

The Beacon

DECEMBER 2018



GOOD NEWS from

United Congregational Church of Westerly

United Church of Christ, Pawcatuck, CT

Sunday Worship ~ 9:30 am

FROM THE PASTOR ...

"The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" Psalm 27:1

The Season of Advent and Christmastide in the church is the one time of year where the values of the church contrast most sharply with the values of the society in which the church finds itself. This is everywhere evident as Christmas decorations proliferate in stores and homes, Christmas music becomes inescapable and shopping, or avoiding it, is the most popular pastime. The truth is Christmas can be downright confusing when the religious celebration slams headlong into secular celebrations. Take Christmas music for example. One minute it's "Grandma Got Run Over by a Reindeer" and then it's "The Carol of the Bells" by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. Geesh!!! No wonder people get Christmas all mixed up! How could you not?

I am fascinated by the dichotomy that is Christmas in our culture these days. As someone raised in the church and working in ministry, I confess it is really difficult for me to wrap my head around the fact that many people who celebrate Christmas have little to no interest in its origins. People might know the story of the baby boy born

in a barn and nativity scenes are part and parcel of Christmas decorations. The baby is cute and everyone loves angels! But, how can a nativity scene ever be just another decoration? Why don't folks know that Christmas stockings are part of the legend of St. Nicholas and his commitment to help the poor? And Christmas trees? They're actually a holdover from ancient pagan winter solstice festivals, adapted for the Christmas story with the addition of lights and "treats" for the Christ Child. Wreaths? Their origin is in the Christmas story too as their circular shape reminds us of the eternal life Christ makes possible. And candles in the window? Part of the ancient Russian folktale of Babushka, the woman who was too busy cleaning to welcome the Wise Men into her home to rest on their journey to find the Christ Child. When she realized how unkind she had been, she set out to find them in a blizzard, leaving a lit candle in the window so she could find her way home. But how many people realize *these* stories ARE Christmas? Everything else is just meaningless fluff.

That's why this year we're going to savor the familiar stories of Advent and Christmastide with the theme of light as our focus. The light of Christmas is God's light for the world illuminated and made real in the person of Jesus Christ. As Christians we are called to be that light in the world. We will explore how we can do this using the weekly themes of the Advent Candles as our reference points— Hope, Peace, Joy and Love. We will also remember that not everyone is happy during the Christmas season when loss and grief looms large even as others are joyful as we gather for our annual Blue Christmas service on Wednesday, the 19th. Then, we will welcome Christmas together as a church family on Christmas Eve with song, story, special music and Communion. We will continue our celebrations after Christmas Day as we recall the child-like faith Jesus inspires in us all at a "Birthday Party for Jesus" service on December 30. And finally, we will end our celebration of God's Light on Epiphany Sunday, January 6 with our annual and popular Star Sunday service.

So, dear friends, if you want to stay focused on the real meaning of Christmas this year, consider making the time to join us at one or more of our special worship services of this holiday season. And bring someone with you! Truly, church is the best place to rediscover what Christmas is all about. Sometimes God's light is just easier to see when you experience it in the

company of others doing the same. The light of God makes plain the way forward in these challenging and sometimes frightening times when so much in the world is ugly and confusing.

Dare to open your heart to God's light this Christmas. You might just be surprised at what becomes visible. Merry Christmas.

Your friend in Christ,

Rev. Ruth



December Birthdays

9 – Bob Sicilian

20 – Mark Dessaulles

21 – Devin Moynihan

26 – Jack Hainsworth

29 – Trina Torres

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

† † † † † † † † † † † †

Diaconate Schedule

<u>Date</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Telephone #</u>
Dec 2	Claire Calabretta	860-536-3625
Dec 9	Bethany Foster	401-539-4003
Dec 16	Elvis Torres	860-245-4759
Dec 23	Lynn Murray	401-539-7578
Dec 24 @ 7pm	Jenny Brummund	
Dec 30	Ed Stratton	401-596-4740

† † † † † † † † † † † †



Rev. Ruth's Community Office Hours from 2 – 4 pm at The Savoy Bookstore & Café in downtown Westerly

Here's a unique chance to multi-task this month! Come by the Savoy any Thursday between 2 – 4 pm to get some Christmas shopping done AND have a chat with me! Great hot beverages and amazing cookies also present! What are your thoughts about Christmas this year? Let's talk about it...

MAKE A NOTE! I will be taking a little time off between Christmas and New Year's so I will not be doing Community Office Hours on December 27.

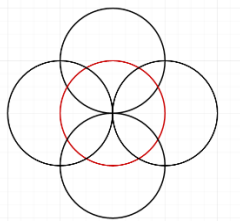
Your friend and chatting partner, Rev. Ruth



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

The labyrinth is settling in for the winter and the buzz is, people are using it! Church members come by when they're in the area just to park and walk in the quiet for a few minutes. We have it on good authority that folks from the neighborhood are using it too! Rev. Ruth will be incorporating it into one or two worship services during Advent and Christmas so watch for details! PS – Rev. Ruth will need A LOT of those *mini battery powered votive candles* to illuminate the labyrinth on Christmas Eve!!! *Donations welcome!!!*

The Pollinator Garden Committee will be meeting in January to begin planning for the spring! New folks always welcome!!!



SABBATH CIRCLES® NEWS

Do kids really understand what Christmas is all about these days? Do your kids or grandkids know that there was a Baby Jesus before there was a Santa Claus? And what about all those things advertised on television endlessly trying to entice kids to want more and more stuff? What can you do, what can we as your church family do, to support your efforts to keep Christmas in perspective this year? *Sabbath Circles!*

Our weekly lessons during Advent will focus on the “First Story” of Christmas and everything leading up to it. The weekly focus of Advent as symbolized in the candles on the Advent Wreath will inform the weekly lesson suggestions which will include both art and community service activities for you to do as a family. On-line resources for helping your kids explore and understand Christmas in more depth will also be provided.

Weekly Sabbath Circles lessons are available in the weekly Sunday morning order of worship & on the church website.



ANNUAL CHRISTMAS BAZAAR & TEA & SILENT AUCTION

Saturday, December 1, 2018

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

Please support our annual event!

Take a moment to breathe and rest in our uniquely beautiful sanctuary for 30 minutes of quiet reflection and prayer each week.



Every Wednesday evening from 6-6:30 pm in our sanctuary

A guided experience of quiet reflection, chant and prayer. Everyone welcome! Come and bring a friend!

MAKE A NOTE! Sanctuary will host this year's "Blue Christmas" Service on Wednesday, December 19. This service is especially crafted for folks dealing with sadness, loss and grief during the holiday season.



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 16th** to go caroling! Avalon at StoneRidge will be one of our stops and then we'll see!! Singing ability not necessary! Remember, the Scriptures say “make a joyful noise!!!!”

MISSION MOMENTS

DECEMBER PNC COLLECTION

A Healthy Breakfast to Start the Day

- Unflavored oatmeal, Cream of Wheat, Rolled Oats
- Whole-grain cereal with fiber and low in sugar and fat, such as Cheerios, Total, Special K, All Bran, etc.
- Whole grain, low sugar, low fat granola, granola bars, or cereal bars
- Shelf-stable and low fat, vitamin D-fortified regular, soy, almond, or rice milk
- Boxed, unflavored, low fat regular dehydrated milk
- Unsweetened applesauce and canned fruit in 100% juice or shelf-stable unsweetened fruit cups
- Dried, unsweetened fruits

CHRISTMAS GIVING TREE



This year the theme of our Christmas Giving Tree will be Socks for All Ages and Children's Underwear. Although we are accepting ALL sizes of children's undies, there is a more urgent need of girls sizes 8—10 and boys size 6—10. The tree is up at the entrance to the sanctuary!

Reverse Advent Baskets



In December we will be distributing **Reverse Advent Baskets**. It's up to YOU to choose your theme, although you don't need a theme at all! Think daily necessities, articles of clothing, non-perishable healthy foods, etc. The idea is to place an item in the basket every day during the Advent Season. Saying a prayer to accompany each donation is a great way to enrich this activity. The baskets will be blessed on Epiphany Sunday, which, of course, is after Christmas. The donated items will be sorted and distributed to local agencies after the first of the year.

ALL-CHURCH CHRISTMAS CARD

Instead of sending out Christmas cards to all of your church friends, think about posting just ONE card on the All-Church Christmas Card Board and saving some money in the process! The bulletin board is our way of saying THANKS to all of you who donate so generously through-out the year and will appear after the bazaar; so, don't get over-eager to send out all of those cards early!

DECEMBER WARM MEALS

The donations collected at the Bazaar from the Hospitality Room will be used for sponsoring the December 9th WARM meal.

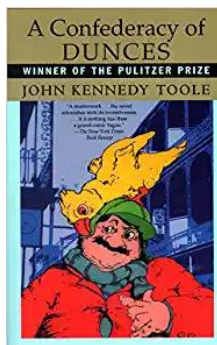


Recruiting Lay Readers for Sundays in December!

Lend your voice and your enthusiasm to this important piece of every Sunday's worship experience! Please sign up on the Worship sheet currently posted on the office door!

BOOKS" has another great book in the works! Join us for a potluck supper and great conversation!

Thursday, January 10, 2019 @ 6 pm
in the church parlor.



Our book:
A Confederacy of Dunces
by John Kennedy Toole

Bring a favorite dish to share and get ready for a delightful gathering where we enjoy delicious food and great conversation about a good book, and anything else that comes up in the moment. Everyone welcome!

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.

A NOTE from the OFFICE:



Our new **Church Directory** of members & friends of the church is available for you to pick up in the office. Please stop by on Sunday mornings or on Mondays, Thursdays, and Fridays between 8:30 am – 1:30 pm to pick up your copy.



TIME TO CELEBRATE UCC WESTERLY!

Rev. Ruth is looking for volunteers to help with a 50th anniversary celebration of our church's consecration on **March 16, 2019**.

We will be planning a commemorative service using the original order of worship for that day in 1969 followed by a special luncheon at which our long time members will be honored! Help Rev. Ruth, the Trustees and the Deacons plan this long overdue party for our wonderful church! Kindly speak with Rev. Ruth to see how you can be a part of our history!

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.



MANY THANKS to all who decorated the small trees! At the time of this writing, they are coming in and look great. *We will need to replenish our supplies for next year!* If you visit the craft shops or Christmas Tree Shop after Christmas, please consider picking up a small tree or 2 when they are on sale. Small strings of clear lights will also be needed!

PRAYER LIST



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

Madelyn Stratton	Beverly & Family
Brian Madill	Scott & his parents
Shirley M.	Gerry
Connie	Nicci & Jeff
Allie	Josh
Ben	Rev. Elizabeth King
Jesse B.	Laura
Ruth King Roes	Mauri Hainsworth
Bill Hoffman	Emma

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 – 1:30 pm



From your staff:

Rev. Ruth, Dav, Susan, and Joann