The Good News

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December 3, 2023 **Second Sunday of Advent Holy Communion Worship Service** 9:30 A.M.



Minister: Rev. Lynne Spencer-Smith Scripture: Isaiah 40:1-11, Mark 1:1-18

Lay Reader: Brittany Light

Ushers: Dale & Nancy Dallmann, Steve Gettel

Advent Candle: The Light Family Choir Director: Cindy Stevens Organist: Tyler Menzales

Sunday School: (Elementary) Erin Borland, Janet Koostra

Nursery care not provided this week

Fellowship: Verna Kessner, KimKay McCarty Martin

Tellers: Paul Haffeman, Sue Skees

The service will be live-streamed and a recording of the livestream service will be available on YouTube later in the day.

> Congregational Budget Hearing Sunday, December 10, 10:45 AM In Fellowship Hall and via Zoom

The preparation of the 2024 budget is underway. Your Business Affairs Board has called for a Congregational Meeting on Sunday, December 10 following worship. The meeting will also be offered via Zoom. The purpose of the meeting is to provide information on the 2024 budget and to seek input from FCUCC-GF members regarding the development of the budget. With limited resources, the Business Affairs Board is faced with some hard decisions. The board welcomes all suggestions. No vote on the preliminary budget will be taken at this meeting. The purpose is to hear from members to help guide in the formulation of the 2024 budget. Please plan to attend.



Christian Education News

This week, all children will begin in their Sunday School classes and have class for the entire worship hour. The Elementary Class (children through grade 5) will meet in Sunday School Room 4 to learn about "The Annunciation" with teacher Susan

Thomas. The Youth Class for grades 6-8 will meet in the parlor to discuss "Why does the Bible Contradict Itself at Times?". There will not be Sunday School on November 26. (But there will be Christmas Pageant Rehearsal that weekend.) Happy Thanksgiving!

In Our Thoughts and Prayers



† Our sympathy to Phil and Jody Maxwell in the death of Jody's mom, Nancy, who passed away Sunday, November 26.

Giving Thanks for Thanksgiving Baskets

With the help of many giving hearts, First Congregational UCC delivered seven Thanksgiving meals to families of West Elementary School. The families received Thanksgiving staples of: turkey, pie, dressing, potatoes, gravy, cranberries, corn, green beans sweet potatoes, olives and an aluminum roaster pan. Through the generosity of Sunday School offering and others who donated money, the baskets included apples, oranges, milk, butter, cereal, pop tarts and pancake mix. All given with the hope of keeping tummies full over the holiday. Many, many thanks to all who joined the Christian Education and Christian Service Boards to make such a wonderful gift possible for seven special families. God bless you all as you have blessed others!



Christmas Pageant Rehearsals

Christmas Pageant rehearsals are awesome! This week, rehearsal will be held on Sunday, December 3 at 12:30 P.M. in the sanctuary for children with speaking roles. Rehearsal on Saturday, December 9 is for <u>ALL</u> children- angels, animals, speaking roles. This will be the first rehearsal for younger kids. Please contact Janet Koostra, 406-727-8443 or janetkoostra@gmail.com with any questions. See you Sunday!



Because of YOU

Your gift-giving spreads joy and makes a lasting impact. Each year at Christmas, your Christian Service Board adopts two West Elementary families, and each year, your generosity fulfills the children's wishes. The gift-giving tree is located in the Narthex. If you wish to fulfill a child's wish, please select a tag, purchase the gift, and return the gift and the tag to the church no later than December 17. The gifts will be wrapped and delivered to West Elementary on December 18. Thank you for sharing your love and joy.

The Surveys Said...

Earlier this year, we sent out a survey to get some feedback on your preference for worship times for Sunday morning and Christmas Eve. Although we had some good indications of your desires for worship times for Sunday mornings, there are no plans to make any changes to our Sunday worship schedule (note that we will begin our turn to worship at 11:00 A.M. on January 7). Christmas Eve is a different story. Over the last several years, the participation in the 10:00 P.M. worship service has been notably declining. There have been times when it was looking like the choir would outnumber the congregation! Your responses to the survey and the decline in attendance at a late-evening service has made it clear that it's time for a change.

This year's Christmas Eve service will be held at 4:30 P.M. It will look and feel and sound just like our traditional service that has been at 10:00 P.M. Keeping in mind that it's in the depths of the winter, it will be dark by the time we light the candles and sing "Peace, Peace" at the end of the service. The sun is expected to set at 4:38 that evening. Keep this time change in mind as you are making your holiday plans. Invite your family and friends to come and celebrate the birth of Christ.

Fishing for Volunteers

Hey everyone! Just letting you know that our turn to work at the FISH Food Pantry is **December 11-15 from 9:00-11:00 A.M.** So if you'd like to volunteer and distribute food to families in need, **please call Carol Davidson at 406-836-1862**. And wearing a mask is fine, too....I probably will be wearing one at the window. Thank you so much if you can help!



"Grace upon Grace." John 1:16

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. **Donations can be made online or with a check written to the church. Please be sure to indicate Christmas Fund in the memo**.

News from the YWCA

Earlier this year, we had the pleasure of hearing about the wonderful work being done at the YWCA of Great Falls from Sandi Filipowicz, their Executive Director. Here's some updates on what they're up to these days. They have purchased a building at 101 Central Avenue and will be moving programs and administration there to allow for them to expand childcare, transitional housing and additional beds in the Mercy Home. You can visit with the staff of the Y at their new location at 101 Central Avenue during the Christmas Stroll on December 1.

Conference Camp Opportunities Save the Dates!

Hold the following dates for next year's summer church camping opportunities

You & Me Adventure Camp at Mimanagish: July 5-8 Youth Adventures Camp at Mimanagish: July 9-15

AND... the Great Escape Adult Adventures will return in 2024. The Outdoor Ministry Team is in the process of lining up venues and dates. Consider serving as a camp staff volunteer.

If interested, please contact Rev. Lynne or Denise Jackson.

Camp Trailer Fundraiser

To support Outdoor Ministry and other Conference missions, we are asking folks to consider participating in a special fundraising opportunity. Not having our own facility creates logistical issues for storage during the camps, transporting programming needs, storage during the off-season, and for portability of events around the Conference. We have come up with a solution, and we are asking folks around the Conference to help make it a reality. We are trying to find a 6 x 6 x 12 trailer to serve as our Conference on wheels. Here is our project:

Find a Suitable Trailer

Consider helping Outdoor Ministry locate a trailer that is available for \$5000 or less that we can equipped for our purpose. Contact Trudi Downer with details.

Individual Support for Mission

- Consider sending the amount you would have contributed to the special camp offering to Outdoor Ministry for the trailer.
- Consider a year-end gift to help with this worthwhile project.
- All money raised will first go to paying for the trailer and then to fitting the trailer with shelving, power, etc.
- In-kind gifts of materials and labor to fix up the trailer are welcomed.

Donation Link:

https://www.aplos.com/aws/give/MNWC/trailer

Holy Wonder

Lights twinkle in the shadows. Snow blankets the ground and muffles earth's sounds. Secrets are shared in whispers. Gifts are hidden until wrapped and then placed under the tree to be picked up and held and shook and wondered at. The mystery of Christmas is told in legends and traditions and song and memory. It's a season of wonder... holy wonder. Did God really arrive in our midst weak and vulnerable as a baby? It would be just the kind of thing God would do.

As we take our next steps into Advent (remember we started it all last Sunday during the joint service with Christ United Methodist Church), I invite you to do so with some holy wonder. Plug the lights in. Wrap a few gifts. Bake a batch of cookies or two and brew up some hot cocoa and then get out of the way. Watch the candle flicker. Watch the snow fall (it will come eventually). Let the dishes and laundry go. The dusting and bathroom cleaning can wait a while. Create some space for the coming of Christ and then get out of the way and let wonder seep into the midst of it all.

The next four weeks of worship will be designed to help you do that. The pace will be a bit slower (except for pageant Sunday on December 17). The lights might be dimmed a bit. The Advent wreath will be our focus. As a community of faith, we'll create that space of Holy Wonder and then get out of the way to let God do with us what we need this Advent Season.

I look forward to the Holy journey with you.

Rev. Lynne

Merger Talks

Several weeks ago, we provided information about a conversation that has begun with the leadership teams of our church (Church Council) and that of Christ United Methodist. The conversation is all about wondering about possibly merging our two congregations. Although we share the facility (and have for over 45 years!), aside from our joint summer worship services and Joint Facilities Committee, we do very little ministry together. What if that were to change and we found a way to unite into one congregation? What might that look like? What hesitations do we have? What benefit would we experience? What challenges could we anticipate? Right now, there are more questions than answers. The conversation is just beginning and there is no decision made other than to explore a bit together.

At a meeting of the two leadership teams on October 24, it was determined that the next best step would be to have representatives of each leadership team develop some talking and listening points. Shortly, members of our Church Council will be open to having informal conversations with you about your thoughts about a potential merger with Christ United Methodist Church. Responses will be brought together and shared with another joint leadership meeting sometime after the first of the year. And, then we'll see what happens. Please be open to some possibilities. Be open to sharing with loving honesty. And pray for wisdom and faithful discernment.

Mitten Makers

A HUGE thank you these ladies, the mitten makers of First Congregational United Church of Christ and Christ United Methodist Church. They have met twice a month in the Fellowship Hall and have cut and sewn over a hundred pairs of mittens that are then donated to local charities.



Pictured are

Karen McElroy, Connie Brauer, LoisBaker, Marilyn Sheffels, Gloria Collins, Rosemary Neilsen

Cold weather is upon us and volunteers are needed for Housed Great Falls cold weather drop-in center located at First United Methodist Church (610 2nd Ave. N). The center is a safe, evening space for people who are experiencing homelessness or are stranded from November-March. When temperatures are forecast to be a "feels like" 25 degrees or lower, the drop-in center is open from 5:30-9:30 P.M. until overnight services at the Rescue Mission opens at 10:00 P.M. Water, warm drinks, a warm meal and snacks are provided to those utilizing the center. The cold weather drop-in center is committed to providing a physically and emotionally safe place for all people regardless of race, national origin, gender, age, creed, or sexual orientation. Volunteers aim to treat all people with respect and dignity, understanding that the people using the center are struggling with issues that many of us can't even imagine. Volunteers serve all people with compassion and grace while performing the following tasks:

Greet guests with warmth and hospitality
Ensure guests sign in when entering the center
Make coffee and serve available food to guests
Engage in listening and conversation
Encourage use of games, puzzles, books, etc.
Clean up space at the end of the evening
Clear the building to ensure no one is left inside
Turn off lights and lock doors when leaving

To learn more about volunteering at the Cold Weather Drop-In Center, please contact Housed Great Falls at housedgreatfallsmt@gmail.com or on Facebook at Housed Great Falls.

Welcome Storles!

On Saturday, November 25, representatives of the congregation (Rev. Lynne, Janet Koostra, Dick Kloppel and Karen Spencer) gathered with the family and friends of Keith and Allie Storle and their children to celebrate the sacrament of baptism. Calvin, Anthony, Anna, Jaycee, Rose and Cameron were all baptized into the Christian Faith and Allie and Keith affirmed their baptisms to become members of this congregation.

Here's a little information about them:

Allie grew up in this church and brought Keith while visiting Great Falls and he said it was the only church he has ever felt comfortable in. Once they moved to their farm outside of Vaughn, it was only natural to bring their family. Their household includes six children and one more on the way. They have been actively involved in foster care for the last 6 years. They bought a small farm in Vaughn and currently have chickens, goats, cats and dogs. They love to stay busy on the farm and as a family.

Their favorite vacation was surprising the kids with a trip to Great Wolf Lodge in Minneapolis last year. They had so much fun in the waterpark, arcade, and ropes course. Flying with six special needs kids and the grandparents went really smoothly!

They would love to get involved in master gardening. It would be so fun to be more self-sufficient on their farm to feed their family and truly know where our food comes from and what they are putting in their bodies.

Please continue to welcome the Storles!



Coming Up

Thursday, November 30

12:15 P.M. Genesis Bible Study, FH

Sunday, December 3

9:15 A.M. Youth Sunday School, Parlor

10:45 A.M. Worship Board, Parlor

12:30 P.M. Pageant Rehearsal

Monday, December 4

1:00 P.M. Christian Service Board, FH

Tuesday, December 5

12:45 P.M. Reading, West Elementary

6:30 P.M. Church Growth Board, Zoom

Wednesday, December 6

10:00 A.M. Bridge, FH

1:30 P.M. Pinochle, FH

6:00 P.M. Youth Group, SS Wing

6:00 P.M. Handbells, Choir Room

7:15 P.M. Chancel Choir, Sanctuary

Thursday, December 7

12:15 P.M. Genesis Bible Study, FH

4:00 P.M. Joint Facilities, FH