

**THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
OF ELLSWORTH, MAINE
FOUNDED 1812**



DECEMBER 2023 - THE STEEPLE NEWSLETTER

First Congregational Church, PO Box 12, 2 Church Street, Ellsworth, Maine 04605 207-667-8321 ellsworthucc.org

From Rev. Keith Bowie, Transitional Minister

It is Advent time! Advent is a season that holds deep significance for us as Christians. It's a time when we begin anew, filled with anticipation for Christ's arrival at Christmas—both His historical birth and the renewal of His presence in our hearts.



One cherished tradition that takes place in Advent is the lighting of the Advent wreath. With its four candles symbolizing the four Sundays of Advent—three purple and one pink—the wreath gradually fills our sanctuary with a warm glow as we draw nearer to the celebration of Christmas. Come and join us as we proclaim the same radiant truth: Christ, the Light of the world, is our steadfast guide, ensuring that we never walk in darkness.

On a personal level, another tradition that helps me “find the sacred in the ordinary” is reading Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*. I have been doing this each holiday season for a few years now, and his work fills me with wonder each time I read it. We all know about Scrooge and Tiny Tim, but the character of Dickens himself is key to understanding this classic that one scholar has called “the Gospel in miniature.” What prompted Dickens to write this novella in 1843? It was set against the backdrop of the Industrial Revolution and a religious revival known as the Great Awakening. Dickens himself experienced abject poverty in his youth. At age twelve, his parents went to debtors’ prison. Dickens had to care for himself and had to work in the factory to support himself during this hard time. This experience filled him with empathy for the poor. Later, at age thirty-one, he read a report on the abomination of child labor, and he decided to “raise awareness,” as we say today, by writing this piece of fiction.

What are one or two of your favorite holiday traditions—ones that cause you to pause and ponder the significance of this holy season? What is it that helps you to prepare your hearts and minds as we await the coming of God’s Son? May the love that fills our hearts propel us to care for all of God’s people, especially those who are the least and the lonely. In this season of Advent may our busy schedules give way to the sacred beauty of this time of year: when something so ordinary—the birth of a child—changed the way we see our world forever.

God bless Us, Every One!

Keith

MASKING is OPTIONAL
in the church building.



Please maintain physical distance and respect the space of those who wish to continue to wear a mask.

DECEMBER CHURCH MEETINGS

- Adult Forum** – Sundays, 8:30 a.m.
Choir – Thursdays, 6 p.m.
Busy Bodies – Mondays, 10:30 a.m.
Music – TBA
Search Comm – TBA
Missions – TBA
Deacons – Sunday, Dec 10, 11:30 a.m.
Christian Ed – Sunday, Dec 10, 11:30 a.m.
Trustees – Thursday, Dec 21, 7 p.m.
Council – Monday Dec 18, 6 :30 p.m.

Our meetings are hybrid, in person AND Zoom, so that you may participate in the way you are comfortable. All FCC Zoom events (meetings and worship) use the same meeting number and password. Please contact the secretary in the church office (T-W-Th) for Zoom instructions.



CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE 5 P.M.

NOTE TIME CHANGE FOR THE 2023 SERVICE.

Everyone is invited to the traditional Service of Lessons & Carols, where we hear our favorite passages from Scripture and sing carols together. The evening concludes with lovely congregational candle lighting.



DECEMBER LECTIONARY READINGS

DEC 3 – ADVENT I (YEAR B BEGINS)

Isaiah 64:1-9
Psalm 80:1-7 17-19
1 Corinthians 1:3-9
Mark 13:24-37

Hope

DEC 10 – ADVENT II

Isaiah 40:1-11
Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13
2 Peter 3:8-15a
Mark 1:1-8

Peace

DEC 17 – ADVENT III

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11
Psalm 126 OR Luke 1:46b-55
1 Thessalonians 5:16-24
John 1:6-8, 19-28

Joy

DEC 24 – ADVENT IV & CHRISTMAS EVE

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16
Luke 1:46b-55
OR Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26
Romans 16:25-27
Luke 1:26-38

Love

DEC 25 – CHRISTMAS DAY

Isaiah 62:6-12
Psalm 97
Titus 3:4-7
Luke 2:(1-7), 8-20



DEC 31 - 1ST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

Isaiah 61:10-62:3
Psalm 148
Galatians 4:4-7
Luke 2:22-40

WITH DEEPEST
Sympathy

We offer our condolences to the family and friends of Eleanor Jones who died November 11. Her memorial service took place Sunday, November 26.

DEACONS

- Dec 3 – Advent I, Rev. Keith Bowie
- Dec 10 – Advent II, Rev. Keith Bowie
- Dec 17 – Advent III, Rev. Dr. David Henry
- Dec 24 – Advent IV, Rev. Keith Bowie
- Dec 24 – Christmas Eve, Rev. Keith Bowie
- Dec 31 – Holiday & New Year Hopes –
Community Service

December Deacon: Katharine Schrader

We Are Here! It's the season of hope and hidden surprises. Our church has struggled the past year, but we continue to bless those in our community with our many mission-filled ways. I won't name every person or group because I'm liable to omit something and to hurt some feelings. We all have worked hard and because of this, we continue to be a place of worship and community outreach.

Next year, every person in our small membership has to find a way to offer their skills and abilities to keep moving forward. I, myself, have made the commitment to attend the Forum and Bible Studies. I have most of the time attended Bible Studies, but I have never attended the Forum. I will do this because I was asked, and the group adjusted the time so choir members can attend. What can each of you do? Maybe ask a friend to attend worship with you Sunday morning, Maybe offer to be an Usher or Liturgist. (Speak with a Deacon.) Maybe offer to be on a clean-up crew once or twice when we have our public suppers. Please find something you would like to see happen and offer to reach out and do it. Determine a time that you could give and a skill that you may be able to offer and let the office or a person on the Deacons/Christian Education boards know. **REACH DEEP and FIND your JOY!**

JOY! JOY! JOY! JOY! JOY! JOY!

Prayer Calendar names

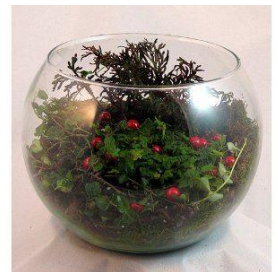
As we attempt to pray for our entire church family over the course of a year, the Deacons ask that you please include these names in your daily prayers during December:

- Gale & Bill Caddoo
- Lynn & Michael Hall
- Betty & Jim Kimbrell
- Elizabeth Palmer
- Marshall Smith
- Leita Zeugner & Bill Hodges
- Jennifer Allen
- Olivia Robidoux
- Pam & Rev. Keith Bowie
- Dylan Lacey
- Dan & Shirley Rhodes

BUSY BODIES

CHRISTMAS CRAFT FAIR SATURDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2022 8:30 A.M. – 1 P.M.

Our fair will feature our popular Berry Bowls, crafts, jewelry, knitted and crocheted items, puzzles, books, baked goods, fudge, attic treasures, and more. Craft donations for the fair are appreciated and can be left at the church. Baked goods can be left on Friday afternoon December 2, from 12-3 o'clock or early Saturday morning.



If you have questions, please contact Louise Emerson (667-4414) or Sue Fuller (610-1626). We can't wait to see you at our Christmas Fair!

**WE NEED VOLUNTEERS
FOR THE ELLSWORTH
CHRISTMAS PARADE FLOAT
Saturday afternoon, December 2**

The parade takes place on Saturday, December 2, at 4 p.m. Line-up begins at the Knowlton Park area at 3 p.m. We have a trailer and someone to pull the float, but we need folks to decorate it, walk in the parade, and hand out goodie bags with Bible verses and candy. Interested? Contact Ruth & Troy Tainter, or Kathy Schrader immediately. The float theme is Christmas Around the World.



**LIVE NATIVITY
SATURDAY, DECEMBER 9**

There will be a Live Nativity on our church lawn on Saturday, December 9. The Tainters have the stable animals lined up. We need a Mary and Joseph. Please contact Bonnie Carter if you would like to participate.

From the Moderator

I wonder how many of us have spent any time thinking about how and why Churches sometimes cease to exist. There are plenty of empirically obvious reasons, changes in demographics, communities that change often through gentrification, the politics of the moment, Church buildings that become impossible to support and so on.

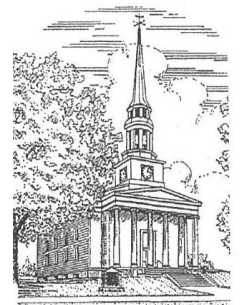
While any of these may contain a nugget of truth none of them get to the hard truths. Churches close when they cease to be a gathered group of faithful people doing all that they can to be alert to God's ongoing revelation of Godself to each of us as individuals and all of us together as a called and gathered group of folks having made the commitment to love God and follow the way that Jesus has laid out in that pursuit. When folks become more interested in advocating for their own perspectives than hearing the concerns and thinking of their beloved community members, love can be replaced by competition for influence and even control. If and when that should happen, a gathered people stop being the Church together and the end is usually close behind.

Please don't misunderstand, disagreements are part of things, a healthy part of things. When things are difficult and passions run high, when there has been long standing disagreement, or when we have procrastinated about discernment over things essential to the life and mission of the Church (the body of Christ in the world), we run the risk of being closed to the ongoing revelation of Godself to God's beloved—you and I and all of us.

In today's world we have an almost idolatrous fixation with individualism. We complain that we are losing community yet insist that, at least for many of us, the one is far more important than the many. None of that is consistent with being a people called and gathered in love for our creator God, for one another and for our neighbors.

We are all aware of the decline in both Church attendance and Church membership. If any Church is to survive in a world determined to distract people from the hard work of discipleship, we need to recognize the movement of the spirit as it stirs us in new and sometimes uncomfortable directions.

We need to remember that Jesus conducted his ministry and called his followers from those that the religious authorities of his time deemed unacceptable. We don't need a narrower gate to entry we need to follow the example of Jesus and open wide the doors and invite people into the joys and challenges of discipleship. We need to be about the commitment to loving all, not some, not only those who think and act like us, everyone. ♦



ADOPT-A-CHILD FOR CHRISTMAS PRESENTS



Emmaus Homeless Shelter

Serving First Those Who Suffer Most

Each December the Emmaus Shelter asks us to “adopt” a child and grant a Christmas wish.

Please have your donations at the church by Sunday, December 10. These are the particulars we received from Stacey at the Shelter: *Please label gifts with name of child (masking tape works great or bagging them in a bag separately labeled works well, too.) Please have gifts unwrapped as we have found families love to see and wrap themselves. If you can include a roll of wrapping paper for them, that is wonderful but certainly not mandatory.* Take the ornament off the tree in the State Street lobby with the child's name on it and sign the list on the clipboard. There will be three items listed. If you are not picking up all three, please let Lois know so the remaining may be picked up if possible. **If you have any questions, contact Lois Stevens immediately.**



NAME	AGE/GENDER	WISH 1	WISH 2	WISH 3
Paxton	3-yr-old boy	Ride-on toy	Matchbox cars with carrier case	Legos
Jetta	14-yr-old girl	Makeup	Jewelry	full-size comforter
Abby	14-yr-old girl	Earbuds	Wireless speaker	Camera
Jayden	16-yr-old boy	Remote control toy	Full size comforter	Clock radio
Natalene	9-yr-old girl	Disney character	Barbie	Science kit
Creston	3-yr-old boy	Ride-on toy	Preschool game	Coloring book & crayons
Harmony	9-yr-old girl	Legos	Barbie	Science kit
Kenneth	12-yr-old boy	Legos	Full size blue comforter	Camera
Alayna	3-yr-old girl	Doll set	Play set	Preschool game
Anthony	1-yr-old boy	Ride-on toy	Cars & trucks	Musical toy
Lance	9-yr-old boy	Legos	Remote control toy	Twin-size green comforter
Shawn	6-yr-old boy	Remote control toy	Tonka toy	Transformer
Mila	6-yr-old girl	Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	Science kit	Disney toy
Axel	5-yr-old boy	Dinosaurs	Cars & trucks	Sled
Carson	6-yr-old boy	Educational toys	Twin-size blue comforter	Football
Xavier	8-yr-old boy	Cars & trucks	Educational toys	Sled
Wyatt	6-yr-old boy	Sensory toy	Music toy	Disney toy
Nicholas	6-yr-old boy	Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	Star Wars	Books
Nyla	3-yr-old girl	Puzzle	Preschool game	Books
Adilyns	5-yr-old girl	Makeup	Craft supplies	Sled



THE CHRISTMAS FUND

has been caring for active and retired clergy and lay employees of the United Church of Christ for over 100 years, providing emergency grants, supplementation of small annuities and health premiums, Christmas "Thank You" gift checks each December to our lower-income retirees.

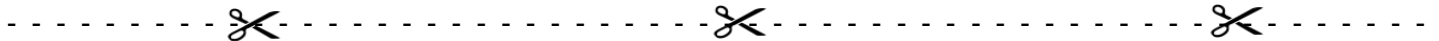
This year, we rejoice at the opening of possibilities for gathering and worshipping together again, as we anticipate the good news of great joy at Christmas. Still, challenges remain for many of our pastoral leaders who continue to experience loss of income as congregations struggle with budget shortfalls.

Please show your continue gratitude for our active and retired UCC clergy who need our support by giving generously to the Christmas Fund this year. First Church will accept gifts to this fund the entire month of December. Envelopes are in the pew racks.

CHRISTMAS POINSETTIAS



We will decorate the Chancel with poinsettias for worship on Sunday, December 24. We will use our beautiful silk ones, but if you wish to buy a live plant, you can purchase your own or they will be purchased for you and displayed. **Live plants cost \$8.** Please fill out the form and make out your check to the church with "Poinsettia" in the memo line. Katharine Schrader will buy as many live plants as there is money for on December 22. You don't have to purchase a plant to list your loved ones' names in the bulletin. **Memorial and honorary information and your plant orders need to be in the church office by Tuesday, December 19.**



CHRISTMAS POINSETTIA DESIGNATIONS 2023

I will bring my own plant.

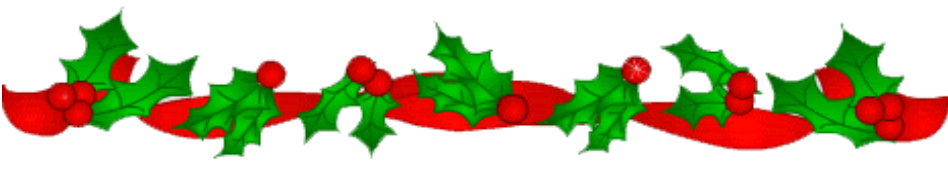

I want to buy ___ plants through the church.

Your name (please print) _____

In Honor of (please print) _____

In Memory of (please print) _____

❁ DECEMBER 2023 ❁

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					1 OFFICE CLOSED	2 8:30 am- 1 pm Christmas Fair  3 pm Parade line-up
3 Advent I Violet 8:30 am Adult Forum 10 am Worship Service & Communion	4 OFFICE CLOSED	5	6 1-4 pm Bowie office 2:30-4 pm Welcome Table take-out	7 9 am Bulletin Deadline 4 pm Chess Club 6 pm Choir	8 OFFICE CLOSED	9 4 pm Live Nativity
10 Advent II Violet 8:30 am Adult Forum 10 am Worship Service 11:30 am Deacons 11:30 am Christian Ed	11 OFFICE CLOSED 10:30 am Busy Bodies activities	12	13 1-4 pm Bowie office 2:30-4 pm Welcome Table take-out	14 9 am Bulletin Deadline 4 pm Chess Club 6 pm Choir	15 OFFICE CLOSED	16
17 Advent III Rose 8:30 am Adult Forum 10 am Worship Service	18 OFFICE CLOSED 10:30 am Busy Bodies activities	19	20 1-4 pm Bowie office 2:30-4 pm Welcome Table take-out	21 9 am Bulletin deadline 4 pm Chess Club 6 pm Choir 7 pm Trustees	22 OFFICE CLOSED	23
24 Advent IV Violet 8:30 am Adult Forum 10 am Worship Service 5 pm C Eve service	25 Christmas OFFICE CLOSED	26 9 am Steeple deadline	27 1-4 pm Bowie office	28 9 am Bulletin deadline 4 pm Chess Club 6 pm Choir	29 OFFICE CLOSED	30
31 White 8:30 am Adult Forum 10 am Worship Service	1 New Year's Day OFFICE CLOSED	2	3 1-4 pm Bowie office 2:30-4 pm Welcome Table take-out	4 9 am Bulletin deadline 4 pm Chess Club 6 pm Choir	5 OFFICE CLOSED	6

**God of Love,
 Your son, Jesus, is your greatest gift to us.
 He is a sign of your love.
 Help us walk in that love during the weeks of Advent,
 As we wait and prepare for his coming.
 We pray in the name of Jesus, our Savior. Amen.**

- Author Unknown



**Now it is high time to awake out of sleep:
for now is our salvation nearer
than when we believed.**



**The night far spent,
the day is at hand.**

Romans 13:11-12

Sunday Worship Service 10 a.m.

Church office hours: Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, 9 a.m. – 2 p.m.

Rev. Keith Bowie, Transitional Minister
Joyce B. Cornwell, Secretary
Lynn Hall, Organist
Nancy Sargent, Choir Director
Jack Lacey, Moderator 745-1348
Tom MacDonald, Vice Moderator
Sue Fuller, Clerk 610-1626
Troy Tainter, Building Maintenance Director
Leita Zeugner, Treasurer

Sidney Emerson & Lynn Hall,
Financial Secretaries
Katharine Schrader, Deacons 266-2541
Ginny Davis, Missions
Bonnie Carter, Music & Christian Education
Council Members at Large:
Joyce Johnston
Rhyne Robidoux



First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ

PO Box 12

Ellsworth, Maine 04605

207-667-8321 office@ellsworthucc.org ellsworthucc.org

facebook.com/fccellsworth/

Our street address is 2 Church Street, but that is not our mailing address. The Post Office no longer automatically gives us our mail with the street address. You must use the Post Office Box number.