

# The Good News

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*like us on Facebook at First Congregational United Church of Christ-Great Falls, MT*

## **December 17, 2023 Fourth Sunday of Advent Worship Service, 9:30 A.M.**



You are invited to join us for our annual Christmas Pageant during worship. With a cast and crew of more than 35 participants, we look forward to sharing the birth of the Christ Child with members and friends. Costumes, the voices of singing children and adults, and scripture hope to provide a heartwarming reminder that Jesus is the reason for the season!

Minister: Rev. Lynne Spencer-Smith  
Ushers: Lila Byers, Norman Menzales  
Advent Candle: The Menzales Family  
Choir Director: Cindy Stevens  
Accompanist: Tyler Menzales  
Fellowship: Dave & Debbe Rothweiler  
Tellers: Paul Haffeman, Liz Lee

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

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### ***2023 Budget Update from the Business Affairs Board***

As the year 2023 comes to an end, and we prepare to close this year's budget, the Business Affairs Board is greatly appreciative for the financial support of our members and friends. If you have completed or are set to complete your 2023 pledge, THANK YOU SO MUCH!

**If you have not yet made plans to fulfill your 2023 pledge, please do so prior to December 31<sup>st</sup>.** For convenience, giving can be done electronically by going to our website. The 2023 budget requirements of our church must be met in December so please note that December 31<sup>st</sup> is a Sunday and a deposit will not process that day. You may want to get this done by Friday, December 29<sup>th</sup>.

Through the generosity of our members and friends, we look forward to meeting our financial obligations for 2023. Thank you for your support of our blessed church. MERRY CHRISTMAS!



### *Christian Education News*

It's the weekend of the annual Christmas Pageant! Cast and crew have worked hard and that hard work is about to pay off! **Christmas Pageant Dress Rehearsal will be Saturday, December 16. Please arrive at 12:15 P.M. to get in costume so we can begin at 12:30 P.M.** We are rehearsing with the choir so run-throughs may take a little longer. We'll do two complete run-throughs. Plan for two hours.

**Costumes will be in Sunday School Room 4. On Sunday, December 17, please arrive at 9:00 A.M. to get in costumes, rehearse music and put on microphones.** There is no Sunday School on December 17. Nursery care will be available.

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### *Cookie Exchange and Lumpia Christmas Fundraiser 2023*

*Friday, December 15- 5:30-6:30 P.M.*

*Fellowship Hall*

**Taste and trade some delicious goodies and sing some carols accompanied by a flute choir led by Norman Menzales.**

**This event is family-friendly and free!**

#### **Cookie Exchange Rules**

1. Make 2 to 4 dozen cookies – one batch to taste and share, the other to swap!
3. To participate, sign up in the fellowship hall or call the office to list the cookies you'll bring.
4. Cookies should arrive on a platter or container labeled with cookie name and if it contains nuts.
5. Bring a container to bring your traded cookies home.
6. Please arrive on time.
7. At the end of the exchange, everyone should have an equal number of cookies – unless you've already eaten some of them!

In addition to sweet treats, nothing says "Happy Holidays" like good food and good music! The Sampaguita Flute Project celebrates Filipino culture by bringing works of Filipino classical music to diverse audiences. In this special fundraising event, you can support Norman and the Sampaguita Flute Project while enjoying delicious Filipino cuisine. **Lumpia is a Filipino egg roll and will be available to sample and purchase! \$20.00/15 lumpia.** For questions, please contact Norman at 478-747-6565.



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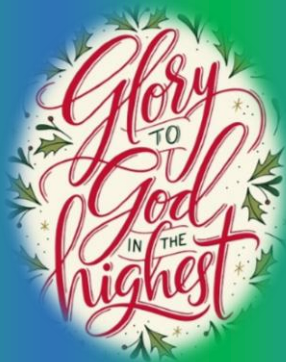
### *2024 Budget Preparation and Pledges*

Thank you to everyone who stayed for the budget hearing last Sunday. The discussion and sincere comments and suggestions were greatly appreciated. There were some who urged members to reconsider and increase their pledge for 2024. Taking suggestions from that hearing, the Business Affairs Board has prepared the proposed budget for 2024. **IT IS NOT TOO LATE TO MAKE YOUR 2024 PLEDGE IF YOU HAVE NOT YET DONE SO.** Please contact Holly at the church office to do this as soon as possible. If you would like to increase the pledge that you have already submitted, also call Holly and give her that information. Your prayerful consideration of supporting the church with the work we do to make a difference for our folks, in the community, and in the wider church is indeed important!

## *Good News of Great Joy!*

We are happy to announce that **First Congregational UCC** has a new staff member in the nursery! Ceara “CJ” Mollohan comes to us with 3 years of experience in the field of childcare and certifications in CPR, first aid and infant sleep safety. CJ began working on December 10. Stop in the nursery to welcome our newest staff member!

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### *Christmas Offering*

Each year during our Christmas Eve service, two organizations are selected as recipients of your generosity. This year, the **West Elementary Food Pantry** and **Veterans of the Cross** have been chosen. The Veterans of the Cross 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 checks each December to our lower-income retirees. What a great way to say “Thank you.”

West Elementary is one of the lowest socioeconomic schools in our district. Our church has been very generous to West Elementary, but they continue to have significant needs. **The Christian Service board will match your contribution to the food pantry up to \$200.00 to help fill the pantry for when the kids return to school after the holidays.** Many students are receiving special care during Christmas, so let us ensure they continue to feel love and care into 2024.

**You are welcome to contribute to one or both; please mark your donation as you wish.**

**Have a blessed and wonderful Christmas.**



### *Ecumenical Solstice Service*

**Central Christian Church (1025 Central Ave.)**

**December 21 – 7:00 P.M.**

Several area Open and Affirming (and ONA leaning) congregations and spiritual leaders are coming together to observe the Longest Night in observance of some of the challenges that the holiday season brings. Plan to attend to find some time and space for comfort and hope.

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### *Upcoming Worship Schedule*

December 24	9:30 A.M.	Christmas Eve morning service
December 24	4:30 P.M.	Christmas Eve service of Lessons and Carols and Candlelight
December 31	10:00 A.M.	Joint service with Christ UMC, UCC leadership
January 7, 2024	11:00 A.M.	Begin new worship time for 2024

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### *Become an “Upper”*

Following last Sunday’s budget hearing, Greg and I have increased our pledge for 2024. Would you consider joining us and become an “Upper”? \$1 a month? \$5 a month? \$20 a month? \$50 a month? We upped ours! Please consider upping yours. Just give the church office a call or send Holly an email and let her know that you want to be an “Upper.”

Rev. Lynne



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### *Coming Up*

#### **Thursday, December 14**

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

#### **Friday, December 15**

5:30 P.M. Lumpia Christmas, FH

#### **Saturday, December 16**

12:30 P.M. Mandatory Pageant Rehearsal

#### **Sunday, December 17**

Return West Elementary Christmas gifts

NO Stewardship Board meeting

#### **Monday, December 18**

6:30 P.M. Church Council, Zoom

#### **Tuesday, December 19**

12:45 P.M. Reading, West Elementary

#### **Wednesday, December 20**

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 21**

7:00 P.M. Solstice Service- Central Christian Church, 1025 Central Ave.

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## ***“The God of...”***

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in faith so that you overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” *Romans 15:13*

We hear and speak of God being “the God of...” Fill in the blank. There’s lots of “things.” The Bible has a few of its own references to “the God of...” as well. Here’s a few:

The God of Abraham (and Sarah). The God of heaven and earth. The God of Israel. The God of our/my salvation. The God of life. God of compassion and mercy. God of my/our praise. God of justice. God of all living things. God of heavenly forces. God of my/our deliverance. God of endurance and encouragement. God of hope. God of love and peace. God of all comfort. God of all grace. The God of the spirits of the prophets. God of the humble.

God of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the Hebrew scriptures (the Old Testament), God is mostly the God of ancestors and of heavenly forces. There’s a few references to compassion, mercy, deliverance and salvation. The Psalms include variations of addressing God as the God of my or our praise. Things shift a bit when we get to the Christian scriptures (New Testament), especially when we get to the Epistles. I chalk it up to the influence of the Greeks who, at the time, were die-hard polytheists and gave us Greek mythology and gods and goddesses like Aphrodite, the goddess of love, sex and beauty. And Eros, the god of love and lust. And Poseidon, god of the sea, horses and earthquakes. We can’t discount the Roman influence as well, thinking about Janus the god of beginnings and passages (hence the name “*January*” for the first month of the year.)

Apparently, we like to make sure that our ‘gods’ have a job to do. It’s also handy to know just which “god” it is we can blame for things.... Like earthquakes and lust. If we take that propensity to want to give God a job to do or to be responsible for something in the human realm, as followers of Christ, it might be a good idea to start there, with Jesus. What characteristics of Jesus compel us to fall in love with him and follow him and can we see something of God in those qualities? If Jesus is the offspring of God, what “genetic traits” does Jesus get from God?

I think the writer of Romans is on to something in their calling upon the God of Hope to use the divine power to fill folks with joy and peace. What greater power could there be than to fill the world with joy and peace? It’s a power that emerges from God’s most important job... to love the world and all that is in it.

This Sunday, we will light the fourth candle on the Advent Wreath on our way to Christmas. It’s the candle of Love. Leading up to it, we have lit the candles of Hope, Peace, and Joy. Perhaps we have not simply been lighting candles but have been calling upon God’s hope, peace, joy, and now love to fill the world to overflowing. It’s God’s job. As followers of Christ, it’s ours as well.

May the God of Jesus Christ fill you in abundance with Hope, Peace, Joy and Love.

Have a blessed week.

Rev. Lynne

