

TheOutlook

University Circle United Methodist Church

All are welcome. All the time.

December 2015



ertainly, you've heard this part of the "Christmas Story" countless times: "In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered."

From this verse—Luke 2:1—one of the most enduring stories in the world follows, as it narrates events swirling around an ancient time and place, a young woman named Mary, a carpenter called Joseph, a journey to Bethlehem and the birth of Jesus.

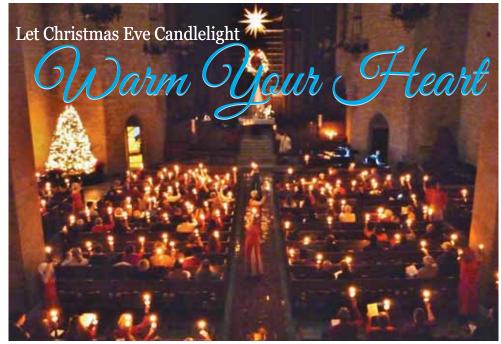
Church Christmas pageants and narrations, scripture-based TV Christmas specials, and manger scenes for sale in stores and, where still unchallenged, on public display throughout the western world—they *all* remind listeners, viewers and tons of harried shoppers to think about the "silent night, holy night" when Jesus was born.

The story that follows Luke 2:1 is so very familiar, particularly in our American Christmas consumer culture, that the force, the meaning of the verse and the entire story of Jesus' birth can sometimes feel all but totally lost. For so many people now, *those* verses, *that* story is merely a "nice" part of the celebration of the season; a nice story to tell the kids and grandkids as a prelude for the big morning of opening presents.

OK. I get that. And, I also get the sentiment

► chalk talk continued on page 6





Join in the joy of Christmas Eve as the glow of candlelight fills the Sanctuary during our 4pm, 8pm and 11pm services.

Each service offers its own unique ways of welcoming the Christ child:

Choirs of voices and bells join with our liturgical dancers to celebrate Jesus' birth through music and expression. Children especially will enjoy singing carols, hearing the Christmas story and watching a dimmed Sanctuary gradually glow with candlelight.

Christmas music comes alive as soloists and instrumentalists join with our Chancel Choir to make this joyous holiday come alive! Carols and candlelight join together to create a meaningful experience to remember.

Softer versions of popular music join with traditional carols and dance to create a very real yet reflective service that concludes with "Silent Night" and candlelight and a renewed sense of gratitude for the birth and life of Jesus.

Make plans now to be a part of at least one of these compelling services. Each will fill you with the warmth, the joy, the true meaning of Christmas.

[Parking is available in our north lot, across E. 107th in the Judson Manor lot, along Parklane and E. 107th and on the east side of MLK Blvd. Follow signs to our east handicap entrance, as needed.]

2015/16 Organ Concert Series: Lavert Stuart

Celebrating 50 years of music ministry, our organist, Lavert Stuart, presents a selection of solo organ and collaborative musical selections, Sunday, December 13, at 2pm in our church Sanctuary. As part of this season's organ concert series, this program celebrates Lavert's five decades of service to the music and church communities and will feature a shared spotlight with our church's three choirs and the DuffyLit Dance Ensemble.

Your attendance at this recognition of Lavert's lifelong dedication to the furtherance of musical expression in the Cleveland community and beyond will be greatly appreciated.



Lavert Stuart



A Letter from Rev. Dr. Kenneth W. Chalker

Dear partner in this urban ministry,

I have always been so very, very grateful that you join with Grace and me to financially support the life of this church. What our gifts make possible on an annual basis is a great witness to the vitality of our faith and commitment to accomplishing loving things in this city.

This Sunday, November 22, we have the opportunity to place before the altar our pledge of support for the mission, operation and program life of this church for 2016. And, once again, I am hoping that you will prayerfully consult with the Creator as you consider the pledge of support you will offer in the year ahead.

Many of you have heard me say that, in all the ways that really matter, we are a mega church. We serve and proclaim a mega God. Our mission is mega. Our opportunities are mega. The spirit of love, hope and inclusive faith that thrives here is mega. God's grace that we experience and which abides here is mega. EVERYTHING about this marvelous faith place is mega. There is no faith place quite like it. This is not a mega boast but a mega affirmation of what *you* make possible.

Being a mega church requires of us mega gifts of ourselves and our financial resources. You and God define what that mega gift-giving means in your life. And make no mistake, the character of this church will always be one that is mega grateful for what you contribute.

This Sunday, I ask that you give mega attention to the maximization of your contributed dollars for contribution during the coming year. Our mega church needs our mega-faithful gifts, our tangible prayers, our grateful expressions of faith in the mission of this family of faith; for it only through our time, talent and treasure that we can continue to be, in the name and way of Christ, a *mega* blessing in our city.

Faithfully, Ken Chalker

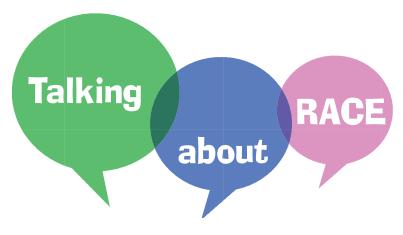
UCUMC OUTLOOK

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~ Malcolm Himschoot, member

At our Church in the Circle, adults across white and black backgrounds met one night each month from September through November to talk about what is seldom mentioned in such company: race.

We all live with it. Some of us are more aware of it than others. Some of us work against racism and know we are doing so while others of us wonder how in the world to work against it. Some of us are tired of working against racism every single day. And some of us are just beginning to define racism and echo a point made in the film, *Cracking the Codes*, by Shakti Butler: "We think of it in terms of being a good person…yet in reality the system of racial inequity is a system."

The purpose of the dialogues at church was to build relationships. Even though we worship together and pray together, sing together and eat potlucks together—some people for many years—there are still deeper levels to reach, to attain understanding and enlightenment. And along the way, we even learned one another's names!

Each night's discussion around prepared questions was followed by small-group sharing in circles of about a dozen people. The questions were taken from the book, *The Anti-Racist Cookbook* by two African-Americans, Robin Parker and Pamela Smith Chambers. Questions led at different times to laughter, commonalities and differences and, for some, expressions of pain. Questions included:

- "What were some early messages you received about race?"
- "How has racism affected the direction of your life?"
- "What makes it hard to talk about race in mixed company?"

More than 45 people participated in the three-month series. Survey evaluations included:

(From a person of color) "This definitely deepened my relationships at church—marvelous experience."

(From a white participant) "I will use what I've learned here to think more deeply about white privilege and how I can take action to promote greater understanding about privilege within my white community."

Some participants crucially reflected that the conversations were too short and still stayed on the surface. Others said the conversations reminded them of their professional environment. Many said that more such conversations are needed—all the more important in light of the November 22 one-year anniversary of the death of Tamir Rice—the event which led to these explicit race conversations in our church.

In light of differing racial experiences and continuing racial inequity, different people in the Cleveland community need in different ways to continue to remember, grieve, demonstrate, be there for each other and organize for change. It's clear that responding together is not easy, and the work is long. But that said, more relationship-building events are planned for 2016, with Chiq Montgomery, myself and others in leadership. We look forward to your participation; it's important...more than ever.

Marketing Matters

~Aaron Collier, Creative Marketing Strategist

Exact Change: An Exact Success



Christine Howey performs her story

From all indications, this October 15 program created some wonderful results:

- * This *Exact Change* production packed the house! Nearly 200 people were in attendance.
- * We became the first community of faith to host Christine Howey's award-winning play.
- * We received over \$745 in donations, collected nearly 85 new email addresses and received overwhelmingly positive feedback from the audience and community alike.
- * We built partnerships and strengthened relationships with ten community organizations.
 - * We received local news coverage from Fox 8 News @ 10 pm.

Website Details and Optimism

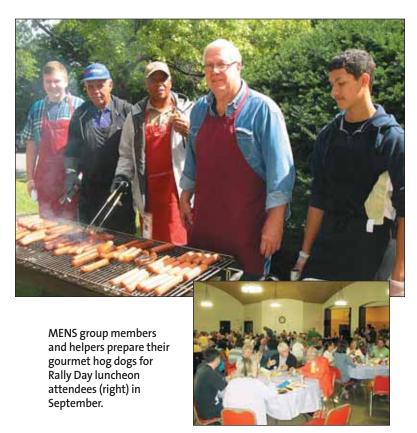
On a monthly basis we are averaging 1,600 visitors on our website who are viewing nearly 4,800 pages of content. You can help us continue to grow our visibility by sharing www.churchinthecircle.com with friends, family and colleagues. In addition, *The Outlook* newsletter is available on our website, under "MORE," making it easy to share electronically or in print.

Facebook

Our church now has 625 "Likes" and reaches approximately 3,000 news feeds every week through Facebook. Add the church to *your* Facebook page and stay tuned in to the latest church happenings!



Marge and Dick Dillon celebrated their 62nd wedding anniversary in August.





GRACENOTES

~Nathan Motta, Music and Arts Director

'Tis the season for carols, cantatas, candles and even some Christmas craziness! Everyone in Music and Arts at Church in the Circle is already hard at work preparing worship experiences that are sure to touch and inspire all who attend. Here is just a taste of what's in store this Advent season:

- "Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silent" with a special clarinet performance accompanying our Chancel Choir
- A celebration of Lavert Stuart's 50 years in music ministry as part of our Organ Recital Series, featuring sounds of the season and performances by all of UCUMC's ensembles
- "Rejoice!"—a contemporary Christmas Cantata offering from our combined Gospel and Chancel Choirs, featuring a 6-piece combo
- Some inspiring performances by our Liturgical Dancers, including the traditional weekly
 procession of the Light for the Advent wreath
- A moving selection of artistic expression in all three Christmas Eve worship experiences, with singing, dance, bells, pipe organ and more—each service concluding with our traditional candlelit "Silent Night"

These are just a few of the many inspiring experiences you can look forward to as we celebrate together this important season of giving, peace and love.

"Come to me. Get away with me . . . and learn the unforced rhythms of grace."

Matthew 11:29

This time of year can really mess with our heads...and our hearts. We can get swept up in the sales of the season, the bargains and busyness, whirled away by the many voices crying out for our attention. Yet our hearts, like one crying out in the wilderness, yearn for *more*.

Join us **Wednesday**, **December 2**, **at 12:00 noon and 7:00pm**, for a Time of Healing & Reflection. Make time to pause, remember and reflect on the Power of Love in your life, even in times when God may seem distant or silent. Let the beauty of Christ restore your tired soul.

~ Heidi Denman McDougall, Minister of Pastoral Care

Dining Opportunities

Second Sunday Lunch (SSL)

continues to be a popular church event as a friendly bunch of folks meet for lunch at various restaurants following worship on the second Sunday of the month.

In October a hungry group of members and friends gathered at Trattoria on the Hill for Italian fare like Mama used to make. November's outing was at Siam Café to enjoy various tasty Asian dishes and the fellowship that ensued. Looking ahead, the festive Holiday lunch will once again be at Edgewater Yacht Club on December 13, hosted by Jan and John Stahl. Betz Richards organizes the monthly lunches and can be contacted for reservations or more information at chefbetz1@aol.com or 440-235-9343.

CHRISTMAS POTLUCK

Join your church friends for a festive Christmas potluck on Sunday, December 6, in the Great Hall following worship. In addition to great food and fellowship, there will be carols playing and special activities for children. PLEASE RSVP on forms found in the church office. Our main dish will be provided, but you are asked to bring a generous side dish so that there's plenty to eat! See you there!

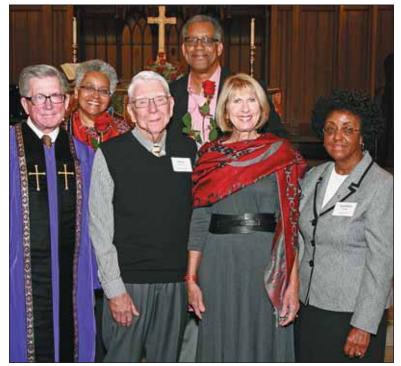
Welcome, New Members

On Sunday, November 8, Church in the Circle welcomed new and—yes—returning members:

CHERYL and STEVE CHEATHAM live in the Larchmere neighborhood of Cleveland and enjoy being residents of the city after living in Shaker Heights for many years. Cheryl is a librarian at the Law Library at Case Western Reserve University, and Steve is an attorney with the Buckley King Law firm. They have three children and a brand-new grandchild. They were looking for a church close to their home and had always wanted to hear Dr. Chalker preach. They now appreciate his sermons as well as the urban nature of our church and are transferring their membership from Heights Christian Church.

CYNTHIA JONES has been an active resident of the Mt. Pleasant neighborhood for more than 50 years, enjoying sports and theater in her spare time, and is transferring her membership from New Life at Calvary Presbyterian Church. She is now retired, but her experiences as a social worker have included working with foster children, adoptive parents and at-risk youth and counseling first offenders in various criminal justice programs.

KAY and KEN KONICEK have returned to our church family after living in Sarasota, Florida, for ten years. They left as members of First Church and are now returning to Church in the Circle. They missed friends and family and the four seasons of NE Ohio—AND LeBron!—and have moved back to Strongsville. Ken is a retired band director, and Kay was a teacher.



Front row (L-R): Dr. Chalker, Ken Konicek, Kay Konicek, Cynthia Jones; back row: Cheryl Cheatham, Steve Cheatham

As a GCC Member: The Mission Ahead

~ Jared Gadomski Littleton

On November 22, 2014, the Church in the Circle community, like so many others, was shocked by the death of Tamir Rice. From the pulpit to the pews, our congregation cried out and asked how we could make a positive difference in the wake of this tragedy.

In response, we came together and began to talk anew about issues of race, violence and social action. The sentiment was universal: it

would be outside of our unique faith and social justice heritage to ignore this tragedy and return to the comfort of our pews.

After nearly a year of discernment, Church in the Circle has taken a big step forward to recommit to social

justice as a core of who we are. On October 4, 2015, our Administrative Council unanimously voted to have Church in the Circle join Greater Cleveland Congregations (GCC). GCC is a non-partisan coalition of faith communities and partner organizations in Cuyahoga County working together to enable a higher level of social justice in our city. GCC unites people across lines of race, class, religion and geography to promote public, private and civic sector actions which strengthen and improve the quality of life of our neighborhoods.

Joining GCC will make Church in the Circle stronger because many members of our congregation, including many youth, live their faith through social justice action. This visible step will remind the community that we are a church that lives its faith through social action. GCC will provide free training and guidance to help us reach out to our neighbors and pew mates to better understand and talk about the needs of the community. This will, in turn, help Church in the Circle connect with our neighborhood and attract more members. In addition, connecting to other congregations and engaging on community issues will make Church in the Circle even more visible in the greater Cleveland community.



During a November 12th press conference at Olivet Baptist Church, Dr. Chalker stands with local clergy to speak out in support of an independent investigation of the Tamir Rice shooting.

The issues facing Cleveland are bigger than just one congregation. Collaborating with other congregations allows us to magnify our impact. While there are a lot of great organizations in Cleveland working on social justice issues, GCC has built credibility and allows the greatest opportunity for individual congregation members to engage in any of six focus topics adopted by the GCC: Education, Jobs, Health Care, Criminal Justice, Food Accessibility and Gun Violence.

If you are passionate about making a difference in Cleveland, we need your voice, your listening ears and your passion for advocacy. We are currently forming a core team to increase our social justice witness and move us to the next level. If you are interested in getting involved in this important work, please contact Jared Gadomski Littleton (JaredLittleton@gmail.com) or Jan Kimball (216) 334-5036 to learn more

We invite you to prayerfully consider how God may be calling you to join this movement for justice in Cleveland.

Church in the Circle and the 'Butterfly Effect'

~ Heidi Denman McDougall, *Minister of Pastoral Care*

Are you familiar with the "butterfly effect"? It's a scientific theory that every action, no matter how small, can change the universe forever. Think of the way a pebble dropped in a pond ripples outward, changing the water in wider and wider circles. The connectional nature of The United Methodist Church can work in much the same way, especially when the internet is involved.

For example, a couple of months ago we received a call in the office from a pastor of a United Methodist church in Lone Oak, Texas. She had found our church online, and shared that the adult daughter of someone who cleans for them at their church (but is not an "official" member of their congregation) was going to be coming to the Cleveland Clinic for some major surgery. The mother, her daughter and grandson would all be here for several

months. Given the nature of the surgery, they would appreciate knowing there was a pastor nearby willing to attend to them spiritually.

A few weeks later, I took a call from Clarksville, Tennessee—another pastor who had found us on the Internet. Interestingly, the first time she called Church in the Circle, there was no answer, so she called a different United Methodist church in Cleveland. Believe it or not, the pastor there actually suggested she try us again. Circle Church was the better choice for her needs. I connected with this pastor, and a young lady who is otherwise alone at the Clinic is now receiving love and prayer within the greater Family of Christ.

It's comforting, isn't it, to know that wherever you go, whatever happens, you remain within the loving Arms of the Body of Christ? Thanks be to God for each one of you who reaches out, touches lives near and far and demonstrates the deep, deep love God has for God's children.



Former UCUMC organist Joanna Li returned October 29 to present an informal concert of her favorite French composers. She was the first of four artists performing as part of our 2015–16 Organ Concert Series.

chalk talk

▶ continued from page 1

expressed by many people who have long since put Jesus and his story in the same category as Santa Claus and the tooth fairy—that familiarity is just the breeding ground for ambivalence...even contempt.

But, all of that expressed, the fact of the matter is that the power and the meaning of the birth story of Jesus are far more relevant to our world and our lives than the "PC" Christmas-card version that so often surrounds and immerses us in only the warmth of the season. (Christmas cards are lovely, by the way. We just need to be bigger in today's world.)

As Luke told it, Jesus was born at the same time *another* government shutdown was hoping to be averted as *another* edict proposed to raise taxes. In addition, a stalemate between the local government of the time and Jesus' followers and others resulted in one example after another of street violence and the loss of innocent lives to all manner of gang-related activity. Police forces were suspect. Politicians were compromised. And it appears that official church "attendance" was at an all-time low.

I could go on. But, to me, the point is pretty obvious: Jesus was born into a world of conflict, discord, want and all manner of unhappiness, making it really hard to help make God a reality to the people around him. He was an "incarnation"—one who took on God's essence in a very real, conflicted, convoluted, promising yet weird world, much like ours today.

...God is

always

about the

life-changing

effort of giving

birth to **hope**."

Doesn't say much for how far we've come as a civilization, perhaps. But I believe the message of Christmas remains the same: that, no matter the mess we may find ourselves in, whether a mess of our own making or the mess others make of things that may affect us, God is *always* about the life-changing effort of giving birth to *hope*.

This is not magic. This is not starlight dreaming about dumb-struck shepherds or meandering wise men from the East or housebroken farm

animals sleeping around a child in a manger. Rather, it is yet another indication of God's gift of *hope*—his reasons for us to always harbor hope while we feed our young, change their diapers and fend off invasive elements while welcoming well-meaning guests with gifts from afar, even all these years later.

We need to nurture that hope to greater and greater maturity and provide for its well-being.

We participate in God's kingdom. We participate in God's promise. The least we can do is to follow God's example, offered through his son, Jesus, born to us this season.

As in those days and now in *these* days, a decree goes out about some new government enrollment deadline from some elected official, even a tax gatherer. And the impact and disruption can be very disturbing. Yet, one of the ways we can rejoice in the message of Christmas *this* Christmas is to grasp the reality that God is in all of this *with* us. We are *not* alone. We will get through this. Life is blessed, always needing us to wrap it in swaddling clothes and cradle it as a precious treasure.

It is my wish that, *this* year, the shared "Christmas Star of Hope" comes to shine brightly over *your* home—over *your* manger place. You'll recognize it: it'll be the one that shines brightest of all.

Merry Christmas and eternal hope to us all.

UCUMW Focus on Mission



~ Cathy Day, *UCUMW Treasurer*

This fall season has been busy for the UCUMW! In October, our mission program speaker was

UCUMC member David
Waltermire, who presented an
informative and inspiring
program about Flat Rock Homes.

Flat Rock
Restoring Hope. Transforming Lives. Living Faith

UMW members participated in the UCUMC Harvest Party, the "Read Across the Globe" event at the Mary B. Martin School and our Neighborhood Lunch while also assisting with cookie fellowships after worship.

Our UMW unit continues to sew (special thanks to our faithful seamstress, Sue Harden) and send Little Dresses and Boys' Shorts to Africa. We have shipped 1,063 outfits in the last four years!

Equal Exchange products, homemade marmalade, Fair Trade handmade bracelets, along with the annual Schermer fresh pecans, are available for sale each Sunday. All proceeds from the sales of these items go to UCUMW's support of more than 25 local, national and worldwide UMW mission programs.

Thank you to all who donated to this year's UMW World Thank Offering. These contributions are used in the total program of mission through the United Methodist Women National Office, located in New York, NY.



UMW Treasurer Cathy Day, speaker David Waltermire, and UMW President Ester Crawl-Bey

OUTREACH

OUTREACH VOLUNTEERS ROCK!

October 19, International "Read Across the Globe" Day featured 16 hardy Church in the Circle volunteers who arrived at 8:30am at Mary B. Martin School, our partner Cleveland school, to read books to students. Escorted to their classrooms by proud and excited students, these church folks read short stories to children in pre-K through 5th grade to encourage them to read on their own. Those in 6th through 8th grade were treated to the storytelling of our own Alice Palda, who entertained them with several tales, including a few ghost stories in keeping with the season.

Our Outreach Committee thanks these volunteers for their gifts of time and talent: Dorothy Adams, Esther Crawl-Bey, Vivian Harris, Kay and Jim Hogg, Carolyn Hufford, Dave Hundertmark, Hassan Lee, Jim Longsworth, Barbara McEachern, Elaine Myers, Alice Palda, Mary Soirefman, Penny Talley, Bea Thompson and John Wheeler.

A New Book for Every Child-

Thanks to the generosity of our congregation, every student at our partner school, Mary B. Martin, will receive a new book of his/her own to take home just before Winter Break. Whether you purchased a

book—or many books!—or made a monetary donation, you have helped make a difference in the life of a child through this annual initiative.

The Food Collection for Cory UMC Food Pantry continues EVERY week. Please remember to pick up a shopping list next to the Big Blue Bin in the Narthex, then add at least one item to your grocery cart every week and bring it to church on Sunday. This program is

affiliated with the Hunger Network of Greater Cleveland and provides nutritious staples to our neighbors in the Glenville area who struggle with feeding their familie s.



CHILDREN ENJOY ANNUAL HARVEST PARTY

Our **Third Annual Harvest Party** proved to be an evening of spooky fun! Nearly 70 children and youth, many in costumes, and 25 adults from the neighborhood and from our congregation were treated to a pre-Halloween party on October 20. Strings of colored lights led the way down the stairs to the Great Hall, appropriately decorated in orange and black. Bats and spiders climbed the walls, a blinking skull watched over the room, and cornstalks, pumpkins and straw bales added to the seasonal atmosphere. Many Church in the Circle volunteers and several young men from the Neighborhood Basketball program helped to create this special event by decorating, hosting an activity station, serving food and just having fun with the children. There was caricature drawing, face painting, storytelling, freeze dancing and a costume contest. In keeping with the theme, candy and small prizes—all donated by our generous church members—were handed out, and party goers enjoyed pizza, apples and monster-green punch. Clean up was a snap with many hands helping, and everyone agreed that a great time was had by all!

A personal note from Hassan Lee, Neighborhood Basketball Coordinator: "I wanted to take this opportunity to thank you for all your efforts in making this year's Harvest Party a success! Thanks for all the unique talents that each of you brought, from everyone that helped with set-up to the folks who manned activity stations and handed out candy, to all those who assisted with the clean-up responsibilities. It was truly amazing to witness and to be a part of what can happen when we use our talents collaboratively and all pull together.

"For me, it was a nice treat to have several members from our Neighborhood Basketball program in attendance, to not only help out, but to also "man" tables and interact with the youth. I trust you all enjoyed yourselves while interacting with our community; I sure did!"





What's Happening at the Circle

November

- 22 Worship, Sanctuary, 11am
- 26 Thanksgiving, church closed Thursday-Saturday
- 29 First Advent Worship, Sanctuary, 11am Neighborhood Lunch, Great Hall, 1pm

December

- 2 Healing Services, Chapel, noon and 7pm
- 6 Second Advent Worship with Communion, Sanctuary, 11am First-Sunday Potluck, Great Hall, 12:30pm
- 12 Trustees, Reception Room, 6pm
- 13 Third Advent Worship, Sanctuary, 11am Organ Concert, Lavert Stuart, Sanctuary, 2pm Second-Sunday Lunch, following worship
- 18 Finance, Reception Room, 6pm
- 20 Fourth Advent Worship with Cantata, Sanctuary, 11am
- 24 Christmas Eve Services, Sanctuary, 4pm, 8pm, 11pm
- 25 Christmas church closed
- 27 Worship, Sanctuary, 11am Neighborhood Lunch, Great Hall, 1pm
- 31 Watch Night, 6pm

~SUNDAYS~

Invitation to Journey, (Heidi's Class) meets Sunday mornings in the Parlor at 9am

Dr. Chalker leads a class at 9:30am in the Yoder Room Children attend worship until Sunday School at 11:20am Middle School and High School Youth meet during worship Worship begins at 11am, Sanctuary

Liturgical Dance Rehearsals, 12:30pm

~ONGOING~

Neighborhood Basketball, Tuesdays and Thursdays, Gym, 4–8pm Neighborhood Lunch, last Sundays, Great Hall, 1pm First Sunday Potlucks, first Sundays, Great Hall, 12:30pm Ladies' Lunch Bunch, last Tuesdays, Reception Room, noon SSL (Second Sunday Lunches), following worship, local restaurants Chancel Ringers (hand bells) rehearsal, Wednesdays, Sanctuary, 6:00–7:15pm

Gospel Choir rehearsal, Wednesdays, Choir Room, 6pm Chancel Choir rehearsal, Wednesdays, Sanctuary, 7:15–9pm Dance Rehearsals for Children and Youth take place in the DuffyLit Studio at our church on Sundays at 12:30pm. Please see Edna Duffy for more information.