Dear Friends,

We have entered the season of Advent, which invites us to recognize our need for Christ to be born anew. I feel this yearning quite strongly this year because life is not as we would like it to be. After plummeting this summer, COVID-19 cases are now on the rise here in Massachusetts. Social media is chock full of discord over the need for mask wearing and the efficacy of COVID vaccines. People in our neighborhoods are going to bed hungry and worrying about how they will pay their bills. We are lonely and isolated from one another despite the smartphones we have at our fingertips. And here at the church, we have all sorts of questions and concerns about our future.

So, we welcome the season of Advent because it is clear that we need a Savior! This time of holy waiting invites us to look away from our troubles and to watch for the light and love that the coming Christ child will bring. Advent offers us a chance to acknowledge both the ache we feel in our hearts over the brokenness of the world and our hopes that the birth of Christ will make a difference in all of it.

I hope that you will join us this month to experience Advent and Christmas at UCC Stoughton. Together, let us prepare our hearts for the newborn King. As God’s beloved community, let us watch and wait together for the fulfillment of God’s promises. We are a family of faith that believes each of us can be a messenger of good news in an anxious world, and that means you! My prayer is that the season of Advent will help renew our faith and prepare our hearts for the miracle of Jesus’ birth.

With blessings of hope, peace, joy, and love,

Pastor Mary
Deaths:
Thomas Danilchuk, who died on October 22. No memorial services have been planned.
Diana Geigis, who died on October 27. Her memorial service was private.

We thank **Maurine Upton, Janet Clough, Marcia Olson**, and all who helped make this year’s Church Fair such a success. May God bless you for all the work you did to prepare for this major fundraiser and the time you spent at the church on the day of the fair. Thank you to all who participated in our recent Outdoor Church of Cambridge outreach: **Al Mahoney, Drew Cesario, Caroline Cesario, Preston Keenan, Anita Keenan, Marcia Olson, Annette Sugrue Baker** and her sons **Jake and Luke**, and **Pastor Mary**. We also thank **Janet Clough, Russ Congdon, Al Mahoney**, and **Pastor Mary** for their participation on this year’s Stewardship Committee. We are very blessed!

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**Farewell, Gian!**

Music Director **Gian DiCostanzo**’s last day will be Sunday, December 12. While Gian’s departure is sad for us, we are happy that he will be pursuing his love of musical theater. Let’s thank God for the ways Gian shared his musical gifts with us this year and pray for God’s richest blessings to be upon him and his future endeavors!
Christmas Eve Candlelight Service

Good news - we will be able to hold this beautiful service in the sanctuary this year! We’re excited that our friends from the First United Methodist Church will be worshipping with us and participating in our traditional service of Lessons and Carols, which will begin at **4:00 pm** (please note the time) on Friday, December 24. **Elizabeth Silvia** will be leading the music for this joyous worship service, which will include Communion and conclude, as always, with the singing of “Silent Night” by candlelight. Please bring your mask and join us to welcome the birth of our Savior!

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**ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS FLOWERS**

It is time to think about decorating our altar for the Advent season. Would you like to have a poinsettia dedicated to someone special? If you wish to donate a plant in memory, honor, or celebration of a loved one, please drop a note in the collection plate or mail your information to the church office indicating your dedication. In order to have your memorial appear in the Christmas bulletin, your donation must be received no later than **Sunday, December 12**. In order to purchase good quality plants that will last, a suggested donation is $10.00, but all donations will be accepted. After the Christmas Services, if you have purchased a plant, you are welcome to take it home with you. Members of the Caring Committee will deliver the remaining plants to our sick and housebound. If you have any questions, please contact **Janet Clough** at 781-344-3860 or cloughjl@gmail.com

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**Church Fair Update**

Thank you very much to all of you who were a large part in making our 2021 Fair a success. You baked, sewed, knit, sent out online messages, set up the tables, decorated the area, were salespeople, you cleaned up after the fair, purchased from one or more of the tables, or you counted the proceeds. A large part of the success goes to **Marcia Olson** and her endless time spent on her computer selling items left by our former tenants or special donated items by our church family. Thank her when you see her. At this time the income of the Fair is **$18,485** with more to come. Thank you all for your support.

**Maurine and Janet**
What’s Happening This Month?

Opportunities

- **Sunday Worship at 10:00 AM.** We worship together each Sunday morning at **10:00 AM.** Please pay careful attention to Pastor Mary’s weekly emails and other church communications for any changes in Covid-19 health and safety protocols. We ask that all who attend indoor worship wear face masks and observe social distancing. If you do not get the weekly email, contact the church office at office@uccstoughton.org. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Pastor Mary at 774-571-7307.

**December Worship Schedule**

*All services will be held in the church sanctuary unless otherwise noted. We ask that you wear a mask and observe social distancing while in the building.*

- **December 5:** Second Sunday of Advent/Communion Sunday. Pastor Mary leading worship.
- **December 12:** Third Sunday of Advent. Pastor Mary leading worship.
- **December 19:** Fourth Sunday of Advent. Pastor Mary leading worship.
- **December 24:** Christmas Eve Candlelight Service @ 4:00 pm. (For more information please see the Christmas Eve article elsewhere in this issue of the Link.)
- **December 26:** Pastor Mary is off and we will not be holding a worship service. We encourage you to visit a neighboring church.

- **Wednesday Prayer Service:** Pastor Mary leads a brief 30-minute prayer service by way of a conference call each Wednesday morning at 10:00 AM. Dial 1-253-215-8782 and when prompted, enter the Meeting ID 862 2469 5175. There will be a scripture reading and time for the sharing of our prayer concerns. This weekly gathering is open to all, so if you have a friend who might find this opportunity to connect helpful. Please share the information.

- **UCC Stoughton Prayer** is a private Facebook group where you can safely share your prayer requests, pray for others in our community, or just vent. No one sees the posts except group members. If you have a Facebook account and would like to join the group let Pastor Mary know.

- **Church Council** meets on the **2nd Monday of each month** at 7:00 pm via Zoom. These meetings are open to everyone, not just Council members. Contact Pastor Mary if you would like to attend via Zoom and she will send you the link to the meeting. If you prefer to attend by telephone, call 1-253-215-8782 and enter Meeting ID 837 8927 2962.

- **Jan 16 (Sun) Annual Budget Meeting:** All members are encouraged to attend this very important meeting immediately following worship. The agenda will be published in the January Link.

Remember to check our Facebook page and church website (http://www.uccstoughton.org/).
Opportunities to Serve

- **Dec 15 (Wed) Mainspring House**: This is this next date we are scheduled to provide dinner for Brockton’s homeless shelter. If you can make a casserole or give a monetary donation to defray the cost of salad and dessert, please contact **Anita Keenan** (keenans21@gmail.com | 781-244-7742). Casseroles must be delivered to the church by Sunday, December 12 and stored in the downstairs freezer. Contact Anita if you need a foil baking pan and recipe or to make arrangements to drop off your casserole.

- **Jan 29 (Sat) Outdoor Church of Cambridge**: We will be serving at the Outdoor Church on Saturday afternoon, January 29 and would love your help to either make sandwiches that morning or travel into Cambridge to distribute them. We also welcome donations of new socks, which are much needed by those who live on the streets. Please let Pastor Mary know if you’re interested in helping with this important outreach.

- **Prayer Shawl Ministry**: Although we cannot yet meet in person, we encourage you all to continue to knit prayer shawls for those who need to feel God’s loving care wrapped around them.

Opportunities to give!

- **Dec 19 (Sun) The Christmas Fund**: The Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund supports and honors those clergy who have served, and are serving, this beloved church by providing pension and health premium supplementation to low-income retirees, emergency assistance to the families of clergy and lay employees and Christmas “Thank You” Gift Checks to hundreds of annuitants. The Christmas Fund provides a lifeline of hope to many lower-income active and retired clergy and lay employees in the United Church of Christ. Through your continuing faithfulness, we will be able to provide the same level of care and compassion as has been our tradition for more than a century. We will take up a collection on Sunday, December 19 but will gratefully accept donations throughout the month of December. Please mail your donation to the church office. Make your check payable to the First Congregational Church of Stoughton and write “The Christmas Fund” on the memo line.

- **Pledge Sunday** was Sunday, November 21. If you have not yet done so, please mail your pledge to the church office to the attention of the Offerings Clerk at 76 Pierce Street, Stoughton, MA 02072. You can also drop your pledge off in person by depositing in the church mailbox to the right of the lower door at the bottom of the handicap ramp. Your offering for next year is so vital for supporting the life and ministries of our beloved church. We are grateful for your generosity.
**Food Pantry:** Donations are still urgently needed. We have resumed collecting non-perishable food items once a month on Communion Sunday. Items can also be left in the Giving Corner in the church lobby at any time. Donations are given to the Ilse Marks Food Pantry. Please be sure to check the expiration date!

**Bottles and Cans:** Please donate your clean, redeemable bottles and cans from your holiday events and parties. They can be left in the drop-off container at the bottom of the stairs just before the church office. Monetary donations are also gratefully accepted, and the money collected is used for various church ministries and operational needs. Contact **Maurine Upton** for more information.

**Needy Persons Fund:** Many in our community are in need during this pandemic. Our church maintains a Needy Persons fund through which we are able to offer assistance to such individuals. If you are able, please mail your donation to the church office at 76 Pierce Street, Stoughton noting Needy Persons Fund on your check. Through your generosity, we are able to help many people. **Thank you!** If you are experiencing difficult financial circumstances and could use some help through our Needy Persons’ Fund, please speak to Pastor Mary in confidence.

**Mitten Tree:** Area neighbors will have a warmer winter when we fill the branches of our church Mitten Tree with hats, mittens, gloves, and scarves. Donations can be placed on the Mitten Tree in the church lobby.

**Socks for Outdoor Church:** The weather is getting colder and the street outreach ministry of The Outdoor Church in Cambridge is greatly in need of warm, water-resistant socks for the homeless in Harvard and Central Squares in Cambridge. We will be collecting new socks, as well as scarves, hats and mittens for both men and women over the next two months. Please contact **Marcia Olson** (baglole.olson@verizon.net | 781-344-9547) if you have some to donate or you can drop them off in the Giving Corner in the church lobby.

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**State-of-the-Church REPORT**

**Annual Reports Due December 18**

In this strange pandemic year when much church activity has been on hiatus, all active boards, committees, and ministry teams should submit a brief report to the **Church Office by December 18.** Please email your reports to **office@uccstoughton.org** and to Marcia Olson at **baglole.olson@verizon.net**.
Adopt-A-Family For Christmas

I recently met a family (a single mother with a 10-year-old disabled daughter) who is living in Stoughton and needs our help. The mother lost her job during the pandemic and has asked if we could possibly provide a few Christmas gifts for her daughter. Here is a list of suggested items:

- Size 12 girls’ clothing
- Shoes or boots size 6.5
- Beanbag chair
- Nail polish and makeup set
- Drawing paper and art supplies
- Full size blanket

It would be lovely if we could also get a few gifts for the mom. She is petite, probably a size small. She would appreciate clothes, a winter hat and gloves, and hand or body lotion. The family is utilizing the local food pantries, but I am sure they would also welcome grocery store gift cards or non-perishable food items.

Please leave your unwrapped gifts in the Giving Corner of the church by Sunday, December 19 or give them to me so that we can deliver them to the family before Christmas. May God bless you for caring about people in need.

-Pastor Mary

A Christmas Prayer

O Lord, the gift of new life, new light,
can be a gift truly only if we open ourselves to receive it.
So, this is our prayer, Lord: that thou wilt
open our eyes to see thy glory in the coming again of light each day,
open our ears to hear the angels’ hymn in the stirring within us
of joy at the coming of the child,
open our hearts to the transforming power of thy love
as it comes to us through the love of all those who hold us most dear
and have sacrificed most for us.
Be born among us that we may ourselves be born.
Be born within us that by words and deeds of love we may bear
the tidings of thy birth to a world that dies for lack of love.
We ask it in the child’s name. Amen.
~ Frederick Buechner
The people on this list may not be able to receive visitors during this time. Please think of dropping them a card or note.

AT HOME, IN NURSING HOMES, AND ASSISTED LIVING FACILITIES
For those who wish to send greetings, the following list is included:

Charles Bittner
Life Care Center, Room 282
546 South Street East
Raynham, MA 02767

Amanda Cushing
Willimansett Center East
Room 308A
11 St. Anthony Street
Chicopee, MA 01013

Dorothy Dawe
The Arbors
2121 Central Street Apt 112
Stoughton, MA 02072

Pam Dykeman
115 Kennedy Rd.
Stoughton, MA 02072

Judy Giannangelo
Care One at Randolph
49 Thomas Patten Dr
Randolph, MA 02368

Maizie John
996 Canton Ave.
Milton MA 02186

Betty Lambert
West Acres Rehab and Nursing Center
Room 311B
804 Pleasant Street
Brockton, MA 02301

Ruth Scrivens
18 Daly Dr.
Stoughton, MA 02072
christmas scavenger hunt

inside...  outside...

- a Christmas story
- a star
- a button
- a candy cane
- a Christmas card
- a cookie cutter
- a mitten
- something red
- a cup of cheer
- a list of something
- a hug
- silver bells
- two front teeth
- something cozy
- eggnog
- something green
- a photo of who you are with
- a pair of slippers
- a poinsettia
- kissing under the mistletoe
- something sparkley
- a Christmas cracker
- a Christmas craft
- a good deed
- an angel

- a decorated mailbox
- a train
- Christmas music
- a house with white lights only
- a reindeer
- inflatable decorations
- carollers
- city sidewalks
- a snow angel
- a nativity scene
- a wreath
- a pinecone
- holly
- a star
- a snow family
- icicles
- Charlie Brown or The Grinch
dancing lights
Christmas tree in a window

rules

There are no rules! Take pictures of your findings... make the scavenger hunt for one day or for the twelve days of Christmas, or for as long as it takes! Have fun documenting your holiday season and enjoy this special time with your family and friends.