

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

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This Month's Highlights:
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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



November 2011 The Congregational Connection...

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



Please plan to join with others in our community
for a

Community Thanksgiving Dinner

This dinner is offered, free of charge, to members of our community who anticipate being alone on Thanksgiving, who are unable to prepare a meal or who are unable to travel to spend the day with relatives. We also invite those who have family members in the military.

Thursday, November 24, 2011

2 seatings will be offered
12:00 p.m. (noon) & 3:00 p.m.

First Congregational Church

100 Maple Street

St. Johns, Michigan

Please call (989) 224-2636 by November 16th to register

Sponsored by:

First Congregational Church, First United Methodist Church, St. Joseph Catholic Church, Kiwanis Club of St. Johns, the physicians and staff of Sparrow Clinton Hospital, S.J. H.S. National Honor Society and Good Wins Club and the ST. Johns Wilson Center Alternative School Students.

YOU ARE THE CHURCH.

How do people in St. Johns come to know First Congregational Church? Through you; you are the living presence of your church.

You make this place more than a stone building on the corner of 21 and Maple. You take the church out of four walls and make it live.

Some have the notion that the Senior Minister is the best representative of the church. It is true that I often speak for the church, declare what it stands for, and encourage people in its fellowship. I know the church's business and act on its behalf. I am often your representative, but never your substitute.

My preaching is just wasted breath unless it is reflected in your life. Your church is not measured by what its leaders say, but by what you say and do. It is easy to make speeches and claims, but these must be validated by the goods. You deliver the goods.

Your church professes a concern for people; you express that concern in our worship services, mission work, and the way in which you treat others. Your church tries to build up a Christian world; you make that happen by how you act at home, on the job, and in the community.

Your church proclaims a message that will save lives and make people new, opening them to a life in fellowship with God. You are the demonstration of that proclamation.

You are the church.

Rev. Matthew Olson

CROP Walk: On Sunday Oct. 2nd, approximately 65 people from 9 area churches and the Kiwanis Club gathered together at the city park pavilion for the annual CROP Walk to fight hunger. It was a beautiful sunny afternoon, just right for a walk around St Johns. The First Congregational Church was proudly represented by 6 walkers, including 2 youth and we raised over \$200! The funds raised from the walk will provide international food relief to so many people and 25% will benefit the Basic Needs Food Center, Clinton Co. Meals-On-Wheels, and the St Johns Ministerial Association's emergency relief fund. Thank you to everyone who walked, made a donation, and to Sue Neuder of the Missions Team for heading up FCC's effort to support the CROP Walk. Let's double these numbers next year!

Submitted by Susan Kilmer, Community Coordinator for the CROP Walk

ST JOHNS MINISTERIAL ASSOCIATION

The St. Johns Ministerial Association will be holding a community-wide Thanksgiving Service at First United Methodist Church, 200 East State Street, at 7:00 p.m. on Tuesday, November 22. Many of the area pastors and worship teams will be participating in the service. This special evening provides a great opportunity to worship with your neighbors while giving thanks to God for his constant goodness and faithful provision.



CONCERT

The "Autumn Pops Concert VI", sponsored by the Greater Lansing Chapter of the American Guild of Organists, will be held Sunday, November 6, 3:00 P.M., at the Presbyterian Church of Okemos, 2258 Bennett Road, Okemos. A free-will offering will be taken, earmarked for the AGO's Scholarship Program. The concert will reflect a blend of pop, classical and jazz. Several very talented area musicians have volunteered to perform "easy listening" music. Put this date on your calendar!

Submitted by Rachael Short

First Congregational Church

100 Maple Street

St. Johns, MI 48879

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Web Site: www.fccsj.com

Facebook: [firstcongregationalchurchofstjohns](https://www.facebook.com/firstcongregationalchurchofstjohns)

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.

THE BOARD OF MINISTRY

Sr. Minister: Rev. Matthew Olson

Moderator: Molly Minnick

Vice Moderator: Shirleyan Lake

Board of Ministry Members:

David Elms, Tom Flynn, Tom French,

Bill Kushmaul, Gary Larsen, Eugene

Livingston, Melanie Lounds, Keith Mino, Cali

Sackrider

Church Administrator: Susan Larsen

Financial Secretary: Paul Martis

Treasurer: Jim Beagle

Chancel Choir: Dr. Charles Graham

Hands of Harmony Director: Susan Kilmer

Director of Music Ministry: Rachael Short

ATTENTION ALL MEN!

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** is meeting on Sunday evenings at 6 p.m. in the church parlor. Guven Witteveen and Sid Lounds will lead this group. All men are invited to join the conversation and camaraderie.

The mission of the Music Ministry Team:

- ~ to support and sustain a creative atmosphere that *supports worship for each member*;
- ~ to encourage *active participation* for the purpose of worship;

Notes from the Music Ministry Team: *A New Song*

My heart is full of gratitude for a God who loves us and is worthy of our praise. Our God loves the praise that anyone would appreciate for its beauty, but our God *really* loves the praise that comes from all the things we would never actually *want* to give: pain, fatigue, pride, doubt, anger, shame, etc. We do not carry that stuff very well, and when we surrender it, then we are free to praise fully, with new hearts and clean spirits. *That* is praise that I want to give to God. (Go ahead; try to stop me!)

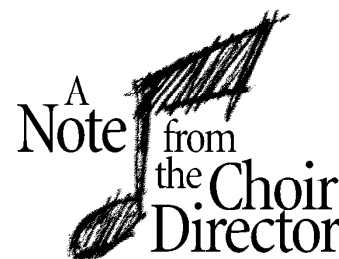
We sing, in Hymn #18, "*Sing a new song to the Lord*," a paraphrase of Psalm 98 in which David opens his eyes to the breadth of praise belonging to God: shouts of joy, jubilant song, harp, trumpet, ram's horn, the roar of the sea, rivers clapping their hands, and mountains singing! No mention is made of pipe organ or piano, but I trust that God will accept that praise offering, if we offer it as such.

Thank you for responding to the invitation to share with me songs that express your praise to God. Over the past year, you have flooded me with new songs. (My i-pod overflows.) You have helped to expand the breadth of praise that we can bring to God in our worship, by learning new songs, hearing new voices, singing along with different instruments, and sometimes playing instruments in the pews! You bear with me as I incorporate my clumsy feet into hymn accompaniment from the organ (surrendering my fear), and as I explore the number of times we may sing the same refrain (ex., "*No place I'd rather be than here in Your love*").

This job gets better and better, as you share with me and as we grow in faith together. Please continue to share new music with me, and **please** help me to remember when our familiar songs, the ones that resonate from deep within us express our praise. Please stay in touch, so that we may praise fully, joyfully, and authentically together.

With love,

- Rachael Short, Director of the Music Ministry



A Note from the Choir Director

To me church service without music is like eating a plain bread sandwich. Yes, it can fill your stomach, but the sandwich is a whole lot better with something between the slices!

As the Chancel Choir director, I have many responsibilities and duties. Do I pick this song, or should I pick that song for the choir to sing? Is the song too easy, or is it boring for them? Will the song fulfill the spiritual needs of the choir? Am I working the choir too hard with too much new music? Is the song too difficult for them to learn in the time allotted, and will they like it? Will the congregation enjoy my selections? How can I engage the spiritual emotions of the choir and congregation with the music I select? Will my choice of music be spiritually meaningful for the congregation? Should the song be of contemporary, gospel, classical, traditional, or spiritual style? Does the song prepare the congregation for the Pastor's sermon? Will the song fit into the theme of the Pastor's sermon? Can I get the tempo just right? Can I get the choir to duplicate the song the way I hear the music in my head? So many decisions, so many choices, and they all have meet the Goldilocks criteria to be "just right" for our way of worship. The responsibility is much greater than appearance would have.

My role as choir director has many facets. Consider this partial list of roles required of me; some essential, others ancillary to the art of choral conducting: I have to convey to the choir my desire of transmuting notes printed on a page into beautiful singing; the way that I imagine the song to be in my head. I have to deal with problems linked to my choir's instruments – the human voice. I have to figure out the procedures needed to prevent and solve vocal problems whether the problems are due to allergies, illness, overuse, misuse, or bad vocal habits. I have to ensure the choir uses proper pronunciation of the lyrics, volume, intensity, timing, pitch, style, etc. At times I have to deal with less than an adequate number of choir members present due to vacations, work schedules, family emergencies, injury, and/or illness. How do I encourage others to join in the fun of singing our praises to God by joining choir so that we can fill the church with His glorious music?

I've sung in choirs for close to 40 years and have had some marvelous directors that I attempt to emulate, but when the opportunity presents itself, I also try to take advantage of continuing my music education to make myself a better choir director.

Some of the roles that I have as choir director are: Leader, group voice teacher, singer, actor, dancer, mime, stage director, psychologist, referee, sociologist, diplomat, politician, group facilitator, motivational speaker, fund raiser, publicist, CEO, and even a financial planner as the cost of music continues to rise.

However, it's all these many and varied labors that when properly blended together gently persuade the choir to generate those moments of choral beauty and expressivity that all choral directors strive to meet, but more importantly are suitable, meaningful and enjoyable to the congregation.

Yours in Christ, Chuck Graham

HELLO CHURCH! From Sarah Gladstone

I would like to share with you something that has been on my mind these past few weeks, that is the idea of 'silence'. I'm currently taking a class called Spiritual Formations in which we survey some of the great spiritual disciplines of our Christian tradition. We have tried our hand at fasting, journaling, contemplative prayer, Lectio Divina, and many other disciplines. Then, last week the class was asked to retreat to a local monastery for a day of silence. What an incredible sight! Students filled the pews of the chapel, covered the flourishing grounds, could be found kneeling at one of the many stations of the cross, and a few could be found curled up in a corner snoozing. Some students took to the absence of an agenda like a duck to water, but others of us (like myself) spent the first part of the day praying for mercy! For we have never let ourselves be agenda-less and the task was daunting.

We came to this place looking for silence and solitude. For the day we logged out of Facebook, turned our phones to silent, docked our iPods, and few very begrudged students surrendered their iPads. We unplugged.

Throughout this day of silence, I carried with me the advice and teaching of Henri Nouwen. For those of you that have not been introduced to this incredible mind, may I suggest adding his collective works to your Christmas list? In his book *The Way of the Heart*, he says that silence does three things:

"Silence makes us all pilgrims." If we think about the early fathers of our Christian faith, many of them retreated to the deserts to pursue God in an ascetic silence. To me, the image of St. Jerome huddled in a cave outside Bethlehem pops in my head. Silence offers us a challenge, and many of the great minds of our tradition have eagerly run towards it. How often do we enter into a discussion just to feel unheard or defeated? How often does our advice (solicited or not) yield fruit? In passing by these places where we would usually interject our words, we free ourselves from the affairs of this world. We clear our 'pilgrim's path' through silence. In silence we are present in our world, but with our sights set on grander things! *"Silence guards the fire within."* I find that the wisest of people to glean from are often the most quiet. This is because when they do speak their rare words, people listen. Words have a power that has been lost in our overly saturated, noise-drenched society. Through the practice of silence, our words regain their meaning. Matthew 5:37a states, "Let what you say be simply 'yes' or 'no'." Have you ever tried living this out? I spent a lent season a few years ago attempting this. I found that I had a lot fewer opportunities to stick my foot in my mouth, fewer arguments, and made a lot more friends! Jesus tells us to not ramble on, to speak truth, and to be straightforward. As Christians we need to tend to our words. We need to ask ourselves: what is more loving right now? Speaking? Or just being present and listening? If we tend to them, our words will regain their meaning, their strength, and their passion.

NOVEMBER SIGN UP SCHEDULES

<u>Altar Flowers</u>	<u>Nursery Care</u>	<u>Fellowship Hour</u>	<u>4th Sunday Supper Host/Hostess</u>
6* Wilbur & Leola Thurston	6* Miriam VanValkenburg	6 Lake, Root, Barnhart & Gunther	November
13* Nancy Worrall Flynn Family	13* Miriam VanValkenburg	13 Missions Team	* December
20*	20*	20*	* January
27*	27 Kelly DeRosia	27 Fourth Sunday Supper	* February

***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

Weddings:
Benjamin Mills & Megan Upton, October 1, 2011



THE NOVEMBER DEDICATION



The "Congregational Connection" this month is dedicated to all military veterans

*Given by
Neil Barnhart*

Children and Youth News

NOVEMBER BIRTHDAYS

- 1 Damion Gehres
- 1 Robert Barron
- 6 Spencer Howell
- 7 Grace Palmer
- 14 Abigail Schuelke
- 23 Garrett Smith



SUNDAY SCHOOL OUTLINE FOR GRADES 4TH & 5TH AND 2ND & 3RD.

Sunday School helps teachers develop meaningful relationships with their students that will lead to a strong foundation of faith. Based on 24 key Bible passages, students in Mr. Rod Fuller's 4th and 5th grade class discover what the Bible says about popularity, success, failure, friendship, rules and mores. Kids develop Bible study skills, grow in Christian maturity and respond by serving Jesus in church and the community.

Keeping adventurous students in 3rd and 4th grades attentive and involved using games, art, storytelling and more is how Dave and Michele Elms lead this group. Dave and Michele lead this lively group into becoming wholehearted followers of Jesus. Their kids develop the ability to use the Bible and related reference tools, and respond by obeying and trusting Christ and sharing God's love with others.

Classes are on Sunday from 10:00 to 10:45 a.m.



What terrific kids we have in Jr. High P.F.! Our group is having a great time together and there are many service projects and fun events coming up, along with an ongoing study of the 12 Disciples. This is all part of our "We Are One" theme for this year.

All middle school students are encouraged to join the fun! We meet every Sunday morning at 10:00 in the room downstairs, across from the nursery. Any questions? Please contact Barb Sherman (292-4029) or Jennifer Beagle (224-0667).



**Saturday,
November
12th,
5 to 8 p.m.
in Wilcox Hall**

*Make Pizzas,
Play games,
Watch Movies,
Make Crafts!*

All children age four through fifth grade, and their families are invited to this fun ,family, free event. Please RSVP to 224-2636 to save your spot!

"Silence teaches us to speak." Silence, as we are talking about here, is something that comes from a place of presence and fullness, not of being withdrawn. We often find ourselves pulled into a place of stubborn silence when we are embarrassed, feel guilty, or ashamed. But this place of silence is not what Christians are called to, but rather creating a silence in which the Spirit can be heard. Henri Nouwen expands on his point by stating, "A word that bears fruit is a word that emerges from the silence and returns to it." Haven't we grown tired of this era, where we have to scream to be heard? Let's savor our voices, our words. I pray for all of us that our voices as Christians can be a voice of love, patience, forgiveness, healing, and hope.

In the Gospel stories, we find that Christ often sent his disciple on ahead of him so that he would have time of silence. On one very important occasion, he retreated to the Mount of Olives to pray on his own. Silence is necessary if we are to be guided by our great and loving God.

Not all of us have the privileged of withdrawing from our world in silent retreat, but can I suggest the monumental task of carving out times of silence in our daily lives? In the morning before the world wakes up... in a fall walk around our neighborhood... in the car while we commute. Let God fuel us in these times of silence, so that when we enter back into our crazy loud worlds we can go there with the fullness of God's love in us.

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.

INVITATION

The Hands of Harmony Bell Choir have been invited again to participate in the Holiday Spectacular Concert at the Wilson Center on December 2nd at 7:30 PM. Several musical groups will perform that night and a free-will offering will be collected to fund the restoration of the Wilson Center auditorium. This will be the third year the Hands of Harmony have participated in the Holiday Concert. While the mission of the Hands of Harmony is to worship God through music, our choir strongly supports the efforts to restore the auditorium for future art and music performances and appreciates the opportunity to share handbell music with the St. Johns community. Please mark your calendar for this special concert and we hope you'll support the restoration of the Wilson Center auditorium.



Submitted by, Susan Kilmer
Director of the Hands of Harmony

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

Birthday greetings are sent out to Lucille Worrall, a former long time member, who is celebrating her 90th Birthday on November 13th. Lucille lives at R#3, Box 2280, McMillan, MI 49853.



DOUBLETS TO DOUBLETS, ETC.

What's Doublets, Etc. about anyway?

It's about a church that ages like its people age and as they get older, they die and you are all familiar with that process. As with people, the groups they belong to also get old and sometimes pass on. (Please remove off your hats and put them over your heart).

Doublets is one of those old groups that get old. After all it started many decades ago. But unlike the human body, groups can get young again. By adding younger people to the mix it gets reinvigorated. While the Doublets started as a couples group, it found that sometimes couples stop being couples for a couple of reasons, hence the addition of ETC. to its name. What is all this leading up to?

Doublets is always looking for new couples-oh, heck they are looking for anyone who is looking for a time and a place to meet other church members in an attempt at having a good time. They have things that they do like; basketball games (MSU) to go to, movie and live theater to attend, food to eat, business meeting to generate new thoughts, food to devour, fun money raising actions to do churchy things with, tailgate parties and someone else's food to eat, and almost anything else that inspires the soul and the mind to higher levels.

They meet, more or less as sometimes it needs to be changed, on the First Sunday of every month 'cept of course in the summer, although there have been times when they got together just for the social thing of it. The group believes in being spontaneous, at least as spontaneous as a group can be, so come join us at the church on Sunday, November 6, at 7:00 p.m. to tie fleece blankets for people at Hazel Findley.

Come and see what we mean by having fun and still giving to the community and to our church.

Gary McCampbell
989.224.6134

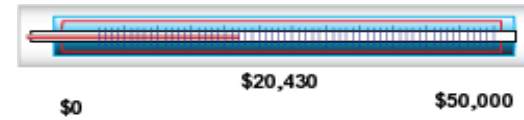
MISSIONS MINISTRY TEAM COAT DRIVE

The church has contributed 45 coats and jackets, 12 hats, 7 pair of mittens, 10 scarves, and 2 pair of boots to the Red-Line Paraclete Ministries "The Basic Needs Center" downtown St. Johns. The Missions Ministry Team would like to thank everyone who helped give a needy family the coats they need for this winter.



AIR CONDITIONING UPDATE!

The total estimated cost of this project is \$50,000.00. With the matching funds and new donations we now have \$20,430.00! 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.



NEWSLETTER

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 January, February, March, April, July, August, September, October, November and December available for your special anniversary, birthday, graduation, or "just because". Please contact the church office at 224-2636 to reserve your month.



TIS THE SEASON!

How about you, your family, or your Ministry Team **DECORATE THE SANCTUARY** for the Advent Season? We have all the trees, lights and other decorations you will need. Please contact the church office at 224-2636 if you are interested. We would like the church decorated by the first Sunday of Advent, November 27th.



I would like to introduce Lawrence Heibek, born and raised in the St. Johns area. Lawrence and his wife Alice (who passed away in 2003) raised two daughters and one son. Lawrence now has 10 grandchildren and 18 great-grandchildren!

Lawrence was a farmer for over thirty years. He also was a school bus driver, a bus mechanic, in the lawn mowing business, an ambulance driver and was the set-up person for Dennis LeVeck with lawn mowers and snow blowers.



Lawrence likes to play cards, and working in his yard. His yard always looks perfect! He is also the neighbor we would all like to have...he mows grass and picks up the leaves for many of his neighbors! He is also an usher here at church.

When the Heibek family moved into town, one of their daughters was attending First Congregational Church with some of her friends.

Lawrence and Alice came to church and decided to join the congregation in April 1965. You will see Lawrence out and about in his shiny red pick up truck.

We consider it a blessing to have Lawrence in our congregation.

Be sure to wish Lawrence a Happy 97th Birthday on November 9th!

