



First Presbyterian Church Communion - December 2018

Dear Friends,

The Advent season is once again upon us. If you're like me, you can feel the excitement in the air as December approaches. I say it most every year: this is a gentler season. People seem politer in December – they open doors for one another, and say hello and exchange “Merry Christmas!” greetings to perfect strangers. We see the words “hope, peace, joy and love” on cards, stores and church billboards - a welcome change from the usual messages we see on the news every day. And what is more peaceful than seeing a house decorated for Christmas while the snow falls gently to the ground? It really is a beautiful season.

That being said, I'd be willing to bet many of us are taking a deep breath, because we know there's a lot to get done by Christmas Day. Even saying that the Advent season is “once again upon us” makes it sound like it has pounced on us unawares. Really though – it seems like one day we're eating leftover Halloween candy, and the next the Christmas flyers are piling up on the counter! This season means business in more ways than one. It can get so hectic that the politeness I mentioned above can dissipate entirely as people look for parking spaces in the malls.

As Christians, it is important to be mindful of the “Reason for the Season.” Good advice as that may be, how do we go about doing just that? It takes intention, that's how! Most basic of all is to own up to the crazy pace of this season, and to take preventive measures to not drown in busyness. It can be as simple as taking time every day to remember Christ in our daily routines all through Advent. Author Amanda Viviers recommends taking a “Less is More” approach to life that is especially helpful at this time of year. She writes, **“Do: Less technology, more paper. Less shopping, more outdoor. Less clutter, more space. Less rush, more rest. Less consuming, more creating. Less junk, more real food. Less driving, more walking. Less noise, more silence. Less focus on the future, more emphasis on the present. Less perfection, more grace. Less work, more play.”** I think we would all be better served (or better serve?) if we really took this to heart!

On our church's Facebook page are a number of suggestions for keeping Christmas on a more blessed track. They include using a Christmas-themed devotional through Advent, giving back by volunteering at charities in our community, visiting people who feel lonely at this time of year, making a “Reverse Advent Calendar,” and engaging in acts of kindness to family, friends and neighbours. There are also many ideas online on how to keep our focus on the meaning of Christmas. The more

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to the world

ways we keep this personal, the better. You see...sometimes I read of people getting angry at others for not saying "Merry Christmas," when maybe **we** need to be reminded of the meaning of Christmas in our own mind and heart.

Focusing on the incredible significance of the birth of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ will prove especially meaningful when things start getting frantic, and you find your cookies burning in the oven! The thing is...it can be very easy to celebrate the Advent Season *itself* – with all the colour, lights, music, food, gifts and get togethers. They are beautiful things, no doubt, but they are not what Christmas is all about. Or more to the point...they are not *who* Christmas is all about.

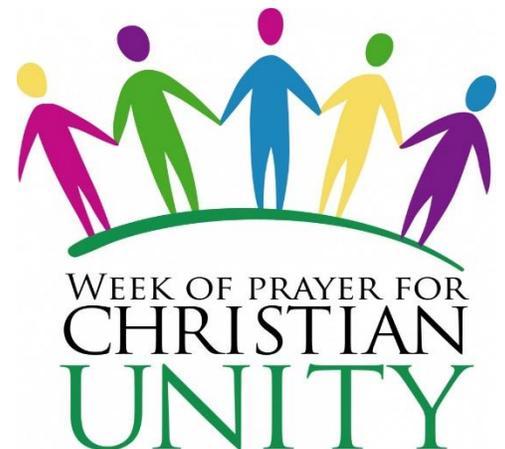
With that in mind, I hope you can join us at FPC during Advent. I will be preaching a series titled "An Olde-fashioned Christmas" which is described further down in this newsletter. I am hoping the messages will remind us that, for Christians, the Advent season is deeply meaningful and world changing. It's no wonder that prophets such as Micah, writing 750 years before the birth of Jesus, wrote "**But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.**" ...**He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And he will be our peace.**

There will be several opportunities to join us in worship and ministry at FPC this season. We will be observing **Communion on Sunday, Dec 2** with a chili lunch hosted by the Sunday School following our worship service. As well, our Sunday School students are taping short videos on what Christmas means to them, and we will be watching them during Children's Time all through Advent. The choir will be presenting a mini-cantata during our worship service on Sunday, Dec 16, and that is sure to be a blessing! And last, but not least, we will celebrate the birth of Lord Jesus Christ at our **Christmas Eve Service on Monday, December 24 at 7:00 p.m.** This service is always a highlight of our church calendar, and we encourage you to invite family, friends and neighbours. But come early, because the sanctuary fills quickly!



Week of Prayer for Christian Unity: Mark your calendars for the WPCU happening here at First Presbyterian on **January 21-25, 2019**. As stated in the WPCU website: "At least once a year, Christians are reminded of Jesus' prayer for his disciples that "they may be one so that the world may believe" (see John 17.21). Hearts are touched and Christians come together to pray for their unity. Congregations and parishes all over the world exchange preachers or arrange special ecumenical celebrations and prayer services. The theme for the week of prayer in 2019 is "**Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue**" which is inspired by Deuteronomy 16:18-20."

The weekday services at FPC will begin at noon, with guest ministers from our area churches delivering the message. A sandwich lunch will follow immediately after the services. In the past few years we have partnered with Evangel Community Church and will



do so again. They host a prayer vigil at the Council Chambers at the Chatham-Kent Civic Centre and an evening concert on Sunday, January 27.

A concluding service for the WPCU will take place in our sanctuary on **Sunday, January 27 at 2:00 p.m.** A list of the guest preachers will be made available in the next few weeks. A freewill offering will be taken at each lunch and at the concluding service. The money raised at the lunches and at our concluding service will be given to a charity in Chatham.

Thank you to Christy Cobb: It is with sadness mixed with incredible gratitude for her years of selfless ministry at FPC that we announce that Christy Cobb will be stepping down as our Christian Education Coordinator as she takes on a full-time position at CKHA effective Feb 1, 2019. Christy has been a loving and tireless advocate for the children and teens who make FPC their church home. Christy's love of Christ, and her desire to share his love has richly blessed our youth over the years. Christy has mentored our children and teens in Sunday School, church outings and special events, camps and retreats. I know for sure that our youth will carry a part of FPC with them thanks to Christy's caring ministry.

We wish Christy the very best in her new job, and thank her for the incredible work she has done in our midst. We will be showing our appreciation to Christy in a service in the new year, but in the meantime, please let Christy how thankful you are for the ministry she has faithfully led in our midst.



FPC NEEDS YOU!!! I ran this segment in my last newsletter, and I do so again, because it is important to keep this high on our congregational radar. There are many ministries at First Church which require your involvement. Please do not think that someone else will volunteer – **we need YOU!** We are at an important stage in our congregational life in which people must step up and into the many ministries at FPC.

I stress this, **because NO church can exist for its own benefit.** All churches are called to serve God in his outward appeal to a world he created and loves. I believe God removes his favour from churches that exist predominantly to please themselves. Specifically, churches die when their members view their church as a place in which they come to be served and ministered to. That doesn't mean that churches do not minister to their own flocks, but they do so

with the purpose that all teaching, strengthening, comfort and grace showered upon followers of Christ must serve to enable them to share the Gospel, and to help others in their communities and the wider world.

Although I am very thankful and greatly encouraged by the level of commitment to ministry shown by this congregation, I also am keenly aware that we need to increase the number of people committed to serving in many areas of our church. I ask for your support, because a healthy church requires a wealth of leadership and enthusiastic commitment that does not rely solely on a small group of volunteers. As well, as my Presbytery duties have increased substantially this year, I would feel some relief knowing FPC is in good hands when I am required elsewhere.



Our **Saturday Outreach Breakfast** is always in need of volunteers in every capacity. We need people to join cooking teams, the serving and clean-up teams and even the shopping teams who look after purchasing the food and supplies we need for the serving our guests every Saturday. Please talk to me, Bob Fletcher, Mike Currie or call the office to inquire about helping in this important and very practical ministry. Remember Matthew 25, people!

Our **Pastoral Care Team** can use your gifts of prayer, care and hospitality. We have dozens of people from our congregation who look forward to visits by me or members of the Pastoral Care Team. My list alone is about 60-80 people on average! Sue Easun, our Pastoral Care Team Coordinator, and I believe whole-heartedly that everyone who makes FPC their church home deserves regular visits if he or she cannot make it to church on a regular basis. Please talk to Sue Easun, me or call the office for more information regarding this ministry of mercy.

The **Mission Team** always welcomes new members. This team is tasked with prayerfully discerning where God would have us serve as a congregation. Projects are both local (like our Backyard Mission) or international through our denomination and the many agencies we partner with and support. Do you have a heart for sharing the Gospel and serving others? This team is just right for you!

Our **Property and Finance Team** could use a couple of new members. Many people have served long and faithfully on this team, and it is only right to allow them to step down from their duties. We thank everyone who has served in this capacity, but we need to maintain the strength of this team in order to do all the behind-the-scenes work that ensures we can continue as a viable church and congregation. I encourage you to join this team if you have the gifts of financial planning and oversight, or if you have a knack for what it takes to oversee the maintenance of our church building.

As well, we are looking to increase the number of people who **count the offering** after the service. We are setting up teams of two volunteers to count together on a rotational basis. We'd love to have 4-6 teams who would then count once a month or every six weeks. If you've never counted the offering, we will pair you with someone who is familiar with the process. On average, counting

takes about 30 minutes so you can be home quickly. The more people we have signed up for this task, the easier it is for everyone.



Our **Audio-Visual Team** is yet another important team that would welcome new members. This faithful group of volunteers makes sure the sound and screens are working each and every Sunday. Their service enables us to have hymns, praise songs, scripture passages and necessary images and video projected on the screen for all to see. I thank Kevin and Barb Capeling for their oversight of this ministry – and yes...it is a ministry. I know Barb would be very happy if you joined this team, and will teach you the ropes - it's actually much easier than you think. Please consider joining this team. Don't assume others will do it for you.

Ann Leatherdale and Martha Wells are stepping down as leaders of the **Decorating Team** after twenty-plus years of incredible service. I thank Ann and Martha from the bottom of

my heart for their faithful service over so many years. They have earned a well-deserved rest from this ministry. And yes...this too is a ministry!

The Decorating Team is a faithful and hard-working group that operates quietly in the background, and yet impacts the quality of our worship services and church life. Just take a look at the Christmas decorations around the sanctuary, and you will see how wonderfully they enhance the quality of our worship life. Needless to say, decorating our sanctuary and church building does not happen by magic – it takes YOUR help! I am asking for two to three people to commit to leading this team so that its work continues uninterrupted.

Last, but not least...our **Sunday Coffee Hour** is made possible by faithful volunteers. Our coffee hour after the worship services provides a place for conversations and meeting new people on Sunday mornings. It's not just a coffee time – it's a form of ministry and a sign of hospitality which is vitally important in a church. We are a family, and getting to know one another is important. Set up is not difficult, and most of the time Benson Tarrant, our custodian, is there to help. As well, Judi Aitken, our team leader will be happy to show you what needs to be done. It's really not that difficult, so please sign up to help. The sign-up list is posted in the hallway by the church office.

Join the Choir: Do you love to sing and give praise to God? Adam Shaw, our Music Director would love if you joined the choir. The choir and Praise Team are vitally important groups in our church, as they help set the tone of our worship services. The choir practices on Thursday evenings at 7:30 p.m. You will not find a more dedicated and friendlier group of people at FPC than members of our choir. Please talk to Adam Shaw if you'd be interested in joining the choir or praise band. Don't be shy – join our music ministry!





Outreach for Hunger: There are many families in our community who are finding it difficult to put food on the table. FPC actively partners with Outreach for Hunger to stock their shelves with food and other necessary items. Donations of food can be dropped off in the donation box located in the Meeting Room. The session at FPC also makes a monetary donation to Outreach for Hunger on a regular basis.

Toy Drive: We are collecting toys for the Salvation Army up to Sunday, December 9. We are asked to buy new, unwrapped toys for children ages 0-12. Suggested toys are: Lego, dolls, action figures, Hot Wheels, board games, stuffed animals, sports and baby toys. Please no toy guns, electronic toys, or computer games.



UPCOMING MESSAGE SERIES

An “Olde-Fashioned” Christmas. There’s just something about Christmas that makes us think of yesteryear. The season of Advent brings to mind a by-gone era where things were simpler, and somehow kinder and gentler. But guess what? If we go back to the origins of Christmas in the words of the prophets recorded in the Old Testament, we find that Christmas is anything but quaint and simple. The Hebrew prophets spoke of a day when God would send the Messiah to redeem the people of Israel, and institute his reign of radical and inclusive love that would upend the global status quo. Join us as we examine an “Olde-fashioned” Christmas, and become reacquainted with the significance, power and hope of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Dec 2 “The TRUE Christmas Season.” Jer 33:14-18; Luke 21:25-36 **Communion Sunday**

Dec 9 “Ready...or NOT?” Mal 3:1-4; Luke 3:1-17

Dec 16 “A major announcement.” Micah 5:2-5a; Luke 1:26-38

Dec 23 “A proper Christmas list.” Zeph 3:14-20; Luke 1:39-55

Dec 24 “The Perfect Gift” Luke 2:1-20 **Christmas Eve Service 7:00 p.m.**

Dec 30 “Next Steps” Psalm 8; Luke 2:21-39



Presbytery Duties: I am the **Interim Moderator** for both Knox Presbyterian Church in Wallaceburg, and St. James Presbyterian Church in Chatham. As such, I am responsible for their administration and wellbeing while they are without ministers. Unfortunately, both congregations are not in the financial position to call a full-time minister in the immediate future. This means my duties as IM are indefinite for the time being. Although I may be tied up at times with the ongoing work of these churches, I will focus primarily on FPC despite these added duties. For sure, my Interim Moderatorship will take up some of the time I would normally devote to

visiting members of FPC, so I ask for your patience in this regard. Please be assured that if you need to see me, contact the office and I will return your call quickly.

As well, I have begun work leading a visitation at Paulin Memorial Presbyterian Church in Windsor, as we attempt to be a help the minister and congregation through a few rough spots. Serving on this team means I will spend more time away from FPC, but I am hoping this will be a short-term assignment. That being said, I don't expect our work there to be done before February, and perhaps longer.



Your Offering: Don't forget - FPC depends on your ongoing financial support! The ministry of this church would grind to a halt without it. I encourage you to faithfully contribute financially toward the work of this church, especially so if you are away for extended periods of time.

If you have not done so already, I **strongly encourage** you to join our **Pre-Authorized Remittance plan (PAR)**. Many members of FPC give through PAR, including Jodi and myself. We would like as many people to join PAR as possible. Remember that our expenses don't disappear when you are away from church! PAR forms are located at the service desk in the Meeting Room or you can call the office for information. Don't delay...Join with other members at FPC who employ PAR!

Welcome to our Newcomers! We are so blessed at First Church as we continue to welcome new people into our church family. Please feel free to contact me, either in person or by calling the office. I'd be delighted to meet with you at the church, or at my "second office" located at the Tim Hortons down the street from FPC to get to know you better.

Please contact the office if you have questions regarding **membership or would like to transfer your church membership** to FPC. Linda Weeks, our Administrative Assistant, will be glad to request your transfer for you. As well, Linda can arrange a meeting with me. I'd be happy to answer any questions you might have about life and ministry at FPC.

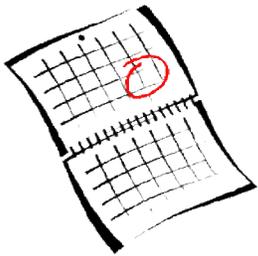


If you are new to our church family, we hope you have begun taking your first steps in the life of this church. A growing and active church congregation is a blessing in many ways. We encourage one another, and work together for the good of others. I hope and pray that you will connect with the ministries at FPC. Working together for the Kingdom of God is the best way to share in the joy of being a Christian. God can use your talents and dedication here at FPC, so dive in!

Membership Information Night: I will be hosting a membership information night on **Thursday, January 10 at 7 p.m.** for anyone interested in attending and/or joining First Presbyterian. This is an opportunity to learn about FPC's structure and governance, as well as a quick overview of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. I will also give a brief overview of the different groups, ministries and mission projects in operation here at the church. A sign-up sheet will be posted in the service desk in the Meeting Room.



Mark your Calendar:



- Dec 2** **Communion Sunday** - 10:30 a.m. Chili lunch after worship.
- Dec 16** Choir Mini-Cantata
- Dec 24** **Christmas Eve Service – 7:00 p.m.**
- Jan 6** Message Series “Charting the Course” begins.
- Jan 10** Membership Info Night – 7:00 p.m.
- Jan 21-25** Week of Prayer for Christian Unity
- Jan 27** Concluding Service for WPCU - 2 p.m. at FP

FPC Website: Please check out our church website at www.firstchatham.org If you are new to FPC, our website is a good place to catch up with what's going on at First Church. I post my messages online, and you can listen to them by clicking on the “Current Message Series” link. You can also view photographs and descriptions of the different groups, Bible studies and ministries in our church. Please feel free to share this website with family, friends and neighbours. It is a great resource for anyone thinking about joining our church family.



First Church is also on **Facebook!** Go to First Church's Facebook page at www.facebook.com/FirstPresbyterianChatham and click “Like” on our main page. You will receive announcements, updates and articles of interest delivered right to your newsfeed.

I hope you can join us for our **Communion Service on Dec 2 at 10:30 a.m.** What better way to mark the beginning of the season of Advent than by remembering Christ's sacrifice for the sake of all humanity. The Gospel of John tells us that **“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”** The hymn says it best: “On Christ, the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand.” Nothing could be greater than the gift of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Come and adore Him!

Blessings,

Mike