
MARCH 2015

The Congregational Connection...

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

BELL NEWS



The Hands of Harmony bell choir will be attending the "Spring Ring" festival on Saturday, March 21st.

The Lansing Area Ministry of Bells (L.A.M.B.), under the direction of Susan Berry of Dearborn, will present its 31st Annual Spring Ring on Saturday, March 21, 2015, at 4:30 p.m. at South Church's gymnasium (5250 Cornerstone Dr., Lansing, off Snow Rd., south of I-496). This facility is handicap-accessible.

Susan Berry is returning to the podium to conduct this year's Spring Ring. She is a well-known authority on handbell ringing, a popular clinician at handbell events at all levels, and the author of *Healthy Ringing*. She is the president of Handbell Services, Inc., and was a representative for Malmark Handbells for over 30 years. 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 100 ringers from 10 choirs will join together for massed ringing; solo numbers will also be played. The concert is free and open to the public. We hope you'll attend this annual handbell music event. A freewill offering will be collected.

CHURCH GOVERNANCE — REVISION OF BYLAWS

For more than a year, a committee of the Board of Ministry has studied and revised parts of the governing documents for the body of believers. The resulting document is being recommended to you for discussion (on Sunday, March 8) and for voting (on Sunday, March 22).

Printed copies will be available each Sunday after Worship, or ***to request postal delivery please contact the church office immediately*** with your preferred mailing address.

Because this set of documents contains vision and mission, as well as bylaws, we want as many people to look over the document as possible, but voting will be limited to members. If you are not sure of your membership status, please contact the church office so we can check the books.

Faith in Jesus, Faith of Jesus

As Christians we know about God—his character, purpose, and passion— primarily through the person of Jesus. For us he is Immanuel¹, God with us; one who lived as we live. We tell the story of Jesus, and have faith in Jesus.

What about the faith of Jesus? What can he, “the word made flesh that dwelt among us”², teach us about living out faith in God? What did it mean for him, as one who “taking the very nature of a servant”³, walked as we do, day by day, with his Heavenly Father, in ministry? What was in Jesus’ mind? What dilemmas did he face? What difficult choices did he make in his ministry? What were Jesus’ troubles, motives, faith questions?

During Lent we are exploring the faith of Jesus in a series of sermons titled, “Whole Hearted Faith”. I chose that title because that is what Jesus had; faith that involved his whole self to the core. Our guide for this series is the gospel writer John. We will take the seven signs John uses to point up the meaning of Jesus’ ministry and examine each one for the faith questions of Jesus as he moves toward the cross and Easter. I encourage you to read John, called by Martin Luther, “Chiefest of the Gospels” by way of preparation.

Let’s learn from the Lord what it means to have a whole hearted faith.

- Matt

¹ Isaiah 7:14

² John 1:14

³ Philippians 2:7

“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 traditional 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 reservations.

Invite family and friends to this special event.



Notes from the Director of the Music Ministry: *Riffs are our Theme*

If you've been paying attention, you've noticed that the Music Ministry Team has been riffing on a theme of discernment this year. Riffs are brief melodies that musicians repeat and change little by little as they search for the melody that will lead forward. To riff is to create in the moment. Our team is responding to changes such as a choir director stepping down, a talented pianist arriving, schedule changes inhibiting direct participation on the ministry team, new additions to the bell choir swelling to overflow the loft ... It's dynamic! Exciting! Confusing! Fatiguing!

Our experience of the past 6 months has meant riffing as we re-assess our mission and goals as a team. Our over-arching sense of purpose and opportunity includes the following:

1. **Support the ministry of worship music** by revitalizing our worship music, supporting FCC musicians who serve out of their musical gifts, and thereby supporting the congregation who comes to worship.
2. **Increase the opportunities for FCC to extend hospitality** by prioritizing spiritual growth and unity.
3. **Support leadership development** of FCC musicians and others who are called to join us.

We are making progress, and ask your continued prayers as we continue to discern. If you feel drawn to join this Ministry Team, please talk to our Chairperson, Beth Webb.

Another form of riffing on all of these themes is our combined effort to build an Easter cantata. We are choosing music from our files, writing the narrative, and looking for readers. This is a collective act of faith, as we serve out of and develop our gifts, follow our sense of call, and try to honor the story.

And it is at this time that God has opened a door for me—a chance to work part-time, locally, as a hospice music therapist. This is holy, challenging work. It is work that I have been waiting for. And my heart wants to honor all opportunities: in music ministry, in teaching and accompanying, and in music therapy. In my discernment, I am asking what I need to set aside so that everyone involved can grow.

This is a lot of riffing! We are grateful for the opportunities that God continues to send. Please pray for us as we continue to actively seek and to follow God's guidance.

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.

Deadline Reminder

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

There is still time

to 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.



2015 EASTER FLOWER ORDER FORM

*"Flowers appear on the earth; the season of singing has come."
 Song of Songs 2:12*

If you would like to honor or remember someone special, this is a perfect way. Lilies, Tulips and Mums (in 6 inch pots, foil wrapped with bows) are being offered for purchase. Please enclose payment with your order form, returned to the church office **NO LATER THAN SUNDAY MARCH 22**. You may pick up your plant(s) following the Easter Sunday Service. A list of the names of the donors and their dedications will be included in the Easter Bulletin. Make your check payable to First Congregational Church.

Your name: _____

I would like to order _____ Lilies at \$9.50 each. Total _____

Dedication: _____

I would like to order _____ Tulips at \$9.50 each. Total _____

_____ Red _____ Pink _____ Yellow

Dedication: _____

I would like to order _____ Mums at \$9.50 each. Total _____

_____ White _____ Yellow _____ Lavender

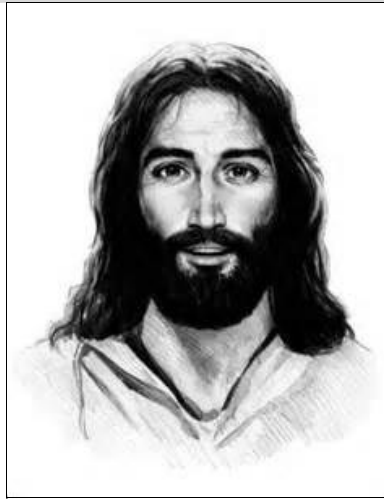
Dedication: _____

Total Enclosed: _____

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

A group is forming to read and discuss the book, “Why Nobody Wants To Go To Church Anymore”, and develop an action plan.

Interested in our future as a congregation? If you would like to be part of this group, please contact the church office for more information.



WANTED

REWARDS OFFERED

Looking for Signs...



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,*

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.

BOARD OF MINISTRY JOYS AND CONCERNS

Please pray for the Board of Ministry team as
we lead the review, discussion and vote on the
proposed revisions to the church bylaws.

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

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

LENTEN CANDLELIGHT GATHERINGS

SUNDAY EVENINGS

6:30 PM Soup, Salad, and Bread Supper

A time to share a simple meal in the fellowship of
friends. Everyone is most welcome.

7:00 PM Service of Heart-Centered Prayer

Lectio divina is an ancient contemplative practice of
listening deeply to the voice of God in scripture. Each
week we are guided in this tradition as we explore a
different section of the Letter to the Philippians.

Step away from your usual Sunday night routine and
join us during Lent.

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