

# The Bell Rope

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL  
CHURCH OF VERONA, NJ  
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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## President's Column

December is never my favorite time of year. All the Christmas preparations stretch my already-busy schedule to the breaking point. And I get depressed by all the holiday hubbub that uses Christ as the excuse for the holiday rather than the reason for it. So I was excited last year to learn of the Advent Conspiracy (AC), a movement started by four churches several years ago, churches that wanted something more from Christmas than commercialism. The AC is centered around four simple phrases, one for each week. Why not try them out yourself this Advent?

First, **Worship Fully**. The season is supposed to be centered on Jesus, and so we should be, too. To help you do that, we're holding three brief services of Advent Peace during the first three weeks in December. In addition, our Sunday worship will include music of the season, candles, sprouting bulbs, traditions of the Hanging of the Greens, and multi-media worship. We'll have a special 5:00 PM service on Christmas Eve. **Worship Fully**.

**Spend Less**. You don't have to give up the joy of giving and receiving gifts. But consider the gifts you give. Are you just giving out of obligation? The AC people suggest giving just one gift less this year. What about Alternative Gifts that make a donation in the name of the recipient? Or buy from non-profits that do good with some of the money you spend. Our sale in December is one place to get such gifts. **Spend Less**.

**Give More**. Sounds like a contradiction with the last one, doesn't it? The AC people suggest that we should spend more time investing in relationships, not shopping. That sounds like more fun to me. So think about how to use the precious commodity of your time this season to give it to others, perhaps visiting someone in a nursing home, or helping at a soup kitchen, or taking the time to read a story or bake cookies with a child. **Give More**.

**Love All**. The AC people challenge us to love as Jesus did, to invest our time and money with those who need help the most, the poor, the forgotten, the overlooked and the sick. To demonstrate the power of these ideas, they chose one project and challenged their members to show their love by giving resources to those in need, and raised more than half a million dollars from just those four churches. How will you show more love this Christmas? **Love All**.

**Worship Fully. Spend Less. Give More. Love All.** Simple, isn't it? Have a blessed holiday season.

*Marge*

## Fair in the Square

On December 4th, our church again will have a booth at Verona's Annual Fair in the Square. The Fair is open from noon to 4:30, when Santa arrives by fire truck. This event is a great way to increase our visibility in the community and show and tell the people of Verona about all the exciting things that are happening at our church, especially at this time of year. This year, we will feature BASES, and Louise Stewart's sparkly stars will be for sale for \$5 each to benefit the program. In addition, we will have information about the church and holiday decorations and crafts from Africa and other developing nations, all priced at \$10 and under. Sales of these items will benefit the projects in Nigeria of Bridge of Faith as well as our own budget.

Your help is needed! Volunteers are needed to help transport items and set up the booth, to greet shoppers and give them information about our church and BASES, and to pack up at the end of the day. If you are able to give 2 hours on the day of the sale, please sign up in the Founders' Room. Hand-warmers will be provided!

## Services of Advent Peace

The season of Advent is about preparation for the coming of Jesus yet again into our lives. Often, however, that preparation gets lost in the preparation for the Christmas holiday. To help us all keep our balance during this busy season, First Congregational will again hold Services of Advent Peace on Wednesdays, December 1, 8, and 15, at 7:30 AM. These are brief quiet times of music, contemplation, candle-lighting and prayer in the darkened sanctuary. The services will be followed by coffee and bagels.

## Christmas Worship Fund

Donations to the Christmas Worship Fund in memory or in honor of loved ones will beautify our sanctuary with music as well as flowers this year. If you would like to donate, please provide the office with the name of the person you would like to honor, along with your donation.

## Hanging of the Greens Service and Christmas Potluck on Dec. 12<sup>th</sup>

On Sunday, December 12<sup>th</sup>, we will ready the church for Christmas by symbolically "hanging the greens," decorating the church with some of the symbols of the season and learning about their meaning. The service will be followed by a potluck lunch. Please sign up for the potluck on the table in the Founders' Room.

## **Christmas Decoration Sale**

During December, the Founders' Room will again be the site of a Christmas Decoration Sale table. Tired of your old decorations? Donate them to the table, and pick up some new ones. Sales will be on the honor system, with an envelope provided, and all profits will go to the BASES program.

## **We're on VTV!**

The Church Council has voted to expand our media presence before Christmas and during the next 6 months by advertising on Verona TV (FIOS 24 or COMCAST 35). In addition to our an ad on VeronaLiving.com, an ad for our church will appear before and after selected Verona TV broadcasts, including the broadcasts of the Verona Cedar Grove Chorus's upcoming holiday concert.

## **Do Your Christmas Shopping at Church**

On Sunday, December 5th, after church, and on Tuesday, Dec. 7<sup>th</sup> and Wednesday, Dec. 8th, from 11:30 am to 8:00 pm, members and friends will have an opportunity to do their Christmas shopping without fighting crowds at the mall, and to benefit mission projects of our church, as well. African crafts and SERRV and other fair trade items from developing nations will be on sale. They will include jewelry, baskets, soapstone and wooden items, scarves, musical instruments, novelty items, and much, much more. In addition, we will offer Alternative Gifts to benefit Habitat, Heifer Project, Bridge of Faith, and the First Congregational Church.

## **Nigeria Update**

Remember those pencils, pens, notebooks and children's books we collected last summer and fall? They are in a container crossing the Atlantic on their way to Nigeria. Along with them are some auto parts to repair the van that was delivered last March and boxes of Bibles from several churches, including the 1st Congregational Church of Park Ridge, who recently donated 9 boxes of old pew Bibles. When they arrive in Lagos and clear customs, they will travel to Awka by truck and go to an area high school, where each child will receive a notebook, pencil, and pen. The Bibles will go to schools as well, to be used in religious education classes. Dalu! (thank you) from the students to all who participated in the Notebook Challenge!

Bridge of Faith recently received a DVD documenting the delivery this past July of an earlier shipment. In the DVD, two scenes stand out – the principal of one of the primary schools remarking on how amazing it was to have received a huge box of crayons, not usually available in Africa, and a man moving from crutches to a wheelchair, with his smile growing larger each minute he sat in it.

## **Estate and Rummage Sale in January**

On Friday and Saturday, January 28 and 29 the church will hold an Estate Sale at the DeBella house, 306 Claremont Avenue, just a block or two from the church. The sale will include both the contents of the house and our own rummage, and can be a significant fund-raiser for the church.

Between now and the end of January, please collect your discarded items for donation to the sale. Items can be brought to the house at any time. Someone will be there most days from 9 to 5 preparing the house for sale, and will be able to help unload your car. Or, if you prefer, bring your items on Sunday when you come to church (but leave them in your car). After church, the house will be opened and you can drop your items off there.

As the sale approaches, volunteers will be needed to price items before the sale and to staff the sale on the 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>. If you are able to help, contact Marge Royle or watch for the sign-up sheets in the Founders' Room after the first of the year. In the meantime, clean those drawers and closets.

## **Cash for Gold Party a Success**

Verona BASES, our before and after-school program, was the recipient of over \$500 from the Nov. 7<sup>th</sup> Cash for Gold Party held in our Founders' Room. Attendees had big smiles on their faces after trading old, broken, or unneeded gold and silver jewelry and other items for cold, hard cash. BASES received 10% of the profits. This was supplemented by the proceeds from the sale of Louise Stewart's sparkly stars and the sale of some new jewelry from developing nations from Bridge of Faith African Crafts. With the economy affecting enrollments, these funds help keep the program available to serve families in our community. Thanks to Joan Park for her work in bringing us this opportunity and for Louise Stewart, the creator-of-stars.

## **Manse for Rent again**

Members with sharp eyes will have noticed that the new tenants for our manse never arrived. Unforeseen circumstances on their part resulted in the lease being cancelled, and the house is on the rental market again. With new carpets in place, thanks to the work of Darryl and Pat Haffner, the manse is all spruced up and ready for the right tenant. If you know of someone who might be interested in renting it, please contact Bill Fried at 973-239-6055.

## **Mitten Tree**

While you're doing your Christmas shopping, pick up some children's mittens, a hat, or a scarf to trim the tree in the Founders' Room. After Christmas, the items will be delivered to the Human Needs Food Pantry in Montclair where they will help some children keep warm this winter.