



The Church Bell

First Congregational Church, UCC
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Advent is Not A Countdown

**MINISTER'S
message**

I have fond childhood memories of this season of Advent. During worship we would light one of the candles for each Sunday: one, two, three, four, CHRISTMAS! The Advent Workshop always offered fun projects to color, bake, glue, or eat. An Advent calendar would show up on our dinner table, each day with a tiny door to anxiously open as part of the countdown. What fun!

But the entire season seemed one of waiting, of counting the days until Christmas. Later in life I learned that Advent isn't just a season to wait - to count the days. It is better understood as a season of preparation. As John the Baptist quotes in Isaiah: "In the wilderness, prepare a way for the Lord."

As years go, 2020 could well be characterized as a "Wilderness Year!" We may find ourselves counting down to Christmas (and the end of the year) just to get it over with. So many of the things that make this season special are absent or significantly altered.

But I'm reminded that Advent is not a countdown. It is a time of preparation. It's a time to re-order our lives and prepare for a fresh incarnation of God's reign among us. Perhaps in the midst of this wilderness time we can look for new ways to practice the justice to which God calls us. Maybe there are new opportunities to offer compassionate care. There might be a fresh invitation to share the hope, love, joy, and peace we name during Advent.

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(Minister's Message, continued from cover page)

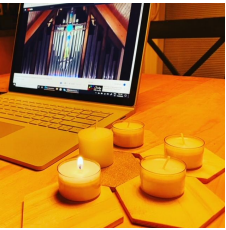
Our church is certainly not in countdown mode. During this wilderness year, we have been on the move, preparing for the next revelation of where God's Spirit may lead us. Next month you will welcome Rev. Tamara Torres McGovern to your pastoral team. Rev. Ben Konecny will step into a new leadership role. Our Capital Campaign is moving forward. Our staff, music, youth and children's programs have pivoted to offer safe interactions and service among our congregation and community.

This will be my last Bell article. In some ways I am counting down to my retirement date: December 31. But during this time we are also preparing for all the hope and promise of your new leadership and the new year.

The last time I preached in-person was March 1. Who knew how we would move completely from in-sanctuary worship to our current online presence? Though December 31 will be my last day of employment, Rev. Ben has graciously invited me to say goodbye to you all during the January 10 worship. (The scripture for the last Sunday of December is all about the wise men and I have no wish to preach about wise people on my farewell Sunday!)

I have cherished this wonderful adventure with you. It has been my honor and my joy to serve among you. I will hold you in prayer. I will remain deeply grateful for our decade of shared ministry. I have been transformed by this spirit-filled church and I will carry that into my new adventure of retirement.

With Great Hope and Profound Gratitude,
Rev. Nathan Miller



Advent Sanctuary Kits

During worship on November 29, we shared our Advent Sanctuary Kits. We hope you will use an Advent Sanctuary Kit to help prepare a worship space in your house this Advent season. Sanctuary Kits are available to pick up at the church during normal hours. Please call ahead to let us know before you stop by. If you can't make it to the church but would still like a kit, please let us know. We're happy to drop one off at your house! Once you have set up your Advent Sanctuary Kit, please feel free to customize it and then text or email a picture of it to a church staff member for us to use during worship. Above are a couple of examples of how church members have already set theirs up!

Thank You for Your Generosity

Thanks to your generosity, we were able to give \$1,155 to Lutheran Family Services from our Immigrant & Refugee Coat Drive!

At publication of this issue of the Bell, we have received \$2,670.00 for the Heath Giving Tree. Heath Giving Tree donations are due to the church office by December 7 to allow sufficient time to distribute funds to families before Christmas break.

Welcome New Members!

Though we have not been meeting in person, we are so grateful that our church family continues to grow! We are overjoyed to welcome the following new members to the church. We hope you'll have the chance to say "hi" in person sometime soon!



Mel, Tom, Remy, & Kip Jensen

"It means a lot to us that First Congregational is Open & Affirming and that you have consistently been a force for good in our community."



Larry Kerrigan

"I was drawn to First Congregational Church because of friends I know who are members of the congregation. I quickly felt connected to the people I met at FCC and to Rev. Nate and Rev. Ben. I appreciate

how welcoming the church is and having the opportunity to meditate with fellow church members during daily Centering Prayer gatherings."



Ron & Madge Randall

"We are pleased to now be a part of the warm and welcoming congregation of First Congregational Church and look forward to joining our friends when worship services start again."



Nate, Jamie, Dahva, Kaida, & Rivka Pierot

"We were looking for a church that was not afraid to intently and actively show

the Love of God, both within the church itself, but also out in the community it lives in. What we found was more than I had imagined. We are full of praise to be able to grow in and show God's love as part of this church community."

A Farewell to Rev. Nate Save the Date!

On Sunday, January 10 at 2pm, we will gather in the west parking lot to say farewell and happy retirement to Rev. Nate. More information will be mailed and emailed out soon. Please make sure your address and email address are updated with the office to ensure you don't miss this important information!

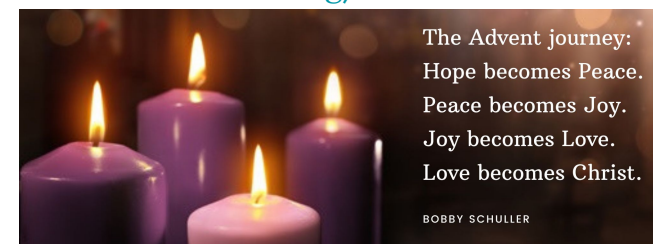
Rev. Tamara Arrives January 17

Rev. Tamara, Piper, and Tovi will begin their journey from Portland, Maine to Greeley shortly after the first of the year. Please keep their family in your prayers as they say goodbye to their beloved community and their family. We pray for their safe travels and a smooth move. If all goes as planned, Rev. Tamara's first Sunday with us will be Sunday, January 17.



Welcoming The Stranger Event

We were pleased to host the "Welcoming the Stranger" event with Sojourn Mennonite Church this past month. We had the opportunity to hear two moving stories from undocumented young adults in Colorado - Tania & Cristian. Through the program, we were invited to consider how our understanding of immigration is changed when we hear the personal stories of people who are most impacted by immigration policy in our country. To learn more about Motus Theater and their efforts to humanize the topic of immigration, visit their website at www.motustheater.org/undocuamerica



The Advent journey:
Hope becomes Peace.
Peace becomes Joy.
Joy becomes Love.
Love becomes Christ.

BOBBY SCHULLER



Christmas Food Boxes In lieu of poinsettias this year, we invite you to remember and celebrate your loved ones by donating a Christmas food box to the Weld Food Bank. Boxes are \$25. Memoriams will be added to our Christmas tree and will also scroll during worship each Sunday. You can mail a check to the church with Christmas Food Box in the memo, or give online using the Givelify app.

Weld Food Bank The Weld Food Bank is still looking for volunteers. Volunteers wear masks and work in socially-distanced small groups. To sign up, please visit weldfoodbank.org/volunteer

Fairacres Manor We continue to provide treats for the staff at Fairacres Manor weekly. If you'd like to help bake, deliver, or shop for treats, please contact Kate Norris for more information at knorris.mail@gmail.com

Christmas Eve Worship Online and In-Person

Like so many things this year, Christmas Eve worship will look a bit different in 2020. We are delighted to offer a Christmas Lessons and Carols service that is being produced by Dr. Derek Chester and will include our Choral Scholars, as well as many of our church members. This Christmas worship experience will be available online, starting at noon on Christmas Eve.

Additionally, we will have an in-person, socially distanced Christmas Eve worship service in our west parking lot from 5:30-6pm. During this time of worship, we will hear portions of the Christmas story and church member and musician Tim Coons will lead us in some favorite Christmas carols, including Silent Night. Please bring your own candles, if possible. We will also stream the service live on YouTube and Facebook.

Advent Concert Series

Though we won't gather in the sanctuary for traditional Advent Concerts this season, we are offering our Advent Concert Series online! A new recording will be released on our YouTube page each Tuesday at 12:15pm and will continue to be available after they premiere.

Dec. 8: Diane Bolden-Taylor & Charlotte Mills

Dec. 15: John Mills & Gary Dempsey

Dec. 22: Shona Royle-Grimes & Friends

Special Sundays

On Sunday, December 13 we will feature special Christmas Music.

On Sunday, December 20, during our regular worship premiere, we invite you to watch our very "non-traditional" Christmas Pageant.



Baptism of Emery Rebecca Gattis

On Saturday, November 28, we baptized Emery Rebecca Gattis as the newest member of our faith family. Emery is the daughter of Kate & Grant Gattis, granddaughter of Carolyn & Scott Gattis, and niece of Melissa Gattis.