Mission Team Leaves for Dominican Republic

On February 12, a group of short term missionaries from Christ Church headed to the Dominican Republic to continue our long time partnership with Christians in that region. The team includes Mike Page—who has been leading our missions to the DR since 1993—his grandson Peter Hochbrueckner, Peg and John Odell along with their children Jack and Emily, and Kaylee Croft. Our team will be serving at Colegio Infantil, a school run by Padre Nephtali and his wife Maria, serving students from pre-kindergarten to third grade. While there they will be building a cafetaria for the school, constructing tables and benches to be used in classrooms and building outdoor benches. Last time Christ Church sent a team to the DR they helped to construct a playground, and this time they will do some maintenance on it, including making the ground more level.

Mike Page has had a friendship and partnership with Padre Nephtali since his first trip to the Dominican Republic when Christ Church helped to build a church for the parish of Santiago the Apostle. Our missionaries provided assistance to him at the various churches he has served. During their visit to the Dominican Republic, Mike and the team are hoping to also be able to visit Cristo Salvador in Yaguita de Pastor, the second church our parish missionaries helped to build, and one we have returned to on several trips.

From Father Matt’s Study

As a parish we are going through a time of transition and discernment. We do not yet know who it is who will be our next rector or where he or she will lead us as a congregation. As your priest, I too am going through a period of transition and discernment as I consider what the next step in ministry is for me and my family. During times such as these it is essential that we seek the Holy Spirit’s guidance. But how exactly is it that one hears from God?

If we want to hear from God, we first must be firmly convinced that there is indeed a God who speaks. As Christians we believe that God has made himself known to his people. In the Nicene Creed we confess that “we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son” and that “He has spoken through the Prophets.” We believe in these last days God has spoken to us chiefly through his Son, Jesus Christ, but that he also has inspired the witness of the authors of Holy Scripture. We believe, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16). And so if we want to know God’s will we should begin by making a careful study of what he has revealed in the Bible. We can have confidence that, when properly understood, the scriptures will lead us to the truth and to God’s will.

God has spoken to his people in general through the Bible. Through
Holy Scripture he has made known his righteous law and all things necessary for salvation. We need look no further if we are wondering whether God approves of stealing, idol worship, or adultery. We need look no further to see that Jesus is the Lord and savior of humankind. But often we are seeking God's will for situations more specific to our own lives. Although the Bible reveals general principles, if we want God's guidance about who to marry, what college to attend, or whether or not to take that particular job, we won't find very specific answers in the Bible. In those cases we need the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Only through developing a close love relationship with God will we begin to recognize his one-on-one guidance in our life. A close personal relationship with God is cultivated through a life of prayer. Prayer is in its essence conversation and communion with God. In prayer he teaches us how to apply the truth of his word in our own lives. He will give us clarity to see how he is at work in our circumstances. Has a door to a certain opportunity closed? Has another one opened? Perhaps God is sending you a message! Sometimes God will speak to us in more immediate ways as well. Sometimes it may be as obvious as an audible voice. Hearing God's voice does not mean you are crazy. It doesn't necessarily mean you are more spiritual than others either! It could be that God just needed to be as explicit as possible! More often than not, God's voice comes to us as that “still small voice” underlying our own internal thoughts and impressions. When God speaks, it comes to us with a sense of conviction. It is obvious to us.

Finally, God speaks to us through other people, especially fellow Christians. God does not want us to be “lone rangers.” He has called us together in order that we can speak into each other's lives. If you feel a leading from God, it is a good idea to test that conviction by sharing it with trusted advisors. We need the outside perspective that others can provide or else we can very easily deceive ourselves. Others may also have the knowledge or life experience that we lack. No member of the body can say to the other, “I have no need of you.”

The season of Lent is an excellent time to begin to develop closer connections as a community, and while growing closer to God together, learning to discern his will. As the theologian Paul Tillich has said, “The first duty of love is to listen.”

From Father Matt’s Study, Continued

By Fr Matt Stromberg

On January 31st an acolyte training session was held in the church. Fr. Matt commissioned new and returning acolytes at the 10 o'clock service of Holy Eucharist on February 7th which was preceded by a delicious breakfast prepared by John Odell, Peg Odell, and Derek Ratliff. At the commissioning service Mary Margaret Raffo and Trent Cooper were added to the ranks of acolytes. Sean Mebust and Lauren Lionetti were thanked for their service as head acolytes, and as they will be graduating high school this year, they passed on the title of head acolytes to Juliet Ratliff and Jack Odell.
Lent at Christ Church

Christ Church invites you to the observance of a holy Lent, a time of repentance, self-examination, prayer, fasting, devotional reading, and meditation on Holy Scripture. Along with our regular worship schedule, ongoing bible studies, and ministries, we are offering a few additional ways in which you can draw near to God and grow in your faith during this season.

On both Sunday mornings at 9am, between services, and Thursday afternoons at noon, we will be hosting periods of quiet prayer and reflection on God’s word in our Saint Agnes chapel. These times will be modeled on the traditional Benedictine practice of Lectio Divina or “Divine Reading.” The focus of this particular approach to reading scripture is different than a typical Bible study. It is about entering into the words of scripture rather than dissecting them. In Lectio Divina we seek to listen to God and receive his guidance. In particular, we ask how God might be speaking into our own lives and circumstances through his word. It is less concerned with understanding the original historical context, examining the original language, or explaining doctrine. Instead, it approaches scripture as a means of personal communication with God the Spirit. Participants are invited to use their imagination and immerse themselves in the narrative or images of the text.

On Fridays at noon in February and at 5pm in March, we will be offering a time of prayer and reflection around the Stations of the Cross. This is an ancient devotional practice sometimes called The Way of the Cross which was walked by pilgrims to Jerusalem marking what was believed to be the actual sites of Jesus’ passion. A series of canvas images depicting the various stations—which were painted by the children of our parish a few years ago—have been hung in our chapel. If you cannot make our noon time devotions on Fridays, you are free to come at any time to do the devotion on your own or with a friend. Booklets containing the service are available on the table by the front door of the chapel. Taking time to meditate on each station is a powerful way to remember and give thanks for the atoning death of our Lord.

A Mid-Week Lenten Prayer Vigil will be offered Tues Feb 23 – Fri Feb 26 at the Mons Nubifer Sanctus retreat center in Delhi. Participants enter into a deep and regenerative silence, spending many hours together each day engaging the practice of still prayer (Christian meditation). All participants have an opportunity to take advantage of the Sacrament of Reconciliation (confession) and/or to receive individual spiritual direction during the program. Learn more at monsnubifer.org or call 607-832-4401. There is a brochure with all of the retreat center’s programs in the Parish Hall.

Also during the season of Lent we will be showing a variety of different cinematic interpretations of the life of our Lord. The Jesus Film Series will be shown Friday nights at 7pm with the exception of The Miracle Maker which will be shown Saturday March 12 at 6pm and preceded by a potluck supper at 5:30pm. Each movie represents a different response from filmmakers to the question that Jesus asks to his disciples, “who do you say that I am?” We believe there is something for everyone in these selections. We hope you will consider joining us and inviting your friends for entertainment, discussion, and fellowship.
Celebrating Advent

By Jennifer Brose

December 26th felt very different in 2015 to our family than it did in previous years. The sense of joy was still present, despite Christmas Day being over. Looking back, it’s clear that celebrating each day in Advent resulted in truly experiencing Christmas to its fullest.

Our family started the Advent season by participating in the wreath making activity in the parish hall. We lit our wreath most nights at dinner, and talked about a weekly reflection theme. Charlotte and Lark each had an Advent calendar, with a simple daily Bible verse, and of course, chocolate. We found the reflections from the “Slow Down. Quiet. It’s Advent!” sheet really thought provoking, and to help the girls keep the focus on Jesus, we colored Nativity Scenes, made angels, and drew things that gave us joy. We visited several libraries throughout Advent, and found a surprising number of books about the first Christmas, our favorite told from the perspective of an angel. We also had a visit from St. Nicholas on his feast day, and had several piano accompanied Christmas carol sing-along sessions. Celebrating Advent focused our minds and hearts on why we celebrate Christmas. The result was a truly joyful Christmas Day and a magnified sense of hope afterwards.
Holy Week at Christ Church

Our celebration of Holy Week begins on March 20th with the Sunday of the Passion otherwise known as Palm Sunday. We will have a blessing and distribution of palms to mark Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem along with a dramatic reading of the passion narrative.

The observance of Holy Week continues with a celebration of Holy Eucharist on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday at 8:30am and on Thursday evening at 7:30pm we will have our Maundy Thursday service, the commemoration of the institution of the Holy Eucharist where Jesus stooped to wash his disciple’s feet. In imitation of Christ’s servant ministry we will wash one another’s feet.

On Good Friday there will be an ecumenical noon time service at Bassett Medical Center and a 3pm Good Friday liturgy here in our Church. We will also offer a children’s program during the solemn liturgy and a child-friendly Way of the Cross devotional at 4:30. On Saturday night, Easter Eve, I am excited to announce that Bishop Mark Sisk—the retired Bishop of Central New York and frequent attender here at Christ Church—will be our guest preacher and celebrant at our Easter Vigil. The vigil is one of the most beautiful liturgies of the Church year. We will begin with the lighting of the new fire at our lych-gate and processes into the chapel for the liturgy of the word in which we will recount salvation history by candlelight. The service culminates in the reaffirmation of our baptismal vows and the celebration of Holy Eucharist. The service will be followed by an ice-cream social in our parish hall. Finally, Sunday morning we will celebrate the resurrection of our Lord with our Easter Sunday services at 8am and 10am.

Eastertide Book Study; The Divine Conspiracy

During the season of Easter you are invited to join us in reading and discussing a book that has become a modern day classic of Christian Spirituality, Dallas Willard’s The Divine Conspiracy. Willard is a philosopher, bible teacher, author, and theologian. In this book he challenges us to move from being merely “believers” to being authentic disciples or apprentices of Jesus. The eternal life that Jesus speaks about is available to us now. We don’t have to die before we start living it! Using the Sermon on the Mount as his basis, Willard goes in depth into “Jesus’ Master Class for Life.” He will give us practical guidance on how to develop godly character in our lives and live in the Kingdom of God now. This book is challenging but extremely rewarding. Our study of the book will be enriched through viewing DVD conversations between pastor and author John Ortberg and the author himself about the themes and teachings of his book. We hope this study will be an introduction to a book that will continue to bless you as you return to it again and again for guidance and insight. We ask that participants purchase a copy of the book themselves. Paperbacks are about ten dollars on Amazon. Why not buy it now and get started early? Thursdays 12pm beginning March 31.

May 5th Ascension

The Feast of the Ascension is celebrated on the fortieth day after Easter Sunday following the account given in Acts 1:3. It always falls on a Thursday and for that reason it is sometimes neglected. We hope you will join us this important feast for a Holy Eucharist at 5:30 pm following by a festive picnic at the rectory.
The Jesus Film Series

Son of God, Friday February 12th at 7pm
Released in 2014, this film was produced by Mark Burnett and Roma Downey as an adaptation for the big screen of a portion of their hit miniseries “The Bible” which aired on the History Channel. It is a straightforward presentation of the Gospel story with a Hollywood polish.

The Gospel According to St. Matthew, Friday February 19 at 7pm
A critically acclaimed adaptation of the gospel story, this film was directed by Pier Paolo Pasolini in 1964. Although its script is taken nearly directly from Matthew’s gospel, this film shocked audiences through its depiction of Jesus as a brooding revolutionary. It is beautifully filmed in stark black and white and is scripted in Italian. The Vatican recently hailed Pasolini’s film as the greatest movie adaptation of the life of Christ.

Jesus Christ Superstar, Friday February 26 at 7pm
A 1973 film based on the rock opera of the same name by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice, this film is framed around a group of performers who go into the desert to reenact the gospel. It tells the story of Christ largely from the perspective of Judas Iscariot, and interprets the psychological and interpersonal struggles of the Biblical figures.

Son of Man, Friday March 4 at 7pm
This 2006 film directed by Mark Dornford-May was the first South African film to make its debut at the Sundance Film Festival. It is a recasting of the life of Christ as an African fable, set in modern times, and mirroring the recent political context of South Africa. The film received the first Veto-Jury prize at the Africa Film festival in the Belgian university city Louvain on May 5, 2007.

The Miracle Maker, Saturday March 12 at 6pm
This film, released in 2000, is one that can be enjoyed by people all ages. It is a stop motion animated presentation about the life of Christ through the eyes through the eyes of Tamar, the terminally ill daughter of a priest from Capernaum. The film was directed by Derek Hayes and Stanislav Sokolov. It stars the voice of Ralph Fiennes as Jesus, and numerous other well-known actors. Preceded by a potluck dinner at 5:30pm.

The Passion of the Christ, Friday March 18 at 7pm
This film is a 2004 American epic biblical drama film directed by Mel Gibson and starring Jim Caviezel as Jesus Christ. The story centers in particular on the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus. The movie is scripted in Aramaic Greek, the language that Jesus spoke, and contains scenes of disturbing violence that would not be suitable for younger viewers.
By April Stromberg

This winter our church began hosting a new community event for children. Like Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, and Chess Club, this program brings members of the community into our building, and shows that Christ Church is a place that welcomes young people. Music Together invites very young children (up to age seven) and their parents, grandparents, or caregivers to sing, dance, play instruments, and have a great time together! Pamela West-Finkle, the director of Community Music and Arts Network, brings such energy, passion for music, and love for children to each class that every week is a delight. The turnout from the community has been so great that we needed to expand to two weekly classes, and enrollment continues to increase. A more formal ten week class will be forming in April 2016. Please call Pam at 607-652-2330 if you have a young child in your life that would benefit from learning the “language of music.” This is a great opportunity for Christ Church families to form relationships with members of the community and for us to instill a love of music in our young people; all while bonding with them and learning musical skills ourselves!

Cooperstown Graduate Program Dinner and Movie

By April Stromberg

The Cooperstown Graduate Program is a partnership between the State University of New York College at Oneonta and the New York State Historical Association. It offers a two year Masters of Arts degree in History Museum Studies and Science Museum Studies. The program includes approximately fifty students, primarily young people who have traveled to Cooperstown to learn how to become museum leaders. Christ Church members with connections to the program have looked for ways that our church can welcome these young people who have come to our community. Their efforts have led to two of these wonderful, enterprising young leaders to become associated with our church. Luke Murphy served as an office volunteer all through the Fall, helping with various office tasks, and acting on his Christian faith through quiet service. Kwasi Aygemang became a member of Christ Church in 2014, and has since been involved as a lector in Sunday services and more recently as an office volunteer. Kwasi and our outreach committee chair, Kathy Lloyd, planned together an event for CPG students in conjunction with the Black Student Union on campus. On March 3, students from the program will gather in our Parish Hall to watch the film Selma and to enjoy a Brooks chicken dinner together. We look forward to further opportunities to welcome these creative and inspiring young people into our community, and to extend to them the love of Christ while we have them with us.
Vestry discussed the 2016 budget in both the November and December vestry meetings. The new 2016 budget was approved in the December meeting and includes an inflation adjusted increase in salary of 2% for the Parish Administrator and Communication Director, staff benefits constant according to last year’s expenses, with a reduction in HSA contributions for the clergy and sexton to offset a 12% increase in health insurance premiums for the year. Facility numbers are similar to last year with a savings on oil due to an oil bid at $1.80/gal. Increase in expenses due to the search for a priest.

In both the November and December vestry meetings, vestry discussed the pledge income for 2015. In November only 69% of expected pledge income had been paid, but total revenue was still up for the year by $17,000. In January, we ended 2015 with a surplus of $3,800.90. The surplus was put in the Capital Reserve fund.

Work continues on the Rectory, including tree stump removal in the driveway, painting, and new storm windows. Some of this comes from the Buildings and Grounds budget, and the Mather Endowment. The committee is applying for a Scriven grant through the Clark Foundation to offset costs. Paul Hager has discussed this with Douglas Bower at the Foundation. The application deadline is the end of April. Paul noted that a list of repairs needed will be presented to the Vestry at the next meeting.

The boiler in the Parish Hall needs to be repaired. A bid for asbestos removal and repair of the boiler was approved.

The complete Parish Profile was posted in the Parish Hall lobby in order to give parishioners an opportunity to see the picture of our church that has been sent out to potential applicants for the new rector position.

The organ was repaired, with new boots installed before Christmas.

The Parish Choice was completed with decisions made regarding the disbursement of funds collected by the diocese for our Diocesan Assessment, with contributions as follows: 5% to Youth Ministry, 4% to Spiritual Life Center (Leadership training courses and healing ministry) and 4% to Missions.

Vestry members continue to receive applications for the new rector position. Applicants need to be thoroughly vetted by the diocese before our vestry can go further in the process of screening them. The vestry approved continuing to support The Living Church, a publication that Fr. Mark supported, and approved withdrawing funds from the rector’s discretionary fund to do so. An ad was drafted for this publication for the rector position that will run in April.
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**Week 1**

- **January 31**
  - Acolyte Rehearsal
  - Choir Rehearsal

- **February 1**
  - Choir Rehearsal
  - Morning Prayer

- **February 2**
  - Morning Prayer
  - Women’s Study

- **February 3**
  - Morning Prayer
  - Women’s Study

- **February 4**
  - Morning Prayer
  - Women’s Study

- **February 5**
  - Morning Prayer
  - Women’s Study

**Week 2**

- **February 6**
  - Morning Prayer
  - Women’s Study

- **February 7**
  - Morning Prayer
  - Women’s Study

- **February 8**
  - Morning Prayer
  - Women’s Study

- **February 9**
  - Morning Prayer
  - Women’s Study

- **February 10**
  - Morning Prayer
  - Women’s Study

**Week 3**

- **February 11**
  - Morning Prayer
  - Women’s Study

- **February 12**
  - Morning Prayer
  - Women’s Study

- **February 13**
  - Morning Prayer
  - Women’s Study

- **February 14**
  - Morning Prayer
  - Women’s Study

- **February 15**
  - Morning Prayer
  - Women’s Study

**Week 4**

- **February 16**
  - Morning Prayer
  - Women’s Study

- **February 17**
  - Morning Prayer
  - Women’s Study

- **February 18**
  - Morning Prayer
  - Women’s Study

- **February 19**
  - Morning Prayer
  - Women’s Study

- **February 20**
  - Morning Prayer
  - Women’s Study

**Week 5**

- **February 21**
  - Morning Prayer
  - Women’s Study

- **February 22**
  - Morning Prayer
  - Women’s Study

- **February 23**
  - Morning Prayer
  - Women’s Study

- **February 24**
  - Morning Prayer
  - Women’s Study

- **February 25**
  - Morning Prayer
  - Women’s Study

**Week 6**

- **February 26**
  - Morning Prayer
  - Women’s Study

- **February 27**
  - Morning Prayer
  - Women’s Study

- **February 28**
  - Morning Prayer
  - Women’s Study

- **February 29**
  - Morning Prayer
  - Women’s Study
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The Wallers for wreath and boxwood making supplies and instruction.

Christmas card and cookie makers, the Odell, Cooper, Sohns, and Victory families

L. Kearns and L. Page for St. Nicholas supplies.

Braeden Victory for being our Lucy Bride!

Generous donors who gave $3,330 to the Alternative Christmas Market and volunteers who ran it.

Stephen Ministry leaders for a beautiful Longest Night service.

The cast of our Living Nativity performance at the Farmer’s Museum’s Candlelight Evening.

Pat Spencer, Janet Rigby and Emily Rigby for cleaning and repairing pageant costumes.

Sunday school teachers for directing the pageant.

The Johnsons and volunteers in the Christmas decorating committee.

Antoine Bourbon-Parme and Eric Hill for leading services in Christmastide.

Jail ministry members Kathy Lloyd, Ed Craig, Tom Ball-Dean, Jeanne Clow and Anita Born.

Adult chaperones at Youth Lock-in, Ashley Cooper, Tom Rhodes, and John and Peg Odell.

Volunteers for the Cooperstown Food Pantry’s Barbeque chicken dinner hosted by Christ Church.

John and Peg Odell and Derek Ratliff for cooking breakfast for the acolytes.

Acolytes new and returning as well as our retiring and new head acolytes.

Short-term missionaries to the DR.

Shrove Tuesday Pancake supper volunteers.

The Wallers for ivy plants for the DR trip.