

December 2011
The Tie That Binds
First Congregational United Church of Christ
Cadillac, Michigan

PASTOR REYNOLDS' RAP

All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." (Matthew 2:22-23, NRSV)

We are all meant to be mothers of God...for God is always needing to be born.— Meister Eckhart, 1260-1328, German Dominican monk

Dear Friends,

Happy New Year! November 27 marks both the start of a new church year and of the 4-week season of Advent—a time when we return to the beginning of the Christian story to anticipate and prepare for the birth of the baby Jesus once again.

Of course, it is no coincidence that the advent of Advent corresponds so closely to "Black Friday," the official start of the Christmas shopping season. Nevertheless, it is more than a little ironic and even disappointing that the birth of a poor baby boy who grew up to be an outspoken critic of the injustice that created poverty should occasion the height of the retail industry's fiscal year. Consequently, it's hard not to associate Christmas "preparations" with a chaotic flurry of retail activity leading up to 12/25.

I'm not trying to be Scrooge here. Exchanging cards and gifts to express our love and appreciation of one another is a beautiful thing. My point is more about balance. Can (and will) we make sufficient space in our outwardly busy lives to ponder, yearn for, and finally receive God's precious gift of Love? Will we make room in the inn of our hearts to offer the Christ child our love and hospitality?

Particularly with the rampant commercialization of Christmas, many people have become increasingly cynical, facing the season with more of a tired "Here we go again" attitude than with the awe, wonder, and delight that all but bursts from children this time of year. If all we're doing is retelling an old story without truly interacting with it, that's not an entirely unreasonable response. But we tell this story over and over again not merely to memorialize it, but because it is integral to our identities as Christians. We want to recall and experience it anew—to re-member ourselves--but also to venture deeper and deeper into it, to peel back its many layers of meaning and hope. And we want to find our 21st Century selves somewhere in that ancient narrative.

13th Century German mystic Meister Eckhart suggested that Mary might be an especially meaningful access point into the Christmas story. After all, if a poor unwed teenager could be chosen to birth the Christ, why not us? Christ did not come once and for all. The human face of God's Love continually breaks through into the world. And so we might ask ourselves what is growing within us as individuals and as a congregation? How are we midwifing or laboring toward a divine in-breaking? Might the "Occupy" movements provide a contemporary glimpse of our justice-seeking God breaking through?

Yes, we live in extremely challenging times, times when hope can seem to be in short supply. Yet the historical Jesus wasn't born during a particularly placid era either. And, really, when do we most need to receive and nurture the Love of Emmanuel (God-with-us)?

May we experience Emmanuel moving within us this Advent season and may our Christ Lights shine brightly through all the world's darkness on Christmas and always, Pastor Carol

SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR DECEMBER 2011-JANUARY 8, 2012

December 4	Isaiah 40:1-11, Mark 1:1-8	Words of Comfort
December 11	Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11; John 1:6-8, 19-28	Hope Restored
December 18	Luke 1:26-38	God With Us
December 25	Carol Sing (Pastor on vacation)	Sing with Joy
January 1	tbd (Pastor on vacation)	Called to Gift
January 8	tbd (Pastor on vacation)	New Beginnings

PASTOR'S SCHEDULE

Pastor Carol will be away from December 25 through January 10. If you have a pastoral care emergency in her absence, please contact **Rev. Paul Tomlinson** at First Presbyterian Church (**231-775-7111**). If no one picks up, please wait for the answering machine's outgoing message, which includes his cell phone number. Pastor Paul can provide crisis counseling, visitation, and prayer; and can officiate at funerals and memorial services.

During normal weeks, Mondays and Tuesdays are Pastor Carol's Sabbath days, during which pastoral care emergency calls can be directed to her cell phone. Non-emergency calls and e-mails received on days off will be returned on Wednesday or Thursday.

PASTORAL CARE

Due to HIPAA privacy rules, hospitals no longer notify pastors when parishioners are hospitalized. Therefore, when in doubt, please assume the pastor is unaware that an FCC member or friend is in the hospital and kindly pass the word along to her. Thank you!

NURTURE AND CARE TEAM

Please contact our Nurture and Care Team Coordinator **Diane** if you need a ride to church or a doctor's appointment, or if you are recuperating from surgery, an illness, an injury, a death or other family emergency and would like the congregation to bring some home-cooked meals to your home.

JOYS AND CONCERNS

Thank You!

Many, many thanks to

- The many cooks, servers, cleaners, and set up/take down people who made the 2011 Harvest Dinner a tasty success. And a special thank-you to organizer extraordinaire, **Penny Phelps**.
- **Bob** and **Troy** for having our newly available upstairs meeting room painted...and just in time for the first meeting of the LGBTQ support group. Take a peek when you get a chance. It looks great!
- **Todd** for the supply of UCC coffee mugs he purchased for the church from the former UCC church in Reed City.
- **Christine** and **Linda** for the beautiful floral arrangements they have provided for our communion table.
- **Carol K, Laura, Sam, Ginny, Lucy, Frank, Scott Sara, Jerry** and **Northwoods Feed & Supply** for all their help making the 2nd Annual Animal Blessing happen. This year we had 12

dogs and 6 cats, a number of visitors from outside of the church, and before and after coverage in the Cadillac News! Here are some of the photographs taken by **Scott Bartlett**:



Prayer List

Please hold these members, friends, and family in prayer: **Lee, Dorothy, Brian, Margaret, the Campo family, Jen, Marge, the Teasdale family, the Family, Cullin.**

MISSIONS

Mission Target for December: UCC Christmas Fund

Penny Phelps

The **Christmas Fund** is the last of five annual appeals that the UCC makes. This offering, formerly designated "Veterans of the Cross," helps retired clergy and other church employees who find it hard to make ends meet. It could be providing health care supplements, or year-end gifts, or even assisting current clergy with emergency funds.

In these difficult economic times the needs are greater and the appeals for emergency grants have increased. Please help your church, the United Church of Christ, participate in keeping God's covenant of compassion and care with those who have worked so faithfully for God.

Stehouwer Free Clinic Pancake Brunches

Mark your calendars for our now quarterly Free Clinic Pancake Brunches, which will be held from **10 am-12 pm** on **February 11, April 14, and June 9!** Attendance at the November 12 brunch was great and included Ed's wife, **Muriel Stehouwer**.

WORSHIP

Hanging of the Greens

Please join us on **Saturday, December 3**, from **10:00 am-12:00 pm** for fellowship and a festive hanging of the greens for the season. Refreshments will be served.

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 grief, broken relationships, the insecurity of unemployment, the weariness of ill health, the pain of isolation—all of these can make us feel 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, 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 18** 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. Healing stations throughout the sanctuary will also offer opportunities to light candles of remembrance, receive individual prayer, a blessing, and/or anointing with oil, engage forgiveness, and take communion.

Christmas Ornament Hanging

Please bring a special Christmas ornament to worship on **December 11**. 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

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.

FUN!

"Sunday" Fun-Day

For December's Fun-Day, we will attend a performance of the Nutcracker ballet at Interlochen's Corson Auditorium on **December 10** at **7:30 pm**. As there is no Sunday performance, this will actually be a "**Saturday** Fun-Day." Please buy your own tickets early, and we can carpool up together. If some are interested, we could make it a big night out and meet for dinner somewhere. This can be as fun as we want it to be!

Ticket prices are \$23 adult, \$20 senior, and \$9 student. Tickets can be ordered online at <https://tickets.interlochen.org/>

If you have ideas for future Fun-Days, please speak to **Sandy**. She especially needs ideas for January and February!

Christmas Caroling

Calling singers of all vocal ranges and abilities! Have fun while sharing the Christmas spirit with church elders and shut-ins! On **December 21** we will meet at the church at **4 pm** to gather our songbooks and form carpools. (You can also join us along the way. We expect to have a schedule of stops available in advance.) Afterwards we have been invited for dinner at **Larry and Connie's** home. If you plan to join us, please RSVP to Connie

VISION

Open and Affirming (ONA)

Mark Your Calendars!

Please join us as we kick off our congregational ONA exploration and education process in 2012! Our first two classes are scheduled for **Sundays, January 15** and **February 12**. They will take place half an hour into coffee hour and be led by pairs of ONA Task Force members. Please come with questions, open hearts and minds as we learn and dialogue together.

A box will be placed at the back of the sanctuary for any ONA questions or topics you would like to submit to the Task Force to be covered in one of the classes. You are also invited to bring your questions to Task Force members **Karen, Margie, Linda, Jen, Karma, Catherine, Troy, Bob, Ann, Penny,** or **Pastor Carol**.

In preparation for the first gathering, here is some terminology from the UCC Coalition for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Concerns. More terms will follow in next month's newsletter.

- **Sexual Orientation:** a term referring to the sex of the people to whom we're physically and romantically attracted.
 - **Gay** males find that the people they're attracted to are other males.
 - **Lesbians** find that the people they're attracted to are other women.
 - **Bisexuals** find they're attracted to some people who are male and some who are female.

[Other terms are used as well, for example, some in African American communities use "**same-gender-loving (sgl)**" and some in the Native American community use "**Two-Spirit**." The exact meaning and usage may vary from person to person, however. In addition, people of various backgrounds who don't find any of these terms adequate or helpful may identify as "**queer**." The term, which can be pejorative, has been reclaimed by some as a term of pride, indicating their freedom from society's limiting expectations regarding sexuality and gender. Some people may identify as "**questioning**" when they are in the process of discovering who they are and how they wish to identify themselves. And some people may resist any labeling at all.]

Whole Earth

Holiday Arts & Recycled Craft Workshop December 3, 1:30-4:30 pm in Fellowship Hall

Learn how to make fun projects out of recycled materials! Youth and adults will make projects to take home (get a head start on holiday gifts!) and get inspiration for how to "upcycle" and repurpose household items. Registration is \$2. Space is limited, so register early by contacting the 4-H office (401 N. Lake St. or 775-9480). Sponsored by Wexford County 4-H and Transition Cadillac

UNITED NORTHERN ASSOCIATION

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

COMMUNITY

Movies for the Mind

The next Movies for the Mind film screening will be on **Sunday, December 18 at 6:00 pm at the Old Phartz** across Mitchell Street from the Blue Heron. Details to follow once the film has been selected

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Summary of 11/10 Meeting

Laura Jacobson-Pentces, Clerk

Much of the November meeting was spent discussing the upcoming Holiday Bazaar (Saturday, November 26). Members heard from Pastor Carol updates regarding the Cadillac High School GSA group that will be meeting in the near future. There will also be a Blue Christmas Healing Service on December 18 - look for flyer and more details to follow. The Book Mark project continues with 1000 2"x8" bookmarks on order from Express Yourself Promotions for the cost of \$41.99, and will be given to visiting and/or new attendees to First Congregational. The Board also noted that there would be at least one Trustee position open for the 2012 Board and as well as the position of Clerk. The Board also discussed the logic of having a regular service on Christmas Sunday and it was decided that a hymn sing would suffice. Pastor Carol will be on vacation from December 25, 2011 to January 10, 2012.

STEWARDSHIP

Penny Phelps

On November 13 we launched our Stewardship Campaign. Prior to that date, members and friends of the congregation had received letters outlining the campaign and enclosing pledge cards. On the 13th, I spoke about our recent history, the financial hurdles we have overcome, and our confidence that we can continue to carry on our ministries and the fellowship that we enjoy. On Nov. 20, Linda Baynes shared with us her story – how she found First Congregational UCC when she first moved to Cadillac and the strength and security she has found here. This is her home. In the coming weeks other members of the congregation will talk about what this church means to them. When we understand the powerful importance of our church in people's lives, we have to do our very best to sustain it. Truly we have been blessed; therefore we need to respond with gratitude. Pledge cards can be placed in the offering plate or mailed to the church at any time, however, we have designated **December 11 as Pledge Sunday**. On that date, we would like to receive and consecrate and give thanks for the support of all those who commit themselves to the continuing work of the church.

POINSETTIAS

It's time to order poinsettias for the sanctuary!

If you wish to join in this time-honored tradition of purchasing a plant to create a blaze of color at the front of the sanctuary, please fill in the form below and either bring it to church or mail it in. **The deadline is Sunday, December 11.**

Poinsettia Order

I/We _____ wish to order
(Name)

_____ poinsettias at \$8 each in memory honor (circle one) of:

_____.

Enclosed is my/our payment of \$_____.

DECEMBER 2011

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				1 *Jazz. 8:30am 5:00pm	2 *Jazz. 8:30am	3 *Jazz. 8:30 am Art Wkshop 1:30 pm
4 Communion Sunday, 10:30 am	5 *Jazz. 4:30 pm 5:45 pm	6 *Jazz. 8:30 am	7 *Jazz. 5:45 pm Choir 7:00 pm	8 *Jazz. 8:30am 5:00pm BOT 5:45 pm *Miracles 10:00 am	9 *Jazz. 8:30am	10 *Jazz. 8:30am Fun-Day: Nutcracker
11 Worship w/ Christmas Ornament Hanging 10:30 am	12 *Jazz. 4:30 pm 5:45 pm	13 *Jazz. 8:30 am	14 *Jazz. 5:45 pm Choir 7:00 pm	15 *Jazz. 8:30 am 5:45 pm	16 *Jazz. 8:30am	17 *Jazz. 8:30 am
18 Worship 10:30 am Blue Xmas Service 4:30 pm Messiah Sing- along 7 pm	19 *Jazz. 4:30 pm 5:45 pm	20 *Jazz. 8:30 am *Audubon 7 pm Items for News- letter Due!	21 *Jazz. 5:45 pm Caroling 4:00 pm	22 *Jazz. 8:30 am 5:45 pm	23 *Jazz. 8:30am	24 *Jazz. 8:30 am
25 Worship 10:30 am	26 *Jazz. 4:30 pm 5:45 pm	27 *Jazz. 8:30 am	28 *Jazz. 5:45 pm Choir 7:00 pm	29 *Jazz. 8:30 am 5:45 pm	30 *Jazz. 8:30am	31 *Jazz. 8:30 am

*Non-Church activities that occur in the church.