

The Link

First Congregational
United Church of Christ
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Volume 36 No. 23

God is Still Speaking,

December 9 , 2014

In a Season of Strife, the Advent and Christmas Spirit!

Dear Church Family,

I can imagine someone saying, “What’s happening in Ferguson, New York, Cleveland, and Phoenix is ruining the Advent and Christmas spirit?” To such a person, I would suggest “flipping the script.” Think instead of how Advent and Christmas can bring hope to a situation that can often seem hopeless. On Saturday, I read a [New York Times article](#) on how conversations about race have exposed sharp divisions and differences among family members, friends, and co-workers. The reporter wrote, “Put bluntly, many people say, they feel they are being forced to pick a team.”

As I indicated on Sunday, we are blessed to be in a situation in which we are called to be on one team: the Body of Christ. Like the rest of society, we may be divided. We may have our differences, but God calls us against the odds to gather at the same table. And, amazingly enough, in our own modest and stumbling ways, we do it! We show up Sunday after Sunday thumbing our noses at the status quo of society as we address serious issues through both our words and our deeds. I am convinced that we are able to do it because we believe in a God of steadfast love who embraces us so that we can embrace each other—warts and all. (Even when those warts can look pretty darn scary!)

In the coming month, I encourage you to let the Spirit of God reign in your hearts this Advent and Christmas season. Celebrate the birth of an infant who shook the conventions of an entire empire. Find a wellspring of hope in our defiant and unruly faith!

Your brother in Christ,

Pastor Brooks

WORSHIP IN DECEMBER

December 14, 2014 Third Sunday of Advent

10 a.m. **Choir Program** . Infant and toddler care available. 10:20 a.m.: Bible Adventures will be on hiatus until January 4th. Youth Group Meets at 11:30 a.m.

Worship Volunteers:

Greeters: Sharon Kenoski and Jean Beary Stolle
Ushers: Dwight Chapman and Carol Pendergraft

December 21, 2014 Fourth Sunday of Advent

10 a.m. **Children's Program**. Bible Adventures will be on hiatus until January 4th. Infant and toddler care available.

Worship Volunteers:

Greeters:
Worship Leader: Opal Chapman
Ushers: Ken Rowe and Cory Saum-Blystone
Mike King

December 24, 2014 Christmas Eve Service

8:00 pm . Worship Service. Infant and toddler care available.

Worship Volunteers:

Greeters: Ed and Ruby Frank
Worship Leader:
Ushers:

December 28, 2014 Family Christmas Brunch

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

New Sanctuary Entrance

Contributed by John Greenauer

Like God's Love, the front entrance remodel is never ending! We have expended the budget but now several good suggestions from members are being considered as additional improvements. Finishing touches are underway after a short holiday break to rest and recuperate the volunteers.

A special thanks to Ken Rowe, Ed Martin, Tom Renner and Scott Jones.

However, water-proof flooring, power outlets and additional door hardware which will allow you to exit without re-locking have been suggested. We would also like to place benches inside and out and will be completing the landscaping. Your suggestions and contributions to the work are appreciated. Also, the Interior Committee has wonderful plans for Holiday decorations

REMEMBERING OUR FAMILY IN PRAYER

Prayer requests for:

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

CONTINUING PRAYER
REQUESTS FOR:

Farley Maxwell
Joan Blair
Agnes Alexander
Gloria Ross
Verna Myers
Abigail Fazio

UPCOMING PUBLICATION DATES FOR "The Link"

<u>Link Deadline</u>	<u>December 21, 2014</u>
<u>Link Mailed</u>	<u>December 23, 2014</u>



CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS PROGRAM

Contributed by Kristina Martin

Please mark your calendars for the annual Children's Christmas program on December 21st. All children present will be invited to participate in a short presentation of "The Legend of Pepita", immediately following the Intergenerational Spanish Choir's concert.

Gandhi's Grandson to Visit Church

Save the date! The grandson of Mahatma Gandhi will be visiting our church on Sunday, January 18th. During worship, Arun Gandhi will join Pastor Brooks for a dialogue sermon. After worship, he will give a presentation in which he shares stories about his grandfather and signs copies of books he has authored. For the presentation, there will be a requested donation of \$15 for those attending.

Welcome New Members!

Please add these new members to your directories:

Janet Melton

5120 NW Columbia St
Vancouver, WA 98663
360-735-5692
Cell: 503-740-4370
haneyjanet@netscape.net

Casey Besaw and Martin Borchering

555 W. 8th St. #218
Vancouver, WA 98660
360-463-1346
Casey Cell: 360-451-3573
caseybesaw@gmail.com
martin.borcher@gmail.com

Richard and Irene Edwards

1013 NE 108th St.
Vancouver, WA 98685
Richard: 877-871-3539
Irene: 218-841-4187
irene@greenspottravel.org
richard@greenspottravel.com

Patti and Ray Jones

3202 NE 158th Ct
Vancouver, WA 98682
Patti: 360-601-3773
Ray: 360-931-0157
pattijones925@comcast.net
olenre1@comcast.net

Gary and Laurie Parafinczuk

13615 NW 45th Ct.
Vancouver, WA 98685
360-828-7076
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Patricia J. Boucher

1404 NE 124th St
Vancouver, WA 98685



December Updates

Every year thousands of people in Clark County experience homelessness. During the cold winter months their need for shelter is even more important, so in 2003, the Council for the Homeless and SHARE partnered with the Greater Vancouver Interfaith Association to create the Winter Hospitality Overflow (WHO), a program committed to providing safe shelter during the winter months.

Our church members volunteer at the men's shelter located at the St. Paul Lutheran church in downtown Vancouver. The WHO guests are offered not only a warm place to sleep, but a hot shower, meal, and the welcome and warmth of a caring community working to address the most basic of human needs.

Although our church volunteer week is March 1-7, **you can help now** by donating men's socks, gloves, hats, thermals, and underwear. Just place your items in the big yellow basket in the narthex.

You can also help with serving a weekend meal. Dave Slocum & Judy Enders volunteer at the shelter every week and serve a warm meal to the men. If you would like to help serve or donate food, contact Dave at 360-573-5120.



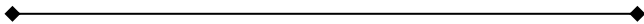
Mission and Outreach Focus for Christmas Eve: The Discretionary Fund

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

**Mary Jo Ebel Circle
Christmas Luncheon
Wednesday, December 17th
11:30 AM**

The Circle will meet at Ellie Bradley's home for our Christmas luncheon. Please bring a salad to share and an item for Open House Ministries. Suggestions are: baby formula, non-perishable food, warm mittens, hats, socks, etc.

Please RSVP to Ellie at 360-944-7838.



Mission & Outreach Special Offering for December is the UCC Christmas Fund

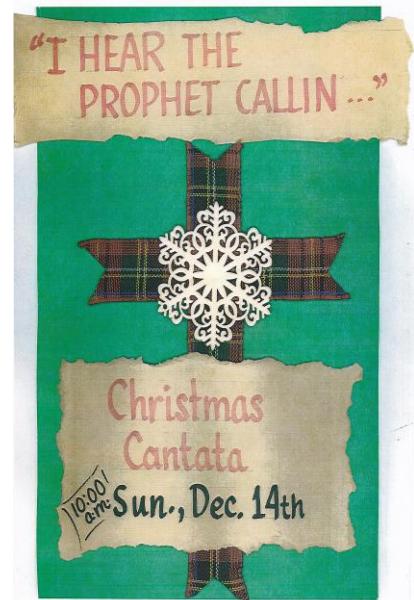
The generous gifts of UCC congregations and individuals to the Christmas Fund enabled the Pension Boards' Ministerial Assistance program to provide some form of assistance to impact the lives of hundreds of persons during the past year.

Our retired clergy/lay employees relied on this income supplementation for basic needs such as food, utilities, and living and medical expenses.

Christmas "thank you" gift checks were given to 543 retired UCC clergy/lay church employees last year. This special gift at Christmas time reminds these Veterans of the Cross that they have not been forgotten and that the Church is grateful for their service.

Please support this important UCC fund by writing a check to our church and putting "UCC Christmas Fund" in the memo line.

Choir Cantata this Sunday



The choir is venturing forth in a folk style this Christmas season. On December 14th, during the worship service, the choir will present the Christmas story in a fresh, new way. 'I Hear the Prophet Callin' by Pepper Choplin is a gathering together of musical flavors: Appalachian, Irish, Latin, Cajun and Early American. I quote the composer: "It seems a natural fit to pair this authentic and sometimes earthy music with the story of the Gospel. Be sure to mark your calendar for Dec. 14th! You won't be sorry!"



End of Year Brunch and Worship

On Sunday, December 28th, we will gather downstairs in Bradford Hall for our annual post-Christmas Brunch. Please bring a breakfast dish to share and come join us in the last service for 2014. We will also need volunteers to help clean up after the service.



Invitation to Bring Cookies on Christmas Eve

Everyone is encouraged to bring a plate of their favorite Christmas cookies to share after the Christmas Eve service.

Order New Book by Pastor Brooks

Pastor Brooks has published a new book entitled "Gratitude for a Daughter: Fifty Pictures and Fifty Prayers of Thanksgiving." The book costs \$30 and all proceeds will go to the church.

A copy of the book is available for preview at the Welcome Table in the narthex. You may order the book online at <http://blur.by/1yRaGmr>.



The Mission & Outreach Ministry Team thanks you all for your incredible support of our "adopted" SHARE family for our Giving Tree. All the gift needs were fulfilled including store gift cards to help the family prepare a Christmas meal.

We also want to thank you for your generous support of our Thanksgiving Baskets. Your gifts have helped lessen some of the stress of the holidays for these families.

Advent Festival 2014

Contributed by Kristina Martin

What a great turn-out for the intergenerational Advent Festival held December 7th. It was such a blessing to get into the Christmas spirit with you. Many, many thank yous to all the folks from Parish Life and Christian Education who helped make the day a success. And a big shout-out to Janet Melton, Charlie Ross, Ed and Claudia Martin and Carole Greenauer for staying after to help clean-up. Thank you and Merry Christmas to all!

NURSERY SHEPHERD PROGRAM BEGINNING IN JANUARY

Contributed by Kristina Martin

We are excited to create a mentoring program for middle school youth who are interested in volunteering in the nursery under the direction of Angie Wason- Hill. Shepherds will help in the nursery on the Sundays with no Bible Adventures (Communion Sundays and in the summer months) and every Sunday until the children are released for Bible Adventures class. Applications will be sent to all middle school families in December. If you are the parent of a middle schooler and have questions, please don't hesitate to talk to either Angie or Kristina Martin.

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.

~Anonymous~