



CHURCH AT THE CENTER



DECEMBER 2024



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

"CENTER CHURCH"

United Church of Christ

One Church Street

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*ALL ARE WELCOME AT CENTER CHURCH ON THE COMMON,
AN OPEN AND AFFIRMING UCC CONGREGATION,
WHERE THE SPIRIT OF GOD STIRS US TO EMBRACE OUR DIVERSITY,
DEEPEN OUR FAITH IN JESUS, SHARE OUR TEARS AND LAUGHTER,
AND EXTEND GOD'S ABUNDANT LOVE AND JUSTICE INTO THE WORLD.*

A day later after I preached on "To Tell the Truth," I am still pondering how truth is essential in all our lives, whether we are truthful to ourselves, to our families, among friends, or out into the world.

Advent is a time that as we await the birth of Jesus, that is, the birth of hope, love, joy, and peace. During this time, I invite us all to be truthful, first to ourselves, then if we have the bandwidth, out into the world. During Advent we are invited to become realistic as to where we are in December 2024. Do we need to consider downsizing, should we look for a different job, are we tired of our impatience or complaining, or how can we pivot to welcome more joy or hope into our lives?

A church member, John Anz, shared how he was on the game show about 40 years ago, "To Tell The Truth." When John was around 12 years old he was asked to be one of the "imposters" for Robert Knecht –a 13-year-old world record holder for the most consecutive push-ups (7026) at the time. John was only slightly nervous and earned \$50 and his choice of turtle wax or Sarah Coventry jewelry. Given that his family who lived in NYC didn't own a car, he took the jewelry! And he did get one vote from the panel! While John had fun and was glad he did it, most of us are not rewarded for not telling the truth.

"For truth shall set us free."

Looking forward to see you in worship, Lori

Rev. Souder will be away December 26 - January 2

The Church Office will be closed Dec. 24 (noon) - 27.

Vigil for Peace in the Middle East December 7th - 10am

Posters will be available, but your own are welcome too!



Breakfast Conversation: Join us for a light breakfast and conversation **December 11 from 8-9am on "What are reparations and to whom?"**

Bring your own insights and or send reading material to Lori to share.



The **Choir will carol at Santa Land at Buttery Brook Park** (off of Rt 33) on **December 13th 5:45 - 6:45. All are invited to join them in caroling.**



At their October meeting, the Trustees discussed that, for safety reasons, the **entrance doors should be locked during Sunday Services.** The Deacons and Trustees have formulated a plan. Beginning December 1st, we will be locking the Church and Park Street entrance doors at 10:10 each Sunday morning. A sign will direct late comers to enter through the front doors (route 116).



Emily Carle has accepted a call to be the Pastor at United Parish of Upton in Upton MA. She begins her official ministry in January, however, **we will host her ordination at Center Church.** Center Church hasn't had an ordination for over 30 - 40 years!

What will this mean? We will joyfully surround Emily with our love, attend her ordination service sometime on a Sunday afternoon, and then celebrate with a meal/fellowship time to follow. More on this significant event later!

Bible Study
at Loomis
All are welcome!

December 5th

Luke 3:1-6 and Luke 3:7-15

December 12th

Luke 1:39-55



02 June Harris

06 Brenda Mathieu

11 Leland Towne

17 Sarah Smith

20 Jeanne (Morrell) Hough

22 Kate Jubinille



IMPORTANT REMINDER:

PLEASE REMEMBER TO COMPLETE PAYMENT OF YOUR 2024 PLEDGE BY DECEMBER 31ST SO THAT WE CAN CREDIT THE OPERATING FUND FOR 2024.

PLEASE KEEP THE FOLLOWING PEOPLE IN YOUR PRAYERS

Continual:

Joan Duffy
Martha Guild's mother, June
Eileen Halkyard
Tom Hazen
Eunice Howes
Phyllis Lacoste
Fay Paquette
Art Stanley
Nikki Wolf, Linda's granddaughter
Those struggling with addiction



If you have submitted one of these requests, please

Situational:

Family and friends of Virginia Johnston
Kate Hoffman, following knee surgery
Leila Mulder, attending boarding school
Kay Pryor, with cancer, family friend
of Karen and Estelle Anderson
Charlie DeNagy, friend Peg Wesolowski
Joanne Santos grandfather, Edwardo,
with cancer
Kendall Johnson-Smith, Preston Smith's
daughter, with cancer

let us know when it is time to remove someone's name.



Christmas Eve Service December 24, 2024 5:00pm

THE MINISTRY AT CENTER CHURCH

Ministers: All Church Members
Senior Minister: Rev. Lori J. Souder
Member in Discernment: Emily Carle

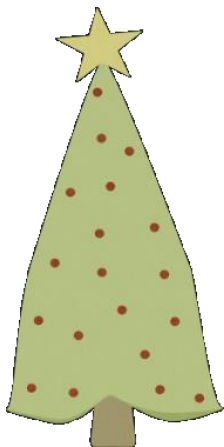


Christian Education Program

Children: Kate Hoffman Julie Burke, Emily Mulder
Youth: Kenneth Mulder
Nursery Care: Annie Burke

Music

Organist: Larry Schipull
Choir Director: Mallory Coakley
Associate in Music: Cynthia Morrell
Office Administrator: Cynthia Jubinville
Sexton: Robert Farman



CHILDREN'S FAITH FORMATION



Advent in the Promised Land Sunday School – God’s Message for the Shepherds The Promised Land Sunday school will be engaged in scripture, stories and crafts relating to the Shepherds’ experiences leading up to and following the birth of Jesus. The perspective of the shepherds is relevant as receivers and messengers of Joy and Love, and each week the children will explore the Christmas story while wondering and waiting, just as the shepherds did so long ago. Julie Burke and Emily Mulder will lead the Promised Land classes in December, while I am recovering from knee surgery. There will be NO Sunday School on December 29th. I look forward to resuming on January 5th.

Blessings during this Advent Season,
Kate Hoffman Director of Faith Formation for Children.

Youth Corner



In the month of November, youth have been involved in decorating activity bags for children to use during worship and putting together Christmas trees for the Holiday bazaar. Way to go, youth!

Due to too many scheduling conflicts outside of church time, we have decided we will no longer try and meet Sunday evenings or Saturday afternoons. Please change your calendars to reflect the fact that we will be moving youth meetings to Sunday mornings during church. During our Sunday morning meetings, we will continue to discuss our need for youth service and youth fellowship and explore ways to provide opportunities beyond Sunday school.

I hope to see you Sunday mornings as we continue our reflections on The Lord's prayer. Consider bringing a friend!

Kenneth

Deacons Message

This year on December 1st, the season of Advent begins. This is a time of preparation and waiting for the birth of Jesus. On Christmas Day, the next season, it is a time to remember the birth of Jesus and his manifestation to the world, which ends on Epiphany on January 6th. The Advent theme this year is Living our Faith. If you would like to participate in any way during a church service, such as reading scripture, joining the choir, being a greater, especially on Christmas Eve, please speak to Pastor Lori or a deacon. May the Advent message of hope, peace, love, and joy be with you throughout the season and into the New Year.

News from the Trustees for December 2024

The end of the year is always a busy time but also a bit difficult for the trustees. At our November meeting, we heard the October numbers on the 2024 budget. By the time you see this, we will most likely be already in December awaiting the November figures which you won't see until the January CAC. Treasurer John Hoffman reported that we stood at 84% of our total pledge income (including a substantial 2024 pledge payment) but overall the income stands at 88.3%. Our overall expenses stood at 81.9%. Some of the line items there are still higher than we would have liked. With some new information, John has been able to rework what our UCC proportional giving for 2024 should be and has decreased that budget line by almost \$500. The UCC Funds (which includes both the permanently restricted funds some temporarily restricted funds) are doing very well in spite of the market fluctuations. John has also provided the trustees with graphs on the permanently restricted fund by month. These are an easy way to actually see how they are doing! John updated us on the 2025 budget proposal projections ahead of the Stewardship Sunday and whatever the pledge information may be. Please know that there it still time to make your pledge for the new year and get it into the church office. And for everyone who has completed their 2024 pledge payments, we give many thanks! Center Church could not run if we did not all support what we are doing!

The trustees also supported the Council's decision to move away from the Christmas Eve offering's previous dispensation (mostly to the Heifer Project) and place it under the Outreach team purview, for new dispersal option(s). You will hear more about that perhaps even later in this newsletter. Given the climate in the US these days and for the safety of everyone at the church, the Council, Deacons and Trustees, on the recommendation of our safe church coordinator Al Duffy, have all agreed that the church doors will be locked now starting at 10:10 each Sunday and reopened after church. Access after that point will be through the front College St. doors.

Our next report will be in the December CAC, again only financially through the November figures. Until then, wishing everyone a safe, healthy and happy holiday season.

Cindy Morrell, secretary

Notes from Church Council

The Council met virtually on Tuesday, November 5. Anita Sarro of HR was the Lead. The meeting was opened at 7:03 p.m. and Corinne Chartrand led us in devotions. She shared a reading from the "Election Prayer from the National United Church of Christ." John Hoffman reported that at the end of September our expenses total was \$200,000. Our budget is somewhat behind. The Council requested clarification of the "restricted fund" and how it is used. In future meetings, the Council will discuss the use of raffles and also inter-generational events. We were informed that the church doors will be locked during Sunday worship. It was agreed that the doors are to be locked ten minutes after worship. The next regular virtual Council meeting will be Tuesday, December 3 with Rachel Alldis as Lead pro-tem and John Hoffman leading devotions. For any Team information, please refer to their articles which can be found in this CAC newsletter.

Center Church in Transition

Dismissed at Own Request: Eunice Howes, November 5, 2024

Outreach Team



It's Secret Santa time! The Outreach Team will once again work with the South Hadley United Methodist Church's Secret Santa Program to purchase gifts primarily for children of Neighbors Helping Neighbors Food Pantry clients. Two years ago, we added gift bags for adults in the families. The program will look a little different this year. A local toy collection will be the main focus of gifts for children. Other items asked for will need to be purchased and wrapped, maybe by some of you. Also, this year there will be a collection box in the sanctuary for items for the adult bags. On the box will be a list of ideas for small, everyday items. Please consider adding items to the box as another way to help these families.

Thank you

Stewardship 2024

Generosity Update

Generosity season continues at Center Church. Generosity Sunday on November 17 was great! As of November 21, we have received 47 pledges worth a total of \$118,826. All but 7 of these pledges were increases for 2025!

If you have not pledged yet, please mail your pledge form to the church office or drop your pledge form in the offering plate during Sunday worship.

Need a pledge card? Pledge cards are in the foyer of the sanctuary and in the pews. You can also email the church office centerchurch@verizon.net for a pledge packet.

Every year our church community strives to do more, help more, be more. But in recent years, despite our best efforts, we have fallen short of adequately funding all our intentions and achieving our hopes and dreams for ourselves, our church, and others locally and globally. And so we must come together. Now. All of us, as one faith community to pledge our prayerful, impactful, increased support to fund the mission and ministry of Center Church. Not just for 2025...but for the future we all hope and strive for.

Your increased pledge, when combined with so many others, will help ensure Center Church can continue to provide a beautiful and welcoming sanctuary, inspiring worship, insightful preaching, joyful music, engaging community outreach, and lessons of discipleship through God's unconditional and inclusive love.

We wish you much peace, love, blessings, and great thanks for your generous support to help Center Church come together to imagine and realize a future we all participate in and can be proud of!





CHRISTMAS POINSETTIAS

Once again, our sanctuary will be decorated with poinsettias for Christmas.
The deadline for placing your order will be December 8th.

Number of plants you wish to order 6 " pots \$ 10 each
_____ red # _____ white
_____ Total payment enclosed.

Please make checks payable to: "First Congregational Church"
and note "Christmas Poinsettias" on the memo line.

Please forward your completed order and check to the church office **on or before December 8th**.

In Loving Memory of _____

In Honor of _____

GIVEN BY _____



Please check one of the following:

_____ I will pick up after church on Christmas Eve _____ I will not be taking my plant(s).

NAME _____



What is Advent? From the National United Church of Christ

One of the fondest Advent traditions for both congregations and families is the lighting of Advent candles. The tradition reaches back to pre-Christian northern Europeans. During the darkest days of winter, they lit as many as twenty-four candles on an evergreen-covered wheel or wreath. By lighting a candle a day, they marked time, anticipating the return of the sun's light and warmth. By the 1500s, both Lutherans and Catholics adapted the Advent Wreath as a devotional way to prepare for the coming of Christ, the Light of the World.

Today, the Advent Wreath is usually an evergreen wreath placed on a table or suspended from a ceiling or an arch. In the wreath are four candles (usually blue or purple, occasionally one is pink); each candle represents one week during Advent. A white candle is often placed or suspended in the center of the wreath.

The symbols of the Advent Wreath are interpreted in many ways. The circle of evergreens reminds Christians of the eternal and ever-renewing promises of Christ. The lighting of candles, spanning the season, acknowledges the deepening of our preparation and the increasing light that bursts forth at Christmas.

Rev. Dr. Henry David Gray



Our Pastor
1935 - 39

Henry David Gray became our 16th senior pastor. He was born on January 18, 1908 to Nathaniel and Margaret Lawther Gray in Antrim, Northern Ireland. In 1923, the family emigrated to the Los Angeles, CA area. He graduated from Pomona College in 1930 and married Helen Lorbeer that same year. They eventually had three children -- David, Ellen and Betsey. In 1933, he graduated from Hartford Theological Seminary with a Doctor of Divinity degree. In 1935, he received his PhD from the University of Edinburgh in Scotland. And after his remarkable educational journey, he answered the Call from Center Church. At the age of 27, he was ordained here on December 9, 1935!

We considered Rev. Gray to be our “transitional pastor.” He took over after our very popular and well-loved pastor, Rev. Jesse G. Nichols, died in late 1934. Rev. Nichols had served us faithfully for 29 years. Rev. Gray remained with us “through the lean and hungry years” of the U.S. He cheerfully announced that through this “we will live joyously, abundantly and triumphantly in the present!” His youthful exuberance sparked an energetic movement within Center Church. He “reorganized our educational work.” Rev. Gray was the moderator of the Hampshire Association. He went about to “study our entire church programs.” We had 431 members when he started and 517 when he left! While with us, he became the National Secretary (1939-1942) for High School and Student work of the Congregational Christian Fellowship. He also helped found various Congregational churches around the world! Through his efforts he was able to get the “National Council for both College and Church” here in 1936! By 1939, due to growing obligations, he realized he needed to move on.



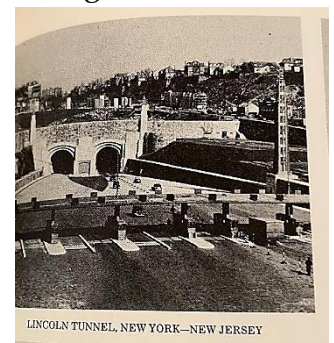
Congregationalist
1849 -



President Franklin
and First Lady Eleanor

His later achievements were varied. He had a radio show, stayed active in youth programs coordinating eight overseas youth assemblies! He was one of the founders of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches. He participated in the merger of the Congregational and Evangelical Reformed Church which then formed the UCC! He became national publication editor of the *Congregationalist* which promotes the “Congregational Way.” He wrote a bestseller *The Upward Call*. His national work brought him in contact with President Franklin and First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. The Country was beginning to

recover with projects like the WPA, which constructed much needed infrastructure. The Lincoln Tunnel was just one of those projects. Popular radio shows like Amos and Andy, Ozzie and Harriet, Kate Smith, Burns and Allen bolstered the country’s mental outlook.



Center Church has so much to be proud of! We gave Rev. Dr. Henry David Gary his illustrious career start! He was a member of an investigative team (1945) for war damage in Britain. He became pastor of South Congregational Church in Hartford, CT in 1955, retiring in 1970. He then relocated to Ventura, CA in the 1980s where he remained until his death on September 1, 1994 at the age of 86.

Tell Me the Stories - December 2024

Jesus, Still Lead On (NCH 446) was a relatively new one for us in 2018. It was one of two texts written in 1721 by Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf (whew!) which were combined into one in a 1778 hymnal. He was a founder of the United Brethren Church which had roots in the Moravian Church. Interestingly, that church was banned by the Saxony government, so Nicolaus traveled in the rest of Europe, the US and West Indies. The two hymns mentioned were written before his religious conversion. Nicholas has only one hymn in the NCH and one in the PH. The tune “Seelenbräutigam” was composed by Adam Drese first for another text which he had written and published in 1698 in Darmstadt, Germany. (It was eventually married with our hymn text.) Drese was born in that town but actually studied in Warsaw where he was sponsored by Duke Wilhelm IV. He returned to Weimar upon completing his studies and served there as the Kapellmeister to the Duke. After Wilhelm died, the duke’s son took him on and they traveled together to Jena where he eventually became mayor. Drese had only one hymn in the NCH. CAC 3/18

Hymn #2 is *Praise to the Living God* (NCH 8) which is also familiar because we know its tune “Diademata” well. Curtis Beach wrote this text in 1966 while he was at a “death of God” conference. The opening words popped into his head (and it fit into “Diademata”) and it took him 6-8 hours to complete the text that evening. Beach graduated from Harvard and then BU School of Theology, and received a PhD from USC. Beach was a Congregational Christian Church pastor, later UCC, and served churches in MA, CA, PA and ME. He has one other hymn text in the NCH (558 *O How Glorious*). He also had three texts in the PH. The hymn tune “Diademata” was originally composed by George Elvey for *Crown Him with Many Crowns* and it was also later paired with *Now in the Days of Youth*. The name comes from the Latin title given to that original hymn. Born in Canterbury, England, one of my sources said that Elvey received his doctorate in music from Oxford just two years after receiving his bachelor’s degree. He was knighted in 1871. He was a noted English organist who played at St. George’s Chapel, for 47 years, where British royalty attended Easter services and other royal occasions. This tune was used with three NCH hymns as well as three in the PH. Elvey’s name is affiliated with a total of seven hymns in the PH. Elvey was well-known in England because of his many contributions to English music – anthems, oratorios, service music and some hymn tunes. He also composed music for many state occasions. CAC 3/16

Our final hymn this month is *O God, Whose Steadfast Love* (NCH 426), one which I have not written about previously. The text was composed by James Haddix, an American born in 1946, who wrote this text to honor his elementary-school teacher mother on her retirement after 30 years. It references mothers and women of the Bible. A UCC ordained minister since 1971 and serving pastorates in NH and ME, he has also taught at Bangor Theological Seminary. This is his only NCH hymn text but there are none in the PH. The hymn tune “Rhosymedre” was composed by John Edwards around 1858. Originally named “Lovely,” a later hymnal editor changed it to the current title. It was in honor of the town in North Wales where Edwards was an Anglican vicar and minister. He was born in Wales and educated at Oxford and was ordained in 1832 and composed a lot of liturgical music in addition to his pastoral work. “Rhosymedre” was also paired with *My Song is Love Unknown* in both hymnals.



Cindy Morrell, associate in music

Resources used: Robert McCutchan’s *Our Hymnody* (1937); and *The New Century Hymnal Companion*, ed. Kristen Forman (1998).

Thank you to All

*who have contributed this year to the
programs and life of Center Church
with your*

Time, Talent, and Financial Gifts.

Blessings of the Holiday Season!

*May we all have Health, Happiness,
and PEACE
in 2025.*