**Prayers**

*Nancy Schalles*, who broke her arm; *Charlene Wozny*, whose *Uncle Earl* died last week; *Raleigh Freeman*, hospitalized at UNMC.

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**Joys:**

*Deb Derrick*, awarded UNO’s December Employee of the Month!

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**Celebrations**

Your support of First Central’s ministry is changing lives:

- Donations of underwear and socks for Siena/Francis House have been piling up! Thanks so much for your generosity. Donations will be accepted through January 1st.

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**Annual Reports and Meeting**

Annual Reports are due to sara@firstcentral.org by January 3rd. The Annual Meeting will be held Sunday, January 28th after worship.

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**Food Pantry**

January 7th is our Food Pantry Sunday, but you can drop off donations any time. Donations of non-perishable foods are welcome, as well as cleaning items, paper goods, and personal care items. Leave donations in or around the wood cart in the Narthex. Thanks!

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**Lent & Easter Worship Brainstorming Party**

Come help plan Lent and Easter worship. Bring your ideas, notes, and a snack to share on Monday, January 8th at 7 p.m. in the Fireside Room on the third floor. All are welcome!

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**Book Club**

The Book Club will meet Thursday, January 11th at 7 p.m. at the home of Sue Epperson and Fred Nielsen, 1109 N. 60th St. The book for January is *Quiet: the Power of Introverts in a World that Can’t Stop Talking*, by Susan Cain. Fred notes that he ran across an article that said that many people would rather give themselves an electric shock than be alone with their thoughts. Fred says it must be hard being an extrovert. Both introverts and extroverts are welcome for what will certainly be an interesting discussion.

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**New Members Welcomed**

New members will be welcomed during worship on Sunday, January 14th. If you would like to become a member of First Central at this time, please let Rev. Scott Jones or Sara Sharpe know.

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**Roof**

After major hail damage due to a storm in June, we will be getting a new roof on all but the main sanctuary! The sanctuary roof was re-done several years ago after a capital campaign, and sustained no damage, thanks to the new shingles. Because we are not using traditional asphalt shingles, work can begin soon, even with the cold weather.
My Year of Reading
Time for one of those typical end-of-year reviews. This one will be about books. According to my Goodreads profile I’ve read 80 books this year—a personal record—though I know it was even more as I don’t count books I re-read especially for the classes I teach or the hundreds and hundreds of times I’ve read children’s books to Sebastian.

For 2017 my goal was to read more deeply in world literature including reading books from cultures I’ve never read before, previous Nobel prize winners, and folks often shortlisted as potential Nobel winners.

Back in 2012 when Mo Yan, the Chinese novelist won, I realized then that I had never read a Chinese novel. I had read no fiction from a 5,000 year old civilization? There seemed to be a gaping whole in my understanding of the world, which I didn’t get around to addressing until this year.

And in 2013 when Alice Munro won the Nobel Prize, Fred Nielsen and I remarked that for both of us it was the first time we had read a winner before they received the prize. As well read people that surprised us about the gaps in our reading.

So, finally in 2017 I was going to address these gaps. I read five books of Chinese fiction, from the enjoyable 16th century tale Monkey to the current hottest science fiction writer in the world Cixin Liu. My favourite of those was Mo Yan’s Red Sorghum.

A fun read I picked up in a Dublin bookstore last year, was No Picnic on Mount Kenya by Felice Benuzzi about Italian prisoners of war who escaped their British camp just to climb the mountain and return.

The Bridge on the Drina by the Bosnian Ivo Andric and The Siege by the Albanian Ismail Kadare were both magnificent and enriched my understanding of the Balkans.

The Syrian poet Adonis writes marvelously.

And a number of books I read were very overrated, in my opinion.

Of all the books I read this year, not just the world literature, the best were Voices from Chernobyl by Svetlana Alexievich, Well-Being: Happiness in a Worthwhile Life by Neera Badhwar (Neera was my ethics teacher in grad school), I Am Abraham Lincoln by Brad Melzer (a children’s book I picked up at the Lincoln Memorial and is part of a great series of bios for children of which we now have several), After the Wrath of God: AIDS, Sexuality, and American Religion by Anthony M. Petro (I need to write a column about this book), The Birth of the Modern by Paul Johnson (which took me almost two years), Selected Poems by Adonis, and The Boy Who Fell Off of the Mayflower by P. J. Lynch (about my ancestor John Howland and which reading to Sebastian every Thanksgiving will now be a family tradition).

Peace,
Scott

MasterSingers
The Omaha MasterSingers are excited to announce open auditions for adult singers, age 18 & over, will be held Monday, January 22nd at 7:00 p.m. We are auditioning for all vocal parts but are specifically looking to grow our tenor & bass sections in the new year. Auditions will be held at First Central Congregational Church. Auditions are casual and fun! Please prepare a 32 measure selection of any song in any style and bring sheet music; an accompanist will be provided. For more information or to schedule an alternate audition time please visit www.mastersingersomaha.com or email us at mastersingersomaha@gmail.com.

The MasterSingers are also looking for new additions to our brand new youth choir, Diminuendo. This low stress, high fun choir is open to children in 3rd through 8th grade who love music. There is no audition for this choir and all are welcome to sing. For more information or to register your child please visit www.mastersingersomaha.com or email us at mastersingersomaha@gmail.com.
THANK YOU
To all who helped out with the FIRSTKids Christmas Program!

A review from Bud Cassidy....
A spunky young girl and a newly-winged angel wandering through the wilderness looking for Joseph and Mary and baby Jesus was the theme of the pageant. The children were in delightful costumes with gossamer folding wings, a bird beak hat, a mouse suit, assorted wise kids, and three-year old elves dressed in white wandering around the chancel looking for hiding places and things to climb. Parents herded the wandering toddlers back to the show. The narrative throughout, though frequently mumbled and unintelligible, or too soft to hear, had enough audible keywords to get the idea, and was punctuated by periods of intense on-stage cuteness. The bird solo was memorable and achieved a rating of 10 on a 10 point cuteness scale. The pianist played the wrong carol at one point and had to start over. Everybody laughed. The baby Jesus, a real baby of some several months old, played the part magnificently, with equanimity and aplomb, reclining quietly and intently in a manger/child seat as the chaotic pageantry ensued all around, enjoying the delightful show. The congregation applauded warmly and appreciatively as those in the the cast who had not wandered away took a bow.

December 31: NO FIRSTKids
January 7: Communion Sunday
Children will stay in worship to receive communion with their families.

MERRY CHRISTMAS & HAPPY HOLIDAYS
from the Education folks at First Central!
Sunday Mornings
Regularly scheduled events

9:00 Coffee in the Parlor
9:15 First Forum (Adult Education), 3rd floor
9:15 Nursery Care to 11:45 a.m.
10:30 Service of Worship
FIRSTKids (church school for Pre-K – 5th grade)
unless otherwise stated
11:30 Coffee Hour, Parlor

next newsletter deadline
Sunday, January 7th
email articles to
officeadministrator@firstcentral.org

Week of December 31

Sunday, December 31
Rev. Katie Miller preaching
Blood pressure screenings

Monday, January 1
New Years Day. Office closed.

Wednesday, January 3
Evergreen Thrift Shop, 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. (through Friday)
Sanctuary Choir, 7 p.m.
Annual Reports due!

Saturday, January 6
Evergreen Thrift Shop, 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Week of January 7

Sunday, January 7
First Forum, 9:15 a.m., Third Floor Parlor
Food Pantry Sunday

Monday, January 8
Staff meeting, 1:3 p.m., Pastor’s Study
Lent & Easter worship brainstorming party, 7 p.m.

Tuesday, January 9
Council 7 p.m., Elevated Track

Wednesday, January 10
Evergreen Thrift Shop, 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. (through Friday)
Sanctuary Choir, 7 p.m.
Annual Reports due!

Thursday, January 11
Book Club, 7 p.m., 1109 N. 60th St.

Friday, January 12
Women’s Retreat (through Sunday)

Saturday, January 13
Evergreen Thrift Shop, 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.

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