

THE 3RD CHRONICLES

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Christmas Issue

MY PEACE I GIVE TO YOU

By: Jochebed Hope Perocho-Garcia

Nowadays, five minutes in a news broadcast would clue you in to the fact that we are living in turbulent times. We are devastated again and again by reports of wars and acts of terrorism all over the world. Just recently, news reports have been showing how heartbreaking the war in Syria has been. We don't even have to go too far— several months ago, a bombing in the Roxas night market in Davao caused at least 14 deaths and 70 injuries. Every night, there seems to be a new report on an unresolved death. In our own families, and communities, in our church— there is conflict and disagreement. Within our minds and hearts, there is confusion and doubt. Peace, now more than ever, seems so elusive. The New York Times once observed that “peace is a fable.”

Not for us Christians. We have been learning that peace is a kingdom value, a core quality of God's Kingdom manifested through us, His children. Quite a challenging task in our present world, but a daily commission for us nonetheless— to uphold peace in every way we can, not just during Christmas, but always.

Just to refresh our memory about the Kingdom of God, in John 3, Jesus told Nicodemus that to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, one must be born again. When we repented our sins, when we marveled at Christ's birth as Word incarnate, when we wept for his death on the cross and rejoiced at His resurrection— we validated the Gospel as true in our lives and accepted Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, reborn in His name, gaining access to His Father's Kingdom. Granted that the physical establishment of God's Kingdom on earth will only happen upon Christ's return,

we are called to prepare for God's Kingdom, to be its advocates, by living according its rules in the present. We are now reminded to closely study the scripture, to live by every word that comes from God and Christ. As Jesus noted, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). Also, as children of God, we are then to grow in “the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). And if there is something that we need to remember about Christ, it is that He is “The Prince Of Peace”.

Isaiah's prophecy on the Messiah had great political weight— he described a prince, a leader who can bring together kingdoms, and a lot of people were counting on that. In hindsight, we now know that Christ as a symbol of peace goes beyond the government structures that man has set up. He is the head of God's Kingdom that flourishes with a kind of peace no temporal kingdom can ever have. The biblical concept of peace, often referred to as the Hebrew word Shalom, is described four-fold: 1. The wholeness and soundness of body and mind; 2. Harmony, or a covenant between two parties; 3. Prosperity, success, and fulfillment; and 4. Victory over one's enemies or absence of war.

But earlier, we described our present world as far from this idyllic picture of peace with righteousness and prosperity in every turn. We have struggles, great and small, that we have to contend with. How do we survive unencumbered by worries? How can we celebrate Christmas in these uncertain and turbulent times?

continued on page 3

EDITOR'S NOTE

CELEBRATE JESUS

Two weeks ago, I tried looking for one of the Youth Choir's favorite anthems entitled "The Truth Shall Make You Free." It is one of the songs from an old cantata, "Celebrate Life", which was first presented by the Youth Choir in the 1970s. Since I could not anymore find copies of this anthem, which was probably lost due to the transfer of the Youth Choir's music pieces cabinet from the old Music Center to the Salcedo annex, I was constrained to order a second-hand copy of the "Celebrate Life" music booklet from www.amazon.com.

When my order finally arrived, I browsed through the music booklet and reminisced at all the familiar songs chronicling the life of Jesus — from His birth, His ministry and relationship with His disciples, and His death and resurrection. Other familiar songs aside from "The Truth Shall Make You Free" are "Song of Mary" and "In Remembrance" (often sung by our choirs during communion).

And as I looked through those music sheets, I reflected on the busyness of this season and how we celebrate Christmas. The "Celebrate Life" cantata calls on us to celebrate the life of Jesus and His gift of eternal life. However, too often we are caught up on shopping, preparing gifts, spending countless time in traffic, attending Christmas parties and reunions, and working overtime, that we forget who we are truly celebrating.

In this issue, we have news updates on the activities of ACTS 29, Ellinwood's theatre ministry, and the various events during the 109th church anniversary. Our cover story helps us reflect on peace in a time of uncertainty, violence, struggles and despair, and proclaims the abiding presence of the Prince of Peace. And, we have interviewed Sunday School children of all ages to ask them what Christmas means to them. We hope that through these stories, we will be able to truly celebrate Jesus not just this Christmas, but for always. We may have some fears about the future, we may have concerns about our health and those of our loved ones, we may be grieving due to loss, but the birth of our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ, is always worth celebrating, no matter what. Let us take time to worship, meditate and joyfully proclaim the Celebrant of Christmas, Jesus.

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The most definitive Biblical example of peace comes from the Prince of Peace Himself, Jesus, on the eve of His torturous death. He knew what lay ahead of Him and yet He comforted His disciples with His words from John 14:27: **“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”** John MacArthur, an American Pastor, describes Christ’s personal peace this way: “It is the same deep, rich peace that stilled His heart in the midst of mockers, haters, murderers, traitors, and everything else He faced. He had a calm about Him that was unnatural and nonhuman. In the midst of incomprehensible resistance and persecution, Jesus was calm and unfaltering; He was a rock. He was so serene that Pilate became greatly disturbed. He was furious that Jesus was standing before him fearless; and in a near frenzy, Pilate said, “Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?” (John 19:10).

Then in perfect peace Jesus replied, “You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above” (John 19:11). That’s the kind of peace Jesus is talking about. That’s the kind He gives to us. It is undistracted fearlessness and trust. So the source of true peace is Christ.”

Again, what a great gift Christ’s peace is: it allows us to remain calm in the most wildly fearful circumstances, to stifle cries and wails, to still the riot in our hearts, to rejoice in pain and trial, to sing in the middle of suffering, and to celebrate and be thankful in everything. An example of this in the Bible arête missionaries Paul and Silas, who sang hymns when they were imprisoned in Philippi; and just last year, Willie Myrick, a ten-year old boy from Atlanta. He was kidnapped from their family’s driveway and from the moment the car’s door slammed shut, Willie sang the gospel song “Every praise is to our God, every word of worship with one accord, every praise, every praise is to our God...” non-stop for three hours. He was cursed at and was told to shut up but he just kept on singing; until the kidnapper got tired of it and dropped him off back in their town. For young Willie, singing was his source of comfort

and expression of faith. And in the end, the God Willie was singing to delivered him from harm.

Indeed, we Christians are challenged to shatter the idea of peace as merely the absence of conflict, but the presence of everything good. Stillness is not always serenity, it could also mean misplaced tolerance, quiet injustice, and stifled fear. It is part of our task as peace makers to remove obstacles to peace by proclaiming what we know is right, denying incorrect teachings, and going against wrong ideals. On a personal scale, we are reminded to gently rebuke family, friends, and fellow believers when we see them fall out of step. We are called to invoke the reconciling power of the Holy Spirit when there are disagreements among our fellowmen; and to actively choose forgiveness when we are wronged. On a larger perspective, as a church, our stand is clear: we should uphold justice by always condemning injustice and unveiling Christ’s truth for all the world to see. When Jesus told His disciples to take up His cross and follow Him, He also reminded them about the trouble and persecution that they will encounter. Some will even be denied by their families for their choice to fully submit their lives to Christ. In some parts of the world, Christians are still considered lawless because they choose to uphold the Scripture. In our present society where killing and violence seem to be the band-aid solution to deep-seated, long-running national illnesses, Christians are called naïve and against efforts to regain control. Not authentic peace, but power-fueled control. But we know better. In a world where falsehood prevails, Christians are the feather rufflers, the rabble-rousers. It’s not easy, but if it were then the world wouldn’t be in the state we are in, and there will be no need for God’s redemption. In the end, Christ assures us that when we do His work we can depend on Him, as He said in Matthew 10: 32: Everyone therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before my Father who is in heaven.

Is peace truly an elusive concept? No. As Christians, we should never give up on presenting this truth to the world— when you accept Christ

NEWS

CELEBRATING 109 YEARS OF GOD'S FAITHFULNESS: THE 2016 EMC ANNIVERSARY ROUND-UP

By: Aliza P. Caronongan

We Tear It Down and Build It Up

Our Anniversary activities kicked with the groundbreaking of the Ellinwood Music and Arts Center, which is set to rise at the site of the former Ellinwood Music Center. "It truly takes a lot of time and effort to build something great... Let us do our part then to keep building God's Kingdom on earth," said Pastor Caloy dela Cruz, who led the gathering after the 7AM service last October 2, 2016.

We Lift our Voices and Sing to You, Our King

Our Ellinwood choirs and homegrown artists lifted up their voices and talents to serenade the heavens for the Anniversary Concert last October 8, 2016 at the Main Sanctuary. Guests were treated to gospel songs and popular tunes from the Youth Choir, the Chancel Choir, the Evangel Choir, the Crusaders Choir, the Covenant Choir, the Vesper Choir, the Rainbow Choir, the Psalm Ensemble, the Ellinwood Chamber Orchestra, and ACTS 29.



Let's Clean This House

Committed to have the church spic and span in time for the anniversary fellowship, 25 of our fellow worshippers participated in our General Clean-Up Day last October 15, 2016. The half-day activity saw the cleaning of the EMC vicinity, the installation of tents, and arranging of chairs and tables for the anniversary fellowship the next day.

Rise Up, Rejoice!

Downpours and drizzles did not dampen the spirits of Ellinwooders who congregated at our 109th Anniversary Worship Service last October 16, 2016 at the Main Sanctuary. The 9:30AM service bore witness to guest speaker Dr. Leonor M. Briones' anniversary message and the singing of the penultimate anthem by the EMC Festival Choir.

We Gather Together

Seventy-nine participants devoted their Saturday morning at our Congregational Retreat held last October 22, 2016. Held at the Old sanctuary from 8AM to 12NN, this year's retreat centered on "Looking Back, Moving Forward" and was anchored by the verses from Titus 2:11-13: *"For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ..."* (NIV)



Halina't Purihin Ang Dios!

Closing out this year's anniversary activities on a high and glorious note was the RAD Worship held last October 30, 2016 at the Main Sanctuary. Following its "Ghostbusters" theme, speaker Pastora Miriam Perocho talked about our Biblical and church's stands about ghosts and spirits. The "inter-generational" RAD worship saw attendees from the youth, and members of the Board of Christian Educators and SS DAMES, and followed a setlist that included songs from the Planetshakers, Hillsong, and Darlene Zschech.

The Artists for Christian Teaching and Service 29, or ACTS 29, began as a ministry where people blessed with acting talent could develop their gifts to serve the Lord. The ministry's name was inspired by the book of Acts which ends in chapter 28 with the mission of the apostles still unfinished. The name is thus a commitment to continue the work that God has given us.

Today, ACTS 29 continues its mission to spread the Good News of God through the performing arts. They continue to put on theatre plays with Christian messages, but they have also grown beyond the stage into other artistic avenues. The ministry now includes a robust dance ministry where members can move for God in either tambourine dancing, hip hop, or jazz. They have a Mime group where members can express a heightened range of emotions which helps the audience feel the message being shared. There is also the White Hand Movement which allows members to use simple hand combination to create visual poetry conveying precious truths in images beautiful to behold. Finally, the puppets ministry allows members to share timely lessons in ways that children and adults find equally engaging. Through these artistic means, ACTS 29 is able to deliver the message of God through forms that appeal especially to the youth.

Each ministry of ACTS 29 was on full display during their major production, A Christ Centered Stage. It was held last May 27 at the PCU auditorium. Over 50 young people, adults, and even elders participated in this blessed event. The stage play depicted ordinary Christians facing modern everyday problems. It showed that there are no easy answers and that we must rely on God to help us get through them. The play incorporated new multimedia into the production with characters interacting with pre-recorded video scenes. Character monologues were accompanied by animated montages in the background. In addition, ACTS 29 vice president Joella Lafiguera points out that the creative set design shows that "the contributions of the people behind the scenes are just as important as those in the background as each one is united in the goal of honoring God through the creative arts." The hard work of the behind the scenes staff, the

ARTISTICALLY DELIVERED

By: Jonan Martinez

long hours the members poured into practice, the joy with which everyone performed, are all a testament to the dedication of every participant.

The ministry has given an opportunity for many of the youth to develop and express themselves in their own unique way. "ACTS 29 is a very beautiful ministry and is composed of wonderful people," says Ricah Usison, the current president of ACTS 29. "At first I joined just for fun because my friends were there. But I stayed in this ministry because this is where I found myself growing. I realized it's where I could develop the talents that my Father has entrusted."

ACTS 29 is open to all. One does not need to be an expert to join. They regularly hold workshops designed to bring out and enhance the talents of its members. They had training sessions for the White Hand Movement and Mime last September. They also plan to have a dance workshop in December and an acting workshop in January in preparation for their next major production in May 2017. "Being members of course requires commitment," Ricah adds. "It's never an easy ministry as you need to devote a lot of time to it but it is incredibly fulfilling." By being good stewards of the talents that God has entrusted to them, the members are able to continue the mission that was begun in the book of Acts.

ACTS 29 has grown immensely from its initial conception. But while it will always be looking for new artistic forms to use, the overall mission will always remain the same — "to minister the word of God through the performing arts, touching the lives of both the artists and the audience." The methods of delivery are continually evolving but the message being delivered remains as timeless as ever. In the end, it is this message that the members hope to spread. They want the audience to see that God loves us and has bestowed upon us a wide variety of internal riches and talents. He has entrusted them to us that we may develop them and use them for His glory. As ACTS 29 continues to find new ways to share this precious message with the world, they hope to continue to be an avenue for members to experience the fulfillment of sharing God's message using their own unique talents. #

WHAT DOES CHRISTMAS MEAN TO ME

It is said that the Philippines has the longest Christmas season in the world. So when the Christmas season starts, what do we think of? The traffic? Lists to make? The hassle of buying gifts? Parties and eating galore? Family reunions? Do we remember to give time to worshipping the Celebrant?

We thought of compiling what several Sunday School kids think of Christmas, in the hope that in their innocence, we may just remember the joy of anticipating Christmas, and the real Reason for the season. Read on...

Christmas is all about Jesus
— Angel Mariano, Grade 1

The meaning of Christmas to me is loving, giving gifts to my friends and family, and celebrating JESUS' birthday.
— Xyza Valdez, 8 years old

It's everybody's birthday
— Miguelle Villareal, Grade 2

Christmas is gift-giving and birthday of the Lord.
— KC Manguiat, Grade 2

For me, Christmas is a special occasion that reminds us of Jesus and that this reminds us that Jesus' birth is the birth of our Savior. This day gives us hope that we can all be greater than we are today.
— Timothy Kalingasan, 10 years old

It's family and God and talking to God
— Jani Ravello, Grade 2

Christmas is about Christmas gifts we receive.
— Ermalyn Magno, Grade 2

Birthday ni God.
— Gwyneth Mendoza, Grade 3

Christmas is the birthday of Christ. It is the day where your family is having some time for each other. Ito ay araw ng pagbibigayan, pagmamahalan at pag-alala kay Kristo.
— Dana Gianan, 11 years old

Masaya ang Pasko. Masaya kami at magbibigayan ng gifts ng mga kaibigan ko.
— Melanie Dicdican, Grade 5

The best thing about Christmas is the joy and laughter, because Jesus was born to save us, and Christmas is not a holiday, it is a blessing. Christmas means:

- *Love
- *Blessings
- *Giving
- *Being united with friends and family
- *Remember that Jesus is always with you
- *Joy of the birth of Jesus

— Aliyah Cuison, 11 years old

Pagbigay ng robot
— Ivan Maranga, Grade 1

Christmas is about Christmas lights.
— Anthony Villareal, Grade 1

Christmas is about the blessings that God gave us, because we remember that God became a human being and He sacrificed His one and only Son, and Jesus being crucified. Actually, everyday is Christmas because we are always giving love. Many other kids don't go to school so we should give them much more love.
— Kristin Palacio, 10 years old

Marami akong regalo.
— Matthew Vergel, Grade 3

Christmas is the birth of God.
— Jake Ang, Grade 4

Masaya kami kapag Christmas.
— Jasmine Longyapon, Grade 4

Christmas means that Jesus was born on December 25. Christmas is for all of us. We need to love, to share, or to give Christmas for the whole world.
— Esther De Lara, Grade 6

Christmas lights...
— Jayden Reyes, Grade 1

Nagbibigayan ng regalo. Naghahanda ng mga pagkain at namamasyal ang buong pamilya.
— Gelo Carandang, Grade 6

Ang Pasko po para sa akin ay mahalaga dahil po kaarawan po yoon ng ating Diyos.
— Princess Senerpida, Grade 5

WHAT DOES CHRISTMAS MEAN TO ME

Christmas is when Jesus Christ was born, and it is a holiday to everyone.

— Elyse De Lara, Grade 5

Jesus, can I ask something for Christmas? I hope my whole family will be here and we will have a family bonding. Christmas is a nice holiday to give. We all know that it's Jesus birthday. Jesus loves us for who we are. He doesn't give what we want but he gives what we need. He did a lot of things for us. Now it's time for us to do a lot of good things.

— Azrielle Tirona, 10 years old

Christmas is the day all celebrate God's birthday and share gifts to your friends, neighbors, especially your family.

— Danielle Dimaculangan, 9 years old

Christmas is a holiday, a day where we celebrate Jesus' birthday, a day when we gather and be happy. Because the gift of Christmas is JESUS!

— Blessie Lopez, 11 years old

For me, Christmas is when our King Jesus is born.

— Raven Cagsawa, Grade 6

Pagbibigayan ng gift

— Albert Macabudbud, Kinder

Toys, gifts, food, Christmas tree, colors

— Samuel Caponong, Kinder

Christmas means good presents

— Andy Acosta, Kinder

Christmas is a time of giving exchange gifts to your neighbor, tita, tito, or kuya.

— Danielle Timbal, Grade 4

Christmas is a special occasion, and in that day is the day when Jesus was born. Christmas is a time of praising the Lord, praising Jesus, and giving thanks to God. This is a time of sharing, giving, and loving the family. Christmas is a special date for us that shows Jesus' birth.

— Trisha Guevarra, Grade 5

UCCP-Ellinwood Malate Church

WORSHIP SCHEDULE

7:00AM English Service

8:30AM Bicol Service (Old Sanctuary)

9:30AM English Service

3:00PM Tagalog Service

3:00PM Visayan Service (Old Sanctuary)

5:00PM English Service

Ministerial Team

Rev. Carlos N. dela Cruz

Rev. Ron A. Camcam

Rev. Gloria Z. Estrella

Rev. Cyrus N. Olea

Rev. Roberto C. Alguso

Pastor Miriam M. Perocho

Teacher Elena E. Morada

MY PEACE I GIVE TO YOU ...from page 3

as your Lord and Savior, you gain these two blessings among so many others: His peace, His lovely gift of peace that grounds and strengthens; and the promise of communing in God's Kingdom in righteousness and prosperity. But we must also take on the charge of creating the closest version of this promised land the best way we can by keeping peace, and always creating opportunities for peace.

Let me close by showing you what peace means in our small home. My daughter Alba, when she started teething, had a difficult time. Gummy smiles were replaced by ear-piercing, long-playing cries. There was an extra difficult night when it was just the two of us because Jeb, my husband and her sleep whisperer, was in Cebu for work. I tried everything to make her sleep— feeding her, giving her different teethers, until finally she responded to rocking and singing (for hours at end, but I digress). However, what really did the trick was a song I haven't sung in a long time, something I learned from Youth Choir waaay way back, and I don't think it was a coincidence:

“My peace I give unto you, it's a peace that the world cannot give, it's a peace that the world, cannot understand, peace to know, peace to live, my peace I give unto you.”

Let us celebrate Christmas with the knowledge that Christ, the Prince of Peace, will be with us through all the twists and turns of our journeys. Christ's peace is the only peace of its kind. Claim it, keep it, fight for it.