

## ***Our Mission***

***By God's Grace, West Parish Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, is committed to Nurturing and Celebrating God's Love in our lives, in the Church Family, in the Community and in the world***

**December, 2020, newsletter**

**Steeple View**

**West Parish Congregational Church**

**United Church of Christ**



### **Pastor's Perspective      December 2020**

The season of Advent is upon us. It is a season of hopeful expectation and anticipation of the arrival of Christ. It is also a time of waiting. Throughout the days and weeks preceding Christmas, we wait with patience and longing. We know of the great joy and peace that is to come. It's on its way...but it's not here yet.

Doesn't this describe what we've already been living through? These last 8-9 months, as we've been dealing with the pandemic and the separation from loved ones and church, has been a time of intense waiting and longing. We had a bit of a reprieve over the summer and early fall, when we could get out more and see one another in person safely using the right precautions. But, now, here we are right back where we started in the early spring. We are hunkering down for the winter months, waiting on the approval and distribution of a vaccine.



Church Council meeting via Zoom

We are also waiting for a new administration to begin its work and, with the divisiveness of the country, it will be a great challenge. Many of us are hopeful for the changes that are to come but, still, we wait.

It's hard to be patient. It's hard, when we know that there is an imminent return of "normal" to our lives. It's so close, yet the time we still need to wait seems endless. Maybe this gives us a better understanding of those Jewish people living in the time just before Jesus was born, living under Roman occupation and the boot of empire, feeling lost and bereft. The

prophets had spoken of one who was to come—“Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace”—but the time had not yet come. And so they waited.

Advent and Christmas at the church will have a different feel this year. Many of those in-person gatherings will have to take place virtually this year. Yet, we still hope to retain the traditions but do them in a new way. You’ll be hearing more about them in the weeks to come. By now, you have heard about the “Christmas Fair in a Bag” taking place on Saturday, December 5<sup>th</sup> from 12 noon to 2 p.m. Get your orders in for your Christmas Fair in a Bag. Also that week, we will begin a ZOOM Bible study focusing on the gospel accounts of Jesus’ birth. It will take place on Wednesdays in December—the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 16<sup>th</sup>—at 6:45 PM. Please let me know if you would like to take part so I can send you the readings and the ZOOM link.

Look for other gatherings and celebrations of Advent as they are announced in the weekly emails that Peggy and I send out. For now, God’s love, hope, peace, and joy be with each of you. Let us wait together with patient expectation for the great joy to come.

*Tim*

## Christian Education

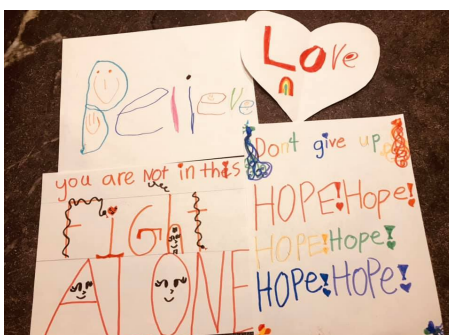
We all have our stories of the Advent-Christmas seasons. For some of us, this upcoming time of year has always been filled with joyful gatherings and events, for others this season has been difficult or painful, and for still others it's been a mix of these things, or perhaps not a significant time at all. For some of us Advent was a distinctly different season from Christmas, and for others the whole month of December was the Christmas season. There is no one right way to live into this sacred time.

Right now we are all probably processing, in one way or another, the changes that will have to happen this year, during this pandemic, as we walk through this season of Advent and celebrate the coming of the Christ child into our world and lives. We know that keeping ourselves and others safe is our top priority, but there can't help but be some grief about the loss of certain rituals and festivities.

Perhaps this year is a unique and special opportunity to get to the heart of why we celebrate at all. What are your most cherished stories of this time of year? During many years, families and

individuals can get drawn deeply into a stressful place of having to take care of a list of “things we always do” whether or not they still hold meaning for us. Perhaps this year we can take a step back and ask questions like, “What do I value most about this season?”

Cassidy and Cody-Ann’s and Lucy and Isla’s Signs of Encouragement



“How can I find a way to stay connected to the people I won't get to see this year?” or “What does the Christmas story mean to me?”

For the young families in our church, we were able to gather outdoors in person twice, before the rising Covid numbers caused us to go back to online only. The Christian Education committee will continue to provide our recorded Sunday School lessons and offer opportunities to gather on zoom for fellowship and an activity/craft. Our most recent zoom gathering was a time of making “signs of encouragement.” The children present made colorful signs of hope, love, and courage, and will display those signs in their yards, their cars, and other places, to help support our neighbors.

The CE Committee will provide tools and opportunities for children and families as they also venture into a new Advent/Christmas experience. I look forward to us discovering new traditions – born out of this pandemic necessity – traditions that we will love for years to come!

Again I will say, the children miss seeing adults of the church outside of the CE Committee members. We would love to find ways for you to see one another. Consider joining us on one of our upcoming zoom gatherings, or maybe record yourself telling a story of cherished Christmas tradition in your family, or perhaps share a photo of yourselves with something you have created. Shoot me an email at [PboyleWight@gmail.com](mailto:PboyleWight@gmail.com) with your thoughts, questions, or ideas.

The CE Committee sends you peace, hope, love, and joy as we head towards Thanksgiving and the beginning of our Advent season. May the peace of Christ be with each and every one of you, this day, and every day.

~ Patricia

## Coming Home

The Ad Hoc Committee on Church Re-opening has met to identify the special steps we need to take if we are to open the church to any activities during the pandemic. One of its first decisions was to re-name the committee *Coming Home*, as we felt everyone would like to *Come Home* to the church building and our community practices soon.

The goal as set out by the Church Council for the Coming Home Committee is to “to study when and how best to reopen the church for physical attendance at worship and other church activities within the building during the current COVID-19 pandemic, taking into consideration all related restrictions and health concerns.” Their task is to present a plan to the Church Council for their approval.

After research on recommended steps to take to re-open places of worship, five areas of concern were identified:

- What **community conditions** of COVID cases should exist before beginning to open the building?
- What **sanitation** processes will be needed before, during and after a gathering?
- What effort needs to be taken to be sure attendees keep proper **separation**?
- What strategies can be taken to assure proper **air ventilation and filtration** where attendees gather?

The Committee has consulted with Rick Karg of Bethel, a member of the American Association of Heating, Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE), who serves as chair of the ASHRAE Epidemic Task Force. He has assisted in developing air filtration strategies for both the chapel and sanctuary.

The Committee has suggested three steps towards fully opening: First for groups to meet or have our small services inside in the chapel; second to hold hybrid services in the sanctuary with limited attendees; and finally fully opening to members and the community. A specified plan will be created for each step that addresses the five areas above. Members of the committee and anyone willing to volunteer will be responsible for implementing these plans to assure each standard set is met for each gathering.

The Committee has presented its preliminary findings to the Church Council. The *Coming Home Committee* will meet again on December 3 at 7pm. Please feel free to join us, or send us any questions or concerns you may have.

Henrietta List, chair

### **Christmas Fair in a Bag - Deacons Report**



We will all miss the annual Christmas Fair & Tea this year. (Maybe not all the work, but certainly the afternoon of the special event!)

You will still be able to have a taste of some of the delicious baked goodies that we so enjoy. For \$20 you can purchase a bag that will contain “cookie walk” cookies, quickbread, tea goodies, tea & cocoa, etc.

Pick up or purchase of a bag will be on Saturday, December 5 from 12-2 p.m. at the lower side entrance of the church. Pre-orders are encouraged. Please contact Diane York at [DianeYorkME@roadrunner.com](mailto:DianeYorkME@roadrunner.com) to order your bag(s). You don't want to miss out!

### **From the Deacons:**

**Historical Note: The date on the bell in the steeple is 1847.**

Many thanks to the Congo Craftsmen for all their work in the narthex and balcony.

Most of the diaconate discussion focused on the Advent Season. We will continue the tradition of giving of pontsettias to those who have suffered a loss in the past year, have been housebound or ill, our loved nonagenarians, in special appreciation, or in need of support.

Advent Sunday services will continue to be recorded and available on YouTube. You can access the link through Facebook as well as it being sent via email. The Christmas Eve service will also be prerecorded and available in the same manner. Other Advent activities are in the works



including a virtual Christmas Concert by the Mahoosuc Community Band. Love Bowl for December is the Christmas Fund, a UCC general offering.



The Maine Conference Annual Meeting was done entirely by Zoom meetings and Zoom webinar. Here are some highlights. The theme “Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the Glory of God.” - Romans 15:7 ran through the two-day conference.

Rev. Jonna Jenson is the new Transitional Conference Minister, replacing Debra Blood. Rev. Deborah Jenks is the Transitional Associate Conference Minister, replacing Darren Morgan.

Abdi Nor Iftin, keynote speaker for Friday, spoke of his very difficult life in Somalia before being able to emigrate to Maine. In *Call Me American*, Abdi Nor Iftin tells the true story of immigrating to America via luck and perseverance. As a Somali refugee, he won entrance to the US in an annual lottery, then risked his life to reach his new home in America and in Maine.

Saturday’s keynote speaker was Jennifer Boylan who spoke eloquently on inclusiveness. She is a transgender woman who wrote *She’s Not There, I’m Looking Through You*, and *I’m Stuck in the Middle With You*. She described the power of saying Yes in our churches, yes to those that don’t look or act like us and are all children of God.

Ron Baard spoke of the ongoing work of MeSOM (Maine School of Ministry) that is entirely online this year. It is open to anyone in the conference wanting to develop their spirituality deeper.

Pilgrim Lodge, the summer camp for our conference, may not have had campers but had lots of maintenance activities completed. Rev. Jennifer Paty, new director for PL, described with joy the completion of so many projects at PL, thanks to the many volunteers committed to the Christian camp experience.

The conference conducted the usual business of approving the budget and clergy compensation package. They had a power point of ministers in transition, leaving and joining churches and ministers dying. Even though we weren’t able to see each other, we felt the connection with churches around the state, in this time of Covid, We Can Be the Church in new ways.

Jane Chandler and Patricia Boyle-Wight,  
delegates to the Maine Conference

## Stay Humble

Marilyn Sahlberg shared this thought that we can all use at this time. Be kind, work hard, stay humble, smile often (even under a mask), keep honest, stay loyal, travel when (safely) possible, never stop learning, be thankful always, and Love.



## Birthdays and Anniversaries

If you see any of these people, please wish them a happy birthday or anniversary.

December 1 – Paul Motts

December 18 Erica Mulley

December 2 – Robin Zinchuk

December 20 – Terry Miles

December 4 – Grace Scott

December 21 – Kaitlyn Keane

December 5 – Randi Dunham

December 23 – Samantha Mallory

December 7 – Jim Chandler

December 30 – Priscella Walker

December 7 – Art Marshall

December 30 – Willow Dunham

December 7– Seabury Lyon

December 30 – Isla DeCato

December 8 – Brendon Bass

Anniversary – Dec. 21 – Seabury and Sharon Lyon

And we welcome the newest addition to our church family. Bill Marshall and his wife Eliza Mette welcomed their new daughter, Eva Ruth Marshall on Nov 14. She weighed 8lbs 2 oz. Grandparents Art and Ellen Marshall are very excited about her arrival. Cards may be sent to Bill Marshall & Eliza Mette, 1559 Washington Ave, Portland Me 04103



## December Calendar dates

**Tuesday 12/1** Book group, 7 PM (ZOOM)

**Wed. 12/2** Men's Breakfast at 8 AM (at church),  
Stewardship Committee @ 11 AM (at church), Pastoral Relations @ 2 PM (at church), Music Committee @ 5 PM (ZOOM), Advent Bible Study @ 6:45 PM (ZOOM)

**Sat. 12/5** Christmas Fair to Go pick-ups 12 noon to 2 p.m.

- Sunday 12/6** Second Sunday of Advent/Worship with Communion (online), ZOOM Fellowship time @ 11 AM
- Tues. 12/8** Trustees, 6:30 PM (ZOOM)
- Wed. 12/9** Advent Bible Study @ 6:45 PM (ZOOM)
- Sun. 12/13** Third Sunday of Advent/Worship (online), ZOOM Fellowship time @ 11 World Service Committee @ 12 PM (ZOOM), Coffee order due
- Tues. 12/15** Red Cross Blood Drive at Church 9-1:30, Deacons @ 10 AM (ZOOM)
- Wed. 12/16** Advent Bible Study @ 6:45 (ZOOM)
- Sun. 12/20** Fourth Sunday of Advent/Worship (online), ZOOM Fellowship time @ 11
- Thurs. 12/24** Christmas Eve Service (online)
- Fri. 12/25** **Merry Christmas!**
- Sun. 12/27** Worship (online) led and put together by Patricia Boyle-Wight, ZOOM Fellowship time @ 11 AM
- Sun. 12/27—Fri. 1/1 Rev. Tim on vacation**

## Book Group

Book group will discuss *Hillbilly Elegy, A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis* by J.D. Vance on Tuesday, December 1. We will discuss *The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek* by Kim Michele Richardson on January 5.

Both meetings are via Zoom at 7 p.m.. Please contact Jane Chandler for a Zoom link. Anyone interested in a good discussion who enjoys reading is welcome.

## A Cup of Coffee means a Cup of Justice

Jane Chandler is taking orders for coffee, tea, and chocolate from Equal Exchange. The company deals directly with farmers around the world, reducing the middleman and providing a fair price for the local grower.

Orders are due the second Sunday of every other month, due December 13. Email her with your order and she will give you the amount due. View available products at

<https://shop.equalexchange.coop/collections/coffee> .



## Christmas Fund is December Love Bowl

Christmas is the time our national church collects money as a way to say thank you to ministers who have devoted their lives to bringing the message of Jesus's love to us. Many of these ministers have worked in small churches, without financial ability to support them in retirement or with disabilities.

Lower-income retirees continue to feel most keenly the financial stress brought about by the current economic climate. Because of that, we ask you to prayerfully consider your response to the 2020 Christmas Fund Offering and give to the best of your ability. Reflect upon the ways in which your life has been touched by a retired pastor, a former youth leader, a Christian Education director, a church secretary, a custodian, or a minister of music, and honor their ministries in a way that will help them and others like them in these challenging times.

Please consider a donation to thank ministers and spouses.

## Congratulations! 200 Emergency Food Boxes

We as a church have done it. We have filled the 200<sup>th</sup> Emergency Food Box, food for a family of 4 for 3 days. Melody was the person who kept soliciting food to fill these boxes. Since Covid, we have switched to one person buying enough to fill the boxes. It costs about \$75 for each set of boxes. Jan Whitworth is now filling these up and delivering them to social workers in the community who are aware of food insecurity.

