***Christ United Methodist Church***

***Snyder, New York***

***“Living Christ’s ways and exploding with love and service”***

***UPDATE***

***December 17, 2013***

***SUNDAY WORSHIP AT CHRIST CHURCH***

***9:00 – Praise Celebration Worship***

**10:00 AOL (Adult Opportunities for Learning) (FaithXpress, Soul Strength, Youth Group – Pageant Rehearsal)**

***11:00 – Traditional Style Worship (This week our Christmas Pageant!)***

***Bring a Friend this week and share the Love and Grace of God!***

Visit us on the World Wide Web at: [**www.Christchurchamherst.org**](http://www.Christchurchamherst.org)

**716-839-2460**

**Dr. B.J.’s blog is** [**www.drbjthoughts.blogspot.com**](http://www.drbjthoughts.blogspot.com)

Hi Everyone:

Less than a week from Christmas . . . how are you doing? Karen and I plan to do a little shopping on our day off together tomorrow. I’ve attended all of the “Holiday” gatherings that I intend to. I’ve begun to focus on the Christmas Eve message and am trying to still my heart and mind so that I can be spiritually ready to celebrate the arrival of the Son of God. How are you doing? Over the years I have become keenly aware that the “most wonderful time of the year” can also be the “most stressful time of the year!” There is so much pressure to get the perfect gift, to keep all of the Christmas traditions (that special once a year cookie that has to be done just like grandma used to make), and for all of our families to suddenly become the nurturing, encouraging and supportive gatherings we think they should be. That’s a lot of pressure. What happens when the gift doesn’t measure up or the cookies get burned or our family gathering doesn’t resemble Ward and June Cleaver’s Hallmark photograph but looks more like an episode of the Simpson’s (or, worse yet, South Park). When expectations meet reality we are often overwhelmed with disappointment. Add to this the inevitable sadness of that first Christmas without a special loved one (who has moved or died) and people are under an incredible amount of pressure. How will you “turn off” the Christmas machine long enough to settle, focus and truly celebrate the Incarnational moment of God becoming a human being to dwell among us? Make time to read Luke 1 and 2 and Matthew 2 and John 1. Pour yourself a nice cup of tea (or coffee or nog), turn off the TV and the music and just sit comfortably and dwell on the amazing story that is at the heart of the season. Stop the merry-go-round frenzy and listen quietly and prayerfully to the voice of our loving God. That’s my plan . . . how are you doing?

Here is what is happening at Church:

1. Attendance last week made it into the 115 range – not bad for a snowy and cold Sunday morning. Thank you to all who braved the elements and for all who made worship God centered this week.

2. This Sunday, December 22, at 11:00 we will have our annual Christmas Pageant: “**Bed, Bethlehem and Beyond**”. The children and youth (and several adults providing assistance) will take us to Bethlehem to remember the birth of our savior. The Pageant will be accented by music from our Choir, our Praise team and the Christ UMC pick up ensemble. This is a “Bed and Breakfast” event with Breakfast to follow in Crafts Hall. Come and join in the celebration.

 Sunday at 9:00 we will have our usual praise worship celebration and feature a song that our own Marg Bouza wrote (and will perform).

3. Tuesday, December 24 is Christmas Eve and there are two worship celebrations:

 9:00 p.m. will be Candles, Carols, Choir and a message from Pastor BJ

 Christmas Eve Reception – join us for cookies and other snack items between our worship gatherings. If you can help see Sally

 11:00 p.m. will be Candles, Carols, Communion and a message from Pastor BJ

Come and join us in the celebration of the Feast of the Incarnation – bring your friends and family to this joyous festival!

4. In our Prayers: Janelle Martin had shoulder surgery this morning; Beth Sweet is having surgery on Thursday; Sandy Cummings is recovering from foot surgery; Dave Wolf, our custodian, was in a car accident this week – no serious injuries but pray for Dave; Art Gundlach has made a turn for the worse and his family asks for your prayers; Guy Castellino, Mitch Mooney, Richard Ball, Bim Rowlands, Glenn Hurst, Nicky Sebastiano, Marian Steve, Ruth Kitson, Shirley Downey, Ed Maker, Carl and Jean Ericson, Alice Schmidt and Diane Lovejoy. Remember those who are serving the US Military (especially Alex and Ian). Remember those who are grieving this season. Remember families in crisis, those looking for work and all who are in harm’s way.

5. **Christmas Collections:** The gift tags on the Christmas tree have been filled delivered. Tags for Three Kings Day at Primera Iglesia are now on the tree. Take one, buy the gift and return it before December 29.

 We are collecting warm hats, coats, mittens and boots – any and all in good shape for those who will need them this winter. Bring to Church.

 We are collecting non perishable food items for local food banks (put in shopping carts at Church)

 We are collecting twin bed frames and bedding for Gateway-Longview! See any youth group member or leader.

6. Uganda Necklaces are available this Sunday – There are few of them left -- these colorful lacquered paper necklaces are available for just $5 each. All proceeds go to support a women’s ministry in Jinja, Uganda run by our friend Moses Wasige. They make great gifts!

7. **A Couple of Financial Notes: 1.** We are approaching the End of 2013: Many of Christ Church’s members and friends make “yearend” contributions in support of the ministry of Christ Church. Remember that for those gifts to be counted for 2013 we need them by December 29.

 2. Pastor BJ challenged each of us to make one additional end of year gift that would equal One week’s tithe (in his case $110) to help meet our Shared Ministry asking for 2013. Several of you made contributions this past week (THANK YOU) and to the rest of us Thank you in advance.

 3. **Treasurer: Donna Yungbluth** will be stepping down as church treasurer at the end of the year. We are deeply grateful to Donna for her two years of service in this role. Under her leadership we have successfully transitioned to “Quick Books” and a new system that utilizes a volunteer treasurer and the Office Manager as a financial clerk. I am sure you all join me in expressing our appreciation to Donna for a job well done.

 **Having said all that . . .** We need a new treasurer. Experience with Quick Books would be helpful (but training can be provided). Some accounting experience would also be a big bonus! If God is calling you to fill this need at Christ Church please let me know (calling me today would be great!)

 4. The Boiler Campaign is concluding this month: please remember to finish out your commitments! THANK YOU!

8. Happy Birthday this week:

 December 19 – Harold Ortman; Alexander Wilson

 December 21 – Nicholas Terranova

 December 23 – Lois Lewis; Jocelyn Reagan

 December 25 – Tim Reed; Jesus of Nazareth (observed)

 December 26 – Allen Dengler, Jacqueline Morris

9. Happy Anniversary this week:

 December 23 – Peter and Pat Zaleski (53 years!)

 December 25 – James and Rosemary Leas (62 years!)

 December 27 – Joseph and Carolyn Day (62 years!)

10. This week at Christ Church:

          TUESDAY December 17 – **CHURCH CHOIR – note change in date**

          December 19 -- Bible Study at 10:00 a.m.

 Trustees at 7:30

          December 21 – Pageant Rehearsal 10:00 a.m. to Noon – Christian Education team meets at Noon

 December 22 – 11:00 – “Bed, Bethlehem and Beyond” Christmas Pageant – Breakfast in Crafts Hall to follow

11. **Calling all Singers:** The Chancel Choir is Rehearsing on TUESDAY (December 17). We are getting ready for Christmas Eve and the end of Advent. Come and join us in the choir room at 7:30.

12. First Meeting of Disciple Bible Study is Sunday, January 5 at 6:00 at the Church. This 34 week Bible Survey course is open to all and will be taught by Rev. Jim Pollard and Rev. B.J. Norrix. **If you are planning to participate:** we need to know so we can have the books ordered and on site for the 5th.

13. Through the Bible in a year:

 December 17 – 2 Peter 1-3, Gospel of John 1

 December 18 – John 2-4

 December 19 – John 5-6

 December 20 – John 7-8

 December 21 – John 9-11

 December 22 – John 12-14

 December 23 – John 15-18

 December 24 – John 19-21

 December 25 – 1 John 1-5

 December 26 – Psalm 117; 119:81-176, 2 John, 3 John

14. Coming in January . . . a couple of ideas

          1. Would anyone be interested in a Breakfast group (a before work Bible/Faith discussion). We could meet at a local restaurant . . . see BJ

          2. We have read through the New Testament and the whole Bible . . . do you want another reading schedule? Let me know. We could, for example, read the Bible Chronologically. . .

15. Beginning January 5 AOL (Adult Opportunities for Learning) will begin a series titled “The Wesleyan Way: A Faith that Matters.” This class meets in the Wesley Room on Sunday’s at 10:00 a.m.

***Parting Thought:***

I went to see “The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug” on Saturday. It was my privilege to take my niece, Allison, who is a Senior at Houghton College and her suite mates, Katie and Theresa, to see the show (and, of course, pizza afterwards). I am a big fan of Tolkien and greatly appreciated the work that Peter Jackson and his crew did on the Lord of the Rings Trilogy. But there is something missing in the Hobbit series. I noticed this in the first Hobbit movie last year. The movie was pretty violent (more than I remembered in the book) and it was missing something. It was only today, four days later, that I figured it out. The Book The Hobbit was a playful romp – yes there was the discovery of the ring by Bilbo and the ominous overtones that came with it – but for the most part the Hobbit is a delightful tale of an unlikely adventure that went “There and Back Again.” The current film version of this delightful book is woefully earnest and needlessly violent. What struck me most in this discovery is how quickly we can lose this sense of play and joy on any journey. Christmas brings out the best in people. Christmas brings out the worst in people. Those who are living into their worst character traits have often lost their sense of joy and play. I have spoken with friends who did the whole “Black Friday at Midnight” thing. They had a great, wonderful and playful time. I have spoken to others who were so earnest in their “bargain hunting” that there was no joy left in them. So, today I find myself wondering . . . what if, in all of our desire to “Keep Christ in Christmas” and the hard work of staying focused on the “Reason for the Season” we have lost something vital to the season and our souls. We have become so earnest we have turned what should be a playful, joy filled, romp . . . into a deadly serious drudgery. I think maybe I will lighten up a bit, smile some more, laugh even more and celebrate the Lord of Salvation with all the joy he deserves and less of the grim determination that wants to take me over. How about you?

I’ll see you when the Church gathers (speaking of joyful romps!)

BJ Norrix, lead servant, missionary, fledgling joy germ

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