



ROAD WORK

-WEEKLY NEWSLETTER-

**OLD ORCHARD BEACH UNITED
METHODIST CHURCH**

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Secret Santas Offer Holiday Gift Help to Parents

From the UM News Service—Dec. 18, 2008—By Heidi Robinson

This Week:

Sunday:

~Breakfast—9:30 AM
~Worship & Sunday
School—10 AM

Monday:

~Food Pantry—9 AM

Tuesday:

~Prayer Service—6 PM

Wednesday:

~Food Pantry—9 AM
~ Christmas Eve
Service—7 PM

Saturday:

~Gab 'n Grow—1 PM

Sunday:

~Breakfast—9:30 AM
~Worship & Sunday
School—10 AM

VERSE OF THE WEEK

"Mary's pregnancy is Spirit-conceived. God's Holy Spirit has made her pregnant. She will bring a son to birth, and when she does, you, Joseph, will name him Jesus—'God saves'—because he will save his people from their sins."

*Matthew 1:21-22
(The Message)*

Laughter, ribbons, wrapping paper and a crowd of smiling faces could be the ingredients for a any holiday gathering. For a group of would-be elves, however, they are the tools for accomplishing a covert mission to benefit some of the city's children in time for Christmas.

Gathered around a table brimming with new toys, clothing and games, eight volunteer "secret Santas" sort and wrap Christmas presents for eventual delivery to financially struggling parents. The parents then get to experience the joy of giving as they present the gifts to their children on Christmas.

"It's really not about the gifts," says volunteer Richard Holbrook. "Don't get me wrong—the gifts are important to a child who wouldn't receive something. But what we're really giving is the love of Jesus Christ."

The familial atmosphere around the wrapping station defines the community spirit of Open Arms, a ministry of the UM W. North Carolina Conf.

The ministry has operated for eight years from a large white house located in the heart of a Winston-Salem neighborhood. Many houses along the block are rentals, and the families living in them sometimes worry about safety. Open Arms has provided a place here to foster community growth: hosting Bible studies, providing after-school tutoring and sponsoring a Girl Scout troop, among its

many ministries.

"We believe God gives every person gifts to share," says Vickie Sigmon, director of Open Arms. "This is a place where families can be nurtured; they can receive help, and they can serve."

Extended family

Some of the volunteers have received Christmas help from Open Arms in past years. La-Tonia Woods considers the Open Arms community an extension of her family.

"I'm here helping because Open Arms opened its arms to me and my child," says the 36-year-old mother. "There have been a lot of times when I don't have, but there is somebody here at Open Arms who does have. The folks here have given to me, so anything they need help with, I'll be here."

The gifts usually make their way into families' homes through a stealthy delivery process in the dark of night.

The gift of joy

Joy is needed in many households this holiday season, but particularly in Lucero Zarat's one-bedroom apartment. The 18-year-old mother of two toddlers works at least 40 hours a week, often feeling sad that she is not at home more with her small children.

"But I'm thankful for my job, and I'm trying to save so we can buy a car," says Zarat as she plays with her 18-month-

old son, Miguel.

Zarat attends a Bible study at Open Arms and, like many members of the community of faith, volunteers her time there. She helps cook meals during large gatherings and donates her time to provide child care. But Zarat feels overwhelmed by the thought of holiday expenditures—and her kids' Christmas wish lists.

For Zarat and other struggling families, the Open Arms van serves as Santa's sleigh this time of year as it pulls up beside the Zarats' apartment complex. Volunteers make a delivery that includes a 5-foot-tall tree, ornaments and, of course, a few colorful packages.

"Guys, can you grab that tree?" Sigmon asks, stepping out of the van with an armful of goodies.

The ministry's volunteers make many similar deliveries during December, providing Christmas gifts to as many as 25 families who might otherwise have none.

"What makes our community so unique is that the very families we serve also give back to meet others' needs at Open Arms," Sigmon says. "Everyone has something to share. The gifts are just one way to help meet the needs of little Miguel and his sister, Mariali."

Zarat is appreciative of this spirit of giving. "The help from Open Arms is an answer to



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Along the road less traveled...

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Epiphany Feast—January 4

Our annual Epiphany Feast is coming tight up and I have been asked to remind people of the “rules”:

- We will be eating—come hungry
- We will be celebrating—come with joy
- We will be exchanging gifts—bring one gift to be given to anyone of any age, preferably homemade

This is a time of celebration and thanksgiving when we can look at all that God has given to us with a humble heart and start off the new year right.

What exactly is Epiphany?

Epiphany is the last day of the Twelve Days of Christmas and, as such, falls on January 6. We celebrate Epiphany in the Church on the Sunday closest to January 6.

Epiphany has different meanings in different faith traditions. Here in the West, we typically mark the arrival of the Magi from the East to visit the child Jesus. In scripture, the arrival of the Magi could have happened as long as two years after the birth of Jesus Christ and most certainly did not happen

while Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem.

The earliest records of Epiphany are from the Eastern Church where Epiphany is known as the Feast of Theophany (Greek word for “divine manifestation”). Epiphany is a Feast Day in both the Eastern Catholic and Roman Catholic churches as well as many other Protestant denominations.

There are many traditions, customs, and rituals held on that day, including the chalking of the door posts with the initials of the three Wise Men. Other traditions include the Blessing of Waters, a strict fast day known as Paramony, and various other fasts, feasts, and blessings.

In Closing

Please plan to come and enjoy our annual Epiphany Feast on January 4. Don’t feel that you have to bring a gift—the gift of everyone’s presence will be more than enough. But if you do wish to bring a gift, please try to bring something homemade. If you absolutely must purchase something, spend as little as possible. It is not the gift that is important; it’s the act of giving.

WE’RE ON THE WEB!
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Upcoming Events

Throughout December—Postage Free Christmas—Don’t forget to check your “mailbox” each week to see if you have any Christmas cards.

21—4th Sunday of Advent. The Sunday of PEACE.

Sunday, December 21 at 6PM—Blue Christmas Service at Cornerstone UMC—This service is especially planned and designed for those of us who are overwhelmed or unable to find the joy of season for whatever reason. Christmas can be a time of increased depression for many. This service will attempt to speak to those of us for whom these conditions are their human conditions

Wednesday, December 24 at 7PM—Christmas Eve Service—Join us for a special time of worship and warmth as we look celebrate the birth of our Lord.

December 28—Christmas Sunday.

January 4, 2009—Epiphany Sunday.

January 2009— Citizen Police Academy—The OOB PD is accepting applications now for the second installment of this popular program.

January 25, 2009—Pulpit Exchange