

FIRST THINGS FIRST

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, REGINA

January 2012

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

In *The Magic Mountain* Thomas Mann writes, "Time has no division to mark its passage; there is never a thunderstorm to announce the beginning of the New Year. It is only we mortals who ring bells and fire off pistols." Indeed, New Year's customs differ throughout time and across distant borders. In Ancient Egypt, the holiday was celebrated at no set date. The celebration was based upon the flooding of the Nile and lasted about one month, as the ground would be too saturated to plant crops. In Babylon, New Year was in the spring. To signal its coming, the King was stripped of his clothes and sent away. All the laws of the Kingdom were suspended until his return. When he returned he would be clothed with new robes and the people would then promise to return to work and good behavior for the rest of the year.

In Vietnam, the New Year or *Tet* begins between January 21st and February 19th. The Vietnamese traditionally believe that a house god resides in each home and travels to heaven on a carp to report on each family's good and bad behavior. All over Vietnam people purchase live carp and set them free in the rivers hoping for good favor. The Shintos in Japan place ropes of straw on their doors to keep evil spirits away for the coming year. And the Chinese celebrate the New Moon or Yuan Tan with parades and lanterns to light the righteous path to travel ahead.

The Celtic New Year festival took place at the end of October... at summer's end. Celts gathered mistletoe to keep ghosts at bay on the day they thought the dead returned to haunt the living for past misdeeds. In some rare villages in Scotland, barrels of tar have been set afire and rolled through the streets signifying the burning of the year just past and the clear and open road ahead. All over the world Robert Burns's poem

Auld Lang Syne is sung at midnight New Year's Eve... words that mean, "old, long time".

The month of January is actually named for the ancient Roman god Janus. Janus is pictured as a man with two faces. One face looks backward and the other forward.

For the Jews, the New Year or *Rosh Hashanah* is a holy time. The date is based not on our calendar but rather the ancient Hebrew calendar. In 2011 it was sunset September 28th and ended nightfall September 30th. To celebrate, a Shofar (ram's horn) is blown to signify the "day of judgment" (Yom ha-Din) or "day of remembrance" (Yom ha-Zikkaron) where God is pictured on His throne, opening a great book containing all the deeds of humankind for review.

Perhaps Thomas Mann was correct. Perhaps it is but mortals who place so much significance upon the turning of a calendar page. But still, one can hardly avoid the importance of such a day; we are but mortals. Though our God exists outside time and space and needs no sun or moon to mark the passing time, His children seem to. We, all of us, all around the world, past and present alike, seem to need that thunderstorm; seem to need that firing pistol. The turning of the page helps us. It helps us to focus on the fertile ground ahead. It helps us to review our lives and devote ourselves to good behavior. It helps us to strive for good and push our own evil spirits into the background. It helps us to see the lights that light the way of righteousness ahead. It helps us to see the ghosts that haunt our past; to evaluate the "old, long time". It helps us to blow the horn of judgment and remembrance and to think of God reviewing our deeds. It helps us to take an accounting of our lives!

This year, let us make each day a New Year's day! Let us review our lives continually! Let us look back and yet ahead at the same time! Let us repent of our misdeeds and see the righteous path ahead! And... let us devote ourselves always to lives worthy of the name Christian!

Rev. Brad Childs

CLERK OF SESSION

Happy New Year! As we begin a new year, there seems to be lots to bring to your attention!

Election of Elders – We have 7 elders whose terms end at the 2012 annual meeting. At its January meeting, Session decided to elect 5 elders to begin terms in 2012 and to establish a nominating committee to prepare a slate of nominees for election at the annual meeting in February. All members of the congregation are invited to nominate members to fulfill this role. According to the Book of Forms...

“Election to the eldership is the call of God, through the congregation, for service in Christ’s Church. Since the eldership is a spiritual office concerned with the rule and pastoral oversight of the congregation only suitable men and women should be considered. They should be committed Christians, in regular attendance at public worship, persons of sound judgment and upright character, and either knowledgeable or prepared to learn of the government of the church.”

If you would like to nominate someone, please submit your nomination in writing to the church office by January 23.

Annual Reports – To all those affected (eg, committee conveners, etc) these reports need to be submitted to Shirley in the church office **by the end of January** so that an annual report is ready for the AGM on February 26.

Commissioned Visitors – First Church is beginning a new initiative – commissioning visitors to keep in touch and visit those in the congregation who would appreciate regular contact. If you would like to be a visitor, or would appreciate receiving visits, please let the church office know.

January 14 Workshop – A workshop is being held for members of Session, the Board of Managers, and members of Session committees. The purpose is to share information from the Stewards by Design conference held last October and to lay the groundwork for future church growth initiatives. More workshops on specific topics will follow throughout the spring, and the congregation will be invited to be involved in these.

January 18 Service – A worship service will be held at First Church on Wednesday, January 18, beginning at 7 pm, as part of the celebration for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. The Regina Council of Churches is preparing this service. All are encouraged to attend.

January 20 Presbytery Meeting – The Presbytery of Assiniboia will meet at First Church on January 20. This meeting is open to anyone who would like to attend.

Visit by Rev. Herb Gale – On April 14-15, the Rev. Herb Gale will be visiting First Church. Rev. Gale is the past Moderator of General Assembly and is currently responsible for Planned Giving. The wide array of possibilities for planned giving is amazing and Rev. Gale presents it in a very interesting way. There will be a workshop April 14 from 1-4 pm, and we will be inviting anyone in the Synod who is interested. Also, the Rev. Gale will be preaching at First on April 15. Please mark those dates on your calendar now and plan to attend!

Wedding policy – The wedding policy has been revised and approved by Session and will be posted on the First Church's website.

Website – Our church website, www.firstpresregina.ca, is undergoing renewal. It now has a new look and we are working on revising the navigation and content. It may be accessed at www. If you have any suggestions for the website, please email Jo at jszostak@accesscomm.ca

Jo Szostak,
Clerk of Session

MUSIC AT FIRST

The month of December was a busy one for the Senior Choir. It performed two works accompanied by pianist William Sgrazzutti at the 71st Rotary Carol Festival, "Past Three A Clock", an old English carol, and "The Colours of Christmas", a new Christmas anthem by John Rutter.

At the December 11 service, the Choir presented Christmas Music, and Catherine Folstad, cellist, played "Canticle for an Angel" by Michael Conway Baker. Piano and organ duets were played by David Lewicki (piano) and Jack Partridge (organ).

The Children's Choir, conducted by Sheila Wilson and accompanied by Emily Ireton, joined with the Senior Choir for the December 18 service to perform "Three Angels" and "Come and See the Tiny King". During the four weeks of Advent, the Children's Choir performed "Advent Proclamation" with different verses added each week. Sarah Bolink, a Faculty of Education student at the University of Regina, played "O Holy Night" during the service on December 18.

Our Christmas Eve service began with pianist Will Ireton playing the Prelude. The Lewicki family -- Matthew and Patrick (piano I) and Laura and David (piano II) -- played David's arrangement of "Silent Night for two pianos, eight hands" during the Offertory. Graeme Mitchell played a flute arrangement of "Once in royal David's City" as part of the service of lessons and carols. Gabriel Omolida sang the first verse of Silent Night with the choir providing a hummed accompaniment during the candle lighting part of the service. At the conclusion of the Christmas Eve service, David Lewicki, piano, and Jack Partridge, organ, played "O Holy Night".

Soprano soloist for the Christmas Day service was Marianne Woods who sang "The Season of Dreams".

The New Year's Day worship service featured music that reminded us of the past year. "A Time to Remember", which had its

inaugural performance by composer/pianist Michael Conway Baker in Vancouver on December, had its second performance at First Church on January 1.

Soprano soloist on January 8 is Marianne Woods, singing "Mary, Did You Know?"

Choir practices resume on Thursday, January 12, at 8 pm. If you are interested in joining the choir, please contact Jack Partridge at the church office. The choir will be singing at the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity service on Wednesday, January 18 at First Presbyterian Church, 7 pm.

It has become a tradition at First Church to observe the birthday of Robbie Burns at the Sunday service prior to Burns' birthday on January 25. Bagpipe soloist Gordon Wiles will be playing the offertory. Be prepared to join the choir in singing "Auld Lang Syne" at the conclusion of the morning service, January 22!

Jack Partridge
Director of Music.

STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE

After a break over the holidays, our Fundscrip initiative is running again! Orders can be placed on Sunday, January 8 for delivery January 15. We also brought in some gift cards for Superstore, Safeway, and PetroCan that you can purchase on January 8 (in case you ran out over the holidays!) See us at coffee time to place orders and purchase cards.

Jo Szostak
Stewardship Committee Convenor

BOARD OF MANAGERS

Please mark your calendars

Annual Meeting

Sunday, February 26, 2012.
(following the worship service)

FELLOWSHIP COMMITTEE

Mark Your Calendars!! You won't want to miss this. It will be delicious!!!!

The Fellowship Committee is putting on a special Valentine's Dinner.

When: Feb 12, 2012, 5:30 pm
Where: the Church
Cost: Adults \$10
Children 6-12 -\$5.00
5 and under – free.



Watch for the sign-up sheet to reserve your place.

Sheila Wilson
Fellowship Committee Convenor

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Thank-you to everyone who helped teaching Sunday School classes from September to December. During January and February the Sunday School will be busy preparing for a very special presentation at the end of February. Adult volunteers will be needed to assist in various capacities, so let Sheila or Bette know if you can be of assistance.

The youth "overnighter" was well received in December. Thanks to the Rev. Childs and Katherine Bethune for sacrificing some shut-eye! Recruitment continues for a potential youth leader.

Bette Kelly
Christian Education Convenor

MISSION & OUTREACH

The next Mission and Outreach focus will be our annual Presbyterian World Service and Development financial appeal from February 12 – 26. We will kick off with a special service on February 12 with guest Dr. Patricia Polowick. Dr. Polowick, a member of St. Andrew's Church in Saskatoon, is on the PWS&D Committee and has visited projects in Malawi.

Our congregation has been a faithful contributor to PWS&D. Here are a few examples of how donations to PWS&D are used.

Flood Relief in the Philippines: On December 16, 2011, Tropical Storm Washi made landfall in the Philippines, resulting in flash floods that have left thousands homeless and hungry as houses and crops were swept away. Homes have been destroyed and entire communities are struggling to cope without food or electricity. According to the ACT Alliance, over 400 families were only days away from harvest before their crops were destroyed. The United Nations reports that over 146,550 people have been directly affected by this disaster. PWS&D is working through local partners to provide a timely and effective response to those in most need.

Educating Girls in Afghanistan: Many girls in Afghanistan will never have the chance to attend school. With youth comprising 50% of the population and the female literacy rate below 18%, investing in the education of girls is more important than ever. PWS&D is working with our local partner to train teachers, provide girls with textbooks and supplies, repair schools, and raise awareness and support for female education. Shanaz, leader of a parent-teacher committee, says, "Before this program, we did not allow our girls to get an education. But now with the program we see the need for education and we send our girls to school." For the 2011-2012 school year, PWS&D aims to increase enrolment from 1,350 to 1,800 girls.

Success in Ghana: Isaac Bukari's face can hardly contain his beaming smile. For many years, Isaac suffered discrimination and neglect from his family and community due to epilepsy until a PWS&D partner helped him access medication and enrolled him in a PWS&D-supported vocational training centre. Isaac excelled at weaving, dyeing fabrics and making soap, and received a new wooden loom and weaving materials to start his own business. Filled with joy and gratitude, Isaac says his life is now "fruitful and productive." Today, Isaac runs a successful weaving business from his home and occasionally visits the training centre to teach new students how to follow in his footsteps.

Watch for more details about the February's PWSD giving opportunities.

Find out more about our church development and relief agency at www.presbyterian.ca/pwsd.

Mary Jesse,
Mission & Outreach Convenor

YOUR COMMENTS PLEASE

With the arrival of a new year this is perhaps a good time to ask you, the readers of "First Things First", for your views on the Newsletter and whether or not you find it is meeting your expectations. As a start, here are a few questions you may wish to reflect on, though you should by no means feel restricted to only these in your considerations.

(a) Are you receiving the kind of helpful information about the congregation -- its activities, its offices and organizations -- that you expect a congregational newsletter to provide?

(b) Are there topics or areas that are not, or not sufficiently, being covered or reported that you would like to see included or covered more fully, and if so, what might these be?

(c) In terms of appearance and ease of reading, do you find the format and layout of the Newsletter, and the font size that is used, to be satisfactory for your purposes? If not, do you have any suggestions you might wish to make?

(d) Is the frequency with which "First Things First" is published (monthly except for July and August) satisfactory to you, and if not how often do you think it should be published?

(e) From time to time the Newsletter carries special features or stories -- apart from its regular features -- such as profiles of congregants, poems composed by congregants, or issues with which the Presbyterian Church in Canada may be dealing. Do you like the idea of special features or do you have any suggestions regarding the types of stories you would like to see and that you think might be of interest or an inspiration to the congregation?

(f) Do you have any other comments

to make which you think might help improve the Newsletter?

You may submit your opinions and suggestions to our Church Secretary, Shirley, either by email (firstpresregian@sasktel.net), phone (522-9571), or Fax (522-2178); or if you wish to make an anonymous submission please put your comments in an envelope marked "Church Office" and drop it in the mail box at the Albert Street entrance to the church.

Thanks for your consideration of these matters.

Doug Stewart
Editor, First Things First

JANUARY EVENTS

8 th	10:30 am	Worship Service & Sunday School
12 th	8:00 pm	Choir
14 th	9:00 am	Workshop
15 th	10:30 am	Worship Service & Sunday School
17 th	9:00 am 10:30 am Noon 7:00 pm	Adult Walk Bible Study Freedom 55ers Board of Managers
18 th	7:00 pm	Regina Council of Churches' Worship Service: <i>Week of Prayer for Christian Unity</i>
19 th	9:00 am 8:00 pm	Adult Walk Choir
22 nd	10:30 am	Worship Service & Sunday School
24 th	9:00 am 10:30 am Noon 7:00 pm	Adult Walk Bible Study Freedom 55ers Board of Managers
26 th	9:00 am 8:00 pm	Adult Walk Choir
29 th	10:30 am	Worship Service & Sunday School
31 st		Annual Reports Due into the Church Office