

## December Newsletter

First United Methodist Church  
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The Witness  
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### **From Pastor Michael ...**

#### **THE LEGEND OF BEFANA**

In this season when we are so busy and harried in our celebrations, let us remember the Legend of Befana. In Italian folklore, Befana is an old woman who once was too busy cleaning to go and see the Christ Child. When she finally finished her sweeping and went to see the newborn king, she had missed him. So now, according to tradition, she flies on her broom and delivers gifts to children throughout Italy during the Christmas season (specifically January 5). She fills their socks with candy and presents if they are good, or a lump of coal or dark candy if they are bad. Being a good housekeeper, many say she will sweep the floor before she leaves. So, unlike Befana, don't let the busy-ness of the season keep you from the true business of the season – adoring our Lord Jesus Christ.

#### **The Ballad of Befana**

*by Phyllis McGinley*

Befana the Housewife, scrubbing her pane,  
Saw three old sages ride down the lane,  
Saw three gray travelers pass her door -  
Gaspar, Balthazar, Melchior.

"Where journey you, sirs?" she asked of them.

Balthazar answered, "To Bethlehem,  
For we have news of a marvelous thing.  
Born in a stable is Christ the King."

"Give Him my welcome!"

Then Gaspar smiled,  
"Come with us, mistress, to greet the Child."

"Oh, happily, happily would I fare,  
Were my dusting through and I'd polished the stair."

Old Melchior leaned on his saddle horn.  
"Then send but a gift to the small Newborn."

"Oh, gladly, gladly I'd send Him one,  
Were the hearthstone swept and my weaving done.

"As soon as ever I've baked my bread,  
I'll fetch Him a pillow for His head,  
And a coverlet too," Befana said.  
"When the rooms are aired and the linen dry,  
I'll look at the Babe."  
But the Three rode by.

She worked for a day and a night and a day,  
Then, gifts in her hands, took up her way.  
But she never could find where the Christ Child lay.

And still she wanders at Christmastide,  
Houseless, whose house was all her pride,  
Whose heart was tardy, whose gifts were late;  
Wanders, and knocks at every gate,

Crying, "Good people, the bells begin!  
Put off your toiling and let love in."

### **Note from Pastor Tara ...**

Although the excitement for Christmas starts before Halloween decorations are put away, the season of Advent is a time for anticipation and preparation of ourselves for the coming of Christ. While for many people it is a joyous time, for many it is not. There are many people who find themselves depressed, and some starting to lose hope. Financial pressure to give gifts can be stressful when money is tight. Some people face serious health challenges or the loss of a loved one. Some are worried about work or facing loss of job. Sometimes it seems like everyone is happy but you. For people who are in this situation, we have a special Christmas service called "The Longest Night." It is held on December 21st, which is the shortest day and therefore the longest night of the year. It is a chance to celebrate Christmas in a more reflective manner. It is a chance to reflect and acknowledge the difficulties, and to look towards the hope brought to Earth through the Christ Child.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in faith so that you overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. -Romans 15:13 (CEB)

The National Suicide Prevention Hotline number is-800-273-8255. This hotline is open 24/7.

### **Trustees' Corner ...**

Well, November has been a bit of a challenge for the trustees. The weather brought cold and rain which caused issues with our roof again and one of our water heaters decided it had exhausted its useful life. Really, and on a Saturday nevertheless. Many thanks to Steve Massow, Ron Cutler, Willis Brown, Bill Miller, Virginia Phillips, Ed Piontek, and Paul Keaton for helping to resolve these issues. Unfortunately, the roof on the education wing will need to be replaced. Bids will be obtained and hopefully this project will be tackled next spring season. Pray the finance committee will find the best financial solution to fund this project. And, amid these setbacks, we haven't lost focus on moving forward with a kitchen facelift. There is still a sum of around \$8,000 to be raised before this project will take place. And the list of capital projects continues to grow that we think will enhance the worship and mission of Portage First. In retrospect, 2019 has been an extremely busy year for the trustees. A great big thank you to our members who have supported the church with their tithes and offerings and for supporting special

fundraisers like the parking lot seal and stripe job completed in September. We will trust that God will provide in his time. Merry Christmas from your property management team— Virginia Phillips, Bill Miller, Joe Reynolds, Bob Dixon, Aaron Massow, Melissa Sullivan, Pat Jackson, Ed Piontek, and Connie Ellefson.

### **Royal Family Kids Camp ...**

Planning has already begun for next July's week-long camp for children ages 6-12 who have experienced abuse or neglect and may be in foster homes. Portage First has always provided 80+ children with a backpack filled with a towel, wash cloth, 2/1 or 3/1 (shampoo, conditioner, and/or body wash), and a blanket. Next February you will have an opportunity to share in a breakfast fundraiser by donating one or more of the above items. More details to follow.

### **Operation Christmas Child ...**

On behalf of the children from around the world, Thank You! On Saturday, November 2, 30+ volunteers stuffed 300 Christmas boxes for children around the world. Lots of fun was had by those who participated. Thank you once again for all the donated items over the course of this past year including being the recipient of the October community dinner donation that allowed us to purchase erasers, sharpeners and glue sticks. We were blessed with a multitude of items to choose from. More than 100 countries will be recipients of the good news and great joy through the power of this simple gift. Thank you for your role in supporting this project of Samaritan's Purse. We will begin collecting items for 2020 beginning in January.

### **First Friday Fellowship ...**

First Friday Fellowship will meet on Friday, December 6, 2019, at 5:00 PM at the Miller Beach Cafe, 903 N. Shelby Street, Gary(Miller), Indiana. Anyone interested in attending please RSVP to Sandra Robinson, (219) 764-8433, by Thursday, December 5th.

### **Missions and Outreach Committee ...**

#### **CHRISTMAS EVE CHRISTMAS COOKIES**

If you have ever had to work on Christmas eve, then you probably know that feeling that you are missing the festivities with families and friends coming together and church families gathering to celebrate and welcome the arrival of the Christ Child. Let's bring some cheer to those people who have to work this Christmas eve and share with them the love of Christ!

We would like to have packages of homemade cookies available for those of you who are willing to distribute them various locations around the community on your way home after the Christmas eve church service. But before we can do that, we need people to bake those homemade cookies! If you are able, we are asking you to join us. Please consider baking dozen cookies and bring them with you on Sunday, December 22, or at the latest Monday, December 23 by 1:00 PM. You can leave them in the church kitchen. We'll get them all packaged up and ready to be delivered on Christmas eve. Thanks in advance for helping to spread love at Christmas!

### **A Gift for our Pastors ...**

Hello Church, The SPRC is collecting a LOVE OFFERING for the holiday season for Pastor Michael and Pastor Tara. You can put your CASH offerings in the collection plate in an envelope clearly marked for the LOVE OFFERING or give your donation directly to Steve Massow, Wanda Samuelson, or Dave Coffey. If you feel led to give, please do so by December 23rd. Questions?!? See your favorite SPRC member!

### **United Methodist Men ...**

Good friends in the Christ - what a wonderful time of year to be alive. We are reminded in special and powerful ways how fortunate we are to be able to be with our families, with our friends, with our coworkers; to be experiencing all the beautiful sights and sounds and all the extra opportunities that are available to us at this time of year. May you be blessed and involved with this Christmas season as the spirit leads you, in all these wonderful opportunities that you may choose to be a part of.

I would like to share with you a small message from Ken Harrison's "Rise Of The Servant Kings" book. The message is entitled "Well Done." How would you complete the following sentence? The goal of my life is \_\_\_\_\_. The goal of football is to score touchdowns. The goal of running a company is to increase profits or stock value. What's the goal of your life? A man with a goal in life is active because he knows what he is pursuing. Let's live lives that the Savior deems "Well done!" God delights in communicating Himself and His ways to every man who is prepared to receive Him. God can work in you only to the extent that you are submitted to Him. We all have some 'self' left in us. Every believer is granted the Holy Spirit the moment he receives Christ (Ephesians 1:13-14). The amount of influence the Spirit has on you depends on the extent of your surrender: the more self, the less God; the less self, the more God.

I pray that you will submit yourself a little more each day to the Lord's leading in your life. As you go to prayer and share your praises and prayer concerns with Him, also take the extra time to listen to His loving message to you. Our United Methodist Men's group will be meeting on December 7th at 8AM in our church's social hall for fellowship, breakfast, Bible study, and a short business meeting. Everything we do in life is a choice. Often times we feel we are forced into our choices, but nonetheless we decide whether or not to participate. May you ask God to help you in your daily choices as you go to Him in prayer each day. He will not only help you, but will bless the outcome of these choices.

Hope to see you for breakfast Saturday, December 7, 2019 at 8:00 AM.  
Because of Him, Mike Matthew

### **Moody Blooms Closing ...**

As a congregation we have been blessed for many years with the creative and beautiful floral artistry from Moody Blooms. Kathy Cunningham has produced works of marvelous beauty that have brought glory to God in the midst of our sanctuary. Now Kathy has announced that she is retiring from this good work and that Moody Blooms will be closing on December 21. On behalf of the whole congregation, I to thank Kathy and her fellow artists for the joyful and living presence her arrangements brought to our worship services. In the history of the church, cuttings of flowers were considered living representations of the resurrection power of Christ. Their living presence and the waters they drink became symbols of the renewing power of baptism and the continual triumph of life. May Kathy find wonderful joy in her retirement, and we look forward to seeing what she accomplishes in this new chapter of her life.

### **Youth Group ...**

The youth group will meet in December at 6:30 PM on Sunday, December 1st and on December 15th for our Christmas party.

### **Let's Decorate a Gingerbread House! ...**

Both men & women are welcome! The United Methodist Women will be hosting a gingerbread house decorating event December 6 at 9:30 AM. The cost is \$10 each house and must be paid Vicki Evanatz by, Dec 1st. Vicki will be putting the homemade (Yum!) gingerbread houses you will decorate them. It is very

important that you sign-up on the sheet at the Connection Center Sunday, Dec 1st so Vicki knows how many gingerbread houses to assemble. Please bring a bag of "something" to share for decorating the houses. Gumdrops, pretzels, marshmallows, small candy canes, mints (red or green), cereal or anything you think would look "cute" FYI: Twizzlers FALL OFF and will not stick to the icing!

### **Christmas Altar Flowers ...**

If you would like to order poinsettias for Sunday, December 22, please fill out a form and return it along with payment through the offering plate or you may drop it off at the office. Forms will be in the bulletins through Sunday, December 8 and also at the Welcome Center. All orders need to be turned into the office by December 12. The cost is \$10 each. The poinsettias will help decorate our sanctuary for the Christmas season and will be yours to take home after Christmas.

### **Green Tips of the Month ...**

- Did you know that some of the items in your pantry (like baking soda and vinegar) work as effective cleaners and, even better, cost next to nothing! Here's a suggestion for a scented all purpose cleaner:

Combine 1 cup white vinegar, 1 cup water, lemon rind, and rosemary springs into a spray bottle, shake, and then let it infuse for a week before using. Once done, you can use the solution to remove hard water stains, clean trash cans, wipe away wall smudges and much more! For more suggestions for "greener cleaners," check out:

[www.goodhousekeeping.com/home/cleaning/tips/a24885/make-at-home-cleaners/](http://www.goodhousekeeping.com/home/cleaning/tips/a24885/make-at-home-cleaners/)

- Here's a great way to reduce the waste that is often generated during Christmas gift giving. of wrapping gifts for your family in paper, why not wrap them in a colorful towel, sheet, or pillowcase from your linen closet, and tie them with a reusable fabric ribbon?, try giving your gift without any wrapping at all! Gift bags, boxes, and tins be sustainable, too, receiving person reuses them. Remember, Christmas colors are red and green, so think!

### **2019 End-of-Year Offering Deadline ...**

To be counted toward giving in 2019, all offerings must be turned in to the church by noon on Tuesday, December 31. Mailed offerings must be postmarked by December 31 and PushPay offerings need to be processed by December 31. Any monies received after this time will be credited to your 2020 giving.

### **From the Finance Committee ...**

The Finance Committee would like to thank everyone's participation in Generosity Sunday. Pat Jackson and family put together a fantastic brunch for us to celebrate our commitment to our church in 2020. If you did not get an opportunity to return your 2020 pledge card, extra cards are available at the Connection Center and can be returned to the church office at any time. Your giving is doing good things for our community and the world, to the glory of God.

PORTAGE FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH FINANCE UPDATE

October 2019

Non Designated Giving	\$27,439.45
Operating Expenses	\$32,005.25
Debt Reduction Giving	\$1,712.00
Debt Reduction Expense	\$2,080.92
Apportionment Paid	\$3,957.11

YEAR TO DATE 2019	YEAR TO DATE 2019
Non Designated Giving	\$281,701.54

Operating Expenses 282,687.23  
Net Year To Date (\$985.69)

Debt Reduction Giving \$22,064.00  
Debt Reduction Expense \$23,281.44  
Net Debt Reduction (\$1,217.44)

Overall Net Current & Debt (\$2,203.13)

Apportionment Paid \$32,642.00

What 'Apportionment'? From [www.umc.org](http://www.umc.org) —

The main way we support the ministries of the church is through our apportioned funds, a method of giving that proportionally allocates the churchwide budget to conferences and local churches. For United Methodists this method of giving has become a strong, generous tradition. Together, through our connected congregations, we accomplish what no single church, district or annual conference ever could hope to do alone. In this way, each individual, each family, each congregation gives a fair share for the church's work. We combine our prayers, presence, gifts, and service to make a significant difference in the lives of God's people.

The Indiana Annual Conference asks that each church provide 11% of the prior month's income as their apportionment, 10% to the conference and 1% to the district.

Happy December Anniversary to...

04	Nathan & Amber Welch	27	Dan & Bobbi McCoy
18	Mike & Connie King	28	Jim & Sue Nickerso
19	Bruce & Kathy Wilson	30	Ron & Melinda Metz
19	Pat & Jennifer Costello		

Happy December Birthday to...

01	Ivy Parker	08	Rosemary Schest	20	Dick Samuelson
01	Connie King	09	Ray Nadolski	20	Jennifer Costello
01	Lynn Liesch	11	Logan Jordan	21	Karen Helmecey
01	Aaron Massow	12	Marcie Jordan	22	Landon Jordan
02	Deb Massow	14	Darren Warne	23	Teresa McKiddy
05	Don Strohl	15	Joni Maxwell	23	Abigail Seberger
06	Karen Bridges	15	Bobbi McCoy	26	Bonnie Grochowski
06	Pat Morris	15	Bill Miller	28	David Coffey
06	Andrew Brown	16	Shirley Schaefer	29	Lillian Karsten
07	John Swerdon	16	Steve Davenport	30	Kathy Wilson