



The Beacon **December, 2022**

“If I say, ‘Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night,’ even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.”

Psalms 139:11-12

An increased awareness of light and darkness during Advent is a hallmark of the church’s liturgies and rituals we are celebrating now. Light takes on a special character this time of year. Sunny days seem sunnier and more crisp as the leaves are mostly gone from the trees. Dark and rainy days are even darker. Christmas lights twinkle lighting up our homes and our neighborhoods in a playful way, with even the drabest building brightened by that single candle in the window. The mystery evoked by the ever shifting realities of light and darkness as winter takes hold is just part of Christmas somehow. Even the story of the night of Jesus’ birth invites us to recall a very pregnant Mary and weary Joseph making their way through the darkest night. So too do the angels singing to the shepherds among the stars proclaim the shining light of the newborn Christ Child to all who hear and see.

With all this in mind, I admit to being confounded by a recent development among some of my colleagues who are very concerned about the use of light/dark imagery in the church for fear it carries with it unintentional racist overtones. Honestly, there is some truth to this. Every year around Easter we see the “Jelly Bean Prayer” pop up on social media – a cute idea with one big problem: black = sin. This is just the subtle and nuanced kind of language that teaches, as part of the “null curriculum,” that white is good and black is bad. It’s easy to see how this could be internalized among little children without anyone seeing the deeper problem with it. That doesn’t mean the problem isn’t there. If black is sin, then how are we

to regard people with black or brown skin? It’s a real question, even if we don’t think about it very much. We should.

For me, what is most problematic about this whole conversation during Advent is that it assumes an awareness of this symbolism of light = good and darkness = bad as a given among most lay folks and I just am not convinced this is the case. If anything, I see this as exactly the kind of “how many angels can dance on the head of a pin” theological debate – one which makes no sense to anyone but theologians and pastors. Therefore, it can have the unintended consequence of inadvertently turning off the very folks we want to have join us in the church – folks who have never been in church or were once, long ago, and now are considering coming back. How will they feel if they become aware that even the use of such powerful imagery of light and darkness is coming into question? I can’t imagine it would be favorable. The truth is that light and darkness imagery is present throughout the Scriptures. Light is associated with God’s in-breaking into the lives of God’s people. Darkness is associated most often with the people’s willful separation with God. Light and darkness are thus powerful images indeed.

Does all this mean I think the church should turn a blind eye to the larger issue of racism? Absolutely not! The exact opposite should be our reality. But there are other ways for the church to pursue this objective this time of year that will not come across as the unwanted intervention of political correctness into the liturgical life of the church. For one, making sure the creches in our sanctuaries do not have blond haired and blue eyed Baby Jesus and Mary center stage is a biggie. Talking with our folks about why this is problematic and inviting them to be aware of how the inconsistency of this imagery obscures who Jesus’ really was -- a semitic Palestinian. In these days of escalating anti-semitic hate crimes, I see this as a lesson most important to emphasize this year!

So, dear ones, this Advent season, I urge you all to bask in the special light of God’s presence sending the shadows of evil, fear and anxiety running. See in these images of darkness and light God’s ever constant reminder that God expects us all to be cognizant of the sin of racism, overt and covert, so that we might do our part to decrease its influence, for darkness is as light to God.

Merry Christmas and the Happiest of New Year’s to each and every one of you.

Your sister in faith, *Rev. Ruth*



Just a reminder to help Rev. Ruth create a "Creche of the Misfits" on the altar this year. She is looking for individual creche pieces to borrow to use as this unique Nativity Scene comes together over the weeks of Advent. If you are willing, please bring in one of your pieces and leave in the basket on the back pew in the sanctuary. Be sure your name is on it! Thanks!

WORSHIP SCHEDULE

**Our Sunday morning worship services
In person & on Facebook Live
every Sunday at 9:45am.**

Please mask if you are feeling unwell or are unvaccinated.

Celebrating the Simple Together

December 4 – 2nd Sunday of Advent with Communion -- Lighting the candle of PEACE

December 11 – 3rd Sunday of Advent -- Lighting the candle of LOVE

December 18 – 4th Sunday of Advent -- Lessons & Carols Service -- Lighting the candle of Joy

Wednesday, December 21 – Sanctuary "Blue Christmas" Service @ 12 noon – Quiet, reflective service for those struggling with the Christmas season

Saturday, December 24 – Christmas Eve Service @ 7pm -- Traditional festive service of candles, carols, special music and Communion with a special Christmas message by Rev. Ruth

December 25 – CHRISTMAS DAY SERVICE will be broadcast only, live from Rev. Ruth's home @ 9:45am – A brief service of prayers and readings

January 1, 2023 – Christmastide Sunday
A simple service of storytelling and song

January 8 – EPIPHANY & our STAR SUNDAY CELEBRATION -- Festive service of Communion, Light and Star Words for the coming year!

Kindly Note: Copies of sermons will be provided by request only. Speak with Rev. Ruth or Carol to receive one!



Diaconate Schedule

<u>Date</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Telephone #</u>
12/4	Claire Calabretta	860-574-5962
12/11	Bethany Foster	401-539-4003
12/18	Lynn Murray	401-539-7578
12/25	Any Deacon!!	

Please feel free to call the Diaconate Person of the Week at any time with your joys, concerns, and prayer requests. Your church family cares about you all the time, not just when you're in the building!



The Deacons are very grateful for recent Deacons' Fund contributions. When Pastor Ruth mentioned the usefulness of the fund, the November donations. were very generous. This assisted us in paying for the substitute organist the second week she was here.

We continue to meet virtually each month, discussing upcoming worship themes & protocols. As always, we appreciate your input. If you have questions about possibly joining the Deacon board, feel free to ask any of us.

Despite weather swings for our first 2 bazaar Saturdays - 75 degrees post tropical storm rain, to 40 degrees the second week, we have had very happy and grateful shoppers. The new baked goods each week have been amazing, along with added artificial trees & wreaths. Each area drew much attention. The Bid-to-Beat baskets have some generous bids, and more than 2 tables of Silent Auction items were auctioned off. We had folks come back for a 2nd week because they enjoyed their first shopping experience. Hopefully our final day, the 3rd, will be equally successful. Many thanks for everyone's work to make this such a success.

Lynn Murray,
Deacon chairperson



Trustee Notes

The trustees are beginning preliminary work on developing next year's budget and would like to thank everyone who has already pledged. If you have not yet sent in your pledge, please consider doing so, this really helps the board to have the information to develop a realistic budget for the upcoming year.

If you are interested in the church property and its financial affairs then the Board of Trustees is the place for you! Please speak to Pastor Ruth or any member of the board (Kathy Tarasuk, Dwayne Spurley, Melissa Stratton, Bill Street, or John Blake)

The next Trustees meeting will be held on November 29th at 6:30 p.m.



MISSION MOMENTS

December

Just a reminder that our Missions objective for the next few months is to piggy-back the efforts of Operation Fresh Start and its donation drives. That means this month we are supporting the toys drive. Please see the article following this for details. Additionally, we want to step up our efforts to support the food pantry at the PNC as we are well aware that

visits to local food pantries are dramatically increasing. So, in November, please continuing bringing your donations of jams, tea bags, canned vegetables and canned meats. Two baskets will be under the altar to receive them on Sundays, one for OFS items and the other for PNC food donations.

Also, a reminder that the month of December is when we receive one of the national offerings of the United Church of Christ. The Christmas Fund is the only fund of its kind set up for the specific purpose of providing financial assistance to clergy who are either disabled or retired with insufficient income to live on. Giving to this fund is an excellent way to support clergy who have chosen to devote their careers to ministry settings where financial security is impossible to secure.

Thank you! Your Missions Board



DECEMBER

Holiday Donation Drive



As all of you already know, the Mission Committee has pledged to support Operation Fresh Start with its monthly donation drives. In addition to donating non-perishable food items to the PNC, we are asking that the congregation donate the following items to help local parents with their holiday shopping;

- Adult-sized pajamas for the older kids who need new jammies, too!
- Duplo blocks
- All types of learning toys
- Puzzles
- Diapers sized 2—6, which are always on the parents' wish lists
- Etc. But NO CRAYONS, BUBBLES, OR COLORING BOOKS, PLEASE!

Items can be placed in the basket on the altar or in the bins at the doors.

Donations should be dropped off by the second week in December, at the **very** latest, so they can be distributed to those families and agencies in need. Thanks so much!



In addition to, or instead of, helping with the church's effort to help this amazing organization, you can also help in an additional way. Please check out this cool way to join in the holiday spirit by adding a gift or two to Shannon's sleigh at her home.

Operation Fresh Start

**3rd Annual Gifts For Hope
Fill a Sleigh Drive**

**Help us put a smile on as many
families faces as we can this holiday
season.**

**Donations of new Gifts for newborns to
Moms and Dads can be dropped off at
our Santa sleigh**

At

**489 Green Haven Rd
Pawcatuck - Saturdays and Sundays**

**Nov 26th- 27th, Dec.3rd- 4th
Dec. 10th-11th**

**For more information contact
Shannon DePerry @ 860-460-8502**

A WORD FROM CONGREGATIONAL LIFE



BAKED GOODS DONATIONS NEEDED FOR THE FINAL BAZAAR ON 12/3!

Last year the baked goods area was a leader in funds raised, thanks to a small group of bakers who donated goods each Saturday for the 5 weeks of our bazaar. Please label your items and consider the cost of the ingredients, pricing them accordingly. The final Saturday of the bazaar, Dec. 3, we will be selling plates of Christmas cookies. If you wish to make your cookies early, wrapping them well and labeling them, you may do that and store them in the church kitchen freezer.

Sending our early thank you for your many donations to help make this year's bazaar a success.
Shirin Platt, Sandi Davis & Carolyn LeRoy

From the Financial Secretary "Looking Back and Looking Forward: Pledge Notes"

Happy December, everyone, and thank you for the generous pledges for 2023!

As Financial Secretary, I manage and record our pledges throughout the year, with the very able assistance of our Assistant Financial Secretaries: Ed Stratton, Bill Street, and Michele Mitchell. Over the last several years, methods of submitting pledges have changed, primarily due to COVID. During the pandemic, we could not attend church, so we mailed in our pledges and started an electronic donation method, via our church's website. Even though we have returned to in-person worship services, many of us prefer to continue pledging with these newer options. Others simply give one annual amount (or semi-annually,

etc). In the above cases, pledge envelopes may not be needed. They are, however, a convenient reminder for people who give more incrementally during the year.

I just want to give a reminder that there are some specific donations that traditionally have been included in pledge envelope boxes. They are also options in the electronic method. One is simply an option to make a special donation for holy holidays and seasons, such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, Lent and Advent. Some members even donate to mark days that are personally meaningful to them...birthdays of a departed loved one, wedding anniversaries, etc. Holiday donations are your extra gift to the church.

We still include an envelope to defray the cost of our newsletter, "The Beacon". Most of us now receive it electronically, but a good portion of our members are homebound, and/or elderly and receive "The Beacon" through the mail. Your Beacon Offering helps pay for postage, paper, copy machine supplies and maintenance, as well as our Secretary Carol's expertise to create and disseminate both the electronic and hard copies. Consider including the suggested Beacon Offering of \$12 each year.

The last item included in envelope boxes is called "Conference Dues." Newer members may benefit from further explanation. I asked Reverend Ruth to provide some information about the Dues Donation. I paraphrase her words...

Our church is part of the larger denomination called the "United Church of Christ," a national denomination, broken up into regional sections called Conferences. We are now a part of the Southern New England Conference, which encompasses all UCC churches in Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts. The Conference is the primary way we connect and cooperate with our fellow churches in various ways: clergy training, educational opportunities for all ages, and fellowship. When churches are in need of a pastor, the Conference helps in the Search and Call process; additionally, it helps prospective pastors prepare for ministry. The Conference is a source of information which is specific to local churches; for example, during the COVID pandemic, our Conference shared CDC and local health department protocols. This allowed individual churches to make proper decisions to keep parishioners safe, without extra time and research on their own. Each UCC church supports the work

of the Conference and the national denominational affiliation by sharing a percentage of its budget with the Conference. We have found it helpful to request this percentage as \$18 per member "Dues." In turn, our Treasurer George Gray submits one check to the Conference, which includes all our members. Paying your Conference Dues enables our church to allocate less of its own operating budget toward the necessary and beneficial expenses of the Conference. Consider including your \$18 Conference Dues with any donation! Thank you for your support!

In conclusion, you may wish to "Look Back" over the year 2022 and decide whether you wish to include any of the donations mentioned in this article. They are, of course, tax deductible. You will receive a statement for all of 2022 in January.

"Looking Ahead," you may want to set aside these special donations for 2023! In order for us to accurately allocate your donations, please label either your check Memo, envelope, or include a slip of paper stating your donation's destination, such as: Pledge, Conference Dues, Beacon, Holiday Offering, etc. These can always be combined into just one check!

If you have not yet turned in your Pledge Form, you can find one in the back pew of the church, or you can call the office to ask for one. Even if you pledge electronically, the paper form is helpful to us as we create a total expected pledge income for the 2023 budget. Please try to have pledge forms submitted by December 31st.

Thank you, as always, for your generosity to our church and its missions.
Respectfully submitted,
Jenny Brummund



An Invitation to Join us at **BOOKS**
 A group of folks who love to read, talk about what we read or just talk...

OUR NEXT GATHERING:

Wednesday, January 11, 2023 @ 12:30pm
 Join us for a BYO Lunch & Beverage
 DESSERT PROVIDED!!
 IN PERSON AT CHURCH!!!!

WHAT WE'RE READING:

WISH YOU WERE HERE

By Jodi Picoult

EVERYONE WELCOME!

This book is available to borrow through your local library or for purchase through your favorite bookstore.

BOOKS is an on-going discussion group ministry of UCC Westerly.

Please speak with Rev. Ruth for any questions.

A WORD FROM THE POLLINATOR TEAM!



A reminder that the Pollinators need your help as the temps cool! Keep your leaf raking to a minimum so the bees and other pollinator insects have places to nest over the winter. A pile of sticks in a part of the yard is also a huge help. And don't cut those dying flowers back! Their

seeds offer winter food to our feathery and furry friends!



The Grief Group

Will not be meeting again until January.

However, the Annual Blue Christmas Service for those struggling with sadness during the Holidays will be on Wednesday, December 21 @ 12 noon in our sanctuary. All welcome.

The next regular meeting of the Grief Group will be Wednesday, January 11 @ 2pm in the Parlor.



The Pandemic Response Team wishes to let everyone know they are still monitoring the situation and will continue to advise church leadership as we move forward through this "post pandemic" time. For any comments, questions or concerns with regard to the Pandemic, kindly speak with PRT Chairperson Bethany Foster at any time. You may reach her at 401-539-4003.



Our newly redesigned website is live!
Check it out at www.uccwesterly.org!



Brighten Someone's Day...

We don't see each other as often as we would like to these days. Here are a few suggestions of folks who might like to receive a card or note from you! Check out the newest Church Directory for more!

Amanda Hainsworth & family
4 Weld Street, Roslindale, MA 02131

Asael Hill
64 School Street, Apt. 2, Westerly, RI 02891

Robert Cornell
168 Liberty Street, Pawcatuck, CT 06379

BEACON PRAYER LIST



Our church has a very active and vital prayer ministry which involves our Prayer Tree, requests for prayers during Sunday morning worship and

this invitation in the Beacon each month to pray for specific folks who are requesting prayers here. So, that means we have multiple active prayer lists at any given time! How wonderful is that! Below is this month's list for the Beacon Prayer List.

Madelyn Stratton	Ruth King Roes
Shirley M	Jennifer Woodhall
Donald	Emma
Scott	Evan

If you would like anyone added or removed from this list for the next newsletter, please call the office. Thank you.



December Birthdays:

Mark Dessaulles – 20
Devin Moynihan – 21
Jack Hainsworth – 26
Trina Torres - 29

Please add in your special days by calling the church office at 860-599-1226!!



OUR STAFF

Pastor: The Rev. Ruth Shilling Hainsworth
Organist: David Cranmer
Secretary: Carol Lindsay
Sexton: Ed Curtin

CHURCH OFFICE SPECIFICS

Mailing Address: 9 Castle Hill Road
Pawcatuck, CT 06379
Telephone: 860-599-1226
E-mail: uccwesterly@gmail.com
Website: www.uccwesterly.org
Office Hours: Monday 9 am-1 pm; Thursday 9 am-3 pm

Please be aware that the Format and spacing for the BEACON may appear differently on your computer or device depending upon which WORD version you have. Thank you for your understanding!



MERRY CHRISTMAS & HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Rev. Ruth, Carol, Dav & Ed!!!!!!