

## A BUCC CHRISTMAS LIST

By now it should be no surprise to anyone that Christmas is coming. There is a lot of planning and preparation going on. That is true here at BUCC also, where we do our best to keep people focused on the real reason for this Holiday. Here is a list of events, some of them described in greater detail inside Outlook.

1: On Friday, December 4 at 6:30 PM; we will have our Advent Potluck. Look for the sign-up sheet in the Narthex so you can plan on what to bring. There will be children's activities to occupy little hands while the adults get organized. People with knowledge of the event advise arriving promptly at 6:30 or maybe a little early, as the next event will begin promptly. This brings us to our second event.

2: A Christmas carol sing at 7:30 PM led by Kathleen Meredith and Sean Casey. We will be singing in the Parlor, by the light of the Mitten Tree.

The construction of our new, revised Christmas Putz takes place the next day. It is Item 3: Starting at 8:00 on Saturday morning we will set up the tables, unwrap the figures and arrange the scene for our traditional Christmas Putz.

After that is done, the next event is

4: On December 13, We will be treated to the Children's Christmas Pageant. The pageant this year is similar to last years in that there will be opportunities for the congregation to participate in the drama and music. The traditional story will be presented with the children taking the lead. Several of the children will perform much of the music as instrumental pieces, which Marka is excited about. The pageant focuses on the meaning of Christmas.

5: On December 20 we take up the offering for the Christmas Fund. This is one of the regular special offerings of the UCC, but it should not be thought of as "just another request for a donation". The purpose of the Christmas Fund is to provide some extra support to help those ministers, and their families, who have devoted their lives to the church. There is a full description inside.

Wow, can you believe it? Its Christmas Eve already, and we are at our final event:

6: Our Christmas Eve service starts at 7:00 PM. Preceding the service there will be a Wassail Bowl in the Narthex. It is an opportunity to wish all a Merry Christmas. We will have both our music directors, Jim Levy and Kathleen Meredith, participating, as well as the BUCC choir. Kathleen will be playing her harp for the service. We will conclude the service by candlelight. This brings us to the end of our Christmas list of BUCC activities. Have a Merry Christmas everyone.



We weep because the night is long,  
We laugh for day shall rise,  
We sing a slow contented song  
And knock at Paradise.  
Weeping we hold Him fast, Who wept  
For us, we hold Him fast;  
And will not let Him go except  
He bless us first or last.

Weeping we hold Him fast to-night;  
We will not let Him go  
Till daybreak smite our wearied sight  
And summer smite the snow:  
Then figs shall bud, and dove with dove  
Shall coo the livelong day;  
Then He shall say, 'Arise, My love,  
My fair one, come away.'  
--Christina Rossetti, from her poem, "Advent"

A waiting empty manger, shepherds gazing at the skies, candles catching flame in the cold and dark, a strong and curious voice in the wilderness crying out, "Make ready, make ready!" These are the images of Advent: of expectant parents, a tiny flickering light, and the world preparing itself for God's in-breaking, earthly presence. It is very different from the messages of the secular world: instant gratification, insignificance, meaninglessness, hostility, superficiality, or rampant, hurtful over-consumption. We mark the Sundays prior to the birth of God's Son year after year to remind ourselves of God's hopes and dreams for our world. This birth is fraught with danger and joy, as all births are. But it is also a larger birth that we await and celebrate: not just that of a small child, but the beginnings of new life and new stirrings within our very own lives. The Advent of Jesus is the advent of a God-shaped life within our own circumstances, whatever they may be. We celebrate a larger birth and a larger truth: we celebrate nothing less than God's love born into the world in every nook and cranny, attic and basement, dark alley and war-torn valley.

True, sometimes it is hard to see this. Sometimes you have to lean your ear closely

against the doors of your heart and the heart of others just to catch small intimations of the Mystery. I remember when my grandfather became gravely ill and entered the hospital in the weeks prior to Christmas. I was six years old. We had presents already wrapped under the tree, decorations hanging all over the house, and fun holiday parties to attend. Then, suddenly, it was as if everything stopped, including time. The living room, where the tree stood, was shrouded in darkness. My parents spoke in hushed and quiet voices that we children could not understand. There were lots of trips to and from the hospital which was over an hour's drive from our home. The atmosphere inside our house was so very different from the world outside. Gaiety gave way to gravity. We did not go to church; we did not sing carols in the car; we carefully crept around the darkness. It was surreal. At least this is what I remember.

But then somehow, somehow Christmas took shape, substance, and form. My folks found a way to light the tree, to place ribbons on packages, to bake cookies and gather firewood, to gather with family and friends, and to hold loved ones close. No doubt, my folks probably went through these rituals for my cousins, my brother and me. No doubt, they struggled deeply with the absence of my grandfather. No doubt, the holidays were not the same as in past years.

Still, in moving through those strange weeks prior to Christmas, and in clinging to each other, we found something to celebrate, honor, and cherish. Gravity gave way, if not to gaiety, then to a lighter spirit. Some dream that God had for us was coming to fruition, some small hope for our family had descended into our darkness and began to flicker and grow, some force was gently pulling us back into community, keeping us from desperate isolation, sustaining our faith, healing our hurts, and giving us strength for the present and future.

*Continued on Page 8*

## Bible Reading ... at Home

(Adapted from SeasonsFUSION - *Seasons of the Spirit*@Wood Lake Publishing)

### **December 6 - Born of Fire**

Baruch 5:1-9 or Malachi 3:1-4  
Philippians 1:3-11

**Luke 1:68-79**  
Luke 3:1-6

Zechariah's song of praise and prophecy as he blesses his son, John, cascades into promises of hope for the people. The anticipated ministry of John recalls the prophecy of Malachi, and looks forward to God's reign of righteousness and peace.

Zechariah's words lift up the role of John in God's redemptive work. What do you hear Zechariah's song affirming about life, self, vocation, and God: as they relate to John, and as they relate to you? In what ways are you being called to be a prophet in your churches, your homes, your communities, in the world? How do we strike a faithful balance between relying on God to bring the "not yet" of God's reign, and our bearing witness to God's reign already among us?

**REFLECTION:** Holy God, we have a job to do this Advent season. You call us to prepare the way, as you called the prophets of old. You are doing a new thing through us. Like a refiner's fire that destroys the old so that the new may shine through, refine us and give us courage - courage to be messengers of justice and righteousness and courage to be bearers of grace and light. Ignite a fire within us so that we may carry that light in the world. Amen.

### **December 13 - Ignited by Fire**

Zephaniah 3:14-20  
Philippians 4:4-7

Isaiah 12:2-6  
**Luke 3:7-18**

John the baptizer bids us to look forward - to turn to God and to Christ and allow ourselves to be transformed from the inside out. It is a call to re-orient our lives to the radical, justice-seeking ways of God's reign. Today's readings assure us that no matter our life circumstances, God loves us and desires to draw us closer. What actions and attitudes might draw you into a closer relationship with God this Advent season.

**REFLECTION:** God of compassion, while we desire to be people of justice and peace, there are times when we ignore those in our community who are in need of physical or emotional support. We want to bear good fruit, but sometimes we get in our own way. We pray that you would ignite your fire within us. Help us to let go of those things that are holding us back from you. Amen.

### **December 20 - Transformed by Extravagant Welcome**

Micah 5:2-5a  
Hebrews 10:5-10

Luke 1:47-55 or Psalm 80:1-7  
**Luke 1:39-45, (46-55)**

Mothers, seers, and prophets sing praises, which lift up promises fulfilled and promises awaited. Mary's song - the *Magnificat* - invites us to join this community that celebrates God's will for justice, hospitality, and peace. Mary and Elizabeth create a mutually supportive community, which in turn acknowledges ties to a communal history. What is our community story - as a Christian family, as denominations, as individual church communities? Is there any part of our story that neglects or shuns certain community members? What reversals should we work towards?

**REFLECTION:** O God, you are with each one of us. You are with the young, the elderly, the disenfranchised, the war weary, the content, and the discontent. You give freely and exuberantly to all of us. No matter who we are, no matter what stage of life we are in, we each receive your gift. We gather to receive your gift with gratitude and songs of praise. We gather to live in the fullness of life, which you have given to us. Amen.

### **December 27 - Unbridled Joy**

1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26  
Colossians 3:12-17

**Psalm 148**  
Luke 2:41-52

It is not surprising that the scripture passages for this first Sunday after Christmas would focus on unbridled joy; after all, we are celebrating Jesus, Emmanuel, who shares our humanity and reaches out to us in love. Yet the word "joy" can be deceiving, because we may expect it to equal happiness, and that is not always the case. For Hannah, we can only assume her sorrow at not raising her child is challenged by the joy that he is serving in the temple. Similarly, Mary and Joseph's anxiety over their lost child is presumably abated as they marvel at the youngster's wisdom. Colossians reminds us that we should give thanks (again, with joy) to God in all we do. Most of all, Psalm 148 calls upon all creation to offer joyous praise to God.

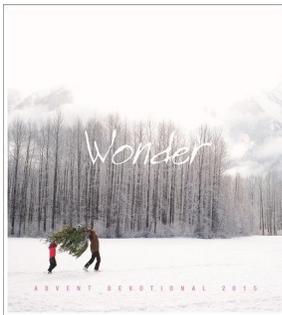
**REFLECTION:** We praise you this day, O God, remembering all that you have done. Especially in this Christmas season, we give you thanks for sending Jesus to be our friend, our teacher, our guide, and our Saviour. As a new year begins, we ask you to be with us each day, helping us follow the example of Jesus to make our world a little more loving. Amen.

**ADVENT  
POTLUCK  
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 4  
6:30PM**



Our annual potluck dinner will be held on Friday evening, December 4. We will begin the evening at 6:30pm with a delicious dinner of dishes brought by everyone. After dessert in the fellowship hall, we will gather in the parlor for some carol singing by the fire and mitten tree. Childcare will be in the nursery for the wee ones.

**ADVENT BOOKLET**



Pick up this year's Advent Devotional booklet in the parlor: *Wonder: Advent Devotional 2014* from the Stillspeaking Writers' Group is a collection of fresh, unique devotionals for the season of Advent. Copies are available in the Parlor.

We are asking for a donation of \$4.00 to cover the cost. the cost.

**SEEKERS**

The Seekers Christmas Party will be on Thursday, December 17 at 7:15 in the parlor. It will be a pot luck so please bring an appetizer type dish to share.

Our book for discussion will be "Eight Day of Creation" by Elizabeth O'Connor.

The exercises and meditative materials that make up this unusual book are designed specifically to help you identify your God-given gifts and to encourage you to use those gifts creatively in the world. Once you've read it, you'll find yourself returning to it again and again for insight and encouragement as you continue the exciting process of becoming all God created you to be.

Everyone is invited to join us for a fun, insightful evening





## NEW LOOK FOR CHRISTMAS PUTZ

This year our Christmas Putz in the Sanctuary will sport a new look. The Worship Team has decided to go for a smaller, less comprehensive telling of the Christmas story. It may resemble a Nativity scene more than the expansive, all encompassing previous edi-

tions. Instead of having each scene individually lit by lights, the whole thing will be illuminated at once. This will eliminate the need for individual positioning of lights.

One thing that has not changed is the fun of seeing the front of the sanctuary transformed into this massive green display. And we will still need many hands to get it done.

So on Saturday morning, December 5th, at 8:00 AM, or as soon as you can get there, join the others in helping to build a landscape of stumps and moss that tells the story of Christmas in the sanctuary. There are jobs for all ages: bringing in boxes, stumps and moss from the shed, a job for the young and healthy, or unwrapping the figures, scrunching paper, a job for the rest of us, and creating the scenes, a job for all of us. Drop in for an hour or spend the morning. No experience needed!

The new format will allow room for creative ideas, unfettered by past practices. Plan on coming over to the church and lending a hand.

The display will remain up through January 9th when we reassemble to disassemble the display and put it away for another year.



## POINSETTIAS FOR CHRISTMAS

You can purchase one of the poinsettias that will decorate our sanctuary during Advent and Christmas Eve. The cost is only \$10.00 per poinsettia. You can buy one for your home, as a gift for a friend, or in memory or honor of a loved one (which will be noted in the Christmas Eve Bulletin). Please complete the order slip included on the inside back cover of this Outlook, along with your check made out to BUCC with notation "Poinsettia" and place it in the offering plate or send it to the BUCC office. Order deadline is Sunday, December 20. You can take the plants you ordered home following the Christmas Eve service.

## MITTEN TREE HAS SOME EMPTY BRANCHES

There is still some space on the mitten tree for you to hang mittens, gloves, hats and scarves for children who need warm clothing this winter. An article in last month's Outlook gave the background of this clothing collection. Your contribution will mean a lot to some child with cold hands this winter. Linkages to Learning will take care of seeing that the items get on the hands of those that need them.



## CHANCE TO PLAY SANTA

It should not be too hard to add another item to the bottom of your Christmas list. It will give you an excuse to explore the toy aisles of the stores to look at the neat new toys that are out there. BUCC will be collecting presents for children and young people. Look for the sign up list and collection box in the narthex during Advent. Share the joy of Christmas with children and young people. Toys in all varieties, books, and puzzles are needed for infants to teenagers. Gift cards are welcome, too.

All gifts should be unwrapped. If you buy gift cards, please place them in the gift card folder.

Gifts need to be at BUCC by Sunday, December 13th.

Any questions-contact Laney McHarry or Linda Cornelius.

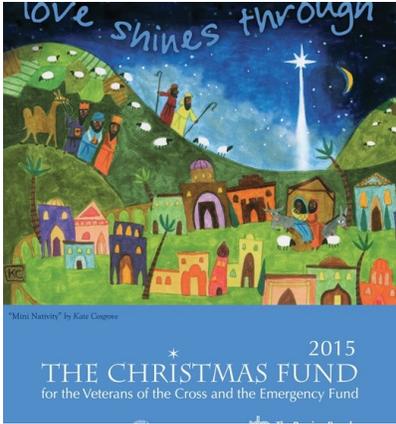
## BOOK GROUP

The Book Group will NOT meet in December.

On January 12 at 3:30pm in the BUCC parlor we will meet and discuss The Children Act by Ian McEwan.

London High Court Judge Fiona Maye presides over a sensitive case involving a family of Jehovah's Witnesses who won't allow their seventeen-year-old son to get a lifesaving blood transfusion because it conflicts with their religious beliefs. Meanwhile, Fiona's husband, Jack, has just left home, and she begins to feel the pressures of both resolving the case and saving her crumbling marriage." -Abstract - Montgomery County Public Library website.

All are welcome to join in on the discussion of this book.



## THE CHRISTMAS FUND OFFERING

The Christmas Fund is one of the four Special Mission Offerings of the UCC meant to assist those who have so faithfully served the church and who now find themselves facing unexpected financial needs.

You have the opportunity to be a part of this ministry that cares for the active and retired clergy and lay employees of the United Church of Christ through your participation in this year's Christmas Fund Offering.

Your gift to the Christmas Fund will not only assist pastors, but also provide for the supplementation of small annuities, supplementation of health premiums, emergency grants, and provide Christmas "Thank You" Gift Checks next December to low-income retirees.

Your gifts are needed more than ever to help the growing number of retirees whose low-income annuities make it difficult to meet increasing living costs. This is your opportunity to participate in God's promise of renewal by enabling this ministry of compassion and care.

During the Sundays in Advent, you can place your check in one of the special donation envelopes or just write a check to BUCC with "Christmas Fund" in the memo line.

Thank you for your generosity.

### AMAZON SMILE

Help Support your favorite charity by shopping on [smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com)

AmazonSmile is a simple and automatic way for you to support your favorite charitable organization every time you shop, at no cost to you.

When you shop at [smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com), Amazon will donate 0.5% of the purchase price from your eligible AmazonSmile purchases to your favorite charitable organization. Donations are made by the AmazonSmile Foundation and are not tax deductible by you.

Many of the charities that BUCC supports are included in this program such as Interfaith Works, Shaw Community Ministry, Garrett County Habitat for Humanity, the Open and Affirming Coalition of the UCC, to name a few.

To learn more and to shop at AmazonSmile simply go to [smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com) from the web browser on your computer or mobile device.

## ANNUAL ALL- CONGREGATIONAL RENEWAL OF BAPTISMAL VOWS

On January 10th, the First Sunday after Epiphany, many churches celebrate the baptism of Jesus Christ in worship—through the scripture readings, prayers, and song. In the past, we have also celebrated this special Sunday by *reaffirming our baptismal vows* as a church body and welcoming new members into fellowship. What are baptismal vows? These are the promises that our parents or guardians made on our behalf if we were baptized as infants; they are very similar to the vows that we reaffirm if we are confirmed in the church, and they are also very similar to the affirmations and promises we make when we become members of our local church. This is a wonderful way to remind ourselves of our communal walk with Jesus in the New Year. What if you have never been baptized? Those who have not been baptized into the Christian faith may receive a blessing this day during worship, or they may request to receive the rite of baptism as adults after meeting with the pastor. Please contact Rev. Dee if you have questions about baptism, would like to receive the sacrament on this day, or you are curious about uniting with the BUCC faith community.

### *A Larger Birth*

*Continued from Page 1*

Friends, the Advent of Christ did not just happen long ago to a bunch of strangers in a desert. The Advent of Christ happens within you. And here's the thing: God grows within you, *both in season and out of season*. God takes the risk to be born in unfavorable conditions in and with a half-hearted people who can not yet see the vision that God sees. That's the miracle: that God does not disdain or abandon us. And here's another miracle to ponder: somewhere in the world this year, God has inspired someone to make Christmas for someone else, to point to a blazing and guiding light, and to take those first tentative steps towards a horizon that seems so very far away.

This Christmas, may that someone be you.

May you and yours have a blessed Advent,  
a peace-filled Christmas,  
and a joyful New Year!

In Christ,  
Rev Dee



*Joyous Christmas  
and best wishes for a happy  
and blessed New Year!*

*From  
The staff of BUCC —  
Rev. Dee, Jim, Kathleen,  
Colleen, Doris, Aleks & Lan*

***Outlook Submission Deadline:***  
Friday, December 18 at 12:00 (Noon).

*OUTLOOK* is published monthly.

Please place items for publication in the mailbox in the church office or  
Email to [dotjerliddel@gmail.com](mailto:dotjerliddel@gmail.com) with a copy to [admin@BethesdaUCC.org](mailto:admin@BethesdaUCC.org)

## DECEMBER 2015

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		<b>1</b> <b>3:30 PM</b> Worship Team	<b>2</b> <b>7:00 PM</b> Metro Garden Club	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b> <b>12:30 PM</b> Islamic Center of Maryland <b>6:30 PM</b> Advent Potluck	<b>5</b> <b>8:00 AM</b> Building of the Putz
<b>6</b> <b>8:30 AM</b> Choir Practice <b>10:30 AM</b> Worship Service, Sunday School	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b> <b>7:30 PM</b> Trustees Team	<b>10</b> <b>3:30 PM</b> Worship Team Meeting <b>7:00 PM</b> Christian Education Team	<b>11</b> <b>12:30 PM</b> Islamic Center of Maryland	<b>12</b> <b>10:00 AM</b> Choir Rehearsal
<b>13</b> <b>8:30 AM</b> Choir Practice <b>10:30 AM</b> Christmas Pageant, Worship Service	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b> <b>7:00 PM</b> Leadership Council Meeting	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b> <b>7:15 PM</b> Seekers	<b>18</b> <b>12:00 PM</b> Deadline for OUTLOOK articles  <b>12:30 PM</b> Islamic Center of Maryland	<b>19</b>
<b>20</b> <b>8:30 AM</b> Choir Practice <b>10:30 AM</b> Worship Service, Sunday School	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>24</b> <b>7:00 PM</b> Christmas Eve Service	<b>25</b> Christmas Day BUCC Office Closed <b>12:30 PM</b> Islamic Center of Maryland	<b>26</b>
<b>27</b> <b>8:30 AM</b> Choir Practice <b>10:30 AM</b> Worship Service, Sunday School	<b>28</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>31</b>		

**HAPPY NEW YEAR**  
**ANNUAL REPORTS DUE**



Team Leaders should have this as their top New Years Resolution. The 2016 Annual Congregational Meeting is scheduled for Sunday, January 24 following the worship service. This represents a schedule change and will reduce the amount of time available to compile and assemble the 2015 Annual Report. It is important that the Team Reports be in Colleen's hands by Friday, January 8th so that a final Annual Report can be assembled for the Annual Meeting.

This important task deserves some thought now, even though it is a busy time of year. If you don't, you WILL be reminded.

***CHRISTMAS POINSETTIAS***



Decorate the sanctuary during Advent.  
Order yours to take home following Christmas Eve services.



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

I /We would like \_\_\_\_\_ Poinsettias @ \$10.00 each = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

\*In memory/honor of: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
(\*Circle one: Donors will be listed in the Christmas Eve Bulletin.)

**Deadline for orders: Sunday, December 20, 2015**

**DATES TO REMEMBER FOR DECEMBER**

*Friday, December 4 at 6:30 PM -- Advent Potluck, followed by A Christmas carol sing at 7:30 PM*

*Saturday, December 5 at 8:00 AM -- Construction of the new, revised Christmas Putz*

*Sunday, December 13 -- the Children's Christmas Pageant*

*Sunday, December 20 -- the Christmas Fund Offering*

*Thursday, December 24 -- Christmas Eve service at 7:00 PM.*



OUTLOOK

Bethesda United Church of Christ  
 10010 Fernwood Road  
 Bethesda, Maryland 20817  
 Rev. Darla Dee Ledger

Phone: (301) 365-3387  
 Fax: (301) 365-3388  
 BethesdaUCC.org