

# THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

DECEMBER 2024



International Council of Community Churches

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| Number 3

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Winessa Crutchfield

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## President's Message

Bob Fread

### *Joy to the World, the Lord is Come*

The famous English hymnwriter Isaac Watts wrote the words many love to sing at Christmas, "Joy to the world, the Lord is come!" Imagine my surprise the first time a professor pointed out that Watts did not write this as a Christmas song. The hymn was composed as a paraphrase of Psalm 98 and does not contain any Christmas images like Mary, Joseph, shepherds, angels, magi, star or even a baby in a manger named Jesus. Yet even though I know the hymn's background, I still choose it to be sung in Christmas worship.

There is something about the words in that opening line, "the Lord is come" that echoes with me. That line witnesses to the Christmas message that the eternal Creator entered wholly into that creation, that as John writes "the Word became flesh to dwell among us" (John 1:14) or as Revelation says "the home of God is among mortals" (Rev. 21:3). Then in

our great diversity we celebrate through various types of worship, songs, foods, and traditions that our Lord has come. In our Community churches' tradition our celebration of God's coming among us is not dictated by any theological confessions that have to be affirmed or any certain liturgy or music in which we must participate, but instead we get to celebrate in our own way how God came to live among people of different genders, ethnic backgrounds, races, languages, etc. as one of them, or I should say, as one of us.

This Christmas, as you and your church celebrate in your own unique way, we still celebrate together, "THE LORD IS COME!"

*A Most Blessed and Merry Christmas to all!*

*Bob*

*Joy to the World*



## *Executive Director's Message*

**Bruce Merton**

### *A Coming in Chaos Then... Coming in Chaos Now*

Celebrating the birth of Jesus is fast approaching. Every year we see the placid, pastoral, serene presentations of Jesus' coming on Christmas cards, in creche scenes and reenactments of a birth we really know very little about. These placid, pastoral and serene presentations often bring joy, comfort and "Christmas cheer." However, they do not tell the story of Jesus' birth in utter chaos.

Yes, Jesus' birth was a truly chaotic event!

Consider the poignant and potent words of songwriter Andrew Peterson. They capture the chaos of society, environment, and personal circumstance:

It was not a silent night. There was blood on the ground. You could hear a woman cry in the alley ways that night, on the streets of David's town.

And the stable wasn't clean. The cobblestones were cold. And little Mary, full of grace, with tears upon her face, had no mother's hand to hold.

Noble Joseph by her side; his calloused hands and weary eyes. There were no midwives to be found on the streets of David's town in the middle of the night.

Jesus' arrival in this world came in the midst of a public scandal wrought by a young woman who becomes pregnant outside of wedlock and the quandary it causes for the man that loves her. It occurs in the chaos of people traveling for the purpose of a census. Chaos abounds in the realization that as birth approaches there are no rooms available for Mary to deliver. There must have been chaos of mind, heart and spirit as Mary and Joseph realized that their son would be born in a stable and have a feeding trough as his first bed.

There was chaos on the hillside as shepherds were gripped in fear at the sight of an angelic army. Imagine the internal chaos of those same shepherds as they left their sheep exposed and alone so they could go to Bethlehem and find the "babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger."

And if that is not enough, there was the ongoing chaos that resulted from the oppressive Roman rule of the Jews and Jewish efforts to thwart and resist that rule by many methods, including killing.

It was certainly a less-than-ideal environment for the birth of Mary's child!

Yet, it is the world Jesus came to. It is the world he grew up in. It is the

world he served in word and deed. It is the world he lived in and died for. It is the world saved by his victory over death.

Jesus was born into chaos over 2000 years ago. By God's power, Jesus' victory over death assures us that chaos will not win and that the order of God's kingdom will prevail!

We live on the other side of the victory over chaos!

And yet, we still make, manufacture, and live in chaos that causes divisiveness, destruction, despair and even death.

The world still needs what Jesus brought as a babe, a child, a man, and a Savior. Advent gives us the opportunity to share the meaning and promise of Jesus' birth and victory. It is a time to remind ourselves and our world that Jesus still comes into our chaos and brings to us the path of hope, peace, joy and love secured by his victory of life over death.

Announcing and living a Christ inspired alternative to the world's chaos is indeed a challenge of immense proportions. Let us remember that Jesus doesn't call the qualified. He qualifies the called, and that means you and me!

May the gifts of God in Jesus – hope, peace, joy and love – be yours!

*Bruce*

## ICCC DECEMBER 2024

75th Anniversary Theme: Reflecting the Majesty of God (Revelation 4:3 ESV)



### Book REVIEW

By Rev. Kenneth N. Nelson



As the ICCC celebrates 75 years of fostering Christian reconciliation and unity, our book reviews will reflect the intersection of faith, community, and social change. In the quest to merge faith with social justice, three books stand out as transformative guides for church communities: *At the Gates: Disability, Justice and the Churches* by Naomi Lawson Jacobs and Emily Richardson, *I'm Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness* by Austin Channing Brown, and *The City is My Monastery: A Contemporary Rule of Life* by Rev. Richard Carter. These works tackle systemic injustices, challenge traditional narratives, and call faith communities to embody Christ's teachings of love, justice, and inclusion in tangible, meaningful ways. Together, they illuminate a path for churches to evolve into inclusive, justice-oriented sanctuaries.

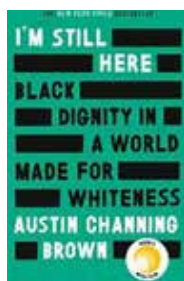


#### **At the Gates: Disability, Justice and the Churches**

Naomi Lawson Jacobs and Emily Richardson bring to light the often-overlooked struggles of disabled and neurodivergent individuals within the church. With poignant insights and compelling narratives, they argue that churches must move beyond a charity-focused approach and instead champion justice and equality for disabled individuals.

This book calls for a reevaluation of both physical spaces and theological practices. Jacobs and Richardson offer practical suggestions, such as ensuring church buildings are physically accessible, amplifying disabled voices in leadership, and dismantling ableism ingrained in theology and culture. As they write, *“By centering disabled Christians’ own stories, this book calls for churches to move from a care-based approach to disability, to one that is focused on justice.”*

At its core, this book serves as a challenge to churches: true inclusion demands not just kind words or accommodations but systemic change that honors the dignity and contributions of disabled individuals. Priced at \$24.95, it is a must-read for any church leader or community member committed to disability justice.



#### ***I'm Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness***

Austin Channing Brown's memoir is both a deeply personal account and a searing critique of systemic racism in predominantly white Christian spaces. Brown's experiences as a Black Christian woman navigating institutions not built for her reflect broader truths about racial inequities in the church and society. With unflinching honesty, she challenges readers to confront the discomfort of their complicity in systemic racism.

Brown's words cut to the heart of the matter: *“Our only chance at dismantling racial injustice is being more curious about its origins than we are worried about our comfort.”* She goes further, urging churches to move beyond performative allyship toward authentic engagement, declaring, *“I need a love that is troubled by injustice.”*

This book is more than a critique—it is a call to action. Brown emphasizes that racial justice is not simply a social or political issue but a spiritual imperative, one that requires a deeper understanding of Christ's teachings on love and equality. Available for \$17.99, *I'm Still Here* is an essential guide for churches seeking to embody true anti-racist practices and foster diverse, inclusive communities.



#### ***The City is My Monastery: A Contemporary Rule of Life***

Rev. Richard Carter offers a refreshing blend of contemplative spirituality and social justice in his account of the Nazareth Community at St Martin-in-the-Fields. This London-based collective is devoted to living out faith in solidarity with marginalized groups, including immigrants and the homeless.

Carter's narrative weaves ancient spiritual disciplines into the fabric of contemporary life, offering a modern “rule of life” as a blueprint for justice-oriented communities.

The stories within this book reveal the transformative power of shared life and mutual support. Carter's reflections remind readers that faith must translate into action: *“Faith must become love and hospitality toward society's most vulnerable.”* By integrating prayer, contemplation, and active service, Carter demonstrates how spirituality can inspire justice work and sustain those engaged in it.

Priced at \$22.00, *The City is My Monastery* is a moving exploration of what it means to live in community with others, especially those on the margins of society.

**SHARE YOUR COMMENTS.** Please share your thoughts about having a book discussion at [ICCCNOW@sbcglobal.net](mailto:ICCCNOW@sbcglobal.net) by the end of the month. For example, Did the book inspire you to take action, change your behavior, or think differently about something? Let us know if you are interested in having the book discussion. Also, let us know if we can quote or paraphrase your comments. Thank you for your feedback and have a blessed month.

## *Dedication Service for New Facility, Imagine Church*

*By Rev. Bruce Jones, Senior Pastor at Imagine Church of the Carolinas*

Sunday, October 27, was a historic and inspiring day for the congregation of Imagine Church of the Carolinas in the Charlotte, North Carolina area, as Dr. Bruce Merton, on behalf of the International Council of Community Churches, led a Service of Dedication for a New Church Building as the church officially consecrated its new facility.



Imagine Church was officially organized on November 2, 2014, and became a member congregation of the International Council of Community Churches a short time later. The church has experienced dramatic growth across its ten-year history, and the Rev. Bruce Jones, a former ICCC Trustee, has served as pastor since its inception. Imagine Church is structured around five primary ministry environments: worship, Imagine Kids, Imagine Nation Youth, life groups, and missions.

The congregation met on the campus of Charlotte's Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary for more than nine years and purchased a sixteen-acre tract of land in 2019. The Rev. Phil Tom of the ICCC led a service of groundbreaking on May 15, 2022, on a new 24,400 square foot contemporary facility which took 26 months to complete. It features a 400-seat worship center, large commons area with cafe, creative spaces for elementary-age children and youth, nurseries and preschool, green room, kitchen, staff offices, and conference room.



Dr. Merton's message for Dedication Sunday reminded the congregation to make God's house a home by keeping it holy, open, and missional, and by striving for excellence. Imagine Church is

located in suburban York County, adjacent to Charlotte, at 5501 Highway 55 East, Clover, South Carolina.

## *Women's Christian Fellowship Looks Ahead with Hope and Service*

*By Winessa Crutchfield  
ICCC WCF President*

The Women's Christian Fellowship (WCF) has faced a season of challenges and renewal as we continue our mission to serve God and our community with faith, hope, and love. In our monthly meetings, we've been reminded of the vital truth that God works through us: "God has no hands but our hands, no feet but our feet, no eyes but our eyes to seek out those who stray, and no lips but our lips to lift thoughts above."

### **Honoring the Memory of Mary Summers**

As we regroup after the loss of our beloved treasurer, Mary Summers, we are inspired by her legacy of commitment and kindness. Mary's contributions to WCF and unwavering faith will remain a guiding light for us. In this time of transition, we are grateful that our assistant treasurer, Myrtis Brame, has graciously stepped forward to serve as treasurer. Her dedication to our fellowship and God's work exemplifies the spirit of service that binds us all.

### **Holiday Fellowship: December 12 at 8 PM via Zoom**

This December, we invite all members and friends to join us for a special Holiday Fellowship via Zoom on Thursday, December 12, at 8 PM. The Zoom meeting link is <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/95370345616>. This virtual gathering will be a time to reflect on God's blessings, share fellowship, and encourage one another as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ.

### **A Call to Lift Others This Holiday Season**

As the holiday season approaches, remember that our words and actions can have a profound impact. WCF encourages everyone to "lift someone up" this season – whether through a kind word, a helping hand, or an act of generosity. Let us be instruments of God's love and grace, seeking opportunities to serve those in need and share His light.

### **Open to Serve Local Churches**

WCF remains committed to supporting our local churches. If there are ways we can assist, please don't hesitate to reach out. We can accomplish God's work and extend His love to those around us.

Thank you for your continued prayers and support. As we move forward, let us remain steadfast in faith and unified in purpose.

## Good-bye

The November Board of Directors meeting ended with a good-bye to DeAnn Bath for her many years of devoted service to the ICCC. Bob Fread, ICCC President, ended the meeting with these words:

“Tonight, we end this meeting in deep gratitude for DeAnn, and her many years of selfless service to this Council. DeAnn never wanted to end her time with the ICCC with any big goodbye, but she agreed that I could end her last board meeting with a few words.

I’ve heard it said that DeAnn is the “brains of the operation,” but that is a huge understatement. I’ve heard that she is “the glue that holds the ICCC together.” I do have to quibble theologically with that statement as I would say that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are what hold us together, but this means that DeAnn finds herself in some great company. DeAnn has forgotten more about the ICCC than most of us will ever know.

I looked back in some ICCC records to find where DeAnn was mentioned the first time. It was in the 2001 Leadership Directory as our bookkeeper/secretary. This means she has been with us for over 23 years. We know that next year is the Council’s 75th anniversary, so this means she has worked for us for almost 1/3 of the ICCC’s history. I believe I am correct in saying she is the longest-serving paid staff member in our history.

For most of her time with us I really didn’t know her well, just meetings at annual conference and an occasional phone call to the Council office. But in recent years I’ve come to know her, work with her, and appreciate her work and heart. When elected to the Board as VP of Informational Services I learned DeAnn has all the information. When I was elected President just a few months ago, her guidance, wisdom and knowledge have been indispensable. But most importantly, what I’ve learned about DeAnn is not about her working knowledge and wisdom, but about her love for us. DeAnn loves this Council. She loves our churches. She loves our people. What more could we have ever asked than for someone to love us as she has done.

I have the almost impossible challenge now to say something to DeAnn on behalf of us all. Therefore, on behalf of this Board [of Directors] and our Board of Trustees, our churches, our pastors, our key laity, our people who have attended conference in the last twenty years, plus a myriad of others – as a Christian community, our most appropriate words to you are “DeAnn, we love you! In this moment we offer our deepest gratitude to God for your servant’s heart and love for us. We pray as you enter this next chapter in your life you will be able to surround yourself more with the love of Ron, Kristyn, Carli, your mom and your grandchildren. DeAnn, from your ICCC family, we love you!”



## *The ICCC Welcomes our New Administrative Assistant Pam Kirkpatrick*

On November 30 the ICCC bids a very fond farewell to DeAnn Bath following 23 years of outstanding service coupled with an abundance of love and care for the ICCC.



On December 1 we join to welcome our new Administrative Assistant, Pam Kirkpatrick. Pam was chosen to fill this part-time position following a very deliberate and extensive search done by the ICCC. Personnel Committee.

Pam is a mother, grandmother, active member of the United Methodist Church, and a person of outstanding capabilities according to the references she gave.

Pam's administrative experience includes 17 years as the administrative support provider for the Department of Foreign Languages at Tennessee Tech University. The three professors that were contacted for references gave Pam very positive, even glowing, recommendations. One wrote, "Her flexibility, work ethic, commitment to others, especially young people, and her tenacity in making things happen make her an excellent candidate for any multi-faceted position."

Pam has a Bachelor of Science degree in English-Journalism, a Master of Arts degree in English Literature and an Associate of Science Degree in Nursing.

Pam lives in Loudon, Tennessee, which is the place where the new ICCC offices are located.

Pam will be working 20 hours per week. She can be reached at the office on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 9 AM to 1 PM, and on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 1 PM to 5 PM. Our phone number and email remain the same: (815) 464-5690 and [iccnnow@sbcglobal.net](mailto:iccnnow@sbcglobal.net).

Transitioning to a new office with a new administrative assistant will take time and patience. Let us give time and exercise patience coupled with love and grace as we welcome Pam and look forward to many excellent and shared experiences.

## **The ICCC Has a New Address! P.O. BOX 249 LOUDON, TN 37774**



815-464-5690  
(SAME)

[iccnnow@sbcglobal.net](mailto:iccnnow@sbcglobal.net)  
(SAME)

P.O. Box 249  
Loudon, TN 37774

**New Office Hours**  
(all times U.S. Eastern):  
**Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays**  
9:00 AM - 1:00 PM  
**Tuesdays & Thursdays**  
12:00 PM - 4:00 PM.

**Please update our mailing address in your contact lists. Mail will be forwarded from our previous address in the interim.**

### **Sharing Concerns with:**

- **Mary Fremont, mother of Rev. Rock Fremont, Jr., Shepherd of the Hills Senior Pastor, who was recently diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia.**
- **Lonnie Miller, Wilson Memorial Union Church, who continues to battle health challenges.**





## PASTORAL SEARCH COMMITTEE

### *Seeking Senior Minister*

Church of the Loving Shepherd (CLS) is an inclusive, ecumenical community church located in West Chester, Pennsylvania, and is rooted in the Christian tradition with 85 members and a typical Sunday attendance of 35 to 50.

Our sanctuary is a beautiful 205-year-old barn with a meditation grotto and garden. CLS is situated on fifteen acres containing meadows, woods, a labyrinth, a pond and a 170-year-old, historic, serpentine-stone manor house with an adjoining office.

Our pastor is retiring, and we are searching for a replacement. We are seeking an ordained pastor with a degree from an accredited seminary who has experience in conducting worship services, in providing pastoral care, and in congregational and community development. This position is for 30 hours per week.

Applicants should value and respect all faith traditions. Considerations that are important to us include openness, a positive outlook, community involvement, dedication to our food ministry program, and a strong interest in our music program.

We are seeking a pastor for an evolving community—a person who is open to sharing with, learning from, and growing with the congregation.

Please submit your resume and cover letter to [churchofthelovingshepherd@gmail.com](mailto:churchofthelovingshepherd@gmail.com).

### *Ordained Interim Pastor*

Wilson Memorial Church, an interdenominational church located in Watchung, NJ, is seeking an ordained interim minister for the period of one year starting Fall 2024.

Responsibilities include: service planning, preaching, performing the sacraments, pastoral care, funerals, weddings, baptisms, and collaborating with leadership.

During the interim's contract period, the church will be performing a congregational study and developing a pastoral search process. Hours and salary negotiable based on availability and experience. Housing available if needed.

Interested candidates should send inquiries and resume to [personnel@wilsonmemorialchurch.org](mailto:personnel@wilsonmemorialchurch.org).

Please also visit our website [wilsonmemorialchurch.org](http://wilsonmemorialchurch.org) for more information.



### *Interim Pastor*

The Protestant Community Church (also known as the Cathedral of the Woods) of Medford Lakes, NJ, is seeking to fill the position of Interim Pastor. This will be a position beginning January 1 of 2025 and continue for the next 8-12 months. The Protestant Community Church (PCC) is located in a bucolic setting fewer than 20 miles east of Philadelphia. PCC is an interdenominational and congregationally governed church with an average attendance of 90-120 between two services at 8 o'clock and 10 o'clock.

The interim pastor is responsible for providing leadership and administrative oversight of the church's ministries, including worship, music, preaching, teaching, mission service, stewardship, and fellowship. This individual will work with the church staff to provide opportunities for members to engage in worship, discipleship, and mission. This individual will use their developed interim-specialist skills to assess the congregation's current and long-term needs and provide counsel and leadership to the church. The Interim Pastor will help to prepare the congregation for a new pastoral leadership.

The Interim Pastor is accountable to the PCC congregation and its Board of Trustees. The applicant must hold a degree from an accredited or recognized Seminary or Bible College, be Ordained or Licensed Minister, have experience as a Lead or Senior Pastor, preferably with interim training.

If interested in this position, please submit the following:

- Cover letter that includes salary expectation
- Current resume (including email address and contact telephone numbers)
- Personal Statement of Faith
- Submit three personal and two professional (minister/pastor) letters of reference
- Copy of Ministerial License and/or Certificate of Ordination

Please submit your information to:  
The Protestant Community Church  
c/o Carol R. Vahlstrom  
100 Stokes Road  
Medford Lakes, NJ 08055