

The Beacon

DECEMBER 2017



GOOD NEWS from

United Congregational Church of Westerly

United Church of Christ, Pawcatuck, CT

Sunday Worship ~ 9:30 am

FROM THE PASTOR ...

Friends – This is a reprise of a Beacon article I wrote for Christmas a few years ago. I believe it says all I would hope to say this year too so here it is once more...

“Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. Matthew 1:18

Thus begins Matthew’s version of the Christmas story. It starts at verse 18 rather than verse 1 because Matthew opens the story with a long genealogy that links Jesus directly to King David and then all the way back to Abraham. Matthew’s version of the nativity story is short and to the point. It takes all of seven verses, if you don’t include the story of the three kings. The other version of Jesus’ birth appears in the Gospel of Luke. Once again though, the story does not begin in the first verse of the first chapter. Instead, Luke begins the actual birth narrative in the first verse of the second chapter because he uses the entire first chapter to set the stage for Jesus. First he describes the birth of John the Baptist to Zechariah and Elizabeth and then he goes on to tell the beautiful story of the Annunciation to Mary by the Angel Gabriel and the Magnificat, Mary’s response to Gabriel, which follows.

The story we think of as the Nativity Story is actually a composite of these two stories from Matthew and Luke but we seldom stop to consider that little tidbit. Instead, we think of the Angel appearing to the terrified young Mary and then we leap to the long journey to Bethlehem, Mary clinging to the back of a donkey with ever patient Joseph trudging alongside. Before we know it the newborn Babe is safely snuggled into the straw filled manger surrounded by smiling animals, his beatific mother and strong yet gentle father hovering nearby. Then the shepherds stumble over themselves in their hurry to see firsthand the miracle the angels sang to them in sheep dotted fields. They are soon on their way only to be replaced by the royal entourage of three kings arriving on camels, laden with gifts. This is the Christmas story we know and love. We don’t worry about the details and whether or not we have the timing and the details right. We just know this is Christmas. This is *our* Christmas story and it’s what draws us to church during this time of year. This is *the* Christmas story – the real Christmas story which is not the Christmas story society tells or understands. Society tells us over and over again that Christmas is about twinkling lights, garish plastic lawn displays, and buying stuff, lots and lots of stuff – everything from a Mercedes sports car to Imagination Elmo. But *we know* that is not Christmas. Not really. Not ever.

Dear friends, we know the real story of Christmas. We know the truth of Christmas – that God loves us so much that God sent his own dear Son to live among us as flesh and blood. We know that Christmas is not about stuff. Christmas is about new beginnings for us all as we celebrate God’s light and truth and hope breaking into the world all over again this Advent Season. May you claim the Christmas story as your own once more this Advent Season. May you revel in its details and luxuriate in the love of God it makes tangible in every telling. May you make the time to kneel at the manger once more, amazed and humbled by all that God has done, is doing, and will do in your life, if only you will make room in your heart for God.

Merry Christmas and the Happiest of New Years to you and all your loved ones.

Your friend in Christ,
Rev. Ruth



Rev. Ruth's Community Office Hours!
Thursdays from 2 – 4 pm on December 7th,
14th, and 21st at
The Savoy Bookstore & Café
in downtown Westerly

Come and chat about whatever is on your mind and heart.

Your friend and chatting partner, Rev. Ruth



shutterstock - 329963300

December Birthdays

- 9** – Bob Sicilian
- 20** – Mark Dessaulles
- 21** – Devin Moynihan
- 26** – Jack Hainsworth
- 29** – Trina Torres

Happy Anniversary to:

Brian & Barbara Johnson – 12-1-79

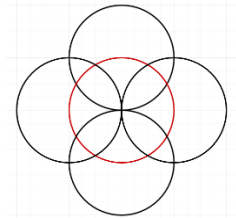
Please add in your special days by calling the church office!

† † † † † † † † † † † † †

Diaconate Schedule

<u>Date</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Telephone #</u>
Dec 3	Claire Calabretta	860-536-3625
Dec 10	Bethany Foster	401-539-4003
Dec 17	Ed Stratton	401-596-4740
Dec 24	Lynn Murray	401-539-7578
Dec 24 @ 7pm	- Ed Stratton	401-596-4740
Dec 31	Jenny Brummund	860-599-1719

† † † † † † † † † † † † †



SABBATH CIRCLES NEWS for December!

December Study Materials will be available for Sunday, December 3rd.

Our plans for Advent and Christmastide are taking shape:

Sun, Dec 3 Advent 1 *Hanging of the Greens & The Prophets' Candle*

Sun, Dec 10 Advent 2 *The Shepherds' Candle*

Sun, Dec 17 Advent 3 *Mary and the Angel's Candle*

Sun, Dec 24 Advent 4 *Christmas Comes to Life! Joseph's Candle*

Sun, Dec 24 7 pm *Christmas Eve – Jesus' Candle & Blessing of the Crèches*

MISSION NEWS

December Mission Projects – We have a lot going on these days at our lively church, that's for sure. But in the midst of all our business and celebrating the many joys of the holiday season, Jesus still expects us to remember those less fortunate than ourselves. Here are some ways we on your Missions Committee offer for your consideration and participation.

Breakfast – the most important meal of the day!



Our food drive for December will continue to focus on everything breakfast! Please help fill our Mission buckets with healthy hot and cold cereals of all kinds, granola bars, muffin and pancake mixes, maple and fruit syrups, Pop Tarts (are there healthy versions?? Yes, there are!!), etc. Please remember that all items must be non-perishable. (These items were requested by the PNC.)

Christmas Socks Collection –

We have two new collections for this holiday season.



You can start shopping the sales right now for warm winter socks for all ages to decorate our **Christmas Sock Tree**. Area shelters have indicated that heavy socks are the most needed items during the cold winter months.

Reverse Advent Baskets –



On Sunday, November 26, we will be blessing and distributing Reverse Advent Baskets, a new twist on an old Advent tradition of marking the days until Christmas with some sort of physical activity each day. With a Reverse Advent Basket, you take it home and then each day of Advent, which begins on Sunday, December 3, you put an item in the basket along with a simple prayer for the one who will eventually receive the item you are donating. Each basket will come with a set of simple instructions to follow. The hope of the Reverse Advent Baskets is that they will help you and your family remember others in need this holiday season and that often the simplest things can make a big difference.

All Church Christmas Card Board –



The week after the bazaar we will be placing one of our large portable bulletin boards in Fellowship Hall, ready to accept just ONE of the Christmas cards that you might have sent out to many in the congregation. Tack your Christmas greeting card on the board and place a freewill donation into the attached envelope. Just think about how much time you will save not having to address all of those cards, not to mention all of the money you will save on stamps! And, by the way, fewer cards later in the recycling bins! All monies collected will be donated to the Christmas Fund. (We remind you, though, that our shut-ins still enjoy receiving cards in the mail.)

The WARM meal for December will be supported by donation jars placed around the Bazaar.



**ANNUAL CHRISTMAS BAZAAR &
TEA & SILENT AUCTION**

Saturday, December 2, 2017

10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Please support our annual event!

News from your Deacons



- Based on some feedback by some of our members, the Deacons have begun a discussion to consider pushing back **the start of worship** to a later time. We would like to know what you think. We would appreciate your thoughts in either direction. Please speak to any Deacons to let us know what you think.
- As an important way of fully including the members and friends of our congregation who have celiac disease and other severe food allergies, the Deacons will be setting up a separate table for Sunday Fellowship to offer gluten free and nut free snack options. If you would like to prepare items for this table, that would be great. If you want to enjoy items on this table, also wonderful. Kindly be careful, however, not to move non-gluten and non-nut free items onto this special table since cross contamination is a real problem for the folks struggling with these health issues. Thank you so much for your support of this new ministry!

Plans and efforts for the BAZAAR are humming along and the **sign-up sheets** to help are posted in Fellowship Hall. **Plenty of help needed!** We are especially looking for donations of different *food items* for the Tea and the Bake Room.

Bake Room – We are hoping that you will make your delicious specialties to sell. Cookies, cakes, pies, breads, muffins, jams, relishes, pickles, baked beans, fudge, buckeye balls, and English toffee are just a few of the items that sell. Also, we welcome gluten free items and treats for our furry friends. The committee has laid out packaging supplies for the items you make on a table in the Sunday School room on the lowest level. You are welcome to take anything that you need from that supply. We thank you for all your donations.
–Carolyn, Shirin, & Sally

Please be aware that there will be **some new kitchen regulations** that we will be implementing this year so that we meet inspection rules. This will include *wearing gloves and hats/hairnets* for kitchen workers, *more caution in keeping sandwiches cold*, and *serving smaller plates of sandwiches* to avoid leftovers. Folks can always request additional sandwiches.



**WE'RE
GOING**

CHRISTMAS CAROLING!!

And we hope you'll join us! We'll be meeting at **2 pm** in the church parking lot on Sunday, **December 17th** to go caroling at Avalon at StoneRidge. From there we will return to the church lot to get our cars and then proceed to **Wilcox Park** in Westerly for a Community Christmas Carol sing at **4 pm** sponsored by the Westerly-Pawcatuck Clergy Association.

A Blue Christmas Harvest Table



Wednesday, December 20 at 5:30 pm

Join us for a simple supper of soup, salads and breads.

Gluten Free options provided!

Then we will gather in table fellowship for prayer, biblical reflection and conversation. We'll consider together how challenging the holidays can be when memories are painful and celebration is difficult.

Bring a dish to share or just bring yourself. We'll be expecting you.



From your staff:

Rev. Ruth, Dav, Susan, and Joann

"BOOKS" IS IN THE BUILDING!



Next gathering on Tues, **December 5 @ 6 pm**
Potluck Supper at the church!

Bring your favorite December comfort food!

Our book for this gathering is:

The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother

by James McBride

Copies available to borrow through the Wilcox Library in Westerly on the second floor!

Just tell them you're part of the UCC Westerly book group!



Here's the latest buzz on the Pollinator Garden Project!

☺ The gardens may be enjoying their winter rest but our Pollinator Garden crew is working on plans for 2018! Check back in January for the latest update!

☺ In the meantime, do you have some extra heavy plastic tarps we could borrow until spring? The plastic sheeting we have been using for the smother keeps blowing off! We also need more heavy pallets or other items to hold the smother in place. Speak with Claire or Rev. Ruth if you can help!

Storm Closing Information



If we have a cancellation at the church due to severe weather, the cancellation will appear on **Channel 8 in Connecticut** and **Channels 6, 10, and 12 in Rhode Island**. You will also receive an emergency email from Pastor Ruth. You can also call the church

office (860-599-1226) to hear a special recorded message announcing any cancellation plans.

PRAYER LIST



The Christmas Offerings

Each year our church actually receives two different and distinct Christmas offerings so we thought it might be helpful to explain as clearly as we can the purpose of each.

The Christmas Offering is an annual offering intended for the church itself for our officers to use as they see fit with the fiscal year coming to an end. You could actually think of this offering as a sort of Christmas gift to the church. Friends and visitors often make contributions through this offering but anyone is welcome to contribute.

The Christmas Fund is a designated offering received on behalf of the national church. It is used specifically to offset the small pensions of clergy who have spent their careers serving either as missionaries or in small, poor churches in the United States which were unable to fund a regular pension for them. It also goes to fund an "emergency fund" created to provide emergency financial assistance to retired clergy encountering special circumstances for which their financial reserves are inadequate.

Offering envelopes for both of these are available in the sanctuary for those of you receiving the Beacon electronically. These envelopes can be placed in the offering plates during any of our worship services between now and the end of December. Please know that your gifts in any amount for one or both of these two offerings are deeply appreciated. They do make a difference, here in our own church and literally across the breadth of the entire denomination.

Please pray for the following members and friends of our church:

Madelyn Stratton	Shirley Harrington
Beverly & Family	Brian Madill
Shirley M.	Gerry
Scott & his parents	The Underhill Family
Connie	Nicci & Jeff
Allie	David Hall
Josh	Ben
Rev. Elizabeth King	Jesse B.
Bill Colprit	Bill & Phyllis Horne
Devyn Moynihan	Susan Moynihan-Freeman
Ruth King Roes	Laura
Bill Hoffman	Mauri Hainsworth
Eli Hammett	

If you would like anyone added or removed from this list for the next newsletter, please call the office or let one of our deacons know. Thank you.

OUR STAFF

Pastor: The Rev. Ruth Shilling Hainsworth
Organist: David Cranmer
Secretary: Susan Perreault
Sexton: JoAnn Spurley
Web Master: Heather Stratton

CHURCH OFFICE SPECIFICS

Mailing Address: 9 Castle Hill Road
Pawcatuck, CT 06379

Telephone: **860-599-1226**

E-mail: **uccwesterly@sbcglobal.net**

Website: **www.uccwesterly.org**

Office Hours: Monday, Thursday & Friday from
8:30 am – 1:30 pm