

PILGRIMS PROGRESS DECEMBER 2009

PILGRIM CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

2802 COMMERCIAL AVENUE, ANACORTES, WA 98221

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REV. SALLY BALMER, M.DIV., PASTOR AND TEACHER



**NO MATTER WHO YOU ARE OR WHERE YOU ARE ON LIFE'S JOURNEY, YOU ARE WELCOME
HERE**

All kinds of winds **MESSAGE FROM SALLY**

This is the season of blustery winds and darkening skies, oft accompanied by twinkling lights, hot chocolate, and old carols. Ah, the mix of Christmas, a weaving of sacred and secular that at times is over-the-top annoying, and sometimes down-home magical. Our stories exude **mythic power**: visitations of angels and dreams, shepherds and wise folk from a far off land. Lean into the story, and the power of a God who surprises and includes draws us in. Or maybe not. Some of us are honestly distracted by details that make little sense. Others of us let the familiarity water down underlying possibilities for pondering more deeply. This season-of-coming, Advent, we will look at some of the old mythic stories that the gospel writers included. They were attempting to point to something--some coming, some sacred presence--in particular ways. We'll have our own search-for-meanings, with the special reminder of God's covenant-presence right in the middle with a time of baptism. Our latest "addition" **Tierney Grey Wells**, born to Jason and Kelley, will join her mom in being baptized on **Sunday, Dec. 13th**. In so many ways, we give thanks for new life and the many ways we participate in the accompaniment of the God-with-us.

Other dates of the month: **World AIDS Day Service is Tues., Dec. 1st at 7:00 p.m.** John Fahy and others will offer special music, and we will hear from folks connected with Sean Humphrey House and Evergreen AIDS, essential organizations which serve Skagit County and others.

The **Christmas Eve Candlelight Service is at 7:00 on Dec. 24th**, offering a time to hear the Christmas story and readings, with carols and candles and time for children.

The following Sunday, **Dec. 27th**, is another opportunity to gather for singing and story.

Finally, also blowing through this season are the winds of **fresh consideration**. Meeting last month after worship, we began a process of intentionally looking at who we are and the role our building plays in that. Understanding the intersection of **three things** will help to ground us in our future decision-making: 1) our passion/ core values, 2) what we're best at and 3) our resources "engine." (*Note: this is called the "hedgehog concept" from Jim Collins--more next month.*)

What "magic" works wonders in your heart? Everywhere, there are stars that would lead each of us, all of us, to a Sacred Presence alive on this earth. In the gifts of the season, being with you as pastor-teacher is a shining brightness in my life.

Wonder, light, love--to you and yours.

Sally

Here is Mike's address for over deployment. He should be able to use his gmail account for e mail. The deadline for sending packages to arrive before Christmas is Dec 4th. Keep in mind that packages may go through customs so please don't send alcohol, anything containing gelatin or pork products, or books or magazines with sexually suggestive or religious content. There weren't any issues last time but we've heard that they've recently become a lot more strict.

Lt Mike Misch
VP-1 PATRON DET
APO AE 09309

Report on Pilgrim's Season of Listening

The "Season of Listening" is the opening phase in our mobilizing for action in the public arena as part of our participation in the North Sound Alliance. We began the 3 sessions with an opportunity to listen to one another's stories about steps along the way to our present spirituality and our participation in Pilgrim. This was a rich experience in which many new fibers of connection among us were woven. We also heard about how we would like to grow in our caring for one another as a community.

Some of the statements about how we would like to grow in our caring for one another were:

- Inclusion in the community was affirmed as a present reality and also identified as something still sought – more companionship, more social events, deeper connections.
- Listening – being a better listener, being listened to
- Groups that gather for a specific time, like the group that met at the Davis's to discuss *The Shack* and the group now meeting to discuss Karen Armstrong's *The Case for God* and the groups that met with Bill Malcomson.
- Practice of Silence

The concerns that were presented as possible issues for collective action were:

- Children – addressing the lack of services for children in Anacortes
- Youth – "nothing to do," need for a safe haven for gay and lesbian teens
- Lack of mental health services
- Care for the earth, environment, ecology
- Need for more affordable housing
- Public education that promotes interfaith understanding and tolerance.
- Keeping the focus on Anacortes issues
- Poverty issues
- Facilitating group involvement in social action

The next stage in this work is to begin formal and informal discussion that would lead to our selecting the concern around which we will organize. That will involve some investigation. For instance, if we decided that we want to make sure that children in Anacortes public schools be well educated about world religions or specifically about Islam, we would have to find out what is currently going on in that regard. Once we choose an issue or concern deeper research would be required. For example

- Who makes decisions about such matters?
- How are members of the teaching staff, administration and school board thinking about promoting tolerance or appreciation of the various religions?

On Sunday, November 22, Bill Malcomson led a congregational meeting about our options regarding care of our building. Sally introduced it with a thoughtful presentation on the kinds of considerations that a congregation might have in mind as it approaches decisions about such a matter. She drew three circles: one representing the resources at the congregation's disposal, one for the uniqueness of the congregation (the special gifts we embody) and one for the passion that energizes the congregation at the deepest level. The area of overlap among these circles is where the answers to our biggest issues are to be found. The next steps in our organizing and the next steps in our choosing how we will deal with building issues will be taken to together. More on that soon.

Sincerely,

Roger Ridgway

For the organizing Core Group: Elaine Lachlan, Lynn Christofersen, Jim and Val Gleeson, Patti Santangelo, Barb and Kyle Davis and myself

From your Moderator:

When we projected our 2009 budget, we assumed that the congregation would contribute an average of \$5,000 per month. Our assumption was based on what happened during the last 6 months of 2008. In fact, we are giving an average of \$4,700 per month. What this means is that we will probably have to dip into reserves to meet our 2009 obligations. We will soon be drawing up a 2010 budget. If we have to realistically project \$4,700 per month in contributions for 2010, it means that we will need to present a budget which will involve some cutbacks in program. If any of you were able to give a little extra for December, and the extra giving brought the contribution average for 2009 up to \$5,000 per month or more, it would definitely help us to be less hamstrung in terms of our 2010 budgeting. I realize that the tight economy has a lot to do with our church's income. However, our individual decisions regarding our priorities are also important factors. Whatever happens, I wanted you to know the facts as regards our income concerns.

Bill Malcomson

Words from Leo Osbourne, creator of the sculpture outside of the Pilgrim Church building--
EXPECTING TO FLY

EXPECTING TO FLY was the title given to an exhibition I presented in the late '90's on Guemes Island just prior to my leaving the island...hence I was 'expecting to fly'....off the island, although at the time only a couple of people knew of my anticipated flight.

It was during the next three years living in Ellensburg, Washington that I created the wooden original of EXPECTING TO FLY in maple burlwood. The objective of the work was to show the essence of the female human transforming into a bird of sensual flight. Uplifting into the Universe the sculpture embodies the presence of the Goddess and her reestablishment as a spiritually enlightened individual. The Gaian, mother earth energy comes into play in the earthboundness of the wood and the placing of the female hips at the base. The form lifts into abstracted female shapes and into birdlike manifestations of form and flight.

That energy of the Goddess is being demonstrated in the world today, as peaceful warriors in the presence of female humans step onto the world stage and bring a new understanding to the world that has been dominated by the patriarchal system of men. The work of writers in many areas exposes the truth about how the female was removed physically and kept emotionally enslaved by the fear of man and his religious organizations. As a visual artist this sculpture helps to establish my understanding and inner knowledge of the feminine, exalting and adorning the female with the ability to fly into her rightful domain as the bearer of light and life.

This sculpture therefore is one of my important works which reflect not only the bird imagery that I have been long known for but also of my deep compassion and love of the female being and the honor that I as a male being can present as an offering to the beauty and majesty of the eternal female.

FIRST ANNOUNCEMENT OF AN INTERESTING POSSIBILITY FOR THE FALL OF 2010

Have you ever wanted to see Western Turkey with its ancient Christian, Muslim and other historic sites?

Have you ever wanted to do this with a compatible group of people?

Bill Malcomson will be hosting a tour entitled CROSSROADS OF TURKEY from October 18 to November 5, 2010.

The projected cost will be \$3,195 per person, round trip from Seattle. The tour company is Grand Circle Tours.

Already approximately 20 people have shown an interest in this tour. Bill would like to recruit 30 people, if possible.

If you registered early, there would be financial advantages. So if you think that you might have an interest in this

great adventure--Istanbul, Canakkale, Gallipoli, Izmir, Pergamum, Ephesus, Hieropolis, Antalya, ancient Troy, Cappadocia, Konya, Goreme, Ankara, contact Bill at wmalcomson@fidalgo.net or 360-466-1540.



[Home: Justice and Witness Ministries](#)

The disparity in funding for public education between wealthy and poor school districts is 3:1 in most states, despite more than 30 years of lawsuits and the improved funding they have brought. Today, with a new Administration and Congress preparing for the long overdue reauthorization of the federal education law (currently called No Child Left Behind) we must call on our leaders to confront long-standing disparities in educational opportunity.

[Urge our leaders to look beyond test scores and achievement gaps. It's time to address opportunity gaps in public education!](#)

Each child should be guaranteed equitable funding levels, and also the opportunity for quality early childhood education; well qualified teachers; challenging courses that qualify youths for college; and instructional resources such as small classes, reasonable case loads for school counselors, libraries, and computers.

In our faithful critique of No Child Left Behind, we have pointed out that it is unfair and immoral to demand equal outcomes on standardized tests without equalizing resources at the federal and



state levels that create the opportunity for children to learn.

[Ask Congress to allocate federal resources for equity and use its power to pressure states to close opportunity gaps.](#)

Completely spent, I lay attended.

Each vital system, one by one,
shut down. Flurries of skilled
clinicians, insistent that I live,
did everything and more
to keep me going.
I slipped away from them.

Then, cradled, by sweet silence,
companioned in the darkness,
unafraid, swaddled in love,
I moved into the nothingness
of continuance.

Haloed by tubes and faces
I lived anew.
My heart beat
a fortified tattoo.

on the occasion of death
Joan Bissell August 18.2009



Take Action!

**UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST**

[Home: Justice and Witness Ministries](#)

Act Now to Prevent Workplace Discrimination!

We are called to treat others as we would like to be treated,



and the workplace is no exception. Yet in many states it is currently legal to fire or refuse to hire someone solely on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

In these difficult economic times, the loss of a job because of discrimination is all the more devastating to workers and their families. This prejudice is not benign; it hurts real families in our congregations.

Congress is beginning debate on a very important piece of legislation that would end this injustice and ensure fair employment practices in the workplace. The bipartisan Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), H.R. 3017/S. 1584, would extend fair employment practices under federal law to the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community.

[Show your Support for ENDA today!](#)

MORE ADVENT REFLECTIONS

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 20th century

A prison cell, in which one waits, hopes--and is completely dependent on the fact that the door of freedom has to be opened from the outside, is not a bad picture of Advent.

Paul Simon, 20th century

The words of the prophets are written on the subway walls and tenements halls / and whispered in the sounds of silence.

Noam Chomsky, 20th century

The people who were honored in the Bible were the false prophets. It was the ones we call the prophets who were jailed and driven into the desert.

Matthew Arnold, 19th century

Waiting for the spark from heaven to fall.

Advent at Pilgrim this year

A space

a color

a waiting empty space where the cross sat.

A waiting blue circle

God filled

God emptied
the space in each of us.

Mary's color
the blue of the sea.

Jonnie

Sally Balmer

Advent is at once quiet and evocative for me. Right after Thanksgiving I head down to a store in old town to buy candles, often in deep blue. With sprigs of holly and other greens, I arrange them atop a bookcase in my living area. I like to light them--or only one, for the first week, and so forth--in the evenings, for a time of quiet before bed, sitting on a soft chair nearby. Often the haunting tune of "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" accompanies me; sometimes I make up verses in singing, although it's anyone's guess whether they'll have any rhyme (or reason). The time reminds me in a particular way that "waiting upon God" has many forms and season

Roger Ridgeway

There is a color associated with every season in the liturgical year. Advent used to be purple, like Lent. But now there is recognition that Advent is not a penitential season. It's a season of preparation, so the color of Advent is now blue. Blue is also the color of Mary, so I think of Advent as a season of expectation of something big, an advent(ure), and I think of it as a season of pregnancy.

Ruth Peterson

I think of advent as a Time for Watching and waiting. But further, this is what I try to do throughout the year: be watchful. One never knows from whom, where or what the call for help might be. Advent goes on all year.

Joan Bissell

Advent is our opportunity to breathe new meaning into old symbols in the celebration new life, comitment and purpose.

Christi Malcomson

A building excitement about shared experiences with family. An opportunity to nurture family and friends: to show them how important they are. A feeling of ambivalence about the birth story.

Somewhere a bell is ringing

Somewhere a bell is ringing.
The kind of bell one might hear pealing
across mountain valleys, on snowy days
echoing,
 echoing,

echoing
as it retraces its own path
again and again.

The kind of bell rung by a frayed, hempen rope
that snakes through a hole from the steeple
to a lower room where the ringer grasps it to
reach and pull,
 reach and pull,
 reach and pull.

A bell usually doesn't ring
with the first haul on the rope
but only after one or two pulls
to get it swinging.
Then, it blends into a union of rhythm between
bell and ringer,
 bell and ringer,
 bell and ringer.

When I was young,
a group of us used New Year's Eve
as excuse to climb the stairs and ladder
to the belfry of our old church and,
at the stroke of midnight,
ring the bell hands-on by rocking it
back and forth,
 back and forth,
 back and forth
as its voice rang fortissimo in our ears.

The sound was so loud,
it must have carried clear across Portland
on the cold winter air.

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