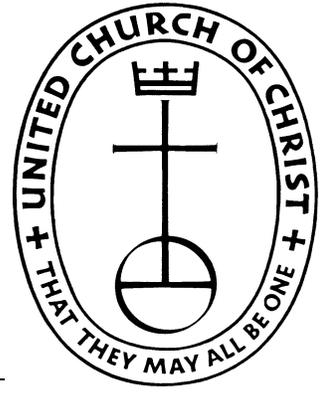


First Christian United Church of Christ Newsletter December 2019



Turkey Day was filled with wonderful food, fabulous conversation and warm fellowship. A successful cake auction followed, which will help fund renovations on the sanctuary sound system.

PASTOR'S COLUMN

The Lord is coming, always coming. When you have ears to hear and eyes to see you will recognize Him at any moment of your life. Life is Advent; life is recognizing the coming of the Lord.
-Henri Nouwen

I love this quote from Henri Nouwen - he reminds us that Christ, our Emmanuel, is always with us. Especially during the Advent-Season we celebrate Christ's presence and recognize that He is in all, of all and without Him nothing that is would be. It is a time to rejoice and to celebrate with ears and eyes as wide open as possible. It is a time to rejoice together in the mystery that is Christ among us the hope of glory. May it be so!

We are so enjoying being among you as co-pastors and are feeling warmly welcomed by the community. In last month's newsletter my wife, Deborah, included some of her story and this month I get to share some of mine. Like Deborah, I grew up in the mid-west. I was raised in a loving family which included my parents, two brothers and a sister. Church was important in our young lives, but I quit attending as a teenager and was drawn back into the church in my 20's. While serving in the Army in Germany in the 1970's, I found having a community in which to worship was important for growing in Christian faith. Deborah and I met right after I left the service and were married in 1977. Marrying Deborah was the best move I made in my life and we are in our 43rd year of being together. Each one gets better as we go.

I completed a degree in Anthropology from Iowa State University and then went to law school at Drake University. During this time Deborah started the Singing Telegram and Balloon business and for the first year she ran the business out of our home. I venture to say that I was the only guy on our block who had a helium tank in his bedroom for filling balloons. I could talk like Donald Duck any time ... day or night.

Deborah and I found ourselves among Quakers (Religious Society of Friends) beginning in 1984. I was drawn to the Quakers because of their openness to the continuing revelation of God. Also, I was drawn to a faith where it was expected that we would and could experience God and Christ in our present walk in life. While Deborah pastored I practiced law for 19 years. During this time I entered a four-year course of study to become a Recorded Friends Minister (Quaker equivalent of Ordination) and was recorded in 1988. In 2001-2002 Deborah and I worked as Quakers in Residence at Wollaston College, Perth Australia and had a wonderful experience with Aussies seeking to grow in faith. In 2004 – 2007 I trained and worked as a Chaplain for the Moses Cone Health System in Greensboro and from 2007 to 2017 I was the Administrator at Friend Homes at Guilford, a continuing care retirement community.

I have several hobbies which keep me occupied in my spare time including golf, reading and struggling with crossword puzzles that forever challenge my brain. My favorite book of recent years is Mark Twain's *Life on the Mississippi* and I am currently reading *The Spirituality of Imperfection* by Ernest Kurtz and Katherine Ketcham. So far it is an amazing read. Next up is Jean Vanier's *Becoming Human*.

Deborah and I have always been interested in ecumenical ministry and are delighted to be here among you at First Christian UCC. I feel like we are kindred spirits as we seek to open our ears and eyes to encounter God together during Advent and beyond.

Tim Jackson, Interim Minister

AN INVITATION: WHEN CHRISTMAS FEELS A BIT BLUE



One of our great contemporary philosophers said it best. A pudgy faced, balding child by the name of Charlie Brown once opened up to his buddy Linus. Charlie bemoaned, *“I think there must be something wrong with me, Linus. Christmas is coming, but I’m not happy. I don’t feel the way I am supposed to feel. I just don’t understand Christmas I guess. I like getting presents, and sending Christmas cards, and decorating trees and all that, but I’m still not happy. I always end up feeling depressed.”*

In response, Linus says, *“Charlie Brown, you’re the only person I know who can take a wonderful season like Christmas and turn it into a problem.”*

But I think - Charlie Brown hits the nail on the head. He speaks honestly about the way *many* experience the holiday season, but don’t want to say it aloud. We know that Christmas “ought to be” the most wonderful time of the year, right? If the holiday season has taught us anything, we know that if there ever was a time for joy, it’s supposedly Christmas—with all the angels dancing and inanimate snowmen coming alive to lead children into merry mischief. How can we not feel a sense of seasonal gladness? But . . . what if we don’t? What if Charlie Brown speaks our mind - at least in part? What if the holiday season *is* hard for us? Maybe – especially this year? It might be a death, a move, an illness, a separation or a loss of any kind. What do we do if our Christmas season is *blue*? One thing I do know: it doesn’t help to have the Linuses of the world telling us that there is something wrong with the way we feel.

So Tim and I offer to you a three-fold invitation. Please let one of us know if:

- *You would like to meet either of us during this holiday season ... to talk or simply sit and pray together.**
- *You would like some written information on dealing with grief and sadness during this “season of joy.”**
- *You would like information on a “Blue Christmas service” held in the area.**

In the meantime, please know you are not alone. Our God who loves you, knows you, and calls you by name is always with you ... as close to you as your very breath. In the words of Psalmist: *Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast. If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night,” even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you. Psalm 139:7-12*

With love and care, Deborah Suess

THE GREATEST GIFT AT CHRISTMAS ...

by Joan G. Paschal

The greatest gift at Christmas
You can't get from a store.
It's when someone asks for your help
You give that and even more.

It could be a welcomed visit
To those who are alone.
Or even just a simple smile
To set a joyous tone.

A helping hand to those in need
Is often the best gift.

Or offering your shoulder
To those who need a lift.

A kind thought, a hug, a kiss
To show how much you care,
And let them know that you intend
To keep them in your prayers.

The greatest gift at Christmas
Is the one Christ gives to you.
It is the love at Christmas time
Carried all the year through.

ALAMANCE STRINGS CONCERT



On Saturday December 7th the students of Alamance Strings perform their annual

concert. The performance will begin with three pieces performed by the teenagers in the String Ensemble: Moussorgsky's Great Gate of Kiev, Tchaikovsky's Sleeping Beauty Waltz, and a setting of the English Carol The Holly and the Ivy. Next, the violin and cello students of all ages take the stage to play repertoire from folk tunes to famous classical works by Dvorak, Schumann, Handel, and Bach. The concert culminates with all the students playing seasonal favorites together. The concert is free to attend, family friendly, and approximately an hour in length. Please join us at 5:00 pm at Shiloh Presbyterian Church on Grand Oaks Blvd.

Amy Marsh

SUPPER CLUB – DECEMBER 3RD

Every time that the Supper Club meets, it's a great time of fun and fellowship! Many have participated in the gatherings and all have had a wonderful time. The next event will be on December 3rd at Valerio's Restaurant. Please contact Eleanor Lovgren by November 28th to make your reservation.

IT'S A BUSY SEASON

The season of Advent is that period of four Sundays preceding Christmas, and this year, the calendar is jam-packed.

- *Nov. 30* *Decorating the Sanctuary, 9 am*
- *Dec. 1* *First Sunday: Hanging of the Greens, 10:30 am*
 - *Lighting the Candle of Hope*
 - *Turn in donation for "Christmas Cheer"*
- *Dec. 8* *Official Board, 8:30 am*
 - *Second Sunday: Candle of Peace, 10:30 am*
 - *Congregational Meeting, 11:30 am*
- *Dec. 15* *Carol Sing, 10:15 am*
 - *Third Sunday: Candle of Joy, 10:30 am*
- *Dec. 22* *Fourth Sunday: Candle of Love*
 - *Lessons and Carols, 10:30 am*
 - *UCC Christmas Fund Offering*
- *Dec. 24* *Candlelight Service, 5 pm: Lighting the Christ Candle and Communion*
- *Dec. 30* *No Sunday School - Join us for Worship at 10:30 am*

CHRISTMAS FUND OFFERING

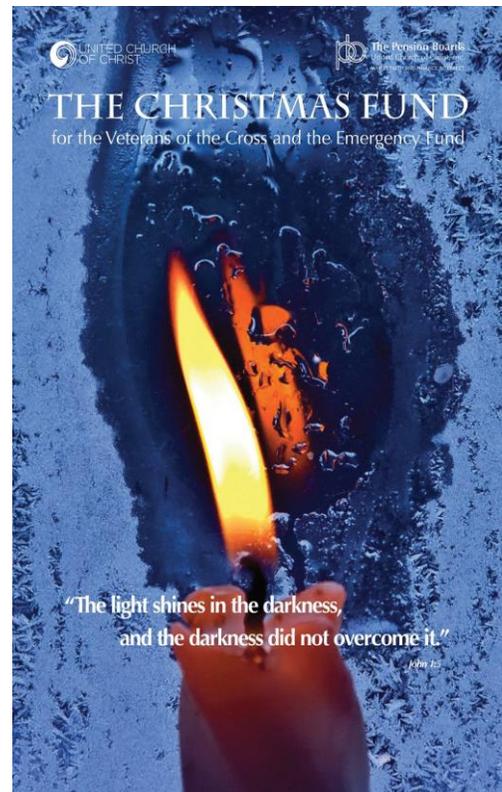
The light of God surrounds us,
The love of God enfolds us,
The power of God protects us,
The presence of God watches over us.
- James Dillet Freeman

support of last year's Christmas Fund Offering, we offer our sincere thanks for your generosity!

For over 100 years, the Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund has been a way to ensure that a light of love and hope will always shine for faithful servants of our church who find themselves facing unforeseen financial need.

We are grateful for the generosity of churches and individuals who contributed a total of \$2,539,471 to the 2018 Offering, enabling us to provide Pension Supplementation, Health Premium Supplementation, special grants for emergencies, and Christmas "Thank You" Gift Checks to over 1,000 individuals and families in need. The date for the Christmas Fund offering is December 22, 2019.

On behalf of the hundreds of clergy and lay employees and their families whose lives were touched by your



OFFICE CLOSED

Because of the holidays, the church office will be closed December 25th and 26th as well as on January 1st. The pastors can be contacted via their cell phones if any emergent issues arise.

MARGARET LIGHTBOURNE CIRCLE

The Margaret Lightbourne Circle will meet Monday, December 2nd at the home of Betty King at 12 noon. Everyone is asked to bring a covered dish to celebrate the annual Christmas Party.

ANNUAL REPORTS DUE

All committee and board chair's, take note. The deadline for your Annual Report is December 19th. Please submit all reports to Joan in the church office. Typed reports are welcomed, but not required,

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

Year to Date through 10-31-19

	Actual	Budget
Income:	\$170,763.80	\$172,415.00
<u>Expense</u>	<u>\$135,079.48</u>	<u>\$172,434.19</u>
Net Balance:	\$35,684.32	<\$19.19>
Balance in Checking 09-30-18		\$16,992.89

As you can see, everyone's continued support is still greatly needed to carry on the ministry of the church. Please send in your giving today.

Respectfully Submitted,
Ken Little and Connie Collins,
Treasurer and Accounting Manager