

NEWSLETTER

FOR MEMBERS & FRIENDS OF FALKNER SWAMP UCC

*Merry
Christmas*
& HAPPY NEW YEAR

See inside for:

- *Financial Update through October 2023*
- *Electronic Giving – new QR code available!*
- *Advent worship schedule*
- *December/January calendar*



- **December 3** - Christmas Decorating after church, inside and outside: Christmas Tree in Sanctuary - Spire with Lights on front lawn
- **December 6** - @ 9 AM - Women's Ministries Breakfast @ Sunflower Café
- **December 10** - from 2 - 4 PM: Christmas with the Dogs; if you are able to bring cookies, please sign up in Fellowship Hall
- **December 17** - "A Nativity Share" - please bring a nativity to share with our church family. Lee & Peg will be at the church on Saturday, December 16th from 1 - 2:30 PM for those who wish to set them up early. Otherwise bring on Sunday morning. They will be displayed in Fellowship Hall.

Dear Falkner Swamp Beloved,

Canadian Pastor Jim Taylor reminds us of one of Jesus' familiar parables, the sower of the seeds,* and how it uniquely relates to Christmas:

“He scattered seed on rocks, among thorns, on a pathway ... Only a small portion fell on good ground and returned a crop. By any conventional standards, that farmer would be a failure.

But it's a perfect reflection of the way God – embodied in nature – scatters seeds. Wildly. Extravagantly. Profligately.

In nature, it seems to me, God never plants just one seed and expects it to mature. Except at Christmas.”

Taylor points out that in Jesus, God planted this one seed. And as Mary lay, exhausted from traveling and giving birth in a stinky, filthy stable, she clutched a bit of heaven that had come to earth.

In this one seed, this “branch from the stump of Jesse,” a quote from the prophet Isaiah that gospel writers insert to place Jesus in the family tree of King David, from this branch falls many seeds in its season, year after year.

As Jesus lived and taught, then died, and rose to God, so too his followers live on sharing his life, sowing many seeds flung across all types of soil. From the one Messiah, then, are planted many little messiahs. For Messiah means “anointed one,” or “deliverer,” even “leader for a particular cause.”

Pastor Taylor's observations lead us to wonder, as little messiahs ourselves, what will we help deliver? What cause or purpose will call to us, as the seedling in us grows to maturity?

What is being planted in you this Advent? How can you, like Mary, take a bit of heaven fallen to earth and nurture the growth of God's planting in you?

With you on the journey,
Rev. Frances

*Matthew. 13:3-9; Mark 4:3-9, Luke 8:4-8



Joyful Noise offerings:

Total raised 1st Sunday Oct 2023 - \$75/Nov 2023 - \$104

Running total since November 2022 -\$779.49

Split evenly between the Mustard Seed Malawi and Operation 143

Financial Update through October 2023

Update from the budget committee:

Total funds available for general use at the end of September:	\$43,224.26
Total Income received in the month of October:	+ \$13,323.84
Total Expenses paid in the month of October:	- (\$14,168.09)
Total funds available for general use at the end of October:	\$42,380.01

Our expenses continue to be larger than our income. We have been drawing down our accounts all year long. The budget team is working on a plan to boost income and decrease expenses. We ask the congregation for their support in these efforts. Please consider increasing your weekly tithings. If we all chip in just a little bit more each month, it will help us to achieve our goal of offsetting the costs to operate our church.

We welcome ideas from the congregation on ways to bring more people in to our faith community.



Electronic Giving!

Did you know Falkner Swamp offers an electronic option for making regular offerings? Contributions can be made using your bank account, debit or credit card. This offers convenience for you and much-needed donation consistency for our congregation. Collection basket offerings can

fluctuate significantly from week to week due to travel, illness and other circumstances, but when contributions are automated, the church receives funds on a steady, uninterrupted basis. To set up your electronic donation stop by the church office for an authorization form. You can also give by visiting our website, www.falknerswamp.org, click on the "Donate" tab at the top of the page and scroll down to see the various giving options. We've included a QR code for your convenience to take you to the donation page.



Directions to use QR code: Hover camera phone over box and click on website (myvanco.com) that pops up.

Bob & Mary Ann Erb share the following:

Electronic giving is an option our family has made use of for a number of years. The number one reason we give electronically is because we want the church to have our donation in hand whether we're here in person on a Sunday morning or not. Since we're both retired, we enjoy the freedom from work which gives us the ability to travel or spend time at the cabin in the mountains. Electronic giving allows our offering to be here when we aren't so Falkner Swamp has the money to cover payroll, electric, gas, and their other expenses.

The options for electronic giving are: weekly, biweekly, semi-monthly, monthly, quarterly and annually. No "one size fits all" approach, you choose what works for you.



Thank you to our Cleaning Crews! They keep all our church spaces sparkling & fresh. For December, we thank Carol Stevens, Linda & Ken Sell, and Ellen Whitfield.

We can always use more team members, please contact the church office if you have some time & can help out: 610-323-4053 or falknerswamp@comcast.net




Women's Ministries sponsored a teenage boy for Multi-Service's Christmas Giving Program. They received a "wish list" which included an Eagles jersey and Hey Dude shoes.

In more Women's Ministries news, the ladies donated \$440 to the church's general fund with the income from their Christmas log sale. All materials to make the logs were generously donated.



DECEMBER

3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
10 AM Worship w/Communion 1 st Sunday of Advent BAMS special offering Joyful Noise 11:15 AM Confirmation Class 7 PM/AA Mtg.		Rev. Frances & Sharon's office hours 9 – 2 PM 1 -2 PM Scripture Study 4-5 PM Confirmation Class	Women's Ministries breakfast @ Sunflower Café 9 AM Sharon's office hours 9:30 – 1:30 PM Blue Christmas Service 6:30 PM				
10	11	12	13	14	15	16	
10 AM Worship Apostolic Sunday Rev. Ann Few Christmas w/the Dogs 2 – 4 PM 7 PM/AA Mtg.		Rev. Frances & Sharon's office hours 9 – 2 PM 1 -2 PM Scripture Study 7 PM Property Mtg.	Sharon's office hours 9:30 – 1:30 PM	**Rev. Frances' office hours			
17	18	19	20	21	22	23	
10 AM Worship Nativity Share following worship 11:15 AM Confirmation Class 7 PM/AA Mtg	7 PM Consistory	Rev. Frances & Sharon's office hours 9 – 2 PM 1 - 2 PM Scripture Study	Sharon's office hours 9:30 – 1:30 PM	**Rev. Frances' office hours			
24	25	26	27	28	29	30	
10 AM Worship 7PM Christmas Eve service 50/50 special offering 7 PM/AA Mtg		<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; display: inline-block;"> Church office closed Rev. Frances vacation </div>					
31							
10 AM Worship Future of F.S. special offering 7 PM/AA Mtg							

** Times vary, please call or text for an appointment:

Please send any newsletter submissions by 9 AM on the final Tuesday of each month (except December & July when they are double month editions), to Sharon Sgriccia, falknerswamp@comcast.net.

JANUARY

	1	2	3	4	5	6
		Rev. Frances & Sharon's office hours 9 – 2 PM	Sharon's office hours 9:30 – 1:30 PM	**Rev. Frances' office hours		
7 10 AM Worship w/Communion Joyful Noise 7 PM/AA Mtg.		9 Rev. Frances & Sharon's office hours 9 – 2 PM 1 -2 PM Scripture Study 7 PM Property Mtg.	10 Sharon's office hours 9:30 – 1:30 PM	11 **Rev. Frances' office hours	12	13 Fellowship Hall rental (Semach) 1 -4 PM
14 10 AM Worship 11:15 AM Confirmation Class Brennan baptism PND Meal 7 PM/AA Mtg	15 7 PM Consistory	16 Rev. Frances & Sharon's office hours 9 – 2 PM 1 - 2 PM Scripture Study	17 Sharon's office hours 9:30 – 1:30 PM	18 **Rev. Frances' office hours	19	20 Spaghetti Dinner (details to follow)
21 10 AM Worship Annual Congregational meeting 7 PM/AA Mtg	22 6:30 – 8 PM Budget Mtg.	23 Rev. Frances & Sharon's office hours 9 – 2 PM 1 - 2 PM Scripture Study	24 Sharon's office hours 9:30 – 1:30 PM	25 **Rev. Frances' office hours	26	27
28 10 AM Worship 11:15 AM Confirmation Class 7 PM/AA Mtg	29	30 Rev. Frances & Sharon's office hours 9 – 2 PM 1 - 2 PM Scripture Study	31 Sharon's office hours 9:30 – 1:30 PM			

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Christmas & Advent Worship
Services

Advent in Worship

Dec 3 - 1st Sunday of Advent with Holy Communion. Rev. Frances preaching, Choral Anthem, Rev. Ann Few, guest pianist. Decorating sanctuary and outdoor lights following worship.

Wednesday Dec 6, 6:30 – 7 PM – A Blue Christmas Worship service. A service of prayers and candle lighting to honor and process difficult emotions during the holiday season.

Dec 10 – 2nd Sunday of Advent, Apostolic Sunday. Rev. Ann Few, pulpit supply. Choral Anthem.

Dec 17 – 3rd Sunday of Advent. Rev. Frances preaching. Nativity Share in Fellowship Hall following worship.

Dec 24, 10 AM – 4th Sunday of Advent. Our children and Choir present, “The Friendly Beasts,” a musical presentation from the animals at Jesus’ birth. Rev. Ann Few, guest pianist.

“Take time to be aware that in the very midst of our busy preparations for the celebration of Christ’s birth in ancient Bethlehem, Christ is reborn in the Bethlehems of our homes and daily lives. Take time, slow down, be still, be awake to the Divine Mystery that looks so common and so ordinary yet is wondrously present. An old abbot was fond of saying, ‘The devil is always the most active on the highest feast days.’ The supreme trick of Old Scratch is to have us so busy decorating, preparing food, practicing music and cleaning in preparation for the feast of Christmas that we actually miss the coming of Christ. Hurt feelings, anger, impatience, injured egos—the list of clouds that busyness creates to blind us to the birth can be long, but it is familiar to us all.”

-Edward Hays in A Pilgrim’s Almanac: Reflections for Each Day of the Year

Christmas in Worship

Dec 24, 7 pm – Christmas Eve with Holy Communion. A service of lessons, carols, and candlelight with a brief message from Rev. Frances. Choral anthem and solos by Bob Erb. Liz DeFrancisco, guest Choir Director and organist.

Dec 31, 10 AM – 1st Sunday after Christmas. Church members present readings for the New Year, with candle lighting.

Thank you to Fran B. and other Music & Worship committee members for purchasing and setting up the **battery-operated candle logs in our sanctuary** windows. These lights will stay on throughout the season, visible to all passing along Swamp Pike that we wait for the Light coming into the world at Christmas.



We hope everyone will join Bob, Bob, Jim and Friends for **CHRISTMAS WITH THE DOGS** on Sunday, December 10th from 2-4 PM. The Dogs and Friends will provide their special blend of melodious harmony to Christmas music with vocal, guitar, gut-bucket, and percussion. Christmas music for all ages will be presented, and the audience is invited to sing along, “loudly and lustily” [Bob Schnaars’ words]. The Kitchen Committee will be providing homemade cookies and beverages [a sign-up sheet will be posted in November asking for donations of homemade cookies]. This is a yearly event, and one that everyone enjoys, plan to join us and bring your entire family, invite co-workers and neighbors ... share the joy of the Christmas Season!

And down the road...

- The Dogs of Falkner Swamp will be singing to the Seniors of Good Shepherd UCC, Boyertown, PA on Tuesday, March 5th, 2024. The program will be 60 minutes of music and begins at 1 PM. Gloria Frimann, who organizes programs for their Senior Group has invited anyone from Falkner Swamp to join them. The Good Shepherd Seniors meet regularly on the first Tuesday of each month.



*Prayer requests will be kept on the prayer list for 3 weeks.
Please contact Rev. Frances if the prayer request should be extended.*

- Laura, daughter of Larry Ercolino, for healing of long-term lung & physical challenges
- for Pam, for new insights and healing with ongoing health concerns
- for Autumn, 15-month-old niece of Kim & Robin, who was diagnosed with diabetes and is now back home
- update to Ethan: Ethan, the 10-year old boy on our list who was in a severe car accident, has come home! He has a long road to recovery and the family thanks all for continued prayers.
- prayers for Tom Niarhos, director of Beacon of Hope, a homeless shelter, and his son Thomas, in custody for last week's fatal shooting. Please pray for them, the family of the deceased, and for church communities hosting the BoH warming centers.



A Blue Christmas Service

“Tis the season to be jolly!”

But are you?

The expectation to be joyful can be a burden when we carry grief, from all kinds of losses.

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

-Matthew 11:28

If you are:

- grieving the death of loved ones, whether this year or from long ago;
- suffering job loss and economic hardship;
- living with ongoing illness or pain, addiction, or struggling with emotional well being that has taken away your vitality and love of life;

Give yourself the gift of time to name that sometimes hope, love, joy, and peace are distant feelings in the face of so much loss.

Join with others in the sanctuary for a brief service to acknowledge grief and loss:

Wednesday Dec 6, 6:30-7 PM

In person and livestreamed on our Facebook page

Falkner Swamp UCC, 2077 Swamp Pike., Gilbertsville, PA 19525

Church office 610-323-4053

www.falknerswamp.org



We plan to make peanut butter eggs again in 2024. The dates will be February 19 – 23 from 8:30 AM - ? (no evenings this year). If you can, please come out to help mix, roll, and dip. Come when you can and stay for any amount of time. Any questions, see Barb G., Becky, or Carol.



Hallelujah! On Tues Nov 28, Marcus Brandt, steeple engineer, and Karen Miller, Consistory President, sign a contract for Marcus to complete the steeple project. Last year the congregation approved a steeple design that Marcus will follow, with projected completion July 4, 2024. Phase 1 will begin within the month, which is the removal of all existing structures and a temporary roof placed. Please keep Marcus and his team in your prayers for good health and safety while working on our new steeple.