



August 2013
The Congregational Connection...

*Our connection to the family and friends of
First Congregational Church, St. Johns, MI*

2013 ST. JOHNS MINT FESTIVAL



AUGUST 9TH, 10TH AND 11TH



FCC Annual Fundraiser

In place of the Mint Festival Food Booth this year, we will be having a Rummage Sale and Barista Bar on Saturday August 10th in the West parking lot of the church. Left over items from the Attic Treasure Sale will be used, as well as any donations you may have.

Please bring items to the church to be included in the sale. Volunteers needed to work the sale and Barista Bar. Please contact Barb Sherman at 517-242-1234, or Joann Martis at 989-224-4165.

Amazing Grace. How Sweet the Sound?

“Grace” is one of those churchy words that gets bandied about without much definition or disciple. What does it mean? What is grace?

Grace is God’s gift. You cannot earn God’s blessing. Flawed you will never measure up to God’s perfect, holy standards. You don’t need to; God gives you his forgiving favor as an act of love. Grace is free and unmerited, and so are all the benefits, delights, and comforts that flow from it. Grace is your need. Grace is God’s gift.

Grace is a story. The Bible is the running account of how, through the centuries, God extended his grace to his people. Faithless though they were to God, God remained faithful and redeeming. God is a radical lover. Defying expectations, he again and again reconciled with his wayward children. Grace is a story.

Grace is a relationship. Grace is the forgiving love of God in Christ to sinners and the operation of that love in their lives each moment. Jesus made God’s grace known to us in a new, personal way by inviting us to accept him, know in him, and abide in him. This means that while we were sinners and enemies we have been treated as children and heirs. This is what separates nonbelievers from believers. The nonbeliever *knows about his god*, and knows that his god is not a free giver. The believer, however, *knows his God* and knows that his blessings are free. Grace is a relationship.

Grace is revealing. Face to face with grace, a person really learns what lies deepest within. Grace will drive you to the end of yourself, your ill-founded hopes, your delusions of self-holiness. It will expose you to the extent of your blindness and decimate your little kingdom. It will make you very uncomfortable and sadder than you have ever been in your poverty of spirit. Grace is revealing.

Grace is healing. As the touch of God grace will open your eyes to God’s love for you, and introduce you to the majesty of the true king. Sins forgiven, your soul is cleansed, and gratitude flows in your heart. In holy grace you will find comfort, hope, celebration, and peace. Grace is healing.

Grace is divine foolishness. Since we are saved by grace anyway, why should we discipline ourselves to follow our God? After all, God has said to us, “You are free, you may do as you please.” It is an invitation to make a mockery of God’s love. Grace is divine foolishness.

Grace is powerful. In the world we know hunger, violence, ridicule, hostility, and death; just like the Lord Jesus. By grace he endured and pleased God in his mission. By grace God raised him from death to life and defeated all that was against him. By grace God used a carpenter from Nazareth to move toward setting all the wrongs of the world right. Grace is powerful.

Grace is costly. While God's saving grace is always and forever free, it is never cheap. For God does not give grace freely in the sense that he will demand no satisfaction of justice. Instead he allows us to trade places with the holy Christ. He gave Jesus, his Son, "*who had no sin to be sin for us...*"; Jesus took on our sin, paying sin's price. For Christ to be our substitute God requires that we, acknowledging our fallen state, humbly receive Jesus as our Savior as he bears our sin before God. In turn we take on his holiness and become like him; "*the righteousness of God.*" (2 Cor. 5:21). Grace is costly.

Grace is ministry. As a gift from God, grace is not your own possession. It is not something you hoard, keep secret, try to target or control, or take pride in. John Newton, writer of the hymn, Amazing Grace, said, "*When I get to heaven I shall see three wonders there. The first wonder will be, to see many people there whom I did not expect to see. The second wonder will be, to miss many people whom I did expect to see; and the third and greatest wonder of all, will be to find myself there.*" Grace is something you let flow through you, pass on, and give away in the service of God as God redeems the world. Grace is a ministry.

Are you living out this amazing grace? Does it sound sweet to you? Does it shape the way you respond to your personal struggles, relationships, and sins? Does your confidence in this grace form how you live with others? Does it move and guide you as you serve God in this group of Christians we call First Congregational Church? Do you extend grace to others in the power of the grace God has extended to you? Does it give you rest in God when life is unpredictable, demanding and painful?

"Dear God, you have shown us your heart in the grace extended to us through Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord. May we take in your grace. May your grace flow through us, that others may know the power of your loving gift. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen."

Rev. Matthew Olson

Come Join The Choir!



Summer is almost gone and the choir season is quickly approaching. I am looking forward to starting the new season with music that may be familiar to some, but still exciting to sing and hear. Attrition and personal reasons have reduced the number of singers in the choir, so I am looking for others who can carry a tune and would like to join the choir to enhance their worship experience. High school students are also welcome to try out. Reading music is not a requirement, and you do not have to have a "soloist" voice to be able to sing in the choir. As with many other groups that make up our church, we are an active, engaging, group of individuals who enjoy each other's company, and help others seek the graces of God through our joined voices in song. Contact either myself or Rachael Short, our Director of Music Ministry if interested. I am looking forward to serving you this coming season.

Chuck Graham
Director, Chancel Choir
989-224-8596

Bad To The Bone

Here's a pleasant thought... think of the worst thing you have ever done in your life. Bar fight, really, really intoxicated and really dumb. Skimmed money from your employer – hey, he owed you anyway! Tried life without God for a while, actually turned to witchcraft and tried casting spells. Maybe the marriage was on the outs anyway and you had a fling and never intended to commit adultery but did – oops! All the threats made in anger to someone you loved and to someone you hated. Remember wishing that smartass got what he deserved and even prayed for his demise? Lied, took advantage of every day of rest and partied instead, turned against your family, and brought dishonor to your parent. Sat on your porch wishing you had your neighbor's landscaping. Shopped for houses when you didn't need one, wanting to live a lavish life-style. Maybe you have held on to pain and regret for so long that forgiveness seems non-existent.

Yes, these are all bad choices; some even slightly laughable with memories you often share around a summer camp fire. However, we as Christians have done worse: we crucified the Lord Jesus Christ. Even though we were not there thousands of years ago, we are of that stock. As Christians we take that weight upon our backs and live with it, that is we live with it IF WE DENY CHRIST. Christ gave us a gift when he died for us. He forever wiped us clean of our guilt, our bad choices. When we bow before God and recognize our sins, he forgives us and sets us free. But we must turn from our sin.

In college it was in recognizing my sin that I found forgiveness and a survivor mentality. I have fully forgiven my “attacker” and it even seems silly to me now that I call him that because I have sinned against others by attacking – verbally, mentally, and probably physically if I am entirely honest. The great thing is that God sees my potential and humble heart through my prayer and my recognition of sin. Repenting is a “turning from”. I had to turn from my old ways of doing LIFE, and turn to HIS ways. It took me time to stop being that typical college student, the student that thought it was fun to get intoxicated and place myself in dangerous situations. I had to turn from the temptation and sin of the flesh and turn to the beauty and joy in helping others. For two years I worked as a sexual assault peer adviser presenting ways to prevent sexual assault to fraternities, sororities, college classes, and dormitories. This gave me strength and taught me how to listen to others. It got me out of my sin and into the spiritual gift of helping. I found tears in helping others, but I also found healing. Life became more about helping others and less about myself.





(Bad To The Bone Continued)

I do not cry over my past. I cry for those hurting here and now, today and every day that we live and breathe. Not one tear remains for my past. It is as far as the east is from the west. It is buried at the bottom of the deepest ocean. God's ways are gentle. His ways are kind. His ways are loving and never quick to anger. Doing things His way means being patient and building up others. This is how we as Christians are to survive and live.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres

This is how we as Christians can set ourselves free. I think it will work for whatever deeds we have committed. We first recognize our participation, we turn from that way of doing things, and finally we turn to God's way of doing things. He will forgive us and has an abundance of love waiting for us. It is a huge reservoir that never runs dry, but WE hold the key. He cannot force our compliance.

2 Chronicles 7:14

If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

I pray we all rid ourselves of the weight that pulls us down. I pray we forge a new path, take a new direction. I pray we let go of our burdens and recognize these burdens belong to the cross. I pray we turn from the old and turn to the new. I pray God helps us let go of ourselves and focus on others and His work.

Prayerfully submitted,
Melanie Lounds



Appalachian Service Project Knox Co, KY 2013

Our youth had a great time and a great experience serving a 69 year old lady that liked to be called, "Boots". Her income was \$751.00 per month. Boots had lost her husband 21 years ago. She lives in a 1977 trailer that had roof work and new floors put down by earlier ASP crews. Our job was to replace three windows, paint and put down base boards in the kitchen, dig a small ditch around the back of the trailer, line the ditch with Tyvek and crushed rock. All the time the ditch, decks, and stairs were being constructed, our team worked in 2-4 inches of mud. Without the ditch, the water coming off the mountain would run underneath the trailer. The trailer had two rear exits and both needed decks and stairs for fire escapes. We completed the stairs and hand rails on the first deck and constructed the second smaller deck. In a trailer fire, people have about five minutes to get out. An odd size door was needed to cover up the water heater in the front bedroom where there was only a hole in the wall. Framing and a door was made from scratch, installed, and painted.

Sarah Gladstone (ASP Summer Chaplain) visited our Barbourville Center Sunday evening and Monday morning. It was great to see Sarah at the worksite.

On Tuesday evening, we drove in caravans out to a farm that had been owned by the same family since the early 1800's. The new owner spoke of the love and history of the land. As a state champion flint lock rifleman, he demonstrated his .45 cal. Flint lock. An ex-navy seal showed how to throw a tomahawk. Early American music was played on guitars and a string base was made from a metal washtub.

On the farm, there was a trench from men walking in line from the revolutionary war; it was almost seven feet deep. A very early working blacksmith shop, store and outbuildings were also on the grounds for viewing.

Thursday evening, we traveled to a state park for picnics with our families. On the way home Boots wanted to stop at the grocery store. Our crew needed some food for Friday and Boots had no car and did not drive. Friday morning at 5:30 a.m., Boots was making homemade chicken and dumplings and mashed potatoes for our work crew's lunch. Boots said she had company coming and it was us. Very sweet!

On the way home from Barbourville, KY, our crew stopped at Kings Island and stayed in a motel on Saturday evening. We arrived home early Sunday afternoon. We have a great bunch of youth in our church and I would take them again on an ASP trip in a heart beat. Only one time did I have to speak to tell them to knock it off (they were getting bored in the truck).

Members of the 2013 ASP team: Andy Beagle, Jacob Crosby, Tyler Crosby, Nathan Sherman, Hannah VanValkenburg, Kate Livingston, and John Fitch.

The 2013 ASP trip was funded by the giving of FCC members, donations, Sr. PF fund raisers, and money paid by each member of the ASP Team.

Submitted by: John Fitch



*Thank you for supporting our ASP Mission
Trip through your prayers and contributions!
You blessed us, we in turn blessed others!*

Staying Connected

Jane Knight
Grace Haven Assisted Living
1507 Glastonbury Drive
St. Johns, MI 48879

Helen Johnson
Grace Haven Assisted Living
1507 Glastonbury Drive
St. Johns, MI 48879

Bill Clark
Hazel Findlay Country Manor
1101 South Scott Road
St. Johns, MI 48879

Bruce MacRae
Hazel Findlay Country Manor
1101 South Scott Road
St. Johns, MI 48879

Church Records

Births: Sue and Lou Neuder welcome the birth of their second grandchild, Abigail Reese Neuder, born July 8th, daughter of Brad and Allison Neuder.

Member Deaths:

John Spousta
John Bradley

Mint Pageant

A big thank you to Jane Jolly, Judy Cramer, Shirleyan Lake, Arlene Wood, and Joann Martis for providing baked goods for the Mint Queen reception.

Did You Know!?

Our very own Rev. Matthew Olson was selected as Clinton County's favorite pastor! Matt first came to our church as an intern in the 1980's, and became senior pastor in 1994.

Check It Out!

Need something to read? The church library has a wide selection of books that you can borrow.

Air Conditioning

The total estimated cost of this project is \$50,000.00. Including the matching funds, we have approximately \$25,649.00 as of July 23, 2013.

Brain Buster

What year did construction begin on the First Congregational Church of St. Johns?

- A) October 13, 1899
- B) October 31, 1889
- C) October 03, 1886
- D) October 23, 1896

Sunday Flowers

The 2013 Flower Schedule is posted on the bulletin board just outside Wilcox Hall. Sign up now to reserve your special date. If you are unable to make it to church to check the list, please call the office at 989-224-2636. You may pick up your flowers following the church service.

Third Sunday Throw Down

Third Sunday Throw Down is Sunday August 18th. Clean clothing and food items are donated to the "Basic Needs Center" in St. Johns. Empty baskets are located in the rear of the sanctuary. Need more information? Contact John Fitch at 224-3565.

Deadline Reminder

The deadline for articles to be put in the "Congregational Connection" is at noon on the 21st of every month. Announcements for the bulletin are due Thursday.

How Do You Want It?

The Congregational Connection will soon be available in a variety of ways to save on postage. Copies will be available in the back of the sanctuary and on the church website. If you are still interested in receiving the newsletter through the mail, please contact the church office.

Prayer Support for Our Board of Ministry

All members and friends of FCCSJ are invited to partner in prayer with a member of the Board of Ministry. Prayer partnerships are unique relationships between two or more people who communicate regularly about what the Holy Spirit places in their hearts. They may pray together or independently, unified in spirit. Sign up in the entry way of the church.



The Congregational Connection
this month is given by

Tom and Beth Webb in honor of Tom's mother's 89th birthday, and in memory of their parents who have passed on.



Concert in the Park

August 7: Beatles Tribute Band-Toppermost
August 14: Great Vocals-Three Men and a Tenor
August 21: Brass Band-Capital City Brass Band
August 28: Elvis Impersonator-Matt King

All shows begin at 7:00 p.m. rain or shine. Bring your own seating.

Sunday School Begins September 15th!

August Children and Youth Birthdays

- 5 Allyse Johnson
- 7 Troy Cramer
- 12 Riley Petersen
- 15 Logan Johnson
- 16 Keegan Elms

Dance For the Lord!

“Let them praise his name with dancing and make music to him with tambourine and harp.” Psalm 149:3

Join us in weekly rehearsals beginning in September. No experience needed. Those interested should contact Holly Graham at 989-640-8604.

Community Fun Night Fun in the Sun

Saturday, August 17th, 2013
1 to 4 p.m.
Motz Park

Invite your friends to come and have some fun at the First Congregational Church Beach Party. Bring your own snacks, Lemonade provided. For more information call the church at 989-224-2636.



One Day VBS

A free day of fun at the Salem United Methodist Church on August 17th, 2013 from 8:00 a.m. – 3:30 p.m. Breakfast and lunch provided. Children who stay all day receive a free backpack and school supplies. Children ages 4-12 are welcome, and must be pre-registered before August 2nd. Call or email to register at 989-224-8811, or lowemapple-salem@mutualdata.com



The Church Staff

Senior Minister: Matthew Olson
Director of Music Ministry: Rachael Short
Church Administrator Interim: Holly Graham
Treasurer: Tom Webb
Financial Secretary: Paul Martis
Chancel Choir Director: Dr. Charles Graham
Hands of Harmony Director, Susan Kilmer

Our Statement of Faith

We believe in God, the Father;
infinite in wisdom, goodness and love,
and in Jesus Christ, His Son, our Lord
and Savior, who, for us and our salvation,
lived and died and rose again and liveth
evermore;
and in the Holy Spirit, who taketh of the
things of Christ and revealth them to us,
renewing, comforting, and inspiring the
souls of men.

Mission Statement

We are a church open to all.
As modern day pilgrims we consider
it our privilege and committed responsi-
bility to:
CELEBRATE the glory of God through
worship, service and stewardship
NURTURE our relationships with Chris-
tian love and truth; and
SERVE others in our daily lives, individu-
ally and collectively
as Christ's people.

The Board of Ministry

Moderator: Shirleyan Lake

Vice Moderator: Bill Rockwell

Board of Ministry Members:

Tom Doppke

Dave Elms

Tom Flynn

Rod Fuller

Jeramie Guetschy

Lois Graham

Melanie Lounds

Marilyn Newman

Barb Sherman

First Congregational Church

100 Maple Street

St. Johns, MI 48879

Telephone: 989-224-2636

Fax: 989-224-8306

E-Mail: fccsj@4wbi.net

Web Site: www.fccsj.com

Facebook:

firstcongregationalchurchofst.johns

Hours:

Monday, Wednesday

9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Tuesday, Thursday

9:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Closed Fridays

Sunday Service 10:00 a.m.



First Congregational Church
100 Maple Street
St. Johns, Michigan 48879

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
ST. JOHNS, MI
48879
PERMIT #83

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

This Month's Highlights:
Cover, Mint Festival
Pg. 2 Rev. Olson's Article
Pg. 4 Bad To The Bone
Pg. 6 Appalachian Service Project
Pg. 10 Children and Youth News