



Steeple Notes

The First Congregational Church of Rowley, U.C.C.
175 Main Street • P.O. Box 364 • Rowley, MA 01969
(978) 948-3993 • www.firstchurchrowley.org



December 2020

Worship Watch

Sun., Dec. 6

Second Sunday of Advent
Isaiah 40:1-11
Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13
2 Peter 3:8-15a
Mark 1:1-8

Sun., Dec. 13

Third Sunday of Advent
Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11
Psalm 126 or Luke 1:46b-55
1 Thessalonians 5:16-24
John 1:6-8, 19-28

Sun., Dec. 27

First Sunday after Christmas
Isaiah 61:10—62:3
Psalm 148
Galatians 4:4-7
Luke 2:22-40

Sun., Dec. 20

Fourth Sunday of Advent
2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16
Luke 1:46b-55 or
Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26
Romans 16:25-27
Luke 1:26-38



An Advent Season Like No Other

December is our Advent Season leading up to Christmas on the 25th. Christian tradition has us lighting candles and preparing and waiting. We are invited to wait in Hope Love Joy and Peace.

I cannot think of a better way to confront the dark shadows of the current pandemic. Our Advent journey this year offers us needed solace in the Grace of God. We can lean on the God present and prepare for the God which is in-breaking and new.

Yes, we have fears as we look forward to the coming days. Our present moment is challenged by deadly contagion and a national divisiveness that blocks effective actions. Yet in faith we can wait for the special birth of Jesus. His entry into our lives and our times can heal all that is broken.



Christmas this year will likely be more modest and restrained than any we recall. That just may be the opportunity we need to quietly ponder our heart's deepest desires. The good news is if we draw near to Jesus, his birth can be the receiving of the reconciliation and new possibilities for which we all yearn.

Blessing to you all in this time of fond reflection,

Rev. Tom

Innovation, Perseverance & Reinvention During COVID – 19

1st Sunday of Advent



Patti Cummings painted battery operated candles and decorated a wreath for our outdoor Advent candle lighting service.



(Virtual) Olde Tyme Country Fair

We are delighted to announce that this year's Christmas fair raised over \$2,000!

When we started planning this year's fair, we didn't know HOW we'd do it - we just knew we wanted to uphold our yearly tradition and we were determined to do so.



**THANK YOU
FOR**

Even though we experienced a few kinks in the process (mostly technical) and the fair wasn't as elaborate or profitable as it has been in the past, we are satisfied with the outcome and are immensely grateful to all who encouraged, purchased, donated, advertised, volunteered and somehow supported this endeavor. We know that it wouldn't have been possible without your help.

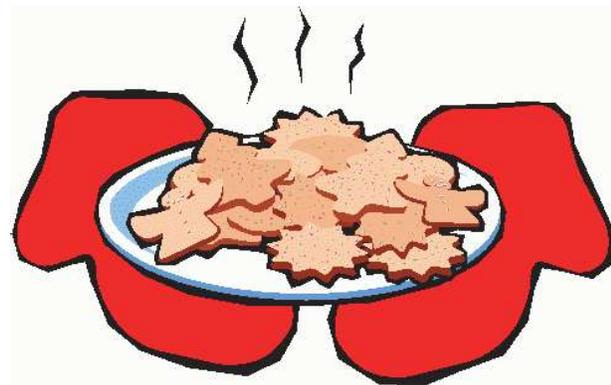
Hopefully we'll be back to 'NORMAL' next year.

Have a blessed and wonderful Christmas.

THANK YOU for your patronage, encouragement and overall support!

Missions Committee

Missions Committee is in full swing. After our **Conversation and Cookies** we are enthusiastic and hoping to engage with you further. We have sent out gift ideas for the holidays putting the environment first! We hope that you found it an interesting list from which you can get some great ideas for your holiday shopping. We will be sending out a book and video list to take you through the coming months too in consideration that we might be spending more time at home We will try to send out more informational emails. Anyone wanting printed copies call Danby at 978-317-3601.



We'd like to get together for **winter walks**. Note our first one below. We'll be putting together the **Rowley Historical treasure hunt fund-raiser**. We are looking at April now for this event and will keep you posted.

There will be more **Conversation and Cookies**, in the coming weeks with a firepit for warmth! Our next one will be on December 20th.



Please remember the Christmas Fund which supports retired ministers, there will be envelopes provided at the drive-in service, but contributions can be sent to the church putting **CHRISTMAS FUND** in the memo on your check. And also we will be collecting hats, gloves, mittens and scarves for our friends in Haverhill and Lawrence and Family Promise.

Have a very happy holiday season. Be grateful for all that you have, and spread your generosity and love to all. **Thank you. The Missions Committee**

Winter Stroll

Come join us for an afternoon walk on December 12th at 2:00. We'll meet at the parking lot of Rough Meadows wildlife sanctuary in Rowley. All ages welcome. Dress for the weather. Wear sturdy walking shoes. Remember to wear a mask. Feel free to call Holly with questions 617-480-4572. <https://www.massaudubon.org/get-outdoors/wildlife-sanctuaries/rough-meadows>

Hats, Scarves, Mittens and Gloves Collection

A drop box for winter items will be left near the office door stoop of the church. New hats, mittens/gloves, and scarves will be donated to people in need.

Coat Drive

If you have new or like-new men's, women's, and children's coats that are looking for a home please leave those at the church or contact Danby.

Christmas Fellowship

Bring your holiday spirit, wear your ugly Christmas sweater, and join us for Conversation & Christmas cookies after service on December 20th around the fire pit. Share what's on your mind, your wishes for the new year, as we reflect on the beauty of our world and share in the peace of the holiday season.



A Holiday Message for Our Time

As a people of faith, God calls us to take care of all of creation which we have as a gift and a blessing. The birth of Jesus reminds us just how vulnerable and interdependent we are as a human family. In the spirit of this togetherness, your Missions Committee is inviting you to make this Christmas a gift to our planet. Making a few simple changes to our shopping and gifting habits will have important long-term effects on our environment and quality of life.

This holiday season, be a champion and a role model for your children and grandchildren. Skip single use plastic bags and toys. Show them you care about them through caring for their environment. Try gifting environmentally friendly items this Christmas. Several gift ideas are provided at the end of this letter.



The Bible proclaims we are stewards of this earth. All living things need clean air and clean water for basic survival. Right now, we are faced with a climate crisis that is also creating a refugee disaster around the world. This is fueling wars, conflict, fear and distrust. Crops are failing, animals die, the oceans are warming leaving fish and marine life in peril and near extinction.

Here for you is a short video showing why we need to reduce the use of plastic. To watch [Click here.](#) Thank you for your concern. In 2021 you will be invited to walk with us to consider how we as a church can pursue this challenge together in faith. Yours in community, **The members of the Missions Committee**

A few eco friendly gift ideas:

- magazine, music, movie or game subscriptions
- gift certificates for an experience or service
- lessons - music, art, karate, dance, horseback riding, skiing to name a few
- membership to Mass Audubon, Essex County Greenbelt Association or The Trustees of Reservations
- annual pass to Massachusetts State or National Parks
- donation to a charity in your loved one's name
- reusable shopping bags
- coffee/tea travel mug
- refillable coffee pods for Keurig machine
- refillable stainless water bottles & thermos (Klean Kanteen, Yeti, Thermos & Hydro Flask known for high quality)
- stainless steel straws
- mess kit - stainless steel utensils, reusable plate and mug, mesh bag
- reusable sandwich, snack containers and utensils
- glass and stainless storage containers, mason jars
- cloth napkins and tablecloth
- eco-friendly art supplies
- toys made from wood, cloth, cardboard, or recycled materials
- bamboo handle toothbrush, hairbrush and comb
- all-natural eco friendly soaps, shampoo and other hygiene products
- bird feeder and seed/suet



Consider ordering online for curbside pickup to save on excess packaging and to support local businesses and jobs. Please use reusable or recyclable wrapping paper, gift bags and natural fiber ribbon.

Christian Education

Sunday School

Sunday School is up and running with positive feedback from all of the families. We continue to use a blend of video presentations, Zoom Sunday School and crafts. The children made birdfeeders out of pinecones as God encourages us to take care of the creatures of the earth!

A highlight of Sunday School is engaging families from as far away as NYC. Sunday School is looking forward to the Christmas season and a special pajama party on December 20th at 11:30 with stories, hot chocolate, snacks and crafts. Stay tuned for more details!



Youth Group

In November, the Youth Group welcomed Penny Hurley as its most recent volunteer. We are so excited and grateful to have her on board. We look forward to having her be a part of our team!

The Youth Group has continued meeting weekly and the weather has been reasonable enough that we were still able to meet **outdoors**. Nevertheless, it is getting darker a lot earlier now and much to our chagrin – we are going to start meeting virtually beginning the first Sunday in December.

November had many memorable highlights. For example, we had our first outdoor “Youth Communion Service” at the beginning of the month. The youth were involved in coordinating and participating in most aspects of the service – this included selecting (and singing) songs, reading scriptures, reciting prayers and openly sharing from personal reflections afterwards.

On November 15th we participated in a creative exercise that involved the utilization of an orange as a focal point (well...a mandarin orange in our case - LOL). This exercise included aspects of ‘mindfulness’ and meditating on the simple beauty of an object of God’s creation (If you want to try it yourself, you can find the exercise here – [CLICK HERE](#)).

On November 22nd, our last meeting for the month, we hosted an International Friendsgiving Potluck service which also included communion. We thank Reverend Tom, our volunteers, our youth and our parents for all of the work you put in to make this possible.

See more November pictures on the next two pages.



Youth Group (November Pictures)

Meditating on an Orange



Creating Gratitude Trees



International Friendsgiving Potluck Dinner

Many of our exercises have been in anticipation of or in relation to our upcoming multicultural exchange. For our Friendsgiving Dinner on November 22nd we brought food, drinks and desserts from a country or culture that was of interest to us. After Reverend Tom led us into a time of communion, we enjoyed a great time of 'socially distanced' fellowship and music! (Thank you for your playlist Alexandra!)

Our list included:

- | | |
|---------|--|
| Mexico | Veggie Enchiladas |
| Mexico | Churros |
| Italy | Biscotti |
| Canada | Poutine |
| Sweden | Meatballs |
| Greece | Spanakopita |
| England | Meat/Pork Pie |
| France | Croissants and Green Tea |
| Japan | Japanese Greenbean dish |
| Lebanon | Syrian Bread, Tabbouleh, Rice Pilaf and Sesame Candy |
| Greece | Chicken w Pita, Tzatziki and Feta Salad |
| Vietnam | Vietnamese Vermicelli Noodles (Bun) |



DECEMBER



December Birthdays

Judy	Robillard	12/4
Neil	Butler	12/5
Louise	Mehaffey	12/7
Robert Hale	Collins	12/11
Karen	Moore	12/13
Pam	Sanford	12/14
Elizabeth "Liz"	Butler	12/16
Karen	Merry	12/21
Rhonda	Ward	12/25
Margaret	Niska	12/30
Matthew	Blouin	12/30

Anniversaries

Elizabeth (Somers) & Bradley Reep 12/16



Historical Birthdays

Jay-Z (rapper), December 4, 1969	Frank Sinatra, December 12, 1915
Walt Disney, December 5, 1901	Beethoven, December 16, 1770
Sammy Davis Jr, December 8, 1925	Humphrey Bogart, December 25, 1899
Emily Dickinson, December 10, 1830	Anthony Hopkins, December 31, 1937



Historical Days in December

Dec. 1, 1955 - Rosa Parks arrested for refusing to give up her seat in the front section of bus.
 Dec. 7, 1877 - Thomas Edison exhibited the phonograph.
 Dec. 8, 1980 - John Lennon was assassinated in New York City by Mark David Chapman.
 Dec. 10, 1964 - Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. received the Nobel Peace Prize.
 Dec. 21, 1620 - The Pilgrims landed at Plymouth, Massachusetts.
 Dec. 21, 1937 - "Snow White" premiered at theaters.