



First Christian United Church of Christ Newsletter January 2012



VICTORIAN CHRISTMAS – A TIME OF FUN AND FELLOWSHIP AT FIRST CHRISTIAN

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VICTORIAN CHRISTMAS – GREAT SUCCESS

On Friday evening, December 9th, not only was First Christian dressed up for the holidays, its members were too! In that date, downtown Burlington was preparing for its Dickens' Christmas extravaganza, and this year First Christian was asked to be a part of it. Since our sanctuary was built in the Victorian era, it seemed only fitting to join in the festivities and host an Open House.

But members of First Christian went all out for this event with many members dressed in Victorian era costumes. In addition to our traditional Advent and Christmas decorations, the Sellars Sunday School room was transformed into the "Ladies' Parlor", its original purpose! Historical displays of the church's past were available in the library and an authentic Victorian Christmas tree was set up on the stage in the Bray Fellowship Hall.

And then, of course, there was food. Could First Christian last an event without food? In addition to hot cider and tea, there were plates overflowing with home-made cookies.

All evening long, from 5:00 pm till 6:30 pm, there was a steady flow of visitors. Many said they had never been in First Christian before!

Beyond all that, however, church members had a wonderful time of fun and fellowship together. When all our visitors had left, First Christians gathered for some more cider and sandwiches, then many in full costume mode, headed downtown to enjoy the evening.

There were too many people to thank for all for their hard work and effort with this event. In many ways, it was a whole church effort. But special thanks must go to Merle Sharpe. It was Merle's idea to participate in this event initially, and she inspired others when, at first many were doubtful. The truth of the matter is never having done this before, we didn't know what response there would be. Yet, because of her hard work and the hard work of countless others Merle encouraged us along. And, in the end, it felt as though every bit of effort was worth it!

PASTOR'S COLUMN

Someone once gave me an article entitled, "A Town in Holland Has Shelved Santa Until December." Apparently Lodewijk Osse wearied of the commercialization of Christmas which was creeping further and further into the fall; one store there even began pushing Christmas in September! Osse asked the city for permission to put up signs featuring a Christmas Tree with a red slash through it. His idea caught on and the city of Assen passed an ordinance outlawing any sign of Christmas until after December 6th.

This is where the story gets interesting. December 6th is the date when tradition has it that the fourth century bishop, St. Nicholas, Sinterklaas, would visit the Netherlands bringing chocolates, marzipan, poems and small gifts from Spain. In Holland, December 6th is not a religious holiday associated with the birth of Christ. It is merely a secular celebration.

Of course, as you may have guessed, when Dutch settlers came to these shores, Sinterklaas became Santa Claus. As the article put it, "They disrobed the bishop, moved him to the North Pole, fattened him up and gave him a team of reindeer."

The good people of Assen are trying to put Santa Claus in his place. They are trying to hold off the celebration of Christmas, at least until after December 6th, so that the tradition of Sinterklaas might not be lost or forgotten. Whether or not their efforts are successful, I appreciate their spirit and wish them well.

This story has relevance because, I suspect, our celebration of Christmas is even more acutely influenced by commercial interests. Stores begin their Christmas displays now after

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Halloween. We all find ourselves in a mad rush to buy the perfect gift. Then, when Christmas day is finally done and all the gifts are opened and the Christmas feast consumed, we are ready to move on to something else. By then we have been “celebrating” Christmas for nearly two months. We’re more than ready to look ahead to the New Year!

But like the Dutch of Assen, it is important to remember our traditions. Traditionally, the church doesn’t begin its true celebration of Christmas till Christmas Eve. We spend all of those weeks of Advent, each week lighting a candle on our Advent wreath to help us get ready, to help us prepare. It’s a time of waiting; a time for patience.

Why do I write all this now in January instead of saving it for next December? Because once Christmas has come we should not dispense with it too quickly. The twelve days of Christmas is not just a cute song you occasionally hear on the radio. For the church, our Christmas celebration doesn’t end on December 25th. That is only the beginning and it stretches on until January 6th, Epiphany, the day we celebrate the visit of the wise men.

In a society stuck in hyper-drive, we tend to crowd the manger with not only ox and ass, Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus, and shepherds who had been keeping watch over their flocks by night, but the magi, too! Yet if you look closely at Matthew’s Gospel, the magi did not visit Jesus in a barn, but in a house. And tradition has it that it took 12 days to get there!

Perhaps it is time to learn a lesson from the Dutch. Perhaps it is time to reclaim our traditions. As we begin this new year, let us do so with a celebration of Christmas that stretches beyond Christmas Day. Mark January 6th, the day of Epiphany, with a small gift to those your love – a flower, some candy, even a card, and take time to say a prayer for them as well. If we can learn to stretch the Christmas spirit of openness and generosity for twelve full days, who knows, perhaps it might become habit forming and extend through the remainder of the year!

Therefore, as you read this in January, my wish for you is this – Merry Christmas! And may your New Year be filled with all blessing and joy.

Mark

JOINT CIRCLE’S OF WOMEN’S FELLOWSHIP PLANS MEETING

A meeting of the Joint Circle’s of Women’s Fellowship will be held Monday, January 2, 2012 at 10:15 am in the Bray Fellowship Hall. Everyone is to bring a sandwich and a can of food for Loaves and Fishes. Drinks and desserts will be provided.

MISSION GRANTS

It is time to submit nominations of community agencies for Mission Grants from the earnings of the Mission Trust Endowment. Please turn in all detailed nominations to the Church Office by January 3, 2012.

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MEN'S FELLOWSHIP BRUNSWICK STEW SALE

The men' fellowship sale of brunswick stew in Nov. was very successful. Thanks for your help, we sold 120 qts. that will help give future scholarships to many seniors. **If you wrote a check**, please be patient for its cashing. Steve Balog is our Treasurer and we all know about his family tragedy in November and lateness is possible. Thanks again!

First Christian Men's Fellowship.

CHARLES A., CANNON CHARITABLE TRUSTS

Jeanne Williams has received word from The Charles A., Cannon Charitable Trusts that the First Christian UCC has been awarded a grant of \$9,000 which is to be used to replace the Air Conditioning System on the third floor of the Education Building. What a Christmas gift!

PROCEEDS FOR MISSIONS MAY BE LOWER IN 2012

Everyone who has savings knows that the past few years have not been friendly to personal savings accounts. That has been true for church's investments as well, particularly First Christian's Mission Endowment Fund.

Each year a portion of the Fund's investment and dividends are set aside for the church's mission outreach. For the past few years \$10,000.00 has been divided between several local ministries. However, this year, as a result of economic conditions, that amount may need to be lowered.

The Official Board has set up a sub-committee to recommend how these monies could be spent. If you would like to make any recommendations, your input is welcomed, just speak to Nell Allred, chair of the Official Board.

Even if revenues are limited this year, they will certainly rebound next year. As a result of a generous gift from the estate of Kathleen Stevens, the Mission Endowment Fund will more than double, but it will take time to realize the additional financial resources that have just recently been received by the church.

The congregation will vote on the distribution of these mission funds at our Annual Meeting on February 5th. And watch next month's newsletter for an update on the exact amount that will be going to mission support for 2012 from our church's endowment.

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CHRISTMAS EVE/CHRISTMAS DAY PLANS SET

This year we will be doing something new for Christmas. Since Christmas day falls on a Sunday, our Christmas Eve Candlelight Service will be a full service. And on Sunday, Christmas Day, we invite you to enjoy the holiday with friends and family. Our communion service Christmas Eve will stand in for both Sunday School and worship the next day. Sunday School has also been cancelled for Sunday, January 1st as well.

However, the Christmas Eve Service promises to be a special one. The service will begin at 5:00 pm, in time to come to worship, then get home for a good Christmas Eve dinner. Hope to see you all there!

ALAMANCE ELDERCARE SUPERBOWL

The Alamance Eldercare Superbowl will be held on January 28th. Organize your team now and make plans to participate in this fun event!

The Board of Christian Education will meet on Sunday, January 8th at 11: 45 am in the Library.

There will not be a 5th Sunday Gathering on January 29th. Regular classes will be held.

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FINANCIAL INFORMATION

Year to Date through 10-31-2011

	Actual	Budget
Income:	\$146,617.85	\$149,701.68
<u>Expense</u>	<u>\$140,769.10</u>	<u>\$148,052.09</u>
Net Balance:	\$ 5,848.75	\$1,649.59

Balance in Checking 10-31-11 \$21,351.09

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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Ministry Support Team

Rev. Mark H. Pickett:

Interim Pastor

Joan Paschal

Office Support

Connie Collins:

Financial Manager

Richard Apperson:

Organist, Choir