

The Good News

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Issue 50

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like us on Facebook at First Congregational United Church of Christ-Great Falls, MT

December 31, 2023 Combined Worship Service 10:00 A.M.



Happy New Year's Eve Day!
We will worship alongside our friends from
Christ United Methodist Church

Minister: Rev. Lynne Spencer-Smith

Scripture: Luke 2:22-40

Lay Reader: Carol Shipley

Ushers: Jenn & Zurie Goss

Accompanist: Linda Hallock

Nursery: CJ Mollohan

Fellowship: Peggy Floen, Bev Harris

Tellers: Liz Lee, Carol Shipley

The service will be live-streamed and a recording of the livestream service will be available on YouTube later in the day.



**Beginning January 7, 2024,
First Congregational United Church of Christ
worships at 11:00 A.M.**



Christian Education News

Once again this Sunday, December 31, there is **no Sunday School**. Children will attend worship with their families. Quiet activities will be ready for kids in the Pray Ground area and in Christ Kid bags (on the rack in the back of the sanctuary). Nursery care will be provided for children up to age five. This will be a combined service led by Pastor Lynne. **Please note special worship time of 10:00 A.M.**

Acolyte training coming soon!! Watch for more details!!

“The Power of Inclusivity” First Annual Open and Affirming Conference ***Proudly Presented by Pilgrim UCC and the Montana-Northern Wyoming Conference***

Rev. Dr. Katrina Roseboro-Marsh (she/her) will talk on
“An Update on the National Open and Affirming Movement”

Free lunch (donations accepted)

Panel of LGBTQ+ Public Leadership

Hosted at Pilgrim UCC

2118 South 3rd Ave., Bozeman, MT 59715

Saturday, January 13, 2024

11:00 A.M. – 3:00 P.M.

Register by January 5th online at <https://www.mnwcucc.org/ona>

Anyone interested in attending as a group from Great Falls, contact Rev. Lynne

What’s the Buzz?

The Church Council continues to discuss, pray and discern the future of our relationship with Christ United Methodist Church. Over the next month, our newsletter will contain information that has been developed through conversations with leadership from both congregations. Beginning next week, we will be presenting four “Talking Points.” These will hopefully address some of the major questions that are starting to arise. It is hoped that they will serve to provide consistent information to each of you. On Sunday, February 11, following worship we will host a congregational “hearing” regarding the request from Christ UMC to merge with us. Note that this will take place two weeks after our Congregational Meeting on January 28. The Council felt the merger topic is significant enough to warrant some designated time for conversation. Please plan to participate in both of these important events in the life of our congregation.

Some information to keep in mind as we engage in this conversation:

- Both leadership teams (FCUCC and Christ UMC) have a commitment to engaging in a good process to explore the possibilities
- You will have multiple opportunities to be involved and receive information
- No major decisions will be made without congregational input and agreement.

As you engage the talking points and include the request for merger in your own prayers, be thinking about the following four things (based on the common business analysis tool: SWOT):

Strengths: How would our congregations be strengthened through a merger of some kind? What existing strengths might come to light?

Weaknesses: How might our congregations be weakened through a merger of some kind? What weaknesses might be revealed in a merger?

Opportunities: What opportunities could emerge through the merger of the congregations?

Threats: What might feel threatening about a potential merger?

As we spend more time in conversation and discernment, the responses to the SWOT questions are likely to change. Keep some notes and bring your thoughts to the hearing on February 11.

Waters of Transition



Ahhhh, the in-between times. In-between:

- Christmas and New Year
- 2023 and 2024 and getting ready for what that all means such as filing taxes, church fiscal and leadership transitions, new resolutions to replace the old ones, etc.
- For those who follow the church liturgical calendar: Christmas and Lent
- For those who are really particular about the church liturgical calendar: Christmas and Epiphany

I've been making my way through "The Holy in the Night: Finding Freedom in a Season of Waiting" by Shannon W. Dycus. It's supposed to be an Advent devotional but it will probably take me until Valentine's Day to actually finish it. I didn't get started on it until well into December and I've not been very good at picking it up every day. But it's too good to put off until next Advent. I'll just keep picking it up every few days and read a section and then sit with it for a while. It's actually been kind of nice to not feel the pressure of forcing myself into reading something I may not be ready to receive in its fullest. Seasons of waiting are ongoing.

In the material intended for day 14 (which I just read!) the author writes of water as a place of transition and how the biblical narrative uses water as a "symbol of God's presence and power across time and place." Shannon goes on to bring the waters of baptism into the discussion and how John the baptizer's call to prepare for the one who was to come is a process of "meaningful preparation and intentional transition." I was drawn to the idea of "intentional transition." So much of life is dealing with transitions over which we may not feel we have a lot of control: Changing health; changing economy and politics; employment terminations and changes due to someone else's decisions (sometimes someone in another time zone who doesn't even know us by name); climate change; grief; and even church.

Sticking with the water analogy, when we realize we are in the deep end of these transitions how do we respond? Do we:

- Sink or swim?
- Tread water?
- Go with the flow?
- Navigate?
- Some combination of all of the above?

When we first found ourselves in the deep end of the pool when the pandemic hit, it certainly felt that we were threatened with sinking if we did not swim. We knew we couldn't just tread water and put things on hold because we had no idea how long this thing would last. Same with going with the flow: which flow do we go with? We learned to navigate the waters. I've never felt the covenantal waters of baptism carrying a church more. There was community when we couldn't be together. There was encouragement when we were faced with yet another variant or change in protocol. There was prayer for one another. There was the courage of faith to try some new things. We all know that we are not through with Covid or any of the other debilitating bugs that are out there. We are definitely not through with the church or one another. Nor is God through with us.

We are standing on the edge of some new waters and possible time of transition once again as we further engage in conversation with Christ United Methodist Church and our future regardless of where that conversation goes. How will we lean into the waters of our baptism to provide "meaningful preparation and intentional transition?" If God is not through with us, how will we go about listening to the still speaking God as we dip our toes into the river of "what's next?"

Don't forget we worship at 10:00 A.M. this week and 11:00 A.M. the next. Hope to see you there!
Rev. Lynne

Coming Up

Monday, January 1- Happy New Year! Office Closed

Tuesday, January 2

12:45 P.M. Reading, West Elementary

Wednesday, January 3

10:00 A.M. Bridge, SS Wing

1:30 P.M. Pinochle, FH

6:00 P.M. Youth Group, SS Wing

6:00 P.M. Handbells, Choir Room

7:15 P.M. Chancel Choir, Sanctuary

Thursday, January 4

4:00 P.M. Joint Facilities, FH

Friday, January 5- Annual Reports Due!
