



From the Pastor's Perspective

Declare! A Voice Crying Out!

*"A voice is crying out: Clear the LORD's way in the desert!
Make a level highway in the wilderness for our God!"
-Isaiah 40:3*

We need Christmas!

I'm not talking about the holiday, the celebrations, the festivities. They are fun and a welcome diversion for sure. But we need what Christmas really is: God breaking into our troubled world—and into our personal lives!—and bringing to us hope. Our world—and our lives—are marked by darkness, coldness, brokenness, lifelessness, emptiness, pointlessness. At Christmas we celebrate that God did not leave us and our world stuck in the mess we found ourselves in, or which we've created. Christmas is God breaking in and breaking us out! God offers help, healing, warmth, light, restoration, rejuvenation, reconciliation. The baby Jesus born in Bethlehem is our Savior! He wins for us new and abundant life. He offers us direct access to God. He invites us on the path of healing and restoration.

We need Christmas! Each of us do. We need Christmas! Our world does.

So, one of the best ways we celebrate Christmas is by telling the world of the Hope that is born. Our response to Christmas is to receive Jesus into our lives. It is to celebrate the hope that we now have. And it is to declare this hope for all our world.

Continued on page 2...

Monthly Church Events

For weekly events see the calendar

December 1	9:00 am United Methodist Men 3:00 pm YPA Show - Elf the Musical 7:00 pm YPA Show - Elf the Musical
December 2	HOLY COMMUNION 8:30 am Prayer 8:45 am Grow Group (Names of God) 10:00 am Worship (Banjo player) 3:00 pm Unexpected Company Chorale Performance "Believe"
December 3	10:00 am Grow Group (Learning to Knit) 10:00 am Grow Group (Grief) 5:30 pm United Methodist Women Christmas Party
December 4	6:30 pm Grow Group Work Team Meeting
December 5	5:30 pm Shared Meal (pot luck) 6:15 pm Grow groups/Confirmation/ Youth Group
December 7	7:00 am Grow group (Restoring the Shack) 7:00 pm YPA Show - Elf the Musical
December 8	11:00 am YPA Show - Elf the Musical 3:00 pm YPA Show - Elf the Musical 5:45 pm Adult Fellowship 7:00 pm YPA Show - Elf the Musical

Pastor's Perspective Cont'd

John the Baptist is a crucial, but often overlooked, figure of Christmas. Deep in the Old Testament God has the prophets proclaim that one day the Messiah will come. So, to get ready, a voice will cry out: declaring to clear a way in the desert, to make ready for the coming of God, to make a pathway in the wilderness for God's arrival. It's a voice to get ready. Then, hundreds of years later, a woman and man in Israel conceive a miracle baby. This baby boy is named John, and God says he is a voice crying out, declaring the coming of the Messiah. Before John is born, the virgin Mary (who is also pregnant) visits John's pregnant mother. When she does, John leaps in his mother's womb. Mary carries the Messiah! Thirty years later, John is baptizing in the desert near Jerusalem, telling people to repent and get ready for God's coming. Then, Jesus comes to him to be baptized, and John declares, "Behold, this is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29) This begins Jesus' public ministry as the Messiah.

Today, it is we Jesus-followers who carry on proclaiming the arrival of the Messiah. Again, this Christmas it is our voice that cries out: The Messiah has come! Turn to God! Worship Jesus! This month, we will be listening to John the Baptist so we can learn to declare his message for our world today. Our Sunday message series is "John the Baptist: Declare! Be a voice crying out." We will declare: 1) Prepare!, 2) Repent!, 3) Believe!, 4) Look!, 5) Be Baptized!, and 6) I'm not worthy! We need Christmas. We need to hear this message. Our world needs to hear this message. God has come. He has brought hope. Declare!

Merry Christmas,

Pastor David

Special Music Celebrating Christmas!

Thanks to a special gift, each Sunday in December we welcome special musicians during worship:

Dec. 4: Banjo

Dec. 11: Marimba

Dec. 16: Piano

Dec. 23: A strings quartet

Don't miss this musical celebration of Jesus' birth!

December 9	8:30 am Prayer 8:45 am Grow Group (Names of God) 10:00 am Worship (Marimba player)
December 10	8:00 am Monday Morning Men 10:00 am Grow Group (Learning to Knit) 10:00 am Grow Group (Grief)
December 12	11:30 am Romeos and Juliets 5:30 pm Shared Meal (Nancy) 6:15 pm Grow Groups/ Youth Group/Confirmation
December 13	12:00 pm Sarah Circle Christmas Party
December 14	7:00 am Grow Group (Restoring the Shack) 5:00 pm Unload Community Care Truck
December 15	6:00 am Community Care Set-up 8:00 am Community Care
December 16	HYMN SING 8:30 am Prayer 8:45 am Grow Group (Names of God) 10:00 am Worship (Piano player) 6:30 pm Lifeline
December 17	10:00 am Grow Group (Grief) 10:00 am Grow Group (Learning to Knit)
December 18	10:00 am Rebecca Circle
December 19	5:30 pm Shared Meal (Pancakes) 6:15 pm Grow Groups/ Confirmation/Youth Group
December 21	7:00 am Grow Group (Restoring the Shack)
December 23	ST ANDREW'S SHELTER VOLUNTEER WEEK 8:30 am Prayer 10:00 am Worship

Hearing Loop System in the Sanctuary



Thanks to two separate special gifts, a hearing loop system is being installed in the church sanctuary on Dec. 4th by Midwest Advantage Computer Systems. This system allows people with hearing aids to access sound from microphones directly to their hearing aids. Harris Miller, one of our church family, has said that the hearing loop systems that he has used "make a remarkable difference." The loop system is wires hidden below the carpet in the sanctuary that are connected to the church's sound system. The sound picked up by the microphone is sent to the sound system, and then it is normally broadcast out through the speakers. With a loop system, the sound is also sent through the loop wires, which sends the sound signal directly to hearing aids. Hearing aids act as receivers and amplify only the sound from the loop system. People can easily set their hearing aids to the hearing loop system, with the push of a button on their hearing aids. Virtually all hearing aids have this function. Trainings will be offered to help people with hearing aids understand how to access the loop system. Watch for more information to come!

December 24	<i>CHRISTMAS EVE</i> 4:30 pm Christmas Eve Service 11:30 pm Christmas Candlelight Service
December 25	<i>MERRY CHRISTMAS!</i> CHURCH OFFICE CLOSED
December 26	NO WEDNESDAY NIGHT ACTIVITIES 8:00 am - 5:30 pm Christmas Camp
December 27	8:00 am - 5:30 pm Christmas Camp 10:00 am - 4:00 pm Youth Activity "Flapjacks and Flannels"
December 28	7:00 am Bible Study 8:00 am - 5:30 pm Christmas Camp
December 30	8:30 am Prayer 10:00 am Worship
December 31	CHURCH OFFICE CLOSED
January 1	<i>HAPPY NEW YEAR!</i> CHURCH OFFICE CLOSED

Homeless Shelter Volunteers Needed for Christmas Week!



At Christmas we remember how the Holy Family (Joseph, Mary, and Jesus) were homeless in Bethlehem. Jesus was born to give all of us an eternal home! So, what better way to celebrate Jesus' birth than to serve those experiencing homelessness? Our church is a founding church of St. Andrew's Homeless Shelter in Hugo. We continue to volunteer to help staff the shelter once a quarter. We purposefully chose our next week to be Christmas week! We need people for the "dinner shift" (5-8 p.m., setting out and cleaning up dinner) and for the "overnight shift" (8p.m. - 7 or 9 a.m., spending the night). The sign-up sheet is in the lobby. Talk to anyone in the office for more information. Christmas is a very busy time, but serving at the shelter will be the most meaningful part of your Christmas this year!

Forest Hills Youth Group

November 17th, a group of the teens and parents helped unload the community care food truck. It was bitterly cold, but they all did a great job with no complaints. It's amazing to work with a group with such a heart for service!

We started our first fundraiser for the 2019 Alaska Mission Trip. So far, we have raised \$1500 of our \$2000 goal. Our ultimate goal is to raise at least \$4000 to help the teens attend the trip. Our goal for this mission trip is to have the church help each youth with \$500, that they would each raise \$500 and then families would pay \$500. This trip will truly be life changing for those that go. If you are a teen and interested in going, or if you are an adult and interested in helping fund or chaperone, please contact Cassi Betker at youth@foresthillsunc.net.



Starting in December, we will be studying the story of Christmas. While fraught with the perils of secular traditions and commercialization, Christmas still provides one of the best opportunities to help students understand the reality of God's love through the events that occurred that night long ago, and the celebration around them. This series, XMAS, encourages students to keep Christ (X) in Christmas by setting a biblical foundation for the humanity of Jesus, the divinity of Jesus, and the Incarnation, where humanity and Divinity collided.

Don't miss out on Flapjacks & Flannels Dec 27th 10am-4pm. Teens come dressed in your favorite flannel and enjoy a fun day of games, movies and Flapjacks!

Cassi B
Director of Youth Ministries



Our Church Missionaries Return to Kazakhstan!

Our church's missionary family received enough funding to return to their important work in Kazakhstan. After celebrating Thanksgiving with family, they flew out of Chicago on November 27th. Their missionary work is a ministry of hospitality, music, prayer and teaching. Please continue to pray for them during this transition. They ask for specific prayers that they would be able to secure permanent residency in Kazakhstan.

CHRISTMAS CAMP!



December 26-28

8:00am - 5:30 pm



Christmas Camp is upon us!

It has been awhile. We took the year off this past season. We wanted to stop, not only to take a rest, but to reassess the things in which our church puts energy and resources.

But now it is time to get to work!

Christmas is all about the Son of God coming to be among us. Jesus is the Savior who takes away our sin. When we believe and trust in him, we receive salvation in his name! This decision marks the beginning, not the end, of our faith journey. In the same way, Christmas really begins on Dec. 26th, the day after. We continue to walk with Jesus not just acknowledge his birth. Now it's time to actually follow him!

Our job as a church is to make disciples. Disciples Love, Grow and Serve! Disciples make disciples! The Christmas season is ripe with such opportunities. Christmas Camp is chief among them.

Think about it: Christmas is over and done. Parents are turning their attention back to the daily grind. Kids just want to unpack and try out their new gifts. And we, as people, just want to take a breather as we look to what is next on the horizon.

Well, we will have to find some other time to breathe! This year we want to jump at the chance to serve families in our community and to live out lives of discipleship. In the days following Christmas, parents have to return to work and kids still have school off. We have the chance to step in and provide parents with a worry-free option for their child care needs.

Not only can we meet a need, reach out to new families and give of our own time for others, we also have the chance to share the story of Jesus with kids. This is the highest calling we have as Christians! We need to live into it!

Sign up to be a part of this important outreach. Use your time and energy to serve our community in the name of Jesus! What better use could there be for the days following Christmas?



Dulac Missions Trip - February 25 to March 1st 2019



Join our group as we go to Dulac, Louisiana for our yearly missions trip to help the Dulac Community Center, which provides a great deal of help to the community. This is a great way to give back, and experience missions work firsthand! Costs include a \$250 charge for room and board while there, as well as the cost of transportation (which includes a hotel room on the way there and back, and food while travelling). This will be our 26th year of making this trip. Please see Kay Bergerson for more details. There are also scholarships available. If you haven't been on a missions trip with the church yet, this is a great opportunity. We will also be collecting Relief Kits (Cleaning, School, and Hygiene), and the details for assembling kits are on the UMCOR web page at www.UMCOR.org. If you are interested in a scholarship, please talk to Pastor David.

AM7 UPDATE

Lay Leader Report 2018

A couple of years ago, the leadership team, with the cooperation of church members, became part of the Healthy Church Initiative process. There was a sense among the leaders that our church needed to do something radically different if we were to continue to be a vibrant, relevant faith community for the next fifty years. After a year of research, surveys, interviews and more, the HCI Consult team made a recommendation.

The Consult Team gave us five recommendations:

- 1) We were to pause all ministries and activities for one year. We were to rest in the goodness of God in order to deepen our walk with Him, deepen our relationships with one another, pray and restore our souls.
- 2) Implement Simple, Soulful, Sunday Mornings. This included ending Kid's Church and having an intergenerational worship time.
- 3) Small Groups for sharing Life and Faith. We were to disband current small groups and build new relationships with one another across generations.
- 4) Devote Wednesday to Community Life with great food and fellowship with each other.

5) Dream a new Dream that takes us into our future. Once we were totally surrendered to God and God began to show us how our church was to be called into this community, we would start to create and design new ministries for God's people.

The Action Ministry Team (AMT) and the Church Management Ministry Team (CMMT) were created to replace our previous leadership structure.

Throughout this past year, the AMT team has been put to work implementing the 5 recommendations given to us. Task force teams were created to work on the 3 legs of Simple, Soulful Sunday mornings, Wednesday Community Life and Small Groups.

You may have noticed how our sermon series at the beginning of the year was building and readying us for opening our hearts and minds to God's calling. We have been "At the Rail", confessing our sins. Next, we surrendered and opened ourselves up to God with our "I Give Up" series. Then we applied the book of 1 John in both our Sunday morning series "Core Strength" and in church-wide small groups with the book "This is How We Know".

The AMT team was also surrendering, giving up through our monthly meetings. The meetings were full of energy and vigor as we encouraged ministries to stop and rest. We struggled with stopping ministries that have defined our church for the past decade. However, most of us agreed that the painful steps we were taking were what our church needed. Like the 1 John series, we needed to focus on the center of who we were, whose we were, and all that we are doing for God.

At our April meeting, we spent the time concentrating on the Bible, meditation and prayer. We found that we don't all take that leap of faith at the same time. We need help to get back to our "First" love, get grounded, and get on that journey of faith. God is leading us. He wants us to follow Jesus' model of "Come, Follow Me." Go out. Be risky. Be bold. It is frightening, but we believe and have hope that this is the journey we're supposed to be on.

In May, we talked about what we hoped to see 5 years from now within our church. What would a new guest entering our church on Sunday or Wednesday encounter? We want them to find opportunities to join groups that facilitate deepening our relationship with God, to see our passion for spiritual development, to witness adult baptism/public affirmations of faith, to see mature/seasoned Christians mentoring new believers, to see a specific process for all level of believers from the basics to sending us out to make new disciples.

In June, AMT had an overnight retreat. The purpose was to move forward with the "dreaming" phase of our journey. We questioned, "How is our church different from any secular group that does "good"? The answer is Jesus. Our dream must be about Jesus. The dreams voiced included: growth in personal relationship with God, walking away from worship feeling filled with the Holy Spirit, focus on relationships, creating a culture of family discipleship, full small groups that are meeting the needs of people where they are at, laying down what's good and finding what's great. We decided that ministry activities should meet all three goals of Love. Grow. Serve. This time away made us a team united in welcoming others into discipleship [by using small groups. God's Spirit was truly present with us.

God gave us a new Mission Statement and it is this:

Forest Hills church is Christ centered, with a focus on making disciples who love God and others, grow in Christ, and serve our wider communities.

This fall Pastor Andrew created a new Family Discipleship group called "Echo". The purpose is to teach parents how to teach our children about living for Christ.

Now, we have begun our Fall Grow Groups. We are offering classes with subjects ranging from spiritual disciplines to grief support to practical living through knitting to Bible study. Everyone is welcome, so come join us and bring a friend.

AMT recommended we continue with our current leadership structure of the AMT Team supporting ministry and CMMT team handling the resources of Forest Hills. At Annual Church Conference on Nov 18, Forest Hills agreed with this proposal.

I am so privileged to be a part of the Action Ministry team and am proud of all of them for the work that has been accomplished this year. We are excited as we look forward to continuing our dreaming in 2019.

Thank you, Pastor David, for your exceptional leadership and thank you to each member of AMT.

God is good, All the time!

Marilee Leonard

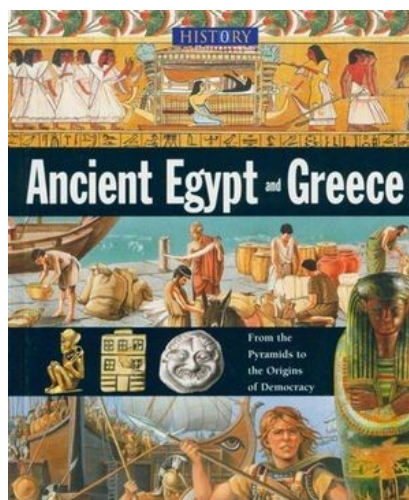
Lay Leader

Christian History Study Tour to Egypt and Greece

Join Pastor and Reese on a tour of Lands of the Bible: Egypt & Greece! 12 Days: June 8-19 (21 with Greece), 2019.

Land of the ancient Pharaohs, pyramids and mummies, as well as the Biblical land of Abraham & Sarah, the Hebrew People, Joseph, Moses, and the Exodus. We'll climb Mt. Sinai (with a camel ride) where God gave the 10 Commandments. It is also where Joseph and Mary fled from King Herod with the Baby Jesus! The 5-star tour includes Alexandria, Cairo, Aswan, Abu Simbel, Luxor/Thebes, and Sinai, as well as a 3-day cruise on the Nile River!

Cost is \$3,700 Egypt (\$4,300 with Greece). Deposit due December 15th. Detailed brochures are available at the Welcome Center. Come travel on our 9th Study Tour, and walk in the footsteps of the Pharaohs, to the alluring biblical land of Egypt!





Happy Birthday to our December born! This month we celebrate the birthdays of the following individuals:

Lillian Truax - December 3

Misty Thoen - December 9

Marilee Leonard - December 3

Cassi Betker - December 11

Matthew Berglund - December 4

Dick Padrnos - December 15

Lynn Ruter - December 7

Donna Gustafson - December 19

Cathy Sanderson - December 8

To all of you! Have a wonderful birthday and a blessed holiday season! If your birthday is missing, please call the office and let us know!

Events and Info

UMW Annual Christmas Party!

**Monday, December 3rd at Keys Café
Bring a gift for Emma Norton Residence**

Adult Fellowship

**Saturday, December 8th, 5:45pm See
Rozanne Foster for more details!**

Romeos and Juliets

**Romeos and Juliets meet on
December 12th at 11:30 am.**

Community Care

**5pm 12/14 - Unload Truck
6am 12/15 - Set-up 8 am Distribution**

Flapjacks and Flannels!

**Thursday, December 27th 10am-4pm!
Bring a friend!**

Lifeline Sunday December 16th at 6:30 pm

**Lifeline is a way for us to come together to be
with God. There will be songs to sing and
prayers to pray, but you can simply come to
enjoy the presence of God. All are encouraged
to attend. because we need Jesus! Our church
needs Jesus! Hang on tight to the lifeline.**

Christmas Services

**Dec. 23 at 10 a.m. - Music by String Quartet;
Message: "Declare: Look!"
Dec. 24 at 4:30 p.m. - Music by Sanctify;
Message: "Declare: Look!"
Dec. 24 at 11:30 p.m. - Traditional
Candlelight service**

Christmas Camp!

**December 26 through December 28
8:00 am - 5:00 pm**