

# STEEPLE VIEWS

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



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JANUARY 2025

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## The Pastor's Page

### Looking for Jesus

Rev. Larry Brickner-Wood

The first Sunday in January is Epiphany Sunday, January 5, 2025. The actual day of Epiphany is January 6<sup>th</sup>, the end of the 12 days of Christmas. Throughout the span of Christian growth and emergence, it has been seen as a great festival at times, and something to be acknowledged but not really celebrated at others. Over time, it has come to commemorate the Baptism of Jesus and the revelation of Jesus to the non-Jewish people through the appearance of the Magi (aka Wise Men) to the Christ child.

The word Epiphany generally means an appearance or manifestation of a divine being; a revelation of essential truth; and an illuminating discovery, realization or disclosure. Both the baptism of Jesus and the appearance of the Magi to the Christ child were epiphanies, not only for those present in those moments but for all of us to come in the generations and centuries that follow.

It was not lost on me that the 2021 attack on our nation's Capital in Washington D.C. occurred on Epiphany, January 6, 2021. I watched in horror that day as Christian flags and symbols and Jesus' name were combined with swastikas, confederate flags, and nationalistic symbols as if they had anything in common. I watched with a broken heart as the capital was stormed, a Vice-President was threatened to be hanged, and a speaker of the House was being hunted like an animal. Police officers lost their lives that day and in the days and weeks that followed. This act of domestic terrorism threatened to break our nation's heart, and we are still in the throes of healing from that terrible event. No revisionist history or casting of the attack as patriotic will change the reality and truth of what occurred that day, the Holy Day of Epiphany where we celebrate the baptism of Jesus as the Christ and the appearance of the Magi, the wisdom keepers, to Jesus.

Jesus was not partisan, a democrat or republican, green party or libertarian, capitalist or socialist. His teaching may be interpreted by some as being political in nature, but I see them rather as fundamental values of how God calls us to live in this world. He said it again and again: Love God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourselves. Blessed are the poor; blessed are the peacemakers, blessed are the meek and those who thirst for righteousness; blessed are the pure in heart, for they will know God. Let those who are without sin cast the first stone. All who exalt themselves will be humbled and all those who are humble will be exalted.

Throughout his ministry and the ministry of his disciples, Jesus was clear: Love is at the center; compassion and mercy are essential; forgiveness is foundational and loving our neighbor includes loving our enemies. In Jesus' vision, justice, equity and right relationship come in the beloved community that honors and practices these principles, values and commandments.

Jesus never said to take power by violence or conquest. Jesus never said to force others to convert and force them to adhere to your teachings. Jesus never said to seek vengeance and retribution. Jesus never said to imprison your enemies, or govern in ways that leave the multitudes hungry while a few amass great wealth. Despite various strains of Christianity attempting over the centuries to put these words in Jesus' mouth, he did not say them. Nor did he advise to practice in ways that are brutal, oppressive and mean hearted. Jesus' vision was/is completely different, and our witness as disciples is to continue to practice as Christ would have us, no matter how hard and challenging that may be.

In this Epiphany season may our hearts be opened to the new ways being revealed to us every day, to the Glory of God, in honor of the Holy Spirit, and in celebrating the joy that is Jesus.

## Let it Snow, Let it Snow, Let it Snow

Winter Wonderland, White Christmas, and other delightful colloquialisms are shared during this chilling season. Many folks I know don't like winter. They either were never winter people, or they just got tired of all the work it takes to maintain a home during this season. And then there are folks like me, who love every season New Hampshire brings. Okay, I must admit that "mud season" is not my favorite, but besides those pesky black flies, it also brings a rebirth of gardens and other lovely vegetation. But "Winter" has a sacred place in my heart. It brings back memories of toboggan rides with my brother. A more recent memory is one of nieces and nephews sliding down the path right here in our backyard. This is the time of year to snuggle down with a good book accompanied by a tasty hot beverage. It's the time of leggings and baggy sweaters. You know, clothes that expand as you become less active. Yes, it involves shoveling and snow blowing, but if we don't do those things we may find ourselves outgrowing our leggings. Winter brings snowshoeing into the woods looking for animal tracks or discovering a porcupine resting in a tall leafless tree. Winter brings a cozy wood stove, crackling its warmth throughout the house.

There are many scriptures that relate to changing seasons. In Genesis 8:22, God tells us, "*While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.*" In this verse, God reminds us that there is a divine order and stability governing our natural world. Most of us know in Ecclesiastes 3:1 God says, "*There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens.*" God reminds us that just like earth experiences seasons, so do we experience changes in our lives, some good and some bad, but all occur within God's loving embrace. God is the ultimate creator and all His creations, be they seasons or humans, are marvelous and wonderful to behold.

While composing this writing I am watching snow descend gracefully in their wintery dance. The birds are flitting from feeder to feeder restoring their body warmth with seeds or suet. At some point today I will shovel and snow blow. But until then I will stoke the fire and relax in my favorite chair with a book and a cup of aromatic hot chocolate giving thanks for this day and this season.

*Donna V Ackerman*

### **Volunteers Needed!**

Please let CLA/Andrea know if you are interested in joining the Coffee Hour Hospitality Team or in becoming an FCCW Lector or Greeter!

## Prepared to Serve

Prepared to Serve is our annual workshop day put on by the New Hampshire Conference. This event will boost your skills, connect you with others who share your vision, and equip you with tools to bring back to your congregations! Mark your calendars: Prepared to Serve will take place on **February 22, 2025** at Pembroke Academy. Registration for participants will begin on January 7th. Here's the [registration link](#).

## Let's Have Dinner Together

Please join the Men's Group for another dinner with our church family and friends. These dinners together have been so joyful, we have been encouraged to continue to make more opportunities available. So, this time we have reserved Moose Mountain Recreation Lodge for 6:00 p.m. on January 22<sup>nd</sup>. You probably already know that you can arrive early and go tubing if we have snow on the ground that day. Not everyone would want to do that, but if you want to arrive early and watch those who do, the bar will be open and the pool table ready.

The entire menu will be available that day and you can view it online any time here: [Menu](#). The owners have asked that we let them know the meal requests ahead of time. That will allow them to have on hand what they need and do all the prep work before we get there. That will help them get the meals out in a timely fashion to such a large group. Please join us. RSVP to George Ackerman who will be coordinating the reservations. Call him with your meal request at 603 651 6331 or email him at [gea5775@yahoo.com](mailto:gea5775@yahoo.com). If you have any difficulty with finding the menu online, let George know and he will work that out with you as well.

## When A Book Comes Around

Our wonderful Librarian, Linda Petkunas, is always ready to order a book if you have something to recommend. Check out the libraries (Fellowship Hall and Parish Helpers Room). The latest books are HEAVEN IS BEAUTIFUL and ON BEING MOR-TAL. Both books are about what is called NDE (near death experience). I have just learned from the author of Heaven is Beautiful that a movie is being made about his experience. Can't wait to see it!

*Carol Lundgren*

## News of Zimbabwe

Deep, deep thanks and appreciation to all who donated to renew child sponsorships or begin a new sponsorship, or give to the girls empowerment sanitary pad initiative or who donated to help feed the children at the Daisy Dube Children's Home.

We currently have 18 children at the primary level, 9 high school students, two in vocational programs and three in college. One student is attending Midlands State University in Zimbabwe completing a masters degree in education. This year we are able to add two additional primary-aged children due to your generosity. You all are amazing. As I have said before, your support changes the trajectory of lives for these children.

But there is more good news! One family donated an astounding amount to put PKZ on the path to drilling a borehole and getting water to the Humani clinic! PKZ Director Vrante Mahlupeko took advantage of a "December promotion" to get the 180' well drilled and the necessary casing for \$4,800. While we still have piping to the clinic itself, a pump with solar panels, the concrete skirting that surrounds the borehole site, a water tank and stand, and ultimately sinks, faucets, and toilets on our wish list, this is an incredible start to achieve our 2025 goals!

Vrante has been assisting Mr. Sindiso Machimbidza, the Daisy Dube Social worker, plan a holiday trip to the Humani Conservation area for a game drive for the 25 young residents. These children rarely leave Mt. Selinda as there is no viable transportation for such a big group. The game drive will give the kids a chance to see giraffes, elephants, zebra, buffalo, impala, kudu, rhinos and more in their native habitat. A traditional braai (BBQ) is part of the event. I hope to receive photos soon but in the meantime enjoy this one of the children having a Christmas feast! Happy New Year!

*Connie Littlefield*



## Gearing up for Souper Sunday!

Happy New Year from the FUNdraising team! Our next effort is the Souper Bowl Soup Sale. As we have in the past, we will be asking for donations of a favorite soup/chowder/stew that we can offer for sale at \$5 for a 12-oz. container. We would love to have some new varieties and hope you can help out! This year our sale is on Saturday, February 8. We will need to know what you are making, a list of ingredients, and how many 12-oz containers we will have to sell. As these are all pre-ordered, we must have this info by January 25 to publicize and get orders in time. This has been a very successful FUNdraiser over the past few years and we hope to carry that on into 2025!

*Nancy Dee for the FUNdraising Team*

## Hazel MacBrien NS News

We had a very busy and exciting December! The first week of the month we introduced number 4. We made ornaments for our December class bulletin board by marble rolling paint with our 3s and using colored pencils dipped in water to color them with our 4s. The sensory table was filled with rice, red and green bells, magnet wands and wooden winter manipulatives. Our three-year-old class did a gingerbread shape cookie song, fed a gingerbread man shapes, walked on sensory "gumdrops" and did a count how many gingerbreads and clip on the correct number activity. Our four-year-old class did a holiday word syllable clap activity, counted how many gingerbreads and cut and glued the correct number in the box, used parquetry blocks to make holiday pictures and played Christmas Bingo.

On the second week we worked on letter Rr. Our morning class used watercolors and painted a snowflake and our afternoon class cut tissue paper and glued it to a snowflake for our class winter bulletin board. We added red and green magnet blocks to our sensory table as well as some small cardboard boxes. The threes used different colored oval shapes to give a reindeer a nose, they rolled a cube and did the reindeer movement they landed on around the room, fed a reindeer a carrot shape and explored with shaving cream. Our afternoon class used holiday erasers to trace zig zag, curvy and wavy lines, did a reindeer color by number paper, used manipulatives to make AB patterns, built number towers with unifix cubes and explored with shaving cream mixed with green foam paint.

For the last week of school in December, we introduced letter Ss. Our threes class read Santa, Santa, What Do You See?, did a Santa and reindeer shape match, worked on colors by finding which colored chimney Santa was hiding behind and explored with playdough. Our fours class did a roll a reindeer dice activity, worked on patterns, did a directed drawing gingerbread house and worked on rhyming cards. Both classes had a visit from Santa and played reindeer games like; antler ring toss, pin the heart on the Grinch, red and green balloon play and paper snowball toss.

We want to wish everyone a very happy holiday and a wonderful 2025!!

# Celebrations!

## JANUARY BIRTHDAYS

4	Max Gehring	22	Susan Raban
7	Donna Ackerman	23	Jill Mullen
9	Rachel Wilson	25	Mjo McCarthy
12	Jillian Currier	29	Tim McCarthy
16	Carole Doughty	30	Joanne Dolbear
19	George Szirbik	30	Janie Silcocks

## JANUARY ANNIVERSARIES

12	Richard & Diana Peckham
16	Jeff & Valerie Ward

## Thank You



I wish to express my gratitude to many of our Church family friends for providing our sanctuary with gorgeous poinsettias. The holiday plants created a colorful, festive and inviting atmosphere!

They are a symbol of good will and community spirit and a reminder of God's Grace shining upon us.

Cheers, *Rachel*

## 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:



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](mailto:dhwilson39@gmail.com)) Prayer requests are kept confidential and will only be shared with permission of the people involved.

## Church Library News

"Being Mortal" (S-J)  
By A. Gawande

In his bestselling books, Atul Gawande, a practicing surgeon, has fearlessly revealed the struggles of his profession. Here he examines its ultimate limitations and failures—in his own practices as well as others'—as life of a patient draws to a close. Riveting, honest, and humane, "Being Mortal" shows how the goal is not a good death but a good life—all the way to the very end. Source: Amazon

*Linda Petkunas, Church Librarian*

## Parish Helpers News


The Parish Helpers had a rollicking good time at the annual Christmas Luncheon. As always, the Knotty Pine was very accommodating and we were made to feel very comfortable and enjoy a nice afternoon.

For our **January 9th** meeting, Sam and Blessing, our Zimbabwe friends, will be our guest speakers. It will be interesting to see how they are doing in their studies, adapting to life in the U.S. and their plans for the future. The meeting begins at 1 p.m. with refreshments and a brief session of business. Hope to see you there!

*Carol Jeffery*

# JANUARY 2025

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			<b>1</b> New Year's Day	<b>2</b> End 68 Hours of Hunger Volunteer Meeting 10 a.m.	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>5</b> Second Sunday After Christmas  Worship and Communion—10 a.m.  Coffee Hour	<b>6</b> Feast of the Epiphany  Caregiver's Support Group 9:30—10:30 a.m.  Choir 5:30	<b>7</b> Faith Formation 12 Noon	<b>8</b> Chair Yoga 10 a.m.  Diaconate Meeting 5 p.m.	<b>9</b> End 68 Hours of Hunger Volunteer Meeting 10 a.m.  Parish Helpers Meeting 1 p.m.	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>12</b> <b>1st Sunday after Epiphany</b>  Worship—10 a.m.  Coffee Hour	<b>13</b> Choir 5:30	<b>14</b> Faith Formation 12 Noon  Ukulele Club 6—7:30 p.m.	<b>15</b> Chair Yoga 10 a.m.	<b>16</b> End 68 Hours of Hunger Volunteer Meeting 10 a.m.	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>19</b> <b>2nd Sunday after Epiphany</b>  Worship—10 a.m.  Coffee Hour	<b>20</b> <b>Martin Luther King Day</b>  Caregiver's Support Group 9:30—10:30 a.m.  Choir 5:30	<b>21</b> Prayer Shawl Ministry—10 a.m.  Faith Formation 12 Noon	<b>22</b> Chair Yoga 10 a.m.  Dinner With Friends Moose Mtn. 6 p.m.	<b>23</b> End 68 Hours of Hunger Volunteer Meeting 10 a.m.	<b>24</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>26</b> <b>3rd Sunday after Epiphany</b>  Worship— 10 a.m.  Coffee Hour	<b>27</b> Choir 5:30	<b>28</b> Faith Formation 12 Noon  Ukulele Club 6—7:30 p.m.	<b>29</b> Chair Yoga 10 a.m.	<b>30</b> End 68 Hours of Hunger Volunteer Meeting 10 a.m.	<b>31</b>	



**INCLEMENT**  
*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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