

Good News



First Presbyterian Church of Ithaca

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Need to Submit an Article? Please send it to the office: office@firstpresithaca.org by the due date. We print and mail the Good News on a monthly basis. Email subscriptions also available.

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Worship Schedule for December 2021:

Sunday, December 5, 10am:

The Second Sunday of Advent with Communion

Scripture: Malachi 3: 1-4

Message: "Imagine."

Scripture: Micah 5: 2-5a

Message: "He shall stand and feed his flock."

Sunday, December 12, 10am:

The Third Sunday of Advent: Lessons and Carols!

This service involves a responsorial pattern of readings and carols, taking us through the story leading up to the birth of Christ.

CHRISTMAS EVE, December 24:

Services at 7pm and 11pm

This year, to assist with spreading out in the sanctuary, we will hold two Christmas Eve Services—both with music, carols, and candlelight. Come early to see more children; come later to usher in Christmas with chimes at midnight!

Sunday, December 19, 10am:

The Fourth Sunday of Advent - and The Christmas Pageant!

Sunday, December 26, 10am:

Scripture: Colossians 3:12-17

Message: "Swaddling Ourselves."

Dearest friends,

From Deacons, to Stewardship, to Thanksgiving and Advent—talk about flipping pages! These are the seasons that move breathlessly, in which there never seems to be enough time—even in normal years.

This year is starting to feel more normal again, whatever that really means—and yet it isn't. Most people are suddenly reporting the signs of stress that we have been carrying this past year, whether we were conscious of it or not. I read an article that talked about how record numbers of people are reporting to their doctors that their hair is falling out, and mentioned it to a friend. "Oh wow—other people too?" they asked. We optimistically attribute things to normal wear and tear, or personal anomalies. In truth, though, we are all a bit like college students five days after exams have ended: suddenly feeling the aches and germs our bodies fought so valiantly, when the adrenaline was present and our teeth were on edge.

So as we head into the season, this letter is just a gentle reminder that we all need to keep being gentle with ourselves and one another. We can gently press ourselves to do a little more than we did yesterday, if we are still building back up; and we can gently allow ourselves to take a rest when we need to, because our stamina is still not what it was. We are in life-training again, recuperating from long absence.

What's Inside:

- **ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS INSERT!**
- **Advent in Plain Sight**
- **Clothesline of Caring and Warmth**
- **Stations of the Nativity**
- **Christmas Joy Offering**

Christmas is full of joy and celebration, but this is only because it was a light *in the darkness*, a joy sent into hard times. Advent was a long, uncomfortable journey from town to town, with the tiredness and danger of pregnancy, with the uncertainty of each night's stay, and a looming foreboding that powerful and jealous rulers were tracking them, as a census was taken and the innocent were then systematically slaughtered.

As we look at the world around us, it is easy to see threat at work. Wars, genocides, climate dangers, and extremism seem to be abounding. Conspiracy and superstition are believed, and science and plain truth ignored. We can see people being led astray, and feel helpless to persuade our neighbors back to reality.

When our own times seem heavy and grim, we remember that it was into just such a time that Jesus was born. Likewise, we are asked never to give up hope, but to serve goodness against incredible odds, and to believe in God whose love always stands victorious at the last.

Be well, pray often,
and do it all with love.

From Pastor Cindy

Dear Friends, this note is arriving in our December newsletter which means, for most of us, that our Christmas preparations have begun, or at the very least, our worry about getting all our Christmas preparations completed has begun. I know I have started to feel a bit of concern as I look at how few days there are between now and Christmas and how many tasks I hope to complete in that time, joyful though the tasks may be.

French designer Coco Chanel, when commenting on fashion accessories, is reported to have said that before leaving the house one should look in the mirror and remove one item. I wonder if this might not be good advice for Christmas preparations as well. Look at your "to do" list and consider baking only six types of cookies instead of twelve or consider putting up lights along the porch railings but not the dogwoods in the front yard.

The reason I suggest this is that even though we call Advent a time of preparation, the one preparation we spent little time on is that of opening our hearts for the birth of the Christ child. This requires very little other than time – time in the evening when we turn off all the lights but those on the Christmas tree and remember why we undertake such a big project, time spent praying for the friends whose Christmas cards arrived in that day's mail, time spent thinking about the daily Advent devotional reading written by our congregation members and compiled and sent out by our Worship, Music, and Spiritual Life Committee, time spent thanking God for the life of Jesus whose very presence on earth was and is a sure sign of God's love.

I do understand that time is often what we feel we have least of to give which is what makes it such a special gift. So, this Advent, please consider spending some of your Christmas preparation time in prayer and contemplation of the best gift ever given, God's love through Jesus.

With joy and love, Cindy

With love and gratitude,



Adult Education

Adult Education Classes

Sunday, December 5:

We will take a look at the Christmas story in the Bible and compare it to the story we remember. From there we will look at the different components of the story and discuss what each contributes to it. Join us in Dodds Hall after fellowship time for this class led by Pastor Cindy.

Sunday, December 12:

We will continue our study of the Christmas story in the gospels and what they have to teach us. Some of the issues we might address include the differing meanings of the story through history, the impact of the context in which it was written, and the importance of this ancient story in our lives today. Join us in Dodds Hall after fellowship for part two of this discussion led by Pastor Cindy.

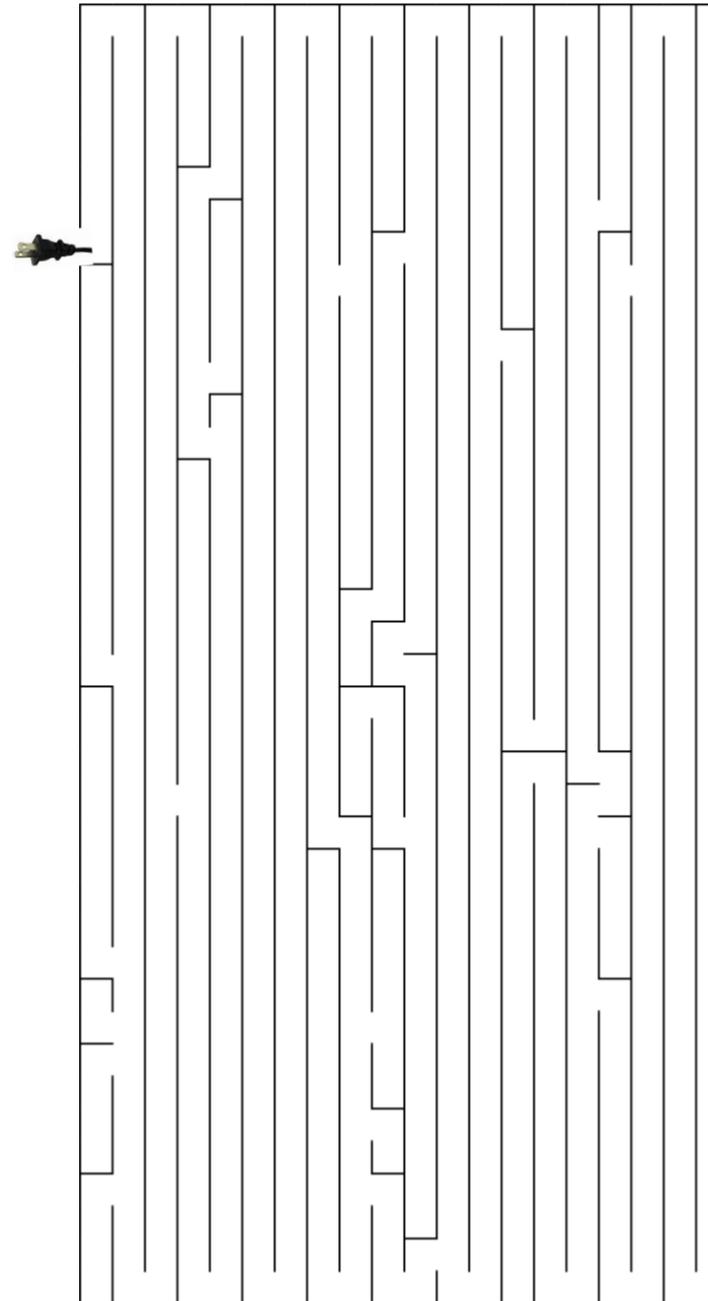
On Sundays Dec. 19 and 26, we will not have classes.



*For additional study of texts relating to the season of Advent, don't forget to make sure you are signed up for the **Advent Devotional 2021** prepared by the Worship, Music, and Spiritual Life Committee!*

Announcements and Reminders

Help—the Christmas Lights are tangled! Can you draw a strand that gets from the outlet to the star?



Birthdays in December



- 1 - Martha Trattel
- 2 – Zaris Sybert
- 10 – Patrick Bohn
- 10 – Deborah Streeter
- 11 – Ah Ling
- 12 – Lucia Armstrong
- 15 – Marilyn Ewing
- 21- Linda Sharpe
- 30 – Mike Ferdinando



...We would love to add your birthday and/or your anniversary. If it's not here, please let the office know and we will be happy to add it!

Stewardship Sunday

Thank you to everyone who participated in Stewardship Sunday! We will update you soon on where we are in supporting the church's work planned for 2022.

If anyone would like to receive a pledge card, to revise a pledge, to ask about direct deposit or online giving, or to ask how to mail or return a pledge, please feel free to call us the office at (607) 272-2800. Kate Hubbs can answer questions about giving, and Linda Sharpe can provide any materials you wish to have!



We hold in our daily prayer:

Ann Cedarholm; Bobbie Collyer; Tom Hurst; Betsy Mann; Gayle Park; David Morey; Jean Radice; Connie Scott and Don Scott, and their family;



Sarah Snow, Heather Lane's mother; Bibs Warner; and Marianne Weaver.

To request prayers from the church, please contact Kirianne or the church office.

From the Deacons:

The Deacons had a wonderful time planning Deacons Sunday last month and are grateful for all those who participated in the service with us on 11/14. Planning this service always seems to bring us inspiration and a renewed sense of cohesion. This year we chose the theme of resilience. Tom Owens provided the following thoughts on this theme, which were read at the beginning of the service:

Over the past 18 months, we as individuals, as a congregation, and as a community have been forced by COVID to exhibit remarkable resilience - resilience to drastic change, and resilience to losses of many kinds. Resilience is not a property that is unique to humans. In fact, it is a fundamental characteristic of life - all living things respond to stressors in their environment by making internal changes. One example are oak trees, a symbol we have integrated into our past several Deacons Sunday services. Oak trees are tough to begin with. However, when an oak tree is stressed by drought, for example, they are capable of growing longer, deeper roots. Resilience in humans comes in many forms. Outside of examples of our own biological resilience, like an immune system, we also have individual and corporal resilience - a capacity to change our behavior and to help others in need. Perhaps most importantly, we have a spiritual resilience - the knowledge that God's grace and love will help to see us as individuals, as a congregation, and as a community and beyond, through all sorts of tough times.

Hanging of the Greens:

On Sunday, November 28, from 3:30pm to 6pm, we will hold the HANGING OF THE GREENS! Here's how it will work:

- At 3:30 we come to the church. If you want to bring a **dish to pass** that would be wonderful! We will have supper together later. Bring a dish downstairs to the kitchen, or just join us straight outside by Cayuga Street as we put out our Christmas lights!
- When we are done with lights, we will head indoors and start putting up trees, bows, greens, and more. Many hands make light work!
- There will be some craft supplies available for kids to help us make paper chains to decorate one of our trees!
- When we are done decorating, we will join together for supper in Dodds Hall from 5-5:30.
- At 5:30, you will be called to come through the sanctuary, and first enjoy the lights in the newly decorated space!
- Finally, we will join outside to appreciate the lights at the front of the church—and there, we will sing a carol together before bidding one another farewell.

Please join us for these celebrations if you are able. It is so much more fun to work together, enjoy each other's company, and celebrate in fellowship. Thank you for your time!



Clothesline of Caring & Warmth

On Wednesday November 17, 2021 First Presbyterian Church of Ithaca (FPCI) hosted a wonderful meal for about 60 people. Taili Mugambee, the Director of URO, stated this in an email:

"I first want to say that last night was amazing. With everything that we perceived to go wrong, everything went so right. Court involved people showed up, volunteers showed up, St. James AME Zion and First Presbyterian were in sync in service, people from many walks were able to connect and hug each other, good food was served, and I mean food in every theoretical and metaphorical way, and happiness was abounded and in abundance."

Opportunities, Alternatives and Resources (OAR) and the Ultimate Re-Entry Opportunity (URO) are dedicated to helping people who have faced or are currently facing incarcerations. The mission is to eliminate systemic barriers to reentry in Tompkins County using a collective impact model.

You will see that the Clothesline of Warmth, which has been a church tradition for many, many years has been updated to Clothesline of Caring & Warmth and is partnering up with the organizations.

The items that are needed:

TCAT Monthly Bus Passes
Wal-Mart, Tops, Wegmans & other gift cards
Toothpaste and toothbrushes
Toiletries: Shampoo, Conditioner, soap, etc
Feminine Hygiene products
Laundry detergent and cleaning supplies
Toilet paper, paper towels

These items must be new:

Men's socks, underwear and long johns
Women's socks, underwear, bras and long johns
Towels, wash clothes, and hand towels.

Thank you to all for your help with this mission!

From the Missioners

The Missioners Committee has been very busy since the beginning of the pandemic, as access to food and healthcare came into sharp focus and partners around the world have increased needs. The church continues to fund a wide range of efforts in support of the church's mission, and these include access to healthcare, food, legal help, education, and more.

We have been particularly pleased to expand the church's support of Enfield Food Distribution, which has seen greatly elevated need in the community. We are supporting new local organizations such as Lansing Lunchbox, which provides food to schoolchildren, as well as recommitting to longstanding support of the Friendship Center, Ithaca Health Alliance, and others who support many locally. Beyond our community, we have supported Afghan refugees arriving in the US as well as those affected by Hurricane Ida. We have also focused on committing to continue and expand our support of education needs around the world, including in Cambodia and Ethiopia, the latter through the Ethiopia Rural Education Project (EREP).

Though many, these is in fact not an exhaustive list of the organizations that Missioners Committee has supported this past year and plans to support next year. We are excited to be able to do this in obedience to Christ's teaching that "I tell you the truth, just as you did it for one of the least of these brothers or sisters of mine, you did it for me." If this work interests you as well, please reach out to James Nagy, committee chair at jjjnagy@yahoo.com

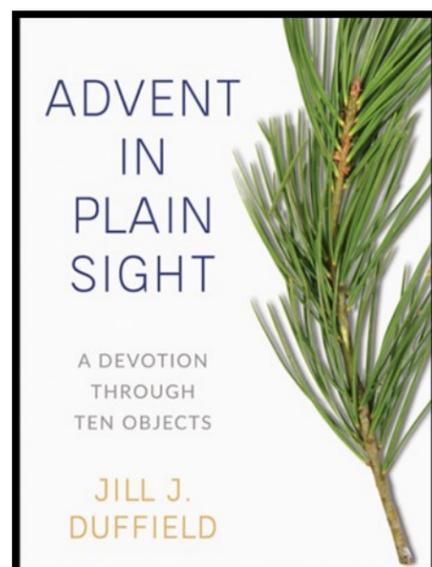
Small Group Study: Advent in Plain Sight

Small group opportunity

during Advent and Christmastide

As we approach another winter with the pandemic still present in our world, we anticipate the coming of the Christ child into our lives to shine light on God at work in this world. Jill J. Duffield has written a daily devotional for small group discussion, taking ordinary objects which appear in the biblical narratives of messianic prophesy and incarnation to find new meaning in the biblical account of Jesus' coming. Through objects such as gates, trees, cloth, light, and water, Jill asks the reader to encounter God's kingdom of heaven on earth and discern divine possibility in what at first glance appears to be utterly mundane. Jill is our guide as we become aware of Immanuel, God with us, past, present, and future.

Sharing our personal experiences after reading the short daily devotionals will expand our own understanding and connect us with others in our community of faith. Our hybrid church services and committee/board meetings leave us yearning for deeper conversations with each other. Meeting for



an hour a week can provide that spiritual openness which only a faith community can offer. This study is designed for six weeks, beginning the week of November 28th, offering groups on Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday depending on people's schedules. Each short reading centers on a theme and includes Scripture, commentary, questions for reflection, and a prayer for the day.

Sign up after services beginning October 31st or online (mascourtney228@gmail.com), indicating your preference of meeting day. Groups will meet via Zoom at 7 PM or can meet during the day if there is enough interest. Weekly theme-based questions will guide the discussion although we have found that small group meetings are influenced often by the Holy Spirit working through group members. We encourage you to form groups based on shared interests, such as young families, intergenerational gatherings, and committee or action groups. Books are available online or can be ordered through local bookstores: Jill J. Duffield, *Advent in Plain Sight, A Devotion through Ten Objects*. Westminster John Knox Press.

Take advantage of this seasonal focus on spiritual life and reclaim the original meaning of Christmas. The people who join the group determine the group's direction and significance. Sign up during November in person or online.

*-The Worship, Music,
and Spiritual Life Committee*

Stations of the Nativity—A Journey to Bethlehem

*Sunday December 19th,
Dewitt Park*

Our Advent Committee and dedicated volunteers have been working hard to bring you a special experience this December 19th! Tell your friends and family... let's make this inaugural event a spiritual success...connecting to God through story, tradition and shared experience. The *Stations of the Nativity – A Journey to Bethlehem* will be held on Sunday December 19th from 4pm to 5pm at Dewitt Park. This will be an outdoor event allowing you and yours an opportunity to wander through the park and back through time to the magical moments of the Christmas story.

The Christmas Joy Offering

In the story of God, as we tell it, there is a barrier that exists between the Created world and its Creator. A wall. Sin, we say, separates us from God, and separation from God is unbearable.

And our story goes on to say that God, seeing that we had no hope in ourselves of getting over, or through or around what separates us, offered us a gift in Jesus Christ who opens a door — a door we could not open ourselves.

What a gift!

But the story goes on to say that Jesus is the *perfect* gift; not only opening a door but coming through it. Our story says God is with us.

In Jesus, God joined with humanity, pointing the way to the end of our separation. And in his life, death and resurrection, so our story of God goes, Jesus *is* the door, now standing open. The giving continues because God is with us, still — and always.

Because being with us is part of God's story, being with others is part of our call.

The Christmas Joy Offering opens doors of opportunity for the leaders who are shaped and supported through our gifts — doors that lead to hopeful futures for young people at Presbyterian-related schools and colleges equipping communities of color. Our gifts open doors that lead to relief for church workers and their families when emergency needs arise.

Proverbs, a book of wisdom sayings, states that it's a person's gift that opens doors. As we give generously to the Christmas Joy Offering, we seek to not only meet needs, but to meet people, to come through the door that generosity opens. We open the door to celebrate "God with us!" We open the door with each and every student who will soon inspire and lead the world. We open the door with each and every church worker who helps us share God's story with the world.

The story of God, as we tell it, is not about a barrier, but about a gift. It's not about the separation, but about the gift of "being with." Please give generously to the Christmas Joy Offering, in celebration of God's perfect gift to us. Give because it brings us together, to open doors of relief and opportunity and to relationships that are part of God's story, a part of God's perfect gift to us.