



THE TOWER TIMES
THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
28 Green Street, Gardner, MA 01440
December 2020



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Telephone: 978-632-2142

Dear Friends,

As we continue our journey through Advent, I want to share a story with you that I first heard shared by the Rev. Cameron Trimble. She prefaced this story by telling us that it is a true story that never really happened. That description seems about right.

One night, four Rabbis were visited by an angel who awakened them and carried them to the seventh vault of the seventh heaven. When they arrived, the Rabbis beheld the sacred wheel of Ezekiel. Somewhere on the descent between heaven and earth, one Rabbi lost his mind after seeing such splendor. He wandered the earth frothing and foaming until the end of his days.

The second Rabbi was extremely cynical, "I just dreamed Ezekiel's wheel" he thought. "Nothing really happened."

The third Rabbi carried on and on about what he had seen. He was utterly obsessed. He spoke and lectured non-stop about how Ezekiel's wheel was constructed and what it all meant. In his own way, he betrayed his faith.

The fourth Rabbi, who was a poet, took a pen and paper and sat near the window writing song after song. He praised the mourning dove, he praised his daughter in her cradle, he praised all the stars in the sky. That Rabbi lived his life better than before.

It is Advent. In this season, our faith calls us to Wake Up! Our faith calls us to keep watch for the birth of the Christ-child, the in-breaking of God's Spirit among us. This is easier said than done in a season filled with hustle and bustle, endless to-do lists, fraught family relationships and lingering ghosts from past Christmases. It is easy to lose our focus.

The in-breaking is happening around us and inside us, if we make room. When it happens, what will we make of it?

Some of us will under-value it.

Some of us will over-value it.

Some of us will miss it entirely.

Some of us will be captivated just enough to let a new image awaken within us. We will continue our life-long task of learning to become fully alive. We will learn to celebrate the gift of new birth.

New life is sprouting all around us if we will only take notice.

Peace and Blessings to You and Yours,

♥ Rev. Karen



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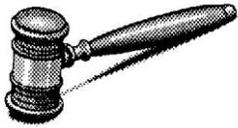


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Council Corner



December 2020

Here is some important information from our latest church council meeting held November 19, 2020. As always, everyone is invited to attend and participate in these monthly meetings to be involved in the life and business of our church.

1. For church activities – indoor, outdoor, etc. we will continue to follow the guidelines from the state of **RED** = No in person activities; **YELLOW** = outdoor activities only; and **GREEN** = indoor or outdoor activities.
2. The Star lighting will be at 5pm on Nov. 29 to kick off the Advent season.
3. Advent plans and the event on Dec. 19 & 20 are still in the works. Please mark your calendar for this event.
4. Financially, the church remains on target with the budget presented at the January Annual Meeting.
5. This year's pumpkin patch was the most successful to date and raised approximately \$7000 for our church and over \$700 was donated to Alyssa's Place. Thank you to everyone who helped!

Everyone is welcome to attend these meetings on the third Thursday of every month at 7pm.

Blessings,
Christy Scott



WHEN: Saturday December 12, 2020

TIME: 10am-1pm

WHERE: Fellowship Hall (if COVID **GREEN**)
 Driveway Green St. (if COVID is **YELLOW**) and
 Cancelled (if COVID is **RED**)

We will be hosting our annual (but due to COVID, scaled down) holiday fair on Saturday, December 12. We will need donations for the bake sale table and the basket raffle.

Additionally, We will also have the luminaries for the Dec. 19 & 20 Event available for a donation at the fair.

If you have any questions or want more information please reach out to Christy Scott at 978-407-7145 or cgstars259@gmail.com

Mission Council News

THANK YOU to everyone who has participated in our recent worthwhile projects.

UNICEF

I have sent a check to UNICEF for \$186.06 which is very close to what we have sent over the past two years. All of that change added up and this was an

excellent amount to send to help children in the areas of Health, Education, Clean Water and Nutrition.



Alyssa's Place & Pumpkin Patch

A personal letter and a check was hand delivered to Alyssa's Place for \$710.29. Our Pumpkin Patch this year did the best ever over the past 5 years. We were therefore able to keep 35% of our profits and thus we were able to give a larger check to Alyssa's Place. Thank you to all who worked shifts including volunteers from Alyssa's Place. It is certainly a beautiful site to see all of those pumpkins on our lawn. We make quite a statement in the Community which is excellent for our Outreach efforts.

Shoebboxes

Thank you to all who did a Shoebox. This year we delivered 17 to the Collection Site. The joy and happiness that shows on the faces in the videos of those that receive a shoebox is really overwhelming and touches your heart.



Angel Project

Our Angel Project for needy children from the Department of Children and Families is already underway. If you would like to participate, please contact Pat Darby at patdarby6@yahoo.com and a list of names will be sent to you. The gifts are due back by Dec. 13th in gift bags. You can brighten the Christmas of a child through your generosity. Submitted by Pat Darby



Handbell Choir



The Handbell Choir is recording many beautiful selections for the coming weeks that will be played on Zoom. For uplifting and enjoyable music that will surely put you in the Christmas Spirit, please join us on Zoom. The entire Handbell Choir feels that it is so enjoyable to be back with each other (social distancing of course) and making music together. Each member gives of their time and talents by being a part of our fine Handbell Choir.
submitted by Pat Darby

ZOOM WORSHIP 9 am



Meeting ID - 899 3289 2745
Passcode - 823921

Christian Education News



Season's Greetings

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Hoping this finds everyone well and finding the joy in the season.

Thank you to the Youth Group for the beautiful work you have done to set up the sanctuary for this Advent, Christmas season!

The church year begins on the first Sunday in Advent. To launch the new church year, gather together all the Bibles in your home. As the new church year begins start a new devotional time tradition-or continue an already established tradition read the story of Jesus birth. Take pictures of you and your family members sharing the good news. Share with us so we can share the stories of our faith community during these different times.

This Advent we are reminded to be alert to this God who shows up in Jesus of Nazareth. In Jesus we have hope because we have the one in whom the truth of his words will never pass away, never end, never fail So live life with gusto, with courage, with hope, and stay awake, keep alert, don't give up . How does public worship, reading the Bible and prayer help you stay awake to Jesus' coming into our lives?

Advent is a time to recall the basic needs of life: a loving and gracious God and justice and mercy that all may have enough to live. In what ways can you "stay awake" this Advent season by caring for the needs of others .

May this season of Advent and Christmas give you insight to our Lord and the courage to be present and strong in your faith and to live out all that God is calling you to do here and now to believe even when times are difficult and uncertain....

Important dates to remember

Advent Star lighting drive up Sunday, November 29, @ 5 pm on FCC front lawn.

Share your Hope, Joy , Peace and Love by purchasing Luminaries Contact Christy Scott or call church office

Let your messages be the light on December 19 & 20

December 2020



CAC toy drive sorting, Sunday December 13 at 2pm-4 volunteers still needed

Contact Sue Rader to sign up ASAP, please

Saturday December 19 & Sunday December 20

Come enjoy the music and light presentation **4:30-6:30pm**

The story of Jesus birth told through a story walk music and live animals.

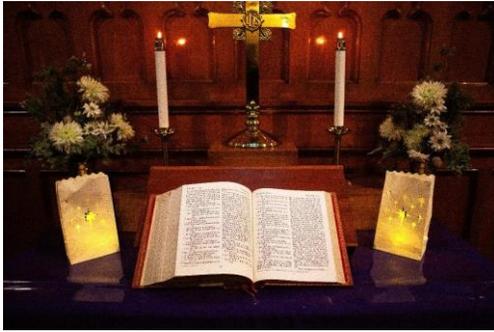
Dress for the weather as this event is primarily outside. Masks and social distancing required.



Many Blessings,

The Christian Education Committee





Be the light share
your prayers of

Hope, Joy, Peace, & Love

Luminaries available for a small donation

Lighting of the luminaries with be
December 19 & 20 4:30-6:30 pm

Filling the night with music and light

First Congregational Church of Gardner
28 Green Street

For more information on purchasing a luminary
contact Christy Scott at 978-407-7145 or
cgstars359@gmail.com.



Deacons News

Advent planning is well underway. We must approach Advent differently given the Covid situation. Each household should have been supplied with a set of candles for an at Home Advent Wreath. Thanks to the delivery crew! Be creative in making your advent "wreath or center". No limits here. We will be requesting photos of your "wreath or center". In your Advent Packet are various readings and prayers that go with each week for you to use if you like.

We want to have many faces and voices in our worship services. You can help by doing readings in

Zoom, recording your advent wreath lighting, doing a hymn sing along or This little Light and completing the Candlelight Challenge.

Deacons for the Month of December are Jane and Bill Clabaugh.

The entire group of Deacons have been prayerfully working to create meaningful worship services given the Covid Restrictions. We are hoping that the Covid rates go down quickly so we can once again gather.

Submitted by Jane Clabaugh

**Please notify the church office at fccgardner@gmail.com or 978-632-2142 with dates/locations of upcoming meetings!
Thank you.**

Resources

The USDA has authorized **Free Meals** for All Kids through the end of the school year. As the positive cases increase and more remote learning will occur, here is a link for the Meals 4 Kids Locator: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/meals4kids>

Massachusetts: National Domestic Violence Hotline

1-800-799.SAFE 7233
TTY 1-800-787-3224
<http://www.thehotline.org>

Gardner Community Action Committee

294 Pleasant Street
Gardner, MA 01440
978.632.8700
<https://gardner-cac.org>

If you have any helpful resources to share please email them to the church office.

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**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DOESN'T
TAKE A HOLIDAY**

We are all aware that the holidays are fast approaching us. Each one of our five senses, experiences overload. Society wants us all to believe that everyone experiences a pleasurable

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time with family and friends. These images we receive, regardless of how we receive them, are telling our subconscious that during the Holidays, everyone is jubilant.

The holidays can be a dark, scary time for some people. Victims of domestic violence are not focused on what gifts to buy; rather how they can survive.

The stressors during the holidays include financial, social, and relational, to mention only a few. Red flags for impending danger to the domestic violence victim are hidden in the chaos of the holidays and stressors increase exponentially. These red flags may be unemployed, fear that the children may be taken away by authorities, lack of family supports, isolating, increased drug and alcohol abuse, possession of firearms, inability to resource law enforcement and court system to enforce or renew restraining orders...all combine to make the victims of domestic violence feel more unsafe and distressed. Combined with inherent feelings of low self-esteem their lives may appear hopeless. Keep in mind, during COVID-19 an increase is in upwards of 20%.

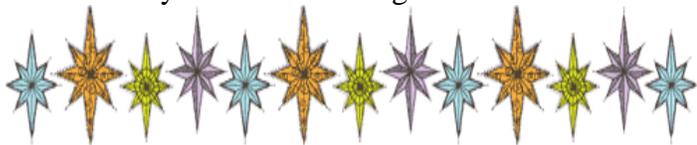
It is vital to have a safety kit in the home in case a situation arises, and may need to leave. This kit should include, clothing, emergency phone numbers, essential documentation, food, money, and a preplanned destination with transportation. This should be kept in a safe location.

If you, or someone you know is experiencing any of the red flags, please do not hesitate to call **508-755-9030 RESTRAINING ORDERS** call Gardner/Winchendon Safeplan Advocate **508-835-8664** messenger

<https://www.facebook.com/GardnerDomesticViolenceTaskForce>

Florence Dupuis

Member of Gardner Domestic Violence Task Force
Submitted by Rev. Karen Hodges



December 2020

Puzzle!

Unscramble the Christmas-themed words below, writing each extra letter on the blank to the right. Then place those extra letters in the correct spots below to discover what we receive at Christmas.



1. TGLBEHHEME _____
2. NEAGLO _____
3. NRMEDAG _____
4. ODEKSNY _____
5. AMGYR _____
6. OHESJIP _____
7. EFJUSS _____
8. ITEENMSW _____
9. SPHDSREEO _____
10. EMCFAL _____
11. TLSRA _____
12. CSSNUEO _____
13. HEVSPE _____
14. ENIN _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9		10		11		12	
13		14					

Answers: Bethlehem (G), angel (O), manger (D), donkey (S), Mary (G), Joseph (I), Jesus (F), wise men (T), shepherds (O), camel (F), star (L), census (O), sheep (V), inn (E); God's gift of love

December

2020

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1 CE meeting 7pm	2 Bible study zoom 7 pm Trustees meeting 7 pm	3 Fellowship table 4:30pm Deacons meeting 7pm	4	5
6 Worship Zoom 9 am	7	8	9 Bible study zoom 7 pm	10 Fellowship table 4:30pm	11	12 *Church Fair 10am-1pm
13 Worship Zoom 9 am *Worship at FCC 10am	14	15	16 Bible study zoom 7 pm	17 Fellowship table 4:30pm Council meeting 7pm	18	19 *Light and Music Event 4:30pm- 6:30pm
20 Worship Zoom 9 am *Light and Music Event 4:30pm- 6:30pm	21	22	23 Bible study zoom 7 pm	24 CHRISTMAS EVE Worship Zoom 4 pm *Worship at FCC 5 pm	25 CHRISTMAS DAY	26
27 Worship Zoom 9 am *Worship at FCC 10 am	28	29	30 Bible study zoom 7 pm	31	COVID CHART *red= no in person *yellow= outside event *green/grey= inside FCC	