

December 2012
The Tie That Binds
First Congregational United Church of Christ
Cadillac, Michigan

PASTOR REYNOLDS' RAP

"Always we begin again." "Listen with the ear of your heart." -The Rule of St. Benedict

"Do you have the patience to wait until your mud settles, and the water is clear?" -Lao-tzu

Dear Friends,

So here we are!--About to end another church year and enter a new one, as Advent begins on December 2. It strikes me that each year passes a little more quickly than the last, but perhaps that is partly an illusion fostered by the retail industry. It used to be "Black Friday" that officially ushered us into the annual Christmas shopping season. But, in the past few years, that "Friday" has begun to inch back into Thanksgiving's Thursday, and so, too, have the ads crept backwards. This year Target's Christmas TV commercials didn't even wait for Halloween: They began airing on October 11, which must be some sort of a record. It seemed like the candy cane lights on Mitchell Street and in Cadillac West appeared shortly thereafter. Apparently corporations and small businesses alike can't wait for us to catch the seasonal cheer and begin our shopping.

Yes, we know, the Advent season is about preparation. Be it Christmas shopping, decorating, or entertaining, we've got our hands full! But, truly, none of those activities is an Advent preparation. Far less frenzied and flashy, Advent is 4-week period during which we are to prepare our hearts through the spiritual practice of waiting. Advent is an invitation for us to place ourselves in the role of pregnant Mary and ponder the seeds of promise God has planted deep within us. While we can easily get caught up in the nostalgia of Christmases past or the anticipation of the upcoming festivities, Advent's gift is presence in and to the present moment. In the spaciousness of savored moments, we are able to begin to discern where Christ may be seeking to be reborn into our lives today.

Waiting isn't something we do well in this culture; nor is it truly one of our core values. Businesses typically reward efficiency and decisiveness and to be concerned with outcomes, profits in particular. Very little thought or intentionality may be given to the processes which help to shape the outcomes. But church life is different. Budgets and buildings aside, church is comprised of human beings and built upon relationships. Ultimately it all points, not to a bottom line or a production value, but toward God's infinite love and healing grace, as exemplified by the self-giving life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Not only are these God's priceless commodities, but they are gifts that can't be rushed. They unfold in their own way and time, guided by the Spirit of God with a little help from us co-creators. Sometimes the process itself is the gift, as it is a way of being in covenant and relationship with one another and God.

Waiting can be uncomfortable. Not filling up every hour with festive busyness can open us up to the risk of pregnant pauses in our lives and our conversations. But I'm here to tell you, that's okay. Do not fear. Something new and precious is struggling to be born in and through this congregation. So stay present to this Advent labor process, knowing that the joyful delivery of Christmas and Epiphany are right around the corner. The light and the revelation of Christ's imminent rebirth in our midst are ours when we have the patience to stay present to our process and to one another.

May God abundantly bless and keep each one of you and your families throughout these seasons of Advent waiting and Christmas joy,

Pastor Carol

SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR DECEMBER 2012

| | | |
|-------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| December 2 | Jeremiah 33:14-16 | Sign of Things to Come |
| December 9 | Luke 1:68-79 | Make Ready |
| December 16 | Isaiah 12:2-6, Luke 3:7-18 | Look Forward |
| December 23 | Luke 1:39-45, (46-55) | Moving with Mary's Song |
| December 24 | Various | Christmas Eve |
| December 30 | tbd | Christmas Carol Sing & Storytelling |

WORSHIP & WELCOME

Hanging of the Greens

December 1

All are invited for fellowship and a festive hanging of the greens for the Advent and Christmas seasons from **noon to 2 pm**, just after the Saturday Pancake Brunch.

Reception of New Members

December 2

Please join us in welcoming new members into our church family.

Christmas Ornament Hanging

December 9

Please bring a special Christmas ornament to worship, when we will take time to share and hang them on our sanctuary Christmas tree. Ornaments may be retrieved in January.

Stewardship Sunday

December 16

Come celebrate and respond to God's goodness to this church as we dedicate and bless our 2013 pledges for God's work in this community and beyond.

Christmas Eve Service

December 24

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

Christmas Carol Sing & Storytelling Service

December 30

An opportunity to sing all of your favorite carols and to experience Penny Phelps' animated storytelling. **FUN!**

Christmas Caroling & Party

December 23

Calling singers of all ages, vocal ranges, and abilities! Have fun while sharing the Christmas spirit with church elders and shut-ins! We will meet at the church at **3:00 pm** to gather songbooks and form carpools. Afterwards all are invited for a festive dinner party at the **Zolysnkys'** home.

****Children and families are especially encouraged to participate****

RSVP to Connie please

Sunday Fun-Day(s)

Based on feedback received via questionnaires distributed at the Semi-Annual Meeting, **Sue Wachowski** is compiling a schedule for the year. To organize an activity, please speak directly to Sue.

OPEN AND AFFIRMING (ONA)

December 16: Study Sessions #5 & #6

January 13: ONA Covenant Vote* at 2013 Annual Meeting

*Once the ONA Task Force has drafted a covenant, it will be circulated to the congregation for feedback prior to the Annual Meeting vote.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

****Mark your Calendars! The Annual Meeting will be after worship on January 13****

Summary of 11/8 Board Meeting

Susan Wachowski

New Business

-The pastoral transition process was addressed by the **Rev. Cheryl Burke**, who provided a Search and Call Manual for our review. It includes a checklist of things to do before Carol leaves, such as saying our farewells, holding an exit interview with the Association Church & Ministry Committee, pastor, and Board of Trustees; and securing transitional leadership. We will need a small committee for the interim search. This is a specialized field of ministry, and Cheryl has a list of qualified, available interim pastors for us to consider once we have determined our particular needs for this time period.

The official search for a settled pastor can wait awhile during the interim. We will need to identify a budget for the search committee, as well as our finances and expectations for possible candidates before we begin the process. (The UCC Michigan Conference website's "Pilgrimage Through Transitions" is very helpful.) It was suggested we ask everyone in our congregation to list their 7 most trustworthy and competent church members as a way to identify potential search committee members.

Building and Maintenance

-**Richard Harvey** has offered his services in overseeing building needs and repairs. Recently he has been adjusting windows to get better seals. We need to find a contractor or engineer to identify areas where water is seeping into the building and determine how best to remediate.

Pastor's Report

-The Craft and Chat group will no longer be meeting at Zolynskys'. Could we look at possibly meeting on Saturday mornings in our upstairs "Galley" meeting room with the comfy furniture?

-Many have expressed their enjoyment of our bible study and dinner-and-a-movie evenings and hate to see these gatherings end. We may want to consider a new focus for future months and keep our eyes and ears open for movies, books, subjects to study starting the first of the year.

Worship and Welcome

-February 3 will be Carol's last Sunday with us. A "God's Speed" service will be held. Planning and prayers are needed.

Stewardship Committee

Your Stewardship

A letter went out the week of November 12 to members and friends of our Church, which included a pledge card, narrative budget, giving guide, and a time and talent pledge card. On November 18, **Pat McCurdy** shared with us how she has been inspired by the members of our congregation.

It is the hope of your stewardship committee that each of you will give prayerful thought to how you will support our Church in the coming year. Our financial needs are great, but we serve a needed place in our community. There will be three more stewardship moments before **December 16** when we will dedicate your pledge cards during the service. You may put them in the offering plate on any Sunday, or mail them to the church (P. O. Box 892). This will allow us to build a budget to review at our Annual Meeting in January. "God loves it when the giver delights in the giving."

Questions? Please speak to **Donna Debney, Sperry Claypool, or Tom Jobson.**

Treasurer's Report

Penny Phelps

Summary Financial Report as of 10/31/12

| | |
|----------------------------------------|----------|
| 2012 Budget | \$85,958 |
| Average Monthly Expenses (\$85,958/12) | \$7,163 |

| Month | Income | Expenses | Deficit | Accum. Deficit |
|----------------------------|---------------|-----------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Jan. | \$5,653 | \$6,765 | \$1,112 | |
| Feb. | 4,854 | 5,287 | 433 | \$ 1,545 |
| Mar. | 3,736 | 6,528 | 2,792 | 4,337 |
| Apr. | 5,452 | 8,444 | 2,992 | 7,329 |
| May | 7,531 | 8,475 | 944 | 8,273 |
| June | 4,526 | 6,234 | 1,708 | 9,981 |
| July | 6,881 | 7,634 | 753 | 10,734 |
| Aug. | 4,820 | 5,185 | 365 | 11,099 |
| Sep. | 6,234 | 10,183 | 3,949 | 15,048 |
| Oct. | 7,745 | 4,641 | (3,104) | 11,944 |
| Projected Monthly Expenses | | | (\$7,163 x 10) | |
| | \$71,630 | | Actual Ten Months Expenses | |
| | | 69,376 | | Actual Ten Months |
| Income | | | 57,432 | |

You can see from the figures above exactly where we stand with only two months remaining in 2012. The **good news** is that October was the first month all year when income exceeded expenses –thanks primarily to members who submitted their 2013 pledge early.

You have received the **Stewardship Letter** describing our needs for the coming year. There isn't much room for cutting the budget, so on behalf of the Board of Trustees, I ask you to give prayerful consideration to how we can continue to sustain the work of this church. What is it that God wants us to do? God is still listening – are we?

AN INVITATION TO ALL

Please Come to Linnea Stifler's Ordination

Saturday, December 15, 2012, 2:00

pm

St. Mary's Episcopal Church, 815 Lincoln St., Cadillac
Reception to follow

MISSIONS

Mission Target for December: UCC Christmas Fund

The Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund is now in its 110th year of "serving those who serve the church." One of four UCC Special Mission Offerings received annually, it supports ministries to lower-income retired clergy and lay employees as well as to active clergy facing unforeseen financial crises. Your gift to the Christmas Fund is an expression of covenant. Through this ministry of giving, we covenant to show love, compassion, and care to elderly pastors who receive thank-you gift checks at Christmas; to widowed spouses who receive pension supplementation to bring their retirement income to a level where they can live with dignity; to clergy families struggling with a chronic illness who receive health premium supplements; and to the many individuals—lay and ordained—who receive some type of ongoing ministerial assistance.

We invite you to covenant with others throughout our church in bringing your gift to this vital ministry, which touches the lives of so many. Your heartfelt gift can and will make a difference.

After 26 Project

One day soon the After 26 Project will ask us to an after-church work day. Stay tuned for details!!



Hurricane Sandy Relief Efforts

The UCC is actively responding to the Hurricane Sandy damage through One Great Hour of Sharing grants. The devastation in many communities is truly catastrophic. Please follow this link for up-to-date information and specific ways to donate: <http://www.ucc.org/disaster/hurricane-sandy-update.html>

Church World Service has already donated thousands of blankets in Cuba and the US. Representatives have said that right now blankets are their greatest need. To make a donation for blankets, please check out this link: http://www.churchworldservice.org/site/PageServer?pagename=blankets_main

As clean-up begins there is increased demand for Church World Service hygiene kits and clean-up buckets. Lansing CWS reports that sending the kits and buckets directly to their depot in Maryland will ensure that they get deployed most quickly. For information about how to make and send kits, please see this link: http://www.churchworldservice.org/site/PageServer?pagename=kits_main

Project Christmas Book Donations

Karma Chapo

Project Christmas is a non-profit organization that seeks to spread the love of Christ to those experiencing hard times in this difficult economy. As in the past, our church is asked to donate new children's books so that all the children will have a book or two under the Christmas tree. To help, please drop books in the Project Christmas box in the library. Books will be picked up on **December 6**. If you prefer to make a monetary contribution, you may make a check out to Project Christmas with a note that it is for children's books or by giving me a cash donation, which I will submit to Project Christmas, indicating that it is for the book table gifts. Thanks for your help!

Stehouwer Free Clinic Pancake Brunch

December 1

Take a break from your holiday shopping from 10:00 am-12:00 pm for some food for body and soul.

UNITED NORTHERN ASSOCIATION

Congratulations to Clare Congregational UCC!

The congregation has called **the Rev. Dr. Adam Brooks Webber** as pastor. He begins his ministry there on January 1. You may recall that we hosted Rev. Dr. Brooks' neutral pulpit on September 30.

Sister Church

Our UNA sister church for December is **First Congregational UCC, Harrison**. Please pray for the congregation during the coming month. Cards may be sent to **211 Spruce Street, Harrison 48625**.

MICHIGAN CONFERENCE

Words from Conference Minister the Rev. Dr. Campbell Lovett

Unity in Diversity (or how many UCC catch-phrases can you find in an otherwise serious reflection)
Last Sunday, I participated in the worship service of one of our Michigan Conference churches. Just before I preached, a wonderful gentleman read the Gospel lesson. When he finished reading, he looked up at the congregation, and I expected him to offer an ascription of praise, perhaps, "The Word of the Lord." Instead, he calmly said, "My name is Ken Auten, and I approve this message!" I can tell you that the laughter in that congregation lasted quite awhile. It was a relief from the barrage of often negative television ads, postcards, and "robo-calls" to which everyone had been subjected during the many months leading up to the Sunday before Election Day.

As Christians, it is the Good News of the Gospel that we unite in approving even in the midst of our myriad differences. We approve this message of love, mercy, compassion, forgiveness, justice and peace - regardless of race, class, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, physical and mental abilities, and political beliefs.

This reminded me of the UCC phrase - prior to the "comma" and the "still-speaking" and the "changing

lives" - unity in diversity. I've been mulling this over in the wake of our national election, because it is clear to me that there are very few who currently find any unity in our national diversity. An analysis of the election results show that we live in a country that knows disunity and division. A little more than half the voters are pleased with the national election results; a little less than half are disappointed. More than half of our states are red, while less than half are blue (though clearly purple would be a more accurate color to represent our nuanced allegiances). Post-election interviews with legislative leaders indicate a sharpening of ideological differences that suggest a continuing congressional quagmire. My informal polls hint at both fear and hope about what's in store as we move forward. However, it is so interesting to note the diversity of the unlikely coalition of youth, Latinos, and white women that seemed to create the unity needed to re-elect President Obama.

What I am discovering in my travels around the state is that no two of our churches are the same. What a surprise, huh? There is a real diversity in membership, organization, worship style, music, and leadership. And yet, we still covenant together to be associations and a conference in order to be more effective, and perhaps more unified, in our mission and ministry. In that covenant, we give up our total independence in order "to walk together in all God's ways" and live into Jesus' prayer, "that they might all be one."

Our call as members of the United Church of Christ, especially during these days, is to be a "united and uniting church" - celebrating our diversity, yet also affirming the unity found in our shared scriptures so that we can join in the affirmation: In essentials unity, in non-essentials diversity, in all things charity. Perhaps the blessing that we can be at a time such as this is modeling that unity does not mean homogeneity, but instead living out the love of Jesus that keeps us together as congregations, associations, and a conference.

I hope that you will join me in approving this message!

Dear God, bless our newly elected leaders that they might govern wisely, promoting liberty and justice for all; and bless the churches of the Michigan Conference that they might be places of growing diversity and increasing unity - to your glory. Amen.

PHOTO/ADDRESS DIRECTORY

For a copy of the 2012 directory, please see **Donna Debney**. A **suggested donation of \$5.00** covers production costs for a binder of photographs and addresses for church members and friends. Whether or not you are able to make this donation, you are invited to take a copy home with you.

PASTORAL CARE

Due to HIPAA privacy rules, hospitals do not notify pastors when parishioners are hospitalized. When in doubt, please assume the pastor is unaware of a hospitalization and pass the word along to her. On days off (Mon, Tues), please direct emergency calls only to her cell phone (**884-9884**). Thanks!

NURTURE AND CARE TEAM

Diane Jobson (775-7367, 920-8764) can coordinate rides to church or doctor's appointments and meal delivery for those recuperating from surgery, illness, injury, grief or a family emergency.

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 16.**

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 2012

| SUNDAY | MONDAY | TUESDAY | WEDNESDAY | THURSDAY | FRIDAY | SATURDAY |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | | | | | | 1 *Jazz. 8:30 am Pancake Brunch 10:00 am Hanging of Greens 12:00 pm |
| 2 Choir 9:30 am Worship w/ Communion & Reception of New Members 10:30 am | 3 *Jazz. 5:30 pm | 4 *Jazz. 8:30 am | 5 *Jazz. 5:30 pm Choir Practice 7:00 pm | 6 Office Hours 1-5 *Jazz. 5:30 pm | 7 *Jazz. 8:30am | 8 *Jazz. 8:30am |
| 9 Choir 9:30 am Worship w/ Ornament Hanging 10:30 am | 10 *Jazz. 5:30 pm | 11 *Jazz. 8:30 am *GALLEY 7:00 pm | 12 *Jazz. 5:30 pm Choir Practice 7:00 pm | 13 Office Hours 1-5 *Jazz. 5:30 pm *Transition Cadillac 7 pm BOT Mtg 6:30 pm | 14 *Jazz. 8:30am | 15 *Jazz. 8:30 am Linnea Stifler Ordination St. Mary's 2:00 pm |
| 16 Choir 9:30 am Stewardship Sunday Worship 10:30 am | 17 *Jazz. 5:30 pm | 18 *Jazz. 8:30 am | 19 *Jazz. 5:30 pm | 20 Office Hours 1-5 *Jazz. 5:30 pm Newsletter Items Due! | 21 *Jazz. 8:30am | 22 *Jazz. 8:30 am |
| 23 Worship 10:30 am Christmas Caroling & Party 3:00 pm | 24 Christmas Eve Service 7:30 pm | 25 Christmas Day Pastor Carol on Vacation | 26 *Jazz. 5:30 pm Choir Practice 7:00 pm → | 27 Office Hours 1-5 *Jazz. 5:30 pm → | 28 *Jazz. 8:30am → | 29 → |
| 30 Christmas Carol & Storytelling Worship 10:30 am → | 31 *Jazz. 5:30 pm → | 1 → | 2 Pastor Carol Back from Vacation | | | |

*Non-Church activities that occur in the church.