



# Heartbeat *news*

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF NEW HARTFORD – DECEMBER 2020

## Rediscovering Christmas: Good News in Troubling Times

*Wherever You are This Year--Rediscover the  
Promises of Jesus Christ*

The four weeks before Christmas are set aside as a time of expectant waiting and preparation for the celebration of Jesus' birth. The term advent is a version of the Latin word that means "coming." But Advent is not just an extension of Christmas; it is a season that links the past, present, and

future. Advent offers us the opportunity to share in the ancient longing for the coming of the Messiah, to celebrate His birth, and to be alert for His second coming. It is a season to explore and experience several key traits embodied in the arrival of Christ: hope, peace, joy, and love.

## Advent Devotional Available

An Advent devotional, "Rediscovering Christmas," with inspirational messages, Bible readings, prayers and songs is found through a link on the church website or church email. Call the office, 315-733-4227, to pick up a printed copy.

## Christmas Worship

**Nov. 29** – First Sunday of Advent

**Dec. 6** – Second Sunday of Advent

**Dec. 13** – Third Sunday of Advent

**Dec. 20** – Fourth Sunday of Advent

**Dec. 24** – 5 pm, Family Christmas

Eve Worship Livestream

**Dec. 24** – 7 pm Traditional Christmas

Eve Livestream

**December** –Blue Christmas Service

Online - More info soon

## The World as We Know It

~Deacon Becky

*“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”*

**Isaiah 7:14**

Loss has a way of turning our lives upside down. This difficult time trying to embrace a ‘new normal’ due to Covid-19 has, unfortunately, taught us that lesson well. We have experienced loss of relatives and/or friends, loss of connection, and loss of a sense of balance. As we enter 2021, many are looking for something drastic to happen so that we can begin to create a ‘new normal’. Personally, I don’t believe we have EVER had ‘normal’ if we are looking at the world for validation of such a status.

It is certainly easy to postulate 2020 as ‘far from normal’ because the circumstances were worldwide and so in-your-face that it was hard to see life as something we could depend on to stay the same—literally from moment to moment. The pandemic, political unrest and civil unrest were so over the top that no one was unaffected. The world saw a breaking down of all structures that create relationship within families, neighborhoods, communities, state-to-state, and country-to-country. Those of us alive today have never seen anything like this before. Hospitals and care centers filled to the rafters with sick and dying people; businesses, churches, and organizations shut down; regular activities no longer safe; peaceful protests interrupted and violent destruction of property and people; people living in fear. Many believe this is a sign of the end of the world. But I suggest, this Christmas, we put these events/circumstances into a biblical perspective—hopefully not surprisingly, one that revisits the birth of our Savior.

Despite everything, our Savior—Immanuel—the child sent to us all those years ago, is alive and working for our good.

Saving Grace—no matter what we are seeing, feeling, thinking, hearing, or doing, God has already broken the chains of violence and unpredictability that keep us from the joy of knowing our Messiah. God’s response is always directed by love, not by ‘man’s’ actions.

The events of today may be new to us and far more difficult than we have ever experienced in

our lifetime, but the world in which Jesus was born into was just as, or more, chaotic, unpredictable and volatile. The people were ruled by Herod through years of paranoia and bloodshed; besieged by battles and wars from those who rose up; thousands crucified. Our inhumanity was a scourge upon the earth. Into this inhumanity, God’s deep love for God’s people brought a new vision—a new direction for salvation. God brought Jesus to show us a new way of being. Jesus was born in Nazareth into a family of craftsmen/carpenters in an area that had a scarcity of natural resources that created sickness and disease and made it difficult for most to live feasible lives. God started at the place of weakness to show grace and mercy. Becoming human, God brought a fresh model of being God’s people—Jesus was a prophet, miracle-worker, and healer; a defender of the poor and marginalized. He came down from heaven that fateful morning to bring the Good News and draw God’s people together. Yet, through the human interactions that unfolded, we saw our capacity for inhumaneness at its finest—the crucifixion of our Savior. Even in the midst of God’s son’s treatment, saving grace shown through. What can we learn from God through the birth of a Savior?

Saving Grace—‘man’s’ inhumaneness did not dislodge the love of God then and it will not dislodge it now. God’s love for us and resurrection power brought Jesus back to us. Saving Grace—God came down...God conquered death and hell...and God is with us today.

Even though the Christmas of 2020 will be unique, let’s not rush into 2021 so quickly that we forget why we celebrate—God’s greatest gift to us on Christmas morning over 2000 years ago was our Saving Grace that will continue to the ends of the earth and into the new heaven and new earth. Merry Christmas to all of you and may you always know how loved you are!

## A Letter from Our Pastor

November 27, 2020

Dear Friends,

Grace and Peace to you in the name of the Lord.

Thank you for your continued partnership to make ministry possible in the ways that provide hope, comfort, and an experience of God's presence through the gifts of online worship and virtual community. In many cases, these things are just what people are longing for at a time when so much is uncertain. We ask that you prayerfully consider and give as the Lord leads during this difficult time and to return your 2021 pledge cards promptly. Thank you all for your continued generosity and faithful support! It takes teamwork to make the dream work.

In early September the church leadership had prepared thoroughly and carefully for the restart of our in-person worship services, with robust health and safety precautions in place; however, the recent, dramatic change in infection rates within our community, along with the extremely low attendance numbers in worship, have caused us to re-consider our plans out of a strong sense of responsibility to exercise the greatest possible care for one another and be good stewards of both our time and resources.

I am very appreciative of the faithful staff and volunteers who were present every week to help make our in-person worship service possible. The average number of others physically attending church was only six. In the past three weeks the numbers were down to four, two and then only one person attending on November 22<sup>nd</sup>. We know there are varied and valid reasons for that but also understand that the majority of people still do not yet feel comfortable worshipping in person.

These are hard times for everyone. In November our nation and the entire world continue to struggle with the impact of the Coronavirus. Treatments and vaccines are in development, yet we still have a long way to go. We are currently entering the worst of the global pandemic. Oneida County this week set new daily highs for infections, and continues to see sharp increases in cases, positivity rates, and hospitalizations.

**The Leadership Team here at First United Methodist Church have been in weekly communication and daily prayer to make faithful and wise decisions regarding our ministries. Due to the significant rise of COVID-19 cases, the increased risk of possible exposure, the required quarantine period, ongoing hospitalization concerns, and the lack of in-person attendance, the leadership team unanimously decided this week that it is in the best interest of our church, those we minister to and the communities we serve to suspend all in-person gatherings for the remainder of the year 2020. If additional weeks are deemed necessary, we will communicate that with you. This includes worship gatherings, small groups and church meetings.**

(Continued next page)



(A Letter from Our Pastor continued from previous page)

**All of these activities will remain online only.** Though the building will remain closed for in-person worship until further notice, we are committed to continuing to provide a virtual worship option so that you may join safely online.

**We encourage everyone to watch and share the livestream worship led by Pastor Brad every Sunday morning at 10:30 a.m. You can find the link on our church website: <https://www.firstumconline.org>**

When a new date for resumption of on-site worship is decided, information will be communicated promptly through our church office. Thank you for your ongoing patience and understanding, and please feel free to contact the church office with questions and ministry needs (315-733-4227).

Please know that the decision to suspend our activities has not been made lightly or without a great deal of thought and prayer. This decision arises not out of fear, but out of love. During this global pandemic, one of the ways that we can love our neighbors is by helping to protect and honor their health. During this time be sure to reach out to others with the love of Jesus Christ. Please use your computers and phones to care for one another. Remember that even though we may not be meeting in the same room, we are still the Body of Christ to one another. (1 Corinthians 12:12-31).

The staff at FUMC will continue to work offsite when possible and only be onsite when required; i.e. recording worship services. We ask you to kindly refrain from stopping by the church without an appointment even if you have your own key.

We are heading into Advent and the Christmas Season. Our theme during Advent is *"Rediscovering Christmas"*. We are hopeful that our Advent journey will allow us the opportunity to rediscover the promises of Jesus Christ during this most uncertain and unusual time. This is always an exciting season in the life of the church, but it will be different this year. We will all be part of history as we gather online for digital Advent and Christmas Eve worship services. I learned very quickly that doing 'online only' ministry can be a seedbed for creativity and we will continue to seek God's direction for innovative ways to convey the powerful and unchanging message of the Gospel.

It is important to hear: The church is not closed. The church is not a building nor has it ever been intended to be restricted to a building. In many ways, instead of being a church with one location, we are now a church with 150 unique locations! Wherever you are...that is the church! Consider this, Jesus healed people he never met and performed miracles that occurred miles from where He was standing. Jesus also said that we would do greater things than He did! In-person worship gatherings are a meaningful and powerful expression of God's love and grace. It is something that  
(continued next page)

(A Letter from Our Pastor continued from previous page)

I long for and I know that many of you also long for in-person worship services; standing side by side, hands raised or clapping, and our combined voices praising God. But the Holy Spirit is not limited to our church building. We're going to worship just as passionately as we ever have. We will reach new people for Jesus who will experience God in bold new ways through your continued prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness and as we continue to advance God's Kingdom in new ways that have been birthed in the cradle of this crisis. In these troubling times, we will share the Good News of Christmas.

I am praying for you, for the church, and the community we are all called to reach for Jesus.

Remember, God Loves You!

In Christ, Pastor Brad C.



### **December Birthdays**

3 - Roxanne Grzywacz  
4 - Jean Bender  
7 - Barb Brigham  
9 - Brad Chesebro  
12 - Jack Elseth  
14 - Edward Brigham

19 - Joyce Wilbur  
23 - Millie Kennelty  
24 - Carl Ciccarelli  
26 - Carole Gehrig  
27 - Paula Healy  
28 - Blake Ford

### **December Anniversaries**

21 - Dave and Shannon Williams

## **Soldier Care Package Ministry**

If you know of someone who is active duty or deployed in the military effort and you would like to add them to our prayer list please send the soldier's name and rank to me. If your soldier is deployed please send an overseas address and we would be happy to send monthly packages to him/her.

**Please send to: Peg Pinkham, [newyorkoma@roadrunner.com](mailto:newyorkoma@roadrunner.com)**

Thank you all for your unwavering support of this ministry. WE ARE MAKING A DIFFERENCE!

Major Elissa Adams  
Major Benjamin Adams  
Pvt. Jesse Babicz  
James Barker  
SFC Brian Boyt  
PFC David Guiterez  
Jon Huff

Captain Patricia Linck McEaney  
Rev Dr. Keith Manry  
Sgt. Keenan Marin  
SSgt. Simon Miguel-Romero  
Tyrell Thompkins  
Captain Schuyler Van Buren

## **Please Remember Your 2021 Pledge For Ministry at First UMC**

Last month letters and a Celebration Pledge Card for 2021 were sent out. If you haven't returned your Pledge for upcoming ministry at First UMC, would you please do so as soon as possible so the church leadership can plan for ministry in 2021 and beyond? God bless you for your financial gifts toward the work God is doing in this community and the world. If you need another card, please ask the church office, 315-733-4227.