

December 2010

The Tie That Binds

First Congregational United Church of Christ
Cadillac, Michigan

PASTOR REYNOLDS' RAP

Dear Friends,

Welcome to Advent! The green of Ordinary Time has at last given way to Advent's rich blue hues. Some consider this time before Jesus' birthday a "little Lent," a somber time of penitent preparation, which is reflected in the use of purple [Lenten] paraments. In our own congregation's use of blue Advent paraments, a similarly royal aspect is maintained, but our focus rests more fully in the impending joy of the Christmas event.

Here are some other meaningful, traditional symbols you will notice as you look around the sanctuary this month:

***Christmas Tree:** One Christian legend attributes the first lighted tree to Martin Luther. As the story goes, one Christmas Eve he wandered in the woods and became enraptured with the beauty of the starry night sky. Its brilliance and loveliness led him to reflect on the glory of Bethlehem's radiant skies on the first Christmas Eve. And so, to share with his family the enchantment he had felt, he cut an evergreen, took it home, and decorated it with candles to represent the glorious heavens he had seen.

***Poinsettia:** While most Christmas greenery reflects European traditions, the poinsettia is native to the American continent. It is named for Dr. Joel Robert Poinset, an ambassador to Mexico who introduced it to the US in 1828. Mexicans and Central Americans call the brilliant tropical plant the "Flower of the Holy Night." Its shape--a many-pointed star-- represents the Star of Bethlehem.

***Advent Candles and Wreath:** The flame of each new candle is a reminder that something is happening, and something more is still to come. The candles are arranged in a circle to remind us of the continuous power of God, which knows neither beginning nor ending. The three blue candles symbolize the coming of Christ from the royal line of David. The pink represents joy. The large white candle in the center is known as the Christ candle and points to Jesus, the Light of the world. As we light a new candle each Sunday, another aspect of our joyful anticipation is celebrated.

As we prepare to receive the Christ child into our hearts and lives once again, let us embrace the deep significance of these traditions in our midst. Let us make room within ourselves and, like expectant parents, eagerly wait for this precious new life to come. With Mary, may we ponder the future and wonder about what it is that is growing within us. What will we birth individually and as a community of faith in the days and months to come? How will we extend our love and gratitude for all that God has given us in this, God's ultimate expression of love? What gifts will we in turn bring into the world? As that hope and vision take shape, let our hearts sing out together, "O Come, O Come Emmanuel!"

Wishing each of you and your families a blessed Christmas,
Pastor Carol

PASTOR'S SCHEDULE

Please note that Pastor Carol will be on vacation December 25-January 3. If you have a pastoral care need in her absence, please contact Mercy Hospital chaplain Rev. Ed Gilbert at 231-342-4397.

SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR DECEMBER 2010

| | | |
|------------------------|---|----------------------|
| December 5 Peace | Isaiah 11:1-10, Matthew 3:1-12 | Vision of |
| December 12 Justice | Isaiah 35:1-10, Luke 1:47-55 | Heartbeat of |
| December 19 | Matthew 1:18-25 | God With Us |
| December 26 Praise | tbd (Carol Sing/Pastor on Vacation) | Cosmic |
| January 2 | tbd (Sara Preaching/Pastor on Vacation) | Epiphany Celebration |

WORSHIP

Ecumenical Blue Christmas Service: A Service of Light in the Midst of Darkness

For many, the Christmas season is a challenging time of year. High expectations and constant words and images of holiday gatherings and the happiness of the season remind many people of what they have lost or never had. The anguish of broken relationships, the insecurity of unemployment, the weariness of ill health, the pain of isolation—all these can make us feel very alone in the midst of celebrating and spending. We need time and space to acknowledge such sadness. We need to know that we are not alone. As days grow shorter and we feel the darkness growing deeper around us, we need encouragement to live the days ahead of us.

For all these reasons and more, **Pastor Carol**, **Pastor Paul Tomlinson** (First Presbyterian Church), and **Linnea Stifler** (St. Mary's Episcopal Church) will co-lead a contemplative Advent service of light and healing on **Sunday, December 12 at 4:30 pm**. All are invited to join us in sharing and hearing prayers, scripture, reflections, and music acknowledging that God's presence is for those who mourn, those who struggle—and that God's Word comes to shine light into our darkness. In addition, healing stations throughout the sanctuary will offer opportunities to light candles of remembrance, to receive individual prayer, a blessing, and/or anointing with oil, and to take communion.

Christmas Ornament Hanging

Please bring a special Christmas ornament to worship on December 19. We will take time during the service to share and hang them on our sanctuary Christmas tree. Ornaments may be retrieved in January.

Christmas Eve Service of Lessons, Carols, and Candlelight

Please join us on Friday, December 24 at 7:30 pm to celebrate the Christ child's birth with a music-filled service of lessons, carols, guitars, and candlelight. A fairy tale reception in Fellowship Hall filled with sweets and other treats will follow the service.

VISION

Our first congregational visioning session with **Cheryl Burke** was a success! 25-30 people attended and took the first steps of crafting a congregational vision. We explored our peak experiences in the church, core individual and communal values, and our wishes for the church going forward.

Cheryl will return in January to continue the process with us. If you weren't at our first meeting and would like to participate, please see **Pastor Carol** or a **Board Member** to get caught up!

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Summary of 11/10 Meeting

[edit]

Proposed Change in the Time of the Christmas Eve Service: The Board discussed possibly changing the service start time to 8:30 rather than 7:30 PM. A vote will be taken at the Harvest Dinner.

[edit]

Maintenance Issues: There was a sewage problem caused by work by the City of Cadillac. Bills have been submitted to the city for reimbursement (Mr. Rooter, \$500 and Serv-Pro, \$900).

FUN!

Christmas Caroling

Plans are afoot for an outing of Christmas caroling at the homes of some of our congregation's members and friends, followed by hot cider and donuts in Fellowship Hall. This will likely occur either on the afternoon or evening of Sunday, December 19 or in conjunction with a Wednesday evening choir rehearsal. Please stay tuned for further details and let **Jack [edit]** or **Pastor Carol** know if you're interested in singing, playing a musical instrument, or having carolers grace your doorstep!

MISSIONS

Our Mission Target for December: UCC Christmas Fund

Penny Phelps

This year-end Special Offering of the UCC is designated to assist retired pastors, church musicians, Christian Education workers, and others who worked on behalf of the church. Because their salaries were modest while they were working, their pensions are also modest, and the recession has hit them hard. Since last December, nearly 1,600 clergy and lay individuals and families have received over \$1,500,000 in assistance. Some of the offering goes to Pension Supplementation, some helps pay for health insurance premiums, some is held in reserve for emergency grants during the year, and some goes to low-income retirees in the form of a Christmas "Thank You" gift.

This year the goal is to raise \$1,650,000 to continue these vital services to people who gave so generously of their special gifts for many years. Think of a youth leader or Sunday school teacher or pastor whose guidance touched your life and give as generously as you can.

THANK YOU!

Many thanks to **Penny Phelps, [edit], Marge Glander**, and the rest of the kitchen crew who went above and beyond to organize, roast, baste, mash, carve, set up, and ultimately make the Harvest Dinner and our Visioning Event's soup and sandwich dinner wonderful, warm and delicious gatherings!

A Note from Lake City High School

Thank you so much for your donation to the Lake City High School Go To Team. Your funds are greatly appreciated!

--LCHS Go To Team

[edit]

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Due to her graduate school commitments, **Melissa Thompson** has temporarily stepped down from her role as Chair of Christian Education. We are extremely grateful for all of Melissa's hard work, love, and dedication to the children and, with her, look forward to the day when her plate is a little less full!

In the meantime, **Laura [edit]** has graciously been acting as Interim Chair. In this role, Laura has worked to reconfigure Sunday School in such a way that more members of the congregation are involved in the children's learning and the children spend a bit more time in the sanctuary and the worship life of the church. The hope is that the adult congregation and our kids will become better acquainted, that a broader base of faith, knowledge, and expertise will be tapped; and that the children's faith and learning will continue to be well integrated and lived out in church and the world. An outline of Laura's plans for this year's Sunday School program is below.

Laura has also been working to engage the kids constructively during coffee hour. Toward that end, she has created a list of "dos" and "don'ts" for them to follow, which they review aloud during each week's Sunday School class. These guidelines are intended to keep everyone in the building safe—kids and adults alike—and to ensure that the kids always have adult supervision. It would be greatly appreciated if everyone, and particularly parents, could become acquainted with the guidelines and help the children to follow them consistently. Thanks!

Sunday School Overview - 2010 – 2011

General

Children are asked to stay with their parents during the first part of worship until they are dismissed for Sunday School. This will be after either the Anthem or after Children's Time

Communion Sunday (First Sunday of the month)

- Children usher, greet, are dismissed from worship after the anthem, and go downstairs to make cards or write letters to members and friends of the congregation.
- Children are encouraged to attend communion with their parents. Someone will come down to shepherd the children from the Sunday School room into the sanctuary when it is time for communion.

Music Sunday (Second or Third Sunday of the Month)

- Children will be dismissed from worship after the anthem.
- Children will participate in songs with members of the choir.

Scripture Sunday (Alternates with Music Sunday—Second or Third Sunday of the Month)

- Concentration for this year is God's love and compassion.
- We will be using I Corinthians 13:4-7 as the basis along with additional scripture passages dealing with similar themes.

Compassion Sunday/Noisy Offering (Last Sunday of the Month)

- Children will receive loose change offering.
- Children will decide where this offering will go—a community organization or other charity.

- Children will report to the congregation how much was collected and who it went to help.
- As a part of this Sunday, adults from the congregation will be asked to come down during Sunday School to share some related experience or interest with the children.

New Coffee Hour Rules for Sunday School Children

The No's ...Don'tsCan'ts

1. No running.
2. No playing on the stage.
3. No going into the nursery or Sunday School Room (unless with an adult) during coffee hour.
4. Don't go upstairs.
5. Don't go into the kitchen area unless with an adult.

The Do's, Can's and Yeses!

1. Do get a snack - with adult help.
2. Do eat and visit with your friends at the kids' table
3. Yes! Bring out the bin that has games (Kerplunk!, Buzzword, Dominos, etc.), and Legos, Drawing paper, Bendaroos.
4. Yes! Have fun playing these things with your friends (and grown-ups, too, if they want to join).
5. When it is time to go, make sure that you pick up and return everything to its proper bin and put the bins back into the Sunday School room where you found them, so the next time you CAN play with them all again!

STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE

Launching our Stewardship Campaign

Advent is a time of planning and hoping and anticipating. It is a time to think about our relationships and to reflect on our gratitude for the people in our lives and the blessings we have received. This makes Advent a perfect time to think about our relationship with our church. What does it mean to us? How can we express our gratitude for God's great gifts to us?

Over the four Sundays in December we will focus on four aspects of Stewardship:

- Dec. 5th – we will issue an Invitation to consider the meaning and purpose of stewardship;
- Dec. 12th – we will work on understanding our Mission/Purpose in worshipping together;
- Dec. 19th – we will Re-dedicate our covenant to each other and to God's creation;
- Dec. 26th – we will share our Thanks for the joy and fellowship that bring us together.

A letter will go out in a day or two that will include a pledge card for 2011 and a narrative budget explaining the church's needs. Please give your pledge careful thought and prayer and either place it in the offering plate on any Sunday in December, or mail it to the church (P.O. Box 892). This will allow us to build a budget to review at our Annual Meeting in January. --[edit]

UNITED NORTHERN ASSOCIATION

Our UNA **sister church** for December is **Wolverine First Congregational UCC**. Please lift up the congregation and its pastor, **Leroy Sutfin**, in prayer during the coming month.

December 2010

| SUNDAY | MONDAY | TUESDAY | WEDNESDAY | THURSDAY | FRIDAY | SATURDAY |
|--|---|---|---|-------------------------------------|---|--------------------------|
| | | | 1 Choir Rehearsal 7:00 pm | 2 | 3 | 4 *Jazz. 8:30 am |
| 5 Communion Sunday Worship 10:30 am | 6 *Jazz. 8:30 am 5:45 pm | 7 *Jazz. 8:30 am PRC 5:00 pm | 8 Choir Rehearsal 7:00 pm | 9 BOT 5:00 pm | 10 *Jazz. 8:30 am | 11 *Jazz. 8:30 am |
| 12 Sunday Worship 10:30 am Ecumenical Blue Christmas Service 4:30 pm | 13 *Jazz. 8:30 am 5:45 pm | 14 *Jazz. 8:30 am | 15 *Jazz. 5:45 pm Choir Rehearsal 7:00 pm | 16 *Jazz. 8:30 am 5:45 pm | 17 *Jazz. 8:30 am *Worship Planning 10:00 am | 18 *Jazz. 8:30 am |
| 19 Sunday Worship 10:30 am | 20 *Jazz. 8:30 am 5:45 pm Items for Newsletter Due! | 21 *Jazz. 8:30 am *Audubon Meeting 7 pm | 22 *Jazz. 5:45 pm | 23 *Jazz. 8:30am 5:45pm | 24 Christmas Eve Service 7:30 pm *Jazz. 8:30 am | 25 *Jazz. 8:30 am |
| 26 Sunday Worship 10:30 am | 27 *Jazz. 8:30 am 5:45 pm | 28 *Jazz. 8:30 am | 29 Choir Rehearsal 7:00 pm | 30 | 31 | |

*Non-church activities that occur in the building

**The stores are full of holiday paraphernalia...
So it must be Poinsettia Time!**

Nothing is more appealing than to see the front of the sanctuary filled with colorful Poinsettias. If you wish to contribute one or more plants, please fill in the form below and either bring it to church or mail it to the church at P. O. Box 892.

Poinsettia Order

**I/We _____(name)
wish to order _____ (number) Poinsettias at \$8 each**

**In memory/honor (circle one) of
_____.**

Enclosed is my/our payment of \$_____.

