

God Bless



The Child

Messiah!



PEACE
on earth



Messiah
George Frideric Handel

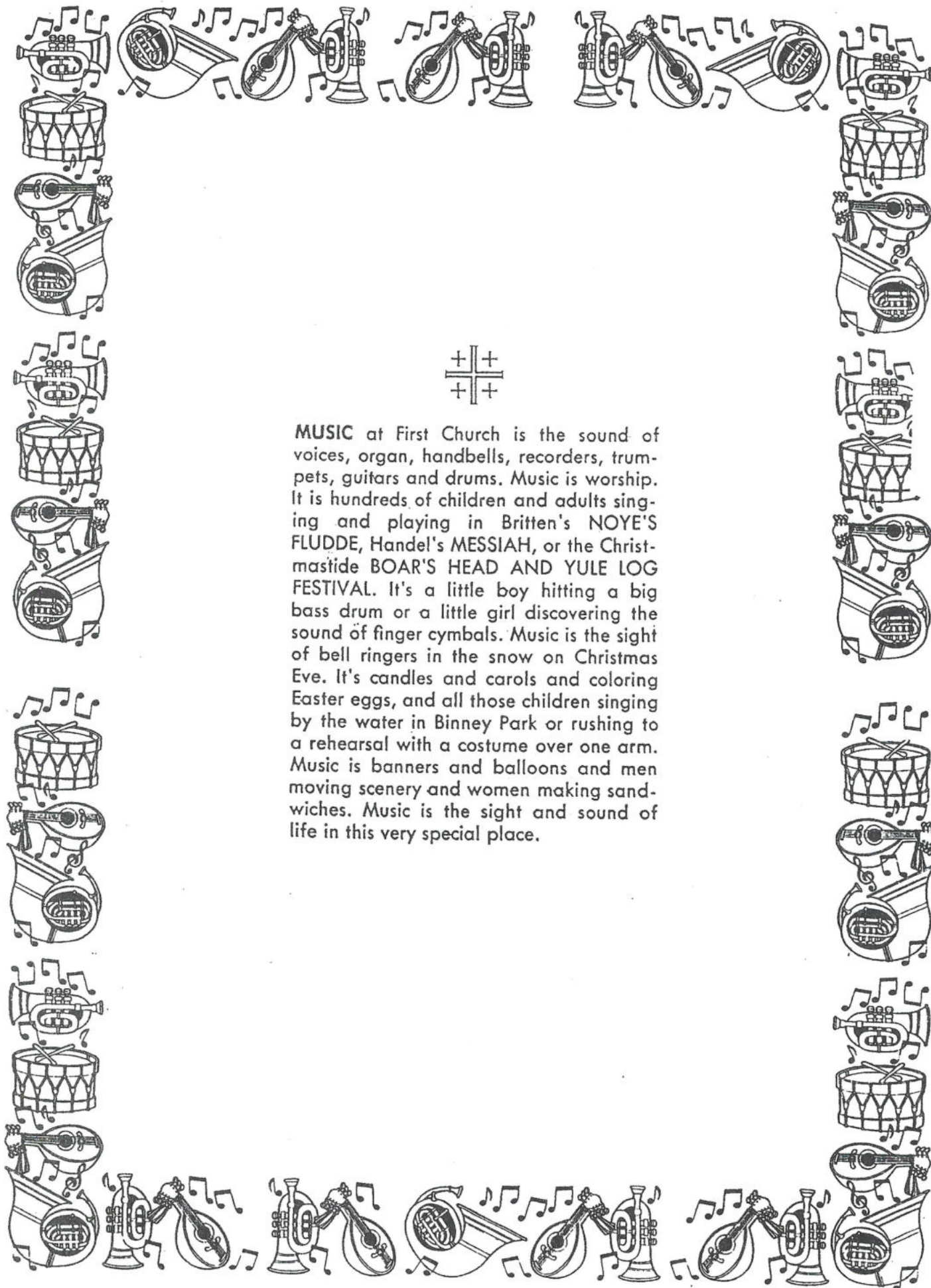
❖ Words by Richard Vogt ❖

IN LOVING MEMORY

Richard Vogt served as Minister of Music at First Church from 1966 until his death in 1995. Among his many talents was an ability with words. He was a prolific writer—of notes and letters, discussions of various causes and religious subjects, and comments on current events.

The following pages are some selections of Richard's words in First Church publications, sermons and prayers.

THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH *of* GREENWICH
❖ 1995 ❖



MUSIC at First Church is the sound of voices, organ, handbells, recorders, trumpets, guitars and drums. Music is worship. It is hundreds of children and adults singing and playing in Britten's NOYE'S FLUDDE, Handel's MESSIAH, or the Christmastide BOAR'S HEAD AND YULE LOG FESTIVAL. It's a little boy hitting a big bass drum or a little girl discovering the sound of finger cymbals. Music is the sight of bell ringers in the snow on Christmas Eve. It's candles and carols and coloring Easter eggs, and all those children singing by the water in Binney Park or rushing to a rehearsal with a costume over one arm. Music is banners and balloons and men moving scenery and women making sandwiches. Music is the sight and sound of life in this very special place.

❖ SERMONS AND PRAYERS ❖



THE CHURCH AS CELEBRATION

A SERMON BY RICHARD VOGT

I was told I could speak from the floor microphone there or up here a little closer to the angels, and as you can see I'm going for broke.

I really have more than four minutes of ideas of what a church should be these days. For me, in all of life I doubt if there is anything more boring than being bored in church. There's really no graceful way to escape from a pew. I know because I've tried. Sometimes I've felt that perhaps this Sunday morning hour is a weekly kind of Lent which the Lord inflicts on us for using the wrong kind of soap, or no soap at all, or something.

But it doesn't have to be like that - ever. God is love and we can worship him in spirit and in truth, and for me that truth is celebration. I do not feel we are meant to sit here and feel guilty world without end.

Churches are filled at Christmas and Easter because these two days are the ones we celebrate best. But can you imagine Hallmark cards existing on Christmas and Easter alone? They would soon be out of business, and there lies part of the answer for us: if we're going to stay in business I feel we should celebrate more.

I believe God intends us to have a good time in church - to laugh, to cry, to sing, to dance, to shout. I feel many people tend to treat this and every church building as sacred - when it is our lives, each other's life, and our bodies which we should treat with reverence, for they are the real temples of God's spirit. Here we have a Meetinghouse, a beautiful place in which to gather, to be together in the drama of glorifying God. Instruments and singing, drama and poetry, only make this house, God's house, come alive. Foot-tapping in church is not a sin; neither is applause. And this season of Lent - it is a time for reflection and concern, but it is still celebration.

I am continually impressed with one person in our midst who gives so freely of her time. She is often the first person to make a worthwhile comment on a significant innovation, and just last week she happened to come into the church just after 8:30 a.m.; the organist was practicing and the windows looked special in the morning light, just as they do today - and she stopped short and said, "Isn't that beautiful?" - to me, to no one, to the Lord, to herself. Emily Lent is younger than all of us.

I learned the other day that some of the major tobacco companies have a marijuana cigarette all set to market - package and all - and only the legal go-ahead is needed. It is ironical that in a few years we may see a situation where

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tobacco is outlawed and marijuana legalized. And who determines the course of human events? Is it the Madison Avenue Holy Trinities such as Doyle, Dane and Bernbach, or will we still find refuge in Father, Son and Holy Ghost, or as some say today: Daddy-O, Junior and Shadow. My point is that we in the church can also anticipate change and steer events in a worthwhile direction.

I don't feel that God intends man to suffer. Man has created the problems. God has given his love in Jesus Christ that we might love and show compassion and overcome all problems.

On Friday I had a happy time taking a few children from this church on a whirlwind five-hour spree in New York, a time filled with pizzas and coca-colas. We ended up at the children's zoo in Central Park, and there in all its glory stood Noah's Ark. The kids climbed aboard immediately and in great stentorian tones began singing, "Eternal Father, strong to save" - that's the Navy Hymn from Britten's "Noah's Flood" for those who missed that event last year. Well, a few animals looked embarrassed and a few adults shook their heads, but this to me, and certainly to those children, was celebration.

Our "Noah's Flood" made much of this church come alive. I really miss it this year and feel that the month of May will be fairly tame without all those animals running around.

Our so-called traditional services can be more significant. And you can also do a better job. For one thing, your hymn-singing is generally for the birds. I blame some of it on the acoustics in this church which devour sound like it was going out of style. I speak as a performing musician in saying that there are certain major detriments to the whole music program, together with a few other disasters which I won't take the time to explain. In any event, most of the hymns we sing are familiar, but you treat them with a certain deadly quality. You need to dig in more - create a scene with your voice, or make believe the water's running in the shower or something.

For our part up here, we can smile at least once per service, and that includes me.

Last Saturday night I laughed and suffered my way through the TV replay of Cecil B. DeMille's "Samson and Delilah" - I urge you not to miss it the next time round. But I thought later about the greater significans, beauty and religion in two current films - "Easy Rider" and "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid" - because they speak the truth, and Victor Mature and Hedy Lamarr just didn't get their message across as well. But the scene where Samson destroys the temple was great.

One further comment in defense of truth. At a New York church a few years back the pastor had a traditional habit of

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welcoming the congregation with a brief and direct greeting: NEVER FEEL A STRANGER HERE. It took a representative from the choir to explain to him that perhaps his choice of words might be improved upon.

In closing, as they say, I urge us all to take more advantage of one another - we should bring our talents into this building; not only for boutiques, auctions and endless committee meetings, but creative talents for creative action. And that includes both men and women. THIS is the hour that needs your attention. Our communion can be filled with homemade bread and homemade wine. Some in the Catholic church are going underground to find salvation, but we have a chance to develop and unite right here. And that unity must include the children - all ages - in a greater way in more services. I am sorry when they knock over the flowers and jangle their bells during prayers and sermons, but in the end I rejoice when they are here worshipping with us.

I urge parents, and particularly fathers, to stop putting New York at the bottom of the barrel. It's a mess, I agree, but it's still the closest thing we have to culture in this area, and I feel that when children see that it takes two or three dry Beefeaters to get the town and the train out of your daily system they tend to get as discouraged about the city as you are. A major part of our salvation lies in paintings, music and drama - not only hockey, football and boat shows. We need to become more involved with the arts in this church.

When my young friend here with the do-it-yourself pants played in church awhile ago for the first time, I was concerned that his appearance might disturb the gray-flannel brigade of undertakers who receive your offering each week. (I might add that many of them are close friends, and I love them all dearly.) But then I noticed that Marc here was wearing a fresh-clean, home-ironed shirt and I decided that he was really dressing up. I'm almost sure that I will always wear a jacket and tie to any church service anywhere, but I don't think either of the Brooks Brothers will be at the pearly gates to defend me on the day of judgment.

Before pollution became fashionable, Associate Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas was a leading conservationist. He has always been that and much more. I recommend strongly his new book, Points of Rebellion. I know he has been called a Communist, and his marital activities have been interesting. I think he married a pretty girl one-third his age recently. But I get the feeling that some people are jealous because there seems to be a little more life in the William Douglasses and Joseph Fletchers, and jealous also because they say what they think out of deep conviction.

In closing, just a couple of more points. We are a nation that sits in front of that magic box every night taking in dreadful statistics about a seemingly endless war. And thirty seconds later we learn how to be totally safe with the best

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deodorant. After awhile you begin to wonder if the guys in Vietnam use Ban, Secret or Right Guard before they begin their daily rounds.

But all is not lost; we can work, we can laugh, we can sing - and life can still be filled with respect and good taste. And remember you can never force joy - there's nothing worse than artificial happy-happy people.

Our anthem this morning is one way to celebrate. It could just as well be Bach or Brahms, a hymn, or just a time for silence.

When man is troubled he moans and cries. When he is happy he smiles and sings and sometimes he dances. The trouble is, I think, sometimes we moan around here when we're happy. It's time to move forward in the name of the Lord - Father, Son and Holy Spirit, world without end, Amen. Or as one writer puts it: in the name of one circus, three rings, forever and ever. Hooray!

Today is Alice's 87th birthday, and if she were physically present she would insist we move this whole event outdoors into the fresh air. She adored plain good fresh air and a day like this, which is also our parents' 72nd wedding anniversary, would be special for Alice, as it is for all of us.

In looking back on Alice's life I feel it is very important to remember what a great cook and homemaker she was. Her home - a beautiful apartment in Jackson Heights - was her castle, always spotlessly clean and prepared for her husband, our small family and guests. We knew both our grandmothers, but our grandfathers both died before Howard and I were born. From this point on I must refer to my aunts as "the girls" because that was their title, and we were "the boys" - and probably when I climb into my pine box they will just say "one of the boys is gone." They had nicknames: Alice was Jim; my Mother was Snowball; Gertrude was Mutt; one of the others was Fussy Fried Chops' and we can't remember the other name.

In the old days, as they say, we would always have Christmas dinner at our house. My mother was also a fabulous cook and the girls and Grandma would come out from the city to East Orange, or, later, Upper Montclair by train or bus, with their beloved turnips in a shopping bag, already cooked and ready for warming. No one else liked turnips and I still don't. And then at New Year's we would make the reverse trip and travel to Jackson Heights and Alice's apartment for a festive New Year's dinner.

Gertrude bought a car one year - a beautiful grey Plymouth for \$895 - and they used to travel around Westchester and Connecticut on weekends. But the car really sat in a garage unused a great deal of the time, so that was the end of that. We had lots of fun at Christmas. Ed Hogan, who was a CPA, and my father, who was a stockbroker, were good friends and talked stocks whenever they met. And Alice and Ed used to come out to Jersey for a weekend every now and then, and actually my grandmother died on a visit to our house.

I will move forward to the time when most of you had contact with my aunts. They loved this church and the Choral Society concerts, and it often became a package deal - Richard and his aunts. As they got older they depended on the kindness of strangers, and those strangers were most of you. When I was housesitting at the Clarks one winter a few years ago they all came up for Christmas and they stayed at the Clarks overnight. I slept at the Williams that night - and I left the four of them laughing and calling from room to room, bed to bed, the way it used to be. They remembered Grandma's calling out "girls be quiet and go to sleep" when the talking and laughing and giggling got out of hand. You can imagine five girls between the ages of one and nine growing up under one roof. And they always kept their senses of humor. With failing eyesight, Dorothy said she could still tell a one-dollar bill from a ten-dollar bill, and she gave me the key ring for my car - it's labeled Mafia staff car.

You will never know how much joy you brought them through the years as you opened your hearts and homes to this lively band of ladies - and they could recite chapter and verse of each comment and remember every item of food all the way home, and I can still hear one say, "Girls, did you notice the dress that Sallie was wearing" as if the others hadn't!" They were lively - and intelligent and interesting, if often a tad prejudiced. When I was growing up and listening to them through those early years I used to think that

all of the world's problems could be solved if we could just get rid of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, plus a few others of different color or religious persuasion. Those were difficult days for Howard and me - and actually my parents and our side of the family were more liberal. But we must remember that they grew up in a lovely Jackson Heights neighborhood when they could go to the store and the city and leave the door open, and they saw it change into the drug capital of this area. But they did mellow - I think the Holocaust and John Kennedy's death had something to do with that - and they met Seth McCoy and Cynthia, and I used to say, "Well, you know they're black" - and they would always look astonished and say, "Oh, but they're different." They wondered why Seth hadn't married Cynthia and Jake married Jane. I told them maybe they couldn't tell black from white. They got the message and tolerance crept in.

Alice and the girls really loved America. They loved New York, and knew it far better than I ever will. They were in the city constantly, both when they were working there and later on. Those were the days of meeting under the clock at the Biltmore, followed by whiskey sours. They could also name the most pleasant and cleanest ladies' rest rooms on the whole east side. They loved music - Verdi's *Traviata* and Puccini's *Boheme* were favorites - and Howard and I certainly have Dorothy to thank for our love of opera. There are many memories - but the strongest is commitment and love of family. This is a sheet I found in Alice's apartment after Dorothy died, and as you know two among many traits I inherited from my aunts are stubbornness and a great ability to save everything. I am a direct descendant. This sheet reads, in part - "NOTICE!!! The person living in this apartment is Mrs. Alice Hogan" - it goes on to relate the care and medicines she should receive, and it closes - "Call us in any situation or emergency!!! We are her sisters - she must be treated with kindness."

These last five and a half years at the King Street Nursing Home were not easy for Alice and sometimes she was not easy to deal with. There were good days and bad days. She missed her sisters greatly and really missed her own home. But she retained her beauty and she loved your visits. I miss her. I miss them all.

I thank you for being here, and for your care of my family and me, and I thank the ministers who looked in on Alice and talked with her, and particularly Thomas who was at the cemetery three months ago.

At the conclusion of the service, after John's postlude, I hope you will come to the lounge for champagne or cranberry juice and hot and cold hors d'oeuvres, the food that Alice loved most. You will also discover some pictures on the tables that date back through the years, including a picture of our aunt Myrtle, whom you never knew. There's a lovely picture of Alice from distant days, plus some fairly recent ones. And there is a stunning picture of my mother with Howard. It sits on the table that Howard and I gave to the church after her death. So Happy Birthday, Alice! - may you all be resting in peace and joy! - five girls still laughing and calling from room to room.

18 April 1994
Richard Vogt

May we join our hearts and minds together in prayer...

Dear Lord, once again we gather in your house for a time of praise and worship. We thank you for this day and every day for the blessings of the land, for the sights and the smells of it...for the sun and the rain, and the wind that churns up the surf...for the harvests of food and flowers. We offer so little and you give us so much. May we always be mindful of our manifold blessings. Make us remember those millions in other lands who enjoy none of our riches. Let us work to bring "live aid" to them, whenever and wherever possible.

In these summer days let us be particularly alert to the needs and care of children and animals. Protect them from too much sun. Watch over our children when they swim and when they travel to distant places. Make us remember to give the birds and animals enough water. Bless all the beasts and children...keep them cool...give them shelter in the storms.

We thank you this day for our ministers and those who sing in our choir and play our organ...we thank you for great voices...we thank you for John (Daniecki)...and especially this day we welcome our friend and preacher Ann (Suzedell)...and we think about Thomas (Stiers) in distant lands. Keep him safe and sound, and bring him back full of great words and stories. Protect all our church family wherever they may be this day...even the winter Christians whom we don't see too often...we summer and winter Christians love you all.

We think about those in hospitals and in homes who are sick...those who need our care and support...those who are lonely and feel unloved. We pray for them, and especially those who live with diseases for which there is little or no help. May your power invade their hearts...may your hands lift their spirits...may they find some peace in mind and body.

We ask your special blessing on those who guide our nation, on our President and his family, and especially now grant him good rest and recuperation...and always turn his mind and our minds to paths of peace and justice. Let us work to promote the absence of war and terrorism...the end of guns and giant weapons of destruction...let our stockpiles be of flowers and our silos filled with food. We remember our friend Herman Reissig and his constant vigil in the peaceable kingdom. Let us honor Herman by continuing his thoughts and lively ways...let us twinkle and growl like Herman when the need is there.

Keep us careful of one another...keep us careful of the land and water...fill our minds with clear thinking...for we live in your world without end...as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be...to your glory, and in the name of one who came to save us...who came to preach your word...even Jesus Christ our Lord, our only mediator and advocate. Amen.

Richard Vogt
28 July 1985

Let us join our hearts in prayer...

Dear Lord, we gather in your house on this summer Sunday, a place set aside to your praise and worship, a place where we can remember who we are and what we are about...a place where we can seek peace of mind...a place where the sound of music dwells...a home away from home.

We who live with quantities of cooling water and air-conditioned spaces would remember those less fortunate, that majority of the world for whom a hut is a home and water a precious commodity. We think about the tragedy of South Africa, the years of oppression now catching up with the times. Those times they are a-changin', and we would and should reach out to those people restless for justice. We would turn the hearts of their oppressors. We would let their good Bishop continue to speak words to clear the air of violence...and just as Jesus was an activist, we would be activists for peace and justice in that world. Activists also for our threatened environment; activists for the control of guns and other weapons. In this week which brought so many shattering reminders of two bombs that changed the course of history, we ask where have all the flowers gone, the flowers of the spirit...have they been replaced with 50,000 warheads...we think not...we hope not. For we remember that we are children of a great good God. We are followers of the prince of peace..or should be.

In these hot humid days we seek your protection of those most central and beautiful in our lives, those who need our special care...our children; those who are sick among us at home or in hospitals; those who walk alone, feeling unloved. Protect them all, and please keep track of the animals...wagging tails that ask only for love and water.

Remember our ministers this day. Bless and protect Robert Croskery and his family, and shelter our friend Thomas wherever he may be. Keep us alert. Keep us alive to troubles around us. But let us not miss the joys of summer, the joys of people having good times together; 'tis our gift to be simple; 'tis your gift that made us free; 'tis a gift to come down where we ought to be.

Protect our President and guide him and our nation in the ways of peace. Let our country be light and strength to the poor and those who live without hope. Let food and "live aid" replace warheads. May we, the air-conditioned people, help those caught up in the heat of hunger and misery. With your help we can change the world...for we must never forget that it is not Ronald Reagan or Mikhail Gorbachev or Francois Mitterand or Margaret Thatcher or Louis Rukeyser who controls this world...Jesus, who calls us o'er the tumult of a restless sea, reminds us by constant example that a greater power exists, and that that power's got the whole world in His hands...He's got the fish of the sea in His hands...He's got the tiny little baby in His hands...She's got the whole world in Her hands. And now, may the deep peace of Christ, your Son, our Saviour, the light of the world, be with us all. Amen.

Richard Vogt
11 August 1985

May we join our minds and hearts in prayer. I invite you to pray with your eyes wide open, if you wish...to focus your thoughts on a concept, an object, or a person, either in this special place, or in your life away from here...something which to you signifies the presence of God in your life.

Lord, once again we gather in your house to do honor and praise to the glory of your name. We do this with words and music, with a voice of singing, in prayers and bright sounds. We ask your blessing on those who speak and sing and make mighty noises. We hope our efforts may in some ways prove worthy.

As we have seen in the world this week, we realize that we do not need Greenpeace ships sunk or wars and weapons to make life miserable on earth. We have seen what havoc a great force of nature can wreak in an instant...thousands of lives changed and shattered. Our hearts reach out to the Mexican people in these days of their calamity and sorrow...A people blessed with colorful traditions have seen their earth rise up and overwhelm them. Help the Mexicans regain their lives. Keep us aware of our responsibilities: let us go there with food, clothing and dollars. God, please bless and comfort Mexico.

Our days remain so wondrous free. Summer slips into fall and we will soon marvel at the myriad colors of a changing creation. While we exist in such great comfort, let us never fail to listen to voices that make waves...to prophets and preachers whose ideas go against the grain. In our comfortably carpeted sanctuary, where even the sound of music is muffled, shatter our complacency with clear, lively thoughts. Herman Reissig said "be young all your life and say things to the world that are true...do not muffle your words." I say, let us dare to be different.

Our thoughts are continually invaded with reminders from South Africa. Desmond Tutu has said: "I have no doubt that one day we will all, black and white, be free; for God made us for freedom." Let that day come through those leaders of non-violence who grace that nation.

At home, in our town, we should think about the cold days ahead and the need for shelter...shelter for the homeless, food for the animals, and mittens for small hands. Lord, you give the great commission: heal the sick and preach the Word, lest the Church neglect its mission, and the Gospel go unheard.

Unstop our ears, dear Lord. Open our eyes to glory. Help us witness to your purposes with renewed integrity. Keep us alert. For we know that in your Son, our Saviour, is our great comfort and joy. Wherever there is injustice, Jesus Christ is there; wherever there is the pain of cancer, Jesus Christ is there; wherever there is famine, Jesus Christ is there; wherever one suffers with AIDS, Jesus Christ is there; wherever there is an earthquake, Jesus Christ is there; wherever there is a church that practices what it preaches, Jesus Christ is there. "Jesus Christ, first and last, no man works like him."

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We ask your blessing and protection for our great land. Guide our leaders and especially our President. Keep his vision clear and his heart uplifted. Let justice roll down like water and righteousness like a mighty stream...for what else is there?

Lord, you have said you would prepare a banquet for all the nations of the world, a banquet of the richest food and the finest wine. You have said you would suddenly remove the cloud of sorrow that has been hanging over the nations. You have said you would destroy death forever. You have said you would wipe away the tears suffered throughout the world. You have said that. And we say: here we are; let us help. Amen.

Richard Vogt
22 September 1985

PASTORAL PRAYER

The following was delivered by Richard Vogt on Sunday, November 9, 1986, as the Pastoral Prayer during the Worship Service:

Dear Lord...we have gathered once again in a house that we hold special... a place set aside to your glory...a place where we are part of a vast family of Christians...those who seek to follow Christ.

This day we rejoice at the beauty of the land on a misty day. The rains came, and they brought some relief and nourishment...and we have a newly-washed world, and another carpet of beautiful, annoying leaves.

We dwell in a tiny corner of your world. It is a corner blessed for most of us...full of comfort...full of food...full of play. May we ever be grateful for these our manifold blessings. Do we deserve them? Only you can say. But let us at least give thanks and reach out...reach out to a world in distress that often lives at our doorstep...a world where food and comfort are rarely found...a world where guns grow instead of flowers...a world that permits guns to grow instead of flowers.

As a holiday season draws near, let us never forget that the homeless in our midst could be housed and fed at the cost of a few nuclear weapons. Let us never forget that a baby seal is far more precious than a fur coat. Let us never forget that there is sickness and suffering enough without the presence of war...or thoughts of war. Let our stockpiles be of candy canes.

We remember this day the sick, especially those elderly who are confined to places not their own...those who suffer terrible diseases as cancer and AIDS, which seem to thrive with little hope of cure. We would comfort these people and somehow convey your strength. We think of those who have suffered accidents, whose lives were changed in a split second. Heal their bodies and ease their pain...and let us be bearers of glad tidings to help them along the way.

We must always remember two special gifts that invade our lives every day... the gifts of children and animals. Let the children keep laughing, and let us still be caught up short at their joy in simple things, simple gifts. Let the animals be cared for and protected...watched over by us, especially in the cold days ahead. Let mittens and dog biscuits be ever at the ready. Keep the children...keep the animals...safe and warm.

We think about the lonely and unloved among us...those who depend on the kindness of strangers...let each one of us be that stranger...let each one of us be a hand at the elbow when it's needed.

We thank you for our ministers and all those who labor on your behalf to bring comfort and guidance to those in need. We thank you for those who sing and make joyful noise with voices and instruments. We pray for our President and all who seek to guide our nation. Let their justice roll down like water, and their righteousness like a mighty stream.

And now we remember families and friends, those whose love supports us at every turn...those who often make life bearable. Bless them all, and somehow bless us, too. But hold a mirror up...a mirror that continually searches our lives...that our work reflect honesty and integrity...that our hands be busy at peace...that our hearts be open to contrary opinions...and let the laughter in.

We pray in the name of a great healer...an activist...a Maker...a Redeemer... a Defender...a guide...a stay...a friend...a concept...a vision...a home... even Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Richard Vogt
November 1986

Let us pray...let us pray with our heads raised or lowered...with our eyes open or closed...but with all hearts and minds on alert.

Dear Lord...we gather in your house once again...(a clear, crisp day)...to glorify your name...to sing and speak your praise...to renew our strength. We sit here a privileged people...rich and happy in things...but often homeless in soul and spirit. We seek Jesus.

We ask your guidance and help with the myriad problems that inhabit our world...problems often of our own devising. We are children of our time..."it is winter...and the world turns on its dark side." Do we want peace?...or do we revel in the activity and profits of war...we who sit untouched...in clean comfort. We seek Jesus.

Once again we are caught up in the mystery and misery of politics, this costly game we play with too much money and too little sense. Shatter our complacency...our acceptance of the mediocre...the invocation of your name by would-be leaders.

We know that you are the comfort where we are the idle...your hand is in the hand of a nurse or doctor...your eyes are in the flowers...your heart is in the child...your touch keeps an animal warm and a bird on the wing...and we must be your continual helpers. We would comfort the hospice patient...we would ease the pain of the AIDS sufferer...we would reach out and throw the guns away and plant flowers on the crest of a wave. We seek Jesus...and we know that we invoke his name to make us seem like Christians. Is Jesus the disturbed person at the check-out counter? Would we be content with Jesus if he appeared right now?...or would we question his dress and his words. Is Jesus here, or is he busy with the homeless and the hungry? Should we be busier with the homeless and the hungry?...and put our money there, where there is no family life? We sit and wonder. We sit.

We would comfort Dan Jansen and his family...and like him, we rise again...we try again. We would comfort William Higgins and his family, and all those who remain hostages, shut away from life. We are all the fallen...we are all hostages. Would we sell our goods and feed the poor? We seek Jesus.

We ask your special blessing on Thomas and Sally and those who travel and worship with them this day in a distant land. Keep them safe and sound...soon to return to us. Bless our President and keep him alert to the calls for peace and justice...to the call from Rome...(late as it may be)...for awareness and an end to a race toward destruction. We seek Jesus. And we know that we can all be Olympic in spirit and mind...our gold is in the sky...if we unloose the chains that bind us...if you will save us from our wanton madness...if we will save ourselves from our wanton madness and dare speak out against injustice wherever it appears...for we are the guilty. So let us rise up...get up again...gather our wings and soar...leave behind this wasteland of guns and prejudice and fly with the wind...for Jesus rides

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on that wind...he lives in the heart of a starving child...he stands near the lonely and those who feel unloved...he is the gold of our spirit...he is the light in our darkness...his voice is the sound of the sweet dulcimer...he is the center of our souls...he is the caretaker of our hearts...he is the wonder in our minds...we would bask in the smile of his face...for he is the source of all peace...he is our hope and stay...he is our shield and strength...he is Jesus...a focus for our Lent...a path toward Easter through the shadows of death...a concept for all seasons.

O God, who stretched the spangled heavens...stretch us...now...right now.

Richard Vogt
...pastoral prayer,
Sunday, 21 February 1988

Let us pray...

Dear Lord, once again we gather in your house to praise and glorify your name. We come to you a blessed and privileged people. We rejoice in the land. We rejoice in the rain...the rains came, and revived our drooping flowers, our drooping spirits.

We come to you with hearts and minds waiting for action, waiting for a vision, waiting for the right moment...and then we realize that the vision is within us and the moment is at hand. Where there is no vision a people, a church, a government perishes. Let us treasure our visions and let go of the cobwebs of our minds. Let us reach out.

We come to you with a world on the brink of long and lasting peace. What shall we do if peace breaks out? Suddenly we can deal with bodies and not bombs...with the homeless and with AIDS...with the elderly and the sick...and those homeless are at our Stamford doorstep...and that AIDS sufferer is at Greenwich Hospital...and the numberless elderly are in overbooked and costly nursing homes here in Greenwich. Suddenly we can deal with the arts...with the freedom of the arts, and with those who would take away that freedom...with the land and the environment...with children...we can take time to look at one another...to lend a hand...to offer help. You, God, have blessed air-conditioned Greenwich, and it is now up to Greenwich to bless and help the un-air-conditioned poor and sick.

In these hot days let us not forget the children and the strength of the sun...let us not neglect water for birds and dogs and cats and an extra pat on the head. Keep us cool of mind.

This day we bless our President and all who lead and direct our nation...and we give special thanks for two men whose lives made a difference in our midst...Karl Menninger and William Brennan...and let us not forget Mikhail Gorbachev...for it is that lively solitary figure who had changed the path of our destiny...who has lifted the hearts of nations everywhere...who has been the catalyst for change everywhere. Let us race to catch up with his vision...and thank you, God, for him.

Thank you, God, for all men and women who lead in new directions...who take the bull by the horns and drag us kicking and screaming to a higher level of life. Thank you, God, for these prophets...and sometimes they are children.

And we who walk easily this day...we would remember the sick and elderly and unloved among us...the lonely souls...those who need a phone call or a flower. May the pain of those in hospitals and

(continued)

nursing homes be eased somehow, even for a moment. God bless the doctors and nurses and aides who make life easier for them and for us.

And so here we are...hazy hot and humid people trying somehow to be better. God help us along that road...for it is a road strewn with flowers...it is a path made great by many before us...it is a path that pulls us up...that leads to a greater glory...it is a winding road...sometimes fraught with danger...with indecision and inaction...but the light...your light...is the beacon that draws us through the night...the long nights of difficulty and despair...and the carefree days of playing and sitting in the shade...we long for the light...we are children reaching out for the light, for your help...for we know that the light in the distance is you, the light of the world...and we play in that light...this day...right now. Amen.

Richard Vogt
22 July 1990

Let us join our hearts and minds together in prayer...

Dear Lord...once again we gather in your house to praise and glorify your name, and to renew and refresh our summer spirits. We have loved the sun but we have revelled and rejoiced in the rain. We need the rain to make your land vital again; we need the voice of the turtle and the songs of birds at daybreak.

We ask your blessing this day on those who are shut away from this world, those who feel unwanted or unloved. We hope this cool day and caring hands can help them along rocky roads. Let those caring hands be our hands.

We ask your blessing on our children, those who are small and trusting. Let us guard them from the hot sun and keep them cool. We remember the animals, and their need for water and shade. Bless all the beasts and the children, wherever they may be.

This day we ask your blessing on our President; keep him alert to life - to good life, but more importantly to poor life, to homeless life, to life with AIDS, to life with despair, to life in a nursing home...make him content with his good works but make him, and all of us, uncomfortable with complacency, for we live with the constant knowledge of what can be in this country...this rich, vast nation that is our happy heritage... we are the privileged few of this planet...but in our Father's house there are many mansions; there is room, there is space, there is a dwelling-place for each person...we would reach out to those sorrowful faces, we would wash and clothe them...for therein lies our salvation...it is not in oil or guns...but in service to man and woman, girl and boy...our salvation is in good works, if we dare but look and speak out against this sea of troubles around us...

We ask your blessing on our distant pastors, Tom and Brenda, and Sally, and on Brigitta here at home...bring her safely and happily to motherhood. We ask your blessing on those who have journeyed from distant places to help us bless your name this day...blessings on Cynthia, Jake and Quinton.

This day and every day keep us aware of our land, this incredible gift that we so often take for granted. We are but transient tenants in this house you have named earth. With Henry Beston, we would hold our hands out over it as over a flame...we would touch the earth, love the earth, honour the earth...her plains, her valleys, her hills and her seas. For the gifts of life are the earth's...dawn seen over ocean from the beach...

Bless us, Lord... forgive us... comfort us...guide us....help us catch the vision of your peace...help us catch the vision of your love...for we sheep pray in the name of the shepherd in our midst, even Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Richard Vogt/Pastoral Prayer, 28 July 1991

*The following is the text from
Richard Vogt's Pastoral Prayer given
on Sunday, April 23, the National
Day of Mourning for the victims of
the bombing in Oklahoma City.*

Let us pray... Dear Lord, we come before you on this day a disillusioned people...our Easter joy has given way to grief...and the triumph of Christ's resurrection has been overwhelmed by so much suffering in the heart of our country...and the children, oh the children...it is difficult to pray...it is difficult to seek solace...sometimes we think we have problems and then such a tragedy catches us up...few of us have ever suffered the loss of a child...fewer of us know what it is like to search in rubble for bodies of children and others...we ask your blessing on those who labor in your name to bring about some measure of peace to shattered lives...

Our land of the free and home of the brave has a hollow ring this day...we do protest violence and guns too little...and it boggles our minds that there are still those who would weaken the all-too-lenient gun laws we now have...

What can we do in the face of such tragedy?...we can speak up against violence and guns...we can protest when there is talk against Jews...against Blacks...against Hispanics...against gays...against neighbors...we can love each other...we can pray for each other and our country...and our president...and we ask your grace and blessing on him

and his family as they represent us this day at a time of mourning...there are the cynical who cry politics as usual...but there is a silent majority who believes in goodness and compassion...and the knowledge that his presence can be *our* presence to bear witness of healing to grief-stricken lives...

For we must learn to think positively and somehow create a climate of peace...a climate of Easter...to plant a path of lilies for those who mourn...and seek a band of angels for those who stand at heaven's gate...

My soul, there is a country afar beyond the stars, where stands a winged sentry all skillful in the wars...there above noise and danger sweet peace sits crowned with smiles, and one born in a manger commands the beauteous files...

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John...bless the beds that they lie on...four corners to their beds...four angels round their heads...one to watch and one to pray, and two to bear their souls away...

We know that we shall not see our Easter Jesus in that poor lowly stable with the oxen standing by...we shall see him in heaven...set at God's right hand on high...where like stars his children crowned...all in white shall wait around...I ask that our Amen be a hymn...that we all stand and sing Hymn 361...

*Have faith in God, my soul;
His cross forever stands,
And neither life nor death can pluck
His children from his hands.*

HYMN TO HERMAN

TUNE: TALLIS' CANON

For Herman Reissig, pastor dear,
We gather 'round from far and near.
He is our leader, guide and friend;
Our love for him will never end.

When Herman was a little lad,
His wit made Martin Luther glad.
And Martin said one holy day,
"You sure do have a lot to say."

"You should do well in Old Soundbeach;
They'll surely pay (!) to hear you preach.
But then, you know, there's always Rome;
For you the Pope might leave his home."

So Herman started out on horse
"To Rome," he said, "I'll chart my course."
But soon the Pope said, "Not here, boy,
Just you tell Martin he's a joy!"

So on to Greenwich Old he came,
Since then we've never been the same.
He looks so great, he speaks so well,
He gives us brimstone, fire and hell!

We gather of a Sunday morn
To hear a sermon, newly-born,
Some think, at times, he talks too long,
As darkness falls he's going strong!

In Florence he has a loving wife,
So beautiful and full of life,
But Herman, think, 'midst all this fun
Next year you will be eighty-one!

Still Herman has no sense of age,
He could be twenty all his days,
His mind is clear, his wit is keen,
His voice is strong, he's full of steam!

If Martin could just see him now,
He'd surely say, "Just take a bow."
So in his stead we gather 'round
And let our praises here resound.
Praise God from whom all blessings flow,
Praise Herman Reissig here below,
Praise him above, ye heavenly host,
Praise Herman Reissig, he's the most!

for Herman
with respect
with trust
with affection

18 March 1979

May we join our hearts and minds together in prayer...

Dear Lord...we gather together again in your Meetinghouse to celebrate your name and give thanks for the blessings of our lives. We are a blessed people; teach us to count those blessings that we may go forth and multiply them in good works among people less fortunate than ourselves.

We thank you this day for the life of Daniel, and pray for those closest to him...Julie, Roger and Laura. May your little prophet Daniel be as strong as his prophet ancestor of old; keep him from the lions' den, and fill his days with courage that he may see visions and dream dreams.

And as we look toward warm days filled with sun and water, keep us ever alert and careful of three gifts which we often take for granted: our children, our animals, and our land. Make us constant caretakers.

This day we think about those who are sick and lonely, and those who feel unloved. Be with them, and let each one of us reach out to someone this week in a special way, to convey that peace which passes human understanding. Comfort all those who live in sorrow, and make us the comforters.

We pray this day for peace in our world, and lift up the names of those who work and struggle for peace. Make us capable of building a network not of missiles but of love; not of weapons but of trust, for we live in the knowledge of one who said, blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons and daughters of God.

May we go all go forth this day in celebration of all life, a young Daniel and all creatures great and small. We rejoice this day. Make us happy Christians, for we pray in the name of Jesus Christ who taught us to pray....Our father....

May we gather our hearts and minds together in prayer...
Dear Lord, once again we gather in your house, your summer house, our Meetinghouse - a place special in our lives, a heaven-haven. We rejoice this day in our myriad blessings, and we thank you for them. We are free and alive to praise your name, and blessedly we can't do a thing about the weather.

This day we remember those who came before us, those men, women and children - names and lives who made a new England, who brought their faith to clean shores, to a green land.
This day we remember the sick and helpless among us, those shut away from life's pleasures, who live with pills and prescriptions and pain. We would reach out to those people. We would stretch out our hands as your ministers of mercy. We would suffer with them and not just look on.

This day we would ask your special care of the children and the animals. Watch over them during these hot summer days. Shade them, keep them cool. Let us remember to leave water in the bird bath and water for wagging tails. Refresh those who must labor these days on their toilsome way.

Many of us do just look on. We look on this universe which you created; the waters, the dry land, the living creatures, the sun and the moon, the fruit trees. Our mornings break, and we find a littered land and play games with the environment. We interfere with you. We do not lift up our voices in protest. We go with the drift; rather missiles than the environment; rather guns than a cure for AIDS. Our priorities are ungodly.

We ask that somehow you make us aware. Shatter our complacency. Make us strong to stand up against a mindless majority. Dare us to make a difference.

We come upon this four-year cycle of games where we must find a leader, but we know that much of the vision must be in our hearts. The change must come in us. We sit by and watch when we should be standing tall and crying out. We would ask your blessing on those who do lead us in our town and in our country. Grant them wisdom. Grant them courage. And perhaps 100 years from now, someone will record an oral history of Greenwich 1988. And in 2088 he could say: "Ah, those were the days; that was a turning point; the country got hold of a vision, and it wouldn't let go. It was a vision for all the people. The leaders took stock, and they moved for change. Our shores became clean once again; our air became clear; thousands were arrested for illegal acts that worked against the environment; strangers said hello to one another on the street in the evenings; the homeless were cared for, and housing was built for them and those others who could not afford too much. It was an era of peace.

America became more interested in simple gifts, and in this town there was a church near a beautiful park. You can still see it. That church became the center for good. They reached out to the

homeless there. They set up an AIDS awareness group. They got off their tails and really did something about things that mattered. There was an awareness of the arts; the seeds for our arts center were planted that year.

They remembered Robert Kennedy's words, 'Some see things as they are, and say why. I dream things that never were, and say why not.' They returned to God, and I think we felt refreshed and forgiven because we caught sight of ourselves, and we didn't like what we saw, so we changed direction. It was a thrilling time. We spent our money wisely, and the town moved forward. It led the way; and that church became a vital place. Oh, sure, there were disagreements, but the truth always kept us free and open. Ah, those were the days. Now we just enjoy what they started then. Some of those names you'll remember. They made a difference. They were real leaders; for their lives were centered in truth, and they heeded the word of God, never ceasing. Those people were a fount for many blessings; they were streams of mercy. They were not afraid to speak out. They moved ahead of their times. Ah, those were the days."

Amen.

Summer 1988

May we join our hearts and minds together in prayer.

Dear Lord, we have journeyed to your house once again to praise your name and to seek grace and comfort. Our lives are so wondrous free, and the land reflects that freedom, filled with myriad colors, filled with piles of falling and annoying leaves, and soon waiting and watching for a clean, white blanket. The land is yours, and we are guests. Soon the birds will fly south; they need no reservations - the land is theirs.

This day we would remember those in our lives, in our church, who are living with sadness; those who feel unloved and unmoved by the beauty of a new day. We think about the sick, those who are slow in body and mind, whose spirits falter. We would quicken those souls. We would quicken those spirits. We say reach out...but do we reach out? Do we work at your work, or do we leave it to you? Do we comfort the sad and the sick, do we push away the thought of AIDS and those who suffer behind closed doors? Make us open those doors; open the doors of our hearts; unlock our pre-set computer minds.

We think about children and how we treat children -these greatest gifts to our lives- and how some take them so for granted. We think about animals; those great invaders of our hearths and homes who sleep 22 hours a day and expect food and love during those two waking moments. And they deserve it. To abuse a child is to abuse dear God. To abuse an animal is to abuse you. In these weeks and months ahead, when we retreat to warmth and an over-abundance of food, let us remember the children; let us remember the animals; mittens and dog biscuits, and love - always love.

Our nation is disturbed. Our mistakes are coming back to haunt us. We seek peace, and we plan for war. We build bigger houses with more gadgets, and then fret when we can't meet margin calls. But the homeless don't care about Dow Jones, and perhaps if we and our nation cared more for the homeless and the hungry and the arts that feed the soul, Dow Jones would take care of itself. We ask your guidance for our President and those who work with him. Keep him alert to the task of peace and good will. Keep him safe and sound of mind and open his heart.

We are in this world to make it a better place for all. We shouldn't be afraid to break the rules and speak out when there is a need. Let us not be token Christians. We remember those who stood up in history; we honor with holidays those who made a difference. We can be people like that, with your help and guidance. We can stand tall and make loud noises for peace and justice. The prophet has said that the work of righteousness is peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever. Are we righteous, or self-righteous? We can be saints. We can be angels.

We thank you for freedom. We ask your blessings on those countries who do not enjoy what we accept too easily. We thank you for food and shelter. Let us work to bring these benefits to all our people, to all your world. Let us put our food and money where our hearts are, for we will fade away, if we do not heed your call: rise up shepherds and follow...there is a star in the East...get ready, time is short. Leave those sheep, work at love. There's really nothing else that lasts, is there?

We pray in the name of Christ, whose glory fills our skies. Amen.