

# The Tower

First Congregational  
United Church of Christ  
Madison, Wisconsin

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LXVIII

December 4, 2011

No. 41

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## Ready for Advent

*John Buchanan is the editor/publisher of the Christian Century magazine, and has been for several years. He is also the Senior Pastor at Fourth Presbyterian Church in Chicago, a church where Joan and I have worshipped occasionally when we have been in Chicago after Christmas. The following editorial is from the most recent issue of the magazine.*

Advent is my favorite season. I think this goes back to the anticipation of school after endless summers, to the joy of fall reunions with college friends, and to my own children's excitement at the first day of school. I love autumn – the leaves turning to red, yellow and orange, the days becoming shorter, the color of the sky and clouds in the gorgeous, slanted fall light. As a boy, I looked forward to darkness at 5pm and returning home to the cozy warmth of home lights after I had finished the evening paper route.

I'm particularly ready and eager for Advent this year. Perhaps it's because recent world events have been so relentlessly grim: another fatal exchange of rocket fire between Israelis and Palestinians, a car bomb attack on American troops in Afghanistan, more suicide bombs in Iraq, fragile economies in Europe and here at home, and presidential candidates outdoing one another in ignoring the critical issues of immigration, financial regulation and global warming. I need Advent.

This year, I'm winding down my ministry as I prepare for retirement. I vowed not to get caught up in thinking "this is the last time for All Saints Sunday," etc., but I have found it hard not to. As Abraham Maslow observed after he'd had a heart attack, we would not love passionately if we thought we would live forever. "My river never looked so beautiful," he said. For me this year, everything is more beautiful, more true.

I hear the profound yearning in Isaiah's poetry: "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down," and the hope: "'Comfort, O comfort my people,' says your God. 'Speak tenderly ...'"

The Advent season plays out against the backdrop of a materialist culture at its gaudiest, most materialistic, most vulgar; the season's advertising will appeal to the least attractive human characteristics – greed and pride and our need to affirm ourselves by what we buy and consume.

Advent responds by reminding us that a child will be born in the midst of a world and a time very much like our own, that the reconciliation and redemption his birth promises is not separate from the world, and that he will call us to follow him and be his people in this same sad, greedy, vulgar and beautiful world. His birth, which dark Advent anticipates, will be a light in the darkness that darkness will not overcome. \*

*I agree with so much Rev. Buchanan says in this article. I, also, have been affected by the awful news which surrounds us each day, by the bleak economic outlook, by the sheer stupidity of the statements of some presidential candidates (and by the media which covers them so breathlessly). I also hear the deep longing for God in Isaiah's poetry, and then the comfort and also the challenge he offers (Advent would be infinitely poorer without Isaiah). Advent is a time of hope – not hope in what I see in world events, but hope in a God who often acts in the world without my seeing it. I will revel in the church's words of hope this Advent season. And I will let those words spur me to act for God's love even when worldly hope seems absent.*

Curt



## JOIN US FOR MORNING SERVICE

**Sunday, December 4, 2011**  
**Second Sunday in Advent**  
**Worship at 10am in the Sanctuary**  
**Scripture Readings: Isaiah 40:1-11,**  
**Mark 1:1-8**

The Isaiah passage is a powerful message of comfort and hope, spoken to the Hebrew people who were in exile in Babylon. They had been in exile for years, actually for two generations or more. Many despaired of ever returning to their homes and their native land; and of course many had been born in Babylon, and they knew of Israel only from stories told by their parents or their elders. But now Isaiah comes with a new word: "Comfort, O comfort my people," says your God. "Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid (or as another translation has it: "that her warfare is ended and her iniquity is pardoned"). Isaiah's word is a word of hope in a time of despair. At any time, and maybe particularly this year, hope in God is what we desperately need.

But as we learn in Mark, hope includes the need to repent for our sins. John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. (Mark 1:4) Good News is present, even in hard times; but that Good News comes at a cost: honesty about ourselves – with God, with ourselves, and with others.

### Thanks!!

to all who helped continue our tradition of serving a free Thanksgiving meal. Through your efforts we were able to serve 440 delicious meals and have ample food to send on to the shelter at Port Saint Vincent.

**Holiday Concert!** Friday, December 16 in the Sanctuary at 8:00pm will be the Madison Bach Musicians Holiday concert. Tickets \$20/\$15 students/seniors in advance, \$25/\$20 at the door. For more information 238-6092 or [madisonbachmusicians.org](http://madisonbachmusicians.org)



## Last Week to Order!!!



### Poinsettias for Christmas

It's already time to order poinsettias to decorate the sanctuary for Christmas. The deadline is **Tuesday, December 6.**  
Cost: \$13 per plant

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

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

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Your plant may be ordered:

In loving memory of \_\_\_\_\_

Given by \_\_\_\_\_

*Or*

In loving honor of: \_\_\_\_\_

Given by: \_\_\_\_\_

Enclosed is a check for \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Mail to: First Congregational UCC; 1609 University Avenue; Madison, WI 53726

## FIRST CONG YOUTH

### COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILA- BLE

Members of First Congregational UCC are invited to apply for college scholarships for 2012-2013 from the Frank E. Page Scholarship Fund. Applicants should be planning to begin or continue education at any accredited 2- or 4-year college or university, and should have a record of academic achievement and service to church and community, as well as demonstrated financial need. The application deadline is Feb. 15, 2012; contact [scholarships@firstcongmadison.org](mailto:scholarships@firstcongmadison.org) for an electronic application.

**All Youth Christmas Shopping** First Cong Church Youth will head to West Towne Mall on Sunday, December 11 from 1 – 3pm for the annual Christmas Shopping event. Teams of youth will scour the stores for deals to find the perfect gift for those less fortunate. Gifts are purchased with Youth Mission funds. A mall scavenger hunt will follow shopping. Sign up in the youth room.

## WAYS TO SERVE

**SCARVES AND JEWELRY** Each year we assemble Christmas gifts for guests at the Salvation Army Single Women's Homeless Shelter. In addition to practical items such as socks, lip balm, combs, and gloves, we like to include colorful scarves and jewelry. If you can spare some from your own collection, please bring them to church marked "shelter gifts" by **December 4**. And don't forget: the shelter is ALWAYS grateful for donations of bed linens, towels and washcloths, duffel bags, tote bags, suitcases, clothing, and small toiletries. If you have questions, or need to arrange for pickup, call Mari McCarty, 238-8837.

**Once again, as we have for the past several years on Christmas Eve**, a group of Prison Ministry Project volunteers will carpool to Fox Lake Correctional Institution to lead an afternoon worship service for the men incarcerated there. The simple service of music and reading of the Christmas story is wonderful, and the inmates sincerely appreciate this special celebration. We will leave the church about 11:40 a.m. on Saturday, December 24th, and return by 5:00. Please join us!

The deadline to sign up is **December 18**. Since we are limited this year to a smaller group, if you're interested in going, please let Janet Pugh know as soon as you can, by e-mailing her at [janet.pugh@charter.net](mailto:janet.pugh@charter.net). We'll need your legal name and date of birth. Because of the prison rules, this is limited to adults only.

**PLEASE BRING NONPERISHABLE FOOD ITEMS THIS SUNDAY** The Gospel exhorts us to feed the hungry, and the first Sunday of every month is when First Congregational collects nonperishable food items (canned or boxed) to help combat hunger in our community. Please bring your donations to church this Sunday, December 4, and place them in the basket under the table in the Narthex. Volunteers from the congregation will deliver them to area food pantries, and you'll be a part of providing "loaves and fishes" to those in need. Thank you.

**Christmas Fund Offering** For 109 years, the Christmas Fund Offering for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund has been a means by which we, as members of the United Church of Christ and its predecessor bodies, live out the mandate to be Christ's Body in the world. The Christmas Fund, one of four Special Mission Offerings received annually in the United Church of Christ, is a ministry of compassion and care to those who serve our church. Lower-income retirees continue to feel most keenly the financial stress brought about by the current economic climate. Because of that, we ask you to prayerfully consider your response to the 2011 Christmas Fund Offering and give to the best of your ability. Reflect upon the ways in which your life has been touched by a retired pastor, a former youth leader, a Christian Education director, a church secretary, a custodian, or a minister of music, and honor their ministries in a way that will help them and others like them in these challenging times. We will receive our offering on **December 18th**.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

**The Advent Workshop is This Sunday!** Don't forget to join us for the annual Advent Workshop after worship this week! There will be a light lunch, followed by the workshop. As always, we'll have cookies to frost and decorate and crafts to make. This year's crafts include old favorites like gifts for your dog and cat, milk-carton candy houses and pine-cone bird feeders. There will also be new items, including a paper star ornament, Christmas note cards and an Advent candle holder for your table. The workshop begins immediately after lunch and will last until 2:30. There is a small charge for each craft to recover the cost of materials.

**Hanging of the Greens** will also take place after worship on December 4. After a light lunch downstairs, anyone who wishes may come upstairs and help decorate the Sanctuary by putting wreaths on doors, hanging greenery on the balcony, and putting up Christmas trees!

**Racial Disparity in the Criminal Justice system and Communities of Faith**, a panel discussion and call to action, will be held **Monday, December 5**, from 5:30-7pm at Fountain of Life Church on Badger Road. For more information contact Jerry Hancock at 608 658-6630.

**Men's Fellowship** The Board of Community Life invites all men to an hour of fellowship. We will meet with no agenda, although we may discuss what Men's Fellowship might be and do. Sunday, Dec.11 at 8:30am. Gallup Coffee and Bakeshop, 1859 Monroe St, Madison. No RSVP necessary. Contact: Tom Syring, [tjsyring@tds.net](mailto:tjsyring@tds.net), 843-2234.

# Church Calendar December 4-11, 2011

## Sunday, December 4

10:00am Sunday Worship ~ S  
 10:15am Wee Worship ~ C  
 11:15am Cherub Choir  
 ~ Room 301  
 11:30am Advent  
 Workshop ~ DR  
 11:30am Hanging of the Greens ~ S

## Monday, December 5

5:15pm Stewardship Board ~ FR  
 7:00pm All Boards ~ C  
 5:30pm Table Tennis Clubs ~ DR

## Tuesday, December 6

5:15pm NA Women's ~ Room 301  
 7:00pm NA ~ Room 301  
 7:00pm Boy Scouts ~ DR, YR  
 8:30pm UW Table Tennis Club ~ DR

## Wednesday, December 7

9:30am Worship Planning ~ MS  
 10:30am Staff Meeting ~ MS  
 6:30pm Coventry Ringers ~ Room 301  
 7:30pm Chancel Choir ~ C

## Thursday, December 8

7:00pm Madison Area Jugglers ~ DR  
 7:00pm Advent Vespers ~ C, SL  
 8:00pm AA ~ Room 301

## Friday, December 9

5:30pm Madison Table Tennis  
 Club ~ DR

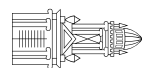
## Saturday, December 10

## Sunday, December 11

10:00am Sunday Worship ~ S  
 10:15am Sunday School  
 11:00am Capital Campaign  
 celebration



BBQ ~ Mid High Bible Study  
 Big K ~ Big Kitchen  
 BOUNCE ~ Mid High Youth  
 Group  
 C ~ Chapel  
 DR ~ Dining Room  
 FIGS ~ Families Including God  
 and Stuff  
 FR ~ Fellowship Room  
 GAS ~ Sr. High Bible Study  
 LRC ~ Learning Resource Center  
 MS ~ Minister's Study  
 S ~ Sanctuary  
 SAGE ~ Sr. High Youth Group  
 SL ~ Student Lounge  
 SR ~ Salad Room  
 YR ~ Youth Room



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL  
 UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

1609 University Avenue  
 608-233-9751 (phone)

Madison, Wisconsin 53726

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

**Worship attendance on  
 Sunday, November 27, 2011 was 202.**

### Staff:

Curt Anderson, Senior Minister  
 Eldonna Hazen, Associate Minister  
 Jerry Hancock, Director of Prison Ministry Project  
 Donald J. DeBruin, Director of Music Ministries  
 Jeff Rabe, Director of Christian Education for  
 Children & Youth  
 Rob Eagle, Bookkeeper  
 Jill Farnsworth, Church Secretary  
 David Krantz, Building Manager

**Office Hours:** 8am-12:30pm, 1:00pm-4:00pm,  
 Monday -Thursday; 8am-noon Friday.

**Phone:** 608-233-9751

**Fax:** 608-233-7180

**E-mail:** office@firstcongmadison.org

**Web Page:** www.firstcongmadison.org  
 Facebook.com/firstcongo

**IN CASE OF EMERGENCIES:** Curt Anderson's  
 phone is 836-1321, Eldonna Hazen's phone number is  
 241-8117 and Jerry Hancock's phone is 658-6630.

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