



*“By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”
Luke 1:78-79*

These beautiful words come from a section of the Nativity Story we seldom focus on in church, but it feels especially appropriate these days when the feeling of uncertainty about so much swirls around through each day. This is the tail end of what’s known as the “Song of Zechariah” and it comes just after the birth of the one who would come to be known as John the Baptist. Zechariah was John’s father, husband to his mother Elizabeth who was the beloved cousin Mary came to visit when she learned she was to give birth to the Christ Child. Zechariah was elated at Elizabeth’s pregnancy since she had been barren for a long time, but he was also terrified when the angel Gabriel appeared to him to tell him the good news. Zechariah, understandably, did not initially believe what Gabriel told him, so he was struck dumb. His speech came back to him only after his son was born and he acknowledged he was to be called “John”. This was highly unusual in that time because usually a male child would be named for his father or another close male relative. But Gabriel had been clear at the time Elizabeth’s pregnancy was revealed that the baby was to be called John. This moment of the baby’s naming in the Temple was when Zechariah asserted his acceptance that this baby was a gift of God and God had chosen the name John. Then he could speak and a beautiful prayer of joy and blessing for this child who would become known as “the prophet of the Most High.”

I also chose this text as the foundational text for my thesis at Harvard where I explored the promises, I believe the practice of Benedictine Spirituality holds for nursing home residents. My mother was one at that time and she was suffering so as who she was slowly flaked away

as Alzheimers claimed more and more of her being. It was heartbreaking. She died in 2010 and I am only just now able to reflect on her life and death without experiencing much pain and discomfort. Zechariah’s beautiful blessing here for all “who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death” has continued to carry me through my own times of grief and discouragement.

In these uncertain days for so much of the world, these words provide a light in the darkness, a reminder of God’s abiding presence and that we are never left alone in our moments of uncertainty and fear. So too, I think we also need remember that God’s light also shines on and through us in those moments of joy and happiness. It’s surprising how easy it is to forget God’s presence in the happy times, the joyful moments of life. But we do it all the time, don’t we. Perhaps this is the year to work on changing that. Perhaps this is the year to make sure in the midst of our celebrations with family and friends that we make the time to offer prayers of thanksgiving at holiday meals. We must also enfold God into all those moments of happiness the Holidays hold by remembering to be kind and generous to those of God’s beloved who suffer from unmet needs and bleak futures. This, dear ones, would indeed “guide our feet into the way of peace” as Zechariah prays. Then, in confidence we can repeat in love and hope the immortal words of Dickens’ Tiny Tim – “God bless us every one!”

Your sister in faith and sibling in Christ,

Pastor Ruth

**MERRY CHRISTMAS
AND THE HAPPIEST OF NEW YEARS
TO OUR UCC FAMILY & FRIENDS!**

Rev. Ruth --- Jerin --- Dav

Rev. Ruth's Community Office Hours

Come visit me at Martin House Books (in the old Savoy Bookstore space!) from 1:00 PM – 3:00 PM on Thursday, December 12th.



Worship Schedule

Our Sunday morning worship service begins at 9:45am in-person and live on Facebook.

Please note that our Advent Wreath ritual this year is a celebration of God's Sacred Stuff – the ordinary items a part of the Nativity Story!

Sunday, December 1 – Advent 1

- The Advent Wreath

Sunday, December 8 -- Advent 2

- The Lamp
- New Members received

Sunday, December 15 – Advent 3

- The Staff

***Thursday, December 19 5pm**

- **Longest Night Service** – Please bring a donation of coats, gloves, hats, or scarves for the homeless in our community.

Sunday, December 22 – Advent 4

- **Lessons & Carols** (sign-up sheet for readers on bulletin board)
- The Manger

***Tuesday, December 24 4pm**

- Christmas Eve Service of Candles, Carols and Communion
- The Christ Candle
- Remember to bring your creche piece for a blessing and your bells to welcome the Christ Child!

Sunday, December 29 9:45am

- Christmastide Service – Happy Birthday Jesus!

Sunday, January 5, 2025

- Annual Star Sunday Celebration!

Please speak with Rev. Ruth if you would like a hard copy of the weekly sermon.



Diaconate Schedule for November

Dec. 1 - Lynn Murray

Dec. 8 - Allana Allik

Dec. 15 - Bethany Foster

Dec. 22 - Joann Spurley

Dec. 29 - Christina Brummund

Jan. 5, 2025 - Lynn Murray

Please know you can call any Deacon at any time with your joys, concerns, and prayer requests.

News From the Deacons

As a reminder to all: Fresh greens will be needed for arrangements for our December 7th bazaar. Holly, evergreens, red berries, etc. Please drop off outside the upper fellowship hall door by that Saturday morning. Feel free to create your own. There are supplies of baskets & decorations in the last room of the middle level.

At our last meeting, the Deacons did some planning for our upcoming services.

After worship on December 8th, we will hold a Caring and Sharing event, where we will write Christmas cards to our friends/members who cannot be with us in person. If you have any extra Christmas cards, please bring a few.

Our Blue Christmas service will take place on December 19th at 5pm outdoors at the labyrinth. This service recognizes those less fortunate than others during the holiday season. The Christmas Eve service will once again take place at 4:00. We are excited that we will be welcoming new members on December 8th. Happy holidays to all!



TRUSTEES NOTES

Pledges for October were \$6,526. \$1,016 more than the anticipated pledge amount of \$5,510. Thanks to all those who are able to keep up with their pledges! Total income for October was \$14,869. Total expenses for October were \$11,458.

The tree trimming work has been completed. The gas to oven has been turned off pending service. It can still be used; the gas just needs to be turned on. The new Pollinator Banner has been installed! Many thanks to our office assistant Jerin for her extensive help with the design, working with both the pollinator team and the manufacturer to get it just right! And as always, thanks to Gary Davis for getting the banner mounted on the building just in time for the first bazaar!

Should you notice something in the building that needs attention, please speak to any trustee.

Also, some financial planning suggestions for any year-end giving to the church you may be considering:

Here is an idea for you to consider. It's called a Qualified Charitable Distribution. Here's how it works.

1. You must be at least 70 1/2 years old.
2. Our Church is a Qualified Charity.
3. Contact your IRA Custodian. They may have a specific form or process you need to follow.
4. Request the Transfer from your custodian.
THE DONATION MUST BE MADE DIRECTLY FROM YOUR IRA CUSTODIAN TO THE CHURCH.

5. Keep documentation. Obtain a receipt from the Church.

6. Report the Qualified Charitable Distribution on your tax return. The amount can count toward satisfying your Required Minimum Distribution for the tax year.

This is beneficial because you can satisfy all or part of your RMD, get the charitable deduction, and the amount you contribute is not Taxable income. Please consult with your Financial Professional to get all the particulars.

Thanks to Trustee Paul Grillo for this suggestion!

From the Financial Secretary



December Special Offerings

If you use donation envelopes, you will notice both Advent and

Christmas envelopes (and belatedly, Thanksgiving, too). These are little reminders that you may wish to make an additional offering, in addition to your weekly pledge for these special times in the church year. These are voluntary, yet always appreciated! Here's a little story...one of our faithful members made a Thanksgiving donation in October, to mark the month that her country of birth celebrates Thanksgiving! This was a donation of personal meaning and thankfulness.

This month, you will notice the appearance of "The Christmas Fund (for Veterans of the Cross and Emergency Fund)" envelopes near the collection plates. This donation is one of the United Church of Christ's Five for Five offerings; it benefits retired ministers who have very small pensions (for example, those who are quite elderly, and/or served in rural or small churches). This money can also help cover medical bills. Many of us think of Reverend Ray Bradley, one of our older interim ministers, and his widow Sally when we make this offering.

The UCC collects and administers five special offerings during the year: Strengthen the

Church, One Great Hour of Sharing, Neighbors in Need, The Christmas Fund, and Our Church's Wider Mission. This last Offering is collected through our "Initial Offering," which is an envelope included in our pledge box. If you do not receive envelopes, you can make this donation anytime. We have set a suggested amount of \$20; however, you may make a donation of any amount. If making this offering, please label your check "Initial Offering." Most folks do this in January. I will write more about Our Church's Wider Mission next month. Traditionally, our humble church has supported all five offerings, thus earning the distinction of being "Five for Five!"

It is a busy time of year and also a time when our money is spread over more expenditures, fuel bills, gifts, charitable donations, and holiday gatherings. Perhaps this is a fitting time to remember those retired ministers who may have to "make ends meet" on their small fixed incomes throughout the year. Thank you for supporting The Christmas Fund, if you are able!

In addition, thank you for your generous pledges for 2025! It's not too late to turn in your pledge; simply place it in the collection plate or mail it into the church.

Merry Christmas from your church's Financial Secretary Team,

Jenny Brummund, Michele Mitchell, Edward Stratton, and William Street



An Update from our Music Ministries

AA Battery donations are always appreciated! Duracell, Energizer, and other major brands are preferred.

BOOKS

UCCW Books is an on-going discussion group ministry of UCCW. We are a group of folks who love to read, talk about what we read, or just talk. Everyone is welcome!

Our next gathering...

Wednesday, January 8th @ 12:00PM

This gathering will take place in the parlor at church. Please bring a bag lunch and a beverage for yourself. Dessert will be provided!

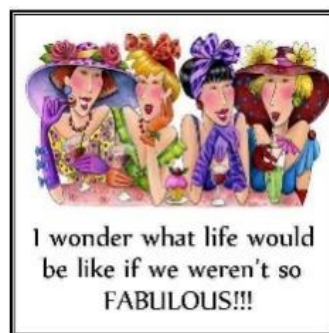
What we're reading...



"The Mystery of Mrs. Christie" by Marie Benedict

Books are available to borrow through your local library or for purchase through your favorite local bookstore.

UCCW Ladies Who Lunch



This is a fellowship group for the ladies of our church with no agenda other than fun! We meet approximately once a month for lunch, conversation and general frivolity.

Due to the busy holiday season, our next gathering will be in January.

Our next gathering...

When: Wednesday, January 15 at 12PM

Where: *S&P Oyster House*, 1 Holmes St. Mystic, CT

A Sign-up sheet will be posted on the bulletin board outside Fellowship Hall mid-December. Hope to see you there! Advance registration a must!

Prayer Tree

Our church has a very active and vital prayer ministry which involves our Prayer Tree. If you would like to be a member of our prayer team or if you would like the team to pray for you, please speak with any Deacon.



Our Staff

Pastor: The Rev. Ruth Shilling Hainsworth
Organist & Choirs Director: David Cranmer
Office Assistant: Jerin Peloquin

Address: 9 Castle Hill Road, Pawcatuck, CT 06379

Telephone: (860) 599-1226

E-mail: uccwesterly@gmail.com

Website: www.uccwesterly.org

Office Hours

Tuesday, Wednesday, & Thursday
9:00 AM – 1:00 PM

Please be aware that the format and spacing for the Beacon may appear differently on your computer or device. Thank you for your understanding!

Brighten Someone's Day...



A few suggestions of folks who might enjoy a card or note.

- Dan Stratton
- Sally Panciera
- Joy Liborio



December Birthdays

Mark Dessaules
Devin Moynihan
Jack Hainsworth
Trina Torres
Erin Blake
Andrew Blake

December Anniversaries

None

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

We are no longer providing specific birthday dates as an added measure of confidentiality for folks. Hope you understand.