Connect with People • Connect with Purpose • Connect with God

First United Methodist Church of Hurst

what are you waiting for?
What Are You Waiting For?

This is the theme of Advent, the season that takes us to Christmas, and it’s the theme of this issue of Connect magazine.

It seems to me that we are always waiting for something, and we often have a hard time with it. Hence the phrase that we hear over and over again (and maybe say ourselves): “I can’t wait for____________” (fill in the blank).

The blank is important because it says something about where we find ourselves. If the blank says, “vacation,” then perhaps it means that we have a once-in-a-lifetime trip that we have planned and anticipate greatly. Or maybe it means that we’re tired and need a break from work. If the blank says, “it to be over” then it means that the season we are in is difficult and hard to bear (see page 6).

So what does it mean when the blank says, “Christmas?” I suspect that it means different things to different people.

For the children of our church it means a variety of things — presents, traditions, food, family, candles and Silent Night (see pages 10–11). I imagine that the list for all ages in our community of faith might include many of these same things.

As followers of Jesus, the one whose birth we celebrate at Christmas, the blank says everything about who we are and what we do. At this time of year, we wait with expectation for the Savior and prepare for his arrival.

We fill in the blank with words like, “hope,” “love,” “joy,” and “peace.” These are good words that are familiar to those of us who are church folk. So I want to press us a little to consider some other words as well. Words like, “justice,” “compassion,” “mercy,” “Kingdom of God,” and all the other words of life that the Christ child brings. Because this is what Christmas is, and the season of Advent prepares us for this.

In response to these words of life that Jesus brings, the question Jesus asks those of us who follow him is, “What are YOU waiting for?”

Perhaps this year, during this season, we can all take a few moments to fill in the blank with something we are willing to be about — as well as all the other things that we traditionally use to fill in the blank.

So what are you waiting for? What does your blank say about you ... this season ... and the call Jesus has on your life?

From our Senior Pastor: Rev. Philip Rhodes

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To submit a story for the next issue of Connect, contact Missy Matthews, mmatthews@fumchurst.org or 817.488.1168.
Dec. 8 and 9: **Festival of Carols**: *A Christmas Tradition!*
Sunday: 4 p.m.; 6:30 p.m. • Monday: 7:30 p.m.
The Music Ministry presents your favorite Christmas music with choir, handbells, and full professional orchestra.

Dec. 15: **Children’s Christmas Pageant**, 11 a.m. worship
Don’t miss this re-telling of the Christmas story presented by our children.

Dec. 15: **Advent Organ Concert** by Dr. Yoon-Mi Lim, 7 p.m.
This wonderful musical evening will include a classical repertoire of organ music, as well as Christmas selections.

Dec. 22: **A Service of Peace**: *Struggling in a Season of Joy*, 7 p.m.
A Service of Peace is a time to acknowledge our broken hearts; a time of quiet reflection, prayer, and Holy Communion.

Dec. 24: **Carols, Candles and Communion**: noon*, 4*, 6* & 10 p.m.
Worship the Savior of the world at our traditional services! The 4 p.m. service is designed especially for children and their families, and features a re-enactment of the Christmas story told through music and drama.

* Child care available for ages five and younger.

**Advent Sermon Series:**

**What Are You Waiting For?**

**Actively Waiting for Christ**

Nov. 30/Dec. 1: *I Can’t Wait For Hope* • Isaiah 2:1-5
Dec. 7/8: *I Can’t Wait For Love* • Isaiah 11:1-10
Dec. 14/15: *I Can’t Wait For Joy* • Isaiah 35:1-10
Dec. 21/22: *I Can’t Wait For Peace* • Matthew 1:18-25
Christmas Eve: *I Can’t Wait For Christmas* • Isaiah 9:2-7

Advent Devotional Guide: Download at www.fumchurst.org/advent, or pick up a copy at the Welcome Center.

Details on Advent Study Groups and Morning Prayers: *page 15*
What are your favorite Christmas traditions?

“Decorating the tree and sometimes our family from Mexico comes and we all get together.” — Casey, 10

“At Christmas, my favorite tradition is when I go to the Christmas Eve service and sing “Silent Night.” When the candles light up the dark sanctuary, I know that we can all feel the power and love of God working within us.” — Emma, 16

What makes it hard to wait for Christmas?

“We asked some FUMC Hurst children and youth ..."

“Getting to come to church at night and watching the service. I like the part when they bring the baby in and the angels, and lighting the candles.” — Katherine, 10

“Me, and my mom, and my sister put out the big glass nativity we have. We help set it up and we have our own nativities for our rooms. We got to pick them out a long, long time ago. We also like to make my mom’s Christmas pie. It’s chocolate and we always have ice cream with it, too.” — Sophia, 7

“Christmas at our house has many traditions. When we set up the tree, we always watch It’s A Wonderful Life. On Christmas Eve, my family goes to church. This is my favorite service because of the songs we sing, and I feel very close to God at this moment. My favorite song is Silent Night, and I love holding the candles. I feel like all of our differences go away and we’re all there as one. After the service, we go to my grandma’s house for a family Christmas party. I love seeing my family and sharing old stories about my Papa.” — Bailey T., 16
“I love Christmas because it is a time of joy, love, and generosity. There is nothing like my family’s Christmas. On Christmas Eve, we all pile into my Grandmother’s house. We hang our stockings and set out cookies for Santa (no matter how old we are). Christmas morning, we wake up and dig through Santa’s gifts and our stockings. My favorite part of Christmas morning is seeing the look on my family member’s faces when they open my gift to them, because the true spirit of Christmas is giving.” — Hannah, 17

“Every single people in our family comes to our house to watch us open presents. And my favorite food is the vegetables!” — Alexandra, 5

“I’m looking forward to Jesus’ birthday!” — Piper, 5

“The thing I look forward to most during Christmas is being able to gather with both sides of the family in the time span of a few days. It’s the exact same routine every year, but I wouldn’t have it any other way. We have our own traditions that each family carries on and they have their own special meanings to me that hopefully will never change and I can keep alive for my future kids. Family is what I look forward every year.” — Austin, 17

“The things that I always look forward to at Christmas are the family gatherings and the time spent together. Family is a very important aspect of Christmas because it is good to be with family. And the food is always amazing!” — Jeremy, 17

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One August, as I was grieving the death of my mom, my marriage fell apart. In November, as I was still sweeping up the pieces of my broken heart, I realized that Christmas was just around the corner. My prayer went something like, “Lord, could you just make it go away?” BUT ... I had a child. So I mustered my courage and vowed to grin and bear the holidays.

I invited Dad to come on Christmas Eve. I moved furniture, painted walls, sewed pillows. On the fireplace mantel, I placed apples and pears and little feathered birds around the family nativity scene. “If I can just stay busy enough, I can get through this” became my mantra.

Exhausted, I sank into the sofa just as my 12 year old son bounded into the room with an explosion of ideas and suggestions: “…and, Mom, let’s go get the Christmas tree — right now!” What could I say? Off we went.

What a delightful son the Lord had given me! I never tired of his enthusiasm, his searching, inquisitive mind. The conversation began, drawing me out of my doldrums.

“Mom, who are those people who take all your money?”

“What?” My mind engaged. I knew from experience that he had a hidden agenda.

“You know, you make money then they take most of it back.”

“Oh, you mean the Internal Revenue Service!”

“Yeah, that’s it. Why don’t we make a law against that?” Holding back my smile, I tried to explain.

When we arrived at the tree lot, we agreed to spend no more than $30 for the tree. After I had paid $50, we headed for home.

The conversation continued. Kelly, easing down comfortably into his seat, gave a big sigh and said, “Oh man, I can just feel it. I was born to be rich.” Ah, the agenda — and a learning moment! I launched in. It ended with the proverbial, “Money doesn’t make you happy.” A silence followed, then a question. “So if money doesn’t make you happy, what does?” I thought, “A loving husband? A healthy mom? What is it going to take to make you happy, Nita?” Panic set in. “What am I going to say to this kid! Nothing can bring happiness into this broken heart!”

I love how God heals. He gave me the words to answer my son, but as well, he began putting back together the pieces of my heart.

“Real happiness is called peace. It is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Because it is a gift, you can’t buy it, yet God gives it to you — just at the right time.”

Children have a very effective way of communicating when they are finished listening — and would like for you to be finished talking! The conversation was over, but something had shifted in my heart. The time was right for God’s healing.

I’m an early riser. I crawled out of bed, poured myself a cup of hot coffee, turned on the tree lights and curled up on the sofa. My eyes crossed to the mantel. There, in the manger scene, lay the little baby among sheep and cattle. With blushing suddenness my eyes ran full. My tears caused the scene to catch in prism, refracting into every corner of the room and drenching my soul in gladness. JESUS!

Before me lay real happiness,
not in painted walls, or even a mommyn/daddy home, but in that little baby, born that night to peasant’s heritage. The gifts of the wise men were gone soon enough; but the child’s gifts would not decay in all eternity. To God he gave glory, to the angels proclamation; to humanity, the star of hope — peace within our souls, good will for another. Unspeakable joy! He gave himself! Oh, precious Savior!

I heard soft footsteps in the room. My son crawled onto the sofa and snuggled close. Only gently falling rain could be heard. Tiny tree lights glistened twice as raindrops caught on the window pane. God’s stillness surrounded us in peace.

— Nita Newman

A Service of Peace
Struggling in a Season of Joy
December 22, 7 p.m.

A Service of Peace is a time to acknowledge our broken hearts; a time of quiet reflection, prayer, and Holy Communion. Those who desire may be anointed with oil as a sign of God’s healing presence. Child care will be available.

Do you have “go to” people?
No?
Join a Go To Group!
what are you waiting for?

Carol Sue Marshall: “I needed a group I could trust to let me be who I am in my spiritual journey — a group of Christian friends who would allow me to ask hard questions and who would seek answers with me. I found that group. Being with them each week keeps me focused on God’s constant presence in my life. Together we are studying, learning, challenging, supporting, disagreeing, and loving, and at all times, working to be the persons God designed each of us to be.

Jill Delgado: “I joined a small group when my daughter was 9 months old and now she is almost four and a half. The women in this group are amazing. I can share anything and I know that prayers will follow and my confidential information will not leave the room. I trust them and look forward to their wisdom, tears, and/or laughter every Wednesday.”

Kevin Campbell: “I participate in a small group for several reasons. First: for community. Meeting weekly with same group provides an opportunity to form new and stronger relationships. I also appreciate that my group holds me accountable to prepare and participate. Finally, it’s about the support. I know these people support me and hold me up in their prayers.”

There is something extraordinary about being a part of a Christian small group. It’s not easy to explain, but we know from the stories of Jesus, as well as the ministry of our founder John Wesley, that we need each other to flourish in the faith.

We need a community to be exposed to different perspectives and hear other’s thoughts and ideas. For faith to be vital, we need to learn new things and examine and challenge old things. We need others to encourage us and hold our feet to the fire. If we are not exploring, questioning, and, most importantly, praying together, our spirits will wither.

Do you have go to people in the faith? If you don’t, in January 2014, new Go To Groups will form. You will have the opportunity to “test drive” what it is like to participate in a Christian small group by committing to a six–week study. At the end of the six weeks, you will have the option of stopping or continuing. Remember, this is a “no obligation” test drive!


Contact Rev. Donna McKee, 817.282.7384, x38, or dmckee@fumchurst.org.
Celebrate Christmas Around the World!

¡Feliz Navidad!
Frohe Weihnachten!
God Jul!
Joyeux Noël!

So many ways to say Merry Christmas! On December 15, children and families of FUMC Hurst will have the opportunity to explore the Advent and Christmas traditions of countries around the world, and learn how to say Merry Christmas in other languages.

Adult Sunday School classes and small groups have already begun choosing countries and making plans! Each group will decorate an area and provide interactive activities in which children and their families may participate as they rotate through the Fellowship Hall.

Perhaps they will make a traditional Swedish treat, create a craft from Germany, or learn a song from the Congo. What a wonderful way to learn about our brothers and sisters around the world and how they welcome the baby Jesus into the world.

It’s not too late to get involved — what are you waiting for?!! This promises to be a wonderful inter-generational activity! If you would like to present a country, please contact Rev. Holly Dittrich. Otherwise, plan to bring your children or grandchildren for a spirit-filled afternoon!

Worship in January ...
Rethinking the New Year

repeat? reboot? restore?

Rethinking ...
Jan. 4/5: ... Our Routines
Jan. 11/12: ... Our Relationships
Jan. 18/19: ... Our Responsibilities
Jan. 25/26: ... What to Relinquish
Feb. 1/2: ... Our Rest
Feb. 8/9: ... Roads

Jesus Loves U2

... and the Commodores, Switchfoot, the Youngbloods, Luther Vandross, Dishwalla, and Todd Rundgren. If music speaks to you about God, come to this new group beginning December 8 — Sundays at 8:30 a.m. in W202. Bring your favorite pop, rock, soul, metal, country, or rap. We’ll gather to play music, study lyrics and celebrate how love comes to us through popular music. Be prepared to rock out and chill out. For more information, contact Rev. Donna McKee, dmckee@fumchurst.org.
Las Posadas commemorates Mary and Joseph’s difficult journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem in search of a warm place to stay the night. (Posadas is Spanish for “lodgings” or “accommodations.”)

The “Posada” has its roots in Spain, but it was fully developed as a tradition in Mexico. It began in the late 1500s with a Christmas Eve procession of a statue of the Virgin Mary. Rector San Juan de la Cruz placed monks behind doors throughout a convent. The monks refused the pilgrims’ requests for shelter for the Virgin. It was only as they reached the church that the doors opened — and the pilgrims and the Virgin were received.

Today, in many Latin-American countries, this event is celebrated over nine nights. But in the United States, Las Posadas is frequently consolidated to a single night of celebration, culminating in a service of worship at a church.

FUMC Hurst will participate in this single night of celebration and worship in a church-wide Service of Las Posadas on December 21.

“Walking Pilgrims” (participants in the Las Posadas procession) are invited to gather in the Foyer at 4:30 p.m. Pilgrims are invited to dress wearing period costumes with warm clothing beneath. They will walk down neighborhood streets, accompanying Mary and Joseph. As they walk, they will ask for shelter at homes so that the Christ child might find a place to be born.

This procession will connect with the Genesis worship service, which will begin at 5:30 p.m. “Awaiting Pilgrims” (those unable to join the procession) will gather in the Fellowship Hall in anticipation of the Holy Family’s arrival.

Following worship, we will have a fiesta with cake, traditional Hispanic breads and cookies, and punch. There will also be a piñata for the children to break. Falling piñata candies represent the victory over evil in the coming of Christ and the many blessings from God. As the piñata is broken, we will remember that the coming of Christ opens the way for salvation and the outpouring of God’s grace.

Come join the journey, as together we celebrate the coming of Christ in a new way. Why not start a new Christmas tradition for you and your family? What are you waiting for?
Advent may be a time for waiting, but members of the Music Ministry can’t wait to share God’s glorious gift of Christmas music with our church and community! From Advent worship services, to the Children’s Pageant, Organ Concert, Festival of Carols and Christmas Eve worship, music moves us toward a deeper connection with God.

Angie Rosenblatt: Nothing makes me feel closer to God than when I’m singing. Each of us has a calling; music has always been mine. I can’t remember a time when I wasn’t singing in a choir. Choir brings me endless joy. As I look forward to Advent every year, I can feel the “little girl” glow in my heart all over again. This little light inside of me is a constant reminder that God has given me the gift of music.

Candlelit services, singing carols as a congregation, listening to the beautiful organ and choral music, fellowship with other Christian men and women, and hearing the sweet sounds of children singing about the story — what better way to celebrate the season than through music? Music is my place, singing is my story. God gave us the gift of music to praise His name and come together to worship.

It’s hard to explain the rush of adrenaline I get when the orchestra starts playing at Festival of Carols.

What greater happiness is there than singing for God to the people of God? Bells, orchestra, organ, choir, soloists — when you leave that night you are changed. You are blessed.

I find myself growing giddy as we get closer to Christmas, not because of the gifts or the food (although these are nice), but because of the music. I can’t imagine a better way to spend our time together.

Rob Allibon: How long has it been since you’ve enjoyed a full orchestra/choir performance? Well, neighbor, that’s too long.

I grew up playing string bass in orchestra. I started singing in choir later in life for all the right reasons (to spend time with my girl — Amy — now my wife of almost 25 years). While choir alone and orchestra alone can be quite wonderful, to me there is nothing quite like the magnificent sound of full orchestra with choir.

It just doesn’t get any better, and we are blessed to enjoy this each year at Festival of Carols.

God uses music to communicate; He speaks to us through music. What are you waiting for? Come hear what He has to say to you this Advent.

Jennette Forrester: Throughout my life, music has been extremely important. I did not realize just how important until I joined such a highly respected choir and I was able to be a part of a true Music Ministry.

Each year Advent brings the greatest joy of the year for me. The Festival of Carols is that special time when I have the opportunity to gather friends and relatives to share this ministry by singing the music of the season. Being a part of the voices raised in praise to God, and sharing my voice with others means the most to me. It’s worth more than all of the gifts exchanged on Christmas.
Elizabeth Ball:
I have been a hand bell player for more than 25 years. For me, the beginning of the holiday season is always marked by playing hand bells during Advent.

Since becoming a member of FUMC and playing in the Festival of Carols, one particular performance stands out for me. It was a time when both of my children were living away from home, going to separate colleges. I hadn’t seen either of them since the beginning of the fall semester and I was missing them.

As I raised my bells to begin playing, I looked up into the balcony and there they were! Sitting together, watching me and smiling. It was a moment frozen in time for me and is now a memory that I treasure. God gave to me the perfect gift ... Andrew and Sarah together that night.

Imagine most children’s birthday parties that you have been to — lots of squeals of joy, time with friends, fun food, dancing, and presents! But for Anna and Katie, both of whom just turned four years old, the presents looked a little different this year.

Instead of the usual birthday presents from friends, they asked their guests to bring children’s books to donate for the children of families served by the Mobile Food Pantry. When asked why they chose to do this, Katie said, “It’s for the kids who don’t have books to read while they are waiting with their parents.”

Families who come to the Mobile Food Pantry the second Friday of every month often bring their children. However, as the number of families being served grows, so does the wait.

During the summer months, when children are out of school, a “Kids Corner” has been offered for the larger number of children to play and create crafts.

During the school year, when there are fewer children, activities are being offered such as coloring — and now, books! These books will be offered to the children to read and, if they wish, to take one home.

Anna, whose favorite book is *Purplicious* by Victoria and Elizabeth Kann, and Katie, whose favorite is *Hot Dog* by Molly Cox, saw a need in their world and are seeking to fill it!

If you would like to join them by donating books for children, or if you know of a child in our congregation who is living their faith by helping to meet needs in our world, please contact Rev. Holly Dittrich. We would love to celebrate them!

*It is the heart that does the giving; the fingers only let go.*

— Nigerian saying
When I think of my strengths and talents, I finish my thoughts quickly. I’m not very strong. I don’t know how to do many things well, but I can do a lot of things poorly. However, I have a great laugh ... and I speak a lot of Spanish. Regardless, when it comes to doing amazing things to help others, I’ve been waiting for Wonder Woman.

I think Wonder Woman will do a great job of helping others. She has quite a bit of practice. She’s fast, she’s smart, she’s got these awesome gold bracelets and a lasso. And she knows how to use them! So I’ve been thinking: I’ll let her do the good in the world. I don’t have what it takes.

I’ve pondered how much time it must take to help others. I’ve come to the conclusion (on more than one occasion) that it must be a full-time job. I think of all the amazing people who get to volunteer full time and I’m so jealous of them! I say to myself, “I’ll volunteer full time too ... as soon as I win the lottery and quit my job.” I really do want to volunteer. I really do want to make a difference. It’s just, well, I have a very demanding job. Plus, I’m sure that I’ll get fired if I try to take time off. The economy is tough and I am afraid I can’t risk that. So I’ll let Wonder Woman do it; she has the time. I mean, technically, it IS her job to help others, isn’t it?

I get overwhelmed when I think about saving the world. I wonder how Wonder Woman handles the pressure. Ending world hunger? No problem, that’s just food. Well, then there’s violence, which gets in the way of delivering food. What about emotional and spiritual health? We can talk to people about Jesus Christ and all that our Lord is, has been, and will be. You know, on second thought, I’ll let Wonder Woman handle that, too. She probably has Wonder Admin Assistant and Wonder Therapist, as well as Wonder Theologian on her staff.

I bet Wonder Woman has a whole team! They fight for justice and help others all the time. They have different strengths and weaknesses. But when they get together, they are AWESOME! Come on! It’s the Justice League! And really, aren’t they so much better when they are together? This team idea seems familiar.

One day, while I was confident that Wonder Woman was on her way, I got a text. My dear sweet friend Nita told me there were two spots that had become available for the Panamá mission trip in October. She wanted to know if I could go. I had just experienced a very stressful work week; I had a “to do” list a mile long. But I really wanted to go. I thought about the possibility of losing my job if I took the days off. Then I thought, “Why not ask? The worst that will happen is that they’ll
We were on the worksite for four days. We bent rebar, built rebar frames, set forms for concrete, poured concrete, made cement beams, climbed ladders, balanced on questionable materials, learned to stucco, played with kids, painted fingernails, painted faces, made masks, sang songs, put on a puppet show... the list goes on.

I watched “Wonder Arthritics” and “Wonder Recently-Recovered-From-Back-Surgeries” work just as hard as “Wonder I-Just-Thought-I-Was-Too-Old-for-This” and “Wonder Young-and-Strong.” We sweated ... a LOT, and loved it. We laughed and joked and shared personal struggles and celebrations. We became a team.

Wednesday was the day I was the most afraid of ... the kids. A secret about me is that I’m not very good with kids, especially the little ones. I’m pretty good with babies and 13 years old or older. But the rest intimidate me quite a bit. I’m also afraid of clowns, and puppets give me the creeps. When the kids started arriving, I saw the ideas of neat lines and soft noise disappearing into thin air. I dug in and found some courage.

I painted faces. The first girl asked for a butterfly. I panicked. “A butterfly? I’ve got no clue how to paint a butterfly!” She thought I didn’t understand, so she showed me the one on her other cheek. Did you know that a butterfly is two capital “Bs” — one backward and one forward? Me neither! Add a couple of antennae and — voila! Butterfly!

Clint called us over for the puppet show. Panic struck again. There was no sound for the music ... so we had to sing ... in Spanish ... a cappella! Panic, panic, panic.

A few songs later it was over. I worried that the kids could hear me sing, then I worried that they couldn’t. I worried that our Spanish accents weren’t good enough. I worried, worried, worried. Then, I saw pictures of the kids during the show. Panic and worries GONE! They liked it! They really liked it!

I never found those gold bracelets or the lasso, but I made a big group of new friends. We built a relationship with missionaries who devote their lives to doing amazing things in Santiago, Panamá. We took time from our construction work to play with kids in the neighborhood. We saw true need. We saw true selflessness. We all overcame some kind of fear or apprehension when we set out on that trip. As a result, we all became “Wonder Something.”

Are you waiting for Wonder Woman to do good in the world? Why not become “Wonder Something”? Face your fears! Climb over obstacles! Why not go do good in the world now? What are you waiting for!!
Rev. Joseph Kazadi

Although there are different native tribes and other religions throughout Africa, the majority of Democratic Republic of Congo (D.R.C.) is Christian (80%) and celebrates Christmas on December 25 — much like here in the United States. However, there are some differences.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, Christmas is called “Mbotama.” In Lingala, which is spoken in the Congo and other African countries, Mbotama means the birth of Jesus Christ. Mbotama is about sharing, love, food, friends, neighbors, family, and new clothes.

In most families, Mbotama plans start in October when the mother or father points out which chicken or goat will be slaughtered on Christmas. This animal is coddled to make it fat for Mbotama feasting. The news that a family cannot afford a chicken or goat on Mbotama is met with great sadness. Even in cities, you will see chickens or goats tethered in yards awaiting the celebration of Mbotama. The children are excited; the adults look forward to a day of no work, going to church, and relaxing with friends and lots of food.

The process of getting ready for Mbotama and preparing the meal is not a chore, but a joy. Love is the major ingredient. One week before Mbotama, an African Christmas Hut (the African version of the traditional Christmas manger) is prepared in the sanctuary of the church. The tall shepherds with their cows and sheep portray a pastoral scene very close to the rural farming community. Bright red, green, and yellow African clothes hang from the ceiling. Long cords hold up rows of pictures and carols. The carved figures of Mary and Joseph are placed in the open hut, “tired” after their long journey from Nazareth. There is no evergreen Christmas tree like in the United States. Instead, there is a mango or palm oil or banana tree. Santa Claus is nowhere to be found in the Congo.

In Congo (as everywhere in Africa), Christmas Eve is very important. Churches host big musical evenings with at least five or six choirs and a nativity play. These plays are very long, starting at the beginning of the evening with the story of King Herod killing the baby boys. People taking part in the play like to show off their best acting skills and tend to go “over the top.” The birth of Jesus is timed to happen close to midnight, and after that come the shepherds and the wise men.

The play normally finishes about 1 a.m. However, in some places there will be further singing until dawn.

Despite all of the celebration on Christmas Eve, the main focus is Christmas Day worship (Mokolo
Ya Mbotama). In the service, the Christmas scene is enacted and hymns and carols are sung. The church is crowded on Mokolo Ya Mbotama. The service starts at 9 or 10 a.m. You will have to get up very early in the morning to get to church and find a seat. Some people walk five to ten miles to get to church. Even people who never go to church attend church on that day.

People get to wear their new clothes. The women are dressed in their most colorful six yards of cloth, wound around their body, with matching blouses. Men wear shirts or suits.

During a certain time in the church service, everyone forms a line and marches to the front of the church, where they drop money and other gifts (live chickens, goats, pigs, beans, peanuts, rice, cassava leaves, and clothing) into a special Christmas basket. A wave of singing, dancing, clapping and drumming reverberates through the whole church. The service finishes about 2 or 3 p.m.

The emphasis of Mbotama is to celebrate God’s greatest gift of all, His Son, Jesus Christ. No one gives or receives gifts on Mbotama. The only gifts given are the items dropped into the Christmas basket for the church’s work of proclaiming God’s love through Christ in Congo. Not one person will attend the Christmas service without giving a gift.

In Congo (like throughout Africa), Mbotama is more a spiritual holiday with Christian meaning, rather than a secular celebration. Mbotama in the Congo and everywhere in Africa is not “commercial” — it is all about love, joy, and gathering and offering gifts for Jesus Christ. There is one tradition that is practiced throughout Africa: the gathering and offering of gifts for Jesus Christ. People will gather branches, leaves, stones and other items as birthday gifts for Jesus.

The church service is followed by an incredible feast. An American Thanksgiving feast doesn’t come close to Congolese Christmas Dinner! Families eat together, and may also include friends and close neighbors.

This dinner is eaten outdoors in front of the family home, with everyone sitting in a circle to share. The typical meal includes chicken or goat cooked in palm oil, green vegetables (Pondu or Ndunda – like spinach), and “Fufu.” Christmas Dinner is not complete without Fufu. (Fufu is the starch that most Africans eat. The consistency is like cooked grits which have been cooled.)

After dark, people walk around the neighborhood carrying lanterns, singing and visiting with neighborhood.

African Immigrants miss Africa most at Christmas.

Mbotama Malamu Na bino Banso ...Merry Christmas to all of you!

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**Study Groups**

Advent is the first season of the Christian calendar, a period of preparation as we await Jesus’ birth. Considering all that the holidays have become in our secular world, it can be hard to stay attuned to the sacredness of the season.

One way to maintain our connection with God is by participating in an Advent study, either in a Sunday School class or a small group. If you are not a member of either of these groups, you can register for an Advent Study Group at the GPS Desk on Sunday mornings in November or online.

**Group times:** Sundays, 8:30 a.m. • Mondays, 10 a.m. or 6:30 p.m. • Mondays, 6:30 p.m. (singles only)

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**Morning Prayers**

Another way to deepen the Advent experience is to attend Morning Prayers in the Sanctuary every weekday at 8:30 a.m.

These services will be approximately 20 minutes of prayer, scripture reading, and music. All are welcome.
By the NUMBERS

56 Decorated trunks and friendly hosts greeted hundreds of children from the church and community at the annual Trunk or Treat in October.

312 Songs were sung at the Genesis service in the past year, most led by George Miadis. Number of guitar strings broken: only 1!

1,000+ Thanksgiving meals were donated by FUMC Hurst members and distributed to local families in need, along with a handmade Thanksgiving card from children and families.

24 Third graders received the gift of a Bible from their congregation in September.

44 Thousand dollars was raised for FUMC Hurst missions at Harvest Festival in September! Our efforts will bless others locally and globally through our church’s missions!
Fingernails were painted as the FUMC Hurst mission team welcomed children in Santiago, Panama, to a day of fun — sharing God’s love through activities and fellowship.

Youth from FUMC Hurst and area UMCs lit up the night with 2,100 glow sticks, glow paint, black lights and hundreds of glow necklaces at October’s “GLOW.”

750 people participated in our recent Financial Peace University. At the start of the class, the total non-mortgage debt of class members was $739,567, and the group had 130 credit cards. By the end of the nine-week class, members had reduced their debt by $24,583, saved $76,650 and closed 45 credit cards.

130 members from FUMC Hurst’s African Immigrant Ministry and the Genesis Sunday School Class joined together for a Thanksgiving Feast on November 9.

3 Choirs — FUMC Hurst Chancel Choir, Flower Mound High School Choir, and First Presbyterian Church of Arlington — joined forces to present Voices of Triumph: A Concert of Choirs and Organ in October.
Every year, thanks to your generosity, our youth take deserving children from Bellaire Elementary shopping for Christmas gifts for their families. It is a holy and special time for our students.

By Cameron Dawson

As Christmas approaches, I can’t help but get a little excited, not because of gifts that I am waiting for, but for gifts that I am about to give.

Every year our youth host the Bellaire Shopping Spree. We take kids from Bellaire Elementary (one of FUMC Hurst’s Adopt-A-Schools) to shop for Christmas gifts for their families.

When the kids walk through our church doors for the first time, you can see they are scared. They shy away from all the bigger kids they don’t know. We split into groups; every youth has a kid or two who they help. We load into vans and go to Target where the kids can shop.

The first year I went, I didn’t really know what to expect. I was just like one of the little kids we were helping, scared and a little bit shy. Once I started shopping with the little boy I was helping that year (I’ll call him Luke), I couldn’t help but be thankful for what I had.

As we traveled around the store I asked Luke what he thought his Mom would want for Christmas. He wasn’t sure and I had no idea how to shop for a person I didn’t even know. We found a scarf and matching gloves. I held them out to Luke and asked, “How’s this?” The grin on his face said it all.

Then we searched for a gift for the next person on Luke’s list — Dad. When we passed the toy section, one thing caught the little boy’s eye — a football. He held it out to me and said, “Me and daddy could play catch together.” When I asked him if that’s what he thought his dad would do, I thought his head was about to fall off he nodded it so fast!

Now we only had two more people to shop for, his brothers. Since they were about his age, we stayed in the toy section. As we walked down one aisle, he stopped and just looked at the wall full of Hot Wheels. He said that at school, all of the kids played with them and he and his brothers wanted some new ones. So we both looked and picked out the coolest Hot Wheels that we could find for his brothers. We did a price check, and I realized we had some money left over. I asked Luke if he wanted Hot Wheels as well, and he grinned from ear to ear.

I asked if he could think of anything else that his family might want, because we still had a little bit of money left. Luke said, “A game we could all play together.” We went back to the toy section and found a board game. As we bought the gifts for Luke’s family and headed back to the church, he could not stop grinning.

We wrapped the presents and had pizza and played games. When it was time for the kids to go back to their school to be picked up by their parents, not a single child was shy or scared. Instead they were sad to say goodbye to their new friends.

As Luke was leaving, I told him goodbye and wished him a Merry Christmas. He looked up at me, said “thank you,” and gave me a hug.

That is why I always help with the Bellaire Shopping Spree. Because when Luke left that day, he made an impact that made me want to help so many others just like him.

Bellaire Shopping Spree on December 14 — that’s what I’m waiting for!

Your special gift can help make the Bellaire Shopping Spree happen.
It will cost close to $5,000 this year. Place donations in the offering plate, marked “Bellaire Shopping Spree.” Bring wrapping supplies to Anderson Center.
Connect through Reading: Sarah and Gaylon Peyton share some of their favorite reads.

“Our recommendations are influenced by our love of reading aloud with our family, our love of the great outdoors, and our participation in FUMC Hurst’s Sunday Afternoon Readers.”

**Family real aloud books**
- *A Christmas Memory* by Truman Capote, illustrated by Beth Peck
- *Far North* by Jan Reynolds
- *The Autobiography of Santa Claus* by Jeff Guinn
- *Gnomes* by Will Huygen, illustrated by Rien Poortvliet
- *The Night Before Christmas — in Texas, That Is* by Leon Harris, illustrated by Meg Wohlberg
- *What Scares Me and What I Do About It: Stories and Pictures by Sunday School Kids*, edited by Jeff Kunkel

**religious**
- *The First Christmas* by Marcus Borg
- *You Don’t Have to Be Wrong for Me to Be Right* by Rabbi Brad Hirschfield
- *Unplug the Christmas Machine* by Jo Robinson and Jean Staeheki
- *Walking Home: From Eden to Emmaus* by Margaret Guenther
- *Love Wins* by Rob Bell

**poetry**
- *Good Poems for Hard Times* selected and introduced by Garrison Keillor
- *Why I Wake Early: New Poems* by Mary Oliver

**biography / memoir**
- *When Women Were Birds* by Terry Tempest Williams
- *Winterdance: The Fine Madness of Running the Iditarod* by Gary Paulson
- *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth* by Reza Aslan
- *The Blue Bear: A True Story of Friendship and Discovery in the Alaskan Wild* by Lynn Schooler

**adult fiction**
- *Abide With Me* by Elizabeth Strout
- *Jayber Crow and Hannah Coulter* by Wendell Berry
- *Moloka'i* by Alan Brennert
- *The Bartender’s Tale* by Ivan Doig

**adult non–fiction**
- *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* by Rebecca Skloot
- *Twelve Patients* by Eric Manheimer
- *Focus* by Daniel Goleman
- *God Laughs and Plays* by David James Duncan
- *Big Data* by Viktor Mayer-Schonberger and Kenneth Cukier

More at www.fumchurst.org /goodreads

**The Sunday Afternoon Readers** is an open group, coordinated by Bob Schlappe. They meet the third Sunday of each month, January through November, 2:30–4:30 p.m. in the Parlor. Bookmarks, with the book selected for the month, are available in the Welcome Center. *2014 SAR selections*
December 1 (Sunday)
Advent Begins
www.fumchurst.org/advent

December 1 (Sunday)
Blood Drive
8 a.m.–12 p.m. • Fellowship Hall
Donating blood saves lives and adds credits to the church's life plan, which helps church members with transfusion costs.

December 2 (Monday)
Simple Elegance
6:30 p.m. • Fellowship Hall
This holiday evening for women features beautiful tablescapes and delicious desserts! Tickets are $10; contact Cindy Brown Harding, 817.281.0493.

December 8 and 9
(Sunday: 4 & 6:30 p.m.;
Monday: 7:30 p.m.)
* Festival of Carols:
  A Christmas Tradition!
The Music Ministry presents your favorite Christmas music with choir, handbells, and full professional orchestra. After the performance, join us for cookies and cider! Reserve FREE tickets.
www.festivalofcarols.org

December 13 (Friday)
Mobile Food Pantry
8 a.m.–12 p.m. • Fellowship Hall

December 14 (Saturday)
Bellaire Shopping Spree
8 a.m. • Fellowship Hall
In this annual mission project, FUMC Hurst youth will take students from Bellaire Elementary shopping for Christmas presents for family members, and then return to the church to wrap the gifts and have lunch together.
Details page 18.

December 15 (Sunday)
Children's Christmas Pageant
11 a.m. worship • Sanctuary
Don't miss this musical re–telling of the Christmas story presented by our Children's Music Ministry.

Christmas Around the World
4 p.m. • Fellowship Hall
Learn how other cultures celebrate Christmas at this inter–generational event!
Details page 8.
www.fumchurst.org/current

* Advent Organ Concert
Yoon–mi Lim, Organist
7 p.m.; Sanctuary
This wonderful musical evening will include a classical repertoire of organ music, as well as Christmas selections.

December 21 (Saturday)
Las Posadas
4:30 p.m. • Gather in the Foyer
Come walk the neighborhood with Mary and Joseph, looking for shelter. We’ll return to FUMC in time for the Genesis service, then celebrate with a pinata and treats.
Details page 9.

December 22 (Sunday)
* A Service of Peace
Struggling in a Season of Joy
7 p.m. • Sanctuary
A Service of Peace is a time to acknowledge our broken hearts; a time of quiet reflection, prayer, and Holy Communion.

December 24–26
Church Office closed

December 24 (Tuesday)
Christmas Eve Services
* noon, * 6 & 10 p.m. • Sanctuary
Worship the Savior of the world! Traditional services, featuring carols, candles, and communion.

* Christmas Eve for Families
4 p.m. • Sanctuary
This service, especially for children and their families, features a re–enactment of the Christmas story told through music and drama.

* Child care available.
WORSHIP

Sunday Mornings
All services of worship are of a traditional style with familiar hymns and meaningful liturgy. Sunday morning worship takes place in the Sanctuary at:
8:30 a.m. • 9:45 a.m. • 11 a.m.

Saturday Evenings: Genesis
An alternative to our traditional worship, Genesis features acoustic guitar in an intimate setting. The Genesis service takes place in the Fellowship Hall Saturdays at 6 p.m.

RECURRING EVENTS

MISSION
Mobile Food Pantry: Second Friday of each month, 8 a.m. to noon. Volunteers needed: email Larry Jenkins, lejwlf@att.net.

Joyful Creations Prayer Shawl Ministry: 9:30–11:30 a.m. Thursday, W120. New members welcome.

YOUTH
Youth Groups (Gr. 7–12), 6–8 p.m. Sunday; Dinner, $3
Sr. High Worship (Gr. 9–12), 7 p.m. Wednesday

MUSIC
Adult Choirs:
Chancel Choir: 7 p.m. Wednesday
Chapel Choir: 6 p.m. Sunday
Revelation Ringers: 5 p.m. Sunday

Youth Choir:
Celebration Singers (Gr. 6–12): 5 p.m. Sundays

Children’s Choirs:
Joy & Praise (K–5): 8:30 a.m. Sunday
Promises (age 3–4): in Sunday School
Joyful Noise (Gr. K–2): 11 a.m. Sunday
Covenant Singers (Gr. 3–5): 11 a.m. Sunday

RECOVERY MINISTRIES
A.A. & AL–ANON, every Wednesday, 6:30 p.m., Recovery House.

A.A. & AL–ANON, every Sunday, 6:30 p.m., Recovery House.

CARING & SUPPORT
Grief Support Group: Second Monday of every month at 6:30 p.m. in W122. Contact Rev. Donna Mc Kee.

Caring Christian Mothers: First Friday of every month, 9:30 a.m., Parlor.
Welcome our Newest Members

Janice Bell
Esther Cooper
Anna Herrera
Mary Nell Partin

Maria Raines
Cynthia Lappo and Harry Chapman
Tom and Jackie Neugent

Cary and Donna Baumgartner
Dennis and Emily Burk
Josh and Ashton Sams

Amy and Sean Tippett, Londyn and Brendan
Yvette and Georgie Vaughan
Jan and Judy Zirkle
Celebrating Your Baptism

Luca Morrissey, son of Amanda and Chad Morrissey, with sister, Makenna

Rori Blount, daughter of Stephanie and Andy Blount, with brother Andrew

Francine Nzwanga, Salomon Ilunga, and Jacob Ilunga (Jacob was baptized Oct. 13)

Matthew and Tammy Walker, and Allison (Allison was baptized Oct. 20)

Memorials and honorariums are a wonderful way to remember and honor friends and loved ones. Make a gift online: www.fumchurst.org/online-giving/ Listing of current memorials/honorariums: www.fumchurst.org/gifts

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OPPORTUNITIES TO SERVE

It is through mission outreach that we exemplify the spirit of Christian love to those in our own local community and around the world. Through such giving, God changes not only the lives of others, but our lives as well.

Following are some upcoming opportunities for service within our congregation and community.

**Festival of Carols**
Each year we welcome more than 3,000 from our community into our church home. How will you help with our radical welcome? We need volunteers to bake cookies for the receptions following the concerts, and to serve as reception hosts, greeters, and ushers. Contact Sandra Hill, shill@fumchurst.org.

**Shoeboxes for Kids**
Each year the Hurst Police Department collects gifts for children in our community who may not otherwise get many surprises at Christmas. Families from FUMC Hurst have a tradition of providing wrapped shoeboxes filled with small gifts, which the officers deliver on Christmas in the neighborhoods where they know there is a need. All are welcome to participate — bring your filled box to the atrium by December 15. www.fumchurst.org/serve

**Mobile Food Pantry**
Volunteer to serve our neighbors in need, helping distribute food. Volunteers are needed each month, 8 a.m. to noon; contact Larry Jenkins, lejwfj@att.net.

**Mission Central First Food**
The first weekend of each month, FUMC Hurst collects items for Mission Central’s pantry, which serves about 400 local families in need each month. The requested item will be posted at www.fumchurst.org and in the bulletin and weekly email news.