Journey Through Change

Numerous aspects of our lives change daily or yearly, yet relief from the whirlwinds of change come with Advent and Christmas. These holy days ground us because of the traditions woven into our celebrations. Layers of memories fuse into previous memories, blanketing us with comfort, strength, and peace.

We are creatures of habit, aren’t we? That is not to say anything good or bad about us. It just is. We like things to stay the same. An adjustment to our status quo or equilibrium is an occasion for coping with grief, newness, and unknown possibilities.

So what happens when a source of our strength—the holidays—means the recognition of change? Because all of us at Ridge can say together, “Advent and Christmas will be different for the entire Ridge UMC family in 2015.” Our congregation has made its way through: senior pastoral leadership transitions, other staff changes, death of beloved members who will celebrate their first Christmas in heaven, and a shift from the way-its-always-been-done to new ways of serving Christ in our world.

My family too has journeyed through massive change this year: we sold our beloved Avon home, Diana graduated from Hickory Elementary in Avon, my appointment changed, we purchased and remodeled a new home in Munster, and our family relocated to this community. If you and I are honest with one another, some of the changes we like better than others. That’s normal. Some changes are easy to move through and adjust. Others give us pause.

Yet, I am reminded that one thing remains the same. A cradle will stand ready to welcome the Christ child this year. My family has not yet decided where the Nativity scene will be displayed in our new home, but He will be with us! We will all welcome the Babe of Bethlehem once again because Jesus Christ stays the same. He is forever and always as our Emmanuel, our gift of possibility, new life, second chances, healing, renewal, and hope.

Maybe 2015 is the best year—after a season of tremendous transition—for all of us to crawl into Christ’s cradle and wrap our arms around the Hope of the World!

See you at the cradle,

Pastor Michelle
Thank You for an AWESOME response to our Stewardship Campaign!

On Sunday, November 22nd, 54 people came forward and returned their Estimates of Giving. The total pledged for the general fund was $274,294—72% of our goal of $382,005 for 2016!

We also received pledges of $43,398 for our mortgage.

If you were unable to join us, you can still return your Estimate of Giving to the church office.

Ridge Church Welcomes 5 New Members

Katelin Ellis joins by letter of transfer from Calvary UMC in Avilla, Indiana. Katelin is married to her husband Chris. She is a high school science teacher at Lake Central. We are glad to welcome Katelin today.

Allan Evett joins by profession of faith. He is a member of the Ridge staff serving as contemporary worship leader. Allan and his wife, Mary, just welcomed their first grandchild earlier this year. Allan is a pianist/keyboardist, and music instructor. We are glad to officially welcome him in membership today.

Rina Horgan joins by profession of faith. Rina and her husband Richard have worshipped with us for some time now. Rina is a teacher in Hammond at Lafayette Elementary, which we assist annually through our school supply and backpack drive. We are glad to welcome Rina today.

Eric and Diana Knight join by letter of transfer from Calvary UMC in Brownsburg. Eric works as a consultant software architect for Cerner, the largest healthcare software company in the world. He enjoys his commute to his office within our new home. Diana is a fifth grader at Frank H. Hammond Elementary school. We are glad to officially welcome the Knights.

Farewell, Matt!

Matt Scardine, who has served as Ridge UMC Youth Group Intern, will be heading to Ivy Tech in Indianapolis to study the culinary arts. The youth group will say goodbye to Matt on December 20th at our annual Christmas party. As a congregation, we are going to recognize and thank Matt for his service at all three services on December 6th. We will greatly miss Matt, but we sincerely wish him well in his exciting new endeavor.
Halloween Carnival & Trunk or Treat a "Spooktacular" Success!

Thank you to Susan Bryce, BethAnn Smolinski, Lauren Holloway, Kathy Giannini and all who helped on Sunday, October 25th. Hundreds of people from the community enjoyed this event!

Ring the bell for The Salvation Army!

Please consider “giving of yourself” during the hectic holiday season and volunteer to RING THE BELL on Saturday, December 5th at Jewel/Osco on the corner of Ridge Road and Calumet Avenue in Munster. Bring a friend ... or two or 10 to help you! It’s fun, and The Salvation Army is always very appreciative of the money that is collected in our kettle.

Did you know that it costs $72.50 a day to pay someone to ring the bell? Volunteers like you allow The Salvation Army to use those funds to help more families.

Just sign up for a half-hour slot on the bulletin board across from the church office.
Salvation Army Angel Tree tags will be available starting November 22nd. Unwrapped items are to be returned to Ridge Church by Sunday, December 6th.

Please take advantage of all the sales NOW to buy gifts for our local underprivileged kids. All items are welcome! Gifts do not need to match a tag.

Advent begins Sunday, November 29th, and brings lots of activities to Ridge Church. Mark your calendars now for these special holiday events:

- Children’s Pageant, Sunday, December 13th @ 9:45 a.m.
- Christmas Cantatas, Sunday, December 13th @ 8:30 & 11:00
- Christmas Eve Services on Thursday, December 24th @ 5 p.m., 9 p.m. or 11 p.m. Childcare will be provided during the 5 p.m. service.

Volunteers are also needed for special readings and candle lighting during worship services throughout Advent. Please call the church office to volunteer.

Christmas Poinsettias

It's time to order poinsettias for the altar. This year, all plants will be red.

Cost: $9 per plant

Special order envelopes can be found on the Welcome tables in the narthex and Fellowship Hall. Please place your order by Sunday, December 13th.

Indiana Day is Friday, December 11th

All Munster 4th-graders will be at Ridge Church for this event, so the church will be closed on that day.
**Christmas Brunch**

**Thursday, December 17th at 11 a.m.**

*MUSIC BY THE MHS CHOIRS!*

This annual brunch is sponsored by the United Methodist Women of Ridge Church. **Tickets are available after services on Sunday, November 29th, December 6th and 13th**

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**Ridge Book Group: ZEITOUN**

**Monday, December 14th at 6:30 p.m.**

Sue Cook will host at 1449 Melbrook in Munster

**Please bring an appetizer or dessert to share**

The true story of one family, caught between America’s two biggest policy disasters: the war on terror and the response to Hurricane Katrina.

Abdulrahman and Kathy Zeitoun ran a house-painting business in New Orleans. In the days following Hurricane Katrina, Abdulrahman traveled the city by canoe, feeding abandoned animals and helping elderly neighbors. Then, on September 6th, he was arrested in his home. Told with eloquence and compassion, *Zeitoun* is a riveting account of one family’s unthinkable struggle with forces beyond wind and water.

**You can pick up your copy of Zeitoun at the Munster Public Library, and join the discussion.**

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**All-Church Caroling**

**Sunday, December 20th**

Each year we try to spread some Christmas cheer to our Ridge Church homebound members and friends. This year we will again be teaming up with the youth.

**Please join us if you can. We will meet at the church at 1:30 p.m. and carpool to the homes or nursing homes we will visit.**

Afterwards we will come back to the church to warm-up with hot chocolate and cookies!
Do You Hear What I Hear? By Joe Felice

On the first Sunday in December, Ridge’s Chancel Choir is going to sing the title song, “Do You Hear What I Hear?” — one of the most beloved songs of the Christmas season. The story of this simple plea for peace began, ironically, during World War II in war-torn France. Noel Regney was a young French musician who risked his life as a soldier in the French underground. The darkness and terror of those fearful years haunted him the rest of his life.

In the years that followed, the tensions of the Cold War between the United States and the U.S.S.R. had escalated to the Cuban Missile Crisis in October of 1962; Noel’s mind was drawn back to the terrible days he had spent in French combat. He wondered if the world would ever see peace. As his thoughts turned to the very first Christmas — a sacred time of peace and promise — the lyrics of a song came to him. He and his wife collaborated, and the result of their collaboration was the beautiful Christmas carol, published in 1962, “Do You Hear What I Hear?”

When we hear this song, do we hear what Noel Regney wanted us to hear? The rendition of the song Noel liked best was one where the vocalist all but shouted the words “Pray for peace, people everywhere.” For him, that was the message of the song, because Noel believed that even in the darkness of fear and despair, the “child, the child, sleeping in the night, He will bring us goodness and light. He will bring us goodness … and light.”

Join us for worship at 8:30 or 11:00 on December 13th for a special cantata that also focuses on hope and peace. “By Heaven’s Light” combines traditional carols, original music and lyrics, and scripture from the gospels of Luke and Matthew on the theme of Christ’s light coming into the world.
**2016 Ridge UMC Committees:**

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<th>Nominating, Pastor</th>
<th>Worship, Mary Lou Mybeck, chair</th>
<th>Education, Shelley Cohs, chair</th>
<th>Memorials &amp; Gifts, Dick Jones, chair</th>
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<td>Beth Kitchell</td>
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<td>Laura Elkins</td>
<td>Joe Felice, staff</td>
<td>Linda Ehlebracht</td>
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<td>Sue Gray</td>
<td>Allan Evett, staff</td>
<td>Beth Ann Smolinski</td>
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<td>Diana Rogers</td>
<td>Pastor Michelle</td>
<td>Phil Loos, staff</td>
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**Children & Family Ministries Pastor**

Ridge Church seeks a passionate, hard-working, dedicated pastoral leader who is eager to deepen and develop the spiritual lives of children, youth and families. This full-time pastoral leader will provide dynamic leadership, direction and supervision for the outreach, fellowship, faith formation, mission and worship of children and their families to fulfill Ridge’s mission and vision.

Preference will be given to candidates who are ordained as Deacons in the United Methodist Church. Experience with lay volunteers, children and/or youth ministry, and leadership within a congregation are a plus.

Inquiry and resume should be sent to Rev. Michelle L. Knight at michelle@ridgeumc.org.
"Are You a Functional Atheist?"

During our recent Learning Forum for active UM bishops, I heard one of our presenters say, "Many of us in the church are functional atheists."

That statement got my attention, and I hope it gets your attention.

He further explained: It is easy for us in the church (especially in church leadership) to fall into the trap of believing it is all up to us. That kind of "functional atheism" is not much different from non-believers who don't believe that God even exists. If we can be really, really busy, we seem to think, then we must be doing something important. The truth is (and this hurts because it strikes home with me), that our being really, really busy – even doing so-called religious work – may be evidence that we are "functional atheists." After all, if it all depends upon us, then we really don't even need God, do we?

So you can see why the words of our presenter hit home with me. I am too busy. I work too hard. I have a full calendar. And – this list the worst part – I tend to work and act like it is all up to me. In effect, I am saying by my lifestyle and schedule that there is no God – because it all depends upon me. Putting it that harshly is difficult, but I fear it may be true.

How about you? Are you a "functional atheist?"

If so, there is a cure: Prayer. When one of our bishops led a prayer time in one of our worship services last week (we have daily worship and often daily Communion as bishops when we meet), he said: "How can we think we don't need to pray? Jesus was the one human being least in need of prayer, and yet he prayed often."

Wow! What a great insight! The cure for our "functional atheism" is to pray, to remember that God is God and not us, and to learn to wait and receive God's guidance before we run off to our next busy religious activity.

This is the time of year when our local church schedules are really full. Activities leading up to Thanksgiving, Advent, and Christmas can become heavy and burdensome – if we think it all depends upon us. Yes, ministry is hard work, and yes, it takes planning and preparation. But perhaps all of those activities will be more meaningful if we start with prayer. The Psalmist says (in Psalm 46): "Be still and know that I am God." We used that Psalm in our prayer service last week in this way: "Be still and know that I am God" (followed by silence) "Be still and know that I am" (followed by silence) "Be still and know" (followed by silence) "Be still" (followed by silence) "Be"

I invite you to try that prayer, giving yourself lots of silence in between those phrases. Don't be a functional atheist.

Be still and know God.
Be still and know.
Be still.
Be.

—Bishop Michael J. Coyner
THANK YOU, Ridge family, from your Missions Team! You are amazingly generous—as of November 15th, through pledges and offerings, you’ve raised a total of $19,218 for various Mission programs. Your generosity has made it possible to help people in our region, nation, and all over the world in 2015.

Locally, you provided the funds to keep the Monday/Saturday Soup Kitchen program going. Each Monday, volunteers from Ridge Church cook and serve an evening meal to an average of 50 people at City Rescue Mission in Hammond. Also, Ridge Church provided lunch for the same number of people at City Rescue Mission on 28 Saturdays in 2015 (our partners in this ministry are First Presbyterian Church of Hammond and St. Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church—each volunteer one Saturday a month). For the year, nearly 4,000 meals were served through the Monday/Saturday Soup Kitchen, using $3,500 that you donated. You also helped provide:

- $200 for Dare to Care for postage
- $300 for Sojourner Truth House in Gary
- $1,617 for Children of Abraham
- $300 in Wal-Mart gift cards for Haven House, plus dozens of towels, wash cloths, sheets, and blankets collected in our Linens for Haven House collection
- $500 for an honorarium given to the Bishop’s special project, Epworth Discipleship Center, which will impact Indiana’s young people who attend camp or retreats
- More than $3,000 given to the Pastor’s Discretionary Fund to help pay utility bills and rent for those in need in the Calumet Region

Other local Mission projects included a backpack and school supply drive, which collected items that were donated to students at Lafayette and Maywood Elementary schools in Hammond, and Sojourner Truth House in Gary. As of newsletter-deadline, the annual North Township Coat Drive was concluding, Shoebox Christmas was still underway, and The Salvation Army Angel Tree gifts were to come.

Nationally, you helped send a group of youth to New Orleans in July to assist with ongoing Hurricane Katrina relief, and sent a small team of volunteers to Colorado in September to rebuild homes damaged in the 2013 floods.

Internationally, you responded generously to the need in Nepal following the tragic earthquake in April. A total of $2,586 was given for UMCOR’s response, and another $1,500 gift was designated to the Tansen United Mission Hospital in Kathmandu. Your Missions Team also sent:

- $1,500 to the Liberia Self-Reliance Initiative to pay the salaries of two farm workers and purchase two bicycles for transportation
- $2,000 to Kokeh Kotee in Liberia to respond to the ebola outbreak in Monrovia
- $2,000 to Operation Classroom’s Hunger in West Africa project
- $3,000 to Servants in Fellowship to provide building materials for three houses in Haiti, which was paid for out of proceeds from the Missions Rummage Sale in April.

If you’d like to join the Missions Team and be part of helping others, you are welcome to attend the next meeting on Tuesday, January 12th at 7p.m., or call the church office for more information.

May Peace be your gift at Christmas and your blessing all year through

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year

from your Ridge Staff
Dear Ridge Family,

One of the best days of my life, 14 years ago, was the day I started my ministry here at Ridge Church. During those years my job seemed to change frequently. What started off as a part-time Minister of Education position, morphed into more and more areas of the life of Ridge Church. Caring Ministries, hospitality, Solid Ground Worship, Primetimers and just about anything else you can think of was at one time or another part of my ever-changing job description.

The one thing that never changed throughout those years has been my love for each of you, my dear friends and church family. Each of you has touched my life and for that I will be forever thankful. Thank you all for the lovely celebration of my ministry last month. A special thanks to Susan Capps, Jennifer Olejniczak, Erin Dal Santo, Alice Altherr, LaVerne Grasty and Dorothy Seefurth for being so awesome that day. Your generous gifts and kind words these past few weeks have been comforting and will be treasured always.

As Don and I prepare for the next chapter of our lives, know that our love for each of you will hold a special place in our hearts. We’re looking forward to worshipping together and spending time with each other and with our children and granddaughters.

Thank you again for allowing me to serve all of you these past fourteen years,

Kathy
**Happy Birthday!**

1. Pat Cappo  
   David Lopez  
2. Mandy Holloway  
   Scott Iverson  
   Samantha McKinley  
3. Vivian Berg  
4. Bob Miskimins  
5. Ella Birgel  
   David Byrne  
6. Joel Bandstra  
   Tim Giannini  
   Terry Smith  
7. Jule Keeler  
8. Daniel Percak  
9. Zach Potchen  
10. Alice Altherr  
   Marie Jones  
11. Kellie Brandner  
12. Karen Wood  
13. Phyllis Lund  
   Heidi Phipps  
14. Jackie Novorita  
   Sarah Schroeder  
15. Diane Comandella  
   Matt Svoboda  
16. Mandy Hay  
17. Jennifer Hill  
   Jeanine Svoboda  
18. Alison Biggs  
   Zoey Chnupa  
19. Don Scatena  
   Dorothy Seefurth  
20. Justin Cox  
   Ellie Marinier  
   Lisa Percak  
   Bob Ray  
21. Betty Lukoshus  
   Jean Stricklin  
   Bill Allen  
   Jan Watson  
22. William Caddick  
   Emily Kitchell  
23. Larry & Donna Hill  
24. Bob & Deb Birgel  
25. Nick & Heather Burmester  
26. December 5th  
27. December 8th  
28. December 26th

**Ushers**

8:30  
David Elkins  
Laura Elkins  
Chuck Lair  
11:00  
Lew Grasty  
Rich Matthews  
Shirley Matthews  
John Novak

**Greeters**

8:30  
12/6  
12/13  
12/20  
12/27  
Carol Lair & Brenda Hendry  
Carol Lair  
Carol Lair  
Carol Lair  

11:00  
12/6  
12/13  
12/20  
12/27  
Tom & Virginia Schreuder  
Bernice Nance & Dorothy Seefurth  
Bernice Nance & Dorothy Seefurth  
One service @ 10 a.m.

**Liturgists**

8:30  
12/6  
12/13  
12/20  
12/27  
Sue Molenaar  
Rina Horgan  
Wes Lukoshus  
Sue Molenaar  

9:45  
12/6  
12/13  
12/20  
12/27  
On service @ 10 a.m.

11:00  
12/6  
12/13  
12/20  
12/27  
Wayne Cable  
Ellen Byrne  
Steve Rogers  
Cindy Regnier

**Hospitality**

8:30 & 11:00  
Rachel Circle  
9:45  
12/6  
12/13  
12/20  
12/27  
Dayanna Frey & Lorena Alvarado  
Jennifer Hill  
Charlene & Tracey Wilson  
Danny & Lisa Percak

Don’t forget: We’ll have ONE service on Sunday, December 27th at 10 a.m.
Do you have news to share? The deadline for *The Connection* is December 15th.

**UPCOMING sermons**

- **December 6th**  
  “Love”  

- **December 13th**  
  “Joy”  
  Zephaniah 3:14-20, Philippians 4:4-7

- **December 20th**  
  “Peace”  

- **December 24th**  
  “The World’s Baby”  

- **December 27th**  
  Join us for one service at 10 a.m. as we welcome our guest preacher, Sue Cook.