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GABRIEL’S HORN HORN

First Congregational United Church of Christ

**December 2021**

A person in a blue shirt

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Beloved Community,

In Advent, we enter a new liturgical year in the life of the church and prepare our hearts to receive God’s great gift of incarnation. It is a season of longing as we anticipate the holiest night of the year—the eve of Jesus’ birth, when God comes to us once more. Our Advent theme, *Close to Home,* speaks to the “already/not yet” tension of our faith: God is with us and for us and within us, yet our everlasting home that tugs heaven down to earth has not yet been realized. When something “hits close to home,” it affects us deeply. During Advent we draw on scriptures, themes, and rituals thick with emotion. Each week we light an additional candle amid lengthening nights, drawing closer to that night when the Christ light is shared by all. And while we draw close to home, we also recall during this rich season that we have not yet arrived. Perhaps you are grappling with profound loss and loneliness or facing the existential grief spawned by climate change. Here at the church, our staff team is not yet complete, and we ache because we are still not regathered in ways we had hoped or imagined. We sense that we are close to home, but we are not yet there. Perhaps somewhere along our Advent path we will be reminded that our home might be the journey itself, where God dwells intimately with us. And so, we make of this holy season a sanctuary through time, alight with candles and the warm embrace of this community which walks alongside of us.

This month is filled with opportunities to give of yourself—from the Christmas toy drive and warm clothing collection to preparing a special Christmas meal for our friends who frequent the Drop-In Center. During Advent we will connect with one another, sharing our annual cookie exchange and marveling at the intergenerational joy sparked by our Christmas pageant yet again. Our worship will include the lighting of our Advent candles, and we invite you to create an Advent wreath with candles in your home that you can light during evening meals or on Sunday mornings if you worship from home. We will also grieve together as we memorialize the life of our beloved Peg Lorenz, faithful friend and active member of our congregation for nearly 81 years. Our Blue Christmas service on Thursday, December 16 will acknowledge the underside of “the most wonderful time of the year” as we lean into the ancient lament of our tradition as well as God’s comfort. We will be blessed to welcome the Rev. Freeman Palmer, the Conference Minister of the Central Atlantic Conference, as our guest preacher on December 5th. On Christmas Eve, we will offer two worship services—a simple, family worship service at 5:30 followed by a candle-light lessons and carols service at 7:30. However you show up, my prayer is that you will experience a taste of homecoming, that warmth and joy kindled by God drawing closer to us. May the ache and longing of this season render the simple glory of Emmanuel, God with us, even sweeter.

In Anticipation,

Amanda

**Worship Commission**

Sign Up for In-Person Worship

In-person worship is limited to 25 people per Sunday given our area’s current case rates, and we continue to require masking and physical distancing. [Click here](https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10c0a4faaa72aa1ff2-first) to sign up to worship in the sanctuary any of the next four Sundays. If you have trouble signing up with this link, please contact Kim Darling directly: [kdarling@gmail.com](mailto:kdarling@gmail.com).

**Guest Preacher December 5, 2021: Rev. Freeman Palmer**

A person standing at a podium

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Rev. Freeman L. Palmer serves as Conference Minister for the Central Atlantic Conference United Church of Christ. Rev Palmer began this call inFebruary 2019 after serving nine years as Associate Conference Minister, Congregational Development for the New York Conference of the United Church of Christ. Originally from Washington DC and a proud alumnus of Georgetown Day School, Rev. Palmer is a second career minister, attending Seminary after a fifteen year career as a broadcasting executive with CBS Inc. Rev. Palmer’s educational background includes a BA in Economics from Swarthmore College, an MBA from the University of Pennsylvania, and a Master’s in Divinity with Honors from New York Theological Seminary. Rev. Palmer was ordained at New York City’s Riverside Church in 2004 to his first call as an Associate Minister at Middle Collegiate Church in Manhattan. After living twenty years in Jersey City NJ, Rev. Palmer relocated with his spouse Donal, an 549ordained ELCA minister, to Baltimore MD, where in February of this year they welcomed their puppy Pooh. A prayer that Rev. Palmer offers daily is Psalm 143:10, “Teach me to do your will, for you are my God. May your Good Spirit lead me on level gound (NIV).”

Map

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**Blue Christmas Service: December 16 at 7:00 PM**

Join us for a Blue Christmas service on Thursday, December 16 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.

A person wearing glasses

Description automatically generated with medium confidence**Memorial Service for Peg Lorenz: Saturday, December 18 at 1:30 PM**

Join us in the sanctuary or by Zoom on Saturday, December 18 at 1:30 PM to mourn the loss and celebrate the life and friendship of Peg Lorenz. Rev. Amanda and Rev. Sam will lead the service, with John Horman serving as our musician. Polly and Judith will offer special music, and Barbara Gerlach will reflect on Peg's life, along with members of her family. We will also enjoy a slideshow treasure trove of photographs from Peg's life, put together lovingly by Rev. Sam. Byron Adams will arrange the flowers. A reception hosted by Care of Parish will follow in the Community Room. [Click here](https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/washingtonpost/name/margaret-lorenz-obituary?id=31667900) to view Peg's obituary, where you can also leave a message for her family. Please note that while masks will be required for this Memorial Service and we strongly encourage all who attend to be vaccinated (and boosted), there will be congregational singing in the second half of the service and we are anticipating up to 75 people joining us in the sanctuary. Please assess your own comfort and risk level to decide how you will participate, and feel free to be in touch with Rev. Amanda with any questions.

Calendar

Description automatically generated**Family Worship on Christmas Eve: 5:30 PM**

Join us at 5:30 PM on Christmas Eve by Zoom or in the sanctuary for our family-friendly Christmas Eve worship service. This simple service will feature scripture readings focused on the story of Jesus' birth, pre-recorded Christmas carols (dancing welcome), and it will end with lighting candles and singing Silent Night. We expect the service to last 45 minutes. Join us as we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ with the children of our congregation.

**Candle-Light Christmas Service: 7:30 PM**

Join us at 7:30 PM on Christmas Eve by Zoom or in the sanctuary for our traditional lessons and carols candle-light service. The service will include a brief meditation from Rev. Amanda, exquisite instrumentalists, and a choral anthem. It will end with the lighting of our candles as we sing Silent Night. In Bethlehem is born the one who is for all, the light of the world, the hope of the ages, as God's love comes to us once more.

**Year W: A Women’s Lectionary for the Whole Church**

Like many mainline congregations, First Church follows the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL)—a lectionary of selected readings from the Bible for use in worship throughout the liturgical year. The RCL follows a three-year cycle and in each year offers a deep focus on the gospel according to Matthew, Mark, or Luke paired with texts from the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament as well as a psalm. Because the RCL is focused, there are many stories and scriptures excluded from the three-year cycle.

This fall, the Rev. Dr. Wilda A. Gafney released her much anticipated “Year W: A Women’s Lectionary for the Whole Church.” This new lectionary includes Dr. Gafney’s own gender-expansive translation of biblical texts. This revolutionary new lectionary centers the biblical stories of women and girls, many of which are not included in the RCL. Year W was field-tested with global and interdenominational conversation partners and collaboration circles comprising clergy, seminarians, and lay leaders of A picture containing text

Description automatically generatedvarious gender identities and expressions.

Dr. Gafney is a Hebrew biblical scholar and Episcopal priest, and a congregational pastor in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. She writes, “While prompted in part by my experience of hearing the scriptures read and proclaimed in nearly exclusively masculine language, multiplied in effect by equally, if not more, male liturgical language, this Women’s Lectionary is a lectionary for the whole church. Androcentrism, sexism, and misogyny in the scriptures, in their translation and in their preaching and liturgical use, hurts men and boys and nonbinary children and adults as much as it does women and girls.” [Click here](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zLfpaRhsSUI&t=97s) to view her TheoEd Talk about biblical language for a God who transcends gender.

The Worship Commission and pastoral staff are thrilled to announce we will follow Year W for the new liturgical year that begins in Advent on November 28th. You can expect new translations of the biblical text including new names for God, a fresh focus on excavated stories of women and girls in the Bible, and framing the gospel and proclamation of the gospel by centering those on the margins of biblical stories and texts. To view a conversation about “A Women’s Lectionary for the Whole Church,” between Dr. Gafney and the Rev. Traci Blackmon from the national setting of the United Church of Christ, [click here](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5FAB5nznEcY). Look forward to a nurture conversation about this new lectionary adventure at First Church.

**Church Council**

**Council Capsule**

Council met for on November 2, 2021, to attend to the business of the church,

including the following.

**Welcome Trista Dunlap**

Council voted to approve the hiring of Trista Toinette Dunlap to serve as our new

Administrative Assistant. Trista has already started and will staff the Church office

generally from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. on Tuesdays to Fridays. She will take charge of

the office email address ([ChurchOffice@FirstUCCDC.org](mailto:ChurchOffice@FirstUCCDC.org)). Trista has most recently worked as a contract administrative assistant with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) at the Department of Commerce. She previously held similar roles with the Department of Transportation and with the Administrative Offices of U.S. Federal Courts. She has also served as a membership coordinator for the Boys and Girls Club of Washington. Trista is a longtime Washington resident, who loves to cook, entertain, and watch movies. She has three children and one granddaughter. She feels moved to volunteer, advocate, and get involved in her community, and in her words to make people “feel loved, safe, and happy.” She looks forward to bringing that passion to her new role at First Church. Thank you to Lucille Dickinson and to Peter Tracey for assisting the Reverend Amanda Hendler-Voss in completing the hiring process, and to Dorothy Hickson for serving ably as our temporary administrative assistant. We are excited to have Trista on board. Please join us in offering a hearty First Church welcome.

**Director of Music Ministry Search**

Our search for a new Director of Music Ministry continues.  The search committee interviewed multiple candidates and we got to the late stages of negotiations with a finalist.  Unfortunately, due to a late changing personal situation, the finalist declined our offer.  The committee is regrouping and assessing next steps, including potential further interviews among the existing pool of candidates and possibly re-advertising the position to attract further candidates.  We anticipate that we may need to pause the search during the approaching holiday season.

We thank the committee for the considerable time and effort its members have expended to date and for carrying on with this extended search.  The committee is chaired by Marian Drake and includes Kristy Goodfellow Mills, Andrew Hamilton, Michael Hopkins, Emily Laing, and Jason Carson Wilson.  And we thank you for your continuing patience with us as we endeavor to find the best possible candidate to fill this important position into the future.

Fortunately, we have two outstanding guest musicians—Dennis Turner and Karen Bartman—who have graciously agreed to continue to provide music for our worship services through the Advent and Christmas seasons.

**Update on Racial Justice Audit**

The Church commissions have completed (or are completing) summary reports

for Council regarding lessons learned from the racial justice audit in our various ministry

areas, proposals for institutional reforms and actions we might take to dismantle

systemic racism and to increase racial and cultural diversity within the church, and

benchmarks for measuring progress. Council will use the Commission reports to

compile a final audit report for the Church as a whole. Thanks to all who are working on this effort! Questions for Council? Please contact Moderator John Smeltzer

(johnlsmeltzer@gmail.com) or Assistant Moderator Susan Anderson

(ssba92@gmail.com).

**Welcome Trista Dunlap**

**A person taking a selfie

Description automatically generated** Council voted to approve the hiring of Trista Toinette Dunlap to serve as our new Administrative Assistant. Trista has already started and will staff the Church office generally from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. on Tuesdays to Fridays. She will take charge of the office email address ([ChurchOffice@FirstUCCDC.org](mailto:ChurchOffice@FirstUCCDC.org)).

Trista has most recently worked as a contract administrative assistant with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) at the Department of Commerce. She previously held similar roles with the Department of Transportation and with the Administrative Offices of U.S. Federal Courts. She has also served as a membership coordinator for the Boys and Girls Club of Washington. Trista is a longtime Washington resident, who loves to cook, entertain, and watch movies. She has three children and one granddaughter. She feels moved to volunteer, advocate, and get involved in her community, and in her words to make people “feel loved, safe, and happy.” She looks forward to bringing that passion to her new role at First Church.

**Social Action & Awareness Commission**

## Toy Drive Update for Shaw Community Ministry, A Wider Circle, and Friends of First Church



I'm so grateful for a terrific start for our Toy Drive.  We are always inspired by the  generosity and love shared by the First Church community.  Here is our Update:

1) **Shaw Community Ministry:** Goal: $650;  So Far: $130  **20% of the way there!**  To support this cause, you can either send a check or paypal to First Church with “SCM” in the note.   Please send me an email so I can update the total.

2) **A Wider Circle:**  Goal: 50 toys; So far: 18;  **36% of the way there!**  The easiest way to support this cause is to purchase gifts from their [Wish List](https://www.amazon.com/hz/wishlist/ls/28EISJ7NV0ZQU?&sort=default).  Our goal is to purchase 50 gifts toward this cause. You can either have the gifts sent directly to A Wider Circle at 9159 Brookville Rd # C, Silver Spring, MD 20910 or bring them to the church and place them in the Toy Box.  I will bring those toys to AWC on 12/19.

3) **Friends of First Church:**For Friends of First Church, we would love for each child to be sponsored by a member of the church.   **So far 2 of the 4 children have been sponsored**. The remaining children are:

              a) A 4 year old Boy - in need of Learning Toys and Clothing (4T).  2 sets of clothes (shirt/pants) would be terrific plus 1 learning toy.

               b) A 10 year old boy - in need of learning toys and clothing (10-12 year old).  2 sets of clothes(shirts/pants) would be terrific plus 1 learning toy.

Thank you all and let's keep this progress going!

in great gratitude for each of you,

Rev. Sam

**“Good news. . . Great joy. . . All the people!” Luke 2:10**

In December, First Church will take up a Second Sunday Offering for the UCC

Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency 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. The Christmas Fund for

Veterans of the Cross is managed by the Pension Boards. Please give generously.

In the year past donations from UCC Churches funded the following:

Monthly pension supplementation for 276 retired clergy and lay employees

($1,180,187)

Health benefits supplementation for 89 retired clergy and lay employees

($274,008)

Emergency grants for 96 individuals and families ($214,649)

Christmas “Thank You” gift checks to 504 retired clergy and lay employees

($252,000)



**In-Person Christmas Cookie Exchange is Back—Dec. 19!**

We welcome you to bring approximately 2 dozen cookies to Church on December 19 for our annual cookie exchange. In order to minimize the spread of germs, Care of Parish will take the cookies and return your plate/platter/tin/etc. with a variety of cookies after the church service/Christmas pageant.  We will have labels prepared so that you can indicate if your cookies are nut free and if you would only like to receive cookies back that are nut free. No RSVP needed. Please contact Kristy Goodfellow Mills with any questions ([Kristy.a.goodfellow@gmail.com](mailto:Kristy.a.goodfellow@gmail.com), 563.580.5558).

**First Church to Sponsor Afghan Refugee Family**

On August 15th, Kabul, Afghanistan officially fell back under Taliban rule, prompting a massive flood of refugees out of the country. Nearly 70,000 of those refugees have arrived in the United States since mid-August. This is a drastic, nearly instantaneous influx for our country, which had previously welcomed a total of 97,000 Afghan refugees since October 2001. With a refugee program that was significantly diminished under the previous administration, supporting those seeking a safer, more prosperous life in our country will require a tremendous communal effort.

Therefore, the Sanctuary Committee is thrilled to inform you that we are partnering with the Sikh Gurdwara community in Rockville, Maryland to sponsor an Afghan family through the Lutheran Social Services’ [Good Neighbor Program](https://lssnca.org/take_action/good-neighbor.html) (GNP). Through the GNP, we will be paired with an Afghan family and will set up an apartment with all of the necessary furnishings and household supplies. We will also provide adjustment support to the family, including transportation to and from necessary appointments. Our two faith communities will also be partnering with [A Wider Circle](https://awidercircle.org) to gather some of the materials and support we need for our family.

So, what does this mean for First Church?

While we are still waiting to be paired with a family, there are ways we can prepare now so that we can jump right into welcoming them once we’re matched.

1. Lutheran Social Services has informed us that finding affordable housing in the DMV is slowing down the process of resettling Afghan refugees currently housed on US military bases. Let a Sanctuary Committee member know if you’re aware of any affordable housing options in the area.

2. Begin to identify furniture or other household items that you could donate to the effort. Byron has graciously given us use of one of the cages in the parking garage where we can store items. We will identify a specific Sunday in the near future where members of the Young Adult group will be on standby to help unload items and move them into the cage. As you identify items that may be of interest, please let Lindsay Swisher (Lindsay.swisher@gmail.com) know so she can keep track of potential incoming donations.

3. We will hold a special Second Sunday offering soon to raise funds that we can use to support our Afghan family, so be on the lookout for that opportunity.

This will be a longer term relationship where we help support a family over the next 6 months to 1 year as they resettle in the United States, so rest assured there will be other opportunities to get involved.

In the meantime, we thank God for this loving, caring community, and pray for the continued health and safety of not only the Afghan refugees, but of those still in Afghanistan.

Members of the Sanctuary Committee: Susan Saudek (Chair), Peter Tracey, Cynthia Hobbs, Joe Mills, James Moore, and Lindsay Swisher

**Donating Items for Afghan Family**

A picture containing ceiling, indoor, building, floor

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2.  Materials go in unit P302, northwest corner of parking, exit P3 parking lobby and turn right, it’s ahead of you.

3.  Get key from Amanda’s mailbox in the church office.  Return key to Amanda’s mailbox.

4.   Do **NOT**leave materials sitting outside P302 door!

**Upcoming Events**

**December Calendar**

**Sunday, December 5**

Second Sunday of Advent

10:30 am Worship

**Tuesday,** **December 7**

6:00 pm Drop-In Center for Homeless Youth

6:30 pm Drop-In Center Yoga Class

**Sunday, December 12**

Third Sunday of Advent

10:30 am Christmas Pageant

**Tuesday, December 14**

6:00 pm Drop-In Center for Homeless Youth

**Thursday, December 16**

7:00 pm Blue Christmas Service

**Saturday, December 18**

1:30 pm Memorial Service

for Peg Lornez

**Sunday, December 19**

Fourth Sunday of Advent

10:30 am Worship

Christmas Cookie Exchnage

**Tuesday, December 21**

6:00 pm Drop-In Center for Homeless Youth

**Friday, Dcemcber, 24**

5:30 pm Family Christmas Eve Service

7:30 pm Candle-Light Christmas Eve Service

**Sunday, December 26**

10:30 am Worship (Zoom Only)

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Ministers, Friends & Members of the Church

Senior Minister – Rev. Amanda Hendler-Voss

Associate Minister – Rev. Sam McFerran

Building Manager – Mr. Byron Adams

Administrative Assistant – Trista Dunlap

Sexton – Ms. Ines Marquez

Members in Discernment – Lynaya Morris, LaTayna Purnell

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