

THE TIMES NEWSLETTER

*A publication of the First Congregational Church
of Scarborough, Maine 04074*

DECEMBER 2020



MINISTER'S CORNER

Dear Friends,

I'm curious what kind of plans for Christmas you might be making. Maybe that's a sensitive issue because we know without question that Christmas in 2020, like all our other life experiences for the past nine months, is going to be different—and probably not in an upbeat, delightful way.

Sadly, there will be no celebratory Christmas Eve service in our sanctuary, with people squeezed into the pews shoulder to shoulder.

We can still sing carols such as *Joy to the World* and *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing* like we do every Christmas season, but we will have to do it without a choir and organ accompaniment.

And Christmas shoppers beware, because spending too much time in stores with crowds of other people, searching for that perfect gift, could make us or someone we love and care about very sick. So, if you're like me, you will be doing most, if not all of your Christmas shopping online, or going old school and using a mail order catalog.

Once again, as we did at Thanksgiving, there will be scaled down family gatherings. And don't even think about kissing someone under the mistletoe who is outside your immediate household. That's a big no-no.

Yes, this Christmas is going to be quite different. The fun things we always look forward to doing this time of year will have to wait for at least another year. Or we will have to find a different way of doing them that's not as fun and satisfying.

The toned down celebration of Christmas in 2020 causes me to reflect, in a deeper, more pertinent way, on the story of Jesus' birth in Luke's Gospel: how Joseph and Mary made a treacherous trip from the town of Nazareth to Bethlehem—a 90 mile journey!—while Mary was pregnant and close to her time of delivery. How they arrived in Bethlehem without reservations and had to scramble to find shelter in a stable. And how Jesus' first bed was a feeding trough for animals, and his first pillow a bundle of hay. Not exactly a Christmas to dream of, sort of like the Christmas we're expecting to celebrate this year.

But, even this year's different Christmas offers a reason to rejoice, because the Lord has come, and no pandemic can prevent the earth from once again receiving her king. Although our planning and preparations for Christmas in 2020 may not be as elaborate as in Christmases past, every heart can still prepare room to welcome the Christ child. And we can still repeat the sounding joy and give thanks for the wonders of God's love.

I pray that you will have a merry Christmas, my friends. But more than that, I pray that you will have a blessed Christmas, with your attention focused on what this season is truly about: God becoming flesh and dwelling with us. May the words spoken by an angel to some shepherds in a field speak to you, as well: "Do not be afraid, for I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people. To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

STEWARDSHIP MOMENT

Christmas is not a day or a season, but a condition of heart and mind. If we love our neighbor as ourselves; if in our riches we are poor in spirit and in our poverty we are rich in grace; if our charity boasts not about itself but suffers long and is kind; if, when we encounter people hungry and we do not wait for someone else to help but feed them ourselves; if each day begins in opportunity to love our neighbors and ends with the achievement of loving them in a large or small way, then every day is Christ's day, and Christmas is always near.

James Wallingford (adapted)

TIME OUT FOR PRAYER

Loving God, Help us remember the birth of Jesus,
that we may share in the song of the angels,
the gladness of the shepherds,
and worship of the wise men.

Close the door of hate

and open the door of love all over the world.

Let kindness come with every gift and good desires with every greeting.

Deliver us from evil by the blessing which Christ brings,
and teach us to be merry with clear hearts.

May the Christmas morning make us happy to be thy children,
and Christmas evening bring us to our beds with grateful thoughts,
forgiving and forgiven, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Robert Louis Stevenson

CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE ONLINE

I'm pleased to tell you that we have recorded a Christmas Eve worship service in our sanctuary, and it will be posted on our church website so you can view it on Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, or whenever it is convenient. The service includes some of your favorite Christmas carols, special music, a Christmas reflection, and even a Children's Message. I hope this recording will be a blessing to you and fill you with the Christmas spirit as we celebrate our Savior's birth.

I will be sending out an email blast to our congregation with a link to the service. It will also have the Order of Worship and lyrics to the Christmas carols attached to it so you can print it out and participate in the service from home! Check your inbox for that email, which will be going out sometime during the week before Christmas!

CHURCH DECORATIONS

If you drove by the church in this month after dark, you may have noticed our holiday decorations. Instead of ordering poinsettias to adorn the sanctuary, the Flower Committee opted to devote their energy to the exterior of the church.

Sue Fielding and Kate Sawdon were assisted by Jerry Lavigne, Dick Grotton, and Don Mitchell, in draping Christmas lights over the bushes and the lamp post by the stairs and mounting evergreen wreaths on the Church, Parsonage and Annex.

A neighbor from the Ocean View Harbor neighborhood down the street donated a 1950's era collection of life size wooden Nativity figures to the Church. They were a little worn (who wouldn't be at age 70!) but we were able to install the Holy Family, Joseph watching over Mary and Jesus, along the walkway from the parking lot to the church entrance.

CAROLING: A "NEW" HOLIDAY TRADITION

On Friday, December 18th, six members of the church sang Christmas Carols while outside the homes of another 6 of our members. Susan Fielding, Terri Brown, Joanne Brown, Diane Brown, Melinda Coombs and Elaine Sederlund met in the Church parking lot, then drove in separate cars to deliver Christmas music and joy to some of the members we haven't seen in a while. Greeting us from their front doors and living room windows were Jane Moses, Barbara Christiansen, Regina Grenier, Reta Leighton, Joan Deering, Lerline Santos, Shirley Brown, Sandra Elder, and the ladies of Kailer Vail. Time and darkness did not allow us to visit more homes, but we are planning on doing this next year and subsequent. God blessed us with a sunny, mild afternoon and a good time was had by all.

FROM THE MINISTRY OF GOVERNING & FINANCE— SAVE THE DATE

The Ministry of Governing and Finance will hold a briefing for FCC members on **Sunday, January 24th**, immediately following the ZOOM worship service, to provide a Semi-Annual Financial Report to the congregation. To attend and participate, merely stay on the phone line or computer screen at the conclusion of the worship service.

Copies of the Six Month Financial Reports will be available from the Church office closer to the date of the meeting. We can e-mail or post these to you if you contact Elaine or you can pick them up in the Church Office. Please stay tuned for any updates to this notice

NOTES FROM THE FOOD PANTRY

We had a wonderful November, serving over 130 families, many of them new to us. Every family received a Thanksgiving “basket” of sides, including stuffing, gravy, green bean casserole makings and cranberry sauce. They were offered a turkey, donated by the Kiwanis, plus other turkeys phonated by friends of the Pantry, Fresh fruits and vegetables arrived, including three varieties of applies, sweet potations, squashes, red or white potatoes, carrots, kale, herbs...you name it, we had it! Pies were provided by one of our dedicated pantry volunteers, apple or pumpkin, with refrigerated pie crust. And for those without cooking facilities, we offered a frozen apple pie.

We have been so blessed with donations of food, muscle power to move all the food, and monetary gifts. Contributions come from individuals from our church and the entire community. Helpers come from Project GRACE, Hannaford, Wayside Food program, Kiwanis, Rotary Club, Scarborough police and police explorers, community businesses and so many others...it is impossible to thank them all.

Our customers give back as well when they are able, offering bottles for CLYNK, saved up coins, handmade scrunchies or face masks, even knitted hats and mittens.

In December we provided holiday gifts of soaps and cleaning supplies, in addition to food, to well over 200 families. Our little church is truly blessed. Even as we are far apart in physical space, we are very close in our spiritual connectedness. God is the glue that holds us all together, so please do not despair. He is with us always.

- Liane Giambalvo, on behalf of the Food Pantry.

AFTERNOON SERVICE INSIDE THE CHURCH BEING PLANNED FOR AFTERNOON OF JAN 24

A small number of church members desire to come together inside the Sanctuary, to worship, pray together and interact more in our devotions. The Ministry of Worship and Spiritual care is planning an in church service for the afternoon of January 24th. This is not to replace the morning ZOOM service, but to complement our worship. Persons interested in attending will need to RSVP in advance to the church office, and follow safety protocols such as entering the church one by one, sitting at a “social” distance and wearing masks. There will be music, but no singing (maybe humming?) While Pastor Gagnon may choose to attend and participate, we envision this as a “lay” service where each worshipper will participate by reading scripture, sharing reflections or stories, or leading a prayer. If you would like to be involved or attend, please contact Elaine at the church office. We will publicize the details as the date approaches.

CHURCH MEETINGS IN JANUARY

January 5th (Tuesday) 6:30 pm: Church Council (ZOOM)

January 17th (Sunday) 11:00 am: Ministry of Worship & Spiritual Care (ZOOM)

January 18th (Monday) Ministry of Governing & Finance (ZOOM)

January 24th (Sunday) Six Month Financial Update (ZOOM following morning worship service)

A Very Big Thank You and Update

From the Ministry of Outreach and Stewardship comes a heartfelt thank you. Thank you for the very generous gifts to the Giving Tree! We were a bit afraid that because there was no real tree from which to select items to send to Long Creek Youth Development Center that our gift would not be as it's always been. We needed a bit more faith in you.

You did give generously!! The cards and checks came in through the mail slot at the church office, put on Elaine's desk, and in the mail. All the cards and checks were delivered to Stephanie Netto at Long Creek on Dec. 18th. One item came after that and still needs to be delivered. Those that sent checks will hear directly from Long Creek. We learned a bit about gift cards which I'll write about at another time.

For those interested, here is a short report on how much and what you gave.

| Gift cards: | Total amounts of value: |
|--------------|-------------------------|
| McDonald's | \$115.00 |
| Target | \$225.00 |
| Burger King | \$ 40.00 |
| Subway | \$ 15.00 |
| Wal-Mart | \$ 15.00 |
| Multi-choice | \$ 25.00 |
| total | \$435.00 |

Checks to the Long Creek Youth Development Center Benefit Fund which included a Donation of \$500 from the our Ministry - Outreach and Stewardship:

| | |
|-------------|-----------|
| total | \$825.00 |
| Grand total | \$1260.00 |

So thank you very much for your gifts, you are wonderfully generous people!!!

By way of other donations made by the ministry in this Christmas Season, there are always donations to Child Fund International made earlier so they can get to the children, and this month a gift of \$500 to the Kreisler Teen Shelter in Portland.

On behalf of the Ministry of Outreach and Stewardship,
Gail Dobriko for Ruth Bruns, Lynn Roberge, Mary Ellen Bossom, Bryce Roberts, Sue Hilton, Vicki Flynn and Meghan Wakefield (way up on the midcoast)!!



TRANSITIONS

E-mail, FAX, ZOOM, text, phone...even in this time of COVID-19, we have so many ways to connect and communicate. Well, here is one MORE way...

We would like to encourage you to share the news of your life and your family in this Newsletter. We miss you and all, and know that life goes on, with all its transitions, joys and sorrows.

Please share with us how you are doing.....a new child or grandchild....a marriage proposal... the passing of a relative or friend.....an educational or career milestone achieved. We want to share your joys and sorrows.

FROM THE FAMILY OF BEN CHASE (1945—1920)

Many thanks for all the Prayers, cards and thoughts to all of us.....from the Family of Ben Chase, brother of Jane Moses and Joan Deering

“God is faithful in all circumstances”



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