

# ***COMMUNITY CHURCH OF THE MIDLANDS***

***Unapologetically Christian, Unapologetically  
Progressive***

## ***Pastor's Paragraph***

### **“A CHRISTMAS STORY”**

Every once in a while I come across a Christmas story that is worth telling. The one I want to share with you during *this* season originated with Max Lucado. I will shorten it a bit and change the names of the two main characters, as well as a few details.

Joe had lost his wife to a horrific illness and left him with a little daughter, so Joe's mother moved in with him to cook, clean, and help rear her granddaughter, Jane.

It was Christmas Eve, and Joe read “The Night Before Christmas” to his little daughter as she snuggled in his lap. The two had become very close; but, as Jane grew up, she began to resent not having a mother as did her friends, and she began to pull away from her father. She decided that since she had survived without a mother, she didn't really need a father either.

Moreover, she abandoned her closest friends and began to run with a group not particularly palatable to her father and grandmother. In fact, when she was around them, she knew when to be quiet. Always. The good conversations they used to have had long since ceased.

Joe felt sad and very helpless. His daughter would sneak out at night and didn't return until the next day. He didn't know what to do about her pierced nose and lower lip, nor did he dare say anything about the tattoos that appeared all over her body. Ditto the extremely low grades she began to get after having earlier been an honor student.

Joe and the grandmother continued to surround Jane with love and caring; but, to *them*, she wouldn't give the time of day.

Jane began to hang out with a young man several years her senior, one who had a police record, was a school dropout, and had an extremely poor reputation in the neighborhood. Jane would pay no attention to her family when they tried to persuade her that her new "companions" might not be in her best interest. Still she would sneak out of the house and wouldn't return for a couple of nights. Her dad and grandmother worried about the possibility of pregnancy and, of course, disease.

One day, the inevitable happened. Jane never came home. She had been seen in the vicinity of the local bus station, and authorities there confirmed that she had purchased a ticket to Chicago, but there were no other clues to her whereabouts.

Jane had "taken off" with the older boy who had a seriously flawed reputation. He had a relative in Chicago that let him and Jane stay with him at night. But after a few days, the older boy found another woman and gave Jane her walking papers. Now, in that huge city, she had no place to sleep and no hand to hold. She just walked around aimlessly. She didn't need anyone anyway, she told herself.

Finally, a woman in the park told her about a homeless shelter near the bridge. For a couple of bucks, which was all she had, she could get a bowl of soup and a cot in a huge room.

The next morning, the girl in the cot beside Jane's showed her a fistful of tips she'd made from dancing on tables. "Why don't you drop by and apply for a job?" Jane was reluctant, but hunger has a way of helping a girl to take what is available.

Jane certainly knew how to dance. Her father had taught her when she was much younger. Now, men the age of her father watched her and paid her to do “private performances” in a back room. So Jane did her job and took their dollars. She tried not to think about the warmth and caring she had experienced at home, the good meals during which her grandmother lovingly had prepared her favorite food, the wholesome friends she had left behind and the many opportunities she had squandered. Jane learned that the relative of her old boyfriend who used her, then kicked her out, had squealed to her father about his daughter’s living with the relative for a while.

Now, the relative with whom she had stayed briefly was bringing letters to Jane—not just one or two but a whole box full, all from her father. “He sends two or three a week,” complained the relative. “It’s a pain in the royal caboose. Give him your address so I won’t have to continue to bring this mail to you.” But, of course, Jane wouldn’t do that, because her father could find her. Moreover, she refused to open any of her dad’s letters. Nevertheless, deep down, she realized she would give anything to feel her father’s arms around her again; but she was afraid that her father might no longer love her if he knew all she had done, the many times she had sold her body to make a living, and the numbers of people she had hurt.

Leaves began to fall, and the air chilled. Jane stared at the boxes full of letters from her father who continued to reach out to her; but, still, she refused to read them. Then, a few days before Christmas Eve, a letter arrived that was *not* delivered by her former boyfriend’s relative. It was sitting on her dressing room table.

“A couple of days ago, a nice looking man stopped by and asked me to give this to you,” explained one of the other dancers. Jane replied anxiously, “*What! He was here?*” The woman looked at her with disdain and said, “*Obviously, right?*” Jane swallowed hard and stared at the envelope. *This* time, she opened it and read the enclosed card: “I now know where you are, I know what you do, and none of it changes

the way I feel. I *still* love you. If you want to come home for Christmas, that would make the season extra special.”

“He still *loves* me,” Jane said to herself, tears streaming down her face. “He loves me, he loves me—no matter *what* I’ve said and done, no matter *how* much I’ve hurt him! Then, tears flowed even *more* freely, blotching the ink on the card she was holding. The words in her father’s message became a streaked mess. Amazingly, only the word “love” remained legible. “It’s almost as though it’s a message from God,” she said softly.

Within an hour, Jane was on a bus. Maybe I’ll be able to make it on time, she thought. And she *did*!

*This lovely Christmas story reminds me of Jesus’s parable of the Prodigal Son, in which the Father represented God’s love for each of us, no matter what. Of course, if we take the biblical message seriously, isn’t that what Christmas is about anyway: the tenacious love of a God who won’t give up on us? It is my prayer that all of us will experience that matchless, indefatigable love during this Christmas season, mediated through family members or others whose caring lets us know that, even through other fallible human beings, God still works to embrace, cradle, and sustain us.*

*With a heart full of love for you,*

*Your pastor and friend,*

*John*

# IT'S HAPPENING AT CCM

*December, 2017*

## PLEASE NOTE THE CHANGE!

Although, in most months, we gather on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday,  
*this month we will gather on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday!*

### Sunday, December 10 (2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of the Month)

#### **11:00 a.m. CCM CHRISTMAS FELLOWSHIP BRUNCH**

We'll gather at Arabesque (2930 Devine Street, Columbia) for a joyful, intimate opportunity to share the Christmas Season together. Since we need to make reservations with the restaurant, please call our pastor at (803) 331-9999 to make your reservation by Saturday, December 2<sup>nd</sup>. Extended family and friends are welcome to join us; so plan now. Let's celebrate the Christmas season *together!*

### Sunday, December 17 (3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of the Month)

#### **10:00 a.m. ANNUAL CHRISTMAS WORSHIP AND CANDLE LIGHTING CEREMONY**

Since several of our members and friends plan to be out of town to celebrate Christmas with family on Sunday, December 24<sup>th</sup> (Christmas Eve), we're having our annual Christmas Service a week early to make it possible for those valuable people to join us.

We're planning a very special worship service to celebrate this holy season. Our pastor will be sharing a message with an intriguing title: "DISCOVERING THE *DEEPER*

MEANING OF CHRISTMAS.” Did you *know* that Christmas has a deeper meaning, and do you know what it *is*? Even if you *think* you know, you probably don’t, since our pastor has never heard this frequently overlooked theme talked about in a Christmas service. As we celebrate this wonderful season at CCM, we’ll have an opportunity to change that! Join us for this significant final service of 2017.

(Traditionally, we do not have our discussion of the sermon following worship during the Christmas season. That opportunity will be resumed in the new year.)

# ANNOUNCEMENTS

## *LOOKING AHEAD*

If you want to mark your calendar, our first gatherings in the new year will be on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Sundays: January 14<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>. Additional details will appear in your January 2018 newsletter.

## *BIRTHDAYS*

Two of our special people will celebrate known birthdays in December. Indefatigable Dr. Norman Masters *may* pause long enough to catch his breath and enjoy a piece of birthday cake on 12/11; and our dear, never-to-be-forgotten former co-minister, the Rev Dale Sessions, will be surrounded by our love and prayers on *his* birthday, 12/14. (Please see the next announcement regarding Dale.)

## *REMEMBERING DALE AND NORMA SESSIONS*

As this newsletter announced, our former co-minister and dear friend, Dale Sessions, is having a birthday this month. In accord with his request when he and Norma were able to be with us each Sunday, we have been giving you periodic updates on the progression of Dale's Alzheimer's disease and remembering him and Norma in our prayers. Although we wanted to do more, we discovered that they already had extremely adequate support in their community at the Lowman Home in Chapin.

However, since Dale's birthday is on December 14<sup>th</sup>, we thought it would be wonderful for some of us to visit Dale and Norma and take a sumptuous birthday cake for Dale.

We had planned to make that visit on Sunday, December 10<sup>th</sup>, immediately after our CCM Christmas Brunch. However, we found that Dale and Norma have a prior commitment until 3 p.m. So our plan has changed. In order to fit into Dale and Norma's schedule, we'll gather at our 7 Oaks church meeting place at 2:30 p.m. and, from there, drive in a motorcade to Dale and Norma's lovely home. John will be responsible for bringing the cake.

We plan to visit our dear ones at around 3:00 p.m. and leave at about 4:00 p.m. This will be a wonderful way to celebrate a very special person who has meant so much to us and to let him and Norma know how much we appreciate and value both of them. So please mark this opportunity on your calendar.

### ***OFFERING THE GIFT OF FOOD***

We hope that we will never experience the anguish of homelessness or the pain of going hungry; but there are others who do, and so each year, we at CCM have tried to do something to help. On Christmas Day this year, CCM will be providing a delicious, nutritional meal for 50 hungry people. In addition, during 2017, our church has provided meals for 500 struggling families. We thank God for the privilege of being able to have a small part in making a difference in the lives of so many people less fortunate than we.



# CCM:

## **FOSTERING JESUS'S SIMPLE APPROACH TO SPIRITUALITY:**

- FREEDOM FROM DOGMAS AND CREEDS,
- MAKING THE KINGDOM OF GOD A PRIORITY,
- AND FOLLOWING THE PATHWAY OF JESUS.

***WHEREVER YOU ARE, THE DIFFERENCE  
IS WORTH ANY DISTANCE!***

### **Our Telephone:**

Senior Pastor: (803) 331-9999. Our mobile cell phone is more reliable than our landline phone, because it is on 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. If no one answers, it usually means that our pastor is in a meeting, in a counseling session, doing regular spiritual mentoring, or is involved in some other form of ministry; but he will return your call as soon as possible, so please be sure to leave a message.

**Our Websites:**

CommunityChurchMidlands.com (Also .net, .info and .org)

*or*

CommunityChurchOfTheMidlands.com (Also .net, .info and .org)

**Our Mailing Address:** P.O. Box 6946, Columbia, S.C. 29260-6946

**Our Location:** CCM usually gathers on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of each month, and any changes will be noted in our monthly newsletter. Please join us at the gorgeous Seven Oaks Community Center in beautiful Seven Oaks Park, 200 Leisure Lane (between St. Andrews and Piney Grove roads, just off I-26 West). When you enter the spacious parking lot, you'll see the main entrance to our newly renovated building on your right. Once you are inside the Reception Area, our meeting locality is on your left. For updates on our programming, to verify meeting times, to learn about changes in scheduling, or for any pastoral need, please feel free to call 331-9999, night or day.

***ALWAYS, WE'RE HERE FOR YOU!***