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FIRST
CONGREGATIONAL
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
AN OPEN & AFFIRMING CONGREGATION

December 2020



From the MINISTER

As the days pass and we move closer to December 25th, it looks like this is going to be the Christmas of our dreams. I don't mean it is going to be more wonderful than we could ever imagine. I'm talking about dreams as in "I'll be home for Christmas, if only in my dreams." Because of the COVID crisis we will have to count on our imaginations, stitching together memories of Christmases past and hopes for future Christmases, in order to cope with the loneliness of celebrating this one without our loved ones and many of our beloved traditions.

One tradition I am going to miss is the Christmas Eve reception I've been hosting for the past 25 years. I usually begin preparations the day after Thanksgiving. There is so much planning, baking, shopping, and hauling stuff from home to the church that goes on that I'm usually totally exhausted by the time the last person leaves that night. But it is all worth the spiritual high I feel when visiting with members and friends, and often family too, as love flows freely while we laugh, share stories and celebrate the reason why we are together - the birth of Jesus.

His birth was very simple, like Christmas will be this year, but remember, it also signaled the coming of "the Light of the World." Jesus said, "I am the Light of the world. Anyone who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." What a great reminder for us, as we pass through this dark time in our lives, that as long as we carry his light in our hearts, it can never be extinguished. That then is our hope and assurance that we WILL make it to the other side of this trying time.

So if we are not able to be together Christmas Eve, please light a candle and remember what I always say at the end of our beautiful candle lighting ritual and singing of Silent Night, "As we celebrate the birth of the Holy Child, remember, this is just the beginning of the story God wants us to share with the world. Let's also celebrate the new life Jesus brings to us through his life, death and resurrection, and the true hope he brings for God's peace on earth. As you blow out this candle, symbolizing that light of Christ within you, may it continue to shine so brightly that all the world can't help but see it."

Shalom, Rev. Lenore

WE MAY NEED TO GO BACK TO LIVE STREAMING

The Leadership Team decided if Erie County moves up to purple in the Ohio Public Health Advisory System for COVID-19, we will need to stop our in-person worship services. Should that happen, we will resume live-streaming like we did in the spring. If you need help figuring out how to access the service, please call Meredith Greenman at 419-357-6161.

CHRISTMAS FUND SPECIAL MISSION OFFERING



They came when you needed them. They answered the phone when you called. They baptized and married and buried your loved ones. They gave up weekend after weekend after weekend to care for your spirit, lead you in worship, and point to God in your midst.

Some of them did it for less money than they could easily live on. Some of them did it for less than they would have been willing to do any other job for, because of what they believe about who God is, and what they believe about who *you* are.

For all the sacrifices that clergy and lay church workers have made in our congregations, over 100 years ago the Pension Boards of the United Church of Christ created the **Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund**, to help support them in retirement and during times of emergent need. This year's theme, "In Such a Time as This," is taken from

Esther 4:14 and reflects the urgent need of some lower income retirees during the pandemic.

We will take an offering for this fund on December 20th, but you may use the enclosed envelope to make your donation any time during the month.

The Christmas Fund provides Supplementation of Small Annuities, Supplementation of Health Premiums, Emergency Grants, and Christmas "Thank You" Gift Checks for retirees and those facing unforeseen financial hardship.

The Center for Peace Through Understanding is in need of donations for its outreach to needy families and individuals, as well as to over 70 nursing home residents. Items needed (by December 6th) include: Christmas cards, non-perishable food items, individually wrapped candies & snacks, small battery operated candles, large print word puzzle books, adult coloring books, and any other small, inexpensive items you think older folks would enjoy. Monetary donations are also welcome. Checks should also be made out to the CPTU (it is its own non-profit, separate from the church) and put in the offering basket or sent to the church.

Following the worship service on December 20th there will be a **congregational meeting** to vote on the 2021 budget. Copies of the proposed budget will be available December 13th.

LONGEST NIGHT SERVICE



Our annual Longest Night Service will be held Monday, December 21st at 6:45 p.m., in-person if possible, live stream if not. 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 pandemic chaos that has become our norm. The title comes from the fact that it is held on what is literally the longest night of the year

CHRISTMAS EVE CANDLELIGHT SERVICE

Hopefully, we will hold our traditional Christmas Eve Candlelight service in person at 5:30 p.m.. However, if necessary, it will be live streamed. We want to extend a welcome to everyone, so please invite your friends and neighbors to join us.



Rev. Lenore will be taking vacation time December 25th - January 2nd. If you have a pastoral emergency during that time, please call Rev. Bob Bottoms at 419-271-0086.

BIRTHDAYS & ANNIVERSARIES

Eric & Amber Warren	12/03
Jack & Rhonda Neese, Marlee & Gene Wobser	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

Charlene Allen, Marc Austin, Colleen Baur, Rev. Bob Bottoms, Vicki Deissler, Fleeman Family, Sam Greenman Sr., Kathy Hunscke, Debbi & Marv Keller, Drew Kreimes, Ruth Maier, Luke Miller, Mitchell Family, Anne Monday, Jack Neese, Nemeth & Thomas Families, John Rainey & Gene Finnegan, Kayli Reno, Bill Ruter, Debby Neese-Voltz, Carole Robinson, Tim Sanders, Jacki Warren
Homebound: Ruth Baker, Anne Johnstone, Elmeda Schwartz, Christine Vroman



We received letters of appreciation for our quarterly donations to Ability Works, the Erie County Senior Center, the LGBT Community Center, United Church Homes (Parkvue), and Volunteers of America. Letters of gratitude were also received from Doctors Without Borders and The American Red Cross for our special donations.

Dear First Congregational UCC,

Thank you for being there and helping me through Confirmation, and my beautiful cross. I loved the reception!

Love, Sammy

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 (<http://www.wkyc.com/news/mobile/text/>) for free text alerts that will send i-alert notifications directly to your mobile device.

We will also notify local 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).

ADVENT 2020

Advent is the time when we prepare our hearts and minds for celebrating the birth of Jesus. The Advent Season began the last Sunday in November when Nette & Kathie Simon lit the first candle on our Advent wreath. 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. A fifth candle, placed in the center of the wreath, is the Christ Candle.

November 29 Lighting the Candle of Love

December 6 Lighting the Candle of Hope

December 13 Lighting the Candle of Joy

December 20 Lighting the Candle of Peace

December 21 Longest Night Service at 6:45 p.m.

All the candles on the wreath will be lit during this service of prayer and meditation designed to bring comfort to those having difficulty finding joy this holiday season.

December 24 Christmas Eve Candlelight Service at 5:30 p.m. ~ Lighting the Christ Candle



It's time to order Poinsettias to decorate the sanctuary for Christmas! Plants may be purchased in memory of a loved one or to honor someone. Following the Christmas Eve service, they may be taken home or left to decorate the sanctuary.

The cost this year is \$7.00 per plant (6.5" pot).

Place this form and payment in the offering basket, or return it to the church office by **December 9th**.

My Poinsettia is in memory / honor of: _____
(Circle One)

Do you plan to take your Poinsettia home? Yes No (Circle One)

Number of Poinsettias @ \$7.00 per plant:

Red ____ White ____ Pink ____ Glitter ____

Total Amount _____

Your Name _____