
DECEMBER 2020, VOLUME 33.12

The Messenger

St. John's United Church of Christ



From the desk of the Council President

"God of hope, I look to you with an open heart and yearning spirit. During this Advent season, I will keep alert and awake, listening for your word and keeping to your precepts. My hope is in you." ~ Matthew Kelly

Writing every month for the "Messenger" has been a learning experience for me. Trying to think of something appropriate and meaningful is similar to writing a sermon once a month, waiting for something to grab me. Of course waiting requires patience and waiting for "Sparky" to grab me requires even more patience. As many of you already know, I'm not a very patient person. June Smyth tells me all the time that my regular job helps me to be patient with other people – it will be our little secret that it doesn't help me to be patient with myself, however. As a result, when I start these articles, I scour sources hoping for that spark, something to start me off.



A Message from the Church Council President

When I sat down to write this month's message it seemed as though thinking about Advent, what it means, what it's become, and how it fits for us today, might be a good place to start.

The word "Advent" is from the Latin word *adventus*, and means "coming". Scholars believe it evolved during the 4th or 5th centuries in Gaul – Spain, France, Germany. It was a season of preparation for the baptism of new Christians and at first pointed not to the birth of Jesus, but to the anticipation of Christ's second coming. It was a season of preparation, 40 days of penance, prayer, and fasting towards the culmination which was baptism. By the middle ages, however, Christians had tied Advent explicitly to Christ's first coming in the lowly manager in Bethlehem. The "coming" then was the expectation of the birth of GOD's promised hope to the world, the hope that would save us all.

Mary's Magnificat in Luke 1:46-55 tells us for what we are waiting

"God's mercy is for those who fear God from generation to generation."

"God has shown strength with God's arm"

"God has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts."

"God has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly."

"God has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty"

Based on these words, is it any wonder that people of Jesus' time expected the Messiah to be a warrior who would physically free them from their Roman occupiers?

Advent, beginning in the Middle Ages, was a time of anticipation of freedom from the bonds that hold us. I was not surprised to learn that Saint Francis of Assisi is credited with creating the first nativity scene in the Middle Ages in an attempt to place emphasis on worship rather than gift-giving.

In 1943 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in jail in Tegel prison, wrote "A prison cell is a good analogy for Advent. One waits, hopes, does this or that – ultimately negligible things – the door is locked and can only be opened from the outside."

It may seem strange to compare Advent to being in prison but that metaphor describes a powerlessness, hopelessness, and loneliness I know I can identify with during this Covid pandemic. Bonhoeffer goes on to refer to the nativity scenes created by the German engraver and architect of the Renaissance period, Albrecht Altdofer, depicting the holy family in a run-down stable which, he said, reminded him of a bombed out building -- a scene with which he was far too familiar.



A Message from the Church Council President

The year 2020 has been an unexpected travesty. Our national and world economies have suffered as if we are in that destroyed building in a war zone. We feel hopeless and bombed out inside. We are exhausted with the constant barrage of bad news as the death toll rises. The up and down elevator of emotions throughout this election cycle has been more than we ever thought we could withstand. Most of us have never experienced a convergence of overwhelming disaster like this in our life time.

Yet, here we are.

With Advent singing in our hearts and twinkling in our eyes, we fervently wish in this season of "coming" that the anticipation of Christ will free us from the bars of this train-wreck of a year.

Can we hear it?

Even though we can't be with loved ones.

Can we hear it?

Even though we aren't worshipping in our beautiful sanctuary.

Can we hear it?

Coming down the centuries to us today:

O come, O come, Emmanuel
And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel

We are not alone, and we are not defeated. God is with us.

Rejoice, rejoice. Emmanuel!!!!

Peace,

Dreama Terrill



December Devotional

Keep Alert!

Mark 13:24-26 and 32-33

“But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven....

But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come.”

Last Sunday, November 29th, was the first Sunday in Advent, the beginning of a new church year. As we observe these weeks leading up to Christmas, for what are we waiting? For what do we hope? What will the New Year bring? The distribution of a vaccine that will end the pandemic? The ability to safely gather again with friends and loved ones from whom we have had to be physically distanced? The restoration of our economy, so that jobs will be available and life can go back to “normal”? The end of civil strife and political unrest? Progress in the pursuit of justice and equality for all, and an end to violent policing and institutionalized racism?

Closer to home, are we looking forward to the selection and installation of an Interim Pastor at St. John’s, who can help us heal and prepare for a long-term settled pastor? Do we look forward to a safe and healthy return to worship in our beautiful Sanctuary and the ability to minister in person to the needy in our community?

Most of us are hoping for these things. We have had enough of the type of suffering referenced in the selection above from the Book of Mark. These are things that we dream about and aspire to, but what about the unknown things? What about the things we haven’t anticipated? In what form will we find “the Son of Man coming in clouds”?

In the referenced quotation, Jesus tells us to keep alert, to be aware, to be open to God’s message. We need to be still, to listen for God, and be responsive to God’s call. As in the carol “O Little Town of Bethlehem”, our hopes and fears of all the years are met in the birth of Jesus. As we prepare to celebrate that birth, let us take advantage of this Advent season to keep alert and aware and truly listen for God’s message of love and peace and hope, in whatever form it takes.

Jeff Jacobs



Congregational Life & Care

The Congregational Life Committee will meet via Zoom after church on Sunday, December 6th, at 11:15 a.m.

Any pastoral issues can be addressed by Rev. Beverly Lindsey. We thank her for her love and dedication to St. John's over the last 9 months.

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.



Guest Preachers: December 2020

December 6th: Dreama Terrill

Dreama has been a member of St John's for around 15 years. Currently she is Council President. Her theological background is what she calls 'checkered ' having been raised Nazarene, Methodist and Baptist. Her childhood social life was filled with rural revivals and she says four of her closest friends are ministers because GOD needs a close eye on her or, they need the practice.

December 13th: Philip Adams

Philip Adams is a final level student at Union Presbyterian Seminary. He expects to graduate with a dual degree - Masters of Divinity and a Masters in Christian Education. He received his Bachelor's degree in Religion and Psychology at Carson-Newman University in Jefferson City, TN. He is the father of six and has seven grandchildren. Philip is an active member at Richmond Metropolitan Community Church.

December 20th: Lessons and Carols

December 27th: Scott Siefert

Scott is a member of St John's United Church of Christ and a Member-in-Discernment in the Potomac Association. He recently relocated to St Paul, MN after living in the Richmond area for over 20 years. He is currently doing a pastoral internship at St Mark's United Church of Christ in Bloomington, MN. He earned a Masters of Divinity degree from Union Presbyterian Seminary and has a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration from the University of Maine.



December Mission of the Month: The Christmas Fund of the UCC

This month we are asking you to support The Christmas Fund of the UCC.

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. Over the past nine months, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the emergency financial needs of many who serve the church have increased dramatically. In such a time as this, the need for the Christmas Fund is more urgent than ever. 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!



UCC CHRISTMAS
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December Announcements

Zoom Worship Services to Continue

Although we had hoped to return to Sunday worship in the Sanctuary beginning on November 29th, the first Sunday in Advent, recent increases in the number of local Covid cases, the imposition of new restrictions on non-church gatherings, and a poll of the Congregation indicating that only 16% (4 out of 25 participants) felt comfortable returning to church for Advent, led to a decision to continue all-Zoom worship services for the immediate future. The Church Council will continue to monitor the situation and rely on advice from federal, state and local public health agencies in order to ensure the health and safety of the Congregation.

Fellowship Lunches on Hold

On November 17th, eight intrepid souls braved the wind and chill and gathered for an outdoor lunch and fellowship at Bell Greek Grill in Midlothian. In light of the seasonal change in weather and the increasing incidence of Covid in the community, the monthly fellowship lunches will need to be put on hold until conditions improve.

Sanctuary Greened for Advent

On Saturday, November 21st, a team met at the church to green and prepare the Sanctuary for Advent services. Although a decision was made not to return to the Sanctuary this season, the beautifully decorated chancel and altar will provide a wonderful backdrop for the recorded portions of our Zoom worship services this month. Thanks to Betsy and Richard Bighinatti, Elisabeth Burnette, Daniel Craig, Johanna Gilbert, Jeff Jacobs, Daniel Martin and Rob Osborn for their help.

Ministry Plan Adopted for 2021

On Sunday, November 22nd, the Congregation unanimously adopted the proposed Ministry Plan (budget) for 2021. It included expenses of \$260,046 and income of \$192,350, for an anticipated deficit of \$67,696, which would be underwritten by a loan from the Endowment Fund. Note that the budgeted income includes a grant of \$85,000 from the Endowment Fund and pledge income of \$90,000. As of December 1st, the church had received pledges for about 2/3rds of the budgeted \$90,000, leaving a shortfall of about \$30,000. Thank you very much to those who have pledged, and particularly to those who increased their pledges over last year's amount. If you have not yet pledged for 2021 (remembering that last year's pledge doesn't automatically carry over), 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 your pledge to Stewardship Chair Jeff Jacobs, at (202) 361-9887 or jwjacobs9@gmail.com. Thank you for your generosity in support of the ministries and missions of St. John's.



December Announcements

Memorial for Thomas Pridgen

Last month we learned that our friend and St. John's member Thomas Pridgen had died on October 23rd. He passed away without family or resources, and because of his deep affection for the Congregation of St. John's we will be holding a memorial service for him at a time yet to be determined and are raising funds for his cremation and a suitable resting place. Please send your donations to the church at 503 Stuart Circle, Richmond, VA 23220, marked "Thomas Pridgen Fund" on the memo line; unfortunately online donations cannot be accepted for this purpose. If you have any questions, please contact Jeff Jacobs at jwjacobs9@gmail.com or (202) 361-9887.

Potomac Association Faith & Democracy 2020 Retreat - December 4th and 5th

As we continue to insist that election officials #CountEveryVote, it's time to take stock, regroup, and imagine together how we organize as the Potomac Association in 2021 and beyond.

What: Potomac Association Faith & Democracy 2020 Retreat

When: Friday, December 4th: 7:30pm - 9pm

Saturday, December 5th: 9am - 11:30am

Who: All people of conscience in the Potomac Association who are ready to organize together for justice in 2021 and beyond.

This retreat will give us the opportunity to begin the reflective and relational work of organizing Virginia, Maryland, and DC in 2021. More details to come, but for now, mark your calendars. The work will continue on January 9th with an organizing and strategy session to begin the year with momentum.

Where: Online (via Zoom)

Register for Friday December 4th:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/join/register/tZMocumqgDsvE9zxcSpxP9pCUYrVZKWmePa3>

Register for Saturday December 5th:

https://us02web.zoom.us/join/register/tZEpc-2hqTkiGtRf6HQdLFj0KXroiv_Clc-w

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meetings.



December Announcements

Ordination of Lindsey Franklin to Christian Ministry - December 13th at 2:00 p.m.

The Addison Association of the Vermont Conference of the United Church of Christ and The Congregational Church of Middlebury cordially invite your presence and prayers for the Ordination of Lindsey Franklin to Christian Ministry.

Given the circumstances we all find ourselves in, this will need to be a virtual service, via Zoom. We invite you to join us using the information below:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84823969152?pwd=b1Z4QWhDei9NU2lGdncvZ0dubTI5UT09>

Meeting ID: 848 2396 9152

Passcode: 797382

One tap mobile+13017158592,,84823969152# US (Germantown)
+13126266799,,84823969152# US (Chicago)

Dial by your location

+1 301 715 8592 US (Germantown)

+1 312 626 6799 US (Chicago)

+1 929 436 2866 US (New York)

+1 253 215 8782 US (Tacoma)

+1 346 248 7799 US (Houston)

+1 669 900 6833 US (San Jose)

Meeting ID: 848 2396 9152

Christmas "Tea" on December 20th

This year, instead of a Christmas Eve worship service, we will be celebrating Christmas on Sunday, December 20th with a service of Lessons and Carols, by Zoom, followed by a Zoom version of our traditional Christmas Tea. Please plan to enjoy a cup of tea, coffee or punch and a holiday nibble while we have a time of fellowship after the worship service.



Wednesday Bible Study

All are invited to attend our Wednesday Night Bible Study from 7:00 to 8:00 p.m. on Zoom. We are exhibiting a powerful spirit and energy as our beloved community is coming together to study the Word. All our invited and affirmed (even if you weren't able to attend previous sessions). This is a wonderful group and you will be welcomed.

We are studying the prophets Amos and Hosea, which are particularly pertinent in these times. We are using the Kerygma Bible Study entitled: *Amos & Hosea: Boundaries, Tough Love, Amazing Grace*. Kerygma says, "This study challenges study groups to join the prophets in being boundary-crossers; to cross the boundary between religion and politics, or that boundary between "us" and "them. "Amos' and Hosea's message is surely relevant for a society such as ours, divided on issues of theology, politics, economics, government, and morality. We need to hear about God's tough love and amazing grace which are extended by the Lord to a people who have often broken the divine heart." We will be completing this study on December 9th.

Starting on December 16th we will be doing *A Study for Advent: the Light Will Shine*.

Kerygma says, "Discover new light in traditional texts and seasonal themes. Find fresh perspectives on the journey through Advent to Christmas and beyond."

The study guides can be purchased directly from [Kerygma](#). If you have any questions please contact Scott Siefert at (804) 350-0826, or email him at sesiefert@gmail.com.

Join Zoom Meeting

<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.



December 2020 Calendar

Wednesday, December 2nd, 2 p.m. - Worship and Music Committee Zoom meeting

Wednesday, December 2nd, 7 p.m. - Bible Study by Zoom

Thursday, December 3rd, 8:30 a.m. - Renovations Committee Zoom meeting

Friday, December 4th, 7:30 p.m. - Potomac Association Faith and Democracy Retreat (Zoom)

Saturday, December 5th, 7:30 p.m. - Potomac Association Faith and Democracy Retreat (Zoom)

Sunday, December 6th, 10:00 a.m. - Worship by Zoom

Sunday, December 6th, 11:15 a.m. - Congregational Life and Care Committee Zoom meeting

Sunday, December 6th, 4:00 p.m. - Anti-racism Vigil at St. John's

Wednesday, December 9th, 2 p.m. - Worship and Music Committee Zoom meeting

Wednesday, December 9th, 7 p.m. - Bible Study by Zoom

Thursday, December 10th, 8:30 a.m. - Renovations Committee Zoom meeting

Sunday, December 13th, 10:00 a.m. - Worship by Zoom

Sunday, December 13th, 2:00 p.m. - Lindsey Franklin Ordination Service by Zoom

Sunday, December 13th, 4:00 p.m. - Anti-racism Vigil at St. John's

Wednesday, December 16th, 2 p.m. - Worship and Music Committee Zoom meeting

Wednesday, December 16th, 7 p.m. - Bible Study by Zoom

Thursday, December 17th, 8:30 a.m. - Renovations Committee Zoom meeting

Sunday, December 20th, 10:00 a.m. - Lessons and Carols Worship followed by Christmas Tea Fellowship Time by Zoom

Sunday, December 20th, 4:00 p.m. - Anti-racism Vigil at St. John's

Wednesday, December 23rd, 2 p.m. - Worship and Music Committee Zoom meeting

Wednesday, December 23rd, 7 p.m. - Bible Study by Zoom

Thursday, December 24th, 8:30 a.m. - Renovations Committee Zoom meeting

Sunday, December 27th, 10:00 a.m. - Worship by Zoom

Sunday, December 27th, 4:00 p.m. - Anti-racism Vigil at St. John's

Wednesday, December 30th, 2 p.m. - Worship and Music Committee Zoom meeting

Wednesday, December 30th, 7 p.m. - Bible Study by Zoom

Thursday, December 31st, 8:30 a.m. - Renovations Committee Zoom meeting



December Birthdays

December 2 - Robert Weickmann
Ulysses Hall

December 3 - Jeff Hetzer

December 6 - Melissa McKenney

December 7 - Anita Sharpenstein

December 9 - Chris Burnette

December 14 - Eric Hetzer

December 31 - Iola Miller

Birthdays will be celebrated on December 13th!



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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