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The Pastor's Diary:

Whew! I'm relieved to see 2011 fade into oblivion. The older you get the more you see and experience. Likewise, you begin to realize that some years tend to be better than others. 2011 was not my favorite year for a variety of reasons. One, family health issues predominated. My mother's stroke stands out along with my own heart issues (medication is a good thing!), etc. etc. Also, we started out the year with 4 beings under our roof and ended with 2. Zoe went to dog heaven in February and Brian joined her in early December. Both were sad events. Of course, to top it off during the Christmas preparations Hans Ostrand died unexpectedly and since it was unattended in his home, the state medical examiner has had to do their "thing" and later in January it appears a memorial service/funeral will be held for him here at church. Then there was the autumn of "tradesmen galore" putting in the gas pipeline and new furnaces. It chewed up huge amounts of my time, turned out well, but I'm really glad it's all done....

However, 2012 promises to be an exciting and positive year! Over the past few weeks we've been busy getting ready for a new puppy: Victoria Miranda Straw Fox, who will be known as: Tori. I'll tell you personally why her important-sounding name if you ask me, but she is also a wheaten Scottie, 7 months old, and a sweetheart. Like Brian, she is coming from Tennessee, so we expect her to be genteel. Puppies make me smile. They lighten my heart. As I type this I'm grinning! Life is looking up. And, and, we made it through December without any snow—hooray times two! By the way, Brian still may write a newsletter column from heaven on occasion, but Tori will take over that task on a monthly basis—so the kids will have something to peruse.

In the midst of a tough year God got us through it all. My mother continually said throughout the years that: "The Lord is good." She still gets the gist of that phrase out now, even after her stroke. But, it's true. He **is** good. He loves us in Christ. He never gives us more than we can handle on an emotional/spiritual level. He provides daily blessings of the earthly kind if we but open our eyes to see them. And He uses the trials we endure to make us stronger and to refine our faith.

My prayer for the new year is that He give us more joy than sadness and a light-heartedness to smile more, laugh more, and celebrate blessings more. That process began in earnest with a lovely, Christ-centered Christmas and uplifting church services. Since He "cares for me" I know that will continue. I'm more aware of my blessings today than I was one year ago before the roof sort of caved in. That's a really good place to be.....Happy New Year!