

E.C. Leader

We Need Each Other!

When I think about December my mind quickly goes to Advent, the time of preparation for welcoming the Christ-child on Christmas. God loved the world so much that he sent his one and only Son, Jesus, into the world. That’s a truth I celebrate; it’s a truth we celebrate. I love to sing Christmas carols. (Just ask the EC Church Center staff; they’ll tell you I do it all year long.) But as much as I enjoy singing Christmas carols I know it sounds a lot better when there are other people singing along. Almost everything is better when you have others to share it with.

The Evangelical Congregational Church *Discipline* says that as local congregations we understand the truth that we need to partner with other congregations. “With the understanding that the local church cannot carry out the Great Commission alone, we surrender self-sufficiency and autonomy to join together in love. Embracing our common *Discipline* and our common purpose—to know Christ and make Him known—E.C. Churches will pray together, fellowship together, develop leaders together, evangelize together, plant churches together, perform acts of mercy together, pursue justice together, and celebrate God together.” Wow! That’s a lot of “togethers” in a couple of sentences. I am thankful that I am a part of a local congregation because together, we can do so much more than I can by myself. I’m thankful too that the congregation is connected to something even bigger, the Evangelical Congregational Church where we can work together to impact the world with the good news of Jesus. The apostle Paul was inspired by the Holy Spirit to use the illustration of a human body to describe just how much we need each other in order to accomplish the work our heavenly Father has prepared for us to do.



R E M E M B E R
THE CHILD

Inside this issue

Futures Initiative Team	2
The Bishop’s TOP TEN Prayer & Praise Items	3
News from Global Ministries	4
News from Evangelical	6
News from National Ministry Team	6
News from Benefits & Compensation	7



Evangelical Congregational Church
100 West Park Avenue
Myerstown, PA 17067
717-866-7581
www.eccenter.com
eccenter@eccenter.com

This truth, that we need each other, was reinforced to me recently following the death of my mother. Many of you understand what that's like. My dad died when I was six years old, so I was raised by a single mom. She was a great woman of God, a college professor, Bible teacher and speaker; but most of all she was mom. I cannot tell you how much all of the cards, emails, notes, and expression of concern I received from all over the EC world meant to me. What a wonderful comfort and encouragement you are to me and my family! We really do need each other.

Christmas is a time of good news and great joy for the world! It was never meant for just a few. It is something to be celebrated together. As a pastor, I always looked forward to opportunities for the church to come together in worship, prayer, service, and celebration. I pray that as you join with your family, your church family, and even with strangers you will come to a greater understanding of how much you need the people around you. Praise God for his wonderful gift of Jesus and thank him for the many people who continue to touch your life as together we follow him. Merry Christmas!

In Christ's service,



The **Futures Initiative Team** is tasked with studying our denominational life and ministries and formulating a strategic plan of how we will “do denomination” in the future. The huge task is stretching our minds and hearts as we work together to discover where the Holy Spirit is leading us. In addition to studying our denominational documents, interviewing our leaders, and spending time together in prayer, the Team is doing a lot of reading. If you'd like to

read some of the books the Futures Initiative Team members are reading here is a list:

- **Church Turned Inside Out, A Guide for Designers, Refiners, And Re-Aligners**
By Linda Berquist and Allan Karr
- **Fly In The Ointment, Why Denominations Aren't Helping Their Congregations And How They Can**
By J. Russell Crabtree
- **The Missional Church And Denominations**
By Craig Van Gelder
- **Missional Renaissance; Changing The Scorecard For The Church**
By Reggie McNeal
- **Your Church Is Too Safe, Why Following Christ Turns The World Upside-Down**
By Mark Buchanan

The Bishop's TOP TEN Prayer & Praise Items

1. Pray for those who continue to deal with the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy.
2. Pray for all of our local congregations who will be impacting their communities and families in practical ways this Christmas.
3. Lift up those who are dealing with the loss of loved ones as they gather together with family and friends during this holiday season (including me).
4. Remember to pray for our missionaries who are separated from their families during the Christmas season.
5. Continue to be in prayer for our Futures Initiative Team as they seek the leading of the Holy Spirit for the future of the Evangelical Congregational Church.
6. I praise and thank the Lord for the wonderful and warm receptions I receive as I visit and preach in local congregations.
7. Pray for me as I work on the theme and agenda for what will be a busy National Conference (May 29, 30, 31, 2013).
8. Praise God for the opportunities he will provide for us to share the real meaning of Christmas with those around us this month.
9. Praise God for the matchless gift he has given us in his One and only Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior!
10. I praise God for the great team he has brought together to serve the E.C. Church: the Conference Ministers, GMC staff, Business Office staff, and the Administrative staff. They are a joy to work with!



You may think that scheduling the Bishop to come and preach at your church is a difficult process. People have said things like “You’re probably all booked up already,” or “He wouldn’t come to our little church,” or “We’re too far away from Myerstown.” Well, let’s answer some of those concerns. While the Bishop has a lot of Sundays in 2013 already scheduled, there are a lot of open dates too. (Especially during the winter months and in the fall of 2013.) Bruce enjoys preaching and meeting people so it doesn’t matter if you have 300 or 30 on a Sunday morning, he’ll come; no church is too big or too small. If we can make the schedule work, he travels pretty well. (Though he gets close to his limit at 18 hours in the same airplane seat!)

So if you’re interested in having Bishop Bruce Hill come to your church to preach, he just may be available. It’s first-come-first-serve and you need to invite him. So check your 2013 church service calendar and see when it would be good to have the Bishop come preach. (He’s even willing to wear socks and a tie if necessary.) If you’d like to schedule a date please email your requested date(s) to his Administrative Assistant, jeahart@eccenter.com, and she will work with Bruce in completing his schedule for 2013. He hopes to see you soon!



ALASKA WORK TEAM OPPORTUNITIES

Once again Global Ministries is sponsoring two summer work teams to Camp LIWA in Fairbanks, Alaska. The dates are July 20-August 3, and August 3-17. Applications are available on the GMC website under the Short Term Opportunities tab.



News from Global Ministries



Christmas Missions Offering—December 23, 2012

Please watch your mail for the GMC Christmas Missions Offering packet: Enclosed you will find the Christmas Missionary Offering information for December 23, 2012. As you take 30 seconds to read the insert you will see that God is using the EC Church to accomplish much in His name. Please help us celebrate what God is doing through the EC Church by placing this insert in your bulletin and calling attention to this great work your people are involved in. We are depending on this Christmas Missionary Offering to help raise the \$240,000 needed annually to fund our denomination's mission work. Thank you for your partnership with the Global Ministries Commission.



INSTRUCTIONS FOR MAILING CHRISTMAS GIFTS/MONEY TO MISSIONARIES:

1. If the missionary is currently serving in the USA or is in the USA on furlough, you can send your gift, check and card directly to them. Contact the GMC office if you need a current address.
2. If the missionary is serving overseas, please send the check to the Global Ministries office made payable to the E.C. Church with a note in the memo line or a note detailing which missionary(ies) are to receive funds and the amounts. You can mail a Christmas card directly to the missionary; again, contact us if you need to check an address.
3. **DO NOT** include a check in a Christmas card and mail it to GMC; we cannot forward Christmas cards overseas. **DO NOT** mail a check directly overseas unless a missionary has specifically instructed you to do so; it usually costs quite a bit to cash checks overseas, and there are many check-altering schemes that could wind up emptying your bank account.
4. Many countries will charge customs duty on any packages sent, so check with the missionary first to see if they want or can use what you intend to send.
5. If you have any questions, call or email the GMC office. Our toll-free number is 1-800-866-7584, and our email is ecglobal@eccenter.com

Work Team Being Formed for Evangelical College of Theology, North East India—August 2013

You may recall that the VBS project for 2012 was to raise funds that would help the Evangelical College of Theology in North East India build a security wall around their campus. We did well at raising the funds—we collected a little over \$17,000! The GMC wants to take this partnership one step further and send a work team of 10-15 people to help our brothers and sisters in the EC Church of India begin building this wall. Actually, they know how to build a wall, they built the entire campus! Our goal is to build something even stronger than a brick & mortar wall—we want to build the relationship between the EC Church in

India and the USA! So while we build the wall together, we will also be strengthening our partnership in the Great Commission. The proposed dates are August 1-13, 2013. The estimated cost will be around \$2,500 per person. If you are interested visit the GMC website at www.ecglobal.org, find the "Short Term Opportunities" tab on the left and print out the "application for work team" form and send it in to the GMC office by January 1, 2013. If you are selected you will be asked to submit the other forms and a \$500 deposit by January 15, 2013. If you have any questions about this work team please contact the GMC office.



Please pray for the 2013 Liberia Trip

Bishop Hill, Pastor Josh Reinders, GMC Director Randy Sizemore and EC Church of Nepal Director Rev. Janga are planning to travel to Liberia January 31-February 9, 2013 to visit their Annual Conference and strategic new ministries. Please pray that all our visas are approved and for spiritual and physical strength and protection for the arduous journey. During and after returning home from our last two visits to Liberia we encountered persistent spiritual opposition. Below is an excerpt from the official invitation letter from Liberia which describes the "adventure" we will have!

I am writing to extend an official invitation to you and Bishop Hill to attend the 44th Annual Conference of the Evangelical Congregational Church of Liberia. You and Bishop Hill and members of your delegation will be attending the closing sessions of the conference and you and Bishop Hill will be speaking to the delegates at the conference. There will be a tour of our churches in Nimba District. This area is about 400 miles away from Monrovia and about 150 miles away from the conference location. Your team will also visit the Trinity, Scanlin, and Johnson Memorial E.C. Churches in Bomi and Monserrado Counties respectively.



Therefore, you and your team should be prepared to travel about 400 miles away from Monrovia on a very tough road in a very deep forest where you may likely see monkeys, deer and other animals frequently along the road. This place is called Gbii District and is Nimba County where we have about 10 plus churches and preaching points. They are presently eager to see you. The disciples traveled to this area along with Rev. Gueh and spent one month there evangelizing leading to the establishment of other churches and preaching points.

Missionary Updates:

1. Dan Dixon will be returning to Rift Valley Academy in Kenya near the end of December. Please pray for his safe travel and a rapid adjustment back into his ministry duties and the new school term.
2. Continue to pray for Gloria Smethers, Lamar & Janice Stoltzfus, and Nick & Lisa Lakatos, currently in the USA through July of next year doing deputation and connecting with supporters.
3. Ed & Val Schubert (Honduras) are praising God for the generosity of their supporters and others who donated funds to allow them to replace their vehicle which was stolen from them at gunpoint.



After a very busy November, Evangelical continues to celebrate its 60th year with a new **Faith in the Marketplace Breakfast** on December 6, from 7:00-8:30 a.m. at the Farm and Home Center in Lancaster. Jim Smucker, president of the Bird-in-Hand Corporation, will be the guest speaker. Details and online registration are available at www.evangelical.edu/lifelonglearning; then click on Faith in the Marketplace... or call Marsha Conley at 717-866-5775 to reserve your place.

Our **Chapel service** on December 4 at 11:10 am will be a special Advent observance, with appropriate scripture and music by the Seminary Chorale. Join us in Dech Chapel if you are in the area.

Please keep our students and faculty in prayer as the semester draws to a close in mid-December. Registration is currently underway for Winterim and Spring semester courses. A complete list of classes is available on the website www.evangelical.edu.

At this season of the year, we at Evangelical are VERY THANKFUL for the Evangelical Congregational Church and all who partner with the seminary in our mission to develop servant leaders for transformational ministry in a broken and complex world. God is at work here in some marvelous ways, and we are most grateful!



News from the National Ministry Team



On October 25th our denomination's National Ministry Team (NMT) made two important decisions regarding leadership positions in the Evangelical Congregational Church.

We are pleased to announce that the NMT unanimously accepted the recommendation of the Director of Global Ministries Nominating Committee and re-elected Rev. Randy Sizemore to a second five year term as our Director of Global Ministries. Randy has evidenced courage and grace in overseeing this international aspect of our denomination's ministry. Please continue to life up Randy and his wife, Carla, and this vital part of the church's work in prayer, asking the Lord's leading and blessing as Randy continues to serve the Lord as Director.

The NMT also accepted the recommendation of the National Executive Committee to modify the Great Lakes Region Conference Minister election schedule. Rev. Gary Brown's current term expires on June 30, 2014 and he is not eligible for re-election. This decision to modify the election process was made primarily for two reasons. The NMT felt that considering the work of our Futures Initiative Team and the possibility of significant changes being made to the position it would not be fair to hold an election at National Conference 2013 and then perhaps make significant changes to the job description. In addition, modifying the election timetable allows us to address a concern expressed by the Supervisory Committee that a one year transition period can be too long for the newly elected man and his congregation. Therefore, the following schedule for the election of the next Great Lakes Region Conference Minister was approved:

- Summer 2013—Nominating Committee formed
- Fall 2013—Nominations received
- Fall 2013—Candidate interviews & selection
- Fall 2013—Nominee(s) announced
- Winter 2014—Election held at a regional meeting
- July 2014—New GLR-CM takes office

News from Benefits & Compensation



A couple end of the year reminders:

- **Pastor Compensation Forms** should be returned to David King, Benefits Administrator, along with a copy to the Conference Minister by January 15, 2013.
- **Annual Statistical Report** due to Rev. Ken Wiest, Statistician, EC Church Center, 100 W. Park Avenue, Myerstown, PA 17067 by January 25, 2013.
- **W-2 forms** for employees (incl. pastors) and 1099-MISC forms for independent contractors are due by January 31 to the recipient and February 28 to the respective government agency or March 31 if filed electronically.
- **The aggregate cost of all applicable employer provided health insurance** is to be reported on 2012 W-2s issued in January 2013. While the IRS and SSA have issued rules on what and how to report the cost of group health insurance, some questions still persist. We are working with our insurance broker to properly interpret the rules and EC Benefits will provide the amounts to report on 2012 W-2s. **The cost of employer provided health insurance is not a taxable benefit. This is informational reporting only.**
- Pastors are employees of the local church and should receive a W-2 with federal, state and local taxes withheld from every paycheck.
- On January 1, 2011 a 2% reduction in the employee portion of the Social Security tax went into effect until December 31, 2011 and renewed for 2012. The continuation of this tax reduction is included with other tax cuts and fiscal policies that are set to expire on December 31, 2012 and if not acted upon by the federal government will result in the "fiscal cliff" being discussed in the media. Please verify any rate changes by reviewing Publication 15, Circular E, Employer's Tax Guide at www.irs.gov.
- The **rates for the active pastor health insurance plan** will not change on January 1, 2013. The new insurance rates are available on the website, www.eccenter.com.
- **HRA reimbursements under the Capital Blue Cross plan are due to PrimePay** by December 29, 2012 for covered healthcare expenses incurred by September 20, 2012. This is an HRA rule regardless of the insurance carrier. Reimbursements not received by December 29 will not be paid. No exceptions.
- The last day to submit **HRA reimbursements** under the Highmark Blue Shield plan is December 29, 2013.
- There will be a **slight increase in the cost of the retiree Medicare supplement plan**, Highmark Freedom Blue, of \$3 per month to \$171 per month. There will also be some increases to co-pays for next year; specialists co-pay increased by \$10 to \$25 per visit, therapy co-pays increased by \$10 to \$25 per visit, ambulance co-pay increased by \$50 to \$75 per occurrence and generic prescription co-pay increased by \$2 to \$10 per prescription. Your invoices for January 2013 will reflect the increase in premium cost.
- **Retirees please be careful** when responding to solicitations for other Medicare supplemental plans or Medicare Part D plans. The regulations concerning Medicare supplemental programs are very complex. There have been instances when a retiree unknowingly cancels their Freedom Blue enrollment. If your membership in Freedom Blue is cancelled for any reason it may take 30 days or longer to get you re-enrolled in Freedom Blue. Please be very careful making any changes to your Medicare supplement coverage.

May you have a blessed holiday season celebrating the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ!



Kevin Henry
Controller

David King
Benefits Administrator



"I will turn their mourning
into joy, I will comfort them,
and give them gladness
for sorrow."
Jeremiah 31:13

A special invitation for you:
Blue Christmas... "I Believe"

A Service of Comfort and Hope

Sunday, December 2nd, 2012

4:00 o'clock PM

Community Evangelical Church
51 Green Valley Road, Sinking Spring, PA
610-670-1942

The holidays are a difficult time for many people, especially those who have experienced loss or significant change. It may be that you are grieving the loss of a loved one, a job, your health, or a marriage. Maybe you will be separated by distance from loved ones this holiday season. Perhaps you may even be angry with God or feel alone and just can't deal with Christmas and all the reminders of holidays spent with those people and things which are now gone from your life. Or perhaps you feel pressured and overwhelmed by holiday preparations and just need to experience some time of reflection to experience the peace and calmness of Christmas.

Please don't despair. You are not alone. There are others who feel just like you do...empty, sad and wondering where God is in their suffering and aloneness. This may seem like a very dark time in your life, but even in the midst of our sorrow there is hope. Sometimes it is found in the most unlikely places.

You are invited to join us for a special Blue Christmas Service where your loss and feelings will be recognized and validated and where you will receive God's comfort, healing and peace, through prayer, Scripture, meditation and music. You will have the opportunity to light a candle to represent a loved one you have lost or a situation that has brought you sadness. Rev. Timothy Sanger, of First Presbyterian Church in Reading, PA will bring a special meditation of comfort and hope.

Please feel free to invite your family, a friend, or just come yourself. We will be waiting to welcome you and help you find the comfort and hope that God offers during these dark times. Light refreshments will be served after the service.

I Believe...