

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

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January

This Month's Highlights:
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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



January 2012 The Congregational Connection...

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

Now That's Italian!

Come join your church family after services on January 15th, for a warm Italian meal. The Senior High Youth Group will be serving tossed salad, freshly baked bread, spaghetti with marinara or meat sauce, and green beans, along with beverages.



Come enjoy the Italian ambiance and take a quick trip to the Mediterranean. Let Luigi serve you!

Prices for adults are \$8, children age 5-13 are \$4, and children 4 and under are free!

All proceeds go to fund our June NAPF mission and conference to South Dakota. Please call the church office to reserve your tickets.

Prego (thank you)!

Submitted by Melanie Lounds,

P.F. Advisor



Spaghetti Dinner

Sermon and Group Study Series

“What’s the Least I Can Believe and Still Be a Christian?”

What, when it comes right down to it, do Christians *need* to believe? Christians need to believe in Jesus—his life, teachings, example, death, and resurrection. These are to core of Christianity. A great benefit of these beliefs is that they provide answers to life’s most profound questions, including, What matters most? Am I accepted? Where is God? What brings fulfillment? What about suffering? And is there hope?

During this series we will also focus on some things Christians don’t need to believe. For example, Christians *don’t need* to believe that everything in the Bible should be taken literally, or that God causes cancer and car wrecks, or that God hates gay people.

Date: Sunday Worship Theme:

- Feb. 5th** Some of what you think is Christianity is not Christianity; it is merely the accrued junk of misunderstanding. Prepare yourself for the real deal.
- Feb. 12th** Jesus was not much of a theologian; in fact, he almost never references dogma. Nor does Jesus have much use for religious rituals. What did Jesus teach? That relationships, with God and others, is what matters most.
- Feb. 19th** We are flawed, sinful people; just look at the world we have made! Yet God sees us as lovable, redeemable, and of infinite worth. He has acted on these beliefs by sending us Jesus, his Son. There is a name for this; we call it ‘grace’.
- Feb. 26th** How does God do his work in the world? Through us, in Jesus’ name, via the Holy Spirit.
- Mar. 4th** Happiness—joy, really—comes for being God’s person in the world. How is one God’s person? By serving others in God’s name.
- Mar. 11th** Jesus promised that those who followed him (believed and obeyed him) would suffer. Why? Because God enters into suffering and redeems that suffering.

Cont. on page 3

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,
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

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.

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 - 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.



9th Annual Women's Retreat

February 24-25, 2012

Please join us for the 9th Annual Women's Retreat on February 24-25, 2012, at the Somerset Beach Campground, Somerset, Michigan. This year's theme will be "Bride of Christ—Ornaments of Grace."

Scripture portrays Christ as the divine bridegroom and the church as His bride—an image providing rich and important spiritual lessons. During our time together, we will enrich our understanding of the Jewish marriage experience and catch a deeper glimpse into the God-given pattern of relationship between Christ and His bride. As part of the bride, we will study how we can make ourselves ready for Christ's return.

We hope you will experience fresh joy and excitement as we look forward to the moment when the Father declares the time has come—Christ's bride is ready! More information, including brochures and registration forms, will be available in early January 2012.

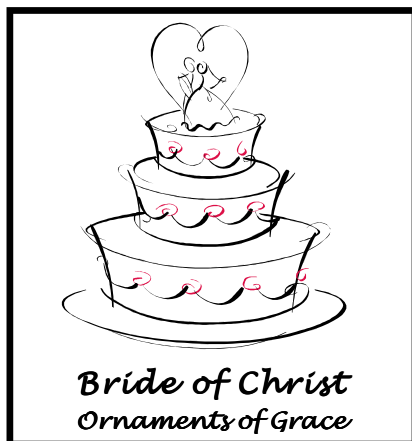
Cost: \$60 per person.

What to Bring: Sleeping bag, towel, washcloth, toiletries, pillow, pajamas, slippers, and Bible.

Driving Directions: Visit www.somersetbeach.org.

Questions: Contact the First Congregational Church, Portland, MI by e-mailing FCCsecy@gmail.com or by calling 517-647-6441.

Pamphlets are available on the Literature Rack at the back of the sanctuary.



What's the Least I Can Believe and Still Be a Christian? Cont...

Mar. 18th Jesus' resurrection gives us hope for life now and life eternal.

You can help us prepare for this dynamic seven week experience in the following ways:

1. Pray for this important event
2. Attend worship every Sunday during the sermon and study series
3. Purchase, from the church office, a copy of the book, "What's the Least I Can Believe and Still be a Christian" and join in a study group (Dates and times to be announced)
4. Invite family members, neighbors, friends, and coworkers to visit the church during this event.

One of the goals of this series is to help us reach out beyond our own congregation. Accordingly, the church has purchased, and makes available to you at no additional cost, copies of "What's the Least I Can Believe and Still be a Christian" that you can give to others as an invitation to join us for this series.

I am looking forward to this series, and our time together. Please contact me if you have any questions about how you can make the most of this opportunity.

Rev. Matthew Olson

DO YOU HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT FALLING?

Many older adults experience concerns about falling and restrict their activities. "A Matter of Balance" is an award winning program designed to manage falls and increase activity levels.

The Instructor will be Jane Braatz from Health For Life Consulting, Inc., Meet at the Clinton County Senior Center, 201 E. Walker Street, St. Johns Length of class is eight Thursdays, Jan. 19th—Mar. 8th, 2012

Class Time: 10:00 a.m. to Noon.

Class is free but donations accepted. Please call Gary Carpenter, Director at 1-989-224-4257 or pick up information at the senior center. Class is limited to twelve people.

HELLO CHURCH!

Christmas trees are rather fascinating. As you stand in front of a Christmas tree, you are invited to look into a family’s memories. There are hand-made beaded wreaths made in the scouts, pictures of grinning children framed by Christmas trees, garland strung together while watching Elf, ornaments and trinkets that mark the passing of years and milestones hanging from pine branches, and of course the beloved star or angel that takes the place of honor on the highest bough.

As you read this, it is likely that my family will be un-decorating our annual tree. Packing away our memories and baubles for the next year. As we approach closer to the top of the tree we will pack away the most important of ornaments: my mom’s baby socks, a green globe that appeared on my parents’ first tree, a pair of mini ice-skates that were knitted by my great-grandmother, and the nativity ornament.

This nativity ornament caused quite the stir in my family back in the day. When my sister, Cortney, and I were little, our parents took us to Bronner’s to look at all the Christmas decorations. We were each allowed to pick out one ornament to bring home. Cortney picked out this awesome Santa one! When plugged into the light strand, the Santa would spin from the trapeze bar he clung to. This Santa has long since stopped spinning, but you can still find him on our tree, squished between the Grinch and macaroni noodle angel I picked out the nativity ornament that marked the year of our Bronner’s adventure, 1991. My sister uses the selection of this ornament to mark the moment in my life when I got all “religious”. I was five.

In seminary, you are regularly asked: “How long have you known Jesus?” or “When did you come to Christ?” Lots of people have dramatic stories of falling to their knees at their lowest point, or stories of Christ speaking to them in their skepticism during college... I mark my story with an ornament. I am fortunate to have known that Jesus was my Lord since I was a little girl. Even though I have strayed from the narrow path (Matthew 7:13-14) I have always known that I belonged to the Lord. During the seminary journey, I have learned how to define and convey my relationship with Christ through story. When someone asks me about coming to Christ, I tell him or her about our Christmas ornaments, and about a childhood lived with the knowledge of Christ’s love.

When Christianity was young, people that called themselves followers of Christ were storytellers, as Christ himself was. They shared stories about Jesus as he walked ancient dusty roads (which we can now read about in the Gospels) and they shared stories about the Lord’s grace, hope, and his call to peace. The early Christian people, shared these stories, used them to teach about God’s character and his promise. But uniquely, the early Christian people told about how Christ worked in their individual lives, We can see this in the stories that Paul shares in his letters. Our modern western society has lost its skill at being storytellers. We are still a people that like to be entertained, certainly. Look at how we value actors, musicians, and athletes. Can we rebuild this ancient tradition? A tradition that sparked and fueled the Christian movement?

I call to you, my church, to try and answer a question: “How do you mark your relationship with Christ?” Let’s unearth this ancient tradition of storytelling, by talking about how we came to Christ. Let’s start talking about Christmas ornaments. Because it is these stories that lead us to sharing about our Lord and savior, to spreading his Gospel. In this winter season, while the earth is hibernating, let us use this time to reflect on our walk with Christ. So that when we are offered the opportunity to share our stories, we can share in this most ancient of Christian traditions.

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.

JANUARY SIGN UP SCHEDULES

| <u>Altar Flowers</u> | <u>Nursery Care</u> | <u>Fellowship Hour</u> | <u>4th Sunday Supper Host/Hostess</u> |
|----------------------|---------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1 * | 1 Miriam | 1 * | January |
| 8 * | VanValkenburg | 8 * | * |
| 15 Fritz Thurston | 8 Stacie Stevens | 15 Spaghetti Dinner | February |
| 22 * | 15 Stacie Stevens | 22 4th Sunday Supper | * |
| 29 * | 22 * | 29 * | March |
| | 29 * | | * |
| | | | April |
| | | | * |

***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

Birth:

Congratulations to **Chad and Rachel Campbell** on the birth of their son, **Brady James Campbell**. Brady was born on December 16th!

His proud grandparents are **Jim and Shelley Gunther**.
Congratulations to all of you!



THE JANUARY DEDICATION

It’s time to reserve your special month of the “**CONGREGATIONAL CONNECTION**” for the 2012 church year. The cost is \$50.00 and is used to help cover the cost of postage. We have **March, April, July, August, September, November and December** available for your special anniversary, a special remembrance, birthday, graduation, or “just because”. Please contact the church office at 224-2636 to reserve your month.

Children and Youth News

JANUARY BIRTHDAYS

- 16 Chandler Petersen
- 21 Allison Clarke
- 23 Rachael Kilmer
- 25 Lillian Sackrider



PAGEANT THANK YOU

Congratulations to the children and youth of our congregation who presented the Christmas Pageant on December 11th. Thanks also to the Sunday School teachers, parents and Rachael Short for putting the time and effort into this special event in our church life.



COME AND JOIN US IN SUNDAY SCHOOL!
10:00 A.M TO 10:45 A.M.

JESUS IN EVERY LESSON

Each week, whether you are sharing a Bible story from the Old Testament or New Testament, "Give me Jesus!" our Sunday School program, will show you and your children how all of the Bible leads us to Jesus. Nothing is more important than a child's relationship with Jesus. As children study the Bible section by section, they develop a deep understanding of God's Word. Each week children will begin to really know Jesus, love God and live their faith in practical, tangible ways.

The **Junior High and Senior High Youth Groups School Youth Groups** meet at 10:00 a.m. until 10:45 a.m. They have great plans for the new year! They have fund raisers and service projects all lined up for this Winter and Spring to help support their trip to the National Youth Meeting in June.

LOOKING FOR A GROUP?

Maybe making coffee is your thing! You can sign up to host a **FELLOWSHIP HOUR** on the schedule in the Wilcox Hall corridor. Coffee, creamer and sugar are all in the kitchen for you to use. You do not need to supply cookies or treats. Hosting should not cost you anything. You simply make the coffee, serve the members who attend the Fellowship Hour and clean up the coffeepots and wipe off the tables when you are done. This can be your way to become involved in the life of our church.

The **HANDS OF HARMONY HANDBELL CHOIR** meets on Wednesdays at 7:00 p.m. The members of the Bell choir always seem to be having a good time! They enjoy the fellowship and learning how to play the bells.

CHANCEL CHOIR meets on Thursday evenings from 7:30 to 9:00 p.m. in the sanctuary. If you like to sing this may be the church involvement you have been looking for.

The **SILO SINGERS** meet on Monday evenings at 8:00 p.m. This men's group sing acappella and are a joy to listen to. Gentlemen this may be your calling!

How about hosting a **FOURTH SUNDAY SUPPER?** You would need to be here to turn on the ovens. Coffee, condiments, salt and pepper are all provided in the kitchen. You would be responsible for providing milk, cleaning off the tables and cleaning and unplugging the coffee makers after the supper. You can sign up on the sheet posted in the Wilcox Hall corridor or call the church office.

SPECIAL THANKS

Thanks to the **Sunday School teachers and Youth Advisors, Stacie and Jerry Stevens, Tom and Ellen Doppke, Dave and Michele Elms, Rod Fuller, Jennifer Beagle, Barb Sherman, Melanie Lounds, Kate Livingston and Guven Witteveen** for doing an outstanding job of leading the children and youth in our church. This is a very important part of our church life and we are lucky to have these excellent people.

Thank you to **Jan Myers, Arlene Wood, Teresa Zuker and Nancy Mino** for decorating the church this Christmas Season.

Special thanks to the **Chancel Choir, Hands of Harmony, Silo Singers, Holy Mamas** and the **Halleluia Choir** for all the beautiful music they presented in December.

Thanks also to **Dr. Charles Graham and Rachael Short** for organizing and directing of all of the Musical Christmas programs.

To everyone involved with the **Christmas Pageant BRAVO!** It was a great success.

To **Nathan Lounds** for all his work on the church Web Site (www.fccsj.com).

To **Paul Martis and Gary Larsen.** You will never know how much work is done here by these two men.

The FCC congregation came through with lots of gifts for the Giving Tree. The gifts were donated to the "Safe Center", formerly "RAVE", here in Clinton County. Thanks to all those who contributed during this great time of need.

GROUPS AND SPECIAL EVENTS

All men from our church and community are invited to attend the TUESDAY MORNING MEN'S BIBLE STUDY. They open with a prayer at 7:00 a.m. sharp and always try to close the study time by 7:50 with time for prayer until 8:00 a.m. Come and join them!

A SECOND MEN'S BIBLE STUDY GROUP will be meeting on THURSDAY evenings at 6:30p.m. beginning on January 12th, in the church parlor. Guven Witteveen and Sid Lounds will lead this group. All men are invited to join the conversation and camaraderie.

A SMALL GROUP is meeting on Wednesday evenings at 7:00 p.m. in the Parlor. Anyone can come and join this group. They will be working from the "Upper Room". The booklets are available on the Literature Rack at the back of the sanctuary.

All ladies are invited to join the LINDA SCOTT MINISTRY TEAM for their next meeting on January 17th, 12:30 p.m. at "Main Street Café". Please RSVP to Joann Martis at 224-4165.

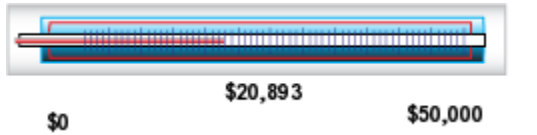
Don't forget to bring your items for the THIRD SUNDAY THROW DOWN! All donations go to the "Basic Needs Center" here in St. Johns. They need our support!

Let's see, by the time of our next meeting the holiday seasons will have passed and we will be recuperating. So on Jan 8th, at 5:00 pm DOUBLETs, ETC. will meet in the basement of the church. At that time we will undecorate the church, finish up the last few blankets so we can distribute them to the local nursing home, have a brief meeting (well, sometimes they are brief), have some homemade soup and bread, and then settle down to watch a video. Actually the video is one made by our church mission team's adventure to Peru. Some of the team members will be there to describe their adventure into a world few of us really have been able to experience. It is always amazing the vast differences we find on our planet as it hurtles through space. We feel so big, yet, we are really quite small and yet so diverse. So join us as we sample, by video and by the words of those who have been there, an example of a different culture and our attempt as a church to dip one small toe into it, in hopes of making a difference. For more information contact Gary McCampbell at 224-6134. Submitted by Gary McCampbell

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AIR CONDITIONING UPDATE!

The total estimated cost of this project is \$50,000.00. With the matching funds and



new donations we now have \$20,892.60! We are well on our way to a cooler sanctuary for next summer! We will continually keep you updated on our fund raising progress for this church improvement.

CARES AND CONCERNS

If you know of anyone who is in need of a get well or a sympathy card please let the Ministry Team know by calling Bonnie Wickerham at 227-5635.



FLOWERS

The 2012 Flower Schedule is posted on the bulletin board in the Wilcox Hall corridor. Now is the time to sign up for that special date you want this year. If you can not make it in to church to check on a date please call the office at 224-2636.



Our first Member Profile for 2012 is Mary Faloon. Mary and her husband Warren came to St. Johns from Bath, MI. They have two children, Bridget who is 30 and Ryan age 26. Mary will have worked at Michigan State University as a secretary in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies for thirty-nine years as of January 4, 2012. Mary loves to read novels,



romance, murder and mysteries. She is a 10 year member of the Red Hat Society here in St. Johns.

She also loves to spend time with her married children visiting them in Chicago and Nashville.

Mary is on the Clinton County Arts Council as the Fund Raising Chairman.

Betsy Fuller and her daughter Lisa asked Mary and Bridget to come to church to decorate the Christmas tree when the girls were seven years old. That was followed by an invitation for Bridget to come and join Children's Choir, then Sunday School.

As of Christmas 2011 Mary has been a member of this church for 27 years. She loves being a part of this fellowship!

Mary is a great gal and when you see her give her a hug and tell her how glad we are to have her here with us.

