



THE QUARTERLY

Cedar Ridge Newsletter

Through Our Eyes

November, 2018

Welcome to the Advent edition of our Quarterly newsletter. Our Advent theme this year is "Through Their Eyes" as we take a fresh perspective on the familiar Christmas narrative by viewing it through the eyes of some of the lesser known characters in the story. Trying to take on the perspective of another person is no easy thing. Being able to see through another's eyes, sitting in their position, or putting ourselves in their skin is the rare gift of empathy, where the barrier between self and other dissolves and we are able to understand with compassion while preserving the dignity of the other. Perhaps never before has empathy been more needed and yet apparently less present. We live in a divided world and a fractured society where there often seems very little willingness to try to pause to understand the other. We seem embroiled in an escalating shouting match where our own demands, our own "rightness," and our own solutions for everyone else are touted above any real attempt to understand why the other disagrees. We seem locked in battle, trapped; hopeless, perhaps.

But the story of Christmas cuts through this hopelessness and breaks the deadlock through empathy. The miracle of the Divine becoming human is empathy itself. The birth of a fragile baby to a relatively powerless peasant couple in first century Palestine was God seeing through our eyes. God came into our narrative. God took on our skin. The Divine presence became flesh and lived with us, along with all our challenges, troubles, hopes and dreams. Christmas is a call to lay down our demand to be understood, and to seek to understand. This is compassion. This is God's glory, full of grace and truth.

In this newsletter you'll have the chance to see through the eyes of various people within our community. You'll also hear about ways we are trying to be a positive, empathetic presence for good in the local community around us. This Christmas season may all of us take up the Messianic challenge to be God's presence to others, to see through their eyes, and to love with deep understanding.

O Come, O Come, Immanuel!

Matthew

Matthew Dyer, Lead Pastor



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AROUND & ABOUT



On **September 23**, Cedar Ridgers learned how to get involved at the Ministry Fair. Thank you to the many volunteers who signed up! **October 6** marked our annual Harvest Festival, with attendance

estimated at over 800 people this year, making it our biggest turnout yet. Then, on **October 21**, we held our Annual Meeting in the auditorium with over 80 in attendance. Among topics discussed were renovation plans for the historic farmhouse and the prospect of a solar farm on our property. In addition, members voted for the nomination of two new board members: Hubert Dixon and Gina Richardson.



and Justice in our Schools. The keynote speaker was the Reverend Brenda Girton-Mitchell—an ordained Baptist minister (photo below), attorney, and former director of the Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships at the U.S. Department of Education. The workshop was attended by more than 60 people, including representatives from Montgomery County Public Schools, Parent-Teacher Association leaders, students, teachers, and other community members. The workshop surfaced many areas where our church community may engage in this important and timely issue, including

- Advocacy around after-school enrichment programs, particularly for Greencastle Elementary School.
- Collaboration with Parent-Teacher Associations to advocate for specific needs.
- Partnership with advocacy coalitions such as Action in Montgomery (AIM) to advance policies that begin to dismantle racial inequity at the county and state levels.
- Convening a safe, creative space for training, dialogue, and connection.

More information and resources are available on our website (www.crcc.org/racial-reconciliation). ●



We kicked off **November** with a Day of Service (11/04), beginning with a potluck at Cedar Ridge. Thanks to everyone who turned out to serve our community together!

On **November 10**, Cedar Ridge's Racial Reconciliation team hosted a half-day workshop, All God's Children: Racial Equity

A Letter from Our New Board Treasurer Alison Pasternak



It's easy to assume that ordinary people can't make a difference. The world has serious problems that seem impossible to solve. Yet, the small actions of ordinary people can have a big impact. And I am not just talking about small actions like wearing deodorant or

remembering to feed your children. The ordinary actions of ordinary people can and do matter.

Ordinary people like Melinda Anderson, who currently serves as a contributing writer for The Atlantic. Melinda writes compelling articles about race, ethnicity, and equity in education. She offers her readers fresh ways to think about these complicated and critical issues.

Ordinary people like Darren Freeman-Coppadge, who

recently earned a Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology and is now a staff counselor at the University of Maryland College Park. Darren has dedicated his career to helping people who are wrestling with issues of identity development such as the intersections of sexuality, spirituality/religion, and race/ethnicity.

Ordinary people like John Fuller, who is a U.S. Army veteran, Strongman competitor, and sewer of Halloween costumes. Earlier this month, John selflessly volunteered to serve as the PTA President at Thunder Hill Elementary School when the former President resigned.

Ordinary people like Sarah Burke, who endured a devastating divorce and then turned her heartbreak into an

encouraging story of healing in her book, *This Is Not the End: Reflections on Finding Hope During the End of a Marriage*. Sarah's insights are a gift to others who have experienced loss.

What do these ordinary people have in common? They are all members of our church community!

What can we learn from them? We, too, are ordinary people who can make a big difference.

How so? One way is by contributing our time and money to Cedar Ridge. By doing so, we are advancing Cedar Ridge's vision: We are providing fresh produce to local families in need; we are supporting the food-in-backpacks program at

Greencastle Elementary School; we are assisting residents of local shelters; we are fighting racism through efforts such as our recent workshop on racial justice in education; we are providing 60 scholarships to students in Guatemala; and we are supporting Ipalan families that are struggling to pay housing or medical expenses. We are ordinary folks contributing to God's big story of unconditional and transformational love.

As Cedar Ridge's new Treasurer, I want to express my deepest appreciation to those who give faithfully to our church. I would also like to encourage additional members of our community to give regularly. Together we can make a difference in the local community and throughout the world.

Alison J. Pasternak

GETTING TO KNOW OUR NEW BOARD MEMBERS



Gina Richardson

I was born in Washington D.C. and have very fond memories of growing up in the Brookland area of the city. Being the fifth of ten kids, I learned at an early age the importance of sharing and caring for each other, the art of compromise and being self-reliant. I was raised in a Christian home, and my parents took us to a small Baptist church in our neighborhood before we joined the new Presbyterian church that was built around the corner from our house. I was fascinated by the stories I heard during Bible school, and felt a very real personal connection to Jesus as a young child. Those early years set me on a spiritual journey that has brought me struggles, joys, and everything in between.

I started attending Cedar Ridge in 1998 with my husband, Kevin and our two sons after accepting an invitation by one of Kevin's co-workers who attended Cedar Ridge. Ian McLaren (founding pastor, Brian McLaren's father) was one of the first people to greet us on our first visit to Cedar Ridge, and we immediately felt welcomed. After the first several weeks attending, I had a real connection with the message of inclusiveness, service and being a community focused on following Jesus. After going to the Journey class, my husband and I became members.

One of the things that I appreciate about Cedar Ridge is how the leadership, staff and volunteers work together to create opportunities to explore and experience spiritual growth and transformation. I enjoy the friendship and growth from being part of a discipleship group. As a visual artist, I enjoy using art as a spiritual practice and in service to others. I love to read and recently joined a book club here that focuses on reading books dealing with spirituality and social justice.

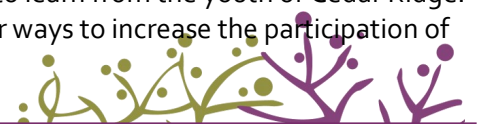
I have been blessed to be part of the work that Cedar Ridge is doing, especially with our partnership in Ipala Guatemala and our work in education equity and racial reconciliation. I am honored to have been elected to serve on our church board. I look forward to serving to the best of my abilities as a member of the body of Christ, and helping to fulfill our vision to our community. ●



Hubert Dixon, III

I'm originally from Nashville, TN. I've lived in the DC metro area for 23 years. I'm married to Sarah Clark, and our daughter is Olivia. I work as an elementary school teacher in DC. Prior to this, I did non-profit social justice work, as an organizer and as a grant-maker. I enjoy cooking and reading. Something folks might not know about me, I worked on my Granddaddy's hog farm in Tennessee as a teenager.

Our family first came to Cedar Ridge at the invitation of Rory Anderson. We started attending six or seven years ago. I appreciate the community, thought-provoking sermons, and opportunity to learn from the youth of Cedar Ridge. Serving on the board, I hope to support the long-term vision of the church and discover ways to increase the participation of our young people in the broader church community. ●





Christmas can be an emotional time... We see "perfect" family holidays in the media. Everyone gathers lovingly around a beautifully decorated tree. Faces light up when they open the gifts that were everything they hoped for and more. A dozen people are seated around the table as the hostess brings in the main dish. Meanwhile, on social media, people we know seem to be headed to exciting locations, making the most of holiday entertainment options, or hanging out in big groups of smiling friends. We think back to Christmases past with a mix of remembrance and wishful thinking... It can hard to measure up to that "perfect ideal."

Meanwhile, in my world, Amazon always loses at least one of the gifts I've ordered. It will take 10 minutes to get everyone to sit down for dinner, by which time one or more dishes will be overcooked or have gone cold. In every photo we take, at least one person will not be looking at the camera, or will be doing something weird with their face or hands. (Teenage boys, people!) My Christmas will not be perfect. But it will be special.

Special because I get to spend time with people I love. Special because we celebrate traditions that join hearts across oceans and down through generations. Special because we are mindful of the good food and drink we get to enjoy. Special because we put work, politics, and every day concerns aside for just a little while, and focus on love.

I'm sure Mary didn't think everything was perfect on that first Christmas as she trekked out to Bethlehem and gave birth in an animal shed. But when she held her tiny son, even the angels burst into song.

As we celebrate our imperfect holiday, may we all find hope, peace, love and joy in the little things—the special moments that slip (sometimes unnoticed) into our busy days. And like Mary, may we "treasure up all these things, and ponder them" in our hearts.

- Ruth Campbell
Pastor of Ministry Development

Here's what a few Cedar Ridders shared with us about their favorite Christmas memories and traditions . . .

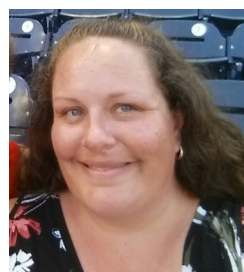
Alice Nelson

Hot Pink Joseph! Nothing gets me more into the Christmas spirit than seeing a hot pink plastic blow- mold Joseph figure in someone's yard. Ok, so maybe it's not hot pink, but it's pink and I'm sure you've seen these oversized plastic nativity scenes.



Perhaps you're wondering why a plastic lawn decoration, Joseph in particular, comes to mind when asked about something special I look forward to at Christmas. When my sister and I were little it was pretty common for us to spend time traveling with our parents to visit one relative or another. I can't remember who started it, but we had a game where we would try to be the first person to spot a hot pink Joseph. Whoever spotted one would yell "hot pink Joseph!" I'm not sure why Joseph stood out. Maybe it's because Baby Jesus and Mary got more attention at Christmastime, and we thought Joseph deserved some recognition. Traveling up and down the Eastern Shore and through the backroads of Gloucester County, VA we definitely saw our fair share of plastic nativity scenes. Sighting that first nativity scene with its pink Joseph meant that Christmas was on its way. Soon we would get the chance to experience special candlelight services, reconnect with friends and relatives, and celebrate the birth of our Savior.

A handful of years ago on Christmas morning my family was acting particularly strange. My mother wouldn't let me take the dog out in the front yard. Other family members blocked the windows as I walked by. Eventually I was told to go outside, and there on the front lawn was my very own hot pink Joseph, courtesy of eBay. Now that I'm older I better appreciate the time spent with my family during the holidays. There's something magical about the memories, the cold air with its occasional smell of snow, the lights twinkling on the tree, and of course, spotting a hot pink Joseph.



Alice serve as a leader in Cedar Ridge Kids.



Caroline Reagan Fuller

One of the special things me and my family do at Advent is straw. The way it works is we get the small wooden manger and a bag of yellow yarn from our bookshelf, and every night of Advent and on Christmas

Eve, we put a piece of straw in for every good deed we did on that day. Our good deeds make a soft bed for baby Jesus.

Another thing we like to do is the Advent wreath. How we do it is every Sunday in Advent and on Christmas Eve we light a candle in honor of hope, peace, love, joy, and the candle in the middle we light on Christmas Eve is the Christ candle. One of my favorite activities is when we decorate the house with Christmas stickers, put lights on the roof or sometimes in our rose bushes, hang our stockings, and decorate the Christmas tree. Me and my younger brother, Jack, get to play in the Christmas tree box while Mommy and Daddy put up the tree and go get the ornaments and music to listen to while we decorate.

Last, but most definitely never least, is Christmas morning! On Christmas morning we get to open all our presents, and one of the best parts is we get candy for breakfast! I love all the Christmas activities because they're all part of a Christmas holiday that is very important to me because it's a lot of work that is super fun to do and it's all done with my family. Also I love all of the excitement on Christmas morning and all of the suspense through the part of night when I'm awake. I like that there is no negativity in that one day of the year and all the joy of opening presents and wrapping up gifts to give and seeing the reaction of my family open their presents. Christmas is one of the most amazing holidays.

Caroline is in the third grade and attends with her parents, John and Jennifer, and brother Jack.



Richard Strub

Christmas for our family is a result of many years of learning and growing. We are all Christians of closely related types. All of us have known for years "the true meaning of Christmas," which for me has

a new, deeper meaning because of Matthew's emphasis on the massive meaning of the incarnation. So for us, it is a time where we are finally all forced to be together, (getting together isn't always that easy) and get a chance to really love, listen, and appreciate each other. I especially love seeing my wife and her mother interact with my side of the family, and I watch with great satisfaction thinking what a

smart, blessed boy I am for having married her.

In the past it was a time of singing. But since my Dad died, I seem to not have inherited his knack for encouraging folks in this activity. This always brings on feelings of sadness which I try to steer in empathetic directions when I look around the room during Christmas celebrations. Sometimes though, when my Inuktitut-speaking-missionary niece is in town for Christmas, she helps as she loves this tradition also.

Often different family members bring friends who unfortunately tend to eat up all of the (my) Christmas cookies my daughter makes. But I overcome these feelings and try to be "entertaining." In my efforts though, I tend to make a few blunders which my wife helps me later to work on. But all in all it is a very enjoyable time.



Richard volunteers selling coffee and serving communion. He attends with his wife, Kelly, and daughter, Anna.



Tonkin Family

Our family has three Christmas traditions: Advent calendars, gingerbread houses and a country Christmas. We have used a variety of advent calendars. When our boys were younger, we used sticker advent calendars with a simple

verse. Over the years we have also used advent calendars containing chocolate or small toys, as well as a Lego calendar. Last year we started using the advent readings from *The Jesus Storybook Bible* by Sally Lloyd-Jones, and we added an advent wreath we light each night. We enjoy marking the days until Christmas--it is a simple activity we can fit into the bedtime routine, and it places the focus on God's plan of redemption. We used advent calendars when I was a child, so it reminds me of my childhood.

The gingerbread house gives us a family holiday project that keeps the boys attention since it involves building, sweet icing and c.a.n.d.y. We celebrate Christmas itself with family and friends at the Tonkin log home in Pennsylvania. It gives us an opportunity to get away from our daily space and routine. We can be free to hang out, play games, and eat too many cookies with loved ones.

Rachel and Joe Tonkin attend with their two boys, James and Patrick, pictured above with their gingerbread house creation.



The House Family

One of our favorite Christmas traditions is our homemade advent calendar. We have a special advent tree with twenty-four compartments. We all contribute our favorite Christmas time activities. Things like: eat a candy cane, read a Christmas story, drive to look at Christmas lights, or drink hot chocolate.

We write those ideas on small cards and fill up the advent calendar compartments. Each day we open a door and do the activity together as a family. The challenge is to make sure the activity can fit in the day's schedule. There is some late-night rearranging of cards, and we have a strict rule about no looking ahead (which is happily ignored by the kids, and then they're really confused when it is different in the morning).

The Saturday compartments are always filled with "Open a Present" cards. This started because we used to travel every Christmas and we liked to stretch out the gift-giving so it wasn't so overwhelming on Christmas morning. We have continued that tradition even though we don't travel for Christmas anymore. I like to coordinate the children's presents for each Saturday so they have something comparable. The first Saturday, they may all get a book, the second Saturday, some art supplies, and so on. Each weekend's presents have a different wrapping paper to set them apart. The children look forward to the advent calendar every Christmas and it is one of the first things we set up when we start decorating each year.



Andrew and Sarah House have been attending since 2016 with their children pictured (right) Micah and Eve (above) James, Micah and Eve.



Nadine Smith

I enjoy the celebratory festivities and cheerful mood of people at Christmastime, including the gathering of families, which often leads to the resolution of long-held hostilities. I also like movies that come out at this time portraying the spirit of Christmas and the indomitable power of optimism.

For years, I've made cookies, starting with my daughter and now with my grandchildren, to distribute to neighbors, relatives, and friends. I feel this helps to take the commercialism out of gift-giving and puts more emphasis on what Jesus teaches — showing love by giving of yourself to

bring joy to others. My grandchildren, however, still want more than cookies!

Nadine (bottom left photo) has attended Cedar Ridge since 2002, initially with her mother, but is mostly joined now by her daughter, Erika, and her grandchildren, Camden and Jayda.

Tara Rose

One of the most precious and treasured times of the year is Christmas (and the holidays in general). For me, it's a joyous time to enjoy family, friends, and food, and reflect on the year. I ponder the joys and sorrows, ups and downs, and think of how God's plans have shaped and molded me, preparing and growing me for God's will. Throughout the year, many of us focus on the daily hustle and bustle of balancing work and home life. Christmas is the time where our family and friends get together and spend quality time with each other; reminiscing, talking, laughing, and sharing, making new memories for years to come.

The three main priorities in my life are God, family, and friends. Although I greatly value and love my job and the people I work with, I am most grateful to God for continued blessings to me, my family and friends. I am constantly in awe of God's greatness and power and am thankful for how God has changed (and continues to change) my heart and life. I have experienced tremendous growth through the trials and tribulations I experienced over the years, specifically over this past year, and am humbly grateful for the lessons I have learned, the gifts God has provided me, and the blessings He has bestowed upon me. One of my greatest joys has been joining Cedar Ridge as a new member. The abundant love and support that I have received from many church members have been astounding, and I am truly grateful and blessed to be a part of this phenomenal church family.

Tara began attending Cedar Ridge early this year with her mother, Rose and became a member this fall.

Linsey and Vivien Malig-Mayhew

Our little family loves outdoor adventures, and we always take one around Christmas time. Being in the presence of God's gorgeous creation reminds us there is peace on Earth, we just have to look for it.

Linsey and Vivien Malig-Mayhew (above), with their dog Pax at Great Falls, December 2017. ●



Wealth and Wisdom from Across the Border

By Jonathan Freeman-Coppadge

*For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom...
1 Cor. 1:25 (NIV)*

We know them as magi, wise men, or kings, but they would more accurately be called enigmas. Tradition has colored in some of the missing information, but Matthew's gospel includes very little about them, as little as Mary and Joseph knew about them when the strangers showed up on their doorstep. Were they kings? Probably not. Were they Zoroastrian astrologers? Maybe. Were they wise? It depends on whether you consider it wisdom to follow a star across deserts hoping that whatever awaits will be worth the journey and the gifts. To their Persian friends and neighbors, the magi's pilgrimage probably looked like sheer folly.

What possessed them to forsake the known in search of an indefinite promise? Was it the same thing that called Abraham out of Ur? The magi followed a star, but how did they know it would lead them to something worthwhile? And how did they know that the barn-born babe was exactly what they had come in search of? How do we identify God's invitation into the wilderness? How do we recognize the unlikely delivery of God's promises?

The magi are unique in the Christmas story for two reasons: First, they are the only wealthy characters. Second, they are the only ones who came to Jesus—Jesus came to Mary and Joseph; the angels came to the shepherds; years later, Jesus would come to his disciples. But the magi made their arduous journey using their own resources, bringing their own gifts, risking their own lives and livelihoods for a king disguised as a toddler.

Are these two things connected? Immanuel means "God with us," and certainly God's arrival on earth should be seen as an invitation to everyone everywhere (1 Tim. 2:4, 11 Pet. 3:9). But when God chooses specific places and people to call his own, time and again Jesus places himself in the path of the poor. The rich, when they encounter Jesus, often write him off as fringe or worse. "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle," Jesus said, "than for someone who is

rich to enter the kingdom of God" (Matt. 19:24). The comparison seems to emphasize its improbability, if not impossibility, but I wonder if Jesus had in mind those mysterious rich foreigners who rode their camels in search of a needle in a Bethlehem haystack and, against all odds, found it. I wonder if Jesus remembered them with admiration, perhaps from stories Mary and Joseph told him about the day three strangers showed up with gifts from another world. I wonder if he held them as models of what it looks like to step out of a place of wealth—Ur, Persia, or the United States—to find God in whatever hovel he chooses to inhabit.

There is an old hymn whose music I love but whose words, taken from a William Blake poem, make me cringe:

And did those feet in ancient time
Walk upon England's mountains green?
And was the holy Lamb of God
On England's pleasant pastures seen?

The hymn implies Yes, and its heart is in the right place: Let God's justice come until England resembles the Kingdom of Heaven. But part of me counters No! Jesus did not walk in the green mountains and pleasant pastures of Blake's white, Western, wealthy England; Jesus came to a dusty land full of brown people suffering under Western imperialists. We are right to celebrate God's coming to mankind, but let us remember that Jesus intentionally visited the poor. He let those with means come to him.

As we celebrate the Christ's Advent, let us give thanks for a God who comes to dwell with his people. In all the ways we are poor, let us be glad for a God who is comfortable with our poverty. And in all the ways we are rich, let us be open to seeing that strange star, or hearing that whispered call, beckoning us out of our comfortable lives and into a world in desperate need of Immanuel. Another church song says, "Christ has no body here but ours." If that is true, where should we make Christ present this Christmas? ●

This fall, Cedar Ridge welcomed back Jonathan and his husband, Darren, and their son, Langston, who recently moved back to Maryland after five years in Boston. Jonathan is a writer and teaches English at the Severn School.



GUAT'S Up

The Art of Partnership

By: Gina Richardson



During our Cedar Ridge annual summer trip to Guatemala this year, our nineteen travelers had the opportunity to participate in a very exciting project with our partners at CIDHER. Since 2010, Cedar Ridge has been sending teams down to Ipala Guatemala to offer support and friendship as well as partnering here in Maryland with the local Ipaltecos in Riverdale Park. CIDHER suggested that we do something special as a way to honor the many years of working together. The Guatemala Team at Cedar Ridge brainstormed with CIDHER during their monthly meeting and video chats, and came up with the idea for a mural.



The images on the mural symbolize many of the ideas and values that were established at the beginning of this partnership. We intended for our partnership to be focused, sustainable for many

years, relational rather than programmatic--a partnership in which we are learners, listeners and co-workers. The figures in the mural represent working

together; the soccer ball for friendship, sharing, participation and coming together; the heart, praying hands and dove are

for love, hope and peace; and the cross for Christ centeredness. The Spanish words painted across the top mean, "Working together for love, hope and peace."

During the 2018 Guatemala trip, team members painted the mural on the outside wall of the main soccer stadium with the help of a talented local artist from Ipala, some of our scholarship students, and students from a local English class. During the three days of painting, many people drove by, waved and honked their horns in approval. There were even a couple of people just walking by who asked if they could help paint. It was an awesome way to commemorate our partnership with the people of Ipala and also make a positive impact on the Ipala community.

Check out the Guatemala wall display in the zoo corridor, across from the water fountains to see a photo of the mural, along with other items and video presentations that show the various people and projects that make up this partnership. ●



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