

January 1, 2012

Happy New Year to everyone!

As we begin the New Year at Sophia Christi we have much to be thankful for as a community. Eight months ago we found our legs and became a legally recognized religious organization in Oregon, and on Friday we completed and sent our application to the IRS to become a recognized tax-exempt non-profit. This foundational work has been the focus of our leadership team this past year, and helps to firmly establish our identity in the formally “structured” world in which we all must exist. Yet who and what we are is not defined by legal papers, financial statements and formal organizational processes. The structures and terminologies of business allow us to function in a world that places a high priority on tracking and regulating numerous social and business transactions. But **who we are** is the Body of Christ in the world. **What we are** is a faith community. Our priorities are not those of banks and government offices, but we comply and “render unto Caesar” as Jesus advised us to do. Along the way we build bridges and make friends, like the young banking assistant who bent over backwards to help Leanne and I obtain and file last-minute forms so that Sophia Christi could save \$100 on the IRS filing fee, and the owner of the copy shop who helped us FedEx an overnight letter to the State just in the nick of time so we could meet a paperwork deadline the next day. As we interact with our world we bless it, one person at a time, in banks, copy shops, department and grocery stores. In all these modern-world “stables” we bring gifts to the Christ child from the far-off lands of faith, and we **are** that Christ child—blessing those who follow **Light**, then peer closer to **see**. If you would like to meditate on the readings for our Epiphany Liturgies these next two weekends, they are: Isaiah 60:1-6; Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6 and Mt 2:1-12.

Mass Schedule This Month

Our Mass in **Eugene** will be Sunday, **January 8**, at **First Congregational Church, UCC, 1050 E. 23rd**, at **4:00pm**. Bring your entrees, vegetable dishes, salads and desserts for the potluck following our Liturgy. Let us know if you would like to be involved as a lector, Eucharistic minister or musician at this Mass, and contact Kathy or Carol. If you are interested in participating as a singer or musician please come at 3:00 and join in on the rehearsal.

Our Mass in **Portland** will be Saturday, **January 14**, at **Northminster Presbyterian Church, 2823 N. Rosa Parks Way** at **5:00pm**. As of February we will be shifting to a potluck arrangement for our dinner after Mass. For the last four and a half years Renee has been providing our main entrée and complementary dishes to insure there would be plenty of food for all. Dinner following Mass became our tradition because of her labor and vision, and we built community across parish and geographical boundaries as a result. This has been an extraordinary gift to the community and I extend my heart-felt appreciation to Renee, and to Drew, for all they have done to establish a sense of “family” here at Sophia Christi. For our January meal, please consider bringing casseroles, vegetable dishes, salads and desserts to help celebrate the New Year.

On Sunday, **January 22**, at **10:30am** we will be celebrating Mass in **Battleground**. The address is 26605 NE 96th Ct. For further information or directions call Helen at 360-687-7475 or email her at umphrey@ipns.com.

Musicians and Singers

You are invited to **join the choir!** If you like to sing and/or play an instrument, please talk to me or one of the choir members after Mass this month. We would love to have you!

Community Meetings in January and February

Please mark your calendars for the Community meetings scheduled for next month in **Portland**, on Saturday, **January 21**, from 3:00 to 5:00pm at **Northminster**, downstairs in the dining hall, and in **Eugene**, after Mass, on **February 12**. To prepare for these meetings, allow yourself to envision where you would like Sophia Christi to be five years from now. What do you think our goals should be for 2012? Think in terms of outreach to the larger community, pastoral needs of our members, spiritual nourishment, prayer and liturgy, faith formation and development, structural and administrative needs. What steps might we take to meet these goals? What does it mean to you to be a member of Sophia Christi and how do you see yourself contributing to the mission of the community? What interests and/or skills do you have to offer as we take the next steps in our growth?

Pastoral Update

In order to qualify for liability insurance (which both First Congregational Church in Eugene and Northminster Presbyterian Church in Portland require of us) we need to have a legal identity as a formal “business” and fit into an IRS tax code category. Our Church partners have been patient and supportive as we’ve taken time to establish a leadership structure that conforms to State and federal regulations while guaranteeing that we continue to be “governed” by a community committed to listening to Spirit’s guidance and direction in its development. How we carry this process of “listening” forward will depend on everyone’s participation and input at community meetings and in a host of other ways as we move forward. We can rejoice, however, that at this point we have succeeded in fulfilling our responsibility to Church partners by completing this second leg of the journey toward becoming recognized as an IRS non-profit.

We met our end-of-year deadline for the IRS application thanks to dedicated efforts and loving service from your leadership team, and a bit of last-minute timing assistance from (I’m sure) Sophia herself! My understanding is that contributions to Sophia Christi will become retroactively tax-deductible to the date of our incorporation by the State last April once we receive a confirmation letter from the IRS. Don’t hold your breath for 2011 taxes, though, since the government, like the Church, moves veeery sloooowly, but we will let you know as soon as we hear anything at all from the Feds.

A pastoral reminder--if you or someone you know has a pastoral need that isn’t being met, please feel welcome—always—to give me a call. You have my email address in this mailing, and my phone number is 503-286-3584. Don’t hesitate to use either one. You can contact me anytime for conversation, home visitation, sacraments of reconciliation or anointing, home Masses or other pastoral care needs.

Food for the St. Andrew Episcopal Food Pantry

We received the following message from Kathleen Greene this month thanking us for our December contributions:

Dear Sophia Christi:, We were so pleased to receive your kind and thoughtful bags of food and cleaning supplies. Bob delivered 11 bags to us weighing 89 pounds. Again you sent so many useful items to stretch meals and keep a home clean. The bags of stuffing, cans of cranberries and gravy were a big hit as well as the chicken broth and dried onion soup mixes. You just know what a family needs for a holiday dinner!

As you know families on SNAP (food stamps) can't buy any toothpaste, toilet paper, laundry soap, diapers or bar soap. You supplied what they needed. We were blessed by you again. These times are very hard for all of us. Let's pray that our law makers' hearts may be softened.

We so thank you and are so blessed just by knowing The Rev Toni, Bob and all of you for your good hearts. --Kathleen Greene

Look for the basket at the entrance to the sanctuary when you come for Liturgy on Saturday or Sunday, and please be as generous as possible.

Our first Liturgies of this New Year focus our attention on three ancient astrologers who followed a star to the site of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem. These three can represent so many things for us, but they are often seen as "Gentiles", religious "strangers", who—in listening to their hearts and following their inner wisdom—managed to find their way to the Christ child, recognize him as king of the Jews, and trust their dream to avoid Herod and return home by another route. If anyone in Matthew's community holds to the notion that the God of the Jews and Jesus is not the God of ALL people, Matthew lays that notion to rest at the very outset of his Gospel. We, too, follow a star to Bethlehem and receive guidance in our continuing efforts to recognize the Christ child in our own hearts, in the lives and hearts of strangers, and at the very heart, the core reality, of our world. Sometimes we are able to recognize a sense of Divine presence in some person we encounter or in some fleeting experience that graces our day. And sometimes, in those moments, we are awake enough to pause in awe and wonder at the nearness and beauty of our God.

As we embark on this New Year together, accompanied by our Emmanuel, God-with-us, my hope is that all of us take time to notice and acknowledge at least a few of the countless ways Sophia, Christ, the Holy Spirit, our Mother-Father God show up in our daily lives. May we learn to see beneath the surface where peace and love reside, and follow the Light wherever it leads, trusting one another to do the same.

The blessings of Christ and Sophia be with each of you throughout 2012,

Toni