



First Church NEWS



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December Worship Schedule

December 3 – RILAS Worship on the First Sunday of Advent with Communion

Worship & Learning Program Theme: Jesus is a gift from God. - Joseph and Mary Start the Story
Activities: Advent Workshop Crafts
Reflection: Rev. Lisa Stedman
Music: Chancel Choir & Jill
Nursery Care & RILAS Learning Program for Children
Coffee & Fellowship in the Chapel
This Week's Advent Mission Collection: Gifts for City Mission Society

December 10 – Worship on the Second Sunday of Advent with Baptism

Worship & Learning Program Theme: Jesus is a gift from God – Shepherds Watching in the Fields
Preacher: Rev. Lisa
Music: Chancel Choir & Jill
Nursery Care & Learning Program for Children (Class session)
Coffee & Fellowship in the Chapel
This Week's Advent Mission Collection: Toiletries for Emmaus House

December 17 – Worship on the Third Sunday of Advent

Worship & Learning Program Theme: Jesus is a gift from God. – The Appearance of Angels with Announcements!
Preacher: Rev. Lisa
Music: FCCR Orchestra, Chancel Choir & Jill
Nursery Care & Learning Program for Children (Group session)
Coffee & Fellowship w/ Card Ministry
This Week's Advent Mission Collection: Food for Local Pantries (Reading and Neighbors in Need in Lawrence)

December 17 – Blue Christmas Service at 2:00 pm

December 24 – Worship on the Fourth Sunday of Advent/Christmas Eve Morning

10:00 am Service for Families & All including a walk-on Pageant

Theme: Jesus is a gift from God!

Reflection: Rev. Lisa

Music: Handbell Ensemble, Chancel Choir & Jill

Nursery Care & NO Learning Program for Children

Coffee & Fellowship in the Chapel



10:00 pm - A Traditional Christmas Eve Service with Candlelight, Carols and Readings

Reflection: Rev. Lisa

Music: Handbell Ensemble, Chancel Choir & Jill

NO Nursery Care or Learning Program for Children

(Please note: There will NOT be a 5:00 pm service this year, due to Christmas Eve falling on a Sunday.)

December 31 – Worship on New Year's Eve Sunday Morning

FCCR's New Learning Program for Children and Families

Our *Learning Program for Children and Families* is designed for busy and active families with children in Kindergarten - 8th grade. Children will explore a single basic theme for three weeks - in different formats. Formats include classroom work - exploring the related Bible Story - a hands-on service project - and activities in the sanctuary - in which every child or the whole family can participate.



Through participation even once during any unit, children will learn a valuable lesson about who Jesus was and what he can teach us about living and sharing God's love.

The *Learning Program* is offered on Sundays during worship at 10:00am; children begin in worship and move following a special message just for them. FCCR also offers separate nursery care for children under age five beginning at 9:50am.

December Schedule:

Sunday, Dec. 3 - An Intergenerational Activity Service - Families and Children actively participate in worship. (Nursery care available.) *Theme: Jesus is a gift from God. - Joseph and Mary Start the Story.*

Sun, Dec. 10 - Children begin in worship and move to a class session following their special message. *Theme: Jesus is a gift from God. – Shepherds Watching in the Fields.*

Sun, Dec. 17 - Children begin in worship and move to a group activity session following their special message. They will be doing some preparations for the walk-on pageant on Christmas Eve morning. *Theme: Jesus is a gift from God. – The Appearance of Angels with Announcements!*

Sun, Dec. 24 - A Special Christmas Eve Service at 10:00 am with a Walk-on Christmas Pageant for all ages. *Theme: Jesus is a gift from God.*

Sun, Dec. 31 - NO Learning Program but Activity Sheets for All.



Candle Readers & Leaders for December Services

Each Sunday in Advent and on Christmas Eve we will be lighting the candles on the Advent wreath and sharing words of faith. We are looking for volunteers to read and lead these parts of the services. If you are a youth (grades 5 to 12) or young adult (home from college for the holiday!?), and would like to participate, please speak to Rev. Lisa. If you are an adult and would like to read for the Blue Christmas Service on Sunday afternoon Dec. 17th or on Christmas Eve at either 10 am or 10 pm, please speak to or email Rev. Lisa. Thank you!



Finding Comfort, Solace & Hope in this Season called Joy

Blue Christmas Service, Dec. 17th at 2:00 pm

Are you seeking a time of deep and quiet reflection on the true meaning of the season? Is the holiday season difficult for you and/or someone you know? Do your memories this time of year include pain or sorrow? Do you find yourself keenly aware of the absence of a loved one? Does all the shopping and singing make you wish you could hide until it is all over? Are you unsure of the true meaning of Christmas?

You are invited to a very Special Service of Worship (our “Blue Christmas Service”), Sunday, Dec. 17th at 2:00 pm in the chapel at FCCR. During this quiet service, we will spend time in prayer, remembering and silence. Readings and music will focus on God’s comfort and love for all people. If you are seeking solace and meaning in the midst of the world’s jingling and jangling, this is a service for you. Please invite others to attend as well! This service is co-sponsored by the Reading Clergy Association and is open to all in our community and beyond!

Advent Collections

On December 3, the Mission Ministry will begin began its traditional four collections – one on each Sunday of Advent – to help social-service agencies minister to needy individuals and families.

But new this year: Because the fourth Sunday of Advent falls on Christmas Eve, our usual schedule of collections will be compressed.

We will collect items for the City Mission Society’s annual Christmas

Shop only on the first Sunday of Advent, December 3. Gifts for adults and children are donated by partner churches such as ours, and then sorted and packed by volunteers. The CMS then invites needy families and individuals to come and select gifts for themselves and their children.



The second Sunday in Advent – December 10 – the Mission Ministry will be soliciting toiletries for the residents of Emmaus House and other clients of Emmaus Inc. in Haverhill. This nonprofit organization provides services ranging from emergency shelter and meals, to counseling and substance-abuse treatment, to job training and placement.

The third Sunday in Advent – December 17 – we will be collecting items for the Reading Food Pantry, which will help families get ready for Christmas dinner!

The fourth Sunday in Advent – December 24 – will have a regular service in the morning and a 10 p.m. candlelight service. It is customary to take up a collection at the candlelight service, of which a portion is allotted to mission activities. The Mission Ministry will give the money collected in this way to the UCC Christmas Fund for lower-income retired clergy and mission workers.

We hope that all of you will join us in these collections to share our blessings with those in need this holiday season. Thank you!



CWF News: Sock and Mitten Tree

Please remember to help to decorate the "Sock Mitten Hat Scarf Tree" for City Missions as soon as

possible. We may have less time than usual this year to do so. For more information, please speak with Margot Habel.



Used Coat Collection through January 7

Mission is accepting coats for children and adults to be donated to the Anton's Coats for Kids program. In these hard economic times there are thousands of individuals in our own community who are without a warm winter coat. Donated coats will be cleaned free of charge by Anton's Cleaners. Once collected and cleaned, coats go directly to the local communities collecting the coats and distributed through the Coats for Kids Distribution Partners network in Massachusetts and Southern NH. Drop off any warm coat in good condition to the collection box near the Chapel entrance until noon on Sunday, January 7.

Poinsettia Order

Forms

Poinsettia order forms to honor the memory of your loved ones, or to celebrate life's milestones are now available. Please feel free to contact the office if you have any questions. Please return forms, or order online, by December 15th.



Mission Ministry Thanks

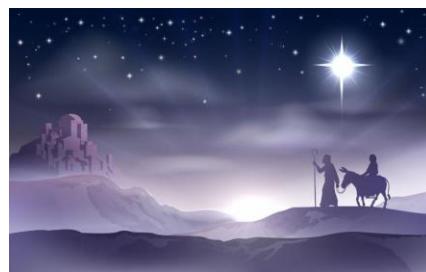
November was a busy month for Mission Ministry collections. We would like to thank the congregation SO MUCH for contributing 221 pairs of white socks to our collection for the Outdoor Church in Cambridge, which distributes more than 3,000 pairs of clean white socks each year. It was such an amazing total for us that the Mission Ministry decided to share the bounty with Ecclesia Ministries in Boston: 150 pair will be given to the Outdoor Church, and 71 pair will go to Ecclesia. In addition, the Thanksgiving Sunday collection of items for food pantries in Reading and Lawrence was great fun. Parishioners brought their offerings to the service, where the items were gathered in by the children of the Learning Ministry. We filled 8 bags of groceries and toiletries for the Reading Food Pantry, and 4 boxes of the same for Neighbors in Need, the food pantry in Lawrence. Many thanks to all!



Pastor's Ponderings

Dear Friends

This year, I'm excited to do something different for Advent! As many of you know, **traditionally** the church season of Advent is a reflective time when Christians prepare their hearts for both the second coming of Christ and the celebration of Jesus' birth. It makes for a complex and fairly



somber season filled with scripture readings about ‘keeping awake’ and ‘being prepared.’

This year at FCCR, we are doing something different! Our Advent season will still be reflective, but we will be focusing on the characters of the Christmas story, the ways that they prepared for the first Christmas, and how that informs our own holiday preparations today.

On Sunday, Dec. 3rd, we’ll be looking at Joseph and Mary, and following that on the 10th, the shepherds, and the angels on the 17th. I believe it will bring a whole new perspective to Christmas and the Advent season of preparation and faith!

The Fourth Sunday of Advent this year actually falls on Christmas Eve. So, we’ll be folding the two together that day. Our morning service will include a fun and easy walk-in pageant, as we focus on celebrating with children and families and people of all ages. Then, at 10pm that evening, we will have a traditional Christmas Eve Service with Candle-lighting, Carols and a Reading of the Story. It is my hope and prayer that you will join us this month and find some of the Spirit of Christmas in worship and fellowship and service at FCCR this year. Because I believe that as we encounter each other and our relationships are deepened, so too is our relationship with the God who loves us. And that’s really what Christmas is all about!

With love and blessings, Lisa



Disaster Response through Faithful Partnership

This year has brought an overwhelming number of disasters – both natural and human-caused. As we gather with our families to give thanks this holiday, now is a good time to reflect on how we can proactively work to care for our neighbors, so that when they are at their most vulnerable they can rest on the strength of our connection, both to each other as people of faith and as a denomination.

Hear from Zachary Wolgemuth, the executive for our UCC Disaster Ministries, about how our response work happens, and the ways in which we are always prayerfully engaged in disaster response in the short and long-term.



When Disasters Strike: Running the Race Together

“How can I help NOW? Let’s Go! What’s the UCC doing? I often receive this type of reaction anytime disaster strikes...”

http://www.ucc.org/disaster_response_through_faithful_partnership

“Why?” ...A Recurring Theme

Why? It’s a three letter word, but a BIG question. You might remember that in one of her sermons recently Rev. Lisa talked a bit about this – and lifted up a sock company as her example of finding “the why”. The company is Bombas. Their business is built around solving the problem of the homeless community where socks are the *number one* requested clothing item in shelters. They say “Our company is built from the ground up around the idea of sock donations. The more socks we sell, the more we donate... One pair purchased = One pair donated.” To date over 5 million pairs have been donated.



At the MAC UCC Super Saturday event held in Framingham recently, several of the sessions addressed the “why” question as well – as it relates to those churches that are vital, and as it relates to other

churches asking and answering new questions that lead them to increased vitality in their communities. Two videos were shared at the event. One is a dated a TED Talk (Technology, Entertainment and Design), about how great leaders (and organizations) inspire action. The speaker suggested that most people and organizations work from the outside in, in a circle – moving in from “what” they do, to “how” they do it, in to the center of “why” they do it. He suggests that inspired leaders and organizations work from the “why” at the center, and move out from there. As examples he lifts up Apple computer whose core “why” is that in all they do, they challenged the status quo, always thinking differently, making computers that are “beautifully designed, easy to use, and user friendly.” Another example was the Wright Brothers who were driven not by a goal of fame or wealth, but by a belief that they *could* fly; and the people that worked with them believed it too. And Martin Luther King Jr., whose “I believe”, “I believe” shared again and again prompted others to believe as well, and so to join him. You can find this video here:

https://www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action. The other video (only a bit more than 3 minutes) is a YouTube offering that demonstrates the impact of “why” in a particular instance. You’ll enjoy it. Find it here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LZe5y2D60YU>.

Those who attended the meeting at church with Chris Doktor in October regarding the building plan will hear in your memories the “why” question arising there as well. He suggested that identifying our “why” – our purpose – will be the best way to find our way forward around building use and potential modifications.

To ask “why” about something is to inquire “for what reason, cause or purpose” are we (doing, building, serving)? For what reason, cause or purpose do we, the First Congregational Church of Reading, exist? Why do we feel it’s important to have a continuing presence in the community? Why are we an important and valuable piece of the puzzle that is our community and our world? We invite you to begin to look through this lens of WHY, HOW, and WHAT? It’s challenging. It’s likely we can all rattle off some of the “what’s” – worship, music, mission, community, and the “how’s” – relaxed and welcoming environment, open to all, honoring the contributions and talents of all, with a passion for justice, but the “why” is trickier. WHY ARE WE? How might we articulate our core “why”... Why are we different? What “why” drives us to move forward in spite of the obstacles we face?

Please think on these things. There is yet “more to be revealed...” [another Lisa sermon!]



Good Reads - Monthly Recommended Articles - Clips and Links from Rev. Lisa (Hard copies of full article available upon request!)

What to do when money gets tight

By David L. Odom, Executive director, Leadership Education at Duke Divinity

“...focus on your organization’s assets and how they can be

leveraged in service of your missional impact...”

https://www.faithandleadership.com/dave-odom-what-do-when-money-gets-tight?utm_source=FL_newsletter&utm_medium=content&utm_campaign=FL_feature

Bricks and Mortals: Sacred Space as Real Estate and Real Estate as Sacred Space

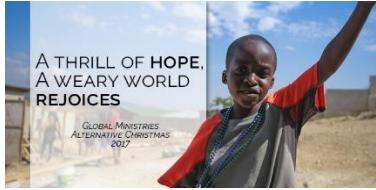
An interview with [Donna Schaper](#), senior minister at Judson Memorial Church, a Baptist church in the heart of the West Village of New York City, since 2005. She is the author of more than ten books and a longtime social activist. Schaper has been working on a book about how Christians think of sacred real estate and also about their bodies as sacred temples. Susan Sink recently talked to her about these ideas.

<https://collegevilleinstitute.org/bearings/bricks-mortals-sacred-space/>

Worship includes 'all ages and all stages' at a San Mateo church

"At First Presbyterian Church San Mateo, worship is like Thanksgiving dinner, with everyone at the table. You might not like everything that's served, but everybody experiences the meal together."

https://www.faithandleadership.com/worship-includes-all-ages-and-all-stages-san-mateo-church?utm_source=NI_newsletter&utm_medium=content&utm_campaign=NI_feature



Offerings from the UCC and Beyond

Ahmed and his family sold every possession they had to buy the first tickets out of Iraq when their lives were threatened. Now this family of ten lives in a home provided by the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon. Ahmed is just one of millions of displaced persons seeking a place of safety and peace. His family was able to escape the violence because international partners prepared a space to welcome them in.

By working in long-term partnerships, UCC Global Ministries is able to address global challenges like the refugee crisis in a way that provides both immediate relief and long-term recovery.

This Christmas, consider giving an alternative gift of [Peace with Justice](#) to be in solidarity with people like Ahmed.

Interested in other areas of global mission? Access the full [alternative gift catalog here](#) to see how you can give the gifts of hope, peace, love, and joy this holiday season.

Save the Dates – Coming in January (and beyond)

MLK Day of Service – FCCR looks forward to hosting as we celebrate MLK's legacy of service! Once again this year, the event is co-sponsored by the church, Reading Cares and the Reading Clergy Association. We invite members of all the churches in Reading and folks from the community to join in on Saturday, Jan. 13th, starting at FCCR. More details in the January newsletter.



[Annual MLK Day Event](#) - Monday Morning, January 15th at RMHS.

[Embracing Our Transgender Neighbors](#) – an open event for the whole Reading community, Sunday, January 21st at 5pm at FCCR.

In Our Prayers

During the month of November, the following were in our prayers:

Health:

Joann Sanford, Esther Larson who fell, Amy Knapp who had a stay in the hospital, a friend Dick in nursing care, Janet Colclough getting a pacemaker, Lance recovering from foot surgery.

Cancer:

Joann Burke, David Carr, Family Members & Friends – Aunt Gin, Susan, Sherry, Julie, Kristin, Clara, Charlie, Carole, Brad, Bruce, Bob, Billy, Everett's cousin Brian.



Grief:

The Bond family in the passing of Uncle Charles, Pat in the loss of her dog,

Other:

All who are dealing with family issues, All who experience persecution, harassment, or violation of their rights and bodies, especially our transgender brothers and sisters.

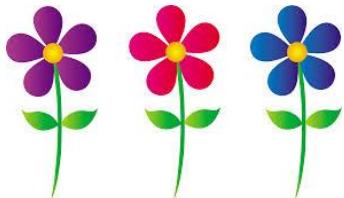
World:

Peace for all, safety for refugees, Those facing terrorist attacks throughout the world; for slave trade in Libya to stop.

Thanks & Joys:

Our church, people who work for justice, freedom, the beauty and bounty of our land, RMHS students in Pippin especially Emily Cain, Sam Gibbs & Catherine Kerr, five years cancer free for MaryAnn Higgins, for Cocoa & Cookies and all who make it happen.

Births: A new grand-niece, Jean Carr's great grand-daughter.



ALTAR FLOWERS

Nov 5 in loving memory of Barbara Brown by her husband William (Bill) Brown.

Nov 12 in loving memory of Richard J Vaughan by AJ and Linda Jerrett.

Nov 19 Cornucopia, full of the abundance of our harvest, reminds us of the many blessings that fill our lives- given by the Deacons.

Nov 26 In loving memory of Erin Louise Nystrom by her grandparents and her mother Jennifer Souza.



Share the Joy of Christmas!

Many parishioners order poinsettias to decorate our Sanctuary as a special way to remember loved ones during the Christmas season

If you would like to place an order, either in memory of a loved one, or in celebration for a life event, or blessing, please fill out the form below and return it to the office by December 15th. You can drop it in the office mailbox, or mail it back. If you have any questions, please feel free to speak with Mary Ann Higgins, or contact the office.

I would like to order a poinsettia to decorate our Sanctuary.

Small Plant at \$3.00 (only available in Red)

Large Plant at \$7.00 (Choice of Red or White)

In Loving Memory of _____

In Celebration of _____

Use back of form if you need more room

I will take my plant home after December 17th.

Please donate to a home bound member of the church family.

Given by

Name _____

Phone _____

do not publish my name on "given by" line

Simply tear this sheet off and complete. Make checks payable to FCCR and note "Christmas flowers" and mail to office. Thank you

Growing in Faith, Going Out to Serve

The First Congregational Church of Reading

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST - AN OPEN AND AFFIRMING CONGREGATION

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POSTMASTER: Return Service Requested

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