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## Religion

### Lent events

#### Call for submissions

Local churches and individuals are invited to submit information about services, activities and Bible studies during Lent to be included in the religion section of the Gazette-Times on March 3, just prior to the beginning of the season on Ash Wednesday, March 5. Submissions should include the date and time, location, a brief description of the activity and a phone number where people can get more information. Send them to religion editor Carol Reeves by mail to P.O. Box 368, Corvallis, OR 97339, by e-mail to reevesc@gazettetimes.com, or by fax to 758-9505. The deadline for submissions is noon on Wednesday, Feb. 26.

### In brief

#### Women's meetings

• **"Following the Prophet: Standing a Little Taller"** — Women members of the Corvallis, Ore. of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are invited to a conference beginning at 10 a.m. today at the state center, 4442 N.W. Harrison Blvd. An opening session in the chapel will be followed by a series of classes and a luncheon. Women who want to sing in the opening session's choir performance should come at 9 a.m. Information: 758-8205.

• **Presbyterian Women's Gathering** — Bill Lewis, director of the Benton County Museum, will present a program titled "The New Homer Museum" at the monthly meeting of the Presbyterian Women, 11:45 a.m. Tuesday at First Presbyterian Church, 114 S.W. Eighth St. A catered salad lunch (\$3) will be served. Child care is available. Information: 753-2228.

#### Events

• **Concert of prayer** — Mark and Michelle Huffaker will lead a concert of prayer at 7 p.m. Sunday at the First Baptist Church in Phenix, 335 S. 29th St. The Huffakers are members of the educational organization, IDEAS. Information: 923-9845.

• **Choir Festival** — Several local church choirs will perform individually in a free concert at 3 p.m. Sunday at St. Mary's Catholic Church, 501 N.W. 25th St. The groups will also join together under the direction of Steven Ziehe, to sing "Hallelujah" from Beethoven's "Mount of Olives" oratorio. Participating choirs are from First Christian Church, First United Methodist Church, St. Mary's and the Lutheran Universal Fellowship. A freewill offering will be taken to cover the cost of music, with the balance going to United Way of Benton County. Information: 757-1988.

• **Tales and healing services** — First United Methodist Church, 1155 N.W. Monroe Ave., offers two special services this week: a tale service at 7 p.m. Wednesday and a healing service at 7 p.m. Thursday. The tale service will feature scriptural, church, scripture reading and periods of silence based on the tale of worship developed at the tale community in France, which shares thousands of pilgrims each year. The healing service, which will include the laying on of hands and communion, is for those seeking healing for the body, mind, soul or relationship. Information: 753-2491 or www.covillestern.org.

#### Labyrinth walk

• **Third Monday Labyrinth Walk** — The Episcopal Church of the Good Samaritan, 533 N.W. 36th St., will open its 11-circuit Chartres-style labyrinth to the public between 4 and 8 p.m. Monday. The 20-minute walk, held in a meditation setting, is led by experienced walkers. Information: 757-6647.

#### Retreats/workshops

• **Retreats/workshops** — Retrouvaille, a Christian ministry to troubled marriages, is offering a weekend retreat to couples who want to heal their marriages and rediscover one another through Saturday, Feb. 22, at the Mount Angel Abbey Retreat House, north side of Seaside. The program consists of a weekend experience and a series of follow-up sessions. Couples of all faiths are welcome. Information: 503-204-8720.

• **"Genesis, St. Francis, St. Clare and Us"** — A creative workshop at the Sharon Prayer Center in Mount Angel, Saturday, Feb. 22, will examine the two creation accounts in the Bible and how St. Francis lived out God's charge to care for creation. The session is scheduled for 9 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. The cost is \$35 including lunch; registration is due by Thursday. Information: 503-446-6773 or www.con.org/creation.

• **"From Beginning to End: The Bible of Our Lives"** — A one-day retreat is set for 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday, March 1, at First United Methodist Church, 1155 N.W. Monroe Ave. Participants must register by Sunday, Feb. 23. The cost is \$35 including lunch. Books and CDs will be available for purchase from The Listening Heart Bookstore in Portland. Information: 753-2491 or www.covillestern.org.

#### Submissions

News items for the religion calendar must be received by noon on Wednesday the week of publication. Information should be mailed to religion editor Carol Reeves at P.O. Box 368, Corvallis, OR 97339, faxed to 758-9505, or e-mailed to reevesc@gazettetimes.com.



*'It makes you think about important questions about the Bible and God. But at the end, you feel like you've accomplished a lot more than just going around shooting things.'*

Jordan Strawn, Christian video game enthusiast

## God in the machine?

Local designer is part of a new trend: Christian video gaming

By CAROL REEVES  
Gazette-Times reporter

Tim Emmerich works hard during the day as an engineer at Hewlett-Packard Co. But after hours, this 35-year-old husband and father of two often retreats to what his wife Jane teasingly calls "the cave," a converted room in their garage, to tinker with his computer.

Wedged between bookshelves and bulging cardboard boxes filled with hundreds of computer and video games for inspiration, Tim Emmerich has spent many a night pursuing a five-year-old dream of creating his own computer game.

But this isn't just any game. Emmerich is one of a growing number of Christian game enthusiasts committed to developing more wholesome fare than the blood and gore many computer and video games offer today.

#### A work in progress

"Jarod's Journey" is what the gaming industry calls an interactive fiction game. A player reads about the adventures of a young man in the first century who is told by his dying father, a Roman centurion, to find out who Jesus is and report back to him before he passes away. The player then becomes Jarod and chooses where he will travel and who he will contact by typing commands to which the software responds. With seven different locations and several characters, such as a shepherd boy, a shoemaker and a sail maker, the possibilities are endless.

No one attacks or kills anyone else. There's no profanity or promiscuity. Just an opportunity to explore the world of early Christianity.

"My desire is to share Jesus. But the hard part is you don't know where the person sitting down at the computer is in their Christian walk," said Emmerich, an active member of the Circle Church of Christ. "I just pray that no matter who sits down to play, they get closer to God."

"Jarod's Journey" can be played by downloading it from Emmerich's Web site, www.GreenWorkInteractive.com.

Only three of the cities Jarod seeks during his mission are fully "populated" at this point — Capernaum, Nazareth and Caesarea. Jerusalem will be next. Emmerich also wants to improve the game's graphics and sound effects. Someday, he'd like to create a 3-D version; the final step will be to develop a print-like Bible study curriculum that will correspond to each player's ability and activities in the game.

Jordan Strawn helped Emmerich test the game in its early stages when he was a member of the youth group at Circle Church of Christ. Now a sophomore at Oregon State University, he says it's a little tough to get into at first, but "Jarod's Journey" is still rewarding.

"It takes a little more dedication than just moving around and clicking the mouse because you have to think about what you would



RYAN GARDNER/Gazette-Times

Computer game designer Tim Emmerich is trying to break into the Christian computer game industry with a Bible-based game called "Jarod's Journey." Emmerich isn't the only one who sees untapped potential among Christian game players. A Medford team has seen success with "Catechumen," shown above, in which early Christians rescue fellow believers from the catacombs.

*'I just pray that no matter who sits down to play, they get closer to God.'*

Tim Emmerich

do in different situations. It makes you think about important questions about the Bible and God," he said. "But at the end, you feel like you've accomplished a lot more than just going around shooting things."

#### Game options

Emmerich is the first to admit "Jarod's Journey" won't appeal to everybody, since it relies more on a player's imagination than dexterity. Most game enthusiasts are attracted to flashy products like action adventure, first-person shooter or role-play simulation games.

Popular Christian versions of these kinds of games exist as well. "Catechumen" challenges players to rescue their fellow Christians trapped in the catacombs during the Roman persecution. "Saints of Virtue" provides the player with the "full armor of God" and scrolls of truth to fight enemies of the heart such as pride, fear and vanity.

"Catechumen," developed by a team in Medford, has sold about 40,000 copies in the last two years. "Saints of Virtue" reports online sales of about 25,000.

Electronic Christian games have been around since the 1980s, but the industry is just now beginning to gain more exposure. The Wall Street Journal carried a front-page story Dec. 17 — including a reference to "Jarod's Journey" — that estimated the emerging industry's sales could reach \$200 million this year.

Emmerich thinks that figure is too optimistic, but shows the enormous popularity of video and computer games.

People like the way they offer instant feedback," he said. "TV is totally passive, and with books, yes, you choose to read the next page, but games are the extreme of interactivity."

"Some people will never pick up a game that's overly Christian, but the community. But there are some like

in Portland last year, an event that will be repeated July 25 through 27.

Christian game developers are looking forward to the opportunity to network and discuss how to strengthen their industry, Emmerich explained. Most are still self-published and can only be found online.

Only a few of the most popular ones are found in Christian bookstores or, on occasion, in large supermarkets like Wal-Mart.

#### Promoting the industry

When he's not refining his own game, Emmerich works on a central Web site, www.ChristianGamesNow.com, that offers information about games for all ages and links to the Web site of each game's developer. He also writes game reviews for various Web sites and single-handedly organized the first Christian Game Developers Conference

#### To learn more

A number of Web sites provide information about Christian electronic games for computers, Nintendo PlayStation, Sega Genesis and Gamecube. Many of them also offer links to online games, chat rooms for gaming enthusiasts and reviews of both secular and games with religious themes.

• www.GraciaInteractive.com  
• www.ChristianGamesNow.com  
• www.ChrisGames.org  
• www.christiangames.com  
• www.ccg.org  
• www.breakthroughgaming.com

rather than a business," he said.

"The industry has definitely touched lives. We just want to know how much until we get to heaven."

Carol Reeves covers religion for the Gazette-Times. She can be reached by e-mail at reevesc@gazettetimes.com or by phone at 758-9516.

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