

The CHRISTIAN

 FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH
(Disciples of Christ) *Visitor*

Longest Night Service of Comfort

Christmas can be a painful time for some. It may be the first Christmas without a loved one, or it may be a time of year that has always been difficult. The anguish of broken relationships, the insecurity of unemployment, the weariness of ill health, the pain of isolation - all of these situations can make us feel very alone in the midst of the celebrating and spending associated with Christmas. We need encouragement and comfort. We need to know that we are not alone.

For these reasons, First Christian Church, First Presbyterian Church, Trinity Episcopal Church, and IU Health Bloomington Hospice are co-sponsoring a special service, traditionally called “*Longest Night*” or “*Blue Christmas*” on **December 13 at 7:00 pm** at First Christian Church. This special service that is open to all will acknowledge that God’s presence is for those who mourn, those who struggle, and those who want to offer support for others who are feeling particularly vulnerable during this season.

The service will provide a time to light candles in remembrance of loved ones, embrace tears, hear the Christmas story, sing some quiet carols, and receive words of comfort, healing, and hope. Please share this information and extend an invitation to anyone you know who would benefit from this special service of support and comfort. All are welcome.

Christmas Eve at FCC

Join us on Christmas Eve for one of several worship opportunities at FCC as we sing carols and light the Christ candle in preparation for the birth of Our Lord and Savior.

At 5:30 p.m. we travel to Bethlehem, following the way of the prophets, holy family, shepherds and magi. This *family oriented service* culminates in a candlelit, no-rehearsal, everybody-gets-a-part children’s Nativity pageant.

Special Music with the Sanctuary Choir and musical guests begins **at 7:30 p.m.**

Christmas Eve concludes with a traditional candlelight service at **8:00 p.m.**, featuring lessons, carols, special choral music and communion.

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PASTOR'S PEN
THE GIFT OF SHARING OUR SACRED SPACE

One of my deepest daily Advent joys and privileges is my daily walk through the sanctuary as I journey from my car to my office. With the addition of the rich symbols, colors, and traditions of the season, the sanctuary space—which is always beautiful—becomes truly “set apart” as holy ground for all God’s people. It is a true jewel in the heart of Bloomington and a gift to this community. Over a very short span of a few short weeks, a large number of folks have experienced/will experience the gift of FCC’s sacred space *for the very first time*. They have been/will be embraced by its warmth and beauty through their attendance at one or more of the following: 1) the Jazz Vespers Service, 2) a memorial service, 3) a benefit concert, 4) a wedding, 5) the Longest Night service, 6) Sunday morning services, 7) a Christmas Eve recital, 8) Christmas Eve services, and 9) the MLK service (in January).

Thank you for helping to make our FCC sanctuary a gift to the community! As we continue with our extremely faithful, methodical, and careful planning process that will lead to enhancements of this sacred space, and as we continue to be open to the movement of God’s Spirit among us, there is no doubt in my mind that FCC’s sanctuary will be increasingly “discovered” by folks who will experience (perhaps for the first time) a sense of the Holy when they are in the sanctuary. Indeed, FCC’s sanctuary is a gift of wholeness and healing to be shared with this fragmented world!

I hope to see you Sunday as we continue with our Advent Worship series titled “Messengers Among Us.” Here is a reminder of each week’s focus:

December 3: Advent 1
Isaiah 40:1-5 (6-11)
Focus: Isaiah: A Voice of Comfort
in the Wilderness

December 10: Advent 2
Luke 1:5-17, 57 (58-80)
Focus: Angel Gabriel: A Voice of
Assurance

December 17: Advent 3
Luke 1:39-45 (46b-56)
Focus: Elizabeth: A Voice of
Blessing

December 24: Advent 4
Luke 2:1-7
Focus: The Holy Child: The Voice
Incarnate

Blessings and Peace,



Pastor Helen



SINGING THE STORY

The Carols of Christmas

The Advent and Christmas season is perhaps the time when most of us actively participate in the activity of transmission of the *story* of our people through song. It is a time for carols, which are popular and traditional songs usually having the events of Christmas as their theme.

The term “carol” comes from the old French word “*carole*,” meaning a “round dance,” which perhaps indicates the far distant origins of such traditional songs. Carol singing at Christmas became popular in England during the mid-nineteenth century, but every culture has a type of popular song that might be categorized as *carol*. “The First Noel” is an English carol and “Infant Holy, Infant Lowly” is a Polish Carol. Medieval carols tend to have memorable refrains that follow several verses of narrative.

A few of our most famous Christmas songs are not actually “carols” at all, but are narrative hymns (“It came upon a midnight clear” is one; as is “Hark, the Herald Angels Sing.”) “From heaven on high” and “Wake, awake the watchmen calls us” are examples of German Chorales. During this Advent season, we hope you will join in the corporate singing and transmission of the story of our faith as we learn carols with the children during the intergenerational Make a Joyful Noise time after services. (To encourage families to sing carols together, FCC is giving every family a beautiful carol book to become part of your family’s Christmas tradition). Also as we go caroling together at 4:00 on Dec. 17, join in singing with the children and youth at the 5:30 Family Christmas Eve Service, attend the 7:30 concert on Christmas Eve before we worship together at the Christmas Eve Candlelight Service we can sing and thus participate in transmitting the story of the beginning of our faith through song.

CHRISTMAS EVE FESTIVAL CHORUS CONCERT – 7:30 pm

Benjamin Britten: A Ceremony of Carols (1942)

Each Christmas Eve, before the Candlelight Communion Service, we have celebrated with a special concert of seasonal music that celebrates the great music inspired by the Christmas narrative. This year our musical offering will be from the well-beloved 20th century setting of Medieval and Renaissance English carol poetry as set by the great British composer Benjamin Britten for chorus and harp: *A Ceremony of Carols*. The majority of the poems Britten chose is taken from *The English Galaxy of Shorter Poems*, and are in three separate old English dialects. Because of this, a “translation” will be provided for any words or phrases that might be unfamiliar to modern ears. However, though much of its language may be archaic, the beautiful settings for soloists, harp and chorus transcend any unfamiliarity and, over the past 75 years since its composition, the *Ceremony of Carols* has become one of the most performed and cherished compositions in the repertoire of music for the Christmas season.

Advent Opportunities at FCC for Everyone

Advent is a special time in the life of the church. During Advent we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus and the mystery of how God became a person. Unfortunately the holidays can be a busy, over-scheduled time for everyone. But this is also a time when we want the things we do to be *meaningful* and *memorable*. So we hope you will plan to make room for any or all of the following activities as you prepare your heart for Christmas.



Sundays, December 10 and 17 during the late learning hour (11:15)

Family Caroling & Christmas Eve preparations (families with children through grade 12)

Contact: Connie Myers

Gather around the piano in the sanctuary for a sing-along focusing on carols we'll sing during caroling on the 17th and at our Christmas Eve services. This is a time the whole family can enjoy, even if you "can't sing." We'll even have carol books for families to pass out beginning December 10! Hum along if that's the most you can manage! Then, we'll make sure our children are fitted for costumes for the Nativity pageant at the 5:30 Christmas Eve service, and we'll practice speaking parts, finding where to stand during the Nativity scene, etc. This way, we won't have to try scheduling a special practice time during this very busy time of year.

Sunday, December 17, 4:00 p.m.

Christmas Caroling (all ages)

Contacts: Lynn Sinn and Connie Myers



Ill health and winter weather keep several in our church family homebound for much of the winter. Caroling is a fun way to meet people where they are while spreading some Christmas cheer. And there's really nothing like singing those sacred carols with children of all ages to put a person in the holiday spirit! Meeting up afterwards for dinner at Café Pizzeria is a great way to finish the evening

What Are YOU Doing Christmas Eve?

If your Christmas Eve plans don't include hosting a houseful of family and friends, and you're looking for a way to keep the night holy, please consider spending the evening with your FCC Family supporting the special services and activities that FCC offers. From 5:00-9:30, the church is a whirlwind of activity as we celebrate two very different Christmas Eve services and a concert of seasonal music. If you will be available during any or all of that time, contact the church office to let us know you can help. We will need greeters, ushers and deacons during our services, as well as help with communion preparation. We will also need adults to help the children during the Christmas pageant and also to collect costumes for laundering following the 5:30 pm service. Contact Connie Myers if you would like to join this special worship team.

**SIMPLE WAYS TO SUPPORT FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH:
AmazonSmile, and Kroger Community Rewards
(just in time for holiday shopping!)**

Do you shop online at Amazon.com or at Kroger? If so, you have a new simple way to support FCC financially. First Christian Church has paired with both *Amazon.com* and Kroger's Community Rewards program to provide shoppers with a way to funnel a percentage of their purchase price to FCC, *at no additional cost to the shopper*. Here's how it works:

AmazonSmile

When you shop at Amazon.com, you can designate an organization to receive a portion of the purchase price for any eligible transaction. You need an Amazon.com account in order to do this. To support First Christian Church, you must start by going to:

<https://smile.amazon.com/ch/35-0876346>.

Then shop as usual. Amazon will donate one half of one percent of your purchase price to First Christian Church. *(Please note, we receive a higher percentage from Amazon if you shop with them through Fundsponge.)*

Kroger Community Rewards

You can also support FCC every time you shop at Kroger and use your Kroger card. Just log in to your Kroger card account and select First Christian Church in Bloomington, Indiana in their Community Rewards program.

Staff Christmas Gift Contributions

If you would like to make a special monetary Christmas gift to our dedicated FCC staff, you may place a donation in the offering or mail it to the church and mark it "staff gift." This is your opportunity to thank the wonderful staff who serve us at FCC!

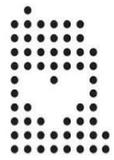
Two Gentle Reminders...

If you haven't turned in your Giving Card for 2018, please do so as soon as possible. Also, as we near the end of the year, we would like to remind you to bring your 2017 pledges up to date as soon as you are able. Please, call the church office if you need to know more information about your giving.

**Christmas Special Day Offering
December 17 & 24**

Disciples Mission Fund Special Day Offerings provide an opportunity to highlight specific ministries as part of our faith celebrations. Support Regional Ministries through the *Christmas Special Offering that will be received on December 17 and 24.*

Regional ministry knits the church together by equipping leaders, encouraging congregations, and building relationships. Often recognized for the ministries of camps and conferences, regions also play a critical role in the preparation and authorization of ministerial ordination. Both are key to church leadership and development.



MCUM December Food & Supply Drive

Help us meet our 2017 goal of 2,000 pounds of food, cleaning supplies and other donations for MCUM's supply pantry. This year MCUM is especially in need as they received an unusually low amount of donations during their community food drive.

Please, consider bringing non-perishable food, cleaning supplies or hygiene products for donation during our Holiday Food and Supply Drive. Each Sunday in Advent items will be laid at the manger on the Chancel as a symbolic offering of love to the Christ child.

Thank you!

Volunteers Needed for Communion Preparation and Clean-up

We are looking for volunteers to join FCC's communion preparation team. This is an easy way to make a real impact here at FCC. You can sign up for as many or few shifts as you are available. Preparation only takes about 45 minutes and can be done at your convenience Thursday-Saturday. You choose what day and time work for you. Clean up takes less than 30 minutes and can be done immediately after worship or on Monday.

Please, contact Peggy Stafford or the church office if you have questions or would like to sign up for this opportunity.

Fulfilling our Commitment to Our Neighbors

Volunteers Needed to Support the Interfaith Winter Shelter

We have committed to continued support of the Interfaith Winter Shelter at its new location, but that support only happens with a small army of volunteers who, together, provide a safe a warm place for anyone who needs it. We have committed to providing volunteer support for the next 21 Fridays. *We need 12 volunteers each Friday* to cover the three overnight shifts. **We still have empty shifts to fill.**

Consider filling one shift per month (through March) or filling in for one of our regular volunteers. No commitment is too small. Contact Jo Weddle, Dave Schilling or Mark Knowles with questions or to sign up.





Order your Christmas Poinsettias!

Purchase a poinsettia in memory or honor of a loved one to be placed in the chancel during Advent and Christmas. Poinsettias are \$12.00 each; You may also make a donation to the Permanent Fund in lieu of or in addition to flowers.

The order deadline is Sunday, December 10.

MCUM Christmas Shopping Success!

Thank you to all who coordinated, drove, shopped, and wrapped gifts for our MCUM families. Certainly, you have helped to make Christmas a little brighter for these families. A special thank you to Christy Duffy-Paiement and Andrea Fletcher who coordinated efforts and to members of the Cambellite class who stayed to help wrap all the gifts!

Advent Devotional Now Available

“Seeing a Different World,” the 2017 Advent devotional, is now available for purchase for \$3.50. Written by Elizabeth Hagan, ordained Disciples minister and author, the devotionals are just what we need during the “getting-ready” season of Advent: honest about the imperfect world we live in and hopeful about the Kingdom of God we are building in its midst. Questions? See Connie Myers, director of faith formation and family ministry.



Holiday Office Hours at FCC

December 22 & 25: Closed

Dec. 27-29: Limited Hours
(email and voicemail checked regularly)

Dec. 29 & Jan. 1: Closed

UPCOMING EVENTS...

Sunday, December 10

9:00 am Learning Session I
10:00 am Worship with Children
Worship & Wonder
11:15 am Joyful Noise Choir rehearsal
11:15 am Learning Session II
3:30 pm Memorial service for Roy
Whiteman

Tuesday, December 12

6:00 pm Handbell Choir rehearsal

Wednesday, December 13

7:00 pm Longest Night service

Thursday, December 14

6:15 pm Sanctuary Choir rehearsal

Friday, December 15

5:30 pm Listening to God meditation

Sunday, December 17

9:00 am Learning Session I
10:00 am Worship with Children
Worship & Wonder
11:15 am Joyful Noise Choir
11:15 am Learning Session II
12:15 pm Board Meeting
4:00 pm Caroling & Dinner

Tuesday, December 19

6:00 pm Handbell choir rehearsal

Wednesday, December 20

5:30 pm Book Bunch Christmas Dinner

Thursday, December 21

6:15 pm Sanctuary Choir rehearsal

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Coffee Fellowship Treat Schedule

December 10: Grades K-12 and
Sharing Table

December 17: Sanctuary Choir
and Handbell
Choir

December 24: Men's Book Club &
Book Bunch

**Scripture Readings
for Sunday Worship**

December 10
Luke 1:5-17, 57

December 17
Luke 1:39-45

December 24
Luke 2:1-7