

# First Parish Congregational Church United Church of Christ – East Derry, New Hampshire

## December 2023

### Our Mission Statement

We are a community of faith built upon a firm foundation of worship, prayer, and education.

In affirming diversity, we are dedicated to welcoming all people who seek the Word of God, Christian fellowship, and service to others.

In partnership with Christ and led by the Holy Spirit, we reach out to the ever-widening community through active and loving ministry.



*“Friend, you enter this church not as a stranger, but as a guest of God. Come, then, with joy in your heart and thanks upon your lips and offer God today your love and your service.”*

Adapted from a 12<sup>th</sup> Century Church in Hampshire, England



“God is in the manger,  
wealth in poverty,  
light in darkness,  
succor in abandonment.

No evil can befall us;  
whatever men may do to us,  
they cannot but serve the God  
who is secretly revealed as love.”

— Dietrich Bonhoeffer

## From the Pastor's Desk

Dear Child of God,

Did you notice that the color of the banners in this December newsletter is purple? Yay! Purple is the liturgical color for Advent. We begin Advent this Sunday. The Advent wreath has three purple candles. I will wear a different purple stole and vestments each week. We will use purple antependia – those cloth banners that are on the lectern. Lots and lots of purple. The church uses purple for the two seasons of watchful waiting: Advent and Lent. In Advent, we wait for the baby to be born. In Lent, we walk with Jesus to the Cross. Granted, they are different kinds of waiting. They are “waiting” nonetheless.

What exactly are we waiting for in Advent? Let's ponder this for a moment together. Perhaps you remember that in Spanish, the verb “to wait for” is the same as “to hope.” We are a people of hope. Hope comes alive in Advent. We use this time on Sunday to collectively remember the stories of our faith ancestors, who proclaimed the reality of Hope in the fulfilled promises of God's Presence. Throughout the ancient times, God promised through the Prophets and then God fulfilled those promises.

Of course, remembering the story of the birth of Jesus, is a cornerstone story of hope among God's people. We take this season of Advent to remember all of the aspects of that miraculous birth. All of God's Creation was active in this birth: the animals, the heavens, the workers, the rich and wealthy. And all of them bowed to the baby who would change the world. All of them took time to stop and praise the power of love. That is what this birth story is all about: love. Love was born in Bethlehem. Love guides all who take the time to stop and pay attention to the signs.

This Advent, take time to notice the messages of hope and love that surround you. This Advent, take time to be a message of hope and love to those around you. This Advent, take time to thank God for the hope and love within you and all around you. You may have to work to find it – Joseph had to work to find a place for Jesus to be born. Mary had to work to accept this gift from heaven. The shepherds left their earthly work to attend to the heavenly work in that stable. The magi had to work by walking and heeding the signs from heaven to find the Christ-child. Each and every one of them was blessed.

From my family to yours, may the blessings of Advent be abundant – whether they are blessings you offer others or they are blessings offered to you.

God Bless Us, Every One!

Pastor Deborah

## Christian Education and Faith Formation

Children Christian Education Program (CCEP) is our church's overall children's program that includes Sunday School. Our program doesn't just include the wonderful hour of teaching children the word of the Lord with crafts and activities on Sundays. It includes programs like the Advent Workshop, Christmas pageant/play and Vacation Church Camp in the summer.

### Calendar

December is a busy time, please mark your calendars of the following dates:

1. December 3- Advent workshop, a family event with lunch, instead of Sunday School
2. December 10 & 17: Rehearsal from 11:30-12:30, after coffee time to practice on stage.
3. Saturday, December 23- dress rehearsal for Christmas Pageant 10-12 in Currier Hall
4. December 24- Children Christmas Play/Pageant: Participants please be at church by 9:30
5. December 31- no classes
6. January 7-Sunday School resumes

### November Sunday School Recap

We started rehearsing for the Christmas Eve morning service. Along with making crafts of the symbols of Christmas that you all will learn about Christmas Eve.

### This Sunday!

#### Advent Workshop: December 3, 2023

**Come for Lunch! Stay for crafts. Let's enjoy our time together.**

Our theme this year is Tis the "Sea"son. "Sea" as we are having crafts related to using elements of the sea.

One craft is a returning craft from last year, a shell angel. Making a shell into an angel ornament. Simple but beautiful to add to any tree.

Another is an ornament is going to be a seek and find ornament. Fill a plastic ornament with sand and hide 4 Christian symbols inside. Shake it around to see if you can spot all 4.



There are a few other crafts as well, but you will just have to come and find out what they are!



### **Sunday Christmas Eve 10 AM Service**

Please join the children along with our wonderful adult volunteers as we celebrate Christmas in the Children's Pageant at the morning service on Christmas Eve.

This year we are doing a twist to the traditional Nativity Play and creating a theatrical shadow performance. But that's not all! We want to share why this precious story has many symbols in today's world. These symbols help remind us of the sacred story of Jesus' birth. This story is what started many traditions that we hold dear to our hearts. But over time, we may have forgotten why these symbols are important and have meaning more than "it's just what we do". The tradition of the Christmas Tree and what we put on the tree means a whole lot more than pretty decorations. To learn more, join us at this year's telling of why Christmas is important and not a commercial holiday.

The children are super excited for this new twist. Come see all their hard work in this year's Christmas Eve Morning Pageant. We look forward to seeing you all there!

### **Notes for the Participant families**

Dress rehearsal on Saturday Dec 23 will be held from 10-12. Families can just drop off the participants and come back to pick them up.

On Dec 24, please be at church by 9.

## Council Roundup

Dear Members and Friends of First Parish.

As we put together our budget for 2024, I need to remind you all that we approved a budget for 2023 that would produce a \$20,000 deficit for the current year. We mounted a Bridge the Gap campaign last February, which filled about \$5000 of the gap. So, we are on a path to end the year about \$15,000 in the hole. We were able to cover this cash gap by using unspent cash that we have for future work on the sanctuary. However, we intend to spend all of that money, and more, in the coming year so that we can get back into the sanctuary by Christmas 2024. So, we need to cover this shortfall. Please consider making an additional contribution to the budget this year to help cover this gap, so that all the funds needed for the sanctuary repairs are available when we need them.

For 2024, we have 48 pledges received as of Thursday evening, for a total of \$183,000. Our preliminary budget calls for pledge income for operating expenses of \$215,000. So, if you haven't pledged yet for 2024, please do as soon as you are able, so that we can assess our position.

Finally, as you've heard, we are mounting an Into the Sanctuary campaign to raise the remaining money needed for us to finally get back into the sanctuary. We are trying to scale back some renovation plans a bit so that this is achievable. We are hoping and expecting that this total will be \$500,000-\$600,000. While this is a lot of money, we already have roughly \$200,000 from last year's fund-raising campaign, and we have 2 donors who combined will match up to \$175,000 in new contributions. So, any pledge you make to the Into the Sanctuary campaign between now and mid-December will be matched 2:1. If our congregation (and any community donors) can come up with \$175,000 in pledges for this campaign, that together with the funds on hand and the matching contributions will bring us to \$550,000--right in the ballpark of what we need to finally complete the work on the sanctuary and return to worship in it.

I realize this is a lot of talk about giving money--something that no one wants to say or hear. But it's a fact of life, and the news is more positive than it has been for several years. We really can see the light at the end of the tunnel! Please do what you can to help get us there.

Randy Brown, Moderator  
for the Council

## Board of Deacons

Happy Advent 2023!

The Deacons are looking forward to an exciting and revitalizing Advent season. We will spend four weeks awaiting the birth of Jesus. We will light the beautiful Advent Wreath, made from pieces from the Meetinghouse! Hope, Peace, Joy and Love.

On the first Sunday of Advent, we light the purple candle of Hope, which reminds us that Jesus is coming and that He will lead us out of darkness. We also begin physical preparations for Christmas, such as putting up and lighting a Christmas tree, as well as the hanging of the greens.

On the second Sunday of Advent, we light a second purple candle, which represents Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem. During the second week of Advent we are invited to reflect on God's promise of universal peace through Christ and how we can be an incarnation of that peace in our daily lives by helping those in need, just as Mary and Joseph were.

The third Sunday of Advent is known as Gaudete Sunday and is all about Joy. Gaudete is the Latin word for "Rejoice," and on this Sunday, we light the pink Shepherd's Candle. Pink is the liturgical color that represents joy. The joy we celebrate this week is the joy of our faith, the joy that we have experienced, and the joy at the coming of Christ.

The fourth Sunday of Advent is all about Love—specifically, God's love for the world, Christ's love for all of us, and our love for our neighbors. The fourth candle on the advent wreath is once again purple, and it is known as the Angel's Candle. This candle serves as a reminder of the angel's message, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

AND the fourth Sunday of Advent is also Christmas Eve this year. The children will present their Pageant in the morning worship service. We will celebrate our traditional candlelight Christmas Eve at a 7:00pm service.

We also want to invite you to join us for these wonder-filled festive activities at First Parish: The Granite Statesmen Holiday Concert December 2nd. Come to the matinee or evening performance. The Advent Workshop this Sunday after the morning worship service. (See the CE article for more details.) On December 9<sup>th</sup>, join Santa for breakfast! Also, please join us for Jazz Jam's Holiday Open House and Potluck on 12/17 @ 3pm.

We also want to recognize that Christmas can be difficult because loved ones are not with us to celebrate this year. We, at First Parish, have experienced significant losses this year. We will host our traditional "Blue Christmas" on Thursday December 21st at 7pm. This is a time to acknowledge sadness in the midst of a season of joy. If you know of someone who has experienced loss, please tell them about this service and invite them to join us.

From your Deacons: blessings and peace this Advent!

Submitted by Liz Greenberg, on behalf of Sue Brown, Sue Lindemann, Reni Harnden, Tom Wood, Jo Worthen.

## Board of Missions

The Mission Board is glad to report that the generosity of this congregation provided for many families over Thanksgiving. \$1,000 was contributed to provide grocery cards. In addition thanks to regular contributions for Mission work, another \$500 was available which enabled Mission to purchase and provide 60 Hannaford cards at \$25 each. 30 cards went to Caregivers and 30 cards to Upper Room.

Our goal was for 200 cans of cranberry sauce to enable Upper Room to add to the 200 bags of food for families in need. We surpassed our goal. Through additional funds made available, Mission was able to purchase enough sweatshirts for Upper Room to distribute to teens who do not have warm jackets.

The Mission Board is currently working on the Christmas gifts our congregation donates for those served by Caregivers. Each name and gift request were taken and when items are purchased and returned, they will be distributed to Caregivers for their clients. Toys for children are being collected and will be delivered to the Upper Room for their parents to "shop" for their children, enabling those parents to provide a special Christmas.

Our church was recently honored for our commitment to serve the community and those in need. The Mission Board is proud to be part of that work through the generosity of our congregation. We are honored to serve the First Parish Church congregation by distributing your donations.

Your Board of Mission is: Cyndi Gray, Liz Greenberg, Nancy Murdock, Karen Wilson

## Holiday Events for Historic Preservation

You can still help complete the Sanctuary—and have a great time!—by coming to tomorrow's Holiday Concert fundraiser for the Meetinghouse. Tickets are still available; buy them online in advance (best) or at the door, Get info and purchase tickets here:

<https://fpc-ucc.org/event-items/holiday-concert-for-the-meetinghouse-2023/>



## Breakfast with Santa December 9, 2023



Bring the whole family for a delicious breakfast, visit with Santa, enjoy kids' activities, try your luck with raffles, and more. The fun takes place next Saturday, Dec. 9, 8:00 – 11:00 AM. Tickets at the door are just \$10 for adults, \$5 for ages 3–8, and free for ages 2 and under. Proceeds will also go directly to the preservation effort, helping to complete the Meetinghouse Sanctuary.

## Safe Church Committee

The Safe Church committee would like to invite you to an upcoming Round Table discussion on Sunday, December 10, 1-4 pm. (snow date Sunday, January 14, 1-4pm) This will be an informal setting with Homeland Security, local police & fire departments. The purpose of these discussions is to help build understanding and/or identify strengths and areas for improvement to provide a safe environment for all. Please note: the exercises are non-denominational; they are intended to be generic and do not relate to any one religion. All religions, first responders, and community leaders are welcome to attend this Round Table Exercise.

Please see below for more information and the link to register. Registration is required & free! If you need help to register, please see Jo Worthen! <https://fpc-ucc.org/Wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/FBCO-TTX-flyer-1.pdf>

## Angel Tree Reminder

Angel tree reminder: please remember that the gifts for the Upper Room, specifically unwrapped puzzles and games, need to be in the office by 3:00 on Tuesday, the 5th. For Community Caregivers you have another week. The wrapped gifts need to be in the office after church December 10.

The Board of Outreach and Mission is so grateful to all of you as you bring joy into the lives of those less fortunate.



## Poinsettias Orders



Red Poinsettia plants are available for \$7.00 a pot. Please indicate the number of plants that you would like in the space provided and return this order form with your payment to the office, in the offering plate, or to Rachel Cobban **no later than Sunday, December 10<sup>th</sup>**. The order form is in the office and will be on the table this Sunday.

You may also email the office. Let us know how you would like to pay and please note if the poinsettia is in loving memory of someone or in celebration of something. If you wish, you may take home your Poinsettias after Christmas Eve services.

## ELECTRONIC GIVING

We now have electronic giving available for anyone who would like to offer a paperless Christmas gift to the church.

We accept Venmo: First Parish (be sure that you see the icon of our church steeple).

We can also process your credit card at <https://square.link/u/g98jLXqb>

Remembering the work of the church at Christmas! God Bless You!

## Christmas Open House (Potluck) and Jazz Jam –December 17th



### Christmas Open House (Pot Luck)

- What:** A Christmas Open House featuring our own Jazz Jam Ensemble
- When:** Sunday, December 17 from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m.
- Where:** Currier Hall, First Parish Church, 47 East Derry Road, East Derry, NH
- Who:** All First Parish Church members, friends, and family
- How:** Please bring a favorite family Christmas finger food to share. Also include a brief story or background information about this beloved food on an index card for all to read and enjoy.

Bring your festive spirit, enjoy some seasonal jazz music,  
and join in singing some favorite carols.

All ages are welcome!

## Church Calendar – December 2023

Saturday, December 2<sup>nd</sup> at 3pm & 7pm – Holiday Concert (Currier Hall)  
Granite Statesmen Barbershop Chorus

Sunday, December 3<sup>rd</sup> at 10am – Worship Service  
Sunday, December 3<sup>rd</sup> at 11am – Advent Workshop

Tuesday, December 5<sup>th</sup> at 6pm – (makeup) Labyrinth Walk  
Tuesday, December 5<sup>th</sup> at 6:45pm – (makeup) Adult Faith Formation

Saturday, December 9<sup>th</sup> at 8am – Breakfast with Santa

Sunday, December 10<sup>th</sup> at 10am – Sunday Worship Service  
Sunday, December 10<sup>th</sup> at 1pm – Safe Church Meeting  
Sunday, December 10<sup>th</sup> at 5pm – Currier being used

Monday, December 11<sup>th</sup> at 7pm – Finance Meeting

Tuesday, December 12<sup>th</sup> at 4pm – Mission Meeting

Friday, December 15 at 7:30pm – Contra Dance

Saturday, December 16<sup>th</sup> at 8am – Star Events Craft Show

Sunday, December 17<sup>th</sup> at 10am – Sunday Worship Service  
Sunday, December 17<sup>th</sup> at 3pm – Jazz Jam and Christmas Potluck

Wednesday, December 20<sup>th</sup> at 7pm – Council Meeting

Thursday, December 21<sup>st</sup> at 7pm – Blue Christmas Service of Remembering Loss

Friday, December 22<sup>nd</sup> at 12pm – Currier being used

Saturday, December 23<sup>rd</sup> at 10am to Noon – Pageant Practice

Sunday, December 24<sup>th</sup> at 10am and 7pm - Christmas Worship Services

Monday, December 25<sup>th</sup> – HOLIDAY

Friday, December 29<sup>th</sup> at 4:30pm – Spaghetti Supper

Sunday, December 31<sup>st</sup> at 10am – Sunday Worship Service



Photo credit: Paul Lindemann

**First Parish  
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**Office Hours**

Please call to make an appointment  
as office hours may vary daily

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