

GABRIEL'S HORN

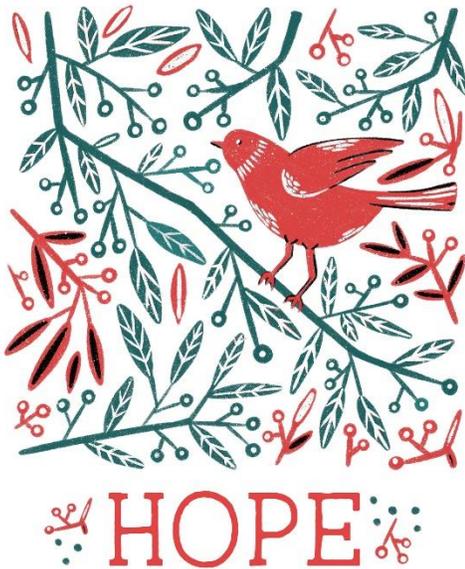
First Congregational United Church of Christ

December 2020



Dear Beloved Community,

With all the warmth of our congregation, I welcome you to Advent—a season of preparing our hearts to receive the mystery of incarnation, the Word made flesh. In Advent, as the nights lengthen, we long for the divine light to be born among us once more, and so we prepare the way—in our hearts, our homes, and our faith practices.



Advent also marks the start of a new year in the wheel of the church calendar. Perhaps, like me, you are eager to release the difficulties of the past year and look toward the future. Nevertheless, this Advent and Christmas season will be different from every other in our lifetimes. We will surely miss the sea of candlelight on Christmas Eve, the gorgeous music echoing in the sanctuary, and the deep comfort of greeting one another in person. This year will be pared back to basics, and yet I am convinced that the stark truths of Advent and Christmas are precisely what our hearts need now. Our yearning for God's presence to be made real among us cuts to the quick more than in years past. Our proclamations of trust that God will indeed come to us might echo "from a weary throat," as Pauli Murray has said, but they will echo in the cathedral of the heart. The traditions of lighting Advent candles, singing carols and welcoming our children to tell the story of Jesus' birth again may hold us fast as we lament the terrible losses our nation has sustained in this pandemic. And perhaps a

season of embodiment will grant us courage to meet the losses we experience in the body with a soul that leans into the blustery winds of hope.

I urge you in this season to participate richly in our life together as a community of faith. Create your own Advent wreath as we kindle hope, peace, joy, and love together on Sunday mornings worshiping from home. Use the Advent table tents sent as a gift from the church so that we might utter the same prayer from our tables and be united in a spiritual practice or act of mercy each week. Delight in our first virtual Christmas pageant. Consider giving to the Christmas Fund or our special offering for Christmas Eve to support Olaiya's Cradle, an independent living program for homeless young mothers. Purchase items for our toy drives. Send an encouraging Christmas card to Sasha Bruce's shelter to share the spirit of the season with a young person. Attend one of our deeply felt Advent nurtures led by Barbara Gerlach, featuring many voices and stories within our congregation. Bake cookies and drop them on someone's porch. Attend our Blue Christmas service on December 17 to experience the comfort of God's love in a season that does not feel like "the most wonderful time of the year." Send a virtual version of your household Christmas card so we can share tidings of comfort and joy with one another.

At the heart of all we do in this sacred season of Advent and Christmas lies worship—a time to draw near to God, to express our longings and receive divine comfort, to light candles amidst the shadows of these times and open our mouths with songs of peace. I pray that you will join us as we await the birth of Christ into this aching world. Prepare the way.

In Anticipation,
Amanda



Blue Christmas Service: December 17 at 7:00 PM

[Click here](#) to join us for a Blue Christmas service on Thursday, December 17 at 7:00 PM. As we approach the longest night of the year on winter solstice, we await the birth of an inner light and dare to imagine that God will come to us again. The Blue Christmas service is traditionally a time to acknowledge the underside of "the most wonderful time of the year." This year, we are even more mindful of the stress, the

amplified grief of loss, the sorrows of those living on life's edge, and the realities of a world in which violence is a lived experience for too many. From the coronavirus pandemic to bleak isolation, a racial reckoning, a challenging election season, and lowered expectations for what is possible this holiday season, we will lean into the ancient lament of our tradition as well as God's comfort. This service will meet us in our grief and struggle and lead us out toward the light with healing music, words that nurture, and the warmth of community. Join us and tend to your soul.



Advent Wreaths & Table Tents for Your Home

November 29 marks the start of the season of Advent and a new year in the Christian Calendar. This year we invite everyone to create their own Advent wreath at home so we can light Advent candles together each Sunday morning in worship from home. [Click here](#) for an instructional video from Rev. Amanda and Simon including a few

possibilities for making your own wreath. In Advent, we prepare our hearts to receive the sacred mystery of Jesus Christ being born among us once more. It is a season of great expectation and waiting. As a gift to accompany you in this season, First Church will send to active families/individuals a packet of table tents to be cut out and put together, one for each week of Advent and one for Christmas Eve. Each tent will include a reflection on our theme of Hygge: The Art of Comfort & Coziness and the weekly theme (Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love), a prayer, spiritual practices, and family activities. As we pray these prayers and engage in these practices together, may we be united across space and time this blessed season. If you did not receive a packet but would like one, please contact Cindy at churchoffice@firstuccdc.org.

Help Lead Worship this Advent & Christmas Eve

[Click here](#) to sign up to serve as a reader or liturgist for the deeply-felt worship season ahead as we launch a new year in the cycle of the Christian calendar, beginning with the first Sunday of Advent on November 29. If you have trouble using Google docs, feel free to email Rev. Amanda to sign up and she will ensure your name goes on the sign-up sheet.

Church Council

Council Capsule for November

Moderator, Kim Darling offered reminders:

- Please respond to the Regathering Taskforce survey sent by email. Council will discuss the results at the December council meeting.
- Please let Melissa Ho of the Nominating Committee know how you wish to serve the church in 2021.

Rev. Sam McFerran reported that youth are volunteering with Seabury to help DC senior with yard work and continuing their social justice workshop.

In January 2021 First Church will begin a year-long, all church audit using the Central Atlantic Conference Antiracism Audit to assess church bylaws, program, process and practice. Rev. Amanda Hendler-Voss led a discussion of the audit process.

- Quarter One includes education: developing a common language, and building an understanding of the audit through nurtures and commission conversations
- Quarter Two addresses specific ministries: commissions, council and others as delegated will discuss sections parts and report back.
- Quarter Three involves assembling results, assessment and sharing.
- Quarter Four prepare the end product: a report with action plan.

The next Council meeting is December 1, 2020

Prepared by Gail Sonnemann, Clerk

Fall Congregational Meeting November 1, 2020

Moderator Kim Darling called to order the First Congregational Church Fall 2020 Congregational Meeting held online at noon on Nov 1, 2020. Members used a Zoom polling function to vote on issues requiring congregational approval. **The following were approved.**

- The 2020 Nominations Committee report (list of officers and commission members) as revised since the annual meeting in January 2020.
- The Christian Education Commission charter July 8, 2020 expanded to include young adult ministry.
- The Social Action and Advocacy Commission policy framework written to guide the church, its staff, groups within, and members with advocacy with governmental leaders or bodies.

Designated Senior Minister Amanda Hendler-Voss reviewed accomplishments in the last six months and expressed thanks to all who made them possible. She singled out Kim Darling for her clear leadership, embodying our mission, who “has been an absolute rock for me personally and for this church.”

Treasurer David Greer summarized church finances in 2020 by saying “We are OK.” We are at roughly 50% of revenue for the year. Pledges are up above expected 75%. While we are offsite, program expenses are down, but we also have an opportunity to make some building repair investments. We will end 2020 with an estimated deficit of \$93,000 because of decreased building rental income. The deficit will be offset by a withdrawal of funds on hand in the general fund.

Lucille Dickinson presented the 2021 Asking Budget prepared by the Budget Committee (Kim Darling, Scott Day, Meg Maguire, John Smeltzer, Nora Marsh, and Lucille Dickinson).

- Decisions were based on the goals to operate increasingly more effectively as multicultural organization, to build community and to act on priority social justice goals.
- The budget assumes six months of only virtual programs and six months onsite, and the same number of staff, hours and salaries as 2020. These assumptions are not predictions but made for ease of calculations.
- Planning assumes no resumption of significant building income in the first half of 2021 and assumes rental of the larger “flex space” in 2021.
- Total predicted income of \$730,566 is 2% less than 2020 original budget adopted January 2020.
- In addition to taking the usual 3% of endowment, in 2021 the church will take \$112,600 from bequest money received in 2019 from Marlene Ross and Bruce Hansen to compensate for lost building income.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:12 PM
 Prepared by Gail Sonnemann, Clerk

Christian Education Commission

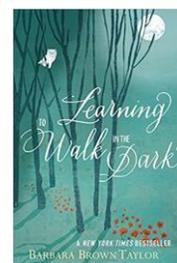


Christmas Pageant (Virtual)
December 13 at 10:30 AM

Please join us for the wonderful tradition of the children’s pageant! This year, we will reflect upon how the Christmas Story provides hope and strength during times of challenge. It will be wonderful!

Theology Reading Group: Tuesday, December 15

The Theology Reading Group will next meet on Tuesday, December 15 to discuss Barbara Brown Taylor, *Learning to Walk in the Dark*, a book recommended by Rev. Amanda for Advent. The link is <https://georgetown.zoom.us/j/94474569293>. All are welcome!



Annual Toy Drive

For the fourth consecutive year, First Church will support a toy drive for DC children and youth for two wonderful partners. The toys (or funds for toys) will be donated to Shaw Community Ministry and A Wider Circle. Shaw Community Ministry provides tutoring and mentoring to youth in the Shaw neighborhood of DC. A Wider Circle, an anti-poverty organization, has committed to provide new unwrapped toys to 10,000 children who live in DC public housing.

In the next week, Meg Maguire and Rev. Sam will share the easiest ways to support Shaw Community Ministry and A Wider Circle.

As in years past, First Church will raise funds to purchase the gifts for Shaw Ministry. We need to raise about \$300 to cover our 12 younger kids for the toys they want. To donate funds to Shaw, you can write a check made out and mailed to Meg Maguire, 4000 Cathedral Ave., NW, Apt. 221B, Washington, DC, 20016. In order to make this tax deductible, write “Christmas donation to Shaw Community Center” on the

memo line. Please let Meg know that *your check is in the mail* with an email to megmaguireconsultant@msn.com.

For A Wider Circle, Rev. Sam will share with the congregation a link for their Holiday Toy Drive Amazon Wish List. We will track our progress each Advent Week!

We are so grateful for the opportunity to share our Christmas joy with these two outstanding organizations! Please contact Rev. Sam if you have any questions at mcferran.sam@gmail.com.



Comfort for the Journey
Advent Nurture Series
November 29 and December 6, 2020

*"Comfort, oh comfort my people, says your God.
"Speak softly and tenderly to Jerusalem, but also make it very clear
That she has served her sentence, that her sin is taken care of—forgiven!
"Prepare for God's arrival! Make the road straight and smooth, a highway fit for our God.*

Isaiah 40:1-3, Message Bible

For many of us, Advent is ushered in with the words: "Comfort," "Speak tenderly," "Prepare a way." We are guided by the prophet Isaiah's comforting words to the exiles in Babylon, telling them their captivity is over and encouraging them to prepare for the long journey back to Jerusalem to rebuild their homes, their city, their temple, their nation.

These are words for our time. Comfort in the midst of a pandemic that has separated us and taken the lives of people we love. Speaking tenderly across the deep divides revealed by the recent election. The call to open a way through the wilderness of challenges that face us as individuals, families, a nation, an inter-connected world to build a more just, kind, equal, beloved community.

Our body's first response to threat and danger is fight, flight, freeze. Or we can flock: find safety by coming together—connecting, comforting, caring for one another. Advent is the season when we prepare our hearts, our world, for Immanuel—God with us, God's love made flesh in a newborn baby utterly dependent on us for its care and survival. And we never outgrow our need for this kind of comfort and care. Our hearts open to tender words, the comfort of touch, empathy and encouragement more than to criticism, judgment, and punishment.

In these two nurtures, we will be sharing times when the comforting presence of God or the tender care of other people has calmed and quieted us when we have felt lost or overwhelmed, blocked or immobilized, depressed or despairing, and helped us find our way and move forward again. We will share how we have

learned to comfort, care for, show compassion to ourselves; how our experiences of being comforted and cared for have helped us to offer comfort and care to others, build community and journey together.

Sharing on November 29: Fredda Sparks, Anthony Leonard, Robert Mann Thompson,
Sharing on December 6: Dwan Reece, Jessica Prentice, John Marsh

SINGING YOUR WAY TO CHRISTMAS

The Origins of Advent and Christmas Carols

By John Horman, Director of Music

In this issue of *Gabriel's Horn*, I'd like to begin a series of articles about the songs and carols we sing during the Advent and Christmas Season. After this issue, look in issues of the weekly newsletter for additional articles about the music we sing during this upcoming season and the stories behind their creation. Many of the songs and carols I examine will be featured in Advent and Christmas worship services, giving you a "heads-up" even before we join voices to sing them as a worshipping community.

On November 29, the first Sunday in Advent, we will be singing three very different hymns:

"O How Shall I Receive You" is a familiar Advent carol in many mainline denominations. The text was written by Paul Gerhardt (1653), a Lutheran pastor, who lived and wrote during the Thirty Years War (like Johann Cruger, who wrote "Now Thank We All Our God"). Gerhardt was well acquainted with the hardships of war, death and plague. He composed more than a hundred hymns, among them some of the finest and most revered hymns of his day. The text to "O How Shall I Receive You" was translated from German into English by Catherine Winkworth in 1863. Today her contribution to existing worship music goes fairly unnoticed, even though her excellent translations not only accurately captured the meaning of the original German, but also maintained the correct number of syllables and accents per line and stanza. Add to it her gift of finding eloquent English rhyme to match the original German rhyme and her talent is nothing short of astounding.

"O Come, O Come Emmanuel" is one of the most ancient of Advent carols. Its text is thought to date back to the days of Charlemagne. There is some speculation that some of the lyrics may be derived from Hannukah prayers spoken before the birth of Christ. Seven "Great O" antiphons were sung in the medieval church on the seven days prior to Christmas, ending with the stanza we sing as our first stanza today. The tune is definitely plainsong (a 15th century French Processional) or chant and creates an ethereal, almost eerie mood whenever it is sung. Its sense of yearning perfectly matches the Advent spirit of anticipation.

"My Lord! What a Morning" is an African American Spiritual first popularized by the Jubilee Singers of Fisk University. It belongs to a slower, more lyrical style of spiritual with long sustained phrases. "Sometimes I Feel like a Motherless Child" is similar in form and mood. The text to "My Lord! What a Morning" is about "end times" as described by Jesus in Matthew 24: 29-30 and Mark 13: 24-26. It's important to remember that the first week in Advent is traditionally a time to speak of repentance and the Second Coming of Christ. This spiritual could not be more appropriate. It is always risky to try to put yourself in someone else's shoes but it's possible that the suffering and misery of slavery presented "end times" as a welcomed alternative to life as it was. Giving some thought to this might help us sing this spiritual with a sense of relief, even joy.

Social Action & Awareness Commission

Second Sunday offering on December 13 for the UCC's Christmas Fund

The Christmas Fund has been caring for active and retired clergy and lay employees of the United Church of Christ for over 100 years, providing emergency grants, supplementation of small annuities and health premiums, and Christmas "Thank You" gift checks each December to our lower-income retirees. Over the past nine months, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the emergency financial needs of many who serve the church have increased dramatically. In such a time as this, the need for the Christmas Fund is more urgent than ever. United Church of Christ congregations and members have blessed the Christmas Fund with their generosity for many years. This year, your care and compassion will be especially appreciated by those servants of the church who are facing a time of need. Thank you!

The generous gifts of United Church of Christ congregations and individuals to the Christmas Fund enable the Pension Boards' Ministerial Assistance team to provide the following gifts:

2019 Distribution Totals	GRANT PROGRAMS	2018 Distribution Totals
A total of \$260,500 was provided to 521 persons.	CHRISTMAS THANK YOU CHECKS for retired UCC clergy/lay employees Retirees with limited financial resources receive a gift at Christmas time as a way of saying "thank you" for years of service to the United Church of Christ.	Provided to 401 persons in December 2018, totaling \$214,100.
A total of \$1,347,419 was provided to 350 persons.	PENSION SUPPLEMENTATION for lower-income retired UCC clergy/lay employees Retirees with limited financial resources receive monthly payments to bring their household income up to a minimum level so that they can afford basic needs such as food, utilities or medical expenses.	Given to 379 persons in 2018, totaling \$1,453,050 throughout the year.
A total of \$374,577 was provided to 144 persons.	HEALTH BENEFITS SUPPLEMENTATION for lower-income retired UCC clergy/lay employees Retirees with limited financial resources receive assistance to pay their UCC Medicare Supplement Plan premiums.	Given to approximately 206 persons each quarter totaling \$429,903 in 2018.
A total of \$123,727 was given to 69 individuals and families.	EMERGENCY GRANTS for active or retired UCC clergy/lay employees Sometimes those who serve the Church face unforeseen circumstances that create financial need. Our help and emergency funds are available to assist in covering those costs.	Given to 37 individuals and families, totaling \$55,663, as of December 31, 2018.

Potomac Association Faith & Democracy 2020 Zoom Retreat, December 4-5

The Potomac Association of the Central Atlantic Conference was very active this past election season in Faith & Democracy. As we continue to insist that election officials #CountEveryVote, it's time to take stock, regroup, and imagine together how we organize as the Potomac Association in 2021 and beyond.

What: Potomac Association Faith & Democracy 2020 Retreat

When: Friday, December 4: 7:30pm - 9pm

Saturday, December 5: 9am - 11:30am

Who: All people of conscience in the Potomac Association who are ready to organize together for justice in 2021 and beyond.

This retreat will give us the opportunity to begin the reflective and relational work of organizing Virginia, Maryland, and DC in 2021. More details to come, but for now, mark your calendars. The work will continue on January 9 with an organizing and strategy session to begin the year with momentum.

Where: Online (via Zoom)

Register for Friday December 4:

[https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZMocumqDsvE9zxcSpxP9pCUYrVZKWmePa3](https://us02web.zoom.us/join/zoom-join?zjs=1&join_url=https://us02web.zoom.us/join/zoom-join?zjs=1&join_url=https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZMocumqDsvE9zxcSpxP9pCUYrVZKWmePa3)

Register for Saturday December 5:

[https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZEpc-2hqTkiGtRf6HQdLFj0KXroiv_Clc-w](https://us02web.zoom.us/join/zoom-join?zjs=1&join_url=https://us02web.zoom.us/join/zoom-join?zjs=1&join_url=https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZEpc-2hqTkiGtRf6HQdLFj0KXroiv_Clc-w)

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meetings.

Christmas Eve offering for Olaiya's Cradle, a project of Sasha Bruce.

Olaiya's Cradle is a supportive, independent living program for homeless young mothers ages 18-21 and their children, for up to 18 months. Women are self-referred, and receive individual counseling, comprehensive maternal and infant health care, life skills training, education and career guidance, and childcare support and parenting training to enable them to achieve self-sufficiency. Residents graduating from the program receive follow-up support and housing assistance to help them maintain stability.



A Great Way to Support Local and Minority-owned Businesses!

The 16th Annual Downtown Holiday Market, Washington D.C.'s outdoor shopping village, kicks off the holiday season Friday, November 20. The beloved outdoor market continues to support small businesses and entrepreneurs across the region, welcoming shoppers for a safe, secure, and enhanced shopping experience in the heart of the District this year.

Operated by the DowntownDC Business Improvement District (BID) and Diverse Markets Management, this year's market will move off its previous sidewalk location to take over two entire blocks of F Street NW, from 7th to 9th Streets NW. The outdoor shopping village's increased footprint will allow for wider aisles on the street and guests can shop confidently in a safe and socially distant shopping experience in accordance with current COVID-19 guidance. *Enter the market immediately in front of the entrance to the National Portrait Gallery at 8th & F Streets, N.W., pedestrian flow will be one-way.*

This year's retail lineup will feature more than 70 exhibitors including Black-owned and minority-owned businesses. One of the vendors is Mundo Handmade, from whom we purchased the Nicaraguan pottery when we were doing the pottery sale. Six food vendors will provide tasty treats and hot beverages, spread across the market. Exhibitors will offer enhanced displays to ensure safety practices including contactless and convenient payment methods for purchases, and simplified product offerings and set-ups. A list of exhibitors and a map of the site can be found here: <http://www.downtownholidaymarket.com/>.

Parking at the church: Laz is keeping the garage open from 6:00 AM until midnight, seven days per week. But the church elevator lobbies on the parking levels and the front doors at street level will remain locked so you will need your access card/fob to enter into church space. The parking validator is on the desk in the Narthex. **While in church space, you must be masked, socially distanced, and proceed quickly rather than lingering.**

WHEN: Friday, November 20 to Wednesday, December 23

HOURS: 12:00 PM to 8:00 PM

WHERE: F Street NW between 7th and 9th Streets NW

December Calendar

Tuesday, December 1

6:30 pm Church Council

Wednesday, December 2

12:15 pm Break Away Meditation

Thursday, December 3

7:30 pm Choir Zoom Meeting

Friday, December 4

2:00 pm Hand Chime Rehearsal

Sunday, December 6

Second Sunday in Advent

9:30 am Sunday School

10:30 am Worship

11:45 am Adult Advent Nurture

Monday, December 7

6:00 pm Monday Small Group

7:30 pm Care of Parish Commission

8:00 pm Young Adult Group

Wednesday, December 9

12:15 pm Break Away Meditation

Thursday, December 10

5:30 pm Finance Commission

Sunday, December 13

Third Sunday of Advent

9:30 am Sunday School

10:30 am Worship, Children's Pageant

Monday, December 14

6:00 pm Monday Small Group

8:00 pm Young Adult Group

Tuesday, December 15

6:00 pm Worship Commission

Wednesday, December 16

12:15 pm Break Away Meditation

6:00 pm SAAC Meeting

Thursday, December 17

7:00 pm Blue Christmas Service

Friday, December 18

2:00 pm Hand Chime Rehearsal

Sunday, December 20

Fourth Sunday of Advent

9:30 am Sunday School

10:30 am Worship

Lessons & Carols

Monday, December 21

6:00 pm Monday Small Group

8:00 pm Young Adult Group

Wednesday, December 23

12:15 pm Break Away Meditation

Thursday, December 24

Christmas Eve Service

Friday, December 25

Christmas Day

Church Office Closed

Sunday, December 27

10:30 am Worship



**FIRST CONGREGATIONAL
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

Ministers – Friends & Members of the Church
Designated Senior Minister – Rev. Amanda Hendler-Voss
Associate Minister – Rev. Sam McFerran
Director of Music – Mr. John Horman
Building Manager – Mr. Byron Adams
Administrative Assistant – Ms. Cindy Dobbs

Sexton – Ms. Ines Marquez
Members in Discernment – Dwight Davis, Lynaya Morris

945 G Street NW, Washington DC 20001
Phone: 202.628.4317 • Fax: 202.347.4911
www.firstuccdc.org