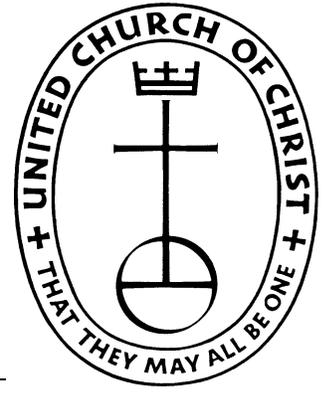




**First Christian  
United Church of Christ  
Newsletter  
December 2014**



*Join First Christian in the celebrations of the birth of  
the Christ Child...*

*Nov. 30 - Hanging of the Greens*

*Dec. 7 - Lessons and Carols*

*Dec. 14 the Christmas Cheer program*

*Dec. 24 - Christmas Eve Service.*

# **First Christian UCC – December 2014 Newsletter**

## **PASTOR'S COLUMN**

The news last week came in large part from the scientific front. The space program of the European Union was able to land a spacecraft on a comet streaking through our solar system. There were complications of course. Apparently it took three times to actually land the thing, and where it finally settled ended up being locked in the shadows of a nearby cliff. As a result, it's solar panels will not be able to fully recharge the landers batteries. Crews are even now working on this matter and hope to find some solution. Still, a few pictures have already come in and some experiments have begun. Any information that is gathered will provide a treasure trove of scientific data.

My first two years in college, I was an engineering student, so stories like this just captivate my imagination. Think of all the technical complexities involved in actually being able to accomplish a task like this! No longer are comets merely mysterious heavenly bodies that streak across our skies every decade or so. Now, we have actually visited one of those things and landed a craft upon it! Now we've seen a comet up close and personal, and as a result, we now know far more than we have ever known before.

But, of course, I was not just an engineering student, I was also a seminary student, and now I'm a minister, and so my theological mind is also captivated by this event. November 30<sup>th</sup> is the first Sunday in the season of Advent. Elsewhere in this newsletter you can read all about the many events that will be coming up in the weeks to come. But in essence, Advent is the liturgical season that helps us prepare for the birth of Christ, the light that is coming into the world.

When Jesus was born some 2,000 years ago, the Gospel According to Matthew tells us that Astrologers from the east followed a star that eventually came to rest over the place where Jesus lay. Was this a comet? We really don't know, but bright heavenly bodies this time of year always remind me of that powerful story from Matthew. Yet, even more than that bright light in the sky, the landing of a space craft on a comet reminds me of Jesus' birth even more. As you can see, my brain operates along non-conventional lines!

Here's the connection I see. It is what we call in our Service of Lessons and Carols, the Mystery of the Incarnation. In John's Gospel, we are told that Jesus was "in the beginning" and that all things were created through Him. Yet, Jesus did not remain at a distance, observing creation through time and space. Instead, He came and landed here among us, born in a stable in Bethlehem. But unlike that space lander on that streaming comet, Jesus did more than look around, then quietly fade away as His batteries ran down and died. Instead, Jesus came to live among us. He came to share all of life's joys as well as all of life's hardships. He willingly took upon Himself all of the hatred, violence, and corruption of the world, even dying on a cross because, according to John, that's just how profoundly Jesus loved the world. And after three days in the darkness of the tomb, that love continued to be so profound that it even overcame death itself, flooding the world with His holy love.

Landing a space craft on a speeding comet is an amazing technological accomplishment. But amazing as that landing may have been, it pales in comparison to the incomprehensible love of God that we have come to know in Jesus Christ. And it's that amazing love that we celebrate this Christmas season!

*Mark*

## **ANNUAL REPORTS DUE**

Just a reminder to chairs of church boards and committees, your 2014 annual reports are due in the church office by December 18<sup>th</sup>.

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## **FIRST ANNUAL FAMILY DAY – A JOYOUS SUCCESS**

Advent makes an early start this year, beginning the Sunday after Thanksgiving, November 30<sup>th</sup>. Advent is that period of four Sundays before Christmas. It is a time for prayer and reflection amidst all the busyness that so much surrounds us this time of the year. As a part of our worship each week, we light a candle on the Advent wreath. Each candle has symbolic meaning as we progress through the weeks – hope, peace, love and joy. It all culminates on Christmas Eve when we light the candle at the center of the wreath, the Christ candle that celebrates the coming of the Prince of Peace – the Light of the World. Join us as we make this spiritual journey together.

On November 30<sup>th</sup> we will celebrate our annual Hanging of the Greens in our sanctuary. Hear again the tale of Christmas, sing Christmas carols and light the Christmas tree. If you are able to help the Deacons decorate the sanctuary in preparation for this service, come by the church any time after 9:00 am on Saturday, November 29<sup>th</sup>. And of course, on the 30<sup>th</sup>, be prepared for the “river” of poinsettias that will make its way up the sanctuary’s aisle in order to fill our worship space with brilliant color.

On December 7<sup>th</sup> we will continue our celebration of Advent with our service of Lessons and Carols. The choir has been hard at work on preparation for this service. Word has it that a string quartet will also join us on that day as we retell the story of the birth of Christ in both word and song. Then please plan to stay immediately after worship for an important congregational meeting. There will be no reception on the 7<sup>th</sup> because of the meeting.

On December 14<sup>th</sup> we will host our Christmas Cheer service. Gather in the sanctuary at 4:00 pm on the 8<sup>th</sup> as we sing some carols, hear a Christmas story and dedicate our Christmas Cheer gifts (see accompanying article).

On December 22<sup>nd</sup>, we will collect our Christmas Fund offering in support of retired UCC pastors and church workers in need (see accompanying article).

Finally on Wednesday December 24<sup>th</sup>, we will gather once more to celebrate the birth of Christ. Our special candlelight service will begin at 5:00 pm and will feature a celebration of the Lord’s Supper. Please note, because we are celebrating communion on Christmas Eve, we will not celebrate it on the first Sunday of the month.

There will be no Sunday School on December 28<sup>th</sup>, but plan to join us that morning, the Sunday after Christmas, for a special Christmas story as a part of our service of worship.

## **THE SERVICE OF CHRISTMAS LESSONS AND CAROLS**

The Chancel Choir will present its annual Lessons and Carols on Sunday, December 7<sup>th</sup>, 10:30 AM. First introduced and performed at Kings College, Cambridge, England in 1918, it was first performed at First Christian in 1968 and has continued through the years. Carols and carol arrangements from the Renaissance through the twenty-first century will be presented. The service will include organ music, a string quartet, vocal solos, and congregational singing. Looking forward to this singular Christmas Music Service at First Christian, the Chancel Choir invites you to come and celebrate the 2014 Christmas Season.

## **CLOSINGS AND CANCELLATIONS**

Please note, the church office will be closed Christmas, December 25<sup>th</sup>, on New Year’s Eve and New Year’s Day, January 1<sup>st</sup>.

There will be no Sunday School or reception following worship on December 28<sup>th</sup>.

The Board of Christian Education will not meet in December.

# **First Christian UCC – December 2014 Newsletter**

## **THANK YOU FOR YOUR PLEDGE**

As we come to the end of one year and the beginning of the next it is important to pause and thank you for your giving. The budget at First Christian is dependent almost entirely on that giving. Your pledges and gifts for 2015 are what empower us to move forward doing the ministry of Jesus Christ both here and beyond. Thank you for your generosity!

## **A NEW SLANT ON CHRISTMAS CHEER**

This year, Christmas Cheer will be a little different for us at First Christian. We have adopted as our “family” our older woman who has told us that her needs are basic. Her request list did not include anything extravagant. Therefore, in order to fill out our list, we have agreed to serve as a “back up” for the program in general. Christmas Cheer has provided a list of children’s toys that are always in need, so we will attempt to help fill the gaps.

A list of needed items are available at the reception following worship. Items should be purchased, wrapped, labeled and returned to the church. Or, if you’d simply like to write a check, we have some willing shoppers who are ready to go. Just make your check out to First Christian and write “Christmas Cheer” on the memo line.

Our Christmas Cheer dedication service will be at 4:00 pm on December 14<sup>th</sup> and will include songs, readings, a story, refreshments and, of course, the dedication of our gifts.

As you know, Christmas Cheer is a local organization that supplies gifts to families in need in our community. Their goal is to help make this sacred season as joyous and cheerful for as many as possible – not only through the distribution of gifts but by providing the opportunity to give as well.

## **CHRISTMAS FUND OFFERING – DECEMBER 21<sup>ST</sup>**

In this holy and joyous time of year, our thoughts turn to the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Light of the World.

The theme for the 2014 Christmas Fund Offering is A Light Is Drawing Near. For 112 years, the Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund – one of four Special Mission Offerings of the United Church of Christ – has been a way in which we, as members of the United Church of Christ and its predecessor denominations, reflect the light of Jesus Christ in the lives of the many women and men who have so faithfully and selflessly served, and who now find themselves facing unforeseen financial crises.

We are grateful for the generosity of UCC churches and individuals who contributed a total of \$1,545,076 to the 2013 Offering. This enabled the Pension Boards’ Ministerial Assistance program to provide, on behalf of the whole Church, Pension Supplementation, Health Premium Supplementation, Emergency Grants, and Christmas “Thank You” Gift Checks to individuals and families in need. We ask that you prayerfully consider supporting this year’s appeal to the best of your ability.

On behalf of the hundreds of clergy and lay employees and families whose lives were touched by your giving to the last Christmas Fund Offering, permit me to express profound gratitude for your generosity and compassion.

May you experience the life-giving light of Christ drawing ever nearer in your life.

Michael Downs

President of the UCC Pension Boards

We will collect our Christmas Fund Offering at First Christian on December 21<sup>st</sup>.

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## **CONGREGATIONAL MEETING SET**

Immediately following worship on December 7<sup>th</sup> we will hold a Congregational Meeting to discuss several important items of business. As usual, action will be taken on the proposed budget for 2015 as well as the slate proposed by the Nominating Committee and approved by the Official Board for our officers, and members of boards and committees for the coming year. In addition, there are two special items of business.

The first involves a transfer of funds from the church's Mission Endowment Fund to help meet the 2015 budget as needed. The second item involves guidelines for the distribution of scholarship monies from the Carrie McLean Taylor Scholarship Fund. This is a process that we have tried to fine tune over the past few years. Presently only interest and dividends are made available for scholarships. Last year this totaled only \$109.00. The new proposal would make available interest, dividends and 90% of capital gains, if any. The remainder of capital gains would be returned to the Fund to build up the principle.

In order to act on these important matters a quorum is required so please make every effort to attend. A call for the meeting with details of the actions to be taken has been sent to all members. If you did not receive this packet, please notify the church office.

## **WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP VISITS ALLIED CHURCHES**

The Margaret Lightbourne Circle visited The Allied Churches Shelter in place of our meeting in November. Kim Crawford, the Director, gave us a very informed tour and details of the operation. One can hardly imagine how much is needed to support individuals at the shelter - food, clothing, transportation and help in finding a job. Children living at the shelter are provided privacy, security and transportation to school and a place to play. Recently, they had to add a Food Pantry when Loaves and Fishes closed. A warehouse has been provided for food storage and a designated room at the Shelter for families to pick up food once a month. Currently there are 25 men, 25 women and six children staying at the shelter. However, whenever the weather gets brutally cold, no one is ever turned away.

Kim Crawford has done an amazing job in organizing the work of Allied Churches, somehow providing, and obtaining the necessary equipment needed to keep a Center of this magnitude on going.

This most informative experience was arranged by Betty King, Thank you,  
Margaret Lightbourne Circle

## **WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP ANNUAL MEETING**

The Women's Fellowship will hold its Annual Meeting on Monday, January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015. The individual circles will meet at 10:00 am and the general meeting will be at 10:30 am. Our speaker will be Dr. Anna Marrow Bass, long time educator. Dr. Bass has served on the Alamance-Burlington Board of Education and is a member of the Alamance Community College Board of Trustees. Invite your friends and neighbors to attend with you. There will not be a luncheon.

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## MARGARET LIGHTBOURNE CIRCLE TO MEET DECEMBER 8<sup>TH</sup>

The Margaret Lightbourne Circle will meet December 8<sup>th</sup> at 12:00 noon at the home of Betty King, 1620 Regency Drive, Burlington. Members are asked to bring a covered dish and four small gifts for shut-in Christmas baskets.

## MEALS-ON-WHEELS PROJECT NEEDS HELP

The Christian Education Committee needs your help. We are collecting items for our 2015 Meals-on-Wheels project. If you have any blank note cards or post cards that you don't need, of drink coasters in good condition that you don't use, whether it's a full set or not, we can use those as well. A box will be set up by the elevator to collect them. Thanks for your help!

## FINANCIAL INFORMATION

### Year to Date – 10-31-14

	<b>Actual</b>	<b>Budget</b>
<b>Income</b>	\$186,537.88	\$169,710.84
<b>Expense</b>	\$ 161,843.10	\$170,327.78
<b>Net Balance</b>	<b>\$24,694.78</b>	<b>&lt;\$616.94&gt;</b>
<b>Balance in Checking</b>	<b>\$29,855.23</b>	
	<b>10-31-14</b>	

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

## **OUR MINISTRY SUPPORT TEAM**

**Office Hours:**

***Monday & Friday, closed***

***Tuesday–Thursday 9 am–Noon & 12:30–3:30pm***

Ministers—All the People of the Church  
Mark Pickett—Pastor  
Richard Apperson—Organist/Choirmaster  
Ellen Hollander—Childcare Provider  
Joan Paschal—Office Support  
Connie Collins—Financial Support  
Rodney Paul—Custodian