

# CROSS & FLAME

DECEMBER 2011

WPAUMC.ORG

## Share the Hope of Christmas

Advent is the season when we prepare ourselves to receive God's gift of Jesus. It is a time of 'getting ready' for the celebration of Christmas.

Unfortunately, for many of us the focus is on preparing for the secular celebration — the coming of Santa Claus. As Christmas nears, day-to-day obligations increase and people think about entertaining, shopping, decorating and other duties that have come to define a "perfect Christmas".

In *The Message*, Eugene Peterson's contemporary translation of the Bible, the Apostle Paul's words in Romans 13 describe the challenge: "But make sure that you don't get so absorbed and exhausted in taking care of all your day-by-day obligations that you lose track of the time and doze off, oblivious to God. The night is about over, dawn is about to break."

Whether we notice or not, God intercedes in human affairs to provide something life-giving, real, and lasting. Far from the temporal satisfaction humans get from acquiring goods, God's incredible love is dwelling among us. We are receiving a gift beyond anything conceived by humanity and marketed on store shelves.

If we truly want a life-giving Christmas, drawing closer to God must take priority over any material desire on this year's wish list.

Put seeking God first on your Christmas list. Spend time daily in prayer and devotions, alone or with a friend or family members.

Try journaling—even a "fridge journal" will work. Keep a notepad on the refrigerator and jot down where you see God or a memory of a time God got you through something that seemed hopeless. Then look for ways to share that hope with others.

Send a card to someone in a nursing home, write a note to a youth who may be having a tough time, or call someone and reconnect.

If you do not think you'll get around to sending cards to a long list of people this year, think of those to whom it may mean the most. Invest your love and energy in sending those few cards. Share Christ's hope, and your hope will be increased as well.

Wherever you go, invite people to worship with you. Find ways to manifest for the community the real hope of Christmas — that through Christ, people will find peace and hope.



-Adapted from Rethink Church's *A Life-Giving Christmas*

## BIBLE STUDY AND PRAYER

Join United Methodists throughout Western Pennsylvania in studying these Bible passages from the Revised Common Lectionary and praying for these congregations and pastors.

### DECEMBER 4 - DECEMBER 10, 2011

#### SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT--PURPLE OR BLUE

READ: Isaiah 40:1-11, Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13, 2 Peter 3:8-15a, Mark 1:1-8

- PRAY FOR: † **Shippingport: Green Valley UMC**, Butler Dist., Susan Pickering, pastor  
† **New Covenant Charge**, Franklin Dist., Corben Russell, pastor; Kenneth Hughes, associate  
† **Waynesburg: Oak View UMC**, Washington Dist., Jerrad R. Peterman, pastor  
† **Mt. Jewett/Hazel UMCs**, Kane Dist., W. Craig Smith, pastor  
† **McKees Rocks: Christ and Sheraden UMCs**, Pittsburgh District, Wayne Meyer, pastor  
† **Arnold UMC**, Greensburg Dist., Karen L. Prescott, pastor

### DECEMBER 11 - DECEMBER 18, 2011

#### THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT--PURPLE OR BLUE

READ: Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11, Psalm 126, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24, John 1:6-8, 19-28

- PRAY FOR: † **Jefferson Hills UMC**, Pittsburgh Dist., Keith H. McIlwain, pastor  
† **Grove City: Grace UMC**, Franklin Dist., Howard A. Greenfield II, pastor  
† **Youngwood: Christ UMC, Greensburg Dist.**, Christopher Livermore, pastor  
Michael Pacelli III, associate  
† **Bellview Charge, Indiana Dist.**, Roger P. Howard, pastor  
† **Somerset: First UMC**, Connellsville Dist., Dale R. Shunk, pastor

### DECEMBER 18 - 24, 2011

#### FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT--PURPLE OR BLUE

READ: 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16, Luke 1:47-55, Romans 16:25-27, Luke 1:26-38

- PRAY FOR: † **Clarion: First UMC**, Franklin Dist., Deryl K. Larsen, pastor  
† **Linesville and Harmonsburg UMCs**, Erie-Meadville Dist., Dennis E. Lawton, pastor  
† **Dawson Charge**, Connellsville Dist., David A. Bell, Sr., pastor  
† **Bobtown/Taylorstown/Mt. Calvary Charge**, Washington Dist., B. Gale Cobb, pastor  
† **Apollo: New Beginnings and Saltsburg Charge**, Indiana Dist., Richard Helsel, pastor,  
Heidi Helsel, associate

### DECEMBER 25- 31, 2011

#### CHRISTMAS DAY--WHITE OR GOLD

READ: Isaiah 52:7-10, Psalm 98, Hebrews 1: 1-4 (5-12), John 1:1-14

- PRAY FOR: † **Brookport Charge**, Kane Dist., Joni K. Williams, pastor, Faith Bryan, associate  
† **Johnstown: Homestead Avenue UMC**, Johnstown Dist., Edward Wagner, pastor  
† **Sigel Charge**, Indiana Dist., Donald E. Rudge, pastor  
† **California: First UMC**, Washington Dist., Thomas V. Chacko, pastor  
† **East McKeesport: First UMC**, Greensburg Dist., Timothy R. Williams, pastor  
† **Ellwood City: First UMC**, Butler Dist., James A. Cannistraci, pastor