

First United Methodist Church
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The Witness

Issue XII
 December 2008



"From Humbug to Hallelujah"

Several years ago, I remember seeing a cartoon with two shoppers in a mall walking by a Salvation Army bell ringer. The caption had one of the shoppers saying, "What will those religious people do next? Now they're even horning in on Christmas!" We might chuckle at such a thought, but even this year I saw a new Christmas CD in the stores called "A New Thought for Christmas." As I scanned the song titles, I couldn't help but notice that this "Christmas" CD envisioned a Christmas without Christ. That, apparently, is the "new thought."

As we approach yet another Advent season, we can't help but be aware of the many ways that Jesus is left out of his own birthday celebration. How sad, for what is there to celebrate if there is no manger, no shepherds, and no star in the sky?

Indeed, that was the point of the character of Ebenezer Scrooge in Charles Dickens' classic story "A Christmas Carol." What reason do we have to celebrate? Christmas, in Scrooge's estimation, is only an excuse to skip out of work. Many today would agree with Dickens' character: Christmas is a "humbug."

We know differently, even if we don't always act like it. Do we sometimes miss the point of Christmas by hurrying here and there, running frantically through the malls and between parties? Is there at least a part of you that secretly dreads Christmas? Why does it have to come again so soon?

This Advent season, we'll be exploring questions like that as we try to recapture the joy of this season. I'll be using Dickens' story as a backdrop for the sermons during Advent and on Christmas Eve. And perhaps, as we watch Scrooge move from humbug to hallelujah, we'll make a similar journey so that this Christmas is the most meaningful we've had for a long time.

I'd encourage you, if you haven't read Dickens' story for a while, to take a quick read of it. Then let's see together what Biblical ideas Dickens was communicating. And most of all, we'll be looking for the baby in the manger all along the way. Make worship a priority this Advent season, because I believe God has some great things in store for us.

I'll see you at the "hallelujah" place on Sunday!

Pastor Dennis

Happy December Birthday to...

1	Dick Brown	14	Eddie Gilliland	21	Sandra Angiollo
1	Ivy Parker	14	Mary Livergood	21	Karen Helmecy
1	Connie King	14	Darren Warne	23	Harley Hidalgo
1	Lynn Liesch	14	Eddie Gilliland	23	Teresa McKiddy
1	Tim Brown	15	Bobbi McCoy	23	Rachael Miller
1	Aaron Massow	15	Bill Miller	25	Cristina Lee
1	James Gilbert	15	Joni Maxwell	26	Bonnie Grochowski
4	Evan Sprang	16	Shirley Miller	27	Donna Vaughan
5	Don Strohl	16	Steve Davenport	27	Noah Penrose
6	Pat Morris	19	Bev Weltzin	28	Karen Mills
7	Jordan Romanov	19	Annie Alvarado	28	David Coffey
8	Rosemary Schest	19	Jaymee Penrose	29	Jacci Moore
9	Ray Nadolski	20	Dick Samuelson	29	Lillian Karsten
12	Gerald Wheeler	20	Jennifer Costello	30	Virginia Torbitt
12	Savannah Riley	21	Maria Cheeks	30	Kathy Wilson



Happy December Anniversary to...

4	Nathan & Amber Welch	24	Ed & Jean Gilliland
13	Ed & Margaret Hodges	30	Don & Julie Kremke
18	Mike & Connie King	30	Dwayne & Betty Evensen
19	Bruce & Kathy Wilson	30	Ed & Jean Gilliland
19	Pat & Jennifer Costello	31	Dick & Pauline Brown

NOTE FROM PASTOR DEB

Have you ever seen the movie Toy Story? Well to be perfectly honest I have only seen bits and pieces of it but from these pieces I've gathered that once the children are in bed or away from home, the toys come to life and have all sorts of adventures.

In a way the same sort of thing happens at our church. Once you or I leave the church building there may be others springing to life.

It's exciting to see that our building is not sitting empty 6 days a week. Instead it is actively being used for faith development, community services, fellowship and more. There are study groups and support group, Blood drives and outreach projects, weddings and funerals, TGIW and programs for children and youth. We sponsor a Cub Scout group. Brownies and Girl Scout meet. Super Seniors, UMW and UMM get together. Choirs practice. And the list goes on.

Sometimes I get a panicky feeling when I drive pass the church and see cars in the lot. I have to pull up a quick mental calendar to make sure I haven't forgotten something I should be attending.

Portage First is alive. It's energizing, sometimes adventurous and at times a challenge. As we juggle schedules and space, it is important to remember that we are striving to do our best to serve God and our community.

You will want to take a look at the church calendar before planning something that involves use of the building. The web site calendar is updated regularly and can be found at www.portageumc.org. There is also a calendar in the center of this newsletter.

A call to the church office is also necessary so that doors can be programmed to be open. Conversely, if plans change, the office needs to know so that doors are not left open.

I am so glad Portage First is taking our mission seriously as we strive to "empower people from all walks of life to develop their personal and spiritual growth through Jesus Christ."

Growth isn't easy. I guess that's why we hear the term "growing pains". I am proud to be part of a congregation who is willing to go through the pain to be obedient to Jesus' Great Commission. (Matt. 28:16-20)

Pastor Deb

The tinkling sound of the bell as you exit a store has long been a sound of Christmas. For the Salvation Army their Red Kettle Campaign provides a major portion of their operating budget. With these funds they are able to reach so many in our community with much needed help throughout the year.



Monday, Dec. 22 Portage First has agreed to provide bell ringers at the Walgreens on Central Ave. (by Town and Country). You are invited to sign up for a one hour time slot. You will work in pairs (or more). There is a signup sheet at the Welcome Center. Choose a time that fits your schedule. We will be there from 9am-9pm.

Parents, this is a wonderful opportunity to be in mission as a family. Bring your children. What a great way to take a break from the hustle and bustle and live the call to service.

Thank God It's Wednesday

Meal - 5:45 Sessions - 6:30

Dec. 3

Real World Wednesday – programs for children and youth including choir, studies, drama and Sports in the Spirit.

Neighbor link of Porter County- What is Neighbor link? How does it impact our lives, the lives of our neighbors and most importantly the kingdom of God? Judy Alders will talk with us about this invitation to practical, neighbor – to – neighbor expression of God's love.

No Pastor's Study

Dec. 10

RWW

Pastor's Study – "Three Simple Rules: Do No Harm"

Wesley's first rule for life is to do no harm. What does that mean? How do we avoid "evil of every kind"? And how do we decide what is "harmful" or "evil"? What standard do we live by?

Dulcimers – Scott Connor will share his love of this Appalachian string instrument. He not only plays the dulcimer but also handcrafts them. Scott will give you some interesting facts about the instrument, play a few songs for you and may even have you strumming a tune by the end of the session.

Communion and Shut-in Visitation - Once a month communion is taken to those who cannot attend worship because of physical limitations. You can find out more about this ministry as Mike Matthew and Pastor Deb share the specifics.

Dec. 17

RWW

Pastor's Study - "Three Simple Rules: Do Good"

It's not enough to not do harm. We're also called to actively pursue good things for the sake of others. How do we get to the place where that is the "natural" or "automatic" thing to do?

Helping Hands – will be needed to put together gifts for those who will be visited by Christmas Carolers.

No TGIW on Dec. 24th or Dec. 31st

First Friday Fellowship Potluck Christmas Party

Friday, December 5, 2008

Dinner at 6:30pm

Church Fellowship Hall

Come enjoy good food, games, Christmas songs, and Christian fellowship and \$5 gift exchange. You are all invited to attend.

Please sign the sheet at the welcome desk.

Merry Christmas to all -

Virginia Spurlock



UMW NEWS

UMW Martha Circle to Meet on December 3rd

Mark your calendars for Wednesday, December 3rd, the date of the next UMW Meeting. Our mornings begin at 8:30 am with breakfast munchies, followed by our business meeting, which starts at 9:00 am.

"It's time for an Audience with God"

In His presence there is comfort,
In His presence there is peace.
When we seek the Father's heart
we will find such blessed assurance,
In the presence of the Lord.

- Dick & Melodie Tunney

Thursday, December 4th is the date of our next scheduled 24 hour uninterrupted 'Audience with God'. Please sign up for your 30 minute time slot and pick up your December Prayer Guide at the welcome center, or get it online.

If this time has proved to be fulfilling and/or helpful in your spiritual journey, please let us know. By sharing your experience you will be an encouragement to others.

May God bless you as you participate in this important prayer event. God has a message for you. If you have questions please ask Jeff King or Linda Mitchell



*Jingle Bells, Jingle Bells, Jingle all the way....Coffee Bar gift cards are on sale today!
Stop by the coffee bar today to purchase your gift card, they make great stocking stuffers too!*



Christmas Cantata

The Cantata "Start at the Manger" will be presented Sun., Dec. 14 at 8:30, 10:00 and 11:30am services. The Children's choir will be singing with the cantata. It is great music.

Come and worship with us and bring your friends.

Caroling will be Sat., Dec. 20. Meet at the church at 2pm for routes to follow.

Refreshments will follow.

The chancel choir will be singing for the Longest Night service Sun., Dec. 21 at 7:30 pm. Do you know someone who is lonely and feels unloved at Christmas? Invite them to come with you.

The choir will be contributing music at the 11 pm service on Christmas Eve. This is such a beautiful time in our Christian journey. Great times to Praise our Lord.



Health and physical limitations often keep persons from being able to attend worship on a regular basis. Christmas brings a special opportunity to bring a bit of Portage First to them.

On **Saturday, Dec. 20th** you are invited to come **Christmas caroling**. No need for a good voice - just a willingness to bring a bit of cheer to some very special people.

Sign up at the Welcome Center. For further information contact John Black or Pastor Deb.

Student and Family Ministries December Events

Coffee Brew with the College Crew

As a way to reconnect, catch up, and talk about life on campus, all college students are invited to come to Starbucks on Route 6 in Portage on Tuesday, December 23rd at 6:00 PM. Together we'll fellowship and reunite over a "cup of joe."

Senior High Students...Doing "THAT THING" We Do!

Mark your calendars Senior High Students, Grades 8-12, for July 5-11, 2009. This is the week that we have signed up for Senior High Institute...now known as 'That Thing!'

For this year, we have already reserved our cabin simply because of the new policy in place. Each church is being asked to reserve spots and pay for them in advance. Because of this, we had to pick a week and cabin that would work best for our high school campers and the number of campers we anticipate going to Epworth Forest and experiencing 'That Thing' with us.

There are 20 available camper openings! This takes into account every camper that went last year and guess what...room for new campers and your friends!

More details on scholarships and camp costs will be forthcoming, but for now 'save the date' and let Jeff King know if you will be going to the camp this summer and who you are bringing with you to experience the way cool 'Christian Things' we do at Epworth Forest!



PLEASE NOTE ---NO children's church on Dec. 14th.

The Christmas Cantata will be offered at all services and will be sure to provide you with the opportunity to share the message of Christmas with your child.



Christmas Eve Worship

Join us for worship as we celebrate the birth of our Lord on Christmas Eve, Wednesday, December 24th. Services will be held at 8pm and 11pm and we will celebrate Holy Communion and conclude with candlelight at each service. Light refreshments will be served between the services.

Christmas "Bell Gift Lift" Program "2008" Sponsored By Mental Health Association of Porter County

Portage 1st United Methodist Church is participating again this year in the "Christmas Gift Lift Program". This is our 6th year in participating. Last year our church provided around (80) gifts to needy and potentially forgotten people. The Porter County "MHA" Mental Health Association with the help of many volunteers and community members organizes, solicits, collects, wraps, and distributes more than (1200) gifts each December to needy individuals and families throughout Porter County. Some of these individuals may receive nothing else this Christmas season other than these gifts.

Names of individuals who will benefit by the gift lift are provided to the MHA by mental health providers in Porter County. In addition, referrals are given by private parties who are aware of a person(s) in need.

The case workers meet with clients to provide MHA with a list of names, age and a "wish list" of (3) items per individual. The list may include clothing, personal care items, toys, and just for fun items. Ages range from infants to 100+.

MHA strives to provide each person with (3) gifts, including at least one article of clothing requested.

"Gift Tags - BELLS" are completed by volunteers and are hung on trees throughout the community. The tags include the information needed for one gift, i.e.: Male, 10 years old, wants a football; or Female, 44, size 18, likes pink. (The names are not included to insure confidentiality.)

Gifts are wrapped and returned to MHA. A portion of the tag remains on the gift for in-house identification and distribution. The instructions are on the tag.

MHA volunteers will pick-up these wrapped gifts from our church.

This is a wonderful way for us to show our love and care of those around us. These folks who benefit from the program sometimes barely make ends meet and the holidays simply don't happen without the generosity of the community.

Be looking for the "Bell Gift Lift" tree in our narthax by Sunday-11/23 or before. Please fill out sticky note on Bell and leave on poster by tree, so that we know who has taken the bell. This way we can check with you and give you a reminder call as the gifts are due for pick-up by MHA. We will want to get our gifts bought, wrapped, and returned to the church no later than Friday-12/12 - please! You can contact Mike Matthew (762-9409-Home/Evenings or 508-9616-Cell Phone), Lynn Pinkstaff (762-4223) or our church office (762-3846) if you have any questions about this program.

We are a richly blessed people and God is doing a mighty work at Portage 1st United Methodist Church in the ministries he is directing us into. It is programs such as these and the church working through them that bring honor and glory to our God. In the Bible the apostle Paul tells us in Ephesians 2: vs. 10, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." May God richly bless you and those you minister to this holiday season.

"Sing a Song of Christmas"

Can You see it? Do you hear it? Can you smell it? It's Christmas...and the sights, sounds, and smells of Christmas are coming to Portage First...

On Saturday, December 6th, the Children's choir will be giving us the Christmas message through song and drama. The program, "Sing a Song of Christmas," is sure to put us in the Christmas spirit and remind us that Jesus is the true reason for this wonderful season!

The evening of worship will begin at 6:00 PM with special music as everyone gathers for the children's program. Pre-worship will go until 6:30 Pm.

At 6:30 PM, the children will deliver the Christmas message through their program, "Sing a Song of Christmas."

Following the worship service, cookies and milk will be served for free, and the coffee bar will be selling hot cocoa, coffee, and other "seasonably warm" beverages.

Bring in the holy Christmas season with the children on Saturday, December 6th. Join us for pre-worship at 6:00 PM and the children's Christmas program at 6:30 PM.



It's time to order your Christmas Poinsettias in honor or memory of loved ones. Orders will be taken from now until December 15th. The cost will be \$8.00 each. Place your order along with payment in the offering plate.



Book Nook Soon to Open!

Thanks to the hard work of the Trustees and the vision of members of our church, the Fellowship Hall now boasts a new Book Nook in memory of Frank Peterson (who had a passion for sharing good books) and Velma Ostroot (for whom the original church library is named). The Book Nook will be located in the back part of the Fellowship Hall.

The Book Nook functions slightly differently than a traditional library. There are no "check-out" or "check-in" cards. If you see a book you like, you are welcome to take it. If it's a book that will continue to be helpful to you, you may keep it. In the spirit of what Mr. Peterson loved to do, the Book Nook is meant to spread good books around, without fees and without any expectation of return.

In addition, if you have Christian books in good condition you have read and do not need any longer, you are invited to bring the books to the church office. Books not used for the Book Nook will be donated to the Rummage Sale.

If you have questions, please contact Pastor Dennis or Mike King. We look forward to this ministry being a place to build community and share good books.

"A Gift of Life"

Webster defines a *gift* as, a present, a thing given, a donation. I feel that a new start could be added to the definition. As believers in Jesus, we can attest to that. I was able to experience another new start, one that affected my earthly life. March 15, 2007 myself, and five others, received organ transplants. Which besides eternal life with God, is the greatest gift I have ever received. Before the surgery, I was very ill. I was a Type I (insulin dependent) diabetic, with kidney failure, on dialysis. Often I think of the unconditional love of this individual for not only me, but, my family. They don't have to watch me being sick, existing and slowly perishing wanting to do anything they could. Or, I probably would have never stepped foot into Portage 1st UMC, and not met you. On the days that I would have attended church it would have been at churches I had already attended. Also, what if am fortunate enough to impact someone's life for Christ in the future? It couldn't happen without first my gift I was given.

It is not only me, when I go to Indianapolis for follow-ups, I see different people each time who received an organ or tissue transplant, and it is the same for them. Many people are affected when someone gives the gift of life, and becomes an organ and tissue donor.

There are over 800 Hoosiers currently on the transplant list. Nationally, one man, woman or child is added to the list every 12 minutes. Every day, an average of 18 people die in the United States waiting for the gift of life!!

So, if you are not already a declared donor, won't you please become one? If you have questions about the whole thing please go to www.iopo.org. The website is full of information for you to read. You are able to declare your wishes online now. Simply go to www.donatelifeindiana.org. Now there isn't any more waiting until you go to the fun ol' DMV.

Thank you for taking your time to read my contribution to our newsletter.

Michael Schoonover



RED CROSS BLOOD DRIVE on FRIDAY, DEC. 12 from 2-7pm
give the gift of life



"Deck the Halls", "There's No Place Like Home For The Holidays", "Joy to the World". The constant refrains about the happiness of the season can be painful for some as many are reminded of what they have lost or have never had. Death is not the only loss we grieve. Sadness comes in many ways - broken relationships, financial insecurity, weariness of ill health and loneliness, to name a few.

As the days become shorter our spirits can sink. We need encouragement. For this reason Portage First will offer a special service called "The Longest Night" on Sunday, Dec. 21st at 7:30pm. This time of prayer, scripture and music acknowledges God's presence amid the struggle and is an opportunity to allow the Word of God to shine light into the darkness. All are welcome. Think about your friends, neighbors and family. Extend an invitation to them. It may be just what they need to make the holidays a bit brighter.

A few thank yous

Michael and I want to thank you from the bottom of our hearts for the support you are showing us through this "bump" in our lives. Your prayers are definitely felt. Your cards, calls, words of encouragement and offers of help are such an encouragement. I sometimes forget whom I've told what but I do try to keep the Care Page updated. You can sign on to this by going to the church web site - www.portageumc.org - then click on the Mike Rousselle Care Page link. Thank you.



Deb

Thanks to your church for hosting our 1st cluster charge conference. Kudos to your praise team for leading us in worship before the meeting. To the ones who helped us shy ones, to interact with someone from another church during the question period

with D.S. Cobb – thank you, you make it very easy.

Many thanks to the ladies who were in charge of the kitchen – the bountiful table was great! It takes hard work form a lot of people to make an event like this go as smoothly as it did, and I just wanted everyone to know that it was appreciated!

Thank you all –Anna Kalbe, Porter UMC

On behalf of the students and staff of Jones Elementary School, we would like to thank you and your congregation for the box of school supplies. Your thoughtfulness of others who are less fortunate than some is to be commended. In times that are very hard for some financially, your donation to our school will help them have the supplies they need.

*Again, thank you for your kindness and know that the supplies will be put to good use.
Sincerely, Mr. Mitchell Miller Elementary Principal*

Notes from the Trustees

By: Bill Miller

It's hard to believe that in four short weeks, Christmas will be upon us and another year will soon come to a close.

It has been a very busy and fruitful year for our church and your Trustees. Following are some of the accomplishments and improvements made this year:

CROSSROADS

Concrete pads were poured for prayer path benches. Concrete was arranged by Don Kremke. Ozinga concrete donated the concrete as well as the delivery. Our thanks to Don and Ozinga.

Benches were put in place on the prayer path and anchored for security. Crosses were installed at each station and plaques were installed on the crosses. Mulch was spread at each station. Labor for the above projects was provided by Trustees and other members of the church. Special thanks to Bob Kellams for all his hard work this year.

Covered stage with electrical was erected on the east side of the red barn. This allows for both daylight and evening outdoor services. Thanks to Kasl Electric for the donation of the electrical work.

CHURCH PROPERTY

The Sanctuary has been completely repainted.

New carpeting has been installed.

We have authorized the purchase of fifty new chairs, thirty of those for the choir and 20 to replace pews in the back rows. Chairs are more flexible for the choir than pews, are equipped with ganging feature (lock together), have racks for Bibles and hymnals. We have also purchased a chair mover (dolly) to make them easier to move. Chairs are stackable and will take less space.

We have made enhancements to the security system with alarms and cameras.

We replaced all the overhead lighting in the fellowship hall with more efficient fluorescents. This will help reduce our electric bill and produce better lighting when needed.

Most of all the fellowship hall tables have been replaced with lighter weight, sturdier models. We have had donations from members to cover the cost of twenty of these tables. Much easier to store and handle.

We have installed a "Book Nook" in the fellowship hall. This is a Memorial to Frank Peterson and Velma Ostroot, long time members of our church who were dedicated to the Christian education of our children and grandchildren. This memorial will be stocked with books to either read on site or borrow. Special thanks to all financial donors and especially to Mike King for spearheading this project.

The Common Grounds coffee bar continues to operate at a small profit and is keeping up with its financial obligations. Come by for coffee, baked goods and fellowship.

The Welcome Center is busy every Sunday. Plan to stop by.

PARSONAGE

All carpeting was cleaned.

Downstairs bath repainted.

Deck and stairs repainted by the Pastor's Family.

An annual inspection was recently completed and we are happy to report that all is well.

There are numerous other projects undertaken by the United Methodist Men, The United Methodist Women, small groups and individuals. Too many to thank in this note, but know how much your church appreciates your efforts.

I want to personally thank all the trustees who served this year and they are: Frank Odar, Bob Romanov Jr., Eddie Karsten, Jim Miller, Ron Cutler, Jacci Moore, Glenn Yerby, and Bob Kellams.

We have many projects to discuss for 2009 and welcome your input and help in making them happen. Please discuss your ideas with any Trustee and any talents you might have for cleaning, painting, gardening, etc., will be gratefully accepted.



DECEMBER