

THE MESSENGER

NEWSLETTER DECEMBER 2023- JANUARY 2024

First Congregational Church UCC
412 4th Street Manistee Mi



From The Pastor

Dear Friends,

The season of Advent is upon us! Advent is a holy time of preparation and anticipation. We wait for the Son of God along with all of creation. We wait for the baby along with expectant Mary. During Advent we prepare, and then throughout Christmastide we celebrate!

This season our worship will be based around the question of how does a weary world rejoice? The overall theme of this series points us to remember that we are worthy of joy. That our joy is rooted in our belonging to God. And that the world needs our joy, even if we and the world are weary. The team at sanctified art has said this about the worship series this year. "This advent, we will hold space for our weariness and our joy. We will seek a "thrill of hope" in our hurting world. We will welcome joy-- even and especially if, like the prophet Isaiah, we cry out for comfort (Isiah 40:1) In this weary world, may we find many ways to rejoice.

Rev Sarah Speed writes beautiful poems to go along with each worship service throughout Advent, and I'd like to share with you now, her poem to go with the overall theme of "How Does A Weary World Rejoice"

The Last Time I say God (Prayer by Rev. Sarah Speed | A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org)

The last time I saw God face to face
I was looking at a bed of tulips.
God was every color of red.
I was merely a mortal, in awe of it all.

The time before that,
we were tying back the curtains,
looking for stars.
God was the deepest purple
and the brightest light.

The time before that,
the city was soft with snow.
God was the quiet that tucked us all in.

And in between these small gifts there were
newborn babies,
and sapling trees,
homemade bread,
the sound of a church
singing on Sunday.

...

Why, yes, we are lucky.
we are more than lucky
for the momens wehen delight and awe
unzip the weight
we carry around.

Blessings, Pastor Liz

December Birthdays

Dec. 2- John Wojcik
 Dec 4- Sally Zielinski
 Dec 5- Erin Welsh Graham
 Kathy Reeves
 Kurt Harvey
 Dec 7- Amanda Diesing
 Germanese
 Dec 8- Erin Tabaczka
 Dec 11- Ron Sluis
 Dec 12.- Dave Martus
 Ron Cowden
 Dec 20- Sage Myers
 Suzanne Schwing
 Dec 21- Will Somsel
 Dec 23- Nanci Swenson
 Dec 24- Darla Jones
 Dec 25- Mickey Finan
 Dec 27- Jacob Livingson

January Birthdays

Jan 1- Taylor Myers
 Jan 4- Bill Weiner
 Jan 8- Chere Ohman
 Kate Thomson
 Jan 10- Cecilia Postma
 Jan 11- Carl Diesing
 Jim Goodwin
 Jan 19- Andy Amstutz
 Jan 24- Eliza Warsen
 Jean Rowe
 Jan 29- Michael Ault

**December Anniversaries**

Dec 3- Stu and Kathy Swiger
 Dec 23- Kate Thomson and Kevin Postma
 Dec 28- John and Kathi Gumper

January Anniversaries

Jan 2- Rev Steve and Laurie Lashbrook
 Jan 8- Geoffrey and Jackie Burkhart
 Jan 10- Renee and Chris Myers
 Jan 27- Ron and Phyllis Cowden

December Greeters

December 3 -
 December 10- Kristen Kimm
 December 17-
 December 24 (10am)- Kristen Kimm
 December 24 (8pm)-
 December 31-

December and January Clock Winders

December 3 - Kevin Postma
 December 10- Andy Amstutz
 December 17- Jane Kendall
 December 24- Jake Deboni
 December 31- Sandy Turk
 January 7- John Helge
 January 14- Stu Swiger
 January 21- Doug Savela
 January 28- Pam Weiner



Please Consider Signing up as Greeters, Coffee Hour Hosts or Liturgists. Sign up sheets are located in the hallway next outside of the small dining room.

January

Be sure to sign up for January greeters, coffee hour host, and liturgist

December Coffee Hour Hosts

December 3 - The Wojick's
 December 10-
 December 17-
 December 24 (10am)- No Coffee Hour
 December 31-

December Liturgist

December 3 -
 December 10-
 December 17-
 December 24 (10am)-
 December 24 (8pm)- Several volunteers needed up to 10 readers!
 ****Talk to Pastor Liz****
 December 31-

Moderator's Musings

The church sanctuary is once again decked out with brightly lit greens, trees, and wreaths. The ceramic shepherds, angels, animals, wise men, and holy couple are gathered around the empty manger right down front where they belong all in anticipation of the baby's birth. The advent candles will be lit to remind us to prepare in our own special ways. This truly is a wonder-filled season in so many ways!

We are truly blessed with a wonderful staff that keep this congregation and this church moving ever forward. Our custodian, Doug Savela, does an amazing job keeping this church well prepared and looking good inside and out. Deb Sorenson, our Administrative Secretary, ensures the bills are paid, the letters get mailed, and the Sunday bulletins are printed. Joe Strouse streams our Sunday services on the internet to keep all our friends and family in touch even if they can't be here in person on Sunday morning. Jerry Stege provides the special music that makes our worship services so meaningful. And last, but certainly not least, Pastor Liz Hoy is our spiritual leader providing guidance we need to live more fulfilling lives. Now is the time for us to make a special donation so they all know how much we appreciate them and their work. Please give your check or cash to me, Elana Warsen, Abbie Huizenga, or Ron Sluis anytime before Sunday December 17th and we will ensure each member of the staff gets a special gift for this Christmas season.

We should also take time this holiday season to reflect and remember all the good stuff that happened for this congregation in 2023. We were able to provide Pastor Liz with a paid sabbatical enabling her to refresh, recreate, and renew her ability to serve as our spiritual leader. We were so fortunate to have Jane Lippert and Chris Lane fill our Sunday pulpit during the sabbatical period. Their messages filled us with the spirit to reach out and do more for our community. We had very successful fund-raising events that featured a book and boardgame sale, the annual Makers' Market, and the ever-popular Holiday Bazaar. Thanks to dedicated leaders supported by many volunteers. This congregation is reaching out to become more engaged with the local community. Our monthly mission works have benefited many organizations that provide help to less fortunate folks. We are providing safe, secure venues for meetings of members of the LGBTQ+ community as well as helping to build trusted allies in keeping with our Open and Affirming certification. We are welcoming new members who see this as a place of worship that aligns well with their personal faith journey.

We also successfully replaced both our heating boilers with more energy efficient systems that should help us reduce our utility bills in 2024. The small boiler has been totally paid for, but we had to take out a \$60,000 loan to pay for the big boiler. We were able to negotiate a relatively low loan interest rate bringing the monthly payment down to \$330. Please consider writing a separate check to cover one of these payments if you find an extra \$330 in your bank account some month in 2024! Of course, if any of you find an extra \$60,000 lying around, we sure would appreciate your help in paying off this loan in full in advance!

It is my prayer for all of you reading this that you have a safe and happy Holiday season. I know I am looking forward to all that this season brings coupled with the words of HOPE, JOY, LOVE, and PEACE for all...and ALL means ALL!

See you in church!

-John Helge

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Monthly Mission

December Monthly Mission:

Giving Tree:

Pick up a name off our giving tree and help provide local families with a wonderful Christmas

January Monthly Mission:

Food Drive

After the Holidays many families are back to having food insecurities and the food pantries need replenishing.

We will be collecting nonperishables for the month of January, and food will be donated to Echo his Love.

Fellowship Report

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who stepped up and hosted coffee hour this past year. This has gotten to be an important part of worship as so many stay and connect with friends. The kids love to get together and have fun too. So, a huge thank you. As a church family we are going caroling on a Sunday afternoon in December too some of our shut-ins. There will be upcoming announcements about it to come soon. Happy holidays to all. -Mary and Stu

Bazaar Report

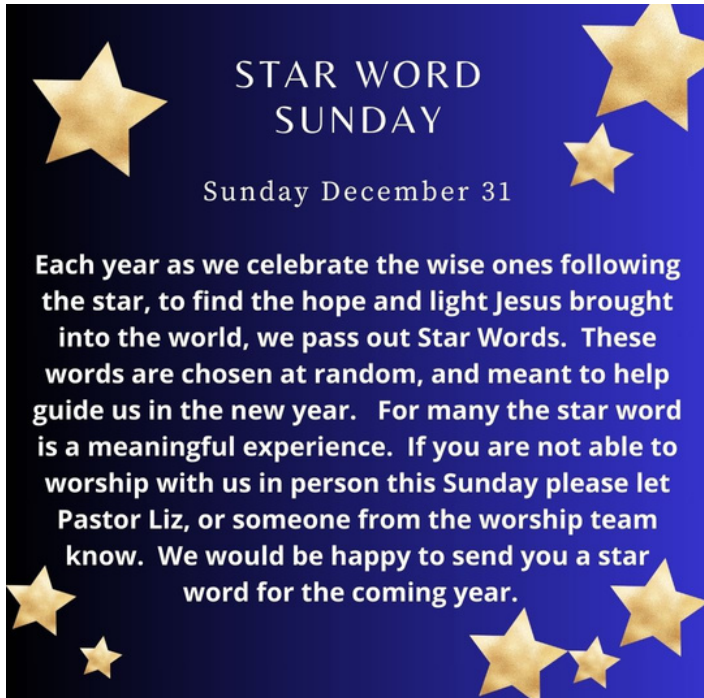
Between the bazaar and the makers market we made \$7,000. Good work everyone. A big thanks to the craft group who works year round to give us new items to sell.

The craft group made 185 placemats for meals on wheels. That is 41 yards of fabric for the back of placemats. 35 yards of batting and 40 yards of fabric for the fronts. Thank you to all who donated to make this happen. Also my friend Carolyn made 20 placemats and the Victorian quilters made 80 to help our cause.

The craft group is making a personalized mug rug for people at medical care for their birthdays .

Again thanks to the people who come to craft group. Thanks you to anyone who has dropped off fabric or anything else we need. Thanks to Tina who keeps us organized and is not even a member. Thanks to Linda for keeping me on task and to Joanne for cochairing with me.

The craft group



Ministry Report

We will begin our observance of Advent on Sunday, November 26 this year. The last Sunday will be observed on December 17. Many churches are following this timeline so that we will give full measure to Advent before celebrating Christmas Eve – which falls on a Sunday this year. Pastor Liz is looking for readers on each of these Sundays, so please tell her or see one of us to volunteer.

“How Does a Weary World Rejoice” (Art, Poetry, & Reflections for Advent in Luke's Gospel) is the name of our advent study on Tuesday evenings. Each week is a stand alone study, so if you can't make them all, you may still participate. See Pastor Liz for a paper or digital copy.

On December 24, there will be our usual 10:00 am service and an 8:00 Christmas Eve lessons and carols service. Please join us for those special opportunities of congregational worship. There will be lots of music!

We plan to go Christmas caroling to our shut-ins on Sunday, December 17. There will be more details coming. If you know of someone whom we might serenade, let one of us know.

The last day of the year is a Sunday. That will be when we distribute our 2024 starwords so don't miss it!

~Nanci Swenson and Joanne Cotugno

Banned Book Club

Banned Book Readings:

December: No Banned Book Club

January- The Hate You Give

Our Banned Book club is a great place for important conversation and everyone's opinion is welcome. We'd love to have you join us.

We meet to discuss each book the last Wednesday of the month at 7:00pm.

We would love to have you join us.



Get to know our People Project

We have a new church project to consider. How well do we know our people, our church community? What do we really know about the Story & History of the people sitting next to us (or listening at home) in our church community? Adriana Persenaire would like to work on gathering these stories, starting with those from our elders. If this sounds interesting to you & you would like to know more about recording your or your family's history with our church, please call Adriana (269-491-9091) or email her at anja0052@yahoo.com

Manistee First Congregational Church

United Church of Christ

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