

STEEPLE VIEWS

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF WAKEFIELD
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
AN OPEN AND AFFIRMING CONGREGATION



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DECEMBER 2024

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THE PASTOR'S PAGE

Advent Arrives Again

Rev. Larry Brickner-Wood

December 1 marks the first Sunday in Advent, a 24-day journey to Christmas. Advent means “arrival” and the season anticipates the arrival of the Christ child into the world. Though it is a reenactment of the miracle birth in historical terms, it is a dynamic spiritual process that touches us in real time. This Advent season, we invite you to join in a journey of spirit through the Advent themes of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love.

Advent 2024 is quite the season. It comes as much of the world seems in chaos. We have had a tension filled and challenging election season that has heightened anxiety, concern and fear in many. The post-election season will see a transition of power at the national level that excites some and greatly concerns others. It can feel like the promise of unity feels even farther away than it did three weeks ago. Hope and joy are even more critical now.

Around the world so many are under the threat of famine, natural disasters, economic oppression and the worsening effects of climate change. People of all ages and identities are under attack from the wars in Gaza and Lebanon, Ukraine, Somalia and too many more. Political tension is rife on almost every continent and it can feel at times that many are talking and none are listening. Peace and love are needed in every corner of the world.

Into this chaos and calamity comes the Advent season, its journey to Bethlehem and the story of Jesus' birth. We will sing and tell stories, pray and listen, dance and tap feet, and be connected in the shelter of each other. Through the festive time of the season, we will be aware that for some it is a time of remembrances and of losses incurred along the way. Through this season, I encourage you to be attentive to those of tender heart and gentle spirits who are hurting.

I also encourage you to make this Advent season a true spiritual journey, and to take care of yourself and your beloveds. Every Advent into Christmas we celebrate the coming of Jesus into the world. May we also use it as an opportunity to discover or re-discover how Jesus comes into our lives.

This Advent season, take some time each day to read a scripture passage, especially from the Gospels. Take some time for intentional prayer and meditation. Walk or move into nature in ways that work for you. Make a gratitude list and let others know how important they are to you. Use an Advent Calendar and do home weekly Advent candle wreath lighting. Use an Advent devotional or two, alone, with friends and/or family. Find someone or something to forgive this season, including yourself. Live more fully into the Advent dreams of Hope, Peace Joy and Love. Hold the hand of a loved one, or someone for whom loneliness is a constant companion. Practice kindness, shine the Christ light and open your hearts to love. God is always excited to be with you, and always has the time even when we may not.

Blessed Advent and Merry Christmas dear ones. You are people of the Way and people who hold the Christ light so brightly. Hope, Peace, Joy and Love be with you!

News of Zimbabwe

As we enter this season of gratitude and blessings, I am overwhelmed with appreciation for the incredible network of supporters who have been the backbone of our Zimbabwe mission. Twenty-seven years ago we started with a sister church partnership, which grew unexpectedly into a far-reaching effort of transforming lives and communities.

What began as a connection with Rufumiso, UCC Zimbabwe, led to rebuilding a church, building a parsonage, renovating schools, and drilling boreholes. Over the years, our mission has expanded to include sponsorships for children—many from child-headed households—a program that has grown exponentially since it began in 2008-2009. We have coordinated many projects: humanitarian shipping containers, building homes and an ECD classroom, supporting the Daisy Dube Children's Home, implementing food security programs, developing income-generating projects like goat and chicken farming, distributing Hipporollers, creating a reusable sanitary pad program to keep girls in school, providing medical assistance, and now, completing the clinic in Humani.

Child sponsorship remains at the heart of our mission. December is our annual commitment renewal month—a time when we invite sponsors to reaffirm their support and welcome new donors into the fold. Whether it is monthly or annual contributions, or one-time donations, every gift ensures school fees, school uniforms and supplies, and brighter futures for these children. Although it can be challenging to stay closely connected with our sponsored children, your love and support over the years have been nothing short of life-changing. If you are interested in becoming a sponsor, please reach out to Ann Bilodeau, Chris Feddern, Donna Ackerman, Jo Szirbik or me.

This recent photo of women crossing the Save River is a vivid reminder of the strength, resilience and



vulnerability of the people of Zimbabwe. By balancing very heavy parcels on their heads, their hands are unable to carry anything for protection to fend off or scare the crocodiles that are in the water. Their journey does not end at the riverbank; they must still walk 13-16 kilometers (8-10 miles) to reach their homes. This courage and endurance are humbling and surely inspiring for us to continue walking with them.

We have achieved so much over the past 27 years. The journey continues as there is always more to be done. Your involvement matters. Let's continue to walk this path of hope and transformation together with our Zimbabwean brothers and sisters.

*You are a blessing,
Connie Littlefield*

Harvest Fair Wrap-Up

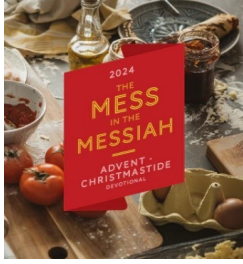
THIS WAS THE BEST FAIR IN RECENT MEMORY! Thank you to all of you faithful folk who baked cookies, pies, breads, and fudge. And to Jo and Evelyn for holding down the fort at the Bake Table and to Carol J., Priscilla, Laura, Linda and Sharon at the sold-out Cookie Walk. Food alone brought in over \$1100!! Thank you to all of you who donated for the gift baskets. And thanks to Julie and Rachel for putting them together so beautifully. The Lunch brought in \$256 and it was delicious, thanks to Connie and Ann. The Penny Sale broke all prior records with \$1200 in ticket sales. Thank you to everyone who donated a gift card or solicited gift cards from area businesses. A special thank you to the Lions Club for donating one of the door prizes. I never expected another non-profit to donate to us, amazing! The Jewelry, Cool Stuff and the Christmas tables brought in another \$1000. More thank yous to Margie and Gloria and Andrea and Ginny and Jean. I apologize to anyone I forgot to mention. It sure takes a village to pull off something like this. When the day was done, we provided over \$4300 to the general fund. Well Done, Team!

Nancy Dee

Christmas Caroling

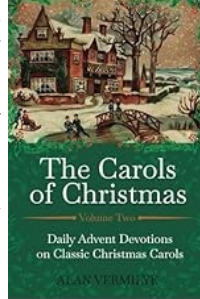
We will be going Christmas Caroling on December 21, with a snow date of December 22. Gloria Ballinger has offered to be the coordinator for this fun event. If you would like to join us or know of someone who would welcome carolers at their home, please let Gloria know (gcballinger@gmail.com). The plan is to leave from the church (time to be determined), go caroling, and then return back to the Church for refreshments and fun. This has been a fun-filled event for the carolers and most welcomed by the people we sing to over the years. Please plan on joining us.

Advent Faith Formation



Please join us starting the first Tuesday of Advent, December 3rd. We will be using both an Advent study ("The Carols of Christmas: Daily Advent Devotions" Volume 2) and the Advent devotional from Still-speaking Writers' Group ("The Mess in the Messiah").

About "Carols of Christmas": This is a heart-warming devotional inspired by some of the most beloved Christmas carols of all time. Inside, you'll enjoy a fresh glimpse of some of the same joyful and nostalgic melodies you sing every year now set to personal reflections in this 28-day devotional journey. The carols include "Silent Night", "Joy to the World", "O Come All Ye Faithful", and "The First Noel". You'll also discover intriguing stories and thought-provoking details like who wrote the carol; what was going on in their life that perhaps inspired the hymn; and how has God used this hymn throughout time. We will use the time to discuss the "Carols of Christmas" readings for that week, along with listening to a portion of the carol being discussed.



Our class will run for an hour (or so) and will be followed by a sharing of thoughts on the Still-speaking Advent Devotions. Faith Formation classes meet regularly on Tuesdays at Noon – typically in the Parish Helpers Room. Our gatherings will be hybrid—in-person at church with a Zoom option. Note that a decision may be made to do a Zoom-only class if weather is a concern. Please contact Julie Kessler if interested in finding out more about our Advent study.

Julie Kessler

Search Team Report

Our church's profile has been reposted on the UCC website with the changes in our compensation package. We have had some interest in FCCW's open pastor position and the team will follow up on this. Per Rev. Larry's suggestion, contact has been made with Yale, Harvard Divinity School, and other seminaries. Hopefully this will prove to be fruitful. What is interesting is that the number of new clergy has decreased, many of these new church leaders have elected to pursue clinical pastoral paths and chaplaincies instead of church pastorships.

The search and call team thanks you for your prayers and support. We had hoped to secure a settled full time pastor by now. We are disappointed but not discouraged. The team knows and trusts that our new pastor is out there and we pray God sends them our way.

3

Buddy Dee

No Need for Worry and Anxiety

The definition of Worry:

"To allow one's mind to dwell on difficulties or troubles"
"A state of anxiety or uncertainty over actual or potential problems"

Since the election many of us have been in a state of worry. It is okay to have such emotions, but it is not healthy to wallow in them. After engaging in a contentious campaign and being the recipient of hateful and slanderous rhetoric, my level of worry and anxiety has been beyond the norm for me. If I have been short tempered or more flighty than usual, please forgive me. I know God has.

The following verses are translations using Generative AI and are not direct known translations of the Bible, but I love their simplicity.

Luke 12:25, 26 *"Does worry add anything to your life? Can it add one more year, or even one more day? So, if worrying adds nothing and actually subtracts from your life, why would you worry about God's care for you?"*

Isaiah 41:10; *God will give you the strength to fight anxiety*

Psalms 55:22; *Cast your burden on the Lord, and He will sustain you*

Matthew 6:25; *Trust God rather than falling into worry and anxiety*

Psalms 94:19; *When anxious thoughts multiply within you, God's consolations delight your soul*

There are so many more verses that refer to God's love overcoming our fears. We are to give our doubts and fears to God. We are bombarded daily by news and other media that increases our anxiety. I have found peace in walking the dog, working in the yard (those pesky acorns and leaves) and with the holidays around the corner, engaging in what I call "retail therapy" (shopping). I am going to take a break from the negatives of today and look at the positives that God provides. I will take more walks, read more books, take more naps, and enjoy the season of Advent. I will return to the new year with my advocacy for social justice. Until then, Peace be with you.

Donna V Ackerman

New in Our Library . . .

Women of the Greatest Generation (Vol. 1-5)
By Rev. Dr. Fran Bogle and Rev. Nancy Reed

These books document the stories of women from countries on both sides of World War II. The stories recount the faith, hope, love, courage of women living through this war. They were donated by the Just Peace Players who performed at the November meeting of Parish Helpers and will be shelved in the History Section of the Parish Helpers Library.

Linda Petkunas/Church Librarian

Hazel MacBrien NS News

November is always a little crazy starting the month with the time change and how dark it gets at the end of the day.

The first week of November we introduced letter Oo, our sensory table was full of pluffle and orange items and our theme was owls. The 3-year-olds painted owls for our school family tree, made an orange collage, fed an "owl" shapes and read Little Owl, Little Owl What Do You See? The 4-year-olds traced lines on an owl and then cut it out for our school family tree, made unifix number towers and did an owl sequencing paper.

During the second week we introduced number 7 and continued our owl theme. Our threes worked on matching a shape to the same owl shape, used mini erasers to trace lines, worked on colors by matching colored owls, did some free painting and explored with playdough. Our fours made shape owls, used magnetic 10-frames to make 7 and used numbered owls to put themselves in sequential order.

The third week of November we worked on letter Tt and our sensory table was filled with corn, feathers, plastic pumpkin manipulatives, Pilgrims and Native American rubber ducks. The threes class did gross motor turkey movements around the room, worked on numbers, then crawled through our tunnel and did our 5 Little Turkeys poem. The fours class did a Thanksgiving cut and paste pattern paper, worked on numbers by doing a 10-frame count the room, rolled a die and built a turkey, did a directive turkey drawing and made The Mayflower out of a paper plate and a straw for the mast.

We celebrated Thanksgiving on the last week of November by sharing a snack with our friends, made a teepee, explored with playdough and feathers, played ring toss onto a paper bag turkey leg, used a turkey baster to blow feathers across a table and used beads to string onto feathers.

We wish everyone a wonderful Thanksgiving with their families and friends! We are so THANKFUL for all of you !!

Parish Helpers Luncheon

The Annual Christmas Luncheon will be held on 12/12 at 12 (on Thursday, **December 12, at 12 NOON**) at the Knotty Pine Restaurant on Pine River Pond Road. We will be ordering from a limited menu. Once again, we will hold our Yankee Swap! To participate, just bring a wrapped gift (about \$10 value) and a sense of humor! It's always a lot of fun. If you plan to attend, be sure to let Ginny know—522-9593 — to add you to our reservation!

Carol Jeffery

Very Special People Needed

We are looking for 8 people to make up a team to work with Laura Frye on **Hospitality**. If we had 8 volunteers, each would have to serve only once every two months. That doesn't sound too overwhelming, does it? And most of our church family really enjoys our coffee hours. I remember when we simply had donut holes and coffee, and that was just wonderful too. The important part of coffee hour is the caring and sharing that goes on during that time. Won't you please consider joining this team to ensure the continuation of our coffee hours? Be a part of this team and make a difference.

We are also looking for a person with **Excel spreadsheet skills** to maintain data for our Shepherd Program. Margie is going away for a while in the spring or early summer for several months and would very much like someone to take over that job while she is away. In fact, if this volunteer falls in love with this task, Margie would be quite happy to pass the torch. But we could start with a temporary position and see where it goes. Won't you please consider helping in this way?

Contact Margie about either the Hospitality Team or the Spreadsheet task at balchlaker@gmail.com or 603-522-6647. Thank you.

Margie Galabrun

Dining with Friends

The Men's Fellowship Group is coordinating another dinner party. We would love it if you could join us, everyone is welcome. This time we are planning to go to the Lodge at Moose Mountain Recreation. We have reservations for 6:00 pm, on January 15th. George Ackerman is coordinating the event, so you need to call to let him know that you plan on attending. The Lodge will have their full menu, but they are requesting that you select your meal choice ahead of time. The full menu can be found online on our church website at [Moose Mountain Menu](#) or on Moose Mountain's [Facebook Page](#). It would be most convenient if you let George know your food choice at the time you reserve your space, or it can be done at a later time. However, space is limited, so plan on attending. Check out the menu and contact George. He will call you in early January if you haven't already given him your selection. If you want opinions about the food choices, the guys have pretty much tried everything on the menu, so just ask one of them.

If we have snow on the ground, you can come early and do a little tubing to build up your appetites. They hope to have the rope tow open when and if we get snow this year. If you want to watch folks slide, the bar will be open at that time too.
Peace,

George Ackerman 603 651 6331

Celebrations!

DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS

1 Tom Stanley	13 Carol Jeffery
2 Shannon Mercer	16 Jeff Ballard
2 Lynn Watts	16 Coralena Meroski
3 Robert Gehring Jr.	16 Barry Truhn
3 Marie Hebb	20 Rev. George Harvey
9 Richard Zacher	22 Jeff Perkins
10 Gloria Ballinger	26 Jessica St Pierre

DECEMBER ANNIVERSARIES

10 Eric & Amanda Boggs
27 Peter & Linda Foss

FCCW Tree of Memories

Remember your loved ones with a personalized wooden dove.

We will have a tree in the entry way of the church so that our church family and friends can be part of remembering loved ones.

Doves will be available (free of charge). Any questions, contact Ginny Schweitzer at 522-9593.



Keeping in Touch

Let's not forget our young folk who are off to college and beyond. Here are some addresses to be in touch with them.

Samuel Khumbula and
Blessing Sithole
67 Blackberry Lane
Keene, NH 03431

Jillian Currier
8012 5th Avenue NE
Seattle, WA 98115-4113

FELLOWSHIP OF CONCERN

We believe that prayer is powerful! During this time of transition in our church, let us pray for the Diaconate, the Search Committee, the Officers, Ministry Coordinators, and Leadership Council for their thoughtful deliberations in guiding our church onward.

And as always, please keep in your prayers all those who suffer in any way in mind, body and spirit,

We ask also your prayers for peace in our world, for the health and integrity of our democracy, and for the flourishing of the work of our community of faith.



Please pray for David and Charlotte L.; Family of Elizabeth F; Nancy B; Richard W; Bob L; Sue L; Cindy E; Carol J's Family: Chrissy B and Michael T; & Connie's sister-in-law Sarah.

FCCW Prayer Chain: Through emails and text messages, we are able to increase our prayer power for "immediate intercessory prayer" for the concerns of our congregation and friends. If you have a prayer request, please email Harriet Wilson (dhwilson39@gmail.com) All prayer requests are kept strictly confidential and will only be shared with the express permission of the people involved.

The Advent Season in Christmastide

Join us for a variety of events through the season of Advent into Christmas Eve and Christmastide.

Sunday Morning services and Christmas Eve— Advent Wreath Lighting each Sunday

Sunday, December 1, 10:00 a.m. The Sunday of Hope
Sunday, December 8, 10:00 a.m. The Sunday of Peace
Sunday December 15, 10:00 a.m. the Sunday of Joy—
Christmas Pageant

Sunday, December 22, 10:00 a.m. The Sunday of Love
Tuesday, December 24, 6:00 p.m., Christmas Eve Service

Blue Christmas Service, Thursday, December 19, 7:00 p.m. at St. John the Baptist Episcopal Church.

Wednesday Wonder—A gentle preparation for Advent

Wednesday, December 4, 4:00 p.m. Healing Hope
Wednesday, December 11 4:00 p.m. Prayers for Peace
Wednesday, December 18, 4:00 Make a Joyful Noise
Wednesday, December 25—Christmas Day!

Dec. 1-25—Place an angel or more on our Memory Tree throughout the month of December
Christmas Caroling—Meet at FCCW! December 21 – Time TBD

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to All!

DECEMBER 2024

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
<p>1</p> <p>First Sunday Of Advent Sunday of Hope Worship and Communion —10 a.m.</p> <p>Coffee Hour</p>	<p>2</p> <p>Caregiver Self-Care Support Group 9:30 a.m.</p> <p>Choir 5:30 p.m.</p>	<p>3</p> <p>Faith Formation 12 Noon</p>	<p>4</p> <p>Chair Yoga 10 a.m.</p> <p>Wednesday Wonder—Healing Hope 4 pm.</p> <p>Diaconate 5 p.m.</p>	<p>5</p> <p>End 68 Hours of Hunger Volunteer Meeting 10 a.m.</p>	6	7
<p>8</p> <p>Second Sunday of Advent Sunday of Peace Worship 10 a.m.</p> <p>Coffee Hour</p>	<p>9</p> <p>Choir 5:30 p.m.</p>	<p>10</p> <p>Faith Formation 12 Noon</p> <p>Ukelele Club 6 p.m.</p>	<p>11</p> <p>Chair Yoga 10 a.m.</p> <p>Wednesday Wonder—Prayers for Peace 4 pm.</p>	<p>12</p> <p>End 68 Hours of Hunger Volunteer Meeting 10 a.m.</p> <p>Parish Helpers Luncheon NOON.</p> <p>BLPOA Mtg. 6 p.m.</p>	13	14
<p>15</p> <p>Third Sunday of Advent Sunday of Joy Worship—10 a.m. Christmas Pageant</p> <p>Coffee Hour</p>	<p>16</p> <p>Caregiver Self-Care Support Group 9:30 a.m.</p> <p>Choir 5:30 p.m.</p>	<p>17</p> <p>Prayer Shawl Ministry 10 a.m.</p> <p>Faith Formation 12 Noon</p>	<p>18</p> <p>Chair Yoga 10 a.m.</p> <p>Finance Team Mtg.—11 a.m.</p> <p>Wednesday Wonder—Make a Joyful Noise 4 pm.</p>	<p>19</p> <p>End 68 Hours of Hunger Volunteer Meeting 10 a.m.</p> <p>Blue Christmas Service St. John's 7 p.m.</p>	20	21 Christmas Caroling
<p>22</p> <p>Fourth Sunday of Advent Sunday of Love Worship—10 a.m.</p> <p>Coffee Hour</p>	<p>23</p> <p>Choir 5:30 p.m.</p>	<p>24</p> <p>Christmas Eve Candlelight Service</p> <p>6 p.m.</p>	<p>25</p> <p>Christmas Day</p>	<p>26</p> <p>End 68 Hours of Hunger Volunteer Meeting 10 a.m.</p>	27	28
<p>29</p> <p>First Sunday after Christmas Worship—10 a.m.</p> <p>Coffee Hour</p>	<p>30</p> <p>Choir 5:30 p.m.</p>	<p>31</p> <p>New Year's Eve</p>				

2024 ALTERNATIVE GIFT GIVING PROGRAM

Alternative gift giving is giving in recognition for the person who has everything to benefit the people who don't. We have an opportunity this Christmas season to consider a gift to any of five worthy programs.

LOCAL PROGRAM

The Feddern Diaconate Discretionary Fund provides temporary emergency assistance to individuals and families in need within our church and within the community.

GLOBAL

Heifer International provides livestock and training to individuals or families in need to increase income, food security, and nutrition with a pass-it-on philosophy. Each person who receives an animal passes on the first offspring to another person/family in need. You can purchase shares of goats, chickens, pigs, rabbits, llamas, buffaloes, heifers and other animals.

ZIMBABWE MISSION PROJECTS (www.projects.org)

FOOT/PKZ Child Sponsorship . Sponsorship provides school fees, uniforms, shoes, food, and school supplies to the children most in need. Sponsorship makes education a reality.

Girls Empowerment Sanitary Pad Program

Girls miss one week of school per month due to lack of sanitary supplies. This gift provides washable, reusable, sanitary pads which provide girls with a sense of dignity and empowerment.

Food for Children at the Daisy Dube Home This program provides protein (soya chunks, fish, meat, eggs, peanut butter), vegetables and other everyday staples to combat malnutrition.

Alternative Gift Giving 2024

Our members and friends have a long history of sharing their resources with others during the Christmas season. If you wish to participate in more than one of the following programs, it is only necessary to write ONE CHECK with your donation allocated according to your wishes. Checks are made out to **First Congregational Church of Wakefield (FCCW)** and accompany this form with a specified amount indicated to the program (s) you choose below.

Local Program:

Feddern Diaconate Discretionary Fund \$ _____

Global:

Heifer International (www.heifer.org) \$ _____

Zimbabwe Mission Projects (www.projectkz.org)

F.O.O.T. / PKZ Child Sponsorship \$ _____


Girls Empowerment Sanitary Pad Program \$ _____

**Supplemental Feeding Program for Children
at the Daisy Dube Orphanage** \$ _____

TOTAL \$ _____

Name: _____

Phone #: _____



I N C L E M E N T
Weather Policy

FCCW Cancellations due to inclement weather will be posted on:
WMUR Channel 9
WCSH Channel 6
FCCW Facebook page at :
<https://www.facebook.com/FirstCongregationalChurchofWakefieldUCC>



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