



THE HERALD

December 2024



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Kim Feeney named Minister of Children &
Families

Holiday Help for Friends and Neighbors

Advent Season Worship & Service News



Advent Devotional Project: Help Us Unpack the New First Church Kitchen Wednesdays During Advent at 7 p.m.

“There are some of us who think to ourselves, ‘If I had only been there! How quick I would have been to help the Baby. I would have washed His linen. How happy I would have been to go with the shepherds to see the Lord lying in the manger!’ Why don’t we do it now? We have Christ in our neighbor.” – Martin Luther

I think of this quotation every Christmas. Something about Mary and Joseph finding no room at the inn, and the image of baby Jesus being laid in a manger, “no crib for a bed,” awakens a sense of empathy in us that we are called to extend to others who are in need now. I went to see *Oliver* and wished I could fill that little boy’s bowl with the extra food he was craving. I know you know the feeling! We imagine that we would have stepped in to make room, to prepare a place, to feed someone who is going hungry in another time and place. And yet Jesus has told us that whatever we do for others who are in need now, we do for him. Advent is a time of preparation. For our devotional time this advent season, I am inviting those of you who want to put your hands to work getting ready to feed and welcome one another in the congregation and also our neighbors in the wider community to come together around the new church island and unpack! Let’s prepare to respond to the needs here and now in our community. We will begin each evening with a time of devotion and then roll up our sleeves and get to work. By the end of the 3 sessions, you will be a resident expert on our new kitchen. In the new year, we will be able to serve the Christ Child we encounter in our neighbors. ---The Rev. Vanessa Rose

Pastoral Team Holiday Traditions

There are so many meaningful ways to celebrate the birth of Christ. For our December issue, we asked the Pastoral Team to reflect on their favorite Christmas traditions while also asking some to offer suggestions for making the holiday season special as we extend our collective best wishes to all of our congregants for a blessed season.



Experience the Joy of Music

“Each Christmas, I look forward to hearing two Christmas broadcasts, both on our area NPR stations, WSHU or WNYC: St. Olaf College's St. Olaf Christmas Festival and the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols from King's College, Cambridge, broadcast on Christmas Eve. Check them out!

The classic Sir David Willcocks arrangement of *O Come, All Ye Faithful* is sung each year at King's College Lessons and Carols. It's not Christmas for me until I hear the descant on "Sing, choirs of angels" and the amazing jazz chord on "Word of the father." You'll hear this same arrangement on Christmas Eve at our 10 p.m. Lessons and Carols service.

Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas is my favorite secular carol. First sung by Judy Garland in *Meet Me in St. Louis*, but for something different, try Ella Fitzgerald's version.

--Dr. Frank Martignetti, Director of Music & Organist

Treasured Family Traditions



“My favorite Christmas tradition is cookie baking and decorating with my mom. Back home in Colorado, she would fill tables and tables with cookies and bake all season. The week before Christmas, we would package them and bring cookies to everyone we could think of and even strangers. When I bought a house in Milford, my mom made it feel like home by coming to visit for a week and baking plates of cookies to help us meet the new neighborhood. It worked, and I still run into people locally now asking how my mom is doing. It is proof that traditions can travel and take root in new places.”

-The Rev. Jake Miles Joseph



“I love decorating and cooking with my kids. We have a tree for their playroom and an assortment of garlands and shatterproof ornaments that they have {mostly} free reign on. Throughout the month of December, we also bake and craft together and make handmade gifts and cards for school”

--Asha Yoganadan, Social Media Coordinator



On Christmas Eve, we share the gift of family with stockings filled with fruits and nuts and holiday ribbon candy. We share stories of our ancestors so that they are never forgotten. And ensure that the children know that this is the greatest of gifts that they will receive.

--The Rev. Kathy Williamson



The Rev. Vanessa Rose helps her little sister Lacey get ready for her debut as Mary.

My favorite Christmas tradition is our Christmas Eve pageant, led by our First Church children. Perhaps my appreciation for the pageant comes from childhood; when I was just one month old, my parents let me participate in my first pageant – as Baby Jesus, which was a risky move!

They tell me that my older sister, who was an angel that year, stood behind Mary and Joseph holding me because I was too hot and fussy in my “swaddling clothes” and she had the tricks to keep me from crying.

Through the years, I participated in many other roles, most often as an angel, and finally in the most treasured role – as Mary. I believe that the words of Mary’s Magnificat are the most powerful in all of scripture, and I

love a pageant when we hear them recited by a brave girl. I hope the children who will participate this year will find a similar love of the “old old story” by being a part of telling it in a new way this year!

--The Rev. Vanessa Rose, Pastor



I have a large family: 6 siblings and their respective spouses, (our father until last summer), 18 nieces and nephews and significant others and 2 great nieces. The week after Christmas, we have been gathering for an annual family reunion for over 20 years. Everyone looks forward to it all year long. Many of us may not see each other during the year except at the reunion. It has helped all the generations know each other and develop some close relationships.

--Kate Croarkin, Business Manager



I love spending Christmas Eve with my mom and siblings' families in Western Massachusetts, but my favorite tradition in recent years has been participating in an adopt-a-family program through a local nonprofit. Instead of purchasing gifts for each other, some close girlfriends and I chip in to purchase gifts for a family impacted by domestic abuse. Checking off the items on the wish lists of these kids is fun and meaningful and we take the shopping seriously, trying to find the perfect gifts for each child. It always brings us so much joy to do this together as a group.

--Beth Fitzpatrick, Congregational Life Coordinator



Teaching Kids What Christmas Means

As we guide our children through Advent and the Christmas season, one of the greatest gifts we can give them is a deeper understanding of the true meaning of Christmas: particularly by emphasizing the love, hope, and peace that the birth of Jesus brings into our lives.

Create family traditions that reflect Christ's love: lighting Advent candles at home, reading the Nativity story together, serving others in the community. I also love the First Church Advent devotional! Every year, the Advent devotional is carefully chosen to serve as a meaningful guide for prayer and inspiration during this sacred season.

My favorite aspect of the Christmas story to highlight for children is the miraculous and humble aspects of Jesus' birth: born in a barn, in a small insignificant town, visited by both shepherds and wise men, heralded by angels. The love of God comes through everywhere, in the most unexpected and ordinary of ways.

Our children hold onto the comfort and joy of their family traditions as they grow older. Traditions serve as powerful reminders of what has shaped our family; they become a part of our family's story. Many studies have shown that traditions provide children with a healthy understanding of oneself and continue to build their self-esteem as they grow. Build traditions and rituals that remind our children (and ourselves!) that Christmas is not just about receiving, but about sharing the love of God with all. This is how we nurture a faith that lasts well beyond the season.

--Kim Feeney, Minister of Children & Families



Three Kings Bazaar, Saturday Dec. 7

Please plan to join us on Saturday, Dec. 7 from 3 to 8 p.m. as we celebrate our annual Three King's Bazaar. We're excited to offer a unique shopping experience with a wide array of guest vendors, visits with Santa, a live auction, treats and more during the town of Fairfield's Tree Lighting celebration.

We also hear that Santa may be popping in for a visit in the early evening.



Covenant to Care Holiday Gift Drive

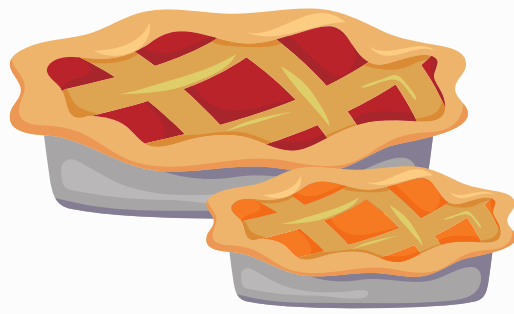
Help make the holiday season brighter for local children by participating in Covenant to Care's annual gift drive. This is a meaningful way to provide some holiday joy to children by purchasing a gift in the \$30 price range. Take a tag at our Sunday, Dec. 8 service for delivery to social workers by December 15. For many of the children who receive these gifts, these will be their only presents. For questions contact Marilyn Henry at 203-255-9256.

Congratulations, Kim Feeney



Please join me in congratulating Kim Feeney, who leads our Disciple & Middle Road Christian formation programs. Her title has been changed from Director of Disciple Road to Minister of Children and Families. This new title is a celebration of the wonderful work she is doing in our congregation: understanding each of the little ones who come here, welcoming them in, caring for each of the families who are a part of the community, raising up faith formation leaders, and encouraging the congregation to take part in this vital ministry.

--The Rev. Vanessa Rose



Thank You, First Church Bakers

Thank you to all the thoughtful and generous cooks who devoted their time and resources to bake pies for nOURish Bridgeport's Feast in a Box program this Thanksgiving. Last week, the nonprofit provided more than 400 holiday meals to holiday families which included turkeys, fixings as well as pies baked by the First Church community. To learn more about the impact of these efforts go to nOURish's Facebook page @NourishBridgeport, to watch videos about this inspiring community project.



Advent Worship Schedule

*** Christmas Eve Pageant 2024 at 4 p.m.***
Lessons & Carols at 10 p.m.

Intimate Christmas Day service in the parlor at 11 a.m.

Sunday services throughout December at
8:15 and 10:15 a.m.



Save the Date!

Holiday Caroling & Cocoa

Sunday, Dec. 22

Watch the Weekly Word
for Details to Come.

The Mendelssohn Choir of Connecticut
Christopher James Hisey - Music Director
presents

MCC Holiday Concert

featuring
Messiah Part I



Sunday, December 15, 2024 at 4:00pm
First Church Congregational, Fairfield, CT



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Office Hours at
First Church
Monday - Friday
9:00am - 1:00pm