



# Epistle

**SOUTH CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH**

**UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

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Advent 2015

As we enter this season of Advent we prepare our hearts and homes for the birth of Christ in fresh, new ways. We are not in a season of just remembering a wonderful event from long ago. God is present in the here and now. Christ is coming soon. We are to be Mary and Joseph opening our hearts to God's love, making room for the birth of that love into our world. Our world certainly needs the presence of Christ, the presence of love. The bombings in Paris, terror in the Middle East, terrified refugees trying to find safe havens, hateful rhetoric on the campaign trail here in America—an overall heavy feeling that our world is being tempted to once again divide itself into warring camps of violent deeds and violent words. Maybe this is why we need Advent to come upon us each year—to help us remember something deeper.

How can Advent help heal our world? I wish I had a simple answer, but I do have glimpses. At our recent community Thanksgiving Distribution—that served nearly 1,500 guests from our community who struggle to put food on their tables—Rev. Jenny Gregg from St. Stephen's Episcopal, offered a prayer to bless the over 200 volunteers who came from all walks of life and a host of faith communities. She said "Christ has no hands but yours". Then, Jenny and I walked through Barrett Hall anointing the hands of our volunteers. I said, "May God anoint your hands with compassion" as I imprinted each hand with a drop of olive oil. These were powerful encounters for me as volunteers stretched out their hands to be anointed. They were students, elders, community leaders, those struggling to make ends meet, Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants, members of the Jewish community, those who don't participate in religion, African-Americans, Latinos, Whites, Gays, Straights, and many others. Two things struck me that day. One was how many individuals from all those categories teared up when I anointed their hands. They sensed they were doing something holy and anointing affirmed that reality. The other was that for all our differences we were a community acting as one. As the day proceeded the sharp lines that often keep us in our separate worlds softened and disappeared. If you watch the short videos at the *Berkshire Eagle* website you can hear and sense the tremendous, outflowing energy that held us all as we worked to nourish our neighbors--and ourselves—for Thanksgiving. All of us together in Barrett Hall that day—volunteers and guests--were being the hands of Christ, the hands of God for one another, anointing each other for life in this complex and, often, brutal world. By the end of the day I was exhausted but felt that we had been on quite a journey into the sacred. Poverty is still with us and so is the violence of the world, yet here was a glimpse of a different world: God at work through us creating something new.

This is the message of Advent. God is coming into the world in the birth of Jesus. God made flesh. When we share bread one with one another and move beyond the barriers that divide us, we help God be born into our world. We are the body of Christ, the body of God. This love took flesh in Barrett Hall

## EPISTLE

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The next *Epistle* deadline is January 3 at 11 am.

*Please note change in regular schedule.*

### OUR CHURCH FAMILY

*The following is an appreciative note from Nan Slonaker to the May Mattoon Class:*

Hi to everyone,

I'm Nan Slonaker (GERRY WHITON's daughter). I just returned from a fantastic visit with Mom in Beverly, Mass. Your card arrived while I was there and Mom LOVED it! She really misses Pittsfield and her "former life there."

#### To update you on Mom:

She goes to exercise class Monday through Friday at 9:30 am (this includes Yoga one day a week). A photo of Mom doing Yoga was posted by the elevator to recruit more people to join the class! She plays Bridge twice a week, volunteers at the Colonial Gardens store, goes on most field trips, and attends most events. I "taught" her how to play pool, she won! Beginner's luck???????

Also, everyone I met told me how much they like my Mom, how kind she is, how much fun she is, etc. Of course I already knew this!

Sincerely, Nan

Editor's Note: Nan's husband, Paul Slonaker, died in mid-November, shortly after her visit with Gerry. The family is remembered in our prayers.

## Berkshire Interfaith Organizing will host first MICAHA Award Dinner in January

Founded one year ago, Berkshire Interfaith Organizing is a group of clergy, their congregations and their regional affiliates who seek to make justice real in Berkshire County. South Church was one of the founding members of BIO, which now includes more than 16 member organizations.

To celebrate its first anniversary, Berkshire Interfaith Organizing will host a MICAHA Award Dinner on **Sunday, January 24, 2016**. MICAHA awards recognize individuals who exemplify the well-known passage from Micah: "And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

Each BIO member organization was asked to choose a MICAHA Award recipient, someone from its membership who demonstrates consistent leadership and giving of one's time in service. South Church Council has selected **Mary Wheat** as our first MICAHA Award recipient, honoring her tireless efforts and inspiring work with the South Church Food Pantry, St. Joseph's Kitchen, and the Thanksgiving Angels.

Mary will be acknowledged, along with all MICAHA award honorees, as part of the program at the MICAHA Award Dinner. The dinner will take place from 4:30 -7:00 pm at St. Mark School at 400 Columbus Avenue in Pittsfield. A fundraiser for BIO, the dinner is open to BIO members and non-members alike, but advanced tickets are required. South Church members and friends may purchase tickets during coffee hour on Sundays in January (look for details in January's *Epistle*). The snow date for the event is Monday, January 25.

For more information about Berkshire Interfaith Organizing, visit the BIO website at [www.berkshireinterfaithorganizing.org](http://www.berkshireinterfaithorganizing.org). If you have questions about program advertisements or donating to BIO, please contact [micah@berkshireinterfaithorganizing.org](mailto:micah@berkshireinterfaithorganizing.org).

Cindy Dickinson

## MAY MATTOON

May Mattoon met on Tuesday, November 3<sup>rd</sup> for noontime lunch. Thanksgiving was the theme for our luncheon tables. Silk-stem flowers set in “glass vases” on the tables were accompanied with a large bouquet – pretty and very colorful. Also, on the tables were cards saying thank you in different languages – an accompaniment to the *Thanks* giving theme.

Fifteen members attended, a small turnout for the lovely day we had, weather-wise. Dessert was provided by hostesses Audra Kinner, Nancy deForest and Bing Honig. A delicious apple/cranberry crisp was served with ice cream. May Mattoon members have volunteered to provide back-up baking when needed for the Coffee House.

Ruth Austin read a letter from Gerry Whiton’s daughter. Gerry is enjoying life and involved in many activities, and exercising as well. Nan, her daughter, taught her to play pool, and Gerry managed to beat her in their first game.

Shirley Vickery reports she also is enjoying her new surroundings. Her new address:

C/o The Oakes, 18 Arbor Lane,  
DeWitt, NY 13214 Phone:315-218-6581

Harriet Hallas attended South Church services as well as the Craft Fair in early November and reports she is doing well. She was impressed with our new kitchen as she spent much time volunteering in the old kitchen.

A get-well card for Ruth Campbell was passed around and signed by members.



Our next Mattoon gathering is Monday evening, December 7<sup>th</sup> at 6 p.m. It will be a covered-dish supper and Christmas party. The program is a Yankee Gift Swap. If you wish to participate, please bring a gift for the Swap. Also, bring toilet articles for the Food Pantry. Hostesses are Pam Garrett, Marge Demary and Sharon Mercier. Hope to see you all there as we celebrate the Season.

On December 13<sup>th</sup>, after the church service, our Christmas Cookie Sale will take place. A plate of cookies will be greatly appreciated.

*Take care and keep warm.*

Alice Gallup

## Happy Holidays

from

### Lord & Tailor Gift and Thrift Shop

Come on in and see all our late fall and winter clothes, scarves and hats, not to mention coats, sweaters and much more. We also have a large selection of gift items and Christmas decorations.

We are pleased to report that we have given the church \$600 this month. Thanks to all of our loyal customers, volunteers and those who donate to the shop. Our joint effort makes this possible.

Nancy de Forest and Audra Kinner



## What's Happening

### CHURCH FAIR SUCCESS and News for Next Year!!!

The Church Fair on November 7<sup>th</sup> was another successful event thanks to our dedicated and hard-working volunteers.

Thank You!!!!

This year's lucky Raffle Winners were:

Quilt: Karen Allender

Painting: Lois Moore

Money Tree: Ruth Austin

Christmas Tree: Karen Allender

We're asking for help next year as we embark on a new adventure. Our Harvest Fair will become an outside *and* inside venue the weekend of October 8<sup>th</sup> (Columbus Day weekend). Our format will remain the same but we want to capitalize on our fantastic location by using our Beautiful Side Lawn for Crafters as well as the Front Lawn for various activities. We have our Core Group of volunteers and welcome (and need) the congregation's help as we launch this new venture.

Kerry

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Christmas is the gentlest, loveliest festival of the revolving year – and yet, for all that, when it speaks, its voice has strong authority.

W.J. Cameron



### CHURCH SCHOOL NEWS

Unit 3 titled “Birthday a Blessing” runs from November 22<sup>nd</sup> through January 10<sup>th</sup>. Scripture readings from Jeremiah, the young prophet, Luke and Matthew will be explored. Among some of the stories in these scriptures are: The Angel Visits Mary, Mary and Elizabeth, and Welcome Baby Jesus.

The Christmas season began on November 29<sup>th</sup>, the first Sunday of Advent, with the traditional “Hanging of the Greens.” The children, assisted by adult members, hung the wreaths in the sanctuary at the beginning of the church service. What a fun way to welcome in the Holidays!

December 13<sup>th</sup> is “Pantry Sunday.” The food item being collected this month is peanut butter. Thank you to all friends and members who support this important mission project. Last month, 59 cans of chicken soup were collected and put on our food pantry shelves! The feeling of love, being helpful, and giving back are felt whole-heartedly by all Sunday school students and staff.

Blessings and Happy Holidays to all!      Ann Roche

### A YEAR-END SNAP-SHOT OF ST. JOSEPH'S KITCHEN AT SOUTH CHURCH

St. Joseph's Kitchen at South Church provides a free community meal each Wednesday to our neighbors who might otherwise go hungry. It was begun under the leadership of John Moore and Sister Kathryn Flanagan in the late 1980s. John retired as the kitchen manager a year ago and several people have stepped up to continue his work. Sister Kathryn stops in from time to time to offer a blessing before the meal.

Members of an ecumenical team serve as Maître d's each week. Art Kaufman (South Church), Dick Noble (First Church) and Charlie Webster (St. Joseph's) greet our guests and make sure that things move along smoothly from the time the doors open at 3:30pm until the last plate has been washed. We would welcome another person to join this team.

Someone has to make sure that proper kitchen protocols are in place and that supplies needed by our cooks and set-up and clean-up teams are on hand. As the 5th Wednesday cook, I took on that role and completed the appropriate certifications. I am grateful for Mary Wheat and Lynn Reynolds who consult with the cooks on what food is available from the Western Mass. Food Bank and other sources.

We are fortunate to have experienced teams of cooks, kitchen help and servers. Each week a lead cook plans a menu, which may be modified by whatever fresh foods are donated that week. By mid-afternoon Wednesday, the kitchen is filled with the aromas of the meal being cooked. By 4:45 pm, the serving tables are in place, and volunteers arrive to plate the hot food. At 5 pm, Joel or someone else will bless the food. Approximately sixty to one hundred guests may come for the meal. Occasionally, a group of Scouts or students will come to help serve. The Board of Realtors puts on one dinner each year. New volunteers are always welcome.

Former Trustee Dale Prindle served a unique role this year – Master of the Works for the extensive kitchen renovation made possible by our Capital Campaign. Under his careful planning and constant supervision, our kitchen was transformed with new electrical and plumbing systems, lighting, wall coverings, sinks, dishwasher, and shelving for the new pots and pans. To keep the warm feeling of the old kitchen, the still-functional metal-topped counters and tables were spruced up, and the original cabinets were stripped, repainted and reglazed. Working in the renewed kitchen is now a joy - thanks to Dale Prindle and your contributions! Pat Politis was a hands-on assistant to Dale in the kitchen renovation. A long-time St Joe's cook, Pat and her mother, Helen Welch, serve up delicious and abundant meals each second Wednesday. In addition, Pat is the St Joseph's Kitchen treasurer, paying bills that relate directly to the Wednesday meal and the South Church Food Pantry.

I hope this article provides you, our *Epistle* readers, with an increased understanding of the weekly St. Joseph's Kitchen at South Church Community Meal.

Mary Rentz



## THE CHRISTMAS PAGEANT

My husband and I had been happily married (most of the time) for five years but hadn't been blessed with a baby. I decided to do some serious praying and promised God that if he would give us a child, I would be a perfect mother, love it with all my heart and raise it with His word as my guide.

God answered my prayers and blessed us with a son. The next year God blessed us with another son. The following year, He blessed us with yet another son. The year after that we were blessed with a daughter.

My husband thought we'd been blessed right into poverty. We now had four children, and the oldest was only four years old.

I learned never to ask God for anything unless I meant it. As a minister once told me, "If you pray for rain, make sure you carry an umbrella." I began reading a few verses of the Bible to the children each day as they lay in their cribs. I was off to a good start. God had entrusted me with four children and I didn't want to disappoint Him.

I tried to be patient the day the children smashed two dozen eggs on the kitchen floor searching for baby chicks. I tried to be understanding. When they started a hotel for homeless frogs in the spare bedroom, although it took me nearly two hours to catch all twenty-three frogs. When my daughter poured ketchup all over herself and rolled up in a blanket to see how it felt to be a hot dog, I tried to see the humor rather than the mess.

In spite of changing over twenty-five thousand diapers, never eating a hot meal and never sleeping for more than thirty minutes at a time, I still thank God daily for my children.

While I couldn't keep my promise to be a perfect mother -I didn't even come close...I did keep my promise to raise them in the Word of God. I knew I was missing the mark just a little when I told my daughter we were going to church to worship God, and she wanted to bring a bar of

soap along to "wash up" Jesus, too. Something was lost in the translation when I explained that God gave us everlasting life, and my son thought it was generous of God to give us his "last wife."

My proudest moment came during the children's Christmas pageant. My daughter was playing Mary, two of my sons were shepherds and my youngest son was a wise man. This was their moment to shine.

My five-year-old shepherd had practiced his line, "We found the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes." But he was nervous and said, "The baby was wrapped in wrinkled clothes." My four-year-old "Mary" said, "That's not 'wrinkled clothes,' silly. That's dirty, rotten clothes."

A wrestling match broke out between Mary and the shepherd and was stopped by an angel, who bent her halo and lost her left wing.

I slouched a little lower in my seat when Mary dropped the doll representing Baby Jesus, and it bounced down the aisle crying, "Mama-mama." Mary grabbed the doll, wrapped it back up and held it tightly as the wise men arrived.

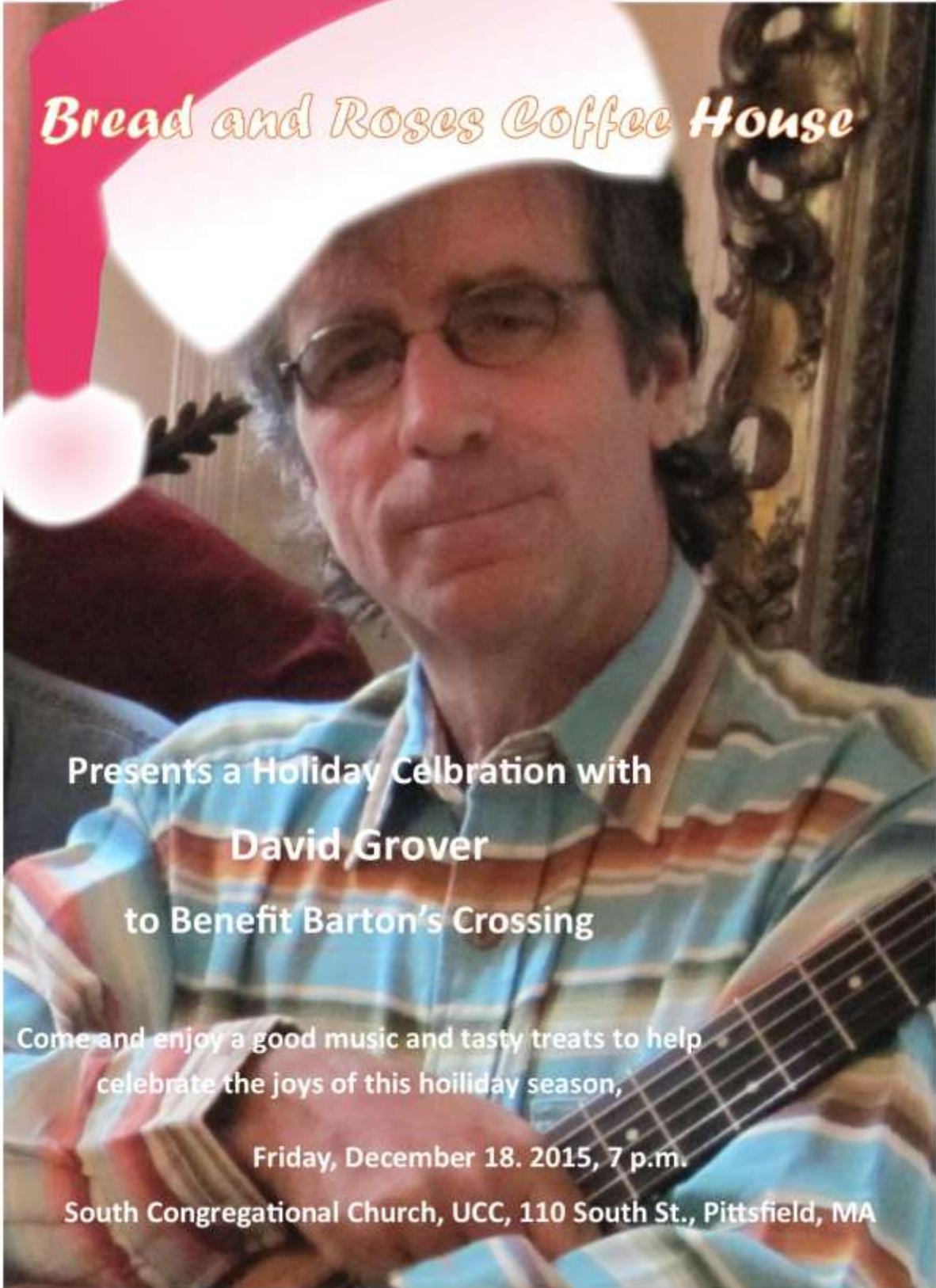
My other son stepped forward wearing a bathrobe and a paper crown, knelt at the manger and announced, "We are the three wise men, and we are bringing gifts of gold, common sense and fur."

The congregation dissolved into laughter, and the pageant got a standing ovation. "I've never enjoyed a Christmas program as much as this one," laughed the pastor, wiping tears from his eyes

For the rest of my life, I'll never hear the Christmas story without thinking of gold, common sense and fur. "My children are my pride and my joy and my greatest blessing," I said as I dug through my purse for an aspirin.

Jesus had no servants, yet they called Him Master. Had no degree, yet they called Him Teacher. Had no medicines, yet they called Him Healer. Had no army, yet kings feared Him. He won no military battles, yet He conquered the world. He committed no crime, yet they crucified Him. He was buried in a tomb, yet He lives today.

Feel honored to serve such a Leader who loves us.



*Bread and Roses Coffee House*

Presents a Holiday Celebration with  
**David Grover**  
to Benefit Barton's Crossing

Come and enjoy a good music and tasty treats to help  
celebrate the joys of this hoiliday season,

Friday, December 18, 2015, 7 p.m.

South Congregational Church, UCC, 110 South St., Pittsfield, MA



## *Christmas Poinsettias*

I/We wish to order \_\_\_\_\_ White and/or \_\_\_\_\_ Red  
Christmas Poinsettia plant(s) at \$15.00 per plant  
and/or \_\_\_\_\_ I wish to give a cash gift of \$15.00

In Memory of:

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Please submit with payment to:

**Mary Wheat**

23 Ivy Lane, Pittsfield, MA 01201

I/We wish to pick up our plant(s) following

*(If you sign up to take your poinsettia with you after service, please remember to do so, as we had many left over last year.)*

\_\_\_\_\_ Sunday Service on December 20<sup>th</sup>

\_\_\_\_\_ Christmas Eve service

\_\_\_\_\_ I/We will leave our plant(s) to be delivered to our homebound  
or hospitalized members.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

**PLEASE SUBMIT YOUR REQUEST BY SUNDAY, DECEMBER 13<sup>th</sup>. THANK YOU.**

# December 2015

## South Congregational Church

| Sunday                                                                                                                                                    | Monday                                                                                  | Tuesday                                                                                                           | Wednesday                                                                                                              | Thursday                                                                                                                                       | Friday                                                                                        | Saturday                                                                                                                |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                           |                                                                                         | 1<br>"Walking in the Dark" Study Group 10 am<br>Men's Forum 12 noon<br>Church Council 7 pm                        | 2<br>Food Pantry 7:30 – 11 am<br>Music Together Bridge 12 – 4 pm<br>St. Joe's Dinner 5 pm                              | 3<br>Food Pantry 7:30-11 am<br>Music Together Quilting-Ladies Benevolent 9:30 am<br>UCC Clergy 12 noon<br>Bridge 6-10 pm<br>Chancel Choir 7 pm | 4<br>Lord & Tailor 10 am-4 pm<br>Bridge 12 – 4 pm<br>AA 6:15 pm                               | 5<br>Music Together AA 10:15 am<br>Lord & Tailor 12-4 pm<br>Filipino-American Christmas Party 6 – 11 pm<br>Al-Anon 7 pm |
| 6<br><b>Second Sunday of Advent</b><br>Worship 10 am with Communion<br>Bridge 3 - 7 pm                                                                    | 7<br>Bridge 6 -10 pm<br>May Mattoon Christmas Party 6 pm<br>NA-There is Hope Group 7 pm | 8<br>"Walking in the Dark" Study Group 10 am<br>Men's Forum 12 noon<br>Diaconate 7 pm<br>Square Dancing 7 pm      | 9<br>Food Pantry 7:30 – 11 am<br>Music Together Bridge 12 – 4 pm<br>St. Joe's Dinner 5 pm<br>Trustees 6 pm             | 10<br>Food Pantry 7:30-11 am<br>Music Together Quilting-Ladies Benevolent 9:30 am<br>Chancel Choir 7 pm                                        | 11<br>Lord & Tailor 10 am-4 pm<br>Bridge 12 – 4 pm<br>AA 6:15 pm                              | 12<br>Music Together AA 10:15 am<br>Lord & Tailor 12-4 pm<br>Al-Anon 7 pm                                               |
| 13<br><b>Third Sunday of Advent</b><br>Worship 10 am<br>May Mattoon Christmas Cookie Sale<br>Deadline for Poinsettia Orders<br>Bridge 3 - 7 pm            | 14<br>Bridge 6 -10 pm<br>Yarn Spinners 7 pm<br>NA-There is Hope Group 7 pm              | 15<br>"Walking in the Dark" Study Group 10 am<br>Men's Forum 12 noon<br>Mission Board 7 pm<br>Square Dancing 7 pm | 16<br>Food Pantry 7:30 – 11 am<br>Music Together Bridge 12 – 4 pm<br>Berkshire Place 10:45 am<br>St. Joe's Dinner 5 pm | 17<br>Food Pantry 7:30-11 am<br>Music Together Quilting-Ladies Benevolent 9:30 am<br>Chancel Choir 7 pm                                        | 18<br>Lord & Tailor 10 am-4 pm<br>Bridge 12 – 4 pm<br>AA 6:15 pm<br>Coffee House Concert 7 pm | 19<br>Music Together AA 10:15 am<br>Lord & Tailor 12-4 pm<br>AA 10:15 am<br>Pittsfield Squares 7 pm<br>Al-Anon 7 pm     |
| 20<br><b>Fourth Sunday of Advent</b><br>Worship 10 am with Memorial Poinsettias<br>Coffee Hour<br>Collections for the Language Project<br>Bridge 3 - 7 pm | 21<br>Bridge 6 -10 pm<br>Yarn Spinners 7 pm<br>NA-There is Hope Group 7 pm              | 22<br>Square Dancing 7 pm                                                                                         | 23<br>Food Pantry 7:30 – 11 am<br>Music Together Bridge 12 – 4 pm<br>St. Joe's Dinner 5 pm                             | 24<br><b>Christmas Eve Carol Sing 7 pm<br/>Candlelight Service 7:30 pm</b>                                                                     | 25<br><b>Christmas Day</b>                                                                    | 26<br>AA 10:15 am<br>Al-Anon 7 pm                                                                                       |
| 27<br><b>First Sunday after Christmas</b><br>Worship in the Parlor 10 am<br>Bridge 3 - 7 pm                                                               | 28<br>Bridge 6 -10 pm<br>Yarn Spinners 7 pm<br>NA-There is Hope Group 7 pm              | 29<br>Square Dancing 7 pm                                                                                         | 30<br>Food Pantry 7:30 – 11 am<br>Bridge 12 – 4 pm<br>St. Joe's Dinner 5 pm                                            | 31<br><b>New Year's Eve</b><br>Quilting-Ladies Benevolent 9:30 am<br>NA New Year's Eve Gathering 2 pm – 2 am                                   | JAN 1<br><b>New Year's Day</b><br>AA 6:15 pm                                                  | JAN 2<br>AA 10:15 am<br>Al-Anon 7 pm                                                                                    |

**NOTE: DEADLINE FOR THE JANUARY EPISTLE IS SUNDAY, JANUARY 3<sup>RD</sup> AT 11 A.M.!**