

# APRIL 2015

The Congregational Connection...

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



Join us on Sunday, April 5  
during our  
11:00 a.m. Worship Service  
to celebrate the resurrection  
of Jesus Christ.

Through music and readings we  
will remember the amazing story of  
God's redemptive love. **Because Jesus  
rose and defeated sin and death, we too  
can rise.**

Come and celebrate with us!

"In the night of Passover all that happened in Egypt  
renews and bestirs itself; and this itself helps to bring  
about the ultimate redemption."

-Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzatto (1707-1746)

## MAUNDY THURSDAY PASSOVER CELEBRATION

April 2nd - 6 PM

Join us for a Christian interpretation of the tradi-  
tional Jewish festival celebrated for more than  
3,000 years.

The evening will include all the elements of the  
Seder; singing, story telling, praying, and eating.  
Children are most welcome! A full dinner will be  
served along with the elements of the ceremonial  
meal. Please call the church office for reserva-  
tions.

Invite family and friends to this special event.



What does Maundy mean?

(Maundy Thursday)

Derived from the Latin word *mandatum*, meaning  
"commandment," Maundy refers to the commands  
Jesus gave his disciples at the Last Supper: to love  
with humility by serving one another, and to remem-  
ber his sacrifice.

## On Knowledge and Beliefs and Bylaws

The Christian life is founded in knowing God. This knowing involves knowing about the attributes of God (intellectual, through study and reflection) *and* knowing God as a person (experiential, in a relationship). Spiritual stature grows as the knowledge of God increases. In the church this knowledge confers on its possessor a right—even a responsibility—to act, to direct action, to establish and supervise policy, and to teach.

Beliefs, opinions, traditions, and feelings about God, no matter how strongly held, do not confer the same right and authority in the church. Why? Because we often chose not believe what we know is true. In writing of this, Dallas Willard, illustrates with buying a lottery ticket. “Most people who enter the lottery know they will not win. They will not win, and they have good evidence that they will not. They may refuse to consider the evidence or to hold it before their mind. Yet they are prepared to act as if they might win. In wagering they are irrational and irresponsible.”<sup>1</sup>

Knowledge is to be the basis of belief, but belief is not a basis for knowledge. That is why we want leaders in the church who: (1) know God, (2) believe what they know, (3) and are able to act accordingly. Their knowing and believing and acting all line up; that is are congruent.

What struck me during the course of our several month long discussion of the bylaws is how some in our congregation seem to have this backward. They dedicated themselves to knowing the bylaws, while at the same time were, by all evidence, satisfied with beliefs, opinions, traditions, and feelings about God.

One might conclude that: (1) the bylaws are knowable in a meaningful way, and God is not, (2) it was more important to know the bylaws than it is to know God, for authentic authority comes from the bylaws (3) the bylaws are real and true, and that God is derived from and exists because of the bylaws (4) the bylaws are the basis of the church.

This constitutes a perverted, Spirit-free take on congregationalism, and I have noticed it in every congregational church of which I have been a part. It is utterly antithetical to our tradition, which is very demanding in knowledge of God and living in community. But we have such a hard time seeing it because we, as moderate Christians, are so secular in our world view. We want church, but we want to leave God out of it. Not comfortable with spiritual matters we eagerly flee the accountability of covenant love for the safe haven of organizational charts and policy statements which demand no knowledge or belief of us. But there is no life in those places. If we are to be anything more than dry branches gathered to be burned we must know and abide in the source of all spiritual life; our Lord, Jesus Christ, risen from the dead.

I supported the bylaws. I helped, in a minor way, to shape them. They are important. I appreciate everything everyone put into them. Now that they have been adopted we can get to the main business; being a people who follow Jesus Christ.

--Matt

<sup>1</sup>Knowing Christ Today, p.18



Notes from the Director of the Music Ministry

## *Easter Cantata: Hope Rises*

Come, Spring! Come sunlight, warm breezes, and flowers! We watch and wait expectantly for signs of new life. Every year. It never gets old. Hope is like that. As long as we have a glimmer of Hope, we can persevere.

Our Lenten journey has brought us closer to a Jesus that I never really understood. He is believable because he dealt with stress, fatigue, annoyance, fear, and doubt just like we do. Looking closely at the Gospel of John, we've examined how Jesus struggled to display God's love through various signs that we often reduce down to magic tricks. He struggled to get it right: to channel God's love in God's way, not through his own powers. Unlike us, he had all the power of heaven at his disposal, but the struggle is the same. And he got it right every time. (Philippians 2:6-11)

As if living the perfect, faithful life and performing healing miracles wasn't enough, he went further. He drew the fire of Death that was our fate, and then broke the curse that separated us from God. He gave us a direct connection to God, opening the door to the Holy Spirit dwelling in each one of us. He gave us forgiveness that has no expiration date, no fine print, no impossible application process. (Romans 8:38-39) And this Divine love has more healing power than we can imagine. God's love is life!

As we have learned about this believable Jesus, who brought God's love to us, we also gathered on Sunday evenings to eat together and to listen for a Living Word of God through Scripture. A spirit of love grew and spread through the group like a wild vine. What began as a polite, quiet, friendly group of people changed over the weeks into a more relaxed, joyful unified body. We engaged with Abba Father as Jesus did, and we heard messages of love, comfort, encouragement, and promise. I have never experienced anything more beautiful, more joyful, more life-giving in my 40 year life in church.

We near the end of this leg of our journey. We have yet to pass through the Valley of the Shadow. But we have the promise of new life after death. As we remember Christ's incredible sacrifice, which is also an example for us, we watch and wait for that new life. We will see it. (Psalm 27:13)

On April 5 – Easter Sunday – we will celebrate Christ's resurrection in worship. The Hands of Harmony will open the service, and the Chancel Choir will present a cantata based on a narrative penned by Music Ministry Team member Ashleigh Fox. Please come and celebrate God's enormous love, brought to you by Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

Blessings!

~ Rachael Short

## STAYING CONNECTED

Helen Johnson/Maxine Kushmaul  
Grace Haven Assisted Living  
1507 Glastonbury Drive  
St. Johns, MI 48879

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

## PICK ONE UP TODAY!

The March/April edition of *The Upper Room* is now available on the literature racks in the back of the sanctuary.

## NURSERY AVAILABLE

This room is located on the lower level of the education wing. It includes a bathroom with a changing table. There is a speaker through which the service can be heard. There is no nursery staff. The nursery is made available to parents who may wish to use it as a place to care for their own children.

Please ask an usher for assistance if you wish to use this room at any time.



*Now THAT is a man of faith! Not just talking about holding on to the cross.*



*This month's newsletter is dedicated  
in celebration of  
the 80th birthday of  
Suzanne Martis on April 28  
and given by her family:  
Edward Martis and  
Spencer and Susan Martis*

*Happy Birthday, Suzanne!*

## SPRING CLEAN-UP DAY

April 25, 9:00 a.m until done



Volunteers needed to ....

Spruce up the **INSIDE** of the church.

Spruce up the **OUTSIDE** of the church.

Spruce up the **BARN** in preparation for the Mint Festival Rummage Sale.

Come for only a couple of hours, or spend the day with us. A lunch will be provided.

Whatever your spiritual gifts are, we can put them to work.

Please contact the church office to sign up.

### Letter of Interest

Dear Community Partner,

The Department of Human Services (DHS) is Michigan's public assistance, child and family welfare agency. Today, we are asking for your help in recruiting volunteers for the DHS, so that we can provide better services and support to our local community.

Volunteers are a very important resource to the DHS and the community. Volunteers can make a difference by providing clerical help to the DHS staff; providing transportation to client's medical appointments and visits; and/or crafting or sewing items needed by the elderly, hospitalized, or needy.

If you have any questions, or for more information, please contact the Acting Community Resource Coordinator at 989-224-5507 or [AndersonR@Michigan.gov](mailto:AndersonR@Michigan.gov).

Sincerely,

Rebekah Anderson  
Acting Community Resource Coordinator  
Clinton County DHS

### 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,*

**Senior Minister:** Matthew Olson  
**Director of Music Ministry:** Rachael Short  
**Church Administrator:** Sandy Kemp  
**Office Staff:** Guven Witteveen  
**Treasurer:** Tom Webb  
**Financial Secretary:** Paul Martis  
**Hands of Harmony Director:** Susan Kilmer  
**Custodians:** Faith Hazard & Shirleyn Lake

### VISION:

to CELEBRATE the glory of God through worship,  
service and stewardship,  
to NURTURE our relationships 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.

### 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  
Marilyn Newman.....517-331-3457  
Jan Myers.....989-682-4194  
Larry Salters.....989-834-5166

### Deadline Reminder

All articles for the newsletter should be submitted by the 23rd of each month. Bulletin announcements are due by Thursday.

### BOARD OF MINISTRY JOYS AND CONCERNS

Continue to pray for the Board of Ministry and all the Ministry Teams as they continue with ongoing ministry needs and concerns, and for upcoming Staff evaluations.

### First Congregational Church

100 Maple Street  
St. Johns, MI 48879

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

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

**Facebook:** firstcongregationalchurchofstjohns

#### Hours:

Mon-Wed-Fri 9:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Sunday Service 11:00 a.m.