

The Messenger

December 2019

The First Church of Monson, Congregational/UCC

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The Church Office is usually open on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays from 9 AM to 1 PM. Pastor Peter will be in the office on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays from 10 AM to 3 PM, or by appointment.

Please visit our website and calendar at www.firstchurchmonson.org.

***No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey,
you are welcome here!***

Our Mission

The Mission of the First Church of Monson is
to praise God through prayer,
to share the Word and love of God by promoting fellowship in the community,
and to serve as stewards of God's creation –
all in a manner that glorifies God and emulates Christ.

Hurry Up and Wait: An Advent Primer



This past month, as various groups of the church gathered for meetings, there was a great deal of excitement in the air! Christmas is coming! Conversations about greening the church, which music the choir will sing, the Christmas pageant, Christmas Eve, the Christmas concert, a Christmas potluck, Christmas outreach projects, poinsettias, snow dates, and a host of other things Christmas have filled our minds and calendars of our church.

And that's just the church. Families are making plans to gather on Christmas day. Menus are being planned, gifts purchased, holiday parties arranged, holiday hairdos sculpted. Halloween and Thanksgiving are distant memories. God bless us all, everyone!

I think it's important, however, to stop and breathe as we enter the Christmas season, and resist our natural urge (like retail stores) to jump right from Thanksgiving to Christmas.

A Baptist pastor named Mitch Randall, in a piece he wrote entitled "Why We Need Advent this Year" writes, "Amid a year overcome with moments of darkness, we need the candles of the advent wreath to shine the flames of hope, love, joy, and peace."

This is only a line from his article, but it served as a good reminder to me, and I hope to you as well, that in order for us to properly welcome the Christ Child in our hearts, we need to move through our contemplative season of Advent. We need to sing, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" long before we shout "Joy to the World."

So come, join our beloved community as we calmly, reverently, faithfully plot our course toward the manger.

Faithfully,
Rev. Peter Johnston, Pastor



On November 10th, the congregation of First Church of Monson came together to “Give Thankfully” on our Stewardship Sunday. At the conclusion of that Sunday, we had received 46 pledges for the calendar year 2020 totaling \$61,852.

Immediately following the close of the worship service, the congregation enjoyed a luncheon provided by the Stewardship Committee and the Church Council. There was a wide assortment of soups, accompanied by breads and rolls, desserts, milk, and cider. Thank you to all who helped to feed the gathering:

Kate - butternut squash soup
Laurie – chicken pot pie soup
Elaine – dessert
Carolyn – vegetable soup
Doug - beef chili
Anne – minestrone and cider
Carol – breads
Mary – dessert
Liz – milk
Carolann - corn chowder with chicken
Joe - sandwiches and set-up

If you were not able to turn in a pledge card yet, please know that we will be happy to see you and collect your pledge card at any upcoming Sunday worship service. Just drop it in the collection plate during the Offering time. If you don't have a pledge card, we will have extra cards available in the sanctuary and the narthex for you to complete and submit. If you would prefer to have another blank pledge card mailed to your home, please call the church office and request it.

Your Stewardship Team,
Doug, Laurie, Carolyn, Anne, and Pastor Peter

December News and Notes



Reminder: Orders for Christmas poinsettias are due by **Sunday, December 1**. Flowers will be delivered for the December 22 worship service and may be picked up following the December 24 Candlelight Service.

The Music Committee's Christmas Dinner and Concert will be on **Saturday, December 7**. Dinner is at 5 p.m. with the concert beginning at 7 p.m. The concert features Sarah the Fiddler. Cost is \$20.00 for dinner and concert or \$10.00 for just the concert.

The Hearts Willing Club will have its **Christmas Celebration Potluck Dinner** on Wednesday, December 11 beginning at 6:30 p.m. There will be a sign-up sheet in Fellowship Hall. Members may bring a \$5.00 gift for a gift exchange and/or a donation to Open Pantry. There will be no January meeting.

It's Really, Really, Really Good News! This year's Christmas pageant will be presented on Sunday, December 15 during the worship service. Our young people, and some older people too, will tell the Christmas story with questions, humor, and wonder.

Pastor Peter will be away on vacation beginning December 25, 2019 through January 1, 2020.

As we are now in the heating season, please be certain to tightly close the exterior doors when entering or exiting the church. Thank you.



Sunday, December 1 – First Sunday of Advent

Saturday, December 7 – Christmas Dinner (5 p.m.) followed by Sarah the Fiddler
Concert (7 p.m.)

Sunday, December 8, Second Sunday of Advent

Monday, December 9 – Loaves and Fishes

Sunday, December 15 – Third Sunday of Advent, Christmas pageant, Open Pantry,
Messenger deadline for January

Sunday, December 22 – Fourth Sunday of Advent

Tuesday, December 24 – Christmas Eve Candlelight Service (7 p.m.)

Wednesday, December 25 – **Merry Christmas!**

Sunday, December 29 – No Sunday School classes – Nursery care will be provided

Wednesday, December 31 – New Year's Eve

You are invited to sing with the Christmas Choir on Sunday, December 22, and on Christmas Eve, December 24. Rehearsals will be held immediately after the worship services on December 8, December 15, and December 22. If interested, please see Director of Music, Kiel.

Proposed Bylaw Revisions 2019

Copies of the First Church Bylaws, with proposed changes, will be available in the Fellowship Room starting on December 8. Please do not take them from the Fellowship Room. The major changes are summarized below. Other proposed changes appear in red print.

1. Grammatical and mechanical corrections were made.
2. Names of organizations were updated, ex. MACUCC to Southern New England Conference.

Article IV. Sections E. and F. (Membership, page 7)

1. Open and Affirming (ONA) language was added.

Article V. Section A. (Officers, page 8)

1. Terms of service for officers were changed to three years, with the option of a second three-year term.

Article VI (Committees, pages 13-16)

1. The size of standing committees (Christian Education, Music, Outreach, and Stewardship) was reduced from six to four members.
2. Term of service on a committee was changed to two years with the option of second two-year term.
3. Nominating Committee was eliminated; Church Council will establish the slate for Annual Meeting.
4. Pastor Parish Relations Committee (PPRC) was added as a standing committee as recommended by both Pastor Rob and Pastor Peter.

Church Council has reviewed these proposed changes. A Special Congregational Meeting to approve these changes is planned for January 12, 2020. If you find something we missed, please let us know!

Suzanne (Church Clerk) and Carol (Member-at-large)

LOAVES AND FISHES MINISTRY CELEBRATES 30 YEARS (Written by Crystal)

In December of 1989, First Church began its ministry at the Loaves and Fishes soup kitchen. Former church member, Linda, made Christmas cookies with her daughter, Ryan, and several of Ryan's friends. They decided to take the cookies to Loaves and Fishes. After confirming with the soup kitchen that it would be okay for nine year olds to bring the cookies, Ryan, Linda, and my daughter, Heather, traveled to Springfield and gave the cookies to the assembled diners on that night. While they were there, they learned that the program was looking for churches to provide the evening meal on a regular basis once a month. Linda came back and discussed the idea with me. I thought that this was a great opportunity for us to get involved, and I was sure that there were enough people in our church who would be interested, so we accepted the challenge.

On the second Monday of January in 1990, we prepared and served our first dinner at Loaves and Fishes. What started as a few platefuls of Christmas cookies has become an important and long lasting ministry for our church. I was the first coordinator, serving for about seven or eight years. Other coordinators, listed in chronological order, were Cindy, Larry, and John. Each of these persons served lovingly for about seven or eight years.

The response of our church members has been enthusiastic and committed. Every month, about 10-12 people prepare a main dish and another 10-12 prepare a side dish of carrots or salad. In addition, a group of people travel to Springfield on our given day to transport the food and serve the meal. Over the years, the servers have included the confirmation class, Sunday School classes, Youth Group members, Girl and Boy Scout troops, National Honor Society members from the high school, and other groups wanting to participate in community service. More recently, our servers have been a dedicated group of retirees who consistently make the trip on the second Monday of each month.

What a blessing this ministry has been for so many. Our kids have learned about poverty and homelessness firsthand, in a way that encourages compassion, not judgment. Our congregation has had the opportunity to serve others every month, either by preparing food or serving it. And the program has provided food for

those most in need. We have been God's hands and feet in the world and have fulfilled the promise in Matthew 25:40. "Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me."

As we begin the 31st year of this ministry, we have new co-coordinators. Trish and I have assumed leadership for the Loaves and Fishes program for the next several years. I would like to thank all of those who have contributed to this ministry – past coordinators, servers, and all those in the congregation who have prepared food over the past 30 years. The longevity of this program speaks for itself. This is an amazing example of the dedication and love of a faithful group of Christians who are the First Church of Monson.

The daily lectionary Scripture references for December can be found at
<https://www.macucc.org/files/files/documentsdailylectionary/december+2019.pdf>



'Southern New England Conference' It Is!

It's official! Delegates at the November 1-2 Annual Meeting voted to form a new conference, the Southern New England Conference of the United Church of Christ (SNEUCC). This new conference was formed by the union of the Connecticut Conference, Massachusetts Conference (MACUCC), and Rhode Island Conference. Delegates expressed some sadness at the dissolution of the state conferences and joyousness at the possibilities for the future.



Staying Connected

The Board of Deacons is working with Lee, our Church Administrator, to create an updated ***First Church Directory***. Lee has placed the information that the Church Office has on record for each family on 3x5 index cards. Please review the information on your card and make any necessary changes on the back.

Cards will be available in the Fellowship Hall before and after each service in December beginning December 8 or during Church Office hours. **Please return the card by December 27** so that updated directory can be created. The information on file will be used for the new directory. Reviewed cards can be placed in the indoor church mail slot or given directly to any deacon or Lee.

December Monson Open Pantry Challenge

The Open Pantry challenge for December is for pasta sauce and cereal. Other non-perishable items that have not reached that “best served by” date are always welcome. Donated food items may be left in the collection baskets located in the narthex. Delivery to Open Pantry takes place on the third Sunday of each month.

December Community Events!

Enjoy the extensive button collection and then join the sin-a-long led by Joe on flute and Gay on piano at the Keep Museum, 35 Ely Road in Monson on Sunday, December 1 from 1:30 to 3 p.m.

The Brimfield Area Master Singers (BAMS) will present their winter concert of traditional and contemporary seasonal music on the following Tuesdays: December 3 at St. Patrick's Church, 22 Green Street in Monson, December 10 at Second Congregational Church, 1080 Pleasant Street in Palmer, and December 17 at First Congregation Church, 20 Main Street in Brimfield. All concerts begin at 7 p.m. Refreshments follow. Free will donations are much appreciated.

Please come and join members of the Monson Historical Society on Sunday, December 15, from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. at the Jacob Thompson House Museum, 7 Main Street, Monson. The museum will be decorated for the holiday season. We will continue to showcase the *Hired Man's Quarters* that were recently refurbished. This attic room space was set aside for the caretaker of the property during the time that Jacob Thompson occupied the residence and may have also been used afterwards to house students attending the Monson Academy School. The event is free, but voluntary donations will be accepted, and refreshments will be served.



Baker's Lane Biscotti made its debut at the Holiday Craft Fair at First Church in East Longmeadow on November 2. It was a wonderful day and the most successful so far, with 33 dozen cookies being sold!

I started selling my biscotti and pizzelle at the Northampton Winter Farmers' Market on November 23rd and will be there every other Saturday. This market takes place at the Northampton Senior Center at 67 Conz Street from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. every Saturday.

My biscotti and pizzelle are also being sold at Pafumi's pizza in Wilbraham!

Orders are now being taken for Christmas—boxes are great gifts for colleagues, hostess gifts, family gatherings, and are great with coffee, tea or hot cocoa (yum!). Platters are available for parties, work gatherings, family functions, etc.

Boxes (1 dozen) of biscotti and pizzelle are available for \$6.00 each and platters (5 dozen) are \$32. You may call, email, text, or fill out an order form in Fellowship Hall. Ten percent of all sales comes back to First Church.

I thank you for all of your continued support!

Ciao,

Lyn Fioravanti

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