Choir to present Cantata on December 13

The choir will share “Memories of a Merry Christmas” on Sunday, December 13 during the morning worship. Created and arranged by Marty Parks, this cantata blends timeless carols with contemporary standards, and “memories” spread throughout. You won’t want to miss this special presentation as Janis Hawkins directs.

Plan now to attend with your whole family—you may even get a chance to share your own memory of a Merry Christmas!

“Whatsoever the surprises of the future, Jesus will never be surpassed.”

—Ernest Renan

Children’s Christmas program and practices planned

December 20, at 6 PM the youth of First Baptist Church will present “The Party”. The play will be presented in the church sanctuary. After the performance, we will gather in Pitman Hall for a time of fellowship and hopefully, a visit from dear old Santa himself!

Each child will have a part to recite, so it is important that those who will be in the play, attend a special practice on Saturday, December 19. We’ll begin at 1 PM and will end at 3 PM. The children will also be rehearsing on Wednesday evenings in December, so please have your child attend Kid’s Club. Parents—don’t forget that Wednesday, December 9 begins at 6 PM and ends at 7 PM because of the church business meeting. Mark your calendars this is a don’t miss event!

Community Hymn Sing

Sunday, December 6 at 6 PM the North Mac Ministerial Association will sponsor their annual Christmas Hymn Sing at the First Christian Church in Virden. Father Daren Zehnle and the parishioners of Sacred Heart Catholic Church are the events hosts. Our choir will be singing a number along with the choirs from many area churches. This is always a great way to jump start the holiday season. Please join us!

Koinonia Class Christmas Party

The Kononia adult Sunday School class invites all adults to a holiday night out. The fun begins at 7 PM at the home of Ray and Libby Klocke, on Friday, December 18. Ray and Libby’s home is at 310 S. Blair St. in Virden.

Bring a light snack or dessert to share. We’ll have games and short time of devotion. It will be a fun evening for all! Plan now to attend.
**Youth wrapping gifts as fund raiser**

The older youth group will be wrapping gifts at Barnes and Noble bookstore in Springfield on 2 different evenings, December 7 and December 23 during the holiday season, from 5-9:30 PM. Your gift must be purchased from the store to qualify for the wrapping. Any donations from customers will be given to the youth group. So, if you plan a purchase from Barnes and Noble, be sure to make it on one of those two nights and help out the youth. This is the first year for the kids to participate in the event, and proceeds will be used to help pay for their attendance at January’s Area II SKWIM event at Greenlake, Wisconsin.
GREETINGS TO YOU AT CHRISTMAS
from Gerald & Della

As your interim pastor it is both a privilege and a challenge to find a way to wish all of you a most blessed and joyous Christmas season. This means may seem too impersonal, but please know that it carries our warmest possible feelings and wishes. We take note of all the wonderful ways you have welcomed us into your church and your lives during these past few months. Thank you so very much for your acceptance of us both and your many efforts to make us feel at home and loved.

Many different emotions and attitudes wash over us during this time. These include the joy of giving and the delights of receiving; the wonder of God’s gift and the hope of life here and hereafter; the strength that comes from loving and being loved; the excitement that comes from family and friends being together at a special time of celebration. But, we realize that some will also find these times difficult because each of us remembers those who are gone and feel the pain of those who are still here but not “here” for us. Out of all these many and mixed feelings may we find a new sense of peace and hope. After all, Christ is the “prince of peace” and “our hope.” If we can experience more fully the “Grace, mercy and peace” offered us in Christ, we will know a new level of joy that will flood our lives and enhance our celebrations.

Our work with you these past few months has been satisfying and rewarding, but also a real reminder of the challenge that is ahead for First Baptist Church, Virden. Though the attendance has been improving slightly it is still a concern how to reach some who have dropped out and how to reach out to others seeking/need a church home. As the nominating committee does its work, they face the painful reality that there are not enough people who are both available and willing to fill some of the important positions for the new year. If you have not been praying about these matters, please do. If you have, please continue.

Hope may still be our most effective word to describe this wonderful, exciting time of the year. While our hope does not deny reality, it looks beyond it and sees what others cannot see and expects what others cannot possibly imagine. Because of hope we can know that God is not done with us (all of us). We do not know exactly how God is going to inject a new vision and a new sense of purpose into our church and ignite our passion for outreach, but we have hope that He will. And, that in His time He will bring a new permanent pastor on board.

In the meantime, may you and yours have a most wonderful and blessed Christmas and be able to be with those you love.

In the Name of the humble baby Jesus,

Pastor Gerald and Della
UNDERSTANDING HOSPICE AND RESOLVING GRIEF

An eight-week series of small group sessions

Chances are good that you (or someone you know) have dealt with some serious loss in your life, and the grief that accompanies that loss. You may have known of someone who had a terminal illness and needed more care than their loved one(s) could give. It is with these kinds of situations in mind that we have planned an 8 week series of small group sessions on Understanding Hospice and Resolving Grief. The 1 ½ hour sessions will begin at 6:30 p.m. on Thursday, January 7 and will meet in Pitman Hall. The first four sessions will be led by Jan Hawkins, who is herself a hospice nurse and is very capable of helping people understand and navigate the often misunderstood area of hospice care. The second four sessions will be led by Pastor Phillips who has served as a hospital and hospice chaplain and has experience in leading grief groups.

There are dozens of very important questions revolving around the subject of hospice care. These sessions will be designed to bring helpful answers and professional guidance to this very important area of medical care. Discussion will be encouraged.

A Hospice doctor will be one of the presenters. The sharing of experiences will be welcomed.

The two subjects will overlap at times, but dealing with grief from losing a loved one is a very real need that all of us have experienced (or will) and few of us are prepared for. The pastor will lead these discussions and give opportunity for people to tell their own story. As you may know loss is not confined to the death of loved ones; it is a reality in all of the significant losses of our lives. Not all questions about grief can be answered, but an effort will be made to bring all the help possible to each one.

We want to invite any and all of our church family to participate, but we also want to invite and encourage others from the community and other churches to attend. There is a nearly universal need for help with these two vital areas of life. For more information about these sessions, you may call Jan, 965-3971 or pastor Phillips, 494-9266.

Christian symbols: The Evergreen Tree

These trees, which keep their green leave year-round, are symbolic of Christmas, eternal life and God’s everlasting love. In the Bible evergreen trees are called the “cedars of Lebanon,” suggesting growth (Psalm 92:12), height (Amos 2:9), fragrance (Hosea 14:6) and steadfast faith.

“The mystery of the humanity of Christ, that he sunk himself into our flesh, is beyond all human understanding.”

–Martin Luther

Making plans for the Virden Christmas Parade

If anyone would like to help with a float for the December 11th Christmas Parade, please let Debbie Kershaw know.

We are still hopeful that we might have an entry to represent our church again this year. The theme is “Christmas Songs”.

“The mystery of the humanity of Christ, that he sunk himself into our flesh, is beyond all human understanding.”

–Martin Luther
SIGN UP LOOMING FOR SKWIM 2010

When: January 15 - 18, 2010

Where: Greenlake Conference Center
Greenlake, WI

What is SKWIM?
SKWIM is a ski/swim retreat that hopes to create a shared experience for students and adults. Middle school, high school, and college students are welcome.

Cost:
Conference Cost - $130.00
(includes room, food, and programming)
Additional cost for skiing and swimming

Speaker and Worship:
The Spark will be leading worship.
Brandon Grant will be leading the sessions. His is the young adult pastor at Eastview Christian Church, Normal, IL
For more information, forms, and resources go to www.skvim.org

“O Little Town of Bethlehem”

In 1865, a young American preacher named Phillips Brooks spent time in and around the fields of Bethlehem. On Christmas Eve, he attended worship in the Church of the Nativity, located on the site where tradition says Jesus was born.

Brooks was so spiritually touched by the experience that he later wrote a hymn for children to sing on Christmas Eve in his Philadelphia church. Lewis Redner, the church organist and Sunday school superintendent, composed the music for the beloved hymn, “O Little Town of Bethlehem.” Today it appears in most denominational hymnals. Brooks, a giant of a man physically (6’6” tall), was known throughout America as an eloquent and dominant force in the pulpit.

There is a large statue of the gifted man of God in front of Boston’s famous Trinity Church, where Brooks last served. His death in 1893 was a major event in Boston. Upon learning of his passing, a 5-year-old girl exclaimed, “Oh Mama, how happy the angels will be.”

THE RETIRED MINISTERS AND MISSIONARIES THANK YOU OFFERING (RMMO)

About this time each year many American Baptists remember their retired ministers and missionaries with a special Thank You offering. For short it is called RMMO and has a special place in the life of ABC and many of its retired ministers. Our church will be receiving this offering during the next few weeks.

This offering is used in its entirety for its two stated purposes. Fifty-seven percent of the offering is divided among some 3000 plus retired ministers, missionaries or surviving spouses. This is given based on the number of years serving ABC churches. (15 years is the minimum). The remaining 43 % of the offering is used for emergency needs in the lives of the same group of ministers/spouses.

The Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board of the ABC is very supportive of all the min-isters and families of ABC churches.
**Candlelight Worship Service**

Join us for a First Baptist family tradition—Christmas Eve candlelight worship begins at 7 PM on December 24 in the church sanctuary.

Pastor Phillips will not be in attendance as he will be celebrating with his own family, but he will be working with the Deaconate board to plan the service.

If you haven’t already, plan to make this special service a party of your family’s Christmas tradition.

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**Family photo**

An 8-year-old girl was showing her 4-year-old sister some pictures from her Bible. The younger sister was fascinated by a picture of Mary and baby Jesus. After examining it intently, she asked, “But where’s Joseph?”

The older sister thought for a moment and replied, “he’s taking the picture.”

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**Advent Anticipation**

In early church history, Advent began as a time of repentance. It served as preparation for Epiphany, which was the second most popular day for baptisms (after Pentecost).

Common traditions during the advent season, including wreaths and candles, add to the anticipation of Jesus’ birth. Another tradition is to leave the manger empty when you set up your nativity scene. Then, during Christmas morning celebrations, you can place the newborn baby Jesus in his “bed.”