



CENTRAL NEWS

Dec 2020

Vol. 29, No. 4

From Rebecca

I write this on a dark November Monday morning. Rain is coming in sheets sideways and thunder pushes poor Hedwig further into her dog nest under the table.

All of us are figuring out how to reconfigure Thanksgiving and in so doing, I think we are getting ever closer to its essence... of thanks living. That is, living each day in gratitude for life itself, for love and moments of forgiveness and grace. But I'm also thinking about the coming season of Advent.

God was in our beginning and God is at our ending. And within those two mysteries, there is Emmanuel, which is of course, "God with us." God is with us throughout our journeys...the God of creation and the God of eternal grace. And God walks with us in our journeys in the person of Jesus Christ.

Paul Scherer writes, if this vision of God does not move and drive and pull and tug and wrench and twist and hold and stride and walk off grimly after God, it is nothing. We stultify it when we use it as a solace and no more. We prostitute it when we hitch it to some private little enterprise against headaches....This is to take the power of God that swings the stars in orbits and ask it to do nothing but household chores.

Life may not always be easy. And 2020 has certainly proven that. But, remember, the God who swings the stars into orbits also cares about you, dear friend...and carries you gently on strong arms of love and care....Jesus has come so we might have life and have it abundantly. We have only to meet the life we are given, greet it with glad shouts and reach out to others of God's flock with care and compassion in God's presence.

And now, the rain has stopped for a time. No rainbow, but the promise of lifting clouds -- reminders of Emmanuel....God with us...wherever we are. So, Hedwig and I are going out to greet the day! Fear and trembling are left under her table. O come, o come, Emmanuel!

With my prayers for A Good Advent, in joy filled waiting, to you and yours,

Rebecca

Stewardship Moment

What a difference a year makes. Last December we were looking forward to Christmas at Central, the Carol Service, the Children's Pageant, the Christmas Eve candlelight service. Life was festive, busy, and spent with family and friends. Then enter the pandemic, and our lives look much different.

Throughout this challenging year, Central has remained a constant in our lives. Service continues, committees meet, and our clergy and church staff have continued to do the important work of Central. We have remained open for each other.

Remaining open is vital and necessary to sustain our community of faith, whether in

the midst of a pandemic or not. The vital work of our church requires the support of each of us. The lights must stay on, the sanctuary must remain warm, clergy and staff must be paid, mission works must continue.

As you reflect this holiday season on the gifts we each have been received, please consider your gift to Central during next year's Stewardship Campaign. As Maya Angelou said, "When we give cheerfully and accept gracefully, everyone is blessed." Please give graciously to spread blessings to us all.

Wishing you a happy, safe and healthy Christmas.

DEC EVENTS

2	Gallery Committee	9:30 am
3	Rebecca's Book Group	12:30 pm
5	Women's Retreat Group	7 pm
6	Stewardship Committee	9:15 am
	Church School	9:30 am
	Middle School Class	10:15 am
	Worship	10:30 am
	Confirmation Class	11 am
	Adult Sunday school	6 pm
	NEOS	6 pm
	WORD	7 pm
7	Technology Committee	7 pm
8	Deacons Meeting	5:45 pm
10	Re-Imagining Chapel Hall	6 pm
	Food for Thought	7 pm
12	Women's Retreat Group	7 pm
13	Church School	9:30 am
	Middle School Class	10:15 am
	Worship	10:30 am
	Confirmation Class	11 am
	Adult Sunday school	6 pm
14	Christmas Memorial Names Due	5 pm
15	Plant & Properties	5:45 pm
	Prudential Meeting	7 pm
19	Women's Retreat Group	7 pm
20	Church School	9:30 am
	Middle School Class	10:15 am
	Worship/Children's Pageant	10:30 am
	Confirmation Class	11 am
	Carol Service	4 pm
	Adult Sunday school	6 pm
	NEOS	6 pm
	WORD	7 pm
24	Christmas Eve Worship	5:30 pm
26	Women's Retreat Group	7 pm
27	Church School	9:30 am
	Middle School Class	10:15 am
	Worship	10:30 am
	Confirmation Class	11 am

The church office will be closed Friday, Dec. 25 for Christmas Day.

JOIN US FOR SUNDAY WORSHIP AT 10:30 AM!



Seeking a Church Home?

If you're looking for a church – or know someone who is – we'd love to talk with you about it at our Inquirers' Meeting. It's very informal. You'll meet with our senior minister, Rebecca Spencer, and others like you who think Central may be the right church home. No commitment necessary. To join us, fill out a pew card during Sunday Worship or phone the Office at 401-331-1960 and Rebecca will get in touch.

Inquirers' Meeting*

Wednesday, January 22, 7 pm

Faith Exploration*

Tuesday, January 26, 7 pm

New Member Sunday: February 2

*These meetings are held in the Fireplace Room of Central Church.

The Deacon's Bench

December is usually about the well-known birthday of Baby Jesus. But this December, please allow me to lift up another special observance: My Central friend, Irene Cloutier, will celebrate her 95th birthday! Irene is a constant inspiration, with international interests and a colorful fashion sense.

This year of the Covid-19 pandemic brings our attention to elders such as Irene. Their years of experience and long memories provide balance to our wide-ranging community.

For me, Central's expert Parliamentarian Bill Clafin is also a senior inspiration (perhaps you can name other friends too?). A few years ago when I became an inexperienced new Committee chairperson, I was often grateful for Bill's mentoring presence. This November, deacon Peter Woodberry also reminisced about transporting Bill to the election polls, where they enjoyed sharing their civic duty.

This fall every deacon has cherished a special link: Each deacon writes to a Central member who either lives in a nursing home, or who may have simply lost touch with our church. We assure these special friends that they are not forgotten. Other enduring networks include Central's Calling Committee, and the ARK circle (Acts of Random Kindness). We rely on you, our readers, to expand these daily networks of grace.

Our United Church of Christ denomination enfolds every age worldwide – newborn to centenarians – as we join the eternal *Hallelujah Chorus!*

Merry Christmas to all ages,

May Grant



Christmas Worship

We love our holiday traditions because they draw us closer and fix our eyes on Jesus. This year, we're re-thinking and re-designing our favorite events to provide space for social distancing.

- **Children's Pageant:** CCC Youth plan and conduct this virtual Christmas pageant tailored for families of all ages. Sunday, Dec. 20, **10:30 am**
- **Carol Service:** Start Christmas week with our inspiring and music-filled Carol Service. Sunday, Dec. 20, **4 pm**
- **Christmas Eve:** A traditional service celebrating the miracle of Jesus' birth. Thursday, Dec. 24, **5:30 pm**

Zero Waste Project

Save the date for a zoom presentation by Kevin Budris, Attorney at the Conservation Law Foundation on The Zero Waste Project, Tuesday, February 9, 2021 at 7 pm.

This presentation originally to be held at Central and hosted by the Perennial Planters Garden Club, will still be available to you via zoom. Watch for details in the coming bulletins!

Treasurer Note

As we draw near the end of 2020, the stock market has emerged from its earlier pandemic-induced slump and has returned to robust levels. If you own shares of marketable stock that have participated in this rally, and if donation of such shares makes sense in your year-end tax planning, Central Congregational would be most appreciative of any such gifts.

In order to donate appreciated securities to Central Congregational Church, please contact either of the Church's Co-Treasurers (Mary F. Hazeltine and Winfield Major) via phone (401-648-0784) or email (mhazeltine@centralchurch.us or wmajor@centralchurch.us) to discuss the process for making such donations.

Thank you for considering Central Congregational Church.

In Memoriam

Our prayers and sympathy are with Mary Marran and her family on the death of her mother, Lillian Bailey.

Our prayers and sympathy are with the friends and family of Susan Gibson, the wife of the former minister of our church, Raymond Gibson. *Requiescat in pace.*

From Claudia

During this season of Advent we turn in the traditional ways to contemplate what it means to us that Jesus was born in Bethlehem to an occupied people experiencing tough times under Roman rule. We all know that such tough times continue into our own time. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote this about Advent: "The celebration of Advent is possible only to those who are troubled in soul, who know themselves to be poor and imperfect, and who look forward to something greater to come."

There is a lot to trouble our souls these days, isn't there? But, when we start from that point there is also a lot that this season of Advent offers us. We hear the readings from the Bible and we contemplate the hymns and understand that this is a season of waiting in the liturgical calendar for Christ's coming into the world.

One of the ways in which we symbolize such waiting is in the lighting of candles on our Advent wreath in worship and at home as well. Its origins came about as an object lesson for children. Johann Hinrich Wichern, a minister in Germany, created it for the children in his mission school in 1839. He used an old wagon wheel and fitted it with four white candles and twenty small red candles. The red ones were lit on weekdays and the white ones were lit on Sundays. Sort of like an Advent calendar, but with candles counting down the days.

In our countdown to Christmas it is fitting that we begin our worship with the lighting of the Advent wreath as we await the celebration of the Advent into this world of the Christ Child. Also fitting is our traditional hymn, "O Come, O come, Emmanuel."

We hear these words from plainsong with a tune from the 9th century and they ring as true as they have through the ages: "O come, thou Wisdom from on high, And order all things, far and nigh; To us the path of knowledge show, And cause us in her ways to go." Particularly poignant are the words of the last verse in our hymnals: "O come, Desire of nations, bind all peoples in one heart and mind; Bid envy, strife and quarrels cease; Fill the whole world with heaven's peace."

May it be so. Matthew Kelly wrote this short prayer for Advent: "God of hope, I look to you with an open heart and yearning spirit. During this Advent season, I will keep alert and awake, listening for your word and keeping to your precepts. My hope is in you." Amen.

Let us watch and wait and wonder and ponder and behold together!

Advent blessings,

Claudia



SAVE THE DATE

Central's Carol Service

Sunday, December 20 at 4 pm

If you'd like to attend in person please go to Central's website to register your tickets
<http://www.centralchurch.us>

The Xmas Fund

The Christmas Fund has been caring for active and retired clergy and lay employees of the United Church of Christ for over 100 years, providing emergency grants, supplementation of small annuities and health premiums, and Christmas "Thank You" gift checks each December to our lower-income retirees.

Over the past nine months, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the emergency financial needs of many who serve the church have increased dramatically.

United Church of Christ congregations and members have blessed the Christmas Fund with their generosity for many years. This year, your care and compassion will be especially appreciated by those servants of the church who are facing a time of need. Please consider donating either in the envelope attached, through [tithely](https://www.giving.ly) or a check sent to Central Church by Monday, December 16. Thank you!

Rebecca's Book Group

Join us for a lively discussion of the New York Times bestselling book, "Jack" by Pulitzer Prize winning author Marilynne Robinson. The fourth novel in Robinson's Gilead series, tells a story of the complexities of American history through love, race and religion. Give Rebecca a ring for a Zoom link..
Thursday, Dec. 3 at 12:30 pm.

Women's Retreat Group

The women of Central are invited to gather in solidarity to pray and check in every Saturday - until we no longer need to meet like this! Ask Claudia for the Zoom link. **Saturdays throughout Dec. at 7 pm.**

Adult Sunday School

Incarnation: Rediscovering the Significance of Christmas

Incarnation comes from the Latin for embodiment/become flesh. We will explore the why and what of the meaning of incarnation. Most importantly, we will think about the how--how we respond to what incarnation means for us as Christians in these days. Based on the book by Adam Hamilton this study will meet 5 times—on the 4 Sundays of Advent plus Epiphany Sunday. Ask Claudia for the Zoom link. **Sundays 12/6, 12/13, 12/20 & Jan. 3 at 6 pm.**

Food for Thought Book Group

This will be our annual Christmas gathering with a new plot twist! You are invited to join us bringing your own beverage, snack or dessert. You are also invited to bring a book (or the title of a book) that you would recommend if you wish. Ask Claudia for the Zoom link. **Thursday, Dec. 10 at 7 pm.**

Spiritual Companionship

Come and join us as we explore where God is in our lives. Spiritual companionship is a very ancient tradition. It is a way to offer ourselves a holy spaciousness by listening for God. Through the companionship of others participants often find new possibilities in their spiritual life and practices. Ask Claudia for the Zoom link. **Thursday, Jan. 7 at 6 pm.**

Caring and Sharing

Join women of all ages who come together in supportive fellowship and activities. This month, we'll connect virtually and share where we are in our lives. Ask Claudia for Zoom link. **No December meeting. See you Thursday, Jan. 21 at 7 pm!**

Church School News

Deck the Gallery!

While the pandemic has forced the Gallery Committee to halt our monthly artist shows, we tapped our very own Jim Scott to brighten the gallery space. His photographs will be on display in the Gallery through winter 2021.

The Children's Pageant

Celebrate the true meaning of Christmas with Central's virtual Christmas Pageant. This year, it will be based on "Do Not Be Afraid," a virtual pageant by Illustrated Ministries. Children of all ages are encouraged to be a part of the timeless story of the birth of Jesus. Stay tuned for more details! **Sunday, December 20 at 10:30 am.**

Christmas Tree Sale Cancelled

It's been a Christmas staple at Central for years. Unfortunately, 2020 has other plans. The Boy Scouts have cancelled the event and will not be selling Christmas Trees this year. We look forward to resuming tradition in the 2021 holiday season.

Stay Connected

Your health and safety are in our prayers, but have faith that God will see you through the holidays, and the pandemic. Stay connected to our faith community by staying active online: sign up for email updates, attend group meetings, share Central's Facebook page for friends to see. Socially distanced, but spiritually connected!

Christmas Memorial Flowers

Dedicate a Christmas poinsettia in memory of a loved one. Names received by 5:00 p.m. on December 14 will appear in the worship bulletins for December 20 and Christmas Eve. A donation of \$30 per memorial name is requested (couples count as one). To give the gift of Christmas flowers please call the office at 331-1960.

Grief Support

I volunteer at Hope Health and now facilitate a Grief Support Group (Zoom) for LGBTQ people who are grieving the loss of a loved one. There does not have to be any link or association with the Hope Health Hospice organization. Anyone interested can either email or call me (401-826-2643), or go to the website: hopehealthco.org and click on Services/ find a grief support group."

Thank you, Robert Iovino-Zuniga

Even though we are not able to meet in person, the church school continues to gather every Sunday on Zoom. This month we are adding an older class geared toward those in middle school. We are using the lectionary-based Seasons of the Spirit for our curriculum. The children have been learning some of Jesus' parables and discussing different ways to bring God's love to the world. Hopefully in the spring you'll smile when you encounter one project the children thought of and have been working on. That's all I can share about it for now.

This month the youth fellowships, NEOS (middle school) and WORD (high school) are meeting on Zoom to brainstorm different ways we can be together during the pandemic. Likewise the young adults are also exploring ways to meet.

Everyone involved with the church school is working hard to make this "new way of being church school" the best it can be. I hope that all our church school families are getting the information and link to Zoom each week. Please let me know if you haven't been receiving these by sending your contact information to judy@centralchurch.us. It will be good to hear from people I haven't yet met. It is always great to have new children join us.

Blessings,

Judy

Carol Service



We present our annual Carol Service once again this year on Sunday, December 20, at 4 pm. The service tells the story of the birth of Christ in scripture and song, starting with the creation story in the garden of Eden and concluding with the lesson of the incarnation. Members of our congregation read lessons, each echoed by a carol or anthem.

The service concludes with a beautiful candlelit tableau of the church as harp, cello, and organ play the blissfully peaceful "Sleep of the Infant Jesus."

We don't yet know if we can present the service in person, but if not we will have a virtual version available. To that end we ask that if you would like to attend in person that you go to Central's website to register your tickets so we can get an idea of attendance, and make possible contingencies if we find demand outpaces capacity!

Now more than ever we long to hear the Christmas Story told and listen to its timeless message of faith and redemption. We hope you can share in this beautiful gift of the music with your family and friends.

To register your tickets and for more information go to www.centralchurch.us.

Confirmation Class

Confirmation class began in November with seven teens participating. This is a time of questioning, exploring, and growing, as the teens consider their beliefs, doubts and understandings of faith. The confirmands are meeting Sundays on Zoom approximately every other week. They will be confirmed in the spring on Pentecost Sunday.

In the month of December the teens will be exploring the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ. Who is Jesus? What might Jesus have been like? What was the focus of his teaching? Why is he called Christ?

Our second meeting will focus on the Holy Spirit and the Trinity. Who is the Holy Spirit? Where does the Spirit fit in the biblical story, the church, and our personal lives? What is the Trinity? What does it mean to be three-in-one? Are God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit co-equals or is it more a hierarchy? The youth will look at the topics in relationship to themselves, their lives, and the world in this time.

Confirmation Class

Every other Sunday at 11 am via Zoom.

Holiday Schedule

Holiday Church School Schedule Sunday, **December 20**, will be the last Church School class in 2020. We'll resume on Epiphany, Sunday, **January 3**.

The Campaign to Re-Imagine Chapel Hall

One of the pillars of Central Congregational that has kept it growing and thriving for almost 170 years is its sense of community, realized in many ways. Built on a foundation of worship so evident in the Salem Covenant, Central's community has always reached beyond itself, to offer:

A welcoming spirit, confirmed in the spread of Central's membership which now comes from at least 35 of Rhode Island's 39 cities and towns, and a dozen Massachusetts and other locations. New Member Luncheons, dinners, pancake breakfasts, theater and musical events, diverse civic groups as the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, AA, Hamilton House and others enjoy and extend this welcome. The "reception area" is fitting for both weddings and funerals, for youth groups and game nights, for lectures and graduations, and for the annual Christmas Bazaar when Chapel Hall becomes a thriving marketplace for the entire neighborhood.

Inspiration immediately greets everyone as they enter the Gallery, where a dedicated Gallery Committee presents a rotating display of the talents of local artists, photographers, and sculptors, including a selection of prize-winning high school artists from around the state each spring. "Opening nights" bring new and familiar faces to Central to celebrate each exciting exhibition. The Church School presents its own lesson-inspired artistic interpretations in the Gallery.

Mission outreach to at least 17 local organizations and our designation by the United Church of Christ as a Global Mission Church, remains at the heart of Central's enduring commitment to serving the needs of the greater community. Vital partnerships with Amos House, Crossroads RI, and Camp Street Ministries and others provide both monetary and volunteer help, such as the Sandwich Brigade which provides food when other sources are closed. The Calling and the Flower Committees visit members who are at home or in nursing homes, so they know how much they are loved, and always very much a part of the community.

It is no wonder, then, that a year of strategic planning by all the working committees of Central Congregational Church coalesced around a compelling idea: that the amazing physical space of Chapel Hall (and the adjacent Gallery) is the "vessel" in which a great part of our community works takes place. Accordingly, the congregation voted on January 20, 2020 to make that vision real by approving a capital campaign to "Re-Imagine Chapel Hall," and to include at least 10% of the monies raised to support the Mission outreach of the church.

Despite the pandemic, committees and individuals have worked continuously throughout this very different year to create an exciting vision for Chapel Hall and the Gallery and to put the framework for the capital campaign together to support our Mission, and to make the vision a reality. The first glimpse of the designs was presented at the reset Annual Meeting on October 4 by the architect, Jim Childress of Centerbrook Architects, and Warren Jagger of Central Congregational. The first mention of the accompanying campaign was also included, as we now will need everyone to help provide the essential backing to make it happen.

As we approach Advent and the inspiration of Christmas, we hope you will all have a blessed season, especially knowing that all the help and hard work you have put into these plans over the last year and more, will come to fruition for the benefit, growth and outreach of our beloved Central Congregational Church.



Central's Newest Members

Ben Cunkelman

Ben moved to Rhode Island about a year ago from Somerville, MA. He works as a scientist at Boston Scientific. Some of Ben's interests include sports, biking, and surfing. Ben is also interested becoming involved at Central by joining the music committee or Plant and Properties.

We welcome you to the Central Congregational Church family, Ben!

Ginny Bradley

Ginny joins as an associate member. She is a long-time resident of Rhode Island and has called it home for the past 50 years. Since retiring from being a volunteer chaplain at Rhode Island Hospital, Ginny has enjoyed reading, writing poetry and creating art.

Ginny might look familiar because she's been a "friend of Central" for several years and attends many special events at the church. The desire to help others is why she is interested in volunteering her time with outreach programs or joining the calling committee. Please give Ginny a warm welcome to Central!

Jerry Brown

Jerry permanently moved to Rhode Island 1 year ago all the way from Chicago, Illinois. Her son, Christopher Brown was married at Central which was the deciding factor in Jerry becoming a member. The experience made her not only fall in love with the beautiful church architecture but with the community. She would love to be a part of the Central community by getting involved in some of our groups or forming her own! Welcome to Central, Jerry!

Janet Harris

Janet is joining Central as an associate member. She has been a life-long resident of Rhode Island but loves to travel. Janet has been a caregiver for most of her life, recently retiring from her position as Family Nurse Practitioner specializing in geriatrics. She would be delighted to provide care to others in need, via visits or phone calls.

Janet has attended services and events at Central for years with a dear friend. She enjoys the music, liturgy and now the feeling of belonging to a Christian community. Welcome to Central, Janet!

Central Congregational Church

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