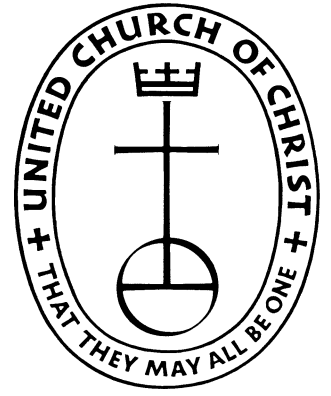


**First Christian  
United Church of Christ  
Newsletter  
December 2013**



**Join us for our many Christmas services  
throughout the Advent Season... look within to find  
our schedule**

# **First Christian UCC – November 2013 Newsletter**

## **PASTOR'S COLUMN**

As I write this, there has been a peculiar confluence of recent events. First, from a historical perspective, this is the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the assassination of John Kennedy, and the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Gettysburg Address. Then, on the current events front, in the past few days we have seen nature unleash its fury with a devastating typhoon in the Philippines and deadly tornadoes in our own Midwest.

None of these events are directly related, of course. Most would not even see a natural connection between them, but for me, all four coming together within a short period of time, strike me as symbolic of the dangers and hardships of life - just how fragile life itself is and how often we take it all for granted.

In some ways, it is hard to believe that JFK's death was 50 years ago - it doesn't seem as though that dark day was all that long past. Maybe even more surprising is to realize that just 100 years before that event, our nation was still in the midst of a bloody civil war. Both the Civil War and Kennedy's assassination were turning points for us as a nation. Some of the naiveté that was part of our national consciousness was lost in the violence of those two times. It is important for us as a people to remember those events and, hopefully, learn something from them, as terrible as they may have been.

But it is not just human cruelty that bears down upon us, at times misery comes at the hands of powerful storms as well. People in the Philippines are just now starting to regain a foothold on life, but it will be a long, long process. For folks in Illinois and Indiana, the destruction that they experienced may not have been as wide-spread as it was in the Philippines, but if it was your town that was flattened, it really makes little difference!

Life is a joyous gift from God, but sometimes life gets weighed down with heart-breaking sorrow and mind-numbing destruction. But what does any of this have to do with Christmas? Only this, as you and I recognize the anniversaries of assassinations and wars, in the midst of the destruction of tornadoes and typhoons, let us recall that it was into a world just such as this that Jesus was born long ago. In this world, you and I are not left to muddle through as best we can. At Christmas we celebrate that, in Jesus Christ, God has come to meet us where we live with all of life's difficulties, sorrows and triumphs.

Remember the story. Mary and Joseph were poor working class folks from a small village in northern Israel. They lived in a land occupied by a hostile military force. They were forced to travel long distances in order to be registered to make sure that they paid their taxes in support of that army that oppressed them. When they finally arrived at the place of registration, there was no place to stay. Even though Mary was about to give birth, there was no place for them to stay – no hospital bed on the delivery ward, no room at the Bethlehem Inn, only a bed of straw in the stable out back.

And after their child was born, Mary and Joseph had to hit the road again. According to Matthew's Gospel, the Jewish "King" of that region, really, a Roman puppet at best, decided to eliminate any competition to his throne, so he sent storm troopers into Bethlehem in order to kill all the new-born sons. But being warned in a dream, Joseph and Mary fled to Egypt. They were forced to become refugees, illegal aliens living in a foreign land in order to survive.

When God came to live among us long ago, it was not into a royal palace or a life of privilege and luxury that Jesus was born. It was into the realities of life's hardships and sorrows that he was born so that he would know what that life was like. The "Good News" of Christmas, the "Good News" of the Incarnation is that, in the midst of those forces that threaten to break us, God is there. In Jesus Christ, God has walked in shoes acquainted with life's sorrows and terrors. He knows what it is like, and he is ready and able to lend us strength when we face similar challenges so that you and I might not just persevere, but prevail.

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Therefore, this Christmas, let us celebrate. In the midst of the storms and conflicts of life, Christ the Savior is born. Christ the Savior is born! Alleluia!!

*Mark*

## **ADVENT ACTIVITIES**

As December quickly approaches, so do our preparations for Advent and Christmas. 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 cumulates 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 December 1<sup>st</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 anytime after 9:00 am on Saturday, November 30<sup>th</sup>. And of course, on the 1<sup>st</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. Then, immediately after worship, plan to stay for a brief congregational meeting to act on both the 2014 budget and the Nominating Committee’s report.

On December 8<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 stringed quartet will also join us on that day as we retell the story of the birth of Christ in both word and song.

Later that afternoon we will have 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 Tuesday 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 which is also our Hanging of the Greens service.

There will be no Sunday School on December 30<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 8, 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 2013 Christmas Season.

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## **OFFICE CLOSED**

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

There will be no Sunday School or reception following worship on December 29<sup>th</sup>.

## **NEW SLANT ON CHRISTMAS CHEER**

This year the Centennial Circle has decided to do things a little differently. We chose the same family again this year because we knew they had moved and would need things for a new beginning. We also chose them because they are so appreciative of everything our church has done for them! With your donations we will have the ability to help this family begin a new life. So this year just make your checks out to First Christian and write Christmas Cheer on memo line and the Centennial Circle will do all the shopping and pick out the most important items that our family needs with the funds available.

As always, thank you all so much for being generous and helping us bless this needy family!

*The Centennial Circle*

## **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 2014 are what empower us to move forward doing the ministry of Jesus Christ both here and beyond. Thank you for your generosity!

## **A CHRISTMAS PRAYER**

Loving Father, help us remember the birth of Jesus that we may share in the song of angels, the gladness of the shepherds, and the worship of the Wiseman.

Close the door of hate and open the door of love all over the world, let kindness come with every gift and good desires with every greeting. Deliver us from evil by the blessing which Christ brings and teach us to be merry with clear hearts. May the Christmas morning make us happy to be Thy children, and the Christmas evening bring us to our beds with grateful thoughts forgiving and forgiven, for Jesus sake. Amen.

Robert Louis Stevenson

## **ANNUAL REPORTS DUE**

Just a reminder to chairs of church boards and committees, your 2013 annual reports are due in the church office by December 19<sup>th</sup>.

## **WORDS OF THANKS**

The church has received a letter of appreciation from Allied Churches for our increased giving of dried and canned goods for the Food Pantry they have recently taken over from Loaves and Fishes. Remember, the challenge to every church is – one dried or canned food item per month per member can keep the Pantry's shelves stocked and hungry people fed.

# **First Christian UCC – November 2013 Newsletter**

Also, we recently received this thank you note from Rodney Paul, our church custodian. We collected a love offering for Rodney and his family on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their service to the church.

*“On behalf of the Paul Family, we would like to thank all of the members of First Christian UCC for our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary gift. Few people have an opportunity in life to work for a place where they feel loved and appreciated. In our 20 years of service we have felt an abundance of both. We look forward to continuing our service to our family at First Christian.”*

*Thanks again,  
The Paul Family*

The John S. Graves Sunday School Class received a much needed and much appreciated gift from one of its members on Nov. 17. Nancy Thomas presented the class with a scroll set of Biblical maps and charts mounted on an easel. The gift from her is in memory of the late Raymond Tatum, one of our church's most beloved and most distinguished leaders. Raymond was a tireless worker who sought to learn how to live the Christian life and to live it every day. He would surely approve of this gift which will be used to enlighten and enhance the study of God's Word.

## **CHRISTMAS FUND OFFERING – DECEMBER 22<sup>ND</sup>**

In this season of light, our thoughts turn to the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, who reflects the love of God for humankind – a radical love that illuminates our lives and helps us see more clearly the path of discipleship.

The theme for the 2013 Christmas Fund Offering is “We Have Come to Bear the Light of Christ.” For 111 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 our predecessor denominations, have shared the light and love of Jesus Christ to those who have so faithfully and selflessly served. Many of these faithful servants now find themselves facing unforeseen financial crises.

Your generous giving to the 2012 Offering enabled the Pension Boards' Ministerial Assistance program to provide, on behalf to the whole Church, \$1,465,437.55 in Supplementation of Small Annuities, Health Premium Supplementation, Emergency Grants and Christmas “Thank You” Gift Checks to individuals and families in need. We are thankful for your partnership and generosity, and ask that you prayerfully consider supporting this year's appeal to the best of your ability. First Christian will collect an offering for the Christmas Fund on Sunday, December 22<sup>nd</sup>.

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, I express profound gratitude for your generosity and compassion.

May the love and light of Bethlehem's child continue to fill your life.

Faithfully,

Michael A. Downs

President/Chief Executive Officer

The Pension Board – United Church of Christ, Inc.

## **CONGREGATIONAL MEETING SET**

Immediately following worship on December 1<sup>st</sup>, the church will gather for a congregational meeting. The purpose of this meeting is two-fold: to act upon the recommended budget for 2014 as well as the proposed report of the Nominating Committee. Copies of both reports are available ahead of time in the church office as well as the sanctuary.

Please plan to attend this meeting as a quorum is important.

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## MARGARET LIGHTBOURNE CIRLE

The Margaret Lightbourne Circle will meet at the home of Betty King on Monday, December 2<sup>nd</sup> at 12:00 noon. Members are to bring a covered dish. Drinks will be supplied. Bring items for the four shut-in baskets. Anyone needing directions are to call Betty King at 584-4521.

### UPCOMING EVENTS

December 1		Hanging of the Greens and Congregational Meeting
December 8	8:30 am	Official Board
	10:30 am	Lessons and Carols
	3:30 pm	Board of Education – <b>please note change in time of meeting</b>
	4:00 pm	Christmas Cheer Service
December 10	7:00 pm	Board of Deacons
December 17	2:00 pm	Board of Finance
December 22	10:30 am	Christmas Fund Offering
December 24	5:00 pm	Christmas Eve Service

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### FINANCIAL INFORMATION

	<b>Year to Date through 10-31-13</b>	
	Actual	Budget
Income:	\$145,070.39	\$166,165.70
<u>Expense</u>	<u>\$159,888.61</u>	<u>\$166,164.40</u>
Net Balance: < \$14,818.22 >		\$ 1.30
Balance in Checking 10-31-13		\$75,066.12*

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.

\*This amount includes cashed in CD of \$55,545.76 that will be invested with financial advisor, so true balance for use is \$19,520.36.

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