

Christmas 2004
Special Edition

The EXCEL Voice



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Merry Christmas from your Executive Committee!

“EXCEL
International De
Colores celebrates
God’s Love
throughout the
world by providing
tools to ignite
spiritual growth”

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Your Executive Committee would like to take this opportunity to wish you a very Merry Christmas and a blessed and prosperous 2005. We would like introduce ourselves. Your EC is here for you and we want to be the most accessible Executive Committee in the history of Excel International. John Fiscus is the chair, and is the regional rep for the *Two Steppers and Excel of the Rainbow Eagle*. John can be reached at bookbear@houstonrr.com, Ralph Wysong is the treasurer and is regional rep for *Excel in the Rockies and Excel in the Southland’s*. Ralph can be reached at raw548@aol.com. Karla Oliver is the clerk and the regional rep for *Excel travelers east and Excel of the Rainbow Zebra*. Karla can be reached at MISSYCHARM03@YAHOO.COM. Dan Lykins is the information coordinator and is the regional rep for *Excel Travelers West and Excel of the Lamb*.

Dan can be reached at excelintherockies@yahoo.com. Rebecca Sylvester is a member at large and is the regional rep for *Excel of the Midlands and Excel of the Armadillo*. Trudie Barreras is a member at large and is the regional rep for *Regio Excel, Excel in the Redwoods and Maui Excel*. Trudie can be reached at barreras@msm.edu. Mary Jones is a member at large and is the regional rep for *Rocky Mountain Excel in Faithfulness and Excel in Faithfulness Abunchovum*. Mary can be reached bethzj@yahoo.com. Eric Strom is the Web servant and Director of the Excel Prayer Ministry. Eric can be reached at elstrom99@yahoo.com. Jerry Reitz is the Historian and can be reached at coasterguy@houston.rr.com. We are here for you! If you need anything, just let us know!!

Your Executive Committee



Left to Right

Bekah Sylvester, member at large, Dan Lykins, Information Coordinator, Karla Oliver, Clerk, Ralph Wysong, Treasurer, Trudie Barreras, member at large, John Fiscus, Chair, Mary Jones, member at large.
Not pictured: Jerry Reitz, Historian. Eric Strom, Web servant





Mr. Ralph Whysong
Treasurer Excel
International

*"I made a promise
to Jesus many
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in anyway he
needed me"*

Ralph's Journey

My name is Ralph Whysong I attended my first Excel weekend in the fall of 1977 in the beautiful coastal town of Santa Barbara California. I had a wonderful experience and this experience totally changed my life. I was a young man of just nineteen years of age. My Pastor- The Rev. Roger Web, was the person who insisted that "I must attend" this weekend exercise. Excel gave me several gifts that have traveled with me in my life's journey ever since. The most important, being able to "Yes" to our God, I saw that I too could serve and be served while learning how to live a life in union with God.

I was a young boy all of nine years of age when I first met our sweet Jesus. Being the product of a divorced alcoholic abusive frustrated father, I found myself in a Baptist Church. It was there that I first heard of what a loving father we had in Heaven! I learned that our Heavenly Father promised me that if I trusted in him that I would always be taken care of and that he would always love me. That was the kind of Father I had always wanted so it was easy for me to love and trust in Jesus. Now I am a middle-aged man and still to this day that childlike faith is very much alive.

I have been a member of U.F.M.C.C. for over

twenty-seven years and was a founding member in Santa Barbara California and also in Sarasota Florida, and am currently a member of M.C.C. of the Redwood Empire located in Sonoma California since 1990. I have served on the Board of Directors more than once. I have served on the "Redwoods Team" two times once in the early eighties for several years and am currently the "Team Director" of said Team for the last two years. I was also a member of the "Excelling in Faithfulness Bay Area" team.

I am proud to be called to serve as a member of the Executive Committee and serve I will. I look forward to sharing my gifts and talents in anyway that I am able. I made a promise to Jesus many years ago that being, that if Jesus would guide me in my life, I would do everything in my power to serve him in anyway he needed me. I feel as though it is God that gave me the courage to say "YES" when asked to serve on the Executive Committee. All I ask from each of you that you keep the Executive Committee and me in your daily prayers and thanks for your confidence.

Ralph can be reached at:
raw5486@aol.com

Upcoming Weekends and Events:

February 17-20 2005

Thursday thru Sunday
Executive Committee Meeting
Location: San Francisco, CA
Contact: excelinfocord@yahoo.com

March 4 – 6 2005

Friday Evening Thru Sunday Afternoon
Suitcase Excel
Location: Johannesburg, South Africa
Contact: coasterguy@houston.rr.com

April 1 – 3 2005

Friday Evening Thru Sunday Afternoon
Excel in Faithfulness Abunchovum
Location: Christian Renewal Center, Dickinson, TX
Contact: turtles13@aol.com

May 20 – 22 2005

Friday Evening Thru Sunday Afternoon
Excel in the Rockies
Location: Colorado Lions Camp, Woodland Park Colorado
Contact: excelintherockies@yahoo.com

June 3 – 5 2005

Friday Evening Thru Sunday Afternoon
National Capital Excel
Location: Mau-Lu Ridge Camp, Brunswick, ME
Contact: KathyGinny@aol.com

July 21 - 26, 2005

MCC World Jubilee & General Conferenc
Calgary, Alberta, Canada

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Advent Reflection Waiting with Joy and Hope

Sometimes it seems as though we spend our lives waiting. Daydreaming about an upcoming vacation, worrying over a medical test, preparing our homes for the holidays —our days are filled with anticipation and anxiety over what the future holds.

As Christians, we too spend our lives waiting. But we are waiting for something much bigger than a trip, bigger even than a social event or a wedding: We are waiting for the return of Jesus in glory. Advent heightens this sense of waiting, because it marks not only our anticipation of Jesus' final coming, but also our remembrance of his arrival into our world more than 2,000 years ago.

Overwhelmed by the demands of the season, we can wait for Jesus in a state of anxiety, or cynicism, or harried indifference toward the miracle that is upon us. Or we can take our cue from the prayer we hear every Sunday and "wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ." Welcoming Jesus into our homes and our hearts, full of hope and joy, prepares us to properly celebrate Jesus' birth and anticipate his return.

The stories of Advent help us strike the right note for our wait: the prophecies of Isaiah and John the Baptist, full of their own stern hope; the pregnancies of Mary and Elizabeth, each as joyous as it is unexpected; the miracles, cures and other signs pointing the way to the Savior. Use these reflections to immerse yourself in the season, and find your own hope and joy along the wait.

First week of Advent: Matt 24: 36-44 This Gospel reading centers on the Second Coming. Some popular books, such as the *Left Behind* series, speculate on what the end of the world might be like. They envision millions of Christians whisked away to heaven, followed by a fervent battle between good and evil. These accounts may be entertaining, but Scripture does not support them. And the fact remains that we don't know what the future holds; we know only that God is good, and that his goodness will prevail in the end. That is why we wait in hope, rather than in fear.

Second week of Advent: Matt 3: 1-12

"'Hope' is the thing with feathers—/that perches in the soul—/and sings the tune without the words /and never stops—at all—." Emily Dickinson's definition of hope captures what many of us have a hard time defining.

Hope is not blind optimism, nor arrogant certainty, nor wishful thinking. Hope, the theme of this week's Gospel, is the knowledge that God would not desert us, that we will endure difficult times to see a better day. Hope gives us the strength to seek peace and demand justice, and to envision the world as God intended it to be.

Third week of Advent: Matt 11: 2-11

This week we light the pink candle in the Advent wreath, signifying joy. Too often we think joy means getting what we want. But consider the joyful mysteries of the rosary—events filled with surprise and often trepidation. Mary didn't ask to become pregnant before marriage, Elizabeth had despaired of conceiving in her old age, and it took a visit from an angel to convince Joseph that things would be OK. Their joy—and ours too—comes not in getting what we want, but in accepting God's will, even when we don't understand it.

Fourth week of Advent: Matt 1: 18-25

The long wait is almost over. Jesus' birth is nearly upon us. As we get closer to the end of a wait, our expectations grow, often into something that can't be fulfilled. We think a new job will solve our problems at home, or moving away will fix a broken heart. Christmas especially gets saddled with unrealistic expectations—perhaps of family togetherness or the perfect gift. Are you doing this to Christ's coming? Are you expecting something of Jesus? Or are you simply waiting to meet him and accept him for who he is?

Christmas

Isaiah 52: 7-10 John 1: 1-14

Hope joyfully. The wait of Advent is over, but the wait for the return of Jesus goes on. As we begin our celebration of Christ's birth, continue to nurture a sense of joyful hope as a Christian anticipating the Second Coming. An active prayer life, regular participation in the sacraments and service to others will help ease the wait. So will our knowledge that the season of Christmas, with its quiet miracle of God become flesh, will one day give way to a Christmas that will last for all eternity.

Dan can be reached at:

Danlykins719@yahoo.com



Mr. Dan Lykins
Information
Coordinator



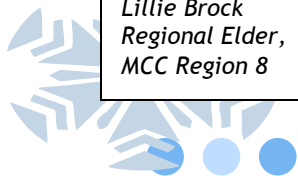


Clergy Corner

The Season of Hope Rev. Elder Lillie Brock



The Rev. Elder
Lillie Brock
Regional Elder,
MCC Region 8



*"In that moment of
"hanging in space," so
many things happen,
terror, silence,
anticipation, wonder,
flight, freedom, fear
and hope"*

This year has been a progression of 11 months that seems void of a particular focus or set of goals. It has been a time when everything that "used to be true" is no longer true. It has been a year in which transition appeared to be the only constant. At times throughout the year I've thought, "OK, it's time to put meat on my job, my life, my spiritual journey! Enough wandering around, you need to find a direction and GO!" But time after time, God has found ways to calm me down and assure me that it is sometimes OK to live in the mystery, in the wonder, in the nothingness.

So here we are, preparing to enter the season of Advent, and finally I'm starting to see that this entire year has been "Advent" for me. I'm reminded of the wonderful little book by Robert Benson titled *Between the Dreaming and the Coming True*. The title alone describes what I believe the season of Advent to be. It is the place where we exist in the "in between" and, most of the time, feel incredibly uncomfortable.

I want to invite us all into this season with a willingness to fully embrace the "in between." I've come to believe through the events and circumstances of this year, that the in between times are perhaps the most rich and hold the most revelation. I've come to understand more fully that I am more

vulnerable to God's love when I'm "hanging out," uncertain about what is ahead. I've grown in my awareness that true change happens most profoundly when I am forced to wait and trust.

The image of the trapeze artist has been a powerful one for me as I move into the official season of Advent so I leave it with you to ponder. In order for the trapeze act to work, the artist must release one bar and "hang in space" for a moment before the next bar swings into position for the artist to grab hold. In that moment of "hanging in space," so many things happen . . . *terror, silence, anticipation, wonder, flight, freedom, fear, and hope...*

What an amazing journey in just one moment! May the spirit of Advent be with you as your dream of new life unfolds from the "in between."

Rev. Elder Lillie Brock is the regional elder MCC Church Region 8 and can be reach at:

RevLillieBrock@MCCChurch.org



"And I will
show you a
more
Excelent
way." I
Corinthians 12:31

2005 All Team Gathering

Location: Navoo, AL

Contact: barreras@msm.edu

September 30 - October 2

Friday Evening Thru Sunday Afternoon

Contact: excelinfocord@yahoo.com

Rocky Mountain Excel in Faithfulness

Location: Colorado Lions Camp,

Woodland Park, Colorado

Contact: excelintherockies@yahoo.com

October 21 - 23 2005

Friday Evening Thru Sunday Afternoon

Excel of the Armadillo Location:

Christian Renewal Center, Dickinson, TX

Contact: turtles13@aol.com

**Don't see your
weekend
listed? Please
send
information to:
[excelinfocord@
yahoo.com](mailto:excelinfocord@yahoo.com)**

News from EXCEL of the Rainbow Zebra

In the Lord's Vineyards Trudie Barreras

This seems to have been a wild and wonderful year for laborers in the Lord's vineyards in what used to be the GLAD District, and is now Region 2. The Excel of the Rainbow Zebra team just presented its 21st retreat since the first weekend in 1994. Excel actually began in this area with a Suitcase Weekend presented by Excel International at Jackson, GA in the spring of 1992, when Brenda Blizzard was the International Director. Two years later, after a long period of preparation involving commutes from Atlanta, GA and Huntsville, AL to Birmingham (our agreed-upon midpoint for training meetings), we were "ready to go". Keith Apple attended our very first weekend as our "evaluator" from Excel International, and also assisted with the music.

Weekend #21 was blessed with over thirty first-time participants and nearly 20 Friends, both first-timers and veterans. We had a gorgeous weekend with lovely Indian summer weather, and God as usual touched us with some splendid miracles. Of very special importance to us in this Region was the fact that our Regional Elder, Dr. Armando Sanchez, attended as a participant. Armando insisted that he wanted to be "just another participant". Having just been in charge of the Regional Conference in Atlanta the weekend before, he believed he needed the rest and time to regroup, taking off any "official hats" he might be wearing. At the end of the weekend, Armando shared with us a glowing report of his experience. He emphasized that he will definitely be considering Excel as a major part of his plan to enhance participation of the laity in churches in Region 2.

Although we were deeply saddened because Rev. David Pettitt of ICM Monterrey was unable to attend our weekend as originally planned due to the tragedy of the illness and death of his friend Alberto, God even brought special blessings out of this. David had been scheduled to be our Spiritual Advisor for the weekend. When we found out, literally at the eleventh hour, that he

could not attend, we were able to persuade one of our own team members to step up to the plate. She has been undergoing a time of crisis herself, and God used this opportunity to reaffirm her own calling. In addition, after the weekend was over, we learned that Sarah, a former team member, had been safely delivered of a baby girl after what was definitely a problem pregnancy. This was especially wonderful, since not only was Sarah on our team, but her mother Beverly had been a team member as well. Beverly went home to God this past spring.

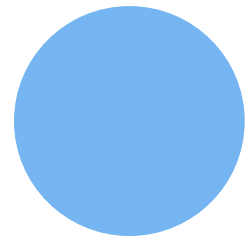
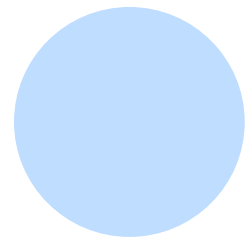
> Preceding the Rainbow Zebra weekend by a month was the fourth Excel in Faithfulness of the Rainbow Eagle weekend. This, too, was a time of blessing and challenge. As a result of various concerns, which surround our team's efforts to be faithful laborers in the Lord's vineyards, we are scheduling a major team retreat for evaluation and decision in January. We have always been a "growing team", and yet have also believed in the importance of stability. Nearly half of the team members at our most recent weekend were participants in the original suitcase weekend in 1992, but the remainders have joined the team since, as graduates of various ERZ weekends over the years. Our primary campsite, Camp McDowell in Nauvoo, AL (near Jasper) remains "Holy Ground" for us, although we have tried over the years to find other locations more easily accessible to some of our "far flung" churches.

We know that as a result of the changes in structure of UFMCC and EIDC, we need to refocus our own mission so that we may best serve God in the vineyard of our new Region 2. We pray that with the blessing of our Elder Armando and the prayers of all of our previous graduates and others who support Excel, we will be able to become the fruitful servants God needs.

Editors Note: EXCEL of the Rainbow Zebra serves the Southeastern US and is Based in Atlanta GA and Birmingham AL and can be reached by contacting:
barreras@msm.edu
Or visit their website at
<http://erzebra.com/>



Ms. Trudie Barreras
Executive
Committee Member
EXCEL of the
Rainbow Zebra



About our Organization

Excel International is a laity led movement within the Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC Church). Our goal is to develop and provide programs to stimulate Spiritual growth and Spiritual renewal and to teach methods that equip individuals to serve the Body of Christ in local congregations. Excel is self-governed, self-administered and self-supporting.

The participants we serve are from all walks of life.

We seek to serve those who are seeking some Spirituality in their life. Excel first started presenting weekends in January of 1976 and has served over 16000 participants since that time.



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We're on the Web!

See us at:

**WWW.EXCEL-
INTERNATIONAL.ORG**

Merry Christmas

Feliz Navidad, Joyeux Noël et heureuse année,
Mele Kalikimaka, Chuk Sung Tan, Frohe
Weihnachten, Idah Saidan Wa Sanah Jadidah,
Nollaig Shona Duit , Nodlaig mhaith chugnat,
Ojenyunyat Sungwiyadeson honungradon
nagwutut. Ojenyunyat osrasay.
Buon Natale e Felice Anno Nuovo,
Buone Feste Natalizie

Buon Natale e felice Capodanno,
Shinnen omedeto. Kurisumasu Omedeto, Chuk
Sung Tan, La Anul si La Multi Ani,
prazdnikom Rozdestva Hristova i s Novim
Godom La Maunia Le Kilisimasi Ma Le Tausaga
Fou, Hristos se rodi ,Sretam Bozic. Vesela Nova
Godina., ubha nath thalak Vewa. Subha Aluth
Awrudhak Vewa, la Manuia le Kerisimasi,
Tausaga Fou, Ya'a't'eeh Keshmish, Cestitamo
Bozic.

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