

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 revealeth them to us, renewing,
comforting, and inspiring the souls of men.*

VISION:

to CELEBRATE the glory of God through
worship, service and stewardship,
to NURTURE our relationship with
Christian love and truth,
to SERVE others in our daily lives individually and
collectively as Christ's people; and to
WELCOME others to join in our journey.



First Congregational Church

100 Maple Street
St. Johns, MI 48879
Telephone: 989-224-2636
Fax: 989-224-8306
E-Mail: fccsj@twbi.net
Web Site: www.fccsj.com
Facebook:
firstcongregationalchurchofstjohns

Senior Minister: Matthew Olson

Director of Music Ministry: Rachael Short

Church Administrator: Sandy Kemp

Office Staff: Guven Witteveen

Treasurer: Tom Webb

Financial Secretary: Paul Martis

Hands of Harmony Director: Susan Kilmer

Custodians: Faith Hazard & Shirleyn Lake

THE BOARD OF MINISTRY

Moderator: Bill Rockwell.....517-214-4636

Vice Moderator: Barb Sherman.....517-242-1234

Board of Ministry Members:

Tom Doppke.....810-241-6794

Dave Elms.....989-227-2865

Rod Fuller.....989-224-3961

Lois Graham.....989-224-8596

Sid Lounds.....989-640-6981

Marilyn Newman.....517-331-3457

Jan Myers.....989-682-4194

Larry Salters.....989-834-5166

BOARD OF MINISTRY JOYS AND CONCERNS

The Board of Ministry would like to thank all our ministry teams for staying on or under their budget for 2014. Because of your hard work and dedication, our finances are good despite pledges being down. We are looking forward to a healthy 2015, both financially and spiritually, with continued budget awareness.

DECEMBER 2014

The Congregational Connection...

Our connection to the family and friends of the First Congregational Church



ADVENT CANDLELIGHT GATHERINGS

Sunday Evenings, 7 PM
beginning November 30th

December nights are long and dark. The December days are short and often dim. These days are rushing up on us, loaded with places to be and things to do; we call it the 'holiday season'. Are you anticipating it with pleasure, dread, or both?

Scripture assures us that the light shines in the darkness. Wouldn't you like that light within you? Do you long for light in the shadow places of your heart? Do you yearn to live in the light of God's hope and peace?

Our Advent Candlelight Gatherings are times in which you are invited to step away from the push of the season and find relaxed, quiet space with your friends and with God. Each week we will sing, pray, reflect, and fellowship in the joy of the season as we remember God's love for us, shown in the birth of Jesus our Lord.

Wont' you Join us?



HOLIDAY MUSIC SPECTACULAR

The St. Johns Community Band is hosting the 10th Annual Holiday Music Spectacular on Friday December 12 at 7:30 PM in the Wilson Center Auditorium. Admission is free. Donations for the Wilson Center Auditorium Renovation Project are welcome.

This event features local talent and the 2014 edition includes The Mint City Singers and The St. Johns Community Band.

For questions, contact David Link, Assistant Director, (989) 640-2587.

Jesus in Plain Sight

"The person who knows my commandments and keeps them, that's who loves me. And the person who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and make myself plain to him." -

John 14:21

This is Jesus speaking to those who would see him. The principle he claims applies not only to him but to all things we love; whatever we love makes itself plain to us. If we love the truth, it will show itself to us. If we love lies, lies will fill our minds and hearts. If we love goods, goods will be all around us. If we love silence, we will seek and find it in the cracks of our days.

We tend to think ourselves as passive recipients and that which is made plain to us is actively communicating. Not so. The recipient will see plainly what he loves. What he doesn't love, he will not see plainly.

That seems all rather philosophical for an Advent newsletter article, but I do have a point.

Around Christmas we are going to the mall, surf the web, check the ads. Relatives we like, and those we don't, are going to be with us. We are going to be overly busy, or at least think it is our duty to be overly busy. We will fret and fume, stress and stress out, try to be 'in the Christmas spirit.'

Do we see Jesus plainly in any of this? According to him, the underlying question is, do we love him? If we do, we will see him. Amid all we do he will be there, holding a place in our minds and hearts. To see him, we don't schedule him in. We make him the focus of our love. We think about him, pray in his name, contemplate his meaning. As we do these things his place within us will grow, and he is made plain.

We become transformed into the likeness of what we love. In loving him, we become like him. We live out his commands. He is made plain in us. That is Advent; God breaking into human history in human form 2000 years ago in the Middle East. That is Advent; God as "Emmanuel" here and now in the Mid-West.

Let me love you, Jesus, that I may see you.

Let me see you, Jesus, that I may love you.

-Matt



Notes from the Music Ministry Team: *Season of Advent*

*O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear.*

The evidence of a world in captivity is all around us: in racial and systemic violence, environmental mismanagement, and overloaded schedules. How would things change if the Messiah was here? In worship, we watch, wait, and call expectantly for the arrival of Emmanuel, *God with Us*.

*O Come, Thou Dayspring,
Come and cheer our spirits by Thine advent here.
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And Death's dark shadows put to flight.*

As 21st Century Christians, we know that God IS with us – always. Our call is to daily make room in our hearts for his radical love to take over our hearts and to change the life that we live. Our worship practices offer opportunities for us to celebrate and to share this love:

November 30 – AM: conclude Bible study series, & transition into Advent.

PM: share a Thanksgiving potluck and go caroling in the *Magic of Music Tour*.

December 7 – AM: students from Western Theological Seminary will bring to life the story told in Genesis 37:1-11. **PM:** Candlelight service.

December 14 – AM: *Christmas Pageant* – our youngest members bring the story to life through poetry and song. **PM:** Candlelight service.

December 21 – AM: *Hope is Born, Emmanuel* cantata presented by the Chancel Choir, directed by Chuck Graham. **PM:** Candlelight service.

December 24 – Christmas Eve service of lessons and carols. Hear the full story of God's love for all creation, sing the songs, share the light.

*Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.*

Blessings as you prepare your hearts.

~ Rachael Short

*We are re-examining our Mission Statement. Thank you for your continued prayers for discernment!

The Music Ministry Team: Beth Webb (Chair); Peter Olson; Susan Kilmer; Rachael Short;
Gaven Witteveen; Teresa Zuker

STAYING CONNECTED

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

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

Marjorie Blizzard
 Grace Haven Assisted Living
 1507 Glastonbury Drive
 St. Johns, MI 48879

PICK ONE UP TODAY!

The November/December edition of the Upper Room is now available in large print. You can find copies in the literature racks.

It's Time to Reserve...

Your special month for 2015 "Congregational Connection." Your donation of \$50.00 is used to help cover costs of printing and postage. Please contact the church office to reserve your month.

MISSION MINISTRY TEAM

The Mission Ministry Team has worked very hard this year to meet all of our obligations yet be mindful of the Church's overall budget. To date we have paid out \$6,100.00 for the first three quarters of 2014. This paid all of our local mission groups we received donation requests from and our International Mission, LM Congregational Churches of South India. We have disbursements for the National and State Congregational organizations remaining. We will meet at the end of November to discuss disbursements based on both the received and forecasted fourth quarter receipts. Currently the Mission Ministry Team has \$5,802.05 available in our budget that was not disbursed. The team has agreed that any funds not disbursed for 2014 will be used to offset the deficit in the Church's budget. If pledges are met and a larger sum is available, based on the policy in place for missions to receive 10% of Pledged, Unpledged, Plate and Electronic Giving, a large portion of these funds will not be disbursed and used as a savings plan for future needs after the National and State obligations are met. If you would like to be part of the Mission Ministry Team please contact one of the members: Sue Nueder, Sue Gladstone, Kathy Kushmaul, Katie Livingston or Barb Sherman.

MEMBERSHIP MEETING

A meeting of the members of the First Congregational Church of St. Johns is scheduled immediately following the worship service on Sunday, December 14 to discuss and vote on the proposed 2015 operational and capital improvement budgets. All members are encouraged to attend.



THE GIVING TREE

This year's theme for the giving tree is KEEP-ING THE TOOTSIES WARM! We are again helping the Rave Safe House and adopting a family in need. Please take a tag from the tree and return the item unwrapped by Dec 22nd.

Purple - women's socks

Blue - kids socks

Red - slippers

Yellow - boots for women, boys & girls

Orange - adopted family



CHILI COOK-OFF REPORT

The winner of the Chili Cook-Off goes to Judy Cramer! Thanks to the Congregation, over \$350 was donated to youth retreats, enough to send four and a half youth! We look forward to our next retreat in January. Our next adventure is volunteering for the Baby Pantry Christmas, serving breakfast and buying presents for three small children. Thank you for supporting our youth and our community.

Respectfully submitted,
Melanie Lounds

FALL CLEANING BEE

On Saturday November 22, 2014, a church Cleaning Bee was held to primarily focus on the sanctuary and parlor area before decorating for Christmas. We had enough volunteers to also tackle thorough vacuuming of most areas on both floors in the Carson wing, including pulling furniture away from the walls, washing the Countryman Hall paneling, washing every clear interior window (not stained glass), dusting all the high places, most wall hangings, ledges, tops of doors, window sills, and more. Following the Community Thanksgiving Dinner, Paul Martis and Ed Martis thoroughly cleaned and waxed the floor in Wilcox Hall. If you missed out on the Fall 2014 Cleaning Bee, don't worry; there will be more opportunities including spring 2015 cleanup inside and outside.

Many thanks go to: Paul and Joann Martis, Tom and Beth Webb, Jim and Maryann Ellickson, Ellen Doppke, Susan Kilmer, Ed Martis, Shirley Jan Lake, Jan Myers, Barb Sherman, Teresa Wood Zaker, and Lois Graham

The winning chili recipe, as prepared by Judy Cramer:

1 lb. lean hamburger

1 medium chopped onion

2 cans chili beans in gravy (I like Bush's)

1 quart of chopped tomatoes I think 2 large cans would be equivalent.

Salt to taste

1 Tablespoon hot chili powder (I like Penzeys Chili 3000)

2 Tablespoons regular chili powder (Penzeys Regular)

1 tsp cumin

1 tsp granulated garlic

Brown meat and onion. Add rest of ingredients and bring to boil. Simmer for about 30 minutes then turn off heat and let stand for an hour. Over night is better.



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Spread the Light

In lieu of poinsettia plants for Christmas this year and in the spirit of the season of giving, we will be offering an opportunity to honor deceased and living family and friends with a monetary donation. This donation will be recognized by placing a lighted votive candle in the front of the sanctuary.

Also, on Christmas Eve, a dedication will be placed in the bulletin as it has been in the past. With the continuing economic struggles in the community, we feel this is a way to bless others as we have been blessed.

Any monetary amount is welcome and each may have up to three dedications on Christmas Eve. The donations will benefit The Basic Needs Center to assist them in pay-

Your name: _____
 In Loving
 Memory of: _____
 In Honor of: _____
 To The Glory
 of God: _____
 Total Enclosed: _____

Return this form to the church office by
 10:00 a.m. Monday, December 15.

JOY FOR JESUS

The First Congregational Church made our statement at the Santa Light Parade on November 28 with a float prepared by members of a volunteer team lead by Teresa Zuker. Walkers handed out candy canes with invitations to our Christmas Eve service. Great job, Team!!



A special baby

Mark Lowry, who wrote the lyrics to the Christmas song "Mary, Did You Know?" says he's always been amazed by Mary's silence at the cross, as her son was being crucified. Maybe she was remembering back to that first Christmas, he wonders, when she counted Jesus' fingers and toes.

"I wonder if she realized then that those were the same fingers that had scooped out the oceans and formed the seas. I wonder if she realized those were the same feet that had walked on streets of gold and been worshiped by angels. Those little lips were the same lips that had spoken the world into existence. When Mary kissed her little baby, she wasn't just kissing another baby; she was kissing the face of God."

Mary silently watched her son die 33 years later, Lowry notes — not just for the world but also for his own mother. "The baby boy she had delivered on that first Christmas was now on a cross delivering her."