

The Messenger

November – December 2023

The First Church of Monson, Congregational/UCC

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The Church Office is usually open on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9 a.m. to 12 noon. Interim Pastor Jack is in the office Tuesday and Thursday morning or by appointment.

Please visit our website for additional information.

***No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey,
you are welcome here!***

Our Mission

The Mission of the First Church of Monson is
to praise God through prayer,
to share the Word and love of God by promoting fellowship in the community,
and to serve as stewards of God's creation –
all in a manner that glorifies God and emulates Christ.

You are invited to join your church family for any or all of these holiday events.

Saturday, 12/2 – Christmas Dinner and Concert sponsored by the Music Committee

Dinner (chili, cornbread, salad, and dessert) at 5 p.m.

Concert at 7 p.m. with David Neill Fanfare Brass

Cost: \$20.00 for dinner & concert; the concert only is \$5.00.

Please contact the Church Office by November 29 for reservations.

Saturday, 12/9 – Breakfast with Santa sponsored by CE and Outreach

Continental breakfast with beverages and baked goods starting at 9:30 a.m.

There will be seasonal activities and games for the children.

Please bring an unwrapped toy to share the giving season with others.

Sunday, December 17 – *Let's Eat Breakfast*

Buffet breakfast from 8 to 9:45 a.m.

Eggs, home fries, quiche, pancakes, fruit, and yogurt

Free will donations are appreciated.

Sunday, 12/17 – Christmas Pageant presented by Sunday School

Paper bag pageant during the 10 a.m. worship service

Join our Sunday School youth for fun entertainment with a message!

Members of the congregation, expect to be involved!

Sunday, 12/17 – Christmas Caroling

3 to 5 p.m. at the Silver St. Chapel at 224 Silver Street, Monson

Enjoy a program of secular and religious music with the choir.

Thursday, 12/21 - Main Street Tavern Night

4 p.m. to closing for dine in or take out

218 Main Street, Monson

Raffle to benefit church programs & missions

Sunday, 12/24 – Morning Worship at 10 a.m.

Candlelight Service at 7 p.m.

All are welcome!

Pastoral Search Committee News



We are all excited about the prospect of finding and calling a new Settled Pastor to our church! This is a long process, and we need help from you, our church family, to understand the direction you want our church to follow, and the type of pastor needed to take us there.

You can help the Search Committee in this task by hosting a small discussion group in your home. We are looking for families willing to open their homes to members and friends of First Church. A member of the Search Committee will be at each gathering to lead the discussion, so the host family would only need to provide a friendly space and possibly some goodies.

Our hope is to schedule the meetings between January 15 and February 25, 2024. The host family may choose the date and time of the meeting. It can be a morning, an afternoon, or an evening gathering.

Please look for a sign-up sheet in the Fellowship Room. The dates and times of these gatherings will be determined by the host's availability. Once we have the hosts and dates, a sign-up sheet will be created for all to choose a meeting to attend.

Remember, we are calling a pastor for all of us and it is our hope that everyone will participate in this process.

Thank you.

Your Search Committee,

Lisa, Elaine, Laurie, Roy, Keith, Deb, David, Judy, and Chris

Annual Stewardship Campaign

We Gather Together



Stewardship Sunday is almost here! We will gather together for worship on November 12, 2023 to offer our gifts to First Church. Following the service everyone is invited to enjoy a delicious soup and bread luncheon.

Covenant members and friends recently received a letter from the Stewardship Committee and Pastor Jack, requesting an annual pledge or donation for the upcoming 2024 budget year.

We ask that you think about what your financial gift to First Church will be for 2024 and hope that you will gather with us on Sunday, November 12 to celebrate that gift. If you have not pledged before, we encourage you to join us. Pledging allows us to know ahead of time how much money we will have to work with and makes budgeting easier and more accurate.

Thank you for supporting First Church with your time, talent, and treasure.

Your Stewardship Team,

Linda, Laurie, Carolyn, and Pastor Jack

Greening of the Church



Greening is the decorating of the church for the seasons of Advent and Christmas. Decorations include an Advent wreath, other small wreaths, garlands, and Christmas trees. The greens symbolize hope, a new life through Jesus.

Greening will be on Sunday, November 26 after the worship service; there are plenty of things to be done and not everyone has to climb a ladder.

The more helping hands, the faster we complete these tasks:

- Bringing boxes down from storage and ladders up (may be done earlier)
- Ironing ribbons and decorating the wreaths
- Hanging the garlands and wreaths
- Setting up the pre-lit trees in the choir area
- Decorating the garlands and trees
- Ironing and hanging the banners
- Testing lights for the window decorations
- Arranging the window decorations
- Setting up crèche in narthex (Baby Jesus is added Christmas Eve.)



December News and Notes



Music Sunday: The Music Committee has decided not to hold a formal "Music Sunday" this year. Instead, we invite everyone to experience the special music of Advent as Kiel, the choir, and congregation prepare for the birth of Christ.

Sanctuary Flowers: Donating flowers in memory of a loved one or in celebration of a special occasion brings joy twice. The flowers add beauty to the sanctuary on Sunday morning. After worship, they can be taken home by the donor or given to a member in need of special uplifting. What a special blessing it is to see the joy on a recipient's face!

Please consider participating in this important ministry in 2024. Flowers may be purchased arrangements or a bouquet from a home garden. Forms to sign up to give sanctuary flowers are in the Fellowship Room. A sincere "thank you" goes to all who have given generously in the past.

Church Space Use: Please make all requests to use space in the church through the Church Office. Lee keeps a master calendar with all space usage noted. The trustees use this information to set the heat for that area. Forms to reserve space are available in Fellowship Hall or contact the Church Office directly. Thank you.

Annual Reports: Reports for 2023 are due into the Church Office by January 15, 2024. The completed Annual Report will be available in Fellowship Hall starting Sunday, January 18, 2024.



The First Church prayer shawl ministry welcomed Maureen and Dorothy, retired nuns from the Sisters of Saint Joseph in Holyoke. They are helping Native American mothers at a hospital in the mid west. There is a need baby blankets and hats for babies and small children.

We were able to give them eight blankets, several small hats, a small teddy bear, and two shawls. If you would like to donate hats or blankets we would appreciate it. Yarn is available.

Thank you from,
Charlotte, Carrie, Donna, Ginny, Jane, Jamy, Lyle, Sarah and Tammy

The First Church Prayer Shawl ministry meets on the first and third Thursday of the month from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. in Fellowship Hall. You are welcome to join us. Do you need to learn to knit or crochet? We can help! We pray for those in need of comfort, healing, and warmth. Please let the Church Office know of anyone in need of a prayer shawl.

Lenten Meditation Booklet: The 2024 Lenten Meditation Booklet will be available on Sunday, February 11, 2024. Ash Wednesday is February 14, 2024. There will be an evening service at 7 p.m.



Undie Sunday

“Undie Sunday” is an Annual Appeal by the Springfield Rescue Mission that gives the community an opportunity to make a difference in someone’s life. During this campaign, we are asking for donations of new underwear, new undershirts, and new socks for men, women, and children. For men, sizes large and extra large are the most needed. Collection boxes are located in the Fellowship Room and narthex. Our collection campaign goes through November 12. Thank you, Your Outreach Committee

The **Christmas Fund for Veterans of the Cross** is an annual UCC special offering that expresses our thanks to retired and active UCC pastors and lay church workers and their families facing financial need; The Christmas Fund provides direct assistance to supplement pensions, help with the cost of medical insurance, and funds to meet emergency needs. This year’s theme is “Grace upon grace,” from John 1:16. “From Christ’s fullness we have all received grace upon grace.”

“From Christ’s fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.”

The **Mitten Tree** is up in the narthex and ready to be decorated with hats, gloves, mitten, and scarves. The tree will remain up through the Advent season and all donations will be delivered to the Springfield Rescue Mission.

Hearts Willing Club



Wednesday, November 15, 2023

7 p.m. - Fellowship Hall

“A Thankful Heart”

Program presented by Deb

Our service project this evening is remembering our homebound members and friends with cards or gift bags. Hostesses are Lyle and Donna.

Wednesday, December 20, 2023

6:30 p.m. – Fellowship Hall

Christmas Social

Potluck: Appetizers and Desserts

Please bring an appetizer or dessert to share.

Sign-up sheets will be in the Fellowship Room.

Beverages will be provided by the Program Committee

If you are able, please bring a gift of non-perishable food for Monson Open Pantry.

Thank you!

Reminder: Hearts Willing Club will not meet in January. Our next gathering is an Afternoon Tea on Saturday, February 24, 2024 from 2 to 4 p.m.

LOAVES AND FISHES MINISTRY CELEBRATES 34 YEARS (Written by Crystal)



In December of 1989, First Church began its ministry at the Loaves and Fishes soup kitchen. Former church member, Linda, made Christmas cookies with her daughter, Ryan, and several of Ryan's friends. They decided to take the cookies to Loaves and Fishes. After confirming with the soup kitchen that it would be okay for nine year olds to bring the cookies, Ryan, Linda, and my daughter, Heather, traveled to Springfield and gave the cookies to the assembled diners on that night. While they were there, they learned that the program was looking for churches to provide the evening meal on a regular basis once a month. Linda came back and discussed the idea with me. I thought that this was a great opportunity for us to get involved, and I was sure that there were enough people in our church who would be interested, so we accepted the challenge.

On the second Monday of January in 1990, we prepared and served our first dinner at Loaves and Fishes. What started as a few platefuls of Christmas cookies has become an important and long lasting ministry for our church. I was the first coordinator, serving for about seven or eight years. Other coordinators, listed in chronological order, were Cindy, Larry, and John. Each of these persons served lovingly for about seven or eight years.

The response of our church members has been enthusiastic and committed. Every month, about 10-12 people prepare a main dish and another 10-12 prepare a side dish of carrots or salad. In addition, a group of people travel to Springfield on our given day to transport the food and serve the meal. Over the years, the servers have included the confirmation class, Sunday School classes, Youth Group members, Girl and Boy Scout troops, National Honor Society members from the high school, and other groups wanting to participate in community service. More recently, our servers have been a dedicated group of retirees who consistently make the trip on the second Monday of each month.

What a blessing this ministry has been for so many. Our kids have learned about poverty and homelessness firsthand, in a way that encourages compassion, not judgment. Our congregation has had the opportunity to serve others every month, either by preparing food or serving it. And the program has provided food for those most in need. We have been God's hands and feet in the world and have fulfilled the promise in Matthew 25:40. "Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me."

As we begin the 34th year of this ministry, we have new co-coordinators. Trish and I have assumed leadership for the Loaves and Fishes program for the next several years. I would like to thank all of those who have contributed to this ministry – past coordinators, servers, and all those in the congregation who have prepared food over the past 34 years. The longevity of this program speaks for itself. This is an amazing example of the dedication and love of a faithful group of Christians who are the First Church of Monson.

Merry Christmas and Blessed New Year to all!