T’was just weeks before Christmas, when all through the town, not a person was stirring, morale was quite down.

The stockings were hung by the chimney with care, but with shopping a challenge, we feared they’d stay bare.

Children are adjusting to new daily grinds, with so much technology occupying their minds.

While sitting, relaxing in flannel and fleece, we ponder the question, When will this all cease?

When suddenly outside we heard a strange noise, we’ve missed having visitors, one of our joys.

Away to the window we opened the blind, but weren’t quite sure just who we might find.

The moon put its glow on the leaves on the ground, which made us amazed by what we just found.

Squinting our eyes with all of our forces, what we began to see was DuBois Center’s horses.

With Sharon, Bre, Scott, Sandy, and Larry, showing that horses are friendly and not at all scary.

With saddles & bridles, and walking so tame, they whistled, and shouted, and called them by name;

“Now Thunder, now, Zephyr, now Cocoa and Apache! On, Clover, on Phoenix, on Sunny, and Classy!

Around the arena, and past all the bales, they trotted and trotted through all of the trails. But that wasn’t all we spied with our eyes, there were other camp things adding to our surprise!

There are counselors leading campers on fun nature walks, and chaplains on hand for devotions and talks.

The lifeguards are ready to make swimming safe, and plenty of opportunities to grow in one’s faith.

Kids making new friends, while enjoying the sun, and yummy s’mores ‘round a campfire when the day is done.

There’s archery with bows and targets to hit and exercise a plenty in the lively gaga pit.
No Chromebook, or cell phone for children to pack, but they sure enjoy GORP, a famous camp snack.

New songs, a cute skit, or learning meal graces, puts plenty of smiles on all the kid’s faces.

So, no need to worry, and no need to fret, no shopping mall necessary, the perfect gift we can get.

What does all this mean - perhaps a sign from above? We can give a camp experience to those that we love!

So that's what was meant by this evening’s surprise sight, So, Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good night!

© Nancy Wagner

Looking for a unique gift for someone special in your life?
Not sure you want to shop in a crowded mall or store this year?
Consider giving a gift certificate for a future DuBois Center experience.

About 13 years ago, Don and I began the tradition of giving an annual DuBois Center camp experience to each of our grandchildren. We love the opportunity to give them the chance to unplug, connect with nature, make new friends, learn new skills, and grow in their faith. The excitement in their eyes as they make their personal camp choice, their anticipation of going to camp, and hearing their enthusiasm about their camp experience is priceless!

Pastor Don & Nancy Wagner

Prayer list for
Dec 6 - 13, 2020
Churches & Pastors
- New Baden St. John UCC, Rev. Stephen (Molly) Stark
- New Hanover Zoar UCC, Rev. R. J. (Lisa) Morgan
Retired Pastors
- Rev. Dr. Sheldon Culver, Columbia, IL

People with Life Concerns
- Send prayers for Rev. Allen (Cheryl) Ladage as he is hospitalized for health issues. Rev. Ladage has been the facilitator for ISC Boundary Awareness Training for retired clergy. Cards may be sent to 10811 Atterbury Dr., St. Louis, MO 63123.
- Pray for Rev. Nancy (Kevin Lee) Spier-Lee as she deals with some health issues and rehabilitation. Rev. Spier-Lee was the Pastor for Zion UCC St. Joe in Waterloo and served on several ISC teams. Cards may be sent to her at 309 Kroeger Ave, Dupo, IL 62239.
- Pray for peace during the post-election.
- Keep all pastors in your prayers as they continue to provide spiritual support and
DuBois Center Gift Certificates are available in any amount. Adding an item from the camp store, such as a hat, plush toy, or water bottle, along with your special personal message, would make an attractive package which can be available for pick up or mailed to the address of your choice. For more information and details, please call: (618) 787-2202 or visit our website at www.duboiscenter.org. The Outdoor Ministry Team is busy putting plans in place to offer safe in-person camping experiences in 2021. Hope to see YOU there!

- Pray for the people of the United States as we work towards equality and civility for us all.
- Pray for the healthcare workers and first responders who have put their lives on the line to protect us.
- Special prayers for the families who are dealing with loved ones who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 and are not able to visit them in person for support. Give strength to the sick and to those who are struggling with separation.

Illinois South Conference COVID-19 Response UPDATE #18, Nov 30, 2020

Advent 2020 - Ideas and Resources for Online Experiences

All of Illinois is now under Tier 3 mitigation measures, which necessitates us to once again move and adapt our Advent and Christmas worship experiences to an online format, just as we did at Easter. Below are meetings, resources and links to help your congregation plan for this Holy time of year.

Advent and Christmas Pandemic Planning ZOOM session
Rev. Shana Johnson will be hosting a special ZOOM session this Wednesday, December 2 at 3 pm so all ISC pastors, musicians, worship committees, and all other interested members of churches can share resources and ideas of what they are doing this year for Advent and Christmas worship services and activities.
Time: Dec 2, 2020 03:00 PM Central Time (US and Canada)
Join Zoom Meeting
https://us02web.zoom.us/j/7088890946
One tap mobile +13126266799,,7088890946# US (Chicago)

Worship Resource from Emmaus Homes
Emmaus Homes in St. Louis helps people with developmental disabilities live like you and me, as a ministry of the UCC. They invite you to use the digital resource kit in total or as individual elements of your own worship. Gifts may be sent to: Emmaus Homes. Attn: Development, 3731 Mueller Rd., Saint Charles, MO 63301. Contact Ashley Panhorst at email or 636-699-9641 so that we can add you to the list of churches finding the worship material.

Advent Devotional
Rev. Dr. Don Wagner is generously sharing his Advent Devotional with all of you. Rev. Wagner created the devotions and Fr. Gerald Schweitzer shared his photographs. If you
feel called to give a gift in order to thank them for these talents, all gifts received in the
distribution of this Advent Devotional will be divided equally and distributed to:

**DuBois Retreat Center**, the camping and retreat center of the Illinois South
Conference of the United Church of Christ. These funds will be used to assist
with scholarships for children and families in need at DuBois Center, and

**Sojourner Truth House**, in Gary, Indiana, which provides much needed
assistance to women and children who find themselves homeless or in
need of specialized care and assistance.

Here is your free copy of the devotional. If you need a printed copy, contact Becky Harris
at St. Paul UCC in Lebanon by email. She will make sure you get a copy.

**A Very UCC Christmas: 2020**
Brought to you by the United Church of Christ National Setting
The staff of the national setting is working on a Christmas
Pageant and full worship service for Local Churches to use as
worship on or around December 27, or use portions of it in
your own services.

Each piece will be downloadable as a video file from the national setting, with more details
released before November 20.

In the meantime, as congregations are planning for Advent and Christmas, please know
that the following components are coming for your use in worship through Advent and
beyond:

10 **Digital Hymns as Music Videos** Download here:
- O Come, O Come Emmanuel (with John 1: 1-5)
- In the Bleak Midwinter (with Luke 2: 1-5)
- Star of Country Down (with Luke 1: 46-56)
- Away In a Manger / Santo Santo Santo
- O Come All Ye Faithful
- Each Winter as the Year Grows Older - v 1 & 3
- Jesus, Jesus, What a Wonderful Child
- Angels We Have Heard on High
- O Little Town of Bethlehem
- Silent Night
- Go Tell it on the Mountain

**A “Lessons and Carols” Pageant service** (including some of the above.)
A fully produced UCC Movie: “A Very UCC Christmas: 2020” with four scenes and music
tracks as above.

- Scene 1: The Board Room Brainstorming
- Scene 2: Finance Committee Transformations
- Scene 3: Faith Formation Finds Volunteers
- Scene 4: Lessons and Carols

The lessons and carols will be streamed for all on Christmas Eve on Facebook and
YouTube as part of the weekly “Thursdays for the Soul” series at 2:30 pm CT. The full
movie, “A Very UCC Christmas: 2020,” will be streamed on two UCC platforms (YouTube
and Facebook) on Sun, Dec 27, at 9 am CT.
Resources from the United Church of Canada
The United Church of Canada, our full communion partner, has done *Advent Unwrapped*, with many ideas to inspire your Advent, including worship, music and prayers.

Creative ways to share Advent this year
WorshipTimes.org offers *20 ways to celebrate Advent this year*, from community service to safe social activities.

A Shared Epiphany Service
The staff of the Illinois South, Heartland, and Indiana Kentucky Conferences with the help of our resident ISC video producer, Nick Luer, are in the process of creating an Epiphany Worship video for our churches and pastor to use on Sunday, January 3. The final video and bulletin will be available mid-December. Stay tuned for the release information to be announced in Weekly Connection, on the Conference Facebook page and in emails to the pastor and church leadership of your church.

For Those Looking to Bring Art to Advent
Visit *Sanctified Art* for some really creative ideas on visual arts, banners, graphic design, childrens ministry and more.

Are You Thinking About Drive-In Worship?
Many congregations are thinking about hosting a drive-in worship service in their parking lots, particularly for Christmas Eve. A short-range broadcast through car radios means every family stays together in their own vehicle, and everyone can hear and attend safely. Fortunately, you don't have to reinvent the wheel to figure this out. Here's a rating guide to the *Top 10 FM Transmitters*, as a starting point for your research. The guide links to specific units on Amazon for purchases, and transmitters are in the $100-$200 range. If you'd like to talk to someone in person to discuss your options, try *MicroCenter* in Brentwood, MO.
Together in Christ's ministry with you – The ISC Conference Council

The Amazing People of Illinois South Conference...
Uni-Pres Kindercottage recently applauded some gifts coming from churches in Illinois South Conference. “We (Kindercottage) do so appreciate the gifts that you bring to us. Judy Koch, chair of the Outreach Team for St. Paul UCC in Belleville (above left) stopped recently with sanitizing products and a check. Donna Davis from St. Paul UCC, Belleville (above right photo l to r: Donna, student, Brenda Crisp), made and donated computer tables for our students! Rev. Phil Kershner from Marine UCC brought many paper goods (lower right photo). THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU!”
The generosity of Illinois South Conference is amazing. The Conference office recently received two bequests from the Laverne Doelling estate. Illinois South Conference received a check for $85,632.36 for the Conference and another $85,632.36 check for DuBois Center. Ironically, the PPP loan we applied for during this pandemic was a little over $85,000, so receiving this estate is like receiving two more Payroll Protection Program loans. This kind of forward thinking keeps God’s work moving even after a person has left this earth. The Finance Ministry Team has worked hard to create a booklet to guide you through the process of estate planning. You can use this resource to help you in planning your future financial plan. It is always available on our website under Resources/Church Business or click here.

DuBois Center 2020 Fall Festival Challenge. Being a major fundraiser for DuBois Center, we knew that the necessary cancellation of the annual Fall Festival due to COVID 19 safety concerns would produce a financial hardship. The negative impact was reduced thanks to the extravagant gifts of those of you who responded. A portion of the proceeds from this challenge has been used to purchase much needed helmets and saddle blankets for the vital ministry of our equestrian program.

Nancy Wagner, Outdoor Ministry Team Chairperson

Matthew 6:21: For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

The United Church of Christ Mental Health Network (UCC MHN) Board began their annual meeting by celebrating the many gifts that outgoing members, Rev. Dr. Rachel Keefe, who served as their vice-chair, and Rev. Hannah Campbell Gustafson, who served as treasurer, have shared with the group. At the same time, they welcomed their two newest board members:

Averyn Payne, PhD., began their first year in Andover Newton Seminary at Yale Divinity School in fall 2020, the same time they joined the Board. Averyn is curious about the ways faith communities can be places of transformation and radical welcoming to those with mental health challenges.

Kyle Ingram, MSW, brings more than 7 years of experience working in public policy at the intersection of disability, social justice, and economic inequality. He also served on the WISE team for the Indiana-Kentucky Conference of the United Church of Christ. Kyle lives in central Indiana with his wife.

At the recent Board of Directors meeting, they set forth the following goals for the coming year:

- Creation of a quarterly newsletter
- Development of videos, discussion guides, and other digital materials, covering the connection between racism, discrimination against LGBTQIA+ individuals, and
mental health injustice. This initiative is funded through a generous 2020 UCC Genesis Grant.

- Becoming an Open and Affirming ministry.

As they embark on the forthcoming year, the MHN Board asks you to hold them in prayer as they work with faith communities worldwide to create A Just World for All. To join them in becoming WISE with regards to mental health, substance use disorders, and other brain disorders, please reach out to them at wise@mhn-ucc.org.

Dec 4 – LIFE (Lifelong Learning) session – Cultural Competency with Felicia Pulliam, JD

Together, we will explore our national and local history, current socio-cultural dynamics to understand how to navigate complex issues, build cultural capacity and support individuals and the congregations they lead to work together to improve life outcomes for members and the broader community. Click [here](#) for more information and registration.

A Message from Hoyleton Youth & Family Services

It’s that time of year! Hope you are doing well.

At Hoyleton, we make it our goal that every child in our care has a gift to open at Christmas. In order to comply with COVID 19 restrictions, we have put together an Amazon Wish List to help gather some of the gifts. Click [here](#) to see the list and fulfill a wish. Have the item shipped to us and we will wrap and deliver your gift.

Please include your name and email/address so we can acknowledge your gift. If you have any questions, please reach out to the Development Team at Hoyleton Youth and Family Services through email or calling Meghan at 618-688-7092. Click [here](#) for a flyer to share with your congregations.

Safety During the Holidays

People with Alzheimer’s disease may not see, smell, hear, and/or remember things as they used to. You can identify and remove potential home hazards to make life safer and easier for them. Consider the following tips to help prevent accidents during the holiday season:

- Secure holiday decorations, such as Christmas trees, lights, or menorahs, so that they do not fall or catch on fire.
- Monitor anything flammable or lit, like candles, and put them away when not in use.
- Make sure lights, cords, and breakable items are fixed firmly, correctly, and out of the way.
- Try to avoid clutter, especially in walkways.

You can also find more holiday hints for dementia and Alzheimer’s caregivers on St. John’s Community Care website. Click [here](#).

St. John’s Community Care's Savvy Caregiver Classes in January.

Taking care of a person living with Alzheimer’s or related dementia at home is specialized work. To do this work successfully, caregivers need special skills, knowledge, and a positive attitude that helps them to care for themselves.

St. John’s Community Care offers Savvy Caregiver training sessions several times a year to aid family caregivers in this role. The Savvy Caregiver Program is a free, six-session training for family and friends who are actively caring for those living with Alzheimer’s or related dementias. St. John’s trainers use curriculum developed by the University of Minnesota for interactive classes.
Each session participants in the class learn relevant techniques and coping skills to manage daily living situations. It teaches the basic knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to handle the challenges of caring for someone with dementia. With this new knowledge and understanding, family caregivers are able to reduce stress and increase their sense of competence in dementia caregiving. Savvy Caregiver will help you:

- Understand the impact of dementia on both you and the person in your care.
- Learn the skills you need to manage daily life
- Take control and set goals
- Communicate more effectively
- Strengthen family resources
- Feel better about your caregiving
- Take care of you!

Each session is comprised of six two-hour classes. The next series will begin in January 2021 at St. John’s Community Care in Collinsville. To register call 618-344-5008 or email Stacey at srhodes@stjohnscc.org

What’s Happening in Illinois South Conference

Choose Illinois South Conference as your charity with Amazon Smile and Amazon Smile will donate a portion of your purchase to ISC. Enjoy your holiday shopping while donating to ISC. Thanks for your generosity.

CONTACT US - YOUR OCWM MONIES AT WORK

During the shelter in place order, all Conference staff will be working remotely, but they are available to help you. Keep these contacts handy.

For the work of Conference teams and committees or search and call inquiries, contact Christy Pursell at cpursell@iscucc.org.

For financial matters (in terms of your church's giving to the Conference or OCWM), contact Debbie Kesner at dkesner@iscucc.org.

For communicating within the Conference, the Conference website, Facebook page or Weekly Connection, contact Lynnette Schuepbach at lschuepbach@iscucc.org.

For DuBois Center information, registration for upcoming events or for information about cancelled camp sessions, contact Julie Riechmann at 618-357-1809 or jriechmann@iscucc.org.

To speak with the Conference Minister, contact Rev. Shana Johnson 618-882-8247 or sjohnson@iscucc.org.

Inclusivity Statement for DuBois Center and Illinois South Conference of the UCC

Because we affirm the value of all God’s people, the Illinois South Conference of the United Church of Christ does not discriminate on the basis of age, race, ability, national origin, religious background, sexual orientation, or gender identity. To the extent possible, we endeavor to accommodate those with a variety of physical, mental, emotional, medical, or dietary needs.

Important Links

Illinois South Conference  Back Bay Mission  CHHS  Deaconess Foundation  Deaconess Nurse Ministry

DuBois Center  Ecuador Partnership  Eden Theological Seminary  Emmaus Homes

Hitz Memorial Home  Hoyleton Youth & Family  LIFE Program  Unleashing Potential  New Athens Home

Pension Board-UCC  St. John's Community Care  St. Paul's Sr. Community

UCC Insurance Board  Uplands Village  UCC Campus Ministry  Uni-Pres Kindercottage