



December 2022

The Epistle



From the Pastor's Pen

When I close my eyes in prayer and allow myself the possibility of looking within, to consider the wonder of God's magnificent all-encompassing love, the darkness I experience is beautiful and inviting. It is a space of deep healing.

In summer months, I volunteer for a program that I loved deeply as a teen and still love today for the power of transformation it serves as a catalyst of in people who dare to say yes to a week on top of a mountain in northern NH. My part is to lead an offsite week-long trip of canoeing and camping on Lake Umbagog (no running water, no bathrooms, no Coleman stove, and fully embracing leave-no-trace practices). Our last night together (back on the mountain) is always spent engaging in a camp tradition off the ages—sleeping on a ledge with no shelter, no fire and a night hike to our destination (no lights). Our conversation focuses on the power of the brain and the wonder of the human eye as the two work together to allow us to see in the dark. We talk of how, even in our sleep, our brains are aware of the space we sleep on and keep us from harm (yes, we have adults awake at all hours to ensure physical safety). We learn to embrace, through this experience, the beauty of darkness as without it, we cannot know light.

Common interpretation of scripture focusing on God's light has led to the belief that light is the source of goodness and hope. This belief implies darkness is not wanted or needed, it is something to banish or get rid of, as well, an extreme belief that God is not even present in the dark. We inherit too, Colonial interpretations of scripture that equated light and dark with the color of skin, leading to a similar dichotomy of thinking that those with light skin are chosen and those with dark skin are full of sin and deserving punishment. Both established negative views of human realities that cannot be changed and are deserving of love. God's love is radical, it is a power beyond our understanding. No one and nothing is separate from it. God created all, looked upon it, and called it good. Human reality and creation brings us our darkest moments. These moments are not given us by God, but are created by series of decision making by ourselves and others, impacting the trajectory of our lives. God's plan is to continue to respond with love and continued opportunity to fully align ourselves with God's love. God is present in what sustains us through the hardness. God is responding as our minds shift towards healing. God is acting when others reach in to pull us out of ourselves and help us find clarity of mind. God is that force that stops us from going to the extremes of harm. God is the deep learning of ourselves that emerges when we lean into the darkness and ultimately saves us again and again.

Barbara Brown Taylor's book, *Learning to Walk in the Dark*, helps us reimagine our understanding of darkness, primarily how Christianity heavily relies on the binary construct of light as good and darkness as bad. Taylor proposes the pair of light and dark exist together in balance, not opposition. She asks, "What can light possibly mean without dark?" Taylor also challenges us to seek a new understanding of those experiences that we call our "darkest" as inherent to human experience and necessary for our survival.

Welcome to our Advent journey *In Darkness and in Light...*

JOYS AND CONCERNS

For our members, family and friends hospitalized, ill and in need of prayers, may God bless and watch over you:

- | | |
|---------------------|---------------------------|
| Dolores Tamulen | Jan Gordon |
| Tariq Malik | James Gallant |
| Bobbie DiBattista | Dot |
| The Murphy family | Audrey Brogan |
| Brian & June Coombs | Eleanor Brogan |
| Charlie Snell | Lorna Ducharme |
| Bob Andersen | Roxxe and Chris |
| Lindsey Kuchta | Bryan Castle |
| Steve Collar | Carole Christensen |
| David Wilson | Sally Aalto |
| Sally Calhoun | Don McKendry |
| Shirley Saari | The Dawley family |
| Eddie Hannula | Sally Aalto friend, Marge |

When sharing joys and concerns, please remember that the services are recorded and be respectful of others' privacy by refraining from giving too much detail. More information can always be shared privately with the church secretary, (Lisa) at fccw.westminster@gmail.com or call the church office (978) 874-5790.



Hi families!
I just wanted to take time to thank each and every one of you for your prayers, words of encouragement, cards, gift cards, and more than generous gifts. I hold my church family very close to my heart and cherish the time I've spent at FCCW more than you know.
In His love,
Devon Murphy

Westminster Community Food Pantry
PO Box 477
138 Main Street
Westminster, MA 01473

November 1, 2022

The Westminster Community Food Pantry greatly appreciates your generous donation of \$105.00. It is through the generosity of individuals, organizations, and local businesses that the pantry is able to continue to help families in our area
On behalf of the pantry volunteers and families we serve, thank you for caring and helping.

Sincerely,
Mary A. Murphy
On behalf of the volunteers of the WCFP



Our deepest condolence's go out to the family of Porter "Peter" Dawley who passed away on November 23, 2022

Our deepest condolence's go out to the family of Jason Murphy who passed away on November 28, 2022



The Scouts BSA Troop 33 is doing a fundraiser for old or unwanted sneakers any condition as long as its a pair, and you can drop them off at Westminster library. There's a drop off box in the children's area. They will either get cleaned and donated or recycled. Children's or adult sneakers any condition, please help our Scouts help others and raise money.



Ethan Dennis Catabia was born on November 14, 2022.

The Catabia family is doing well and is thankful for all the well wishes from our church family.



Consider attending and mark you calendars for this community event involving some of our church members.

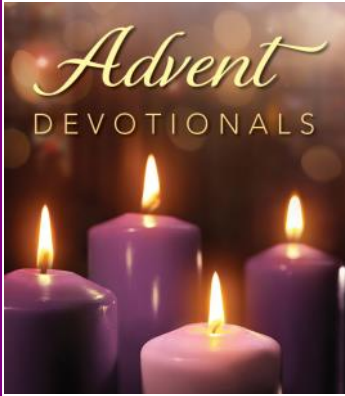
Greater Gardner Community Choir

Date: Sunday, December 11th

Place: Bethany Baptist Church on Ryan Street in Gardner

Time: 3 p.m.





Advent Devotionals

Two Advent Devotionals are available as you enter the Sanctuary and near the office. One for families with conversations laid out to have around the dinner table and activities that help children and youth understand the story of Christ’s birth in expanding ways. The second is tailored to adults with a single devotion for each week of Advent and a variety of questions that can be explored as you progress through Advent. These devotionals connect with the Advent Book Study as well as with our Sunday worship and correlate with each other.

EXTRA-SPECIAL Intergenerational Gatherings

Sunday, December 18th @ 9:30 am

Christmas (pageant) storytelling event



Friday, December 23rd for Carols at Academy Hill @ 7pm

(Dress warm and spend some time exercising your vocal cords before you come, you want to be ready to sing your favorites!)

Saturday, December 24th for a Christmas Eve Service @ 8 pm

During this gathering we will celebrate Christ’s birth, sing some of our favorite carols, and enjoy the beauty of the Sanctuary in candlelight.

Sunday, December 25th @ 9:30 am for an abbreviated **Christmas Day Service** of joyous singing and storytelling. This service will be crafted for all ages.

Friday, January 6th for Dinner Fellowship and the Celebration of Epiphany @ 6 pm

Epiphany is the moment the Kings arrive in front of baby Jesus and his parents, twelve days after his birth. In some cultures, and family traditions, this is the day for gift giving. Come celebrate the gifts in your life around tables filled with community and community and good food. This is a new kind of creative worship for our faith community. Pastor Stacey hopes you will join her in this moment of expanding our understanding of what it is to praise our God.



The next Church Council meeting will be held Sunday, January 8th in Covenant Hall at 10:45 am

The Annual Meeting is scheduled for Sunday, January 22nd at 10:30 am in the Sanctuary.

Snow date: January 29th.

Committee and Pastoral Reports should be “camera ready” by Tuesday, January 3rd (by noon) & emailed to fccw.westminster@gmail.com

To shop at AmazonSmile simply go to smile.amazon.com from the web browser on your computer or mobile device.

Then pick your own charitable organization:

Search :



First Congregational Church of Westminster

That’s \$0.50 for each \$100 you spend on Amazon !

Amazon keeps score.





Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1 6:30- 7:30 PM Food Pantry 6:30 PM Choir Rehearsal	2 Office closed	3
4 9:30 AM Church School 9:30 AM Worship 10:45 AM Mini Hollyberry Fair (FH) 10:45 AM Advent Craft & Soup Pot Luncheon(FH)	5 8:00 AM Meditation (Zoom) 6:00-7:30 PM Scouts (FH)	6 8:00 AM Yoga 10:00 AM Staff (Parlor) 7:00 PM Diaconate 7:00 PM Boy Scouts Meeting (CH)	7 7:00 PM AA (FH)	8 6:30- 7:30 PM Food Pantry 6:30 PM Choir Rehearsal	9 Office closed	10
11 9:30 AM Church School <i>Christmas Pageant Prep...</i> 9:30 AM Worship Service 3:00 PM Greater Gardner Community Choir (Bethany Baptist Church Gardner)	12 8:00 AM Meditation (Zoom)	13 8:00 AM Yoga 10:00 AM Staff (Parlor) 6-7:30 PM Cub Scouts (CH) 7:00 PM Advent Book Study (Zoom)	14 6-7 PM Cub Scouts (CH) 6:30-8:00 PM Boy Scouts (friendship room) 7:00 PM AA (FH)	15 3:00 PM Trustee (FH) 6:30- 7:30 PM Food Pantry 6:30 PM Choir Rehearsal 5:45 PM Scouts (CH)	16 Office closed	17
18 9:30 AM Worship Service <i>Christmas (Pageant) Storytelling Event</i>	19 8:00 AM Meditation (Zoom) 6:00-7:30 PM Scouts (FH)	20 8:00 AM Yoga 10:00 AM Staff (Parlor) EPISTLE DUE	21 6:30-8:00 PM Boy Scouts (CH) 7:00 PM Longest Night Service 7:00 PM AA (FH)	22 6:30- 7:30 PM Food Pantry 6:30 PM Choir Rehearsal	23 7:00 PM Carols & Singing (Academy Hill) Office closed	24 8:00 PM Christmas Eve Service
25 9:30 AM Lessons & Carols Christmas Day 	26 8:00 AM Meditation (Zoom)	27 8:00 AM Yoga 10:00 AM Staff (email) 6:00 PM GGM (Parlor) 6-7:30 PM Cub Scouts (CH)	28 6:30-8:00 PM Boy Scouts (friendship room) 7:00 PM AA (FH)	29 6:30- 7:30 PM Food Pantry 6:30 PM Choir Rehearsal	30 Office closed	31 New Years Eve 



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 9:30 AM Intergenerational Worship	2 8:00 AM Meditation (Zoom)	3 8:00 AM Yoga 10:00 AM Staff (Parlor) 5:30 PM CE 7:00 PM Diaconate COMMITTEE REPORTS DUE!	4 6:30-8:00 PM Boy Scouts (CH) 7:00 PM AA (FH) 7:00 PM Advent Book Study (Zoom)	5 6:30- 7:30 PM Food Pantry 6:30 PM Choir Rehearsal	6 6:00- Epiphany Service & Fellowship Dinner Office closed	7
8 9:30 AM Church School 9:30 AM Worship/ 10:45 AM Church Council (CH)	9 8:00 AM Meditation (Zoom) 6:00-7:30 PM Scouts (FH)	10 8:00 AM Yoga 10:00 AM Staff (Parlor) 6-7:30 PM Cub Scouts (CH)	11 6:30-8:00 PM Boy Scouts (CH) 7:00 PM AA (FH)	12 6:30- 7:30 PM Food Pantry 6:30 PM Choir Rehearsal	13 Office closed	14
15 9:30 AM Church School 9:30 AM Worship Service (Sanctuary)	16 Office Closed <i>Matin Luther King Jr. Day</i>	17 8:00 AM Yoga 10:00 AM Staff (Parlor)	18 6-7 PM Cub Scouts (CH) 6:30-8:00 PM Boy Scouts (friendship room) 7:00 PM AA (FH) EPISTLE DUE	19 3:00 PM Trustee (FH) 6:30- 7:30 PM Food Pantry 6:30 PM Choir Rehearsal 6:30 PM Cub Scouts (CH)	20 Office closed	21
22 9:30 AM Church School 9:30 AM Worship Service 10:45 AM Annual Meeting Sanctuary	23 8:00 AM Meditation (Zoom) 6:00-7:30 PM Cub Scouts (FH)	24 8:00 AM Yoga 10:00 AM Staff (Parlor) 6:00-7:30 PM Cub Scouts (FH)	25 6:30-8:00 PM Boy Scouts (CH) 7:00 PM AA (FH)	26 6:30- 7:30 PM Food Pantry 6:30 PM Choir Rehearsal	27 Office closed	28
29 9:30 AM Church School 9:30 AM Worship 10:45 AM SNOW DATE Annual Meeting Sanctuary	30 8:00 AM Meditation (Zoom)	31 8:00 AM Yoga 10:00 AM Staff (email) 6-7:30 PM Cub Scouts (CH)				



CHRISTIAN OUTREACH

The Christian Outreach Committee is beginning to think about the holiday season and the mittens in past years we have hung on The Giving Tree in the Narthex. There will be no tree this year as you enter the church, but that doesn't take away the feelings we have for giving to others. This year we have decided to again support the Residential reunification homes run by Community Healthlink whom we worked with last year.

These three homes, two in Worcester and one in Leominster, are residential treatment programs that provide a safe, supportive recovery community and promotes a sense of empowerment, family healing, and life skills essential for women and their children to stabilize and lead drug free, productive lives. These programs support and strengthen the family unit and provide these moms with the support they need to become effective, self-reliant caretakers for their children. These Christmas presents will bring joy to a group of children who otherwise may not get to enjoy a "normal" Christmas morning.

We know that the actual shopping for the items that are on the children's wish list may be tricky again this year and we want to be respectful of individuals who may also be trying to stay out of the stores. To that end the Outreach Committee has put together a registry on Amazon and as a congregation we will try to meet the children's wish list. All the individual gifts are on there along with the option to buy a \$10 gift card – the proceeds of which will be used to fund the remaining items from the wish list. The registry can be found either by searching Kristen Catabia or copy and paste this link into your browser:

https://www.amazon.com/hz/wishlist/ls/2IWDNQOCW8XT5?ref=wl_share

We are asking that all purchases be made by **December 12th** allowing time for shipping, wrapping and delivery ahead of Christmas.

Thank you for your kindness and generosity.

The Christian Outreach Committee



Longest Night Worship

December 21st

7pm

Quiet friend who has come so far,
feel how your breathing makes more space around you.
Let this darkness be a bell tower
and you the bell. As you ring,

what batters you becomes your strength.
Move back and forth into the change.
What is it like, such intensity of pain?
If the drink is bitter, turn yourself to wine.

In this uncontainable night,
be the mystery at the crossroads of your senses,
the meaning discovered there.

And if the world has ceased to hear you,
say to the silent earth: I flow.
To the rushing water, speak: I am.

“Let This Darkness Be a Bell Tower” by Rainer Maria Rilke from *Sonnets to Orpheus II, 29*.
Translation by Joanna Macy and Anita Barrows.



We will gather on this winter solstice to honor and embrace the darkness of our lives. In this service, we will allow ourselves to face our grief, learn from our pain, extend love to those scariest thoughts inhabiting our minds. We will step into a journey together of walking in the dark.

Aspects of this service will be familiar as experienced in what you may know as a Blue Christmas service of honoring those you grieve. Others will feel new, all serving to bring us to a deep place of solace, love, and appreciation for these life experiences that teach us incredible skills of endurance.

The glorious mums on our front steps have been donated.....



In Loving Memory of:	by:		
John Gronroos	Candi Hitchcock	Alfred and Doris Jones	their family
Dr. Roger Yates	Candi Hitchcock	Winston Dunn	Keith & Martha, trent & Lori, & Mary
Ardy & Irene Kamila	Julie & Peter Gagnon	Paul and Helen Dunn	Mary, Trent, & Lori, & Keith & Martha
Richard & Betty Gagnon	Julie & Peter Gagnon	Porter and Dolly Dawley	Mary, Trent, Keith & Martha
Roger	Sandi Thibodeau	Mary Kate	Mary
Walter and Lili Marble	Sandi Thibodeau	Francis and Susan Niedenuhr	Keith & Martha, Trent & Lori, & Mary
our parents	Nancy & Eric White	Betsy and Bill Crane	The Dunn's
Barbara, Floyd, & Tim Collar	Leslie	Maureen O'Keefe	her family
Jim and Adam Berube	The Sides Family	Our parents	John & Sally Aalto
The Rev. Charles Sides & Harlan & Charlotte Spotts	The Sides Family	Dill Paiste & Roger Thibodeau	John & Sally Aalto
My grandparents	Beth Heckman Weiser	Phil Burgess	Ceil Burgess
Doc Roc and Helen Radunzo	Sally & Ernie Johnson	Roc & Helen	Doris
Alban & Theresa Johnson	Sally & Ernie Johnson	Nonna & Nonno	Doris
Gary Caouette, Peggy Correa	The Caouette family	Mom & Dad	Duchess
Sally Sutherland (Mom)	Anne Ring	Owen	Doris
Our parents	Doris & Ken Pierce	Joe	Zingarella
Dorothy Bartholomew and Sam & Louise Perla	Debbi & Bill Perla	Meg, Tink, and Greg Azarian	Bambi Azarian
Our parents	Ted & Judy	Dr. Roger Yates	Bambi Azarian
Our friend, Kathy Hawkins	Don & Karen Brighenti	Jordan B. Malik	Mom & Dad
My husband, Bob	Eleanor Brogan	Jordan B. Malik	Tahiva Malik
Laurinda Shaw	The Catabia Family	Pat & Cam Godfrey	Richard & Kathy Miller
Dad	LeeAnn Brogan Gikis	Joseph & Dorine Waskewicz	Steve & Jane Collar
All my deceased relatives	Pam LeBlanc	Barbara, Floyd & Timothy Collar	Jane & Steve Collar
My parents (Etta & Lefty)	Pam LeBlanc	Bob Comerford	Steve & Jane Collar
Ray & Irma Leslie	John & Debbie Fairbanks	Phil & Rebecca	Bill & Mary Waight
Clyde & Esther Fairbanks	John & Debbie Fairbanks	Our parents	Bill & Mary Waight
		Marty Hughes	Roy & Gloria Hughes

In Loving Honor of:	by:
My Aunt Mary & Uncle Barry	Pam LeBlanc
My sister, Linda, & Norman	Pam LeBlanc
Grammie and Papa	Isaac Puutio
All children in our Community	Appleseed Academy
Our grandchildren: Carleigh, Brendan & Lauren	Iris & Richard Rollins
Our grandson, Isaac	Grammie & Papa
Carolyn, as we celebrate 50 wonderful years of marriage	Stephen Hemman
My sons, Rob & Chad	Stephen Hemman
My dad, Gary	Lisa Roberts
Our parents & children	Lisa Roberts
Our children & grandchildren	Carol & Matt McGee
2 faithful friends	Bill & Mary Waight
Caia, Ronan, Jessica & Tim Caouette	Eunice Arcangeli
	Sally & Ernie Johnson



**Pastor Stacey is a Clergy Coach
(...though not yet certified)**

When our congregation signed a covenant with Pastor Stacey for her leadership during this transitional period, we celebrated her receipt of a grant through the Lilly Foundation and the efforts of the Southern New England Conference to be trained as a clergy coach. Just before Thanksgiving she completed the first level of her training and next week will finish her Mentor Coaching and will have achieved the status of Associate Coach. She will be moving on to the second level of the training one day/week in the Spring. Pastor Stacey is choosing to seek certification once she has completed the Profession Level Training. By the end of this she will be licensed to coach individuals, organizations, business executives, and more. In order to arrive at the point of certification, Pastor Stacey is required to provide 500 coaching hours in the settings she serves. This allows Pastor Stacey to offer a unique service to the individual members of our congregation and to our congregation as a whole.

Coaching is applicable in all aspects of our lives—grief; vocational changes; moving through conflict with family or friends or community; making significant changes in our lives; finding the strength within to move through difficult moments; seeking to build more joy; finding self-confidence; navigating health concerns—the key is that the coachee is in a position of being ready to engage in the work of an architect, of designing what the future is going to look like. Coaching is not Pastoral Care in the traditional sense. Pastoral Care through the ages is similar to that of a “talk” therapist, taking the participant deeper into the why of the concerns they are presenting with a goal of assisting in the seeing of God and Christ to carry the participant through the hardship/healing/exploration. Coaching recognizes in each individual that there is already incredible resilience, skill, and vision for the present day and future life they will lead. Coaching seeks to tap into the knowledge and already present experience of the coachee to grow themselves. A coach approach to Pastoral Care is one that embraces the participant as whole and fully capable of achieving their dreams and greatest potential. It is a process of listening and asking questions to help the participant or coachee identify for themselves the change they desire, their next steps towards achieving their goals, key self-learnings and takeaways, and to make connections to healing work they’ve already done in their lives.

Our congregation is invited to reach out to Pastor Stacey and explore aspects of our lives that we might address through coaching with her. The number of sessions will vary from person to person and Pastor Stacey will work with you to understand what it might look like to be in a coaching relationship with her. She invites us, any time we approach her for pastoral care, to name what we need most from our time with her. She will be ready to pivot from traditional Pastoral Care into Coaching in any conversation with us. She will also be ready to ask us if we might be open to a coach approach in our conversations when she perceives it might be useful to us. As well, there may be times, when in meetings with her that she announces she is “donning her coach hat” and removing the one she wears as an Interim Minister. We may even find, as she lives into this new aspect of her vocational calling, that her sermons shift in delivery method.

Offering
Envelopes

OFFERING ENVELOPES ARE AVAILABLE

As you consider your 2023 pledge to support our church, you may also be considering how you will bring your gifts to the church. You can place your donation in monthly or weekly envelopes available through Sally Aalto. She can be contacted at 978-874-0220.

Pledges can also be given through the Bill Pay program. Information about this is available from John Aalto, Church Treasurer.

Thank you for your gifts to our church.



If you'd like to sign up for coffee hour please sign up on the clipboard outside of Lisa's office or you can email fcw.westminster@gmail.com

ADVENT BOOK STUDY

I invite you to join me in reading Taylor's work and in two discussion sessions of it: December 13th and January 4th at 7pm through zoom (information to login will be shared through email to the faith community).

If you would like to participate and zoom is not possible or purchasing the book is difficult for you, please talk with Pastor Stacey (she has creative solutions so there are no barriers to engagement—a few free copies of the book will be available in the office beginning Tuesday, December 6th).

Sneak peek into the Sanctuary.
Come join us in the beauty of this holiday season!



**The First Congregational Church
of Westminster
United Church of Christ
138 Main Street • PO Box 477
Westminster, MA 01473**

The Epistle
December 2022
Phone: 978-874-5790

Email: fccw.westminster@gmail.com
Visit our Website at www.westcong.org



**Tuesday
December 20, 2022**



Seeking the story

Angels joyfully announced a special arrival in Bethlehem at Christmas.

Directions: Find the words listed below. Then unscramble the intersecting letters to complete Luke 2:11, NIV.

WORD BANK

- Shepherds
- Child
- Nazareth
- Census
- Baby
- David
- Mary
- Travel
- Town
- Register
- Born
- Night

T	B	W	Y	A	Z	K	E	S	H	N	G	D	J	K
Q	O	Y	A	P	R	A	L	B	F	P	I	C	Q	L
N	R	W	X	B	E	Y	R	M	B	D	M	O	E	E
S	N	O	N	W	G	A	I	B	A	C	D	O	T	D
R	G	X	J	F	I	W	M	V	B	R	R	C	E	O
P	S	C	E	N	S	U	S	H	Y	U	Y	F	P	N
O	T	P	I	G	T	Q	C	N	T	G	M	U	S	T
O	A	N	D	B	E	C	H	I	L	D	N	Z	F	A
A	T	B	A	U	R	W	H	G	F	V	A	B	U	M
T	R	A	V	E	L	J	C	H	V	O	Z	G	N	H
F	B	Q	I	W	D	X	P	T	E	N	A	O	L	Q
Z	C	R	D	Q	S	H	E	P	H	E	R	D	S	V
R	U	V	Y	K	N	I	R	T	K	G	E	Y	I	R
K	V	A	Z	X	L	S	H	Y	T	P	T	J	S	K
L	L	E	S	M	J	Z	L	Q	R	U	H	V	W	X

"Today in the town of David a _____
has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord."

LUKE 2:11, NIV