

## FROM THE DIRECTOR FOR YOUTH & CHILDREN'S MINISTRIES

This is a difficult season. Life has been challenging in many ways over the last year, and with the holidays approaching, we are faced with complicated decisions for our church community, as well as for ourselves and our families. Just as we have been striving to do this year in our ministries at St. Andrew, it is my hope that we can stay connected with one another in healthy ways.

Poetry has always been a source of comfort and inspiration for me, whatever my emotional landscape looks like. My most favorite poet, Mary Oliver, says:

“To pay attention, this is our endless and proper work.”

This has been one of my guiding principles over the last year. There is so much fighting for our attention, not only in the news and in our social media feeds, but in our homes and hearts where everything feels crammed together with no space to breathe. Many are stretched thin, burnt out, and overstimulated. With so much swirling around us, how do we decide what to pay attention to?

Advent is the perfect season for this moment. When the world around us is sprinting toward Christmas, for Christians, Advent is the season that says, “No, no. Not yet.” Advent is a time of waiting, of slowing down, of paying attention. As the days are getting shorter and the nights are getting longer, we are preparing our hearts for the arrival of Jesus. We are called to pay close attention to ourselves and the people we love most. Pay attention to your feelings, your anxieties, and your body. Carefully tending to ourselves and those we love is a revolutionary act right now. When we feel frantic about our to-do lists and trying to manage our very full plates, Advent reminds us to pause and turn our attention to the things that matter most: hope, peace, joy, and love.

The traditional practice of the Advent wreath originated as a family practice, though it is a modern liturgical practice in some churches. This year, we invite you to create your own Advent wreath at home and set aside time as a family (whatever your family unit may look like) to light the candles, and take a breath, and sing or talk with one another about the things that matter to you. We especially invite you to use a wreath at home as you watch our online Advent worship services.

There are many ways to hold an Advent devotion at home, but we have put together a webpage of resources for easy access. There you can find information on how to create your own Advent wreath, as well as weekly and daily Advent devotionals. You can find family resources, video links, and more to sustain your spirits during this season.

We'd love to see photos of how you are celebrating this Advent season!