

Devotion sponsored by:

Banning;

Brawley, First;

Garden Grove;

Shell Beach, Community



When a woman here is pregnant, it is said that she is up a tree—they do not know which way she will get down, either fall to the ground or climb down safely. Recently a very young woman brought her three-day-old baby into the clinic. The cord had been cut with a dirty razor and ashes rubbed on the cord “to seal it”. She had climbed down the tree safely, but she lost her precious baby after she was down. Our hearts were saddened by such needless death. We went to the chief and the churches and announced we would be holding a seminar on how to climb down from the tree safely. We wanted to tell them why they should come to maternity for giving birth. Almost three hundred women came that day and many witnessed how maternity had helped them down the tree safely.

When we are up a tree for whatever reason, God's promise is that through Jesus we, too, can climb down and receive the Christ child in the manger. ☆

Saturday, December 14

**YOUNG-GIL and KAREN CHUNG
in JAPAN**

Devotion sponsored by:

Camarillo, Korean;
Honolulu, Christ; L.A. Wilshire,
Korean Ministry; Ontario, Trinity;
Pomona, Covenant



Every body said that it is too difficult to proclaim the gospel in Japan. Yes, it is so hard to proclaim the gospel when the church has not increased. Why it is difficult—I will tell the story for the reason.

The first reason is that the people don't decide and don't confess their God or the good news of the gospel. Ordinarily they just accept any god. There are too many religious gods. They accept every god, so they can't choose one God. The second reason comes from their society. The people couldn't go to the church on Sunday. In Japan, all the schools have activities every day after school. On Sunday they have a game with other schools. They want to come to church but they couldn't come to church. Every Sunday morning, there are so many activities—weddings, social meetings and company meetings. In most churches, there are few school students and no young people. Third, is the cultural reason. The culture is 'not to bother others'. Dependent on that culture, they become dutiful and honest people. The people are constantly reminded 'don't bother others'. So they can't say twice that they believe God, and come church. That was also the obstacle of proclaiming the gospel. Then what is the way of proclaiming the gospel?

Mark: 10:27 — *“For men it is impossible, but not for God; everything is possible for God”*. God is the power of prayer and work for the Holy Spirit. We believe in God. God does every thing. ☆

Third Sunday of Advent December 15

JUDY ATWOOD in KANSAS

Devotion sponsored by:
Arroyo Grande, First;
Los Osos, Trinity;
Trona, Community



This year will be a new experience around the holidays at Ogden Friendship House because it is the first in our new facility. Again, we are registering families who need assistance with meals for Christmas and gifts for their families. So we are asking for those of you near and far who would like to assist in this process to let us know. If you live a distance and want to make a monetary contribution for this program, we will give a family a gift certificate to purchase the items they need for their family. Or if you want, you can shop where you are and ship gifts to us. A second option is for you to provide the funds for Christmas dinner food, if you wish. If that doesn't work out, we will provide the meal to go with the gifts. So there are a variety of ways in which you can be in mission and ministry here through the holidays. We again will have the Christmas Stores—one for children to select gifts for their parents/care givers and one for parents to select gifts for their children.

As always we covet your prayers for our continued faithfulness to mission and ministry here in Ogden on behalf of the United Methodist connection. We lift you also in prayer for your faithfulness where ever your ministry takes you. ☆

Monday, December 16

JOON SHOUNG and HEE JIN PARK in ATLANTA

Devotion sponsored by:
Aiea, Korean; Los Angeles Korean;
Van Nuys Korean



Advent is a season of waiting with hope and expectancy. It is time to wait for the future that does not belong to us yet who are living in present time. We can have hope and expectancy for the future, because history belongs to God. We know how God has done for us in the past and brought us to present and surely we know that God will take us to the future. In Advent, however, we Christians focus our eyes to the future from present, which appears to be weary, painful and despairing.

Advent reminds that Christians are people of vision. Advent is not simply waiting for another celebration of Christmas, but for a changed world that Jesus brings us once again.

The more the present time is filled with despair the more our vision of God's kingdom is clear—like the stars are brighter in a darker night. The point is that we are not sitting and waiting for our vision to come true, but we bring our vision to the present and live this day by it. That is how we live the future in the present. That is how our faith in God can transform this day no matter how it may seem to be weary and filled with despair. ☆

Tuesday, December 17

**JOSÉ ORLANDO and YOLANDA RIVERA
in ARGENTINA**

Devotion sponsored by:
Claremont; Long Beach,
Belmont Heights; L.A. Westchester;
Pomona, Westmont; Tarzana, St. Paul's



“I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people...” Luke 2:10

There is not much good news about Argentina nowadays. The economy is in shambles; there are eighteen million people considered destitute (half the total population); a hundred children die every day of starvation; violent crimes are “the meal of the day”... But every once in a while some good news gets to us—a hot breakfast program for children started in a church—a shipment of needed medications sent by a nation in solidarity with Argentina—children educated to search for peace. These are little glimpses of hope that brings joy to our hearts.

I guess that is what happened with the announcement of the angels to the shepherds two thousand years ago. It was not just any child being born that night: it was the expected Messiah, God with us, a Savior, which was such good news that we are still celebrating them today! As we go through life it is wise to emphasize more the good news than the bad news, but it is extremely important to be as good news to others as we can. That's what God did, and what gives Christmas its real meaning. ☆

Wednesday, December 18

CLAUDIA and TOSHI YAMAMOTO in JAPAN

Devotion sponsored by:

Alhambra, Sage Granada Park;
Honolulu, Harris; Irvine, University;
Kailua; Kailua, Keolumana; L.A. Centenary;
San Diego, Pacific Beach



“They shall beat their spears into sickles. Nations shall learn more no more.” Isaiah 2; 4

The words of Isaiah ring out during this Advent season. For over fifty-seven years Japan has had a Peace Constitution which says Japan will not go to war anymore. In January 2000, Constitutional Review Panels were set up within both Japanese Diet chambers. Though the panels do not have the legal mandate to actually propose changes, many people, including ourselves, see them as a first step toward an attempt to change the Constitution, and particularly Article 9, the “war renouncing clause.” The National Christian Council in Japan has been very concerned about militarism and the threat of war. We believe that any use of violence will destroy God’s creation and will take human lives, which are created in the image of God. Christians in Japan sincerely pray that God will use us as instruments of peace and reconciliation. Advent is a period of waiting but what we do while we wait is important. Advent is also a time of hope. We can raise our voices together here and in other countries to work for a better world. Let us all pray for peace. ☆

Thursday, December 19

DON and MINIONETI COBB in FLORIDA

Devotion sponsored by:

Aiea, Hawaii; Bishop;
Honolulu, Harris;
Honolulu, Kilohana; Los Angeles,
Westchester; San Diego, Mission Hills



Around the holiday season many of us in the United States are concerned that we may put on a few unneeded pounds. In much of the developing world the concern is to find enough to eat. An FAO report entitled *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2002* crossed my desk this week. The lead paragraph: “Millions of people, including 6 million children under the age of five, die each year as the result of hunger. Of these millions, relatively few are the victims of famines that attract headlines, video crews and emergency aid. Far more die unnoticed, killed by the effects of chronic hunger and malnutrition, a ‘covert famine’ that stunts their development, saps their strength and cripples their immune

systems.” There are still 840 million undernourished people in the world.

In spite of all that is going on there are many reasons to celebrate Christ’s coming this year. In a time of hatred there are those who live as though He came and is still present. Surrounded by greed others share freely. In fact if you look carefully at those you love in your community of faith you will probably find many indicators saying, “He has come indeed”! As we work at Educational Concerns for Hunger Organization (ECHO) on your behalf we are in contact with many Christians who are doing something to fight hunger and malnutrition around the world. There are no simple solutions but we can find answers by working together. We can make a difference. Echo’s vision: to bring glory to God and a blessing to mankind by using science and technology to help the poor. Why not? ☆

Friday, December 20

TONI ETHRIDGE in CAL-PAC

Devotion sponsored by:

Costa Mesa, Mesa Verde; Covina;
Highland, First; Pomona, Trinity;
West Hollywood, Crescent Heights



I recently heard a wonderful sermon about writing one’s own “Life’s Mission Statement”. We were told that it might take up to two years to write it and condense it down to one or two sentences. Doesn’t that make you think? In this process you also learn how to use your gifts, talents and abilities which everyone has.

I know I have been fortunate to share my ability and gift of love and passion for mission work. I have been so lucky in the past several years to meet many of you who have the same gift—the commitment to serve and help those in need. I am in awe of your dedication. Your friendship and your willingness to come forward have blessed me when I have called upon you. Many of you spend countless hours volunteering at churches, hospitals, medical clinics, food banks, building at our conference projects, Sierra Service Project, Arson Rebuild, Good Samaritan Medical Mission in Vietnam and in South Africa and many others. It is such an awesome gift and it all comes down to LOVE. 1 Peter 1:22 says “Love one another deeply”.

As we await our Savior’s birth during this Advent season and we pray for peace in the world, how will you use your special gifts, talents and abilities to make this world a better place and help someone in need? ☆

Saturday, December 21

ROMEO DEL ROSARIO in PHILIPPINES

Devotion sponsored by:

Guam; L.A., Rosewood; National City, First;
San Diego, Nestor; Tustin, Aldersgate;
L.A., Westwood



Psalm 85:13 Contemporary English Version—*Justice will march in front making a path for you to follow.*

As a way to begin the class in Ecumenics and Mission, my students and I agreed that every so often we would read something written by folk we have pushed to the edges of our lives. At the first opportunity, we read a poem entitled “Black-knot Flower” written by Tomihiro Hoshino, a paraplegic Japanese man who became a Christian after a devastating accident. He learned to draw holding a paint brush in his mouth. Next, we read the epilogue of the book *Embracing the Exile*, written by John E. Fortunato, who describes himself as gay and Christian. Next week, we will read a prayer from the Aboriginal people of Australia. We are lining up a few more readings.

Ecumenics, of course, is rooted in the Greek words “oikos”, meaning house, and “oikoumene”, meaning “the whole inhabited earth”. Christ comes to dwell in our “house”, in our “oikoumene” so that we will never ever again push anyone to the edges of our lives.

Prayer: Advent God, come and complete your work in our lives, in our “house”. Inspire us to prepare a path of justice for your coming. In the name of the Christ who comes. Amen. ☆

Fourth Sunday of Advent December 22

**CHIN CHEAK YU and GEORGE MARTZEN
in SINGAPORE**

Devotion sponsored by:

Los Angeles Chinese;
L.A. Westchester;
Laguna Woods,
Laguna Country



“Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come.” Mark 13:33

During these weeks of Advent we anticipate the birth of Jesus, who announced God’s Reign of righteousness, peace and joy. However, Mark reminds us of a future consummation of that Kingdom, a finale that often seems shrouded with the cadence of judgment –

wars and rumors of war, sniper bullets in Maryland and increasing acts of terror from Jerusalem to Bali.

How can Christians “keep alert” in this Reign of Terror? Can we not increase our awareness even as we continue to share the gospel? One of Chin Cheak’s classes examined the recent wave of terror. Students were dismayed that western nations, after the Bali attacks, dismissed Southeast Asia as too dangerous, when in fact people here join with the west in confronting a common enemy. Unfortunately, the increased rhetoric of war serves only to polarize marginalized people, so they are more readily exploited by terrorist groups.

The story of Jesus’ birth in Roman-occupied Palestine inspires us to shine the light of God’s love and justice even in our terror-occupied world. In Singapore, Bishop Solomon has initiated a new movement, *Methodist Volunteers*, for encouraging the Methodist family to get involved in social ministries. It is a positive way to keep our eyes open to the world and to remember that the love of God nurtured in our hearts longs to touch our neighbors as well.

Please join in prayer with the Methodist Church in Singapore as we seek to build bridges and share God’s redeeming love across Southeast Asia and the world. ☆

Monday, December 23

DANIEL HEINER in NICARAGUA

Devotion sponsored by:
Norwalk, United;
Temecula;
Torrance, Walteria;
Twentynine Palms



Central America has gained fame for its numerous wars, jungles and national parks. The dangers from past wars and current political situation in Nicaragua, in addition to its difficult access have deterred most development and have preserved the largest rainforest on the continent. Nicaragua remains the last frontier and is still avoided by most. I continue to work and live in the small rural communities that are located in and around the jungles. My neighbors continue to live without running water, phones, and just a few hours of electricity a day. The wealth/prosperity of the world’s modernization/globalization has not improved the lots of these peoples. I see many of my neighbors leave their community full of poverty and security and go forth into the confusing, chaotic, noisy modern world of the capital city Managua. Today we continue working jointly with women’s participation in farming/forestry. We also have projects in genuine partnerships with community and church to promote justice and equity. All these years of church work with the communities here has taught us in Nicaragua that Jesus rejects the violent response to evil. “He who takes the sword will perish by the sword.” Jesus, speaking to us about a new way of living, proclaims that peacemakers are blessed and that “they will be called children of God.” As one who has lived in a country at war here in Nicaragua, who has seen the devastating affects warfare has

on community and church, I believe war is incompatible with the teachings and example of Christ.

On this Advent, as the Bush administration talks of going to war— we must listen to the words of Jesus and our Council of Bishops and reject war as a usual instrument of national foreign policy and insist that the first moral duty of all nations is to resolve by peaceful means every dispute. God's Peace ☆

Tuesday, December 24

MARY KELLY in TONGA

Devotion sponsored by:

Aiea, Hawaii; Hilo, Hawaii;

Huntington Beach, Community;

Reseda, First; San Diego, St. Mark's



Where is he who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east and have come to worship him.
Matt. 2:2

I sit here in the Southern Hemisphere and wonder about stars. The night skies are all new here. I have learned to identify Scorpio and Draco, thanks to Robin Simmons a VIM volunteer, and to look for the Southern Cross. All the Christmas songs and stories accumulated in my life don't seem to work here. It's a summer, hot and sweaty Christmas here. As I read the Christmas story I wonder if they saw *here*, below the Equator, some glory in the heavens. "I wonder as I wander, out under the skies," sings through my mind. Was Jesus birth marked by some marvelous display in the southern heavens as well? Did people look upward and know that some great heavenly event was taking place as Jesus stepped onto Earth? Did the heavens seem to rejoice even here? I hope so. The summer nights are shorter here, but they are glorious and beautiful nights with clear, bright skies and a sea of stars. Could the angels' songs have echoed through the night skies and be heard by one who had the ears to hear? Would I have had the ears to hear them? Do I, today? I sit here with tears close to the surface as I write this. I am asked to hear God's voice in many ways as God speaks it into my life. Can God trust me to speak it into others lives? Can God trust me to sing the heavenly songs into willing hearts? Can I see the Star of Bethlehem from here and joyously announce the Good News to all those around like the shepherds running from the stable with the wonder of such a miracle on their faces?

Miracle of miracles, wonder of wonders, God with us, among us, within us. Hallelujah! ☆

Christmas Day, December 25

TERESA SANTILLANA in CAL-PAC

Devotion sponsored by:
Malibu; Northridge;
L.A. Westwood



A Human story: A young couple came to visit the church one Sunday. María was pregnant with her second child and she was having health problems. She suffered with kidney stones so they stopped coming to worship. I visited them regularly and in one of the visits she told me that her first baby came into the world after so much pain and discomfort during her pregnancy that she was afraid this time.

Little Manuel was about two and half years old and began attending our church preschool twice a week. This was possible due to a scholarship offered by the church. Maria had many moments of pain in the waiting months, but she hoped and trusted in God that everything will be fine. Praying, trusting, receiving Holy Communion at home and after all those months the baby was born. The second Sunday after the birth, the family came to church to give thanks to God for the birth of Valeria.... The pain, the hope and the trust became flesh... Joy!

A Bible story: *See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.* Isaiah 40:10-11

An Advent Reflection: You trust only when there is some doubt. At the same time you doubt, because you trust. In this tension hope is present and active. At this Advent time think about the hope you have for a child that will be remembered in his birth and in the mother's pain that turns into happiness and sees the promise fulfilled. ☆

Thursday, December 26

FRED and PAT HAGGARD at RED BIRD MISSION

Devotion sponsored by:
Anaheim, Light of the Canyon;
Hesperia;
Torrance, First



Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. Matthew 5:15-16 (NIV)

Jesus came into the world to be the light of the world while he was here. He brought the light so that mankind could witness it first hand and to give us the opportunity to inherit and hold the light after he was gone from this world. All we have to do to claim this light is to put our trust in the light and we can become children of the light.

The women and men of Red Bird Mission and Clinic are working daily to be lights in this world of darkness. We are exposed daily to the darkness of ignorance, lack of education, disease, hunger, broken relationships, unsafe and unsanitary housing, loneliness, substance abuse and dependency, poverty and the lack of a relationship to Christ. Our reason for being here is to serve Christ by introducing the unsaved in our area of influence to Christ through the deeds we do in the delivery of our ministries.

You too are being challenged to serve and daily be the light of Christ in your world. Remain open to Christ's calling in your life and let your light shine so that others may praise God for the good deeds you do. ☆

Friday, December 27

**DAVID and LORI PERSONS
in D.R. Congo**

Devotion sponsored by:
Alhambra, First; Coronado,
St. Paul's; Montebello;
Pasadena, St. James



For four years now Congo has been at war with Rwanda and others. During this time, about 3 MILLION PEOPLE have died, most of them women and children from starvation and lack of medical care brought on by the conflict. PLEASE, STOP AND THINK ABOUT THAT FOR A MOMENT!!! and what that would mean if you were talking about something like that in America or our troops in battle!!!! Many villages have been destroyed and the population terrorized by all sides. Most recently, local militia groups, called the Mai Mai, who originally started by protecting civilians, have gone into traditional witchcraft for protection and are committing atrocities beyond belief including growing cannibalism. These Mai Mai groups are spread around the country especially where the war has most affected the population and now have become a law unto themselves.

A pastor was sharing how when the Mai Mai took his village they were accusing him of working with the other side. He tried to share that as a pastor he had to show the love of God to all people regardless of their regional and ethnic identity. They took him out to kill him but could not find their guns in place. Praise God! They then went to get knives to do the job. It was taking time and so with the miraculous help of a friend he was able to escape! The Mai Mai were getting drunker and more drugged. They decided to burn the village. Many were burned alive in their huts and others had only the clothes on their backs as they fled. The pastor's wife and children were able to escape in different directions. After walking through the bush for three days, the family was reunited in a distant village. Praise the

Lord! As we listened to his testimony our hearts were torn apart and we are still crying with the pain that his story represents and that of thousands of others. He quietly said “but God was with us!

We had that HOPE! IS THIS NOT THE HOPE OF THE CHRISTMAS MESSAGE? EMMANUEL, GOD WITH US! What a precious gift and knowledge to the Congolese as they are going through this horrible time of suffering. Are we aware of this HOPE in the precious gift of the Lord Jesus and what that can mean in our lives? This is the REALITY OF CHRISTMAS where ever we are. New HOPE as we wrestle with the way we live our lives in this horribly chaotic world! This is what we are celebrating—not the tree brightly lit, the candles, the gifts and or how well we sing the cantata but EMMANUEL, GOD WITH US IN JESUS CHRIST—CHRISTMAS! ☆

Saturday, December 28

DONNA LOU VAN BUREN in PHILIPPINES

Devotion sponsored by:
Duarte, Church of the Foothills;
Glendale, First; Tujunga



Christmas comes early in the Philippines! It was a surprise to get a text message on my cell phone in September with these words: “Let me be the first to wish you a Merry Christmas!” It was from Nydia, a deaconess, teacher, and graduate of Valencia Academy, the Methodist high school in Mindanao where I taught in the late 1960’s. It was a special pleasure to know she still remembered me!

Joseph, not yet betrothed to Mary, got his Christmas surprise greeting in a dream. “An angel of the Lord appeared to him and said, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife . . . She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.’” (Matthew 1:20-21) Here at Union Theological Seminary-Philippines students and faculty alike hope for Good News this Christmas. In the midst of fears and uncertainties abounding here and throughout our world at present, we VERY MUCH need a message of hope this Advent season.

“Come, o come Immanuel” into the hearts and minds of people everywhere to fill all with the love and saving grace of God born into this world through God’s son, Jesus. ☆

Christmas / New Year Gifts

Through Advance Special Projects for your Conference-Related Missionary

Checks should be sent through your church to the California-Pacific Conference:

Dan Gara, Treasurer, P.O. Box 6006, Pasadena, CA 91102-6006.

Be sure to include the Advance #, the country and the name of project.

ARAMAYO/ARIAS - Ecuador...# 000433-7RA <i>Christian Education Program for children, youth and women</i>	Christian Education
ATWOOD - Kansas... # 19416-49905 <i>For low income family children K-5 two days a week</i>	After School Program
BARTON - Alaska...# 931602-1 <i>Outreach Ministry for Kids in Nome</i>	Midnight Sun Ministry
BOYLE - Japan...# 006380-4RB <i>Train rural leaders from third world for one year in Japan</i>	Asian Rural Institute
CHUNG - Japan...# 006380-4RB <i>Train rural leaders from third world for one year in Japan</i>	Asian Rural Institute
COBB - Florida... # 011956-4RA <i>Assist women farmers in arid agriculture techniques</i>	Rural Development Program
CROWE - D.R. Congo... # 011071-3RA <i>Provide medical supplies for community needs</i>	Health Center
DEL ROSARIO - Philippines... # 000424 <i>Scholarship for student pastor at Union Theological Seminary</i>	Union Theological Seminary
ETHRIDGE - CAL-PAC VIM...# 922230-8 <i>Resource materials for UM Volunteers in Mission in CAL-PAC</i>	UM Volunteers in Mission
FINAU - Fiji... # 013364-5BM <i>Student accommodations, Suva, Fiji</i>	Pacific Theological College
GARCIA - Chile... # 011589-6RA <i>Culturally-centered education to Aymaran Indian boys and girls</i>	Andean Youth Project
HAGGARD - KY... # 773726-2 <i>Education and community outreach in the heart of Appalachia</i>	Red Bird Mission, Kentucky
HEINER - Nicaragua...# 009878-ORA <i>Replant trees for use in heating & cooking needs of indigenous farmers</i>	Cooperative Firewood Plantation
HENDERSON - Mexico... # 007629-3RA <i>Combat hunger through agriculture, livestock and health projects</i>	"Give Ye Them To Eat"
HOFFMANN - Russia...# 011510-RA <i>Salary for Russian pastor and program assistance for Moscow church</i>	Way, Truth and Life UMC
HOLWAY - Alaska... # 931435-2 <i>Chaplaincy services to children living in Jesse Lee Home</i>	Alaska Children's Services
JEFFREY/PIERCE - Honduras...# 014165-6RS <i>Scholarships for seminary students in Honduras</i>	Theological Community of Honduras
JOCSON - Nepal...# 012415-1CO <i>Provide much needed medical equipment</i>	Tansen United Mission Hospital
KELLY - Tonga...# 013114-5BZ <i>Educational materials for Tupou High School Youth - Vaololoa</i>	Educational Materials
OLEWINE - Jerusalem...# 629805-0 <i>Vocational training, health services, enabling Palestinian refugees</i>	Health and Community Development, Gaza
PARK - Atlanta, GA.... # 011510-RA	Way, Truth and Life UMC Moscow
PERSONS - D.R. Congo... # 005773-4RA <i>Scholarship for student pastor in Mulungwishi Theological School</i>	Mulungwishi Theological School
RIVERA - Argentina...# 013944-7AZ <i>Church development in Central America</i>	Church Extension Ministry
SANTILLANA - CAL-PAC... # 011279-1RA <i>A ministry to young women in Porto Alegre, Brazil</i>	Susanna Wesley Safe-House - Brazil
TEMPLETON - LA Inner City... # 97000-0481 <i>Assistance for homeless children, youth and families</i>	Children, Youth and Family Collaborative
VALINO - Japan...# 013994-8DZ <i>Assistance to seafarers in need from foreign ports</i>	Ministry to Seafarers
VAN BUREN-Philippines... # 000424 <i>Scholarship for Union Seminary student</i>	Philippine Partners GL/MSN PRT
WHITFIELD -Tanzania... # 011878-6RA <i>Scholarship and assistance for African leadership training</i>	Methodist Leadership Training Institute
YAMAMOTO - Japan... # 006380-4RB <i>Train rural leaders from third world countries in Japan</i>	Asian Rural Institute
YU/MARTZEN - Singapore...# 013086-8IN <i>Library development at Trinity Theological College - Singapore</i>	Trinity Theological College



**Bishop Mary Ann Swenson
Jeff Swenson**
The United Methodist Church
The Los Angeles Area
Advent - 2002

Dream This Dream

*The lion and the lamb shall lie down together;
The kid and the panther shall play in the sun;
No one shall know the strange word "soldier";
And war shall be a shameful deed
that long ago was done.*

*And rest for the weary, and food for the hungry,
And peace for the comfortless
shall not be far to seek;*

*And beauty in labor, and beauty in laughter,
And beauty in loving shall come to the meek,
Mountain calls to mountain top -
Sinai unto Calvary;
Whispers rise from ancient fields -
They push up through the sod;
"Tell all the children
To tell their children's children
To dream this dream for God."*

Ernest Cadman Colwell (1901 1974)

This was a poem written by "Pomp" Colwell, the first President of the Claremont School of Theology. Pomp Colwell and others took the dream to the California desert to form a United Methodist seminary. St. Francis of Assisi took the dream to the desert when he left the city and his old life to follow Jesus, live simply, and love God's creation. He went to the desert to love God and pray for the world. Colwell and Assisi's dreams echo the dream of the ancient prophet who went to the desert and waited for peace.

He dreamed of a peaceful kingdom where God's person would lead with a spirit of wisdom and understanding. It would be a time of justice and righteousness where none would hurt or destroy. Also, "the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."

In this advent season we once again dream and wait for peace. The world yearns for peace. The children need the hope of peace. Still peace does not come.

Yet we continue to Dream the Dream. I pray for peace. I pray for justice. I pray for God to establish righteousness in all creation. We belong to God and to one another. So I pray with you and with those who have gone before us, "tell all the children to tell their children's children to dream this dream for God." ☆