



The Red Door

December 2013

The Signs of the Times

He told them, “You have a saying that goes, ‘Red sky at night, sailor’s delight; red sky at morning, sailors take warning.’ You find it easy enough to forecast the weather— why can’t you read the signs of the times?
Matthew 16:2-3 (The Message)

With the coming of Advent, a new year in the church calendar also begins. And when we talk of a new year we also think of time. Whether it’s the liturgical year, the calendar year, the academic year or the fiscal year, the thing is that we are reminded of the inexorable passing of time: a year has passed and another one begins.

Reflecting on time we realize that the only time we can truly experience is the “now” or the present. When the present passes into the past we can only review it through memory; there’s no more actual living of it since it’s already gone. With the future, well it simply has not happened yet. The best we can do is to hope for it to happen, as the letter to Hebrews reminds us—“Faith is the assurance of things hoped for” (11:1). Our daily conversations also provides us with phrases that try to capture the meaning of time. We say things like “there’s no time like the present,” “the time is right,” “I’m having the time of my life,” and “time flies when you are having fun” just to name a few. Regardless, they all deal with time in the present.

The season of Advent is indeed a season of hope and longing. That’s just by mere definition as “advent” implies something or someone that is not here yet. The readings on the first Sunday in Advent reminds us that we live in that expectation of the second coming of Christ. The prayers associated with the day are also a petition for Christ to return: “Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come.” Nevertheless, all this talk about future events may pose a risk for us as well. Often what happens is that we seem to sacrifice the present for a future that is not here yet. Christ promised us that he would return, yes, but he urges us to prepare for his return by being vigilant and prepared in the present.

The only way of preparing for the future is by being mindful and concretely living in the present. This we are reminded by Mother Theresa of Calcutta. Known as the saint of the poor, she dedicated her life to help and care the most needy in the world. “Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow has not yet come. We have only today. Let us begin.” Her words remind us that the most urgent need is the one we have in front of us right now. There might be needs left unsatisfied in the past, and there might others that will come. But for the time being the only need we can help is the one happening in the present.

In this time of Advent let us be expectant as Jesus calls us to be. But let our waiting be an active one. We can’t afford to idly wait for the kingdom of God to simply happen. Instead, let us be co-creators of God’s kingdom in our present. The signs of the times are in front of us now. May we all have a hopeful and active waiting in this season of Advent and always. Amen.

The light of the eyes rejoices the heart, and good news refreshes the body. Proverbs 15:30

Emanuel Community Center Treasurer's Report November, 2013

INCOME-EXPENSE STATEMENT

Beginning Balance	\$10,334.67
Income	\$5,162.80
Expense	\$2,720.31
Ending Balance	\$12,777.16

Notes

In November income from the Global Village Market with an additional offering from Greenland Hills UMC raised \$1,784 for the food pantry. Feather Crest Farms donated 628 dozen eggs to the food pantry and are holding them in their cooler for us to use as needed. The costs for the Food Pantry increased slightly, with each family receiving a turkey for Thanksgiving as well as fresh produce. A \$2,000 donation from a Greenland Hills UMC member for the food pantry was a welcome gift.

There were no unusual expenses incurred, and ELC members made cash donations to ECC to be used for the food pantry, or where needed.

INCOME/EXPENSE THROUGH NOVEMBER 30, 2013

	Income	Expense	In Kind
Food Pantry	\$21,502	\$22,386	\$16,597
Creations of the Heart	-	500	-
ESL	-	100	-
Unidos Podemos	1,440	960	-
Operating Expenses	6,114	9,562	-
Angel Tree Program	-	-	-
Summer Reading Program	2,000	2,599	728
Back to School Carnival	3,760	4,064	2,617
Totals	\$34,815	\$40,171	\$19,942

Arwen Peszynski and Devin Burg of the MIF-ELCA holding Emanuel LC's \$16,500.00 loan principal payment check at MIF-ELCA headquarters in Chicago on November 14, 2013



Many thanks to all of you who dug really deeply to come up with \$18,800.00

to apply as a special principal payment on the loan on our new lot next to the church house. We gave the MIF a check for \$16,500.00 (see picture) and then were able to mail them \$2,300.00 more that was received from additional gifts. The principal payment reduces our loan balance to about \$80,000.00 and will enable more of our monthly loan payments to be applied to principal with less going for interest.

Notes from the Church Council

The Council met on November 11th and will meet again December 16, 2013. We continue to focus on the budget and congregational growth. The pledge drive was conducted with our stewardship focus for the fall. We want to begin planning for our 2014 budget, which will be presented to the congregation in January 2014. Our finance committee, led by Miles Schulze and Bob Moody, Treasurer, will begin working on the budget in early December. We will use the information from the pledges to help with the planning. Anyone with input or questions can contact Miles, Bob, Pastor or myself. Cindy Seamans and Sonia Arrendondo are also on the committee and welcome your concerns and comments.

We had a very successful cleaning day before the Fall Festival. I want to thank all of those who helped on that Saturday or other days when they could. There is a lot of work to do at the church and volunteers are very necessary. If you can help in anyway, please let Pastor or Council members know. Sandy Duvall is organizing people to do some of the yard work. Please call her if you can help. Her number is 956-457-8729 (yes, 956 area code). She speaks both English and Spanish so please give her a call.

As we plan for the Annual Meeting and the year 2014, we will be asking people to serve on the Nomination Committee. We are also looking to fill some new positions this year. One is Social Media manager. We recognize the importance of this means of communication if we are to be significant in the 21st Century. Let us know if this position appeals to you. We also will ask for volunteers to assist with ongoing maintenance and repair projects. There is always work to be done and our budget requires us to do it ourselves.

Gaynelle Schulze is working on a specific way to engage our visitors. She is forming a committee to work with her. Please let her know how you can help.

I want to thank Pastor Julio for holding our very meaningful Thanksgiving service. It has been a tradition at Emanuel and we had a good attendance. Thanks also to Donna Miller and the wonderful Children's Choir. I think we all left more aware of our abundance and reasons to be thankful.

As we move into Advent and plan for Christmas, let us continue to join together as we do every year at this time. I personally find Emanuel to be a place of peace, reflection and true giving resulting in the real joy of Christmas.

Peace,

Karen Roberts, Council President

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Love God; check. Love my neighbor; check.

Love myself; what?

Love God and love your neighbor; it's pretty easy to understand what Jesus had in mind when He dubbed these "the two greatest commandments." But, the meaning of that part about loving my neighbor *as I love myself* isn't immediately obvious from either the commandments themselves or from Jesus' declaration of their pre-eminence. Are we really supposed to *love* ourselves? (The commandment says "*love your neighbor as (you love) yourself.*") I think we'd all find it a bit unusual, though, to hear declarations of love for "myself" rising from the congregation during announcement time at our Sunday worship service; and I think many of us would run screaming from the whole idea behind these two commandments if Jesus had said, "*the two greatest commandments are love God and love yourself as your neighbor.*"

Although the blood of Jesus freed us from the briar patch of our own humanness – where sin and hate live – so we might know the peace of His grace within our soul – where love lives – we still tend to think of ourselves largely in terms of our humanness. It's in that human realm, though, our creator left us free to make our own decision about ourselves – liking or disliking, loving or hating the reality of ourselves. Those among us who feel "okay" about ourselves are alive in their body, in their mind and in their soul. They love God; they truly love their neighbors; and they love who they are and what they've become. They realize that *knock on their door though it might opportunity won't knock down their door*. Opening that door takes *action on their part*. The "not so okay" people look on every major life experience as some sort of competition based on a sense of personal insignificance. And they live in fear of the next battle and frustration over having lost the last one. They believe they're simply incapable of figuring out what's important and what's a distraction in most situations and end up focusing solely on the single most obvious task in any given situation.

Bottom line, though, "okay" isn't a god-given human characteristic; nor is "not so okay" some kind of birth defect. "Okay" people aren't special to God nor are "not so okay" people lost in His world. In fact, our okayness is based on a decision we make about ourselves *all by ourselves*. Living in the world of fear and frustration in our daily life with our neighbors dampens the fires of our youthful self-confidence, and living in the world of guilt, self-doubt and seemingly unanswered prayers in our spiritual life dampens our youthful belief in God's promise that we simply need "knock" or "ask." Somewhere along the way in life – usually about our mid-to late-thirties – we convince ourselves our life experiences add up to disappointment or delight, failure or success, winning or losing, okay or not so okay. With that conviction, we decide whether or not we like who we've been and what we've become, and then, barring some kind of intervention we act out that decision for the rest of our life. An okay judgment invariably leads to a fulfilling life; not so okay to fear, anxiety and a searing sense of loneliness.

How have you judged yourself in the past? With your neighbors? With the Lord? How do you feel about yourself today? Are you okay? Not so okay? Well, whatever your judgment of yourself is right this moment, I have good news for you. Despite the bumps and bruises, there's good to be found in every aspect of your life; there's joy to be found in every event in your life. The scars of your humanness that brought you to your current concept of yourself are really meant to *remind you of where you were yesterday*, not to *dictate where you're going to be tomorrow*. And as for your relationship with God, He isn't even counting your bumps and bruises, much less your scars.

Think about this; the beautiful stained glass image high above the altar in Emanuel pictures Jesus standing knocking on the locked door of your heart. He's knocking, hoping you'll let Him in, because He can't fill your life with His grace from outside. Hope is all He has, though, because there's no handle on the door, *you have to open the door to your heart from inside*. Do it! Unlike the door; throw open your heart; let go of the negative experiences that have been guiding your life – especially those hampering your life with the Lord. Set down and walk away from whatever beliefs you've held about yourself based on your past life. Declare your love for the Lord. Declare your love for your neighbors. And declare your love for yourself. Then fling open the door to your heart and bid the Lord come in:

"Lord, you know I'm hopelessly human, but raise me up to what you've known all along I can be. Raise me up in your love so that I might stand on mountains. Use me as a vessel to pour out your love for me on my neighbors and to give back to you in the greatest of my thanksgivings. And, Lord, thank you for your unbearable forgiveness and infinite patience with me when I was less than you meant for me to be in the past. But know now, the cold shadows of my yesterday are gone, the warm light of your love is shining brightly on my today."

Jim Hyland

(Jim Hyland spent 40 years helping employers and employees maximize their potential in the workplace and, now, ten more years helping true believers build or repair their relationship with the Lord. This text is taken from his closing message to the 2012 men's fall retreat of Trinity Presbyterian Church in McKinney where he served most recently as a deacon.)

December 2013 Church Calendar

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	2	3 10 Food Pantry – 8 a.m. 7 – ECC Board Meeting	4 6:30 Bible Study	5	6 Creations of the Heart 9 a.m.	7
8 English service – 10 Spanish service – 12:15	9 6:30 Council Meeting	10 Food Pantry – 8 a.m.	11	12	13 Creations of the Heart 9 a.m.	14
15 English service – 10 Spanish service – 12:15	16	17 Food Pantry – 8 a.m.	18	19	20 Creations of the Heart 9 a.m.	21 6:30 - Posada
22 English service – 10 Spanish service – 12:15	23	24 Food Pantry – 8 a.m. 7 Christmas Eve Service	25 CHRISTMAS DAY	26	27 Creations of the Heart 9 a.m.	28
29 English service – 10 Spanish service – 12:15	30	31				



Birthdays for the Month of December:

5 – Ariana	18 – Iris Arredondo
6 – Carl Schulze	19 – Eva Vences
7 – Jessica Martinez	21 – Donna Herbner
8 – Jose C. Hernandez	Lina Jones
11 – Nathan Zelle	Alma Y Cruz
Cosme Trevino	23 – Mark Kittisopikul
Nathan Flores Hernandez	24 – Carolyn Armour
12 – Elva Gonzales Cerda	Maria Torres
Guadalupe Cerda	28 – Melody Jones
13 – Carmen Suarez	29 – Aliza Marie Trevino
14 – Bob Moody	30 – Manuel Gonzalez Cerda
San Juan Suarez	31 – Cindy Seamons-Good



Thanksgiving service was held on Nov. 27, the eve of Thanksgiving. It was a wonderful, spirit-filled service which was sweet and to-the-point. There was a video which celebrated the beauty of everyday and was, in one member's word, "awesome!" The Children`s Choir sang 3 songs. A stalwart band of four girls sang lustily. A member of the congregation pronounced them as "simply adorable." The Adult Choir is preparing for Advent and will be singing two Advent Sundays as we as Christmas Eve. We look forward to hearing a soloist on the 3rd Sunday.

The Cornell liturgy will be sung during the Advent, Christmas and Epiphany season.

Thanks for all your support for the choirs. We invite anyone who enjoys singing to join our loyal band. We are especially in need of sopranos. Donna

A n n o u n c e m e n t s



All hands on deck to decorate our church for the upcoming Christmas season. Come on Saturday, December 14 around 10:00 am and help to set in the Christmas spirit.

The Posada is Coming! We will have our posada on Saturday, December 21 at 6:30 pm. We'll start by processing around the church remembering Mary and Joseph's trip to Bethlehem. Then the youth group will present their "pastorela" in the sanctuary to finish with food and hot drinks in the fellowship hall. Bring a favorite dish to share and come to enjoy with us!

Christmas Eve Service will be at 7:00 pm. Be here to celebrate the birth of Jesus.

Creations of the heart – Next Sunday, December 8, the women from the Creations of the Heart group are holding their annual sale of handmade crafts which have been made by each of the members of the group. These crafts are excellent for gifts and stocking stuffers for the Holidays. Also, as a way of expressing their gratitude for the support of the congregation, they will offer food, drinks, and more for you to enjoy with your family and friends. The food and preparation will be a donated by the women, a free will offering for the church (not for the group) will be welcomed.

Angel Tree – Our 2013 Angel Tree is up. Please, take a look at the cards available on the tree and consider sponsoring a child this Christmas. For info on what you can bring, please talk to either Pat or Blanca. Gifts must be here by December 8.

And for the Homeless... - We are also collecting small flashlights, batteries and socks to distribute to the homeless. There is a box outside in the narthex where you can place those.