



Epistle

SOUTH CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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December 2013

The creation of art is a wondrous way to enter the sacred space of God. I have been enchanted by the art workshops Ann Roche and Alma Blafield have created for our children this fall. There was the harvest collage created in September, the Blessing Tree in the spirit of St. Francis for All Saints Day, and the story board of the Pilgrims journey on the Mayflower made of clay, paint, maps, and sticks constructed just before Thanksgiving. Since our children have been having such fun it seemed time to get the rest of us involved. This coming Sunday will be our Advent worship/workshop experience held in Barrett Hall, followed by a covered dish brunch. During worship we will focus on Isaiah's vision of a fresh shoot sprouting from an old stump, revealing a day of new beginnings for the world. This vision includes the image of the wolf living with the lamb and the child of God's choosing leading the people. We will also focus on Matthew's story of John the Baptist calling the people to prepare the way and let go of their false hearts. To make worship more participatory there will be opportunity to write down things in your life that get in the way of peace. We will let go of these things by placing them in a container out of which a new shoot is growing. Having let go of the old we will embrace the new by creating a bright banner that includes an image of a gift that we offer the world. By letting go of what gets in the way and embracing the gifts God has given us we prepare the way for the coming of the Prince of Peace. I will also help our children solve a 'puzzle' based on the vision of Isaiah.

During the worship/workshop we will not only craft a banner for church, we will also have a chance to write a simple greeting to those who will receive toiletry gift bags at the pantry, and following worship we can craft an ornament to take home. Our children will also have crafts to work on in Cooke Center. Following the brunch I will gather with those so interested to reflect on the meaning of Advent from a biblical and artistic perspective. Bring a dish to share, sharpen your imagination, and open your heart to the God of peace who will gather with us as we prepare ourselves and our homes for the birth of the Christ Child.

A different kind of artistic experience was held on the Monday before Thanksgiving as well over a thousand families from our community were given frozen turkeys and all the fixings by the "Thanksgiving Angels". Of the ten pantries involved in this remarkable collaboration, South Church was not only the host but was well represented in terms of volunteers. For more, see the description that is included in this [Epistle](#). You might be asking: How was this event artistic? Art happens when we are able to move out of our heads--the world of daily practicality--down into our hearts, into the realm of deep connection. On that Monday there was practicality in evidence: organization, foodstuffs, boxes, and all the rest. But there was also something holy present. Warmth, tenderness, caring, received and given by people of all ages and all stations of life. Volunteers helping guests. Guests helping volunteers. Smiles and recipes shared. Music playing. The long line outside softened by hot apple cider, hot coffee, cider donuts, and warm conversation. Patience shown to those having a difficult day and for those glitches that always show up. In a society that has become so unequal and so stratified this day of neighbor helping neighbor revealed a glimpse of Isaiah's vision of a time when "the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf, the lion, and fating together..." This is an artistic vision of the most sacred kind, and there it was playing out in Barrett Hall. What if we created a world like that?

EPISTLE

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- Moderator Mary Rentz
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- May Mattoon Alice Gallup
- Ladies Benevolent Marge Demary
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The next *Epistle* deadline is January 5 at 11 a.m.

Please note change in regular schedule.

OUR CHURCH FAMILLY

In memoriam:

Dr. Roy P. Walchenbach November 13

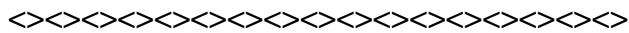
LORD & TAILOR GIFT AND THRIFT SHOP

November was a special month for the Shop! We made \$600 on the day of the Harvest Craft Fair. That also marked our 4th year of operation.

In celebration we held a luncheon on November 13 for our regular volunteers, including those church members who have helped us along the way. We are very grateful for all your support in this effort.

As a result we have been able to contribute \$700 to the church this month. The total for 2013 so far is \$6300.

Nancy deForest and Audra Kinner



PEACE

We look forward to the time when the
Power of Love replaces the Love of Power;
then will our world know
the Blessings of Peace.

William Ewart Gladstone



It is a busy and exciting time in the life of Christian Education here at South Church! November ended with a wonderful art workshop headed by Alma Blafield. First we read a book about the journey of the Mayflower. We discussed the longing for religious freedom that many of its passengers had. The relationship between the Natives and the Pilgrims was also discussed; how they worked together to help the pilgrims learn to survive. A storyboard was created using maps, paint and clay to recreate the journey of the Mayflower. The children learned the importance of working together and the blessings of having religious freedom. It was a fun and creative event for all involved. Thank you Alma!

On Sunday afternoon November 17th, I hosted a movie and pizza gathering at my house for the youth. We watched "Teaching Killer Whales Compassion", a movie about homelessness. Afterwards we had a reflective discussion lead by Joel. It was a fun time of fellowship and getting to know each other. During the Christmas season we all planned on doing some Christmas caroling. Anyone interested please contact me, we would love to have you join us!

Moving into December- December 8th is the Advent Happening here at South. The children will be working on a craft to bring home for the holiday. After the service, there will be a pot luck meal. I will have a table set up for children of all ages to decorate their own cookies!

During the Christmas season, the children will learn the story of the Magi who followed a star to find the Christ Child. Scripture from Isaiah and Matthew will be read. Visions of a Peaceable Kingdom, and readiness for the coming of God's reign are a few of the themes we will be exploring. Looking forward to Christmas!

A happy and safe holiday season to all from Rachael, Ariana and myself! We very much enjoy teaching and spending time with all your children in the Christian Education Program here at South Church.

Ann Roche, Dir. of Children & Youth Ministries



Thanksgiving Angels

On Monday, November 25, the “Thanksgiving Angels” provided frozen turkeys and all the fixings to over one thousand local families. I had the privilege of being present for most of the day. It was a remarkable and holy experience as these ten local food pantries came together to soften the sharp edges of poverty in our community for this most significant holiday. Guests and volunteers alike were filled with a spirit of thanksgiving, gratitude, and joy. The sense of community among us was vibrant. Not only was South Church the host for this event but we were very well represented among the sixty or more volunteers--that included youth from St. Joseph’s high school and employees from Berkshire Bank. Our volunteers were: Mary Wheat—who quietly and skillfully was the chief coordinator for the entire event—Lynn Reynolds, Mary Rentz, Lois Moore, Liz Clifford, Mary Ellen Puntin, Bill Puntin, Cindy Dickinson and 3-year-old Rose, Sato Valenti, Dale Prindle, Sue Kaufman, Michelle Pixley, Pamela Pixley, Ashley Pixley, Jeanine Rontowski, Helen Welch, Will Garrison and me.

In addition Paula Haskell, our church secretary, was the bookkeeper for all the lists and donations that were given to the “Thanksgiving Angels” as well as the one fielding seemingly endless calls about the distribution. Tom Tarjick, our sexton, helped in the lengthy process of loading and unloading carts, as well as keeping clean the spaces that were being used for storage, transport, and distribution. Pittsfield police officer, Jeff Coco--married to Kelly Sullivan Coco--was instrumental in helping us have police coverage and assisted with many parking challenges during the day. Bob Hill, took many photos of the event that will be posted on our website. Also in attendance and working very steadily and faithfully was the “South Church Pantry Team,” a group of at least ten friends of the church, who Mary Wheat has organized into a team to assist with the weekly pantry. Many of these volunteers are former—and current—users of the pantry who give of time and energy to staff this vital ministry. All of this brings to mind these words from the Gospel of Matthew:

“...for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” Thank you one and all for welcoming Jesus into Barrett Hall this past Monday.

Rev. Joel

MISSION BOARD DECEMBER PROJECT

In the parlor is the Giving Tree. This year the items on the tags are from the wish list of the Elizabeth Freeman Center. As you may or may not know, the Elizabeth Freeman Center provides services and leadership to address domestic and sexual violence in Berkshire County 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It came out of two organizations, Women Services Center and the Rape Crisis Center. These two organizations merged in 1997 and adopted the name "Elizabeth Freeman Center."

Elizabeth Freeman, also known as "Mum Bett," was born a slave in 1742 and was given to the Ashley family in Sheffield, Massachusetts. She ran away from the Ashley home after being struck by a hot shovel trying to protect another enslaved household servant. When the Ashley family tried to force her back, she sued for her freedom under the new Massachusetts constitution that stated that "all men are born free and equal." With the help of Theodore Sedgwick, a Stockbridge attorney and abolitionist, she won and was freed. She then changed her name to Elizabeth Freeman. She died in 1829 and is buried in the Stockbridge Cemetery. She remains an inspiration to all and is a symbol of courage and freedom.

The tree will remain up for the whole month of December. The items do not need to be wrapped. The Mission Board will deliver them in January. Items of need include: diapers (all sizes) new underwear (for women and children), baby monitors, feminine products, BRTA passes, deodorant, new jogging outfits (all sizes), gas cards, and baby wipes.

Thank you for your generous and caring spirits that help others to have hope and courage to carry on in difficult circumstances.

PS: Both Morningside and Conte Schools were very appreciative for the warm clothing donations in November! We are keeping them on our radar and asked them to let us know if they have any further needs.

Thank you,

Jean Robertson-for the Board of Missions

**BLUE CHRISTMAS SERVICE
ST. HELENA'S EPISCOPAL CHAPLE**

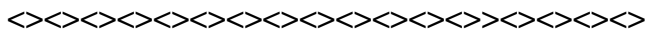
As we draw closer to the Christmas season I thought some might be interested in the following. This should be a very meaningful service for those who are holding grief this Advent and Christmas season. I hope to attend and if you would like to join me, let me know. Rev. Joel

This year St. Helena's Episcopal Chapel will be offering a Blue Christmas Service on Sunday, December 22nd at 5:00 pm. Many are acquainted with the paradox of the Advent and Christmas seasons – a time when we feel we are supposed to celebrate hope, love, joy and peace, and yet a time that can also be full of depression, sadness and grief. This service is dedicated to the memory of those who are no longer among us to share in our holidays; it is also dedicated to all those who are facing Christmas feeling lonely, isolated, alienated, or with feelings of grief and sorrow.

Blue Christmas service provides a safe place of rest, comfort and healing, it is open to all to acknowledge that the struggles that we all face need not be faced alone. St. Helena's invites all members of the community to join in this special worship service which will include prayers for healing and special focus on those who live on in our memory.

During December, a special Blue Christmas tree will be featured at the front of the chapel of St. Helena's; all are invited to place pictures, significant ornaments, or other mementoes celebrating the past lives of loved ones including spouses, relatives, friends, beloved pets, or others, whom they wish to have remembered during this sacred time of year.

St. Helena's Episcopal Chapel is located at 245 New Lenox Road in Lenox. All are welcome.



Christmas: We are better throughout the year for having, in spirit, become a child at Christmas time.

Laura Ingalls Wilder



Lectionary for December

Sunday, December 1 – First Sunday of Advent: Hope

Isaiah 2:1-5
Psalm 122
Romans 13:11-14
Matthew 24:36-44

Sunday, December 8 – Second Sunday of Advent: Peace

Isaiah 11:1-10
Psalm 72, 1-7, 18-19
Romans 15:4-13
Matthew 3:1-12

Sunday, December 15 – Third Sunday of Advent: Joy

Isaiah 35:1-10
Psalm 146:5-10
Luke 1:47-55
Matthew 11:2-11

Sunday, December 22 – Fourth Sunday of Advent: Love

Isaiah 7:10-16
Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19
Romans 1:1-7
Matthew 1:18-25

Tuesday, December 24 – Christmas Eve

We will gather for a carol sing at 7 p.m. followed by our Candlelight Service at 7:30 p.m. which will include trumpets, soloists, and Chancel Choir.

Psalm 97
Isaiah 62:6-12
Titus 3:4-7
Luke 2:1-20

Sunday, December 29 – First Sunday after Christmas with worship in the Parlor

Isaiah 63:7-9
Psalm 148
Hebrews 2:10-18
Matthew 2:13-23

December 2, 2013

Dear South Church Members and Friends,

Here we go again — "Stretching for God's Future."

On October 27 the congregation overwhelmingly approved a three-year capital campaign of \$200,000+ that will help South Church stretch into a new future in our community.

The projects, carefully vetted by Dale Prindle and the Trustees, will preserve this historic Pittsfield landmark – the steeple, the facade, the roofs – and will update parts of our building – the kitchen, sanctuary – for new ministries with the community.

The feasibility study revealed an energy and spirit within our congregation that is remarkable. Where we see grey heads, the consultants found creative, deeply committed men and women for whom Christian living means continuing growth, change and renewal.

The breath of the Holy Spirit has lifted and changed South Church throughout its history – from the early abolitionists, through periods of plenty and depression, into the heart of the Civil Rights movement, and most recently into meaningful service within the greater community.

Today, St. Joseph's Kitchen, the Food Pantry, the Thrift Shop and our Habitat partnership offer needed resources to local families and individuals. Church groups bring members and friends together in conversation, study, and joyful purpose. Our worship experiences and ministry to our young deepen our spiritual life as a community, offering practice in contemplation, the arts and service to others.

In the next few weeks, John Robertson, Joel, and I will be working with a small committee and our consultant, Rev. Jay Terbush, to plan a three-year program that meets our capital goals, stretches our vision and deepens our faith.

After a rousing kick-off event on Saturday, February 8th, church members will be visiting each other to engage in discussions of the opportunities and challenges South Church faces, as well as making financial pledges. On March 16th we will share our gifts and thoughts in a service of celebration and dedication.

Thank you for the opportunity you have given John and me to help stretch our church for a future that will become clearer as we move through the next few weeks.

Please mark February 8th on your 2014 calendar for a not-to-be-missed kick-off celebration!

With warmest wishes as we stretch for God's future,

Mary L. Rentz
Moderator

MAY MATTOON

We gathered for lunch on Tuesday, November the fifth around another beautifully-trimmed fall-themed table. You can't beat the May Mattoon hostesses when it comes to happy, bright table settings. The mood is set. The chatter picks up as we munch down our sandwich lunch. A delicious apple crisp with ice cream followed and was provided by hostesses Pam Garrett, Ruth Campbell and Sara Adams.

We then proceeded to the business meeting. It was noted that there would be a knitting tree in the church on Sunday, November 17th to hold donations of hats, mittens, and socks for children five to twelve years old.

It was brought to our attention that Judie Grady would undergo back surgery to eliminate back pain. We pray that all goes successfully and she feels relief soon. God Bless!

We then filled jars with candy, M&M's and pretzels to be sold at the Harvest Fair on the 9th of November. The jars were colorful and I know for a fact that they were yummy.

Our next meeting is a Christmas party and takes place at 6 p.m. on December 2nd. There will be a Yankee swap of gifts among members again this year. Also, if you wish to participate, bring a small, wrapped Christmas gift to be given to a shut-in.

Please remember to bring toilet articles for the Food Pantry along with any store coupons, diapers or wipes. Don't forget your place setting. Hostesses for the December meeting are Mary Rentz, Marge Demary, and Sharon Mercier.

Note: On December 15th a Christmas cookie sale will take place. Hope you had a beautiful Thanksgiving.

Alice Gallup

THE RED CARPET AREA

Thank you Fred Austin for the wonderful photography exhibit we have been enjoying the last few months.

Now the Red Carpet Area has a new art display. Bob Hill's artwork is there, ready for you to enjoy.

2013 CRAFT FAIR RESULTS

Craft Table	\$1,213.00
Raffles	989.90
Vendors	545.00
Christmas Trees	1,175.00
Bake Sale	578.80
Plants	185.65
Silent Auction	611.00
Luncheon	<u>871.25</u>
Total	\$6,164.60

In addition to the above Lord & Tailor Thrift and Gift Shop netted \$600 for the day.

Winners of the Craft Fair Raffles

Money Tree - Bruce Munson, Richmond, VA
"Evelyn's Sunshine Quilt" - Bruce Munson, Richmond, VA

Art Work by Bob Hill - Margaret Wichman
Inlaid Jewelry Box by George Lovejoy - Virginia Vogel-Polizzo, Washington, MA

Many thanks to ALL who contributed time, talent and hard work to this all-out effort, which proved to be most successful on so many levels.

Pat Hill

Miniature Christmas Trees Report

The miniature Christmas trees that were created for auction at our Craft Fair were bid upon, sold, and are in their new homes. All 23 trees, each with their own theme, were especially beautiful this year.

Among them is a 4-foot necktie tree, crafted by Marge Demary and given to the Steven Valenti's Clothing Store, in thanks for displaying the trees in their North Street window in the month of October and part of November.

The amount raised was \$1,175 for our Food Pantry. Many thanks to all the work done on this project.

Jeannine Rontowski



CHRISTMAS MEMORIALS

Christmas memorials and poinsettias will be available for Sunday, December 22, and for Christmas Eve, December 24. You will have your choice of either red and white. If you would like to order one, please contact Mary Wheat at 442-3706. The price is \$15.00 each plant.



FOOD PANTRY

Thank you one and all for your help before Thanksgiving day with the turkey distribution – from setting up to cleaning up and everything in between. Everyone worked very hard and did so in a friendly, helpful way.

Over 1000 different families received turkeys and “fixings” on Monday and another 43 on Tuesday and Wednesday. For the majority, the food supplied a Thanksgiving dinner that these people otherwise would not have had. One woman brought us a thank-you note on Tuesday and I quote:

“Thank you all so very much for giving to this community. You have brought joy to many people. The folks all around me, while waiting in line, were all so happy and friendly. Everyone helping one another. I am so blessed by all the great folks helping – the parking attendants, the servers, the bakers, the planners, the givers, the seen and the unseen. Thank you so very much for giving to all. I believe God was looking upon us all with a happy smile!”

Thank you everyone for making this possible.

Mary Wheat



*“There has been only one
Christmas ~
the rest are anniversaries.”*

W.J. Cameron



BLACK AND WHITE TV
(Under age 40? You won't understand)

You could hardly see for all the snow,
Spread the rabbit ears as far as they go.
Pull a chair up to the TV set,

“Good Night, David.” “Good Night, Chet.”

My mom used to cut chicken, chop eggs and cut meat all on the same cutting board with the same knife and no bleach, but we didn't seem to get food poisoning.

My mom used to defrost hamburger on the counter and I used to eat it raw sometimes, too. Our school sandwiches were wrapped in wax paper in a brown paper bag, not in ice pack coolers, but I can't remember getting e-coli.

Almost all of us would have rather gone swimming in the lake instead of a pristine pool (talk about boring). No beach closures then.

The term cell phone would have conjured up a phone in a jail cell, and a pager was the school PA system.

We all took gym, not PE (Physical Education). And risked permanent injury with a pair of high top Ked's (only worn in gym) instead of having cross-training athletic shoes with air cushion soles and built in light reflectors. I can't recall any injuries but they must have happened because they tell us how much safer we are now.

Flunking gym was not an option – even for stupid kids! I guess PE must be much harder than gym.

Speaking of school, we all said prayers and sang the national anthem, and staying in detention after school caught all sorts of negative attention.

We must have had horribly damaged psyches. What an archaic health system we had then. Remember school nurses? Ours wore a hat and everything.

I thought that I was supposed to accomplish something before I was allowed to be proud of myself.

I just can't recall how bored we were without computers, Play Station, Nintendo, X-box or 27 digital TV cable stations.

Oh! and where was the Benadryl and sterilization kit when I got that bee sting? I could have been killed.

We played “King of the Hill” on piles of gravel left on vacant construction sites, and when we got hurt, Mom pulled out the 48-cent bottle of Mercurochrome (kids liked it better because it didn't sting like iodine did) and then we got our butt spanked. Now it's a trip to the emergency room, followed by a 10-day dose of a \$49 bottle of antibiotics, and then Mom calls the attorney to sue the contractor for leaving a horribly vicious pile of gravel where it was such a threat.

We didn't act up at the neighbor's house because if we did, we got our butt spanked then and then we got our butt spanked again when we got home.

I recall the kid from next door coming over and doing his tricks on the front stoop, just before he fell off. Little did his Mom know that she could have owned our house. Instead, she picked him up and swatted him for being such a goof. It was a neighborhood run amuck.

To top it off, not a single person I knew had ever been told that they were from a dysfunctional family. How could we possibly have known that? We needed to get into group therapy and anger management classes. We were obviously so duped by so many societal ills, that we didn't even notice that the entire country wasn't taking Prozac! How did we ever survive?

December



2013

<i>Sunday</i>	<i>Monday</i>	<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>Wednesday</i>	<i>Thursday</i>	<i>Friday</i>	<i>Saturday</i>
1 1 st Sunday of Advent Worship With Communion 10 am Women's Book Club 11:30 am	2 May Mattoon Christmas Party (Covered Dish Supper) 7 pm	3 Men's Forum 12 noon	4 Food Pantry 8 – 11 am UCC Clergy Meeting 12 noon St. Joe's Dinner 5 pm Qigong 5:30	5 Food Pantry 8:30-11 am Ladies Benevolent 9:30 am Spiritual Support 6:30 pm Chancel Choir 7 pm	6 Lord & Tailor 10 am – 4 pm AA 6:15 pm	7 AA 10:15 am Lord & Tailor 12-4 pm AA 7 pm
8 2 nd Sunday of Advent Worship and Workshop with Potluck Lunch in Barrett Hall 10 am	9 Yarn Spinners 7 pm	10 Men's Forum 12 noon Diaconate 7 pm Capital Fund Committee 5:30 pm	11 Food Pantry 8 – 11 am St. Joe's Dinner 5 pm Trustees 6 pm	12 Food Pantry 8:30-11 am Ladies Benevolent 9:30 am Spiritual Support 6:30 pm Chancel Choir 7 pm	13 Lord & Tailor 10 am- 4 pm AA 6:15 pm	14 AA 10:15 am Lord & Tailor 12 noon-4 pm AA 7 pm
15 3 rd Sunday of Advent Worship 10 am May Mattoon Christmas Cookie Sale	16 Food Pantry Volunteers Pot Luck Lunch 1 pm Yarn Spinners 7 pm	17 Men's Forum 12 noon Mission Board 7 pm Capital Fund Committee 5:30 pm	18 Food Pantry 8 – 11 am St. Joe's Dinner 5 pm	19 Food Pantry 8:30-11 am Ladies Benevolent 9:30 am Spiritual Support 6:30 pm Chancel Choir 7 pm	20 Lord & Tailor 10 am-4 p.m. AA 6:15 pm	21 AA 10:15 am Lord & Tailor 12 noon-4 pm AA 7 pm Pittsfield Squares 7pm
22 4 th Sunday of Advent Worship 10 am Poinsettias	23 Yarn Spinners 7 pm	24 Christmas Eve Carol Sing 7 pm Worship Service with Candle Lighting Ceremony 7:30 pm	25 CHRISTMAS DAY	26	27 Lord & Tailor 10 am-4 pm AA 6:15 pm	28 AA 10:15 am Lord & Tailor 12 noon-4 pm AA 7 pm
29 Sunday Worship in the Parlor 10 am	30 Yarn Spinners 7 pm	31 NEW YEAR'S EVE	JAN 1 NEW YEAR'S DAY St. Joe's Dinner 5 pm	JAN 2 Food Pantry 8:30-11 am Ladies Benevolent 9:30 am	JAN 3 Lord & Tailor 10 am-4 pm AA 6:15 pm	JAN 4 AA 10:15 am Lord & Tailor 12 noon-4 pm AA 7 pm

NOTE: DEADLINE FOR THE JANUARY EPISTLE IS SUNDAY, JAN. 5TH AT 11 AM!