



God is still speaking,  
**UNITED CHURCH  
OF CHRIST**



December 2014

Pastor's Page

**Important Dates**

- Dec 6- Picking & Weaving Greens
- Dec 7- 4pm Potluck & Worship
- Dec 10- Valley Gives Day
- Dec 21 Pageant Sunday
- Dec 24- 7pm Candlelight Service
- Dec 25- Christmas
- Dec 31- First Night Activities
- Advent..... p. 2
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It is time for my yearly article where I am a curmudgeon about Advent. Advent is that introverted holy season crowded on both sides of the calendar by those noisy extroverts-Thanksgiving and Christmas. Advent has no family recipes or feasts or national holidays built in. There is no making a list and checking it twice, no frenzied countdowns of shopping days left to please our family and friends. I have yet to see an Advent commercial. It is a holy season of listening; a time of preparation through waiting and watching; of mindful being, in anticipation of the new birth of the still-speaking God among us. How might we make room for this shy introverted holy season?

Our staff has been preparing early for worship during the Advent and Christmas seasons to create sacred space in the short winter days and holiday busyness. We hope to create space for both the silence pause we need to restore our souls, as well as the joyful expression during our most prominent holy festival. You will see many of our traditional services and rituals on the calendar- Gathering and Hanging of the Greens, our late afternoon service on the day of the Hot Chocolate Run, the Christmas Pageant and Christmas Eve "Lessons and Carols" by candlelight. We have added a few new twists to keep things fresh. Each Sunday as we light our Advent candles, we will learn about the history of a seasonal carol. Our pageant will be a participatory event lead by Tom McCabe of Paint Box Theatre. We are also planning brunch for the service after Christmas and will share together over food in Lyman Hall.

You can help make these worship services sacred and meaningful. First, set aside a little time each day for reflective silence. Listen to some quiet chant music and just set a timer for 15 minutes, light a candle and sit in silence. Have the church prayer list beside you and

send loving kindness toward someone on the list. The scripture passages for each Sunday are printed for you. Take a few moments to read and reflect upon them. These sacred pauses will help tune your heart through Advent listening and waiting. (Continued)



Second, let's work together to create sacred Sabbath space when we gather for worship. Come a little early to worship so we can all settle in together. Dana has prepared wonderful music to set the tone. Please refrain from church business that is not an emergency starting 15 minutes before worship. Get things done before Sunday. You can email or call Pastor Sarah and me ahead of time, but we are often inundated with information on Sundays, which makes it hard to be as present as we would like to be. Please consider volunteering in advance to help with Second Hour refreshments, the potluck and being a greeter, so other church leaders are not anxious for help. If we visit the sign up board in Lyman Hall and commit to one thing, many hands make light work.

Pastor Todd

## Weekly Themes for Advent and Christmas

**November 30** - "Keep Awake!"

Scripture: Mark 13:24-37

**December 7** "Hope in the Wilderness"

Hot Chocolate Run and Hanging of the Greens

Worship and Communion is at 4:00 PM (no morning service.)

Scripture: Mark 1:1-8, Isaiah 40

**December 14** "God Has More Light and Truth to Break Forth from the Holy Word"

Scripture: John 1:6-28

**December 21** "Be Not Afraid"

Pageant Sunday- See page 3!

Scripture: Luke 1:26-38

**December 24** "Lessons & Carols"

Candlelight Service at 7:30 PM

**December 28** "Where Did You See Christ in Christmas?"

Brunch beginning at 9:30 with worship in Lyman Hall.

**Saturday, December 6**

**10:00am Gathering the Greens**

**1:00 PM Weaving the Greens**

Each year, many at First Churches gather together for all or part of a day, beginning with the picking of laurel at the Judd's house, coupled with delicious refreshments, followed by weaving the laurel into ropes in the church basement.

A group will gather at Carol and Ned Judd's house, 10 am, to pick laurel in the woods behind their house, and then warm up in their kitchen with hot drinks and food. Please be sure to dress appropriately for weather, for instance, wearing boots and warm and dry coats. If you plan to be there, please call Carol and Ned at 584-9461. They will also give you directions to their house, which is at 372 Audubon Road in Leeds. Weaving begins at 1 pm in the basement of the church. We are looking for volunteers for all positions! They have to set up everything downstairs and get people working in teams.



## December 7<sup>th</sup>- 4pm Worship

*Hanging of the Greens, Light Supper and Carols* Our Sunday worship service will be at 4pm, so people can participate in the downtown Hot Chocolate Run. We will celebrate the Hanging of the Greens, and share communion in a multi-generational service. After worship, we will share a light meal at 5:00 PM and sing carols in the Parlor. Sign-up sheets will be available in Lyman Hall after service for the potluck, or you can sign online or email

[admin@firstchurches.org](mailto:admin@firstchurches.org).

## Children and Youth

Before I say a word about what has happened in our Children's Ministry or what is about to happen, I want to say, "thank you." I want to thank everyone who has contributed to our program by volunteering, teaching, and/or bringing their children. It is such a joy to see so many kids in church and I count it a privilege to have this opportunity to work with them. I am truly grateful.

I am also pleased to report that our Sunday School program is humming right along. We've had strong attendance throughout the fall and a wonderful group of teachers assisting me in 4 classrooms! And the curriculum is so much fun to work with that I do believe our teachers are enjoying the class as much as the kids. Stacey Martin, who has been teaching the 3-4<sup>th</sup> graders sent me this little note a few Sundays ago:

*I thank you for giving me the opportunity to teach our precious children!! It has opened my eyes to being more mindful of our Lord's ways through their eyes. I so look forward to Sundays!! I am so proud and filled with gratitude to be a part of our congregation!!!!*

From the very beginning we have wanted to create a program of which we could all be proud, a Sunday school that would feel like real ministry for all involved. I think we are succeeding.

I know I felt as proud and fulfilled as Stacey returning from the retreat with our confirmands. We all had a great time, but I was really proud of our kids for the way they jumped right in with open minds and hearts. They made friends instantly. They took the sessions seriously. And our young people had beautiful things to share with the group about what makes First Churches such a special place. If you haven't yet had a chance to see the beautiful collage they made in honor of our church, please let me know and I'll show it to you. Their work over the weekend blew me away. But the greatest joy by far was simply getting to know them better. We are blessed to have these young people as a part of our congregation.

Looking ahead, we will be having our annual Christmas Pageant on **Dec 21** during worship. We will be looking for volunteers of all ages to dress up and play the traditional roles (Caesar, Mary, Joseph, Donkey, Shepherds, Wise Men, etc.) The speaking roles are small and easy to remember – no more than 5 lines – and the new format we will be using with Tom McCabe of *Paintbox Theater* does not require any rehearsal. It promises to be a pageant to remember. If your child would like to participate please let me know. And if you don't manage to secure part ahead of time but want to participate, just come dressed as an animal –any animal- or a star, and we'll find a place for you in the pageant.

Finally, our joint youth group is looking ahead to a lock in this **January 16-17<sup>th</sup>**. We've got tons of fun planned for youth from 6<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> grade. It should be a great night. Thank you all and let's keep up the good work. - Pastor Sarah

### **BECAUSE WHO NEEDS SLEEP?**

#### **St. John's Episcopal- 8pm-8am! 16 JANUARY, RSVP by 1/5**

Come join youth grades 6-12 from First Churches, Edwards, and St. John's for a crazy fun-filled all-nighter. There will be games, movies, crafts, under-croft peach basket basketball, popcorn, pizza, bagels, and maybe even a little spirituality thrown in for good measure. We're going to have a great time. But it won't be the same without you, so come and have fun all night long.

## **SEASON'S GREETINGS, FIRST CHURCHES FAMILY!**

### **-From your Moderator**

Yes, it's December! Advent! We are once again blessed with this special time of year. We are further blessed to share it with new faces and voices. It's a good feeling. Advent is when I try to slow down and take in the wonder of our little part of the world. I think about how small we are, compared to where I grew up but, how much we do and how far we reach. I try to put aside the typical day to day fears and worries, and remind myself that in Advent we celebrate 4 Sundays; each with its own focus – Hope, Peace, Joy and Love. I try to look for examples of them in my day, my life and in the world at large. One of the first things that came to mind was the past year here at First Churches. How in the beginning of the year, we were hopeful. We engaged with each other in peaceful and affirming dialogue and felt the joy of success when we came to the decision on the continued stewardship of the Tiffany window. We felt hope and joy again with the opportunistic decision to call an Associate Pastor. Many of you have commented about our new and improved Children's Church and Sarah has brought multiple gifts and new faces to our youth program. And through it all - Love. None of this is possible without the love we have for each other and for First Churches.

Welcome Advent! Welcome magical season of wonder and light. Welcome all of God's people – with Hope, Peace, Joy and Love.

### **Special Meeting for December 14 – Organ Refurbishing**

As Moderator, I am calling for a special meeting of the congregation for Sunday, December 14th in Lyman Hall immediately following worship. The purpose of the meeting will be to discuss a plan for some major work on the organ in our sanctuary. Our Minister of Music, Dana Pasquale, will present some of the major needs to reconstruct the covers of the wind chests. The Board of Trustees has come up with a plan to finance the repairs to present to the full congregation for approval. We encourage everyone to stay for a 20-30 minutes meeting.

Respectfully submitted,  
Donna O'Meally, Moderator

## **Missions**

### **Cot Shelter Meals**

*Monday, December 1; Monday, January 5*

Folks interested in volunteering to serve and clean-up, provide food or drinks, and/or support through a money donation should contact Jenna Sellers at [jennaesellers@gmail.com](mailto:jennaesellers@gmail.com) or 413-427-4173

### **Christmas Gifts for 30 Children at Treehouse**

Tags for each child at Treehouse are on the tree in Lyman Hall. There are many teenagers, an older group than we have had in the past at Safe Passage and Grace House. Please choose one, buy a gift or a gift certificate if indicated, attach the tag to it, and bring it unwrapped to the *December 14th* service for delivery. Your thoughtfulness will bring grateful smiles.



## DEACONS' PAGE



- **COMMUNION**

The Board of Deacons will begin using a new method of receiving communion. Intinction, which is the action of one receiving a piece of bread and dipping it in juice, will begin on Dec. 7. Participants will come forward to the altar area, receive a piece of bread and then dip it into the cup. Pastor Todd will explain the procedure before communion begins. We will use the traditional method of individual cup and bread on World communion Sunday and another Sunday

which will be decided at a later date. Our Board of Deacons is a very small, but committed group and we have been looking for alternate methods of serving communion using fewer hands to setup and clean up. THANK YOU to Peggy Anderson, who donated a new pottery chalice and pitcher for the communion table.

- **GREETERS**

We are also looking for folks who would be willing to be an usher/greeter. We even have a new information sheet which will help you out. If you are interested in helping please see one of the Deacons, or sign up at the Board in Lyman Hall

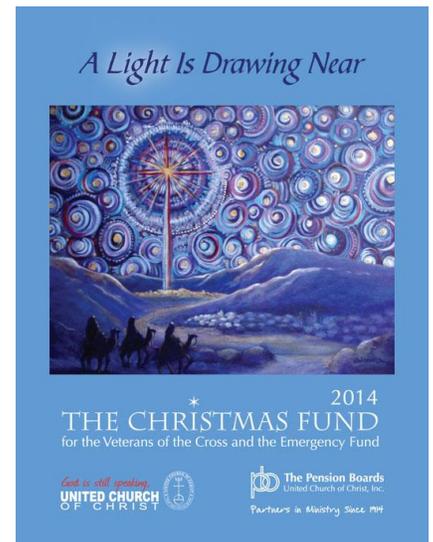
### **Offerings for Retired Church Leaders**

*“We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.” — 1 Thessalonians 1:3*

In this passage, Paul expresses his affection for the new converts in Thessalonica. He is encouraged by their faith and strong sense of community. He urges them to show appreciation for those who provide leadership for their faith journey. The recognition that we are touched and inspired by a minister or leader as we grow deeper in our faith and then become an inspiration to another is woven into the fabric of our Christian identity from our earliest traditions. The roots of RMMO go back to the mid-1930s, when American Baptist congregations received a Communion Fellowship Offering on the first Sunday of each month to support retired ministers, missionaries, and their widowed spouses within their churches. In 1977 American Baptist Churches USA launched the Retired Ministers and Missionaries Offering (RMMO) to continue this appreciation of God’s service. Your church’s offering makes it possible to provide emergency assistance in times of crisis and to send a “Thank You” check to those who are eligible. Through your generous giving in 2013 we provided \$1,141,295 in assistance and “Thank You” checks to over 3,350 people. Our goal for 2014 is \$1.2 million.

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.

On November 30 and throughout Advent, envelopes will be available in the Narthex and on the table as you enter the Sanctuary near the elevator. These are for gifts to The Christmas Fund (UCC) and The Retired Ministers & Missionaries Offering (ABC). Each December, our denominations send a money gift to our past ministers to thank them. Please donate during Advent to express your appreciation for their faithful service and guidance to us over many years.



## YOU'VE DONE IT AGAIN!!!

Another successful Church Fair! It is so amazing and exciting to watch the fair take shape on the Thursday and Friday before the day of the fair.

**Amazing** because even though the “fair plan” was set in motion months ago, so much has to come together in the space of those two days: moving furniture, setting up tables, bringing up the boxes from the fair room, preparing each individual display, gathering of food for the luncheon and, of course, the baking of The Pies. This is what you all do so well.

**Exciting** to watch each autonomous part of the fair set up to become what it will be on the day of the fair. Not to mention the anticipation of what will come of these preparations. Are the tables ready? Will this Church Fair do well this year, or not??

The fruit of all these labors is clearly evident in the \$7400 (and possibly a bit more) that this major event raised.

Thank you, friends and members of First Churches.

Barbara, Celeste, Ginny, Peg  
Fair Steering Committee

### Many Hands Made Light Work – and Lots of Fun at the Fair

Mary Ramos and Margie Riddle are so grateful for all the helpers who made the luncheon at the fair a success. We were assisted by at least twenty folks who made soup and pulled pork at home, provided ingredients, prepared the meal, served, and washed many dishes. Our very efficient and friendly wait staff assisted customers in carrying meals to tables and clearing dishes. Some new items on the menu, particularly beans and rice, provided a healthy meal and relaxing break for shoppers and workers at the fair. Those of us working in the kitchen had a grand time together. Many thanks to all who helped!



On December 10, 2014 many local non-profits will participate in a 24 hour fundraising blitz known as Valley Gives Day. This year First Churches is a participant. How it Works- When a donor comes to the Valley Gives website and makes a gift to his

or her favorite nonprofits between 12 AM and 11:59 PM on December 10th, that gift will be added up along with all the thousands of other gifts being made to nonprofits in western Massachusetts throughout the day. At the end of 24 hours, the nonprofits that have the most unique donors will be rewarded with special grants from a prize pool which consists of up to \$225,000 in awards. This could mean extra money for “new donors” or having large numbers of people donate, even if it is small amounts. Throughout the day, donors will be randomly chosen and their gift will be amplified with a “Golden Ticket,” adding anywhere from \$500 to \$1,000 to support their favorite nonprofit. More than over 100 different nonprofits will receive this bonus. The potential for prizes is outlined in our [Prizes and Rules page](#). Please click here for more information. Please consider sharing this with your contacts. Truly, every little bit helps. We came into this a bit late, and we are working hard to get a Valley Gives Page up on the website. Please contact the church office with any questions. Thank you all for your support!

## WELCOME NEW MEMBERS



### **Reverend Sarah Buteux-**

The Rev. Sarah Buteux, brings many and varied gifts along with 13+ years of ministry experience to her work at First Churches. Although Sarah was raised evangelical, ordained by the Swedenborgian Church in 2001, and received Privilege of Call from the U.C.C. in 2014, she identifies most fully as Emergent. She is a graduate of Smith College and Harvard Divinity School. Sarah has ministered in the valley for the last nine years to a growing and thriving U.C.C. congregation in Hadley Massachusetts. As

much as she loved her work in Hadley, Sarah left in order to follow the call God laid on her heart to explore alternative ways of creating a fully inclusive Christian community. That call led her to found Common Ground, a farm to table dinner church. In July of 2014 the congregation of First Churches invited Sarah to come on staff as their associate pastor and not only offered Common Ground a home, but formally adopted it as a new ministry of First Churches. Sarah is charismatic and compassionate, intelligent and kind. She is a theological and social progressive with an evangelical heart whose greatest joy is welcoming people into the kingdom of God and then empowering them to extend that same extravagant welcome to others. Sarah is well known and respected in the Pioneer Valley as an inspiring preacher and singer, a creative and adaptable leader, a voice people trust and a pastor they can count on. She is the mother of George (age 7) and Genevieve (age 4) which keeps her grounded and connected to the lives and challenges of other families. Sarah is happily married to Andrew Dole, a professor of Religion at Amherst College.

### **Dawn Davis-**

If you ask Dawn where she is from originally, the most common reply is, “Good question”. Her father was a serviceman, so they moved A LOT. Dawn attended 20+ schools before attending High School and Vocational School. Even still, she has been blessed with friends and classmates who invited her to church with them. Dawn went to a Christian College, studying Christian Education. She worked as a daycare and preschool teacher for 20 years. When she first moved to Northampton back in the ‘80s she worked at the Clarke School for the Deaf. Dawn met Elaine Wert about 21 years ago. When they get together they are worse than two kids in a candy store. “We are bad”, is how Dawn describes her and Elaine’s relationship. Dawn has lived at Michael’s House for 3 years with her 10 year old cat Gray-Purr. Elaine joined her 2 years ago. It is still never a dull moment. Now they are able to worship together. Despite being in a wheelchair for the past 8 years Dawn still feels very blessed in many, many ways - too many to write, but just ask her.



### **Oonagh Doherty-**

Oonagh Doherty lives in Northampton with her husband Bruce and her fifteen year old daughter Yinyin. Oonagh was a legal services attorney in Holyoke for nearly twenty years, specializing in the areas of family homelessness, family law and benefits. She deeply respects every world religious tradition which is practiced with kindness, honesty, and a love of justice. Her own family background is Scots Presbyterian, Catholic, Anglican, and Jewish. She feels she has found companionship at First Churches and wants to thank everybody for their welcome.

**Mike Martin-** Mike is happy to follow his wife Stacey Martin in joining First Churches. Stacey has been teaching Sunday School and their son, Noah, is in the Rainbow Room class.

**Desiree Jarosz-**

Desiree says she, “is a simple woman who does the best she can. Short and sweet, just like me!” It was a pleasure for Vanessa to work with Desiree in the kitchen at the Church Fair!



**Irene Mattison-**

Irene Mattison recently moved to Easthampton from Williamstown. Before retirement she had a family greenhouse and flower shop. She is transferring membership from First Baptist Church in Williamstown. Irene enjoys sitting in her pew with Marge Magner and Pricilla Pike.

**Ruth Parsons-**

Ruth Parsons is a long-time member of the Williamsburg UCC, (Baptized in 1934). She has been singing in the First Churches choir since moving to Northampton three years ago and is joining now as an Associate Member. Ruth enjoys knitting and croquet, and made many items for the church fair. She has four grown sons, and is retired after 40 year of working at the October Company in Easthampton.

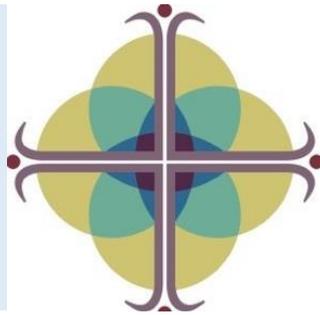


**Kevin Ranney-**

Kevin is a son of the city. He describes himself as a musician, artist and a “popcorn poet”. Once start reading his poetry, you won’t want to put it down. Injuries required him to retire his guitar, but Kevin enjoys playing his harmonica nightly on the front steps of First Churches, calling the night in with his harp. He has sung with the Kennedy Choir Boys and the Florence Congregational Choir despite his intense stage fright. Kevin loves all music, but has a passion for Country music. While a member of Honor Court Kevin helped start the Safety Net program for women. The program has since turned into Jessie’s House and now Grace House. Kevin worked as a logger for many years with local lumber companies, including owning his own tree business. Kevin strongly believes in “paying it forward”, and adds that he doesn’t have a lot to offer, but has tons to give. He is an active participant with Cathedral in the Night and offers love and prayers to those more and less fortunate than he. He is the father of five children; Amanda, Robert, Jenna, Kevin Jr., and Stephen. Through much adversity in his 53 years on the planet, Kevin is proud to be living a clean and sober life. He attributes all his strength to Jesus and his faith in humanity.



# December 2014



Sun.	Mon.	Tue.	Wed.	Thu.	Fri.	Sat.
	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
	12:00 Bible Study Tieyin's Birthday		1230 Finance 7:00 Deacons	5:30 Common Ground		Vanessa's Birthday
7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.
NO 10am Worship 4pm Potluck & Worship	12:00 Bible Study 7:00 Peace & Justice		6:30 Trustees 6:30 Missions	12:30 Dorcas Luncheon @ Brewmaster's Tavern		
14.	15.	16.	17.	18.	19.	20.
10:00 Worship & Sunday School 11:30 Special Meeting re: the Organ 5:00 Cathedral in the Night	12:00 Bible Study	Marcus' Birthday		5:30 Common Ground		2:00 FC Choir Caroling @ First Churches
21.	22.	23.	24.	25.	26.	27.
10:00 Worship & Sunday School Pageant Sunday 5:00 Cathedral in the Night	12:00 Bible Study		7:00 Christmas Eve Lessons & Carols			
29.	29.	30.	31.			
10:00 Brunch, Worship & Sunday School 5:00 Cathedral in the Night	12:00 Bible Study		First Night			