

THE UNION COURIER

Union Congregational Church
United Church of Christ
The Rev. Corey J. Sanderson, Interim Pastor

220 Main Street
Groton, Massachusetts 01450



December 2021



Every year, as we enter the month of December, we come face-to face with the paradox of the Advent and Christmas seasons. It's a time of year when we feel like we are 'supposed to be' celebrating the great gifts of our faith — hope, love, peace, and joy. Yet, so often in our personal and family lives, and in the lives of those all around us, there are these very real experiences of depression, anxiety, sadness, and grief.

The endless jingly refrains on radio and TV, while we are trying to do our grocery shopping or just get a haircut, drive home this singular 'Fa La La' message that this month

is supposed to be a season of happiness and joy. While there is much to celebrate in life and many reasons to be joyful, this relentless holiday cheer can actually remind people of what they have lost or have never had. What I have learned through the years is that, for many people, the Advent and Christmas holiday seasons can be quite painful.

The anguish and grief surrounding the death of a loved one can make us feel terribly alone. A recent separation, a divorce, or a break-up can leave us reeling. Some people are struggling to find employment, wrestling with depression, or unexpectedly finding themselves in the midst of a family crisis. Whether these challenging situations were caused by the pandemic or just exacerbated by it, December can often be a dreary time for many folks.

This year, we are offering a 'Blue Christmas' service on Tuesday, December 21st, at 7:00 p.m. in the Sanctuary. While most folks immediately think of the song Elvis Presley sang, 'Blue Christmas' is a quiet and contemplative worship gathering for people who have had a difficult time and need some healing and hope. Given the global deadly pandemic that's been raging for the past eighteen months, that includes just about all of us.

'Blue Christmas' is not a traditional formal worship service, but it's more like a special worship experience, such as Ash Wednesday or Maundy Thursday. It's a worshipful time of music, prayer, silence, poetry, singing, scripture, and candle lighting that exists in that hinge moment between Advent longing and the looming reality that Christ will be born anew again. December 21st is the longest night of the year, so from there on out the days will be getting a little brighter.

While this evening is for all of us who make this congregation our church home, this is equally a gift to the people in the larger community. As people of faith, we are tasked with loving our neighbors. This is one way we can do so. Together, we can acknowledge the struggles that we all face, while providing a safe place of rest, comfort, healing, and hope. We all need space and time to acknowledge our sadness and be reminded that we are not alone. This might be the most important gift you can give to someone you know who has had a difficult year.

I have found, through the years, that church people sometimes think that inviting someone to a church event is this complex, stressful, scary, odd, high-pressure experience. In reality, it's a thoughtful and kind gesture that says, 'I was thinking about you and thought you might find this helpful or meaningful.' We invite people to things all the time. We tell friends, 'You should totally read this book I just finished; you would love it!' We ask for recommendations on Facebook for dentists, plumbers, or a good company that

Blue Christmas (cont.)

does yard work. We ask a co-worker if they want to meet at a coffee shop, or a neighbor if they want to join us for some event this weekend. Just because it is a church event, that really doesn't make it any different. One of the best ways to do so is to say something like,

I'm going a 'Blue Christmas' service at my church on Tuesday night, December 21st, at 7:00 p.m. and thought you might find it meaningful. It's a quiet and contemplative community vigil with music and poetry, singing and readings, silence and candle lighting, for people who have had a hard time this past year. I wanted to see if you had any interest in joining me. It's different from a Christmas Eve service, which is more upbeat and celebratory. Blue Christmas offers some hope and healing to the struggles we all face. It's not just for our church; it's geared for the wider community. If you are interested, I can meet you there or can pick you up on my way.

You can word it however you like, and say it in person, on the phone, or in an email, text, or Facebook message. Carol and I have put together some promotional materials you can forward or point them to.

One slight *caveat* is that sometimes people who have very little experience with church, or who maybe have had some bad experiences with churches, need some extra clarifications. I tell them, it's free, it's open to everyone (not just those who go to this church), you won't need to wear a name tag, there's no dress code, there is no offering where you have to give money, there are no forced awkward social introductions, there is nothing to sign up for, etc.

This Blue Christmas worship gathering is simply a gift to the larger community, because we are a church that cares. It's the textbook definition of 'Sharing Christ, Changing Lives.' As we continually strive to love and serve our neighbors, we are reminded that we are not supposed to put our light under a bushel basket — we are called to let the light of God shine through us in our lives.

Peace,



A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "Amy".



Christmas Eve Worship

Friday, December 24

4:00 p.m.—Family/Traditional Candlelight

All are welcome at this traditional candlelight service, which will include a children's sermon. Masks are recommended, but are not required. We hope you will be able to join us!



Our Church Family/News

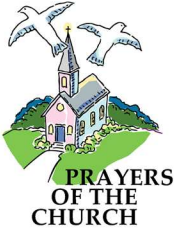


Ongoing Prayer List: If there is a name you would like to add or remove, please contact Carol Zaiatz (978-448-2091 or unioncc@uccgroton.org).

Stephanie Booth
Kristin Kelly
Rudi Schmid
Matt & Mandy Spain

Joe Marchesani
Bill Moeller
Sakkinen Family

Sanchez Family
Betty & Liz Waggoner
Laurie Waye



- Kim Daly and family, in the death of her mother, Martha Stone Crane, on October 27.
- Lauren Sanchez and family, in the tragic death of Jaime Sanchez, husband and father.
- Helen Misselhorn and Karen Sherwin, as they prepare for their move to Florida.

December Birthdays

Brenda Semienko	12/02	Dick Burrier	12/19	Ken Lefebvre	12/25
Will Nickerson	12/03	Gary Johnson	12/20	Carolyn DiCenzo	12/29
Scott Burgess	12/12	Don Kennedy	12/21	Joe Barreiro	12/31
Dave Woods	12/16	Janet Carey	12/22		
Korbin Larsen	12/18				

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?



Baptized in the Name of the Lord

Congratulations to **The Morrison Family** on the Baptism of **Luca Robert** and **Parker James Morrison**. Both were Baptized on Sunday, November 21, during worship.



Thank you to **Carly and Chip Detwiller** for the beautiful wreaths on the front doors of the church building. They look beautiful!



Proposed Budget Meeting Sunday, December 5, in the Fellowship Hall

Copies of the Proposed 2022 Operating Budget are available in the Sanctuary.

All are invited to a meeting at which the membership will approve the Operating Budget for 2022. Questions may be directed to our Treasurer, Dennis Carey (Treasurer@uccgroton.org), Mary Hanson, Stewardship & Finance, or Moderator Jean Armstrong. There will not be a Zoom option for this meeting, so we hope all who are able to will attend. For those who have not been at Worship and would like to review the budget, there is a link provided in the Friday email.

Church News (cont.)

Serving on Committees and Ministries

In preparation for our Annual Meeting late January/early February (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.

Committees: Buildings & Grounds; Christian Education; Diaconate; Endowment; Missions; Pastor-Parish Relations; Stewardship & Finance

Ministries: Fair; Kitchen; Technology; Youth and Family

Feel free to approach Jean Armstrong (Moderator) with your questions or to express an interest in a particular Committee or Ministry.

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 21.** 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). Carol will email last year's report to the respective committee chair to make the process easier. Thank you!

Hike at Andre's Institute

On **Sunday, November 21**, a group of us (11 plus Carl Prestia's German Shepherd) took a hike at **Andre's Institute in Brookline, New Hampshire**. It was a beautiful day. The two Colbert kids kept us entertained and attentive. The group was led by Steve Legge, who challenged all to guess his favorite sculpture! Two people guessed correctly and received a prize. Everyone had a great a time. Below are some pictures from the trip—enjoy!



Stewardship / Sunday School / In the Community

Stewardship Update



Pledge Update

The Stewardship Team would like to thank all who participated in Pledge Sunday (11/14) and to those who sent in their pledge for 2022. **As of 11/28/21, we have received 46 pledges. If you have not pledged yet, please mail your card to the Church Office, Attn: Collector (220 Main Street, Groton, MA 01450) or email Margaret Wheeler (collector@uccgroton.org).**

Year-end 2021 is approaching fast. Please make sure **all current year pledges are up-to-date no later than Sunday, December 26.** If you have questions about the status of your current year pledge, please email Margaret Wheeler (collector@uccgroton.org).

Now That I've Pledged—What's Next? If you requested weekly giving envelopes for 2022 when you filled out your pledge card, they will be available in late December. Since pledges are made for the upcoming calendar year, we start tracking 2022 pledges in January. ***If you have any questions about pledge envelopes, making your donations through online banking or giving online, please contact Margaret Wheeler (collector@uccgroton.org).***

Stewardship Team

—Jean Armstrong

—Halsey Platt

—Craig Smith

—Margaret Wheeler

Sunday School

December 5

Communion—Activity in the Fellowship Hall

December 12

John the Baptist, Luke 3:1-18

December 19

Mary Visits Elizabeth, Luke 1:39-55

December 26

No Sunday School—School Vacation

January 2

Communion—Activity in the Fellowship Hall

Christian Education

—Carl Prestia, Chair

—Jenn Coviello

—Bonnie Marchesani

In the Community...



Groton Interfaith Council

Walk of Lights/Groton Community Tree Lighting
Saturday, December 4, at 4:15 p.m.
Meet at the Prescott Community Center

This year, join the **Groton Interfaith Council** for the 'Walk of Lights' and the 'Groton Community Tree Lighting' celebrating the beauty of light in our diverse faith traditions. We will gather on **Saturday, December 4th at 4:15 pm.** The celebration begins on the sidewalk in front of Prescott Community Center, 145 Main Street, Groton. Volunteers will offer battery-operated candles for the 'Walk of Lights' down Main Street to the Groton Tree (near Filho's Cucina). Feel free to bring a lamp or luminary from your own faith tradition! Spontaneous carols may occur, for certain there will be cheerful banter as we make our way through our village center. ***For more information contact Nadia Madden, 781-640-4814, Judy Nauman, 978-808-4881, or Marie Melican, 978-448-8224.***

A Farewell Gathering Sunday, November 28

On Sunday, November 28, we had a farewell gathering after Worship for **Helen Misselhorn** and her daughter **Karen Sherwin**. They have been long-time members here, but are moving to Florida. We will miss them both terribly, but wish them well and hope they will come back to visit us often!



Christmas Angel Giving 2021

Join the Missions Team in supporting two wonderful local causes this Christmas season. Stay tuned for more information in Friday's email and the church bulletin.



Catie's Closet

Based in Dracut, Massachusetts, *Catie's Closet* transforms unused areas inside schools into safe, welcoming spaces where students in grades pre-K through 12 can discreetly shop, free of charge, for clothing, toiletries, and other necessities. By arming students with the power of choice, *Catie's Closet* fuels their confidence, encourages them to stay in school, and unlocks opportunities to break the cycle of poverty.

Catie's Closet improves school attendance and graduation rates, as well as the mental, emotional, and physical health of students facing poverty, homelessness, and other crises by providing free, in-school access to clothing and basic necessities and uniting with community partners to meet students' other immediate needs. Read more at: <https://www.catiescloset.org/our-work/> (link provided in the Friday email)

The Missions Team is curating a list of useful items you may choose to donate this year to *Catie's Closet*. Look for a list in the regular Friday email and there will be donation boxes located at the top of the stairs (on both sides) where you can donate needed items.

The Sanchez Family

As many of you are aware, Jaime Sanchez, of Ayer, Massachusetts, unexpectedly passed away on Saturday, November 13, 2021, after a fatal car accident. His wife, Lauren Sanchez, has been a librarian at the Groton Public Library for many years. Most recently, she has acted as the beloved children's librarian. We are looking to support Lauren and her two teenage daughters in a personal and loving way, as they come to terms with their devastating loss. We will provide more details in the upcoming weeks on how the congregation as a whole can best support the Sanchez family.

In the meantime, if you are interested in making a monetary donation directly to the Sanchez family (in addition to the church's combined gift), please use the link provided in the Friday email.

Missions Committee

—Julie Sutherland-Platt, Chair
—Lynn Manalo

—Krista Kubick

—Stefanie Lempp

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CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED



DATED MATERIAL
PLEASE DO NOT DELAY

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

Advent/Christmas

Dec. 5 – Advent Two!

Holy Communion
Poinsettia Orders due by Monday, Dec. 6

Dec. 12 – Advent Three!

Dec. 19 – Advent Four!

Poinsettias will decorate our Sanctuary

Dec. 21 – *Blue Christmas* at 7:00 p.m.
(see p. 1-2)

Christmas Eve Candlelight Worship (p. 2)
4:00 p.m.—Candlelight Service (families are welcome)

Dec. 26—Christmas Carol Sing

