

The Congregate Tidings

Volume 38 Issue 12

December 2024

The Pastor's Piece **Hello Darkness, My Old Friend** By Pastor Walt Hampton, J.D., CFC

As December unfolds and the days grow shorter, darkness settles over the Northern Hemisphere. It's not just a shift in light but something that seems to seep into our bones.

I feel it deeply, personally. Living with Seasonal Affective Disorder, I know well the weight of the long, dark winter nights and the effect of losing sunlight's simple warmth. The recent election, too, has cast a shadow over our collective spirit, leaving a lingering sense of division, uncertainty, and weariness.

Darkness has become an unwelcome yet familiar companion, always present, always hovering.

And yet, here we are in Advent, a season that beckons us to hold on, to look for light precisely in the darkness. Advent doesn't deny the shadows that surround us; it acknowledges them. We are, after all, preparing to welcome Christ, the Light of the World, born into a world that was—and still is—full of darkness.

The Prophet Isaiah speaks to this very tension. "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined" (Isaiah 9:2).

These words were spoken to a people familiar with hardship and uncertainty, not so different from us. They knew what it meant to wait, to yearn, to hope. Isaiah's words are a reminder that in every generation, no matter how long the night may seem, light has and will find us.

But we don't rush to that light; we meet it by embracing the darkness as part of our journey.

So how do we, in these dark days, embrace the shadows? One way might be to shift how we think about darkness itself. Too often, we see it as something to fear or avoid. But darkness has its own sacred purpose. Just as seeds take root in the dark soil and new life stirs in the womb's quiet, hidden spaces, so, too, our souls are nurtured in darkness.

Advent is a season that whispers, "There is no shame in the night; there is no need to rush to morning. Sit a while. Linger here. There is something for you to learn."

In the dark, we encounter our vulnerability, our limits. We are reminded that, as much as we'd like to, we cannot control or predict everything. This acknowledgment of our smallness, our dependence, is one of Advent's gifts. We are, as the Psalmist writes, "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14), but we are also fragile, in need of care, connection, and rest.

In embracing the darkness, we also learn something about hope.

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Hope is not about denying reality or pretending everything is fine. True hope is forged in the fires of reality. It's the kind of hope Isaiah spoke of—hope that emerges not in spite of the darkness, but because of it. The kind of hope that grows in the awareness that this world, with all its turmoil and tension, is still God's world, and we are not abandoned.

As I look around this December, I see many who are weary and hurting, longing for something more. Perhaps you are one of them. If you are, I want you to know this: you are not alone.

In the quiet of these winter nights, the God who is Love is drawing near. In the words of Isaiah, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given" (Isaiah 9:6). This child, this Emmanuel, comes not just to the light but to the shadows, to the places of grief, uncertainty, and weariness. In those places, a holy invitation waits for us—to let Love find us where we are, not where we wish we were.

The Advent season invites us to light candles not to erase the darkness but to mark it, to remember that light shines brightest when all around is dim. Each flickering flame represents different part of the Advent journey—hope, peace, joy, love. These are not fleeting emotions or quick fixes; they are practices, ways of being that draw us deeper into the mystery of this season.

So this December, as the nights grow longer, I invite you to sit with the darkness. Light a candle if you can, but let it remind you not only of the coming light but of the beauty found in the shadows. Let it remind you that in this quiet season, God is at work, preparing something new. Just as the earth rests in winter to ready itself for spring, so too our spirits find renewal in this waiting, in this darkness.

May we be brave enough to lean into this season, to embrace the darkness and the lessons it has for us. And may we be reminded that even here, perhaps especially here, we are not alone.

Darkness may be a familiar companion, but it is not our final one. For unto us a Child is born, a light in the night, a promise that even the deepest shadows cannot overcome.

This Advent, let us walk together through the darkness, holding our candles of hope, peace, joy, and love.

May we carry these lights, not only for ourselves but for each other, knowing that even in the longest night, the dawn is promised. And as we move toward Christmas, may we find ourselves, like those shepherds long ago, awestruck at the gift of Love born into our world—into our lives, our waiting, and yes, even our darkness.

May it be so.

Peace to you.

+Walt



LET'S SPREAD SOME CHRISTMAS CHEER!
PLEASE JOIN US FOR SOME CAROL SINGING



There is nothing better than to touch lives and make people feel special, even though they might feel alone during much of the Christmas season. What matters is that a group of people from First Church of Christ in North Conway take time to sing Christmas carols, holiday songs and spread cheer to these people. The look on their faces when we arrive and sing to them is heartwarming. It's as if they've waited all day for us to come by.

If you have never gone Christmas caroling before and enjoy singing the songs of the season, think about going, it will be the best gift you can give someone - the gift of your time and love.

WHEN: SUNDAY DECEMBER 22nd

**WHERE: MERRIMAN HOUSE
MINERAL SPRINGS
HOMEBOUND MEMBERS AND FRIENDS**

TIME: MEET AT THE CHURCH AT 1:00PM OR MEET AFTER CHURCH AND BRING A BAG LUNCH.

O LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM A TIMELESS CAROL OF HOPE AND PEACE

By Muriel Magg - Music Team Chair

Christmas carols are a big part of the Christmas season. “O Little Town of Bethlehem” is a popular carol that is often heard and for good reason. The lyrics refer to the town of Bethlehem where Jesus was born of Mary. The hymn describes the setting of Christ’s birth and the wondrous gift that would be his life, teachings, and sacrifice.

“O Little Town of Bethlehem” was written by Phillips Brooks (1835-1893), born to wealthy prominent Boston citizens who were descendants of the earliest Puritans of Massachusetts. Brooks was the second of six sons, four of whom entered the ministry.

Phillips was educated at Harvard University and after graduation taught briefly at the Boston Latin School before attending the Episcopal Seminary at Alexandria, Virginia. At the age of twenty-four Phillips was an ordained Episcopal priest and began his ministry at the Church of the Advent in Philadelphia, where his impressive personality and eloquence won crowds of admirers. Three years later, he became rector of Holy Trinity in the same city. Except for a year of travel abroad, he remained there seven years, during which time he completed the lyrics of his famous Christmas Carol, “O Little Town of Bethlehem.” Brooks then accepted the rectorship of Boston’s Trinity Church and remained in that position until he became Bishop of Massachusetts.

This giant of a man, who stood 6-feet 8 inches, also had a big heart that endeared him to old and young alike. There were toys in his office for the many children who visited him. It was a familiar sight to see the beloved Bishop sitting on the floor playing a game with a group of children, so it’s not surprising he wrote his best songs for them. Brooks never married, but other people’s children became like family to him.

Phillips Brooks traveled to the Holy Land in 1865, and this is thought to be where he got his inspiration for “O Little Town of Bethlehem.” He was deeply moved by his experience there and felt a great connection to the place. Brooks remembered standing in the old church in Bethlehem close to the spot where Jesus was born, when the whole church was ringing hour after hour with the splendid hymns of praise to God; how again and again it seemed as if he could hear voices he knew well, telling each other of the “wonderful night” of the Savior’s birth. This is evident in the lyrics of the song, which paint a picture of Bethlehem as a peaceful and idyllic town. The lyrics describe Bethlehem as a place where “the dear Christ enters in”, and where the silent stars go by”. This conveys a sense of wonder and awe at the birth of Christ, and the simple beauty of the night sky. The lyrics also describe how, in Bethlehem, the strains of heavenly music float overall. This speaks to the power of music, and how it can bring people together in peace and harmony. It is this message of peace and love that Phillips Brooks was trying to convey through his song “O Little Town of Bethlehem.”

Phillips Brooks turned to his friend Lewis Redner, the Organist at his church, for assistance in composing the music for the lyrics he had written inspired by the tranquility and significance of Bethlehem. The two worked collaboratively to create what would become one of the most cherished Christmas carols of all time. Published in 1874, we are blessed to continue singing it one hundred fifty years later.

May the Holy Child of Bethlehem be born anew in your hearts this Christmas season.
O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel!



Deacon's Corner...

The Gift of Forgiveness

By Helen Goss – Diaconate Chair

We are entering into the final month of this year and for most of us it's one we won't soon forget. Gratefully, we are on the other side of what has been a contentious period during a very divisive election. Whether you are pleased or displeased with the results, as Pastor Walt has shared each Sunday, you are left with many feelings to work through. Personally, it has left me in a rather anxious state and struggling to be hopeful for the future.

However, time moves quickly and [Advent](#) is upon us, and I believe that is a very good thing! The Diaconate is preparing the sanctuary to celebrate the birth of our Savior, one of the most blessed times in our tradition. Along with the visual changes that enhance our worship space in praise of this event, we know that the music will match the Spirit that can only be found as we gather together in our faith community.

We have just come from celebrating *Thanksgiving* and all that we have been blessed with. Now as we look to the holidays ahead and trying to find that perfect *gift* for loved ones, I would ask, what do you want most this Christmas?

In my head I keep hearing the second Commandment of "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." For me, in order for that to happen, *forgiveness* plays a key role – both given and received. This Christmas I am asking for the gift of forgiveness. Have you ever messed up, said something hurtful, broken trust with another, or taken action without consideration of the outcome? I am guilty as charged! And for me, the reparations start with forgiveness. I have thought about this a great deal and read up on the subject from those who have delved into the process. Whether given or received, forgiveness can be a powerful act when given out of love. But I do recognize that the ask of being forgiven can take a very long time when the hurt has run deep.

So in addition to world peace, I am asking that you join me in asking for the gift of forgiveness before this year is out. Then we can all be ready for a fresh start in the New Year to freely follow in the ways of Jesus Christ and work daily to forgive quickly and be forgiven when we have overstepped.

We look forward to very meaningful services coming during this time of [Advent](#) and hope to see you during the month. **Chris DeVries** has joined as a new member and is someone you will want to greet!

Our [Candlelight Service](#) will be at 7pm on the 24th and promises to be a glorious celebration of the One who comes into the world to save us and be our hope for a just world for all.









May your holidays be marked with small acts of kindness given out of an abundance of love!

"Forgiveness does not mean ignoring what has been done or putting false label on an evil act. It means, rather, that the evil act no longer remains as a barrier to the relationship. Forgiveness is a catalyst creating the atmosphere necessary for a fresh start and a new beginning."

~ Martin Luther King, Jr.

December 2024



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 10:00am Worship Celebration 11:00am Coffee Hour After Worship 2:00pm - 5:00pm REVOLVING CLOSET-TEENS 4:00pm Christmas Family Night 	2 12:00pm - 1:00pm AA meeting 6:30pm - 8:00pm Crafty Hands Workshop 6:30pm - 8:00pm Scouts of America Troop 150 and Pack 150 	3 11:30am - 1:45pm Food Pantry Open	4 7:00am The Absurdity of Advent (Online) 	5 9:30am - 2:30pm WIC Program 12:30pm - 2:45pm Food Pantry Open 3:00pm - 4:00pm Chancel Choir Rehearsal 4:00pm - 5:00pm Bell Choir Rehearsal	6 12:00pm - 1:00pm AA meeting	7 9:00am - 2:00pm Conway Police Department Food Drive at Market Basket
8 10:00am Worship Celebration 11:00am Coffee Hour After Worship 	9 12:00pm - 1:00pm AA meeting 6:30pm - 8:00pm Crafty Hands Workshop 6:30pm - 8:00pm Scouts of America Troop 150 and Pack 150	10 11:30am - 1:45pm Food Pantry Open 5:00pm Music Team meeting	11 9:00am - 11:00am Essential Non-Food Pantry	12 12:30pm - 2:45pm Food Pantry Open 3:00pm - 4:00pm Chancel Choir Rehearsal 4:00pm - 5:00pm Bell Choir Rehearsal	13 12:00pm - 1:00pm AA meeting	14
15 10:00am Worship Celebration 11:00am Coffee Hour After Worship 11:30am Church Council meeting 2:00pm - 5:00pm REVOLVING CLOSET-TEENS	16 12:00pm - 1:00pm AA meeting 6:30pm - 8:00pm Crafty Hands Workshop 6:30pm - 8:00pm Scouts of America Troop 150 and Pack 150 January Congregate Tidings Deadline	17 11:30am - 1:45pm Food Pantry Open 4:00pm Trustees meeting 5:00pm Diaconate meeting	18	19 12:30pm - 2:45pm Food Pantry Open 3:00pm - 4:00pm Chancel Choir Rehearsal 4:00pm - 5:00pm Bell Choir Rehearsal	20 12:00pm - 1:00pm AA meeting	21
22 10:00am Worship Celebration 11:00am Coffee Hour After Worship 11:30am - 12:30pm Mission Committee meeting 	23 12:00pm - 1:00pm AA meeting 6:30pm - 8:00pm Scouts of America Troop 150 and Pack 150	24 11:30am - 1:45pm Food Pantry Open 7:00pm Christmas Eve Candlelight Service 	25 Christ Is Born! 	26 12:30pm - 2:45pm Food Pantry Open	27 12:00pm - 1:00pm AA meeting	28
29 10:00am Worship Celebration 11:00am Coffee Hour After Worship	30 12:00pm - 1:00pm AA meeting	31 11:30am - 1:45pm Food Pantry Open 	1	2 9:30am - 2:30pm WIC Program 12:30pm - 2:45pm Food Pantry Open 3:00pm - 4:00pm Chancel Choir Rehearsal 4:00pm - 5:00pm Bell Choir Rehearsal	3 12:00pm - 1:00pm AA meeting	4

The Absurdity of Advent

Wednesday, December 4th, 7 pm ET (Online)

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/3566301237>

Join us for an hour-long journey into the heart of Advent—a season that calls us to hold onto hope, peace, joy, and love at the very darkest time of the year. In the wake of the recent election and the heaviness that seems to permeate our world, the themes of Advent feel antithetical; and yet more urgent than ever.

In this program, “The Absurdity of Advent,” we’ll explore the startling irony and beauty of a Creator who chooses to enter our world as a fragile, crying infant, born to an unwed mother in a cold, dark barn. Together, we’ll consider the deeper meaning of the incarnation—a mystery so profound and, yes, absurd—that it invites us to see God’s light in even the darkest places.

Through reflection, conversation, and contemplation, we’ll engage with these themes and seek to understand how Advent’s absurdity reveals profound truth. Leave with a renewed sense of purpose and a clear vision for honoring and celebrating the magic and mystery of this season.

All are welcome to this time of inspiration, connection, and celebration. Please see link above.



**CRAFTY HANDS WORKSHOP
 HOLIDAY CRAFT SALE
 in Mary Lancaster Room
 Thanksgiving to Christmas
 to benefit
 MISSIONS COMMUNITY SCHOLARSHIPS
 (For Trade Schools & College Students)**

Co-Leaders: Deb Smith & Mary Lou Waite—Mission Devotees



Poinsettias!!!

If you would like to purchase one in memory or in honor of someone for Christmas, please provide the following information along with payment of \$10.00. (Checks payable to First Church of Christ.) These can be taken home after the Candlelight Service on December 24th for your enjoyment or for delivery to a loved one.

Given by: _____

In Memory or Honor of: (circle one)

Your request and payment can be placed in the Collection Plate on Sunday, dropped off at the church office, or mailed to the church at PO Box 401, North Conway, NH 03860.

DEADLINE TO ORDER IS WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 18TH.



DECEMBER ANNIVERSARIES

- 12-07 Douglas and Lisa Gibson
- 12-18 Steve and Denise Woodcock
- 12-19 Sue and Tom Davidson
- 12-26 Don and Laurel Ekberg
- 12-29 Jim and Karen Umberger



- 12-04 Carl Lindblade
- 12-04 Russell Seybold
- 12-05 Elizabeth George-Hussey
- 12-06 Mary Lou Waite
- 12-10 Hope Nusbaum
- 12-12 David Shedd
- 12-14 Lee Coffield
- 12-15 Vinnie Furtado
- 12-18 Ken Nusbaum
- 12-19 Glenna Tibbetts
- 12-19 Jodie Neal
- 12-20 Carol Stoneman
- 12-21 Conner Furtado
- 12-28 Steve Cameron
- 12-31 Cynthia Briggs



**REQUESTS
FOR
PRAYER**

Please pray for those dealing with illness, surgery or recovery, especially: **Tony; Evelyn Porter; Linda Hyde; Jesse and Linda Red Horse; and Angie Terry, Jennifer Terry’s sister-in-law, and Jeff and Lois Ward.**

Remember those in our extended care facilities:

At Merriman House:

Liz George-Hussey; Cynthia and Conrad Briggs and Marilyn Elliott.

Please call the church office with prayer concerns if you wish names to be listed in the next *Congregate Tidings*.

LECTIONARIES

DECEMBER 1, 2024
First Sunday of Advent
Communion Sunday
 Jeremiah 33:14-16
 Psalm 25:1-10
 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13
 Luke 21:25-36

DECEMBER 8, 2024
Second Sunday of Advent
Communion Sunday
 Baruch 5:1-9 or Malachi 3:1-4
 Philippians 1:3-11
 Luke 3:1-6

DECEMBER 15, 2024
Third Sunday of Advent
Communion Sunday
 Zephaniah 3:14-20
 Isaiah 12:2-6
 Philippians 4:4-7
 Luke 3:7-18

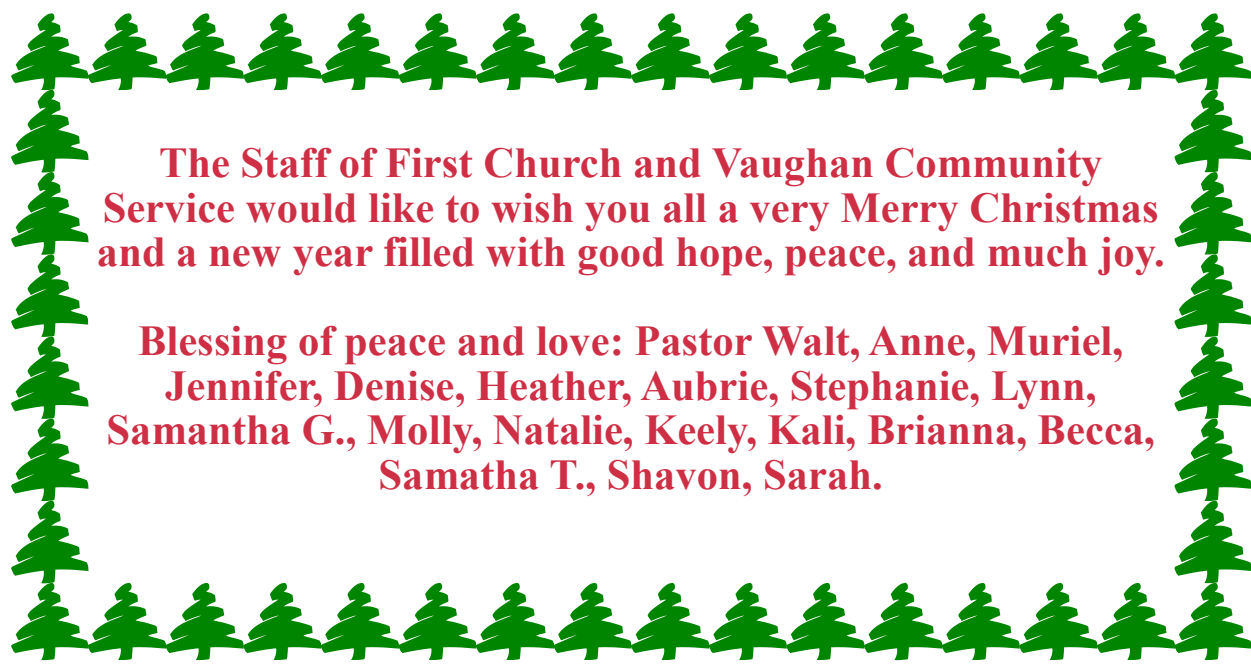
DECEMBER 22, 2024
Fourth Sunday of Advent
Communion Sunday
 Micah 5:2-5a
 Luke 1:46b-55 or Psalm 80:1-7
 Hebrews 10:5-10
 Luke 1:39-45 [46-55]

DECEMBER 24, 2024
Christmas Eve
 Isaiah 62:6-12
 Psalm 97
 Titus 3:4-7
 Luke 2:[1-7] 8-20

DECEMBER 25, 2024
Christmas Day
 Isaiah 9:2-7
 Psalm 96
 Titus 2:11-14
 Luke 2:1-14 [15-20]

DECEMBER 29, 2024
First Sunday After Christmas
 1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26
 Psalm 148
 Colossians 3:12-17
 Luke 2:41-52

DECEMBER 31, 2024
New Year's Eve
 Ecclesiastes 3:1-13
 Psalm 8
 Revelation 21:1-6a
 Matthew 25:31-46

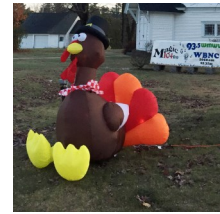


The Staff of First Church and Vaughan Community Service would like to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a new year filled with good hope, peace, and much joy.

Blessing of peace and love: Pastor Walt, Anne, Muriel, Jennifer, Denise, Heather, Aubrie, Stephanie, Lynn, Samantha G., Molly, Natalie, Keely, Kali, Brianna, Becca, Samatha T., Shavon, Sarah.

“The View from my Window”

By Jennifer Perkins, Vaughan Administrator



November remains a busy month for the Vaughan Food Pantry with the distribution of Holiday Gift Baskets and the 23rd Annual Mt. Washington Radio Food Drive. The event was held in memory of Greg Frizzell who passed away suddenly in October, The **Holiday Giving** broadcast event on **Wednesday November 20, 2024** exceeded all expectation and brought in nearly \$70,000.00. This year, as in the past, it was held at the Vaughan Community Service Building located at 2493 White Mountain Highway beginning at 7:00am and ending at 6:00pm. Once again, this event helped support 5 local food pantries in the Mount Washington Valley area. The food pantries include; Bartlett/Jackson Food Pantry, Madison Food Pantry, Freedom Food Pantry, Tamworth Food Pantry and Vaughan Food Pantry.

What once began years ago as a simple raffle to win a turkey at a few local businesses, grew into a larger turkey and food drive bringing in hundreds of frozen birds and thousands of pounds of canned and shelf-stable food items.

The Pandemic forever altered this event. In 2019, no one was able to congregate. Fear of the illness spreading led to cash only with people driving up and placing their donation in a basket held in the hands of the radio announcers and Vaughan representatives.

Time has ushered in change yet the model of cash donations remains. Money allows these local food pantries to purchase items needed to fill their shelves.

In 2024, COVID-19 is here to stay and we have adjusted. We continue encouraging people to consider a financial contribution over frozen turkeys and food items. That said, no frozen turkeys or food will be turned away. We are truly blessed to live in such a generous community!

Warmly,
Jennifer



From l-r: Joe, Pastor Walt, Paul, “Stretch”, and “Tall” Paul, members and friends of Knights of Columbus



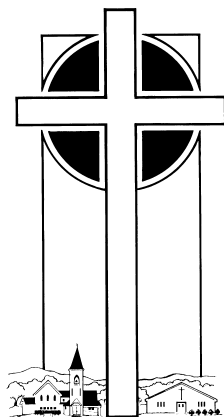
Annie Provenzano and George Cleveland



Alec Kerr

The Congregate Tidings
First Church of Christ, Congregational
United Church of Christ
PO Box 401
N Conway, NH 03860-0401

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



TO:



Join us for our
Candlelight Service on
December 24th at 7:00pm.

CHURCH & VAUGHAN STAFF

Pastor: Rev. Walt Hampton, J.D., CFC

Church Administrator/Editor: Denise Leighton

Associate Organist: Muriel Magg

Chancel Choir and Handbell Choir Director:

Anne W. Polak

Vaughan Administrator: Jennifer Perkins

Vaughan Learning Center Director:

Heather Ouellette

Church Sexton: Mark Schiller

Worship Service at 10am

Church Office (603)356-2324

Pastor Ext. #2, Denise Ext. #1

Fax Number (603)356-2106

Vaughan Food Pantry (603)602-1801

Vaughan Learning Center (603)356-5213

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