

DECEMBER 2025



THE BEACON



First Church Congregational *United Church of Christ*

26 Pleasant Street
Methuen, MA 01844-3199
Telephone: (978) 687-1240

Rev. Dr. Ann Rogers-Brigham, Interim Pastor
amrogersbrigham@gmail.com

Roberta Jurovich, Office Manager
firstchurch.roberta@gmail.com

Mike Boutin, Minister of Music
boutinerjr@gmail.com

www.firstchurchmethuen.com

Worship on Sundays at 10:00 AM
In-person & on Facebook Live

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Minister's Message **Rev. Dr. Ann Rogers-Brigham**



Dear members and friends of First Church,

We are glad to move into December days, savoring Advent themes and moving toward Christmas joy. What are we seeing each day to help us move into our church seasons of Advent and Christmas? What can help us to be filled with awe, wonder, and reverence for creation and God's light permeating dark days?

For me, I am helped with early morning sunrises of reds and yellows and blues on the eastern horizon looking out the parsonage windows. They invite me to open the curtains after a long night and welcome the day during late autumn and early winter days. Some of you told me about seeing the northern lights on late nights or early mornings. I have even seen the pictures you have taken on your phones or enjoyed pictures published in our local papers. I am dependent on my early morning sunrises to inspire me but some of you have opened the gates to the awe and beauty of "northern lights" from your backyards.

There is nothing like images that invite us to have conversations with God, encounters with the Divine One calling us to watch and wait and expect God's coming each day. Yes, "tis the season" of welcoming the invitation to watch and wait, to look and listen, for the Divine coming among us and laying out the expectations of what is and what may be.

Last month I invited us to the practice of *Lectio Divina*. It was an invitation for a reading and a rereading of a passage of scripture or prose to stir and nurture a relationship to faith, to the Divine One calling us to be in conversation. This month, I'd like us to consider a different approach. It is called *Visio Divina*. *Visio Divina* follows the pattern of *Lectio Divina* using sacred art. It fosters the practice of sacred seeing.

In the beginning of November, our confirmation class at First Church took a trip to St Xenia Orthodox Church in Methuen. (See pictures in this issue) We went to learn about worship in the Christian Russian Orthodox tradition by going to their Saturday evening worship service. It was a time for us to meet new friends and to experience worship in their beautiful church filled with icons, candles, incense and sung prayers throughout the service. Those images reminded me of ways we can experience God with our senses in a powerful way. So, shall we experience "*Visio Divina*?"

You can choose whatever image that has meaning and may inspire. I thought of the icon of the Annunciation that was given to me by the Congregational Church of Almaden Valley, UCC, in San Jose, CA, on the occasion of my installation as pastor. The image is one that I go back to for inspiration and affirmation of call and anticipation of the future. It may be a good one for us to use as we are in this interim period in the life of First Church.

How do we practice *Visio Divina*? I have included images from the Annunciation that may help you find your focus for the Advent and Christmas seasons. One is similar to my Annunciation icon and the other is a more modern Annunciation picture by Henry Tanner.

Let's begin:

- Start in silence with your eyes closed, remain still, and remember that you are in God's loving presence.
- Gaze at the image. Let your eyes explore the image, then rest on the characters and objects without rushing. Note your feelings without judgment as you examine the whole and parts of the work.
- If you'd like, you can read accounts of the events over which you pray.
- Gaze at the work again and imagine that you are in this scene. Who are you in the scene? Where are you, and what do you see from there? What do you hear or say?
- How is the sacred present to you in this experience? What is God saying, and how do you respond?
- In silence and stillness, take a few moments to contemplate God's gift to you in your prayer. Rejoice in God's love.

Visio Divina is a form of prayer we can take with us wherever we are and whatever our circumstance. Most of us take pictures with our phones; what images are we capturing that draw us to God's presence, an appreciation of life, even its flaws? I am glad, I believe, as you are for those magical moments when we see the world as we think God may see it. How we yearn for new ways to see this world we inhabit and meet the God who calls us to look, to listen, to learn and not be afraid.

What about you? How are you viewing the opportunities each day to know your world and the people you see?

At First Church, we are glad to call ourselves a “family” of faith. Surely, we all feel some solidarity in the opportunity to defy the odds and join hearts and lives to be the church and make a difference in the world. The church is a wonderful way to meet new friends and to get a perspective on life that we have not had. It is not easy to be the church but, as we are involved in the church, we know the benefits and cherish Christ’s call to see the world as God may see it and as others see it. How can we, especially as we go into this New Year, make our faith community a priority and hold the Christ light for our surrounding communities in need?

May the seasons of Advent and Christmas help you in your search for God’s presence and healing. May the seasons give you expectation and longing. May the seasons remind you to not turn back from seeing the suffering of the world. May you, upon seeing, be alive in living and growing and celebrating the love of Christ found in the cradle of Bethlehem, found in the living Savior among us.

Advent hope and Christmas peace

Rev. Ann



The images for Viso Divina are from a traditional Orthodox icon of the Annunciation and a more modern Annunciation image Henry Ossawa Tanner, 1898.

Advent Prayer

*In our secret yearnings
we wait for your coming,
and in our grinding despair
we doubt that you will.
And in this privileged place
we are surrounded by witnesses who yearn more than do we
and by those who despair more deeply than do we.
Look upon your church and its pastors (our congregations)
in this season of hope
which runs so quickly to fatigue
and in this season of yearning
which becomes so easily quarrelsome.
Give us the grace and the impatience
to wait for your coming to the bottom of our toes,
to the edges of our fingertips.
We do not want our several worlds to end.
Come in your power
and come in your weakness
in any case
and make all things new.
Amen.*

~ Walter Brueggemann, *Awed to Heaven, Rooted in Earth*
(Dr. Brueggemann died this year, June 5, 2025. We honor his memory, his words of wisdom and devotion to his call to ministry. He was a UCC Minister from the mid-west who became

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Gathering of Clergy, Congregation Representatives and State Police

On Tuesday, November 18th, I attended the Faith-Based Organizations Safety and Security Seminar at Gillette Stadium in Foxboro, Ma. I learned much about resources for faith communities and the support available to us for safety and security concerns. Father Gregory Vozzo, Pastor at St Theresa's Church, Our Lady of Good Counsel Parish and I sat together, representing our Methuen Clergy group. It was very nice to meet our State Police and other Law Enforcement personnel along with people from many other faith communities in Massachusetts.



Questions? I'm glad to share about the experience and opportunity be part of the seminar.



Rejoice and Come Home...

Advent & Christmas 2025 *First Church Congregational*

Methuen, MA

Sunday, November 30th:

10:00 AM – Worship – *1st Sunday of Advent (Hope)* ~ *New Member Sunday, World AIDS Day Remembrance*

Scripture Readings: Psalm 122, Isaiah 2:1-5, Matthew 24:36-44

Sunday, December 7th:

10:00 AM – Worship – *2nd Sunday of Advent (Peace)* ~ *Communion, Service of Confirmation, Gifts to the Manger*

Scripture Readings: Psalm 72, Isaiah 11:1-10, Matthew 3:1-12

Sunday, December 14th:

10:00 AM – Worship – *3rd Sunday of Advent (Joy)* ~ *Advent Cantata*

Scripture Readings: Psalm 146:5-10, Isaiah 5:7-10, Matthew 11:2-11

Sunday, December 21st:

10:00 AM – Worship – *4th Sunday of Advent (Love)* ~ *Children/Youth Pageant*

Scripture Readings: Psalm 122, Isaiah 2:1-5, Matthew 24:36-44

Wednesday, December 24th:

7:00 PM – *Christmas Eve Service* ~ *Lessons, Carols and Candlelight Service*

Thursday, December 25th:

Merry Christmas to All!



Sunday, December 28th:

10:00 AM – Worship – *1st Sunday after Christmas* ~ *Carol Sing and Christmas Readings*

Scripture Readings: Psalm 148, Isaiah 63:7-9, Matthew 2:13-23



Worship will continue to be broadcast each Sunday, at 10:00 AM, on YouTube Live (www.youtube.com/@firstchurchcongregationalm1729).

2025 CHRISTMAS GIVING

If you wish to make a Christmas donation or poinsettia order, please use this form and return it to the church office **by Sunday, December 14th**. Please note: All donations received before this deadline will be listed on the “Christmas Giving” list in the bulletin. *Thank You.*

[illegible]

Poinsettia Plant for Altar

□ **7"** pot, **single** plant at **\$16.00**; how many? _____; total \$ _____*

☐ **7"** pot, **double** plant at **\$25.00**; how many? _____; total \$ _____ *

Please print when completing

In Loving Memory of _____

In Celebration/Honor of _____

(circle choice)

Given by _____

**After the Christmas Eve service, all plants will be delivered to a homebound member or friend of the church*

[illegible]

Donation

BUILDING MAINTENANCE _____ OPERATING EXPENSE _____

ORGAN RESTORATION _____ OUTREACH _____

OTHER _____

Please print when completing

Given in Loving Memory of _____

In Celebration/Honor of _____

(circle choice)

Given by

[illegible]

Please make checks payable to: ***First Church Congregational***

Thank you!



Sunday Worship

10:00 AM

We hope you will join us!

We like to see you in the congregation on Sunday mornings, but for those who cannot attend in person, worship will be broadcast each Sunday, at 10:00 AM, on YouTube Live (www.youtube.com/@firstchurchcongregationalm1729). An Order of Worship will be emailed out by the Friday before the service.

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A Meal (Breakfast) with Ann

2ND Wednesdays at 8:00 AM

at Ellie's Farmhouse Restaurant, 436 Broadway, Methuen

Join Rev. Ann and other members and friends for good breakfast and conversation. They will next meet on Wednesday, December 10th. And, as always, it's "dutch treat".



Breakfast Group from November

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Weekly Bulletin Prayer List



We print a Prayer List within each Sunday Worship bulletin. To have someone included on the bulletin prayer list, please let Roberta, in the Church Office, know by emailing her at firstchurch.roberta@gmail.com. Thank you.

If you, or someone you know, is in need of a pastoral visit, please contact Rev. Rogers-Brigham at amrogersbrigham@gmail.com or 978-687-1240.

Children/Youth Christmas Pageant

"In Search of Shelter and Love"

We invite your children and youth to join us on Sunday, December 21st, for our Christmas Play *"In Search of Shelter and Love."* The play is adapted from a play based on the story of Las Posadas.



Las Posadas, which means "the inns" or "the shelters" in Spanish, is a 400 year old Advent tradition in Spanish-speaking countries, particularly Mexico. Las Posadas commemorates the journey of Joseph and Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem and their search for shelter in preparation for Jesus' birth. Traditionally, participants will travel from house to house, as Joseph and Mary did in Bethlehem, only to be turned away.

The play will help us to remember Jesus' message of love for the world. It will help us to honor each person as a child of God. The play will prepare us to mark the Christmas season as a time for love in action. The play will help us to remember many families in need of shelter and welcome and God's love and compassion.

Please have your child/youth here at church around 9:15 AM, before our 10:00 AM worship Sunday, December 21st so they can go over their singing parts and dress as a character in the nativity. Thank you to adults for helping us! We'll go over their entrance and exit parts. We thank our high school youth, Andrew Pavlenkov and Isabella Bane, for being our narrators. Questions? Call Lori Bennett, Sarah Pavlenkov or Rev. Ann.

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Christian Education December Schedule:

This is the Sunday School schedule for the weeks before Christmas for the Youth:

- December 7th – NO Sunday School / Communion / Confirmation Sunday / Gifts to the Manger
- December 14th – NO Sunday School / Advent Cantata
- December 21st – NO Sunday School / **Children & Youth Christmas Pageant**
- December 28th – NO Sunday School / Carol Sing and Scripture Readings
- January 4th – Sunday School Resumes / Communion

If you need a registration form for Sunday School, please let us know. Thank you.

Blessings,
Mrs. B & Mrs. P



CONFIRMATION SUNDAY IS DECEMBER 7

Our confirmands are looking forward to being confirmed on Sunday, December 7th, at First Church. Thank you for supporting Andrew, Bella, Haleigh and Alexis during their class time and field trips. Special thanks to their mentors and parents and extended family for their support and encouragement. I'm especially thankful for the care of our Diaconate for our Confirmation Program. Judi Boyko faithfully served as the Diaconate liaison and assisted our class with her presence and help with many aspects of the learning experience. Please look for more photos in our January Beacon celebrating this special day for our youth.

We want to share photos of our experience visiting St Xenia Russian Orthodox Church in Methuen on Saturday evening, November 1st. Our youth, mentors, parents and other First Church members joined us for the worship in the Christian Orthodox tradition. Father Michael Crowley, their pastor, warmly welcomed us to the church and gave us a tour before the service started.



At our last class on Sunday, November 9th, we welcomed Eddie Najeeullah to teach us about Islam! It was part of Bella's presentation on Islam. Each of our youth did a presentation on a world religion toward the end of our lessons in November. We were glad to welcome Eddie, Christine, Matthew, Judi and Anne Benedix to Confirmation Class that day.



From the Chair of the Church Board...

Halleluia for Advent!! As I write this, it is actually on the cusp of Thanksgiving, and I certainly pray that you all had a wonderful time with friends and family. With the coming of Advent, I am always invigorated by everything that the season brings – parties, gift getting & giving, decorations galore, and many yuletide treats that seem to arrive from everywhere. However, it is the worship services that truly warm my heart, spirit, and soul. In First Church, I know that many of our church committees are working on these special elements, events, and programs as well for celebration of our savior's birth, so it will be a wonderful season ahead!

As always, we have plenty more going on, including:

- I certainly hope you were able to attend the Methuen Community Thanksgiving service that was held on the 23rd. It was so wonderful to unite with the other churches in our region and pray together. The music was absolutely splendid, and it was a real treat heading into Advent.
- The search process for our next settled pastor is continuing. The profile is online with the UCC, and prospective pastors have applied for the position we offer. We are receiving their profiles and beginning the interviewing process for potential candidates to be our next settled pastor. The committee is meeting virtually and physically, and they are working at a rapid pace to build our future. If you would like to see the final profile, it will be available in the office after worship.
- It might seem early, but our annual George Washington Birthday Dinner is approaching. It will surely be a spectacular time of fellowship, so please think about volunteering to be part of it. You all make this event shine!
- Our Outreach group is hard at work with numerous efforts. Last month, the team focused on how First Church can help families this Thanksgiving, and numerous food baskets were distributed. I sincerely thank you all for time, talent, and treasure given for those less fortunate. With Advent, the mitten tree is up, gifts are being collected for the Methuen Arlington Neighborhood, and lots more. More is being planned and there are a ton of other ways to give for the upcoming season, so please read further to find out how you can help. Between all these focused projects and our continuing food pantry, helping so many in our community, there are numerous ways to make an impact.
- Chapel school is having a great year! The teachers and children are busy in the classrooms and playground, and it is wonderful to hear the joy throughout the church. However, enrollment is still active for the 2025-2026 school year, so if there is a family that may need our services, I invite you to connect them with Gina or Roberta. Tours are happening regularly.
- Our Membership Development & Communications team is hard at work planning fun events throughout the coming year. They are investigating lots of activities and fellowship times, so stay tuned. If you're interested in their work or helping out, please reach out to Carol Sanborn for more information.
- ...and so much more!

So, if you're looking for some way to help our church and our community, there's plenty of options. Also, there's always the prayer shawl ministry, other outreach projects, singing or ringing in one of our outstanding choirs, or just joining the walking group to help yourself. There are so many

new opportunities available through our historic congregation, so feel free to seek out what you would like and help our neighbors & neighborhood at the same time.

As always, all are welcome to chat anytime with me. I love to hear your ideas and suggestions. We also have a lot of other activities and missions scheduled, so I would love your input. I know you all work so hard to make our church a blessing to our families and neighbors, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart. Let's keep the energy and drive rolling, continuing to seek God, care for each other, and improve our community.

God bless!
Josh Ferry



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News from the Search Committee

The Search Committee has cleared another hurdle. Our church profile is posted, and we are starting to receive inquiries from interested pastors.

In order to respond to candidates quickly, we have broken into three teams:



- Steve, Josh, Rev. Ann and Mike will review profiles.
- Steve, Stacey, Christine, and Mike will participate in the initial round of interviews with candidates.
- Sue, Becky, John, Carol, Fred, Jen, Lori, and Sue will help with second round interviews.
- All committee members will have an opportunity to meet with candidates when they are on-site for a site visit and third round interview.

Our committee members are Steve Boyko, Christine Bane, Lori Bennett, Mike Boutin, Jen Dockham, Fred Frederiksen, Stacey Murray, Sue Newton, Sue Riedel, Carol Silva, John Silva, Becky Smith and Josh Ferry (ex-officio). Please speak to any one of us if you have any questions at all about the search process.

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IN CASE OF SNOW...

As we enter the snow season, please be advised that on weekdays, if school is cancelled, the church office will not be open. If a blizzard is predicted for a given Sunday, if there are any changes to the time of worship, or worship is cancelled, please check our church web page, www.firstchurchmethuen.com and Facebook page (www.facebook.com/firstchurchmethuen).



Musical Musings

So much to get caught up on: Rich and I led this year's Festival of Trees submission and are really proud of how it turned out! Thank you again to all those who bought ornaments, wrote checks, or just wished us well! Even though we didn't win an award this year, we are still really proud of our beautiful Twelve Days of Christmas tree, and know it will bring a lot of joy to a lot of people over the next few weeks. The Festival of Trees has been a wonderful partner to First Church: again, this year, they awarded us a \$10,000 matching grant to help defray the cost of the work we did on the exterior of the church last spring and summer. Thank you, everyone!

The choir has been working so hard to prepare for our upcoming Advent Cantata on Sun, Dec 14. We hope many of you are planning to join us in person for worship that morning. It's great for the choir to be singing to lots of people in person! Music will include selections from JS Bach, traditional African American spirituals, Bortniansky, Larson, and more. We are doing a set of three pieces all based on the same music by Nicolai: Wachet auf (Sleepers, Awake!). Sue Riedel will sing it in the original German version, then the choir will sing Bach's famous version, and then finally, we will sing a setting based on the African American spiritual. We will be joined by our handbell choir, very ably led by Paul Delabruere, who is finishing up his doctorate in music education at Boston University and has rung bells and sung in the choir with us in the past. We are really fortunate that Paul has agreed to take on directing the bell choir. Thank you, Paul! We look forward to hearing the bells again!

Christmas Eve will be a musical delight, with the choir and handbells and trumpet singing lots of carols and gorgeous Christmas music, including the Carol of the Bells! Come early to hear the prelude music, and of course, one of my favorite musical moments all year, singing Silent Night in the darkened church. It always makes me weep....

During this beautiful, albeit busy holiday time, take a moment to breathe...to listen....to hum along to a favorite carol....be still. God is still speaking.

Peace and all good things,

Mike Boutin



Gifts to the Manger



This year's **Gifts to the Manger**, as last year, will be delivered to Methuen Arlington Neighborhood (MAN) Inc. and they will be given to about 150 children in the MAN program. There will be a designated box for your gifts at the Crossroads.

Please bring your unwrapped gift(s), for children between the ages of 8 and 17, to the church on:

- **Final Sunday is December 7th, before or after worship (10:00 – 11:00 AM)**
 - **Weekdays until 12/6, from 9:00 AM to 1:30 PM.**

Go to the parking lot door, ring the bell and we will meet you at the door.

MAN will also accept wrapping paper, ribbon, bows, and tape.

Whatever you can help with will be appreciated.

The gifts, and other items, will be delivered on Wednesday, December 18th, in time for MAN parents to wrap the gifts for their children. Thank you in advance for your donations. These kids are wonderful children and really appreciate what they receive.



The Annual Mitten Tree

The Annual Mitten Tree has long been a popular part of our Christmas celebration at First Church and is a joint effort between The Outreach Ministry Team and The Chapel School.

Our Mitten Tree will be placed in the crossroads, waiting to be filled with mittens, hats, and scarves. The children at Chapel School will see it every day!

Donations can also be brought during worship, Sundays at 10:00 AM. You may also bring your donations to the parking lot door, Monday through Friday, from 9:00 AM – 1:30 PM. Ring the bell and we will meet you at the door.

All donations of hats, scarves and mittens will be given to the Methuen Public Schools Family Resource Center to be distributed to those in need of warm accessories.



We will post pictures, as the tree fills up, on the Chapel School and First Church Facebook pages. We look forward to a tree covered with colorful and warm decorations.

Stewardship Ministry Team...

The final Sunday of this year's stewardship campaign was celebrated during worship on Sunday November 16. Members and friends all walked our pledges to the front of the sanctuary for blessing. As we have for the past few years, we enjoyed a delicious chicken pot pie luncheon together. Our thanks go to the Bread and Roses Team and their helpers who helped make it possible. We appreciate all who have returned your pledge card already so that we can **LIVE THE VISION TOGETHER**.

To begin our campaign this season, Reverend Ann gave a Stewardship Meditation. We also learned more about new members Matt and Rena Caron and their journey to membership at First Church. And we heard the Stewardship Team Sermon on "Living the Vision Together." Because of the support of the many members of First Church who contribute their time, talents, and treasures, **together we make it happen**. What is your **VISION** for the future of First Church!

We have already received many pledges. If you haven't returned your pledge yet, it is never too late to do so. If you need a pledge packet, please contact the church office and one will be mailed to you. Also, if you are an electronic giver, please be sure to return an electronic giving form, even if there is no change of information. Also, check out the new boxes on the e-giving form to add a one-time donation to the UCC "Our Church's Wider Mission" fund electronically. If you have any questions, please see a member of the Stewardship Ministry Team.

Stewardship Ministry Team:

Kathy Romano – Chairperson

Rev. Ann Rogers Bringham, Irene Maggio, Marilyn Peck and Robyn Sliney

Interview with Matt Caron
11/9/25



Stewardship Sunday
11/16/25



Living the Vision Together



Seeking God



Caring for Each Other



Improving Our Community

Your Pledge Makes It All Happen

From the Outreach Ministry Team

Thanksgiving NIN Evening Food Pantry Distribution

- Everything is in place for the NIN Food Pantry Thanksgiving food distribution of a turkey, pie and bag of groceries filled with the fixings for a Thanksgiving Dinner, plus other grocery items.
- It is through the generosity of our church family and friends that we are able to provide these items along with those received from Neighbors in Need.
- Thank you for helping us give a Happy Thanksgiving to the 400 families who come to our Tuesday Night Food Pantry.



Methuen Community Thanksgiving Service



- We thank the people who came to the service that brought food items and made monetary donations to the NIN Food Pantry. We are grateful for their generosity.

Gifts to the Manger and Adopt-a-Child

- Lori Bennett says 4 families have adopted a child. Through the generosity of these families, each child in need of extra care will have his or her wish list fulfilled.
- You can bring your Gifts to the Manger through Sunday, December 7th. There is a box at the Crossroads where you can leave your donated unwrapped toys, for children 7-18 years old
- The gifts are given to the Methuen Arlington Neighborhood, Inc, where parents are invited to choose a toy and then wrap it for their children.



Annual Mitten Tree

- Chapel School will again be displaying its giving tree in the hall near the church office. Chapel and First Church families, as well as members of our Prayer Shawl Ministry, may place mittens, hats and scarves on the tree during the Christmas season.
- These donations are delivered to the Methuen Public Schools Parent Resource Center to be given out to students in need.



Outreach Ministry Team

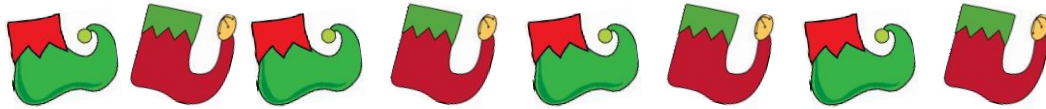
Marilyn Peck, Team Leader; Lori Bennett, Cindy Bateson, Jo-Ann Crosby, Barbara Donaghue, Ken Peck, Marie Rubino, Carole Silva, John Silva, and Becky Smith



Walking Group for Fitness and Fellowship

Tuesdays in December

The weather is turning colder, and snow is probably on the way so we will be walking at **The Loop** starting this month. We will meet at **10:00 AM in front of the AMC Theater** on the following Tuesdays in December: 12/2, 12/9, 12/16, 12/23 and 12/30. Bundle up and join us for exercise and conversation!



Prayer Shawl Ministry



The Prayer Shawl Ministry meets year-round and always welcomes anyone who wishes to be part of this ministry. Knitting or crocheting experience is not a prerequisite to becoming a member. Come for the fellowship and someone will be glad to help you if needed. Please contact Bobbi Barlow more information.

We invite you to join us on **Wednesdays from 1:00 - 3:00 PM**,
in the parlor of First Church Congregational.

*Note: There will be no Prayer Shawl on Wednesday, December 24th.
Merry Christmas!*

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“The Best Christmas Gift”

A Poem for Christmas by Joyce Rupp

*The gift of personal kindness,
perhaps the most essential
of any presents waiting
under the lighted tree of life.*

*Prepare this precious gift of self
by filling it with deliberate choices,
giving the best of your goodness
to those traveling the human pathway.*

*Wrap this gift of your selflessness
with deeds to ease another's burdens;
tie a wide ribbon of thoughtfulness
around the gift with the intent care
of that given to a newly born infant.*

*Place a generous bow upon the kindness;
then offer this finest treasure of your love
with the fullness of a joyful heart.*



The Chapel School

We just wrapped up Thanksgiving here at Chapel. It was a busy day enjoyed by everyone. We feasted on chicken nuggets, french fries, corn and stuffing. The children really enjoyed it and we barely had leftovers!

At this year's Methuen Festival of Trees, our tree, "*The Very Hungry Caterpillar*" won **FIRST PLACE** in the *Best Tree Done by Children* category! Huge thank you to all the teachers and children for putting this all together! The Festival of Trees ended on Dec. 6th. Can't wait until next year to see what great idea we come up with.

We are already in Holiday mode preparing one of a kind gifts and treasures for the children to give to their parents. It's busy merriment every day leading up to Santa's arrival. We will all need our long winter's nap after Christmas to rest, regroup and refresh.

The Mitten Tree will be filling up during the month of December. All the donations of hats, scarves and mittens will once again be delivered to the Methuen Public Schools Family Resource Center. The staff there will distribute the items to children in need of these warm articles of clothing. Working together both Church and School helps to pay it forward to those who need it the most. Giant shout out the pray shall ladies for making our tree a success.

Staying healthy is still the number one priority. We need to continue to take care of ourselves, eat healthy and get plenty of sleep so that we can all enjoy the Holidays with family and friends. Enjoy these special times!

Chapel School will have a half day on Tuesday the 23rd and will remain closed until Sunday January 4th. We will reopen on the Monday the 5th of January.

Gina Colarusso

Director



Congratulations to the Chapel School
for taking 1st Place
for "Best Tree Done by Children"
at the 2025 Methuen Festival of Trees!!



Our tree is "The Very Hungry Caterpillar"

Come see the trees at the Festival through December 6th!
www.MethuenFestivalofTrees.com

While at the Methuen Festival of Trees to see the trees from First Church & The Chapel School...



Keep an eye out for a couple other trees done by parishioners:



"On Angel's Wings"
by Becky Smith



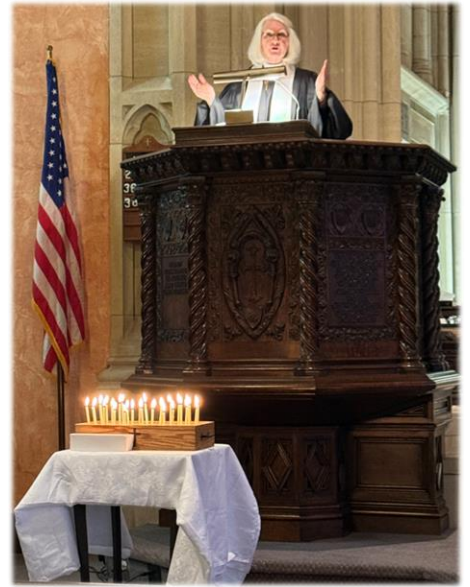
and

"Crafty Christmas"
by The Craff Family
(Cathy Gable)



All Saints Sunday

On November 2nd, parishioners were invited to light candles for loved ones and Rev. Ann called the names of FCC members and friends who died in the past year.



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Veterans Sunday

On November 9th, Col. Matthew Bane, Christine's son, came and spoke during the Children's Moment about his military life.



Community Thanksgiving Service

On Sunday afternoon, November 23rd, First Church hosted a Community Thanksgiving service. This ecumenical service featured pastors and choirs from many area churches:

- *Our Clergy:*
Rev. Ann Rogers-Brigham, First Church Congregational, UCC
Rev. Nathaniel Burnes, First Baptist Church
Rev. Eleanor Prior, St. Andrew's Episcopal Church
Rev. Gregory Vozzo, St. Theresa's Church, Our Lady of Good Counsel Parish
- *Our Musicians:*
Mike Boutin, Director, First Church Congregational, UCC
Craig Seamen, Director, St. Andrew's Episcopal Church
Lori McLaughlin, Director, St. Theresa's Church, Our Lady of Good Counsel Parish
Cynthia Arsenault, Director, St. Augustine Church, Andover
Cathy Meyer, Director, South Church, Andover
Adam Vidal, Trumpet
Choir Members from all the churches



Check out the write up on the service in the December issue of **Methuen Life** (page 15)!

Church Membership Reception

We formally welcome members and friends into First Church life on a regular basis. What joy it is to welcome the following people into our church life on Sunday, November 30th:

- Marie Rubino - joining us as Friend of First Church
- Shauna and Jason Colby with daughter Caroline - joining as Friends of First Church
- Christine O'Connor, joining as a Full Member of First Church. Christine is transferring her church membership from the Tewksbury Congregational Church UCC. Christine's husband is Will, and their daughter is Kathleen.



Our new friends and members share this about why they are joining First Church:

Self-discovery and love to study the biblical mysteries. Deep dives into the Word, seeing the Bible is alive.

~ Jason Colby (Affirmation of Faith, Friend)

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Raised catholic, have not been to church regularly since high school and looking to reconnect with God by attending Sunday worship, volunteering and giving back to the community.

~ Shauna Colby (Affirmation of Faith, Friend)

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I grew up going to church regularly. I believe in the need for a church community. I went to Catholic Church from infancy until Junior High and then attended both Catholic church and Tewksbury Congregational until after taking confirmation classes at both churches to join the Congregational Church. I helped to run the youth group for two years before getting married. I enjoyed my church community as a young adult, and it taught me so much about how God wants us to treat others and gave me insight into being a productive member of society. After having my daughter, I have been looking to find a community to raise her in good faith. My faith and engagement in church community are important to me. I feel like God has been pushing me to get more involved in a church closer to my home.

~ Christine O'Connor (Transfer of Church Letter, Full Active Member)

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I attended the Catholic Church but was not happy with it and stopped going in my 20's. I have a strong faith but have not attended any church until 2 years ago when I attended First Church. I felt that this was the right church for me. At this time, I would like to become a friend of First Church, attend regularly and participate in church activities. I am not interested in voting at this time.
~ Marie Rubino (Friend of First Church Congregational)



Be sure to welcome our new FCC member, Christine O'Connor, and friends of FCC, Jason Colby, Shauna Colby & Marie Rubino

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First Sunday of Advent - Hope

On the First Sunday of Advent, November 30th, our "Hope" advent candle lighting family was our new member, Christine O'Connor, and her daughter, Kathleen.



What's the REACH Ministry?

Do you know of someone facing surgery, recovering from surgery or living with a long-term illness? Do you know someone who has recently lost their job or could use financial support? Do you know someone who suffers from depression or is often down in the dumps around the holidays?



Maybe this person is you?

If so, we can help. Our new **REACH** Ministry wants to make sure that members of our community have a place to turn for support in their time of need. The term **REACH** stands for -- **R**eliable, **E**ngaging, **A**ble, **C**aring and **H**earfelt support.

Contact Judi Boyko or Pat King for more information, or speak to our Pastor.

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Would you like to make an electronic donation to the church?

Use your smart phone or tablet by scanning this QR code!



Or visit our website at

www.firstchurchmethuen.com

and click the **"Donate"** button.

Thank you for your support.

Happy Birthday!

DECEMBER BIRTHDAY

01 Mary Simonian
05 Michelle Wright
06 Neil Bateson, Susan Kerr
12 Bob Newton
18 Susan Riedel
19 Andrew Pavlenkov
23 Maureen Wright
26 Allan Barlow



JANUARY BIRTHDAY

04 Deborah MaueSprague
06 Cathy Gable
07 Janet Towler

* * * * *



DECEMBER ANNIVERSARY

12/9 Irene & Peter Maggio

Married 48 years

JANUARY ANNIVERSARY

1/6 Robert & Susan Newton

Married 47 years

December 2025						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Worship Service Sundays at 10:00 AM <i>In-Person & On YouTube Live</i> www.youtube.com/@firs firschurchcongregationalm1729	1	2 10:00 AM Walking Group (The Loop) 4:30 PM Food Pantry 6:30 PM Cantata Rehearsal	3 1:00 PM Prayer Shawl	4	5	6
7th Advent Sunday Communion Confirmation <i>Gifts to the Manger</i> 8:30 AM Choir Rehearsal 11:00 AM Kids Choir 11:15 AM Fellowship Time	8 4:30 PM Chapel Staff	9 10:00 AM Walking Group (The Loop) 4:30 PM Food Pantry	10 8:00 AM Breakfast with Ann 1:00 PM Prayer Shawl 6:30 PM Cantata Rehearsal	11	12	13
14th 3rd Advent Sunday <i>Advent Cantata</i> 8:00 AM Choir Rehearsal 11:15 AM Fellowship Time	15 1:00 PM Cook for Bread & Roses	16 10:00 AM Walking Group (The Loop) 4:30 PM Food Pantry	17 January 2026 <u>BEACON deadline</u> 1:00 PM Prayer Shawl	18	19	20
21st 4th Advent Sunday <i>Christmas Pageant</i> 8:30 AM Choir Rehearsal 11:15 AM Fellowship Time	22	23 10:00 AM Walking Group (The Loop) <i>Chapel School Closes at 11:30 AM</i> 4:30 PM Food Pantry <i>Christmas Distribution</i>	24 <i>Church Office & Chapel School Closed</i> 7:00 PM Candlelight Service (Christmas Eve)	25 <i>Church Office & Chapel School Closed</i> <i>Merry Christmas</i> 	26 <i>Chapel School Closed</i>	27
28 8:30 AM Choir Rehearsal 11:15 AM Fellowship Time	29 <i>Church Office & Chapel School Closed</i>	30 <i>Chapel School Closed</i> 10:00 AM Walking Group (The Loop) 4:30 PM Food Pantry	31 <i>Church Office & Chapel School Closed</i> 			

Dates and times are subject to change

First Church Congregational

United Church of Christ

26 Pleasant Street

Methuen, MA 01844-3199

Address Service Requested