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JANUARY 2021  
VOLUME 34.1

# The Messenger

*St. John's United Church of Christ*



## From the Council President

January 2021

“When you come to the end of all the light you know, and it's time to step into the darkness of the unknown, faith is knowing that one of two things shall happen: Either you will be given something solid to stand on or you will be taught to fly.”

- Edward Teller

Thank goodness we are finished with 2020!!

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## From the Council President

When preparing to write a message for January, the quote above kept swirling through my mind. We all certainly stepped into the darkness of the unknown in 2020. It's been an absolute horror of a train wreck as we have watched over and over again the virus numbers going up and up. We couldn't take our eyes off it. We've all been scared out of our wits wondering what is going to happen next. Many of us have had unexpected losses. Most of us have been separated from our loved ones. All of us have lived in silent fear as we just kept holding our breaths, hoping this would be over soon.

And now, the end may be in sight.

With the two, maybe soon to be more, vaccines in the "pipeline" and coming our way, we know we can hang on a little while longer. Even with the exhaustion of fear and the frustration of staying apart, we now know that the end of this pandemic is closer than it was back in March.

Which brings me back to the quote above. It says "faith is knowing you will have somewhere solid to stand OR you will be taught to fly."

. . . Taught to fly . . .

Think about that a moment. It hasn't been easy, but the faith we have all shown has truly been our solid place to stand. As a result of our faith, we have over and over again stepped into the darkness of that unknown.

Faith has led us to bring a multitude of different voices and styles to our pulpit as we have continued to have engaging, meaningful worship week after week.

Faith has led us to develop a wonderful bible study program where we feel safe to express our thoughts and beliefs with not only local members of St. John's but folks who are outside of our physical community.

Faith has led us to continue to update our beautiful building, preparing it for our glad return to the sanctuary.

Faith has led us to contribute over \$30,000 to a number of deserving local charities, including sponsoring not just one but two apartments for our long time charity, CARITAS.

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## From the Council President

Faith has led us to bring even those less technically astute among us to come back to worship through Zoom.

Faith has led us to stand outside our building on Sunday after Sunday in opposition to racism and in support of justice and equality for all.

Our faith has given us a solid place to stand, while GOD has taught us to fly and come closer together as a community.

In teaching us to fly out of our darkness, GOD has never ceased to inspire us, teach us, and strengthen us. Our "still speaking" GOD encouraged our little community over and over again to participate in our projects. Nearly one-third of our membership has engaged with our community, emboldened to show up and stand up for justice, and to be a witness to GOD's love in the world.

GOD has challenged us this year to see things differently, to use our diverse gifts, and to draw out unrealized talents in others. We have been pushed out of our comfort zones and made many changes that we might never have made without 2020 under our belts. We are now forging ahead into this New Year, this new decade, with a new Interim Pastor and new opportunities to share GOD's love.

Still GOD is calling us, giving us a solid place to stand as we feel the wind lifting our outstretched wings, encouraging us to fly out of the darkness.

And with the help of GOD, fly, we shall!

*Dreama Terrill*

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# January Devotional

## Lamentations 3:22-23 KJV

“It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.”

A new year is here. We no longer need strength for 2020 and all its challenges. Each new day of 2021 will be lived through new mercies as promised in God’s word. We can’t stockpile that compassion from Christ to mete out for each worry we have through a stressful work week. Tomorrow’s mercies will be enough to handle whatever tomorrow’s issues put in front of us. God gives each of us enough mercy for each day. We live day by day through his grace. The heavy weight of today’s burdens is just that...it’s borne today. God’s mercy will sustain us anew tomorrow. We can trust in that promise.

I’ve always felt a peace knowing that God’s mercies are new again and again. I can’t use them all up. Each day I wake, I experience a filled bucket of grace from God. Life doesn’t always turn out how I envision. It often turns out to be a real challenge. Sustaining me and blessing me is the knowledge that God’s compassion is always there.

*Terri Weaver*

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# Interim Pastor Announcement

The Interim Pastor Search Committee received an early Christmas present when the Church Council unanimously accepted our recommendation that The Rev. Thomas Charles Gerstenlauer be our Intentional Interim Pastor.

Many remember Rev. Gerstenlauer as St. John's Interim Pastor from 2013–2014. He has specific training and experience as an Intentional Interim Minister. Tom was ordained December 1, 2001 in the United Church of Christ and has served UCC churches in Michigan, Ohio, Virginia and Massachusetts.

His pastoral experience has been very diverse not only in locations but in the kinds of ministry he has been inspired to guide in each locale. He has served in suburban and urban church settings, as senior pastor with staff and as sole pastor. His ministry experience ranges from worship planning to urban mission development. He is committed to the work of social justice and has been especially active in the areas of anti-racism, LGBTQ rights, urban mission development, and immigrant justice.

In his own words, Tom describes his overall view of ministry: "My call to ministry in the United Church of Christ has meant more than professional development for me. This work has challenged me personally as well, and has meant deep spiritual change for me. The transformation continues in times of solitude and in community. I have found that like a physical workout regimen, religious practice leads to spiritual strength. We live in challenging times and we must prepare for some heavy spiritual lifting. Fortunately, the church persists on all fronts. Seeking clarity of principles and values, we find spiritual siblings in likely and unlikely places. Together, we are Christ's body; together, we are one."

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# Interim Pastor Announcement

The interim pastoral search committee specifically asked for his view of interim ministry, to which he responded: "I subscribe to and seek to practice the five basic developmental tasks of interim ministry. Key to perception of developmental needs is engagement with the congregation: individually; in small groups; with leadership bodies; as a congregation. Also key to fruitful ministry during interim periods is establishment of effective ethical and professional boundaries. I have come to understand that the interim presence can become confused with a sense of need to settle, both by the congregation and the minister. Clarity about the nature of the relationship and the tasks at hand are very important to the success of our ministry together and for the future of the church in society. Equally important is clarity about how the values of the congregation are expressed through its actions, with which appreciative inquiry methods can help. Committed to God and one another we go forward, in Christ."

Pastor Tom offered this biblical quote as being of particular inspiration in these times: "My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing." (James 1:2-4)

Pastor Tom will begin his ministry among us on January 2nd and will be preaching and leading worship on January 3rd.

Those who served on the Interim Pastor Search Committee were Beverly Lindsey, Chair, Elisabeth Burnette, Terrie Pendleton, Gary Beasley and Daniel Martin.

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# From the Pastor

Epiphany greetings to all!

It has become my custom on Epiphany Sunday to offer stars to the congregation at worship. Distribution presents a special challenge this winter, but I pressed myself to imagine a way to make it happen. I hope you find this exercise engaging, challenging, and gratifying.

On the page below is a version of the psalm usually offered at Epiphany celebrations. I invite you to read these verses slowly – perhaps more than once – and in the reading identify one or two words that catch your attention. Write the word/phrase in the heart of the star below then cut it out. Place it somewhere where you'll see it through the year ahead (I usually put mine on the bathroom mirror.) As it did the magi, let the star guide you in faithful and prayerful reflection throughout the year. Let it be a reminder of the mystery that is the Holy presence with us.

As it was for wise ones who revisit the miracle of Christmas each year, may you be overwhelmed with joy this season and in the new year ahead!

Pastor Tom



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Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14 – from Psalms for Praying by Nan C. Merrill

Bring justice to the peoples,  
    O Beloved,  
    and your mercy to all  
    generations!  
May the people be known for  
    mercy,  
    rendering justice to the poor!  
Let their spirits soar as the eagle,  
    let joy abide in every heart!  
May You hear the cry of the poor –  
    the young and the old,  
    setting free all those in need,  
    melting the hearts of the oppressors!  
May we know You as long as the sun  
    endures,  
    and as long as the moon,  
    throughout all generations!  
May we acknowledge You in the rain  
    falling on the fields,  
    like showers that water the earth!  
In our day may justice flourish,  
    and peace abound  
    throughout all the nations!  
May the leaders of nations from  
    all the earth  
    listen to your Word;  
May they spend time in Silence  
    before they counsel!  
May the leaders surrender to  
    your love, and  
    the nations serve the Most High!  
For You heed the needy when  
    they call,  
    the poor and those who have  
    no friend.  
You have compassion on the weak,  
    the downtrodden,  
    And give them strength and  
    hope.  
From injustice and oppression,  
    you redeem their life;  
    and precious are they in  
    your Heart.



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# Congregational Life & Care

The Congregational Life Committee will meet after church on Sunday, January 17th at 11:15 a.m.

If there are any members who would like to join us on the Congregational Life and Care Committee, we would love to have you. Please contact Betsy Bighinatti.

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# Guest Preacher:

## January 2020

On Sunday, January 24, 2021, our guest preacher and worship leader will be The Rev. Lindsey Franklin. Lindsey was recently ordained in the United Church of Christ on December 13, 2020, and has been part of the St. John's church family since moving to Richmond in 2018. She currently serves as Associate Pastor for Development at Richmond Hill, an ecumenical Christian community and monastery in Church Hill. She also chairs the UCC Potomac Association Justice & Witness Committee. She lives in the Fan and loves being outside, swimming in the James River, and exploring the city.

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# January Mission of the Month: ACTS

Our Mission of the Month for January will be ACTS (Area Congregations Together in Service). ACTS provides funds, support and other resources to our neighbors in financial crisis, including rent, mortgage and utility assistance along with referrals to appropriate agencies. Due to the Pandemic, ACTS has been named the Regional Organization for Eviction Protection. Since July, ACTS has distributed over \$5 million to assist some 2,000 households in maintaining housing stability. As we enter 2021, many households are in dire financial crisis. Our support helps ACTS to compassionately support our neighbors with dignity and hope before they become homeless.



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# January Announcements

## **Finance and Stewardship Update**

As reported last month, on November 22nd the Congregation unanimously approved a ministry plan for 2021 that assumed pledge income of \$90,000, and as of late December we are still significantly short of that goal. It is only through your generosity and the generosity of others that St. John's can offer ministries that nurture, heal, and connect us to God and to each other. While we have been away from worship in our building, work has continued to conduct weekly worship by Zoom, expand our online and digital presence, support local community needs, initiate and conduct weekly Bible study, and maintain and renovate the building in anticipation of our return, all of which requires financial support. We thank all those who have already pledged their time, talents and monetary support for next year, and hope that those who have not yet done so will consider pledging as your circumstances permit. If you have not yet pledged, remembering that last year's pledge doesn't automatically carry over and needs to be renewed, please return your pledge cards to the church at 503 Stuart Circle, Richmond, VA 23220. Or if it's more convenient, or if you need another pledge card, you can call or email Stewardship Chair Jeff Jacobs, at (202) 361-9887 or [jwjacobs9@gmail.com](mailto:jwjacobs9@gmail.com). Thank you for your generosity in support of the ministries and missions of St. John's.

## **Do you need food, or know someone who does?**

As the pandemic continues, and people may be quarantined or feel unsafe going to the store, some of us may need help in maintaining food security, or know others who do. As you know, we are blessed with many terrific cooks at St. John's, and many have offered to provide meals to those who may need assistance. If you are having trouble getting to the store, would like to have some freshly-made food delivered, or know someone in need, please contact Jeff Jacobs at [jwjacobs9@gmail.com](mailto:jwjacobs9@gmail.com) or (202) 361-9887. Likewise, if you are able to be "on-call" to respond to a need for food, and have not already let Jeff know, please contact him to know of your availability.

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# Wednesday Bible Study

All are invited to attend our Wednesday Night Bible Study from 7:00 to 8:00 p.m. on Zoom. Join other members of our beloved community to study the Word. All are invited and affirmed. It is hard to get out and be with others in this time of pandemic and this is a great way to get with others in a time of study and fellowship. You will be welcomed.

Our study will focus on Advent. The Study is entitled "The Light Will Shine, A Study for Advent." Kerygma says, "Discover new light in traditional texts and seasonal themes. Find fresh perspectives on the journey through Advent to Christmas and beyond." It is a great way to increase understanding and enjoyment of the season.

If you have any questions on the study or on how to get a copy of the guide, please contact Scott Siefert at (804) 350-0826, or email him at [sesiefert@gmail.com](mailto:sesiefert@gmail.com).

Join Zoom Meeting

[https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83862586668?](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83862586668?pwd=eUxGQjlrCtsbzVteHc2RHhYTjFJdz09)  
[pwd=eUxGQjlrCtsbzVteHc2RHhYTjFJdz09](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83862586668?pwd=eUxGQjlrCtsbzVteHc2RHhYTjFJdz09)  
Meeting ID: 838 6258 6668  
Passcode: 003903

One tap mobile

+13017158592,,83862586668#,,,,,0#,,003903# US (Germantown)

+13126266799,,83862586668#,,,,,0#,,003903# US (Chicago)

Dial by your location

+1 301 715 8592 US (Germantown)

We welcome anyone dialing in on the phone who wants to be recognized to introduce themselves since we can only see phone numbers on the screen.

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# January 2020 Calendar

## **Sunday, January 3rd, 10:00 a.m. - Worship by Zoom**

Sunday, January 3rd, 4:00 p.m. - Anti-racism Vigil in front of St. John's

Wednesday, January 6th, 2 p.m. - Worship and Music Committee Meeting by Zoom

Wednesday, January 6th, 7 p.m. - Bible Study by Zoom

Thursday, January 7th, 8:30 a.m. - Renovations Committee Zoom Meeting

## **Sunday, January 10th, 10:00 a.m. - Worship by Zoom**

Sunday, January 10th, 4:00 p.m. - Anti-racism Vigil in front of St. John's

Monday, January 11th, 6:30 p.m. - Church Council Meeting by Zoom

Wednesday, January 13th, 2 p.m. - Worship and Music Committee Meeting by Zoom

Wednesday, January 13th, 7 p.m. - Bible Study by Zoom

Thursday, January 14th, 8:30 a.m. - Renovations Committee Zoom Meeting

## **Sunday, January 17th, 10:00 a.m. - Worship by Zoom**

Sunday, January 17th, 11:15 a.m. - Congregational Life and Care Meeting by Zoom

Sunday, January 17th, 4:00 p.m. - Anti-racism Vigil in front of St. John's

Wednesday, January 20th, 2 p.m. - Worship and Music Committee Meeting by Zoom

Wednesday, January 20th, 7 p.m. - Bible Study by Zoom

Thursday, January 21st, 8:30 a.m. - Renovations Committee Zoom Meeting

## **Sunday, January 24th, 10:00 a.m. - Worship by Zoom**

Sunday, January 24th, 4:00 p.m. - Anti-racism Vigil in front of St. John's

Wednesday, January 27th, 2 p.m. - Worship and Music Committee Meeting by Zoom

Wednesday, January 27th, 7 p.m. - Bible Study by Zoom

Thursday, January 28th, 8:30 a.m. - Renovations Committee Zoom Meeting

## **Sunday, January 31st, 10:00 a.m. - Worship by Zoom**

Sunday, January 31st, 4:00 p.m. - Anti-racism Vigil in front of St. John's

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# January Birthdays

January 3 - Rick Pearman

January 3 - Marcie Agee

January 6 - Frieda Walsh

January 8 - Kathy Freise

January 8 - Linda Higgins

January 9 - Georgianne Stinnett

January 14 - Hank Allen

January 20 - Fritz Will, IV

January 23 - Vicky Lyle

January 25 - Joachim Altenkirch

January 25 - Charlotte Quick

January 26 - Bruce Miller



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## **St. John's United Church of Christ**

St. John's United Church of Christ is a diverse community forming a united congregation, seeking to grow our faith, share it with others, and serve God's people wherever the need is present. We are living God's love and all are invited!!!

### **An Open and Affirming Congregation**

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