

The Parchment

Monthly Newsletter of First Congregational Church UCC

December 2017



Greetings from Dr. Guerrero

Near the end of September I heard someone talking about acting. I wrote this down: "People rearrange their lives to watch an actor who touches them."

That's so, isn't it? I've done it and I'm sure many of you have too. For what else will people rearrange their lives? Work? Family? Do people rearrange their lives for their church? Sure, some do. For others, though: "Church? What church?"

Well, what about this one? We take it for granted, you know, and that's dangerous. In this time of near-abandonment of churches and other religious institutions in favor of private and individual spiritual practice, the danger is especially vivid and sharp. As one writer says, "Spiritual maturity means you can endure frustration, negotiate conflict and get to the other side of disillusionment with the capacity to hope." No one does that alone or online.

As you celebrated Thanksgiving was this church on your mind? As you prepare for Christmas will you be here for worship on Sundays, or just Christmas Eve? In the new year will you rearrange your life? For what? Why?

"Don't be afraid," says the Christmas angel. "I bring you good news of great joy. To you is born this day in the city of David a savior, who is Christ the Lord!"

Good news and great joy, the joy of a savior: Christ the Lord! It means you can change. You can grow. Your spirit, mind and heart can grow. If you call yourself Christian, though, it's hard, awfully hard, without the church.

Time to rearrange?

God is good.

We're open every Sunday. See you then, and bring somebody with you!

"I bring good news to you—wonderful, joyous news for all people." – Luke 2:10



News from Brenton Offenback, Director of Music Ministry

Christ's Paradox

Have you ever spent time in your devotional life reading poems about God instead of literature written in paragraph form? Poetry is all around us: modern day songwriters use it, history has recorded it, we sing it in hymns, and read it in the Bible as well as other countless books. But what about the poetry itself? I'll admit that I am not an expert in poetry but I do know that one of the beautiful qualities of poetry is the different levels of meaning. In other words, meaning from poems can be at face value or it can be perceived to have a deeper, more

meaningful understanding which invokes deep thought and reflection. For example, take the first verse of the Christmas hymn "Good Christians, Now Rejoice":

Good Christians, now rejoice, with heart, and soul, and voice;
Give ye heed to what we say: Jesus Christ is born today;
Ox and ass before Him bow, and He is in the manger now.
Christ is born today! Christ is born today!

It is simple to understand and it pleases the ear with rhymes. But there isn't much depth there. However, take the cradle song titled "Jesus, Jesus, Rest Your Head". It's not found in many hymnals but it will be sung at our Christmas Dinner program on December 13 at 7:00 p.m. The chorus is simple, yet thought provoking:

Jesus, Jesus, rest your head. You have got a manger bed.
All the evil folk on earth, sleep in feathers at their birth.
Jesus, Jesus, rest your head. You have got a manger bed.

At first glance, the poem is simple. But after a second read, you'll begin to ponder the deeper meaning. Now, sleeping on feather pillows and beds does not make us "evil folk". However, Jesus our Lord incarnate, came to earth and His very first bed was a feeding trough! What bed did you lay your newborn on? I will bet it wasn't a feeding trough! So this text makes us ponder deeper about Jesus: Why was He in a trough? What purpose did Jesus have here on earth that started Him out in a trough?

Perhaps, the most thought provoking style of poems provided here is the paradox poem; poems that contradicts themselves, but remain true. During our church service on December 17, one of the pieces the Chancel Choir will be performing is titled "Christus Paradox." The piece opens with this text;

You, Lord, are both Lamb and Shepherd.
You, Lord, are both prince and slave.
You, peace-maker and sword bringer of the way you took and gave.
You the everlasting instant;
You, whom we both scorn and crave.

At this point, I must leave for you to ponder Jesus this Christmas season. Doesn't Jesus want us to search deeper for Him? "For though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you."
(2 Corinthians 13:4)

Merry Christmas from Your Parish Nurse Jan

I have poured through a number of articles, some religious and some not intending to find inspiration for my Christmas article this year. One thing that stands out is that all the stress associated with Christmas seems to be manufactured by false expectations and a lot of smoozy marketing, which in the end takes us away from what Christmas is all about.

Christmas is a religious holiday, a day to celebrate the birth of our Savior Jesus, and to give thanks and rejoice in that. It is a wonderful time to be with family and share our faith. That is truly all that is necessary, and we all know it. However, through the years, the celebrating and gift-giving has become much commercialized and the expectation of it being "the most wonderful time of the year" falls very short for many people. Putting pressure on yourself to have to create "the most wonderful time" for everyone else is unrealistic.

Regarding the holiday stress management, all the articles gave advice to not go overboard. Don't overbook, don't spend more than you should. If you are lonely, go volunteer to help someone in need, visit shut-ins, join a caroling group, send cards to others you know who are lonely or sick.

Many of us have lost loved ones this year. It most certainly will not be "most wonderful" but, despite that, what is and always will be wonderful is the hope that Christmas brings. It means that we will all be together again someday in a different world with no pain, sorrow or suffering. It means that those who have gone to heaven are having a "most wonderful" time. There is nothing wrong with bringing up happy memories of and toasting those who are not present at the table.

Each Christmas season I like to remind the church body that we have a few church members who may not be celebrating with family or friends or will be unable to worship with us in fellowship. A telephone call, card, or visit is always appreciated. For your convenience, an address list is included in this month's Parchment. The Called to Care Ministry will again be seeking out folks to bring gifts and offer fellowship. Please contact Beth Kenagy if you would like to participate in sharing God's love and blessings of the true Christmas season.

I wish you all a very peaceful and joyous Christmas, focusing on what is most important.

Please note that I will be taking some time off from December 22 to January 2 to spend time with family and friends for the holidays. If you require assistance, please contact the church office.

(Nurse Jan's new second band, "Night Train" will be playing at the Greater Bridgman Area Chamber & Growth Alliance's Holiday Village on Saturday, December 16 from 4-6 p.m. Lots of family friendly holiday activities will take place in downtown Bridgman that day.)



Advent and Christmas

Advent begins on Sunday, December 3 with communion. This is the 4-Sunday Christian season of anticipating the birth of Jesus Christ. Jesus came as Immanuel, "God with us." He came as God incarnate, i.e., God in the flesh. His mission: To demonstrate the intimate, loving, redeeming nature of God, ever intent on drawing us closer to our Creator, and in the process, redeeming this broken world. On our Advent calendar:

December 3, Sunday 10:25 a.m.

Communion & Baptism in the newly renovated Sanctuary

December 10, Sunday 10:25 a.m.

Children's Christmas Program

December 13, Wednesday

Christmas Dinner – 5:30 p.m.

Christmas Program – 7:00 p.m.

December 17, Sunday – 10:25 a.m.

Our Chancel Choir's Christmas Worship Service

December 24, Sunday – 10:25 a.m.

8:00 p.m. – Christmas Eve Candlelight Prelude

8:30 p.m. - Christmas Eve Service

Office Christmas Schedule

The office will be closed on December 25, 26, 29, and January 2.

End of the Year Donations

Please remember if you would like your donations to be on your 2017 giving statement, the last date to turn anything into the church office is noon on Thursday, December 28.

FCC Library News

If you are looking for a book to inspire you this Advent, please stop in the library. Some of them will be highlighted on the shelf. We have books about the birth of our Savior that come from the Bible. Others are written to tell the story of Jesus' birth. Still others are novels that help us to get into the spirit of the season. Also available are DVD's, *The Christmas Candle* by Max Lucado, *The Christmas Wish* (starring Debbie Reynolds, (now that goes back a few years). *Silent Night*: the story behind the well-known Christmas carol and *No Ordinary Shepherd*. Our doors are always open!

Women's Bible Study

We will be continuing our study of *Finding Bethlehem in the Midst of Bedlam* by James W. Moore. Due to a power loss on Thursday, we will be finishing the study with two sessions on December 17. All women of the church are welcome to join us at 1:30 p.m. in the Greeting Room. Any questions, please contact Patty Nordberg @429-7297 or pnordberg@comcast.net.

December 3, session 2,
Christ Came to Set us Free

December 10, session 3
Love Came Down in Bethlehem

December 17, session 4 & 5
(4) The Precious Memories
of Christmas
(5) Mind the Light

Annual Reports

Board chairs, please remember that your annual reports for 2017 are due in the office by December 20.





News from Christian Education

Important Notes for CE

- Wednesday night child care will be from 6:15-7:45 p.m.
- Wednesday night dinner 5:45-6:30 p.m.
- Lock in for Youth! December 1-2 from 7:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m.
- December 10 - Children's Christmas program during worship.
- Youth Fundraising Event! Youth will be accepting donations for Christmas Decorations at a table in the Gathering Room on December 10 and 17 to help pay for their Spring Hill Winter Retreat.
- CE Christmas Party! All CE Kiddos from 6:30-8:00 p.m. on December 13. Snacks, movie, crafts, and board games for all ages.
- All CE Family Fun Afternoon! Laser Tag at Slackers Family Fun Center on December 17 from 2:00-5:00 p.m.
- Spring Hill! Spring Hill has been moved. The new dates will be February 2-4. There are 12 youth spots open and 4 adult spots. Please contact Emily Luther if you plan on attending @ emilyluther12@gmail.com.

**** We will be off for winter break on the following days: ****

December 20, 27

January 3

**** We will start back up on January 10**

Merry Christmas!

December Teaching Themes

Kid Connection Jr.

Infant to kindergarten, meet on Sunday mornings, and Wednesday nights at 6:30 p.m. The story we get to share with preschoolers this time of year is so special that we need to tell it with excitement and wonder so that our children are excited about it too! We want to tell the true story of Christmas in a way that communicates to preschoolers that Jesus really is the best gift ever! He's a very special delivery! December's memory verse:

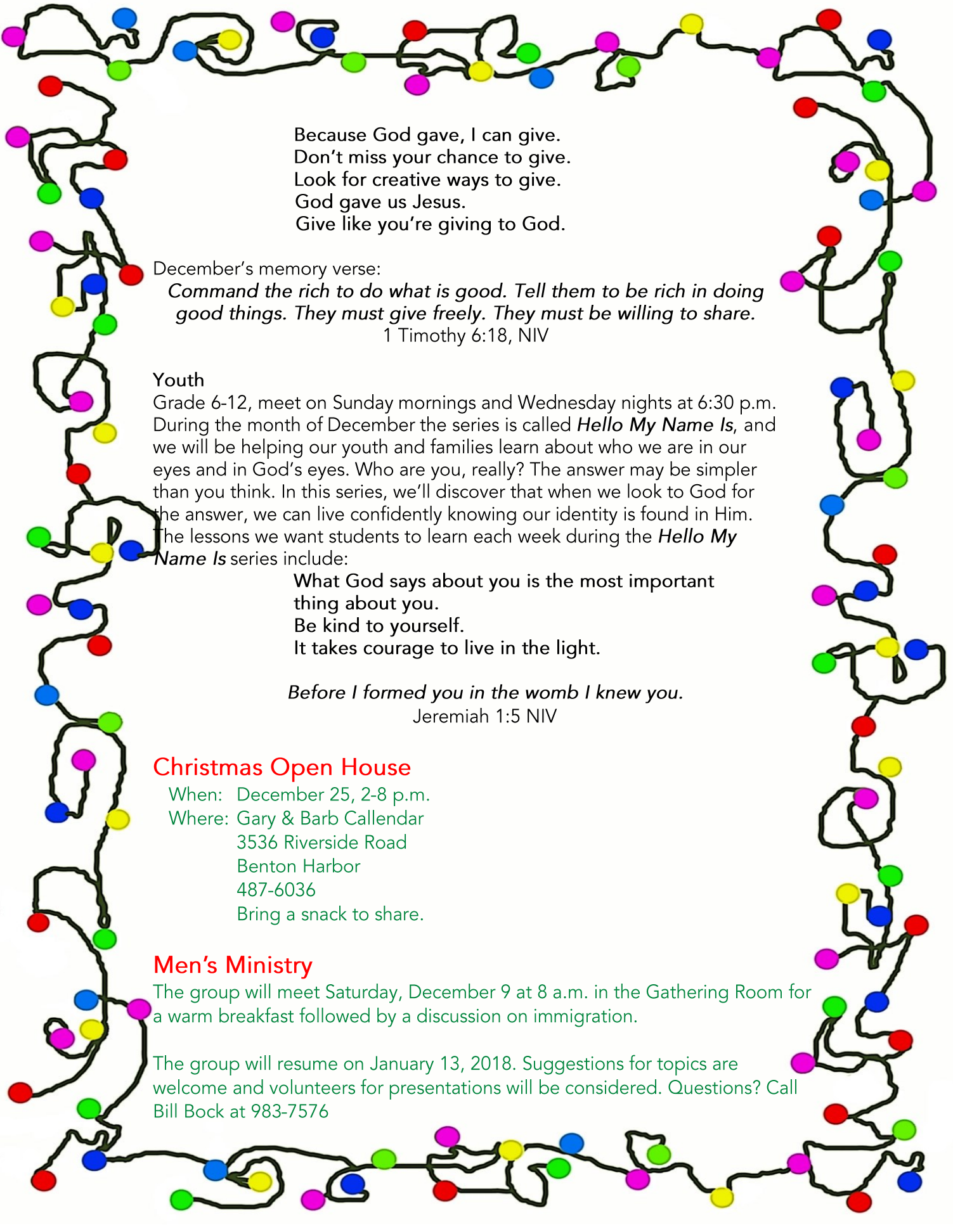
"God has given a Son to us."

Isaiah 9:6, NIV

Kid Connection

Grades K-5, meet on Sunday mornings and Wednesday nights at 6:30 p.m. Every good and perfect gift comes from God. In fact, generosity is at the very core of God's character—He even gave us His own son, Jesus! Jesus showed unwavering generosity as He traded His life for ours. And, because God gave us Jesus and Jesus gave His life, we can be generous towards others. Not only that, but when we are generous towards others, we prove that we love God by loving the people He loves. We pray that this Christmas, as kids celebrate God's amazing generosity, they'll see how they can be generous with their family, friends, and neighbors. The lessons we want the students to learn each week include:

(Continued on the next page.)



Because God gave, I can give.
Don't miss your chance to give.
Look for creative ways to give.
God gave us Jesus.
Give like you're giving to God.

December's memory verse:

Command the rich to do what is good. Tell them to be rich in doing good things. They must give freely. They must be willing to share.

1 Timothy 6:18, NIV

Youth

Grade 6-12, meet on Sunday mornings and Wednesday nights at 6:30 p.m. During the month of December the series is called *Hello My Name Is*, and we will be helping our youth and families learn about who we are in our eyes and in God's eyes. Who are you, really? The answer may be simpler than you think. In this series, we'll discover that when we look to God for the answer, we can live confidently knowing our identity is found in Him.

The lessons we want students to learn each week during the *Hello My Name Is* series include:

What God says about you is the most important thing about you.
Be kind to yourself.
It takes courage to live in the light.

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you.

Jeremiah 1:5 NIV

Christmas Open House

When: December 25, 2-8 p.m.

Where: Gary & Barb Callendar

3536 Riverside Road

Benton Harbor

487-6036

Bring a snack to share.

Men's Ministry

The group will meet Saturday, December 9 at 8 a.m. in the Gathering Room for a warm breakfast followed by a discussion on immigration.

The group will resume on January 13, 2018. Suggestions for topics are welcome and volunteers for presentations will be considered. Questions? Call Bill Bock at 983-7576

Called to Care Christmas Card List

Caretel Inns
3905 Lorraine
St. Joseph, MI 49085
Nancy Worthington

Pine Ridge
4368 Cleveland Avenue
Stevensville, MI 49127
Florence Hill

Royalton Manor
288 Peace Blvd.
St. Joseph, MI 49085
Ron Guertel

Whitcomb Senior Living Community
509 Ship Street
St. Joseph, MI 49085
Peg Baker
Nancy Conybeare
Marilyn Eller
Robert Ticknor
Jerry Warren

Willows
3440 Niles Road
St. Joseph, MI 49085
Marion Darr

Woodland Terrace
8850 Red Arrow Highway
Bridgman, MI 49106
Jeanne Atwood
Shirley Garey
Bev Hollowell
Elaine Mehlafl
Ruth Yeske



Living at Home

Joanne Averill
3458 Valley View Drive
St. Joseph, MI 49085

Dave & Anne Brockway
722 W. Shawnee Road
Baroda, MI 49101

Stella Casey
2460 Shoreham Highlands
St. Joseph, MI 49085

Ron & Carol Drews
551 Ansley Drive
St. Joseph, MI 49085

Wesley Hemerling
318 Kingsley Avenue
St. Joseph, MI 49085

Bess Miller
2874 Robin Hood Drive
Stevensville, MI 49127

Norma Smith
1956 Salisbury Place
St. Joseph, MI 49085





Women's Group News

Mary Martha Circle

They will meet at noon on Tuesday, December 12 for a Christmas potluck in the Gathering Room. Bring your cookies for shut-ins with you and we'll pack cookies after lunch.

Women's Fellowship Council

On Wednesday, December 13 at 10:30 p.m. they will meet in the Greeting Room for their monthly meeting. All women of the church are invited to join.

Church Women United

The next event will be in 2018. Thank you to FCC for hosting "Kindling New Fires for Peace" in November. Ann Palenske provided a wonderful lunch with the help of her crew. Joyce Vance created centerpieces and organized women from Monday Musical to provide an invocation, and our Fellowship Hall was a wonderful place to gather.

Church-Wide Christmas Dinner

On Wednesday, December 13 at 5:30 p.m. Chef Ann Palenske will be preparing a special beef tenderloin dinner (mac & cheese for kids). Following dinner we'll go to the Sanctuary for a special musical program by Brenton Offenback. For the **dinner you will need to purchase meal tickets ahead of time** \$15/family of 3 or more and \$5/single. Tickets are on sale before and after worship and during the week in the office. During the program the children and youth group will be having a Christmas party in the youth room. Questions? Call the church office at 983-5519.

December Birthdays

- 01 – Bob Kenagy
- 01 – Paula Thompson
- 03 – Gary Callendar
- 03 – Collin Morrow
- 03 – Emily Morrow
- 03 – Logan Morrow
- 05 – Missy Gable
- 06 – Joan Gleiss
- 06 – Christine Norland
- 08 – Andrea Giandiletti
- 09 – Pam Jennings
- 09 – Wayne Root
- 09 – Nancy Worthington
- 10 – Tom Hollowell
- 11 – Dennis Thompson
- 12 – Steve Nordberg
- 13 – Garron Sternaman
- 13 – Jeff Yircott
- 13 – Winnie Zimmerman
- 14 – Mary Caple
- 14 – Jeff Terry
- 15 – Cindi Collum
- 15 – Evert Martin
- 18 – Joanne Van Den Berg
- 20 – Cindy Ehrenberg
- 23 – Kaley Schlipp
- 24 – Bev Hollowell
- 25 – Jennifer Ort
- 25 – Phyllis Root
- 26 – MaryAnne Houser
- 27 – Lucy Ann DeVries
- 28 – Bob DeVries
- 28 – Evelyn Reczek
- 28 – Gordon Schreiber
- 29 – Florence Hill
- 31 – Will Christy

WHAT OUR CHURCH IS ABOUT

Our Vision

As believers in Jesus Christ, we will be a church of vibrant Christians.

Our Mission

We welcome people to faith in Jesus Christ to:

Discover God
Equip one another for life
Reach inward and outward to serve

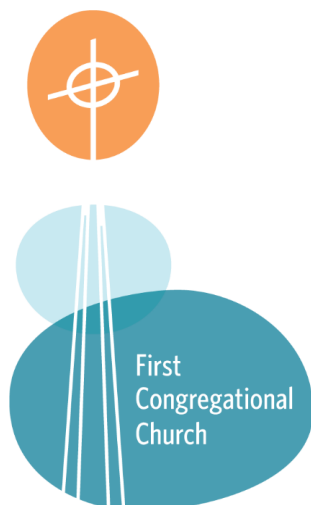
The Invitation to Discipleship from Jesus Christ

Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Matthew 11:28-30

We grow as disciples through these 6 practices:

Daily Prayer
Bible Reading
Weekly Worship
Generous Giving
Selfless Serving
Spiritual Friendships



INTERIM MINISTER

Dr. Charles Guerrero

SUNDAY SCHEDULE

September thru May

9:15 a.m. Adult Classes

9:30 a.m. Chancel Choir warmup

10:25 a.m. Worship

10:45 a.m. Christian Education classes

June, July, and August

9:55 a.m. Worship

Childcare available during worship.

WEDNESDAY FAMILY NIGHT

September thru April

5:00 p.m. Jubilate Ringers

5:45 p.m. Church Family Dinner

6:30 p.m. Kid Connection

Middle High Youth Group

6:30 p.m. Dr. Guerrero's Class

THURSDAY NIGHT

5:00 p.m. Alleluia Ringers

6:30 p.m. Chancel Choir

OFFICE HOURS

Open: Monday - Thursday

8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Phone: (269) 983-5519

Website: fccstjoseph.org

Email: office@fccstjoseph.org

Address: First Congregational Church

United Church of Christ

2001 Niles Avenue

St. Joseph, Michigan