

Weekly Connection

For the Week of December 16, 2018 - December 22, 2018
Diverse Minds, Covenant Hearts, Made One in the Body of Christ



Celebrating in an Imperfect World

Each year, I send a Christmas photo card to family and friends with our family Christmas letter enclosed. The photo card consists of both individual pictures of each family member as well as one picture of all of us together. The family letter features a picture of our pets, our good news of the past year, accomplishments and celebrations of each family member and for all of us as a whole.



This year as I put together the pictures I instinctively knew that this was probably the last year the face our sweet Abraham would grace our family Christmas card. On Sunday, we had to say goodbye to our 16-year-old dog, Abraham (right), who brought so much joy and unconditional love to our family. As we spent the day reminiscing about Abraham, the girls both said how glad our Christmas cards had already gone out so we would not have to think

about how to share the sad news of the death of our beloved Abe in the Christmas letter.

I thought about how interesting it is that so many of us, my family being no exception, have a perfectionist filter through which we try to portray our families, our situations, and even the world during the holidays.

For example, one of the unwritten rules of the Christmas mailing is that although I create the card and write the letter each family member has an opportunity to do their own edits. This usually comes with the standard complaints of *"I look terrible in that picture! Let me send you a better one."* or *"I don't like how you phrased this in the letter, what about saying this instead..."*

Each year, I send out the shiniest portrait and story of our family. I imagine we all do that to some extent in the holiday season. We mistakenly think the season is about capturing some sort of idealist perfection. Even though we know life is not

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Pray for...

**Prayer list for
Dec 23 - Dec 29, 2018
Churches & Pastors**

- Cahokia Bethel UCC, Rev. Carol (David) Shanks
- Carbondale Church of the Good Shepherd, Rev. Kim (Dr. Aaron Newcomb) Magwire

like this even for a holiday season.

One year when we took a family trip to Israel, I was determined to get the "perfect" picture of the family in Bethlehem for that year's Christmas card. I had envisioned the backdrop of the city, like it is often featured on Christmas cards. Yet, instead of the silhouetted version; ours would be the full majesty of our family standing on the holy ground of Jesus' birthplace.

What I did not expect was the reality of Bethlehem. When we entered into the armed gates of the city, we were instantly met with graffitied cement walls and litter-strewn streets. Bethlehem was not the beautiful city I had imagined. The Church of the Nativity was also not what I had imagined it would be either.

Well known as a holy site (Nativity Grotto) is a church that was built over what is thought to be the cave in which Jesus was born. Although the Church itself was beautiful, all I can remember is being rushed down the stairs and back up to the main level of the church as the tour guide loudly commanded, "*Keep walking down follow the arrows, keep walking; follow the arrows. Now look to your right. That hole is the part of the cave. You may pay homage to this holy site. Now look to your left, take those stairs back up. Keep walking. Keep walking and follow the arrows.*" This was the birthplace of Jesus? This was the most holy site I waited a lifetime to see?

However, the next day it struck me at how perfect the experience truly was. In retrospect, as I considered the dirt and grime of that city, I realized Bethlehem was the perfect birthplace of Jesus. We proclaim that the Christ child was born into humble beginnings to remind us that he was Emmanuel, God-With-Us, but it was not until seeing Bethlehem with my own eyes that I understood the power and beauty of this message.

I think we try so hard to make our Christmas traditions picture perfect; we miss the true message of the birth event. Jesus was born into the world. Jesus was born into this flawed, imperfect, messy world to be forever present with us in our joys and in our sorrows, in our times of laughter and in our times of tears, in our victories and in our defeats, and in our moments of celebration as well as our moments of humiliation.

Dear friends, even though the temptation is to strive for the perfect Christmas cards, letters, dinners, gifts, celebrations and worship services, remember that there is no need to seek that kind of perfection. The only perfection we need to seek is the presence of the Christ child to be present with us in all times, all seasons, and all circumstances in our lives, our families, our churches, our communities and our world.

Blessings, Rev. Shana Johnson, Conference Minister

Retired Pastor

- Rev. Jack Spratte and Barbara VanAusdall, Mascoutah, IL

Attention:

There will be no *Weekly Connection* on Tuesday, December 25, 2018 and January 1, 2019 because of the holidays. The Prayer lists for those upcoming weeks are below.

Prayer list for Dec 30, 2018 - Jan 5, 2019 Churches & Pastors

- Carlinville St. Paul UCC, Rev. Kevin (Shellie) Strope
- Carlyle Immanuel UCC, Pastor Ken (Barbara) Schafer
Retired Pastor
- Rev. Gary and Joyce Kniepkamp, St. Jacob, IL

Prayer list for Jan 6 - Jan 12, 2019 Churches & Pastors

- Central City Zion UCC, Rev. Nancy Peebles
- Centralia St. Peter UCC, Pastor John Pawloski, Student Pastor
Retired Pastor
Rev. Robert Smidt, Springfield, IL

UCC Resources



Save the Date – Day of Discipleship is planned for February 23, 2019 at the St. Paul UCC in Belleville from 9:30 am – 2 pm (registration at 9 am). Hear presentations from the UCC General Legal Counsel, Ministerial Excellence, Support and Authorization (MESA), Office of Philanthropy, and The Pension Boards of the UCC. Send several leaders of your church to find out more about resources that are available from the UCC denomination which will support your local church.

24 Hours at Eden Dates Announced

Our annual event, 24 Hours at Eden, will be February 17-18, 2019. This is a recruiting event at which we welcome prospective students on campus for 24 hours. During their time on campus, prospective students will experience life at Eden including sit in on a class, meet Eden's outstanding faculty, interact with current students and learn about what it means to be a part of the Eden Community. If you know someone who may be interested in pursuing a world class seminary education, please send them to the Admissions Department to learn more about 24 Hours at Eden. Call Admissions at 877-627-5652 or click [here](#) for more information.



People with Life Concerns

- Keep Rev. Joel (Emily) Jackle-Hugh in your prayers as he recovers from surgery. Rev. Jackle-Hugh is the Pastor at Pana United in Faith Church and a member of the ISC Justice & Mission Team. Cards may be sent to 609 Fairgrounds Rd, Box 78, Pana, IL 62557.
- Please pray for Pastor Nancy (Scott) Shubert as she deals with some health issues. Pastor Shubert serves Holy Ghost UCC in Darmstadt and Trinity UCC in Biddleborn. Cards may be sent to 12691 State Route 177, Okawville, IL 62271.
- Pray for Rev. Debbie Jo Atkins as she recovers from surgery. Rev. Atkins is the pastor at St. Paul UCC in Staunton. Cards may be sent to 339 North Franklin St, Staunton, IL 62088.
- Keep Pastor Don (Lois) Propeck in your prayers as he deals with some health issues. Don is the pastor of St. Paul UCC in Jamestown and is currently serving on the ISC Committee on Ministry. Cards may be sent to him at 2163 E 1150th Ave, Loogootee IL 62838.
- Pray for Rev. Nancy (Kevin Lee) Spier-Lee as she recovers from surgery. Rev. Spier-Lee recently retired as Pastor of Waterloo Zion UCC St. Joe and served on several ISC Teams. Cards may be sent to Rev. Nancy Spier-Lee, 309 Kroeger Avenue, Dupo IL 62239.
- Keep Kyle Nuetzel (24) in your prayers as he continues rehabilitation at home. Kyle is the son of Kathy & Rev. Patrick Poole.
- Keep Rev. Paul and Marilyn Thompson in your prayers as each of them deals with health issues. Rev. Thompson is retired, but serves on the ISC Recruitment Committee. Cards may be sent to them at 910 Circle Drive, Red Bud, IL 62278.
- Pray for Pastor Tom (Marcia) Ellison who is recovering from surgery. Pastor Ellison is the pastor at St. Mark's UCC in DuBois and serves as ISC's Region 7 Convener. He has also served on several other teams as well as Conference Council. Cards may be sent to 11426 State Highway 37, Benton, IL 62812.



DuBois Center News

The Camp and Retreat Center of the Illinois South Conference of the United Church of Christ



BUDDY to BUDDY
Hoyleton Mission Experience 2019
June 30 - July 3

Behind the eight-ball? Still looking for a meaningful summer mission trip for your youth? Look no further! This close-to-home mission experience offers teens the opportunity to "live kindness, do justice and walk humbly." Youth encounter God as they participate together with young people from Hoyleton's youth residential programs. They swim, create cool crafts, play games and more! Daily reflections and prayer times focus on diversity, justice and our role as Christians. After the Hoyleton campers head for home each day, the buddies and their chaperones take time to debrief the day's experience, plan for the next day and take-on a physical work project at DuBois Center. There is also time to relax, play and participate in some traditional camp activities. Activity supervision is provided by staff from DuBois Center and Hoyleton Youth & Family Services. Registration is by church group, not individual, and adult chaperones must accompany youth participants. Space is limited. Click [here](#) to learn more or contact us at dcinfo@DuBoisCenter.org or 618-787-2202.



YEAR-END SUPPORT
for Ministry at DuBois Center

This time of year, we are more mindful of giving thanks - for family, friends, our church community and God at work in our lives. At DuBois Center, we are also thankful for stories, especially ones of connection, challenge and transformation. These stories tell of new-found confidence for first-time campers, deepening parent-

child relationships, faith discussions that come alive, individuals transformed into communities, unlikely friendships built on respect and so much more. Scores of dedicated volunteers, staff members and donors together make DuBois Center a place of welcome and hospitality, a place to connect, belong and grow... a place where faith is nurtured and stories are written. With your financial support this work continues. Click [here](#) to read our annual letter which highlights aspects of our shared ministry in the outdoors at DuBois Center in 2018. This is your ministry, the work of your congregations, the work of the Illinois South Conference. We hope you will consider a tax-deductible year-end gift. You may donate safely [online](#) or, if you prefer, use this [form](#) and mail your donation. With so many demands on your resources, we are truly honored by your gifts of financial support as well as offerings of prayer, time and talent. Thank you.

'TIS THE SEASON... for Baking

From our kitchen to yours... we would like to share one of our favorite camp recipes - Ranger Cookies. For a holiday touch, try adding Craisins to the mix.

Mix Together:

1/2 c shortening (softened)
1/2 c butter/margarine (softened)
1 c brown sugar
1 c white sugar
2 large eggs
1 tsp vanilla

Mix Together:

2 c flour
1/2 tsp baking powder
1 tsp baking soda
1 tsp salt

Now mix two bowls of ingredients together.

Then mix in the following:

2 c crispy rice cereal
2 c quick oats
1 c coconut

To Bake:

Preheat oven to 350°.

Blend all ingredients together well in order listed above, scraping the bowl often. (This will result in very thick dough.)

Scoop out onto cookie sheets with parchment paper (optional).

Bake until lightly browned (approx. 8-10 minutes).

Makes about 2-2.5 dozen.

Happy Baking and Merry Christmas!



OFFICE & EVENT COORDINATOR
Employment Opportunity

Enjoy connecting with people and the outdoors? Fluent in computer-speak? Looking for a position that is more than just a job? DuBois Center is seeking an Office & Event Coordinator. This is a permanent, part-time position; the purpose of which is to organize, coordinate and implement office and event functions at DuBois Center including camper family and guest relations, data management (financial, camper, guest group and employee), coordination of office help, assistance with marketing efforts and occasional guest group hosting. The person filling this position will be an integral part of the ISCUCC staff overall and the DuBois Center team. To apply, please submit a resume and cover letter to DuBois Center via email at dcinfo@DuBoisCenter.org. Click [here](#) for the position description.

SUMMER JOBS

DuBois Center Equestrian Program

Looking for a rewarding summer job working with children and horses? How about hands-on experience managing a trail ride program? DuBois Center has openings for a dedicated summer barn coordinator and two barn assistants/cabin counselors. Spending time with the horses is a highlight for many of our campers. In addition to caring for our 20-horse herd, our summer barn team utilizes basic riding instruction and time "getting to know the ponies" to help campers build self-confidence and learn to respect and appreciate God's amazing creation. For those who have never experienced a horse up close, the first moments can be overwhelming. However, with nurturing guidance, campers quickly learn that they can overcome their fears and experience something wonderful. Tears often transform into giant smiles. The joy campers show is reward enough, but serving on the summer barn team also provides hands-on work experience for individuals considering a career in equine or social service related fields. For more information, check out the attached [flyer](#) or contact Shirley at shirley.director@DuBoisCenter.org or 618-787-2202.



MORE than just another SUMMER JOB!

Energetic, child-focused, fun-loving with a heart for ministry - sound like you or someone you know? Check out this [flyer](#) and consider whether an amazing summer at DuBois Center might be just the opportunity you have been looking for. Positions include cabin counselors, activity leaders, barn assistant/counselors and coordinators. FAITH. FUN. HARD WORK. GREAT FRIENDS. LONG HOURS. AMAZING MEMORIES. Gain practical experience, build your resume and make a difference! Job descriptions and application packets are available [online](#). Questions? Contact us at dcinfo@DuBoisCenter.org or 618-787-2202.



DuBois Center is your OCWM (Our Church's Wider Mission) monies at work. When you or your congregation gives to OCWM, you are directly supporting the work of DuBois, a Camp and Retreat Center of the Illinois South Conference of the United Church of Christ. Thank you for your ongoing support of OCWM!



CHHSM News

Council for Health and Human Service Ministries



Save the Date! Hoyleton Youth & Family Services' *A Night for Heroes 2019 Salute* will be held on February 22, 2019 at the Four Points by Sheraton. It will be their salute to everyone that makes Hoyleton's work possible. A cash bar at 6 pm kicks off the evening followed by a wonderful dinner at 7 pm. *A Night for Heroes* culminates with Awards, the Fund-the-Need auction that provides support to every one of Hoyleton's nearly 20 programs and services for nearly 3,000 youth and families throughout southern Illinois - and, music and dancing with Butchwax and the Hollywoods! This year's emcee will be Cory Stark, co-anchor at KMOV-TV. Individual tickets are \$50/person. Sponsorships available. Contact Amanda Garrison at agarrison@hoyleton.org or 618-688-4742.

Join the Eden Community on February 8, 2019, at 10:30AM, for the Bracke Lecture called ***Redeeming Administration: The Invitation Hidden in the Clutter on Your Desk.*** Administration is often critiqued both by those within the ministry and without as work that takes fun-loving people and turns them into anxious curmudgeons, but it doesn't have to be that way. Speaking out of her own experience as an administrator in educational and congregational settings, Ann Garrido will look at practices of administration that can be potentially transformative, making us not only effective administrators but holier, healthier Christians.

Dr. Ann Garrido is Associate Professor of Homiletics at the Aquinas Institute of Theology in St. Louis, Missouri. Dr. Garrido's books will be for sale in the Eden Bookstore and will be available for a book signing after her lecture. Click [here](#) for more information on the lecture.

St. John's Community Care presents Brain Wave held on Wednesdays and Fridays and continues for 10 weeks. First class will be held on Wednesday, January 16 from 10 am - 2 pm. Brain Wave is open to people experiencing early memory loss. This group provides a safe, positive, strength-based environment where participants



will learn, share, and engage together with an expert. Benefits of the class include education about memory loss, meaningful activities that build upon strengths and abilities, fun peer support, skill building and mentally challenging activities. Outcomes for participants may yield decreased depression, decreased anxiety in social settings, stabilized cognitive functioning and increased coping skills. To register or to schedule an assessment appointment, call 618-344-5008 by January 4. The curriculum was developed by the University of Wisconsin. Click [here](#) for a flyer.

What's Happening at Illinois South Conference...

YOU ARE INVITED to a FREE VBS SHOWCASE St. John Evangelical UCC in Collinsville on Friday, January 4, 2019 from Noon-2 pm. It is intended for anyone wanting to view the 2019 VBS curriculum options before purchasing. Lunch will be provided by St. John's Church Youth Ministries Team. RSVP to Dana by January 2 at 618-344-2526 or faithhall@stjohneucc.org.

Merry Christmas to Region 1

Carbondale, *Church of the Good Shepherd*
 DuQuoin, *St. John's*
 Marion, *Zion*
 Metropolis, *Zion*
 Murphysboro, *St. Peter's*
 Pinckneyville, *St. Paul*

Merry Christmas to Region 2

Columbia, *St. Paul*
 Dupo, *Christ*
 Evansville, *St. John*
 Floraville, *St. Paul*
 Hecker, *Friedens*
 Maeystown, *St. John*
 New Hanover, *Zoar*
 Red Bud, *St. Peter*
 Valmeyer, *St. John*
 Waterloo, *St. Paul*
 Waterloo, *Zion*

Merry Christmas to Region 3

Cahokia, *Bethel*
 Collinsville, *St. John Evangelical*
 Dupo, *First Congregational*
 Edwardsville, *Eden*
 Edwardsville, *St. Paul*
 Granite City, *St. John*
 Granite City, *St. Peter Evangelical*

Merry Christmas to Region 4

Brighton, *St. John*
 Carlinville, *St. Paul*
 Fieldon, *Fieldon*
 Godfrey, *Congregational*
 Godfrey, *Evangelical*
 Jerseyville, *Peace*
 Moro, *St. John's Church of Midway*
 Wood River, *St. John*

Merry Christmas to Region 5

Alhambra, *Salem*
 Breese, *St. John's*
 Grantfork, *Grantfork*
 Hamel, *Immanuel*
 Highland, *Evangelical*
 Jamestown, *St. Paul*
 Marine, *Marine*
 St. Jacob, *St. Jacob*
 Staunton, *St. Paul*
 Summerfield, *St. John*
 Troy, *Friedens*

Merry Christmas to Region 6

Carlyle, *Immanuel*
 Central City, *Zion*
 Centralia, *St. Peter*
 Farina, *Friedens*
 Hookdale, *St. Peter*
 Ohlman, *St. Paul's*
 Pana, *United in Faith Church*
 Tower Hill, *St. Paul*

Merry Christmas to Region 7

Addieville, *Zion*
 DuBois, *St. Mark's*
 Hoyleton, *Zion Evangelical*
 Irvington, *Friedens*
 Johannisburg, *St. John's*
 Nashville, *St. Paul*
 Okawville, *St. Paul*
 Okawville, *St. Peter's*
 Plum Hill, *St. John's*
 Stone Church, *St. Peter's*

Merry Christmas to Region 8

Biddleborn, *Trinity*
 Darmstadt, *Holy Ghost*
 Freeburg, *St. Paul's*
 Lebanon, *St. Paul*
 Lenzburg, *St. Peter's*
 Marissa, *Friedens*
 Mascoutah, *St. John*
 New Athens, *St. John*
 New Baden, *Zion*
 Trenton, *St. John*

Merry Christmas to Region 9

Belleville, *Christ*
 Belleville, *Concordia*
 Belleville, *St. Paul*
 Belleville, *Trinity*
 E. St. Louis, *Good Shepherd of Faith*
 Fairview Heights, *St. John*
 O'Fallon, *O'Fallon*
 Smithton, *St. John's*

Region 9

The St. Louis Symphony Brass Quintet returns to O'Fallon UCC in O'Fallon on Sun, Dec 23 at 9:45 am throughout the worship service. Come and enjoy as they share their amazing talents.