

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

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MARCH

This Month's Highlights:

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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

March 2012 The Congregational Connection...

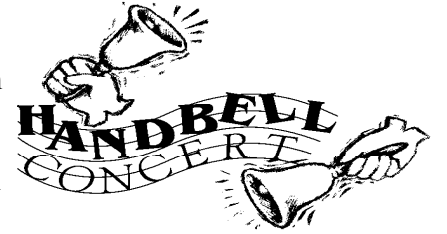


*Our connection to the family and friends of
 First Congregational Church, St. Johns, MI*

SPRING CONCERTS

The "Hands of Harmony Bell Choir" will be attending the annual "Spring Ring" event. This special event offers hand bell ringers the opportunity to attend classes on bell ringing techniques and participate in mass ringing with other choirs. The Lansing Area Ministry of Bell (LAMP), under the direction of Monica McGowan of Lakeview, MN, will present it's 28th, Annual Spring Ring on Saturday, March 17, 2012, at Waverly High School's gymnasium (on Snow Road between Michigan Avenue and West Joseph in west Lansing). This facility is handicap accessible.

Monica McGowan has a Bachelor of Science in Music Education and found her life's passion in handbells as a ringer and brings her extensive training, experience and enthusiasm for handbells and handchimes to every forum and venue. The theme of the concert is "Ringing Through the Year- A Celebration of Church Seasons" and handbell arrangements of music of the church year (Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, Advent, and Christmas) will be featured. About 200 ringers from 20 choirs will join together for a mass ringing; solo numbers will also be played. The concert is at 4:30 p.m. on Saturday, March 17th, and is free and open to the public. A freewill offering will be taken. Hope to see you there!



Submitted by Susan Kilmer,
 Director of the Hands of Harmony

MUSIC WITH A MISSION

The next Music With A Mission concert is Sunday, March 18th, at 4:00 p.m. to benefit the Baby Pantry. The concert on March 18th, will feature choral selections from the MSU Community Music School Young Men's Chorus, MSU Acafellas, and the Silo Singers. Light refreshments will be served and a free will offering will be collected for the Baby Pantry. Please mark your calendar for this special event!



Submitted by Susan Kilmer

Senior High Youth Group Activities

This year our church is sending Ana Witteveen, Becca Stevens, Trisha Cheeney, and youth leader Katie Livingston to South Dakota for the annual NAPF conference and mission work. NAPF (National Association of Pilgrim Fellowship) allows teens to meet and bond with other Christians from throughout the country and to share their faith in a fun-filled atmosphere. Partnering with Mission Discovery in Rapid City, South Dakota, NAPF will also include aspects of worship, speakers, small group time, service, leadership and FUN! Rapid City is home to thousands of Lakota Indians who have moved from the Pine Ridge Reservation in search of a better life. Our youth will serve forgotten and overlooked residents by repairing and painting run-down homes, hosting children's bible school, and sharing God's love with children and adults who need to experience hope. Our youth will also have the opportunity to do some touring in the incredible area of the Black Hills, the Badlands and Mt. Rushmore.

Thank you for supporting our fundraising activities, and we promise more opportunities for you to help us help others! But what else are our youth doing?

Hannah Van Valkenburg, Ana Witteveen, Andrew Rademacher, and Trisha Cheeney are venturing out to Appalachia this year for the annual Appalachia Service Project. John Fitch and John Cheeney are planning to take the journey, as well as one lucky middle school student, July 15-22!

After our February Edru Roller Skating extravaganza and our visitations to other churches, we plan on sticking around St. Johns for a bit. Saturday, March 10th is our SPF lock-in. Bring a friend to this yummy event where we will bake, hear a lesson on Jesus of Nazareth, and watch the movie *Passion of the Christ*. We invite parents to share in this movie experience and discussion as it is a very moving film. The next morning our fellowship snacks will be served to you after church service. (Don't forget – Sunday, March 11th is Daylight Savings Time!!)

This year our youth have helped serve breakfast for the Baby Pantry ministry. In similar fashion the youth's next community service project involves feeding a crowd in order to help a 5 year old girl named Tori. Born perfectly healthy, Tori developed Transverse Myelitis when she was 9 months old. It left her ventilator dependent and paralyzed from the shoulders down. In spite of her many challenges, she leads a full and active life. As a kindergartener at Luce Road Elementary in Alma, Tori participates as much as she can. As Tori is wheelchair dependent, her parents (Devon and Eric Roger) assist Tori so she can participate in dance, horseback riding, and soccer. Our youth share the excitement of serving a St. Patrick's Day Boiled Dinner Benefit to help raise funds for a handicap-accessible van in order to transport Tori. If you are interested in volunteering with this event, donating an item for the Silent Auction, or attending with friends, family, and neighbors, then spread the news! We will be preparing and serving the meal Saturday, March 17 from 4-7 p.m. Contact Molly Minnick at 989-307-9936 for more information on how you can help.

With all of these events, we still invite anyone interested in New Testament readings to our Sunday night Bible reading at the home of Stacie and Jerry Stevens. The youth have read several books in the New Testament this year.

Remember, there are many opportunities for your kids to get involved, whether it be Sunday mornings at 10 a.m.... Sunday evenings at 7 p.m.... being involved in community service projects... or participating in fun evening events like skating and movie night. We look forward to being a kid with them!!

Sincerely,
Melanie Lounds
Guyen Witteveen
Kate Livingston

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.

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.

A message from **JACOB ATEM** who spoke at our church about South Sudan and the need for a clinic and health care. "First of all, SSHCO would like to thank you for the support and prayers that you have given to SSHCO. As many of you know, we have completed Phase 1 (Building the health clinic in Maar) and now we are in Phase 2 (Supplying the clinic)." You can still make donations and change the lives of thousands in Marr, South Sudan. Go to www.sshco.org for the latest updates.

MICHAEL ANDERSON, 65, a former long time member of our church passed away in Suttons Bay, MI on February 11th. He is survived by his parents John and Phyllis Anderson, Orchard Creek Assisted Living, 9517 East Cherrybend Road, Apt. 29, Traverse City, MI 49684. Michael is the nephew of Howard and Dorothy Sousley.



There are 316 names for butterflies in a number of languages. I have been lead to understand that butterflies are called butterflies because they *fluttered by* . That leads



to the reason, if one has to have a reason, to announce that we, that is Doublets Etc., will be departing from the church parking lot on Sunday March 4 somewhere between 12:45 and 1:00 pm to go to Meijer Gardens to see the post "hatching" of this year's flutter bys, ah Butterflies. If we have ten or more people going, it will cost us \$7/per head for those 65 and older. It will be a little more if we have fewer heads and accompanying bodies. Lunch and business meeting will be in the Meijer Garden's cafeteria. EVERY HEAD is invited. Full details: who is driving, who is not, exactly when we will eat and when we will not, will be arranged during coffee hour after church services. So if you are interest come down to the coffee hour and help us get the details worked out, as it depends on how many want to go and who wants or does not want to drive. The details are no big deal so do not sweat the small stuff, but do expect a good time. I have been assured that all of the flesh-eating butterflies have been muzzled and vaccinated. For more information all Gary McCampbell at 224-6134.

Submitted by Gary McCampbell

MUSIC WITH A MISSION

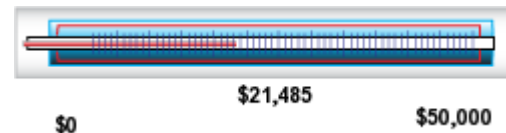
On Sunday, February 12th the Music Ministry Team hosted an organ concert to benefit the Basic Needs Center of St. Johns. The concert featured the musical talents of Jonathan and Stephanie Gewirtz and Rachael Short. Keith Mino served as the emcee, the Junior High Youth Group helped greet people as they came in and handed out programs, the Doublets provided cookies, and the bell choir provided ice tea and lemonade. Approximately 45 people attended the concert. Two large baskets of food items were collected and a free will offering raised \$458.00, all to benefit the Basic Needs Center. Thank you to everyone who helped make the concert a success!

Don't forget to **SPRING FORWARD** on Saturday, March 10th, before you go to bed. You don't want to miss church in the morning!



Sunday School for children and Youth Groups are held at 10:00 a.m.

AIR CONDITIONING UPDATE! The total estimated cost of this project is \$50,000.00. With the matching funds and a new donation of \$70.00 we now have \$21,485.55! We will continually keep you updated on our fund raising progress for this church improvement..



PASTOR'S PONDERINGS, Submitted by Rev. Matthew Olson

There is a debris strewn wood not far from my home; the kind of place that collects rusted water heaters and broken concrete, household trash and poured out motor oil. The weedy, bare, misshapen trees look bleak and beaten back in the winter wind. I, who love the forest, shun this woods; I find its air of casual, reckless abuse depressing.

On the edge of that ugly place, in the early light, with snow on the ground and the air at 18 degrees, I saw my first Robin of spring 2012.

It didn't look like spring. But there she was. The bird was sitting in a brittle, barren shrub, her dull feathers fluffed against the cold, eyeing me as I eyed her. I stepped closer. The bird did not move. I'm sorry to say that I spoke reproachfully. "You fool!" I said aloud. "It is 18 degrees. You'll freeze!" The Robin seemed unconcerned. "You are the fool", she said to me with her settled eyes. "Spring is almost here; you are just too blind to see it."

The wood was still an ugly place, but I had been spoken too. Despite appearances, the bird was there; a sign of the future, of what is to come. The bird had hope. It had invaded that woods and made it its own, perhaps preparing to claim it as its territory. Maybe the Robin will build a nest and raise her family there, and be found hunting among the plastic shopping bags for insects.

I wondered about my own claim to hope. According to the Book of Hebrews, hope is "an anchor for the soul." Was I anchored in God's certain purpose, and therefore invading the future with real hope, claiming it as my territory? Was I being faithful to God's sworn intent to bring about a new heavens and a new earth? Or was I merely moving into the future trying to keep my head up and loses down?

Only God knows where that bird came from. But wherever it came from it had to leave that place in order to land here. Following its example I've decided: I am done mourning the woods, done focusing on what it isn't. I am looking to it now for new shoots of growth and the unfolding of tender leaves. Maybe I will see flowers among the matted leaves and scattered cans. And I will be looking for the Robin.

It won't be paradise. It will still be a tattered and dismal place. But I will claim it in hope and see it with fresh eyes. Isn't that what Jesus did; claim the world for God in hope? And isn't Jesus the true sign of hope itself? As Peter put it, God "has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

The wood, though marred, is still part of God's creation. Amid the garbage new life will stir. Won't you join me in claiming the hope of the world, the Lord Jesus, as your own?

"I am the beginning and the end, behold, I make all things new"

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 the newsletter in three installments. This is the second.-MWO

These are our goals and each and every decision that has been made in regard to the 2012 budget relates to these goals.

The Board of Ministry and specifically the Business Committee began working on the 2012 budget over the summer. Numerous meetings were held and many, many discussions took place. Nothing about this budget was done in haste and prayerful consideration was given to each item. When concerns were brought, we attempted to listen to and act on those concerns. We even postponed this meeting by two weeks in order to try our hardest to listen to everyone who brought issues before us. This does not mean that we agreed on everything. But I do believe that we worked as hard as we could to bring you a responsible budget proposal.

This being said, let's turn our attention to the actual proposed budget. There are several comments which I would like to make by way of introduction.

First, for 10 of the past 11 years, we (as a congregation) have passed a deficit budget. While I believe that the majority of the congregation is aware that these have been deficit, there appears as though we have not fully understood what happens each year to cover this deficit. As a Board, we want this to be fully stated and understood by each member of the congregation as that from this point on we can move forward in the most transparent and clear manner.

When there is a deficit and we do not bring in enough money to cover our expenses, that money comes from the investments accounts which house our endowment funds. And for 10 of last 11 years, we have taken money from these funds to cover the deficit in the budget which was approved by the congregation.

Now, there is not a single member of the Board and I would hasten to guess not a single member of the congregation that is pleased with this scenario. The Board of Ministry is dedicated to changing this situation once and for all. But this change cannot happen overnight.

Submitted by Molly Minnick, Moderator

NEXT MONTH: Plans to reach our goals and end deficit spending.

MARCH SIGN UP SCHEDULES

<u>Altar Flowers</u>	<u>Nursery Care</u>	<u>Fellowship Hour</u>	<u>4th Sunday Supper Host/Hostess</u>
4 *	4 Chelsea Rossow	4 Jr. High P.F.	March * April * May *
11 Barb Sherman	11 Stacie Stevens	11 Sr. High P.F.	
18 *	18 Stacie Stevens	18 The Harris Family	
25 *	25 Chelsea Rossow	25 4th Sunday Supper	

***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:

Mason Allen Forbes, January 30, 2012, son of Wade and Courtney, grandson of Dave and Darlene Barber.

Deaths:

Randy R. Pasch, February 1, 2012, nephew of Ruth Nihart
 Jack D. Gunther, February 7, 2012, father of Jim Gunther
 Ann Marie Slamka, February 7, 2012, sister of Eunice LaBar
 Dorothea O. Kelley, February 10, 2012, grandmother of Patti Mayes



THE MARCH DEDICATION

The "Congregational Connection" for this month is dedicated in loving memory of



Alferd Wickerham

on his birthday, March 24th.

It is given by his wife Bonnie Wickerham

Children and Youth News

MARCH BIRTHDAYS

- 9 Emily Rademacher
- 12 Alyssa Elms
- 14 Lauren Doppke
- 15 Nathan Sherman
- 20 Audrey Lockwood
- 23 Payton Simon
- 24 Grace Lounds
- 25 Meagan Leasher
- 28 Trisha Cheeney
- 29 Logan Hazel



MICHIGAN CONGREGATIONAL SUMMER CAMP

The dates for camp for this coming summer have been set. It will be held from Sunday, July 29th, to Friday evening, August 3rd. It will be held at the YMCA Camp Copneconic in Fenton, MI, Genesee County. You can check their website at www.campcopneconic.com. Summer camp is for all youth currently in 3rd through the 8th grade. Registration packets are available on the Literature Rack on the south side of the sanctuary. All registrants with a deposit post-marked no later than May 1st. receive a \$30.00 early registration discount. All other applications are due by July 15, 2012. They have limited space, so you are encouraged to register as soon as you are able.



Jr. High P.F. "March is Reading Month"

Book Sale!



Candle Sale!



Bake Sale!



Sunday, March 4th During Coffee Hour

Do you have unwanted books that need a new home? Please consider donating them to our youth! We are looking for all types of books for all ages. Donations can be left at the church between now and March 4th. We also would be happy to pick them up for you-just let us know or call the church office.

Thank you!

Barb Sherman (292-4029) &
Jennifer Beagle (224-0667)
Jr. P.F. Co-leaders

Notes from the Music Ministry Team:

Serving God by Ministering to Our Church Family

Last month, I shared the goals that will guide our work as a Music Ministry Team as this year unfolds. While much of our February meeting was devoted to discussion of the concerts hosted by our team to benefit the Basic Needs Center (Feb. 12) and the Baby Pantry (March 18), we also reviewed our recent activities and goals.

Activities

Together with our Senior Minister, Chuck Graham, and I attended the annual Symposium on Worship held at Calvin College in Grand Rapids (Jan. 27-29). We found refreshment and inspiration in the worship services, workshops, and in fellowship with Christians from around the world:

*The song that follows the Benediction ("*Jesus, Draw Me Ever Nearer*") came from one of the worship services. We loved it, and wanted to share it with our church family as a beautiful prayer to bridge our corporate worship with the worship of our daily lives.

*We also found it helpful when worship leaders took time at the beginning of worship service to give us an overview of the music – where to find it, teaching new songs, and explaining the purpose of the music. We felt prepared to worship, free of uncertainty and confusion, and we want to extend that same courtesy to our church family.

Two weeks later, I attended a weekend conference in East Lansing (Feb. 11). Author and musician Bob Kauflin led us in worship and shared insights from his 30 years of study and experience as a worship leader. Out of a desire to grow, the members of the music committee have launched a group study of his book, Worship Matters: Leading Others to Encounter the Greatness of God.

Goals

Our Team's guiding principle is to serve God by ministering to our church family through music. Any perceived "success" as it pertains to our worship experience is the direct work of His Holy Spirit. Every Sunday morning, the Senior Minister and worship leaders pray together in preparation for worship, and we ask that you also prepare for worship in prayer. As we learn and grow we expect that some of our efforts may fall short of our intentions, so please be patient with us. We are relying on your timely, direct, honest dialogue in order to serve God and our church family effectively.

"Let your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us, even as we hope in you." (Psalm 33:22)

Blessing! ~ **Rachael Short**, Director of the Music Ministry

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

The mission of the Music Ministry Team: 1 to support and sustain a creative atmosphere that supports worship for each member; 2 to encourage active participation for the purpose of worship; 3 to proactively develop musical worship experiences that are varied, meaningful, and personal.

2012 Easter Flower Order Form

If you would like to honor or remember someone special, here is a perfect way. Lilies, Tulips and Mums (in 6 inch pots) are being offered for you to purchase. Please have your order in the church office by **Sunday, March 26th**. Please enclose your payment with the order form. You may pick up your plant following the Easter Sunday Service. A list of the names of the donors and their designation will be included in the Easter Bulletin. Make your check payable to First Congregational Church.



Your Name: _____

I would like to order _____ **Lilies** at \$8.00 each. Total _____

Dedication: _____

I would like to order _____ **Tulips** at \$8.00 each. Total _____

____Red ____Pink ____Yellow

Dedication: _____

I would like to order _____ **Mums** at \$8.00 each. Total _____

____White ____Yellow ____Lavender

Dedication: _____

17TH ANNUAL ATTIC TREASURE SALE

APRIL 17th & 18th, 2012

10:00 A.M. – 5:00 P.M.

WILCOX HALL, LOWER LEVEL

It's time to start gathering your "Treasures" for this annual event.

Donations may be brought to church the week of April 9th. Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday

9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

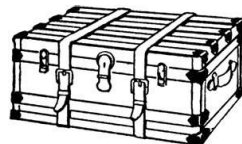
Wednesday 9:00 a.m. until noon.

Clean, gently used items please!

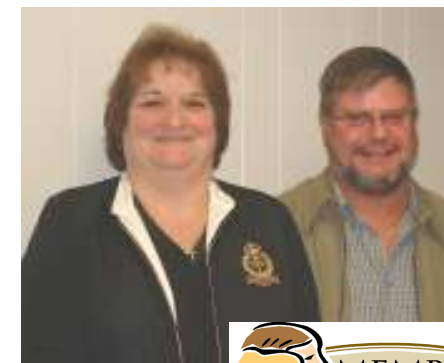
Dishes, vases, small furniture, glassware, linens, Christmas items, knick-knacks, toys, books and older costume jewelry.

No clothing.

For more information contact Paul or Joann Martis at 224-4165.



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, **March 18th**. Contact John Fitch at 224-3565, or any Missions Team member for more information.



We would like everyone to meet Jim and Jayne French. Both of these great people were born and raised in St. Johns and have raised a family here. Their oldest daughter is Melanie. She and her husband Derek have a son Damian. Son, Mike and his wife Julie, own Mike's Power Equipment. Youngest daughter Wendy and her husband Tom have a daughter Morgan. Jayne is a Sales Associate at Harr's Jewelry and Jim retired from General Motors after 33 years. He now works at Car Quest and at Mike's Power Equipment both here in St. Johns. The hobbies they enjoy are spending time with their family and watching their grandchildren. Jim enjoys working on cars and drag racing and Jayne really likes to read and shop. They were brought to First Congregational Church by Ed and Gail Cary former members of our church. They have been members for seventeen years! We are so blessed to have this family in our church! Please extend a hand of friendship the next time you see them.

KYLE ROOT son of Randy and Kim Root is an honor graduate and about to finish Air Traffic Control School at Keesler Air Force Base in Biloxi, MS. He will be home for a short time to help out the local recruiter and then he is off to Luke AFB in Phoenix, AZ where he will be a radar controller.



CHURCH HOLY WEEK SCHEDULE FOR

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
Palm Sunday: April 1st. Service at 11:00 a.m.
Maundy Thursday: April 5th. Service at 7:00 p.m.
Good Friday: April 6th. SJMA Community Service at 7:00 p.m.
Easter Sunday: April 8th. Service at 11:00 a.m.

Childcare provided.