

The Link

First Congregational
United Church of Christ
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Volume 34 No. 23

God is Still Speaking,

December 11, 2012

Improve Your Spiritual Health!

Dear Church Family,

On January 1st, fitness clubs will be offering membership discounts to capitalize on the New Year's resolutions of those who want to improve their physical health in the year to come. I am pleased to announce that our church will be offering an even better deal! We will help you improve your spiritual health with a FREE six-week Faith Formation Program! While others worry about the size of their stomach, you will be doing something to enlarge your soul!

This revolutionary Faith Formation Program seeks to introduce concepts and practices that will enrich your daily spiritual life. You will explore ways to make meaning out of life and get connected with God. You will also learn practical exercises to make your faith real every day. In short, you will go from spiritual flabbiness to spiritual fitness in six short weeks. You will do this by being part of a dynamic and friendly small group of 8 to 10 persons. Your small group will be led by a skilled facilitator who will take you to new spiritual heights!

We will begin sign ups for small groups soon! The groups will then begin to meet the week of January 13th. Don't pass up this amazing offer! It is the opportunity of a lifetime. Your spiritual life deserves it!

Your brother in Christ,

Pastor Brooks

WORSHIP IN DECEMBER

December 16, 2011 Third Sunday of Advent

10 a.m. **Choir Program** . Infant and Toddler Care available. 10:20 a.m.: Christian Education for children 3 yrs. - Grade 7. Youth Group Meets at 11:30 a.m.

Worship Volunteers:

Greeters: Gail Schmidt and Charlotte Warren
Ushers: Ken Rowe and Cory Saum-Blystone
Mike King and Duke Charpentier

December 23, 2012 Fourth Sunday of Advent

10 a.m. Worship Service. Rev. Brooks Berndt preaching. Infant and Toddler Care available. 10:20 a.m.: Christian Education for children 3 yrs. - Grade 7. Youth Group Meets at 11:30 a.m.

Worship Volunteers:

Greeters: Karen Kulm and Leslie Wu
Worship Leader: John Fite
Ushers: Joe and John Eckroth
Tom and Josiah Renner

December 24, 2012 Christmas Eve Service

8:00 pm . Worship Service. Rev. Brooks Berndt preaching. Infant and Toddler Care available.

Worship Volunteers:

Greeters: John Fite and Ken Rowe
Ushers: TBA

December 30, 2012 Family Christmas Brunch

10:00 AM in Bradford Hall. No Bible Adventures or Youth Group this morning.

The Music of Christmas December 16th

Come enjoy the choir's Christmas concert on Sunday, December 16th during the worship service. You will hear familiar carols such as: STILL, STILL, STILL; I SAW THREE SHIPS and TOMORROW WILL BE MY DANCING DAY. An arrangement of the tune, SCARBOROUGHFAIR with advent lyrics opens with the haunting sound of the clarinet played by Cary Pederson.

Also on the program, are Linda Wear singing THE WEXFORD CAROL and Richard Trefren singing DIVINUM MYSTERIUM.

Narrators will be in costume depicting: Isaiah, the prophet- Ed Frank; Elizabeth- Pam Osborne; the inn-keeper's wife - Barbara Harlan and a shepherd boy - Isaac Martin.

You will want to invite family and friends to this joyful event.

REMEMBERING OUR FAMILY IN PRAYER

Prayer requests for:

Our sons and daughters overseas, and the people of the Middle East;

CONTINUING PRAYER
REQUESTS FOR:

Kathleen New

Kathleen New is currently at Fort Vancouver Convalescent Center as she recovers from a broken ankle.

UPCOMING PUBLICATION DATES FOR "The Link"

Link Deadline

December 23, 2012

Link Mailed

December 26, 2012

Mary Jo Ebel Circle Annual Christmas Luncheon

The annual Christmas Luncheon and meeting for Mary Jo Ebel Circle will be held Wednesday, December 19th, 11:00 A.M. at the home of Ellie Bradley.

Bring a salad to share and a donation of warm socks for the children at the YWCA Safehouse. Please RSVP to Ellie at 360-944-7838

CHRISTMAS PARTY YOUTH GROUP

The annual Youth Group and Families Christmas Party is December 16th, at 11:30 at Kristina's home. (2212 D Street, Vancouver 98663) Kristina will provide pulled pork BBQ sandwiches (veggie option available) and drinks. Bring a potluck item and a **WRAPPED White Elephant gift – one per person wanting to participate**. If you have questions, please call her at (360) 695-4545.

Slocum Family News

Contributed by Becky Andrews

Two babies were born into the Slocum clan within the past month. Dave Slocum is great-uncle, Judy Enders is great-aunt and Irma Slocum is great-great grandmother of both.

1. Oliver Ren Zemel was born 10/22/12 weighing 9lbs. 4oz. His proud parents are Jane and Dustin Zemel of Baton Rouge, LA.

His grandparents are Julie Slocum Robinson and Mike Robinson of Federal Way, WA.

2. Leighton Robert Thomson was born 11/20/12 weighing 7lbs. 10oz. His proud parents are Ryan and Emily Thomson of Hailey, Idaho.

His grandparents are Becky Slocum Andrews and Doug Andrews of Kelso, WA.

Thanks! Becky Andrews

Many Thanks

I want to thank all of my wonderful friends in this church for sharing their love and encouragement to me during my illness.

I had one week of conservative treatment where I was fed only ice chips as my only "food". The next week I had surgery where the doctor took our adhesions which were blocking my intestines.

God bless all of you for being with me during this scary time.

Opal Chapman

Christmas Eve Cookies Needed

Contributed by Nancy Fite

Everyone is encouraged to bring a plate of their favorite Christmas cookies to share after the Christmas Eve service. Parish Life will provide Wassail.

December 30th Brunch and Worship

Instead of our traditional worship service in our sanctuary, on December 30th at 10 am, we will have a special family worship and brunch in Bradford Hall. Please bring muffins, egg casseroles, fruit, or something "brunchy" to share.

The Mission and Outreach Focus' for December are the UCC Christmas Fund

Contributed by Marnie Wright

The annual Christmas Fund brings hope to people who have served or are serving UCC churches and mission. It supplements meager pensions and health premiums for them, giving them a better quality of life. It sends "thank you" gifts to about 900 people, 20 of whom are over 100 years of age.

and

The Discretionary Fund

The Christmas Eve offering is used to fund our discretionary fund for the upcoming year. This fund is used to assist church members in times of need and crisis. In a difficult economy, our ability to help people in hard times is often a true blessing for those who receive it.

Cookies for the Choir Festival

While the choir is singing their annual Christmas Music Festival, the Bible Adventures students will be baking snickerdoodles to serve during the coffee hour. Because the children cannot bake enough cookies during class time, please consider bringing a plate of your favorite holiday cookie to share. There will be tables set up in the narthex for you to set your cookies on before church. MANY THANKS to the people who have volunteered to bring snickerdoodle cookie dough that day. I appreciate your help!!!



Christmas Eve Service

The Christmas Eve Service will be at 8:00 pm. The theme of this year's service is *"Sacred Songs and Holy Silence."*

Before the service, classical Christmas music will be provided by Leslie Wu, violin and Michael Wu, cello. Reflections and meditations will be interspersed with selections by the choir and congregational carol singing. The service will end with the candlelight singing of Silent Night.



We Have a Christmas Elf!

Contributed by Joan Blair

Have you noticed that our potholes are filled and the leaves have been raked?

We have a secret Christmas Elf named John Hannon who did all the dirty work. Thanks for the wonderful job you've done John!

Dear Church Family,

Thank you for your prayers, positive visualizations, meals, calls, visits, and cards. Both Glen and I are grateful for all your support and help. We are thankful for each of you as we count our blessings.

With appreciation,
Karen Owen

News Coverage and Wonderful Photos Online!

Whether you are on Facebook or not, you can visit our church's facebook page to find links to the recent television coverage of our church, photos from the wedding ceremonies held here on Sunday, and photos from Sunday's Christmas Children's Program. Go to www.facebook.com/vanucc

The 2012 Children's Christmas Program

I am so very thankful for the help of so many wonderful people who helped with the Children's Program. Without your help, it would not have been nearly as wonderful. Thank you to: Dr. Kit Stowell, Richard Trefren, Gina Marquardt, Lynn Renner, Cory Blystone-Saum, Virginia Dunbar, and Kathy Woolley. And, of course, the children who participated in all ways...you are all stars in my book!

Pastor Brooks Office Hours

My weekly office hours are at the following times:

Tuesday	11 am to 1 pm
Wednesday	4 pm to 6 pm
Saturday	3 pm to 5 pm

If possible, please contact me before visiting. I occasionally have irregular meetings, events, and emergencies that take me away from the office at these times.

Please note that Pastor Brooks will be gone for vacation from December 25th until his return to the office on January 8th.

Plans to Address Child Hunger in 2013

Submitted by Pastor Brooks

With great success, our church focused its social action efforts on marriage equality in 2012. In 2013, Mission and Outreach plans to return to our focus on children's issues by focusing on child hunger. I have been working with Mission and Outreach to develop partnerships that will enable us to do that more effectively. In addition to continuing our partnership with the Children's Alliance, we will be partnering with the Faith Action Network to address child hunger. This Saturday a few of us will be meeting with the social justice ministry team of Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church in Vancouver in order to explore the possibility of working together. Like our congregation, Beautiful Savior is a member of the Faith Action Network. Stayed tuned for more reports on our continued planning.

Something to Think About....

Some signs and symptoms of The Advent Virus:

- * A tendency to think and act spontaneously rather than on fears based on past experiences.
- * An unmistakable ability to enjoy each moment.
- * A loss of interest in judging other people.
- * A loss of interest in interpreting the actions of others.
- * A loss of interest in conflict.
- * A loss of the ability to worry.
(This is a very serious symptom.)
- * Frequent, overwhelming episodes of appreciation.
- * Contented feelings of connectedness with others and nature.
- * Frequent attacks of smiling.
- * An increasing tendency to let things happen rather than make them happen.
- * An increased susceptibility to the love extended by others as well as the uncontrollable urge to extend it.

Hopefully, this virus is extremely contagious. Let's do our best to pass it around.

A REMINDER ABOUT CHURCH PLEDGES

As the end of 2012 approaches, please remember your 2012 church pledge. At this point the payment on 2012 church pledges has fallen behind. Please check your own payments and, if you are able, please end the year with your 2012 pledge paid in full.

Thank you,
Richard Trefren, Treasurer

Church Receives Award

On Saturday, December 8th, our church received the Advocacy Congregation Award from the Faith Action Network, a statewide interfaith advocacy organization. We received the award for our marriage equality advocacy. The award was given at an awards dinner in Seattle. A large crowd was present that included Washington State Speaker of the House Frank Chopp and Senate Majority Leader Ed Murray. In accepting the award, Pastor Brooks spoke of the ripple effects of courage as he spoke of the Rev. Farley Maxwell and the members of our church who voted to become Open and Affirming 20 years ago.

Environmental Impact Hearing on Coal Terminal

The local chapter of Coal Free Washington invites attendance and participation at an environmental impact hearing on a proposed coal terminal near Bellingham, Washington that would ship an estimated 48 million tons of coal a year to China. Vancouver will be effected by the steady stream of coal trains that are 1.5 miles in length and would pass through our city leaving coal dust behind.

The hearing will be held December 12th from 4-7pm at Clark College's Gaiser Hall. Even if people have no desire to speak or give written testimony, attendance is encouraged. Learn more at powerpastcoal.org.

***On a dark night in turbulent times,
God touched our world quietly, gently
and with light. Again we are reminded
how deeply we are loved.***

~Anon