

# THE GOOD NEWS



The Newsletter of Ebenezer United Church of Christ—viewable at [ebnzc.org](http://ebnzc.org)

January/February 2011

## Thank You!

Thanks to all of you who have accepted a place of service this year: our Board, ushers, worship team, those who open the building, those who prepare meals, and all who do so much. So many members serve in various ways in our church. And, truly, our church could not function without such help and participation. So I thank you for all you will be doing this year at Ebenezer for our Lord.

*“If your gift is serving others, serve them well.”*  
—Romans 12:7

*“Work with enthusiasm, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people.”*  
—Ephesians 6:7

And thanks to each of you who pray for me during the week and on Sunday. My theme song could easily be the old spiritual: “It’s me, it’s me, Oh Lord, standing in the need of prayer.” Sarah and I cannot tell you how much we covet your prayers.

## Confirmation 2011

Sarah and I are excited by the opportunity to spend time with some of our young people. We have begun studying 10 Keys to Unlocking the Bible. We will have fun learning about the Bible, and how Jesus is there from Genesis to Revelation. Pray for these students: Mollie Pabst, Amber Garrison, and Tori Weber.

## Physician and Author

We will continue our study of Dr. Luke’s Gospel this spring. Since the book ends with the resurrection of Jesus, we should be right there come Easter Sunday. Continue to read, study, meditate, watch, listen, or use a different translation to get a grasp on this wonderful account of our Lord’s ministry. God has promised that His Word will never return void. We know then no matter how we

take it into our minds and lives, God will use it in a mighty way.

In the coming weeks, as you read this third Gospel narrative, look for ways that God uses it to speak to you. And if you would, please share some of that with me—e-mail, phone, a note, in person. I would be delighted to know about it.

## Warm and Personal

I am grateful each Sunday for the interest you take in our guests and visitors. Many of you make a beeline for them during the time of greeting. No one could experience your friendliness and sincerity and not feel that they had been genuinely and warmly welcomed. Keep it up!

See you Sunday—with a smile on your face, and anticipation in your heart.

—*Franklin*

## Free Will

Free will was a topic of discussion in Sunday School a few weeks ago. Not that our lesson that day was about free will, just that we touched upon the topic in one of our many far ranging, sort of off-topic discussions, that was some how related to that Sunday’s lesson.

We have a study book we follow. Everyone knows this week, what the topic is for next week. What we do not know is where that topic will take us. As often as not, each Sunday, we learn as much about subjects not on the lesson as we do about what we have studied. Adult Sunday School is a fun time. I am amazed how much I learn each week. You must attend. Just try our class for two Sundays in a row.

*(cont’d on pg. 2)*

Anyway, back to the subject of free will. Free will came up in the context of how badly we abuse our free will. Someone in class wondered if God ever regrets giving us free will. It was a rhetorical question, more a comment on how disappointed God must be with us. Even though the question did not need an answer and I did not answer it, an answer popped into my head.

I think our free will is all about love. The love God has for us is beyond our comprehension. He wants us to love him. We cannot truly love Him unless we have free will.

Our daughter, Erin, was about the cutest little girl that ever existed. Every Sunday SueAnn would have her dressed up in some frilly dress with white tights and her little patent leather shoes. She was a vision! She loved getting dressed up and going to church. After church was over SueAnn and I would walk out of the sanctuary and we would visit and wait for children's church to get out. Now here is the reason I know that free will is about love. Erin would come out of her classroom, many feet down the hallway. She was always happy and had a smile on her face. (Just looking at her made me smile.) The good part is coming.....

Once out of the classroom she would look around for her mother and me. Once she laid eyes on us, her smile turned into something beyond joy. Her face would just glow. Then she would break into a full out sprint. From something like 20 or 30 feet away (that is how I remember it); she would leap into the air and launch herself at us. For those few moments, every Sunday, after church, she was pure love and she chose to give that love unconditionally to SueAnn and me. I am unable to find the words that will convey to you how wonderful it felt to be so loved, especially from someone I loved so much!

I believe the Lord desires this unconditional love from us. If we could all be like a child in our relationship with Him perhaps, it would be easier to love Him that much. Instead, we put conditions on our love. We tell Him we will obey if he does such and such for us. We hold onto our sins and tell the Lord, tomorrow or next year, just not now. Selfishness and love are not compatible.

Why is it we do not just leap into the air and trust our Lord to catch us?

—Ed Sheridan



## The Last Christian

Recently, I read a *New York Times* article, called "Last Christians ponder leaving a hometown in Iraq." Romel Hawal, 48, was born and continues to live in Habbaniya Cece, Iraq. This town of 10,000 is located in Anbar Province, a stronghold for Al Qaeda and other Sunni extremist groups. Mr. Hawal is the last Christian man in town. Each morning, he goes to his church, Mary Queen of Peace, to clean and to remember. His wife wants to leave town, but he feels obligated to stay. Mr. Hawal's son knows no other Christians and has no memory of attending church.

Habbaniya Cece was once a village of harmony, with Christians and Muslims, Arabs and Kurds, Sunnis and Shiites all living together in peace. Mr. Hawal's Muslim neighbors used to enjoy celebrating Christmas with him. On the street where his church is located, are an Assyrian Christian church (now an unused, bombed out shell), a Shiite mosque (new but with no cleric because of violence against Shiites), and a Sunni mosque. Like more than half of the estimated 1.5 million Christians who once lived in Iraq, Mr. Hawal's Christian neighbors have all fled the violence and persecution.

I often wonder if we are too complacent in our faith as we sit in comfortable pews free to worship when and how we choose. Would our faith remain strong if we experienced the persecution so many of our Christian brothers and sisters around the world experience?

QuickTime™ and a TIFF (Uncompressed) decompressor are needed to see this picture.

In November, 51 worshipers and 2 priests were killed during a Sunday mass in Bagdad. In early January, 23 Coptic Christians were killed as they left their church in Alexandria, Egypt. Extremist Muslim websites have listed 64 churches in Egypt as targets. In Jos, Nigeria (where the late Marion Klippert served as a missionary for decades), 38 Christians were killed in a Christmas Eve church bomb blast. These are just a few examples; 200 million people have been murdered for their faith in the past century, more than in any other century.

Mr. Hawal says that he will remain in his hometown, given courage by his Muslim friends who do not want him to leave. He will continue to care for his church, even as he worries about the safety of his son.

I was curious to see if the article about Mr. Hawal and Habbaniya Cece received more than passing notice. I “Googled” the name of the town to see if it had received any attention on the Internet. To my surprise, page after page listed websites that have posted copies of the article—I stopped counting at ten pages. I couldn’t help thinking of Jesus’ words regarding the woman who anointed him with costly perfume: “I tell you the truth, wherever the Good News is preached throughout the world, this woman’s deed will be remembered and discussed.” (Matthew 26:13).

—*Patricia Worster, Editor*

## World Day of Prayer 2011

World Day of Prayer is a worldwide ecumenical movement of Christian women of many traditions who come together to observe a common day of prayer each year on the first Friday in March.

Services begin at sunrise in the Pacific and follow the sun across the globe on the day of celebration. Each year a different country serves as the writer of the World Day of Prayer worship service. World Day of Prayer was founded on the idea that prayer and action are inseparable in the service of God’s kingdom.

Women, men, and children in more than 170 countries and regions will celebrate World Day of Prayer, Friday, March 4, 2011. The women of Chile have written the service around the theme, *How many loaves have you?* They ask us to enter a process that draws us into the Bible, into the context of Chile and into the real situations of our lives and communities. Together, we are asked to respond to what we have and how we can share it with others. In this past year, Chile has been challenged by a devastating earthquake and the collapse of a mine in which many miners were trapped. Again, we are reminded to share our bread and to receive the bread that is shared with us. On March 4, 2011, let us reach out our hands

and hearts to touch the lives of sisters and brothers in Chile and around the world.

For more information, visit [www.wdpusa.org](http://www.wdpusa.org).



I am looking forward to working with the children at Ebenezer church. A study of the Bible, how we got it, what it contains, who wrote it, etc. I am open to any ideas that the children would want to study. There are so many topics to choose from that I am positive we can find ideas to keep interest and learning at its peak. It should be an interesting year as we have several students who are ready for confirmation instruction and perhaps we can coordinate with the pastor to assist in our lessons on Sunday. I ask that the congregation keep us in their prayers as we learn new ways to make a difference in the lives of our children.

—*Marj Schwabauer, S.S. Superintendent*



## Shrove Tuesday Pancake Feed

This year’s Shrove Tuesday Pancake Feed will be held on March 8, from 5 to 7 p.m. Be sure to invite your friends and family. A freewill offering will be received.

## In Memory of Edith Christensen

The family of Edith Christensen has presented the church with two more memorials in addition to the refrigerator which was purchased last fall. A microwave oven was purchased for the kitchen, and a lilac bush was planted to the left of the stairs to the main entrance. We are grateful for these gifts in remembrance of Edith.

## Lent 2011

Lent begins with Ash Wednesday on March 9.

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## 2010 Annual Report/ 2011 Directory

If you have not received a copy of the 2010 Annual Report or the 2011 Directory, copies are available at the church.

### Officers for 2011

Chairman .....	Ed Sheridan
Vice Chairman.....	Tom Amen
Secretary .....	Brenda Brehm
Treasurer.....	Norma Hansen
Sunday School Superintendent.....	Marj Schwabauer
Deacons .....	Peter Debus
.....	Katherine Gropp
.....	Kevin Garrison
.....	Gene Hinkle
.....	Don Lutzi
.....	Jack Meister
Trustees .....	John Brehm
.....	Leonard Robertus
.....	Don Weber

### Dorcas Society

Members are reminded that the first meeting of the Dorcas Society in 2011 will be on Tuesday, March 1, at 7 p.m.

### Anniversaries

2/1.....	Jed & Nikki Ngirchoimei
3/11.....	Larry & Gayla Carr
3/17.....	Phil & Elvina Becker
3/26.....	Reuben & Norma Keller
3/29.....	Bill & Elsa Amen
4/17.....	John & Carolyn Pabst
4/19.....	Jack & Rhonda Meister
4/27.....	Erin & Luke Dreyer

### Birthdays

2/1.....	Michelle Long
2/1.....	Nancy Worster
2/4.....	James Graff
2/7.....	Char Reid
2/13.....	Amanda Dougherty
2/15.....	Amber Garrison
2/16.....	Gayland Seidel
2/19.....	Jed Ngirchoimei
2/25.....	Bow Filbert
2/28.....	Kathy Graff
3/2.....	Jerry Filbert
3/11.....	Janet Zieg
3/12.....	Lori Hinkle
3/12.....	Rebecca Hansen
3/13.....	SueAnn Sheridan
3/15.....	John Pabst
3/17.....	Gayla Carr
3/18.....	Mike Fleming
3/22.....	Paul Smith
3/27.....	Gary Ganger
3/27.....	Kim Graff
3/28.....	Larry Hansen
4/1.....	Carolyn Robertus
4/2.....	Brett Amen
4/5.....	Ed Sheridan
4/6.....	Marj Schwabauer
4/7.....	Reuben Keller
4/12.....	Franklin Krause
4/12.....	John Reinhardt
4/15.....	Addison Fleming
4/16.....	Gene Hinkle (Jr.)
4/29.....	Michael Worster