

The Bell Tower

Newsletter of the First Congregational Church of Hatfield, UCC

2022

December

No. 12

Advent's Light

Advent is the four-week season prior to Christmas. *Advent* is from the Latin "to come." Its four Sundays represent the putative 4,000 years the world waited for the Messiah to come into the world, that is from the mythical Adam to the birth of Jesus.

Advent is a time of preparation. The image is often used that we become the spiritual mangers for the coming Christ Child, and as such we need to prepare to welcome Him. This should, accordingly, be a time of heightened spiritual practice.

This is one of the few times of the year when the world outside the church actually assists the work of the church. In these weeks prior to Christmas, there is a palpable sense of kindness and community that is more focused than at any other season. Generosity is encouraged. Random acts of kindness are celebrated. Personal connections are welcomed. Jesus may not be as pronounced as Santa, but in the public square His name is proclaimed in unusual ways. Christmas carols are sung on commercial radio stations. His birth is celebrated with cards and gifts. Christmas lights glow and push back the longest nights of the year.

Light is a principal Advent theme. As the Hebrew Prophet Isaiah looks forward to the reign of the coming Messiah, he writes: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined ... For a child has been born for us, a son given to us." (9:2, 6a)

The message of light is presented before us each Sunday as we light a candle of the Advent Wreath. Each Sunday more light is added to the Advent Service. The first candle is the candle of hope, the second of peace, the third of love and the fourth of joy.

Darkness is not any-thing. It is not a substance or a power unto itself. It is the absence of light.

Advent prepares us and the world for the coming of Christ by introducing light where it was not. And this is why the first candle is the candle of hope. Advent calls us to help create a better world, to share more light, by adding acts of kindness and generosity where they are lacking, and one of the glories of this time of the year is that people actually give credence to this hope that we can be better.

Somehow peace seems more reasonable as we prepare for the coming of the Christ Child. The Messiah enters the world as a helpless child, and most everyone is able to relate to a child's innocence. Animosity and violence seem an insult when placed next to the animal's manger that cradles the baby Jesus. When nuclear conflict is closer than it has been six decades, the prospect of peace is a most welcome light.

Advent offers us the opportunity to ponder why God leapt from heaven's glory to enter the world in the poverty of a citizen of a defeated nation. It is reasonable to assume that God's perfect love is the motivation. God in Jesus wanted to share the fullness of human life with us, and allow us to share in the fullness of God's life. This bond is a testament of divine love and it calls upon us to love, as well. The warmth of this season, the love that is shared so demonstrably, is a blessing that people cherish.

And all of this adds up to a sense of abundant joy. Joy is not limited to laughter and smiles. Joy is a deep contentment and hope. Sadly, the ostentatious celebrations of this season can amplify the depression or loneliness that some may be suffering through. Joy was once described to me as J=Jesus, O=others, and Y=yourself. Our joy is not in isolation. It must incorporate Jesus and others. Hopefully, in this way, the light of Advent's joy may be spread among all, and especially among those who feel forgotten or who are troubled.

By sharing hope, peace, love and joy, the coming of the reign of Christ is made more real, and the light of the season pushes back the darkness.



DECEMBER EVENTS

Sat. 3 rd	Christmas Craft Fair 8:30am – 2:00pm.
Mon. 5 th	Rev. Randy will attend the monthly meeting of HEART (Hatfield Equity Alliance fighting against Racism Together) at 5:30pm. Online <i>Exploring the Bible</i> study group from 7-8:00pm.
Tue. 6 th	Rev. Randy will attend the monthly Association Committee on Ministry meeting at 5:45pm.
Mon. 12 th	Monthly meeting of the Board of Trustees at 7:00pm.
Sat. 17 th	Luminarium gathering at Town Hall at 6:00pm followed by fireworks, and the Luminarium Concert at our church at 7:00pm.
Sun. 18 th	<i>Christmas Fund Offering</i> will be accepted throughout the United Church of Christ.
Mon. 19 th	Online <i>Exploring the Bible</i> study group from 7-8:00pm.
Sat. 24 th	Christmas Eve Worship Service at 7:30pm.
Sun. 25 th	Sunday Worship Service at 9:30am.
Tue. 27 th	Monthly online meeting of the Board of Deacons at 6:00pm.

REGULAR GATHERINGS

Sundays: Worship Service begins at 9:30am online and in person. Sunday School begins after the children's sermon during the worship Service.

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

Thursdays: Choir rehearses in the parlor at 7:00pm.

CHURCH COVID POLICIES

The Church Council has decided that while the numbers remain higher than we would like, the COVID vaccines and COVID treatments have combined Accordingly, the Council encourages for the benefit of those who may be are now optional. The Council will the numbers spike upwards, then we may return to the mask requirement if needed.



to lower the risks of this pandemic virus. those attending in person to wear a facemask immunocompromised, but face coverings continue to monitor the COVID numbers. If

SEASON OF ADVENT

The four-week Season of Advent began on November 27th and will take us all the way to our celebration on Christmas Eve at 7:30pm. This is a time dedicated to spiritual preparation as we anticipate the coming of the Christ Child. The world struggles to be a warmer, more caring and generous place during this season. It may have taken on a life of its own actually, independent of the story of the Bethlehem manger, but it also provides people of faith the opportunity to remind these people filled with good will and cheer about the story of Jesus. Non church goers may be more receptive during this season to an invitation to join us at worship. May the sharing of the gift of faith and church be one way in which we acknowledge the coming Christmas celebration.



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CHRISTMAS CRAFT FAIR

The Christmas Craft Fair will be held on Saturday, December 3rd. “The craft fair will be here before you know it! Real Folks will be looking for volunteers to sign-up and help, such as setting up and later taking down tables, baking, making raffle baskets, donations for raffle baskets and new ideas. Jewelry – see Jennie Belden. Jennie will need jewelry donations for her table early

Baskets – see Mary McCarthy if you can – see Maki Reopel. New to the sale last year chili, potato salad, lazy pierogi, etc. We are anyone, or a couple of people got together and pierogi that would be great. At the baking



variety of baked goods such as cookies, cakes, breads, trail mixes, granola, fudge, and jams and jellies. The gift card tree – see Larry and Paula Mattison. This raises a lot of money for the church. If you are out and about, pick up a gift card for our tree. Outdoor sales – see Amy Novak. We have many sellable Christmas items for sale

outdoors, but maybe some greens, sleds, skates or outdoor winter toys and items would be a nice addition. To make this another successful year we need all our church families' help. Thank you. Linda Milewski"

CHRISTMAS FLOWER DONATIONS

We are now accepting donations for the poinsettias that will adorn our church sanctuary and add another layer of beauty to our Christmas celebration. Marcia S. is in charge this year. A sign-up sheet is at church. We are asking that donations be offered in enough time for us to have the poinsettias in place for the Luminarium concert on December 17th. Therefore, the cutoff date will be Dec 10th. Please make checks out to *Real Folks Society* and turn them in to Marcia S. Thank you.

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. United Church of Christ congregations and members have blessed the Christmas Fund with their generosity for many years. This year, your care and compassion will be especially appreciated by those servants of the church who are facing a time of need. Thank you!"

Here is a link to a video clip of one family that has been blessed by this generosity: <https://youtu.be/V-v5dO7NP7s> This offering will be accepted throughout the UCC on Sunday, December 18th.

CHRISTMAS EVE and CHRISTMAS DAY WORSHIP

We will gather to share in the joy and wonder of Jesus' Bethlehem birth on Christmas Eve at 7:30pm. With light, music, community and the Good News of "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour ... You will find a child wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." (Luke 2: 11, 12) The angel announces this glorious news to shepherds in the field watching their flocks at night. For this reason, we gather in the darkness of one of winter's longest nights to announce the birth of God Incarnate. In Jesus God enters our world as one of us for all of us. Rejoice! You are invited to share in one of Christianity's holiest celebrations, and you are asked to share this invitation with all those you care about.



Christmas Day is a Sunday this year. All Sundays are holy days of worship. We will gather on Christmas Day at 9:30am to continue to announce and share in the unbelievable message and the glorious possibilities that Jesus' birth brings to all creation.

STUFF OUR STOCKINGS SOCK COLLECTION

This collection of new socks will begin on December 4th and will continue through the month of December. The socks will then be distributed to help the homeless stay warm during the coldest weeks of winter. Thank you for your Christian generosity to those most in need.

CHURCH MUSIC

Music is important in our worship all year long, but especially so around Christmas. A friend, an old choir member, posted this on her FaceBook page: "Dear people who complain about Christmas music being played too early, I don't see ya'll writing truly different. There is something in innocence and the sacred in Christmas demands music. Maybe it all started outside of Bethlehem, but it is still today. If you would like to join our that the choir and Anthony, our Music Minister, gift us with at worship, especially at this time of the year, please reach out to Anthony at church or any other way. And thank you for sharing your gift with the rest of us through music.



Thanksgiving bangers." Christmas is the mixture of profundity, joy, that demands more than words. It with the angelic chorus in those fields such an important part of Christmas choir and the beautiful gift of music

NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE WORK IN PROGRESS

The Nominations Committee is at work currently seeking volunteers to serve as officers of the church and on our church committees. The Annual Congregational Meeting is scheduled for Sunday, January 15th. If you would like to help with the work of our church, please let the Nominations Committee know. If you are approached by

one of its members, please give it due consideration. We are fundamentally democratic in our governance and operation. We cannot function without the participation of our members. The members of the Nominations Committee are Bill Belden, Jeff Folts, Carolyn Forsyth and Edwin McGlew.

BIBLE STUDY GROUP

Our online Bible study group is reading from the Gospels of Luke and John and the Acts of the Apostles at present. If you would like to join us as we read this distinct account of Jesus' life and ministry, and then of the early days of the church, we would love to have you join us. Let's read, study and discuss the book that literally has changed the world. Send an email to randyc1897@gmail.com for the login. We meet on alternate weeks for one hour. If you have any questions about how Bible study works, send them along to the same email as above.

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 Facebook: www.facebook.com/First-Congregational-Church-of-Hatfield-UCC

Pastor: Rev. Randy Calvo 413-824-1630 randyc1897@gmail.com

Committee Chairpersons:

Benevolence, Amy N.

Christian Education, Anita W.

Church Moderator, Jonathan B.

Deacons, Jeff F.

Music Minister, Anthony T.

Real Folks Society, Martha Z.

Trustees, Ed M.

