

Our Mission

By God's Grace, West Parish Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, is committed to Nurturing and Celebrating God's Love in our lives, in the Church Family, in the Community and in the world

January 2021, newsletter

Steeple View

**West Parish Congregational Church
United Church of Christ**



Pastor's Perspective

Hello, and Merry Christmas! I'm writing this on Christmas Eve and it sure feels strange to not be preparing for the in-person Christmas Eve services. Instead, the service was recorded last night and, in a few hours, we will be gathering near the front steps of the church to sing "Silent Night" with our candles. What a strange Christmas. What a strange year. And yet, in many ways, Christmas may have more meaning for us this year. We have been the ones in "exile," the ones "dwelling in darkness" for the light to come into the world. We need that light in a new way this year. And this is not just any light—it's Jesus Christ, the light of the world, bringing hope, joy, peace, and love.



Tim conducting Advent services online

This year I've enjoyed reading the poems of Howard Thurman (1899-1981), African-American author, philosopher, theologian, educator, and civil rights leader. He was Dean of Chapel at Howard University and Boston University for more than two decades, wrote 21 books, and in 1944 Thurman co-founded San Francisco's Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples, the first integrated, interfaith religious congregation in the United States (from the website *Godspace*)

Here are two poems from Thurman that get to the heart of many of the realities of so many people living in the year 2020.

“The Work of Christmas”

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among people,
To make music in the heart.

[*The Mood of Christmas & Other Celebrations*](#) (1985)

“Christmas Is Waiting to be Born”

Where refugees seek deliverance that never comes
And the heart consumes itself as if it would live,
Where children age before their time
And life wears down the edges of the mind,
Where the old man sits with mind grown cold,
While bones and sinew, blood and cell, go slowly down,
Where fear companions each day's life,
And Perfect Love seems long delayed.
CHRISTMAS IS WAITING TO BE BORN:
In you, in me, in all mankind.

[*The Mood of Christmas & Other Celebrations*](#) (1985)



Merry Christmas to you and your Family, may Christ's peace live in you, and prayers and best wishes for a much better 2021! Tim



Candlelight gathering on Christmas Eve

About 40 people came outdoors in the damp and rainy weather Christmas Eve to stand outside, sing *Silent Night* holding candles or luminaries, while masked and socially distanced. What a year for our church without gathering in person. It was joyous to see each other in person.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!! from the Christian Education director

Sometimes the year of 2020 has seemed so long, and yet it's still hard to believe that 2021 is upon us.

The families with young children and youth have been engaging in the Advent/Christmas season using a curriculum called "Be Not Afraid." It's a curriculum created by a company called Illustrated Ministries. The original focus of this company was creating time for spiritual practice and fellowship through coloring beautifully designed pages. However, they branched out into curriculum, and during this time of Covid (and remote Sunday School) their materials have been a wonderful fit for our families.



The Doyle family lights the Advent candle

This time of moving into a new year is often a time to look forward and backward.

Looking back at the year behind, what did we learn? What did we grieve? What opportunities were presented to us among the difficulties and griefs? As we look forward to 2021, what do we feel called to? As individuals, or families, or churches? Perhaps taking the time to journal a bit about this would help us find our grounding and faith when we struggle with the difficulties of this time in our world.

As the year begins, the children will focus on the theme, "Compassion with the World." From the curriculum is this description: "By creating fresh starts, we work with God to care for all and participate in the holy work of renewal so all may joyfully gather at the table together, receiving God's abundance. Through hearing God's instruction in Leviticus 25, the children will learn the meaning and history of 'Jubilee.' Children will see how rest/sabbath, fresh starts, and taking care of one another are all important forms of compassion and justice."

This seems like a wonderful and appropriate way to begin the new year. If you would like to share a story with the children, or show them a favorite craft of yours, they would love to see you! Shoot me an email at PboyleWight@gmail.com with your thoughts or ideas.

The CE Committee sends you peace, hope, love, and joy as we head towards the New Year and Epiphany. May the peace of Christ be with each and every one of you, this day, and every day.

~ Patricia

A Christmas message from the Maine Conference

My heart is toward you, dear saints of the Maine Conference of the United Church of Christ, and my prayers rise for you as Christmas draws near. Even as we applaud the arrival of first COVID-19 vaccines, we are applauding through tears for so much loss and fear and illness and grief.

In our public conversations this year, Christmas is named by what it isn't. It's a Christmas of can't and won't and mustn't. It's a Christmas without parties and big family gatherings and feasts that use all our dinner plates. It's a Christmas without our familiar ways of caroling and Christmas programs and dear worship traditions.

Can you remember a Christmas gift you've given that was a whole lot of work? Maybe something you made with your own hands that took a long time? Maybe a gift for which you saved all year to be able to offer? I think the can'ts and won'ts and mustn'ts of this Christmas are just those kinds of gifts. They are hard work. They've taken a long time. They are holy. They are gifts of well-being for friends and strangers. They are gifts of well-being we even give ourselves.

And. For all the isn'ts, Christmas is what Christmas is. Christmas is the gift of Emmanuel. The gift of God-with-us. My prayer for you, dear saints, is that the strangely silent nights of this season will be deeply holy nights.

The table grace of my childhood was, "Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest and let these gifts to us be blest." This year, with more empty seats around our tables, may we welcome Jesus as our dearest guest.

- Rev. Jonna Jensen, Interim Conference Minister of the Maine Conference

January Calendar Dates

Friday, January 1	Happy New Year!
Sunday, January 3	Worship on You Tube, via emailed link, website, and Facebook Communion will be live streamed on ZOOM at 10:45 AM (via email link), Fellowship time to follow, Christian Education Committee at 12 PM on ZOOM
Tuesday, January 5	Prayer Group at 8:45 AM on ZOOM Book Group at 7 p.m. on ZOOM
Sunday, January 10	Worship on You Tube, via emailed link, website, and Facebook ZOOM Fellowship time at 11 AM
Tuesday, January 12	Prayer Group, 8:45 AM on ZOOM, Trustees, 6:30 PM on ZOOM
Wednesday, January 13	Church Council at 6:45 PM on ZOOM
Sunday, January 17	Worship on You Tube, via emailed link, website, and Facebook

Tuesday, January 19	Prayer Group at 8:45 on ZOOM, Deacons at 10 AM on ZOOM
Sunday, January 24	Worship on You Tube, via emailed link, website, and Facebook Annual Meeting on ZOOM at 11:30 AM (after Fellowship time)
Tuesday, January 26	Prayer Group at 8:45 AM on ZOOM
Wednesday, January 27	American Red Cross Blood Drive, 9:30 AM-1:30 PM
Sunday, January 31	Worship on You Tube, via emailed link, website, and Facebook

Love Bowl for Heating Assistance

Love Bowl in January will go to the heating assistance fund. With so much uncertainty in the world, it is so important to remember our neighbors who are struggling. You may be warm and comfortable when the wind is howling outside. Others may have a hard time staying warm. Tim LeConey sends funds to Community Concepts for their help in our region.

Successful Christmas in a Bag

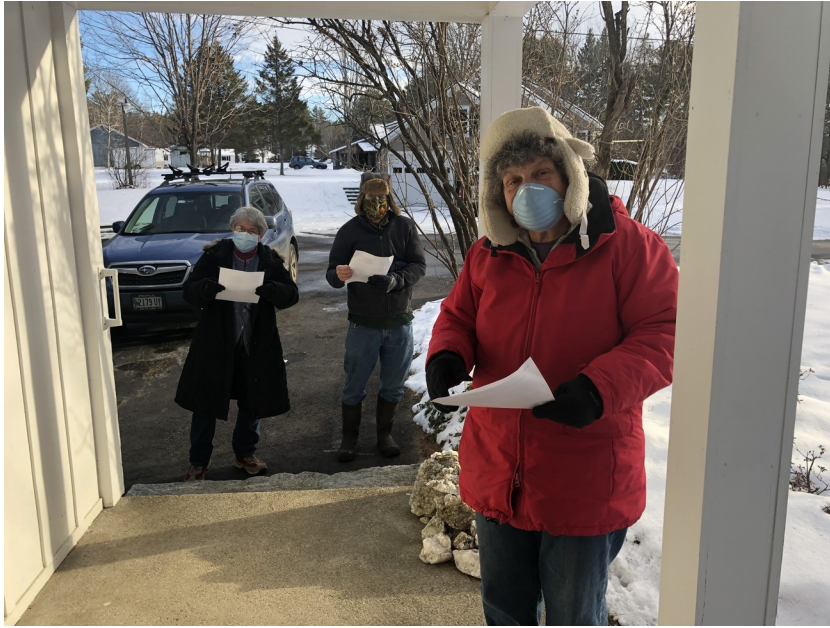
The Christmas Fair in a Bag Fundraiser was a successful substitute for the annual Fair & Tea. It was a creative approach to bring a little bit of Christmas to the community. Thanks to Jim Chandler for the idea. More than 75 bags were made. A total of \$1,916 was made for the church budget. Many hands put the spirit of Christmas in each bag.



Stewardship Update

As our 2021 Pledge Campaign is nearing completion, the Stewardship Committee wishes to thank everyone who made a commitment to keep our church and the work that it does strong in the year ahead. To date we have received \$76,498 in dollars already given or pledged for next year. This compares to \$79,013 pledged last year. We are hopeful that a few more pledges will come in and help us equal last year's number. We would also appreciate any feedback you may have about the Pledge Campaign itself.

Jim Chandler, Jim List, Marvin Ouwinga, Diane York – Stewardship Committee



Christmas caroling

A few choir members who just wanted to sing went to members' homes and sang some carols. Everyone was masked and sang outside.

Although difficult to sing through a mask, it was something that could be safely done in this time of Covid. Several mentioned this as one new event that should become a tradition.

Annual Meeting is Sunday, January 24 at 11:30 a.m.

The church will gather online this year Sunday, Jan. 24, at 11:30 a.m. to hear the reports of the church committees, vote on new officers for the upcoming year, and vote on the 2021 church budget. An email link will be sent out. You can also access the ZOOM meeting on the church website bethelcongregationalchurch.org. Perhaps you will want to have your own chili at home, to remember the usual shared chili meal.



Church in a time of Pandemic

This has been a very different year in the life of our church. An outside force, a little virus, has pushed us to rethink how we live our spiritual and social lives, individually and as a church. West Parish has a long and rich history and it seems important to capture not only what has happened in 2020, but also how it has effected us as individuals and how we have taken steps to fulfill needs in different ways. To this end I would like to invite any of you to submit your experiences and thoughts about this unusual year. Generations from now there may be interest in how we have adapted and kept the church and its work alive as well as fed our own spirit. Marvin Ouwinga, ouwingam@gouldacademy.org, our church historian will be glad to receive and collect our writings. He has also agreed to look back through church records to see if he can find information about church life during the 1918 pandemic.

Diane York

Book Group to meet January 5

The monthly book group will meet via Zoom on Tuesday, January 5 at 7 p.m. We will discuss “A Tree Grows in Brooklyn,” by Betty Smith. Anyone is welcome to the book group discussions. We will send you a Zoom link or you can go to the church website bethelcongregationalchurch.org and click on calendar to get a link for ZOOM meetings. The next months’ books are listed below.

January 5, 2021 – *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* by Betty Smith

February 2, 2021– *The Thursday Murder Club* by Richard Osman

March 2, 2021 – *The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek* by Kim Michele Richardson

Birthdays and Anniversaries

January 2 – Jeremy Dunham

January 20 – Jan Whitworth

January 6 – Ella Blair

January 20 – Linda McDonough

January 6 – Mary Isham

January 24 – Matt Keane

January 7 – Marilyn Sahlberg

January 24 – Kylie Coffin

January 10 – Jane Chandler

January 24 – Diane York

January 13 – Sharon Lyon

January 26 – Kaitlyn Brown

January 17 – Al Cressy

January 29 – Eileen Opie

January 19 – Carla Boyle-Wight

January 29 – Neil Scanlon

January 30, 2017 – Bob Elliott and Linda McDonough anniversary