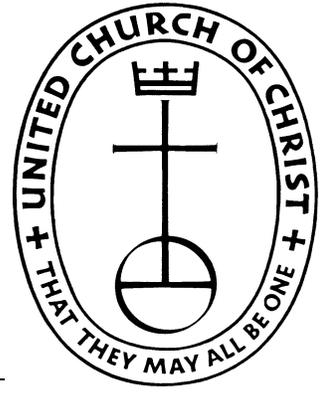


# First Christian United Church of Christ Newsletter December 2017

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Dec. 2nd - 9:00 am - Decorate Sanctuary

Dec. 3rd - 10:30 am - First Sunday of Advent, a service celebrating the Christmas Story through Chrismons

Dec. 10<sup>th</sup> - 3:00 pm - A program in celebration of Christmas Carols

Dec. 17<sup>th</sup> - 10:30 am - A Service of Lessons and Carols, Chicken Pie Meal to follow

Dec. 24<sup>th</sup> - 10:30 am - Worship, Christmas Fund Offering

5:00 pm - Candlelight Christmas Eve Service with Life's Journey UCC and First Reformed UCC

# First Christian UCC – December 2017 Newsletter

## PASTOR'S COLUMN

I recently came across this quote from C. S. Lewis in *The Four Loves*:

*“To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give it to no one, not even an animal.*

*Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness.*

*But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable.*

*The alternative to tragedy, or at least to the risk of tragedy, is damnation. The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is Hell.”*

In many ways, that's exactly what Christmas is all about. God so loved the world, John's Gospel tells us, that Jesus, God's only Son, was sent to be born and live among us.

From the very start, Jesus was vulnerable. He didn't spring forth from God fully grown and full of power. He was born a baby, incapable of carrying out even the very basics of life. He needed someone to feed Him, burp Him, and change His diaper (or its first century equivalent!). He wasn't even capable of turning over without help!

But God loved us so much that Jesus was born – helpless, open, vulnerable. And in many ways, that's how He lived His life until it was ended – broken on a hard wooden cross.

As Lewis observes, it's no fun being broken, not to mention crucified! Many of us will go to any lengths to guard and protect ourselves from it. But the irony is that being guarded, closed off and “safe” from all threat and danger is the surest path to death itself: spiritual death, that cold, aching numbness deep down inside. It is only in being open and vulnerable that leads to life.

I'm reminded of the comment of a young boy who cried out in exasperation when told at dinner time to eat his vegetables because they were good for him. “Why are all the vitamins in spinach,” he asked, “instead of ice cream where they belong?”

I don't know, but it's in the spinach that we find them, just as we only find love when we are open and vulnerable to one another and risk being hurt.

God so loved the world, we're told, that Jesus was born into this messy, hostile, often violent world. He did not meet hatred with hatred, or fear with fear. Instead, He greeted the world with open, outstretched arms and a heart to match. He reminds us that if we ever want to experience true love, we must be willing to do the same.

God so loved the world, God so loved you and me, that Jesus was born. May that divine spirit of love be born in all our hearts, both now and forever more.

*Mark*

## CHRISTMAS FUND OFFERING – DECEMBER 24<sup>TH</sup>

For 116 years, the Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund has been a tangible expression of God's love and light in the world. One of the four

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Special Mission Offerings of the United Church of Christ, the Christmas Fund provides UCC congregations and members an opportunity to reach out in kindheartedness to those who have faithfully shepherded our Church and who now find themselves facing unexpected financial needs.

In 2016, UCC congregations and members generously contributed \$1,562,260 to the Offering. This enabled the United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance, the charitable arm of the Pension Boards, to provide, on behalf of the whole Church, Supplementation of Small Annuities, Retiree Health Premium Supplementation, Emergency Grants, and Christmas “Thank You” Gift Checks to individuals and families in need.

The theme of the 2017 Christmas Fund Offering is Shepherding the Light, and our goal is to raise \$1.7 million to help support these ministries of light and love. The recipients of these gifts have faithfully served the church and now, in their time of need, we can be the church to them. We invite and encourage you to shepherd God’s light, and support this year’s appeal.

On behalf of the hundreds of clergy and lay employees and their families whose lives were toughed by your support of last year’s Christmas Fund Offering, we offer our sincere thanks for your generosity!

## IT’S A BUSY SEASON

The season of Advent is that period of four Sundays immediately before Christmas, and this year, the calendar is jam-packed:

**December 2<sup>nd</sup>** – Please, come and help us decorate the sanctuary for the season. Meet in the sanctuary at 9:00 am.

**December 3<sup>rd</sup>** – The First Sunday of Advent. In addition to our procession of poinsettias and the lighting of the first candle on our Advent wreath, this year’s service will be different. We will focus on the meaning behind all of our Christmas decorations, especially the Chrismons that yearly grace our Christmas tree.

**December 10<sup>th</sup>** – Will mark the second Sunday of Advent. In addition to our morning worship, there will be a congregational meeting immediately after the service. Beyond action on our 2018 budget and the 2018 Nominating Committee’s report, we will consider some revisions to the Carrie McLean Taylor Scholarship Fund. Because of the meeting there will be no reception.

Later that afternoon we will re-gather in the sanctuary for a special program sponsored by the Board of Christian Education. Not only will there be an opportunity to sing several favorite Christmas carols, but we will learn the story behind each carol. In addition, watch as the Christmas creche is constructed before your eyes!

Finally, if you have purchased gifts for Christmas Cheer, the 10<sup>th</sup> is the day to bring them in. (No wrapping paper, please).

**December 17<sup>th</sup>** – Our choir has been hard at work on a Service of Lessons and Carols that will be held on this date. The service this year will feature English carols. Some will sound familiar, many others, new. The service will conclude with a rendering of Handel’s “Hallelujah Chorus” from his famous, “Messiah”. Then, following worship, the Deacons will host a light chicken pot pie luncheon.

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December 24<sup>th</sup> – Christmas Eve, and we will have two services this day. In the morning, at 10:30 am, we will hold our usual morning service. This year, the 24<sup>th</sup> is the fourth Sunday of Advent. During the service we will collect our annual Christmas Fund offering in support of retired ministers and other church workers in need (see accompanying article) . Then, at 5:00 pm, we will host a joint candlelight Christmas Eve Service with members from Life's Journey UCC and First Reformed UCC. In addition to communion, the service will feature a combined choir from the three churches.

**December 31<sup>st</sup>** – On New Year's Eve there will be no Sunday School. The Rev. Jamie Fonville will be our guest preacher.

## **CHANGE OF MEETING DATES**

Both the Board of Deacons and the Finance Committee have moved their meeting dates in December. Both will meet on the 12<sup>th</sup>, the Finance Committee will meet at 2:00 pm and the Deacons at 7:00 pm. Both will return to their regular meeting dates in January.

## **NO SUPPER CLUB IN DECEMBER**

Because of the busyness of the holiday rush in December, the Supper Club will not meet. Mark your calendars, however, for January 2<sup>nd</sup> when things will resume. Why just celebrate the New Year on one day? Enjoy a good meal and even better fellowship on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and start the New Year right.

The Supper Club is open to one and all. We meet in a local restaurant once a month for a pay-as-you-go meal. We meet the first Tuesday of every month at 6:00 pm. Watch for the specifics of the next gathering in the January newsletter.

## **ANNUAL REPORTS DUE**

All committee and board chair's, take note. The deadline for your Annual Report is December 14<sup>th</sup>. Please submit all reports to Joan in the church office. Typed reports are welcomed, but not required.

## **OFFICE CLOSED/DOORS LOCKED**

Because of the holiday schedule and staff vacation time, the church office will be closed on December 26<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> as well as January 2<sup>nd</sup>.

Also, following the recent church shooting in Texas on a Sunday morning, the Official Board thought it would be prudent to lock our sanctuary doors fifteen minutes or so after the service has begun. Many thanks to Benjie Terrell who has taken on this responsibility.

## **PASTOR ON VACATION**

Mark will be away for vacation the week between Christmas and New Years. He and Margot will be making the trek out to Colorado to see family. Many thanks to Jamie Fonville who has

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agreed to be our “guest” preacher on the 31<sup>st</sup>. Because this Sunday is on New Year’s Eve, there will be no Sunday School that morning.

## **SPECIAL ART DISPLAY FOR DECEMBER**

Over the past several months, our art gallery has featured a wide variety of colorful art from numerous artist. This December, however, we are going to try something new. In keeping with the season, we invite you to bring in a cheche, or manger scene, that you may have at home. There are many cheches in various styles, from all parts of the globe. It was suggested that, if you were willing to share yours this December, it would make for a fascinating and beautiful display in our gallery.

December 3<sup>rd</sup> is the first Sunday of Advent, so if you could bring your creche in by then, it would be perfect. However, if the 3<sup>rd</sup> is too soon, delayed entries are also welcomed. Displays may be placed anywhere in the walkway between our Education Building and the sanctuary. If we have more creches than that space can accommodate, it was suggested that creches could be placed under our sanctuary’s Christmas tree.

Also, if you are an artist, or someone in your family is, and would like to be one of our featured artists in 2018, call the church office or speak with Mark and we’ll sign you up!

## **RECEPTION SIGN-UPS NEEDED**

As we prepare to turn the calendar page on a new year, the Deacons are hoping to find folks who can host receptions following worship. Traditionally, there is no reception on the first Sunday of the month. That leaves three Sundays to fill. If you can lend a hand, the sign-up sheet is in the Sellars Parlor. If you can help regularly, or even occasionally, all efforts are welcomed! And receptions don’t need to be fancy. Drinks and cookies are fine. And thanks for your help.

## **MARGARET LIGHTBOURNE CIRCLE**

The Margaret Lightbourne Circle will have a Christmas Party at Betty King’s home on December 4<sup>th</sup> at 12 noon. (1620 Regency Drive, Burlington). Please bring items to contribute to a covered dish meal. It is asked that you notify Betty King (336 417-6906) or Bobby Mebane (336-584-7439) if you can come to ensure proper planning.

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## FINANCIAL INFORMATION

Year to Date through 10-31-17

	Actual	Budget
Income:	\$166,030.96	\$176,891.50
<u>Expense</u>	<u>\$160,683.33</u>	<u>\$166,916.74</u>
Net Balance:	\$5,347.63	\$9,974.76
Balance in Checking 10-31-17		\$22,201.71

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