



- Dec 3- 6:30 Membership Mtg
- Dec 4- 6:30 Outreach Mtg
- Dec 6- 5:30 Advent Dinner
- Dec 10- 6:30 Property/Finance
- Dec 11- 6:30 Deacons Mtg
- Dec 12- noon & 6:00 Book Club
5:30 Advent Soup & Study
- Dec. 15- 4:00 Church Pageant
- Dec. 17- Worship/Music Mtg
- Dec 18- 6:30 Council Mtg
- Dec 19- 5:30 Advent Soup &
Study
- Dec 22- 4:00 Snow Date
Church Pageant
- Dec 24- noon Christmas Break
office closed
- Dec. 24- 5:00pm Christmas Eve
Family Service
10:30pm Lessons/Carols
- Dec 27- 9:00 Office reopens
- Dec 31- noon office closes for
New Year's Holiday
- Jan 3- 9:00 office reopens



- Hand Bell practice meets at
10:45 a.m. after Sunday worship
- Stitches of Love meets every
Tuesday at 7:00 p.m.
- Choir practice meets every
Thursday at 7:00 p.m.

Tower Tidings



Congregational Church of Laconia, UCC

December 2019

Pastor's Letter

Dear Friends,

As we leave the day(s) of stuffing and turkey, pies and mashed potato behind and move on to the season of colored lights, and carols, Christmas trees and poinsettias, I for one like to take the first Sunday or two in December to pause even if just for a moment, long enough to catch a sense of "the Advent." Rev. Fredrick Buechner, who can express such things in a more poetic way describes the search for "the advent" in this way:

"You walk up the steps to the front door. The empty windows at either side of it tell you nothing, or almost nothing. For a second you catch a whiff in the air of some fragrance that reminds you of a place you've never been and a time you have no words for. You are aware of the beating of your heart.

The extraordinary thing that is about to happen is matched only by the extraordinary moment just before it happens. Advent is the name of that moment.

"The Salvation Army Santa Claus clangs his bell. The sidewalks are so crowded you can hardly move. Exhaust fumes are the chief fragrance in the air, and everybody is as bundled up against any sense of what all the fuss is really about as they are bundled up against the windchill factor.

But if you concentrate just for an instant, far off in the deeps of you somewhere you can feel the beating of your heart. For all its madness and lostness, not to mention your own, you can hear the world itself holding its breath."

In the midst of the preparations for the celebration we call Christmas make sure you give yourselves a few of those moments, take in the sounds and smells of the season and hear the beating of your heart and the world holding its breathe in anticipation. If we can do this we just might find ourselves ready!

*For thus said the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel:
In returning and rest you shall be saved;
in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.*

Isaiah 30:15

Blessings

Pastor Neil Wilson





Hallelujah Toffee Time!

This will be the 6th year that we have sold "The World's Best Toffee" benefitting OneLife Africa, a nonprofit group our daughter Stephanie and son-in-law Andrew started in 2011. One Life offers financial and emotional support for academically talented Christian boys and girls, allowing them access to the highest quality boarding high school education available. In Kenya, tuition is charged to attend high school and the children living in the slums and poor rural areas do not have the financial resources to pay for their education. OneLife Africa provides students with the educational opportunities allowing them the chance to get out of the

ghettos. The Congregational Church of Laconia UCC has sponsored two students and our latest one "Dawning Okuku" graduates in December. He will be applying for Kenyan Government assistance to attend University. In addition to church sponsorship, many of you in the congregation have supported students as well.



The biggest fund raiser of the year for OneLife Africa is selling Hallelujah Toffee. The toffee is formulated from an old Amish secret family recipe and is only available once a year. The students that have no sponsors are called "The Candy Kids" and the proceeds from toffee sales enable them to continue their studies in search for a better life. The toffee, with Linda's assurance of quality, will be available to purchase after church services at Fellowship Time in December. One pound is priced at \$20 and ½ pound is \$12.50. This toffee is a wonderful Christmas gift and a great way to support education in Kenya. Thank you for your support! Blessings! Linda and Ted Tunnicliffe 524-5049.

Merry
CHRISTMAS

"Promise me you'll always remember:
you're braver than you believe,
stronger than you seem,
and smarter than you think."

Our Christmas wish to all our friends this

Christmas season,

Lovingly,

The girls in the office,

Camille and Carolyn xx oo



Look and See

submitted by Janet Simmon Michael Zoughbi has created a non-profit project for Christian artisans to create beautiful olive wood carvings: hand-made figures of Mary, Joseph and Jesus as well as Christmas ornaments.

The goal of the Olive Wood Project is to employ Bethlehem Christians as life is difficult for them living under occupation and unemployment is extremely high. The Christian population in Palestine has decreased tremendously from nearly 10% in 1998 to about 1% today. He seeks to create work for his carvers so they won't leave Bethlehem.

When he sings "O, Little Town of Bethlehem," Michael sings it as someone who knows it intimately. As a Palestinian, he traces his heritage as a Christian back 1,000 years. As a resident of Bethlehem, his homeland is the Holy Land. But, ironically, Christianity, according to Zoughbi, "is dying there." Only 1.7 percent of the population ascribes to the Christian religion, a percentage that "used to be over 45 percent." (That would be before 1948.) Many are leaving because of the economy. Part



of the problem in Zoughbi's opinion are the restrictions placed on traveling between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, just five miles apart. In fact, it often keeps Zoughbi apart from his wife, a native of Jerusalem. They must live in separate homes much of the time.

"Jerusalem is important for us as a Christian," he said, "A lot of things are going on there to practice your faith." "I need to

practice my faith freely ... that is my dream," Zoughbi said. "We don't want to go through the process of permission. There are a lot of problems." An Israeli military checkpoint lies on the road between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Zoughbi advocates access to the Holy Land for everyone. "Most of the Christians in the Holy Land are Palestinian."

Bethlehem is a town of about 35,000, while the area surrounding it has a population of about 180,000. Tour groups generally spend only a couple of hours in Bethlehem itself, but in his opinion, to know it requires staying in its hotels and eating in its restaurants.

The Wooster, Ohio, Trinity United Church of Christ, met Zoughbi through UCC's mission connection with the Holy Land. The UCC and other denominations have facilitated venues in the United States for Palestinian Christian wood carvers to sell their crafts. Related to the economic venture, "Michael set up a connection to be able to travel to the United States to tell his story -- what it is like to be a Christian in Bethlehem." "I am not a carver; I'm not patient enough to be a carver," Zoughbi said, but he does act as a middleman for olive wood carvings sold abroad. His other projects include bee hives and greenhouses.

Michael's message to all ethnic groups living in the area is: "We are different parts, but belong to the same body."

"Peace is important," he said. "Everybody in the whole world is interested in coming to the Holy Land."

Prayers, Prose, & Potpourri

Written by the women of UCC of New Hampshire! This is a perfect little stocking stuffer for a special friend, or for a teacher on your Christmas list. \$10

Advent Soup and Study

Dec 12 & 19 5:30 Join Pastor Paula and Intern Derek Waldron as we explore the season of Advent and the meaning of the birth of Jesus. Deacons will provide yummy soups, bread, drinks and dessert. Take the time to pause this Christmas season to explore and fellowship.



Save These DATES



December 6 at 5:30 p.m. - Advent Spaghetti Dinner
December 12 at noon or 6:00 p.m. - Book Club
December 12 at 5:30 p.m. - Advent Soup and Study *see below*
December 15 at 4:00 p.m. - Christmas Pageant
December 19 at 5:30 p.m. - Advent Soup and Study
December 22 at 4:00 p.m. - Snow date for Pageant
December 24 - Office closes at noon
December 27 - Office reopens at 9:00 a.m.
December 31 - Office closes at noon
January 3 - Office reopens at 9:00 a.m.

Paula's Note

As I write this note, it's a few days before Thanksgiving. The pace of life is picking up. I try to get most of my shopping for Christmas gifts and all my decorating done by the end of the first week in December so that I can really honor the season of advent and take the time to prepare my heart and focus on the 'reason for the season'. But alas, that makes the end of November extra busy.

Last Saturday I was in a hurry to do one more errand when the car in front of me suddenly stopped. I wondered what the young man was doing and I admit being a bit annoyed. Then I saw a person slightly bent over and slowly struggling to cross the street. I realized that the young man driving the car in front of me was more aware and compassionate than I and he had stopped so the gentlemen in the light coat could cross the street.

With the car stopped - I too paused for a moment and gave thanks for the safety of the person crossing the street and for the young man who paid attention to the needs of another.

At that moment my heart was filled with joy at the thoughtfulness of the young man; I was embarrassed by my own impatience and reminded of the importance of simple acts of kindness. I was reminded that Advent and Christmas is a time to ponder Jesus' teachings of love, hope, joy and peace for all people. It's time to put those teachings into action. Oh that we could all live everyday with the spirit of Christmas in our hearts.

Blessings

Pastor Paula



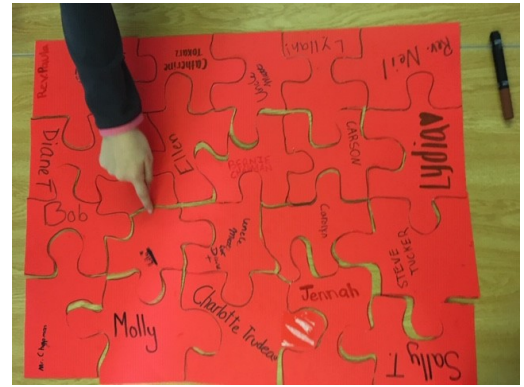
Advent Family Potluck Dinner Friday December 6 from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

Food, fun, and fellowship – what better way to prepare our hearts and minds for the season of Advent? All church members and friends are invited for the annual Advent Family Potluck Dinner. We will begin the festivities at 5:30 pm in Fellowship Hall. Come and enjoy some games, holiday craft activities, a photo booth, and Andy Giovanni's fabulous, home cooked spaghetti and meatballs. Please bring your favorite holiday salad or dessert for our potluck dinner. We look forward to sharing the joys of the season with each of you!

The Educational Ministries Committee - Angel, Mary-Ellen, Lydia, Penny, Diane, Jean, Paula and Robbie



Putting together the pieces of the puzzle of our Beloved Community- UBUNTU!



Christmas Pageant Preparations Have Begun!

The Educational Ministries Committee is pleased to announce that The Holy Family this year is Thomas, Maleia, and Lyla Claire Raymond as Baby Jesus. Lyla is the youngest grandchild of Jaylene and Bob Bengston and the niece of Pageant Director, Lorieanne Valovanie.

The pageant is scheduled for Sunday, December 15 at 4 p.m. with a snow date set for December 22. The casting call is going out to all sheep, shepherds, angels and wisemen! Sign-ups will take place during coffee hour on Sunday mornings. See Rev. Paula Gile or give her a call at the Church Office for more information.



The all-cast rehearsal has also been set for Sunday, December 15 right after the worship service. Costumes will be fitted and Lorieanne will coordinate a run-through of the pageant in the sanctuary. For everyone else - mark the date – Sunday, December 15 – bring a “white gift” - a canned good wrapped in white tissue paper and join us for a traditional pageant celebrated in song, scripture and a sprinkle of magic!

CHURCH CHRISTMAS CARD SUPPORTS THE CAMBERSHIP FUND



The Educational Ministries Committee invites you and your family to sign the Church Christmas Card. By signing the card, you will be reaching hundreds of church members without the fuss of buying, signing, and posting lots of Christmas cards. There's no specific dollar limit – just what you would spend on mailing Christmas cards to church friends.

All donations will go directly to the church's Campership Fund. The Fund helps send Faith Formation kids to places like Horton Center on Pine Mountain where they experience God's love in a caring community. This summer, with your help, we sent 13 children to

church summer camp. Sign your name, make a donation to the Campership Fund, and we take care of the rest! See us after any worship service in the Pleasant Street foyer. Thank you!

You never know how strong you are until being strong is your only choice.

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Dec 2
Pat Williams
Natalie St. Pierre
Joni Stover

Dec 3
Mary Ellen Azem
Dave Frost
Andrew Hazleton

Dec 4
Evelyn MacMillan



December Birthdays

Dec 5
Virginia Wakeman
Stephen Tucker

Dec 6
Stephen Tucker

Dec 7
Robert Durfee
Jack Weeks

Dec 9
John Marcel

Dec 10
Paula Gile
Marilyn Lynch

Dec 11
Del Kennard
Sophia Joyal

Dec 13
David Williams

Dec 14
Steven Austin

Dec 16
Noah Marshall

Dec 19
Tina Levasseur
Carson Tucker

Dec 23
Sylvia Quackenbush

Dec 24
James Coddington

Dec 25
Betsey Milder

Dec 27
Jean Davie

Dec 30
Muff Kruse

Dec 31
Jo Connelly



A Christmas Fair Thank You!

Thank you to all of you who donated to, participated in, contributed towards and worked on the Christmas Fair! We couldn't have done it without you!



21st Century Church Update

What about that CAT??? Will we ever see the results??? Last spring, eighty-seven percent of you thoughtfully shared your perspectives on the Congregational Assessment Tool--the CAT. In September, a group of folks listened intently as a Holy Cow! Consulting analyst explained the results of our survey to us. WOW! There was a lot to take in!! The results are very extensive and somewhat complex. Your Creating and Leading the 21st Century Church (CL21) team and pastors are still digesting the results and thinking about how this survey can inform our church's activities and decisions moving forward. So the journey is just beginning!!!

The Poinsettias have been ordered for the alter decorations for Christmas. If you would like to purchase one in the name of a loved one, the price is \$20. There are envelopes in the pews for designating flowers for a loved one, or you can drop the money off at the Church Office. Best wishes for a wonderful Christmas season.

Claudia Wright, Alter Guild Chair

