

**FIRST
CONGREGATIONAL
UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST**



THE OPEN DOOR

DECEMBER 3, 2008

Issue 24 Volume 08

724 E. South River Street
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Stephen P. Savides, Senior Pastor
Gene Sinner, Church Administrator

Jane B. Anderson, Co-Pastor

Maynard E. Beemer, Pastor Emeritus

Deb Burich, Director for Volunteer Ministries

John M. Albrecht, Director for Music Ministries

Jon D. Riehle, Organist

Kara J. Woodford, Director for Children's Ministries

Lyssa Fish, Director for Youth Ministries

SCHEDULE OF WORSHIP

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2008
SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT
COMMUNION SUNDAY

8:45 and 10:30 a.m.

Our Sanctuary Choir, soloists from our LU Music Scholars, and full orchestra present Bach's *Magnificat*.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2008
THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Sermon..... Rev. Jane Anderson
Music:

8:45 a.m.....The Sanctuary Choir,
10:30 a.m.....Vocal Quartet,
The First Congregational Children's Choir

**SUNDAY MORNING WORSHIP IS
BROADCAST OVER RADIO STATION WECB
104.3 FM AT 8:45 A.M**

2008 CONTRIBUTIONS

All contributions received by December 31, 2008, will be credited to the 2008 tax year. ***Any contributions received after December 31, 2008, will be credited to the 2009 tax year.*** If it is important for us to receive your contribution for the 2008 tax year, please do not wait until the last minute. Anytime in early or mid December are good times to send in that special gift. Thanks so much for your generosity! We truly appreciate it and thank God for these blessings!!

DIAPERS FOR BABY JESUS

The church is holding a diaper and baby wipe drive for LEAVEN during the month of December. Drop diapers in the designated box in the narthex. LEAVEN is a local mission that has provided care

and service for clients for over 20 years. LEAVEN stands for Limited Emergency Assistance Valley Ecumenical Network. It was founded by local religious and business community leaders to help meet emergency financial needs of local people in our community. In 2007, LEAVEN turned hardship into hope for over 6100 families and more than 25% of them need assistance with utilities, including electricity, heat and fuel oil. The rising cost of these necessities has been a struggle for many this past year.

THE GIVING TREE

The Giving Tree will once again take its place in the narthex to benefit the Emergency Shelter of the Fox Valley. It is a small table top Christmas tree decorated with ornament/gift card tags. Last year this program was initiated by a Girl Scout from our church. Her hope was to offset one of the Emergency Shelter's greatest costs, food. Those wishing to participate should remove an ornament from the tree. A label attached on the back will indicate an amount to be purchased in the form of a grocery store gift care. Please purchase the gift card at any grocery store, mark the back with the amount. Return the gift card to the Giving Tree's drop box located on the table next to the tree. A volunteer will make sure the cards get to the Emergency Shelter.

CHURCH SCHOOL SHARING PROJECT SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7TH.

We ask all children who are able to bring an unwrapped gift that will be given to the *Salvation Army* for a child less fortunate than ourselves. Any gift, large or small, appropriate for ages infant through teen are needed. You may put a big bow on the gift if that would make it easier for your child to part with it.

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK:



“Christmas Beyond Words”

A couple years ago, as my family was getting ready to leave for Christmas Eve services, one of my children asked me, “Dad, are you going to let us enjoy this Christmas or are you going to try to explain it to everybody?”

Well, the answer is the same this year – I’m going to try to explain it to everybody. But of course that’s a foolhardy task. The real Christmas cannot be explained. It can’t be marketed. It can’t be sold. It can’t be bought. It can only be experienced. The real Christmas is something that lies just beyond our powers to describe it in words.

In his autobiography, the playwright Moss Hart describes one particular Christmas Eve at the turn of the century when he was ten and his family was living in New York City. They were very poor and Moss was surprised that special night when his father said “Let’s go downtown” and set out on a walk down to 149th Street, a part of town where push carts full of toys were lined up for shoppers.

Moss knew his dad was going to try to buy him a Christmas present, but he also knew that his dad had very little money. As they walked by these carts, Hart said he saw all sorts of toys he wanted. But after his father asked the price, the two of them would move quietly to the next cart, his father putting his hands in his pocket and fingering the few coins he had. So it went from one cart to the other. Nothing the youngster wanted could be purchased for what his father had been able to save. This is how Moss Hart remembered his feeling that night:

“As I looked up at him I saw a look of despair and disappointment in his eyes that brought me closer to him than I had ever been in my life. I wanted to throw my arms around him and say, ‘It doesn’t matter ... I understand ... this is better than a chemistry set or a printing press ... I love you!’ But instead we stood shivering beside each other for a moment - then turned away from the last two pushcarts and started silently back home... I didn’t even take his hand on the way home nor did he take mine... Nor did I ever tell him how close I felt that

night - that for a little while the concrete wall between father and son had crumbled away and I knew that we were two lonely people struggling to reach each other.”

Now do you know what I mean by Christmas lying just beyond words? So many of our Christmas experiences are similar to the one Moss Hart describes. There is such intense and deep feelings evoked by this holiday. We turn to our loved ones, ever-conscious of their preciousness, but often the words don’t or won’t come. The real Christmas lies just beyond words.

That is both the beauty and bitterness of this holiday, that it stops our tongues and silences our voices. It is both the disappointment and the promise of this season that we aren’t sure how to describe it. We only know that it holds something precious, something vital, something that we and our world cannot do without.

Back in 1994, two Americans, at the invitation of the Russian government, were teaching around the country. They found themselves in a Russian orphanage of about 100 boys and girls, children who had been abandoned, abused and left in the care of a government-run program. It was from their mouths that these orphans heard, for the first time, the traditional story of Christmas.

“We told them about Mary and Joseph arriving in Bethlehem,” said one of the men. “Finding no room in the inn, the couple went to a stable, where the baby Jesus was born and placed in a manger. Throughout the story, the children and orphanage staff sat in amazement as they listened. Some sat on the edges of their stools, trying to grasp every word.

“Completing the story, we gave the children three small pieces of cardboard to make a crude manger. Each child was given a small paper square, cut from yellow napkins I had brought with me. No colored paper was available in the city. Following instructions, the children tore the paper and carefully laid strips in the manger for straw. Small squares of flannel, cut from a worn-out nightgown an American lady was throwing away as she left Russia, were used for the baby’s blanket. A doll-like baby was cut from tan felt we had brought from the United States.

"The orphans were busy assembling their mangers as I walked among them to see if they needed any help. All went well until I got to one table where little Misha sat - he looked to be about 6 years old and had finished his project. As I looked at the little boy's manger, I was startled to see not one, but two babies in the manger.

"Quickly, I called for the translator to ask the lad why there were two babies in the manger. Crossing his arms in front of him and looking at his completed manger scene, the child began to repeat the story very seriously. For such a young boy, who had heard the Christmas story only once, he related the happenings accurately - until he came to the part where Mary put the baby Jesus in the manger.

"Then Misha started to ad lib. He made up his own ending to the story as he said, 'And when Mary laid the baby in the manger, Jesus looked at me and asked me if I had a place to stay. I told him I have no mamma and I have no papa, so I don't have any place to stay. Then Jesus told me I could stay with him... for always.'"

Here it is, the real Christmas, the one we find beyond words. We find it with a baby as we feel his small arms around our neck. The baby is named Immanuel, which means "God is with us." Beyond words, we discover, like the orphan Misha, that the God who came in Jesus Christ will never abandon or abuse us, but will stay with us - for always.

Your friend and fellow minister,
Rev. Steve Savides

MUSIC NOTES

From Director For Music Ministries, John Albrecht
Special thanks to the following who shared their holiday weekend by providing music leadership at this year's Community Inter-faith Thanksgiving Eve service on Wednesday, November 26, at 7:00 p.m. -- our Sanctuary Choir; Karen Leigh-Post, mezzo soprano soloist; John Daniel trumpet; Victoria Daniel, timpani; former LU Music Scholar Emily Fink Birsan, soprano soloist; Derrell Acon, LU Music Scholar.

Mark your calendars for this Sunday, December 7, when our Sanctuary Choir, soloists from our LU Music Scholars, and full orchestra present Bach's *Magnificat* in both worship services. Janet Sutter will serve as concertmaster. Come celebrate Advent with this choral/orchestral masterwork.

JOYS AND CONCERNS

Members of our church family benefit from our prayers, continuing support, and words of encouragement as they celebrate special times or struggle with difficult times in their lives. Please keep these people in your prayers. Greet them with a loving word when you see them.

Dee Abts' father
Evie Bocher, Jone Riester's mother
Janice Carroll on the death of her father
Heather Genke Bogacz
Arlene Danz
Sue Dederling's brother, Hal
Arline Emrich
Ingrid Fields
Paul Grube's mother, Pauline Grube
Les Gunter
Jean Harkins
Sam Johnson
Tammy Nelson's mother, Jacki Krause
Lynn Panci, Moon Beach Camp, Admin. Assistant
The Rabas family on the death of Amy's mother
Kathy Remick
Julia Schultz
Maxine Smith
Val Wylie
Carol Yonan

CONTINUING PRAYERS:

Katie Behl
Trish Brehm's father
Philip Buchanan
Arlene Danz
Steve Furstenberg
Ken Geiger
Joanna Helms
Carol Huebner
Ethel Jesse
Tenley Johnson, mother-in-law of Gene Sinner's son
Judy Kaddatz
Larry Livengood
James Marsh, father of Mae Van Driest
Richard Miller's son-in-law, Rick Kramer
Dan Nisler's brother, David Nisler
Jane Oie
Carla and Dennis Oudenhoven
Mike Ross
Bette Schmidt
Sue Schroeder
Joyce Spurlock
David Strom
Helen Wright

**THE DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE
OF THE OPEN DOOR IS 9:00 A.M. ON
MONDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2008.**

MIDDLE SCHOOL ORCHESTRA

Middle School 7th and 8th Grade Band and Orchestra Students are invited to participate in this year's **Christmas Prelude from the Chapel** on Sunday, December 21, 2008. This Christmas Prelude will be an instrumental program of holiday carols held in the Chapel before each of the two services on Church Family Christmas Sunday. Small ensembles of brass, woodwind, strings and percussion as well as our full orchestra will start the day as our church youth provide these concerts for this festive family Sunday.

All 7th and 8th grade musicians will prepare for this program with three rehearsals held after their Wednesday evening religion classes on December 3, and December 10, and December 17 from 7:30 – 8:30 p.m.

Dress rehearsal for the Sunday programs will be Saturday, December 20 from 11a.m. – 1 p.m. Music folders are available to be picked up from the church library beginning Sunday, November 23. Add to your holiday spirit of giving. Offer your instrumental talents and contact the church office for sign-up.

Directors: Beth Vercooteren and Marlessa Benson

AN ONLINE OPPORTUNITY FOR ADVENT

Leader: Reverend Jane Anderson

No Room For Them in the Inn

Mary and Joseph certainly experienced what it was like to be homeless, about to expect a child, and to have to rely on the hospitality of strangers. How do we think about homelessness and hospitality in today's world in the U.S.? How do we practice or fail to practice hospitality to the homeless in our society? We will be discussing online Johnathon Kozol's book *Rachel and her Children* and our spiritual response to his captivating observations about homeless families in America. Books are available for purchase in the church office.

Sunday Evenings from 8:00 to 9:00 p.m.

November 30, December 7, 14 and 21

THE OPEN DOOR BY E-MAIL

Church members receiving the newsletter by e-mail have been very pleased with the ease at which they are able to access the newsletter online. If you have not signed up for this feature, please call the Church Office.

HOSTING THE WARMING SHELTER

First Congregational UCC will host the warming shelter for the week of **February 1-February 8, 2009.**

The Fox Valley Warming Shelter is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing nightly temporary emergency shelter for adult men and women who do not qualify for other shelters or housing. The shelter rotates to different churches each week and now has 9 churches offering their facilities.

On a normal night, 12-15 people find shelter and a meal of hot soup. They also are interviewed in order to make the most appropriate referrals to other community services with the goal of more stability and self-sufficiency.

The shelter has a paid director and several part time staff. A staff member is present every night as well as volunteers who are scheduled for 3 - four hour shifts: 8pm-midnight; midnight – 4am; 4am – 8am. While a staff member and volunteer will be here at 8:00 p.m. the guests will arrive around 9:00 p.m.

This ministry offers many opportunities for our members – volunteering as well as taking new steps in our spiritual lives. There will be more information in the next *Open Door* regarding volunteering with the shelter.

Deb Burich

CHRISTMAS EVE CALENDAR



- 2:00 p.m.** Family Service with our Organ Scholars
- 4:00 p.m.** Family Service with Children's Choir and our Organ Scholars
- 7:00 p.m.** Carols by Candlelight with Chamber Ensembles
- 10:00 p.m.** Lessons, Carols and Communion with the Sanctuary Choir, and Instrumentalists

Summary, Church Council Meeting, November 18, 2008

The By-Laws of First Congregational United Church of Christ authorize the Church Council to act on behalf of the congregation between annual meetings. Council would like to keep members informed about its work, so we offer in *The Open Door* each month a brief summary of our decisions and discussion. Readers who are interested in knowing more or providing feedback are encouraged to contact the Moderator, Jann Kostecke.

Decisions made:

- After hearing from Heather Bogacz about her faith journey, her work as a chaplain, her program of part-time study toward Master of Divinity at Luther Seminary, and her desire to pursue ordination in the United Church of Christ, Council voted to support Heather's request to be received in-care of the Wisconsin Northeast Association. Council further voted to provide an annual scholarship to Heather during the period she is working on her M.Div.
- Council voted, upon recommendation from the Mission and Outreach Ministry Team, to host the community Warming Shelter for homeless men and women during at least one week in January of 2009, and to do an additional week during the 2008-2009 season assuming there are no insurmountable difficulties encountered during the first week. Council was unanimous in endorsing the importance of the Warming Shelter ministry in our community and expressing our commitment to being a part of it.
- Ministry teams and committees were charged with revising their 2009 budget proposals in order to bring them to a level 25 percent below those budgeted in 2008.
- A subcommittee was tasked with preparing a letter to the congregation outlining the financial challenges the congregation faces in maintaining mission and ministry at its current levels without increased support from members. The letter will be over the signature of the Moderator as a representative of the Church Council.
- Council reviewed possible nominees for the position of Vice Moderator and was reminded of the need for someone to fill the Vice Treasurer position.

Other topics discussed:

- The church's overall financial position continues to be quite challenging. Revenue for October was slightly above budget and expenses continue below budget, but we are still anticipating a high five-figure or low six-figure operating deficit at year-end.
- Planning for the Annual Meeting on January 24, 2009, and the leadership retreat on March 7, are proceeding well.
- Deb Burich shared new members' appreciation for sense of welcome they found here and our openness to people at all stages of life's journey. Pastor Steve Savides noted positive comments related to the November 16 Hospitality Sunday.

For more information on any of these topics or to provide input about them, please contact the Moderator, Jann Kostecke.

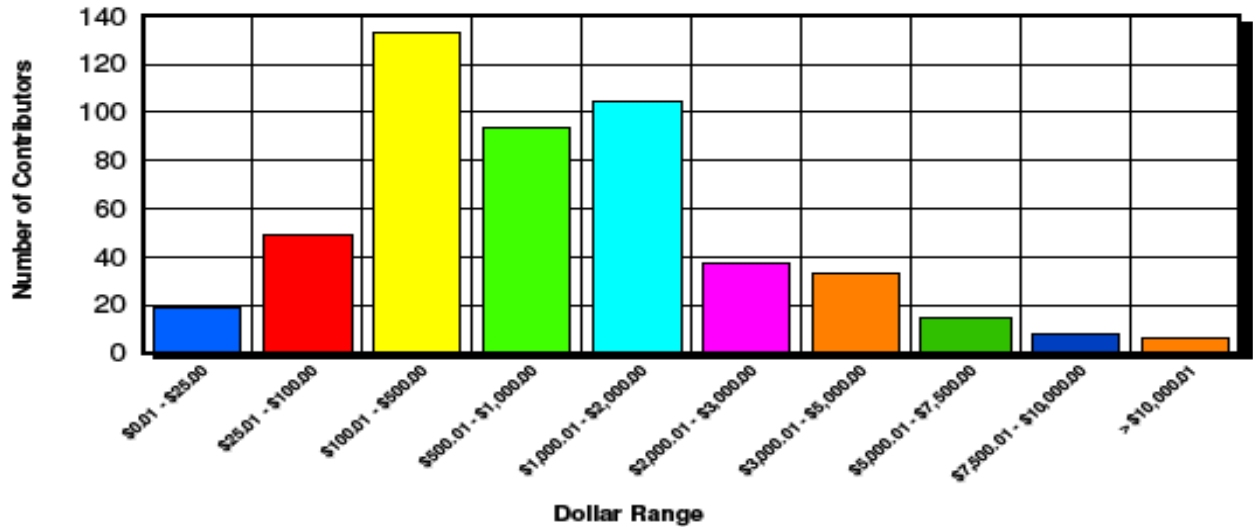
Steve Hirby

11/25/08

Contribution Analysis

Selected Funds: Pledge

Annual Contribution Range 2008 Projected Contributions



Statistical Summary

<u>Range#</u>	<u>Annual Dollar Range</u>	<u>Number of Contributors</u>	<u>% of Contributors</u>	<u>**Projected Annual Contributions</u>	<u>% of Total Contributions</u>
1	\$0.01 - \$25.00	19	3.81	\$260.40	0.04
2	\$25.01 - \$100.00	49	9.82	\$2,757.38	0.37
3	\$100.01 - \$500.00	133	26.65	\$33,137.71	4.50
4	\$500.01 - \$1,000.00	94	18.84	\$64,535.28	8.77
5	\$1,000.01 - \$2,000.00	105	21.04	\$150,213.51	20.40
6	\$2,000.01 - \$3,000.00	37	7.41	\$92,960.15	12.63
7	\$3,000.01 - \$5,000.00	33	6.61	\$124,774.28	16.95
8	\$5,000.01 - \$7,500.00	15	3.01	\$91,947.80	12.49
9	\$7,500.01 - \$10,000.00	8	1.60	\$65,197.40	8.86
10	> \$10,000.01	6	1.20	\$110,497.50	15.01
		499		\$736,281.41	

The average contributions for each contributor are: \$28.38 /week
 \$122.96 /month
 \$1,475.51 /Annual

***Projected Annual Contributions are calculated based on actual contributions received through 11/17/2008, which is 321 days into the contribution year.*

The projected annual amount is then 365 days divided by 321 days (1.14) times the amount contributed through 11/17/2008.

VITAL STATISTICS

BAPTISMS:

BRIELLE ELYSE BIELKE, daughter of Dennis and Kerry (Gresens) Bielke, on October 12th

ADDISON HOPE BAIER, daughter of Larry and Karla Baier, on October 12th

CLAIRE ANNABELLE ARMSTRONG, daughter of Joseph and Emily Armstrong, on November 30th



WEDDINGS:

ALAN JAHNKE to KATIE BONHAM on September 19th

JAMES LARSON to BARBARA SMITH on October 11th

LARRY KIRCHNER to CRYSTAL PIERCE on October 18th

MARY VAN DRIEST to JONATHAN PARKER on October 25th

ERIC LOE to KATHLEEN McFADDEN on November 22nd



BIRTH:

BRANDON JOHN MELEWSKI, son of Brian and Ann Melewski, on October 11th



DEATHS:

WILLIAM MELZER – October 13th

JOSEPHINE (MRS. WILLIAM) BUCHANAN – October 27th

TED OSENROTH – November 3rd



NEW MEMBERS RECEIVED ON NOVEMBER 16th:

Douglas Bartelt
Mandy Bartelt
Jon Fleming
Brigitte Granger
Gary Granger
Daniel Hornung
Denise Hornung
Robert Krupinski
Deanna Kubiak
Nicholas Kubiak

Barbara Larson
James Larson
Robin Reed
Kathy Przyworski
Beth Resch
Cheryl Rollins
Charles Spanbauer
Stephanie Strzalka
Mary Sullivan
Jennifer Zastrow