



## 'TIS THE SEASON

The Christmas season is not just a time for giving presents and exchanging greetings; it is also a time when scam artists are especially active. Perhaps you've noticed the increase in robocalls pretending to be from the IRS or the Social Security Administration ("You must contact us immediately or there will be dire consequences!"). Or maybe you received a letter from a suspicious looking charity, something that sounds almost legitimate but isn't (The World Wildlife Relief Fund?). There have even been recent reports of hackers attacking financial institutions in an attempt to get critical data. It's enough to dampen your Christmas spirit.

Last December, an email went out to church members from someone claiming to be me. In the past, there have been several clumsy attempts to impersonate me in an email. Usually, the culprit spells my name wrong (Swanthea) or the tone of the appeal is suspect (Here's a hint: if the greeting is "My dear friend washed in the blood of the lamb!" there is no chance it came from me). But, the email that went out in December was pitch-perfect: clear, to-the-point and urgent. It was also signed "peace" which is my standard sign-off. The only clue that it wasn't me was the email address, which was a version of my name and the church name from a gmail account, but not my exact email address.

I can't recall who first alerted me to the new scam but someone forwarded me a copy of the email, purporting to be from "Pastor Shawnthea" asking for financial assistance. Then I got a phone call from a church member, a dear person who asked, "Do you need help?" Once I figured out why I was being offered help, I explained it was a scam. Yet the calls kept coming: some people wanted to warn me that I had been "hacked" and I had to explain I hadn't been hacked, I was being impersonated. A few people ask why the pastor was requesting financial assistance from parishioners (I would never do such a thing). But most people called or sent emails offering assistance. Luckily, as far as I know, no one was completely taken in by the ruse.

My first response was outrage and anger. What kind of terrible person tries to take money from church people? Especially at Christmas?! With so many people in real financial trouble, the idea that some wretched soul would try to pick the pockets of generous Christians filled me with rage. It's like robbing a Salvation Army Santa or stealing from the Toys for Tots bin. I confess I had many dark and un-Christian thoughts about the person who sent that email. I might have even prayed for God to smite this unknown trickster. In a reverse-Grinch moment, my heart shrank as I contemplated what fate ought to befall this virtual thief.

Then the phone rang again. It was another church member calling to alert me to the suspicious email. He said, "I didn't think it was really from you, but I wanted to call, just in case." I thanked the person and assured him that I would never request financial help via email. We talked a bit and he told me how the pandemic has been for him and his family. We commiserated about canceled plans and hopes for a vaccine in the new year. It was a lovely conversation. At the end, the caller said, "It's nice to talk to you. We watch the services on Sunday, but I'm sure you feel like you don't know us very well. I hope things are better in the New Year and we can see each other. But if you ever do need help, you can call me. I would help you."

When I got off the phone, I realized I was smiling. The idea that someone who hasn't seen me in person in 10 months would be willing to help me filled me with joy. What a kind and generous person! Then I thought about all the other people who had called in response to the scam email—each one offering to help. What a remarkable group of people—kind-hearted and generous!

Suddenly, instead of feeling malice towards the scammer, I felt love and gratitude for being part of such a wonderful church. Christ's spirit of loving-kindness and service flows through this faith community. I always hoped this was true, but the scam email proved it. I'm smiling even as I write this!

I look forward to 2021 with great hope and expectation. May God bless us with an end to this pandemic and a return to being face-to-face. And when that day comes, I will look out upon this congregation knowing that you are Christ's beloved disciples!

Happy new year!

*Dr. Monroe*

# Birthdays & Anniversaries

## JANUARY BIRTHDAYS \*80 & OVER

- 1/03 - Helen Ward
- 1/06 - Peggy Sherman
- 1/08 - Susan Allis
- 1/13 - Jane Harrison
- 1/19 - Robert Erbes
- 1/20 - Bill Dansby
- 1/24 - Pat Brogan
- 1/24 - Fran Bradley
- 1/30 - Jean Moore

## JANUARY ANNIVERSARIES

- 1/20 - Ron & Billie Lantis (31)

If we missed you, please accept our apology. Contact the office to make sure we have your correct information on file.

## CHICS BIBLE STUDY GROUP



CHiCs (Connected Hearts in Christ) Small Group will be starting a discussion of *Inspired* by Rachel Held Evans. In this book, Evans examines some of our favorite Bible stories and possible interpretations. She is undaunted by the most difficult passages and wrestles through the process of doubting, imagining, and debating Scripture's mysteries. The group will start on **January 7** over Zoom and meets weekly on Thursday evenings from 7:00 p.m. - 8:30 p.m. If you are interested in joining us please email Beth Lundy at [Lundybb@comcast.net](mailto:Lundybb@comcast.net) or 610.246.0029 by call or text.

## VIRTUAL CONNECTIONS



Stay connected with us and join one of our virtual meetings or Bible studies. See below for what is currently being offered:

**SERMON PREVIEW GROUP:** meets each Wednesday at 9:00 a.m. To join, [click here](#); Meeting ID: 861 2945 8059. You can also dial 1.929.205.6099 and when prompted enter 861 2945 8059.

**TUESDAY MORNING MENS GROUP:** meets each Tuesday at 8:00 a.m. To join, [click here](#). The meeting ID is: 837 5361 0456; passcode is: TPC. You can also dial 1.301.715.8592 and when prompted enter the meeting code 837 5361 0456 and passcode 160971.

**WEDNESDAY NOON MENS GROUP:** meets each Wednesday at Noon. To join, [click here](#).

**VIRTUAL FELLOWSHIP\***  
Join us, virtually each Sunday, following the 10:30 a.m. worship service for fellowship. It's easy! Grab a cup of your favorite coffee and a sweet snack and log on to Zoom. Join the meeting by clicking on this link: [Join Zoom Meeting](#), or in your Zoom app enter Meeting ID: 837 9739 7682 and when asked for a password enter: Peoples

Don't have access to internet? No problem! You can still join us from ANY phone! Dial 1-312-626-6799 and when prompted for a meeting ID enter 837 9739 7682# and the password is 50803#.

\* Please note: For those who are with us in person for worship, there will not be a fellowship until further notice. Virtual fellowship will continue for those at home.



Hello PCYG Students and Families!

I hope you had a safe and fun winter break, and are ready to jump back into the semester this month! Our weekly PCYG will continue to be held virtually for the time being—in an effort to keep each of you and the surrounding community safe.

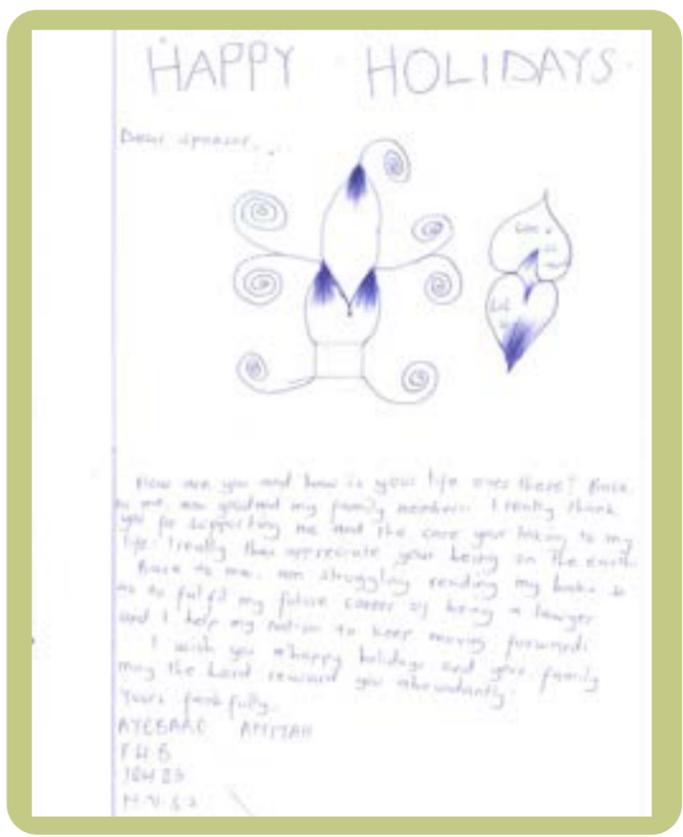
Middle school youth group will meet Wednesday nights from 6:00-7:00 p.m., and high school youth group will meet Sunday nights from 6:00-7:00 p.m. both via zoom.

The upcoming months are exciting but unknown, so I am waiting to announce events or set a calendar. Thank you for your patience and flexibility as we work together to make this semester a great one. I am looking forward to the things we will be able to do together, and the ways we can connect and grow as a PCYG family!

## HAPPY HOLIDAYS FROM THE NYAKA AIDS ORPHAN PROJECT

This year has been challenging for the entire world, and with the dedicated giving of our congregation, Community Engagement has been able to continue support for our international mission work at The Nyaka AIDS Orphan Project in Uganda, Africa.

Please enjoy these notes from Peter and Anitah, the two students we sponsor. Community Engagement has been so honored and blessed to support so many organizations locally as well as around the world this year, and to each of you we say "Thank You!"



## NATURE CONNECTIONS DECREASE MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

by Dana Johnson, Director, Peoples Church Preschool

On the *Adventure Journal* website, Justin Housman describes a recent study from Aarhus University in Denmark where "researchers found that being raised surrounded by nature as a child meant a 55% lower incidence of developing mental health issues as adults. Even better, it seemed that the more time children spent in nature, the better as far as mental health outcomes were concerned.

'If we were talking about a new medicine that had this kind of effect the buzz would be huge,' said Kelly Lambert, a neuroscientist at the University of Richmond. 'But these results suggest that being able to go for a walk in the park as a kid is just as impactful.'

Source: "Study: Kids Who Spend Time in Nature Become Happier Adults," by Justin Housman, [adventure-journal.com](http://adventure-journal.com), February 27, 2019





**THE PEOPLES CHURCH**  
200 W. Grand River Ave.  
East Lansing, MI 4882  
517.332.5073  
ThePeoplesChurch.com  
*JANUARY 2021 PORTAL*