

ZION UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST OF TREMONT

December 10th, 2023

Second Sunday of Advent

A Service of the Word



Advent 2 Candle

by Stushie Art

Church bulletin cover Stushie art unique crayon and digital worship art

A Scottish pastor, ministering in East Tennessee

<https://stushieart.com/2023/11/28/advent-2-art-for-churches/>



UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST
a just world for all

December 10th, 2023
Second Sunday of Advent
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WE GATHER IN COMMUNITY

“Every sunset is an opportunity to reset. Every sunrise begins with new eyes.”
Richie Norton

Welcome and Announcements

Prelude – *Adam Petrosino*

CALL TO WORSHIP (Inspired by Isaiah 40)

Leader: A voice cries out declaring God’s presence.
Comfort, O Comfort my people, says God.

All: We come preparing the way of the Lord.
Together, we actively wait for God’s peace.

Leader: A voice cries out declaring God’s equity.
Valleys shall be lifted and hills be made low.

All: We come to make straight in the desert a highway.
Together, we’re pressing toward God’s peace.

Leader: A voice cries out declaring steadfastness.
Grass withers, flowers fade, but God’s word stands forever.

All: We lift up our voices with strength and good tidings.
Together, we carry out God’s peace.

*** Invocation**

**Spirit of God,
who dwells within our hearts,
wean it from that which aims
to separate us from you.
In this moment
of collective worship
Take the dimness
of our souls away.
Let us seek you.**

Let us find you.
Teach us to feel
that you are always at hand
As we lift up our voices
with strength to worship you.
Amen.

Opening Hymn: NCH 122 - Come, O Long-Expected Jesus

A READING OF THE WORD

First Reading: Isaiah 40:1-11

The Revised Common Lectionary readings begin in the Hebrew Scriptures with the calling of the voice out of the wilderness to the people who were in exile. In these verses of Isaiah 40, the people hear words of comfort from God through the prophet sometimes referred to as Second Isaiah. The people have been in exile for over seventy years, and now, with the rise of the Persian empire, the people will be encouraged to return home from Babylon. The people have suffered more than enough—they've suffered too much. What God will do in bringing the people out of exile is restoring everything to how God intended—the high brought low, the low brought high, all the rough places smoothed out. God is leveling the playing field and starting over for the people of Israel. Though they will not remain faithful, God's word is always faithful—forever. The prophet calls upon the people who remained in Jerusalem to shout to the world that God is bringing the people home. God is like a shepherd leading the people, carrying those most vulnerable—the next generation.

- 40** 1 "Console my people, give them comfort,"
says your God.
- 2 "Speak tenderly to Jerusalem's heart,
and tell it
that its time of service is ended,
that its iniquity is atoned for,
that it has received from YHWH's hand
double punishment for all its sins."
- 3 A voice cries out,
"Clear a path through the wilderness for YHWH!
Make a straight road through the desert for our God!
- 4 Let every valley be filled in,
every mountain and hill be laid low;
let every cliff become a plain,
and the ridges become a valley!
- 5 Then the glory of YHWH will be revealed,
and all humankind will see it."
The mouth of YHWH has spoken!
- 6 A voice commands, "Cry out!"
and I answer, "What will I say?"
—"All flesh is grass

and its beauty is like the wildflowers:
 7 the grass withers
 and the flower wilts
 when the breath of YHWH blows on them.
 How the people are like grass!
 8 Grass withers, and flowers wilt,
 but the promise of our God will stand forever.”
 9 Go up on a high mountain,
 you who bring good news to Zion!
 Shout with a loud voice,
 you who bring good news to Jerusalem!
 Shout without fear,
 and say to the towns of Judah “Here is your God!”
 10 YHWH, O Sovereign One,
 you come with power,
 and rule with a strong arm!
 You bring your reward with you,
 and your reparation comes before you.
 11 Like a shepherd you feed your flock,
 gathering the lambs and holding them close,
 and leading mother ewes with gentleness.

Psalm Response: Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13 (Responsively)

These verses comprise a song of God’s faithfulness even though the people have gone astray. In verses 1-2, the psalmist speaks of how God has forgiven the people and restored them. In 8-13, the psalmist concludes that for those who are faithful, for those who remain in awe, God will bring all good things together. Poetically, the psalmist imagines steadfast love and faithfulness embracing, righteousness and peace greeting each other in a kiss. Faithfulness springs up from the ground while righteousness reaches down from the sky. God draws forth everything together in goodness and leads the people in the way of peace and righteousness.

85 1 O God, favor your land once again
 and restore the fortunes of Israel;
**2 forgive the guilt of your people
 and cover all their sins.**

8 I will listen to what you have to say, God—
 a voice that speaks of peace, peace
 for your people and your friends
 so long as they don’t return to their folly.

**9 Your salvation is near for those who revere you
 and your glory will dwell in our land.**

10 Love and faithfulness have met;
 justice and peace have embraced.

**11 Fidelity will sprout from the earth
and justice will lean down from heaven.**

12 God will give us what is good,
and our land will yield its harvest.

**13 Justice will march before you, God,
and peace will prepare the way for your steps.**

Second Reading: 2 Peter 3:8-15a

The Epistle reading from 2 Peter may be the latest book in the New Testament, coming as late as the middle of the second century (and not written by Peter). Knowing this, we hear the assurance that Christ will return, though God's time is not our time. Speaking of the day of God as told by the prophets, the writer envisions the day using the image of the thief in the night (Jesus used that as well in Mark 13), the heavens set on fire and dissolved and the elements of earth melted (the erasing of the line between heaven and earth), and the vision of a new heaven and new earth (as in Revelation 21). The writer urges the believers to wait patiently and remember what Paul wrote to them (meaning the receivers of this letter would be familiar with the letters of Paul at this point). This passage reminds us that scripture brings us assurance, that our waiting is not in vain. For the prophets of old who waited for the Messiah, for shepherds who would not lead the people astray, for a return from exile, to the leaders of the early church struggling to survive decades after the ascension of Jesus and the destruction of the temple—waiting for God is an active practice of faith, and we can learn from them.

3 8 This point must not be overlooked, dear friends: in the eyes of the Most High, one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. 9 God does not delay in keeping the promise, as some mean “delay.” Rather, God shows you generous patience, desiring that no one perish but that all come to repentance.

10 The day of our God will come like a thief, and on that day the heavens will vanish with a roar; the elements will catch fire and fall apart, and the earth and all its works will be destroyed in the flames. 11 Since everything is to be destroyed in this way, what holy and devoted lives you should lead! 12 Look for the coming of the Day of God, and try to hasten it along. Because of it, the heavens will be destroyed in flames and the elements will melt away in a blaze. 13 But what we await are new heavens and a new earth where, according to the promise, God's justice will reside. 14 So beloved, while waiting for this, make every effort to be found at peace and without stain or defilement in God's sight. 15 Consider our God's patience as your opportunity for salvation.

Gospel Reading: Mark 1:1-8

These verses are the beginning of the Gospel of Mark. Considered the oldest Gospel account we have, Mark begins the gospel with the quote from Isaiah 40 of the “voice of one crying out in the wilderness,” and immediately associates the verse with John. The Good News begins with John the Baptizer in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The Gospel does not start in the city of Bethlehem, the city of David; nor does it start in Jerusalem, the city of kings and the temple, or even in a quaint village in Nazareth. The Gospel starts in the middle of nowhere. And the people from the countryside and from Jerusalem began to go to John and met

him at the Jordan. And this wild man who wears camel's hair and eats locusts with honey tells them that one is coming after him who is more powerful (so John maybe thought he was powerful, just not as powerful as the Messiah?) What a way to begin a story! The one who is coming after John will baptize with the Holy Spirit. This is the beginning of the Good News—it's out of nowhere, it's for everyone, and it includes the work of the Holy Spirit.

- 1** 1 HERE BEGINS THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST, the Son of God:
2 as it was written in Isaiah the prophet: "I send my messenger before you to prepare your way,
3 a herald's voice in the desert, crying,
'Make ready the way of our God.
Clear a straight path.' "

4 And so John the Baptizer appeared in the desert, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to John and were baptized by him in the Jordan River as they confessed their sins. 6 John was clothed in camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist, and he ate nothing but grasshoppers and wild honey. 7 In the course of his preaching, John said, "One more powerful than I is to come after me. I am not fit to stoop and untie his sandal straps. 8 I have baptized you in water, but the One to come will baptize you in the Holy Spirit."

Advent Candle Lighting Liturgy: Second Sunday in Advent (December 10) - PEACE

One: Hope is assertive, but peace is subversive. The psalmist reminds us in Psalm 34:14 that we must seek peace and pursue it. We must search for it like a treasure hidden in a field, like it is the most precious, fragile thing we can imagine. But peace doesn't live only in dreams. Peace whispers into our ear that there is always another way, another path from rage and hate and fear. Peace calls us to have patience, but to not give up. Peace is not passive, but always lurking, just waiting for us to recognize we can grasp it. We light this candle as a reminder that peace is something we must pursue, for we follow the Prince of Peace.

Light two blue candles

All: God of Peace, our world is full of angry voices calling for vengeance, calling for retribution masked as justice, calling for destruction as a lie for peace. But we know the true peace that comes from you is available for us all if we seek it. If we follow you. May peace light our way in this world that desperately needs it. Amen.

Advent Candle Lighting Song: The Holy Fire of Advent (sung to the tune of NCH 148 - "What Child Is This")

The Holy Fire of Advent

Author: Rev. Elana Keppel Levy, 2022

Tune: GREENSLEEVES 8.7.8.7.6.8.6.7. with refrain

Source: English traditional melody, 16th century

1. The fire of hope awakes our hearts when in despair we're sleeping.
It speaks of light while through the night the shadows swiftly creep in.
Come, see the sparks of life that burn against the pow'r of strife;
Come, stand within its glow, the holy fire of Advent.

2. The call to peace rings in our ears when all around is raging.
Within, without temptation shouts – our wrathful whims engaging.
Wait, wait, our Savior's near: our weapons drop to the ground here.
Be joined in family, the holy fire of Advent.

Reflection - "Tidings of Comfort." by the Rev. Michael Howard,
Faith in Action Minister, Living Water Association, United Church of Christ

WE RESPOND

*Prayer of Response

We know that the daylight will shift, that the weather will change,
but in this moment, O God, help us to settle deep into this season.
To understand the harshness and bleakness of this time, but that it will pass.

We remember that Good News appears out of nowhere.
It is a voice of one—one person. It is a voice that cries out in the wilderness,
in the middle of nowhere. It is a voice that sees the futility of life,
that people are like grass that withers and fades away, and yet still has hope.

Still calls for comfort. Still calls for peace.
We hear your voice, O God, in the bleak midwinter.
We hear your voice, O God, in the terrible
cries of war and violence and bloodshed.
We hear your voice, O God, calling us to turn back to you.
We hear your voice, O God, calling us to the water.

We are settled in deep, O God, into the bleakness, and yet we know
Your voice is calling us, and will move us and shake us and stir us to do something,
for you will make all things new.

The world is about to turn. Amen.

*Advent Hymn - NCH 116 - O Come, O Come, Emmanuel vv. 1, 2, and 5

Invitation to Share Our Tithes and Offerings

Leader: We believe in the God of righteousness, and God believes in us to carry forth the mission of
loving and caring for community. Let us now share our gifts and resources so that we may
continue to walk humbly with God and with neighbors.

The Offertory – *Adam Petrosino*

***Presentation of Offerings – Doxology**

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God above, you heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

***Blessing of the Gifts**

We dedicate these gifts that have been shared for the fortification of the beloved community. Let these gifts usher peace into this world and signal to the people that God is with us. Amen.

Prayers of the People

The Lord's Prayer (using "debts" and "debtors")

Our Father, who art in heaven
Hallowed be thy Name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
As we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power,
and the glory,
forever.
Amen. ☩

GOING FORTH

***Parting Hymn: There's a Song in the Air (see p. 9- all verses)**

There's a Song in the Air

Josiah Gilbert Holland, 1872

Karl Pomeroy Harrington, 1904

$\text{♩} = 110$

1. There's a song in the air! There's a star in the sky! There's a
 2. There's a tu - mult of joy o'er the won - der - ful birth, For the
 3. In the light of that star lie the ag - es im - pearled; And that
 4. We re - joice in the light, and we e - cho the song That comes

mo - ther's deep prayer and a ba - by's low cry! And the star rains its
 vir - gin's sweet Boy is the Lord of the earth. Ay! the star rains its
 song from a - far has swept o - ver the world. Ev - ery hearth is a -
 down through the night from the hea - ven - ly throng. Ay! we shout to the

fire while the beau - ti - ful sing, For the man - ger of Beth - le - hem cra - dles a
 fire while the beau - ti - ful sing, For the man - ger of Beth - le - hem cra - dles a
 - flame, and the beau - ti - ful sing In the homes of the na - tions that Je - sus is
 love - ly e - van - gel they bring, And we greet in His cra - dle our Sav - ior and

king!
 king!
 king!
 king!

Public Domain
 Courtesy of the Cyber Hymnal™

***Commissioning and Benediction**

One: As you were present with us through your Word, O God:

All: May we be present to others who will come to us this week.

One: As you fed us with peace, Bread of Life:

All: May we grace others with your peace in the coming days.

One: As you welcomed us with your presence, Spirit of hope:

All: May we welcome those you send us who have no hope. Amen.

Postlude - Adam Petrosino (please be seated for the postlude)

* * * * *

Credits

- (1) The Call to Worship, Invocation, Invitation to Share our Tithes and Offerings, and the Blessing of the Gifts, are adapted from *Withering Grace...Standing Word: Service Prayers for the Second Sunday of Advent Year B*, written by The Rev. Mia M. McClain, Senior Pastor of Riverside Baptist Church in Washington D.C. She is an ordained UCC minister. Permission granted to reproduce or adapt this material for use in services of worship or church education.
- (2) The Advent Candle Lighting is adapted from *Advent 2023 Year B: Traditional themes of Hope, Peace, Joy, Love*, by the Rev. Mindi Welton-Mitchell. Posted October 28, 2023, on her blog, *Rev-o-lution*. <http://rev-o-lution.org/new-advent-candle-lighting-liturgy-for-2023-and-12-days-of-christmas/>
- (3) Prayer of Response is adapted from Sunday Worship Resources for December 10th, 2023, written by Rev. Mindi Welton-Mitchell, posted December 1st, 2023, on her blog, *Rev-o-lution*, <http://revo-lu-tion.org/>
- (4) Commissioning and Benediction are adapted from *Liturgy and Communion from December 10th, 2023, Advent 2-B*, Written by Thom M. Shuman, and posted December 3rd, 2023, on the blog, *Lectionary Liturgies*, <http://lectionaryliturgies.blogspot.com/>
- (5) Permission to stream the music in this service obtained from ONE License #A-736636. All rights reserved

Ministers, All of Us

Scott Rosenstein, Pastor
Adam Petrosino, Music Director
Keith Konet, Council President
Beverly Wurm, Administrative Assistant



NEWS AND UPCOMING EVENTS

God is Still Speaking...

No matter who you are, or where you are on life's journey, you will find a spiritual home in this United Church of Christ congregation. WELCOME!

Tithes and Offerings - Checks and Money Orders can be made payable to: "Zion United Church of Christ" and placed in the offering basket or mailed to:

**Zion United Church of Christ
c/o Keith Konet
1039 Bridlewood Drive
Copley, OH 44321**

Questions: Contact Keith Konet at 330.604.6939

Welcome to Adam D. Petrosino, Our New Music Director/Pianist

We are so pleased to welcome Adam, and his partner, Kiel, to our community of faith here at Zion United Church of Christ of Tremont, Cleveland, Ohio. We're grateful to you sharing your presence, faith, and musical gifts with us.

Adam can be reached by e-mail at A.D.Petrosino@gmail.com and by phone at **234.205.9397**.

Administrative Assistant, Beverly Wurm

Beverly is keeping some limited Office Hours at church (2700 W. 14th St)/home. The days and hours are:

Fall Schedule :

Tuesday– 9am – 1pm

Wednesday – 10am-2 pm

Thursday – 9am – 1pm

Beverly can be reached at: zionchurchtremont@gmail.com or by phone at: 216-273-7561 (church) or 216-310-6810 (mobile).

We Welcome Our Guest Today - The Rev. Michael Howard, Minister of Faith in Action

**with the Living Water Association of the Heartland Conference (Ohio & northern Kentucky),
United Church of Christ**

330.940.2220 x 103 | michael.mfia@livingwaterone.org

Michael has been serving as the Minister of Faith in Action, since March 2019. From the wooded knobs of Kentucky countryside, Michael is a teacher, community organizer, and prophetic Christian leader. He has taught and served around the world, including Peru, Brazil, India, and Ethiopia; along with Kentucky, Virginia, and New Jersey. In addition to traditional pastoral ministry, Michael has coached and co-founded a number of community organizations, nonprofits, and

small businesses. Michael is an ordained minister in the UCC and has an MPA from Morehead State University and an MDiv from Drew Theological Seminary.

Contact Michael for:

- All things related to Community engagement, outreach/mission, prophetic action
- Help with visioning and organizing community engagement ministries
- Prophetic witness and social justice issues
- MissionInsite questions and interpretation
- Wider church connections and issues
- Advocacy and community forums
- Interfaith relationships



Advent Sundays at Zion Church

- Sunday, December 3rd, 11:00 AM – First Sunday of Advent – Holy Communion
- Sunday, December 10th, 11:00 AM – Second Sunday of Advent – Guest Preacher is the Rev. Michael Howard, Faith in Action Minister with the Living Water Association of the Heartland Conference (Ohio & northern Kentucky), United Church of Christ
- Sunday, December 17th, 11:00 AM – Third Sunday of Advent
- Sunday, December 24th, 6:30 PM – Fourth Sunday of Advent followed by Christmas Eve Service of Carols & Candlelight

The Advent Wreath

The Advent wreath is a Christian tradition that symbolizes the passage of the four weeks of Advent in the liturgical calendar of the Western church. It is traditionally a Lutheran practice, although it has spread to many other Christian denominations including the United Church of Christ.

It is an evergreen wreath with four candles, sometimes with a fifth, white candle in the center.

Beginning with the First Sunday of Advent, the lighting of a candle can be accompanied by a Bible reading, devotional time and prayers. An additional candle is lit on each subsequent Sunday until, by the last Sunday of Advent, all four candles are lit. Some Advent wreaths include a fifth, Christ candle which is lit at Christmas Eve or Christmas Day. The custom originated in family settings but has also become widespread in public worship.

More recently, some Eastern Orthodox families have adopted an Advent wreath with six candles, symbolizing the longer Christmas fast in Orthodox tradition, which corresponds to Advent in Western Christianity.

Christian symbolism in the Advent wreath

Advent wreaths are circular, representing God's infinite love, and are usually made of evergreen leaves, which "represent the hope of eternal life brought by Jesus Christ". Within the Advent wreath are candles that generally represent the four weeks of the Advent season as well as "the light of God coming into the world through the birth of Jesus Christ" although each of the candles can be attributed its own significance as well. The four candles of the Advent wreath specifically symbolize the Christian concepts of hope, peace, joy and love, with these candles being lit subsequently throughout each week of the Advent season. Many Advent wreaths also have a white candle in the center to symbolize the arrival of Christmastide, which is known as the 'Christ candle'. It is first lit on Christmas Eve, the beginning of Christmastide and may be lit throughout the rest of the Christmas season. The Christ candle is colored white because this is the traditional festal color in the Western Church. An additional layer of meaning names the first candle as the Messiah or Prophecy candle (representing the prophets who predicted the coming of Jesus), the second is the Bethlehem candle (representing the journey of Joseph and Mary), the third represents the shepherds and their joy, and the fourth is the Angel's candle, representing peace.

In many Roman Catholic and Protestant churches, the most popular colors for the four surrounding Advent candles are violet (or blue) and rose, corresponding with the colors of the liturgical vestments for the Sundays of Advent. For denominations of the Western Christian Church, violet is the historic liturgical color for three of the four Sundays of Advent as it is the traditional color of penitential seasons; **blue has been historically used too, as it represents hopefulness, reflective of the theme of Advent surrounding the First Coming of Jesus and the Second Coming of Jesus.** Rose is the liturgical color for the Third Sunday of Advent, known as *Gaudete Sunday* (from the Latin word meaning "rejoice ye", the first word of the introit of this Sunday); it is a pause in the penitential spirit of Advent. As such, the third candle, representing joy, is often a different color from the other three.



You are Invited to A Christmas Party

OWLS CLEVELAND – Older, Wiser, Livelier Seniors are hosting a Christmas Party on **Wednesday, December 13th, 11:30 AM – 1:30 PM** at **Zion Church** (2700 W. 14th Street). Movies, Music, Bingo, with Prizes along with a special holiday luncheon!

RSVP to 216-310-6810 (Bev Wurm).

A Christmas Eve Candlelight Service

Will be held on Sunday, December 24th at 6:30pm. We invite you to share the light in a service with beautiful music and a message that reminds us of that night long ago that continues to transform our world and our lives. The Christmas Eve worship service will include carols, a relevant Christmas message and our cherished tradition of passing the candle light and joining in the singing of Silent Night. You can also join the service via the Zoom platform online at 6:30 PM on December 24th.





**Tremont-Duck Island-Irishtown Bend Holiday Food Drive
2023-2024
Running now through January 15th, 2024**

lend a helping hand to neighbors - families and children - in need
in Tremont, Duck Island, and Irishtown Bend
and provide help to the 12 local Cleveland food pantries - ministries.

Round 1: To assure your donation of cash/checks/canned goods/paper products will be received by local food pantries before the Christmas-New Year's Holidays – please donate by December 15th, 2023

Three Ways to Donate:

- 1) **Give canned goods & paper products** – deliver to Zion Chapel (2700 W 14th Street).
- 2) **Donate online by Credit or Debit Card, Venmo, or PayPal** – visit:
<https://givebutter.com/HolidayFoodDrive-TRE-DI-IB>
select the Holmden-Buhrer-Rowley/Mentor-Castle-Clark block clubs or the Auburn-Lincoln Park block club and the food pantry/hunger center you would like your donation to go to
- 3) **Donate by Check** – make payable to the food pantry/hunger center of your choice ******(see list below******) – for verification purposes, deliver check to Zion Chapel and Pastor Scott will see that it gets to the food pantry you designate.

**Total Collected as of Friday, December 8th, 2023 at 6:50 PM - \$11,870
Goal in Cash/Checks for this food drive: \$25,000**

Food Pantries – Hunger Center Ministries:

- Immanuel Lutheran Church Food Pantry
- Pilgrim Church Food Pantry
- St. Augustine Hunger Center hot meals program
- St. Malachi Church Back Door Ministry
- The Greater Cleveland Food Bank
- Westside Catholic Center
- St. Augustine Parish food pantry services
- Iglesia Nueva Vida Food Pantry - Comedor comunitario
- Mega Church Resource Center Food Pantry
- Hunger Action Network of Greater Cleveland
- Scranton Road Bible Church Food Pantry
- St. Michael the Archangel Food Pantry - Reparto de Compras

Some Special Days/Holidays in December, 2023:

- World AIDS Day – December 1st
- Advent Begins – December 3rd
- St. Nicholas Day – December 6th

- Chanukah (also called Hanukah or Hanukkah) Begins – December 7th
- Human Rights Day – December 10th
- Bill of Rights Day – December 15th
- Winter Solstice – Yule – December 21st
- Festivus Day – December 23rd
- Christmas Day – December 25th
- Kwanzaa Begins – December 26th
- New Year's Eve – December 31st

Any questions regarding the Holiday Food Drive contact Scott Rosenstein (tremont701@gmail.com)– or call Scott at 216.577.1514 (mobile).

Please Remember in Prayer

- The Universal Church, its members and mission,
- The nation and all in authority, the leaders of our nation - federal, state, and local.
- For democracy and our democratic institutions and norms in the United States.
- The welfare of the world and the concerns of the local community.
- The interrelationship of Gospel values and civic engagement.
- Ministries of the United Church of Christ and of Zion Church.
- The leaders of our church: local, regional, and national, including The Rev. Karen Georgia Thompson, General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ. We also pray for our Living Water Association UCC, Association General Minister, The Rev. Nayiri Karjian, and Association Faith in Action Minister, The Rev. Michael Howard.
- The ministers and missionaries of the world.
- Those who are refugees and immigrants.
- For children separated from their parents at detention camps along our southern border.
- For racial and religious justice and reconciliation in the United States and around the world.
- Mother Earth and the global reflection on climate disruption.
- For peace, justice, and freedom throughout the world and particularly for the peoples of Ukraine, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, and the United States.
- Gaza is ruled by Hamas, an Islamist militant group that is committed to the destruction of Israel and is designated as a terrorist group by the US and many other powers. Hamas launched an unprecedented assault on Israel on Saturday, October 7th, 2023 with hundreds of gunmen infiltrating communities near the Gaza Strip.



At least 1,200 Israelis were killed, while around 250 soldiers and civilians, including women and children, were being held in Gaza as hostages. During a pause in military action in late November, Hamas released 73 Israelis and 24 foreign nationals from captivity in Gaza, according to the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. A spokesman for the Israel Defense Forces said that 159 hostages remain in Gaza. They include U.S. citizens. Israel in return released

210 Palestinians held in Israeli prisons (mostly women and teenage boys). In addition to

significant air strikes Israel followed up with a ground invasion of Gaza. More than 17,177 people have been killed in Gaza and surpassing 35,000 wounded, according to the Gaza Health Ministry. The death count is incomplete because health officials can't tally the dead at two of the enclave's large hospitals or account for bodies under the rubble from air strikes that Israel's military has carried out in response to the Hamas attack on October 7th, At that time Israel imposed a total blockade on the territory, denying it food, fuel, water, and other essentials. During a temporary pause more than 200 trucks loaded with medical supplies and food aid have entered Gaza from Egypt each of the past few days, some of which made it to northern Gaza — a first in the conflict. The United States airlifted more than 54,000 pounds of medical equipment and food aid for Gazans, which is the first of three deliveries. The pause ended and hostilities resumed on Friday, December 1st. There is a significant and growing humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

- Two significant earthquakes jolted Nepal on Monday, November 6th, just three days after a powerful temblor killed more than 150 people in the Himalayan nation. A magnitude 5.2 earthquake struck Nepal on Monday, centered in the Jajarkot district about 250 miles northeast of the capital, Kathmandu, which was hit hard by the magnitude 5.6 earthquake on Friday. At least 153 people were killed by that first quake, according to the latest official figures from Nepalese authorities on Monday, which was a slightly lower toll than provided over the weekend. More than 339 people were also injured.
- The people of Lewiston, Maine and surrounding communities following a mass shooting at two locations on October 25th that took the lives of 18 people and injured 13 other people.
- According to data from the Gun Violence Archive a total of 633 mass shooting incidents have occurred in the US as of December 6th, 2023. In 2022 a total of 648 mass shootings occurred. In 2021 a total of 693 mass shooting incident occurred across the US, in 2020 a total of 611, in 2019 a total of 417, with 337 incidents in 2018. While we pray for the families and friends of those whose lives have been taken in violent acts – and we pray for those injured in body, mind, soul, and spirit—and for their neighborhoods and communities across the United States – We know that our words and prayers are not enough. We must repent for our collective inaction and commit to tirelessly working toward meaningful gun violence prevention.
- For those affected by the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic and the various variant surges: for all those who are infected and/or sick, and those who are grieving, for all who are affected, all around the world, for essential workers and frontline workers...we pray for comfort, for safety, for health and for wholeness.
- The residents and management of the San Sofia Apartments who share a campus with us.
- Those anticipating surgery, recovering from surgery, or undergoing medical procedures, tests, or treatments.
- Those living in assisted living or in a nursing home
- Those who are homebound and those who are caregivers
- Those who suffer or are in any trouble, and the departed.
- Those on our church prayer list:
 - Patti Augustine (*health concerns*) and family. Patti's brother Dave is recovering from recent open-heart surgery.
 - Robert O. Bucklew (*Bob Bucklew's Dad*) is residing at Mapleridge Senior Living Willoughby, OH. Robert recently celebrated his 91st Birthday.
 - The family, loved ones, and friends of Betty Funk.

- Marian Heffernan (*neighbor to Scott and Bob – health concerns*)
- Ken Kauffman & friends: Nim Bryant, Isadora Almaro, Joe & Janelle Reardon, Barbara Reed, Nancy Moore's sister has passed away and prayer for Nancy's neighbor for healing.
- Jocelyn Paulette and her parents, Kevin & Jacqui Konet - prayers for recovery.
- Keith Konet and family.
- Marcia Leslie (*friend – health concerns*)
- The family, loved ones, and friends of Elaine Lukacs.
- Patricia Matheny and family (*including prayers for her Cousin Paul Kevin McCray*).
- Our new Music Director, Adam Petrosino, and his partner, Kiel.
- Barbara Rossington (*Prayers for Barb for recovery of procedure - & Prayers for Barb's cousin, Robert, for tests and procedures*).
- The family, loved ones, and friends of Henry Senyak.
- Debbie Webb (*continued prayers*)
- Beverly Wurm (*prayers for family*)

Thursday, December 7, 2023

Nesting for Hope

From Michael Howard, Minister of Faith in Action,
Living Water Association, Ohio NorthEast, UCC



Advent is a season of expectation and anticipation. We light candles in collective prayer, reminding ourselves what our faith is all about. Like mothers-to-be, we nest, expecting the arrival of the hope, peace, joy, and love of Christ to be born in the world around us.

It is also a season of charitable giving—*don't forget to donate!* It is a season of stories that warn against greed and highlight destitution. It feels good to give, and so we spend the season collectively practicing it. Yet, Advent reminds us of the specific gifts God calls us to embody.

Lighting a candle of hope reminds us that charity isn't good enough. Hope is not transactional. It cannot be outsourced with a check, a gift card, or a jam cake. Hope is a sacred and divine gift. God offers hope to us in Christ so that we might give it to others. Where charity addresses immediate needs, hope changes lives.

As the holiday season wraps us in a spirit of giving, our collective attention turns towards the "less fortunate." Toxic charity unintentionally labels community members solely by their needs, expecting them to showcase their shortcomings in exchange for partial and temporary quick-fixes to enduring problems. Charities like the Salvation Army diligently collect donations outside grocery stores. Toy drives and community meals abound. Warm spaces are offered to shield the homeless from the cold. While these acts of service are desperately needed, hope moves us beyond the familiar rhythms of giving. Where charity labels people according to their deficiencies, hope names strengths and awakens possibilities.

In her excellent book, *Hope in the Dark*, Rebecca Solnit writes, "Hope is not a lottery ticket you can sit on the sofa and clutch, feeling lucky. It is an axe you break down doors with in an emergency. Hope should shove you out the door, because it will take everything you have to steer the future

away from endless war, from the annihilation of the earth's treasures and the grinding down of the poor and marginal... To hope is to give yourself to the future - and that commitment to the future is what makes the present inhabitable."

Because it is relational, hope adds dignity to charity. To hope is to make the crucial shift from transactional and toxic charity to lasting community transformation. Hope calls for a more profound understanding of the systemic forces that sustain the challenges the people in our community face.

Hope goes beyond gestures of generosity or giving extra time doing direct service—as important as that service may be. Hope involves a willingness to confront uncomfortable truths. It demands that we unravel the intricate web of economic, social, and political factors that contribute to the persistence of the injustice around us. The unspoken promise at the heart of our holiday generosity is our calling, not just to feed the hungry, but to actively root out the causes of hunger in our communities—to actively hope.

This season, as we light the candles of hope, peace, joy, and love, let us pray to learn to better utilize these relational gifts God has given us in Christ. During this Advent, what if all of our preparations and anticipations were focused on giving the gift of hope, learning to be people who make for peace, building communities of justice and joy, and demonstrating what love looks like in public. Advent is our collective opportunity to question the way the world is and actively work for its healing and wholeness. When the candles of Advent are lit, may they light in us the gifts of hope, peace, joy, and love. May we give to alleviate immediate suffering while offering ourselves to the work that hope bears in us.

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