***Christ United Methodist Church***

***Snyder, New York***

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

***UPDATE***

***December 23, 2013***

***Christmas Eve Worship at Christ Church December 24***

***9:00 p.m. – Candles, Carols, Choir***

 ***11:00 p.m. – Candles, Carols and Holy Communion***

 ***EVERYONE is WELCOME***

***SUNDAY WORSHIP AT CHRIST CHURCH***

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

***10:00 – FaithXpress/soul Strength resume January 5***

***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:

It is Christmas Eve, Eve Day (grin). My prayer is that everyone is settling in for a few days of observance, remembrance, and family gatherings. Christmas can easily be a muddle – so much party and revel that we miss out on the quiet, the simple and the majestic joy of the birth of our Savior. I have been praying for the Christ Church family, that the love of God shown through the birth of Jesus will touch your hearts and minds in deep and transformational ways. I have been praying for the Christ Church family that we will look above and below and beyond our traditional gatherings and will see the least, the lost, the last and the hurting around us and will take that next brave step to make a connection and be Christ’s hands and feet and hearts and voices all around us. Take a moment to smile at a clerk, give way in traffic, touch a child, bless someone who is alone, speak words of hope and joy and peace, and, most of all, “glad tidings of great joy for today is born to us a Savior, who is Christ the Lord!”

Here is what is happening at Church:

1. We were just short of 200 on Sunday (in spite of the Ice). Special Thanks to the Education Team (all of you) and the children and youth of Christ Church for a great presentation of “Bed, Bethlehem and Beyond!” The story was well told, well presented and very poignant for Christmas. THANK YOU. Appreciation to the Choir and the Praise Team and the Christ Church youth pick up ensemble for all of the great music that was interspersed throughout the play. We were greatly blessed by your efforts and our celebration of the birth of our savior has been enhanced by your story telling. THANK YOU! Everyone!

2. Tuesday, December 24 is Christmas Eve: Here is what we have planned:

 9:00 – Nine Christmas Lessons and Carols with candles, choral music, and a Christmas Message from Pastor BJ

 11:00 – Christmas Eve Communion: candles, carols and the Christmas Message and celebration of Holy Communion (near Midnight!)

Bring your friends and family and neighbors and random strangers.

3. This Coming Sunday is December 29 and the last Sunday of 2013. We will be “clearing the decks” as we prepare for a new year. AOL will meet this week but there will be no FaithXPress or Soul Strength (they resume on January 5).

4. In our prayers: Keep the family and friends of Art Gundlach, Janet Y. Barber, Dorothy Bradfield, and Jean Bartholomew in your prayers – grieving this time of year is especially difficult: pray for Fred Painton, Sandy Cumming, Guy Castellino, Mitch Mooney, Richard Ball, Bim Rowlands, Beth Sweet (following surgery), Marian Steve, Glenn Hurst, Nicky Sebastiano, Ruth Kitson, Shirley Downey, Ed Maker, Ed and Jean Ericson, Alice Schmidt, and Diane Lovejoy.

 Arthur Gundlach’s Memorial Service will be January 4: Calling hour at 10:00 a.m. and service at 11:00 – at Dietrich Funeral Home

5. One of the great things about the Christmas season is seeing all of our young people home: It was great to see Ian Johnson (on leave) and all of our college students as well as other family members! Welcome home everyone.

6. Christmas Collections: we are gathering warm hats, coats, mittens and boots as well as non perishable food items for local food banks.

 We are also looking for twin bed frames and bedding for children and families served by Gateway-Longview. THANK YOU (we did give 2 beds away).

 There are still a few “3 Kings Day” Celebration tags on the Christmas Tree in Crafts Hall – take a tag, bring a gift by this Sunday (December 29).

7. YEAR END GIVING:

 1. Just a reminder that for gifts to be credited to 2013 we need them by this Sunday (December 29). THANK YOU for your generosity in 2013 and for your faithful support of the ministry of Christ Church. I have encouraged everyone to make one additional gift in 2013 (the equivalent of 1 week’s tithe) to help pay our Shared Ministries to the Annual Conference. – Thank you to all of you who have stepped up and for those planning to do so.

 2. **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!)

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

8. Happy Birthday this week:

 December 23 – Lois Lewis; Jocelyn Reagan

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

 December 26 – Allen Dengler; Jacqueline Morris

 December 27 – Laurie Hannon, Emily Scaringi

 December 28 – Teresa Watson

 December 29 – Paula Kreib

9. Happy Anniversary this week:

 December 23 – Peter and Patricia Zaleski (53)

 December 25 – James and Rosemary Leas (62)

 December 27 – Joseph and Carolyn Day (62)

10. Through the Bible in a year:

 December 23 – John 15-18

 December 24 – John 19-21

 December 25 – 1 Letter of John

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

 December 27 – Revelation 1-4

 December 28 – Revelation 5-9

 December 29 – Revelation 10-14

 December 30 – Revelation 15-18

 December 31 – Revelation 19-22

11. 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!

12. At Christ Church This week:

 NOTE: the Church office will be closed December 25-27!

 Tuesday, December 24: Christmas Eve Worship at 9:00 and 11:00 p.m.

 Friday, December 27 – Game Night at 7:30 in the Wesley Room

13. 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. . .

14. 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:***

The world around us is changing (rapidly so) and the Christian Church, for the most part, seems to be stuck in a feedback loop that has us locked in the 1950’s (or earlier). I have watched the brouhaha surrounding a TV show “Duck Dynasty” and have come to the conclusion that, since there is no such thing as bad publicity, the folks at A&E have gotten exactly what they wanted – a larger audience watching their programming either because they find it distasteful or because they want to support someone they only see through the lens of a camera. Well played A&E. I have watched the Twitterverse and Facebook and the national news service around the revocation of the credentials of an Eastern Pennsylvania pastor named Frank Schaefer – Rev. Schaefer presided at the marriage of his son to another man. Although the service was legal in the state where it happened, United Methodist pastors are specifically prohibited by the United Methodist Church’s book of Discipline to preside at such ceremonies. Rev. Schaefer was brought up on charges, tried by a church trial and eventually had his privilege to function as a United Methodist Pastor revoked. It doesn’t matter what I feel about homosexuality (either for Phil or Frank). It doesn’t matter, all that much, how I feel about the Order and Discipline of the United Methodist Church. It doesn’t even matter what I think about same sex marriage. What I find disturbing is a denomination (United Methodism) that is so enmeshed in keeping its institution together that it is willing to do serious harm and damage to real people in real places. What I find even more disturbing is the “win at any cost” attitude that prevails in the Left and Right extremes of our denomination. I suspect that most of us are in the Methodist middle (and perhaps muddle). We believe that the church, by its very definition and connection to Jesus Christ, MUST be open to everyone. My Bible tells me that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, Slave nor Free, Male nor Female (Galatians 3:28). Those three distinctions were the three primary divisions in the Roman World: religion, economics and gender. In Christ these disappear. My Bible also shows me that Jesus went to the outcasts, the known sinners, the broken, and that he saved his harshest words for “religious people.” My muddle comes from the other side of the equation. I promised to uphold the Order and Discipline of the United Methodist Church. It is the covenant to which I chose to belong when I was ordained. I believe the Order and Discipline of the United Methodist Church has fallen off the biblical and Wesleyan rails in the wide variety of ways and when we have chosen one human behavior over others (in this case homosexuality) to be singled out as “inconsistent” with Christian teaching we are widely missing the mark (is anyone willing to make a full list of behaviors that are “inconsistent with Christian teaching”?). I believe that our denomination is headed for a train wreck (a process that is well underway) and unless we rediscover that Jesus emphasized grace over law and love over exclusion there will not be a “People called United Methodist” into the next century. Please join me in prayer for our leaders (especially our Bishop Mark Webb) and for the agitators on the left and the right and for us in the middle (or muddle). I think the message of the season is pretty simple. Christmas is the unmistakable proof that God’s love for God’s creation has no bounds: heaven cannot keep it, earth cannot contain it, death cannot restrain it. I am unabashedly in love with Jesus. I am striving to be that Love to all people in all places and situations. That is the essence of Church: it is not the political process, it is not about winning and losing: it is about loving Jesus and loving people and there is no way to restrictively and exclusively define that love.

 To all my friends at Christ UMC please pray, and then pray some more. We have as our mission statement: Living Christ’s Ways and exploding with love and service. How might our love and service explode in the craziness of the day? How might we best live Christ’s Ways

Seeking to love as Jesus loved,

BJ Norrix, lead servant, soul lover, missionary

This email is a communication ministry of Christ United Methodist Church. If you do not wish to receive this please let me know. Otherwise feel free to share with friends and neighbors.