

DECEMBER 2020

Volume 35 - Issue 12

# The Congregational COLUMNS



## THE COLUMNS

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF  
FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH  
IN WAUWATOSA

## T'was the Night Before Advent

By J. Todd Jenkins

*'Twas the beginning of Advent and all through the Church  
Our hope was all dying we'd given up on the search.  
It wasn't so much that Christ wasn't invited,  
But after 2,000 plus years we were no longer excited.*

*Oh, we knew what was coming no doubt about that.  
And that was the trouble it was all "old hat."  
November brought the first of an unending series of pains  
With carefully orchestrated advertising campaigns.*

*There were gadgets and dolls and all sorts of toys.  
Enough to seduce even the most devout girls and boys.  
Unfortunately, it seemed, no one was completely exempt  
From this seasonal virus that did all of us tempt.*

*The priests and prophets and certainly the kings  
Were all so consumed with the desire for "things!"  
It was rare, if at all, that you'd hear of the reason  
For the origin of this whole holy-day season.*

*A baby, it seems, once had been born  
In the mid-east somewhere on that first holy-day morn.  
But what does that mean for folks like us,  
Who've lost ourselves in the hoopla and fuss?*

*Can we re-learn the art of wondering and waiting,  
Of hoping and praying, and anticipating?  
Can we let go of all the things and the stuff?  
Can we open our hands and our hearts long enough?*

*Can we open our eyes and open our ears?  
Can we find him again after all of these years?  
Will this year be different from all the rest?  
Will we be able to offer him all of our best?*

*So many questions, unanswered thus far,  
As wise men seeking the home of the star.  
Where do we begin how do we start  
To make for the child a place in our heart?*

*Perhaps we begin by letting go  
Of our limits on hope, and of the stuff that we know.  
Let go of the shopping, of the chaos and fuss,  
Let go of the searching, let Christmas find us.*

Continued on page 7

# Worship & Discovery

## Casual Worship



Saturdays at 4<sup>pm</sup>

Until further notice, Casual Worship will be meeting in the Social Hall. It may be watched as a live-stream on Facebook Live.

## Adult Learning Hour

The session meets Sundays at 8:45<sup>am</sup> in Room LL2, which is next to the Choir Room.

## Women's Ministry

Tuesdays, 7:30<sup>am</sup>

Sessions meet in the Friendship Lounge. We are studying the Book of Revelation. Please bring a mask and a Bible and join us! Contact Pat Reddy at [deltaforms1td@sbcglobal.net](mailto:deltaforms1td@sbcglobal.net) about participating via email.

## Men's Ministry

Currently on hiatus.

## Men's Bible Study

1st & 3rd Wednesdays, 6:30<sup>am</sup>, in Room LL2

Led by Bruce Milne, the group is currently studying the Book of Romans. Men's Bible Study will meet in Room LL2 on the Lower Level on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of the month. There is no meeting on the 5<sup>th</sup> Wednesday of the month when it occurs.

Please contact Bruce for information about meeting during social distancing at [wbmilne@aol.com](mailto:wbmilne@aol.com)

### Operating Statement Summary Year to Date as of October 2020

	Current Year	Prior Year
Pledge base received	77.0%	78.0%
Pledge Income	\$410,345	\$380,618
Total Income	\$529,606	\$523,588
Total Expense	\$469,328	\$477,208
Net Income	\$60,278	\$46,380

Detailed financials available at office.

## Christmas Decor Donations

*Dedicate to Your loved ones this Holiday Season*

Your Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

In honor of: \_\_\_\_\_  
(and/or)

In memory of: \_\_\_\_\_

Amount: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

## Annual Meeting

Sunday, January 31, 2021

Immediately following a shortened  
10<sup>am</sup> Worship

The Annual Meeting will propose  
the 2021 budget for approval  
and vote on the slate of  
Board and Committee nominees.

## Year End On-line Giving

We want to remind members that First Church offers secure on-line giving. This may be set up by going to the church's web site ([firstchurchtosa.org](http://firstchurchtosa.org)) and clicking on the giving icon to log in or set up your account.

If you plan on making an on-line contribution for 2020 and want it included on your year-end statement, please make your contribution by Tuesday, December 28<sup>th</sup>. There is typically a 3-day lag between the time you enter your contribution and when the funds are received by the church.

If you have any questions, please contact the church office.

## CONGREGATIONAL COLUMNS

A monthly newsletter produced by the First Congregational Church of Wauwatosa to keep members and the community up to date on activities at the church.

[www.FirstChurchTosa.org](http://www.FirstChurchTosa.org)

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Senior Minister

**Rev. Dr. Barry W. Szymanski,**  
Minister of Pastoral Care

**Tonia Wallner**  
Director of Christian Education

**Rhonda Kwiecien**  
Keyboard Musician

**Roxanne Trump-Miles**  
Dir. of Jr. & Cherub Choirs

**Jim Harris**  
Administrator

**Jillian Bruss**  
Financial Secretary

**Marianne King**  
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**Mark Lund** - Custodian

**Kale Lund** - Sunday Custodian

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# Off the Top of My Head

The late Senator John McCain spent five and a half years as prisoner of war in Vietnam in the 1960s. During that time, he was frequently tortured or held in solitary confinement. He reported that his lowest point came on Christmas Eve 1969. McCain was giving up hope of ever getting out of Vietnam alive. To compound his homesickness, the captors played the song "I'll Be Home for Christmas" over the PA system.

Just then, McCain heard tapping on his cell wall. This was the code the POWs used to communicate with one another. On the other side of the wall was Ernie Bruce, a Marine who had been imprisoned for four years already. In spite of his dire situation, Bruce was tapping out, "We'll all be home for Christmas. God



By Rev. William S. Trump, *Senior Minister* bless America." These simple words of comfort restored John McCain's hope. The message of Christmas is always one of hope. This world needs saving, but God began that process of salvation two thousand years ago with the birth of a babe in Bethlehem. There's something about Christmas that elevates us. Christmas is about hope of a better world to come.

Christmas is going to be different this year. As I write this before Thanksgiving, we don't know what the weeks ahead will be like. It is my prayer we find a way to regain and nurture that Christmas hope of a better world tomorrow.

We will get through this together,  
- Bill

## Women's Ministry Starting Something New

Women's Ministry continues to meet on Tuesday mornings at 7:30, and is about to begin something new and would like to invite others to join us. Over the years many have expressed a desire to be part of this group but because of the time of meeting, work schedule, or family responsibilities they have not been able to join us. So our group would like to come to you, if you can't come in person as we begin a new study of the book of Revelation (how that works is explained in detail at the end of this message).

On November 10<sup>th</sup> our group started the often ignored and seldom mentioned Book of Revelation. This last book of the Bible may be more important and relevant for our current world situation than it has ever been before. God gave us this book, along with all of scripture not to confuse us, not to scare us or to entertain us, but to show us He is completely sovereign and in control of all things. This is a book of comfort for His people and is given for hope and faith for our future, and most importantly it is to reveal the Glory of Christ.

We are told that someday we will stand in His presence and see His face. Are you ready for that? If not, why? What are you waiting for? Would you consider joining us? Here's how that can be done....

1. You are always welcome to join us in person, 7:30<sup>am</sup> on Tuesday mornings, in the Friendship Lounge. We are practicing social distancing, ask all to wear a mask and to bring a Bible with you.
2. You can participate at home, when it works into your schedule.
  - a. Each week after our Tuesday session we will send an email to you on the content we covered, any key discussion points and a take away question.
  - b. You read through the passages and email at your convenience, and respond if you desire with any comments or revelations of your own.
  - c. Always feel free to join us in person.

How do you get started? Contact Pat Reddy via email [patreddy@deltaformsltd.com](mailto:patreddy@deltaformsltd.com) or call the church and Pat will reach out to you.

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## End of Year Info for Pledgers

The Board of Stewardship, Benevolence and Church Relations is very gratified by the many Pledge Cards that have been turned in for 2021. We encourage those who haven't yet done so, to bring or mail your card to the church Office as soon as possible. The Budget & Finance Committee, which has begun planning for the 2021 budget, can work more efficiently if they have a clear idea of what amount of income we can anticipate.

As 2020 winds down, we want to make sure that we apply your pledge checks to the correct year. If you plan to donate toward your 2021 pledge in December, please write 2021 in the memo line. You are welcome to combine your pledge contribution with a donation to the Christmas Special Offering, but please indicate on your check the amount you would like to go toward each.

Any contributions to your 2020 pledge must be delivered to the church Office NO LATER THAN NOON ON THURSDAY, DECEMBER 31 to be included on your year-end statement. You will receive your year-end statement in early January. Please call the Office at (414)258-7375 if you have any questions.

Many churches have faced a financial crisis in the past year. We thank all of you who have made sure that First Church has been able to meet its operating budget and actually increase our financial support of important organizations helping those in need such as Sojourner Truth House of Peace, Milwaukee Rescue Mission and the Tosa Food Pantry.

- The Board of Stewardship & Benevolence:  
Mike Huitink (chair), Jim Forester, Ann Harris,  
Carol Hudson, J.C. Moore, Barbara Wells.

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## Finding Fellowship in the Time of COVID

During the pandemic, each of us had an opportunity to reflect on what is important to a congregation. Certainly, we miss coming together for worship in the Nave, hearing the choir, and greeting one another with a big hug. We also miss the many fellowship opportunities we have come to love, especially now as we begin the season of Advent and Christmas.

The Board of Fellowship hasn't given up on providing our congregation with opportunities for fellowship during this uniquely challenging period. Beginning in August, Fellowship developed a monthly Game Night that was available on Zoom. It took a lot of creativity and work to prepare the Online Scavenger Hunt, Disney Trivia Game, Fall Trivia Game, Halloween Party and Costume Contest. The fact that participation was meager is regretful. Those who did participate had a great time and won gift cards to local businesses.

Despite our frustration with the light response, we're not giving up. Fellowship is considering a bonfire on Ridge Court with hot chocolate and cider and we're brainstorming ways to help you all share in the spirit of Christmas – even if remotely.

Please check the "What's Happening" eblast on Thursday for information about upcoming Fellowship activities.

We miss you all and count the moments until we can all be together again!

- Jane Boyd and Barb Dunham (co-chairs), Carmen Berte,  
Sarah Blake, Randy Goelzer, Keith Harmon  
and Mary Beth Stevenson



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## Thoughts from the Care Board

The Care Board's primary function is to reach out to those in need through the various ministries of the church: prayer, communication, meals, prayer shawls, and more. Sometimes, knowing of a "need" is our biggest challenge, as a board and/or as a member of the church.

This year has added to that challenge as we have been unable to come together, and many of us have found ourselves isolated. As the end of 2020 nears, the Care Board is grateful for the faithfulness of this church and would like to thank the many members who serve behind the scenes, whose hands and feet deliver "The Church" to others. We pray that as you anticipate the coming year, you would have a renewed hopefulness in the gift of Grace we have received and continue to bring praise and glory to our Lord Jesus Christ in the work you do in His Name.

- Pat Reddy

# JUST FOR YOUTH

December 2020



## Sunday School

Sunday, December 6, 13, and 20  
for ages 3 – 5<sup>th</sup> grade

Children begin in church with their families during 10<sup>am</sup> worship. They will be dismissed to Sunday School during the service. We will be following a One Room Schoolhouse model to get the year started in the Friendship Lounge or in the Social Hall. Class will be taught by one adult, along with teen helpers.



## Faith Finders

Monday, December 14 for grades 1-5

This group meets on the second Monday of the month for fellowship, games, and program time. They begin with an optional dinner at 5pm, followed by programming from 5:30 - 6:30<sup>pm</sup>. Friends are welcome! Come and enjoy tacos. Donations for the meal are appreciated.

## Covenant Class

Sunday, December 6 and 20 for 9<sup>th</sup> graders  
Group meets at 8:30<sup>am</sup> in the Friendship Lounge.

## Pilgrim Fellowship (PF)

We started the year on a positive note and are looking forward to Sunday afternoon/evening meetings moving forward. E-mails will be sent with the exact schedule of dates and times, and we will meet two times per month. All Junior and Senior High students are welcome, and please feel free to bring your friends.

## Christian Education is Looking Toward Christmas

Tentative is the catchword of the moment. With the COVID-19 situation changing day to day, we can make plans, but we can't make promises. Looking toward Christmas, the Board of Education is adopting a creative approach that allows us the flexibility to offer you many of our beloved Christmas traditions – whether in person or online.

Members of the PF Leadership Team are working on a script for the Christmas play that will accommodate any restrictions associated with COVID, especially the number of kids that can be on stage at one time. Depending on where things stand with the pandemic, we may need to livestream this Christmas Eve service. Either way, our PF kids are having fun with the project and hope to present a play that is as meaningful as it is entertaining.

The traditional Christmas Pageant will be cancelled unless we can safely attend church in-person. Regardless, we will contact parents of our little kiddos to obtain their permission before including them in the pageant.

The Christmas Workshop offers special challenges, but the Board of Christian Education is discussing several potential strategies for organizing the workshop in a way that would protect the children, their families, and the volunteers.

Christian Education will be providing definitive details, including dates and times, in the “What’s Happening” eblast.

- Your Board of Christian Education: Patty Bartholf and Ardith Moore (co-chairs), Peggy Griffith, Tori Raddemann, Jon Stern and Julie Wills.

## REGISTER NOW

# for the Youth Mission Trip 2021 June 19-25

## FCC members and non-members welcome!

The 2021 Youth Mission Team is now accepting applications.  
Due to successful past fundraising, the application fee is only \$100. This fee covers food, lodging, and travel expenses.  
Applications are located in the Atrium. Scholarships are available!

Need more info?

Contact Tonia Wallner: [tonia@firstchurchtosa.org](mailto:tonia@firstchurchtosa.org)

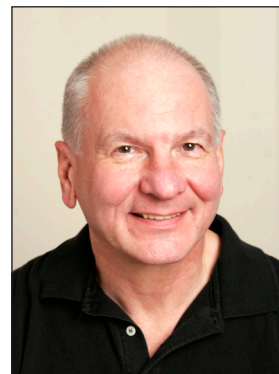


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# A Note From Pastor Barry

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By Rev. Dr. Barry W. Szymanski, *Minister of Pastoral Care*



The Christmas season is a marvelous, amazing time, especially as we reflect on the story of Jesus' birth. Every birth is a miracle. Holding a newborn baby brings astonishing happiness. Picture the awesome joy of Mary and Joseph when Jesus was born. While we celebrate Christmas with familiar carols and Handel's Messiah, Jesus was most likely born in the silent stillness of a place made comfortable by the warmth of animals. So, whether at the time of the Nativity, or this year, the Christmas season offers us an opportunity to pause and consider that God is continuously wanting to make Himself known. While the birth of Christ was a one-time divine event in history, the voice of God is always with us in the seemingly mundane: in the wonder of the color of leaves, water dancing in sunlight, the curiosity of children and adults.

Christmas carols, Handel's Messiah, holiday cards, and even catalogue shopping may bring us the feeling that the season has arrived. Yet our spirituality may deepen as we realize the hope God offers us through the coming of his Son into the world. For thousands of years people have yearned for His Light to brighten their hearts – now He is here! This is the joy and wonder of Christmas.

When Jesus was born Mary and Joseph's hearts were filled with hope. They had a precious child. They were in a safe place - at least temporarily, for soon enough Herod would learn of a possible threat to his power. But for a while, in their cozy micro-world, in the snug stable, with the heat of the animals, the world was good. It was full of anticipation, full of love. The radical, fateful, heaven-and-earth shaking events would occur later. Now was the time for reverence.

We often look for God in the big things of life, the big problems, the big matters. Yet in God's world we should also be alert to His voice in the small and common things of life. In the trivial we will appreciate God's presence continuously surrounding us. Even as we say a brief "Thank you" for our meal prayer we acknowledge His being. Dietrich Bonhoeffer lived appreciating God-with-us when he observed that "God is the beyond in the midst of life, not simply where human powers give out at the borders, but in the center of human achievement and joyous living."

Christmas opens our eyes to the astonishing wonder that God keeps coming to us: in creation, a long time ago through Abraham and Isaiah, and now, believe it or not, through the people around us. While we might persist to search for God in critical events; we should also pursue Him in the little, the everyday. Edmund A. Steimle made a wonderful observation when he said that God appears both to be less than he really is, and also larger than we can imagine, "... so we can recognize him in his love, in the big, overbearing problems of a world in radical change, or in the simple delights of daily life. He's literally all over the place hoping that we'll have the eyes to see and the ears to listen to his coming."

May this Christmas season be blessed for you!

- Pastor Barry

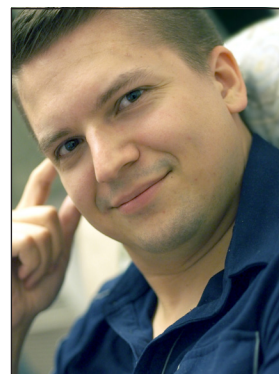
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## Welcome, Brett!

We are pleased to announce that Brett Hanisko (baritone), has joined the First Church Choir as section leader. Brett is a seasoned performer who frequently appears in Milwaukee-area choral ensembles, including Milwaukee Chamber Choir. He is a section leader with Bel Canto Chorus, as well as Chant Claire, for which he serves as vice president. Brett has performed solos within these ensembles as well as stage roles with UWM Opera, Milwaukee Opera Theater, and Waukesha Civic Theatre. At UW-Milwaukee, he studied in Kurt Ollmann's studio and graduated with a BA in Vocal Performance.

When not performing, Brett enjoys the many wonderful cultural and recreational offerings in the downtown area. He says "we have an excellent symphony, a lovely art museum with all sorts of fun events, and a beautiful lakefront (and riverfront!) full of parks and trails." Brett particularly enjoys hiking in state parks, including Governor Dodge, several of the Kettle Moraine trails and, of course, Devil's Lake. He says he dabbles in photography when he visits some of these picturesque locations.

During COVID-19, Brett has kept himself busy by biking, including 40-mile rides through the summer. He also started playing the recorder in March to give himself something to do when all his regular activities were getting cancelled, and, "hasn't looked back since." He now has 8 recorders and, being a big early music fan, loves to play Renaissance and Baroque music. Once it's safe to play wind instruments in a group, he hopes to join or form an ensemble.



## A Report to the Congregation

These are trying times with significant disruption in the life of First Church over the last nine months. We continue to have faith that each of you is doing what is necessary to stay safe. We also have faith that there will be a brighter future for all of us.

The elevator team would like to bring you up to date on the elevator project.

The project is actively proceeding. The team reviewed the original construction drawings to understand the underlying assumptions and risks. The project was initially based on installing a new hydraulic elevator. It would require a 5-foot pit that we determined would jeopardize the building's foundations and expose the construction zone to risks of increased excavation collapse. This high-risk roadblock led to searching for ways to mitigate these risks.

We looked at alternate locations for the elevator. The current location remained as the best choice. Trying to find a way to reduce the foundation risks led us to review the original elevator choices. An electric elevator, originally rejected, showed promise for us. While the size of the car remains the same, the external shaft is smaller and only requires a 4-foot pit. The dimensions of the electric elevator and the smaller pit would reduce the structural issues and minimize the intrusion into areas outside the shaft. As the State code requires a 5-foot pit, we would need a State code variance for the project to proceed.

In parallel, after a short delay in February and March, multiple experts were brought in individually to look over the proposed construction zone and offer opinions to understand and reduce risks to the facility.

We have applied for the code variance and the City of Wauwatosa has approved it. It has been forwarded to the state elevator safety office for their approval. We have received positive feedback that the variance approval is pretty normal for older buildings. Due to a State scheduling mistake, the review meeting has been delayed to January 5th. Approval will set the project in motion.

Upon approval, the construction drawings will be updated to show the revised construction needs and details. With these drawings, we will make formal requests for final bids and choose a general contractor. Construction schedules will be formalized and the impact on church activities will be assessed.

We are in pretty good shape financially as the commitments for the Capital Campaign from members were above expectations. We are thankful for your support as many have already fulfilled their commitments. We ask for your continued and timely donations as you are able. Funds from the Capital Campaign, supplemented by Church funds, should enable us to move forward with the project in 2021.

- Your Church Elevator Team

## Calling All Ringers!

Join us as we celebrate the season! All choir and handbell members are invited to a virtual Christmas Party via Zoom on Sunday, December 13, at 4:00. Grab your favorite holiday beverages and snacks and join Scott and Rhonda to catch up with your church musician friends!

A Zoom link will be emailed to all choir and handbell members. We're looking forward to "seeing" everyone soon!!

- Scott DeKok and Rhonda Kwiecien

*Continued from page 1*

*We open our hearts, our hands and our eyes,  
To see the king coming in our own neighbours' cries.  
We look without seeking what we think we've earned,  
But rather we're looking for relationships spurned.*

*With him he brings wholeness and newness of life  
For brother and sister, for husband and wife.  
The Christ-child comes not by our skill,  
But rather he comes by his own Father's will.*

*We can't make him come with parties and bright trees,  
But only by getting down on our knees.  
He'll come if we wait amidst our affliction,  
Coming in spite of, not by our restriction.*

*His coming will happen of this there's no doubt.  
The question is whether we'll be in or out.  
"Behold, I stand at the door and knock."  
Do you have the courage to peer through the lock?*

*A basket on your porch, a child in your reach.  
A baby to love, to feed and to teach.  
He'll grow in wisdom as God's only Son.  
How far will we follow this radical one?*

*He'll lead us to challenge the way that things are.  
He'll lead us to follow a single bright star.  
But that will come later if we're still around.  
The question for now: Is the child to be found?*

*Can we block out commercials, the hype and the malls?  
Can we find solitude in our holy halls?  
Can we keep alert, keep hope, stay awake?  
Can we receive the child for ours and God's sake?*

*From on high with the caroling host as he sees us,  
He yearns to read on our lips the prayer: Come Lord Jesus!  
As Advent begins all these questions make plea.  
The only true answer: We will see, we will see.*



**The First Congregational Church of Wauwatosa**  
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