

---

# REVELATIONS

---

First United Methodist Church of Laurel, Maryland  
Vol. 37 No. 12

December 2006

---

## Moving On: My First Christmas in Heaven

---

**C**oping with the loss of a loved one can be difficult, even after some time has passed. That is why the "Moving On" group was started, to support each other no matter how long it's been since we lost a loved one. So, I would like to share with you a poem that Pastor Dennis shared with me when we started the group. It's called "My First Christmas in Heaven" The author is unknown, but the feelings are real. —Lois Hamilton

### My First Christmas in Heaven

I see the countless Christmas trees round the world below  
with tiny lights, like heaven's stars, reflecting on the snow.

The sight is so spectacular; please wipe away the tear,  
for I am spending Christmas with Jesus Christ this year.

I hear the many Christmas songs that people hold so dear,  
but the sound of music can't compare with the Christmas choir up here.

I have no words to tell you the joy their voices bring,  
for it is beyond description to hear the angels sing.

I know how much you miss me; I see the pain inside your heart,  
but I am not so far away and we really are not apart.

So be happy for me, dear one. You know I hold you dear,  
and be glad I'm spending Christmas with Jesus Christ this year.

Please love and keep each other as my Father said to do  
for I can't count the blessings or love He has for each of you.

So have a Merry Christmas and wipe away the tears,  
Remember, I'm spending Christmas with Jesus Christ this year.

*Ed: Moving On is a group of adults who have lost a loved one, such as a spouse, through death or divorce, or a child of any age. The group meets the third Saturday of each month to support, encourage, and fellowship with each other. You do not have to be a church member, of any church, to attend Moving On get-togethers. For more information, contact Lois Hamilton.*

### About Revelations

*Revelations*, the newsletter of the First United Methodist Church of Laurel, is published monthly. **Deadline for January submissions is December 15.** If you have announcements, articles, photographs, or suggestions for articles, contact Dave Meixner (301-498-1728 or themeixners@comcast.net) or the church office.

---

### First United Methodist Church of Laurel

424 Main Street  
Laurel, MD 20707  
301-725-3093  
Web site: www.fumcl.org  
E-mail: office@fumcl.org

#### Pastor

Rev. Dennis Whitmore

#### Associate Pastor

Rev. John R. Thomas

#### Director of Nurture and Evangelism

LeRoy Ruby

#### Director of Music

Judy Law

#### Organist

Dr. Mack Statham

#### Director of Youth

Ann Marie Miller

#### Office Manager

Shari Kornak

#### Financial Secretary

Georgianna Schallenberger

#### Nursery Coordinator

Kelly Miller

---

### In This Issue:

Christmas in Heaven.....	1
Pastor's Message.....	2
Announcements.....	3
Board of Child Care .....	5
Holiday Bazaar Recap.....	5
Elizabeth House .....	6
"WOW" Update.....	6
Board of Trustees Update	6
Journeying Through Your Grief .....	7
Good \$ense Course.....	7
Blue Card Questions .....	8
Christmas Traditions .....	9
2007 Altar Memorial Flowers .....	10
Our Church Family .....	10
Christmas Worship .....	12
Calendar .....	insert

---

## From the Pastor: Sin of Omission

---

**A** Sunday School teacher was teaching on the subject of sin. She asked the class, "What are sins of omission?" One little girl responded: "Aren't those the sins we should have committed but didn't?"

When I last visited my old hometown of Baltimore, I was in the middle of the city, where so much violence and drug trafficking occurs. One thing in particular grabbed my attention as I sat at a red light and viewed the scenes of hopelessness and decay. Contrasted against that view were the many steeples near and far, poking up over the tops of houses and buildings. In the midst of a city that, like all cities, has experienced the destructive influence of sin, here were the many churches sitting majestically in the middle of it all. How can it be that there are so many churches, and yet they seem to have so little influence?

*I Peter 4:17 says, "The time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?"*

Of course there are churches that are doing wonderful work for the salvation of souls and the glory of God. But how much more has God empowered us to do that we refuse to do or would rather ignore? Do we curse the darkness, or do we bring the light into our neighborhoods? What needs to be done there? The church isn't here just to make a difference in the world. We're here in Christ's name and by His power to make the world different. —PD

*For more from Pastor Dennis, visit the church Web site under Points to Ponder, [www.fumcl.org/pastor/points/](http://www.fumcl.org/pastor/points/)*

### **Advent Sermon Series: "The Journey To Christmas—With Isaiah"**

The entire Old Testament points forward to Jesus Christ (Luke 24:27-49). As we study the New Testament, we find frequent references made to those scriptures; Isaiah is the most often quoted Old Testament prophet; his name is mentioned about 20 times.

"Isaiah" is a name with roots in the names Joshua, Elisha, and Jesus. It means, "The Lord is Salvation."

Some scholars say that the book of Isaiah is the Bible in miniature—the message of the 66 books of the Bible is summed up prophetically in the 66 chapters of Isaiah. With that in mind join us during Advent for a five-part series entitled "The Journey to Christmas—with Isaiah."

December 3: "Who Needs God?" (Isaiah 2:1-5)

December 10: "The Messianic Age" (Isaiah 11:1-10)

December 17: "Streams in the Desert" (Isaiah 35:1-10)

December 24: "God is With Us" (Isaiah 7:10-16)

Christmas Eve: "He Comes in the Dark" (Isaiah 9:2-7; Luke 2:1-14)

### **The Book of Isaiah: The Bible in Miniature\***

*Isaiah*—Sixty-six chapters in two sections: chapters 1-39 focus on God's righteousness, holiness, and justice; chapters 40-66 focus on God's glory, compassion and grace.

*The Bible*—Sixty-six books in two sections: 39 in the Old Testament: focus on God's righteousness, holiness, and justice; 27 in New Testament: focus on God's glory, compassion, and grace.

*Isaiah, chapters 1-39*—Israel's rebellion and need for restoration.

*Old Testament*—Humanity's rebellion and need for salvation

*Isaiah, chapters 40-66*—Predicts God's future provision of salvation in the servant.

*New Testament*—Describes God's provision of salvation in the Messiah.

*Isaiah—Message:* A holy God will gain glory by judging sin and restoring His people.

*The Bible—Message:* A holy God will gain glory by judging sin and saving those who call on the name of His Son, Jesus.

\*Source: Nelson Study Bible Notes.

---

## Announcements

---

### United Methodist Youth Fellowship

Here is our United Methodist Youth Fellowship calendar for the rest of 2006:

Sunday, December 3 – We host and set up for the covered dish dinner and Chrismon service. Be there at 5:00 pm.

Sunday, December 10 – Lunch at 12:30 p.m. (after 11:00 a.m. service) followed by the showing of the *Jesus* film until 3:00 p.m. At 6:00 - 10:00 p.m., Boys and Girls Night Out; more information to follow.

Friday, December 15, 5:00 – 8:00 p.m.: Cooking and serving dinner for Winter Haven.

Sunday, December 17, 5:30 – 8:00 p.m.: Christmas caroling and Christmas party.

Friday, December 29, at 8:00 p.m. – Saturday, December 30 at 8:00 a.m. – LOCK IN! Bring a snack and 2-liter drink to share. Friends welcome.

Sunday, December 31 - Youth Sunday. We will be ushering for both services.

More information on all of these events will be announced at the upcoming meetings. For more information, contact Russell Reynnells, President, or Ann Marie Miller, Director, 301-498-3397.

### Angel Tree for 2006

**Sunday, November 26**, marked the beginning of our **Angel Tree** ministry for Christmas 2006. Through this ministry, children of prison inmates are able to receive Christmas gifts from their parent in prison, who would otherwise have no means of sending them. First UMC has offered to help twelve children in five families this year. **Collection of gifts will take place until Saturday, December 16**, when we will wrap the gifts and deliver them to the families along with a Bible and a word about God's love for them. If you have any questions, call Bev Raynor at 301-725-3093. For more information on Angel Tree, visit the Angel Tree Web site at [www.angletree.org](http://www.angletree.org).

### Family Advent Wreath Booklets Available

Pastor John has prepared a special resource for families to use during Advent. Through the lighting of Advent candles and building a creche, families will come to a greater understanding and

appreciation of some of the customs that help Christians prepare for the Christmas celebration. The booklets—which are different from the Advent wreath lighting and creche building in "WOW" worship—will be available on the hospitality table beginning Sunday, November 19.

### Coffeehouse with Nick Pino Band, December 2

The *In His Name* coffeehouse returns on Saturday, December 2, at 7:00 p.m. when the Nick Pino Band takes the stage.

This coffeehouse is different than all others though; this coffeehouse will be a Rockin' Christmas Party. All of the music will be Christmas music, so come ready to sing the standards and enjoy Nick Pino originals. A free will offering will be taken to support the completion of the Meditation Garden that Brandon Frazee (and family) have worked so hard to create.

So, come out and drink some of the best coffee in Laurel, enjoy delectable snacks, hear fantastic music, fellowship with old and new friends, and, best of all, support a fantastic project so that Brandon can complete his Eagle Scout project. For more information, contact Kevin Dunlap.

### Chrismon Service and Covered Dish Dinner, December 3

This year's **Chrismon Service** will be on **December 3, at 6:30 p.m.**, preceded by a **covered dish dinner at 5:30 p.m.**, in our fellowship hall. The Chrismon Service, held annually on the evening of the first Sunday in Advent, is a time when families can focus their thoughts on the true meaning of Advent and Christmas. During the service, children young and old will be invited to decorate the Chrismon tree.

**Chrismons** are nondenominational Christmas tree decorations that teach the word of God. Chrismon is a combination of two words, *Christ* and *monogram*, which means initials or symbols for a particular person. For more information on Chrismon, go to our Chrismon Web page at [www.fumcl.org/ministry/chrismon.php](http://www.fumcl.org/ministry/chrismon.php).

## **Christmas Cantata and Dinner, December 8**

On Friday, December 8, please plan to join us for an evening of food, fellowship, and festivities as the **Chancel Choir** presents the **annual Christmas Cantata**. The evening will **begin at 6:00 p.m.** with a **catered dinner in the Fellowship Hall**. At 7:00 p.m., move with us into the serene holiday atmosphere of the Sanctuary to hear again the story of Jesus' birth in song and spoken word as the choir presents "**He Came To Us.**" Following the cantata, return with us to the Fellowship Hall for the traditional **Dessert Social**, provided by the choir.

Mark your calendar now and plan to attend this evening's activities. Start off your Holiday season with dinner and music with your church family.

## **Christmas Symbols Party, December 9**

Children's Ministries invites the children of First UMC to its annual **Christmas Symbols Party** on **Saturday, December 9, from 10:00 a.m. until noon**, in the Fellowship Hall. Join in the fun as the children get to make their own crafts to decorate the tree at home or to give as gifts. Bring a friend and make gifts and symbols for the season. There is **no charge** for the party or the crafts. For more information or to help with this ministry—you can sign up in the Narthex—contact Juanita Malone or the church office.

## **First UMC Bake-off and Auction, December 9**

Also on December 9, the confirmation class is sponsoring a **baked goods competition and auction to benefit the Good Samaritan Fund** and help with the church food pantry. Baked items can be dropped off at the church Friday evening (before the Cantata) or from 8–10:00 a.m. Saturday. Judging will take place from 10:00 a.m. until noon, and the auction will begin at 12:30 p.m. Contact Debbi Schneider (deborahjschneider@yahoo.com) if you are interested or need more information.

## **Mission Trip to Paw Paw, December 9**

Just a reminder about our Christmas trip to the Rev. Nancy L. Ward Mission House, in Paw Paw, WV, on Saturday, December 9. The mission house assists families at Christmas with food, clothing, cleaning supplies, and toys. Suggestions for donations are new gloves, scarves, socks, books, games, and puzzles. Cleaning supplies are always in short

supply and monetary contributions to help with the cost of heating, medical needs, and prescriptions are also needed. Checks should be made payable to First UMC with "Rev. Ward Mission House" marked in the memo section. Drivers of vans or pick-up trucks are always needed. For more information, contact Georgianna Schallenberger or the church office.

## **Men's Winter Haven, December 10-17**

First UMC is hosting the men's shelter the week of **December 10-17, 2006**. Winter Haven provides all of us an opportunity to serve as the hands and feet of Christ to those in unfortunate circumstances. We need volunteers to provide meals, volunteers from 6:30 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. to register the guests, and volunteer shelter monitors to stay overnight, from 10:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. **Sign-up sheets** for each of these opportunities are **located in the narthex**. For more information, contact Greg Sweitzer or the church office. Also, keep an eye out for Women's Winter Haven, from February 25 to March 4, 2007. More information will be available as the date approaches.

## **UMYF to Hold Rummage Sale, January 6**

The United Methodist Youth Fellowship will hold a **Rummage Sale on Saturday, January 6, 2007, from 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.** We will accept any items for sale that you wish to donate, provided they are in "sellable" condition. For more information, contact Russell Reynnells or Ann Marie Miller.

## **New Year's Eve Celebration and Game Night**

Join the church family in celebration of the New Year. The event, sponsored by the Fellowship Team, will **begin Sunday, December 31, at 7:00 p.m.** Lots of snack food will be provided. Bring your favorite board game to share with everyone. We will finish the evening by watching the ball drop from Times Square and welcoming 2007. For more information, contact Jeremy Newkirk.

## **A "Weekend to Remember"**

For thirty years, the *FamilyLife Weekend to Remember* conferences have been helping couples create the kind of memories that build a healthy marriage. *Weekend to Remember* is a weekend marriage conference that teaches God's design for marriage and family. The environment is fun, non-threatening, and sometimes hilarious. And it's a wonderful time

for couples to refresh good marriages or heal troubled ones. Special group rates are available when five or more couples (or 10 people) register together at least 21 days prior to the conference. Once the initial group is registered, we can add more couples at the group rate until the day of the conference.

We would like to get a group together to attend a FamilyLife *Weekend to Remember* conference sometime in the next few months. For more information on how to register for this wonderful event, contact Amanda Berard, at 301-659-0075. Make your spouse the most important person in your life for a weekend—you won't regret it!

### **Ham Luncheon—Thank You!**

The UMW held its fall ham luncheon on Thursday November 9. It was a busy three days getting ready for the luncheon. The ladies and men served 382 ham lunches to eat in, take out, and to the shut-ins.

I just want to thank all the people it took to get this together. To all those who scrubbed and peeled potatoes. And to those who fixed and sliced hams and mixed potatoes into salad till their arms ached. Also, to all who baked goodies, helped in the kitchen, and served all those lunches. A simple thank you just doesn't seem enough, but that's all I can say, THANK YOU ALL. —Mary Hoffman

### **Memorial Garden Update**

As 2006 comes to a close, we want to take a minute and provide you an update on the Memorial Garden. Since the dedication, the church has received numerous compliments on the return of the garden from both church members and passersby. Hopefully, you have had an opportunity to rest on one of the benches and enjoy the wonders God has provided.

As of this writing, 86 brick pavers have been purchased and installed. These pavers both honor and memorialize many of the families who have worked long and hard for the glory of God at First UMC. With winter coming, no more pavers will be installed until spring. With 1,200 pavers available for future consideration, contact Jim Welsh, Pat Elliott, or a member of the Memorial Committee if you are interested. —Jim Welsh

---

## **Board of Child Care: Sharing the Christmas Spirit**

---

During December, we have the opportunity to share our giving with the Board of Child Care. A bright red and white stocking coin folder will be given to all the students in the Sunday school classes on Sunday, December 10. Please, encourage your children and family to share their coins with other less fortunate children.

The Board of Child Care is the official childcare provider for the Baltimore-Washington Conference. It is committed to providing quality programs in a safe and caring environment for children and their families. All donations collected through the Christmas giving go directly to help the children. For questions regarding the Board of Child Care, contact JoAnne Urion, at 301-953-7762.

---

## **Campbell's Labels: Changes in the Program**

---

A special note to everyone who collects Campbell's, Swanson, and Prego labels for our Methodist school at the Board of Child Care: all labels need to be turned in by December 10. Place the labels in the label-decorated can in the church kitchen. We plan to continue this project, but we will now be collecting UPC symbols or lids instead of the labels because of changes in the program. Keep saving; we will say more about the revised program in the January *Revelations*. For more information, contact JoAnne Urion or visit the Labels for Education Web site at <http://www.labelsforeducation.com>.

---

## **Holiday Bazaar a Great Success**

---

The United Methodist Women would like to thank everyone who supported this year's Holiday Bazaar. We were able to collect over \$2,600 for the missions that the church supports. We could not do this without the help of all those who helped to set up, sell, organize, clean up, and collect items for what was a successful bazaar. And of course, all the customers we had from our church and the community. Thank you all for your time, prayers, and support.

---

## Elizabeth House

---

One of the many outreach ministries that First UMC supports is Elizabeth House, located at 308 Gorman Avenue, here in Laurel. Incorporated since 1976 under the name FISH of Laurel, Inc., Elizabeth House operates entirely from private donations of money, food, and volunteer services.

As part of its ministry, Elizabeth House offers hot meals and bag lunches to an average of 40 people each night, 7 days a week, 365 days per year. Volunteers from churches, schools, and civic groups come together to prepare and serve the meals and make the lunches. Several members in our congregation pick up baked good from Starbucks and deliver them to the Elizabeth House each evening.

How can you help? Elizabeth House is a Laurel-based organization run by volunteers, so there are many ways you can help. Volunteers are needed to prepare meal (items are already on site), make bag lunches, serve meals, take pastry donation from Starbucks and deliver to Elizabeth house. Juice boxes and salad items are especially needed. Also, remember Elizabeth House as you order your Christmas poinsettias and make holiday donations.

For more on Elizabeth House, visit the church Web site (<http://www.fumcl.org/mission/fish.php>) or contact Becky Boeckman at 410-695-4431.

---

## God's "WOW" Worship: Update

---

The first month of "WOW" worship has gone very well. The Second Cup Cafe area provides us with the space to do a variety of activities. Our young Christians have responded well to the greater variety of learning experiences. While still in its infancy, I believe that "WOW" worship has a great potential for our young Christians at First UMC.

Our initial success has been accomplished because of the dedication and commitment of the adult and youth volunteers. They have proven to be a talented and resourceful group of Christians who love ministering to our younger members.

The continued success of "WOW" worship, however, is going to require even more volunteers. Ideally, we would like to have six volunteers at each of the 8:30 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. sessions.

I would extend an invitation to all members and friends of First UMC to make an investment of one Sunday a year to "WOW" worship. This would help to achieve one of our goals: to build relationships within the church family. In addition, it would give all of us a personal experience that would allow us to share about "WOW" worship with families who are worship guests. —Pastor John

*A personal word of thanks to the Keystone Sunday School Class for taking the responsibility of providing the "specialty" items needed. —PJ*

---

## Board of Trustees Update

---

Here is a brief update on what is going on at the First UMC regarding the buildings and grounds.

Installation of the LULA has been rescheduled. The car has to be resized to fit in the shaft. There will be no extra cost to the church for this, but the installation date was changed to the first week in January.

The refrigerator and stove in 425 Prince George Street must be replaced. If anyone has a useable refrigerator or gas stove in good condition they would like to donate, please let Kevin Dunlap, Roland Miller, or Mary Constable know. (This would save the church some money.) Also, the gutters at 425 Prince George Street need cleaning; if any member of the congregation could take care of this, please let the Trustees know.

The Trustees are currently looking into the possibility of using a professional building cleaning company to clean the church. We are currently accepting bids for the service.

Just a reminder that as you notice things in the church that need to be fixed, please inform Kevin Dunlap, Roland Miller, Mary Constable or the church office.

---

## Journeying Through Your Grief: Coping with the Holidays

---

By Lois Hamilton

Coping with the holidays can be one of the most difficult things for people who have experienced the loss of a loved one. Instead of a time of joy and celebration, one can experience a renewed sense of grief, resulting in feelings of sadness, loss, and emptiness. Since the loss of my husband on Christmas Eve twenty years ago, I have gained a lot of experience with this subject.

Here are some suggestions that may make life more tolerable during this period.

- ❖ Talk about your grief. Ignoring your grief won't make the pain go away, but by talking about it with caring friends and relatives you will help yourself heal.
- ❖ Be tolerant of your physical and psychological limits. Feelings of loss may decrease your energy level. Try to lower your expectations about being at your peak through the holiday season.
- ❖ Eliminate unnecessary stress. Don't overextend yourself but be sure to allot time for yourself.
- ❖ Be with supporting, comforting people. Identify friends and relatives who will allow you to express your feelings, Include the name of the person you lost in your conversations.
- ❖ Plan ahead for family gatherings and do what is right for you. Decide what family traditions you want to continue and the new ones you would like to begin. Structure your holiday time and focus on what you personally want to do rather than going along with plans of well-meaning friends and family.
- ❖ Embrace your treasury of memories. Memories are one of the best legacies that exist after the death or loss of someone loved. Share them with family and friends, If your memories bring laughter, smile. If they bring sadness, it's all right to cry.
- ❖ Express your faith. If your faith is important to you, you may want to attend a holiday service. You may even want to give a donation in memory of your loved one.

❖ Love yourself and be patient. This 20th anniversary is *almost* as hard as my first one, but I know that although it's easier to go through, it's never easy. I'll put a wreath on my husband's grave in the little Methodist churchyard where he is buried and I'll cry as I talk to him. I'll also do something I've done every Christmas since he died. That is to buy a Christmas gift from him to me. He had great taste!

My wish for you is to have as joyous a Christmas as you can, and thank God that you had such a one to love—grief is the price of that love here on Earth. May God bless you.

---

## Good \$ense Budget Course Offered in January

---

You too can experience the joy of financial freedom! Join us starting Saturday, January 20, for the Good \$ense Budget Course. The course will help you discover tools and develop skills that enable you to control your finances, rather than allowing your finances to control you. You will get practical help and guidance on how to prioritize financial goals develop a personalized spending plan, identify action steps to reduce expenses, reduce debt, and much more!

The course is more than just a learning experience about budgets and finances. It will enable you to reflect on your relationship to money and how it affects your relationship with God.

No matter what your circumstances—financial crisis or abundance—Good \$ense can help you discover how to become a diligent earner, generous giver, wise saver, cautious debtor, and prudent consumer. It can help you learn how to resist the pull of the culture and draw closer to the mind and heart of God. Experience the joy of becoming financially faithful as well as financially free!

To insure that we have enough material, be sure to sign-up on the sheet in the church office by December 31. The course will run four Saturdays starting January 20, from 11:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Lunch will be provided. Contact Debbi Schneider for more information.

---

## Blue Card Questions

---

By Pastor Dennis

**Question: Is tithing giving of money only or does it include time and gifts?**

Tithe means “tenth.” In the Bible a tithe always referred to that portion of produce or money set apart as holy unto God (See Leviticus 27:30-33). The first recorded tithe was paid by Abraham (Genesis 14:20). Jacob, his grandson did likewise (Genesis 28:22). Theirs was a free will, voluntary offering.

God’s law sums up the instruction for paying the tithe and for what purpose.

*“You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year. And you shall eat before the LORD your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil, of the firstborn of your herds and your flocks, that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always. But if the journey is too long for you, so that you are not able to carry the tithe, or if the place where the LORD your God chooses to put His name is too far from you, when the LORD your God has blessed you, then you shall exchange it for money, take the money in your hand, and go to the place which the LORD your God chooses. And you shall spend that money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen or sheep, for wine or similar drink, for whatever your heart desires; you shall eat there before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your household.”* (Deuteronomy 14:22-26 NKJV)

(See also Deuteronomy 26:12; Numbers 18:21-24)

We also have the general principle stated in Proverbs 3:9-10, to honor the Lord with the first fruits “of all your produce” (again it’s money or produce, not time or service).

Some who have no income may only be able to give time or service. Some people may prefer to give a tithe of their time or their service to the Lord. For instance a professional (attorney, accountant, roofer, etc.) has high-quality, necessary, and often expensive services that can be well used in the ministry of Christ’s church.

The point of the practice of tithing is to give the first of the best that you’ve received through God’s blessing upon your life. It’s not that the amount is

critical or that God needs our stuff, but the act of giving the first of our best to God honors God as our Provider. It’s also a declaration of trust and gratitude toward Him to Whom it all belongs (Psalm 24:1).

The tithe is a good start; after all, He lets us keep 90 percent and blesses that.

**Question: Does God respect civil marriages? (The drive-thru-Vegas-wedding-chapel style performed by an Elvis impersonator?)**

What do you mean by “respect”? Does that sort of marriage count in God’s eyes? In Matthew 19:6, Jesus said, “What God has joined together let no man separate.” So if “Elvis” officiated this wedding, does it mean that God did not join them together? And if God did not join them together, then does that mean it’s not as binding in His eyes?

Here’s the perspective I take on this question (since I don’t know who’s asking it or if there is a specific situation from which this question arose).

Marriage itself was created by God (Genesis 2:21-24). Jesus quotes this passage in Matthew 19:4-6 and says that marriage is the *reason* God created them male and female (v.4-5). So the uniting of two into one new family is part of God’s original created order. So, whatever method was used to unite a man and woman in the legally recognized bond of marriage means they *are* married; “the two become one flesh.”

Jesus’ saying “what God has joined together, let no man separate” is speaking not just of specific married couples, but also of marriage in its original intent as well. Anything that happens or denigrates marriage as something less sacred than what God intended certainly does not please Him; however, a marriage has been established, a new family formed. That is a legal fact. The Bible shows that words and vows made on earth are powerful and we will be accountable to God for thoughts, deeds, and words. Broken vows violate God’s law so, even a Vegas wedding chapel wedding comes under the purview of God’s law and standards of righteousness.

Christian marriages are specifically and intentionally Christ-glorifying, God-honoring covenants. There is a higher standard of commitment and sacredness involved. However, the secular contract marriage at the courthouse or the Pastor Elvis in the church of

Vegas version still is bound under God's law of righteousness in so far as the vows are honored and the man and woman uphold their commitment to care for each other and remain bound to one another as a family unit.

More could be said and developed on this, but in essence we are accountable for relationships and how we behave toward each other.

---

## Christmas Traditions

---

### Advent and the Advent Wreath

The first Sunday in Advent marks the beginning of the Christian year. Advent ends and Christmas begins at sundown on Christmas Eve.

*Advent* means "coming". The four Sundays in Advent are a time of expectancy. The color of the season is purple, denoting royalty and honor because our long awaited King, Jesus Christ is coming. We remember His first coming as a baby, but we also anticipate His second coming on the Day of Judgment.

Traditions teaches that this dark world has waited 4,000 years since Adam for God's light to come and bring redemption. In pre-Christian times, there was an ancient practice during the darkest month of the year (winter solstice) of lighting candles around a wheel to celebrate the return of light, as the days became longer.

This practice was "Christianized," retaining the lit candles in the circular shape. But the wreath of evergreens represents everlasting life. The circle symbolizes God's unending love. Each week one more candle of the four is lit as the day draws near for God's light in Christ to come. The general symbolism of the candles is this: three purple candles symbolize the royalty of the Coming King; the rose or pink candle symbolizes the joy of anticipating Christ's birth.

The specific meaning of each candle varies from tradition to tradition, and even church to church. We recognize this meaning.

- ❖ 1st candle HOPE
- ❖ 2nd candle FAITH
- ❖ 3rd candle JOY
- ❖ 4th candle PEACE

We light the white candle in the center on Christmas Eve, Christmas, and the Sunday after to symbolize the birth of our King, Jesus Christ.

### Why is Christmas Day on December 25?

In the days of the Roman Empire, the feast of Saturnalia (named for the Nature god, Saturnus) was celebrated from December 17th into the new year. Being the darkest time of year, when the days were shortest, there was great celebration and revelry in the hope that the sun would be reborn, and come back. It was a time of merriment and gift-giving among friends (especially to children); and also a time of wild parties and good times all around, which would have put today's office Christmas party to shame.

The highlight of this period was the "Day of the Birth of the Unconquered Sun" on December 25 (according to our calendar). It was the great feast day of the pagan Mithraic religion, a faith that rivaled Christianity in popularity, particularly among the Roman soldiers. Certainly there were other influences, but essentially this period of December was a pagan festival time designated for worshipping the sun god.

In A.D. 354, Bishop Liberius of Rome ordered all Christians to celebrate the birth of the unconquerable Son, Jesus Christ on December 25. It was a deliberate way of Christianizing a pagan holy day. It was called "Christ Mass Day", or as we now call it, "Christmas Day."

St. John Chrysostom (A.D. 386) writes, "They called this December 25, the Birthday of the Invincible One (Mithras); but who was so invincible as the Lord? They call it the birthday of the Solar Disc; but Christ is the Son of Righteousness".

The Mithraic religion is long gone, but Christ Mass Day lives on! Let us not give it back to the pagans.

---

## 2007 Altar Memorial Flower Calendar

---

Would you like to place flowers on the Church Altar in memory or honor of one of your loved ones? You can do this by calling Georgianna Schallenberger, of the Altar Service Guild, at 301-776-9307, or by filling out the following form and mailing it to the church or placing in the offertory plate. We are starting to fill the 2007 Flower Calendar, and we will do our best to reserve a date closest to the one you request. The flowers are \$13 for each vase, and you may choose to pick up the flowers after the 11:00 a.m. service or ask that they be delivered to one of the shut-ins or a friend. Up to four vases and one cross arrangement are available each Sunday.

A special thank you to all the "cheer callers" who delivered flowers this year to shut-ins or persons who were ill. It is a rewarding ministry, and anyone who would like to help with this should call the church office at 301-725-3093 or Georgianna Schallenberger, at 301-776-9307.

---

## Order Form - 2007 Memorial Flowers

Presented by: \_\_\_\_\_

Date Desired: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Vases: \_\_\_\_\_ (\$13.00 Per Vase)

In Loving Memory of:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

In Loving Honor of:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Check your choice:

Pick Up: \_\_\_\_\_ To Sick/Homebound: \_\_\_\_\_

Please make check payable to the *Altar Service Guild*. Give or mail your order to Julie Hildebrand, 15719 Haynes Rd., Laurel, MD 20707. Thank you.

---

## Our Church Family

---

### December Birthdays

- 2 Haley Kornak  
Stacey Marques
- 3 Craig Moe
- 4 Kevin Black  
Harriet Holmes
- 5 Jeffrey Clayton  
Brent Knoblett  
Deborah Reynolds  
Shari Kornak
- 6 Claire Malone
- 7 Judy Good  
Sherry Myers  
George Robbins
- 8 Angela Houghton  
Nathan Self
- 10 Julie Kosatka
- 12 Gladys Beall  
Harry Coon
- 13 Ashley Good  
Peter Stankewich
- 14 Jane Hanfman  
Daniel Turner

- 15 Carolyn Hanna  
Elmer Harding  
Barbara Moe  
Rebecca Nickles
- 16 Carol Macht  
Ana Teasdale
- 18 Cheryl Billups
- 20 Timothy Coleman  
Matthew Kuckuda
- 21 Jennifer Landy
- 22 Karen Hammond
- 24 Brandy Ellinger  
Bradley Holmes
- 25 Angela Bouie  
Edith Clinton
- 27 Nancy Burdge  
Carol Higgins
- 28 Sue Gascot
- 29 Penelope Crall  
Michelle Delgrosso  
Kenneth Godfrey  
Kimberly Elliott
- 30 Betty Johnson  
Tim Reed

- Casey L. Smith  
Courtney F. Smith  
Stephan Stankewich

### December Anniversaries

- 1 Mabel & Warren Litchfield
- 9 Joanie & Ron Cerimele
- 10 Nancy & John Castle, III  
Hazel & Larry Foster  
Gayle & Fred Snyder
- 17 Myriam & Odile Martin
- 21 Edith & Vaylah Clinton
- 23 Julie & Tom Miller
- 27 Ann Marie & Roland Miller
- 28 Mary & John Coleman  
Shirley & David Lewis
- 29 Lavonne & Brad Swank
- 30 Dorothy & Elmer Harding  
Christine & Bradley Holmes  
Esther & George Okai
- 31 Marcella & Dennis Whitmore
- 31 Theresa & John Thomas

## Homebound/in Nursing Homes\*

Velma Cook

8820 Briarcroft Lane  
Laurel, MD 20708  
301-776-8069

Mary Davis

Harmony Hall, Inc.,  
6336 Cedar Lane, Room 356;  
Columbia, MD 21044

Helen M. Dixon

Goodwill Retirement Home  
891 Dorsey Hotel Road  
Grantsville, MD 21536

Thelma Donaldson

813 Fourth Street  
Laurel, MD 20707  
301-725-5376

Marie Duvall

Morningside House, Rm. 328a  
7700 Cherry Lane  
Laurel, MD 20707

Josh Johns

Mariner Health of Greater Laurel  
14200 Laurel Park Drive,  
Room 310  
Laurel, MD 20707

Mary Johns

9254 Unit 15 Cherry Lane  
Cherry View Park  
Laurel, MD 20708

Dorothy Jones

c/o Carol Nichols  
7221 Tall Pine Way  
Clarksville, MD 21029  
301-604-3026

Brownie Marton

Morningside House, Room 116  
7700 Cherry Lane  
Laurel, MD 20707  
301-490-2123

Josephine Sadilek

14200 Waggaman Avenue  
Laurel, MD 20707  
301-776-2057

Sandy Self

Holy Cross Rehabilitation and  
Nursing Center  
Room 114-B  
3415 Greencastle Road  
Burtonsville MD 20866  
301-388-1595

\*As of November 1. If this listing is incorrect or incomplete, please inform the church office.

## Our Mailbag

Dear First Church,

A big thank you for the lovely flowers brought to me while I was unable to get out to church. They did much to cheer me and Warren, too. We are both doing better and hope to get back to church soon.

Sincerely,

Mabel and Warren Litchfield.

Reverence Dennis Whitmore

First UMC of Laurel,

Dear Reverend Whitmore,

I want to let you know how much I truly enjoyed worshipping with you on Sunday, September 24. It was a great pleasure to be able to preach at my parents' church and to be welcomed by such a warm congregation. Thank you for that opportunity. May God's Grace be with you all.

In Christ,

Warner H. Brown, Jr.  
Resident Bishop, Denver Area

To Pastor Dennis and Our Entire Church Family,

We thank each and every one of you, for your prayers, cards, calls, visits, and flowers during our spell of sickness. Looking forward to being back in your presence and active very soon.

May God continue to shower His blessings upon each one of you.

Warner and Ida Brown, Sr.

To all at First Church,

Christmas greetings to all of you. How we miss you! We can't believe fifteen years have passed since we left Maryland. We would really like to travel east to see you again.

I (Jean) really enjoyed working as your secretary for four years. All of you were so kind and thoughtful!

Everything is going well here. Richard worked for FEMA a few times, but things have been pretty quiet on the disaster front - thank heaven!

God bless you all. Have a blessed new year!

Jean & Richard Ohmann  
rmohm@yahoo.com

To Our Church Family,

We would like to thank you for the visits, cards, flowers, prayers, and other kindness during Charles' (Dad's) hospitalization, his sudden decline, and after his passing. We still feel God's presence through all of you, and our family is grateful to be surrounded by such a loving atmosphere.

Fondly,  
Mary Ellen & Ginny May and Family

**First United Methodist Church of Laurel**  
424 Main Street, Laurel, MD 20707  
Phone: 301-725-3093  
Website: www.fumcl.org

NON-PROFIT ORG U.S. POSTAGE PAID LAUREL, MD PERMIT NO. 115 DATED MATERIAL
--

Sunday Worship at 8:30 a.m. and 11:00 a.m.  
Sunday School (Adults and Children) at 9:45 a.m.

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Name  
Street  
City, ST 20707

---

## **Christmas Worship: “We’ve Never Done It This Way”**

---

We have a special day of worship planned unlike any other. As the old saying goes, “We’ve never done it that way.” And this December 24 certainly fits that description!

The morning services for the Fourth Sunday in Advent will take place at 11:00 a.m. The Confirmation Class will help lead the worship service and be confirmed into membership. *There will be no 8:30 a.m. service that day*, but there will be a special Christmas presentation by our children starting at 9:00 a.m., followed by Sunday School at the regular time.

Later that evening, at 8:00 p.m., will be our *first* Candlelight Service, which will include a full choir, wonderful songs and hymns to celebrate Christ’s birth, and a message by Pastor Dennis.

Our *second* Candlelight Service will take place at 11:00 p.m. The second Candlelight service was not part of the original plan; however, we are blessed

with a special visitor this year. (No, not Santa!) Reverend Mark Teasdale, former Associate Pastor of First UMC and Pastor of Rockland UMC in Ellicott City, will be our preacher. It will be wonderful to celebrate our Lord’s coming with our friend and brother in Christ.

Christmas morning will go as before: a 9:00 a.m. informal gathering in the sanctuary. Wear your footie pajamas, Garfield slippers, or other stylish sleepwear if you like. Just be decent. On Christmas morning, let’s give Jesus our first hour, worshipping Him with the gift of our time. There’s no bulletin, offering, or other formalities. Just come, sing your favorite Christmas hymns, and listen to a special children’s story by Pastor Dennis. Then we’ll move to the Fellowship Hall for a slice of Jesus’ birthday cake and a cup of coffee or juice.

On January 1, 2007, New Year’s Day, the Sanctuary will be open from 10:00 a.m. until noon so that anyone who wishes may come for prayer and Communion. —Pastor Dennis