

# Welcome to First Congregational Church



The Good Shepherd, 1917  
Henry Ossawa Tanner  
Oil on canvas  
25 1/2 × 32 in.  
Crystal Bridges Museum

Henry Ossawa Tanner studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts before moving to France, where he found some measure of freedom from racism. He was the first internationally acclaimed African American artist. His biblical paintings, in particular, were very popular.

## **Announcements**

**Advent Video Discussion:** Following worship TODAY (and Dec 7th, Dec 14th) everyone is invited to join us for this year's advent video discussion series, in-person and on Zoom.

**Outreach:** Please take an angel from the bulletin board for the Salvation Army Christmas Toys for children. Thank You Sana Nichols

**Weekly Prayers for the Nation:** Join Rev. Renee' for a weekly hour of prayer for our nation on Zoom. Wednesdays at 1pm. Zoom link is in the weekly E-News and in the calendar on the website.

### **2025 Advent & Christmas Activities and Services**

*[We are following the Celtic Christian tradition of 40 days of Advent this year, which makes for 2 additional Advent Sundays]*

#### **Sunday, November 30th**

10:30-11:30 am - Third Advent (Hope)  
11:30-12:15 - Celtic Christian Advent Discussion

#### **MONDAY, December 1st**

2:30-3:30 pm - Blue Christmas Service

#### **Sunday, December 7th**

9:30-10:30 am - Greening the Chapel  
10:30-11:30 am - Fourth Advent (Peace) with Communion  
11:30-12:15 - Celtic Christian Advent Discussion

#### **Sunday, December 14th**

10:30-11:30 am - Fifth Advent (Joy) & Hanging of the Chrismons  
11:30-12:15 - Celtic Christian Advent Discussion

#### **Sunday, December 21st**

2:30-4:30 pm - Jazz Sanctuary; Sixth Advent (Love)

#### **Wednesday, December 24th**

6-7pm - Candlelight Christmas Eve Service (Christ)

#### **Sunday, December 28th**

10:30-11:30 am Worship service with Christmas Hymn Sing

#### **Sunday, January 4th**

10:30-11:30 am Epiphany worship service with Communion  
11:30 Coffee hour

**Welcome to First Congregational Church**  
*An Open and Affirming Congregation of the United Church of Christ*  
Rev. Emilia Halstead  
November 30, 2025 - THIRD ADVENT (HOPE)

Welcome and Announcements

Prelude                                      Courageous Cat (Teresa Richert)                                      Annie Papinsick

Setting Our Intentions for Worship

Call to Worship:(created by Pastor Emilia using ChatGPT)

In this Advent season, we gather in watchful hope—like creatures who know how to listen to the earth, how to move with grace in the Divine rhythm of belonging.

**We come longing for a steadiness deeper than our worries, a presence fluent in freedom rather than fear.**

Animals teach us something of holy composure—of knowing one’s place in the great circle of creation, unburdened by the serrated confusions that so often trouble the human mind.

**We come to remember that God invites us into this same calm, grounded hope.**

Advent calls us to wait, with trust, for the God who loves us deeply is already drawing near.

**Let us worship our God, who fills us with joy and peace, so that we may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

Bringing Ourselves into God’s Presence: (created by Pastor Emilia using ChatGPT, and the words of John O’Donohue)

“Animal movement can exhibit wonderful grace. Animals have a native closeness to the earth and they move in the sure rhythm of this belonging. They enjoy an inner composure and coherence.”

**Quiet the clamor within us. Settle our spirits into the soft soil of Beauty. Open us to the wisdom of creation—the grace that lives in movement, the peace that lives in trust, the presence that lives in every breath. Come, Holy One. Center us. Hold us. Amen.**

OFFERING OUR MOMENTS OF BEAUTY

SONG: #112                                      Keep Awake, Be Always Ready

Keep Awake, Be Always Ready, Arthur G. Clyde

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Keep awake, be always ready, God’s time approaches sure and steady,  
God’s strength will keep your heart from blame. Clouds, the Spirit’s light concealing,  
Disperse, God’s purest light revealing, creation will its Sovereign name.  
Dry branches burst forth green, God’s advent signs are seen: Hallelujah!  
Christ’s judgement won, God’s will be done; God’s new dominion thus begun.

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Rise and shine for One is coming whose love will quench all nature's thirsting  
To be made forever more. On that day to end all weeping, death's swords  
Transformed to tools of reaping, the God of might will mercy pour.  
Incarnate, God appears embracing all our tears: Hallelujah!  
God's majesty eternally revealed to set the cosmos free.

LIGHTING THE ADVENT CANDLES (created by Pastor Emilia with ChatGPT)

*[Relight the Candle for the Creator and Holy Spirit]*

'But as for me, I will look to the Eternal One, and my hope is in the True God  
who will save me. My God will hear me.' (Micah 7:7)

**'We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the  
inner sanctuary behind the curtain.'** (Hebrews 6:19).

*[Light the Candle for the Hope]*

Christ of the morning light, grant us 'strength for today'—

**strength rooted in Your steadfast love,  
strength that steadies our steps and shelters our hearts  
as the winds of the world blow cold.**

And kindle in us 'bright hope for tomorrow'—

**hope that shines like a lantern on the path,  
hope that will not falter or fade,  
hope born of Your promise  
that darkness shall not overcome the light.**

Bless this candle, O Holy One.

**May its small flame carry the ancient truth that You are with us,  
now and always, guiding us toward peace. Amen.**

Hear now our modern lesson: A sample of chapter One from *Black Portsmouth:  
Three Centuries of African-American Heritage* by Valerie Cunningham and Mark J.  
Sammons.

Here ends the Lesson.

**Amen.**

Hear now from the Hebrew Scriptures...

Hebrew Scriptures                      Genesis 8:1-12 (The Message)                      Sara Nichols

Then God turned his attention to Noah and all the wild animals and farm animals  
with him on the ship. God caused the wind to blow and the floodwaters began to  
go down. The underground springs were shut off, the windows of Heaven closed  
and the rain quit. Inch by inch the water lowered. After 150 days the worst was  
over.

On the seventeenth day of the seventh month, the ship landed on the Ararat  
mountain range. The water kept going down until the tenth month. On the first  
day of the tenth month the tops of the mountains came into view. After forty days  
Noah opened the window that he had built into the ship.

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He sent out a raven; it flew back and forth waiting for the floodwaters to dry up. Then he sent a dove to check on the flood conditions, but it couldn't even find a place to perch—water still covered the Earth. Noah reached out and caught it, bringing it back into the ship.

He waited seven more days and sent out the dove again. It came back in the evening with a freshly picked olive leaf in its beak. Noah knew that the flood was about finished.

He waited another seven days and sent the dove out a third time. This time it didn't come back.

Here ends the Lesson.

**Amen.**

Hear now from the Gospel of Matthew...

Gospel Lesson                      Matthew 10:28-31 (The Voice)                      Sara Nichols  
Don't fear those who aim to kill just the body but are unable to touch the soul. The One to fear is God who can destroy you, soul and body, in the fires of hell. Look, if you sold a few sparrows, how much money would you get? A copper coin apiece, perhaps? And yet your Father in heaven knows when those small sparrows fall to the ground. You, beloved, are worth so much more than a whole flock of sparrows. God knows everything about you, even the number of hairs on your head. So do not fear.

Here ends the Gospel Lesson.

**Amen.**

SERMON

"The Grace of Animal Movement"

Rev. Emilia Halstead

*PAUSE FOR REFLECTION*

Song: #138

Jesus, Our Brother, Strong and Good (Public Domain)

1 Jesus, our brother, kind and good, was humbly born in a stable rude,  
and the friendly beasts around him stood; Jesus, our brother, kind and good.

2 "I," said the donkey, shaggy and brown, "I carried your mother uphill and down;  
I carried your mother to Bethlehem town. I," said the donkey, shaggy and brown.

3 "I," said the cow, all white and red, "I gave you my manger for your bed,  
I gave my hay to pillow your head. I," said the, cow all white and red.

4 "I," said the sheep with curly horn, "I gave you my wool for a blanket warm;  
you wore my coat on Christmas morn. I," said the sheep with curly horn.

5 "I," said the dove from the rafters high, "I cooed you to sleep that you should  
not cry;

we cooed you to sleep, my love and I. I," said the dove from the rafters high.

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6 Thus all the beasts, by some good spell, in the stable dark was glad to tell of the gifts they gave Emmanuel, the gifts they gave Emmanuel.

Global Ministries Weekly Prayers: Egypt (*Written by: Nardeen Raouf, Partnerships and Resource Mobilization Specialist Bishopric of Public, Ecumenical and Social Services (BLESS)*)

Mission Moment from Egypt

Responsive Prayers with Egypt

Almighty God, we praise you and thank you for this country. Watch us over as we go about our works for the people of Egypt.

**We pray for our country's safety. Every border we have is being ignited by calls of war and destruction. We ask that you keep those that live here safe from others who would do us harm. We pray, Lord, that we one day see an end to all the calls for power and destruction, whether in Palestine, Israel, Sudan or Libya. May we live in peace and love in order to enjoy the many blessings that you have blessed this nation and region.**

Lord, we continue to pray for this country's prosperity. In these hard times of inflation and distorted priorities, we ask for your hand in programs that help those who have problems helping themselves. We thank you for your hand in helping those who do not have proper homes, jobs, and more. We pray, Lord, that our people continue to find ways to bless those that feel alone or helpless.

**Lord, we pray for CEOSS and the work it is doing in this country for the prosperity and advocacy for those without a voice. We pray for the different initiatives that we undertake, whether in development or dialogue, to really change the mindset and livelihoods of people so that we will be able to reflect your image to others. In Your Name, Amen."**

Prayers of the People

*(Response to each prayer:)*

God of the Animals,

**Receive our prayers.**

Pastoral Prayer (created by Pastor Emilia using ChatGPT)

Lord's Prayer:

**Our father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.**

Sung Amen: #101      Comfort, Comfort O My People (Public Domain)

“Comfort, comfort O my people, tell of peace,” thus says our God;  
Comfort those whose hearts are shrouded, mourning under sorrow’s load.  
Speak unto Jerusalem of the peace that waits for them;  
Tell them that their sins I cover, and their warfare now is over.

Offertory

Invitation (created by Pastor Emilia using ChatGPT)

GRATITUDE MUSIC      Angelfish (Anne Crosby Gaudet)      Annie Papinsick

LITANY OF DEDICATION (created by Pastor Emilia using ChatGPT)

God of hope and holy wildness, receive these gifts we offer—given from our lives,  
our labor, and our love.

**Bless them, that they may nurture courage, move towards justice, and  
embody compassion for all creatures in your creation.**

May our giving shape us;

**Into people who move with grace, who listen deeply, and who overflow  
with hope by the power of your Holy Spirit. Amen.**

CLOSING SONG: #102      O How Shall I Receive You (Public Domain)

1 Oh, how shall I receive you, how meet you on your way,  
blessed hope of every nation, my soul’s delight and stay?  
O Jesus, Jesus, give me now by your own pure light  
to know whate’er is pleasing and welcome in your sight.

2 Love caused your incarnation; Love brought you unto me.  
your thirst for my salvation procured my liberty.  
O, love beyond all telling, that led you to embrace,  
in love, all love excelling, our lost and fallen race.

3 You came, O Christ, with gladness, in mercy and goodwill,  
to bring an end to sadness and bid our fears be still.  
In patient expectation we live for the great day  
when a renewed creation your glory shall display.

Setting our Intentions for the Week Ahead

Greatest Commandment

Benediction & Sending (created by Pastor Emilia using ChatGPT)

Postlude      WoO 31, no. 3; *Die Henne (The Hen)* (Johannes Brahms)      Annie Papinsick