

The Pioneer

'Preparing for others to follow'

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United Church of Christ
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~ December, 2017 ~

...from the Pastor's Pen...

Dear Friends,

On the Sunday after Thanksgiving, the church year ended and a new one began. We are out of sync with the Gregorian Calendar which, internationally, is the most widely used civil calendar, but that's not surprising because Christians have always been out of sync with civil practices; Jesus was entirely out of sync with the Roman Empire.

And yet, to help attract converts, the new Christian church planned festivals and events to coincide with many pagan celebrations already being practiced by local populations. People gathered as always but learned about new reasons to celebrate, and over time, we have claimed these dates as our own. December 25th is one of them. For us, this date has designated the birth of Jesus since the 4th Century, but in pre-Christian times, it was a festival enjoyed as part of the Winter Solstice.

And so it goes. I welcome the beginning of Advent, a quiet time, when we intentionally reflect on our lives over the past year and how we have embodied our Christian values in a world so much in need of them. We've heard hard words from Matthew in the last few weeks as we've followed the Revised Common Lectionary, and so here's what I want to do with the remaining pages of the December Pioneer: let's lighten up!

A few of you have sent articles to me, and they are printed in this issue. They are all intended to be uplifting and sometimes even humorous, and I hope you enjoy them.

Blessings and love to everyone, and I rejoice to share this hopeful and lovely season in church with each precious member, friend, and visitor of our congregation.

In faith and love,

Pastor Becky

UCC Daily Devotional

Emily Heath

New Church Year's Eve

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory." - Matthew 25:31

It's new year's eve in the church. You're having a big party tonight complete with countdown and ball drop, right? Yeah, I'm not either. But I do like the idea of taking notice when the church year turns over once again.

This happens every year, on the last Sunday before Advent. The liturgical year is a cycle of stories, starting with waiting for the birth of Jesus Christ, moving through his death and resurrection, celebrating the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and then spending many weeks in "ordinary time," where we think about how to live out our faith in our everyday lives.

In American contexts, given the timing of a national holiday, this Sunday is often overshadowed by "Thanksgiving Sunday" or "That Sunday after Thanksgiving When No One Comes to Church Sunday."

This is not one of our big church holiday observances.

But maybe it should be. The message of Reign of Christ Sunday is that, once again, we have cycled through the story of the Christian year. And once again, on this last day, we proclaim that only Christ reigns supreme.

No nation, leader, ideology, or thing can ever take the place of the only one that we should worship. And that is very good news.

In days when the world is filled with violence and uncertainty, when injustice seems victorious, and when hope seems dim, the church needs this day to say, "Not for long . . . and not inside of our doors."

Proclaiming that Christ alone is Lord of us, and of the world, is a radical act.

Standing on the brink of another year, looking towards the birth of one who would change everything, now is the time to claim that promise once again.

So, happy new year, church. This is not the end. This is the beginning of a hope that will always rise again.

Prayer

God, no matter what distractions compete for my heart, you alone will I serve, and you alone will I worship. This year and always. Amen.

From a Rev. Charles Stanley Sermon

- thank you for this article, Jean Stoker -

"Be Fruitful All the Days of Your Life"

1. Keep Learning. Once we stop learning, we will stop growing. Read the Bible – you will always learn from the Bible.
2. Keep Loving. Love God, love one another; such love will enhance your feelings for others.
3. Keep Laughing. Let joy make you happier.
4. Keep Leaving Problems Behind You. Don't dwell in the past. Let your burdens go.
5. Keep Dreaming. Think about what you *can* do – it's a matter of attitude!
6. Keep Doing Your Best. You are young and useful at any age if you always do your best.
7. Keep Planning Ahead. Goals are worth working for.
8. Keep Leaning on the Lord...every day.
9. Keep Listening to God. Ask God to speak to your heart to help you stay strong, healthy, and useful.

Friends: This is information you may have forgotten or never knew. Marilyn Stoker sent this article to me via email, and I think it's the perfect way to begin the new church year.

The Moon & God

July 20, 1969

What was the first liquid and food consumed on the moon? I'm betting that most are unaware of this story.

Forty-five years ago, two human beings changed history by walking on the surface of the moon.

But, what happened before Buzz Aldrin and Neil Armstrong exited the Lunar Module is perhaps even more amazing, if only because so few people know about it. I'm talking about the fact that Buzz Aldrin took communion on the surface of the moon. Some months after his return, he wrote about it in Guideposts magazine.

The background to the story is that Aldrin was an elder at his Presbyterian Church in Texas during this period in his life; and, knowing that he would soon be doing something unprecedented in human history, he felt that he should mark the occasion somehow.

He asked his minister to help him and so the minister consecrated a communion wafer and a small vial of communion wine. Buzz Aldrin took them with him out of the Earth's orbit and onto the surface of the moon. He and Armstrong had only been on the lunar surface for a few minutes when Aldrin made the following public statement:

"This is the LM (Lunar Module) pilot. I'd like to take this opportunity to ask every person listening in, whoever and wherever they may be, to pause for a moment and contemplate the events of the past few hours and to give thanks in his or her own way. He then ended radio communication, and there, on the silent surface of the moon, 250,000 miles from home, he read a verse from the Gospel of John, and he took

communion.

Here is his own account of what happened: "In the radio blackout, I opened the little plastic packages which contained the bread and the wine. I poured the wine into the chalice our church had given me. In the one-sixth gravity of the moon, the wine slowly curled and gracefully came up the side of the cup. Then I read the scripture: 'I am the vine, you are the branches. Whosoever abides in me will bring forth much fruit ... Apart from me you can do nothing.'

"I had intended to read my communion passage back to Earth, but at the last minute [they] had requested that I not do this. NASA was already embroiled in a legal battle with Madelyn Murray O'Hare, the celebrated opponent of religion, over the Apollo 8 crew's reading from Genesis while orbiting the moon at Christmas. I agreed reluctantly."

"I ate the tiny toast and swallowed the wine. I gave thanks for the intelligence and spirit that had brought two young pilots to the Sea of Tranquility. It was interesting for me to think that the very first liquid ever poured on the moon and the very first food eaten there were the communion elements."

"And, of course, it's interesting to think that some of the first words spoken on the moon were the words of Jesus Christ, who made the Earth and the moon - and who, in the immortal words of Dante, is Himself the "Love that moves the Sun and other stars."

Advent

(from the Latin word adventus, which means "arrival" or "coming") is the first season of the liturgical year. It begins four Sundays before Christmas, the Sunday falling on or nearest to November 30, and ends on Christmas Eve.

2017 December Events

Each Tuesday during December, 6:30 pm, Adult Bible Study discusses
“Sent,”

a daily Advent devotional.

All are welcome to join this discussion.

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Sunday, December 10, Children and youth assist for worship.

A surprise guest speaker will preach.

Saturday, 12/16, 2 pm, rehearsal for Pageant followed by caroling in the  
neighborhood. Come and sing together!

We will give handmade ornaments to the homes we visit.

Community Rehearsal for “Messiah,” 1-3 pm.

Sunday, 12/17, Christmas pageant by Children and Youth.

Santa and Elf come to our church.

Cookie exchange after worship.

“Messiah” presented at Tully HS,  
conducted by Stephen B. Wilson.

Thursday, 12/21, 7 pm, Blue Christmas Service  
led by Revs. Becky West and Brenda McCutcheon.

Sunday, 12/24, 7 pm, Christmas Eve Service  
with candlelighting, lessons, and carols.

Sunday, 12/31, Rev. Brenda McCutcheon leads worship.



## December Celebrations

Dec. 1: Eric Shirley  
 2: Jed Swayze  
 3: Ashlyn Swanka  
     John and Jean Hilts  
     Anniversary  
 4: Steve Burt  
 7: Ashley Ellis  
 8: Carolyn Swanka  
 9: Julie Baldwin  
 12: Charlotte Delaney  
 17: Evan Knapp  
 18: Adam Fox  
 23: Jim Henderson  
 28: Evan Shirley  
     Blake Shirley  
     Amy Twentyman  
 31: Matthew Swayze

To every heart bound in sin,  
 ~rejoice this Christmas day~  
 the gift of grace will set you free  
 the Christ, the Lord, the Way.

To thirsty souls everywhere,  
 ~rejoice this Christmas day~  
 and drink from the Fountain of Life  
 the Grace, the Mercy, the Way.

To all those who are heavy-laden,  
 ~rejoice this Christmas day~  
 for He is the Prince of our Peace  
 the Door, the Lamb, the Way.

Rejoice on this Christmas day,  
 your Lord and Savior is here  
 rejoice, I say again rejoice  
 let His birth bring your heart cheer.

*Luke 2:11*  
*King James Version*

*"For unto you is born this day in the  
 city of David a Saviour, which is  
 Christ the Lord"*

# Rejoice This Christmas Day

by [Deborah Ann Belka](#)

Unto us a Son was given,  
 ~rejoice this Christmas day~  
 a gift from God to you and I  
 the Truth, the Light, the Way.

To the world a Savior's born,  
 ~rejoice this Christmas day~  
 He fills the soul's hunger pain  
 the Bread, the Life, the Way.



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## O Holy Night

*May God bless you and all the world  
during this Holy Season.*

