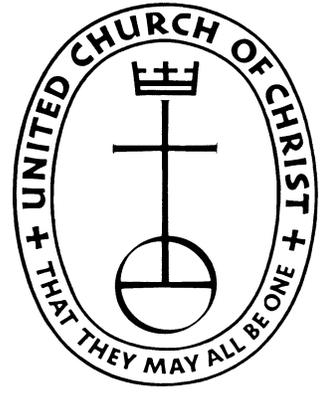


**First Christian
United Church of Christ
Newsletter
April 2018**



*He is Risen!
He is Risen, indeed!*

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PASTOR'S COLUMN

As I write these thoughts it is on the eve of our celebration of Palm/Passion Sunday. Our service will focus on the “Seven Last Words of Christ” as He died upon the cross. You and I live in a world of seemingly increasing violence. Every day there are new reports of bombings, shootings, kidnappings, gang violence, on-going wars. And it strikes me that our faith recognizes this terrible violence because standing at the very heart of our faith is one of the most awful acts of violence imaginable – death on a cross.

In our churches, crosses are always things of beauty. And, in the church we’ve heard the story of Jesus’ crucifixion so often we are tempted to skip right over it entirely and head directly to the Resurrection. In our minds, we think death on a cross was not easy, but look what awaited Jesus on the other side. Even our beautiful crosses seem to belie the horror of this instrument of torture and death. Yet, as Jesus hung on the cross, there was no vision of glorious Resurrection tripping through his mind as minute followed minute for three long hours. What Jesus felt up there on the cross was a sense of God’s forsakenness. “My God, my God, why have You forsaken me,” He cried out.

The Resurrection is God’s redemption of all of that suffering and pain. The Resurrection is God’s affirmation that the life brought by Jesus is even more powerful than death itself. But the power of that message is lost if we too quickly pass over the cross on our way to the empty tomb.

Which brings us back to today’s headlines and living in a violent world. Our faith acknowledges violence in the world and calls it sin. It stands in judgement of that violence, and when you and I have a hand in that violence, even if only indirectly, our faith stands in judgement of us and calls us to repent and be changed.

I write these thoughts on the eve of our celebration of Palm/Passion Sunday. But something else is going on today. Today millions of young people and their supporters are gathered in Washington D.C. and other cities around the country and around the world to call for an end to gun violence and for meaningful gun reform. It is estimated that 800 such rallies are taking place today.

After so much senseless slaughter that has taken place for far too long, the students at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida have said “Enough. We are tired of putting our lives at risk merely by going to school. We will no longer allow ourselves to be used for target practice for those with weapons to perpetrate massive, indiscriminate death.” And it seems that their voices are being heard.

I am reminded of a passage that we often read at Christmas time from the book of Isaiah. It speaks of God’s peaceable kingdom where the lion and the lamb shall lie down together and a little child shall lead them. Today, it is the children who are leading in the way of peace and hope. The question is, will we listen and follow?

Clearly, the issue of guns in America is complex and divisive, but with our children speaking out and many major corporations independently taking action, isn’t it time for reasonable, sensible reform?

For far too long, the vast majority of Americans who favor such reforms have remained silent and allowed vested interests to carry on without missing a beat. Now, the voices of our children shame our silence, and the horror that was the cross seems to say to us, “What are you waiting for? You are supposed to be Jesus’ agents of peace, hope, compassion and life. It’s time to follow the kids, just as Isaiah said. It’s time to raise your voices and act!”

Mark

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EASTER CELEBRATIONS

Having gone through the Season of Lent marking its start with the sign of the cross on our foreheads at the Ash Wednesday service, we have gone on a long spiritual journey. It has been a time of introspection and confession. It carried us through the excitement of Palm Sunday to Jesus' Last Supper with His disciples on Maundy Thursday. It took us to the garden where Jesus was arrested, then endured a kangaroo court-like trial where He was convicted and sentenced to death. Then, Lent took us back to the place where our journey began – the cross. On a Friday we call "Good," Jesus died there on that cross and then was buried. For three days He remained in the tomb, but on the third day, something happened.

On Sunday April 1st we will gather to celebrate that "something." As the sun breaks the horizon on Easter Sunday morning, we will gather on the lawn outside the church office to proclaim, "Christ is risen." "He is risen, indeed!" Our service will begin at 7:30 am In case of bad weather, please gather in the sanctuary. And we invite you to bring any fresh flowers from your garden to decorate the cross at the end of the service.

Following worship, we will move to the Bray Fellowship Hall for a breakfast hosted by the Board of Deacons as well as a time of fellowship together. Also, because of the hour of our breakfast, there will be no Sunday School on the 1st.

At 10:30, we will re-gather for our service celebrating the Resurrection. Special music is planned including a guest musician. In addition, since this is the first Sunday of the month, we will also celebrate an Easter adaptation of the Lord's Supper.

JOIN THE PRAYER GROUP

Come join us. First Christian has a dedicated prayer group that puts your prayer needs before the Mercy Throne every day. Unfortunately, our numbers have shrunk due to death and illness. There are no meetings, dues or uniforms. All we ask is that you spend at least 15 minutes at a time you choose to pray for the people on the prayer list. I send a typed list as needed or in case of emergency I call everyone. Presently our group is made up of Mary Newsome, Julie Miller, Ann Strange, Betty King, Merle Sharpe, Eleanor Lovgren and Mollie Blum. If you want to be an active part of this church's ministry join us. I read a funny comment about answered prayer. It said God always answers prayer. Sometimes it is yes, sometimes no and sometimes, you have got to be kidding. We have had some wonderful answers to prayer. If you are interested call Mollie at 336-578-5076. God says where two or more are gathered in his name there He is also. We don't have to be physically together as long as we are of the same mind in our prayers.

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THANK YOU FROM VERA REEDER

Please know you have my deepest heart-felt thanks for the many individual and group cards I get every day. I really enjoy getting the mail and know I will never forget your thoughtfulness and caring. Steve and I moved to Clayton in 2015 but miss Burlington and my family there. Of course, being near my step-daughter, Melissa, and her family is a great benefit to us both; especially in my current situation.

Please know I send you my prayers because I know so many of you have your own challenges.

May God bless you and again, thank you so very much for keeping me in your thoughts and hearts.

Love, Vera

CHURCH WOMEN UNITED

Church Women United will hold their May Friendship Day on Saturday, May 5th. The theme for this year's gathering is "Reaching for Wholeness." The event will be held at the Terrace Restaurant at Twin Lakes. Check-in is at 11:45 am. The program and lunch begin at noon. The cost is \$11.00 per person paid in advance. For more information, contact Judy Springer at 3831 Wade Coble Dr. Burlington, 27215 or contact the church office for a registration form. The reservation deadline is April 26th.

FIGHT CANCER – BUY A CAKE

Our annual Hot Dog Lunch and Cake Auction is scheduled for Sunday, April 22nd. Immediately following worship that day we will gather in the Bray Fellowship Hall immediately following worship for a good time of food and fellowship. But the real star of the day will be the cake auction afterwards. Last year we raised a record amount in support of the American Cancer Society's battle cancer. Will we do even better with this year? Our auction is all in support of the Relay for Life's broader community fund raising efforts.

Mark your calendar and bring your checkbook that day. The day is always a lot of fun! And if you can bring a cake to add to the effort, please do. Actually, the auction is not reserved for cakes alone. We always have a whole array of various treat. If you can bake or cook, pitch in and contribute your favorite.

MARGARET LIGHTBOURNE CIRCLE MEETING

The next meeting of the Margaret Lightbourne Circle will take place on April 9th at 1:30

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pm in the church conference room. The change of dates is due to the Easter Monday holiday.

SPAGHETTI SUPPER ON THE HORIZON

This year the Board of Deacons will once more partner with the Alamance Council for the Blind in sponsoring our annual spaghetti supper. That meal will be held in our Bray Fellowship Hall on Friday, May 4th. Doors will open at 5:00 pm. The cost is \$9 per ticket available from a member of the Board of Deacons. And once more we will be graced with the presence of “The Cornpickers” who will provide entertainment. If you can’t sit down and eat, take-home plates are available. And if we have enough left over, spaghetti sauce will be sold in quart containers at the end of the evening.

In anticipation of the dinner, members of the Society of the Blind will be joining us for worship on Sunday, April 29th.

SUPPER CLUB – FEBRUARY 6TH

The Supper Club gathering will be held on April 3rd at Kimber’s Restaurant in Gibsonville at 5:45 pm. This is a “pay your own way” event. Come, join in on the fun and fellowship we always experience at these gatherings. Please call Eleanor Lovgren (336-226-2671) by 8pm on March 30th to make your reservation.

FIFTH SUNDAY PRESENTATION ON SOUTH AFRICA

Last summer at the end of his mission trip to Uganda, Matt Rice extended his journey with a trip to South Africa. On April 29th for the Fifth Sunday educational program, Matt will make a presentation on that trip. Meet in the Bray Hall promptly at 9:30 am for Matt’s multi-media presentation which will take the place of our regular Sunday School schedule that day.

NEW TV

Some of you may have seen the bulletin notices about the Board of Christian Education searching for a new television set. The current “go to” set is probably 30 years old and weighs well over 100 pounds. Needless to say, the technology is dated and that TV was very hard to get around.

The good news is that someone heard of this need and responded. Through an anonymous gift the church now has a new, large, flatscreen television set. Complete with the latest technology and much lighter weight, it should be ready for use in the near future. And many thanks to our secret donor!

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NEW DIRECTORY TO BE PUBLISHED

As you may recall, when we published our annual report there was an updated directory included. It was around this same time that we were changing over some of our record-keeping software in the church office. Unfortunately, the transfer of dates from our old system to the new was less than perfect and some errors were included in the published directory. We asked for any corrections that you may have found and several responded. If you noticed an error and have been putting it off, be in touch. Consider this a “last call.” In the near future a corrected directory will be available. We hope it will be as up-to-date and accurate as possible.

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

Year to Date through 02-28-18

	Actual	Budget
Income:	\$55,809.65	\$33,737.18
<u>Expense</u>	<u>\$35,266.60</u>	<u>\$33,737.32</u>
Net Balance:	\$20,543.05	<\$ 0.14>
Balance in Checking 02-28-18		\$25,713.33

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