

BELL TOWER NEWS

College Hill Presbyterian Church – DECEMBER 2023

513.541.5676 | 5742 Hamilton Ave. | Cincinnati, OH 45224 | chpc.org

THIS ADVENT MEET THE LAMB OF GOD

Surrounded by all the world's and the Church's lovely trappings of Christmas, we may be tempted to forget or ignore the real picture of Christ's birth. The manger sits in stark contrast to the glitter and glitz.

Eugene Petersen's *Message* paraphrase puts it this way:

The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son.— John 1:14

Jesus, God's perfect gift, did come in the *fullness of time*, but it took such a long time for this to happen, most people stopped watching for the signs of his arrival. When it did, the shepherds were the first invited guests. Why? They were devoted to preparing and watching expectantly.

At the time of Jesus' birth, Bethlehem had a population of about three hundred. It was the area of lush fields and natural caves where Levitical shepherds raised lambs for sale as sacrifices at the Temple in Jerusalem. These special shepherds were trained for and tasked with the responsibility of discerning which lambs were suitable for sacrifice, since only unblemished lambs were



ADVENT SPIRITUALLY PREPARES BELIEVERS FOR THE MOST SIGNIFICANT ARRIVAL IN ALL OF ETERNITY — JESUS, THE CHRIST, BEING BORN IN THE FLESH...GOD WITH US.

acceptable.

"The chosen lambs" were protected from damage by being wrapped in strips of cloth similar to those used for mummification or burial.

This wrapping worked so well that even their own newborn children were bathed, rubbed with salt and oil, and bound with cloth strips to restrict movement and keep them safe. There was always a ready

' supply of swaddling clothes handy. Shepherds were expectant, equipped and ready.

As Christians we hear the world say, "Be happy...it's Christmas time." But we know that many this Christmas are lamenting — crying out, longing, hoping, asking God to show up in their neighborhood or to show up in the lives or in the circumstances of those they love (CONTINUED ON PAGE 3)

THE STAR ON OUR FAMILY TREE

BY BONNIE MACK

It was just a plastic star, after all. Why should I get so upset and sad when it didn't light up for the first time in as many years as I could remember? I couldn't recall any other tree topper we'd ever had. I knew my husband Tom bought it because he took care of things like that. Perhaps that was part of the reason for my sadness. Tom just took care of things I didn't want to bother with... electrical, technological, financial, structural, maintenance things. But the most obvious reason I felt undone by a dead star was the fact that it represented Tom's death and the absence of his light in my life. We met the first night of college at the freshmen mixer and never looked back.

We'd been married nearly 53 years and had been blessed with a wonderful family, including 8 grandchildren (pictured in 2020). Life together definitely has had its ups and downs, but both of us shared a deep sense of gratitude to God for his faithfulness and goodness to us and our family. Tom died on Good Friday (4/15/2022) after a short hospital stay. I'd been trying my hardest to cope.

The Lord had felt so close, reaching out to me through His Word, Christian music, my loving and caring family, and steadfast friends. God's fingerprints on my life had been assuring me of His faithful presence. But now, 8 months later, with the reality of the permanence settling in and the joy of the Christmas season feeling bittersweet, I desperately needed to know God saw me and cared.

My in-town family all came over Thanksgiving weekend to put up my tree and outside decorations. When the tree decorating was finished my youngest son placed the star on the top and plugged it in. It didn't light. He handed it to me to check because it's ALWAYS worked. Nothing! I tried several times, even using different outlets! I couldn't believe it. Tom bought it so long ago that I can't remember not having the lit star on the top. I was so sad, practically undone, and only half listened to the kids saying I would need to buy another tree-topper. While we were all stunned and saddened by



2020 TOM & BONNIE AND THEIR 8 GRANDCHILDREN

the unlit star, we also joked that Tom was pranking us, his *modus operandi*.

I was texting with my out-of-town oldest son and wife about it. He responded, "Mom, put the star up on the tree anyway. Dad loved it, so his presence will still be with us, just in a different way." Despite my sadness, I decided to put the unlit Lucite star at the top of our tree. The family was in town the next weekend and saw the "lifeless star" which we talked about again. After everyone left on Sunday, I decided to plug the star in just in case. Again, nothing happened. I walked away, keeping the

tree lit, and half-heartedly told God how sad I was over the unlit star. I mumbled, "Maybe you'll light it for us on Christmas Day when everyone's here." I even answered myself, "Sure..." It was an honest prayer but a weak one.

A little later, as I was talking to my sister-in-law who knew nothing about this, I glanced at the tree and thought I saw the star lit. I initially suspected it was some tree lights reflecting off the star but walked into the living room to check. Surprise of surprises, the star was brightly shining just like it always had. I interrupted my sister-in-law and said, "You're not going to believe this..." and told her the whole story.

I wasn't sure how this had happened, but I didn't care. I just basked in the sheer joy of seeing a lit star. I was crying, laughing, doubting, rejoicing, and questioning simultaneously. It was then I remembered my paltry prayer and almost the exact words I had mumbled. I don't understand it, but I'm choosing to believe it's my little Christmas miracle from the Lord, showing

me God cares about every detail of my life. He wants me to know that even my half-hearted, grumbling prayers are important to him, because I am important to him, just as we all are.

The Creator of all stars connects intimately with ordinary people and I'm so grateful he does. Each time I plug in the tree, my eyes dart up to the top to double check, and I cry again and praise him once more. I'm profoundly grateful I can rest in the assurance that God sees me. And I'm even more thankful Tom is shining brightly in Heaven, seeing the Lord face-to-face this Christmas.

MEET THE LAMB OF GOD

BY SHARLYN STARE

(CONTINUED FROM THE FRONT COVER)

and pray for, including themselves. They may have turned away from God or felt abandoned in their grief and struggle.

Such feeling were not unknown by those who awaited Christ's birth more than 2000 years ago. They actively lamented and talked to God in prayer:

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? —Psalm 22:11

Save me, O God, by your name; vindicate me by your might. Hear my prayer, O God; listen to the words of my mouth. —Psalm 54:1-2

People searched the Scriptures, established traditions that helped them to acknowledge how God acted on his people's behalf in the past; confessed their sins and asked for God's forgiveness; were specific about their need and affirmed their trust that he would respond. But there was no assurance.

When Jesus finally arrived in that manger, Jews and many other God-seeking people were weary of waiting. Some like Mary and Joseph obediently traveled to a backwater town filled to overflowing with strangers, only to lodge in a cold stable with animals. The Magi left their familiar country and went to a distant land by following an astronomical phenomenon. The Levitical shepherds, the most prepared and



expectant "watchers," still needed a supernatural angelic choir to shift their attention from God's sheep to adoration of God's Shepherd.

In God's Word, Matthew 1-2:12 and Luke 1:1-79 tell the story. Mary and Joseph, shepherds, Magi, and many, many more all met at a manger to witness a the arrival of a child unlike any other.

Today, wise men and women still come to the manger. They trust that whatever their lament, Jesus has come into *their* neighborhood — the pure, sinless, spotless Lamb of God. The really Good News is that those who receive him are freed from their sins, transformed by God's Holy Spirit, and reflect God's Glory to other as the neighborhood changes.

In spite of the fears, circumstances, and griefs, those who know they are loved by God through Jesus Christ can experience with the shepherds that first Christmas morning whether they are singers or not:

Glory to God in the highest, and on the earth peace among men and women with whom God is well pleased. —Luke 2:14.

2024 MISSION TRIP TO KENYA

INFORMATION & APPLICATION
www.chpc.org/Kenya

DATES IN KENYA?

Nine to fifteen days during the period from May 18-31, 2024.

WHERE WOULD YOU BE?

- Helping Gabriel Howard who lives and works in the huge cosmopolitan city of Nairobi. You would stay in an apartment near Gabe and travel with him each day to the Language School and for other activities; and/or
- Hope Community Centre on the beautiful Kinangop Plateau, a couple of hours north of Nairobi, serving Mama Lucy and over 200 children. You will stay in a large, well-built compound. One of their buildings has an entire floor for guest rooms.

HOW TO PREPARE

Pray for God's guidance for each person he is calling on this trip. The cost of the trip is about \$3,000 for housing, food, and transportation.

APPLY ONLINE BEFORE DEC. 31
AT WWW.CHPC.ORG/KENYA.
PREPARE AND PAY THE \$500
DEPOSIT BY DEC. 31.

QUESTIONS? Samuel Mock (smock@chpc.org), Robin Riechel (robinriechel26@gmail.com), Mary Sue Verhagen (verhagenms@gmail.com), Catherine Sanders (csanders@chpc.org)



THE WORK OF CHRISTMAS: When the angels have become stilled, the star is gone, the kings are back home, the shepherds are back with their flocks - the work of Christmas begins: find the lost, heal the broken, feed the hungry, free the prisoner, rebuild the nations, bring peace, make music in the heart. —BY HOWARD THURMAN



JACKY KALUBI ON TRI-STATE BILLBOARDS

Avril Warren called and said, “On Red Bank Road, I saw Jacky Kalubi larger than life on two billboards.” Avril stopped and took the photo above.

In the May 2023 *Bell Tower News*, we announced that the Seven Hills School had awarded Jacky Kalubi a distinguished teacher award: The Elise Eaton Allen Faculty Chair. It is given every four years to an outstanding educator in the arts or in world languages.

The Seven Hills School is “a private academy in Cincinnati, Ohio, that celebrates the unique talents of students, pre-k through 12th grade” (and teachers too). “The school has a superb record of college placement and breadth of scholarship...[and] provides some of the best college preparation not only in the Cincinnati area, but in the nation.”

Jacky has taught French language and culture for more than 30 years. She knows that learning can’t take place without the meaningful, positive, and authentic relationships between herself and her middle school charges. Her lessons are designed to fuel students’ curiosity, not only about the French language, but about the world beyond. Her students are well prepared for the challenges that await them in high school, college and life.

In Jacky’s bio on the school web-

site, she says, “I believe that people-to-people communication and understanding of other cultures are essential in forming the character of my students. I hope to contribute to the general education of these young people by not only teaching the language but by giving them opportunities to gain insight into patterns of living and thinking in ways that are different from their own. I relish the fact that students not only learn the language and the skills associated with it but they get to learn history, anthropology, sociology, literature, customs and traditions, lifestyle, and art. They get to hear conversations, songs and music, and taste different foods. The development of all these skills, together with the students’ understanding of the structure of language, may lay the foundations for furthering their own study of French or lead to the pursuit of other world languages.

We who know her personally have seen Jacky’s unwavering commitment to embracing the rich diversity of the world and expressing God’s love to others in need. She consistently reflects Jesus in other arenas of life—across the street & around the world. That’s certainly worth a billboard!



JESUS WONDERFUL
COUNSELOR
MIGHTY GOD
EVERLASTING FATHER
PRINCE OF PEACE



FROM THE PRESBYTERIAN
OUTREACH FOUNDATION

Pastors Valeriy’s congregation* numbered less than 25 at the time of the attack. After seeing his church and home destroyed, Valeriy was completely disenchanted and thought his days of being a pastor were over. Now he is serving over 100 and feeding hundreds of people per week. One of our mission contacts in the region, commented, “It’s ironic. Many pastors thought the war was the end of their ministry when in fact God was about to open a massive door and we are seeing the harvest from their obedience.”

Valeriy is just one pastor among many whose lives have been turned upside down through this war. Yet because they have opened themselves up to the opportunity God has brought to them, the country is experiencing a spiritual revival unlike anything before.

PRAY FOR PEACE IN THE MIDST OF WAR

* IN AN UNDISCLOSED LOCATION



PERFECT FOR HOLIDAY GIFT GIVING

KEVIN MOSER, CHPC's Director of Traditional Worship, has teamed up with Jessica Smith for this new CD featuring 19 fabulous hymns — more than an hour of orchestral music in various styles: classical, gospel, folk, Celtic, traditional, and contemporary. It is ideal for background dinner music and quiet times of meditation, personal devotion, prayer, and praise.

Purchase from Kevin for \$15 each Sunday after the 9 AM worship service, or buy from Amazon, CD Baby, Apple Music, iTunes, Spotify, Pandora, and Deezer. Contact Kevin by email at kmoser@chpc.org.



SOME OF THE TITLES: *COME CHRISTIANS, JOIN TO SING; BRETHREN, WE HAVE MET TO WORSHIP; MORNING HAS BROKEN; THIS IS MY FATHER'S WORLD; IN THE GARDEN; BE THOU MY VISION; AMAZING GRACE; AND MORE.*

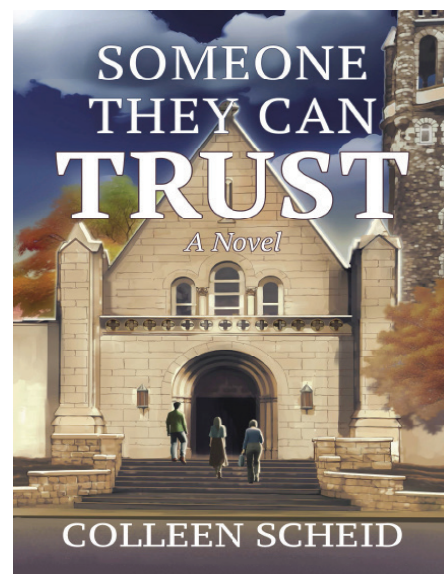
A GREAT GIFT

FROM COLLEEN SCHEID

I always thought College Hill would be a great setting for a novel...It has beautiful buildings, lovely green spaces, rich history, diverse population – and plenty of conflict! All that makes for good fiction.



My new novel (pictured) explores what happens when a destructive pastor (not ours) comes to a church



a lot like ours. Three devoted members are derailed by this new arrival, and must come to terms with their own brokenness if they want to rescue their church and themselves.

It's a contemporary Christian novel with elements of romance and suspense. Above all, it's about the transforming power of God and how God works through churches to heal and restore. Good for teens and adults, for personal reading and group study, as a tool for grappling with the endemic problem of physical and emotional abuse.

Available in paperback and an e-book on Amazon.com. For a "signed copy" contact Colleen at scheidison@gmail.com.

GIVE THIS TO SOMEONE YOU LOVE!

Gary Sweeten's new book is one of the hottest sellers on Amazon.

"One thing is for sure: Most people want good relationships or even great ones." With these simple words, Dr. Gary Sweeten invites us into his life's work of teaching people worldwide how to "love other people in ways that make them feel understood, valued, and appreciated." In one slender volume, Gary distills his most helpful teachings, biblical precepts, scientific findings, entertaining illustrations, poignant stories, memorable taglines, down-to-earth experiences, and heaven-sent grace.

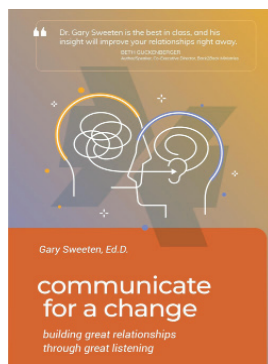
"Loving other people isn't a matter of emitting love rays but of demonstrating genuineness, warmth, empathy, and respect. For most of us, though, the few skills that we think we have in those areas can be more hurtful than helpful: "Oh, you shouldn't worry about your son. He'll grow out of it." But in this book, Gary explains concrete, learn-able skills that

we can all use to demonstrate concern without trying to fix people: 'It seems like things have been piling up on you, and you wonder what's going to happen next.' That kind of response not only conveys warmth, empathy, and respect, but it also ensures that we don't end up owning other people's problems.

Communicate for a Change targets ordinary moms and dads, neighbors and friends, coworkers, and perfect strangers who want to demonstrate extraordinary care.... "

Benefit from Dr. Sweeten's fifty years of experience in combining current psychological research with biblical principles.

A companion workbook and video series are available at RelationalPeace.org. Book reviews and sample at Amazon.com. \$14.99 paperback or Kindle FREE.



During a recent weekend retreat, a well-known Life Coach said, “Jesus was the only completely congruent person. So be on the lookout for Christians who exhibit congruency in their lives and learn from them.” Intrigued, I began researching attributes of congruent people. Since they act in direct accordance with their dreams, passions, beliefs, values, mission, and goals, they radiate trustworthiness. People are attracted to them and want to be around them. Customers buy from them. Students are inspired by them. Congruency leads to attraction and connection—something everyone seeks. As I was collecting information for the article below, I realized that even though I (had known Tim Johnson for 40+ years as a friend, fellow Church Elder and Trustee, I’d missed his “congruency” until I took time to look. After you read this article, consider people in your own life who may exhibit their own form of congruency and learn from them.— SHARLYN STARE, BTN EDITOR

GLIMPSES OF CONGRUENCY PS T19:144 MESSAGE

Timothy E. Johnson prepared well to be a tenured finance professor at the University of Cincinnati’s School of Business, but God had bigger plans. Tim was attending MBA classes four nights a week when he was approached by his first client seeking investment counsel. What began as a “little side business run out of my house,” in 1965 became Johnson Investment Counsel that currently manages over \$15 billion in assets.

Tim believed that wealth management is about so much more than just managing money—it’s about ensuring the quality of life that his clients want for themselves and their families, now and in the future. No wonder that the firm he developed merged proven theories about security analysis and portfolio management with Tim’s genuine interest in helping people and institutions.

He recruited a team of experienced professionals and knowledgeable staff who shared his core values and who now own the company. The Johnson Investment Counsel has steadily grown to become the state’s largest independent wealth management firm.

Giving back to the community is another of Tim’s personal and business values. Being an active member of the community has been instilled in the employees and has become part of the firm’s corporate culture. Community service and community

philanthropy with clients is encouraged through the use of the Johnson Charitable Gift Fund and other means. Over half a billion dollars are held in charitable accounts that have been directed to charities by Johnson Investment Counsel’s clients. Of the company’s employees, 80% volunteer with 175 organizations, serving on over 140 boards and advisory committees throughout the surrounding communities.

A personal passion of Tim and his wife, Jan, has been the founding and funding of The Johnson Investment Counsel Institute at UC’s Lindner School of Business. The Institute will feature top-notch facilities, distinguished faculty, collaboration with industry partners and robust student involvement.

David Szymanski, former Dean of the Lindner College of Business said, “The Johnson Investment Counsel Institute and

Lab will be leading-edge and serve as critical experiential learning tools to educate and train future business leaders for Cincinnati and beyond. Thank you to both Tim and Janet and Johnson Investment Counsel for their incredible generosity and tremendous dedication to the success of our college and the university.”

How exciting for others outside the Church to observe the fruit of Tim’s abiding in Jesus Christ and how it has formed his personal life, his business acumen, and his service to others. Thanks be to God for glimpses of congruency today and in the future. May we learn from them.



TIMOTHY E. JOHNSON, PH.D. RECEIVING AN HONORARY COMMERCIAL SCIENCE DEGREE. THE UC LINDNER COLLEGE OF BUSINESS FINANCE PROFESSOR, FOUNDER & CHAIR OF JOHNSON INVESTMENT COUNSEL IS FLANKED BY NEVILLE PINTO, U.C. PRESIDENT (LEFT) AND PHIL COLLINS, CHAIR OF U.C.



JACOB ZHOU's DOCTORAL VOCAL STUDIES UPDATE

We at CHPC are privileged to enjoy Jacob's excellent baritone voice in worship as section leader for the Chancel Choir. On November 15th, (PICTURED) CHPC Choir members joined other music lovers at UC's College-Conservatory of Music to encourage Jacob during his DMA Re-



cital Program. The hour-long program included pieces in Italian by Vivaldi and Verdi; German by Schubert and Mahler; French by Duparc; and English by Ralph Vaughan Williams. Jacob has a 3-hour major exam in Feb. and a oral defense in March and will graduate as Dr. Zhou. Pray for him!



In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

JOHN 1:1-5 (NIV)



CHPC Offices will be closed Dec. 25 and 26. Have questions or need help setting up an online gift? Call Heather Lethander at 513-541-5676 extension 1119. Sun., Dec 31 is the last day for 2023 tax deductible gift.

DECEMBER PRAYER OPPORTUNITIES

All are Welcome

- 12/6 WEDNESDAY 7 PM. Prayer for CHPC—Parlor, off the Atrium.
- 12/10 SUNDAY 10 AM (between worship services).
Pray for CHPC Global Outreach— Parlor, off the Atrium.
- 12/19 TUESDAY CHPC's Prayer Canopy Time—Prayer Rm, Sanctuary.
- 12/30 SATURDAY 10 AM to Noon. Outside Prayer & Coffee—Meet the neighborhood, share a cup of coffee, and experience prayer.
- 12/31 SUNDAY NEW YEAR'S EVE 6:30-8:30 PM. — CHPC Sanctuary. Celebrate New Year's in a new way. The Greater Cincinnati Prayer Canopy will meet for a special event and time of prayer.

Questions? Contact, Christy Roediger 513-675-0346

We experience great joy, we experience tremendous fear, we live with disappointment, we see loss that we cannot measure. This world where we live offers a roller coaster of events and happenings that takes our breath away. One moment we are drenched in peace and joy from the beauty of it all. Another moment our world has crashed and we can't imagine being able to take another breath.

It's into this ever-changing world where God himself came to meet us. The Creator of all came to us in our own form in a world that rocked with uncertainty. And he invited us to Come Unto Him and to Love more and forgive recklessly. As you prepare to celebrate our Savior this month, open all of your life... not just the pretty parts. Jesus came for all of it. That is the glory of God.

Father, please open my heart in a new way to the Savior Child in this season while we wait and celebrate your coming. Cause me to see Jesus in my world and in the faces that surround me. Be glorified in this season, Almighty God.

AN ORDINARY PLACE FOR AN EXTRAORDINARY BIRTH

BY PAM DOLLARD, CHPC MEMBER

Years ago while visiting Israel, I was struck by how ordinary the place was. Ordinary rocks, ordinary dirt, ordinary cats, even ordinary plants (at least to the eyes of someone who had lived in Southern California). This impression of ordinariness was at first disappointing, even a little dismaying, after all the anticipation that comes with a trip to the Holy Land. I could imagine my tepid response, after returning home, to eager questions about how my trip was: "It was nothing special." What a let-down!

A few days later, after coming to terms with "ordinary," I experienced a moment of profound insight that changed ordinary from something boring into something to be celebrated. The gist of it was this: ordinary is what God came into, and because He came in, it became extraordinary. The miracle of Israel was that God chose that ordinary place and those ordinary people to be the eyewitnesses of his most extraordinary work.

The incarnation was a celebration of Jesus stepping into the ordinary of human life, and in the process, transforming it. The same process continues today as He steps into the ordinary of our lives, through the indwelling Holy Spirit, walking through each day with us. I am so often blinded by the mundane, repetitive rhythm of life; but every so often there comes a break in the clouds when I see with clarity—the astonishing, remarkable truth—the wonder of His presence in me, in us, in life where we live it. I should wake up each morning amazed that this is so, and one day when there is more of heaven and less of earth about me, maybe I will.

Advent holds this promise: that we will someday live in perpetual awe of Him, our wonderful, marvelous, exceptionally extraordinary God: the one who redeems our ordinary. So I will celebrate the ordinary, for this is the raw material He uses. This is the place where He dwells.



DECEMBER PREACHING
RECOMMENDED BY THE CHPC
COOKING
CHANNEL

A Christmas Recipe

SUNDAYS 9 AM AND 10:30 PM
WORSHIP SERVICES EXCEPT AS NOTED

Sun., Dec. 3 **CANDLES OF HOPE**
(Birthday Candles) – Prophet's
anticipation and hope (Isaiah 11:1-1).

Sun., Dec. 10 **SPRINKLES OF TRUST**
(Sprinkles)- Mary (Luke 1:26-38) &
Joseph (Matthew 1:18-25) trust.

Sun., Dec. 17 **A CUP OF
CELEBRATION** (Icing) - Shepherds'
and Angels' celebration and
announcement (Luke 2:8-21).

Sun., Dec. 24 **ONE POUND OF LOVE**
(cake mix)– Jesus' love and humility
(Philippians 2:1-11; John 1).

One Service 10:30 AM
Family Friendly • Nursery Only

Christmas Eve
One Service 8:00 PM
7:15 PM Prelude—soloists, choir
and instrumentalists.
Candlelight Service • Nursery Only

Church offices closed - Dec 25-26.

Sun., Dec. 31 **3 Tbsp. WISDOM** -
Wise Men seeking wisdom
(Matthew 2).

New Year's Eve Day
One Service 10:30 AM • Nursery Only

New Year's Eve 8 PM
Prayer Canopy hosting city-wide
prayer event at CHPC.

DEADLINE DEC 10th
**CHPC is looking for your favorite
holiday recipe.** Send digitally—Word
format preferred, but email will work
as well. Recipes will be compiled and
shared for the new year.