



**First Christian
United Church of Christ
Newsletter
February 2012**



GOD IS LOVE

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PASTOR'S COLUMN

My oldest daughter, Courtney, was home for Christmas break from school. On December 22nd she made a joyous proclamation, but it wasn't because it was only three more days till Christmas or that she got great grades for the semester. What Courtney said was, "The days are getting longer!" Being just a few short hours away from the shortest day of the year, she was technically correct although perhaps a bit overly optimistic!

But I knew what she meant. Both of us are sensitive to the light – or the lack thereof. The perfect day for both of us is in mid-summer when the sun comes up early and goes down late. And in these dog days of January when the sun does neither, all we can do is sit and wait for the days to lengthen and the light to return.

Of course, all of this has a spiritual side as well. The Gospel of John talks about Jesus coming as a light to shine in the darkness of our world. And the liturgical season we are presently in is Epiphany. Epiphany means revealing or uncovering. In the New Testament it is best exemplified by those wise men, those astrologers from the east who followed a star until at last, they discovered that Light of the World!

Yet in February, we turn the page on our liturgical calendar and enter the season of Lent. But Lent has something to do with that sense of light as well. In fact, Courtney's comment might better have been saved for February 22, otherwise known as Ash Wednesday, the start of the season of Lent this year.

The word "lent" actually comes from an old English word that means "lengthen." It's a time when we actually begin to notice the days getting longer, but Lent is also a time for a spiritual journey where we travel with Jesus down a road that leads to the darkness of betrayal, arrest and crucifixion, but ends in the bright glory of Resurrection!

Let us embark on this journey together, not only as we notice the increasing light in our days, but the growing brightness in our souls. But, of course, such a spiritual "brightness" does not come accidentally. If you and I just wait long enough, the days will get longer on their own, we don't have to do anything about it. To grow spiritually however, takes discipline which, in fact, has the same root as the word "disciple."

As a part of this spiritual discipline, I'm sure you've heard people over the years talk about "giving up something for Lent," making a sacrifice of something that you normally enjoy or treasure. Some people I know have given up sweets or have fasted one day a week and given the money they've saved to an organization like Loaves and Fishes that helps fight hunger in our community.

And, if you are inclined in that direction, I strongly encourage you. But rather than giving something up for Lent, as a part of your discipline for spiritual growth, I'd like to encourage you to add something for Lent. Rather than doing away with something, try adding something. Set aside extra time to read Scripture or devotional material. Set aside time each day to pray for those not usually remembered in your prayers. How might it change us if we actually took Jesus seriously and prayed for our enemies and those who wish us ill as individuals or as a nation? Or perhaps what you add to your life might be volunteer service – helping deliver Meals on Wheels, or working with the Literacy Council helping people learn to read, or maybe visiting lonely people in the hospital or a nursing home.

The days are getting longer. Each day the sun adds more and more light to our lives, but if during the season of Lent, through practiced discipline, we can add something new to our days, we might just find a brighter light shining in our hearts and should as well. And if this "something new" that we add is not a sacrifice done with a sense of obligation, but a joy that enriches our lives, it might just become habit-forming, stretching not only till Easter, but long beyond.

Come, let us journey together!

Mark

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MANAGEMENT OF BLACK LAKE TRANSFERRED

Over the years, the Southern Conference has been blessed with several retreat centers: Blowing Rock Conference Center, John's River Valley Camp and the Franklinton Center. There has also been another retreat center, Black Lake, in Asheboro. However, over the years Black Lake has not been regularly used and has fallen into disrepair and has become a regular drain on the Conference's budget. However, a new "win-win" solution has arisen in the past several months.

Catawba College, our UCC related school in Salisbury, has agreed to enter into a partnership with the Southern Conference around Black Lake. This year, the College will take over management of that conference center. They will assume responsibility for its maintenance and expenses and use the center as a "laboratory" space for students who can put into practice some of the things they've been learning in the classroom. With its beautiful natural setting, Black Lake will be ideal for student work on environmental and preservation issues. But the college also expects to continue operating the center as a location for conferences and meetings as well.

Not only will Catawba's stewardship on Black Lake remove a financial burden from the Conference at a time when money is short, but it will keep management of this property within the UCC family as well.

NEW CONFERENCE MINUTES ON BOARD

As has been mentioned in previous newsletters, the Southern Conference has a new "Designated Conference Minister," the Rev. Edward Davis. Edward began his work the week of January 8th and has already jumped into the thick of things. He comes to us from Chicago, where he served as the Associate Conference Minister for the Metropolitan Chicago Association of the Illinois Conference.

Edward will serve among us for three to four years as he helps us discern our future path for ministry as a conference. A lack of money and a cut back in staff will make his work challenging, but after one week, he is already bringing spirit, energy and vision to the Conference, helping to build a strong foundation for future growth and ministry.

Please keep Rev. Davis, and our entire Conference, in your prayers in the days and weeks ahead.

MARK ON VACATION

From February 13th – 20th, Mark will be away for a week of vacation. He and his family are going to Northern California to celebrate his 60th birthday. In his absence Rev. Scott Comrie will fill our pulpit on February 19th. And, as always, if a pastoral emergency should arise while Mark is away, please be in touch with Eleanor Lovgren, chair of our Board of Deacons, at 226-2671.

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ANNUAL MEETING – FEBRUARY 5TH

Our Annual Congregational Meeting has been scheduled for Sunday, February 5th. The meeting will take place in the sanctuary immediately following worship. The agenda includes receiving reports of all the church's boards and committees, the instillation of new officers, a memorial service for church members who have passed away during 2011 and any other business appropriate to come before the congregation.

One item that will be considered is a resolution that will be coming to the church from the Official Board. The Investment Committee raised a question about language in the document establishing the Carrie McLean Taylor Scholarship Fund. Since there are no longer members of the family in a position to clarify this matter, the Official Board is making a recommendation to the congregation for its action. In essence, the recommendation calls for all interest and dividends from the Fund's investments to be used for scholarships each year, but for capital gains to be reinvested in the fund. Previously, capital gains had also been used to support yearly scholarships.

Annual reports are currently available. Please, limit one per family. Additional copies of the church's directory will be available. There is no limit on the number of directories families may take!

MISSION ENDOWMENT GIFTS DOWN

As reported in last month's newsletter, because of the down turn in the economy, the church's Mission Endowment investments suffered this year. Since the January issue of the newsletter, the exact amount of the funding has been set by the Official Board. For 2012, there will be \$4,500.00 available for Mission Endowment Distributions. This will be one of the reports that the congregation will vote on at its upcoming Annual meeting on February 5th.

This amount does not represent the total mission giving by the church in 2012. In addition to Mission Investment distributions, mission funds are included in our regular, yearly budget. There are also several special offerings that occur regularly throughout the year.

Both the Investment Committee and the Official Board wishes that this number of \$4,500.00 was higher, but next year it will certainly be a healthier amount. Not only is there the hope that the economy will continue to improve, but the Mission Endowment Fund itself has more than doubled because of the generous gift of the Kathleen Stevens estate. These funds did not arrive until the end of 2011 and therefore, did not have the opportunity to produce earnings for the Fund this past year. But hopefully, that will change over the course of the coming months.

ALTAR FLOWERS

If you would like to place flowers in the altar in memory or in honor of someone during 2012, please contact Jeanne Williams or Faye Strickland.

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JOHN GRAVES CLASS EXHIBIT COMING IN FEBRUARY

Beginning in February, the John Graves Class will be displaying pictures and/or information in memory of deceased men of the church - our fathers, husbands, sons, friends, etc. The collection will be exhibited in the Graves Classroom on the second floor in the Education Building. Anyone who would like to loan materials for display should bring them to the church office or contact a member of the class before February 5th.

DATES TO REMEMBER...

February 1 st	6:30 pm	Board of Trustees
February 5 th	11:30 am	Annual Congregational Meeting
February 6 th	10:30am	Morning Circle
February 6 th	1:00 pm	Margaret Lightbourne Circle at the home of Jeanne Williams, bring a can of food for Loaves and Fishes.
February 7 th	6:30 pm	Centennial Circle at the Cutting Board
February 12		Loaves and Fishes Collection
February 7 th	8:30 am	Official Board
February 12 th	11:45 am	Board of Christian Education in the Library
February 16 th		Deadline for March newsletter and calendar items
February 21 st	2:00 pm	Board of Finance
February 21 st	6:00 pm	Men's Fellowship
February 22 nd		Ash Wednesday
February 28		Lenten Lunches begin at various churches in Burlington
February 28 th	7:00 pm	Board of Deacons
March 11 th		Daylight Savings Time begins
March 15 th		One Great Hour of Sharing
April 1 st		Palm/Passion Sunday
April 5 th		Maundy Thursday
April 8 th		Easter

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FINANCIAL INFORMATION

Year to Date through 12-31-2011

	Actual	Budget
Income:	\$163,806.62	\$179,842.00
<u>Expense</u>	<u>\$166,591.22</u>	<u>\$179,842.00</u>
Net Balance:	(\$ 2,784.60)	\$0
Balance in Checking 12-31-11		\$14,933.95

As you can see, everyone's continued support is still greatly needed to carry on the ministry of the church. Please send in your giving today.

Respectfully Submitted,
Ken Little and Connie Collins
Treasurer and Accounting Manager

Church Office Hours
Monday & Friday-closed
Tuesday-Thursday
9:00 am—3:30pm
Closed for lunch
12:00 pm-12:30pm
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Office Email:
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Ministry Support Team
Rev. Mark H. Pickett:

Interim Pastor

Joan Paschal

Office Support

Connie Collins:

Financial Manager

Richard Apperson:

Organist, Choir