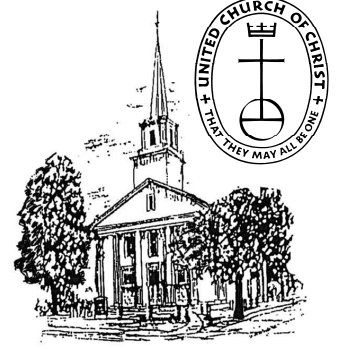


THE UNION COURIER

Union Congregational Church
United Church of Christ
The Reverend Gail L. Miller, Pastor

220 Main Street
Groton, Massachusetts 01450



December 2017



These December days are filled with expectation and preparations as we revisit what it means for God to come to earth as a human being — Jesus Christ. And so that we don't miss a moment, the Bible readings of the season invite us to Lift up, Look up, Wake up, Get up. Our hearts, our minds, and our spirits are raised as we receive the good news that God has come close — so close that we can hear him breathe and see the dirt under his nails.

I love to read of the people who were right there when it happened, starting with Mary, who believed that it was indeed God's will for her to be the mother of the savior of the world. And then there's Elizabeth, her cousin, who knew in an instant that God was at work in both of their pregnancies. And how about Joseph? Who also had to not just **hear** God's voice, but **heed** it as well. And those shepherds, whose night out under the stars was far

from silent, when the angel chorus erupted. And the magi, who followed for months (years?) in faith and for miles the sign that God had given them.

When we read (and reread) about the people who were the first to know and be on the scene, it sounds so easy — this following of Jesus and knowing God's will. And I find myself saying (with frequency), "It's harder for us who live at a time when Jesus isn't walking around in the flesh." Or is it? Because, while the Bible gives us the accounts of those who saw, and knew, and responded, and followed; it also gives us those who missed the signs, who ignored the voice, who were face-to-face with Jesus and couldn't get out of their own way enough to see who was right in front of them.

All this is to say that if we're going to follow Christ, discern God's will for us, respond to the Holy Spirit's leading, we need to lift our eyes, our minds, our hearts and focus on Him. The church has been given a high calling — to proclaim the good news of God's love in Christ for and to ALL people. This is what we're here for; and our personal preferences take a back seat to this.

This is the context / motivation / foundation for the proposed building project. We're not pursuing it because WE think it's a good idea; but because we have discerned that it is in the service of God's calling on our congregation.... that Christ would be shared and lives would be changed. Because the question is, are we doing this (*Sharing Christ ~ Changing Lives*) to our fullest potential? I don't think so...Not when we ask kids to cross a street to get to Sunday School. Not when people, who've been worshiping here for years, don't know where the Pastor's office is. Not when people stay away from worship because it's just too hard to get in the building.

What Christ wants for his church — our church — is to be welcoming, hospitable, accessible, joyful, faithful... to point to Him in all our endeavors.

For years we've been making plans for the future of our church. (And, before that, there were decades of talking about making plans for the future of our church!) When we gather on Sunday, for the Informational Meeting about the proposed Building Project, we will learn more about what is possible and what it will take to bring to fruition our vision and goals of making the church building accessible and consolidating our ministries to one property.

It all starts with showing up, listening up.... but mostly lifting up our hearts to the Lord!

Dec. 3 - THIS Sunday

10:00 a.m. Worship with Communion
(35 mins.)

Kids remain in worship

10:35 Kids to downstairs for
carols, a movie (*Veggie
Tales* Christmas movie),
snacks

Presentation: Proposed
Building Project

11:45 On your way!!!

There is no Fellowship Hour, so bring
your morning beverages with you!



Our Church Family/News



Ongoing Prayer List: This list will be refreshed again in January. Feel free to contact Gail Miller or Carol Zaiatz (978-448-2091 or unioncc@uccgroton.org) to add a name to this list.

Diane Black
Kathi Bond
Megan Bettison
Jack Cornforth

Charlie Elwood
Scott Joyce
Ellie Kennedy

Jack Lyons
Myrtle Murphy
Holly Norton

Debbie Sampson
Rudi Schmid
Liz Waggoner



- Halsey Platt, recovering from hand surgery.
- All those affected by natural disasters and mass shootings.
- Ellie Kennedy, at Lifecare of Littleton.

December Birthdays

Brenda Semienko	12/02	Dave Woods	12/16	Janet Carey	12/22
Will Nickerson	12/03	Don Landry	12/17	Hannah York	12/23
Stephen Cappucci	12/06	Myrtle Murphy	12/18	Ken Lefebvre	12/25
Gail Miller	12/08	Korbin Larsen	12/18	Taylor Ansted	12/27
Adam Elibero	12/11	Dick Burrier	12/19	Carolyn DiCenzo	12/29
Scott Burgess	12/12	Don Kennedy	12/21	Joe Barreiro	12/31

If we missed your birthday, it is not in our database. Please email unioncc@uccgroton.org to give us your birthday. Also, we would like to recognize significant anniversaries — would you share that information with us?



Ladies' Lunch at *The Devens Grill* (4 Ryan's Way, Devens, MA)
Friday, December 1 (Meet at the church at 11:45 a.m. to carpool)
Join your friends from church for lunch. (The restaurant varies each month.) All women of the church are invited! If you need a ride, contact Janice Owen or Brenda Semienko.



Decorate the Sanctuary

Saturday, December 2 at 9:00 a.m.

Start the season with the Deacons for the annual decorating of the church Sanctuary for Advent and Christmas. Bring the whole family for a festive morning of beautifying the church. There will be hot cocoa and coffee available. Everyone is welcome—please join us!

Annual Report

In order to have the Annual Report finished by mid-January, we need to collect committee and ministry reports now. **Please email your report as a word document attachment to Carol (unioncc@uccgroton.org) by Tuesday, December 19.** Also, if you haven't sent Carol your Committee Meeting notes on a monthly basis, please include in this email your Committee meeting notes for the entire year (12 separate documents for those who meet every month). Thank you!

Serving on Committees and Ministries

In preparation for our Annual Meeting on January 28, 2018, (when the "turnover" of committee members occurs), the Church Council invites you to let us know your interest in serving on Committees and Ministries. *Committee* positions require formal membership in the church and *Ministry* positions allow for anyone to serve. The current Committee/Ministry Roster can be found inside the Church Directory (available on the back tables in the Sanctuary). *Feel free to approach Stefanie Lempp (Moderator) or Pastor Miller with your questions or to express an interest in a particular Committee or Ministry.*



Church Council November 15 Meeting Summary

On December 3 there will be an informational meeting regarding the possible building addition. Worship will be shortened, Communion will be by intinction and there will be no coffee hour.

Church Council will be hosting a potluck on January 20. Watch for details.

There was a discussion on how to spend the \$2,290 in the Birthday Fund; we are researching Easter banners for the Sanctuary, some new cookware (such as pots and pans) and new folding chairs for the Fellowship Hall.



Congregational Budget Meeting Summary Sunday, November 19

The preliminary 2018 budget was passed; the final 2018 budget will be voted on at the Annual Meeting on January 28, 2018.

The Birthday Fund has \$2,290. It will be spent on banners for the Sanctuary, \$750 for upgrades to the kitchen cookware, and the remainder will be spent on nicer folding chairs for the Fellowship Hall.

Building Project Informational Meeting Sunday, December 3, after Worship

This will be a "your questions answered" meeting, so if you have lingering questions that you've not yet brought to a meeting or a person (Gail or anyone on FaST), please find one of us sooner rather than later so we can provide the best information possible on December 3. We will share the findings of the Feasibility Study and outline next steps and possibilities in light of our discoveries through our meetings with the town. *FaST: Stefanie Lempp, Julie Platt, Pete Hnath, Gail Miller. Others who've been helping with these recent steps: Dennis Carey, Bob Goudey, Halsey Platt, Craig Smith, Mike Smith*

Fellowship Hour — Everyone Takes a Turn

Back in February we started a new approach to Fellowship Hour — taking turns serving as the kitchen "staff" each week. A schedule was put together for the year (two households are assigned to each Sunday), and those who are on the schedule receive it by email, so you can know well in advance when it's your turn. (You will also receive a reminder three weeks prior to your Sunday.) The Kitchen Ministry and Deacons are grateful for the wide support and sharing in this excellent ministry. Fellowship Hour is important to us; and sharing in the work of the church is a way we live our faith.

Sunday School Schedule

Joy to the World



Each Sunday in December, the children will spend the **first 10 minutes of Sunday School learning a Christmas Carol — *Joy to the World***. Bonnie Marchesani will sing with the children in the Fellowship Hall.

Please join us in teaching Christian Carols to our children by listening to and singing these traditional carols at home and in the car throughout the month.

December 3—A Special Christmas Movie
(Fellowship Hall)

December 10—John the Baptist Prepares the Way
Mark 1:1-8

December 17—John the Baptist Proclaims
Jesus' Coming — John 1:6-8, 19-28

December 24 — Christmas Pageant Performance
during morning Worship

December 31—New Year's Eve Day
No Sunday School

New Members Joined in Nov.

Bible Study



Brian, Juliet, Margaret, and Raquel

Juliet Silveri and Brian LaGasse

Juliet grew up in Holden, Massachusetts. She went to Boston College and graduated with a B.A. in History. She is now a technical writer at Hanscom AFB. Juliet's hobbies are gardening and creative writing.

Brian grew up in Bedford, Massachusetts. He graduated from UMASS Amherst as an Electrical Engineer and is working now at

Oracle diagnosing hardware problems. His principal hobby is woodworking and repairs at home. He has made much of the furniture in their house.

Brian and Juliet moved to Groton in 1999. They like the quality of the school system, the quieter atmosphere, the country, trees, and the open landscape. They were both raised in the Catholic Church as children. Juliet attended church in the Townsend UCC before coming here ten years ago. She is inspired by the people here, their dedication and faithful serving. They have two children, Clarissa and Charlotte, fraternal twins who are sophomores at GDRHS.

Juliet has taught Sunday School here for eight years. She is looking forward to contributing to our church in new ways. As a member, Brian is also looking forward to taking a bigger role at church.

Raquel Majeski is from Tampa, Florida, where she lived until last year, when she moved to Vermont. She is now the Director of Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion at Lawrence Academy. Raquel attended Eckerd College in St. Petersburg, Florida, and went on to obtain a Master's Degree in Reading and Special Education from Nova Southeastern University of Fort Lauderdale. Raquel has three children: Thaddius is 20 years old, in the Army and stationed in Germany; Lauryn, age 10, who will be singing in the Groton Community Christmas Concert this year; and Wade age 4. Raquel does not presently have a great deal of time for hobbies, but in the past she has enjoyed working with non-profit organizations where she makes a difference in peoples lives. Raquel grew up in a Baptist Church and has felt that our church has similarities to the Baptist Church she was in in Florida. She likes the children's program here and is looking forward to meeting people and getting more involved in the church.

Margaret Wheeler grew up in Armonk, New York, where she attended a UCC church. She attended Wellesley College, majoring in English and Math. She went to work for Digital Equipment Corp. and still works in computers. Margaret lives in Westford with her husband, Mark, and has two sons, Greg and Jeff, who are recent college graduates. Margaret previously attended the Community Church in Westford, but has been attending church here for the past two years. She has enjoyed a fresh perspective here. She looks forward to continued spiritual growth and insight to what is important in dealing with life's challenges. Margaret enjoys knitting, gardening and hiking. She has climbed Mount Monadnock several times and walks in the mornings before going to work in Littleton.

Bible Study

Wednesday Evening Bible Study

7:30 p.m. in the Pastor's Office

Contact: Janet Kennedy

Thursday Morning Bible Study

10:00 a.m. (26 Court Street)

Matthew's stories show Jesus in everyday situations doing and living as he calls us to live and be. We see Jesus being with people, listening, teaching, healing, touching real human needs. He calls us to follow him to a life in and with God, to pay attention to the people around us and minister as we are able. Come and join us as Matthew raises issues that are very modern. Everyone is welcome to join in vibrant conversation and insights along with cookies and tea. Contact: Marvin Caldwell

Stewardship—Pledge Update



The Stewardship Team would like to thank all who participated in Pledge Sunday (11/19) and to those who mailed in their pledge for 2018. **As of 11/26, we have received 55 pledges for a total amount of \$205,000. If you have not pledged yet, please mail your card to the Church Office, Attn: Collector (220 Main Street, Groton, MA 01450).**

Year-end 2017 is approaching fast; please make sure all current year pledges are up-to-date no later than Sunday, December 24. Contact: Bob Goudey

Now That I've Pledged—What's Next? In late December, the weekly giving envelopes for 2018 will be available at church. They are a handy way to keep track of your weekly giving. Since pledges are made for the upcoming calendar year, we start tracking 2018 pledges in January. Contact: Bob Goudey

The 2017 Stewardship Team

—Bob Goudey
—Halsey Platt

—Andrea McDonough
—Craig Smith

—Gail Miller

Missions

Teen Challenge Banquet

Teen Challenge held its' annual banquet on October 27 at the Radisson Hotel in Manchester, NH, and ten from our church were seated at a front row table. The theme of this year's banquet was *Expanding Borders* and, based on the scripture from 1Chronicles 4:10, when Jabez cried out to the God of Israel, "Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory! Let your hand be with me and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain." And God granted his request.

One of the speakers, Governor Chris Sununu, spoke about how he had presented this program to the National Drug Czar just the day before and stood before the President of the United States asking for assistance with creating more faith-based programs of this kind. The Mayor of Manchester, Ted Gastsas, spoke about the "Safe Stations," which are safe places for individuals with addictions to turn to when they need help without fear of punishment.

Teen Challenge is hopeful to increase their 26 bed residential program to 100 beds and also create a 30-bed detox medical unit as well, in order to serve a greater need in their community. It is so exciting to see the incredible things God is doing and the lives that are forever changed because of the great work of *Teen Challenge*.



Tewksbury Hospital Giving Tree

The Giving Tree is located in the back of Fellowship Hall at church. Please consider taking a patient's "wish" gift from the tree, signing the itemized list at the Missions table, and **returning your unwrapped gift to the designated box in the Fellowship Hall by December 10.**

Tewksbury Hospital operates a 370 bed Joint Commission accredited hospital. The hospital provides comprehensive treatment, care, and comfort to adults with medical and/or mental illnesses who have been denied care at other facilities.

Missions Committee

—Julie Sutherland-Platt, Chair
—Lynn Manalo

—Brenda Barker
—Halsey Platt

—Ellen Hargraves

Christmas Events



Journey to Bethlehem

Friday, December 1

Faith Evangelical Free Church (54 Hosmer Street, Acton)

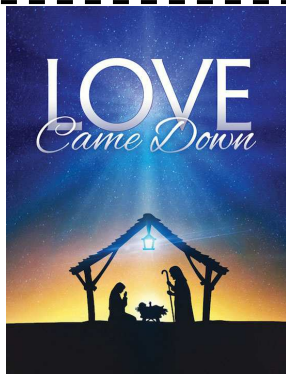
Meet at the church in Acton at 6:45 p.m.

This adventure takes you back to biblical times and reenacts the journey family would have taken to Bethlehem to be counted in the census as Mary and Joseph were. It's not a show, it's a journey that winds through the grounds of the church and can't be described with words. This is appropriate for children of all ages. Look for the Gail and Sophia so we can go through as a group.

Sunday, December 3 at 4:00 p.m.

The Groton Interfaith Council will host the annual Groton Christmas Tree Lighting service on **our church's front lawn**, featuring carol singing, prayers, and seasonal readings by representatives of Groton faith communities.

Afterwards all are invited inside our church for warm drinks and goodies. *We are looking for volunteers to donate refreshments to serve, which can be dropped off in the kitchen after worship that Sunday.*



Groton Community Christmas Concert

Sunday, December 10
2:00 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.

Monday, December 11
7:30 p.m.

Come and enjoy the 43rd Annual Groton Community Christmas Concert. There will be wonderful music of the season, sung by children and adults from Groton and 11 surrounding communities; Edie Tompkins, Director. This concert is held in our Sanctuary and is free (though donations will be accepted at the door).



All Church Christmas Caroling

Sunday, December 17 12:00—2:00 p.m.

We will gather at church to warm up. Then we'll visit people from the church who would appreciate a personal visit and the warmth of God's love shared in song.



Christmas Pageant

Sunday, December 24

Performance at 10:00 a.m. Worship Service

This year's drama looks at the Christmas story from the perspective of the donkey and the camel! Again, our own Kathleen McKenzie will direct it — contact her with your questions. **Rehearsals will take place:**

Saturday, 12/16	9:00 - 11:00 a.m.
Saturday, 12/23	9:00 - 10:00 a.m.
Sunday, 12/24	9:00 a.m.*

*To run through the show and get into costumes before the rest of the congregation arrives.



Christmas Eve WORSHIP

Christmas Eve Candlelight Worship (NEW TIMES)

4:00 p.m.—Family Worship

Especially for the Young

Our new Youth Bell Choir will perform; there will also be a sermon, offering, and passing of the light at the end of the service.

8:00 p.m.—Traditional Lessons and Carols

More Adult Family Worship Service

This service is more traditional and includes Lessons and Carols, along with a sermon, offering and the passing of the light at the close of the service. There will be lots of music and the full Christmas Story. *If you would be interested in reading scripture at this service, please contact Gail (978-448-2091 or gail@uccgroton.org).*

Please use the order form below to decorate our Sanctuary — cut along the dotted line and mail with your check as instructed below. Thank you!



2017 Poinsettia Order Form

Due by Sunday, DECEMBER 17!

An assortment of red and white Poinsettias will be placed in the Sanctuary for Christmas Eve Worship, December 24

Please make your check payable to *UCC Groton (memo: Poinsettia)* and mail the form and check to:

Carol Zaiatz
Union Congregational Church
220 Main Street
Groton, MA 01450

For the bulletin insert:

Plant is Given by: _____

In Loving Memory of: _____

In Honor of: _____

_____ Poinsettia Plant(s) @ \$15.00 each Total = \$ _____

After Christmas, plants will be delivered to folk in the church who might appreciate a gift of love. If you have a specific person in mind, please enter their information here:

Name _____

Address _____

If you have any questions, please contact Carol Zaiatz (978-448-2091 or unioncc@uccgroton.org). Thank you very much and may you have a Blessed Christmas!

Union Congregational Church
United Church of Christ
220 Main Street
Groton, MA 01450

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED



DATED MATERIAL
PLEASE DO NOT DELAY

[] PLEASE REMOVE ME FROM YOUR MAILING LIST
Please return to your mail carrier.



Advent/Christmas

Friday, Dec. 1 – *Journey to Bethlehem* (p. 6)

Sat., Dec. 2 – *Decorate the Sanctuary* (p. 2)

Dec. 3 – Advent One!

Holy Communion (by intinction)

Senior Choir

Building Project Informational Meeting after Worship (p. 3)

4:00 p.m.—Community Tree Lighting at our Church (p. 6)

Dec. 10 – Advent Two!

Handbell Choir

Christmas Concert — 2:00 and 7:30 p.m. (p. 6)
and 7:30 p.m. on Monday

Dec. 17 – Advent Three!

Senior and Handbell Choirs

Poinsettias Orders Due (p. 7)

12:00 p.m.—Caroling (see p. 6)

Dec. 24 – Advent Four!

Christmas Pageant during 10:00 a.m. Worship (see p. 6)

Christmas Eve Candlelight Worship (p. 7)

4:00 p.m.—Especially for the Young

8:00 p.m.—Lessons and Carols