

Metropolitan Community Churches

Around The Fellowship

U n f i n i s h e d W o r l d . U n f i n i s h e d C a l l i n g

January 15, 2008

**Judy Dale,
Editor**

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Department

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IN THIS ISSUE:

- **Special ATF Edition! MCC Holiday Reports!**
- **Check Out These Fabulous Holiday Decorations**
- **Special Services: The Reason For the Season**
- **Concerts and Plays Inspire, Uplift!**
- **Helping Others Honors The Christ Child**
- **Advent and Christmas Studies Around The Globe**
- **Holiday Parties: MCCers Know How To Celebrate!**
- **See How MCC Observes Kwanzaa**
- **Ring In The New Year, MCC Style!**

SPECIAL ATF EDITION! MCC HOLIDAY REPORTS

Welcome to a special edition of "Around The Fellowship" newsletter! MCC churches around the globe celebrated Advent and Christmas with an amazing array of special services, concerts, events, plays, and community events. For the first time ever, we're pleased to share reports from local churches on the many ways MCC congregations observed the birth of Jesus during the recent holidays .

FABULOUS HOLIDAY DECORATIONS!

The folks from **Holy Covenant MCC** (Brookfield, Illinois) decorated not one, but two trees at the world-famous Brookfield Zoo for the holidays. One was done by the children and one by the adults to depict both the church and the LGBT community it serves.

MCC Baton Rouge (Louisiana) had a tree in the sanctuary adorned with angels, which were placed in memory of honor of someone.

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**PASS THE WORD!
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Pass the word to

The Christmas tree in the Green Bay sanctuary of **Angels of Hope MCC** (Green Bay and Appleton, Wisconsin) stood without lights, tinsel, or decorations. There wasn't a tree skirt or presents beneath it. It was a simple and silent reminder of Advent, allowing congregants to focus on the Light that would come and not on the commercialism of the secular holiday.

The sanctuary at **King of Peace MCC** (St. Petersburg, Florida) was filled with red poinsettias given in memory or honor of friends and loved ones.

"Don We Now Our Gay Apparel!" was a gathering in the sanctuary at **Wichita Falls MCC** (Texas) to decorate for Christmas, followed by a dessert potluck, hot chocolate, and wonderful entertainment by their musicians.

MCC Omaha (Nebraska) held their annual Christmas Boutique and Bake Sale to raise money for the church and to help folks decorate their own homes for the holidays.

Along with other organizations and businesses, **Exodus MCC** (Abilene, Texas) participated in the Christmas Lane Project, displays created by participants on the grounds of the State School. People could drive through and enjoy the sights and sounds of Christmas. EMCC's message, of course, was about God's love.

Poinsettias dedicated to loved ones filled the sanctuary at **MCC of Northern Virginia** (Fairfax, Virginia).

Faith, Family and Friends was the theme for the tree which **Healing Spirit MCC** (Rochester, Minnesota) decorated for their city's Festival of Trees at the Mayo Civic Center.

SPECIAL SERVICES: THE REASON FOR THE SEASON

MCC Elizabethtown (Kentucky) preceded their Hanging of the Greens service with a Prayer Breakfast. They named the day *Greens, Egg and Ham* (with apologies to Dr. Seuss!) and used it to learn about the meaning of the holiday symbols we use.

To create more insightful services during Advent, **MCC Manchester** (England) changed their order of worship. For the sermon, they pre-recorded readings and reflections, mixing them with modern music and various images.

ICM Los Angeles (California) celebrated the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe with mariachis, fellowship, and food. She is known as the Patroness of the Americas.

Central Texas MCC from the Heart (Waco, Texas) lights a candle to honor Our Lady of Guadalupe, as well as one for those living with or who have passed on because of AIDS, and one for the soldiers fighting

members of your congregation!

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overseas.

A Blue Christmas Service was held at **Christ Covenant MCC** (Decatur, Georgia). Drawing on the reflective Taizé tradition, the evening provided the quiet beauty of prayer, scripture, song, and memorial ritual for those struggling with grief during the holiday season. They enjoyed a time of fellowship and refreshments afterwards. **MCC Newcastle upon Tyne** (England) and **MCC Bournemouth** (England) also hosted Blue Christmas Services.

Sunshine Cathedral MCC (Ft. Lauderdale, Florida) again had their Christmas Eve Service for the community at the Broward Center of the Performing Arts. The South Florida Pride Wind Ensemble, the Ft. Lauderdale Gay Men's Chorus, and the Lambda Chorale preformed.

MCC Good Shepherd (Parramatta North, NSW, Australia) was invited by Archbishop Ronald Langham to share in their Advent Eucharist.

The Christmas Eve service at **MCC San Jose** (California) featured several guests. **Rev. Michael Patrick Ellard's** parents, Pat and Tim Ellard, were visiting from New Jersey and each did a reading. Lois Vidt, mother of their church administrator **Karl Vidt**, played the piano so that their music director could conduct the choir, which was augmented by members of the Rainbow Women's Chorus and the San Jose Peace Chorale.

New Spirit MCC (Cincinnati, Ohio) began the Advent season with a Hanging of the Greens Service.

MCC Sydney (Australia) had their 13th Christmas Eve Service at the Sydney Town Hall. The Sydney Gay and Lesbian Choir, Sydney Homotones, Mitzi Macintosh, Michael Tesoriero, Justin J Bear, and Crave (MCC Sydney's band) all performed. **Gavin Ward** accompanied the carol singing on the Town Hall grand pipe organ. The service also featured a Nativity Pageant.

MCC Boston (Massachusetts) and **Good Hope MCC** (Cape Town, South Africa) held their traditional services on Christmas morning. **MCC Omaha** (Nebraska) did likewise with the Deacons serving a Pancake Breakfast afterwards and at **MCC New York** (New York) a Holiday Feast followed the service.

MCC Toronto (Ontario, Canada) hosted their annual Christmas Eve Service at the Roy Thomson Hall with over 1000 in attendance. The evening featured traditional Christmas carols and a special performance by **Louise Pitre**. The children of MCCT participated in the opening processional, along with the choir, lectors, deacons and clergy.

For one of their services during the holidays, **Church of the Trinity MCC** (Sarasota, Florida) held a Taizé candlelight prayer service. For another, they gathered in their shorts and sandals on their land for a time of drumming and singing carols.

New Covenant MCC (Columbia, Maryland) held weekly Advent Prayer Services for a time of focused prayer and song followed by a simple

meal in the midst of the holiday bustle.

At the Christmas Eve Service at **Resurrection MCC** (Houston, Texas) attendees were presented with commemorative ornaments.

MCC Baton Rouge (Louisiana) used a unique liturgy written by clergy candidate **Jonathan Hammett**. *Yuletide*, a six week celebration of the principles which bind and strengthen the church, was inspired by an idea in Joe Perez's book *Soulfully Gay*. It included inspirational quotes from Dr. Martin Luther King, James Baldwin, the Dalai Lama, and others, plus a candle-lighting ritual with rainbow colored candles.

jhammett@hopeministriesbr.org

The Marketing Ministry of **MCC of the Lehigh Valley** (Allentown, Pennsylvania) held a Phone-a-thon to invite people to their Christmas Eve Service. Congregants brought their own cell phones and enjoyed an evening together making the calls.

The folks at **All Saints" MCC** (Christchurch, Aotearoa/New Zealand) shared in a potluck before a special service of carol singing.

For the first time in several years, **Spirit of Life MCC** (New Port Richey, Florida) had a Christmas Eve Celebration. They concluded the service with candlelight and singing outside for their neighbors.



CONCERTS AND PLAYS INSPIRE, UPLIFT!

Peterson Toscano debuted his *Ho-Ho Homo No-Mo Holiday Special* at **MCC Portland** (Oregon). The characters he portrayed showed the madness of Christmas in America's zaniest ex-gay residential facility for wayward gays!

Sing Noel! was the theme for **MCCDC's** (Washington, DC) Christmas concert, which was attended by friends from neighboring MCCs and the community, as well as their own congregation during the two evenings of presentation.

One performance of *Santaland Diaries* at the Limelight Theater in St. Augustine, Florida, benefitted **FirstCoast MCC** and starred MCCer **Ian Mairs**.

MCC Albuquerque (New Mexico) produced a live nativity scene for two evenings.

The choir of **Promise MCC** (Oak Cliff, Texas) participated in a Christmas Concert with the White Rock Community Church choir.

Gentle Shepherd MCC (Tallahassee, Florida) used their Christmas Concert to say goodbye to the Unitarian Church which had been their home for many years. Their service on December 23 was in their very own building!

Christmas Concerts were presented on two nights at **MCC in the Valley** (North Hollywood, California).

MCC Bournemouth (England) held their annual Christmas Carol Concert. Including the offering and the raffle, they raised £600, half of which they donated to the Youth Space Project.

The children of **Exodus MCC** (Abilene, Texas) presented a special Christmas program for the congregation.

Church of Our Savior MCC (Boynton Beach, Florida), **MCC of the Palm Beaches** (West Palm Beach, Florida) and New Hope First Community Church shared in a joint Christmas concert *Prepare Ye the Way*.

Bruno Casolari, the new choral director at **MCC Key West** (Florida), led their special music for the holiday season.

The choir of **MCC Los Angeles** (West Hollywood, California) presented three performances of *A Season of Change*.

Laughing All the Way was the Christmas show at **MCC Richmond** (Virginia). It was a dinner theater production complete with dessert and coffee afterwards.

The Christmas Concert at **MCC Austin** (Texas) included the Sanctuary Choir, the 6:24 Band, Ora Voce, and a host of other talented vocalists and musicians.

The Celebration Choir of **MCC San Diego** (California) presented *A Soulful Celebration* as their Christmas music this year.

The Sunday Children of **All God's Children MCC** (Minneapolis, Minnesota) performed a Christmas Concert on their new handbells.

The choir of **MCC Knoxville** (Tennessee) twice performed *Once Upon a Night* under the direction of **Ray Evette**. This outreach constitutes the highest attendance at MCKK for the entire year and was 18% over last year with a total attendance of 399 people! Sixty-four congregants were involved in the production.

The children of **First MCC** (Atlanta, Georgia) performed a Christmas pageant.

ICM Los Angeles (California) presented *La Pastorela y Posadas*. Proceeds from the event went to support ICM's outreach to the Latino/a community.

Hallelujah, Christmas was the presentation of the Celebration Choir at **King of Peace MCC** (St. Petersburg, Florida). It was a stirring musical celebration with jazz, gospel, and classical arrangements of joy-filled songs.

Celebrate the Season! combined members of the **Resurrection MCC** (Houston, Texas) Music Ministry and the Houston Pride Band for an evening of sacred and secular seasonal favorites. During the concert, Thunderbird Theater provided a special program for the children, Santa's Texas Adventure. Everyone enjoyed treats and

fellowship afterwards.



HELPING OTHERS HONORS THE CHRIST CHILD

Holy Cross MCC (Pensacola, Florida) participated in Operation Christmas Child, the filling of shoeboxes to be given to children around the world. **Living Springs MCC** (Bath, England) also participated by collecting toys, scarves, gloves, hats, hard sweets, and toiletries. That was the project which **Pikes Peak MCC** (Colorado Springs, Colorado) and **Eternal Joy MCC** (Dayton, Ohio) chose as well. In addition to filling the boxes the donors send \$7 (USD) per box for shipping and other projects of Samaritan's Purse, an international organization assisting needy individuals. In conjunction with Starbucks, **Exodus MCC** (Abilene, Texas) filled 75 shoeboxes.

MCC of Our Redeemer (Augusta, Georgia) adopted an entire nursing home for Christmas. They purchased items such as sweatshirts and lap blankets which were given to the residents who did not have family or gifts during the holidays. Plus, the congregation went caroling at the 108 bed facility.

New Life MCC of Hampton Roads (Virginia) filled food baskets, as well as provided clothes and toys for needy children, and went caroling at a nursing home.

The Cycle Disciples of **FirstCoast MCC** (St. Augustine, Florida) decorated a tree which was displayed with 65 others at the Festival of Trees at the World Golf Village. This year they picked the theme of recycling. Two years ago it was motorcycles and won 1st place. Last year they came in 3rd with their breast cancer one. The money raised benefits the Empty Stocking Fund and the United Way of St. Johns County.

MCC Good Shepherd (Parramatta North, NSW, Australia) collected non-perishables, sweets, biscuits, coffee, tea, and other items to fill hampers for the residents of Pingaree House for Christmas.

Folks from **MCC of the Hudson Valley** (Albany, New York) spent the afternoon together shopping for Toys for Tots and enjoyed dinner afterwards.

A group from **Hope MCC** (Daytona, Florida) spent Christmas afternoon in a downtown park, serving a hot dog picnic for 40 homeless people and giving them gifts of blankets, clothing, and toiletries.

Food, clothing, and money were collected at **Living Springs MCC** (Bath, England) for the people who use the night shelter at Julian House. The church matched each pound donated to purchase practical Christmas gifts for the homeless.

At **Agape MCC** (Fort Worth, Texas) they purchased Christmas

presents for foster children and collected bears, which they blessed on Christmas Eve and then donated for police officers to give to children in crisis situations.

ICM Los Angeles (West Hollywood, California) produced High Heel Extravaganza, a fun-filled talent show, in order to raise funds for the church's Christmas Toy Drive.

Three families in need were adopted by the folks at **Christ Covenant MCC** (Decatur, Georgia) and showered with Christmas gifts.

Cornerstone MCC (Mobile, Alabama) hosted the annual Christmas gathering for clients and families of South Alabama CARES, their local HIV/AIDS support services provider.

Members from **Good Hope MCC** (Cape Town, South Africa) not only provided presents for the 60 children at Helping Hands in Gugulethu, but they also donated items on the organization's wish list. Mable Solani operates an educare centre from her single garage, but she also offers youth programs, workshops for adults to assist in job creation, provides HIV/AIDS and spiritual counseling, and runs a soup kitchen in the winter. Her only income is from parents who are asked to pay R70 per month, if possible, and even without government support, she feeds each child two meals and snacks each day. For pictures of the event, [CLICK HERE](#).

Over \$500 (USD) worth of food and a check for \$400 was presented to the Director of the HIV/Aids Foundation in Keaau by the members of **Open Arms MCC** (Pahoa, Hawai'i) to provide food for the holidays to their clients.

achurch4me? MCC (Chicago, Illinois) supported the 23rd District Community Policing Toy Drive.

Volunteer elves from **MCC Toronto** (Ontario, Canada) sorted and delivered 1600 Star boxes to needy children in one section of their city. The boxes contained a warm hat, mitts, socks, sweater, some tooth care items, a game, a book and some candy.

MCC Key West (Florida) again partnered with Wesley House Family Services to provide for the needs of families in Monroe County during the holidays.

Nancy Flowers, the new HIV/AIDS Ministry Leader at **Harbor MCC** (Galveston, Texas), coordinated their first project, filling pet Christmas stockings for the special companions of persons with HIV/AIDS.

Rev. Mike Nikolaus' company, God's Goodies, baked "heavenly deserts" for the holidays. Ten percent of the purchase price on all orders went to feed the hungry. So, Rev. Mike tithes and God smiles! www.godsgoodies.com

Seventy-one children and teens infected or affected by HIV/AIDS

received \$75 (USD) gift cards or presents from the folks at **MCC Louisville** (Kentucky).

Congregants of **MCC of Greater Dallas** (Texas) again collected coats, blankets, hats, gloves and scarves to donate for persons who are homeless. They also provided canned goods to be distributed through the AIDS Interfaith Network.

The Mission Team at **MCC Baltimore** (Maryland) sold See's Candy during the holidays as part of their fundraising efforts toward their mission trip to South Africa this year.

William Morán-Berberena, Director of **MCC New York's** (New York) Food Pantry, paired congregants with children who needed to receive a Christmas present.

MCC of the Chesapeake (Annapolis, Maryland) congregants volunteered as elves for the party for the HAVEN clients to ensure that the families had a wonderful holiday season.

MCC in the Valley (North Hollywood, California) again collected toys and gift certificates for children and teens who are HIV+.

MCC Brisbane (Australia) gathered food and other items to provide hampers for young people who are assisted by Open Doors, a service for 12-18 year olds who are either homeless or at risk of homelessness due to their sexuality or gender identity.

The Social Transformation Team of **New Covenant MCC** (Columbia, Maryland) coordinated the purchase of grocery gift cards by congregants to be given to the Laurel Advocacy Referral Service to be distributed to their clients.

The children at **Harvest MCC** (Denton, Texas) collected food, specifically canned items with protein, for AIDS Services of North Texas.

In partnership with Santa Clara County's Health Trust, **MCC San Jose** (California) provided 51 kids affected by HIV/AIDS with clothes, blankets, food, movie passes, presents, and gift certificates. They also sent Christmas cards to people in prison. For many, it was the only holiday recognition they received.

The Chancel Choir and others from **All God's Children MCC** (Minneapolis, Minnesota) went caroling to the homes of shut-ins and to some nursing homes. Afterwards they enjoyed a Potluck Soup Supper together.

Folks at **MCC Portland** (Oregon) selected "wishes" from a tree at church and purchased the items for individuals and families who are in recovery from alcohol or drugs or who deal with HIV/AIDS.

Imago Dei MCC (Glen Mills, Pennsylvania) helped sponsor families who have recently "graduated" from the Domestic Abuse Project of Media's Safe House into transitional housing by providing holiday

meals and toys for the children.

Children who are infected or affected by HIV/AIDS had their Christmas wishes fulfilled by members of **MCC NOVA** (Fairfax, Virginia).

In order to show its appreciation, **MCC Detroit** (Michigan) collected a second offering each Sunday during Advent to provide Christmas bonuses for their staff, both paid and volunteer, and a dinner for worship participants. They even presented a gift certificate to their Elder!

MCC San Jose (California) adopted 51 children between the ages of 10 and 17 for Christmas. All of the recipients are affected by HIV or AIDS.



ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS STUDIES AROUND THE GLOBE

The sermon series at **Trinity MCC** (Gainesville, Florida) focused on Christmas Dreams.

Advent Groups met at various locations in northeast England as part of the ministry of **MCC Newcastle**.

MCC United (Tulsa, Oklahoma) offered two different weekly Advent Home Study Groups.

At **MCC Albuquerque** (New Mexico) they focused on *The Promise of Peace: Your Journey of Transformation*, to remind them that calling is to journey with others to God's holy mountain to experience God's peace which passes all understanding.

Rev. Suzie Chamnes created an Advent booklet for the congregation of **Spirit of Life MCC** (New Port Richey, Florida). It provided daily meditations and prayers for each day of Advent.

Hope was the theme of the special weekly Advent Study at **MCC Baltimore** (Maryland).

Putting a Little Character into Christmas was the Advent Study at **New Life MCC at Hampton Roads** (Virginia). It was written by MCC's own **Rev. Dr. Nancy Horvath-Zurn**.



HOLIDAY PARTIES AND FESTIVITIES

MCC Richmond (Virginia) hosted a Christmas Slumber Party for the children, giving the parents an extra night for secret shopping!

MCC of Our Redeemer (Augusta, Georgia) had their annual Christmas Party at the Riverchase Club House, enjoying a

"Rudolph's Revenge" gift exchange and a catered dinner with the theme of food from around the world. They even had a Gingerbread house!

MCC Bournemouth (England) celebrated the 4th Anniversary of their pastor **Rev. Dwayne Morgan** with a Christmas Dinner.

MCC Baton Rouge (Louisiana) hosted a Potluck on Christmas Day at the church, as did **MCC of the Lehigh Valley** (Allentown, Pennsylvania).

Healing Spirit MCC (Rochester, Minnesota) combined several events into one. They had a catered dinner, complete with a silent auction and a baked goods and crafts sale, followed by a concert presented by Ovation, an ensemble from One Voice, the LBGT chorus in the Twin Cities.

Congregants at **MCC Elizabethtown** (Kentucky) enjoyed a gift exchange at their holiday party, gave DVDs to the children, and used the occasion to raise money to help a family for Christmas.

MCC Key West (Florida) had a float and marching contingent in their city's Christmas Holiday Parade. They also went caroling aboard the Conch Train while viewing Christmas lights about town.

Among numerous holiday activities planned for the folks at **MCC Manchester** (England) was a train trip to York, a wonderful medieval city, for the day to wander around the shops and minster.

Trinity MCC (Gainesville, Florida) held a Christmas Dessert Social following their Christmas Eve Service.

Santa Claus appeared at the **Agape MCC** Christmas party with presents for all of the children 10 and under.

Jackie Akers, Patrick Fisher, Bud Minard, Bonnie Reda, and Buzz Van Horn planned the holiday party for **Open Arms MCC** (Rochester, New York). There was, of course, food, entertainment, and door prizes.

The Makati City and Quezon City congregations of **MCC Philippines** held their first ever joint celebration - a Christmas Party!

Following a Saturday night service, the folks from **MCC Austin** (Texas) went caroling in the neighborhood around the church and then enjoyed hot chocolate and a cookie exchange.

Folks at **MCC Knoxville** (Tennessee) hosted their third Appalachian Christmas celebration complete with **Rev. Bob Galloway** telling Christmas stories mountain style, carols accompanied by stringed instruments common in the Appalachians, learning about mountain traditions, gift-giving, and a potluck of mountain favorites.

Christ Chapel MCC (Santa Ana, California) held their Annual Christmas Tea complete with scrumptious goodies! This year the

event featured a Scottish theme.

The folks from **Open Arms MCC** marched in the Pahoia (Hawaii) Christmas parade with their church's banner. They passed out candy with the church's name and their ensemble sang the length of the parade from the back of a decorated pickup truck.

MCC of Greater Dallas (Texas) families and friends enjoyed a Holiday Cabaret, an evening of music, fun, and fellowship.

For \$5 (USD) the folks at **MCC in the Valley** (North Hollywood, California) could Dial-a-Carol. They could pick which carol and the choir would call the designated person and sing for them. The congregation gathered for the singing after worship one Sunday.

Everyone danced the night away at the **Holy Cross MCC** (Pensacola, Florida) Christmas party. Santa appeared to surprise the children, who had their pictures taken with him.



SEE HOW MCC OBSERVES KWANZAA!

Adrain Bowie and **Rev. Carolyn Mobley** led a special service on the first night of Kwanzaa at **MCC United** (Tulsa, Oklahoma).

Mary Ann Lawson again led the Kwanzaa Service at **MCC Lubbock** (Texas). This year they focused on the fifth principle: Nia (purpose).

MCC Austin (Texas) is doing an extended celebration of Kwanzaa. **Rev. Robyn Provis** began the sermon series on December 30 on the importance of Kwanzaa for all people, focusing on the first principle of Unity. Following worship services, the congregation enjoyed a Karamu, a Kwanzaa Feast. On the Sundays in January the following clergy are preaching on the various Principles of Kwanzaa: **Rev. David Bieniek**, Self-Determination; **Rev. John Meissner**, Collective Responsibility and Cooperation; **Rev. Bernie Barbour** from **Resurrection MCC** (Houston, Texas), Purpose; and **Rev. Robyn Provis** will conclude the series combining the principles of Creativity and Faith.

The Kwanzaa service led by **Georgia Thweatt-Johnson** at **MCC Richmond** (Virginia) was featured in Virginia's state-wide newspaper, the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*. **Rev. Dr. Robin Gorsline** likened Christmas and Kwanzaa as times to bring us back to our roots, reminding us that we are all God's children. To read the news article, [CLICK HERE](#).

The Drum Divas performed at the Kwanzaa Celebration at **church4me? MCC** (Chicago, Illinois). Following the worship service everyone joined together for a potluck of dishes representing their own cultural heritage.

Kwanzaa was celebrated at all three Sunday services of **MCC New York** (New York).



RINGING IN THE NEW YEAR, MCC STYLE

Healing Spirit MCC (Rochester, Minnesota) had their fourth annual *Let It Go* Sunday.

MCC Louisville (Kentucky) hosted their annual New Year's Eve Game Night followed by a Watch Night Service, bringing in the New Year with Communion and prayer.

Safe Harbor MCC (Halifax, Nova Scotia) celebrated the New Year with a Dinner Dance extravaganza, complete with midnight champagne and a Tuscan antipasto buffet. The proceeds supported Manna for Health, a special needs food bank.

MCC-DC's (Washington, D.C.) Watch Night observation had several facets. The sanctuary was open from 7 pm until 1 am for prayer and meditation. Individuals could write notes to God as they closed out the old year and welcomed the new. These were burned just before midnight as those assembled entered a time of Holy Communion, which ended just after midnight. Then folks gathered to share traditional New Year's dishes such as black-eyed peas, Hoppin' John, corn bread, and greens. The evening was hosted by **Cecelia Hayden-Smith** and **Loyal Snyder**.

First MCC (Atlanta, Georgia) offered a Watch Night style service on the last Sunday evening of 2007. The annual year end Burning Bowl was featured along with **Rev. Dr. Kathi Martin** preaching. After the service there were refreshments and entertainment by a Jazz Band.

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