

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

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# FEBRUARY

**This Month's Highlights:**

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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



## February 2012

### The Congregational Connection...

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

A Seven-Week Sermon and Study Series  
 for Thoughtful People

### **"WHAT'S THE LEAST I CAN BELIEVE AND STILL BE A CHRISTIAN?"**

*Beginning February 5th*

As Christians in the Congregational Way, we are serious about understanding the Bible, but not dogmatic fundamentalists. We welcome the emerging trends in philosophy, science, and ethics, believing that they can sharpen our thinking and shed further light on the life of faith. Founders of many colleges and universities, we are not anti-intellectual. For us knowledge of the Bible and of the world are ways through which we know God.

This series is designed to help us practice and sharpen our mainstream way of being orthodox Christians. The focus will be on what we need to believe about, and how we relate to, Jesus. Along the way we will also touch on some things that serious Christians do not need to believe.

Not everyone will agree with the book. That is expected; I don't agree with everything in the book myself. We are not endorsing the book. We are endorsing open minded, serious discussion. Differences of opinion will be respected, even encouraged.

Beginning the week of February 5<sup>th</sup> the schedule of book discussion groups is as follows:

<u>Day</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Childcare</u>	<u>Leaders</u>
<b>Sun</b>	7:00 PM	Graham home 1202 Glastonbury	No	Lois Graham, (c:989-640-8603) Trish Schuelke, (h:224-6162)
<b>Tue</b>	7:00 PM	Church parlor	No	Keith Mino, (c:989-277-0215) Chris Harris
	7:30 PM	Lounds home 1999 East Steel Road	Yes	Nathan and Melanie Lounds (h:224-0932)
<b>Wed</b>	7:00 PM	Church parlor	No	Heather Risselada, (c:517-355-5145)
<b>Thur</b>	6:30 PM	Church parlor	No	Guven Witteveen, (h: 224-2768) Sid Lounds

Each group will be discussing the same section of the book each week. You are encouraged to participate in whatever group best suits your schedule.

Copies of the book, "WHAT'S THE LEAST I CAN BELIEVE AND STILL BE A CHRISTIAN?" are available in the church office. *Who Are You Going To Invite To Join Us For this Special Event?*

**THIS PASTOR PONDERES**

While most of you claim the summer sun, winter is my favorite time of year. As you have been glad for rain instead of snow, I have suffered from the unseasonable warmth. I need winter. In winter I see much more clearly my world, and what I am; a speck of temporary, warm jelly united with a vast and icy cosmos, insulated from the unfathomable cold reaches of space by the thin atmosphere of earth.

I saw this again during a cold snap a few weeks ago, on a dark night in the snow mantled woods. My wife, Beth, and I walked a mile or so along a forgotten trail, the way forward showing in our headlamps. Then we turned off the lights. Immediately all was silent, black, and shapeless; I became very aware of the rhythm of my breath in the stillness. In a few moments our eyes began to adjust. First the gross outlines of the trees took shape against the sky. Then the details of the branches and needles resolved themselves in the dim but well spread light reflected on the snow. It was the light of the moon and the stars. As we resumed our walk I thought of how what seem to me mere twinkling points in the sky being actually massive, long dead suns emanating fossil light just now reaching us. I thought of supernovas and dark matter and all the heavens beyond my sight and comprehension.

Each day these vault above me, overwhelmed by the immediate and powerful light of the near star for which my physical eyes are calibrated. I wonder; spiritually am I as short sighted? The light closest to me, that immediate light of my perception and understanding has my attention and is my daily guide. In this light I assume that I really see; not much else matters or seems real. Yet beyond my sight is an incomprehensibly vast, mysterious cosmos of which I am only occasionally and dimly aware. My comprehension has little to do with the real universe of titanic forces, vast distances, eternal timeframes, odd motions and confounding, counter intuitive physics. The Apostle Paul invites us to wonder; *“For by him all things were created; things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible...all things were created by and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”* And this physical world is only one dimension of God’s creative work! Am I as short sighted to the things of the spirit as I am usually blind to scope of the heavens above?

In our light soaked region you must get away from the illumination of the towns and farms for the sky to reveal itself. I’ve noticed an exciting, similar pattern with my spiritual sight. Somehow, when I turn off the glare of my own definitions and understandings and let my mind hang wide open, and wait, by a miracle, I see a little more. It is thrilling, and I want to see further. I hold fast to the promise that someday I will see all the way. Paul describes it like this; *“Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.”* I understand this to mean that after death physical and spiritual sight will, in some way, unite. In that moment I will be simultaneously see the beauty of the ridges that compose my finger print and the awesome collision of galaxies, my utter insignificance in all that has been, is, and shall be, and God’s eternal, glorious magnificence. For me, this will be the last and greatest miracle.

*Submitted by Rev. Matthew Olson*

**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  
responsibility to:

**CELEBRATE** the glory of God through  
worship, service and stewardship  
**NURTURE** our relationships with  
Christian love and truth; and  
**SERVE** others in our daily lives,  
individually and collectively  
as Christ’s people.

**THE BOARD OF MINISTRY**

**Sr. Minister: Rev. Matthew Olson**

**Moderator:** Molly Minnick

**Vice Moderator:** Dr. Keith Mino, Jr.

**Board of Ministry Members:**

David Elms, Tom Flynn, Tom French, Rod  
Fuller, Bill Kushmaul, Gary Larsen, Eugene  
Livingston, Melanie Lounds, Cali Sackrider,

**CHURCH STAFF**

**Church Administrator:** Susan Larsen

**Financial Secretary:** Paul Martis

**Treasurer:** Jim Beagle

**Chancel Choir Director:** Dr. Charles Graham

**Hands of Harmony Director:** Susan Kilmer

**Director of Music Ministry:** Rachael Short

**COMMUNITY NEWS**

This is a reminder that the congregation is invited to **THE WHEEL INN**, St. Johns on Saturdays and Sundays and bring along a copy of our current weekly bulletin. The Wheel will collect those bulletins, attach your bill to it and every quarter they will total those numbers (pre-tax) and make a 5% donation back to our church.

**CHOCOLATE FANTASY** “The Sweetest Night in Town”, Thursday, February 2, 2012, 6:00-8:00 p.m. at the Clinton County Senior Center, 210 E. Walker Street. Tickets are \$10.00 per person and all proceeds go to the Center. Contact Gary Carpenter for tickets at 224-8785.

**First Congregational Church**

100 Maple Street

St. Johns, MI 48879

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**Fax:** 989-224-8306

**E-Mail:** fccsj@4wbi.net

**Web Site:** www.fccsj.com

**Facebook:**

firstcongregationalchurchofst.johns

**Hours:**

Monday - Tuesday 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Wednesday 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Thursday—Friday 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.



**Notes from the Music Ministry Team: *Holy Spirit, Lead Us.***

The Holy Spirit is moving among us at FCC. Do you feel it? Do you hear it? The Music Ministry Team is developing plans to increase our openness to discern the Spirit's direction and our faithfulness to follow. This feels like the process of group songwriting, so I choose standard song form to share some of our ideas with you.

**Intro**

*Our purpose is to worship.*

*We will share the work of preparation, communication, and unification of purpose.*

*Our worship will be our unique experience with God.*

**Verse 1**

*We will work as a team, and we have clarified specific roles for each member according to their gifts and interests. By sharing the work, we open ourselves to creative ideas, and bring them to completion in our worship together.<sup>1</sup>*

**Chorus**

***Holy Spirit, lead us. Give us faith to follow.***

**Verse 2**

*We will devote considerable time to deepen our understanding of effective worship that is pleasing to God and that is meaningful for us. We will share what we learn through this newsletter and weekly bulletins so that we can worship together with joy that springs from unity of purpose.<sup>2</sup>*

**Chorus**

***Holy Spirit, lead us. Give us faith to follow.***

**Verse 3**

*Our discovery growth will inform our involvement in worship planning. We will work closely with our Senior Minister and with the Lay Ministers to support specific worship themes. We will dialogue with the Congregation at large to involve you in this process.<sup>3</sup>*

**Chorus**

***Holy Spirit, lead us. Give us faith to follow.***

**Outro**

*Our purpose is to worship.*

*We will share the work of preparation, communication, and unification of purpose.*

*Our worship will be our unique experience with God.*

The songwriting process can be time intensive and messy, and life-giving. Please partner with us in prayer. Let us all seek the presence and direction of the Holy Spirit, and the faith to follow.

***Blessings! Rachael Short, Director of the Music Ministry***

**Music Ministry Team:** Chris Harris (Chair); Trisha Cheeney; Chuck Graham; Susan Kilmer; Jan Myers; Ruth Root; Ana Witteveen; Guven Witteveen.

**The mission of the Music Ministry Team:**

<sup>1</sup> to **support and sustain** a creative atmosphere that supports worship for each member;

<sup>2</sup> to **encourage** active participation for the purpose of worship;

<sup>3</sup> to proactively **develop** musical worship experiences that are varied, meaningful, and personal.

**HELLO CHURCH!**

Over the past year there has been a verse that has etched itself on my heart. That verse is Esther 4:16: "If I perish, I perish". At this point in the story of Esther, she is asked to go to King Xerxes to plead for the lives of the Jewish people. But as the limits of her station would have it, she goes before the king at the risk of her own life. Yet knowing that she is the hope of her people, she commits herself to the task, and accepts the likely outcome, "If I perish, I perish."

About a year ago I met a real life Esther. At the time I was at a mission in the Dominican Republic called Mission Emmanuel. While I was there, the group helped build houses, deliver clean water around the village, play with the local school children. The usual mission kind of things. But while we were there, we were offered a slightly different opportunity. One day we were packed on to school buses and taken to the local Leprosarium, which is just a fancy way of saying a modern leper colony.

As we were pulling up to the gate outside the compound, a man was sitting there in his wheel chair waving at us. He had no feet, there were thick bandages around his arm and his hand that he was waving had only one finger. So if there was any doubt as to where we were going, that cleared things up. As we got off the bus, we met outside a series of small apartments that had their backs turned to us. We were met by the doctor that cared for the community there, and he greeted us with a lesson on what leprosy really was, and how history has bred misgivings about the disease. (Did you know that the disease is contracted through inhalation?) He said that in the 40 year he had been working there, he never heard of a visitor contracting the disease, so we could rest easy. In fact we were encouraged to hold hands and to wrap our arms around the patients as much as possible. There is one thing that these people craved it was physical touch. But he also said. "One day I will catch leprosy, and when I do... nothing will change. I will just continue my work and then die among my people." As he said that, Esther's words rang in my head, "If I perish I perish".

I carry with me a lot of stories from my day at the Leprosarium, but the most significant story I walked away with was that of the doctor's commitment. Esther and the doctor have something great in common. As God had gifted Esther with beauty, intelligence, and bravery. God had also gifted this doctor with the same kind of inexhaustible bravery. They acknowledged that they had been designed as a tool for God's work, and they readily gave themselves to Him. As Christians we are occasionally asked to call upon a divine kind of bravery as we wade into the struggles of our friends and family. When we think ourselves lacking, I would just like to remind you all to consider the story of Esther and that of the doctor.

***Submitted by Sarah Gladstone***

*FYI Sarah, the daughter of Bob and Sue Gladstone, grew up attending First Congregational Church and was very active in the Senior High Pilgrim Fellowship and the National Association of Pilgrim Fellowship.*

**Dear Friends and Members of First Congregational Church**

At the 2012 Congregational Budget Meeting in January Church Moderator Molly Minnick gave an overview of the work the board of Ministry has done to focus the ministry of the church on meaningful goals. She also explained how this was reflected in the church budget. Her comments were so comprehensive and helpful that I asked her to allow us to publish them in this newsletter in three installments. This is the first, -MWO

(Molly opened the meeting with prayer, and then proceeded to her comments)

*“Father in heaven we thank you for the opportunity to serve you as a congregation of believers. You bless us in so many ways. We are grateful for the gift of music, for the dedication of our teachers and our youth leaders, for our spiritual leaders and for everyone who serves you in their own special and unique ways. As we gather together now to do the important work of your church be with us in spirit and bless us with your grace. Amen.”*

Please review the Board of Ministry Goal Areas for 2011-2012. These goals, approved unanimously by the board this summer, drove the budget discussions and led us to the proposal which was presented at our December meeting.

Central to our goal areas is the goal of growing the church in a meaningful way. By growing the church, we mean offering programs that facilitate the spiritual growth of our current members and friends. We want to grow the church through:

- *Thriving small groups, Bible studies being done and lay ministers and Steven Ministers being trained.*
- *The youth in our church through active and engaged youth groups, Sunday school classes, VBS, children’s music programs and Children in Worship and Follow Me Programs.*
- *Engagement with our fellow believers in doing mission work in our community such as the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday throw down, offering the Community Thanksgiving Dinner, supporting the Basic Needs Center and housing the Baby Pantry.*
- *The active recruitment of new members. We want to offer exciting programs that will draw people to us in the spirit of Christian fellowship. This goal area is central as we feel that in order to survive for another 100 years we must continue to grow in all areas.*

The other three goals areas include a goal related to increasing our awareness of the financial matters of the church and much has already been accomplished here. We have dedicated ourselves to having an outside accounting firm audit our books for the first time in 10 years. This audit has been complete and the Business Committee will be reviewing it at our February meeting.

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**FEBRUARY SIGN UP SCHEDULES**

<u>Altar Flowers</u>	<u>Nursery Care</u>	<u>Fellowship Hour</u>	<u>4th Sunday Supper Host/Hostess</u>
5 *	5 *	5*	February *
12 *	12 Stacie Stevens	12 Barnhart, Gunther, & Fitch	March *
19 *	19 Staci Stevens	19 John De’Lavern	April *
26 *	26 *	26 4th Sunday Supper	May *

**\*Openings that need to be filled.**

This page is published to keep you informed of participation in our church on Sundays and of changes in our church records. This also includes the dedication of our monthly newsletter.

**CHURCH RECORDS**

**Friend Death:**

Marie Giesecke, December 19, 2011, Grandmother of Jennifer Beagle  
Robert E. Lee Christian, December 31, 2011, Father of Marianne Harris

**THE FEBRUARY DEDICATION**

“The Congregational Connection”

for this month is in

Celebration of the 50th Wedding Anniversary of

*Joe and Marilyn Armbrustmacher*

given by their family, the late Paul Bullard, Alice Bullard  
and Barbara Bullard



Also in loving memory of

*Paul Bullard*

Given by his family, Alice Bullard, Barb Bullard, Joe and Marilyn Armbrustmacher

Children and Youth News

FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS

- 11 Kaitlynn Doss
- 17 Brady Cramer
- 18 Jada Palmer
- 24 Jordan Shoup



Save the Date!

Lock-in

Friday, February 24th - Saturday, February 25th

All middle school students are welcome to join the fun at the lock-in and also every Sunday morning at 10:00. This is a fun, active youth group that meets downstairs, across from the nursery. Please contact Barb Sherman (292-4029 or Jennifer Beagle (224-0667) for more information.

Changing the world begins  
 one child at a time -  
 in Sunday School

Nearly 85 percent of people who make a decision for Christ do so between the ages of 4 and 14. Our greatest opportunity to lead a person to Jesus happens during the elementary years. That means the Sunday School program is the most powerful tool the Church has to impact the life of a person for all eternity. How would you answer this question: "What is the purpose of Sunday School?" Many people would say "To teach the Bible." While helping kids know the Bible is important, it's just as important to help them live it out in their daily experience. Sunday School should not only get your kids into the Bible, it should get the Bible into your kids, transforming their hearts and lives.

The Sunday School,  
 Junior High and Senior High Youth Groups  
 meet at 10:00 a.m.

We have also been working with the Internal Revenue Service to update our records and get them some documentation that they are requiring related to the filing of our W-2s. This has been a labor intensive, but necessary, process.

We also organized and carried out a stewardship campaign this fall that so many of you graciously participated in and which resulted in pledges of just under \$200,000 for 2012. Thank you to all who assisted in this endeavor.

We have a very important goal related to our youth and we have gotten off to a very good start here. Thanks to the many, many adult leaders in our congregation, we have programs for children of all ages. And what's equally exciting is to see how many of the young people raised in our church return from college to perform in the cantata and how many junior high and senior high students assist with programs such as CIW and Follow Me. We even have students who serve as liturgists.

Finally, we have a goal related to our church services. This goal deals with modernizing the church service and the variety of music we offer, offering an early morning services as we did this summer and using different forms of media and social networking to enhance the programs that we offer.

*Next month: How the goals of the church are reflected in the church budget and the history of deficit spending.*

*Submitted by Molly Minnick, Moderator*

WALK TO EMMAUS

The Gospel of Luke relates the story of two disciples of Jesus who were going along the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus. As these two friends were walking together, they shared their hearts deepest concerns about the death of Jesus. An unknown person joined them and explained the scriptures as they walked. Toward the end of the day's travel, they urged the stranger to eat with them. As the stranger took bread, blessed, broke and shared it with them, their eyes were opened and they recognized the risen Christ. Then they rushed back to Jerusalem to share the good news with others. *Luke 24:13-35.*

**There is talk about the Emmaus Community. What is it?**

The Walk to Emmaus is based upon *Luke 24:13-35* and is an experience of Christian renewal and formation that begins with a 3-day short course in Christianity. It is an opportunity to meet Jesus Christ in a new way as God's grace and love is revealed to you through other believers. When the Walk is completed, there are Gatherings each month on the second Friday to nurture this process of discipleship, fellowship, worship and instruction. Normally the Lansing and surrounding counties gather at Pilgrim United Methodist in St Johns. In February, the Gathering will take place at First Congregation Church. All of you at First Congregation are invited to this potluck Gathering. This community is non-denominational, comfortable and just really loves Jesus. It is truly a moving and

*Cont. on page 6*

**WALK TO EMMAUS CONT.**

joyful experience for everyone and I am very sure that you will like it. February is a wonderful month to plan to warm your heart in fellowship and a cozy buffet. We would love to serve you. It will be Friday, February 10, 2012. It begins at 6:00, dinner at 6:30, then fellowship and Communion in the sanctuary. Please come and join this lively group as we worship together. If you have any questions, you may call Jean Bond at 989-640-0115, see Rachael Short or visit the website [www.lansingemmaus@truepath.com](mailto:www.lansingemmaus@truepath.com) for more information. The website will list the dates of future Walks and Flights for youth. Blessings in Christ's name.

*Submitted by Jean Bond*

**MUSIC CONCERT EVENT!**

Sunday February 12th at 4:00PM, the Music Ministry Team is sponsoring an organ concert at 1st Congregational Church. The concert will feature several solo pieces by organist Stephanie Gewirtz, who will also accompany (piano) her brother Jon Gewirtz (saxophone). Stephanie Gewirtz works as an accompanist in the Greater Lansing area. She accompanied the choral programs in the Okemos and East Lansing Schools and served as staff accompanist at Lansing Community College. She has been music director for numerous community and professional theatre productions. She also accompanies many voice and instrumental recitals. Stephanie currently is the Music Director at St. Agnes Church, Fowlerville where she oversees the music programs and serves as organist/pianist.

Jonathon received his Masters of Music Performance in saxophone study from Michigan State University and his Bachelors of Music Education degree from Central Michigan University. Jonathon has performed with the Jimmy Dorsey Big Band, the Midland Symphony Orchestra, and the Lansing Symphony Big Band. He has performed throughout the United States, Europe, and Brazil in various ensembles including classical, jazz, funk, R&B, and pop. Jonathon teaches a variety of music classes at Lansing Community College, Olivet College, and Hillsdale College including music appreciation, blues and jazz history, rock and roll history, music theory, aural skills, private saxophone lessons, and conducting jazz bands and jazz combos. Stephanie and Rachael Short will also present a piano/organ duet. Everyone is welcome to attend, please invite your friends and family to this music event at FCC. Please bring a non-perishable food item for the Basic Needs food pantry and a free will offering will also be collected. Refreshments will be served after the concert, hope to see you there!

*Submitted by Susan Kilmer, Music Ministry Team*



It's game night for First Congregational Church **DOUBLETS, ETC.** on Sunday, February 5th at 6:00p.m.. That means that the Superbowl will start about 6:25 p.m. EST. To celebrate such an occasion DE (Doublets Etc.) will have a game night of our own. Those who show are encouraged to bring their favorite board game (no spinning bottles have been agreed upon). Delicious refreshments will be available in the form of a dip with crackers and maybe something sweet-thus eat healthily before arriving. We will play at each table for a portion of the hour and then scatter to other tables just to add to the confusion and possible delight and frustration of the players. No money on the table unless it is to be donated to a charitable function of the church. Did I mention we will meet in Wilcox Hall and all are invited? Ahh Yes, I just did.

*Submitted by Gary McCampbell*

Don't forget to bring your food items and gently used, clean clothing for the **THIRD SUNDAY THROW DOWN!** All donations go to the "Basic Needs Center" here in St. Johns. They need our support! Our next collection is Sunday, February 19th. Contact John Fitch at 224-3565, or any Missions Team member for more information.



Isn't it time to sponsor the "**CONGREGATIONAL CONNECTION**" for that special occasion during the 2012 church year? The cost is \$50.00 and is used to help cover the cost of postage. We have **April, July, August and December** available. Please contact the church office at 224-2636 to reserve your month.



Jim and Cathy Sanderson were married on November 14, 1964. Cathy was an Executive Legal Secretary at Ford Motor Company's World Headquarters. Her husband Jim worked for a commercial laundry service. In 1972 they purchased the Capri Motel here in St. Johns and raised their two sons, Bob and Bill. They sold the Capri 24 years later and retired.

Jim is a do-it-yourselfer, including totally building a lake home starting in 1971. Cathy enjoys reading, gardening, spending time with their four grandchildren, and spending time at their lake house.

When Jim and Cathy moved to St. Johns, they were looking for a church that made them really think about it being Bible-based and not based on "house rules". The friendliness of members was also a consideration. They decided First Congregational Church was a good choice and joined this fellowship on March 23, 1975.

Jim has served as church Moderator and Cathy has taught Sunday School, been in the Mabel Maier Women's Division and Church Clerk for a three year term.

Extend a warm "Hello" to this special F.C.C. couple. We are fortunate to have them worship with us.

