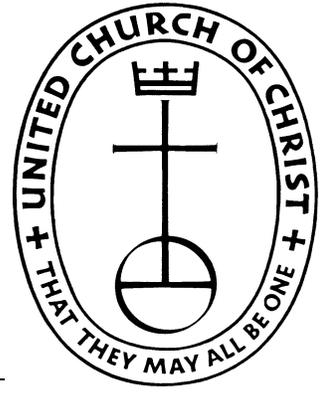


First Christian United Church of Christ Newsletter January 2019



*Christmas at First Christian...
A time to celebrate peace, joy and
love together.*

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PASTOR’S COLUMN

January 1st is just a day like any other. It may be cold outside. It may be an extra day off from work for many, but it’s just another day. Our year is made up of 365 of them. But then again, January 1st is different. It marks the start of a new year. Symbolically, it represents something entirely different – a time for resolutions and a fresh start, a time to begin anew. It almost has an echo of religious to it – new life, rebirth, the promise of hope. In many ways, this new year promises to be momentous and filled with all things new for all of us.

Not only is this the start of 2019, but it’s also the start of my last month as your pastor. So, as this is my last pastor’s column, it presents an opportunity to look back even as well as gaze ahead. In many ways, it seems like it was just yesterday when I walked through the door and met with a group of deacons for an interview. It was a pretty low stress situation. You were looking for a short-term interim. I knew I could help, so really, it was more a conversation about the church’s situation than an intense interrogation. I never would have guessed at that time that I’d still be here eleven years later – albeit with a gap of a year and a half in between.

I think back on all that has happened over those years – the special events and celebrations, the ministry we were able to do together, the times of laughter over a shared meal. But most of all, I think of the saints of this church who are no longer among us – the love they had for God and their love of First Christian. And I think also of you. You have been such a wonderful, supportive and loving congregation. It has been a blessing to share our lives and work together.

Of course, the new year brings with it a lot of uncertainty. For Margot and me, it involves a move, settling into a new community, finding a new church, making new friends. For First Christian it will involve a search to find my replacement. There is a lot of work that will need to be done in that effort, the least of which will be forming a search committee.

You are not the same church you were back in 2007. Our membership numbers are down and our budget is stressed. Some might be tempted to say that we are a weaker church today than we were eleven years ago. But I’m not sure that’s true. I’ve seen people step forward and volunteer their talents and gifts in amazing ways. And I’ve seen this church nurture the gifts of some who doubted they even had them to begin with. I’ve also seen a congregation that is far more flexible and willing to try something new rather than saying: “We’ve never done it that way before.” There is far more strength in this church than many sometimes believe.

During the coming interim, take the time to explore those gifts. Remember where you came from and celebrate it. But also dare to dream new dreams. Don’t be content to see the future as only a continuation of the present. God is calling you to something fresh and new – like the new year! Take time to share and encourage one another as you have often encouraged me. Pray for one another. Listen for the voice of God pointing to a new tomorrow. Then, when that work is done, ask yourselves – what qualities in a minister are important to help us move towards that future?

Perhaps your next pastor will be a woman, or gay, or African American – someone who will love you, but also challenge you in exciting new ways. I have been full-time, but does the church still need a full-time pastor? There have been merger conversations in the past, would the church consider that option again? Or would there be a possibility of sharing a full-time pastor with another church? There are many issues to consider. Take your time and consider them thoroughly. Listen carefully to everyone. Feel the guiding hand of God upon

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you. God has a vested interest in continuing the ministry of Jesus Christ in this place through you.

The new is always scary. But we have not come this far alone, God is not about to forget any of us!

I will miss you, but I'm also excited to see where God will take you next. As we begin this new year, may each day bring a special blessing from God. And thank you all for the blessings you have so generously shared with me!

Mark

REPORT ON THE CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

On December 16th, there was a congregational meeting following worship. This meeting was delayed on week because of the snow storm that dropped nine inches on Sunday the 9th. The rescheduled meeting was called to order by Merle Sharpe, and a quorum was declared. The proposed budget that was presented by the Official Board was approved. This totaled \$206,898 for 2019. The slate that was proposed by the nominating Committee was also approved. Many thanks to all who so faithfully completed their terms, and many thanks to all who have stepped forward to take their place.

A piece of business that was new to this year's meeting was the election of the Pastoral Search Committee. The Official Board serves as the nominating committee for this post, but members of the committee are elected by vote of the congregation. They are: Elsie Bolick, Betty King, Mack Painter, Ken Little, June Sellars, Phil Bray and Julie Miller. Alternates: Nell Allred and Mike Smith.

The committee has already scheduled its first meeting on January 14th. They will meet with the Rev. Eddie Weathers, Minister for Church Affairs with the Eastern North Carolina Association of the Southern Conference.

Mark your calendars now for February 3rd. That is the date of our Annual Congregational Meeting when the Annual Reports will be presented. There will also be a brief memorial service for those church members who have died in 2018.

CAN YOU HELP WITH RECEPTIONS?

As we turn the page on another year, there is a new sign-up sheet 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.

PASTOR AWAY

Mark and Margot will be away January 18-21. They will be traveling to Indianapolis to attend the funeral of Margot's brother, Scott Trusty. Our guest preacher on the 20th is the Rev. Richard McBride, former Chaplain at Elon University.

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AN ART GALLERY OF CRECHES



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UPCOMING EVENTS

- **January 1st** – The Supper Club will not meet on this New Year’s Day. The church office will be closed both the 1st and 3rd.
- **January 7th** - The Margaret Lightbourne Circle will meet in the conference room at 1:30 pm.
- **January 12th** - Take down the greens. Meet in the sanctuary at 9:00 am and help us take down and store our Christmas decorations.
- **January 13th** – We will celebrate the baptism of Christ as we recall our own baptism.
- **January 16th** - 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 20th.
- **February 3rd** - Annual Congregational Meeting immediately following worship.

MARK’S LAST SUNDAY – 01-27-2019

Mark Pickett’s final service as pastor of First Christian will take place on January 27th. Participating in the service that day will be the Rev. Eddie Weathers of the Southern Conference who will lead the congregation in a ceremony of parting. Immediately following the service, there will be a catered supper in the celebration of Mark’s ministry.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR GENEROSITY AND SUPPORT

Many thanks to all who helped to make this season a little more joyful for those in need. In addition to the many gifts that were purchased, we also collected \$ 1000 for Christmas Cheer. Beyond these gifts, on December 23rd we will collect our annual Christmas Fund Offering in support of retired UCC clergy and lay workers.

Margot Pickett also wants to express her deep gratitude for all of your prayers, cards and expressions of love at the death of her brother, Scott Trusty.

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FINANCIAL INFORMATION

Year to Date through 11-30-18

	Actual	Budget
Income:	\$172,817.86	\$185,554.43
<u>Expense</u>	<u>\$180,513.02</u>	<u>\$185,536.23</u>
Net Balance:	<\$7,695.16>	\$18.20
Balance in Checking 11-30-18		\$4,538.79

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