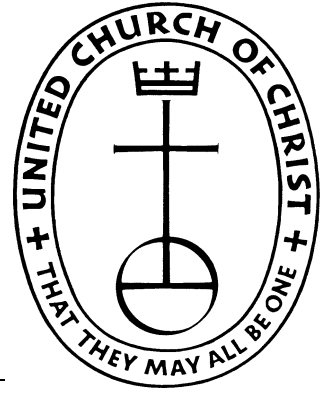


**First Christian  
United Church of Christ  
Newsletter  
January 2018**

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*Christmas - a time of  
beauty and awe!*

# First Christian UCC – January 2018 Newsletter

## PASTOR'S COLUMN

I've been thinking about gifts lately. Maybe it's because we've just come through Christmas and the flurry of gift giving and getting that comes with it, and maybe it's because the heart of Christmas is really all about God's most precious gift to us. But the gifts I've been thinking about don't come in brightly wrapped boxes with beautiful bows and ribbons. No, the gifts I'm thinking of come in very ordinary wrappers, ones that we see day in and day out and so we don't even think of them as gifts at all. What I've been thinking about lately is how we are gifts to one another.

As much as such thoughts have been provoked by Christmas, I suspect they have also been inspired by a sense of loss. In 2017 we saw the death of six long-term members. Since October alone we have marked the passing of Doris Allen, Jo Horne, June Harris and Eula Wellons.

Time is a funny thing. Often we live as if time will go on forever, but just when we think we have it in our grasps, it's gone. I'm not big on New Year's resolutions. They never seem to come to much and so I figure, why bother? But if I were to make such a resolution this year it would involve time, and a determination not to allow so much of it to slip by unnoticed. And it would also involve people and, in the long run, how fleeting our time is together. I would resolve to look at those around me, those I know and love, and not take them for granted but see them as special gifts that have graced my life, and how, hopefully, my life has graced theirs in return.

But since this is a pastor's column and New Year's resolutions are not a Biblical concept, perhaps I should couch all this in more theological terms. I once thought that God's greatest miracle was the Resurrection. Jesus' Resurrection, however you understand it, was God's "Yes" to the World's "No." It was a demonstration that love is more potent than hatred, life more enduring than death, and as Bill Coffin used to say, there is more grace in God than sin in us. Without a doubt, the crucifixion and Resurrection are the cornerstones of my faith and understanding of God and Jesus Christ.

And yet I am reminded of the old Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard and how he would insist that the greatest miracle was not the Resurrection but the Incarnation, of God becoming human and living among us. And the more I wrestle with it, the more I am convinced Kierkegaard was right.

In a world where we are often so self-consumed that we are too busy to notice even those closest to us, God was not too busy to notice and come. Despite our own spitefulness and sinfulness, we were so precious in God's sight that, in Jesus Christ, God took on flesh, lived among us and shared our greatest and deepest fears. And the issue for me today is not to add one more resolution to the garbage heap of New Year's good intentions, but rather to try and look at the world as God looks at it and see a world full of people precious enough for Jesus to live and die for – one of those people being me.

As we begin this new year and the joys and trials it may bring, may we all slow down a little, and open our eyes to a new world around us. And let us give thanks and rejoice!  
Always!

*Mark*

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## AN ART GALLERY OF CRECHES

Usually the hallway between the sanctuary and our Education Building is filled with art of one sort or another, but it was suggested that our December display be a collaborative effort. Members were asked to share a family creche with the rest of the church. And share we did. Our collective display was a real celebration of the season. Below are just a sampling of the many that were shared. Thank you to all who participated.



## CAN YOU HELP WITH RECEPTIONS

As we turn the page on another year, there is a new sign-up sheet available for our receptions following worship. The sheet is in the Sellars Parlor and is waiting for your help in filling the blanks. As you know, there is no reception following worship the first Sunday of each month, but other weeks are open. If you can help on a regular basis, or even on an occasional basis throughout the year, your efforts are greatly appreciated. This time of fellowship after worship has become a special time for us as a church. Please help it continue.

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## **UPCOMING EVENTS**

- **January 2<sup>nd</sup>** – The Supper Club will gather at Kimber’s Restaurant in Gibsonville. This is a “pay your own way” event. Come, join in on the fun and fellowship that is always experienced at these gatherings. Please contact Eleanor Lovgren by Dec. 28<sup>th</sup> to make your reservation.
- **January 6<sup>th</sup>** - Take down the greens. Meet in the sanctuary at 9:00 am and help us take down and store our Christmas decorations.
- **January 8<sup>th</sup>** - The Margaret Lightbourne Circle will meet in the conference room at 1:30 pm.
- **January 17<sup>th</sup>** - Assemble annual reports. Meet in the conference room at 10:00 am and lend a hand in assembling this year’s report. Reports will be available to the congregation on the 21<sup>st</sup>.
- **February 4<sup>th</sup>** - Annual Congregational Meeting immediately following worship.

## **ADVENT – A SEASON OF CELEBRATION AND GIVING**

The season of Advent began this year with a different kind of service. Rather than our usual Hanging of the Greens, this year we held a service that focused on the meaning and symbolism of all our decorations, especially the Chrismons that grace our Christmas tree. From Thanksgiving through mid-December we also collected funds in support of Christmas Cheer. In all, close to \$1400 was collected in an effort to help bring Christmas gifts to many families that would otherwise go without. Many, many thanks to Julie Miller and Mary Newsome for their leadership in coordinating this important effort and to all who contributed.

On the afternoon of December 10<sup>th</sup> there was another special event sponsored by the Board of Christian Education. In past years, the Board has sponsored a Christmas Pageant, but this year they presented a program that focused on the story behind many of our favorite carols. Many thanks to Jamie Fonville who developed the idea and did the research. Not only was there an opportunity to sing great carols but we also discovered the story behind the words and music. Many thanks also to Matt Rice for his assistance at the organ and to Benjie Terrell and his neighbor for the delicious home-baked cookies that followed the program.

The gift of music was again celebrated the following Sunday with our annual Service of Lessons and Carols. Both Matt and the choir have been hard at work for weeks practicing this music that came from the various parts of the world. As an extra treat, Matt hung flags from the balcony in our sanctuary from the various countries from which the carols came. The service was wonderful and our choir was amazing! If you missed it, go to our church web site, [firstchristianucc.org](http://firstchristianucc.org). At the top you’ll notice a tab called “download archive”. If you click there you’ll find a list of recent newsletters, Wednesday Musings and, on the right side, recent worship services. Click on December 17<sup>th</sup> and you’ll be treated to a wonderful musical experience.

On Christmas Eve we had two services. During our morning service we collected an offering for the Christmas Fund which helps support retired UCC ministers and church workers in need. As of this writing, contributions are still coming in. Thanks to all for your generous support. Then, later that same day, we hosted a special Christmas Eve candlelight service with members of Life’s Journey UCC and First Reformed UCC. In addition to

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communion and the lighting of the Christ Candle on our Advent wreath, the service featured a three church choir. Might this be the “First” annual joint candlelight service? Stay tuned next December!

## **A BRIGHTER SANCTUARY**

Have you noticed that there is better light in the sanctuary and on our stained glass windows at night? Thanks to Keith Miller and his ten-foot ladder and a very long pole many of the burned out bulbs have now been replaced with new, long-life bulbs. Many thanks to Keith for both his hard work and his ingenuity.

## **CONGREGATIONAL MEETING HELD**

Following worship on December 10<sup>th</sup>, the church held a congregational meeting to adopt a budget for 2018 as well as elect new members to our various church boards and committees. In addition, some revisions to the guidelines for the Carrie McLean Taylor Scholarship Fund recommended by the Official Board were also approved.

Mark your calendar for February 4<sup>th</sup>. That is the date for our church Annual Meeting to be held immediately following worship.

## **A TIME TO SAY “GOODBYE”**

The last several weeks of 2017 were a difficult time for us as a church. Over a period of eleven weeks we lost four of our long-term and very dear members:

Doris Allen – October 2<sup>nd</sup>

Jo Horne – November 13<sup>th</sup>

June Harris – November 21<sup>st</sup>

Eula Wellons – December 16<sup>th</sup>

Please continue to remember in prayer the families of those who have lost someone dear during a time of the year when most others are celebrating. In addition, some \$3600 has been contributed to the church in memory of these special people. Even though they are no longer with us, these gifts will continue their work here at First Christian.

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## FINANCIAL INFORMATION

Year to Date through 11-30-17

	Actual	Budget
Income:	\$172,723.96	\$188,595.25
<u>Expense</u>	<u>\$178,318.38</u>	<u>\$183,608.47</u>
Net Balance:	<\$5,594.42>	\$4,986.78
Balance in Checking 11-30-17		\$12,104.05

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