

The Messenger of The First Church of Monson
December 2017



Dear Members and Friends,

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German Lutheran pastor who was executed by the Nazis for his part in an attempt to overthrow Adolf Hitler, found himself alone in a prison cell on Christmas Eve, 1943. He was accustomed to big family gatherings at Christmas, parties with dear friends, and worship. Oh, how he loved to praise God at Christmas! Reflecting on all that he had lost and all that he was missing, Bonhoeffer wrote these powerful words which are found in *Letters and Papers from Prison*:

"Nothing can make up for the absence of someone we love, and it would be wrong to try to find a substitute; we must simply hold out and see it through. That sounds very hard at first, but at the same time it is a great consolation, for the gap, as long as it remains unfilled, preserves the bonds between us. It is nonsense to say God fills the gap; he doesn't fill it, but on the contrary, he keeps it empty and so helps us to keep alive our former communion with each other, even at the cost of pain.... The dearer and richer our memories, the more difficult the separation. But gratitude changes the pangs of memory into tranquil joy. The beauties of the past are borne, not as a thorn in the flesh, but as a precious gift in themselves."

Advent and Christmas bring great expectations, major preparations, moments with friends and families, and worship. How we love Christmas and the joy it brings! We also come to this time knowing that it will bring a tug of our hearts. Those we love and have lost, those who have always been with us and are not able to be at their usual places, those fond memories of Christmas past, bring us, as Bonhoeffer noted from prison, a gap, and the dearer the memories the more difficult the separation. When we gather to celebrate the birth of Christ, we rejoice in the gift that God gave in the child in the manger. May we also come to our dear memories in the same fashion, as a precious gift.

Wishing you a bright Christmas,
Rob Gormbley, Pastor

STATEMENT
Our Mission
STATEMENT
STATEMENT
STATEMENT

**The mission of The First Church of Monson is
to praise God through prayer,
to share the Word and love of God
by promoting fellowship in the community, and
to serve as stewards of God's creation –
all in a manner that glorifies God and emulates Christ.**

Sunday, December 24, 2017

This year, the Fourth Sunday of Advent and Christmas Eve fall on the same day. We will have the regular 10 a.m. worship service in the morning and a traditional candlelight service that evening beginning at 7 p.m.

All-Church Conversation – December 17

The next All-Church Conversation, Church and Mission, will be held on Sunday, December 17 following the worship service. You are invited to join Pastor Rob for a brief presentation, followed by a facilitated open conversation. This is a great opportunity to respond to the presentation, ask questions or comment on any church-related topic.

Notice to those people who give online

If you have your pledge fulfilled by automatic withdrawal from your bank account, you must fill out a new form for 2018. The forms can be found in the Narthex and on the small table near the door in front of the Sanctuary. Completed forms may be put in the Church Office mailbox or in the offering plate. Thank you.

Messenger Mailing News



Starting in February 2018, the *Messenger* will no longer be sent to members and friends using bulk mailing. There will be four options available for continuing to receive the newsletter:

- pick up a print edition in church
- have a copy emailed to you
- read the edited version posted on the First Church website (firstchurchmonson.org)
- subscribe to receive a copy sent via first class mail (\$12.00/year)

The mail reason for this change is our declining membership numbers. In order to send items by bulk mail, there must be at least 200 identical pieces. With the recent membership review conducted as per our by-laws, we fall well below that number.

More details will be published in the January 2018 *Messenger* for those wishing to receive the newsletter by email or first class mailing.

You do not need to be anything if you are picking up a print copy of *the Messenger* in church or are reading the online version posted at firstchurchmonson.org . If you want to receive the *Messenger* by email or first class mailing, please complete one of the following:

For those requesting email

Please provide the Church Office with the following information:

Name/names _____

Email address _____

Please notify the Church Office if your email address changes.

For those requesting first class mailing

Please provide the Church Office with the following:

Name/names _____

Address _____

Please pay by check (\$12.00) to First Church Monson with *Messenger* written on the memo line.

Stewardship Update

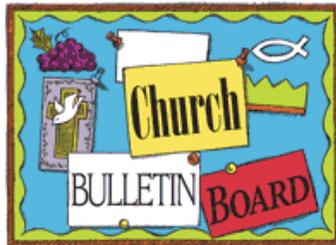


On Stewardship Sunday, November 12, we received 36 pledges. Of these, four were from people who had not pledged in 2017. Of the remaining 32 pledges, 72% or 23 pledgers increased their pledges. The total amount pledged so far is \$59,497. These are very early results; hopefully by the time you read this *Messenger*, we will have gathered many more pledges.

We will continue to gather pledges during the month of December. However, the earlier you can make your pledge for 2018 the better able we are to prepare next year's budget. There are extra pledge cards in the Narthex and on the small table in the front of the Sanctuary near the door. You can also request a pledge card by calling the Church Office at 314-267-3312.

First Church depends on your support. Thanks to all who have already made a financial commitment for 2018.

Your Stewardship Committee, Crystal and Doug



You may have noticed some changes to our bulletin boards with more changes coming-. The members-at-large, Jane, Elaine and Carol, along with Pastor Rob, are working to revamp the bulletin boards with new designs and designations.

Each board will now have a specific focus. The boards at the High Street entryway and the Narthex will feature a "Welcome to First Church" display. In the Fellowship Room, the first board as you enter will be about our church's ministries. The second board is for community programs and events with the last board for posting committee and board minutes.

Please leave items to be posted in the Church Office. Thank you.



Your Pastoral Search Committee has spent countless hours and has devoted much thought, reflection, discussion and prayers in order to complete our mission of securing a new settled pastor for First Church. We hope you have had a chance to view the Church Profile—there are 4 copies of the profile in Fellowship Hall. Please look it over while you are here in the church, as the copies need to remain on the premises.

We are happy to say that the summary of the profile has been listed on the UCC Website, which means potential candidates may now view the posting and, if interested, submit a request from us for the entire profile. To view the summary, please visit <http://oppsearch.ucc.org/web/fastsearch.aspx>, scroll to the bottom and click on “Monson, First Church Monson.”

Our current work is focusing on interview questions and working with our representative from the UCC to move forward with interviewing potential candidates. This is an exciting time for us, and we look forward to this next step in the process. Please keep us in your prayers while we undertake this most important calling.

Hearts Willing Club members recently assembled and distributed fourteen “**Thinking of You**” care bags for homebound members and friends. Thanks to all who contributed to this most meaningful ministry.

More than 45 boxes of cereal were donated to the **Monson Open Pantry** in November thanks to Pastor Rob’s Cereal Challenge.

Paper products needed!

Paper supplies like TP and paper towels are always needed and much appreciated! Please consider donating a roll or two. Thank you!

**Hearts Willing Club
December 13, 2017
6:30 p.m.**

**"The Reason for the Season" Christmas Party
Potluck Dinner**

"The Lord has done great things for us; we are glad."
-Psalm 126:3



Gift Exchange & Open Pantry Donation
(\$5.00 grab bag gift)

Sign up to bring main dish, salad, rolls and butter, fruit,
vegetable or deli platter, relish/pickle tray,
cheese and crackers, dip and chips
Dessert and beverages will be provided.

Hostesses: Program Committee

The Daily Lectionary Scripture References for December can be found at
<http://www.macucc.org/files/files/documentsdailylectionary/dec+2017.pdf>

BAMS Winter 2017 Concerts

The Brimfield Area Master Singers (BAMS), under the direction of Bob Wills, will be presenting three concerts entitled JOYOUS this season. All concerts will be on Tuesday evenings beginning at 7 p.m. at the following locations: November 28 at United Church of Christ Ware; December 12 at Saint Patrick's Monson; and December 19 Brimfield Congregational Church. The performances will be accompanied by Gay on keyboard, Joe on flute and Michael on guitar.

Included in the program are a Christmas Pops Medley, "Canon of Thanks," "Blizzard" and many pieces with Christmas themes. A reception with light refreshments will follow each concert. All performances are free and open to the public. Donations are gladly accepted.

*Christmas Fund 2017 *Shepherding the Light**

"Shepherding the Light" is the theme for the United Church of Christ's 2017 Christmas Fund Special Mission Offering. The Christmas Fund provides direct financial assistance to retired and active United Church of Christ authorized ministers and lay employees and their surviving spouses, including pension and health premium supplementation, emergency assistance, and Christmas thank-you checks. A ministry of the Pension Boards, this offering is usually received on the Sunday before Christmas.



Help decorate the Mitten Tree located in the Narthex with a gift of warmth! Mittens, gloves, hats and scarves for all ages are much appreciated. Your donations will warm the hands and hearts of people in need.

