

St. Johns United Church of Christ

News from Pastor Ken

December 2023

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I realize that it sounds odd hearing these well wishes in this order but that is how it goes in the church world.

Happy New Year and Merry Christmas!

According to the Liturgical calendar the church New Year officially begins the first Sunday in December this year with the first Sunday in Advent. For all of you keeping score this begins year B.

My understanding and appreciation for Advent continues to grow with every passing year. When I think of what Advent is all about, it is helpful for us to consider that Advent is to Christmas what Lent is to Easter. It is a time of spiritual preparation and discernment. It is that time when we can consider the incredible gift that we are about to receive and how we would like to use it. I like to think of the gift of Christmas as an unlimited gift card that we can use anytime and anyplace to shape and guide our lives. But like all gift cards, they only give us benefit if we use them.

I think my Christmas' have become richer and more fulfilling as my understanding of Advent practices becomes richer and more intentional. Advent is a time of spiritual centering, reflection, and preparation for the year to come so when Christmas gets here, I am ready. Not necessarily on the outside but on the inside. I think part of what use to (and still can) make me crazy about Christmas is that I thought everything needed to be just right on the outside in order to be right on the inside, including gifts, decorating the house, the tree, the lights, the dishes, the...the..., the.... You see, I can make myself stressed just thinking about it. And in the process of potentially being overwhelmed about the outside, it becomes easier to forget to prepare and make ready the inside. The heart and the spirit of Christmas.

<https://www.facebook.com/Stjohnsuccmarinecity/>

So for the past few years it is first things first. Heart and spirit first and then allow some time to put up a little tree, a few decorations, and a little bit of shopping. Just as a note, I do not buy things people will not use just because I do not know what they need. Ah.... Christmas

So once again I have gathered my meditation materials and have been making my brief list of any specific things, I am seeking God's direction about in my life. I invite you to join me in spirit for a day in prayer, meditation, or whatever practice you use to center your spirit, I would enjoy sharing that with you. I continue to be excited about the journey ahead. This year I invite you to join me in re-arranging our priorities and sharing with me in ways to more fully enjoy Advent and therefore Christmas.

First, slow down and take time to remember what this season is truly about. It is time for thinking about our individual relationships with God and listening for what it is God would have us to do and who it is that God would have us to be. It is a time of prayer, reflection, and discerning. It is a time for considering and acting on how it is you want God to impact your life. I also want to remind you to expect the unexpected.

Secondly, Advent is the beginning of the new church year. It is a season for appreciating what is, acceptance and coming to terms with what was, together with the hope of what is to come. I look with anticipation toward this New Year both in my personal life as well as our life together as a community of faith. This has been an exciting year of growth and transition for me and our church family. There continues to be an exciting sense of energy and anticipation. I invite you to pray and prepare for what God is calling you individually and we as a community, to be and to do in the year ahead.

Third, Advent is the gateway to Christmas and all the joy and anticipation that comes with it. As I stated earlier, I am aware that during the holidays we are sometimes consumed with trying to make life perfect. It seems that no matter how much we do or how hard we work there will always be a couple of things more we could have done. Is not that the way life is. I think the key to happiness during the holidays as well as throughout life is to slow down, plan for what you can plan, do what you can do, and then relax and take time to enjoy the ride, knowing that things are always going to turn out a little differently than the plan. Make sure to leave room for the Spirit to do its thing.

During this time of Advent, I invite you to follow that simple formula, plan a little, do a little, and enjoy remembering that the biggest gift that you will receive is not under the tree. It is the gift of God's unending love for you, the gift of boundless, unconditional, unearned, mercy, grace, and forgiveness. So sit a moment, wait a while, take a deep breath, expect the unexpected and then prepare to open the Gift that will transform your life forever. Expect a miracle.

Remember that whoever you are and wherever you are on life's journey, you are held in God's unconditional love, boundless mercy, and unending grace. And there is a place for you here.

May you know the love and grace of God in your life. May your heart and life be filled with the Spirit. Merry Christmas!!

Take care and be well, Peace.
Ken

Hapy Birthdays in December

12/6 Mary Galvin
12/19 James Reynolds
12/25 Ken Gadd
12/26 Loretta Prange
12/29 Giuseppina (Josie) Hilsinger

Worship Ministry Volunteers Needed Please sign-up

Please consider signing up for the ministries of Usher/ Greeter, Liturgists, Communion Servers, and Altar Care.



Military Prayer List

I will be including a list in the newsletter of our men and women in the military, to acknowledge those who serve and to pray for their safety. Please submit your love one's, family member or friend's name, rank, and branch of service to be placed on the list.

Joshua Bieske	Sgt. First Class	US Air Force
Lacey Tite	Security	US Navy

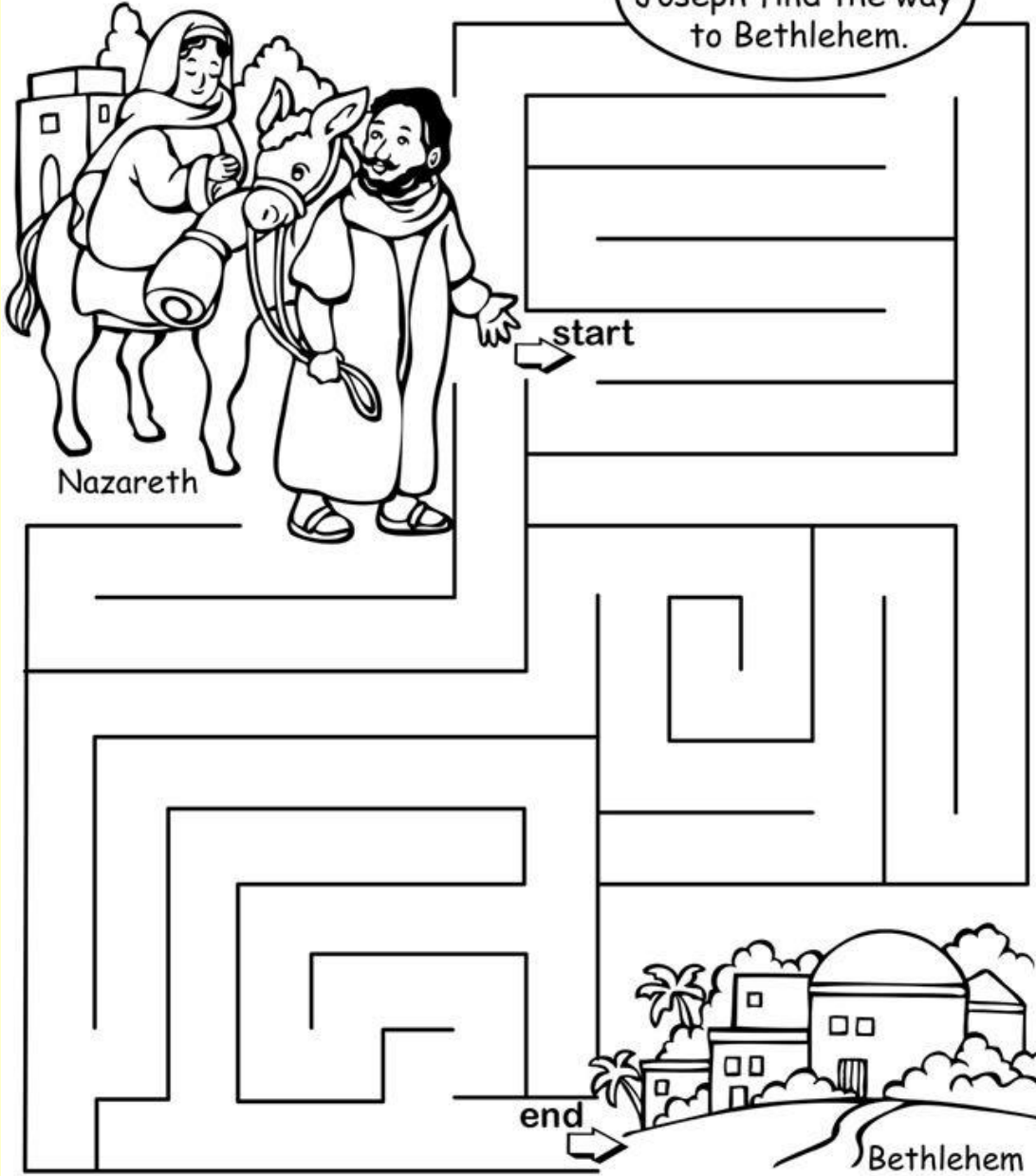
Prayers For

Prayers for Wayne, Judy, Frank, Chris, Gary, James & Family, Gina, Michael, Trudy, Kathy, Ken, Nancy, Melanie, Don, Families of St. John & St. James

Kid's Page

A LONG JOURNEY

Help Mary and Joseph find the way to Bethlehem.



Joseph and Mary went on a long journey from the town of Nazareth to the town of Bethlehem.
(Luke 2:1-5)

Christmas Blessings!



A Christmas Blessing
During this Christmas season

May you be Blessed with the spirit of
the season, which is peace.

The gladness of the season, which is hope.

And the heart of the season, which is love.

Somehow not only for Christmas, but
all the long year through.

The joy that you give to others, is the
joy that comes back to you.

Meeting Minutes / Reports

St. John's United Church of Christ
October 9, 2023, Council Meeting MINUTES

Call to Order: 6:37 p.m.

Council Members Present: Georgia Phelan, Carolyn Hosford, Miriam Guyor, Don Weichert, Linda Girard, Pastor Ken, Shari Faucher, Katie Phelan
September 11, 2023, Minutes: Motion by Carolyn to accept minutes as presented, second by Shari. Carried.

Calendar updates: October 25 & November 1: Discussion group, 7:00 p.m.
November 5 & 19: Sunday Service with Communion
November 5: All Saints Day Observance. Memorial photos encouraged at service
November 7: Fall Fundraiser Dinner at Murphy Inn, 5-8 p.m.
November 12 & 26: Sunday Service and Sunday School
November 22: AA Gratitude Meeting
November 22: Thanksgiving service at St. Paul's Lutheran Church, 7:00 p.m.
December 3: First Sunday in Advent
December 3 & 17: Sunday Service with Communion
December 10 & 24: Sunday Service and Sunday School at 11:00
December 13: Mary Martha Guild Christmas party at noon, bring dish to pass.
December 21: Blue Christmas Service 7:00 at St. John's
December 24: Christmas Eve Service, 4:00 at St. John's and 7:00 at St. James
December 31: Sunday Healing Service

Ministry Reports

Worship - no report

Fellowship - Georgia will make copies of the flyer for the Murphy Inn fundraiser dinner

Outreach A. Mary Galvin is making arrangements to adopt a family for Christmas. This could be a joint effort with St. James
B. Nov. 21 is the Marine City Christmas parade. Miriam will coordinate our entry.

Spiritual Growth A. Zoom Discussion group to be held on Oct. 25 and Nov. 1 at 7:00, the discussion will be on the Sacraments. Ken will send out invitations to join. Inform him if you would like to be added to email list.
B. Our Sunday School is looking for Youth Ministry projects.

Earthly Gifts

- A. Treasurer's Report - Motion by Shari to accept as presented, second by Miriam, carried.
- B. Our CDs at Huntington were renewed in new accounts with better rates. Ken needs new account numbers.
- C. 2024 Budget Committee. Georgia, Carolyn and Ken will serve on this committee. To start the process, Ken will look at comparisons of last year's budget to where we are at this point.

Building and Grounds

- A. Parking lot sealing estimates will be provided to the Budget Committee for inclusion in the 2024 Budget.
- B. All went well with our boiler check on Oct. 3.

Records/History Book - Had a marriage inquiry, possible is in St. Mark's records.

Pastor's Report - Mid City Nutrition has ministry opportunities.

Unfinished Business: Georgia will print up our envelopes due to cost for professional printing.

Correspondence - none

Adjournment: Motion by Miriam to adjourn at 7:35 p.m. Second by Carolyn and carried.

Closing prayer: Pastor Ken Next meeting is November 13, 2023

Message from St. Johns Council President

I hope everyone had a blessed Thanksgiving with people you love and who love you!

And that brings us to today- at the cusp of Advent and Christmas. Although the secular season is roaring around us, hopefully we're all taking a deep breath and reveling in the real reason for the season. All those years ago, in that faraway place, Mary and Joseph had little clue as to the journey they were about to embark on. They knew they were to be a part of something bigger than themselves, but what?

Of course, we now know what they didn't. They became the beginning of Christianity, which we all live by everyday of our lives. We don't always know what's coming, either, but like them, we rely on our faith to see us through. And see us through, it does. No matter our future or fate, our faith is always there to guide and support us in our dealings with this world, all leading to our eternal life beyond.

I hope that you can find it in yourselves to enjoy the secular but truly cherish the spiritual Christmas. Who says we can't do two things at once? There's no way to avoid, nor can we, the hubbub of Santa and company, but in our lives we can choose to elevate CHRISTmas to be the true focal point of this very, very Christian observance and celebration. In our lives and in Church, of course. See you there 😊

Georgia

The Mary Martha Guild Christmas Luncheon

The December Mary Martha meeting will be our annual Christmas dinner. We will be meeting on Thursday, December 14 at noon. The congregation is invited to join us. The meat will be provided. Everyone is asked to bring a dish to pass. A signup sheet is available in the fellowship room. A free will offering will be collected, which will be donated to a family in need in our community. If you have any questions, please contact Loretta Prange.

December Activities

Saturday, December 2 – Euchre at St. James – 6:30pm.

Sunday, December 3 - Sunday Worship with Communion 11 am

Sunday, December 10 - Sunday Worship 11 am

Wednesday, December 13 – The Prayer Group - 11:30 am in the Fellowship Room

Wednesday, December 13 – Mary Martha Guild Christmas Luncheon, noon, meat provided, bring a side dish.

Saturday, December 16 – Euchre at St. James – 6:30pm

Sunday, December 17 - Sunday Worship with Communion 11 am

Thursday, December 21 – Blue Christmas at St. Johns – 7pm

December 24 - Sunday Worship with Communion 11 am

December 24 - Christmas Eve Worship 7 pm

December 31 - Healing Sunday Worship 11 am

Giving Lasts All Year!

St. John's & St. James' Christmas Charity Tote Bags: Some needed items:

We are starting over again for the next year. The tote bags are for both boys and girls between the ages of 2 and 14. The items accepted anytime: hygiene items such as: toothbrush holders, toothbrushes, toothpaste, washcloths, dental floss, comb/brushes, hair accessories such as head bands, ponytails, clips, bows, and barrettes and school supplies such as: notebooks, crayons, colored pencils, colored markers, pencil sharpeners, scissors (for youngsters and older children), rulers, large erasers. Pens, pencils and socks, hats, scarves and gloves/mittens and toys.

Please donate travel size items, we only have so much space to store the items in for the year and we need to get all items to fit in the bags. Please try to **stick to the list** so we receive enough of the items we need and not a little of items that are considered extra items.

Thank you!!!

Donations accepted all year to accumulate 100 of each item.
distribution is via local organizations. Donation box & COMPLETE LIST on table.

Scripture Readings for December

Sunday, December 3
First Sunday of Advent
Isa64: 1-9
Ps 80: 1-7, 17-19
1 Cor 1: 3-9
Matt 13: 24-37
Where Are You, God?

Sunday, December 17
Third Sunday of Advent
Isa 61: 1-4, 8-11
Ps 126 or Luke 1; 46b-55
1 Thess 5: 16-24
John 1; 6-8, 19-28
Shouts of Joy

Sunday, December 10
Second Sunday of Advent
Isa 40: 1-11
Ps 85: 1-2, 8-13
2 Peter 3: 8-15aSol 6: 17-20
Mark 1: 1-8
Messengers of Hope

Sunday, December 24
Fourth Sunday of Advent
2 Sam 7: 1-11, 16
Luke 1: 46b-55 or Ps 89: 1-4, 19-26
Rom 16: 25-27
Luke 1: 26-38
Birthing a Promise

Sunday, December 31
First Sunday after Christmas
Isa 61: 10-62:3
Ps 148
Gal 4: 4-7
Luke 2: 22-40
Long-Awaited Gift

1 Additional Activities

Sunday Services

Sunday Service is held at 11:00 a.m. each week. This service is also available live via online streaming at 11:00 a.m. St. James' service is streamed at 9:00 a.m. Both are available to view as a video any time after the live streams. www.facebook.com/Stjohnsuccmarinecity or www.facebook.com/St.James-United-Church-of-Christ-10150090210425008

Council Meetings

The Church Council's next meeting is December 11th at 6:30 p.m. in the Community Room.

Sunday School

Sunday School is held the second and fourth Sundays of each month. Students are encouraged to attend services on the first and third Sundays as well. Lynn Andrews and Miriam Guyor are teachers this year.

Mary Martha Guild

Mary Martha Guild meets the second Wednesday of each month at noon in the Community Room.

Coffee Donations

There is a container on the counter by the coffee pots for freewill donations to help pay for the cost of Coffee Hour. Any help will be greatly appreciated.

Prayer Group

Prayer Group meets the second Wednesday of each month at 11 a.m. in the Community Room. We will be praying for our family and friends. Anyone is welcome to join us. Please let us know if you have any prayer needs.

Coffee Hour

Although we gather for coffee, visiting and goodies each Sunday after service, we have a special Coffee Hour the first Sunday of each month when special food is prepared and shared. This is provided by members. To take a turn to host, please sign up in the Community Room.

Hundreds of older and disabled neighbors in our community need help getting to doctor appointments, the grocery store or other essential errands. Being able to get food and medical care can make it possible for them to remain in their homes as long as possible. The **Interfaith Volunteer Caregivers** program is in need of drivers who are available during daytime hours. If you have just a couple hours a month that you can give to someone in need, you can make a huge difference in the life of a struggling neighbor. You tell us what days, times and areas are convenient for you and we call you with specific appointments that meet your criteria. If you are free, say yes. If you're not, simply decline and we will call you another time. Even one more ride a year makes a big difference to the person who needs it! Please call our office today at (586) 757-5551. Learn more at www.ivcinfo.org

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DECEMBER NEWSLETTER