

The Good News of First Congregational UCC and Christ United Methodist Church

Volume 2024

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

Worship Notes For December 22, 2024 4th Sunday of Advent 9:30 A.M.



Worship Leader: Rev. Lynne Spencer-Smith

Scripture: Micah 5:2-5a, Luke 1:39-56

Lay Reader: Dana Kirkmeyer

Ushers: Betsy Rogstad, Susan Thomas

Acolytes: Kaeden Dunn, Jullian Valley

Advent Candle Lighting: Bruce Cole & Bill Tiskus,

Dean Jardee, Kelly Quick

Choir Director: Jason Webster

Accompanist: Victor Tsai

Nursery: May Harris

Coffee Fellowship: KimKay McCarty Martin, Verna Kessner

Treats: Lois Baker, Nancy Dallmann, Carolyn Dowdy

Tellers: Ed Venetz, Nancy Zadick

The service will be live-streamed on both church Facebook pages
and a recording of the livestream will be available on YouTube
later in the day and on the UCC website.

In Our Thoughts and Prayers



† **Cathy Dunn** (Eric Dunn's and Chelle Schrader's mom) is home from the hospital for heart issues.



Christian Education News

Change in plans! **No Sunday School on December 22!** Children are invited to attend worship with their families. **Nursery care will be expanded to include children up to age 7.** On December 29, there will be no Sunday School and no nursery care.

Sunday School and Nursery will resume on January 5.

“... The Glory of God Shone Around Them...”

Luke 2:9

Each year during our Christmas Eve service, two organizations are selected as recipients of your generosity. This year, the **YWCA Mercy Home** 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 lower-income retirees. What a great way to say “Thank you.”

Mercy Home is more than emergency housing for women impacted by domestic violence; it's a 60-day program providing a comprehensive support system for women and their children escaping abusive relationships. The approach empowers participants to pursue goals, regain control of their lives, achieve self-sufficiency, and live with dignity. Additionally, Mercy Home offers a 24/7 crisis line for those seeking assistance and support in dealing with intimate partner violence.

Christmas offering donations can be brought to church or you can use the QR code to access our PayPal page. Please remember to indicate the designation of your gift in the “note” section on PayPal. **You are welcome to contribute to one or both.**



Christmas Pageant Thanks!

Many thanks to all who helped make the Christmas Pageant possible! Appreciation and gratitude to the children who participated and their adults who brought them to rehearsals and helped them learn their lines. Children were: **Bailey Schrader, Elvis Light, Chase Schrader, Alicia Light, Lily Borland, Echo Greene, Angelito Dunn, Saint Dunn, Kaeden Dunn, Aalayah Dunn, Violet Walker, Jaycee Storle** and **Piper Light**. Take another bow, kids! And a standing ovation for the crew: **Sue Turton, Gwen Valley, Jullian Valley, Eric Dunn, Chelle Schrader, Scott Schrader, Alicia Light, Betsy Rogstad, Noel Walker** and **Erin Borland**. Very special thanks to **Jason Webster**, musical director; the Chancel Choir and accompanist **Barb Swaby**. **Ray Young** was a fantastic Isaiah and **Cara Dunn** did a wonderful job narrating! And thank you, thank you, thank you to our engaged and attentive audience--we were honored and delighted to perform for you!! The Pageant is a true group effort! I am beyond grateful for all who made this possible! Christmas blessings! **Janet Koostra**



Save the date and make your plans for our annual

Christmas Eve Service!

Service of Lessons, Carols and Candles

*This will be a unified service, an offering
for both congregations, friends and families.*

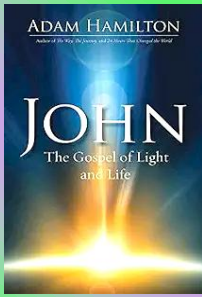
Tuesday, December 24

4:30 P.M.

The office will be closed on Christmas Day and may have reduced hours December 24 and 26.

**THANK
YOU!**

A big thank you to my daughter for the birthday party this past Sunday. Also, thank you to my grandkids and great-grandkids for being here from near and far. And, also, to my church family which is a blessing to me! **Louise Toole**



Bible Study to Begin

The bible study group that has been meeting for years on Wednesday mornings will begin again on January 8 at 10:00 A.M. We meet in the church parlor for 1.5 hours and all are welcome. The next session will be led by Retired Pastor Paul Holland. We are going to look at Adam Hamilton's study of John. The book is entitled *John: The Gospel-Light and Life* by Adam Hamilton. Please purchase your own book for the class. Cost is \$15.52.

Notes from West Elementary:

- ❖ Thank you so much for helping us give the kids a wonderful Thanksgiving! We appreciate your kindness! Thank you and Happy Thanksgiving!
- ❖ Thank you for our turkey box. It is much needed and in perfect timing.
- ❖ Happy Thanksgiving! Thank you for donating the basket to my family! Have a great Thanksgiving and Christmas.
- ❖ Thank you for donating!
- ❖ I just wanted to say thank you for everything. Things are kind of hard right now. Single mom with four kids. So you have no idea how much my family will appreciate this. God bless and thank you for everything.
- ❖ Thank you so much for your kindness and generosity. Our family greatly appreciates your support.

Thank you so much for supporting West and our families during Thanksgiving and all throughout the year. Your partnership means the world to us. We really appreciate your kindness. Blessings, Staff at West Elementary School



The Mitten Makers delivered **193 pairs of mittens** on December 10. Mittens went to Alliance for Youth, The Angel Room, YWCA Women's Shelter, Cameron Family Center, Mental Health and First United Methodist Church. 20 folks were involved in making mittens from Christ United Methodist, First Congregational UCC, and the Lutheran Church in Power.





At their November meeting, United Women In Faith decorated the fellowship hall with crafts made at the meeting. They did not meet in December but will meet again on **Thursday, January 16 at 1:00 P.M.** We can't wait to see what they have in store for the new year!



The Giving Tree for West Elementary. The Christian Service Board sponsored three families with a total of 13 children this year. Thank you to everyone who took a tag and *Imagined Together* spreading joy this holiday season



Shoebboxes for Browning was a combined effort from area Methodist churches, First Congregational UCC, including the Sunday School class. Paul and Linda Holland delivered boxes to Browning and were pleased to see that this was the largest amount of boxes. Way to go, everyone!

Christ UMC November Financial Report

November Income	\$14,477.57
November Expenses	\$13,221.24
Net Income for November	\$1,256.33
Checking Balance November 30	\$55,754.87
Year to Date Income November 30	\$6,891.97

Thank you to everyone for your continued support of our church. Merry Christmas and God's Blessings to everyone. Have a happy, healthy, prosperous and wonderful New Year. Jeanne

November 30, 2024 Financial Highlights First Congregational United Church of Christ

Income

Pledges Actual YTD	Pledges Budgeted YTD	Pledges Budgeted Total Year
\$157,947.97	\$171,565.17	\$187,162.00

Other Income

Actual YTD	Budgeted YTD	Budgeted Total Year
\$35,014.75	\$26,071.59	\$28,443.00

Memorial Board Donation

Actual YTD	Budgeted YTD	Budgeted Total Year
\$90,980.00	\$83,398.16	\$90,980.00

Total Income

Actual YTD	Budgeted YTD	Budgeted Total Year
\$283,942.72	\$281,035.91	\$306,585.00

Expenses

Actual YTD	Budgeted YTD	Budgeted Total Year
\$265,988.59	\$280,225.60	\$305,700.00



Thank you to all who support the church through financial gifts. As a way to keep everyone informed, the Business Affairs Board will be providing periodic financial updates in the Good News. Here's where we stand in regards to overall income and expenses in relation to our budget. If you'd like to see the detailed financial report as of the end of November, scan the QR code or follow the link below.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1RcZBCZ_VfjV9UGv0YFE4k9X8sKZo7p9Y/view?usp=sharing

2024 Giving Deadline

With the holidays fast approaching, the current year ending, and a new one coming up: **please remember that donations meant for the 2024 tax year, whether pledged or unpledged, must be received in the office by December 31, 2024.** Fulfilling current pledges before the end of the year is most appreciated. **If you are unsure about your pledge, please call the church office.**

Scam Alert!

Reminder that neither Revs. Lynne nor Dawn will ever ask you to purchase gift cards or give money directly to them for any charitable reason. It's a common scam for people to contact nice people pretending to be someone they know and trust to help someone out. **If you get a request from someone asking for you to buy gift cards or transfer money to them, chances are it's a scam.** The best thing to do is contact them directly (don't reply to the email or text) to verify.

I'm still being carried by the joy of the Christmas Pageant from this past Sunday. If you weren't able to be present in church, have a look at it on our Facebook pages (<https://www.facebook.com/greatfallsucc/> or <https://www.facebook.com/christumcgf/> or the UCC's Website: <https://greatfallsucc.org/sermons/9584> or YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/@firstcongregationaluccgrea9068>

The annual Christmas Pageant is a favorite of everyone. The angels are adorable. The shepherds are sweet. The magi are magnificent. We have the opportunity to see "our" kids not just tell but live the story of God's love becoming real, in the flesh. Often the pageant is presented on the third Sunday of Advent when we light the candle of Joy that reminds us that, even while we wait, God is with us. There was such great joy in the room last Sunday. It's never perfect but it's always what we need.

I think it's fair to say that it's the imperfections that often make the pageant memorable. This year, our dear Mary came on stage without the baby Jesus in her arms so that when it came time for her to deliver her first born, we could all see the Christ child in the manger. Never fear! for our dear Mary is a quick thinker and she dashed out of the stable, picked up the waiting Jesus and literally delivered him into the manger with the finesse of a quarterback handing off a football just in time for the running back to score the winning touchdown. (Way to go, Bailey!)

We can learn a lot from the imperfections of Christmas pageants. We can learn that God doesn't need our perfections to make a holy arrival. We can learn that we can improvise in life and faith. We can learn that the Christ child will be delivered in whatever manner we will pay attention. It might be on a silent night or in the bleak midwinter or in a little town. We can learn that Christmas can come through well-rehearsed lines or spirit-filled ad-lib. We can learn that we can't help but be drawn to the wonder of it all because, when it comes right down to it, Christmas is not about learning but about being... being open to however it is that God chooses to arrive, it will always be in whatever way we need.

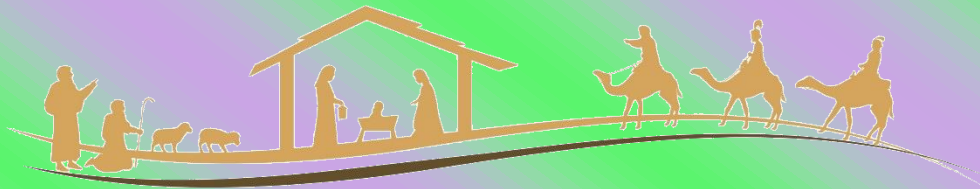
So, my friends, be patient. Pay attention. Let down your expectations. Be open and receive. We've had a taste of Christmas Joy. And it's good. Really, really good. Not perfect but just what we need.

Have a blessed week.



Joy to the world

Rev. Lynne



Rev. Lynne will be out of town December 27 – January 2.

She will be available by email, phone and text. For immediate pastoral care needs, contact Rev. Eric Finsand (Our Savior's Lutheran Church) 406-799-7788.

Longest Night

This coming **Saturday, December 21** marks the winter solstice when the northern hemisphere has tipped the farthest away from the sun. Because of that, we experience the longest night of the year. And then, four days later, it's Christmas! It is no mistake that the birth of Christ is celebrated shortly after the longest night in the northern hemisphere.

We don't actually know the exact date of Jesus' birth. It wasn't until the early 300's CE that the church designated December 25 as the day to celebrate. There are a number of theories behind why December 25. Some claim that December 25 was chosen so that the observance of the birth of Christ would compete with and weaken pagan celebrations. I wonder if it was a "if you can't beat them, join them" sort of thing? Other theories have to do with December 25 being chosen so that it would coincide with the Roman winter solstice festival. And others suggest that it was chosen because it comes 9 months after the Roman spring equinox. The observance didn't really take hold as a major Christian holiday until the 9th century.

I've always liked that Christ's birth is celebrated four days after the shortest day/longest night. It's the time when, before we can even detect it, the days start to get a little longer. It fits in with the tradition that Christ lights the world with God's love. It's also a reminder that, no matter how dark things may seem to become, there will always be more light to come.

I especially like that reminder during those days (and we all have them) when sadness or loneliness or anxiety invade the season. We see all the joy around us and it's hard to join in. We carry HUGE expectations to be jolly and grateful and filled with the spirit of Christmas yet we realize just how hard that is sometimes. Some of us may be experiencing our first Christmas without.... Loved ones, a job, a beloved pet, our family and more. Sometimes we just like to sit in the darkness because, well, just because.

With Christmas being four days after the longest night, even though we may not be able to perceive the increasing light, we can be reminded that the light of God's love is still upon us.

To all who find the holidays challenging, remember that the promise of Christmas is that God comes into the hardest places with love and grace. May you know that gift this year.

Rev. Lynne



Coming Up

Friday, December 20

1:30 P.M. Grief Support, Parlor

Tuesday, December 24

4:30 P.M. Christmas Eve Worship Service

Wednesday, December 25

Merry Christmas! Office Closed

December 27-January 2

Rev. Lynne out of town

Monday, December 30

Annual Reports Due

Wednesday, January 1, 2025

Happy New Year! Office Closed

Thursday, January 2

4:00 P.M. Joint Facilities, FH

Sunday, January 5

10:30 A.M. UCC Conversation, Sanctuary
