

## December 2018



### From the **MINISTER**

Is it just me, or do we already seem to be in the last-minute Christmas rush? Maybe it's because Thanksgiving was early, or that stores started advertising Black Friday specials a week before the actual day this year, but it seems to me that people are already in the holiday frenzy that doesn't usually hit until a couple of weeks before Christmas. I suppose it doesn't help that the snow began to fall earlier than usual this year. Whatever the reason, I don't like the feeling that we're running out of time, when actually we're just beginning Advent, the time of preparation for the birth of the Christ Child.

I can't help but wonder what Jesus would think about the way even we Christians celebrate his birthday. If we're honest, we have to admit most of us celebrate by buying presents no one needs, decorating our homes and entertaining and partying, often leading to overeating and drinking. The preparation and cost, in addition to the traditional weight gain, all creates stress and takes away from what should be the joy of the season.

Luke 2:17-20 tells of a better way to celebrate: *When they saw this, **they made known what had been told them** about this child; and **all who heard it were amazed** at what the shepherds told them. But Mary **treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart**. The shepherds returned, glorifying and **praising God** for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.*

I doubt that any of us are willing to totally eliminate our Christmas traditions, no matter how stressful, but why not try to cut back some this year? Let's focus more on those words of scripture that tell us to honor Jesus' birth by sharing the birth story with others, being amazed at the story, cherishing it and thinking about what it means for us personally and for the world, and finally, praising God!

We will do all of this throughout the Advent season, beginning Sunday, December 2<sup>nd</sup> and continuing through the season of Epiphany, ending January 6<sup>th</sup>. I hope you and your loved ones will be here to join us. ~ Shalom, Rev. Lenore

P.S. Don't worry, there will be plenty of goodies for my Christmas Eve reception! While I do plan to make cutbacks in other areas this year, that is one tradition I'm not ready to give up.



A new church year, and the Advent Season, begin December 2nd when members of the Board of Christian Education light the first candle in our Advent wreath. Advent is the time when we prepare our hearts and minds for celebrating the birth of Jesus.

In early church history Advent began as a season of preparation for the celebration of baptism at Epiphany, much like the season of Lent before baptism on Easter. Eventually it became a four-week period of preparation for the coming of Christ at Christmas.

The Advent wreath tradition began in Germany in the sixteenth century. Four candles (three purple and one pink) are arranged on the wreath. Purple reminds us of the royalty of Jesus and the penitential nature of the season. Pink symbolizes joy. While we have traditionally assigned the words Love, Hope, Joy and Peace to the candles in our Advent wreath, other churches sometimes give them other designations. For example, they may be called the Prophet's Candle, Bethlehem's Candle, Shepherd's Candle and Angel's Candle.

Beginning with the First Sunday of Advent, the lighting of a candle is accompanied by a reading and prayer. This year members of our Boards will do this. We light an additional candle each subsequent week until, by the last Sunday, all four candles are aglow. A fifth candle, placed in the center of the wreath, is the Christ Candle and we light it on Christmas Eve. As a whole, these candles represent the coming of the light of Christ into the world.

### **Help Sandusky Become A Welcoming City**

Thanks to our Center for Peace Through Understanding, the City of Sandusky is on its way to becoming a Welcoming City. Did you see the article in the *Register* about it?

The City is now seeking to establish a Task Force to make recommendations regarding possible ways to make Sandusky a more welcoming and inclusive place for all. Anyone interested in helping to make this happen is invited to attend the "Welcoming Sandusky" Task Force Meeting: Discussion on Structure & Format Monday, December 3<sup>rd</sup> at the church at 6:00 p.m.. Please spread the word in your neighborhood and in any organization to which you belong. Flyers are available at the back of the sanctuary.

### **BOOK CLUB NEWS**

Friday, December 7th the Book Club will meet for a Christmas Tea and discussion of *A Dog Named Christmas*. At that time the book for January, *The Noel Diary* by Richard Paul Evans will be distributed.

With this holiday-themed novel by one of their favorite authors, members will continue their celebration of Christmas. It is the story of a man receiving the best Christmas present ever: the chance to re-write the past.

The Book Club meets at 2:00 p.m. on the first Friday of the month in Frosty's Activity Center at the Parkvue Health Care Center. Everyone is welcome. Books are available from the church office.



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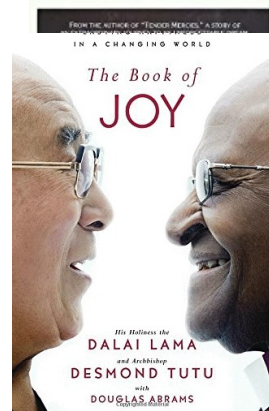
### **Our Church Family Is Growing**

Kathy Hunscke, and possibly others, will be taken into membership on Sunday, December 9<sup>th</sup>. If you have been considering joining the church, this would be a great time to do it. Contact Rev. Lenore if you would like to know more about it.

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## Looking For Joy this Holiday Season?

If so, you just might find it in *The Book of Joy, Lasting Happiness in a Changing World* by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu with Douglas Abrams. These Nobel Peace Prize Laureates, survivors of more than fifty years of exile and the soul-crushing violence of oppression, spent a week together to create the book. It was their hope that the book would be a gift to others as they answered the question: How do we find joy in the face of life's inevitable suffering?



Following worship on December 16<sup>th</sup> (the Sunday we light the joy Advent candle) Rev. Lenore will give a quick review of the book. The following Thursday the Study Group will discuss it in greater detail at 7:00 p.m. in the Boardman Room.

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In this Christmas season, it's time to thank our Pastor and church staff for the fine job they do. You may give your contribution directly to our Treasurer, Scarlet Berry, or put it in the offering plate, but please be sure to mark it "staff gifts" and turn it in by Sunday, December 16<sup>th</sup>.

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### Longest Night Service

Our annual Longest Night Service will be held Friday, December 21<sup>st</sup> at 6:45 p.m.. Beginning with 15 minutes of harp music and including prayers, reflection and Charles and Robin's beautiful music, this service is designed to bring peace in the midst of the holiday stress. The title comes from the fact that it is held on what is literally the longest night of the year

### CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

DECEMBER 23<sup>rd</sup>

Following the worship service on December 23<sup>rd</sup> there will be a congregational meeting to vote on the 2019 budget. Copies of the proposed budget will be available December 16<sup>th</sup>.



### CHRISTMAS EVE CANDLELIGHT SERVICE

We will hold our traditional Christmas Eve Candlelight service at 5:30 p.m.. Rev. Lenore will host a reception in the Boardman Room following the service. We want to extend a welcome to everyone - please invite your friends and neighbors to join us.



**Rev. Lenore** will be taking vacation time beginning December 26<sup>th</sup>. She will return to the office Thursday, January 3<sup>rd</sup>. If you have a pastoral emergency during that time, please call Rev. Bob Bottoms at 419-271-0086.



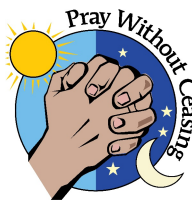
## COMMUNITY BREAKFAST

### *Community Breakfast*

Our next breakfast will be held December 29<sup>th</sup> from 9 -11 a.m.. The menu will be pancakes, scrambled eggs and sausage. Please spread the word - anyone who needs a meal or would enjoy having someone to share breakfast with is welcome to come.

Volunteers and financial contributions are needed. There is a sign up sheet for workers on the back bulletin board in the sanctuary. Donations can be sent to the church or put in a pew envelope and marked "Community Breakfast." If you have any questions, please see Mark or Cathy Pifer.

Directory Update: Kathie & Nette Simon, 118 East Parish St., Sandusky, OH 44870



Eric Maier, Jack & Rhonda Neese, Linda Ott, Stuart Rhea, Kathie Simon, Evalyn Vroman, Angie Williams, Adam Williams & Family and the Berquist, Brenton, Santi, and Schlett Families. Homebound: Ruth Baker, Anne Johnstone, Dot Malinovsky, Dorothy Moore, Elmeda Schwartz, and Christine Vroman

## BIRTHDAYS & ANNIVERSARIES

Eric & Amber Warren	12/03
Jack & Rhonda Neese	12/06
Ruth Baker	12/10
Denise Roberts	12/12
Bill Roche	12/14
Samson Greenman, Jr.	12/19
Alex Wilhelm	12/20
Jerry & Libby Boros	12/28
Mat Justice	12/30

## THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU

We received letters of thanks from Ability Works, The Volunteers of America (Crossroads Homeless Shelter) and the LGBT Community Center for our quarterly donations. The Sandusky Artisans also expressed their gratitude for the Shoreline donation they received.

## MEMORIALS

We received memorial contributions from Angeline Schlett in memory of Matthew Schlett and from Mary & William KoehlerIII in memory of Jackie Niven.



## CHRISTMAS CONCERTS

**The Sandusky Choral Society**, under the direction of Heather L. Carman, will present their 82<sup>nd</sup> annual Christmas concerts on Friday, November 30<sup>th</sup> at 7:30 p.m. at Norwalk First United Methodist Church, 60 West Main St., and Sunday, December 2<sup>nd</sup> at 3:00 p.m. at Grace Episcopal Church, 315 Wayne St.. A reception will follow each concert. Tickets are \$6.00 and may be purchased in advance from chorus members or at the door the day of the concert. Bob Bottoms, Sari Kelley, Jacki Warren and Tim Work are members of the Choral Society.

On Friday, December 7<sup>th</sup> and Saturday the 8<sup>th</sup>, **The Firelands Chorus** will present Home for the Holidays with a special visit from Mr. & Mrs. Santa Claus and The Osborne Elementary Piccolo Choir at Zion Lutheran Church at 7:30 p.m.. A reception will follow. This is a free concert with a freewill offering being collected. Glenn Gast is a member and will participate in the Friday concert.

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St. Stephen UCC is hosting their **Annual Christmas Bazaar** on Saturday, December 1<sup>st</sup> from 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. in their Fellowship Hall. Several vendors will offer a variety of items. They will also have Lebkuchen cookies, a Christmas Resale Shop and Script Gift Cards. Lunch will be available. The \$1.00 admission will benefit their food pantry for local families.

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### EMERGENCY CANCELLATIONS

If the weather is unfavorable and you aren't sure about leaving the house for worship, or any other church event, please check the "iAlert" on News Channel 3 WKYC or go to [wkyc.com](http://www.wkyc.com). You can also sign up for free text alerts that will send i-alert notifications directly to your mobile device. Sign up at <http://www.wkyc.com/news/mobile/text/>.

We will also notify radio stations WCPZ(102.7 FM) and WLKR(96.1 FM) of any cancellation involving the church. Obviously, if a level 3 snow emergency has been declared, everything is cancelled! You can always call Rev. Lenore to find out what is, or isn't, going on (419-366-8729).



### REPORTS FROM OUR BOARDS

#### Christian Education

*Jacki Warren-Chairperson*

The Board met on Tuesday, November 6, 2018. We discussed the following:

**Retreat:** We are extremely grateful for a large anonymous donation that made it possible for the retreat to have an outside speaker this year.

**Budget:** We decided to stay with the same budget request for 2019.

**Sunday School:** Materials for Advent have arrived. Patsy will be away Sunday, 11/11 and Kathie Simon will sub. Jackie will explain to the class why the bell will be rung at 11:00 a.m. that day

(Armistice Day) and have them help ring it. We thanked Patsy for her taking on the class and her amazing work with them. We discussed the need for a different table and chairs for the class.

**Book Club:** The Christmas Tea will be Friday, December 7<sup>th</sup> in “Frosty’s” at the Parkvue Health Care Center. As usual there will be goodies, favors and inexpensive prize gifts. A Dog Named Christmas will be discussed. Final details will be made at our December meeting.

**Study Group:** The group will meet in the conference room this Thursday (11/8) with Jacki leading because the LEADS class will be using the Boardman Room.

**Peace through Understanding:** The Center will be a nonprofit by the end of the year with a board and officers in place. The group hopes to meet in January at the Jewish synagogue.

Rev. Lenore reported that Boards will be in charge of the Advent Candle lighting this year. We chose the first Sunday, December 2<sup>nd</sup>, the Love Candle and would like to involve children present in the lighting of the candle.

We discussed the possibility of having some new board members next year.

Our next scheduled meeting is Tuesday, December 4, 2018 at 11:00 a.m.

Respectfully submitted, Phyllis Bottoms

## **Board of Elders**

*Joy Berquist & Chris Michaels-Co-Chairs*

Season greetings to my First Congregational family. As I sit and write I realize this past weekend we set up for the First Sunday in Advent which is December 2<sup>nd</sup> and is the Sunday of love in the Advent season. But I want to take a step back and thank everyone who signed up to read scripture in November: Mark Pifer, Meredith Holman, Jackie Warren, and Halley Leffler. I would like to thank them personally for that.

Now is an exciting time in church, not only are we celebrating the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, but we are also taking new members into our church family which is a great thing. So to our incoming new members to The First Congregational United Church of Christ family, welcome!

Yours in Christ,

Chris Michaels, Co-chair

## **Board of Mission & Outreach**

*Barb Petersen-Chairperson*

We will be receiving our annual Veterans of the Cross offering throughout the month of December. Please see below for more information.

**The light of God surrounds us,  
The love of God enfolds us,  
The power of God protects us,  
The presence of God watches over us.**

– James Dillet Freeman

For over a century, the **Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund** has been a tangible expression of God's love and light in the world. Year after year, United Church of Christ (UCC) members and congregations have reached out in kindness, compassion, and gratitude to those who have faithfully shepherded our Church in the past and who now find themselves facing unexpected financial needs.

In 2017, UCC congregations and members generously contributed over \$1,500,000 to the Christmas Fund. This enabled the United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance (UCBMA), the charitable arm of the Pension Boards, to provide, on behalf of the whole Church, Supplementation of Small Annuities, Retiree Health Premium Supplementation, Emergency Grants, and Christmas "Thank You" Gift Checks to individuals in need.

The theme of this year's Christmas Fund Offering is ***The Light Is Surely Coming***. The goal is to raise \$1.7 million to help support these ministries of light and love. The recipients of your gifts are persons who have faithfully served the church for many years. And now, in their time of need, you can be the church to them.

Our Board of Mission & Outreach invites and encourages you to join thousands of UCC members and congregations who will support this year's appeal and trust the light is surely coming. You may make a donation any time this month using the envelopes located on the back table in the sanctuary.