

First Church News

First Congregational Church, UCC
Columbus, Ohio

"Enter to Worship - Depart to Serve"

December
2011
Vol. 159,
No. 12



Kneeling in Bethlehem . . . on E. Broad Street

By The Rev. Timothy C. Ahrens, Senior Minister
(tahrens@first-church.org)

You have to crawl on your hands and knees to enter the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem of Judea. The doorway through which you enter is called "The Door of Humility." It stands 4 feet high and there is no way in unless you bend down low.



After crawling through the doorway, you wipe the sand and dirt off your clothing and stand up and face to the basilica's high altar of gold, adorned with hundreds of oil burning gold and silver lamps, surrounded on all the walls by golden mosaics now mostly dimmed by time and smoke. Above, a high ceiling of ancient

wooden beams give this sanctuary - one of three oldest in all of Christendom - the look and feeling of an ancient, golden barn.

The basilica's floor contains a series of trap doors that dropped several levels down revealing the original mosaics from 337 A.D. This is only the beginning of journey that will take you down ancient stone stairways to the exact spot of Jesus' birth - marked by a 14-pointed Silver Star set into the marble floor and surrounded by more silver and gold oil burning lamps. It is very different from the stable we hear about in Luke 2:1-20.

In the summer of 2010, I crawled into Bethlehem's Basilica. Kneeling low in Bethlehem was a truly humbling
(See Rev. Ahrens, Page 3)

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Advent/Christmas
First Church
2011

Sunday Services
9 and 11 a.m.

December 11
Congregational Dinner & Children's Play
Parish Hall, 6 p.m.

December 18
Sanctuary, 4 p.m.
Festival of Lessons and Carols
Prelude begins at 3:30 p.m.
Will be broadcast live on WOSU
**To help alleviate hunger in Central Ohio
we are asking you to bring a can of food
to donate to the MidOhio Food Bank.**

December 24 ~ Christmas Eve
7:30 p.m. ~ Pageant
11 p.m. ~ Candlelight service

December 25
10 a.m. worship (One service only)

Advent Visitors Coming . . . And So are Long-Time Members

By the Rev. Dr. Janine Wilson, Associate Minister
(jwilson@first-church.org)

Now that the salary study has been completed and we are in the phase of responding to the findings, I want to begin to share some of the interesting things I've learned along the way. The first one of these is the relationship between membership and worship attendance . . . one of our favorite sticky wickets at most (maybe all) churches. Who are we? Where are we? It's kind of a "where's Waldo" conversation.



When this topic of size becomes the focus, words range from celebration, to surprise, to lamenting and sometimes even grumbling - this is normal. It is good many are willing to express views and feelings on the topic. After all, we don't have to live in Missouri to have a touch of the 'show me' state within us. We do not always see hundreds of people in the pews each week, so therefore we cannot possibly have hundreds of members. This seems logical; especially since many of us grew up in congregations that were smaller, suburban, or rural. We are not alone as we wonder - if we have so many members, where are they?

One of the most interesting pieces of information that surfaced in the salary study was a report that provided the statistics for *membership versus attendance* in churches across America. The reality is this: the larger the membership, the smaller the percentage of members in worship; and . . . the smaller the church, the higher the percentage of attendance in worship. This study echoes the results of several I located this past year.

The reality is this: our attendance matches the research. For fun, take your best guess at our attendance by counting *every week of advent* one week alone will not give you much validity to your own game. Include every singer, musician, worship leader, child, young adult and adult in both services of worship. It doesn't matter if a person attends two worships or one; they count twice if they attend both. Add them together. Have a friend cover one if that is helpful. (Remember, this is tracking *attendance in worship*, not tracking members in worship.) Next, look at the numbers in the third column of the chart and then move left and you will see the membership range. It's pretty fun - the stats work for us, even though we were not uniquely identified as part of the research project.

| Size of Congregation | Churches in the study | Median # regular attenders, including children | Mean (avg) Percentage |
|----------------------|-----------------------|--|-----------------------|
| 7 - 49 | 302 | 20 | 58% |
| 50-99 | 566 | 40 | 58% |
| 100-249 | 785 | 75 | 43% |
| 250-499 | 454 | 120 | 40% |
| 500-999 | 188 | 200 | 36% |
| 1000-2499 | 78 | 258 | 34% |
| 2500 & up | 35 | 443 | 29% |

But please don't stop there – let it bug you just a little . . . , because the truth it brings home to all of us is this: God calls each one of us to be an ambassador of the good news of Jesus Christ. If there is someone who sits near you and is absent, give them a phone call. Let them know you missed them. Make sure they are well. And, if you have the blessing of sitting next to a newcomer, please share your name, walk them to fellowship time and introduce them to others. If we all practice these simple steps attendance will no longer be our focus because we will all grow in spirit and love of God as we express care, concern, welcome and nurture – all to the glory of God.

With joy,
Janine

Wednesday Book Study - Only December 7

Our regular Wednesday Book Study has just finished our study of Martin Buber's *I and Thou*. In December, we will only meet on December 7. We will have a delightful break from deep theological reflection and read *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*. Come and delight in a story framed in Portsmouth, Ohio, and now an American classic. Copies are available in the office or just show up!

On January 4, we begin a new book by Walter Brueggemann, our 2012 Washington Gladden lecturer. He is one of the world's foremost Old Testament theologians and will be with us May 12 -13.

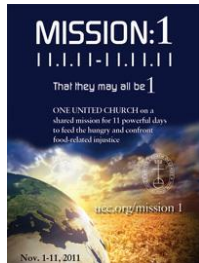
Come and study with us now. The group meets from 11 a.m. to noon the first and third Wednesday of each month. – **Rev. Tim**

Mission: 1 a Success Story for First Church and UCC

By Tom Brownfield

Hunger is a vast and growing problem around the world as well as here in Columbus. Food pantries are stressed with greatly increased need and much reduced corporate and individual food donations. That is why the United Church of Christ undertook Mission: 1.

From November 1 to November 11, more than 1.25 million food items were distributed to local food pantries by UCC congregations. Our church collected and distributed 694 cans or boxes of non-perishable food items to three local pantries: Gladden Community House, Project Open Hand and Broad Street Presbyterian Food Pantry.



The monetary collection for hunger relief was tremendous as well. The UCC said that as of November 13, donations received for hunger-related ministries had topped \$91,000 (\$677 at First Church) and monies for East Africa relief stood at more than \$94,000 (\$1,188 at our church). However, tallies of committed funds to the two causes not yet received by the UCC's national offices in Cleveland added up to more than \$130,000. An updated total will be announced in a few weeks.

We can look with some pride at what our efforts have accomplished so far, but there is much more to be done. On the third Sunday in the coming months, we shall "gather together to ask the Lord's blessing" by bringing forth food donations for our local pantries. As we worship and give thanks, we shall remember Jesus' call to feed his sheep (John 21:17).

(REV. AHRENS, Concluded from Page 1)

experience. However, you do not need to leave Columbus, Ohio, to be humbled this Christmas. You do not need to crawl through the entranceway of First Church on December 25, but if you are here you will be humbled in the heart of our city. When you arrive at our cathedral of grace, well over 500 people will be gathered for worship and a meal to follow. We call it Bethlehem on Broad Street - but it is really Christmas coming alive - the way Jesus would know it to be.

I remember seven years when Christmas Day fell on a Sunday. The sanctuary was filled with our city's poorest neighbors and friends. When we asked for people's

prayers of joy or concern, one man smiled and joyfully proclaimed: "I am so grateful this Christmas. As I battle diabetes, God blessed me this year. I only lost one of my feet. God has been so good to me." Everyone cheered in response! I was humbled in the presence of this truly grateful man.

Christmas is coming to First Church. Once again, we will have

Related story on Page 6

glorious music, special Children's plays, a Christmas pageant to remember, gift giving, and joyful Advent worship and Christmas Eve services (find the dates and times in this newsletter).

However, there is only one place to be on Christmas Day if you want to experience the truth, joy and humility of Christmas. Come to First Church for 10 a.m. worship. Bring your children, your grandchildren, your neighbors and friends. Come and worship Christ the newborn King. Enter our doors of humility on Christmas Day and you will be changed forever. Stay if you are able to serve a meal to our friends and neighbors. Everyone is welcome here.

Upcoming Sermon Titles

Advent

December 4 - Advent II

Readings: Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; Isaiah 40:1-11; Mark 1:1-8
Communion Meditation: "Comfort in the Wilderness"



December 11 - Advent III

Readings: Psalm 126; Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11; John 1:6-8, 19-28
Sermon: "Deliverance From the Ruins"

December 18 - Advent IV

Readings: Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26; II Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Luke 1:26-38
Sermon: "Wandering Home"

Christmas

December 24 - Christmas Eve

Readings: Psalm 97; Isaiah 62:6-12; Titus 3:4-7; Luke 2:1-20
Communion Meditation: "Born Tonight!"

December 25 - Christmas Day

Readings: Psalm 98; Isaiah 52:7-10, John 1:1-14
Sermon: "Native Son"

January 1, 2012 - Christmas 1

Readings: Psalm 148; Isaiah 61:10-62:3; Luke 2:22-40
(May use alternative readings for Epiphany)
Communion Meditation: "Unlisted but Called"

December Music Notes

By James E. Bobb, Minister of Music
(jbobb@first-church.org)

**Festival of Lessons and Carols
December 18, 4 p.m**

In the glow of candlelight and the warmth of beloved music, we gather to hear again the message of the angels. First Church choirs, ringers and both Kimball and von Beckerath organs lead us in this traditional service of scripture, carols and congregational singing. We warmly welcome WOSU-FM and host Christopher Purdy, who will broadcast this live. Prelude begins at 3:30 p.m.



Worship

Prepare your heart in worship this season. Our worship is full of ancient symbolism that unites us with Christians throughout the ages, places and circumstances. Nowhere will this be more in evidence as we prepare to celebrate Christmas Day worship at 10 a.m. with Bethlehem on Broad Street.

The universal Christian anticipation of the incarnation is summarized by our regular use throughout Advent of the hymn *O come, O come, Emmanuel*. This hymn is derived from the Great O Antiphons. Originally to be sung at Vespers as the antiphons to the *Magnificat* (Mary's Song) from December 17 to December 23, the antiphons address the Messiah with various titles drawn from the Hebrew scriptures, and concluding with a plea for God's presence and action.

December 17- *O Sapientia* – O Wisdom, which hast come out of the mouth of most high, and mightily ordereth all things, come and teach us the way of wisdom.

December 18 - *O Adonai* – O Holy Lord, deliverer of the house of Israel, who in Sinai did'st give the law to Moses, come and deliver us with an outstretched arm.

December 19 - *O Radix Jesse* – O Root of Jesse, standing as a banner for the people, whom the nations shall seek, come and deliver us, and tarry not.

December 20 - *O Clavis David* – O Key of David, that openest and no one shutteth, and shuttest and no one openeth, come and bring the prisoner out of the prison house.

December 21 - *O Oriens* – O Dayspring, brightness of light everlasting, and Sun of Righteousness, come and enlighten them that sitteth in darkness and the shadow of death.

December 22 - *O Rex Gentium* – O King of the nations, and their desire, the cornerstone who maketh reconciliation, come and save humankind, whom thou hast formed of clay.

December 23 - *O Emmanuel* – O God-with-us, our King and Lawgiver, the Desire of the nations, come and save us, O Lord our God.

The Latin text of the O Antiphons imbeds an acrostic: read in reverse order from the last to the first antiphon, the second word of each begins with the letters ERO CRAS, Latin for "I shall be present tomorrow," the text not revealed until the singing of the final antiphon on December 23. Try using these texts in your devotions, or perhaps compose your own prayers on these models such as: O God of time and eternity, you hold each of us in your care throughout our earthly lives, come and free us from our bondage to time and bring about your loving purpose for our lives and all on earth.

Getting to First Church

With road construction in Columbus under way, here are some tips on getting to the church (444 E. Broad St.) from various directions:



FROM THE EAST: From I-70 west, take I-71 north to the Broad Street exit. Go west from the exit.

FROM THE WEST: From I-70 east, take I-71 north to the Broad Street exit. Go west from the exit.

FROM THE NORTH: From I-71 south, exit at Broad Street and turn west; from Rt. 315 south, exit at I-670 east. Go east to Cleveland Avenue.

FROM THE SOUTH: From I-71 north, exit at Broad Street. Go west on Broad Street.

Don't Forget!
Annual reports are due at the end of the day on December 16
Please send yours to
dmahoney@first-church.org
Have ????? Call Denny Mahoney, 228.1741

First Church Youth Christmas Play/Dinner is Dec. 11

By Mark Williams, Christian Education Director
(mwilliams@first-church.org)

Angelus the Angel needs to perform a miracle by Christmas to earn her wings. But there's a slight hitch: no one in heaven believes in Christmas anymore. Her personal trainer, Adventus, advises her to work on her jumping jacks instead, while the Heavenly Administrator, Archdiocese, says pigs will fly before she believes in Christmas. It's a Catch-22 that could cost Angelus her personal pilot's license if she doesn't change minds fast.



Join the children of First Church on Sunday, December 11, for *Angels We Have Heard on Broad near High* and see if Angelus finds a solution in time. The holiday fun begins at 6 p.m. in Parish Hall with dinner, followed by the play. Sign up in the office.

Adult Education

Education hour at 10 a.m. with the Advent lesson titled "**From Longing to Receiving**" leads participants through the Old Testament and the Gospel lectionary texts for four weeks, tracing important Advent themes of longing for God's help, anticipating God's presence among us, recognizing God's work among us, and receiving God's new gifts to us. The classes are led by members of the congregation. Hope to see you there!

Advent Resources Available

Advent resources for children, families and adults are available at the entrance to the worship space and in classrooms.

An Advent children's activities calendar and teen's calendar are available and is perfect to display on a refrigerator or a family bulletin board. *What are We Waiting For?* is a booklet of **family** prayers, scriptures and reflections for each day of Advent. *The Lord Is Near* by Henri Nouwen is an **individual** devotion booklet for the days of Advent. Please pick up a copy at either service or in the church office.

Each Sunday of Advent, several activities sheets are available for the children that relate to our children's time in worship. The activities sheets are available for the 9

a.m. service as well. Sunday afternoon, December 18, there will be several activities available at the door for the younger children during the lessons and carols because they remain in the Sanctuary for the entire concert.

Good Samaritan Donation Can Be a Blessed Christmas Gift

By Marty Worth, Program Director
(mworth@first-church.org)

Our most recent Good Samaritan Day was November 14. We were able to help 40 people but had to turn away many due to a lack of funds.

Winter is just beginning and the need will only grow as our funds dwindle with the year coming to an end. The need comes to our door on a daily basis. It is part of the fabric of our work week here at First Church. Not only ministers, but all staff members and office volunteers are fielding requests for help.



If you wish to send a donation for Good Sam, a check made out to First Church and marked for the Good Samaritan Fund would be greatly appreciated. Here is a great gift idea: If you are trying to think of a gift for someone, you may want to consider giving a donation to Good Samaritan in that person's name. Several people did so last year. An enclosure card is available when such donations come in. Contact me at 228-1741, ext. 14, or mworth@first-church.org.

I am blessed to have this ministry as part of my work here at First Church, even though it is the most challenging and emotional. Providing food to a man who then asks to pray with me; then listening as he blesses me, my family and this church in a most beautiful prayer. I know that this ministry is living this teaching of Jesus every day:

Then the righteous will answer him, „Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’ (Matthew 25)

Thank all of you for your continuing support of the Good Sam program.

Bethlehem on Broad Street to Celebrate 26 Years

By Arlene Reynolds, Coordinator

There are lots of different ways to mark the holiday season. But for many of those who have participated on our yearly ecumenical fellowship, there is no better way to celebrate the birth of Christ than through Bethlehem on Board Street.



In response to a single request for dinner on Christmas Day at the St. Lawrence Haven, BOBS began 26 ago. The event has expanded to several thousand guests each year through the efforts of churches of different denominations, different faiths, and organizations on and off Broad Street.

As we move into the coldest part of the year, there are many families and individuals with deep and immediate needs for food and clothing. This is particularly true in today's troubled economy. We address the clothing through our partnership the Project Help Clothing Ministry Program. We address the need for food through our food box giveaway at Broad Street United Methodist Church and the Christmas Day dinner party and gift celebration at the First Congregational Church.

On Saturday, December 3, food, gently used clothes, toys and school supplies will be distributed by **Project Help Clothing Ministry from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at McKendree United Methodist Church, 3330 Cleveland Ave.** Call Mary Day or Jim Fewlass or Sandy Watters-Holley (614) 475-9615 to donate or to volunteer.

On Saturday, December 17, more than 1,200 food boxes with gift certificates for perishable foods will be given out from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Broad Street United Methodist Church, 501 E. Broad St. Trinity, King Avenue, Maple Grove, Asbury North, Broad Street, Church of the Messiah, and Westerville United Methodist Churches and Trinity Baptist Church gather and assemble the boxes at their churches and deliver them to Broad Street on Saturday, December 10. On December 17, volunteers will be needed in the sanctuary. Call 614-228-4571. David Benson and Julie Canfield are the coordinators. The Downtowners will help with the party.

On Christmas Day, Sunday, December 25, the Christmas celebration of Jesus' birthday will be at

the First Church, 444 E. Broad St. (next to the Art Museum). The doors will open at 8:30 a.m. At 10 a.m. we will have our worship service, followed by dinner from 11:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. There will be hospitality, caroling, entertainment, gifts, toiletries, children activities and free phone calls. There will be no carry-out meals.

To volunteer or donate, call 228-7338 or email bethlehemonbroad@columbus.com.

Stewardship 2012

A Progress Report on 'God's Wondrous Gifts'

We have good news to share . . . with a caveat. Through November 20, 174 households of faith had made commitments for our 2012 budget, adding up to \$452,000. The average pledge is \$2,597.70. This is fantastic news! With 70 households of faith who joyfully contributed to this year, we are on track to top our number of giving units and dollars committed from the previous years. We are well on our way to topping \$600,000!



Now, here is the caveat. We need everyone who is a member to step up and make a heartfelt and joyful commitment for the coming year. Together with the 70 households who have been faithful this year, we have another 150 households who name and claim membership but have not joined our joyful heart of giving for 2012. Whether you can commit a small amount or a great amount, we need everyone to help.

Together we will have the greatest year of stewardship in our church's history! We can do this! But only if we do it together! Pledge on-line at the church Web site: www.first-church.org or email our business administrator, Sharon Leidheiser at sleidheiser@first-church.org, or send it by mail to the church. Please join together to spread the joy of "God's Wondrous Gifts" that are alive and well at First Church.

Second Thursday Meets Dec. 8 - The Second Thursday Fellowship will meet Thursday, December 8, at 10 a.m. in the Parlor. There will be refreshments, a sharing of Christmas memories and a gift exchange. Folks are reminded to bring a wrapped gift (\$5 value) for the exchange.

How Churches Die

By the Rev. Timothy C. Ahrens, Senior Minister
(tahrens@first-church.org)

On November 20, I officiated at the funeral for a church. I had a seemingly simple task. I offered the final words (known in worship as "the benediction") at the final service for a congregation who had worshiped in downtown Columbus for over 175 years. With my right hand raised over the worshiping congregation, I offered the final words. Just like that, Central Presbyterian Church was closed forever. The interim pastor chose me for the task because our congregation had been born out of Central in 1852. Although we parted ways of September 26, 1852 over the issue of slavery, we were brothers and sisters in Christ. As a brother in Christ, I gave the final benediction.

After worship, I spoke with 15 of the remaining 40 members. They were in shock. They did not want to walk out of the sanctuary one last time. One woman held me and cried and cried and cried.

It was an awful experience. I never want to experience the feelings I felt for the rest of my life. I don't ever want to close a church again.

I never want to offer another benediction at the funeral of a congregation. It was a horrible religious experience, which has me thinking about how churches die. Below, I have listed ten ways churches die.

1. They die from neglect. When buildings are not taken care of, when preaching and worship are not attended to, and when people stop caring enough to come to church, they die.
2. They die when people stop praying for the health and well-being of the church and keep talking about all that is wrong with the church.
3. They die when children aren't raised and educated in the church and never know to pass it on to their children.
4. They die when numbers are dropping in all areas and no one pays attention.
5. They die when not all the members support the stewardship of the church.
6. They die when folks die or move on to other churches and new people don't join.
7. They die when the generation of excellence, which leads the ministry and mission of the church, doesn't pass on the mantle to the next generation. They hold on to it for too long. They do not let go.
8. They die when negative leaders complain and do not uplift the staff and emerging leadership of the church - causing turnover in pastors and a revolving door of young and energetic leaders.

9. They die when the Sunday *New York Times* or Sunday morning TV is more important than Sunday worship.

10. They die slowly. They don't die all at once. However, the light of God and the power of the Holy Spirit leave a church a little at a time and the light and love don't return.



Central Presbyterian Church on S. Third Street

The church is a beautiful and fragile living organism. It has a heartbeat and pulse at all times. It has eyes and ears, lungs that breathe and it responds to the kindness of the human touch. It laughs and dances. It praises and rejoices. When uncared for, unkempt, unloved, and forgotten, it slowly dies. It loses its focus and purpose. It doesn't happen all at once. It happens over time.

I don't ever want to bury a church again. Next month, I will lift up 10 ways a church grows and flourishes.

Come to worship this month. See you in church.

2012 Annual Gathering

It will be new and different,
and it will offer the best of past Gatherings!

Day 1: Saturday, June 16
Quest Conference Center, Columbus

Emphasis on learning, inspiration and conducting business

Adam Kukuk - Four Doorways Workshop

In a Four Doorways workshop you will explore all-age worship resources.

Inclusive, participatory, and ecumenical music from all over the planet.

Rev. Susan K. Smith, Pastor, Advent UCC - Keynote

- Business meeting
- Worship service

Day 2: Saturday, September 15
Templed Hills Camp

All about fellowship, fun and friends

- Hog roast for lunch
- Campfire (optional Friday overnight)
- Enjoy the camp with outdoor and indoor activities

Mark your calendar for one day or both!

First Church Leadership Tackles Important Issues

By David Holt, Moderator

The church leadership has been working in many important areas this year, here are some key highlights:
Staff Salaries

A careful study benchmarking our staff salaries with those of other comparable churches has been completed after many months work. At the November meeting Council approved the following paraphrased recommendations:

- Our staff should be compensated at “median-plus” levels when measured against comparable positions at other comparable churches.
- Annual pay increases should be an important priority in our annual church planning.
- Many of our staff members currently receive pay that is below the comparable median benchmarks; bringing every staff member up to at least the median benchmark level should be an important priority in the 2012 budget.
- When pay increases are not possible, other creative perks should be explored.

Many of us are dismayed by the low levels of our staff compensation and believe that the congregation needs to be more fully informed of this situation (this was part of the impetus for the study in the first place). To bring the five staff members who are below median (by an average of 15%) up to just median levels (not median-plus) will cost about \$50,000 annually. \$50,000 is almost 10% of the 2011 budget for member stewardship pledges. Watch for more details coming in the weeks ahead concerning the salary study, how we got to this place, and how together as a congregation we can change this for the better.

The Future’s Broadening Way Capital Campaign

Over \$3.3 million has been pledged and over \$1.4 million has already been received towards the capital campaign. Your capital gifts have already been put to work in the following areas:

- Monthly mortgage payments for the west lot
- \$200,000 additional principal payment to reduce mortgage interest
- Initial steps to integrate the west lot into our original church property
- Parking lot resurfacing
- Parish hall chair lift
- Sanctuary lighting repair
- Minor restroom upgrades

- Exterior tuck-pointing mortar assessment
- Contribution to UCC Central Southeast Association -Widening the Circle (new church starts fund)
- Contribution to Deep Griha Society in Pune, India (founded by First Church friends Rev. and Dr. Onawale)

Although the \$3.3 million pledged to date is laudable and the largest campaign we have ever conducted, it is also significantly short of our essential goal of almost \$4.8 million in capital funds. We are carrying out plans based on the pledges received and we are still welcoming and receiving new gifts. The official giving period runs through the end of 2013, however many members have planned their capital campaign giving to stretch into 2014 in order to reach their total pledge amount. The projects funded by this campaign are essential to our future.

Long-Range Planning

In August the congregation approved 10 long range goals presented by the Long-Range Plan Committee and Church Council. Church commissions, committees, boards, lay leaders, and staff are busy embracing the goals and strategies and are already implementing many of the action steps. You can read on-line or print the entire Long-Range Plan by following the link on our website home page at first-church.org. We need your involvement and support as we work towards our goals.

Property Planning Group

Church Council formed a property planning group to:

- develop a conceptual site plan for the entire church property to guide future development, and
- coordinate with our neighbors (such as CCAD and the Museum of Art) and engage with community officials concerning future development of our property and other developments within our vicinity (such as the Creative Campus initiative centering on Gay and Ninth Streets)

Watch for upcoming information on these and other important efforts. Much is happening and this is a great time to be involved at First Congregational. Make sure that you are a part of the excitement!

Like to read? – Marie Pfeiffer is home again. She is looking for someone to come in and read to her. If you can help out, call her at 268-2331. Thanks!

The End is Near

By James Fewlass, Treasurer

How many times in cartoons and in real life reports is someone touting, "The end is near!?" As your treasurer, I need to remind you that the budget year of 2011 is drawing to a close at the end of this month. As I said in last month's newsletter, the date for the close of contributions for 2011 is December 30.



As 2011 winds down, there will be numerous Budget and Finance meetings to develop the 2012 budget. They are this past Monday, November 28, Monday, December 5, Wednesday, December 14, all at 7 p.m. Any January meeting dates needed will be set by the committee as we move through December.

What is positive about December is that as the old calendar and budget year closes, the new church year has already begun – Advent. Advent is a wonderful time to create a 2012 budget from the promise of the stewardship of our time, talent and treasure. Happy New Church Year! We've already begun.

UCC Justice Training An Inspirational Weekend

By Abby Salak, Intern



Table during worship

Andra provided videos and information about oppression, stereotypes and justice around the globe.

The youth and adults then discussed their understandings of justice and oppression in small groups; learning how to bring justice to our own communities and churches. Andra is an amazing progressive Christian singer-songwriter; she led us in vespers and worship. Her music was the guiding force of the weekend, songs like *Offering* and *#40* reminded us that we are created in God's image, that we are called to combat injustice and oppression, and that God gives us

Sarah Ahrens and I recently traveled to Pilgrim Hills for a lovely fall weekend of Justice LED training and fellowship with youth and youth leaders from UCC churches all over Ohio! Andra Moran and Stephen King, an amazing duo from Nashville, led us in learning and worship throughout the weekend.

a new song every day.

On another note, Advent began November 27 and Janine, Tim and I will be providing scripture and meditations throughout this season of preparation. You can find them on Facebook, at First Church Advent Meditations. Please join us to explore Advent and what it means for us to come together as a community in preparation for Christ's birth.

Monthly Budget Update

Current Pledge Income

Pledges Budgeted -- \$529,872
October Actual -- \$45,246.30
YTD Actual -- \$415,633.11
YTD Budgeted -- \$485,716
Needed Each Month -- \$41,268.90



October Mission Offerings

Deep Griha -- \$1,556.05
CROP - \$585
Catalyst -- \$697.60
Neighbors in Need -- \$551

Total Mission Offerings -- \$3,389.65

Other Mission Giving
Good Samaritan -- \$1,095
Bethlehem on Broad Street -- \$200



Missions Offering Schedule

In December, the undesignated loose offerings will benefit the following missions that First Church supports:

December 4 - AIDS Task Force
December 11 - Bethlehem on Broad Street
December 18 - Good Samaritan
December 24 - Christmas Fund
December 25 - Christmas Fund

Moving or have new contact information?
Let us know by calling 228.1741

IRA Charitable Rollover Law Offers Benefits for Contributions

By Sheldon Taft, Chair, Board of Trustees

Council has approved a request by the Board of Trustees to inform all members of First Church who will be at least 70½ or older by December 31, 2011, of a special giving opportunity offered by the "IRA Charitable Rollover" law.

The IRA charitable rollover law allows **taxpayers aged 70½ or older to make tax-free contributions of up to \$100,000 from their IRAs** (but not from 401(k) plans) to **First Church** or to other qualified charitable organizations. Contributions must be made by December 31 to take advantage of this tax benefit; but because December 31 falls on a Saturday, such **gifts should be made by December 30**.

It is not expected that this benefit will be available after 2011.

The contribution must come to the church **directly from the IRA account and not through the taxpayer**. Such IRA contributions are **not treated as an itemized deduction but are excluded from taxable income**, even if you take the standard deduction. They **also reduce dollar for dollar the taxpayer's Required Minimum Distribution ("RMD") for the year**.

Donors who itemize their deductions ordinarily are prohibited from deducting more than 50% of their Adjusted Gross Income ("AGI") for charitable donations, but **donations from IRAs (up to a total of \$100,000) are excluded from this AGI 50% limitation**.

Some states, including Ohio, do not allow tax deductions for charitable contributions. However, **charitable rollover contributions from an IRA are effectively excluded from income and therefore from state income taxes**.

Every donor's circumstances are different so please **consult with your tax advisor** to see if an IRA charitable rollover is right for you.

Some members of First Church have already taken advantage of the IRA charitable rollover law to make contributions to the church's Stewardship Campaign, Capital Campaign and endowment funds managed by the trustees for the benefit of First Church.

If you have any questions or are considering a special gift, **please contact a trustee or an advisor to the trustees**. The trustees include Joyce Canfield, Sue Cook, Randy Hoffman, Meredith Kneuve, Sheldon Taft, Lissa Wade, Christopher Washington, Tom Worley and moderator, David Holt. Advisors to the trustees include treasurer, Bill Johannes; legal counsel and secretary, Meredith Kneuve; and senior minister, Tim Ahrens.

POINSETTIA ORDER FORM

Decorate our church and your home for Christmas, and honor your loved ones.

Name _____ Phone Number _____

Total Number of poinsettias _____ x \$10 each = \$ _____

(Orders must be in the church office no later than Dec. 11. Please include payment with order. Make checks payable to First Church, write "poinsettias" in memo line.)

IN MEMORY OF _____

OR

IN CELEBRATION OF _____

I will . . .

_____ Take home after the 11:00 pm Candlelight Communion Service on December 24

_____ Leave in the sanctuary for Bethlehem on Broad Street, December 25



First Church Quilters Need Help

First Church Quilters are beginning a new group project. It's going to be great fun for us and hopefully will raise some money for the church. We would love to have you join us. We will be doing some work as a group on Saturdays and some work at home. Our aims are high, but our numbers are low.

We need quilters and quilt fabric. If you have scraps or yardage of cotton fabric you could donate, you may drop them off at the church office or at one of our meetings. We meet the second Saturday of each month at 10 am in the large conference room. Our next meeting is Dec. 10. All are welcome – beginners and long-time quilters. Come and check us out.

Questions? Call or email Marilyn Minter at 855-7945, mlminter@insight.rr.com, or Gleva Stephens at 258-5940, gstephens3@columbus.rr.com. – **Gleva Stephens**

Fair Trade Gift Baskets Available

Lovely gift baskets will be for sale Dec. 4 and 18 during Fellowship Hour. Sandra Geronimo will create the baskets from a selection of Fair Trade coffee, tea, cocoa and candy, and include some decorative touches. The baskets make thoughtful host gifts. Profits go to Parish Life to defray the cost of fellowship coffee and to Sacred Earth.



Holiday Gift Cards Needed For Gladden Community House

As you make your holiday list, please remember the families served by Gladden Community House. Firefighters provide toys for the children, but funds are limited for gifts for teens and senior citizens. \$20 gift cards from Walmart or Target would be appreciated. Cards may be left in the church office, preferably by Dec. 16. Thank you and Merry Christmas!

Are We Open?

When winter weather turns harsh,
Stay with www.first-church.org
to see whether First Church has closed

Member Happy December Birthdays

- | | | | |
|-----|------------------|-----|----------------------|
| 1: | John Rau | 21: | Joyce Canfield |
| 3: | Leslie Fulford | 21: | Dorothy Leachman |
| 3: | Molly Van Gorden | 21: | Andy Thomas |
| 4: | Elaine Warren | 22: | Rick Henderson |
| 4: | Frank Cook | 22: | Ellie Zeiger |
| 5: | Jason Bishop | 23: | Marty Worth |
| 5: | Madeline Hadley | 24: | Lee Ann Hadley |
| 6: | Kay Davis | 25: | Diana Kutschbach |
| 6: | Karl Danneberger | 26: | Trisha Bishop |
| 6: | Diane Rambo | 27: | David Fulford |
| 7: | Denise Thompson | 27: | Rachel Axt |
| 8: | Janet Axt | 28: | Paul Leidheiser |
| 8: | Kent Ramdo | 28: | McAshan Dean |
| 10: | Brian Thomas | 29: | Jim Organ |
| 11: | Sam Spofforth | 29: | Benjamin Rowley |
| 13: | Joe Provenzano | 30: | Jamie McWilliams |
| 14: | Elizabeth Asp | 30: | Tracy Cloud-Thomas |
| 14: | Dan Ward | 31: | Jim Roehm |
| 14: | Pamm Greene | 31: | Jon Anderson |
| 14: | Betty Johnson | 31: | Catherine Cunningham |
| 14: | Suzie Rhoads | | |
| 14: | Lori Horne | | |
| 14: | Gretchen Weller | | |
| 15: | Anne Bennett | | |
| 17: | Jane Chavers | | |
| 18: | Mary Alice Kuhn | | |
| 19: | Carol Hussey | | |
| 19: | Larry Dixon | | |
| 19: | Bob Davis | | |
| 19: | Barry Bastian | | |
| 20: | Margaret Browne | | |
| 20: | Christa Ewing | | |

Member Happy December Anniversaries

- | | |
|-----|------------------------------|
| 10: | Diana and Bob Kutschbach |
| 12: | Linda and Ron Reiger |
| 19: | Marty and Gerry Worth |
| 20: | Teresa and Jorge Polo |
| 22: | Pauline and Earl Fritz |
| 23: | Jane and Mike Weddle |
| 26: | Becky and Sheldon Taft |
| 27: | Sarah and Tom Trace |
| 27: | Jane and Dick Ward |
| 28: | Rebecca and Ian Baird |
| 28: | Missy and Doug Zimmerman |
| 28: | Francille and John Firebaugh |
| 29: | Pam and Andrew Welsh-Huggins |
| 31: | Shawn and Darel Finley |

OOPS! If we miss your birthday or anniversary, contact Denny Mahoney at 228-1741, ext. 17, or dmahoney@first-church.org.

Next Newsletter Deadline

The deadline for submitting articles for the January *First Church News* is December 20 at noon. It will be published Friday, December 30.

Calendar

Thursday, December 1

10 am – First Thursday Fellowship – Northampton House
6:15 pm – First Church Ringers – Gallery
7:30 pm – First Church Choir – Choir Room

Friday, December 2

5 pm – Confirmation trip to Tifereth Israel

Sunday, December 4

9 am – Treble/Teen Choir – Choir Room
9 am – Worship – PH
10 am – Choir – Sanctuary
10 am – Education Hour – Rooms C and D
11 am – Worship – San
12 pm – Fellowship Hour – PH
12:30 pm – Confirmation Class – Room D and Parlor
6 pm – Sonreir – PH
6 pm – Middle School Group – Middle School Room

Monday, December 5

6:30 pm – Bible Tells Me So – PH
7 pm – Budget and Finance – LC
7 pm – Rev. Ahrens' MMRAG – Rev. Ahrens' Office

Tuesday, December 6

12 pm – Card Care Ministry – LC
5:30 pm – Sacred Earth – LC
7 pm – Education Committees – Room D
7 pm – Music Committee – Parlor

Wednesday, December 7

11 am – Book Study – Parlor

Thursday, December 8

10 am – Second Thursday Fellowship – Parlor
6:15 pm – First Church Ringers – Gallery
7:30 pm – First Church Choir – Choir Room

Saturday, December 10

9 am – Christmas Play Rehearsal – PH
10 am – First Church Quilters – LC

Sunday, December 11

8 am – Cookie Mission – LC
9 am – Treble/Teen Choir – Choir Room
9 am – Worship – PH
10 am – Choir – Sanctuary
10 am – Education Hour – Rooms C and D
11 am – Worship – San
12 pm – Fellowship Hour – PH
6 pm – Children's Play and Dinner - PH

Monday, December 12

6:30 pm – Bible Tells Me So – PH

Tuesday, December 13

12 pm – Volunteer Luncheon – PH
1:30 pm – Card Care Ministry – LC
6 pm – Music Committee – Parlor
7 pm – Executive Committee – LC

Wednesday, December 14

7 pm – Budget and Finance - LC

Thursday, December 15

6:15 pm – First Church Ringers – Gallery
7:30 pm – First Church Choir – Choir Room

Saturday, December 17

9 am – House and Grounds - PFR

Sunday, December 18

9 am – Treble/Teen Choir – Choir Room
9 am – Worship – PH

10 am – Education Hour – Rooms C and D
10 am – Choir – San
11 am – Worship – Sanctuary
12 pm – Fellowship Hour – Sanctuary
4 pm – Lessons and Carols – Sanctuary

Monday, December 19

6:30 pm – Bible Tells Me So – PH
7 pm – Trustees – LC

Tuesday, December 20

12 pm – Card Care Ministry- PFR
7 pm- Council – LC

Thursday, December 22

9 am – Youth Working with BOBS
6:15 pm – First Church Ringers – Gallery
7:30 pm – First Church Choir – Choir Room

Friday, December 23

Office Closes at Noon

Saturday, December 24 (Christmas Eve)

7:30 pm – Pageant – San
11 pm – Candlelight Service - San

Sunday, December 25 – (Christmas Day)

10 am – Worship – Sanctuary
Bethlehem on Broad Street – All Day

Monday, December 26

Office and Building Closed

Tuesday, Dec. 27-Thursday, Dec. 29

Building Closed, Office Open, 9 a.m.-3 p.m.

Friday, December 30

Building Closed; Office Closes at Noon

Rev. Ahrens' Advisory Group Meets Dec. 5

The next meeting of Rev. Tim Ahrens' MMRAG group will be Monday, December 5, at 7 p.m. Committee members are Tom Brownfield (783.8753), Tom Stewart (486.2823), Jenny Provenzano (844.6324), Amy Wagner (457.0582), Helen Spears (882.0083) and Matt Myers (794.3252).

The committee consults with Rev. Ahrens about his pastoral relationship with the congregation. Comments about Rev. Ahrens' ministry and about the life of this church are welcomed, and committee members can be contacted with your thoughts. The committee members respect confidentiality when requested, but encourage members to allow them to share the names with the group and Rev. Ahrens to facilitate more direct and responsive feedback.

Fellowship Hour Beverage Sales



Coffee and tea sales will be available on December 4 and 18 during Fellowship Hour. This is a UCC coffee project initiative and your participation is greatly appreciated.

Prayers

December Fellowship Hour

December 4: Colossians
 December 11: Corinthians
 December 18: Daniel
 December 25: No Fellowship Hour

December Acolyte Schedule

December 4: Ben Allen and Merry Roach
 December 11: Courtney Batrchelor and Jack Koscher
 December 18: Ben Allred and Victoria Washington
 December 24: Emily Cooke and Will Zimmerman
 (Schedules online at www.first-church.org)

Prayer Request: Please let us know of a prayer concern for yourself, a family member or other church member by calling the Rev. Timothy Ahrens at 614.228.1741, ext. 13, by using prayer request cards found in each pew or by emailing tahrens@first-church.org.

Please pray for those who continue to walk through grief and loss, for those battling illness and addictions in their families, for all serving in Iraq and elsewhere and for others in need. Please offer prayers for those who are lonely, lost and hurting. Pray for our nation as we face all too much anxiety, fear and uncertainty with faith, hope and love. May God bless you in your giving and in your living in Christ's love and grace. Amen.

Baptisms

Elizabeth Janette Hamilton – November 13
 Jack Holden Allen – November 23
 Benjamin Thomas Allen – November 23
 Gabrielle Elizabeth Collins – November 27

Weddings

Paige Sikora and Jason Braun – November 12

Keepsake Ornaments Still Available

**Contact Mark S. Williams
 228.1741, ext. 15 or
mwilliams@first-church.org
 2011 Ornament is \$18**



**~ Remember Your Loved Ones ~
 With a Dedication of Flowers**

Contact Marty Worth at 614.228.1741, ext. 14,
mworth@first-church.org

Worship CDs Available: We provide copies of worship services on CDs. The CDs are available in the literature rack outside the church office after worship. A \$1 donation for the CD can be left in a container on the church office counter.

Church Staff

Timothy C. Ahrens.....Senior Minister
 Janine Wilson.....Associate Minister
 James E. Bobb.....Minister of Music
 Mark S. Williams.....Director of Christian Education
 G. Dene Barnard.....Organist/Choirmaster Emeritus
 Sharon Leidheiser.....Business Administrator
 Martha Worth.....Program Manager
 Denny Mahoney.....Office Manager
 Thomas Luff.....Building Manager
 Kelvin Murphy.....Custodian
 Frank Wall, William Lee.....Custodians
 Nikki Boop, Rosemary Pawandiwa-Priore.....Nursery
 Chinyere Newsum.....Nursery
 Linda Mumford.....Wedding Coordinator
 Jane Chavers.....Wedding Coordinator
 Fran Panek.....Wedding Coordinator

Church Council

David Holt..... Moderator
 Gerry Worth.....Vice-Moderator
 Judy Smith, Bev Cook.....Secretary/Assistant
 Jim Fewlass, Cindy Conn.....Treasurer/Assistant
 Sandy Bennett, Neal Brower.....Administration/Assistant
 Melissa Prendergast.....Church Growth
 Tanya Miller.....Education
 Wally Giffen, Charlie Weaver...House & Grounds/Assistant
 Fran Panek, Bruce Panek.....Mission/Assistant
 Jackie Dean, Abby Cave.....Parish Life/Assistant
 Mary Weaver.....Senior Deacon
 Elaine Warren.....Deacon
 John Deliman, Jim Gallagher...Music, Arts, Heritage/Asst.
 Melody Leidheiser.....Nominating Chair
 Sheldon Taft.....Trustees
 Emma Welsh-Huggins.....Member-at-large
 Tom Brownfield.....Member-at-large

The First Congregational Church
United Church of Christ
444 E. Broad St.
Columbus, Ohio 43215-3821

DATED MATERIAL - VERY IMPORTANT
Please Deliver By: Monday, December 4, 2011

TO:

[Empty dashed box for recipient information]



The First Congregational Church, UCC

444 E. Broad St., Columbus, Ohio 43215
Phone: 614.228.1741 FAX: 614.461.1741
Email: home@first-church.org Web site: www.first-church.org
Office Hours: Monday - Friday, 9 a.m. - 3 p.m. Closed Major Holidays

“An Open & Affirming Faith Community”

SUNDAY WORSHIP HOURS

Worship at 9 a.m. ~ Parish Hall
Worship at 11 a.m. ~ Sanctuary