



Christmas Eve Worship Experiences

December 24 Our 7 p.m. worship service celebrates the birth of Christ with a celebration of lessons and carols, cello and harp, choir and the singing of 'Silent Night' by candle light.

Our 10 p.m. worship service celebrates the birth of Christ with lessons, carols, communion while accompanied by a Jazz Combo and Quartet.

Worship Themes for December 2017

- December 3** **Join the story.** There is a reason why the various Christmas stories are so popular: people join the story, place themselves in it. A contemplative reading of Luke 2:1-20 to which we are invited to place ourselves in the story.
- December 10** **Awe!** At a time of rock bottom misery, when it couldn't have seemed that life could be any worse, God acts. And as is usual with God, God's actions require human participation. In this case, Mary chooses to be a vehicle for God's work. How are we vehicles for God's work? Luke 1:46-55.
- December 17** **Praise and Thanksgiving!** The angels sang, so can we! Luke 2:8-14. Our Bell Choir, Choir, New Creation Ensemble and organ lead us in a celebration of the birth of Christ. This is a time to bring your friends and families!
- December 24** **Join Jesus' movement.** The point is not the baby; the point is where the baby takes us. Mark 1:9-18 serves to direct our attention to Jesus' call to us.
- December 31** **Life Hacks.** Social media and magazines are filled with what are called 'lifehacks'---ways of doing something well that aren't widely known. A life hack for college students might be '10 ways to fund your education without borrowing.' On the day before New Year's, what 'life hacks' does our faith give us? Proverbs 1:1-7; John 1:43-46.

New Creation Worship

In Advent we will launch a journey to hope as we prepare for the birth of Jesus. We will use the literary trope of the Magi setting forth from the mountains of Persia in search of the One whose star they had seen at its rising. Themes of this journey include:

- December 3** If we are seeking Christ and not just sitting here, what do we need to do? What are we packing for this journey? We will identify aspects of our lives that we want to leave behind and the hope that we have for the future.
- December 10** John the Baptist went into the desert and ate locusts and wild honey so that he could be ritually pure and totally open to God. We take this as a challenge: what do we need to do to be totally open to God?

- December 17** The story of Mary is the story of a young woman whose journey of faith led her to be open to God's purpose for her life. What's our purpose? How do we say 'Yes!' to God?
- December 24** Christmas Eve, no 5:30 p.m. New Creation service, but there will be the 7 p.m. Christmas Eve Candlelight service and the 10 p.m. Jazz service with candlelight carols and communion.
- December 31** According to Luke's Gospel, after Jesus' birth his parents brought him to the Temple in Jerusalem for presentation. It was an ordinary trip, but Anna and Simeon recognized the work of God in their presence.

Pastor's Reflection

As you will soon realize if you haven't already done so, Christmas will be a bit confusing this year. Christmas Day is Monday the 25th. Christmas Eve is the evening before, or to be perfectly technically correct, Christmas Eve begins at sunset on the 24th. That is because in the Jewish conception of time in place when Jesus was born, the new day began with sunset, not midnight. Usually that is an irrelevant piece of trivia known only to a few people, but this year it will get taught to us all on Sunday the 24th, which is the Fourth Sunday of Advent in the morning and Christmas Eve in the evening.

You would think that God could keep a more focused schedule! But if Christmas teaches us anything, it is that God is willing to intervene and mess up our presumptions. When we think that we can't solve a problem, God is willing to empower the 'we can'. When we think that certain people are unacceptable, God is willing to love unconditionally. When we think that certain patterns and structures of oppression and alienation and suffering can never be changed, God is willing to mess with that!

Messiness, the breaking of molds, grace that we never expected is all a part of Christmas! Enjoy, and see the page on spiritual opportunities for ideas on what to do that may be new for you!

– Rev. Michael H. Montgomery

UPDATES

We received an urgent appeal from CEPAD, our partner in Nicaragua. Nicaragua was ravaged by Hurricane Nate in October, killing over 20 people directly and more crucially, washing away the freshly planted crops that would be what people ate next spring. Under the direction of our Board for Outreach and Service, we sent \$1,000 to CEPAD to aid in the emergency relief. The money came from funds reserved for use in Nicaragua (non-current operating budget). CEPAD's thank you is posted on the Mission Bulletin Board.

Our CROP walkers have raised over \$1,500 and close to \$2,000 in support of disaster relief and economic development projects of Church World Service. While nobody would ever boast about such a thing (who, us?), we are pretty close to a tie for the third ranked CROP walk team in Indianapolis. Just sayin'.

Thank you to Wendy Baldwin and everyone who pitched in for the Thanksgiving Dinner on Thanksgiving Sunday after the traditional worship, and then again in New Creation Worship in the evening. It was a wonderful day!

From the Moderator

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted. - Ecclesiastes 3:1-2

Often times we hear so many congregations bemoan the reality that their attendance/membership has decreased so much in the last decade(s). On the flipside a recent post on the United Church of Christ Facebook page gave several excellent qualities that are found in smaller churches:

- * Smaller churches are particularly authentic.
- * Smaller churches stay connected to their community.
- * In a small church there's always time for prayers of the people.
- * In smaller churches you can build genuine, loving relationships.
- * In smaller churches lay leaders are active and willing to help out.
- * Smaller churches give the biggest welcome.
- * Smaller churches keep believing in their ministries.
- * Smaller churches are in touch with each other's spirits and the Holy Spirit.
- * Smaller churches are not afraid to break the rules.

How many of the above qualities are evident at FCC? While some of the qualities are corporate driven; most are effective if done by individuals supporting a common goal. As we end 2017 and enter into a new chapter in the history of First Congregational, let's get excited about our possibilities.

— Bob Cook, Moderator

Sunday Adult Classes

All classes meet in the Library (room 212) at 9:45 a.m. All are welcome!

The adult class on Sunday mornings (9:45) will continue to interpret Jesus' life for us.

Shalom: A Study of the Biblical Concept of Peace – Our Sunday Morning Adult Study:

On the first Sunday of Advent, December 4th, we will commence another Kerygma study: "Shalom." This will include the many concepts of peace in the Bible, both "Shalom," the Jewish term, and "eirene" which is the Greek word for peace used in the New Testament.

During the weeks of this study we will look at the many meanings for peace as we use it, discover what "shalom" meant in Israel, review what we often mean by "peace" as wholeness, health and harmony, and talk about war and peace. When Jesus pronounced "Blessed are the Peacemakers," what did he mean? Before the study is completed, we have an opportunity to share our hopes for peace, in Israel and for the earth, and identify our role as peacemakers. Come join us on Sunday mornings at 9:45 a.m. in the church library. (There will be no class on December 24th, Christmas Eve.)

Call to Service

"Here am I; send me!" Isaiah 6:8"

Mission of the Month, Christmas Fund

December's Mission of the Month is the Christmas Fund, one of the "5 for 5" offerings of the United Church of Christ that FCC has committed to support. The Christmas Fund, formerly known as the "Veterans of the Cross Offering," gives congregations and members an opportunity to reach out in loving compassion, providing assistance to those who have so faithfully served our churches and now find themselves facing unexpected financial needs. Most of these retired pastors served in times and places where their retirement benefits are much smaller than those of pastors retiring today. These funds enable the Pension Boards' Ministerial Assistance program to provide, on behalf of the whole Church, pension supplements, health premium supplements, emergency grants for health or unexpected travel expenses, and Christmas "Thank You" gift checks to individuals and families in need.

In 2016 UCC congregations contributed \$1,562,260 to this special offering. This year the theme is "Shepherding the Light," and the goal is \$1.7 million to help support these ministries of light and love. Please give generously this month to carry on this work in the coming year.

Pantry Item of the Month

During December we are collecting the following items: noodles, muffin mix, cereals, and laundry detergent.

Foundation Update

The Foundation continues to be an important backstop to First Congregational's finances. The foresight of those who founded it and those who made it financially secure should be appreciated by us all. Please consider the Foundation in your year-end giving and will, so that the church will continue to enjoy its benefits well into the future.

Yellowwood Forest Update

On Nov. 9th, the Indiana Division of Forestry auctioned off a timber contract to log 300 acres of the backcountry area, which was set aside in 1981 to be a wild area, free from logging. There were four bids. The winning bid was from Hamilton logging in Martinsville for \$108,000. This works out to about \$70 per tree as 1733 trees are to be cut. The highest bid was for \$150,000 from a furniture-maker in Tell City who was trying to save the forest. He would not have logged. However, his bid was not considered because he did not have a timber license.

By this action Gov. Holcomb ignored the thousands, of calls, texts, emails, and letters sent to him by Hoosiers pleading that this area, which represents .1% (1/10 of 1%) of our state forests, be preserved. Several area newspapers had editorials opposing the sale, including the Indy STAR, as well as the tourist bureaus of Brown and Monroe Counties.

Meanwhile, 2000 scientists worldwide released a letter to humanity warning of the dire consequences of environmental destruction, including forest fragmentation. The fragmentation of any habitat greatly increases the likelihood of species decline and extinction in the remaining little pieces of habitat. A very sad thing is happening to our Earth, and in Indiana those with power are accelerating the decline of our forests and forest creatures.

We are asked to contact Gov. Holcomb again and ask him to accept the bid of \$150,000. He can save the forest if he chooses. Ask 10 friends to do the same or write a letter to the editor of your local paper requesting that the forest be saved. Yard signs are available from the Indiana Forest Alliance. Here is a link to a new editorial in a Bloomington paper: <http://www.idsnews.com/article/2017/11/editorial-yellowwood>

Thanks to everyone who has done something to try to save this forest by signing a petition, making a call, talking to friends, or writing a letter. Thank you for your concern. We have to keep trying to get people to do the right thing.

Janet Selby

Financial Update

When We Give, We Reach Out With Helping Hands

When we give to the ministries of First Congregational UCC, we are serving those inside and outside our church community. As 1st Peter 4:10 says: "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, with whatever gift each of you has received."

Trends through October:

- **Contributions** are running below our 2017 budget. Pledges are doing well – right on our budget and significantly ahead of 2016. However, other unrestricted contributions are falling far short of both our budget and last year.
- **Expenses** are being managed well. All controllable expenses are essentially on or below budget.
- Through 9 months we have spent about \$17,000 more than we've taken in.

- Roughly half this “gap” will be closed when we receive our annual draw of income from the church’s Endowment fund.
- However, **we foresee a budget deficit in the range of \$5,000 - \$8,000 unless overall contributions pick up in the last 2 months.**

To help us achieve our goal of a balanced budget for the year, any additional gifts you can make in 2017 over and above your pledge would be greatly appreciated.

1. Current Year Actual vs Budget Summary

1/1/2017 through 10/31/2017 Using 2017A

Category	1/1/2017 Actual	- Budget	10/31/2017 Difference
INCOME	178,871	195,942	-17,070
M. Unrestricted Contributions	178,871	195,942	-17,070
M.01 Pledged Offerings	165,712	165,193	519
M.02 UnPledged Offerings	7,378	16,250	-8,872
M.03 Surplus from Prior Year	4,479	4,479	0
M.04 Endowment Income 2016	0	8,717	-8,717
M.05 Transfer from Minister's Fund	1,303	1,303	0
EXPENSES	195,847	207,589	11,742
A. Pastoral Leadership	82,315	81,998	-318
B. Worship & Faith	32,672	32,833	161
C. Care & Connections	376	458	83
D. Witness & Welcome	644	750	106
E. Outreach & Service	18,730	23,433	4,703
F. Trustees	94	425	331
G. Administration & Operations	17,288	23,021	5,732
H. House & Grounds	39,131	39,017	-115
I. Miscellaneous	4,596	5,654	1,057
Net Difference:	-16,976	-11,647	-5,329

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Jim Lootens, Treasurer lootens.jb@gmail.com

Important Information Concerning the Gift of Stock

In the past giving the church your gift of stock was a bit confusing. However, the good news is that we have finalized an easy way to complete this transfer! In all situations where you would like to donate stock, you just need to tell your broker to use the following information to deposit those shares into the First Congregational Brokerage account:

Fidelity's Depository Trust Company

DTC No: 0226

Account No: Z50424340

In all situations, Fidelity (our broker) is instructed to sell the stock when transfer is complete and then to move the money to our cash portion of the account. We then move the money to the account that respects the donor's wishes (such as Pledge). If you still have questions, please contact Jim Lootens.

What's Happening at First Congregational

January Colony Submission Deadline

The submission deadline for all announcements, articles, report and event is Friday, December 15, 9 p.m.

Christmas Experiences

There will be a caroling in December at which carolers will go visit and sing to members who are sick or homebound. The date is not yet fixed, but plan on groups of five or six people gamely singing traditional carols with more gusto than class.

Mark Jacobs to be Ordained

Mark Jacobs, a graduate of Christian Theological Seminary who attended here and served as a student intern with us in 2014-15, will be ordained on December 10, 2017 at St. Peters UCC in Champaign, Illinois. Rev. Worth Hartman and Rev. Michael Montgomery will give addresses at that service. A portable communion set has been purchased by the church for Mark and a card is available to sign at church.

Search Committee

The Search Committee is diligently working towards finding a permanent, highly qualified and very fitting candidate for our open Pastor position. We have had several 2nd interviews and at least 2 neutral pulpits. We are very hopeful for the next couple of months but we are very limited to what we can tell you as it could create confidentiality issues with candidates.

Please be patient with us and please do not speculate among yourselves or anyone outside of the church. An inadvertent comment could jeopardize our work and therefore jeopardize the completion of our search and call process.

Thank you,
RandyWalker
Chair, FCC Search Committee

Christmas Outreach

What would Advent be at First Congregational Church without the mitten tree?? Caps, gloves, mittens, scarves and socks are welcome and will be divided between Horizon House (larger sizes) and School 79. Why IPS 79? The social worker with whom we formerly worked at School 42 is now there and tells us there is much need.

We will also have the "giving tree" in the parlor for the After Care families at Family Promise, i.e. those families now in housing but who remain under their watchful eye. This tree invites gift cards of \$25 each. We suggest Target or a gas card.

Thank you, Outreach and Service

Transport Team

The Transport Team is a part of First Congregational UCC seeking to help our own who might need a little extra assistance. Ideally, we get people from home to church and back on Sundays or other special occasions. We also have a few volunteers willing to provide meals to the homebound. It's possible, if we can match needs to resources, that we can do more for those of us with greater needs.

Unfortunately, the controlling issue of the last paragraph is the phrase, "match needs to resources." A handful of folks have already volunteered to be on the team, but only two so far have expressed willingness to drive.

We'd like to have a much better handle on both needs and resources.

- If you'd like to help with driving or preparing meals, or anything else you think could be of use, please let me know
- If you need a little extra help with getting around town, or if you've been feeling poorly and need some help till you're back on your feet, please let me know

You can reach me at 317-735-2895 (home), 770-548-5217 (cell), or hoot eagle@me.com. I'd greatly prefer you to email me, since I need stuff written down to get things organized. If you give me a call, I'll try very hard to remember long enough to write down what you tell me. Thank you all very much!

Green Team - Power Consumption

The Green Team has been monitoring our power consumption since 2006 (with a gap from 2008-2010). Overall, the news is good: We have cut our bills by 20%. Over a few months this spring and summer, we changed all of our lights to LEDs. It's a bit early to draw hard conclusions, but in three of the last four months, our power consumption has dropped between one-third and one-fourth. (The fourth month, July, actually showed a slight increase over July 2016; possibly we had warmer weather this year, inducing a rise in our air conditioning—as noted, it's early to draw firm conclusions.)

Overall, our energy reduction has been encouraging, but we need to do more. Ray Wilson, head of the Indianapolis Green Congregations and a local expert on converting homes and houses of worship to solar power, lays out a rough rule of thumb: A church should seek to reduce half its energy budget through stringent and ruthless energy savings, and the other half through conversion to solar. Using that, we could set 2006 as our baseline year, in which the average monthly energy consumption was 3779.2 kilowatt-hours (kWh). We would then see that our goal for energy conservation is to bring it down to an annual average of 1889.6 kWh. This may seem too ambitious, but our average consumption for April-June of this year was 1866.7! We can do this!

Announcements from the Congregation

Small Groups

Young Adults Group

On December 3, the Young Adults will meet at 7 p.m. at the church.

Men's Lunch

This lunch and discussion gathering for men of First Congregational meets at various restaurants in the greater Indianapolis area. They meet every other Thursday at 1 p.m. This month they will meet on December 14 and 28. Please contact Randy Walker at (317) 796-2081 or rk10walker@gmail.com for information.

Women's Lunch Bunch

All women of the church are invited to get together once a month for lunch, friendship, and fellowship. In December we will meet on Thursday, the 21st at 11:45 a.m. For any questions or information please contact Sue Chapman, 317-259-1806 or carolsuech@sbcglobal.net.

Circle IV

Circle IV will meet on December 19, at 1:30 at Nancy Dickinson's home. All women of the church are invited to attend. For any questions or for more information, please contact Linda Lupton.

Plymouth Rockers

The Rockers will meet November 28 at the church. We'll have a pitch-in lunch, followed by watching a new movie, "An Inconvenient Sequel." Due to busy holiday schedules, we won't meet in December, but will meet next on the fourth Tuesday in January.

Spiritual Practices for Advent

Gratitude Journaling

To keep a gratitude journal is to take a few minutes each day to write about something that you experience for which you are grateful. This allows us to reset our patterns, to be alert to what is happening in our lives. It is quite similar to a practice of mindfulness; of stopping the daily churn for just a moment, noticing and appreciating.

A gratitude journal gives us something to do that is concrete, can be measured and reflected upon later. Thus it allows us to learn new routines. Both Advent and Lent can be special occasions to commit to improving spiritual life. If you can begin something new and do it every day, after 40 days it may have become part of your daily life.

Gratitude journaling can be a wonderful new habit to bring into your life. Take five or ten minutes every day. Think about something good and beautiful, whether something you did or happened, or even something that's a regular part of your day and tends to fade into the back-ground. Bring it out and look at it closely. Appreciate it. Then write it down. You're done! Rich Gibson

Do Good!

Remember the Scout motto: 'Do a good deed daily!'? Preparing for Christmas is a good time to get back in shape by consciously working to do a little bit of good each day. For this as a spiritual exercise, it must be something that is more than your daily chores. So starting to recycle would count, but continuing your recycling does not. Randy Walker

Fasting

We've all heard about fasting to lose weight or out of penance for Lent. Advent fasting is different: this is about disciplining your eating in order to engage your whole body (and not just your mind or feelings). There are many ways and reasons to fast. One such way is what's called "The Daniel Fast." Based on Daniel 1 and 10, this 'partial fast' in which you only eat food grown from seed (fruits, vegetables, whole grains) and drink only water for 21 days. During this time, you seek to deepen your relationship with God by leaning on our Creator, calling on God's strength, and hearing God's voice.

Advent is a time in which we ponder the coming incarnation— when we are given the opportunity to reflect on the need for a savior and to feel a longing for Jesus and the light he brings. While engaging this discipline during Advent, I will be working to discern God's voice in response to three questions: why do I need this? How can I welcome Jesus into my heart? And how I can be a mirror to reflect the light of Jesus in our world in this upcoming new year?

I invite you to join me this Advent in fasting and in seeking answers to those questions in your own life. They are big questions that we cannot answer on our own. But I have found that fasting produces an inner-peace that seems to magnify the voice of God. To learn more about the Daniel fast, go to daniel-fast.com or talk to me, Lianna! My email is lcampos33@gmail.com.

Listen to Music

There is a great range of Christmas music, pick music that helps you reflect about Christ's birth and incarnation. The following music is available on free internet music services (e.g., Spotify):

Gabrieli, *Christmas Mass in Rome*

Michael Praetorius: *Christmas Vespers, Advent and Christmas Music*

J. S. Bach, *Christmas Oratorio*

Sting, *If on a Winter's Night*. The English rock star sings a number of traditional English folk carols.

Paul Winter Consort, *Solstice Live*. A jazz celebration of the winter solstice. While the entire album is delightful, the last few songs focus upon Christmas.

Books

The New Century Hymnal. Read the Advent and Christmas sections (hymns 101-153) as poetry.

-*Chicken soup for the soul : it's Christmas! : 101 joyful stories about the love, fun, and wonder of the holidays* (2013). *Chicken soup for the soul : a book of Christmas miracles : 101 stories of holiday hope and happiness* (2017)

-*Christmas around the World* (2004) a pictorial Life book.

Bronwyn Angela White, *something new to say: words of spirit, faith and celebration for Advent and Christmas* A New Zealander, where Christmas comes in the middle of summer, White has discovered that the meaning of Christmas doesn't require pine trees, snow or sleighs! A progressive Christian perspective.