

The CrossRoads Connection



A Youth and Young Adult Ministry of
St. Andrew United Methodist Church

Is THIS Christmas?

If you do much shopping at all, you are certainly aware of the significance of the Friday after Thanksgiving, right? In case you don't, this day is THE number one retail sales day in our country. It's a day our retail merchants wait for all year long – and count on to get a jump on the Christmas shopping season. It's also a day many bargain-conscious shoppers look forward to, but I ask you: is this Christmas?

This past Friday, the day after Thanksgiving, most of us read about the horror that took place in that Wal-Mart in New York. Approximately two thousand impatient customers rushed the door and trampled a temporary employee trying to earn a little extra for the holidays. The man died from his injuries. When asked to leave the store so they could treat the injured, the crowd nearly rioted, shouting: "We've been here since Thursday!" How sad! Now, I ask

chipping in

you: Is this Christmas?

That same day, I read a news story online (CNN) about 2 people shot to death in a Toys R' Us store in California. And, I know we all hear the stories by those we know who actually braved the sales events, about the pushing, fighting and name-calling that they personally witnessed, and we wonder is any of this Christmas?

I will confess to you that every year I promise myself that I will be done with my Christmas shopping by June next year, and every year I am braving the crowds picking up the leftovers and picked over's to finish my nearly last minute shopping. Thank heavens I serve a church or I'd probably be one of those desperate souls out there on Christmas Eve, miserable and peevish, going through the stores

shoveling anything that still looks usable into a cart so I can rush home and speed-wrap it before the family gathers the next morning to open gifts.

It always seems like the gift that we most frequently give ourselves, year after year, is stress – it's certainly the topic of discussion I hear most (and DO most) as Christmas Day approaches. I don't finish my shopping as early as I'd like (now THERE'S an understatement) due to a combination of SAP (Seasonal-Affected

Procrastination), hating to go shopping and REALLY hating to go shopping (I hate shopping twice – dreading the going and hating the doing!). I have a pet theory that the biblical city of Sodom and Gomorrah was really not a city, but a gigantic mall with a "Friday after Thanksgiving Bargain Every Day" mindset – and



Pat Sleeth is pastor to the CrossRoads community.

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Our MISSION: We seek to encourage youth and young adults to develop a genuine faith in Jesus Christ, encourage them to grow as lifelong disciples, and to equip them to minister to others for the sake of the world.

Pastor Pat's Chipping In

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look what happened to them!
No thanks. I'm not going.

Here's how bad I am when it comes to bargain shopping: On the "Sales Event Day of the Year" this year, I did not go shopping. In fact, Trent and I went fishing. Cold, you bet! Trophy fish caught? Zip. Chapped hands? Check. Bad case of Rudolf nose? Yep. Biggest accomplishment of the day? I didn't spend a moment shopping. Doesn't get much better than that for me!

As much as I hate shopping, I LOVE Christmas! I've been surreptitiously listening to Christmas carols since August, and now the big red truck is rockin' with holiday tunes! And, as I've confessed every year, I love the lights and ribbons and bows. But, is this Christmas?

I don't know about you good folks, but none of what I've been talking about is really Christmas – at least, not for me. I've been talking about the holiday event, not the real Christmas event. I'm not going to wrestle with Santa vs. Jesus in this article – I have YOUNG grandchildren! In fact, there is no war between Jesus and Santa at my house - I love them both and have room for them both. I just don't get them confused.

People trampling a sales clerk to death to save a few bucks for a gift for Aunt Mildred or little

Tommy is not Christmas. And, neither is shooting someone for the last Wii (or whatever that craziness was about). This is criminal behavior; let's not confuse it with the spirit of Christmas. Christmas is a living, loving experience; a habit that once I quit doing, it takes awhile for me to get back on track. As Pastor Tim pointed out last Sunday, it takes about four weeks to sort our priorities and get 'em straight again. It takes waiting and self inventories and prayer and equal and liberal applications of love and joy before I get out of my consumer mindset and into my Christmas mindset – I know I NEED Advent to get me ready for the gift I'm offered by Christmas, or I'm likely to miss it, and I suspect it's the same for most of us.

Christmas is God reintroducing Himself to us. God, showing up in a surprising place in a surprising way – and He STILL does this! Christmas is God reminding us how much He loves us by reminding us to love others. Christmas is God: real, alive, freshening, healing, encouraging, persisting and never, ever giving up on us. Christmas is God opening my eyes to my fellow persons in ways I too often forget to do on my own – without a "nudge." Christmas is God, "the Nudger," helping me to see past all the glitter and fuss and holiday stress and realize that, no matter

Remember, you can always access the CR calendar on the Web at theCrossRoads-umc.org



what my culture tries to tell me, God IS enough.

Advent is a season of waiting for God and getting ourselves ready for the meeting. I can't say I'm a big fan of waiting, but if I don't get my head around slowing down long enough to figure out it's not about me, I'm going to miss Christmas – again. Contrary to our cultural adaptation, Christmas is the gift of giving. Not giving stuff. Christmas is, at its heart, an opportunity to give ourselves in new and meaningful ways to the people who need us. Now, that's Christmas!

It is my fondest hope that you WON'T see me at the mall this year. But you might well see me at a Salvation Army red kettle. I rarely pass up the gift of putting something in the red kettles this time of year and, if I get a chance, you'll find me ringing a bell to call others to share this same gift. You might well find me appreciating the gift of dropping off gently used warm clothing at a thrift shop so others can be warm, and my favorite gift of all to give at Christmas is a check to a local charity in honor of our extended families. We don't shop for everyone in both our families – we send them a card letting them know they generously contributed to a charity, again, this Christmas.

The gift of Christmas is God, working through us to make a difference. May your Christmas experience this year be wonderful and full of love and the gift of sharing. We hope to see you all through Advent, and we certainly look forward to seeing you and yours on Christmas Eve – talk about a Christmas party!

See YOU at the CrossRoads

Pastor Pat

Junior High Update

Teens on a Mission

By Dana Kirkwood

I realize it is December, but I wanted to take this opportunity to talk about Thanksgiving. See, I need to tell you how incredibly thankful I am to be able to work with the Junior High kids on a weekly basis. I am constantly amazed at the talent, intelligence, energy, and wisdom that these kids bring to our group week after week. It is a testament to these kids that the members of our group that have moved away seem to always take a moment to come back and visit with us when they are in town. In the past few months, I was lucky enough to be able to show the Clarke family around our new building. They moved out East and were driving through town and happened to stop hoping that youth group was meeting. In addition, The Gossen family, Tom, Vicki, Joe, and Allie, were here for our Thanksgiving meal. The kids were thrilled to see them. You've no idea how high a teenage girl can scream until you've given them a great surprise like Allie's visit. My ears are still ringing. The great part of this group, no matter how far away they go, they are still considered one of the gang. What a great testament to God's love for us... no matter where we are; we are loved!

Pre-teens come with their own set of ideas and standards. Friendships are ever changing. In the course of the three years they are in junior high, these kids will mature, take their own opinions, and they will start to challenge adult views. I love that about them! The greatest part of all this, during all that turmoil, they still find time to come to our group and talk about the very simplest commandment God gives us...to love one another. Isn't that amazing!

This month, as we get busy with the holiday seasons, please take a moment and look at the kids in our congregation. These individuals hold our future, and I'm here to tell you...our future looks incredibly bright! The junior high leaders are thankful for each and every one of them!

Happy Holiday, and thank you for sharing these kids with us!

Please remember to invite any pre-teenager in the grades 6 - 8 to join us on Sunday evenings from 6:00-7:30! I promise you, they will have a blast!



Happy Thanksgiving!

By Katie Townsley

The Sunday before Thanksgiving, the junior and senior high youth groups got together for a "kids only" Thanksgiving of their own. The leaders provided ham and turkey, and we all brought dishes to complement the meal. The church was filled with the smells of Thanksgiving - turkey, stuffing and pumpkin pie. Not only did the smell of the meal fill the air, but laughter filled the air as well as we visited and sat together after eating to watch the movie "Wall-E". What a great time!

News from the Young Adult Ministries



Young Adult Sunday Café:

The Young Adult Sunday Café continues to be held on Sunday mornings at 10 am. This class is for anyone who considers themselves a young adult (most are in their 20's and 30's), whether single, engaged, married and/or parenting. We usually start with some community time and breakfast munchies, then dig into our lesson of the week.

We have just begun an Advent series rooted in the Christmas Story found in the second chapter of Luke. In particular, we will be studying and discussing some of the common Christmas images and words presented by Luke and with which we are all familiar, but may not have spent much time considering the meaning and depth of them during Jesus' time, from God's perspective, and as they apply to us today. Our studies in this Advent Series will include:

"Said the Little Lamb to the Shepherd Boy"

"Angels We Have Heard on High"

"Joy to the World"

"Let There Be Peace on Earth"

We are having a great time at the Café and love spending the time with God and with each other. Each lesson stands on its own, and there is always room for more – so please join us on any Sunday morning.

Hey all young adults!

This includes married couples, singles, anyone in their 20s, 30s, or 40s.

We're taking it easy this month as December tends to get busy, but please contact Monica Hoover if you would like more information on our activities and fellowship. We will begin planning for the spring season shortly so if you have any ideas or something you would like to do, please let Monica know. Thanks! Her contact information is monicasusan78@yahoo.com or 765-586-4788.

THE JOY OF FRIENDSHIP,
THE FUN OF FELLOWSHIP