

## ***The Pastor's Notebook***

Many years ago a family was in a real foul mood as the big day, Christmas, drew close.

Mom was upset with Dad because he was late getting home from his company's Christmas party the night before which meant she did most of the gift-wrapping. Dad was upset because his wife didn't even try to understand that he couldn't leave the party before his boss did. And the son was mad because he had to go to his Grandparents' home and couldn't play hockey with his buddies.

But there was one member of the family, a teenage girl, who seemed to have Christmas spirit. In fact, she had so much Christmas spirit that she never even noticed how crabby everyone else was.



When she began to play Christmas carols and invited the others to sing a-long, her brother snapped, "Why are you bright and cheerful? Save you piano playing for Grandma's. It's going to need some livening up!" The parents simply scowled and said nothing.

The daughter, still oblivious to the tension around her, said, "Well, why don't we practice some Christmas Carols now so that when we get to Grandma and Grandpa's we can bring some Christmas joy to them? They never seem to have much fun except when we are there."

Amidst all the grumbles and complaints, over the next few minutes the others slowly moved around the piano and soon all were singing their favorite carols.

Maybe it was the night. Maybe it was the young girl's enthusiasm. Maybe she was the angels' song for them.

Who will you brighten up this Christmas season? Where will you inject a joyful, hopeful song that washes away some of life's bitterness and frustration? To whom will you be an angel of the Lord, bringing "good news of great joy?"

Yes, life will go on as usual after Christmas. But that baby, that Lord, is still out there, and that music will still be swirling around in your heart.

Merry Christmas from our family to yours,

*- Tom*

## ***Christmas Eve Worship***



The church will be filled with the sounds of Christmas carols, joy, friendship and love as we gather together on Christmas Eve. Plan to be a part of the wonder on this sacred, candlelit night as we celebrate the wonder of Christ's birth.

**4:00 pm** - A family worship service for children of all ages!

**7:00 pm** - Casual, acoustic worship with Jeff Leonhart and a wonderful gathering of instrumentalists and singers.

**10:00 pm** – A beautiful service of carols, candlelight, and the miracle of Christmas in a traditional style sure to touch your heart.

## ***Parents of School Kids' Dinner Club***



Join us for our annual Christmas party on Sunday, December 9 from 5 pm until 8 pm at Jaime and Robin Gray's house. Bring an appetizer to share and your choice of drink. Child care is available at the church for children 3 and under for a small cost. Any questions or to RSVP please see Janice Evans or Robin Gray.

## ***Thank You!***

A BIG Thank You to EVERYONE who helped with the Brunch on Nov 4<sup>th</sup>. Starting with our Chef Extraordinaire, Mark McDermott, Lisa McDermott, Decorator Extraordinaire Lea Cook, Dishwashers Extraordinaire Catherine Taylor & Mike Stephan, Donna & Jeff Leonhardt, Gloria Stephan, Lorna Schlutz, everyone who brought the delicious breads, & Chris Bright for the set up & take down. Apologies to anyone I've forgotten. You ALL helped make for a great meal & even better time for Fellowship!



Also, THANK YOU to everyone who has, or will turn in a pledge for 2019. Intentionally committing to giving is a leap of Faith, in God's Grace AND in First Bethel. Whether or not you feel able to pledge your financial support, let's all recommit ourselves to supporting First Bethel with our prayers, our presence, our gifts and our service.

## ***Been Carded Lately?***

Did you know you can help the youth group without it costing you a cent? It's true!

If you like to eat, buy clothes, and put gas in your car then you can help the youth of First Bethel Church. **Just purchase gift cards for your favorite retailer and a percentage goes to funding youth programs and service projects.** Giant Eagle/GetGo and Eat n' Park gift cards are available in the narthex every Sunday between services. Hundreds of others can be ordered! See Charlene Pauline with any questions.



**"My idea of Christmas, whether old-fashioned or modern, is very simple: loving others. Come to think of it, why do we have to wait for Christmas to do that?" – Bob Hope**

## ***Our 2018 Blue Christmas Service***

Not everyone is up and cheery for the Christmas holidays. Dealing with the death of a loved one, facing life after divorce or separation, coping with the loss of a job, living with cancer or



some other disease that puts a question mark over the future, and a number of other human situations make parties and merriment painful for many people.

First Bethel Church has created a sacred space for anyone living through dark times during the holidays. Our service, called Blue Christmas, recognizes the pain of loss felt by many at this time of year, and offers a reflective, gentle space to gather in the healing presence of God.

If you have undergone a difficult loss, transition, or life change, the church cares about you and invites you to a special time of music and worship on **Friday, December 21 at 7:30 pm**. Bring a photo or memento of your loss or struggle and we will place the before the altar during the service.

## ***Christmas Caroling!***

Friends young and old will be sharing a measure of Christmas cheer this year as we go caroling in the community. . Scheduled for **Friday December 14 at 5:30 p.m.**, we'll take our Christmas music to the residents of local nursing homes, many of whom have little chance to be with family on Christmas Day.



**Caroling**

If you'd like to brighten another's holiday by sharing the Christmas story in song, call Pastor Tom Barnicott at 412-722-8316 or the office at 412-835-0700 to sign up. **Drivers are always needed** for this evening so we offer a heartfelt invitation to you especially.

## ***Outreach's Outlook***

We had our last Daily Bread for the year and 6 persons from FBUMC went down to New Hope Church and served 142 meals. Everyone seemed to enjoy the meal. Our dates for next year are as follows: Feb 17, April 7, June 23, July 21, Oct 27, and Nov 24. Mark your calendars for next year and let Sally Irick know if you would like to help.

The Outreach committee has been busy getting ready for the holidays. The Giving Tree is up and the angels need to be back under the tree by



Sunday Dec 9. Please do not wrap the gifts but a gift bag is fine. The Head to a Toe tree is at the entrance to the education building. They need to be on the tree by Sunday Dec 16.

Watch the bulletin in January for information on our new program . It will be a program to give a person a phone call and check to make sure they are ok and if they are in need of anything i.e. a ride to the doctors or a prescription that needs to be picked up.

Save the date of Sunday Feb. 3 as the Outreach committee will be hosting a SOUPER BOWL AND SANDWICH LUNCHEON that day. There will be only one service at 10:00 am that day and the luncheon will follow. According to the Greater Pittsburgh Food Bank 1 in 7 families struggle to put food on the table Daily. The luncheon will be free will giving and all the money will be donated to SHIM. SHIM's buying power is 500% greater than purchasing food from the supermarket. More information will follow and we hope to see you there.

May you all have a blessed holiday season!

Merry Christmas!

*- Sally Irick*

## ***Thoughts on Having “Enough”***

Wait a little, my soul, wait for the divine promise, and you will have more than enough of all the good things in heaven. If your appetite for present things is excessive you may lose eternal and heavenly ones. Use the things of the world, but long for the things of eternity. You cannot be fully satisfied by material possessions, for you are simply not made to enjoy them. Even if you owned every good thing in the world you would not be happy and blessed, for your blessedness and joy are in God, who created all these things. Your happiness is not in what is seen and admired by others but in what the good and faithful followers of Christ seek. Your happiness is in what the spiritual and pure of heart, those whose citizenship is in heaven, sometimes experience in this life, though it is meant for the next. --From “The Imitation of Christ” by Thomas a Kempis

## ***Meadowcrest Christmas Service***

Bring the good news of Jesus to our neighbors at Meadowcrest on Braun Road in Bethel Park!



Our next visit to Meadowcrest for a time of singing and worship will be December 21 at 3:00 pm. Join us for a meaningful time with our neighbors. No experience necessary, just a caring heart and a willing spirit! See Pastor Tom today.

## ***Bell Sunday Worship!***

There will be ONE WORSHIP SERVICE on Sunday Dec. 30 and what a special service it will be! Plan to join us at 10 a.m. for our annual **Bell Sunday Service!** From sleigh bells to cow bells, bring any type of bell to ring throughout the service as a sign of joy and celebration.



## **Music Notes** by Ruth Finlay

Christmas time is always a special time for music at First Bethel.

Mark December 16 on your calendars. The Chancel Choir will be presenting “I Believe He’s the Son of God” (a cantata) at the 9am service. Not surprisingly, this is the story of Jesus’ birth through the eyes of those who lived during that time. Our narrator will be Mary Ann Ritchey. The 11:00 service will be regular worship.

Christmas Eve services will be:

- **4pm** and tailored to children and their families.
- **7pm**, Jeff Leonhardt, and group will provide wonderful music as in past years.
- **10pm** will be with the Chancel Choir. All will have the familiar carols and candle light. Please join us for one of these times.

We are always open to welcoming new members in our groups. The Chancel Choir is open to all adults (and teens) and we especially need men and altos!

The bell group, Wesley Ringers, would welcome new members at any time. We rehearse on Thursdays at 6:30 pm.

Children, grades K-5, the Angels of God, sing with Miss Phil on Wednesdays at 6:30 pm.

**DO YOU THINK THAT YOU MIGHT LIKE TO SING BUT DON’T WANT TO “SIGN UP FOR LIFE”?** **We have a great deal!!** How about a limited time such as February through Easter (April)? Not a long commitment, but enough to “get your feet wet”. We would love to have you. Call me with questions! (412-833-3982).

Have a blessed Christmas season!



## ***Martha Circle News!***

It's hard to believe the Advent season is here. Soon we will be preparing for the celebration of the birth of our Savior.

Our Circle will be hosting the Advent Dinner, Sunday, December 2 at 4:30 pm. We provide the ham, rolls and beverages. All those who attend are asked to bring a covered dish and/or a dessert. Also, please bring your own place settings and silverware.

Wednesday, December 5<sup>th</sup>, the FIRST Wednesday in December will be our annual Christmas party in the Susanna Wesley Room at 6:00 pm. It's A TIME FOR REFLECTION AND ALSO A TIME TO LOOK FORWARD TO A NEW BEGINNING IN 2019. We do not meet in January.

Women in Ministry



Our thoughts are with Tom and Linda as they will be making a big change in their lives at the end of January, after many years in the ministry.

We wish everyone a Blessed Christmas and a happy, healthy new year. Luke 2:10 – “Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy!”

- Donna Hennen

## ***Dinner Club***

We are trying to start up the “dinner club” again Apologies for the late start. If you are interested in dining with others from the church and growing personal relationships with your church family, please sign below (with phone number). Hopefully enough will sign to make this work. Tentative plans is to be able to start by January.

If there are any questions, please see Jim Walter or Ken Williams.



## ***Book Club Footnotes***

**The January 18, 2019 book discussion will be “Where the Craw Dads Sing” by Delia Owens.**

“The story is set in the 1950s and revolves around a young woman named Kya Clark, who is from extremely rural North Carolina. Known by others as the Marsh Girl, she lives alone in nature—but the draw of other people, and specifically love, brings her into contact with the greater world. This novel has a mystery at its core, but it can be read on a variety of levels. There is great nature writing; there is coming of age; and there is literature. *Crawdads* is a story lovingly told—one that takes its time in developing its characters and setting, and in developing the story. You’ll want to relax and take your time as well, and when you’re done you will want to talk about it with another reader.” Chris Schluep , Amazon Book Review

**December 21<sup>st</sup> discussion is “The Quiet Season” Remembering Country Winters by Jerry Apps**

“Jerry Apps recalls winters growing up on a farm in central Wisconsin during the latter years of the Depression and through World War II. Before electricity came to this part of Waushara County, farmers milked cows by hand with the light of a kerosene lantern, woodstoves heated the drafty farm homes, and “making wood” was a major part of every winter’s work. The children in Jerry’s rural community walked to a country school that was heated with a woodstove and had no indoor plumbing. Wisconsin winters then were a time of reflection, of planning for next year, and of families drawing together. Jerry describes how winter influenced farm families and suggests that those of us who grow up with harsh northern winters are profoundly affected in ways we often are not aware.” (Amazon.com)

**On December 21st, we’ll gather at the home of Mike & Gloria Stephan at 7PM (1/2 hour earlier than usual). Their address is 2840 Locust Drive Pittsburgh 15241 (Peters Township). Spouses are welcome, and we’ll provide drinks and a few cookies.**

## ***Library News -- Christmas Reading***

**ADVENT STORYBOOK**-- This beautifully illustrated book has often been called a Christmas devotional for children. It has 24 short stories about a little bear's long journey to Bethlehem. Along the way, there are acts of courage, kindness and love. Each story marks a day in *Advent*. The marvelous artwork is by noted European children's book illustrator *Maja Dusikova*.



**HOW TO CATCH SANTA**-- This colorful story is fun to read. Can you really "catch" Santa on Christmas Eve? Would you like to try? The book is full of ideas, cute drawings and kids' letters, like this one: "*Dear Santa -- For Christmas, I would like world PEACE ... and a pony. Thank you.*"

Those are new additions. We have numerous other Christmas books, and not just for children. They include:

- **THE POLAR EXPRESS** -- A North Pole journey, and a sleigh bell only children hear.
- **CHRISTMAS DAY IN THE MORNING** -- Look for the hidden pictures in this classic.
- **SARAH'S SONG** -- A woman's faith touches many lives.
- **THE CHRISTMAS CANDLE** -- Faith, miracles and a mysterious angel.
- **THE LAST CHRISTMAS RIDE** -- A sister's love.
- **THE LITTLEST REINDEER** -- The story of Rory.
- **A CHRISTMAS SNOW**-- Woman trapped in a blizzard finds the true meaning of Christmas.
- **A TREASURY OF CHRISTMAS MIRACLES** -- Subtitle: *True Stories of God's Presence*.

We love putting our Christmas books on display!

~Your Library Staff~

## ***Note From The Trustees:***

The responsibility of caring for our church properties is a never ending task. Your Trustees work hard year after year to keep these aging properties properly maintained.

A few of the things we have accomplished this year are:

- A curtain was hung at the stage area in Founders Hall.
- Our parking lots were paved
- The lights in our parking lot and at our Kings School Road entrance were replaced with dusk to dawn LED lights. These lights are less costly to operate and provide additional security by lighting these areas whenever it is dark.
- New LED light panels are in the process of being installed in founders hall. These panels are brighter, safer and less costly to operate than the lights they are replacing.
- New LED lights have arrived to replace the failing cove lights in the Sanctuary. We hope to have those lights installed before the end of the year.
- Our outdoor sign along Rt. 88 has been dark for a while. Again we have turned to LED's. The sign will be rewired and new lighting installed before the Christmas holidays.
- New walk off mats have been purchased and placed throughout the buildings.
- Thanks to a generous gift from one of our members 8 dead or dying trees on our property along Rt. 88 will be removed and the collapsed sewer line from the office building will be addressed
- At the parsonage some dead trees were removed and some outside painting was done.



For the coming year we are looking at some work needed at the parsonage and we will be looking at the repair or replacement of the roof on the education building.

The Trustees thank the congregation for their continuing support. Your support is the only thing that allows us to accomplish our many tasks. THANK YOU!

***- Jim Howells***

## ***While Waiting ...***

Advent does not lead to nervous tension stemming from expectation of something spectacular about to happen. On the contrary, it leads to a growing inner stillness and joy allowing me to realize that he for whom I am waiting has already arrived and speaks to me in the silence of my heart.

Just as a mother feels the child grow in her and is not surprised on the day of the birth, but joyfully receives the one she learned to know during her waiting, so Jesus can be born in my life slowly and steadily and be received as the one I learned to know while waiting.

- Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Genesee Diary*

## ***Small Packages, Great Things***

The motto for Hershey's Kisses used to be "Big things come in small packages!" That also could be a motto for Bethlehem, for Baby Jesus and, indeed, for us. It's an important message to remember when we fear we're too weak to fix the world's problems, too small to fight the gigantic terror that threatens a loved one or too lacking in abilities we see in others.



*"But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah,"* God declares through the prophet Micah (5:2), *"from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel."*

Bethlehem was a mere village. God's ruler for Israel started as an infant. His birthplace was a small stable, not a palace or temple. But size isn't everything. Big — that is, great — things can come in small packages. And thanks to the tiny baby who grew up to share immeasurably huge love with the world, God can do great things through you, too!

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***"True peace is not merely the absence of tension; it is the presence of justice."*** - Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.



## ***Just Do It Anyway***

by Gloria Stephan

In the song “Anyway” by Martina McBride, you’ll find these lyrics:

*“You can spend your whole life building  
Something from nothin’  
One storm can come and blow it all away  
Build it anyway  
You can chase a dream  
That seems so out of reach  
And you know it might not ever come your way  
Dream it anyway  
God is great  
But sometimes life ain’t good  
And when I pray  
It doesn’t always turn out like I think it should  
But I do it anyway  
I do it anyway  
This world’s gone crazy  
It’s hard to believe  
That tomorrow will be better than today  
Believe it anyway”*

After hearing this song sung in our sanctuary a few weeks ago, I’ve been encouraged to do things ‘anyway’. Despite the devastating news of yet another mass shooting, wildfires, political divisions, social injustice, etc, I know my God is bigger and love is stronger than any evil. Won’t you join me in building up instead of tearing down, dreaming instead of despairing, praying instead of lashing out, believing instead of being discouraged, loving instead of judging, and keeping hope alive?

How much better our world would be if we’d build knowing it may not last, dream despite the chance for disappointment, pray because we need to be in conversation with God, and still believe in love in the darkest places. Be the good you want to see in the world. Be a light. Just do it anyway.

Appalachia Service Project is a Christian ministry, open to all people, that inspires hope and service through volunteer home repair and replacement in Central Appalachia. ASP's vision is to see substandard housing eradicated and everyone who comes into contact with the ASP ministry transformed. Our trip is scheduled for June 9, 2019 and even if you have doubts about joining us, do it anyway. Registration for First Bethel's trip is required by February and space is limited.

For more information, see the ASP website at [www.ASPHome.org](http://www.ASPHome.org) or contact me at [gstephan57@gmail.com](mailto:gstephan57@gmail.com).

## ***Youth Group Activities***

Dec 2 (Sun)	4:30 FBUMC Advent Dinner/Crafts
Dec 15 (Sat)	5:30-10:00 Progressive Dinner
Jan 6 (Sun)	4:30-6:00 Youth Group @ church
Jan 19 (Fri)	7pm-8am Winter Lock-In
Feb 3 (Sun)	4:30-6:00 Super Bowl Youth Group @ church
Feb 15-17	Jumonville Weekend



## ***The Christmas Grump***

Uncle Bill had the reputation of being a curmudgeon. He always seemed to have something to grumble about. Bill's friends and family were used to his demeanor and usually took it with a grain of salt.

One year, while Bill's relatives were decorating for Christmas, his young nephew wondered aloud, "Do you think Uncle Bill will put up a Negativity Scene again this year?"

As we enter the new year, learn to light a candle in the darkest moments of someone's life. Be the light that helps others see through the eyes of faith.

# ADVENT



## Evening

Sunday December 2<sup>nd</sup> at 4:30

We will start the evening with a covered-dish dinner.

The wonderful ladies of Martha's Circle  
will prepare a ham!

Please bring a dish to share.

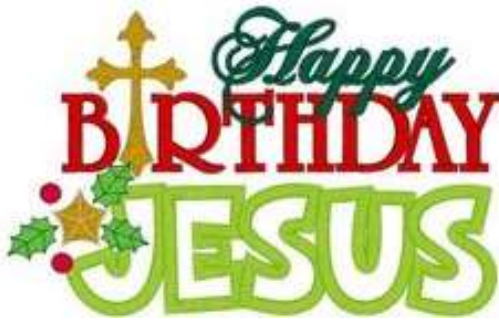
We will move to Founder's Hall for Crafts,

and yes, Mr. and Mrs. D will be doing

### Ginger Bread Houses!!!!

We will end the evening with a  
carol sing in the sanctuary!!!

Please sign up in the Narthex.

The logo features the word "Happy" in a green cursive font at the top. Below it, "BIRTHDAY" is written in large, bold, red capital letters. Underneath that, "JESUS" is written in large, bold, green capital letters with a white outline. To the left of the text are decorative elements: a gold cross, a gold star, and green holly leaves with red berries.

Happy  
BIRTHDAY  
JESUS

Come and Celebrate

The Real Meaning of Christmas...

December 8<sup>th</sup> from 11:30 to 12:30

Join us for

Games, Crafts, Treats and a Pizza Lunch!

In Honor of

Jesus' Birthday,

Please Bring a baby gift

to give to SHIM.

RSVP to Miss Lynda by

December 4<sup>th</sup> 412-835-6141





## ***Enter In***

Tired of making small talk at church about the weather or sports? Then follow Edward Welch's advice to "enter in" to the lives of your fellow worshippers.

A churchgoer once asked Welch, author of *Caring for One Another*, two simple yet profound questions: "What was the best thing about your week, and what was the worst thing about your week?" About a month later, when some issues were weighing heavily on Welch's heart, he wondered who'd be willing to pray for him. Immediately, the person who'd asked him those two questions came to mind.

When Christians enjoy one another's blessings and carry one another's difficulties, Welch says, the body of Christ gets built up.

## ***Life Lessons from a Snowman***

- It's okay to wear white well after Labor Day.
- Simply hanging out in your front yard can be fun.
- Accessories don't have to be fancy or expensive.
- We're all made mostly of water.
- You know you've "arrived" when a song is written about you.
- So what if you're a little bottom-heavy?
- Don't get too much sun.
- Sweating too much can be disastrous!



## ***January -February Worship News!***

*Please be sure to mark your calendar with the following highlights to our Sunday worship schedule:*

***January 20*** – Bishop Cynthia Moore-Koikoi will be present and will preach at both services.

***January 27*** – Pastor Tom's final service before retirement. There will be one service at 10 a.m. and a reception afterwards.

***February 3*** – It's a Soup & Sandwich Sunday with one service at 10 a.m.