

The Shepherd's Watch



I found a terrific surprise in my December mailbox – Christmas letters!

I love Christmas letters! I love how they connect me to people I care about whom I don't get to see as often as I used to. The photographs are terrific – they help me remember where my friends and their families are in their lives (“Has he gotten grey hair? Is that really the baby I held at her baptism?”) I especially appreciate how these messages distill the year into a – relatively! – small space. Even if I was there I often have trouble remembering what happened. (This never happens to you, does it?)

This month, I'm delighted to share these Christmas letters from our Shepherd of the Hills ministry and committee leaders. Join me in reading about the many blessings and joys we've shared together at Shepherd of Hills in 2005.

May you find peace, joy, hope, and love this Advent and beyond –
Kimbol Soques, newsletter editor

December 2005

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Merry Christmas!

I hope this Christmas letter finds you healthy and blessed. For those of us at SHPC, 2005 has been an exciting year, marked by the bookends of two grand parties with a birth in between. The first party was thrown for our 25th Anniversary. The whole church gathered for a time to remember and celebrate what God has done in the years since our beginning. It is amazing to recount all the things God has done in and through us over the years. It is also

69 acres on Highway 290 West and by raising pledges through our Reaching Up Reaching Out campaign to make it happen. The party was terrific – a spirit of excitement greeted our future.

In between the two parties so many things happened that it would take a book to recount them all. But I do want to tell you about a birth that occurred. In August, we gave birth to a new church in Dripping Springs. We had been dreaming and planning for a child like this for a



amazing to think how we have grown from 6 or 8 people gathered around a dinner table to over 700 people who now call SHPC their spiritual home. We took a picture that day. It hangs over the coffee bar and will forever lock that celebration in my mind as a time of profound thanksgiving for God's faithfulness.

The second party took place just a few weeks ago. While the first party celebrated the past, the second party celebrated the future. Celebration Sunday proved to be a great culmination to our 25th birthday year. For our Celebration Sunday, we took worship on the road. On a beautiful fall day we dreamed together in worship about our future as a church. We took our first steps towards realizing that future by committing to purchase

long time. Nancy Marroquin, our parish associate, took the lead as a number of our members committed to help start this new endeavor. They began worship together in August and have been going and growing ever since. This new church seems a fitting tribute to those who helped launch SHPC 25 years ago. They gave their lives as Christ's disciples to help us. Now we are called as Christ's disciples to give ourselves away in service to others. What a great way to celebrate Christmas! I hope you have a wonderful holiday season and a blessed New Year.

In Christ,

Handwritten signature of Nancy Marroquin.

Dear Santa,

I want to thank you so much for all that you gave me this last year. It was a miracle year for me! The gifts you provided have been put to great use. For example...

Last year I had on my Xmas list that you might bring 50 kids to our mid-high student ministry so that they could hear about the love of Jesus and grow in community with each other. Well, you sure did that! Before this year I could never have imagined what 50 middle school kids looked like or even sounded like in a small student lounge. Now I don't have to imagine it! And they just keep multiplying! At the rate we are growing, this next year we will need twice the space we have now just for them.

So Santa, could you fit in that sack of yours more room for the new kids that keep coming? And could you please also stuff into your sack the new leaders that we will need to meet those students with the love of Jesus?

Santa, I also want to thank you for what you have done with our older students. I had on my list last year that our kids would grow in knowledge of God's Holy Word. And – well – you came through again! Students are now reading their Bible, memorizing passages and many are involved in weekly small group Bible studies *in addition to* Sunday School and youth group. Thank you for the hunger for the Bible you have placed in them.

NOEL HALLELUJAH MERRY CHRISTMAS HAPPY NEW YEAR NOEL HALLELUJAH MERRY CHRISTMAS HAPPY NEW YEAR NOEL HALLELUJAH MERRY CHRISTMAS H

As 2005 closes, I am counting my blessings. The church office continues to be blessed with the most extraordinary and amazing set of volunteers! They do their own scheduling; they find their own replacements, operating as a self-sufficient office corps of dependable and competent folks.

Bob Beardslee, Thelma Morris, Lydia Ellison, Paula Kemp, Carol Brandt, Doris Peltzman, Ann McDaniel, Harriet Cavness, Pauline Beezley, Linda & Stacey Eskelin, Sally Schilstra, Tommye Sprotte, Dan Lawler, Jinny Thompson, Sharon Rothert and Herk & Judy

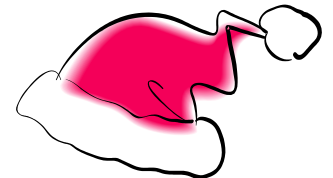
Letter 2 Santa from Mike & the Student Ministry



I hope this year you will continue to bring the two things I always ask for. I always want our kids to have maturity in what it means to follow Jesus – that they might know the difference between doing what is right and what is easy. The other thing I always ask for is innocence. I see these students grow up way too fast. They have seen too much, heard too much, felt too much and been treated as adults too long. I hope that this year you could fit into their stocking some of the innocence that they lost in recent years.

Lastly, for the kids who don't believe anymore... Oh, not in you! They still believe in you – but for those who do not believe in Jesus. Santa, could you please bring them to a faith in Jesus that they can embrace and understand – a faith that is filled with his love and truth. Let them stand strong in Jesus and he will lead them.

I still believe in Miracles
Little Mike



Johnson (before their departure to become part of the new Dripping Springs church) have all pitched in to answer phones, greet office visitors, do office "odd jobs," produce bulletins and newsletters and generally make things hum along in our day-to-day operations. We enjoy each other's company and manage to get quite a bit of work done. **If you think you might enjoy helping out, give the office a call! Otherwise, please take a moment when you see any of these folks to thank them for their generous sharing of time and cheer as they give to SHPC in such faithful and loving service.**

Time flies when you're having fun!

That may sound clichéd, but for those of us involved in Children's Ministry this year it's reality, both in our personal lives and in our work with children at Shepherd of the Hills.

Take our newest addition to Children's Ministry, Britta Dukes. One year ago, Britta was single, attending seminary, and wondering what God's plans for her would be. Now she is happily married (just this past October!) and living a completely new life as our new Director of Children's Ministry.

As for our past Director – Liz was pregnant with her second child just 12 months ago. Now she is the proud mother of a walking, talking (well, babbling) 11-month-old boy. Liz's oldest, now 2, was barely putting two words together a year ago. Now she forms sentences, sings the alphabet song, and counts everything from her blocks to the macaroni noodles on her dinner plate.

Children's Ministry says – Merry Christmas!



The kids in our program are also growing by leaps and bounds, in body, mind and spirit. We've been having so much fun, the year has gone by in the blink of an eye. We had so many kids at VBS this year that some who arrived at the start of the week felt a little hesitant to join in... thinking, "who *are* all these kids, anyway?" By the end of the week they did not want to

leave – they had formed close bonds with new friends, students and teen leaders alike. The walls of the narthex echoed with songs like "He's the King" as kids roared praises to the Lord at the top of their lungs.

Club H2O week flew by just as quickly. Five mornings spent splashing and soaking in very cold water would seem to most adults to be a lo-o-ong week. Yet kids who began the week as strangers were hugging each other and calling each other "best friends" by the end, and nobody wanted to leave.

Time also flew at our Children at the Lord's Table Workshop last Spring. During the workshop, children wrote their own prayers, and took such pride in crafting them that there wasn't time to read all of them aloud at the workshop. Time also leapt forward at our Family Retreat, where families hung around for hours after check out, not wanting to bring the weekend of fellowship and relaxation to a close.



As time marches forward at pace, we to the uncertain future has to

an alarming tend to hold on present, about what the offer. It's hard to let go as our kids get older and become more independent. We remember, however, that with the passing of time comes great promise, exciting change, and important growth. This Christmas season, as time will surely continue to zip by at the speed of light, Britta and I both will take some precious moments to thank God for the blessings He has bestowed upon the life of our church, and our children at Shepherd of the Hills, as we look forward to the wonders He has yet to perform.

Merry Christmas and may God bring peace to us all in the New Year.

Britta Dukes and Liz Boyce





Christmas Greetings from . . .

Adult Ministry

Dear SHPC congregation,

I'm now in my sixth year of serving in the volunteer position of Director of Adult Ministries and I am still loving it. I feel so blessed to have this opportunity to use the gifts God has given me to be in service in such a special place. I'll admit I get discouraged from time to time – when plans move slowly or space is hard to find – but there is always someone with a story to tell me... of scripture newly understood, friendships newly formed, or prayer answered. My spirit is lifted. When I focus on what IS happening, instead of on what is not yet, my heart is filled with joy.

Everywhere I look I see healthy Christian growth. In Disciple 1, I see new people struggling through Scripture for the first time, finding the joy of discovering the Word for themselves while surrounded by the support of fellow searchers. In Book Club I hear wonderful discussions – lively but friendly disagreements which are much more interesting than if everyone interpreted the book the same way! In Mary-Martha Circle I see loving Christian friends who support each other through illness and loss, and rejoice together over exploits of children and grandchildren. In Foundations I see young couples supporting each other as they learn to build strong marriages based on Christian values. In Bible studies for Mothers of Young Children I see mothers sharing the burdens and joys of family life while letting each other know they are not alone. In Crown classes I see people beginning to control their finances rather than letting their finances control them. Most importantly, I see leaders basing their decisions on biblical principles rather than on personal opinions.

This year I have experienced an even greater sense of community and support in my work. The more I recognize the gifts of others and ask them for help, the more I experience the joy of being blessed by those willing to ease my load. Men stained and moved furniture and installed equipment for me. One woman baked cookies for me at the last minute and did it so joyfully that I was doubly blessed! Others shared their technical skills as we begin using Power Point presentations in classes (with our new projector!). Teachers went above and beyond the call of duty in their careful planning of lessons and personal caring for their students. Two men spent a Saturday morning away from their families to help me move my daughter's furniture out of storage and over to hurricane victims. Many people simply gave me kind words or a hug. I cannot imagine working in a place where one would more loved and supported.

Now, with the support shown for the recent *Reaching Up, Reaching Out* campaign, I am thrilled to see that the members of SHPC share a long-term vision. It is so exciting to know that eventually we will be able to grow into new space and have more classes to reach more people. I hope, as we enter an exciting new year, that each of you will be able to find some class or group where you can grow in biblical knowledge and be in Christian community here at Shepherd of the Hills.

Blessings, Sherry Smith



Holiday Cheer from your Evangelism Committee

In 2005 I've looked at the Alpha Course from two very different perspectives – seen its two faces, you might say. I'd like to share them both with you.

January 2005 brought the first Alpha course to SHPC. What a huge blessing it was for me! I was a part of the support team, whose responsibility it was to put on the class. That meant signing up participants, getting all the course materials, the tables, the chairs, the tablecloths, finding leaders and helpers to facilitate the small groups, finding someone to cook the meals (!), getting the videos ready. As Alpha began, I watched folks walk from the dinners to their small groups and saw them chatting together more as the weeks went by. I stood outside many a small group room, waiting to break down the tables and chairs, while these folks talked and shared – not ready to leave just yet. As the support group, we may have thought that the tasks and the details would be all we would focus on, but what really happened was

the fellowship that bonded our team together. We talked and laughed, cried and prayed and became a close group of friends. I thought my job was to give, but I received more. The behind-the-scenes group became our own small group fellowship.

Our second Alpha course began in September. This time I decided that, in addition to remaining part of the support team, I would participate. I wanted what went on in those small groups – and I was not disappointed. The ten weeks flew by as we shared questions, experiences and more questions. We agreed, disagreed and learned to respect different journeys of faith. We wondered where the time had gone and we didn't want it to end.

The next Alpha course will begin in February and again, I'll be part of the support team. I can't wait!

Have a safe and happy Christmas –
Leslye Womack

Holiday Devotional: What to do with Mr. C?

I know many parents struggle over what to do about the age-old Question of Mr. Claus. Keeping in mind that I have many young readers I will not disclose anything that might get you, as a parent, into hot water either way. But – what to tell them and when?

This is an issue of innocence. Youthful innocence only lasts so long, and we as parents should not be ones who destroy that kind of innocence. We are the ones who have been chosen to *protect* their innocence. Yes, belief is a magical thing that should be cherished. When things come along to shake those beliefs, we parents are there to pick up the pieces and put into context of a bigger picture of our love and God's love for them. Many of the things we believe only take form inside our hearts.

The real issue I have with Mr. C is with his "you'd better be good or you will not get any toys" policy. It scares me to think that there is

some supernatural being who will determine my worthiness of gracious toy rewards based on my good works (or lack thereof!). I really want that Red Ryder BB gun with a compass in the stock – I better be *extra* good over the next few weeks just to make sure Santa and my family know for sure that I deserve it! But frankly, if the gifts I receive were based solely on how good I was I would always get a lump of coal in my stocking. Mom and Dad, please try hard not to go there.

I get concerned when at this time of year we take this great image of a king who comes to kneel at the feet of Christ and turn him into a works = reward philosophy. When I speak of Mr. C. to my kids I speak of humility and grace. Humility, putting others and their needs before our own. Grace, understanding that all gifts are not deserved, rather given in love. **With humility and grace I wish you all the best and truest gifts of the Spirit this holiday season.**

Pastor Mike

Happy Holidays from S.A.M.

The SHPC Senior Adult Ministry's regular Tuesday activities throughout this year have included "Groan"-Ups Game Days on the first week of the month, Old Fashioned Hymn Sings the second week, the Golden Years Lunch Bunch the second Saturday of the month and "Soup to Nuts" Luncheons the third week of each quarter. We have offered Older Women's Legacy Writing Classes from the Story Circle Network and monthly support groups on the fourth Tuesday. Every 5th Tuesday of the month, a brown bag lunch forum for sharing true stories of our lives called "True Tales" has taken place, contributing to our oral history. We have had regular participants come to each event, yet we have grown with the attendance of many newcomers. Each event is filled with joy, fellowship – and often good food! As we learn more about each other, we find new ways to serve our Lord and share in the fullness of His love. The bonds of friendship grow strong. Our community becomes larger, yet ever more connected.

In 2005 we hosted workshops to learn about health needs. We sponsored a kit ministry, providing needed supplies to many who are facing disasters. Our seniors reached out and encouraged their friends and neighbors to participate in various events. They have pitched in to help in the set-up and clean up of our many activities, making it all the more fun and enjoyable. In short, we have loved one another as we share God's love.

In the coming months, we hope to offer more opportunities to encourage more of our congregation to come, meet and get to know the members of our community. In April 2006, we have a Senior Adult Retreat which will be a chance to have fun and reflect upon our spiritual needs. Other classes are being planned to give insights into providing for our needs as we age.

As we integrate these activities with our opportunities for Christian education through our Bible studies, we put into action the principles we are learning. Our Mary-Martha Circle, which meets the first Thursday of each month, has reached out to encourage intergenerational Bible studies for the future.

This year we have grown quietly. Next year,



we hope even more of our senior adults will be able to find something that invites them into the community of fellowship at Shepherd of the Hills Presbyterian Church. **Watch the Sunday bulletins and the church website carefully to learn about the ways you can participate in Senior Adult Ministry Activities in December.**

During this season of Advent, we invite you to prepare your hearts and minds to live abundantly among the fellowship of Christians and reach out to those who don't know the wonderful present of love and grace that was given to the world at the birth of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

In His name –

Carol Cunningham, Senior Adult Ministry

NOTE: The December meeting of the Old Fashioned Hymn Sing has been moved to the *third* Tuesday, December 20th, for a Christmas Caroling Activity. See you there!

WOW!!!! It has been such an amazing year in the life of SHPC. It has been an amazing year of responding to God and to the many needs of this world. Mission is first and foremost an individual response to God. We recognize what God is doing in our lives and worship him by humbling our own needs and seeking to help others. **So many individuals at Shepherd of the Hills have responded this year in so many different ways such that if the responses were a shout, the noise would be deafening.**

Even before the long string of disasters began in late summer, SHPC's mission awareness was on the upswing. Our connection to the village in Manymula started the year with enthusiastic sewing activities for clothing and other items. The congregational response through World Vision to adopt 76 children in Manymula was overwhelming. Several groups – including the Senior Adult Ministry, the Youth, and the Foundations group – started a ministry of building kits for disasters, health, and other needs both in the U.S. and overseas.

Larry had a strong sermon series highlighting personal and congregational growth in witnessing to others. Michael's newsletter articles and work with the youth have provided an inspiration to us all. Our major mission activities such as IHN, the work trip to Mexico, the Bread project, and Disaster Response have grown stronger. A new group

known as Living Waters coalesced to provide a drinking water system to the Maya Quiche Bible Institute in Guatemala.



And then came the disasters: Katrina, Rita, floods in Guatemala, earthquakes in Pakistan – where do they end? The response of the congregation was again beyond expectations. The church eventually adopted *seventeen* individuals from the Katrina evacuation. Donations seemed to come from everywhere, and many individuals pitched in to provide shelter, food, clothing, jobs, and heartfelt concerns.

The SHPC Mission Committee has been facilitating ways for individuals and groups in the church to participate in mission. The committee's budget and direct donations to mission activities have reached a new high and allowed us to increase our financial support to groups in the church, local charities, and activities in South Texas, Mexico, Malawi, the Congo, and Guatemala.

Everyone at SHPC should thank God for his work in our lives individually and in our work as a church. We pray that he will continue to invigorate our responses and seek to do his will.

God's blessings to you and yours this holiday season –
David Parmer, for the Mission Committee

**CHRISTMAS GREETINGS
FROM THE MISSION COMMITTEE**

I'm sure you're wondering — "A Christmas card? From the *Finance Committee*? I thought they were opposed to extravagant expenditures like embossed holiday mailings!"

You should know better — Advent is a season that gladdens our hearts! Not only because we

A SPECIAL THANK YOU

We are sure that you are aware that land development expenses and capital campaign expenses have been incurred over the past months since the contract was placed to buy land for our church expansion. Some of you

Happy 2005 Tax Year from the Finance Committee



love to celebrate the coming of our Lord, but also because we can close the books on 2005 and look forward to 2006.

Speaking of closing the books — Your finance committee and your accountant, Holly Spink, offer the following to you for your convenience as it may affect your Federal income tax return:

Pre-paid 2006 operating fund payments may be made during the month of December. Please make sure the lower left-hand corner of your check is marked "Operating Fund Prepayment". We will place these contributions in an account credited as you have noted, and move them into 2006 operating revenue status during January 2006. However, the payment will be shown on your 2005 Giving Statement for Federal income tax purposes.

Reaching Up and Reaching Out contributions for 2006 may also be made during the month of December. In this case, please mark the lower left-hand corner of your check "Capital Campaign Prepayment", and we will provide credit on your 2005 Giving Statement for Federal income tax purposes. (Remember: consult with a qualified tax professional about any income tax ramifications. We do not provide financial advice.)

made early contributions to the capital campaign, and the finance committee found these very helpful in providing sufficient cash to pay for incurred expenses on time. We are extremely thankful that you chose to contribute early, and want each of you to know that SHPC is indeed fortunate that you did. Early payments to the capital campaign reduce interest expenses the church would otherwise have to pay in order to finance this very important endeavor.

Merry Christmas to you and yours and may the Lord pour out an extra measure of blessings for you in the new year.

Ron Miller, on behalf of the Finance Committee

A Christmas Present from the Budget Guy!

Keeping Christmas Debt-Free... ...It's as Easy as 1 - 2 - 3

- Decide how much you can spend...
...BEFORE you ever set foot in a single store or click on an "Add to shopping cart" button.
- Make a list...
...of everyone you want to give a present to, and how much you can spend for that present. If your total spending on the list is more than the amount in Step 1, change your list.
- Stick to Steps 2 and 3...
...like super glue wrapped in steel bands and encased in cement.

Check out what's happening at SHPC with our **December Online Extra!**

Just because it's December doesn't mean that life at Shepherd of the Hills slows down! Catch up on the latest news and new happenings from our Online Extra, at www.shpc.org/online_05Dec.php (linked from the News page). Below are some of the things you'll find ...

**Christmas Eve Worship Choices –
4 p.m., 5:30 p.m., and 7:30 p.m.
Find out all about it!**

Silent Auction for Mission is looking for your tempting treasures to auction off in February

Christmas Pageant – December 18th at 5 p.m.

**SHPC's Annual Christmas Cantata
December 11th at 5 and 7 p.m.**

Beth Moore Bible Study starts in January!
Read more about the Women's Wednesday Night Devotional

Check out the fun our Preschoolers
are having!

Our Inquirer's class is back again in January ...
make your reservation now

Fellowship Bridge keeps on playing in December –
come take a trick with friends!

Presbyterian Women of all ages are now
convening monthly. Find out what they're up to!

Golden Years Lunch Bunch is having its traditional Christmas feast – bring an appetite

A new prayer small group is starting up January 8th. Alpha
grads in particular may want to find out more ...

Mary-Martha Circle is looking forward to seeing **you** at their next meeting

Help stock our new "kitchen pantry" for walk-ins – check
out our shopping list before you make yours

Dinners For Eight will be resuming in February
... sign ups begin in January

Marriage Alpha with Kim & Larry – sign ups begin January
8th at 9 a.m., and spaces will go like hotcakes!

December

1 Thursday

- 9:30 a.m. MYC (Mothers of Young Children) Devotional
- 10 a.m. Mary-Martha Circle

2 Friday

- 7 p.m. **Let Heaven & Nature Swing!**

3 Saturday

- 9 a.m. Chancel Choir cantata rehearsal
- 10 a.m. Family Advent Craft Day
- 7 p.m. Everlast Lock-In & Broomball

4 Sunday **Second Sunday in Advent**

- 9:45 a.m. Bright Lights Sunday School
Alternative Gift Fair
- 11 a.m. Finding Financial Peace, portable A*
- 5 p.m. Foundations, portable A
- 6:30 p.m. Everlast Evening Fellowship

6 Tuesday

- 11 a.m. "Groan"-Ups Game Day

7 Wednesday

- 6:30 p.m. Evermore Fellowship
- 7 p.m. Chancel Choir Rehearsal

8 Thursday

- 9:30 a.m. MYC Devotional
- 7 p.m. Book Club

9 Friday

- 12:30 p.m. Preschool Christmas Program
- 6 p.m. Student Ministry: "Chronicles of Narnia"
- 7 p.m. Fellowship Bridge Group

10 Saturday

- 9 a.m. Drop-N-Shop
- 11:30 a.m. Golden Years Lunch Bunch

11 Sunday **Third Sunday in Advent**

- 9:45 a.m. Bright Lights Sunday School
Alternative Gift Fair
- 11 a.m. Finding Financial Peace, portable A*
- 5 p.m. **Christmas Cantata**
- 6 p.m. Foundations Potluck, portable A
- 6:30 p.m. Everlast Evening Fellowship
- 7 p.m. **Christmas Cantata** (second performance)

13 Tuesday

- 11 a.m. Soup to Nuts: Robert Hadlock

14 Wednesday

- 6:30 p.m. Evermore Fellowship
- 7 p.m. NO Chancel Choir Rehearsal

15 Thursday

- 9:30 a.m. MYC Devotional

17 Saturday

- 7:30 a.m. Men's Breakfast Fellowship

18 Sunday **Fourth Sunday in Advent**

- 9:45 a.m. Bright Lights Sunday School
Alternative Gift Fair begins
- 11 a.m. Finding Financial Peace, portable A*
- 5 p.m. **Christmas Pageant**
- 6:30 p.m. Everlast Evening Fellowship
- 11:59 p.m. JANUARY Newsletter deadline**

20 Tuesday

- 1 p.m. Hymn Sing — Caroling Party
- 6 p.m. Stephen Ministry group meeting, room 7

21 Wednesday

- 6:30 p.m. Evermore Fellowship
- 7 p.m. Chancel Choir Rehearsal

24 Saturday **Christmas Eve**

- 4 p.m. Children's Service
- 5:30 p.m. Candlelit Service
- 7:30 p.m. Candlelit Service with communion

25 Sunday **Christmas Day**

- 11 a.m. Worship, childcare for birth - 5

26 Monday

CHURCH OFFICE CLOSED until January 2nd

26 Wednesday

- 6:30 p.m. Evermore Fellowship
- 7 p.m. NO Chancel Choir Rehearsal

1 Sunday **New Year's Day**

- 9:30 a.m. Worship, childcare for birth - 5
- 11 a.m. Worship, childcare for birth - 5

* Adult Sunday School Class

Feel free to tear off and save this page to help you keep on top of everything that's happening at Shepherd of the Hills!