

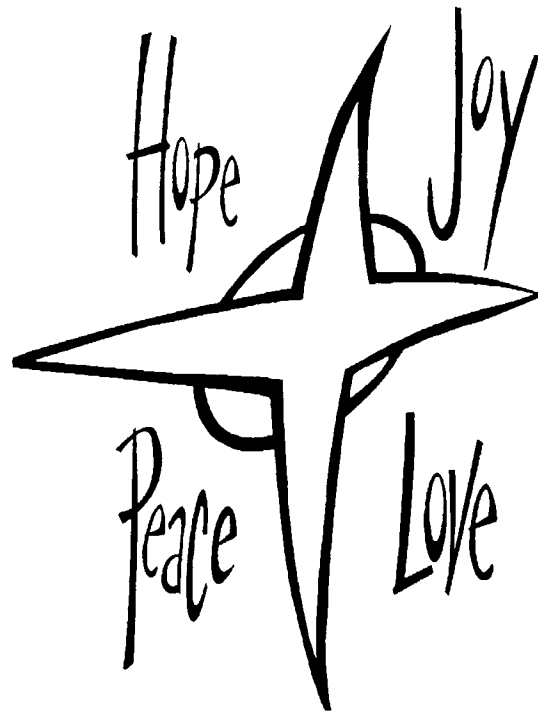
# The Open Door

December 2011

**L**ove for Truth

**P**assion for Righteousness

**E**nthusiasm for Service



# Advent

*The door is open at  
First Congregational Church*

*All are Welcome*

*In preparation  
for  
Christmas ...*

# Christmas Is For Sinners



Pastor Jamey Nichols

The late great British journalist, Malcolm Muggeridge, observed that the depravity of mankind is at the same time the most empirically provable fact and the most intellectually resisted. On the one hand, anyone with a below-average IQ recognizes that people can be downright mean. On the other hand, most people like to think of themselves as basically good, preferring to point out other people's failures rather than their own.

The past couple of Sundays we have heard God's Word on the subject of human sinfulness. It's disappointing that the very word "sin" isn't as welcome as it used to be in previous generations. Even in decent churches today, one can go for months without ever once hearing the pastor talk about sin or mankind's need of redemption. Why do you suppose that is? Perhaps one reason, as an old friend of mine once told me, talking about sin is kind of negative and a downer. He preferred sermons that stirred warmth in his heart. He didn't want to leave church depressed, and he found sin sermons depressing.

I'll grant that when it comes to sermonizing about sin, some pastors talk about little else. For those congregations, it can get pretty old and leave you feeling like you're getting beat up every Sunday. At the same time, I believe it would be a tragic disservice to God's people to tell the wonderful story of Christmas and leave out one of the key elements: sin.

'Tis the season of joy, Christmas is. A time for celebration, giving, and remembering the little child born in the manger. A favorite time of year for many, we all enjoy the unique sounds and sights of the holiday. With all the festive yuletide in mind, think with me for just a moment.

Why was Jesus born in the first place?

Why did he grow up to have a one-on-one with Satan in the wilderness?

Why was he referred to as "Lamb of God" or "Savior"?

Why did he get nailed to a cross?

The answer to all these questions leads ultimately to the same place—sin. It was because of the moral failure of humanity that Jesus did all these things. He was born to die in our place taking our punishment. He went up against Satan to do what we could not—resist temptation. He had nick names that pointed out his power over our sin and the punishment of death. He bore our sins in his body on the tree.

As I, in faith, strive to "put to death" that nature of sin still living in me, I am reminded that I, too, will take my turn in physical death. Although the blessed babe wrapped in swaddling clothes has beaten death, I must still pass through its shadowy valley on my way to complete redemption—body and soul. Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes:

"In life with Jesus Christ, death as a general fate approaching us from without is confronted by death from within, one's own death, the free death of daily dying with Jesus Christ. Those who live with Christ die daily to their own will.

—continued on next page

The E100 Challenge readings for the month of December are listed below:

December 4, 2011— Annual Pledge Sunday



Paul to the Churches:

December 11, 2011 — #83—The Armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-20)

Sermon title is: "The Fight of Your Life"

December 18, 2011 — #84—Rejoice in the Lord (Philippians 4:2-9)

Sermon title is: "Give Peace a Chance"

December 25, 2011 — Christmas Day service at 9 a.m. with special guest attending

*Pastor Jamey's column continued ...*

"Christ in us gives us over to death so that he can live within us. Thus, our inner dying grows to meet that death from without. Christians receive their own death in this way, and in this way our physical death very truly becomes not the end, but rather the fulfillment of our life with Jesus Christ. Here we enter into community with the One who at his own death was able to say, 'It is finished.'"

This Christmas, as you gaze upon images of the babe in the manger, remember why he was born. Never lose sight of the fact that swaddled in those clothes was the promise of a future death, undeserved, and willingly endured for the forgiveness of sins.

**Merry CHRISTmas!**



*Pastor Jamey*

## *Strangers in the Pew ...*



**Carrie and Brett Hallihan** may be found among the balcony dwellers on Sunday morning. Carrie began attending FCC in 2008 with her father, who at the time, was diagnosed with cancer. They became acquainted with neighbor Pastor Jamey because they live just a few houses away on Lake Stanton.

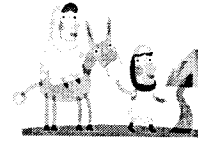
Brett and Carrie are high school sweethearts—together for 14 years. They have two four-legged furry feline children—Max and Oddie who bring joy to their lives. Brett grew up on a farm in Fenwick with his parents, Jan and Judy, and sister, Mollie (32). Carrie grew up on Lake Stanton with her parents, Drew and Bev Stowell, brother, Brandon (26), and half sister, Kami (42).

Carrie shared her background with the FCC congregation earlier this year and has recently taken a part-time RN position at Spectrum Health Kelsey Campus in Lakeview working in surgery. She enjoys the department and is hopeful something full-time will develop.

Having been in I.T. (information technology) for the past 12 years, Brett's real passion lies in aviation. Aviation was in his family growing up and over the years he has become more and more involved in aviation around the Montcalm and Ionia County airports. He received his private pilot license in 2007, purchased his first airplane in 2010, and enrolled at the School of Missionary Aviation Technology in Ionia to become an AP mechanic through their one-year program. Brett is very excited to have this amazing opportunity to change careers and work with airplanes on a daily basis.

In their spare time, Brett and Carrie enjoy traveling, biking, gardening, reading, cooking, time with friends/family, nature/wildlife, and of course, flying. Their favorite place to visit is Alaska—visited in 2009 and flew their personal airplane for a two-week trip in 2010. They are very thankful to God for all the blessings he's provided in their lives.

## *Let's hear it for the youth . . . by Pastor Tara*



WOW! I can't believe that December, Christmas, and 2012 are right around the corner and that REVOLT student ministries has been up and running for three months already! I guess the old adage is true: "Time sure does fly when you're having fun." The month of November definitely was not lacking in the fun factor or in the faith factor. REVOLT students had several outings including our monthly roller skating Monday.

In addition, a large group attended the Rock and Worship Roadshow in November 4 held at the Van Andel Arena. Thousands of teens, youth leaders, parents, children, and grandchildren gathered together in a ginormous stadium for a 4+ hour event filled with a balance of Christian rock music and worship. It was absolutely awesome to see so many of our teens clapping and singing along, and then standing with arms raised, praising our glorious Father in Heaven. The experience of being united in worship with such a vast array of fellow Christians is like none other and is only a prelude and appetizer to what we will experience in Heaven before the throne of our God.

The following weekend was simultaneously exhausting and exhilarating! Friday night two suburbs full of high school students traveled to Cornerstone University in Grand Rapids for "Road Trip." They had a small taste of college life, spending time with students in games, worship, and dorm life. The best part of the trip was the service project on Saturday when our group went to the Pregnancy Resource Center in Grand Rapids. There we learned all about the history of the center as well as their current operations. After our quick lesson, we spent time deep cleaning the entire building; vacuuming, washing windows, cleaning toilets, sinks, door handles, and light switches, sweeping staircases, and taking out the trash. While that may not have seemed like a big deal to us, we found out that we saved the center between \$150 and \$200 in cleaning service fees, an important contribution to a center that is completely funded by donors and that does not receive any government assistance.

Also on Friday night, REVOLT student ministries hosted another "Overtime" event and called it the "11-11-11 edition." While students were excited just to be able to have somewhere to hang out and have fun again, they couldn't wait for 11:11 p.m. Right on the dot, we began drawing names and gave away 11 amazing prizes to 11 amazing people "Let's Make A Deal" style! It was a fun night for all.

On Saturday morning, three moms and three middle school girls also traveled to Grand Rapids. They made their way to the "Girls of Grace" conference where they enjoyed special mother-daughter time as well as time with friends. The conference highlighted issues that teen girls face, including beauty, friendships, and purity. If you're interested in hearing more, ask Samantha Nichols what "wait for a steak" means!

REVOLT student ministries is growing and going strong. We have just launched our student praise team and are looking forward to bringing a musical special to the FCC Family in December. Tune in next month for even more exciting updates.

What a difference a year makes! Last year, we were challenged to make Christmas a little brighter for someone less fortunate. It could have been someone who was temporarily laid-off, a single-parent family, or maybe an elderly friend or neighbor. You could have been anonymous or straight forward with your gift.

Let me tell you briefly what we did. We actually selected three families. Two through DHS/FIA and the other was related to us. One family was a single mom with a small child; the next family was a mom, dad, and two teen sons. For these two families, I enlisted the help of my co-workers. I got a list of needs from each family, sent it out, and the donations started coming in. What "need" wasn't donated, my family fulfilled. I also asked each family for a "want" and that was also given. As for the third family we picked, their need was winter heat. They had a corn stove, so we purchased shelled corn and had it delivered. All families were over-the-top thankful and could not say thanks enough. However, the thanks aren't really necessary; it is the hope that one gives that lets them know someone cares.

"Let us not become weary in doing good . . . ." —Galatians 15:9

Now, on to business. The Nominating Committee has been formed, and we will be looking for volunteers to fill vacancies on the various boards/committees. If you would like to volunteer some of your time, please call the church office to indicate your intent. If you are approached by someone from this committee, we ask that you please prayerfully consider this request. We must all do our part to keep our church functioning both spiritually and physically.

May your Christmas be filled with blessings of many kinds!!!



**Greetings ...**  
**From the Diaconate**

May your holiday season be one of joy and thanksgiving because of the gift of Christ. God planned it all for you and me. God blesses each one of us because he loves us.

May God be included in your home this season of Christ's birth and for all seasons.

May you have peace and happiness being with your family and friends through the holidays.

Remember . . . "The Lord will keep you from all harm—he will watch over your life; the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore."  
—Psalm 121:7-8 NIV

Pat Miller, Chair  
Diaconate Board

**FINANCIAL NOTES**

Income/October 2011      \$ 14,969

Expenses/October 2011    \$ 18,139

Parking lot update as of: 11.29.11  
\$ 46,653.05

**Women's Community Bible  
Study . . .**

A Beth Moore study series, "Stepping Up/A journey through the Psalms of Ascent (Psalms 120-134)," will begin in January. The first meeting will be held at 8 a.m. on Saturday, January 7. A breakfast brunch will be served in Fellowship Hall.

The study will continue for six weeks at 7 p.m. on Thursday evening from January 12 through February 16.

The cost of the study, including the book, is \$15. To enroll, please contact Pat Miller (pmiller@fccstanton.org or 989.831.4219) or leave your name and number with the church office (989.831.5240).

**Membership Class . . .**

Pastor Jamey is offering a membership class for anyone interested in baptism or formal membership at FCC.

The class will be held at 7 p.m. on Monday, December 12. Please contact the church office (989.831.5240) if you are interested.

**Join us for special services . . .**

December 11 - 6 p.m. - Christmas Musical—"Camel Lot"  
by FCC youth



December 24 - 7 p.m. - Christmas Eve Candlelight Service with  
Communion

December 25 - 9 a.m. - Christmas Day service with special guest attending

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**DVD AND BOOK FOR THE MONTH OF DECEMBER . . .**

THE DVD SELECTION IS "IRONMAN" BY  
DICK AND RICK HOYT. THE BOOK SELECTION IS *MIND OVER EMOTIONS: HOW  
TO MENTALLY CONTROL YOUR FEELINGS* BY LES CARTER

The Diaconate's DVD selection for December is the Dick and Rick Hoyt story from the 1999 Ironman Triathlon World Championship Show. This is a father-son team who compete across the country in marathons and triathlons (father pushes son in a wheelchair). Inspirational!

The book selection, *Mind Over Emotions*, by Dr. Les Carter, a Christian psychotherapist, deals with emotions such as anger, shyness, envy, grief, and guilt. The book is written in terms that the average layman/woman can understand and the guidelines are scriptural and psychologically sound. A good read!

The selections are available for loan for one week and may be checked out through the church office.

# *Merry Christmas*



*Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.*

*—Isaiah 7:14*