

# JULY/AUGUST 2014

The Congregational Connection...  
*Our connection to the family and friends of the  
First Congregational Church*



## July/August Highlights

July 4th: Independence Day

July 13th: MI Congregational Summer  
Camp

July 20th: 3rd Sunday Throw Down

July 21st: VBS Starts

August 8-9th: Rummage Sale



**Vacation**



**Bible School**

**July 21-25**

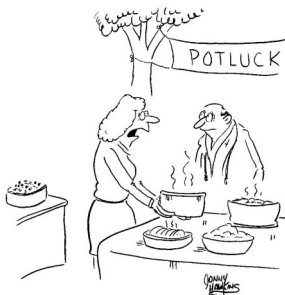


God bless



A M E R I C A

...land that I love.



"Was it okay to make deviled ham?"



What you do matters!

Jesus smiles when he sees your ministry.

You pass on faith and hope to a future adult.

You help children find their voice.

You change the world—one child at a time.

As you encourage a child's faith...you encourage your own.

You get to watch children become friends and followers of Jesus.

Jesus is the author and finisher of your faith...and your ministry.

Kids' fingerprints leave a mark on your heart.

Children are counting on you.

If not you, then who?

God has called you.

(The words of a poster on the wall of my daughter Gretchen's room. Gretchen is director of Vacation Bible School)

Jesus said, *"Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven."* Why did Jesus say this? Because children are open to his message. Nearly 80% of the people in our churches today became Christians before age 18. About half of them decided to follow Jesus by age 12.

It is said that Congregationalist D.L. Moody had come back from a tent revival meeting where he reported that 2 ½ people were saved. Whoever he was talking to replied, *"You mean two adults and one child?"* Moody responded, *"No, two children and one adult. When you save a child, you save a life—a whole life."*

So there is a window of opportunity, and Jesus recognized this. Between the ages of 4 and 14 people are more moldable than they will ever be again. They make choices that will shape the rest of their lives. God loves these children, and wants to claim them as his. He has set his church to this work.

What we do with this 4-14 window is of great concern for Christ. That is why Faith Adventure (Sunday school) and Weird Animals (Vacation Bible School) are so important. Gretchen understands this. In her words: *"We need to spread God's love. Growing up can be hard, especially without God. Kids need core values they can use as they grow up. They need to know that if they are different God still loves them; this is the theme of the Weird Animals VBS. Society is so judgmental and has such bad morals. Kids need to know how to be a good person. They will be selfish without God. They need to know, in their hearts, that they are really loved by God."*

What you can do:

- Pray that God will use our VBS to bless children and bring them into his kingdom
- Be a blessing; search your mind and heart for those you can invite to our VBS
- Help with some of the VBS activities



Notes from the Director of the Music Ministry: **The Gift of Music**

When the Music Ministry Team closed our June meeting in prayer, each member thanked God for the gift of music. Since that evening, I have spent a lot of time thinking about this extraordinary gift: its inherent properties and potentials; our roles in experiencing, receiving, and sharing the gift with others. I want to share with you some insights from the Team and a few of my own observations.

Music is a time-ordered phenomenon; it exists only while being practiced or performed. When the music stops, its potential remains in the notated score, in the instrument, and in the performer. Music is also subject to rules of timing, as anyone who taps a foot, dances, or synchronizes a physical task to music's pulse can attest. Whether we perform or listen, we choose the depth of our engagement with music over the lifespan of a single piece and over a lifetime of pieces. So too, in a life of faith, as Guven Witteveen observed, "you have to be in it [engage] to get it."

A life devoted to the study and performance of music can bear the marks of slavery to perfectionism, technical mastery, and elitism. Susan Kilmer reminds me that a life devoted to worship God opens doors for experiences outside of our primary work-a-day roles. I see this in the love that Susan (who is a career scientist) has for music that connects her spirit with God's word: love that she extends to members of the Handbell Choir in rehearsals, organization, and continuing musical development. Chuck (who is a chiropractor) expressed his ministry with the Chancel Choir as "a way to open people up to hear God's word." Quality performance is, for Chuck and Susan, always secondary to relationships and to the Gospel message.

Ashleigh Fox, who is new to the team, has experienced the power of music as a memory aid, and as a support - an extension of her mother's love - to strengthen her tolerance for difficult tasks. Ashleigh receives these gifts and hears a strong call to share the gifts with others. She responds by joining almost every musical group at church, and now the Music Ministry Team. She recently wrote that "Keeping this gift from others is like keeping God a secret from those who do not know him and God is NOT a secret to be kept."

As I prayed with these brothers and sisters, I was reminded of all the potential in this gift of music. Mostly, however, I thanked God for the loving hearts of Guven, Susan, Chuck, Ashleigh, Beth, Nathan (who still serves on the Sound Board ministry team), Peter (joining) and Teresa with whom I serve, and for our Senior Minister Matt who nurtures us to grow in ministry. Music is full of potential, but only God's love can transpose potential into a transformative gift.

*Praise God for the gift of music and for love to unleash it!* ~ Rachael Short

**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.

**The Music Ministry Team:** Beth Webb (Chair); Chuck Graham; Peter Olson; Ashleigh Fox, Rachael Short; Susan Kilmer; Guven Witteveen; Teresa Zuker

\*Thank you to Nathan Sherman (outgoing member) for your willing service and gifts shared!

## God Resides in Community?

Already this summer I have been busy – busy traveling, that is. Grading AP essays in Louisville, Kentucky and Ludington for my husband's Gus Macker basketball tournament literally moved me. When we arrived home, I needed to go to church Tuesday since I knew I would be traveling to Grand Haven for my son's soccer tournament the next weekend. I also needed to see my church book group and discuss One Thousand Gifts. I needed hugs and support and connection to the community I missed.

Community is important. In the Bible we read as whole communities are condemned, like in Amos 1:3 when the people despised the Lord, did not keep the commandments, and lied. We learn “for these transgressions” they are punished. We also read as the Lord said to Jeremiah in 11:9, “A conspiracy is found among the men of Judah, and among the inhabitants of Jerusalem.” It was in communities that sickness grew and it is in community that healing can take place. Even in Revelations we read, “Of the tribe of Juda [were] sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Reuben [were] sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Gad [were] sealed twelve thousand” (Rev. 7:5). Community, big huge groups of people, is important to God.

Even the Gentiles, those of another community, were given an opportunity to gain salvation. God can save whole communities and whole groups. One day, the world (the largest community) will bow down and proclaim him Lord.

During all of my summer travels, I think about home and church and St. Johns. Many of us know that feeling of returning home, of finally sleeping in our own beds, of our animals greeting us and “asking” why we have been gone so long as they follow us from room to room. We find comfort in home and what we know so well. Let us not only be comfortable returning, but let us feel an urgency to return—this urgency to connect, praise God, and feel His strength and love surging within us.

If you feel a bit lost without your community as you travel this summer, remember to come back in full force. The Bible says in Hebrews, 10:24-25 “... let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another....” I look forward to meeting you again, to studying the word, to talking with you about God, to connecting to God where three or more are gathered.... Share Him proudly proclaiming His glory in every community.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Melanie Lounds

### Staying Connected

Helen Johnson/Maxine Kushmaul  
 Grace Haven Assisted Living  
 1107 Glastonbury Drive  
 St. Johns, MI 48879

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

### Newsletter Dedication

In loving memory of  
 Hila Beaufore.  
 From her husband,  
 Darwin Beaufore.

### Pick one up today!

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

### Brain Buster

What was the first plague God brought upon the Egyptians when Pharaoh refused to let the Hebrews leave his land?

- A) Water turned to blood
- B) Dense darkness for three days
- C) Death of all Egyptian firstborn males
- D) Swarms of gnats

(A) (See Exodus 7:20-21ff)

### Rummage Sale

You are going through your closets, cleaning out the shed, garage and basement and not sure where to put all the items you have accumulated and no longer use? I have a solution for you! Bring them to First Congregational Church for our annual Rummage sale **August 8th & 9th** during Mint Festival weekend. If you would like to help out during the week before with set up or the Friday and Saturday of the sale please contact Barb Sherman at 517-242-1234 (cell), or 989-292-4029 (home).

Save Your Items for Our Rummage Sale



God Bless You!  
 Barb Sherman

**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@4wbi.net

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

**Facebook:**

firstcongregationalchurchofstjohns

**Hours:**

Monday-Wednesday 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

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

Closed Friday

Sunday Service 10:00 a.m.

**Senior Minister:** Matthew Olson

**Director of Music Ministry:** Rachael Short

**Church Administrator Interim:** Holly Graham

**Office Staff:** Guven Witteveen

**Treasurer:** Tom Webb

**Financial Secretary:** Paul Martis

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

**Hands of Harmony Director:** Susan Kilmer

**Custodians:** Faith Hazard & Shirley 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

Lou Neuder.....517-204-1593

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

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

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

**Board of Ministry Joys  
and Concerns**

-Welcoming newly elected members to the  
Board of Ministry.

-Dave Elms leading the Loaves and Fishes  
ministry.

-Keeping up with pledges through the sum-  
mer months.