

*The Sweet Spirit*  
*Olive Branch United Methodist Church*  
*December 2016*



**From The Pastor's Pen**



Greetings and Peace in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

As we prepare our hearts and minds for the birth of Jesus, may we be ever mindful of the reason for our preparations, anticipation, and joy. May we be filled with the hope, joy, love and peace that Jesus gives us as we ponder those gifts He has given us.

We have been given the greatest gift ever given in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Christ. As we contemplate what gifts we can give to our loved ones and friends, consider this gift per Robert Stand:

*The Perfect Gift That Fits Everybody*

*Are you looking for the exactly just right gift to give this Christmas Season? Here's one that is easy to find, inexpensive, non-fattening, and fits all sizes: HUGGING! Yes, you are reading this right, hugging!*

*Hugging has been found to be healthy because it helps the body's immune system, it cures depression, it reduces stress, it induces sleep, it's invigoration, it's rejuvenating, it has no unpleasant side effects, anyone can apply it, it is unbreakable, and it works like a miracle drug!*

*Not only that, HUGGING is all natural....it is organic, naturally sweet, no preservatives, no pesticides, no artificial ingredients, and 100 percent wholesome! HUGGING is practically perfect....no movable parts, no batteries to wear out, no periodic check-ups, low energy yield, no assembly required, and always....fully returnable! Try it! You might be really surprised!*

A hug can go so far, even when words are not said. Consider hugging someone this Christmas season that normally would not receive a hug, and of course, continue hugging those you normally hug. As you know, and in case you don't.....Nancy and I love hugs!

Nancy and I wish you and yours a CHRIST-filled Christmas and thank you for the wonderful gift we have received by being appointed as your clergy family.  
Merry Christmas!

## From the District Superintendent:



Greetings,

We are in the Season of Advent, preparing to celebrate the birth of Jesus and expecting Jesus' return. It is hard to believe in 25 days the Christian church will gather on a Sunday morning to celebrate and worship Jesus.

Yes, we do live in a divisive time, folks are divided over many things, but we can join in one accord knowing "There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God and Father of all who is over all, through all, and in all." Ephesians 4:4-6 (CEB) Let the

voice of God be heard as the church sings.

Hark! The herald-angels sing,  
"Glory to the newborn king;  
peace on earth and mercy mild,  
God and sinners reconciled!"  
Joyful, all ye nations rise,  
join the triumph of the skies;  
with th'angelic host proclaim,  
"Christ is born in Bethlehem!"

So my sisters and brothers who may be fearful, disheartened, or dismayed be of good courage "for a child has been born for us, a son given to us, authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." Isaiah 9:6

Blessings, Bob Parks, Farmville District Superintendent

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## Just a Thought

Christmas: Not a time for inventing new twists on the age-old story by Rev Joe McKeever

*"Unto you is born this day in the City of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11).*

Just tell the story.

Tell the story with faithfulness and respect. Tell it accurately and fully, bringing in the accounts of Matthew and Luke, drawing from the prophecies of old.

Tell the story with imagination and appreciation.

Try to imagine how Mary must have felt. Evidently, she was living a normal life of a young Jewish maiden when the angel of the Lord interrupted her with life-changing plans. Talk about show-stoppers! “How can these things be” indeed! What will people think? What will Mama say? How will I ever be able to pull this off? What is the Lord up to? And why me, of all people?

Try to imagine how Joseph must have felt. The young lady who has won his heart and for whom he has been making plans informs him that she is pregnant. And has the chutzpah to claim it’s the Lord’s doing and that she is still pure. Oh yeah. Put her away? That’s the only way. A godly person has to avoid even the appearance of evil. And then one restless night, an angel appeared with information that changed everything.

Try to imagine how the families of Mary and Joseph must have felt. Talk about mixed emotions! Maybe their traveling to Bethlehem is a good idea. Get the girl away from home so the neighbors won’t know that this baby was born too early, so to speak. Perhaps Mary and Joseph will go on living in Bethlehem after its birth so people around here will forget the scandal and conveniently lose track of the years.

Imagine how Gabriel must have felt. He was making the greatest announcement ever—the one awaited since the Garden of Eden fiasco—and the only audience is a small group of wide-eyed shepherds. Will these unsophisticated types appreciate what’s being said, understand what this means, drop everything and go? Or will they be as dull as the religious leaders in Jerusalem?

Imagine how the angelic choir must have felt. They practiced that little song for eons and traveled zillions of miles and then, when the curtains were opened, they found their whole audience was a few shepherds who didn’t know one note from another. The Heavenly Father sure doesn’t do things the way we would, does He? But then, angels know that. Angels live with Him in glory. They know things we do not.

Imagine how the shepherds must have felt. A night like all the other nights they’d worked out there in the pitch blackness, only to have the landscape light up like noonday when an angel appeared and stood about twenty feet out there in midair. Did they wonder, “Why us? Why this announcement to a few lowly shepherds with no theological degrees or religious vocations? We’ve had no preparation for this and we’re not sure anyone will believe our report. Couldn’t the Lord have found better recipients for this announcement, a better welcoming committee for His Son, more reliable witnesses for this story?”

Imagine how the citizens of Jerusalem must have felt when a few foreign visitors show up asking, “Where is He who has been born king of the Jews?” That sure set the town to gossiping for a few days. Finally, the visitors with the funny accents worked their way up to the castle where they were invited in for an audience with murderous King Herod himself.

Imagine how the religious leaders in Jerusalem must have felt. Herod asked them about the birth of one called “King of the Jews.” They told him what the Prophet Micah had said—this One “whose goings forth have been from the days of eternity” was to be born in Bethlehem—and that seemed to satisfy him (Micah 5:2). But did any of them ever think of actually walking the five miles

to Bethlehem to see for themselves? Were they too busy with their religious careers, self-advancement issues, vocational interests, to do anything so simple and blessed such as dropping everything to worship the newborn King?

Something you may have wondered....

You have perhaps wondered what you would have done had you been alive when Jesus was born, in the crowd when He ministered, in the throngs when He walked the dusty trails of Galilee. How would you have responded when He preached to the crowds on the seashore, when He was nailed to the cross, when you heard that He was risen from the dead?

We have all wondered, “What would I have done?”

—*Would you have come to Him?* Would you have worshiped and followed, listened to His every word and given your heart to Him?

—*Would you have opposed Him* as some did? Banded together with other opponents and worked up schemes to trap Him, made plans to arrest Him, schemed to still His voice and stop His work lest He stir up Rome and cause more trouble?

—*Or would you have gone on your way*, too busy to be bothered by another religious charlatan with yet another scheme for ending Rome’s oppression?

We know the answer.

“O Come Let Us Adore Him. Christ the Lord.”

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#### Message from the Council Chair – Jane DiStefano

The Church Administrative Council meets every other month on the second Monday at 7:00 PM. Anyone interested in the business of the church is invited to attend. It is always an open meeting, although voting is limited to committee members.

This month the Council will meet on December 12th at 7:00 PM. Remember that this is everyone’s church and what is important to you, is important to us.

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#### United Methodist Men

The Men of the Church sponsored a cleanup of Ankum Road in October. Ten members of our church took time from their busy schedules to walk two miles and pick up trash. Though it sounds like work we did have fun. We ended up filling 16 bags of trash that was pick up by VDOT the following week. Our stew was a great success we were able to make about 290 quarts of Brunswick Stew and we sold all it! Thank you to all who helped and bought some stew. The Annual Thank You Dinner sponsored by the UMM is being planned. Watch future editions of the newsletter and

the bulletin for a date, time and place. The new sign has been installed in front of the church. Let's thank the UMM for their efforts to have this done. New officers have been elected to lead the Men in the coming year. Monty Evans will take over the reins of the presidency, Ray Dyer will remain as our treasurer.

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## United Methodist Women

12 new books were added to the UMW library. We encourage you to borrow a book. There is also one CD entitled Called to the Fire. Book titles are: Boundless', 'Snake oil', 'Love casts out fear', 'Falling into Place', 'Slowing time', 'Launch your encore', 'Sally Ride', 'Broken and Blessed', 'Pre-Post racial America', 'Fully awake and truly alive' and 'Wild in the Hallow'.

As you might notice from the titles these are not just books that women would be interested in. Please share this valuable asset by visiting the library located in the area between the sanctuary and the social room. There is no check-out process, just borrow, read, enjoy and return.

UMW is selling flavoring for holiday baking at \$2.50- available flavors are vanilla, butter, coconut, almond and lemon. You can buy these in the social room.

Book review- If I Live to be 100.

I chose this book as I find I am meeting more people who have reached this milestone. This book from the UMW library was written by Neenah Ellis a reporter with National Public Radio. She interviewed 16 people who had very different stories of their 100 years. She met a couple who courted by horse and sleigh in Vermont during 1918. She visited with a person whose great- great-grandfather was a colonel in Washington's Army. We learned to see the virtue of looking forward, as the centenarians did. This very moment that we're in right now- is precious and fine. The true richness of life is to be found in each other. The life we share with each other and the ways we become connected. Their stories add up to a course in living well, with lessons and inspiration for all of us.

I enjoyed reading this and recommend it.

Nancy Maguire

## Outreach

Christmas is here and we will again be providing dinner for our friends of Olive Branch who are in need. The menu is:

Ham

Rolls

Green bean casserole (cream of mushroom soup, green beans, fried onions)

Sweet potatoes

Black eyed peas

Christmas cookies (homemade - We need 12 dozen)

If it is in your heart to help please provide the items listed for a Christmas Dinner for our families. Please keep our families in your prayers and remember that we have been asked to support the least of us. Again this year we will have an Angel Tree with the needs of those we care for. Let's open our hearts to help them by taking an angel and filling out the wish on the angel for those less fortunate than we are.

Please don't forget our Church pantry! Our brothers and sisters in the greater community are suffering and need help. We are blessed that Food Lion is willing to provide us with meats, vegetables, fruits, and baked goods but, it is up to us to fill out the dietary needs of the families we serve. We currently service 12 families with food donations. Help keep our pantry stocked with your donations. I know you will open your hearts. Also, one of our biggest needs is meat. So if you are able, pick up an extra package of meat to help out one of our families. A big "thank you!"

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### HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Celebrating birthdays this month:

4 - Jack Smith, 6 - Sidney Fross, 9 - Linda Carty, 15 - Morgan Fross,  
18 - Steve Johnson, 19 - Thelma Smart

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### Anniversaries

10 - Ed & Jane DiStefano 23 - Jack and Suzette Smith

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### Choir Makes a Joyful Noise

And our choir does just that. On December 18<sup>th</sup>, during the worship service, the choir will present a time of singing our joy at the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. It should be an exciting time for us and the church! Let us all come together to praise the Lord in song at our worship services.

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(See Luke 2:1-16)

12-19-2014

IT HAD A STAR ON TOP SO I FIGURED IT  
SHOULD HAVE A MANGER AT THE BOTTOM

#### Upcoming Events:

Sun December 11<sup>th</sup> -- Second Sunday Luncheon - After Services

Mon December 12<sup>th</sup> -- 6:00 pm - Outreach Committee

7:00 pm -- Council Meeting

Sun December 18 -- Special Christmas Music by the Joyful Noise Choir

Sat December 24<sup>th</sup> -- Christmas Eve Service 7:00PM

Sunday December 25<sup>th</sup> -- Church Services at 11:15 AM

This is your newsletter. It is meant to be a way to communicate what your church is doing and what all the organizations are doing both in the congregation and the community. I am sending this electronically via email and copies will be made available for those who need a printed copy.

There are many organizations within our church and I hope they would like to have their achievements, plans, and meetings made known to the entire church. It is my hope that they will ask one of their members to drop a short note as to what they doing each month. The line of communication in the church needs to be open and full of what we are doing at Olive Branch to make disciples in our area. If you would like to send us something, please bring it to church or send me an email ([revedumc@yahoo.com](mailto:revedumc@yahoo.com)) and we will see that it gets published. We need all information by the 24<sup>th</sup> of each month for the following month. Please, let's keep our church informed on what we are doing. See you at church and all our activities!

God bless. **Merry Christmas** to all! Ed DiStefano