



## Celebration Notes from Jerry Stinson

*Celebrating God's Love Every Sunday at 10 am.*

# Christmas Eve Services

## December 24 – 6 pm Christmas Eve Service With Children's Pageant

A Children's Christmas  
Pageant

Special Music by Charming  
Chimes, All Seasons Choir, All  
Seasons Choir Continued,  
Beloved Bells and Sheep's Kin

*Christmas Dreams,*  
A Meditation by Libby Tigner

*Followed by a Birthday Party for  
Jesus in Patterson Hall*

## December 24 – 10:30 pm Candlelight Christmas Eve Service

Sermon: *A Child of God*  
Jerry Stinson, preaching

Christmas Readings and  
Carols

Two Anthems by Our  
Sanctuary Choir

Leland Vail and Carlos Carlos  
singing *Gesu Bambino*

Lighting the Christ Candle

Music by Bellissimo,  
Our Adult Bell Choir

The "Hallelujah" Chorus

*Followed by a Wassail Reception  
in Patterson Hall*

# Sunday Services

## Sunday, December 28 10 am Service of Celebration

Sermon: *Unfinished Business*  
Jerry Stinson, preaching  
Text: John 21:25  
Libby Tigner and  
Martin de Jong, liturgists

## Sunday, January 4 10 am Service of Celebration

Sermon: *Coping with Change*  
Jerry Stinson, preaching  
Text: Genesis 12:1-5  
Libby Tigner and Mr. Lloyd  
Wright, liturgists

## New Adult Education Class Begins January 4: The Historical Jesus for Beginners

*By Libby Tigner*

Perhaps you've heard the phrase "historical Jesus" or even "pre-Easter Jesus" or maybe "Jesus of Nazareth vs. the Christ of faith." These are all phrases that get used when referring to contemporary academic work about the life of Jesus, or the scholarly quest for the historical Jesus. These academic pursuits are trying

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## In Sunday School

**December 28**

**Theme:** Awaited Gift

**Scripture Focus:** Luke 2:22-40

**January 4**

**Theme:** Another Road

**Scripture Focus:** Matthew 2:1-23

(Continued from page 1)

## The Historical Jesus for Beginners

to separate out what the man called Jesus may have actually said and done in the Palestinian hillsides 2000 years ago in contrast to what the often conflicting biblical records and church doctrines state.

You are invited to join in the quest for the historical Jesus in an adult education class that will acquaint you with contemporary biblical scholarship. We'll learn about some methods of biblical criticism, review some of the work of the Jesus Seminar, and discuss how all of this might make a difference in how we go about being the church or in calling ourselves Christian.

The class, The Historical Jesus for Beginners, will be held on Sundays at 8:30 am in the Klar Rooms, beginning on January 4 and ending on February 8. I hope you can join us!

## Make a New Year's Flower Resolution

By J.J. Halter

Have you always wanted to buy flowers on Sunday for the sanctuary? Now is your change to fulfill that wish by getting on the 2009 calendar for the your special Sunday. Proclaim in your dedication what you are celebrating. Let your church family share your good news. Or you can let them empathize as you remember your loved ones who are no longer with you.

It is easy to do by contacting J.J. Halter at 562-421-5610 or *halt-jones@aol.com*. The cost is only \$75 and the flowers are yours after the service if you wish. The money need not be paid until after the flower Sunday. I am looking forward to hearing from you soon or throughout the year as your special events materialize.

## Senior Minister's Blog

Jerry Stinson's blog article on December 23 will encourage people to support a new movement aimed at a broader, bolder approach to education. His blog article on December 30 will look at how some first-graders learned firsthand about people with disabilities and how to treat them with respect. Go to the blog and not only read the article, but add your comment as well: *jer-rysjusticejournal.blogspot.com*.

## www.firstchurchlb.org

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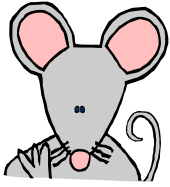
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**Editor: Ruth Warkentin**

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## The Church Mouse has heard...

Lisa Bode Heard has run off again with The Orphean Circus to perform in *The 99 Cent Only Calendar Girl Competition* at the Bootleg Theater in downtown LA. It's a wild, gender-bending take on beauty contests and winning in America — set to R & B dance music! Sort of like Willy Wonka meets KC and the Sunshine Band! Lisa performs on Fridays and Sundays. The run has been extended to February 1. For more info go to [www.bootlegtheater.com](http://www.bootlegtheater.com).

A lovely interview with First Church Moderator Michele Wilson is featured in the most recent issue of the Carpenter Center newsletter. Asked what she imagines her life will be like when she is 70, Michele's answer is, "It is my prayer that if I am blessed to reach the age of 70, that I am still in my stilettos, using my time to support and attend arts events, lunching with my girlfriends and being a doting grandmother."

*Please send your news to the Church Mouse in care of Ruth in the office, or put one of the news slips from the pews in the offering plate on Sunday.*



## Photo Directory Sign Ups Continue

*By Libby Tigner*

Smile! And get ready to have your picture taken. The Life-touch Church Directory photographers will be here January 20-28, and we need you to sign up now. Please stop by the computer lab after church on January 4 or 11 to sign up for your photo session. A professional photographer will take your photo, show you digital proofs, and help you choose which one will go in our new directory. There will also be photo packages for purchase, if you would like — but there is no obligation at all.

We hope to have all of our members and friends in the new directory, so please make your appointment this Sunday. If you can't make it to church, then you can contact Ruth in the church office and she will help you make an appointment.

## Thanks from Beloved Bells!

On behalf of all the ringers, thank you to all the people who supported our first fundraiser of the year by attending the wonderful Winter Festival Concert and Sparkling Reception. We hope you enjoyed the festive concert and reception!

We also want to thank all the people that made the reception so spectacular, with special thanks to Marjie McMillin for organizing the event and all the food and recipes. And thanks to all the parents and friends who helped with decorating, making the food and the truly dedicated ones who hung in there till the very end of clean-up!

We hope the experience started off your holiday season in just the right way!

Merry Christmas!

*Tracy Halter-Balin*



## Support Group to Meet January 6

The Support Group for people caring for their aging parents or grieving the death of a parent will meet in the Pownall Room on Tuesday, January 6 at 7 pm.

## Budget Deficit Committee

By Jerry Stinson

Our incoming moderator, Peter Wright, has put together a special new committee to begin addressing the issue of our budget deficits. This will be an advisory committee which will seek to develop a solid financial plan with which to move into the future. The committee will make recommendations for action that will then proceed through our regular structure, i.e., Personnel Committee, Board of Stewardship and Finance, and Church Council.

The committee will begin meeting in January. The following people will serve on the committee: Peter Wright (Moderator), Alison Mitchell (Vice Moderator), Jerry Stinson (Senior Minister), Pam Chapin (Treasurer and Former Moderator), Mary Lou Klar (Former Moderator), Jerry Mitchell (Former Moderator), Bob Kalayjian (Former Moderator), Barbara Smith (Former Chair of the Board of Stewardship and Finance), Bob Halter (Former Chair of the Board of Stewardship and Finance and owner of the accounting firm used by the church for many years), and Bill Cole (Former Moderator).

## Thank You!

By Marjorie McMillin

A huge thank you to all the folks who helped make the Sparkling Reception a success: the members of the BOCA board who brought food and stayed to help; the bell parents who did such a great job decorating the tables — it was beautiful; the bell parents who cooked and baked and stayed to help replenish foods; the kids who helped to serve and generally made themselves very helpful; and last, but never least, the bell parents and others who stayed to clean up afterwards. You are all sparkling angels! Thank you, thank you, thank you!

*Marjie McMillin, BOCA Chair*

## Save the Date

By Ben Rockwell

Saturday, February 28, the Air Quality Ministry Team and the Social Justice committee will be holding a Community Town Hall meeting on Air Quality and the Neighborhood.

## Community Health Care Discussion December 27

What: Community Health Care Discussion. Topics will include improving accessibility to medical, dental, optical and mental health care, preventative medicine and public health, and a wide range of health-related issues.

When: 11am - 3pm, Saturday, December 27, 2008

Where: Klar Rooms

Who: Anyone concerned about health care may attend and offer comments. Among invited guests are Health and Human Services Department Secretary-designate Tom Daschle, County Supervisors Don Knabe and Mark Ridley-Thomas, and Assemblymember Bonnie Lowenthal, as well as representative of health advocacy organizations.

Why: This event was organized at the request of the Obama-Biden Transition Project.

For more information, contact Casey Peters at 562-726-1967.



## From the Moderator

By Michele Wilson

It has, indeed, been my pleasure to serve as the 2008 Moderator. After agreeing to serve as Vice Moderator, I queried if it was automatic that I would become Moderator the following year. Less than one month after agreeing to take on the task of Moderator, we were in escrow on a larger home and we were adopting a daughter. One month after actually becoming Moderator, my husband announced he needed to find himself, I was canceling the escrow and, to my great heartbreak, canceling the adoption of our daughter; however, I decided to maintain the balance of our life "status quo" and fulfill my term as Church Moderator.

I spent the first half of the year fielding emails and telephone calls and getting a deeper understanding of the congregation. Over my year as Moderator, I earned 16,333 points on my American Express card taking congregants to breakfast and lunches. I thank each of you who accommodated me by meeting with me during the day so I could be available to my son at night. At the beginning of the year, I was challenged to bridge the gap between the "adult's church" and the

"children's church." As I indicated in an earlier article, I learned that what I was really being challenged with is how the church's resources are spent: on programs directed towards attracting and maintaining adult members with grown or no children or on programs directed towards attracting and maintaining families with children.

Someone once told me the difficulty with being Moderator is just as you get a handle on the issues, your year as Moderator is over. However, as I worked my way through many breakfasts and lunches with congregants, I found that the programs that First Church offers has a balance of programs for adults and families alike, and many times those programs bleed into each other. Congregants who come to First Church for the adult education programs and the music program enjoy the Youth Sunday, Beloved Bells, Sheep's Kin and All Seasons Choir as well. Additionally, I was surprised by how many members with grown children or no children volunteer with the children's program. I was not as observant of this until my term as Moderator, but more congregants than I thought know my son by name and also remember the first Sunday we brought him to church after our adoption.

However, if I speak truth in this article, the congregants that wanted to speak to me on this topic were really speaking about parents whose children are quite involved in the children's program but the parents of those children are not involved in the wider activities of First Church or within First Church leadership. Nonetheless, as Moderator, I found that tackling this issue was beyond the scope of what I could accomplish in a single year. On this issue, there is a deeper reconciliation required. I can see how the children's program can resonate with one's child but the adult programs do not resonate with the parents. So the parents bring their children for the rich children's program, but the parents are not connecting beyond that. All of that being said, I certainly did not witness a conflict between congregants regarding the resources spent on adult programs versus children's programs.

During my tenure, we made a minor change in Church Council in response to the complaint that the Church Council meetings were too long. To remedy that, we condensed reports to items the Council needed to act upon and brief informational or calendar items rather than having reports that recapped every detail of the

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### *From the Moderator*

board meetings the week before or drifted into non-agenda items.

My great regret this year is that we remain in a \$200k-\$250k annual deficit. On this topic, there is a great divide between congregants who want to reduce spending versus those who want to direct stewardship campaigns towards increasing revenue (increasing pledges). As many of you may have read in my report regarding building use which was prepared for the annual meeting, Patterson Hall is not generating the revenue the congregation expected when Pilgrim Hall was built, and when we turn to reducing personnel, our largest expense, there is always the question of what positions/salaries do we cut. Additionally, there are no more church assets to sell to create a windfall.

I also learned that there are 147 regular attendees that account for a 2007 total contribution of \$10,286, but leave no bread crumbs to identify who they are and why they do not make an annual pledge towards the church's operating budget. Further, I was quite shocked to learn that 11 members accounted for 26% of the church's operating budget for 2007; just 11 congregants account for 26% of the 2007 giving. In this difficult economy, First Church, like many other churches, is reliant upon the pledges of our members for the majority of our operating budget. It was my pleasure to work on the Stewardship Committee led by Cathy Clay, and the foundation she laid will be valuable for future stewardship campaigns.

At the beginning of my term, the Stop the War Ministry Team was on the verge of extinction. Four months later, they were revived and we had a congregational meeting where we voted to take a stance against war, the Iraq war specifically, as a Just Peace Church. Further, at the beginning of the year, there was a request for diversity in worship, and Jerry and Libby explored having a short service at 8:30 am on Sunday morning, incorporating some alternative means of worship. However, these explorations became moot when the glorious Worship and Arts Ministry Team was created this spring. What wonderful elements they have added to our services.

A group of you met me for breakfast at Park Pantry, and you had some wonderful feedback for the congregation. To begin, you suggested a monthly total of how much it costs for the sanctuary and Pilgrim Hall to exist so members are aware. You also

suggested that it be quite clear that an interim position is merely an interim position with no guarantee of the position becoming permanent. I liked the suggestions of conducting some board meetings on Sundays after or before worship, with child care provided, so that parents of small children can participate in the leadership of the church. Finally, this group was adamant that new members fall away because membership into the church is too easy. There was the suggestion that membership parallel the path to membership the children participate in to become members of the congregation, including classes and group discussions prior to membership.

Finally, a Youth Church Council was created this year that will work in partnership with our Director of Children and Youth Programs to develop the youth and children's program. We now have a Youth Moderator, a Youth Vice Moderator, a Youth Treasurer and a Youth Secretary. I cannot wait to see what the Youth Church Council does with their program and how they use their Youth Church Council meetings to integrate with the church services and outreach programs.

I came to First Church in 1998 a Baptist, interracially married to an agnostic. First

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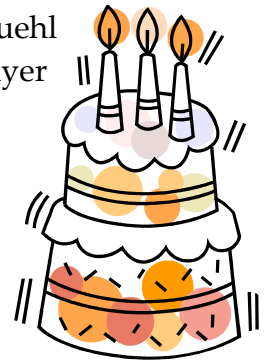
### *From the Moderator*

Church was the only church that would have us. Over this year, many of you were quite accommodating during the myriad meetings the Moderator has to attend. As an instant single parent, I found it a scramble to arrange babysitting, and when I did not want to be separated from the baby, I propped him next to me, put on his video Ipod to Little Einsteins, gave him a bag of goldfish crackers and attended the church meetings with him in tow. Thank you for being generous and accommodating of our private life changes. Although my visit was brief, it was a pleasure meeting the members of the choir this year. It was quite shameful that I have listened to you for ten years but did not know many of your names. I also thank Kindred Spirits and Serendipity for welcoming me, and I hope I will continue to visit even though I am no longer in leadership. You have a wonderful 2009 Moderator in Peter Wright and Vice Moderator in Allison Mitchell. My time in leadership is at an end and it is now time for me to plan what is next for me and Dante; nonetheless, I am confident that this congregation is in good hands and will continue to grow and care for each other as we always have.

### January Birthdays

- 1 Andrew Baliscao,  
Charmaine Charles
- 2 Debra Moore
- 3 Kenia Casarreal
- 5 Sandy Fisher, Kent Speirs
- 6 Caleb Fisher, Catherine  
Hanna
- 9 James Penner, Matt  
Wilson
- 12 Kimberly Schneider
- 13 Chan Brainard
- 14 Sam Johnson
- 16 Dayne Navarro, Timothy  
O'Keefe
- 17 Chuck DeBruyn, Michael  
Gardner
- 18 Frances A. Reed
- 19 Marion Nguli
- 20 Dan Mahoney

- 21 Harold Kameya, Deanna  
Melzian
- 22 Joyce Cannon, Ernest  
Fowler, Allen Morlock,  
Madison Solem-Kuehl,  
Suzanne Turner
- 23 Tina Datsko, Caitlin  
Fisher, Nancy Harris,  
Cynde Soto
- 24 Louise Diefenbach
- 25 Richard Castle, Mary  
Flynn, Spicer Ramsay
- 26 Charleen Mullen, Chase  
Solem-Kuehl
- 27 Betty Mayer



### January Anniversaries

	<u>Years</u>
12 Margaret and Ken Jones	3
22 Bret and Anne Witter	3
17 Loren and Dean Solem-Kuehl	4
17 Terry O'Neill and Dan Mahoney	10
12 Katie Hickox and Chris Knap	14
25 Sara and Ken Schoenfelder	14
53 Robert and Mary Lou Klar	21
17 Nicole and Michelle Cook	25
60 Andrew and Leonie Baliscao	26
29 Melody and Kevin O'Keefe	26

### Pathways Volunteer Hospice Training

Pathways Volunteer Hospice will hold volunteer training in January for its care giver, bereavement and hospice programs. Pathways is a non-profit organization that provides compassionate care to those living with an illness or loss. The training will be held January 13, 15, 20 and 22, 8:30 - 11:30 am. To sign up for training or for more information, contact Meg at 562-531-3031.



*The Pilgrim*  
 241 Cedar Avenue  
 Long Beach, CA 90802

Periodicals  
 postage paid at  
 Long Beach, CA

TO:

“Never place a period  
 where God has placed a comma”  
[Gracie Allen]

## Parish Concerns

Your thoughts and prayers are requested for Lizzie Strong (Karen Miller’s granddaughter); Susan & Tom Dorsey on the death of their stepdaughter, Mary Hockenbery; David Fisher on the death of his father, Walt Fisher; and Bob Kalayjian upon the death of his father, Wayne Kalayjian.

*To put someone on this list, put a note on the Parish Concerns board on the Third Street landing or contact Ruth in the office (562-436-2256 x221 or office@firstchurchlb.org). All names are published in two successive issues of The Pilgrim.*

## Online Calendar

Don’t miss out! Check the online church calendar at [www.firstchurchlb.org/calendar.html](http://www.firstchurchlb.org/calendar.html) for details about all church events. You can use the online calendar to email invitations to friends to church events and to set up emailed reminders to yourself. Just click on any event to see information about it.

## You’ve got a date ...

### Thursday, December 24

6 pm: Christmas Eve Service with Children’s Pageant  
 10:30 pm: Candlelight Christmas Eve Service

### Thursday, December 25

Office closed

### Saturday, December 27

11 am - 3 pm: Community Health Discussion (organized by volunteers for the Obama Transition Team)

### Thursday, January 1

Office closed

### Saturday, January 3

9:30 am: Undecorating

### Sunday, January 4

11:30 am: Communications Committee Meeting

### Monday, January 5

7 pm: Central Association Meeting

### Tuesday, January 6

7 pm: Caregivers Support Group Meeting; Drop-In Center Committee Meeting

### Wednesday, January 7

7 pm: Service of Spiritual Wholeness

### Thursday, January 8

6 pm: Board of Cultural Arts Meeting

*All regular Thursday musical groups rehearsals resume.*

### Sunday, January 11

11:30 am: Parish Life Board Meeting

## No *Pilgrim* Next Week

*The Pilgrim* is not mailed the week between Christmas and New Year’s Day. The deadline for the first issue in 2009, dated January 11, is Wednesday, December 31 at 12 noon. Please submit all emailed items as attached files, not in the body of the email.

## Becoming a Member of First Church

Whether you have been attending for a few weeks, a few months or several years, we would like you to consider becoming a member of First Church. When you are ready to take that step, please call or email Rev. Jerry Stinson at 562-436-2256, ext 230 or [revjstinson@verizon.net](mailto:revjstinson@verizon.net).