

FEBRUARY 2015

The Congregational Connection...

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

INDULGE FOR LENT?

Rather than sacrificing something for Lent — especially something easy and spiritually insignificant, such as chocolate — Patty Kirk, in Guideposts magazine, suggests finding new ways to indulge in God's presence. Surely one can do this by having extra devotions or attending Lenten worship services. But Kirk offers these ideas:

- Spend time outdoors, sensing God's magnificence.
- Spend time with others, extending generosity and compassion. Remember Jesus' promise that when you care for others, you care for him (Matthew 25:31-46).
- Pray for the "little things," coming before God in childlike trust and feeling peace.
- Watch attentively for God's answers to prayer, and receive them as reminders of his presence.
- Turn anxiety into prayer. As you frame concerns as prayers and entrust them to God, you "sacrifice" the tendency to wallow in worry.



“REVEALING THE MYSTERIES OF HEAVEN”

Please join us for this exciting and interesting video series about Heaven, continuing on Sundays at 12:30 pm. Your hosts for this series are Rod and Betsy Fuller. The series will answer and clarify the most important questions Christians have about their future eternal home.

If you have any questions please contact Rod or Betsy Fuller at 989-224-3961.

CONVERTING FROM CHRISTIANITY: Disconnection, Lethargy, Apathy

“As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God.” Psalm 42:1

Remember when you felt that way? Remember when you were excited to talk about your faith? You were vibrant in your walk with God. You felt blessed with your spiritual gifts and eagerly set to the work of God’s kingdom. The Holy Spirit was at work. Prayers came readily.

But now you are tired. God has been such a disappointment; His Kingdom a letdown. The message of the gospel is one of power and life, healing and hope. Where is that in the church? God’s people are dull and dead. Dealing with them has been stressful; you have been deeply hurt and sometimes filled with sorrow. The contradiction between what is supposed to be and what is makes it the whole enterprise feel like a farce, a mockery. Where is the blessing here?

So, in weariness, you lower your sights, disconnect, and slide into lethargy. You have your Bible, and you sometimes read it. But you don’t expect to be changed by reading it or study it with other Christians in the spirit of Christian fellowship. You attend worship service at church if you have nothing better to do, or if you are starting to feel guilty because you have not been in so long and don’t want to feel guilt. Worship God at church? Encounter the living Christ? That is not really what you expect to do. As for the work of the kingdom through the church, the church being God’s chosen instrument; you still think that, by and large, church is a good thing. The idea of church is a good thing, anyway, especially for those who need it. But you have done your part in the past (maybe when your children needed church) and now you have moved on to other things. Maybe someday you will get back into what you were once doing. But not now. So many other things to do.

Do you need church? No, not really. You do not find it very relevant. You are doing fine without it. Actually you are happier without it. Without church “obligations” you have less constrictions on your free time, and have more family time. As for your spiritual life? You can be spiritual on your own; maybe more spiritual.

Day by day you are making the choices that shape your life. What is happening to you? You are converting from Christianity, becoming post-Christian.

(continued from page 2)

Post-Christian is where our society is going, and many of us are embracing a post-Christian way of life. It is what is happening now. But it is not a new thing.

The Bible has a lot to say about persevering in the faith; attending church, being in fellowship with other Christians, not growing weary of doing good works, being persistent in prayer, and following the ways of Christ. Why so much to say about these things? Because they are difficult! Because it is easy to give up, disconnect, fall out of step with God. We need to be alert to these things. As Paul writes, “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?” (2 Corinthians 13:5)

That brings us to the essence of faith. We are practical people. Many of us stick with the church, stick with God, provided that the church and God is working for us, making us happy. When it isn’t, we move on.

That isn’t faith. “... faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” (Hebrews 11:1). And the Christian faith never set your happiness or satisfaction as its agenda anyway. Jesus is set on the well-being of your soul, and that involves suffering, struggle, and brokenness before healing and new life.

“The Lord is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.” (Psalm 34:18).

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:3).

— Matt



Notes from the Music Ministry Team *returns next month*

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 January/February edition of *The Upper Room* is now available on the literature racks in the back of the sanctuary. This is a great resource for daily reflection and prayer.



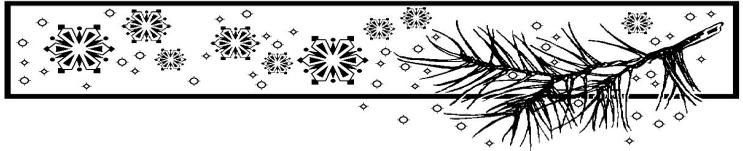
Don't Forget

Reserve your special month for
the 2015

“Congregational Connection.”

Your donation of \$50.00
helps cover costs of printing
and postage.

Please contact the church
office to reserve your month.



CMACCCM 2015 Annual Women's Retreat “Spiritual Housecleaning”

The Home of the Heart

February 27-28

Speaker: April L. Barrett

The theme of our retreat this year is “Spiritual Housecleaning”. We will experience practical Biblical teaching based on Robert Boyd Munger’s “My Heart, Christ’s Home.” Munger likens our spiritual life to a home with many rooms — The Study, The Dining Room, The Living Room, The Work Room, The Rec Room, The Bedroom, The Hall Closet, and Transferring the Title. We’ll look at how clutter and neglect can affect our spiritual journey just as they affect a physical home.

Psalms 51 is the scriptural foundation for this passage.

- The Home of the Heart
- Clutter
- Mind/Time Clutter
- Neglect
- The Closet

Registration Fee \$50 (non-refundable) is required by Feb. 14th to hold your place. See the church office for registration forms.

LETTERS OF INTEREST

To the Hands of Harmony,

I wanted to take a few moments and express just how deeply grateful I am that you welcomed me with opening arms in being able to share in making wonderful music and great fellowship and frequent comedic relief with you all. You have helped me get through some very tough times and for that, I will always be indebted you all. You will always hold a special place in my heart. I Love you all very much!

*Love,
Ashleigh*



Clinton Transit

New Freedom Care A Van (Clinton Transit) is a non-profit organization made up of dedicated volunteers who provide special transportation for frail and disable passengers living in Clinton County to their medical appointments.

The program is in its fifth year and demand for assisted travel continues to grow in the senior and disabled population of our county. Last year we provided 2,486 trips. Over the last four months we have seen a sharp increase in applications for new riders. This is why we are coming to you on bended knee.

As the need for our services continues to grow, so does the need for volunteer drivers. If you are looking for a way to give back to your community and enjoy helping others, please consider joining our team. Training is provided. Whether it is one day per month or many days per month, any amount of time would be greatly appreciated.

If you are interested in volunteering or would like more information about our organization, please contact us @ 989-668-0617.

Thank you for your consideration.

Gale Capling
Project Manager



“WHY NOBODY WANTS TO GO TO CHURCH ANYMORE” ACTION GROUP FORMING

The statistics are clear: in our post-Christian society the American church is in decline. We saw this in the film, “When God Left the Building”. People are leaving in astounding numbers, with no sign of a turnaround. Is there any future for the church?

The producers of the film have written a book, “Why Nobody Wants To Go To Church Any-more”. A group is forming to read and discuss the book, and develop an action plan. For the action plan we will be using a separate workbook.

It will require at least six sessions to complete the workbook and develop the plan. At the moment it looks as if Monday evenings at 7 PM are the best meeting times (excepting Board of Ministry meeting nights), beginning February 23rd.

Interested in our future as a congregation? Be part of this group. Please contact the church office or sign up at the back of the sanctuary so that we know how many books and action plan workbooks to order. If you would like to be part of the group but cannot meet on Monday nights, let that be known so that the schedule can be adjusted.

LENTEN CANDLELIGHT GATHERINGS SUNDAY EVENINGS, 7PM, BEGINNING FEBRUARY 22ND

You are invited to step away from your usual Sunday night routine and find relaxed, quiet space with your friends and with God. Each week we will sing, pray, reflect, and fellowship in the joy of the faith as we walk with Jesus toward the climax of his ministry and the fulfillment of his purpose.

Won't you join us?



GIFTS, TALENTS, TIME....THANK YOU TO THOSE WHO HAVE GIVEN.

1. Fall Banners

In the fall the six walls of the sanctuary were beautified by fall banners which were donated by six women who wanted to make our fall season more meaningful and beautiful. If you enjoyed these and would like to sponsor more for other seasons contact any member of the Altar Ministry Team: Jan Myers, Arlene Wood or Teresa Zuker.

2. Christmas Decorating

The Christmas decorations were again lovingly placed by people who chose to share of their time and talent. Then after Christmas there were those that helped to put them away.

3. Light Parade Float

Many people participated with monetary donations to cover the cost of candy canes and printing of invitations to our Christmas Eve service. There were people who spent some of their time stapling the invitations to the candy canes, engineering and putting together the lighted float. The night of the parade we had people give of their time to walk in the parade and spread the invitations to our church to the people who were there to watch the parade.

4. Magic of Music

A group of fourteen shared their gift of music...singing and playing chimes to spread some Christmas cheer. The Lord blessed us with a beautiful day to go caroling and ringing to Clinton Commons, Hazel Findley, Grace Haven and five of our special friends that were unable to get around well.

5. Spread the Light

Once again the congregation supported the Spread the Light on Christmas Eve with 50 votives in honor of, in memory of and to the glory of God of loved ones. Each candle represented a monetary donation that was designated to the Basic Needs Center right here in St. Johns. The total of the donations was \$525.00.

This was a busy Christmas Season and many helped to make all these events successful. With much gratitude!

Submitted by,
Teresa Zuker



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 & Shirlejan Lake

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.

Deadline Reminder

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

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

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

BOARD OF MINISTRY JOYS AND CONCERNS

Watch for the upcoming announcement of proposed change in the Church Bylaws, to be voted on in a meeting of the Church Membership after the Sunday service, probably sometime in March.