



## First Church of Christ in Mansfield (Congregational) United Church of Christ

549 Storrs Rd. P.O. Box 36 Mansfield Center, CT 06250

860.423.9008 + [www.myfcc.info](http://www.myfcc.info)

Ministers: All the Members of the Church

The Rev. Charles Ericson, Intentional Interim Minister

Erik Haeger, Organist

Olivia Russell, Worship Circle Coordinator

Mandy Boukus, Office Assistant

### December 21, 2025 ~ Fourth Sunday of Advent Christmas Sunday

#### Welcome to Our Guests!

*We're delighted you have joined us for worship; the members are the ministers of this church... if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask us!*

#### Playing the Chimes

#### Greeting and Announcements

#### Prelude

Erik Haeger

#### Centering in the Spirit

Jo-Ann Wunschel

One: Here in worship—

**All: we pray together,**

One: we stand together,

**All: we sing together,**

One: we listen together.

**All: Here in worship—we are not alone.**

One: So when life gives you reason to grieve, to fear, or to worry, remember this moment.

**All: We are not alone. Let us worship our with-us God.**

#### Procession of the Children

#### Light a Candle for Peace

Shelley Murley (adapted)

Light a candle for love, light a candle for love,  
light a candle that shines all a-way a-round the world.

Light a candle for me, light a candle for you,  
that our wish for world peace will one day come true.

Sing peace a - round the world. Sing peace a - round the world.  
Sing peace a - round the world. Sing peace a-round the world.

**Lighting of the Advent Candle:** Love Cheryl Chase

In a world full of fear, where do you see the presence of love?

**We see love all around us. We see love when people hold open the door. We see love in a warm embrace, a homemade casserole, a phone call after a long day. We see love in random acts of kindness and intentional acts of empathy. We see love all around us.**

You are right. Even in a fearful world, love is all around us. Today we light the candle of love as a reminder of this good news. May this flicker of light help us remember that even in a fearful world, love is here. Love is world-changing. Love is shining bright. We only have to look for it.

*Lighting of the candle.*

**Thanks be to God for a love like that! Amen.**

**\*Opening Hymn**

*Hail to the Lord's Anointed*

**CH140**

**Prayer for Transformation**

**God of Wonder... Promise... Mercy... and Love, We come to you this morning acknowledging that none of us is perfect. We all make mistakes. We don't always stay at the side of a loved one who is afraid; we don't always offer a hand when a stranger is alone. We don't always choose solidarity when a neighbor faces fear. Fortunately, you offer us grace. So, we take a deep breath, and start again. Thank you, God. Your mercy is a gift.**

*moment of silence*

**Words of Grace**

Friends, none of us is perfect. We all make mistakes. Fortunately, God offers grace, and so do we offer grace to one another. So let's take a deep breath, and let's start again.

God's mercy is a gift. We accept your grace and would love to start again. May it be so, with God's help. Alleluia, Amen.

**\*Song of Praise**

**Glory to God**

Paul Vasile



Glo - ry to God, whose good-ness shines on me, and to the Son, whose grace has  
World with-out end, world with-out end, A - men. World with-out end, world with-out  
par - doned me, and to the Spir - it whose love has set me free! As it  
end, A - men. World with-out end, world with-out end, A - men.  
was in the be-gin-ning, is now and ev-er shall be, A - men.

**The Prophets**

**Isaiah 41:5-10**

5 The coastlands have seen and are afraid; the ends of the earth tremble; they have drawn near and come.  
6 Each one helps the other, saying to one another, "Take courage!" 7 The artisan encourages the goldsmith, and the one who smooths with the hammer encourages the one who strikes the anvil, saying of the soldering, "It is good," and they fasten it with nails so that it cannot be moved. 8 But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend; 9 you whom I took from the ends of the earth and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, "You are my servant; I have chosen you and not cast you off"; 10 do not fear, for I am with you; do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you; I will help you; I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.

**Gospel Reading**

**Matthew 1:18-25**

18 Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be pregnant from the Holy Spirit. 19 Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to divorce her quietly. 20 But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." 22 All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 23 "Look, the virgin shall become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." 24 When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife 25 but had no marital relations with her until she had given birth to a son, and he named him Jesus.

**Reflection**

"A Love that is Righteous and True"

Rev. Chuck Ericson

**Hymn**

*When God Is a Child*

**CH132**

**Reading**

*a poem by Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed – "Tethered"*

Barbara Dobrocki

When we were children, we fell asleep  
 with walkie talkies tucked under our pillows.  
 All that separated us was a bathroom,  
 a hallway, a few feet of empty space,  
 but as children, even small distances can feel like miles.  
 So after the parents whispered prayers over our skinned knees  
 and spelling tests, after they kissed our sweaty foreheads  
 and tucked us into bed,  
 we'd pull the walkie talkies out from under our pillows.  
 We'd roll the dial on the top of the transceiver.  
 We'd sputter that invisible tether to life.  
 And with a few crackles in the quiet of the night,  
 you'd whisper my name.  
 I'd press down the button.  
 I'd promise I was close.  
 As an adult, I don't know what ever happened  
 to those blue-grey walkie talkies.  
 But I know,  
 that even today,  
 if the monsters in the closet feel too real,  
 and you whisper my name,  
 I promise I'll be close.

### Call to Prayer

### Hear Us O Lord

Don Besig and Nancy Price

Hear us, O Lord, as we come now in prayer, shar-ing our joys, our trou-bles, and our cares.  
 9  
 Help us, O Lord, to be o-pen to your word, and teach us to put our trust in you.

### Prayers of the People and the Prayer of Jesus

*Please pray the Prayer of Jesus in whatever language is comfortable for you.*

*The following are offered as examples...*

Our Father/Mother/Creator,  
 who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.  
 Thy kingdom come.  
 Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.  
 Give us this day our daily bread,  
 and forgive us our debts/sins/trespasses,  
 as we forgive our debtors/those who sin/trespass against us.  
 And lead us not into temptation,  
 but deliver us from evil.  
 For thine is the kingdom,

**and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.**

## Invitation to Generosity

This is a week when we often feel the disparity between the haves and the have nots. Many will go into debt striving for a perfect holiday, while others cannot even imagine the ability to have such a day. God has told us many times and, in many ways, where love flows from – it comes from the hand we extend when we have enough and even when we do not. Let us bring forth the true joy of this season and give as much as we are able.

Your financial offerings may be placed in the collection plates as they come around, or mailed to: First Church of Christ in Mansfield UCC, PO Box 36, Mansfield Center, CT 06250.

## Musical Offering

## "Rejoice with Joy to the World"

arr. by Pepper Choplin

*The congregation is invited to sing the first two verses of “Joy to the World” at the start of this piece, and then join in the third verse later, when given direction to do so.*

*Joy to the world, the Lord is come!  
Let earth receive her King;  
let every heart prepare him room,  
and heaven and nature sing,  
and heaven and nature sing,  
and heaven, and heaven and nature sing.*

*Joy to the world, the Savior reigns!  
Let all their songs employ;  
while fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains  
repeat the sounding joy,  
repeat the sounding joy,  
repeat, repeat the sounding joy.*

*He rules the world with truth and grace,  
and makes the nations prove  
the glories of his righteousness,  
and wonders of his love,  
and wonders of his love,  
and wonders, wonders of his love.*

### \*Doxology

22

Praise God from whom all blessings flow; Praise God all creatures here below; Praise  
 5 God for all that love has done: Cre - a - tor, Christ and Spi - rit, One. A - men!

## **\*Prayer of Dedication**

Love and Light of the world, we give you thanks for these gifts. We give you thanks for the privilege of generosity. We give you thanks for the ability to share your divine love in a tangible form with our siblings around the world. Help us to remember, as we await Christ's birth, to give more generously than we receive, knowing we will always be rich in your abundant love. Amen.

**\*Closing Hymn**

*Hark! the Herald Angels Sing*

**CH150**

**\*Benediction**

Now may God bless you and keep you;  
May God's face shine upon you and be gracious unto you;  
May God's countenance be lifted up upon you and give you peace. Amen.

**\*Passing the Peace**

The peace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, is with you always.

**And also with you.**

Let us share with one another a sign of that peace.

**Postlude**

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*This morning's opening liturgy is used by permission granted by Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed | A Sanctified Art LLC | [sanctifiedart.org](http://sanctifiedart.org)*

*The Invitation to Generosity and Prayer of Dedication were written by Maria Mankin for "Raised Above: Service Prayers for the First Sunday of Advent Year A" from Worship Ways on [www.ucc.org](http://www.ucc.org)*

*Our cantor this morning is Laurel Thurman.*

*The choir is directed by Cathie Rowe.*

*Coffee Hour hosts are Kathy Healey and Robert Johnson.*

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## **THE WEEK AHEAD**

### **TODAY**

**11:15 a.m.** Second hour intergenerational Advent craft

**5:00 p.m.** Mansfield Tolland PFLAG

### **Wednesday, December 24th (Christmas Eve)**

**7:00 p.m.** An informal family-friendly version of the traditional Anglican Lessons & Carols service, blending short Bible readings telling the Christmas story with popular hymns.

### **Sunday, December 28th (First Sunday after Christmas)**

**10:15 a.m. Breakfast Church**

Our weekly church service will take place in Fellowship Hall over a **Potluck Breakfast**, with a creative Breakfast Church liturgy woven into the meal, using resources by the Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed and Sanctified Art. (*This service will not be livestreamed on YouTube.*)

## **The Christmas Poinsettias on the chancel are given . . .**



by Mary Anne Baker in memory of her husband, John Baker

by Sandy and Don Baxter in memory of their parents, Nickie & Willie Pilardi and Bob & Mary Baxter

by Jean and Wes Bell in memory of grandmother Eva Benedick

by Pam Bridgeford in memory of her inspirational friend, Loris Masterton, her dear friend and neighbor, Adelaide Corcoran, her dear friends Ellen Boehle and Susan Hewes, and her wonderful mother, Ruth M. Dyer

by Cheryl Chase and Laurel Thurman in appreciation of Pastor Chuck

by David Darnell and Gary Coté in memory of their parents, George & Evelyn Coté and Frances Darnell

by Christine and Arthur Dimock in loving memory of Winston and Norma Hawkins

by Barbara Dobrocki in memory of her parents Edeltraut & Roman Dobrocki

by the Drescher Family in honor of dear friends

by Carol Fineout in loving memory of friends Susan Hewes, Ellen Boehle, Loris Masterton, Ellen Shirshac, Ruth Berube, and Carol McMillan

by the First Church Choir in appreciation of Cathie Rowe for her efforts with the Advent Choir, and Bobbi Giardina for her work with the choir and the Children's Worship Circle

by Deb Richards and Mark Messier in memory of their parents, George & Joyce Richards and Betty & Dick Messier

by Jo-Ann, Frank & Frankie Wunschel in memory of the beloved members of the Waide and Wunschel families

*About this year's Advent theme & series from Sanctified Art LLC*

### **WHAT DO YOU FEAR? INSISTING ON HOPE THIS ADVENT**

*Luke's Gospel begins the story of Jesus with this opening line: "In the time of Herod..." This detail may seem minor to modern readers; however, it reveals layers of information about the fearful world Jesus entered, one filled with rampant oppression, economic disparity, uncertainty, and instability. A world not so unlike our own. And yet, throughout the stories of Christ's birth, we hear the whispers of angels delivering a surprising message: "Do not fear."*

#### **ADVENT WEEK FOUR:**



*"Give me your hand" might be counter to how we usually respond to fear, but what if fear can result in connection instead of isolation? Joseph moves through his fears of rejection and shame in order to stand in solidarity with Mary, shielding her from harm. Their bond makes them each stronger. We don't live out our callings in isolation—our communal flourishing depends on each person stepping into their calling despite their fear. How can we offer support to one another? Where can we reach out when fear makes us feel isolated? When do we need to accept an outstretched hand? And can we use our power and privilege, like Joseph, to stand in solidarity with people whose lives are at risk?*