

The Messenger

Orchard Covenant Church
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THE PASTOR'S PAGE

We've Been Busy!

Besides our regular weekly and Sunday activities with preparation - bulletins, Sunday School, worship, Munch 'n Mingle, choir, special music, teachers, kitchen teams - take a look at some major events we've been part of:

March 23 a large baby shower dance party for Lela Magongo, wife of Amani Mtungwa – their fourth child, a son Simeon Lukalula, was born healthy on April 7. During the same time Amani's father died, and OCC and refugee community gathered at their home on April 13 to grieve and celebrate his life.

March 30 Reverian Butoyi's nephew's wedding at OLSH and reception including 200+ Burundian and East African guests, showcased beautiful Burundian traditions – music, dance, gifts, At the wedding Father Bill spoke not just to the couple, but to the whole community, telling their story as since 2007 he and we at OCC have seen this community progress amazingly here in their new homeland. Father Bill told the group, "I am so proud of you." I am too.

April 6 at the Martin Luther King Family Services Social Justice Luncheon at Chez Josef – almost 500 people were there to bestow Social Justice Awards to local people and organizations – including ACTS tutoring of which our ACTS program is a part, and some of our members have been with since its beginning 31 years ago.

THEN, also on April 6, we held our awesome Spring Fine Arts Evening – we displayed our art and 17 individuals and groups sang, spoke, and played self-composed, sacred and other favorite pieces. It all moved my heart, and I still have chills over the choir singing, "I Choose Love," composed after the shooting at Emmanuel Church in Charleston, SC.

Then, Holy Week clean – up – thanks to our youth the property was raked and cleaned, and now thanks to many, including Mike and Jeanne, Mary Ann, Dick, the Johns H, Wally, Mark Harvard, Jose Nunez and others, we spring-cleaned and got some painting done.

THEN – April 21 Easter Breakfast, and a wonderful Resurrection Service –

THEN – April 25-26 the East Coast Conference Ministers' annual meeting – which WE HOSTED! About 85 pastors attended, and everyone loved our hospitality, food, and our awesome church building.

ADD TO THIS, our Pastoral Search Committee meets regularly –

AND, if we all told our personal stories, we would be amazed how many ways God is working in and through OCC and our busy people. God is so good to us in so many ways!

WHEW! IS ANYONE TIRED? NOW AN IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT!

It's OK to keep May simpler! Let's breathe deeply – and continue to be "busy" simply in the routines of the OCC family's daily and weekly life with Jesus by our side:

Busy - in activities that refresh and renew

Busy in the Word and in prayer – for: OCC, for our greater witness to Christ in our community – for our Search Committee, for our next pastor, for vulnerable people, for our world

Busy in quieter days, time in our gardens, practicing hospitality

Busy with healthy living, body, mind, spirit, and in our relationships

Busy joining the OCC family for worship at 11am on Sundays. See you in Church! Pastor Nancy

MAY BIRTHDAYS

May 3 - Dick Warner
May 4 - Chris Hokanson
May 4 - Eric Hokanson
May 9 - Virginia Ventulett
May 10 - Jon Abrahamson
May 11 - Esther Jumba
May 12 - Diane Lawler
May 13 - Angie Anderson
May 14 - Sara Gleason
May 19 - Jeanne Clow
May 20 - Jared Pringle
May 25 - Ron Hokanson
May 25 - Sue Wages
May 26 - Ashley Nuñez

[If your date is wrong or your name has been omitted, please contact the editor.]

DATES TO REMEMBER

May 4 Membership Class, 9:00 a.m.
May 6 Council Prayer and Meeting, 6:30 p.m.
May 7 Springfield Rescue Mission
Men's New Life Program Graduation
May 11 Letter Carrier Food Drive
May 12 Mother's Day
May 18 Men's Breakfast

The Men's Connection

Saturday, May 18

Time: 8:30 to 9:30 am

at the Orchard Covenant Church

Breakfast will be served.

Exploring Church Membership

Saturday, May 4 from 9:00 am to 12:30 pm
in Pastor Nancy's study.

All believers in Christ are members of the worldwide Body of Christ. It's also good and biblical for all believers to commit themselves to membership in a local congregation. How else can we fulfill all the commandments to "love one another, build up one another, forgive one another, etc?" These commandments are talking about the local church! Every church needs people who are committed to the work of Jesus in their specific location. On Saturday May 4 Pastor Nancy will hold a class to explore what that might mean for you. You don't have to join the church after the class - just come and let God's Spirit lead you into your next steps. Any questions? Call Pastor Nancy 413-896-8875.

Annual Meeting of the East Coast Conference

The annual meeting took place at ECC on April 26-27 with Toni Wapner and Linda Howell as delegates from OCC. The theme of this year's mission and ministry is By the Spirit. "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit." Gal 5:25. The following are highlights from the time:

- 61 delegates represented 33 churches
- 7 new churches have been planted, including 3 in the Boston area as part of the Highrock network. 26 church plants are currently in various stages of development.
- Hartford House of Praise and Worship was welcomed into membership
- 8 pastors were recommended for ordination at the annual meeting of the ECC in Omaha, NE
- Wally Ebner and Alice Nakitare were commended for their service on the East Coast Conference Board
- The budget of \$2,164,489 was approved with projected income of \$1,382,188 leaving a shortfall of \$782,301.
- There is movement toward having an extension of North Park Seminary on the East Coast.
- A Sankofa experience is planned for the Fall, taking place on the East Coast with a bus trip from Boston to Washington D.C. stopping at sites along the way that are related to slavery, the Civil Rights Movement and Racial Reconciliation.

Lest you think that this gathering was just about reports and budgetary concerns, we can assure you that much interaction occurred. Mealtimes were special gathering times. There were also moments when we circulated around the room, participating in a coaching experience in which we were taught to ask "powerful questions", an excellent discipleship and leadership tool. Workshops geared in this direction were held on Saturday morning The East Coast Conference is alive with the Spirit of God and on the move, enabling churches and individuals to impact communities, bearing witness to Jesus Christ.

SEARCH COMMITTEE UPDATE

Linda Howell, Chairperson

The joy of the Lord continues to be our strength as we put the final touches on our church profile, placing us in a position to accept profiles of potential pastoral candidates. Please be praying for the committee as we get to this next stage. And pray for the candidate that is being prepared by the Lord to accept a call. May we all be of one heart and mind in Christ Jesus.

Highlights of the April Council Meeting

Mike Foster, Chairperson

We discussed our financial situation, noting that we are able to pay our bills, but we are still quite tight in terms of balancing income and expenses.

We received some updates from the pastor search committee—from Dina, Francis and Marlon. We determined the need to come to the congregation for about \$5,000 to support the pastor search process. You will be hearing more about that soon.

The Blue Room furnace, dating from 1939, likely needs replacement. The furnace that heats the sanctuary may well also need replacement in a year or two'

FUN IN SUNDAY SCHOOL

How tall was Goliath? Depending on how you measure: 1 Miss Roberta + 1 Seth = 1 Goliath



SPRING FINE ARTS EVENING

Dave Cioch

A few weeks ago Orchard Covenant Church held our Spring Fine Arts Evening and it was a delightful night of creative art and magical music. Arriving guests were guided to our "Blue Room" to enjoy a room full of visual art displays, all products of our own OCC brothers and sisters. We have some truly talented folks here of all ages.

At 7:00 pm we enjoyed a concert of music and readings of all varieties by performers of all ages. We had mother-daughter, husband-wife, full family, solos, and good friends singing and playing their songs together. We even had a rousing full audience singing of "Happy Birthday" to our honorable Alice who did MC duties for the evening. Thank you to all the people who put in their time and energy and talents to help make this an enjoyable evening for all. A special thanks to June Foster for her leadership and to her and Ben for their amazing offerings on the pianos.

THOUGHTS AFTER SRI LANKA VIOLENCE

Article in Christianity Today, April 23, 2019)

Ajith Fernando shared some thoughts about responding to the violent murders of so many in his native country of Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday. He says Christians need to ask how to think biblically in response to such a situation. He says Christians should not ignore such events, but get together to discuss a common response. Here are six responses he calls "necessary:"

1. Lament Loss.

Christians must **Lament and mourn** over the losses, develop a theology of groaning (Romans 8:23) that opens the door to lament. The Bible describes many instances of lament (Acts 8:2, also 9:39) and we can adopt practices that harmonize with Christianity.

2. Condemn Evil

The Bible **condemns the wrongs of nations**. Where possible and appropriate, we need to strongly name and condemn barbaric acts.

3. Alleviate Suffering

Christians are called to answer the problem of evil by **acting to alleviate suffering**. The Bible holds much advice to care for the wounded and vulnerable. We must look for opportunities to help, on a personal and community level.

4. Leave Vengeance to the Lord

In our hearts and thoughts, we must apply the **principle of God's "Holy-love,"** never avenging ourselves - but leaving responses to God. God gives us freedom to take our hands off the "revenge cycle," instead, we are to love and bless our enemies (Romans 12:17-21).

5. Don't Bear False Witness

The Bible is severe in its condemnation of **false accusation and harming the innocent**. Racial, ethnic, and religious prejudice often comes from lumping large numbers of people alongside a few radical members of the group they belong to. Don't do it! Violence against all Muslims, for instance, encourages more radicalism.

Let's look at Muslims and others with "gospel-influenced eyes. How can they hear the good news of salvation by the God who loves them, if we do not befriend them?

6. Pray

Prayer is the most powerful thing God's people can do in a national crisis. (1 Kings 19) Can we mobilize individual and corporate prayer - for Christians in Sri Lanka and around the world?

Holy-love will win in the end! Come Lord Jesus (Rev. 2:20).

PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH

Pray for the Search Committee as they gather information that will help attract a new pastor.

Pray especially that the church's financial needs can be met with generosity and abundance.

Pray for the Church Council as they, with God's help and guidance, give leadership to our church in 2019.

Pray for all of those who have suffered at the hands of hateful people, violating the sanctity of holy places. Lord have mercy!

A PRAYER FOR OUR BEAUTIFUL WORLD

This world is yours, planned in eternity,
created in a moment of sheer exuberance,
permeated with love,
well made.

This place is yours, in its simplicity,
blue sky and countryside, pure creativity,
painted with care,
well made.

This day is yours, pure generosity,
given for moments of gentle reflection,
in the bustle of a day,
well made.

This moment is yours in its entirety,
a drop of time in an ocean of history,
gifted with joy,
well made.

