

# The Bell Tower

Newsletter of the First Congregational Church of Hatfield, UCC

2021

December

No. 12

## Advent Matters

I think you may know that I enjoy watching baseball. I sort of understand the game and the strategy. I don't watch football, and one of the reasons is that I don't understand the game. I'm not seeing what a fan sees. I only see big guys hitting each other. And hockey, well, just forget it.

I listen to Classical music all day when I'm home. The internet makes so many stations available to me. It's wonderful. For as much as I enjoy the music, I guarantee that I'm not getting as much out of it as someone like Anthony, our Music Minister. There are things going on that evade me, but are obvious to a trained ear.

I not only read the news, I also choose to follow certain commentators because I value their more well-informed opinion. Again, they are able to notice things I simply would not see.

I list these few examples as an introduction to the Season of Advent. Please do not take the analogy too explicitly, but Advent is like the kid who gets picked-on, Christmas is like the bully, and the world is the even bigger bully.

Christmas finally arrives and the celebration should last for at least the traditional twelve days until the Epiphany, but the world expects something much different. The day after Christmas, the world begins sales to get rid of it all, and good luck hearing a Christmas carol on the radio ever again until the next November. The world bullies Christmas into silent submission.

And Christmas returns the favour by bullying Advent. Christmas gets cut short by the world so it in turn muscles Advent out of the way. Christmas is in full swing even before we light the first candle of the Advent wreath.

Now, you may ask, what is the harm? Does Advent matter? Think about the list at the top of this column. A deeper understanding of something, whether it be sports, music, news or whatever, allows for a more profound interaction, one that is not possible through a casual encounter.

When we take the opportunity that Advent provides to prepare for the coming mystery of Christmas, to slow down the rush and the hype,

and to walk more intentionally from prophecy to promise, then the celebration of Jesus' birth strikes more deeply. Then we can move past settling for the conventional messages of Christmas and explore the challenge of what it means to believe God emptied Himself of His divinity (cf. Philippians 2:5-7) to live among us as one of us as Bethlehem's Holy Child.

Advent's four weeks also share with us the gift of expectation. How many of us have watched a young child's excited expectation as Christmas draws nearer and longed for a taste of that kind of wonder again?

Well, Advent is a season founded on excited expectation. Advent looks in two directions. It looks to the past and remembers the world's longing for the coming of the Saviour. Please take the time to read Isaiah 11:6-9 and feel the wonder of God's prophet.

Then realize that Jesus comes into the world as the fulfillment of that divine revelation, and yet still the world is filled with violence and destruction. Some Christians look forward to a Second Coming of Jesus to erase this discrepancy, but I wonder if we are not already inspired and empowered by Jesus' first coming to make a difference. Jesus has proven to us who we can be. Do we believe enough in Him to believe this about ourselves? I know the world is violent and uncaring, but Advent's message of expectation is that hope, peace, joy and love have a fighting chance if we trust who Christmas reveals we can be.

Maybe the child born as Immanuel, "God with us," can offer us an alternative to the self-destructive, self-fulfilling prophecy that we are incorrigible. Advent is the season that looks to the past and prepares for the coming birth of the Saviour, and also looks to the future realizing that divine promises remain to be fulfilled if we take seriously that God is with us as one of us to reveal what is possible by us when we believe.



## DECEMBER EVENTS

Sat. 4 <sup>th</sup>	Christmas Craft Fair 8:30am – 2:00pm.
Mon. 6 <sup>th</sup>	Rev. Randy will attend the monthly meeting of HEART (Hatfield Equity Alliance fighting against Racism Together) at 5:30pm.
Tue. 7 <sup>th</sup>	Online <i>Exploring the Bible</i> study group from 7-8:00pm.
Wed. 8 <sup>th</sup>	New Member Meeting at 6:30pm.
Mon. 13 <sup>th</sup>	Monthly meeting of the Board of Trustees at 7:00pm.
Tue. 14 <sup>th</sup>	Rev. Randy will attend the monthly meeting of the Hampshire Association Committee on Ministry at 5:45pm.
Sat. 18 <sup>th</sup>	Luminarium at 6:00pm at Town Hall with fireworks; church carolers in front of building at 7:00pm.
Sun. 19 <sup>th</sup>	Christmas Fund Offering will be accepted.
Mon. 20 <sup>th</sup>	Online <i>Exploring the Bible</i> study group from 7-8:00pm.
Fri. 24 <sup>th</sup>	Christmas Eve worship Service at <b>7:30pm</b> .
Tue. 28 <sup>th</sup>	Monthly meeting of the Board of Deacons at 6:00pm.
Fri. 31 <sup>st</sup>	New Year's Eve. Prayers for a fun and safe celebration for all.

## REGULAR GATHERINGS

Sundays: Worship Service begins at 9:30am online and in person.

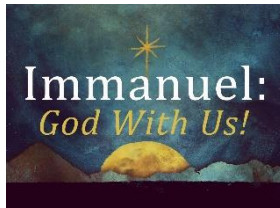
Tuesdays: Yoga classes are offered every Tuesday in the church parlor at 5:30pm – **Now in person at the church.**

Wednesdays: Hatha Yoga classes take place every Wednesday at 6:00pm.

Thursdays: Choir rehearses in the sanctuary at 6:30pm – **Now in person at the church.**

## SEASON OF ADVENT

Advent is the beginning of the church year. It is a time of renewal. It is the four-Sunday season prior to Christmas. The four weeks symbolize the the birth of the Messiah. Advent is a time important time to prepare ourselves to know about the other Christmas decorating; the baking; the running in so church's pause. Advent lets us catch our the real reason for all this excitement – the celebration of the coming birth of Jesus.



We invite you to join us as a part of the worshiping community during Advent. Share with us as we light the candles of the Advent Wreath, sharing more and more light each Sunday. Let us gather as the People of God to welcome each new revelation of the hope, peace, joy and love that are embodied in the person of Jesus.

## NEW MEMBER CLASS

As mentioned above, Advent is a season of new beginnings. What a perfect time to think about taking the step forward and formally joining our congregation. Any and all are welcome and encouraged to join us at worship and to serve Christ. Formal membership is not required for any of this. However, there is something special and sacred about joining in the formal covenant between member and congregation, and congregation and member. There is a bond that is witnessed by Jesus and empowered by the Spirit in this covenant. If you would like to take this step forward, or if you have questions you would like to ask first, please reach out to Rev. Randy at [randyc1897@gmail.com](mailto:randyc1897@gmail.com). The date of this gathering is December 8<sup>th</sup> at 6:30pm at the church.

## CHRISTMAS CRAFT FAIR

The Christmas Craft Fair will be held on Saturday, December 4<sup>th</sup>. We will be offering homemade foods, outdoor decorations, crafts, and raffles. The donating and volunteering. Can you make bows, pick holly, gather greens? Amy



Craft Fair has jobs for all – set-up, clean-up, swags, decorate cemetery boxes, make Novak will again chair outside sales and can use your help. We can accept artificial wreaths, trees and outdoor lights. No small items please. The food table will hold cakes, pies, bread, candy, jellies, prepared meals (i.e., soup, mac & cheese) and more. Moki Reopel can use all your donations to help make a great food sale. Carolyn and Joe will again be at the raffle tree. We need gift cards in any amount, and thank you. Mary McCarthy will handle the gift baskets. If you need help,

she will wrap for you. Please keep your basket value at \$25. If you have any questions, please call Marty at 247-5453. Thank you.

### **EXPLORING THE BIBLE ON-LINE STUDY GROUP**

The Massachusetts Bible Society has published a three-volume text called *Exploring the Bible*. We are reading Volume III on the New Testament. comfortable with the Bible, I study. If you would like to see what email ([randyc1897@gmail.com](mailto:randyc1897@gmail.com)) information for our Zoom needed, only a desire to become God. This month we will be reading from the books of Hebrews, 1 Peter, James, Jude, 2 Peter and Revelation as we work toward our study of the four Gospels.



If you would like to become more encourage you to join us for Bible Bible study is like, please send me an and I will send you the login meetings. No prior Bible knowledge is more familiar with the written Word of

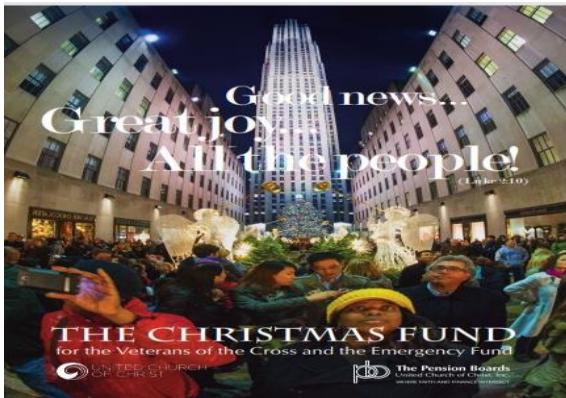
### **CHRISTMAS FLOWER DONATIONS**

Adding to the beauty of the church's Christmas celebration are all the poinsettias that adorn the sanctuary. Please contact June Lampron by Sunday, December 5<sup>th</sup> if you would like to donate a poinsettia, or sign-up in church on Sunday. Each poinsettia costs \$12 and they may be offered in memory or in honour of those you choose. The donations will be listed in the church bulletin.

### **LUMINARIUM**

Hatfield's Luminarium celebration will take place this year. It is scheduled for Saturday, December 18<sup>th</sup>, beginning at 6:00pm. It will be held in front of Town Hall. Immediately following the festivities there, fireworks will be fired from the area around the Lion's Club Pavilion. They should be visible from Town Hall. Those in attendance are then invited to the Fire Station for hot cocoa. At 7:00pm our choir members will sing Christmas Carols from the front steps of the church. This is a beautiful Christmas tradition and I hope you will be able to attend.

### **CHRISTMAS FUND OFFERING**



The *Christmas Fund* has been caring for active and retired clergy and lay employees of the United Church of Christ for over 100 years, providing emergency grants, supplementation of small annuities and health premiums, and Christmas "Thank You" gift checks each December to our lower-income retirees. Here is a link to a testimonial about the power of these offerings: <https://youtu.be/hZE3qjZuFpc> If you would like to contribute, your offering will be accepted on Sunday, December 19<sup>th</sup>. And "Thank you."

### **CHRISTMAS EVE CELEBRATION**

Christmas Eve is one of the church's most anticipated celebrations. We gather in the darkness of one of the year's longest nights to proclaim loudly and joyously the wondrous mystery of the Incarnation, that God has entered our world as one of us in the startling humbleness of a child born in an animal's manger, to an unwed mother, in a defeated and occupied nation. No one expected such a thing. I'm sure if it were not in Holy Scripture such a tale would be labeled blasphemous. But we should never be surprised when God surprises us. And what a message of hope this is!



On this night we will share in a Service of Nine Lessons and Carols. The readings move from prophecy to fulfillment, and the music lets us all share in the praise that began with angels singing to shepherds in the night. We close our Service by quietly and gently singing "Silent Night" to candlelight, letting us part with the gift of peace that the Holy Child shares with us all.

Please make time for church on this festive and busy night. Please invite the family or friends whom you gather with to join us as we become the Bethlehem manger. Let church be a part of your Christmas traditions.

And please make a special note that our worship Service on Christmas Eve begins **at 7:30pm.**

### **VISITATIONS**

If you would like me to stop by for a visit, please let me know. I have received both of my vaccination shots, and I have no problem wearing a mask on top of that. Also, if you or a loved one ends up in the hospital, please let me know so that I can come by for a pastoral visit and a prayer.

### **CHURCH MASK POLICY**

The Church Council has based its mask policy on the number of cases in Hampshire County. If the cases rose above 10 per day per 100,000 people, we would require masks in the church building. The numbers have surged past this mark. Therefore, masks must be worn to attend worship Services in person. When they fall again, masks will again be optional. Thank you for your cooperation.

### **PRAYER SHAWL MINISTRY**

The Conference is conducting a prayer shawl ministry. They have asked local congregations to make the shawls, pray over them and then send them to the Conference to be shared with communities and others. One of our members has offered to help with this making the shawls. If you are interested, please contact Rev. Randy.



### **GIFT CARDS**

*Big Y* and *Stop and Shop* gift card sales are a continuing fundraiser of our congregation. Please contact Linda M. if you would like to purchase any. The church earns 5% on all sales. Thank you.

### **CONTACT INFO: HATFIELD CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH**

Website: [www.hatfieldchurch.org](http://www.hatfieldchurch.org) Facebook: [www.facebook.com/First-Congregational-Church-of-Hatfield-UCC](https://www.facebook.com/First-Congregational-Church-of-Hatfield-UCC)

Pastor: Rev. Randy Calvo 413-824-1630 [randyc1897@gmail.com](mailto:randyc1897@gmail.com)

#### **Committee Chairpersons:**

*Benevolence, Amy N.*

*Christian Education, Anita W.*

*Church Moderator, Amy N.*

*Deacons, Jeff F.*

*Music Minister, Anthony T.*

*Real Folks Society, Martha Z.*

*Trustees, Jonathan B.*

