

Keeping In Touch

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE SECOND CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF STAFFORD
PASTOR: REV. DR. ROBERT R. LAROCHELLE

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A MESSAGE FROM PASTOR BOB.....

By the time you read this, the season of Christmas will definitely be in full swing! For those of us who are connected to the community of faith called church, we recognize that the four weeks prior to Christmas constitute a uniquely special time of year indeed, this season that we enter on Sunday December 3, this season we call Advent!

While Christmas and Easter stand out as significant days in the life of the church and throughout much of our world, the days leading up to them are extremely important and for us participants in this community of faith, our church, they provide an opportunity to immerse ourselves in what they might really mean for us as we enter this season we know as ADVENT, a word that is centered on the experience of COMING, specifically the coming of Jesus into this, our world.

As I see it, there is something VERY SPECIAL in what happens within a congregation through these four Advent Sundays which culminate in the celebration of Christmas! My hope and my suggestion is that we embrace these days and reflect upon their meaning!

HOW MIGHT WE DO THAT?

The season of Advent is a unique one. It is a season centered on the recognition that when December 24 and 25 come around, we will be celebrating the birth of Jesus and reflecting upon all that this Jesus stood for in his relatively short life upon this earth. Yet, along the way to that wonderful celebration, something very special happens when we come to worship. What is truly unique is that each Sunday in December leading up to Christmas Day, we experience together the LIGHTING OF A CANDLE.

This candle lighting moment centers on a different word each week, with each of the words telling us something contained within it and leading us to reflect on the connection of that word to the experience of Christmas. Each Sunday at worship throughout this Advent season, we will witness and experience the lighting of four candles, the candles of HOPE, PEACE, JOY and LOVE, each of them pointing us in the direction of that which we celebrate come Christmas Day!

In a very real sense, you could describe what we do in a congregation as rather countercultural. While Christmas preparation outside the walls of the church focuses on television commercials talking up the purchase of all kinds of items come Christmas time, one even suggesting a great time to buy an extremely expensive car, INSIDE a congregation, we are considering something different. We are pointing ourselves in the direction of what it means to really celebrate Christmas!

What we are doing really is coming to terms with the importance of the relatively short life of this baby born in Bethlehem. We immerse ourselves in the experience of a prayer and a candle, directing us toward an understanding of Christmas that goes way beyond the material and the commercial, yet rather focuses on understanding what matters in our lives as expressed so simply and beautifully in these Biblical words, found in the New Testament: "For I want you to understand what really matters...." Philippians 1:10

Our experience of Advent and those simple, special words that inspire our candle lighting at worship on these four Advent Sundays point us in the direction of this Jesus whose birth we celebrate come Christmas!

Speaking personally, I look forward with great anticipation toward experiencing this Advent season with you

here at Second Congregational Church. May we find in these next few weeks a truly special and meaningful Advent that prepares us for an outbreak of Christmas joy, the joy we celebrate when we celebrate Christmas!

May yours be a wonderful and peaceful Advent and a joyous and peaceful celebration of Christmas!

Pastor Bob

Rev. Dr. Robert R. LaRochelle, Pastor

Christ Climbed Down
from His bare Tree
this year
and softly stole away into
some anonymous Mary's womb again
where in the darkest night
of everybody's anonymous soul
He awaits again
an unimaginable
and impossibly
Immaculate Reconciliation
the very craziest
of Second Comings----- from the poem CHRIST CLIMBED DOWN, Lawrence Ferlinghetti

TREASURER'S REPORT

Category	Year-To-Date	Budget-To-Date	Percentage
R21—Freewill	\$ 1,112.63	\$ 916.67	121%
R22—Pledges	\$ 15,682.00	\$ 16,666.67	94%
R23—Contributions	\$ 4,336.94	\$ 5,833.33	74%
R24—Fund Raising	\$ 8,260.02	\$ 8,333.33	99%
Capital Campaign	\$ 1,469.00	\$ 2,106.67	70%

Thru October 31, 2023

Looking ahead to the budget for 2024, I foresee the need to increase our income if we are not to begin depleting our invested funds. Based upon 2023 giving the difference between expenditures and income is nearly \$18,000. If it is within your means for an increase in giving I would urge you to do so. I also acknowledge that with limited numbers our options for fundraisers is somewhat limited as well. The Trustees continue to do all they can to contain expenses. A change in our property insurance carrier has resulted in a \$1500 per year saving while providing increased coverage. There are not enough reductions in expenses to balance the budget, so increases in income will be needed as well.

Ken May, Treasurer

Jesus Is The Reason for the Season

CHURCH COUNCIL

Council met on Tuesday 11/14/2023 at 6:30, reports were read and accepted some highlights as follows:

- Pastor Bob reports that he has participated in meetings including a review of our Safe Conduct Policy and Procedure, contact with homebound members, emailing twice weekly messages to the 43 people on our email list, meeting with members who request a meeting and staying in contact with the local clergy association as well as the Tolland Association. He is preparing for A Thanksgiving program of prayer offered on Facebook as well as the Advent Season.
- Treasurer reports that all bills and obligations have been paid and met. He also reports that we have been holding our own as far as spending is concerned. Now we have a pastor so additional spending will occur going forward. He also suggested moving some money from a passbook account into a 18 month CD at 5% interest as soon as he is able to get to the bank.
- Diaconate reports that people on our 'check in list' will be receiving fall plants and a card to let them know we are thinking of them. On the last Sunday of November we will be Greening the Church in preparation of Advent which begins December 3rd. While Bob is off for two previous Sunday commitments Sarah and the deacons will be filling in.
- Trustees report that Tom Hoefle has repaired the toilet plumbing issue in the parish house - thank you Tom. Tom also looked into the humming sound coming from the hot water heater this will require an electrician. We met with Anderson and Krause to compare their insurance policy against the one we currently have and found their policy to cover more issues at an increased benefit for \$1,630.00 less that we are paying now, it was decided to make the move to this policy. Frontier has upgraded us to fiber optic for phone and internet at a price that is less than what we were paying for phone alone.
- Financial Secretary reports that we only have received 7 pledges so far totaling \$9,420.00 for pledges, \$936.00 for missions and \$1340.00 for Capital Campaign.
- Stewardship reminds us the annual appeal stewardship Sunday is November 26th. Please prayerfully consider what you might pledge for next year.
- A reminder to all chair persons or others who wrote SOPs to review them and make any necessary changes printing out revised SOP and put it in SOP note book in the church secretary's office by November. Please feel free to see me if you need help.
- Missions reports Thanksgiving food is all set and Christmas food will be next.
- Nominating is still looking for a few people to fill some open positions within our church.

The next council meeting will be December 19th at 6:30 pm.

Bruce Ladr,
Church Moderator

TRUSTEES

Most of the work day tasks have been signed up for or completed, but we do still have a few tasks left. A proposal was written for a side by side comparison with our insurance company. A few of us met with Michael from Anderson Krause to see how the insurance we have now compares with theirs. We voted to switch insurance companies to Anderson and Krause as of January 1st, 2024. There were several reasons why including us getting more insurance in just about every area for less premiums. This company is also family owned and has a lot of experience with UCC Churches like ours. The difference in premiums are as follows for Guide One we were paying \$8,868 per year with an average of 8 to 11 percent premium rise yearly. With Anderson and Krause we will be paying \$7,238 with a guarantee of no premium rises through all of 2024. This gives us a savings \$1,630 for the first year. Copies of the proposal are in the Pastors office, Secretary's Office and with our Moderator and Trustees, if anyone wants to see a copy. During the insurance process we were asked to give a few things including policy on Safety and Safe Conduct. With the help of Reverend Isaac Lawson and

Bruce Ladr's previous written policy we were able to update our Safe Conduct policy. It was looked at by all council members, and will be voted on at the next council meeting. There will be revised and completed copies in all places stated above if anyone wants to look it over. I can also email you a copy.

We also decided to form a Safe Conduct Committee of three persons. This committee will be responsible for making sure all training logs are completed and signed, disclosure forms are completed by all volunteers working with children, and confidentially filing all background checks/CORI checks if they need to be done. We feel it is important to be up to date on all of these matters, and continue being as safe as we possibly can. Thank you!

Respectfully submitted,
Andrew Greaves, Board of Trustees Chairperson

DEACONS

Hello everyone,

Four people on our Check-in list received mums and cards. We will be handing out something for Winter as well. I am grateful for all of the deacons who volunteered to do in-person deliveries- something that is very important to keep people in our community together, regardless of any of the things that prevent us from being together on Sundays.

Advent begins December 3rd. Thank you to everyone who helped "green" the church, and make everything look festive for the Advent season.

Last month, when we announced the purpose of the Deacon's Fund, we received many more donations towards it. Thank you for supporting your fellow congregation members in this important collection. Times are hard, and everyone needs a bit of help now and then. Current balance is \$815.57.

Sincerely submitted in the peace and service of Christ,
Sarah Roman Greaves

IN AND AROUND THE CHURCH ...

Our Hearts and Prayers reach out to our Brothers and Sisters who have various needs and struggles: continued prayers for Sarah, Lucy, Donna and Doris ... prayers for the Butler Company to be ready for snow ... prayers for Corrine Sedor as she heals from delivering Caleb ... prayers for peace and continued growth of our church family ... prayers for Janet and Rich as Rich battles lymphoma ... prayers for those who have lost their lives in the conflict in the Middle East, and those with family and friends in danger there, including Reema ... prayers for peace for everyone ... prayers for Bertrand and Claire ... prayers for peace at heart for the memories that make us sad ... prayers for my brother-in-law Gary ... prayers for Ricky who had brain surgery ... prayers for all who suffer from mental illness and addictions ... prayers for world peace ... prayers for Joe and Florence and Janet and Rich ... prayers for a successful job search ... prayers for a good friend Derek ... prayers for my sister Angela battling cancer ... prayers of thanks for Veterans young and old who have served our country ... prayers for Bruce having back surgery ... prayers for the kids in our program ... prayers for Juliana as she gets over her illness ... prayers for world peace ... prayers for families who gather to give thanks ... pray for the evil to come into the Light ... prayers for the children of the world facing hardships and tragedy ... prayers for my brother Dave's wife Phyllis diagnosed with lung cancer.

Celebrations: Mike and Michelle Sedor 14th Anniversary ... granddaughter Hannah celebrated her 8th birthday ... thanks for a successful Holly Bazaar.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year

A LIGHTER MOMENT. . .

Why did the Christmas tree go to the dentist? It needed a root canal!
What did Luke Skywalker say after he planted a Christmas tree farm? May the forest be with you!
How did the two rival Christmas trees get along? They signed a peace tree-ty!
How do Christmas trees get ready for a night out? They spruce up!
What was the Christmas tree's favorite shape? A treeangle!
What is a Christmas tree's favorite candy? Orna-mints!
Why are Christmas trees so fond of the past? Because the present's beneath them.
What do you call cutting down a Christmas tree? Christmas chopping!
Why are Christmas trees so bad at knitting? They have too many needles.
What did the beaver say to the Christmas Tree? Nice gnawing you!
What do you get when you mix a Christmas tree and an iPad? A pineapple!
What did one Christmas tree say to another? Lighten up!
What month does a Christmas tree hate the most? Sep-timber!

BIRTHDAYS AND ANNIVERSARIES

December Birthdays

6 Sarah Roman Greaves
6 Forrest Burke
13 Emma Hatch
31 Janice Gowdy

December Anniversaries

None

MISSION MOMENTS

As you all know, we are right in the middle of the busy mission's season. With your generous support, we were able to supply four families with a full Thanksgiving meal. Thank you so much. Erin at the Crystal Lake Food Pantry was so grateful for our donations. A special thank you to the Dickson family who gave us one complete meal for the Pantry. A total of five bags were delivered, weighing 75 pounds. Also, 11 pounds of other food items were delivered. You folks are so appreciated.

On to Christmas! The committee is in full swing organizing all the areas where we have offered the help of our church family. Let's start with the Crystal Lake Food Pantry. This year they have changed the way they are going to offer their Family Christmas Dinners. Instead of giving the actual food, they have rethought the process and are now offering the families gift cards toward the purchase of food items of their choice. The NIN jar is on the coffee counter awaiting your donations. Just as a point of reference, the usual cost of one meal has been between 50 and 60 dollars. As of the date I am sending my submission, November 22, we have thus far collected \$147 dollars. Thank you for your continued support, past, present and future.

Five gift tags for a young ones Christmas gift were offered to our congregation on November 5th and 6th. All the tags were spoken for and we are looking forward to seeing the unwrapped gifts under our Christmas tree in the Narthex. These gifts as well as the smaller gift items used as miscellaneous additional kids gifts are due on December 3rd. The miscellaneous items are being collected in the Narthex as well. In addition, the scarves, hats, mittens/gloves and socks are due on the 3rd also.

For the first time, The Town of Stafford Holiday Gift Assistance Program in a collaborative of Stafford Social Services, The Stafford Family Resource Center, The Stafford Childhood Collaborative, The First Selectman's Office and The Stafford Resident Trooper's office. The plan is for the Senior Center meeting room to be turned into a small shopping area where the miscellaneous gifts will be displayed and the parents of the recipients will walk through and do some "shopping". To make this work, Grace Parrow, Social Services Director is

looking for volunteers to help out on the distribution day. Friday, December 15th , proposed times are 9:00 am to 7:00 pm. If you would like to be a volunteer for a few hours that day, please call Grace at 860-684-3906.

Regarding our annual winter coat drive: so far eight coats have been brought in and hung on the coat rack in Fellowship Hall. We are waiting to hear back from Jenn at the Social Services office letting us know where to bring the coats. If it turns out that they are not running the program this year, we will contact the Hockanum Valley Community Council in Vernon to see if they are collecting winter outerwear. So if you have any coats that you no longer want, please bring them in to Fellowship Hall. We know that this is a lot that we are asking for but please know that your generosity is greatly appreciated by those who are recipients of your gifts.

Blessing of the Season,
Judy, Michelle and Linda
Your Missions Committee

SUNDAY SCHOOL

Hey everyone! Sunday School has been awesome this year. We welcome two new students to our classroom and are now at 10 students. Due to the growth of our Sunday School this season we have decided to stick with a hybrid class when we have 7 kids or less, and to split the class up younger kids, and older kids when we have 8 or more. Lessons will be planned for all scenarios, and we are blessed to have such a great class. We are always looking to grow more so if anyone ever hears of anyone looking for a Sunday School, or wants to tour the facilities, let us know! This coming month we will be decorating a tree, hanging a wreath, and making Christmas Cards for our shut-ins, people at Evergreen, and the Senior Center. This will be done on December 3rd and 10th, but could start the week before if we have a big turnout with our students. This will teach the kids about Community Service. We as teachers look forward to doing these kind of things with the children and giving back to our Community. Thank you!

Andrew Greaves

STEWARDSHIP

Thank you all for your 2024 pledges. Your pledges are extremely important for the operation of this church. If you have not pledged yet, but would like to, there is still time. Please either mail your pledge slip to the church, or drop it in Sunday's offering. If you need a pledge slip or have questions about pledging, please contact:

At this time we have received twelve pledges. The total for the general fund is \$15,995, for missions \$1,306 and for capital campaign \$2335.

Lisa Ostrowski
860 966 8966

Thank you again,
Stewardship Committee

HOLLY BAZAAR

Thank you to this wonderful Church family! We had a very successful Holly Bazaar with 19 vendors, over 20 raffle baskets, lots of baked goods and hot soup!! Without the teamwork and support it would not have been so successful!! We were able to raise over \$2,144.50!! A wonderful job!

Have a very merry Christmas!

Kim Dickson, Coordinator

December 2023

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					1	2
3 - Hope Worship Service 9:30 AM Diaconate 11:00	4	5	6	7	8	9
10 - Peace Worship Service 9:30 AM	11	12	13	14	15	16
17 - Joy Worship Service 9:30 AM Food Bank Sunday	18	19 Church Council 6:30 PM	20	21	22	23
24 - Love Worship Service 9:30 AM	25 Christmas Day	26	27	28	29	30
31 - New Years Eve Worship Service 9:30 AM						