

Keeping In Touch

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE SECOND CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF STAFFORD

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Sermon: A New Road for a New Year
Matthew 2:1-12

Rev. Kenneth C. Landall

A new year always brings a sense of hope, doesn't it? The previous year with all its tragedies, problems, disappointments, failures, and sadness is now behind us, and a clean slate lies ahead.

This is symbolized on New Year's Eve by the old man with the sickle and the newborn baby. The old has passed away; the new has come. With whistles and horns and parties, and probably more to eat and drink than we should have, we ushered in the new year. Yet, beneath the gaiety and laughter, there's a gnawing feeling – it's all still the same; nothing's really changed. If anything, passing from the season of lights and glitter and carols to the season of dark, cold, bleak mid-winter, only makes the emptiness worse, the depression deeper.

For sure there has been plenty in the news to make anyone depressed. Whether it is the crushing economic disparities in this country, the pernicious scourge of racism, [the increase of] global warming and its severe weather events, homelessness, the plague of illicit drugs, rampant

gun violence, etc., etc.

Also, many of us are feeling personal pains or anxieties this new year. Some of us are wrestling with important decisions regarding a primary relationship or a task to be done; some know firsthand the powerful effects of disabling disease or worry about health issues in the upcoming months; some have had to deal recently with a major loss; some wonder if we can make it in the coming year without the presence of one who meant so much; some of us are feeling very lonely, in spite of people all around us; some of us fear growing older, or fear what the future may hold; some wonder if dreams will ever be realized, or whether the new year will be even more frustrating and filled with feelings of futility than the last. Many of us are feeling pain or anxiety this new year. What is this pain or anxiety like for you?

When we feel this way, the temptation is to stay with the familiar and the comfortable, to crawl back into bed and pull up the covers, or to sneak into the manger with Jesus, where it's warm, safe, and secure. The temptation is to stay where we are – in the dark crevices of depression or defeat, of fear or foreboding, in the deep ruts of sameness, boredom, or lethargy.

But Epiphany with its emphasis on a light shining in the darkness, reminds us that life continues on, that revelation and growth and new beginnings loom on the horizon, that new roads appear up ahead, new roads that will take us, if we choose to let them, into new adventures, new challenges, new opportunities to be the persons God wants us to be. Epiphany reminds us that life continues on, even as one year ends and another begins, "one season following another."

The Magi, also called the Wise Men or the Three Kings, who bring their gifts to the Christ Child, illustrate this movement. Tradition says there were three of them; the Bible doesn't say how many. In the Middle Ages they were given names: Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar; they are nameless in the Bible. The Magi became identified as kings. The story in Matthew is about kings and wise men, but these are people in addition to the Magi. The kings are: Herod, a ruthless tyrant who stops at nothing to achieve his goals; and Jesus, a vulnerable and helpless baby, who becomes known as the King of Kings, a baby who grows up to be a ruler whose power is hidden in humility. The wise men are the chief priests and scribes, well-versed in the scriptures, who are called in by Herod to tell him where this so-called king of the Jews was to be born.

The Magi from the East are inquisitive, adventurous, obedient to their calling, and seek no honor for themselves. They humble themselves before the Christ Child and offer sacrificial gifts of great value. In short, they fit the image of servants more than royalty or those with superior wisdom, and thus, are exemplary role models for us. But it's what they do at the end of the story that is of particular interest this morning. Matthew says they are warned in a dream not to return to Herod. In the Bible, dreams are an important conduit for God to communicate with people. Could be for us too, for as we in the UCC say, "God is still speaking."

The Magi, after they have offered their gifts, realize the danger in returning to Herod, and leave "for their own country by another road." They set out from there by another road, a new road, a different road than the one they'd been traveling upon. They move on in their journey of life, and so must we. For us, the manger is only one stopping place on our journey of faith. And while the tranquility of the manger may move us deeply, it should never transfix us. The rest of Christ's journey, and our journey, remains to be traveled.

As we embark on this new year, embodied so well in the spirit of Epiphany and the reality of life moving on, a fair question for us to ask is, "how can we move on?" The answer may be found in the refrain from an old church camp song I'll bet many of you remember: "Rise and Shine." Isaiah tells the people of Israel to "Arise, shine; for your light has come..." They no longer have to live in darkness – nor do we. Rise and shine, get up, begin again – there is more to come! There are new roads to travel upon in this new year. But there are also powerful forces working against this directive. Apathy, lack of confidence, our physical or mental state, extreme caution or timidity – all these tend to hold us back. Worse than any of these is fear – disabling, crippling, immobilizing fear.

God has promised to uphold us no matter what – believe this promise! God has promised to grant us victory over all our spiritual enemies – believe this promise! God has promised to grant us full and free forgiveness of our sins through and because of Jesus Christ, our newborn Savior – believe this promise! Don't creep upon these promises as though they were too fragile to hold you up. Stand upon them, confident that God is as good as God's word, and that our living, loving Lord will deliver them as promised. Maybe you've heard the expression: "even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there!" It's true! So, in this new year, let's get up and get going. Let us rise and shine, knowing that it is God's light that empowers the light within us.

This sounds like a great New Year's resolution, doesn't it? But it won't be complete until we finish the old camp song's refrain, and "give God the glory." We do this by living thankful lives, thanking God for the blessings we've received, and by sharing the Good News with others. We do this individually and together as the church. The mission of the church, as Paul implies to the Ephesians, is to reflect the light of Christ, to point to Christ's work in the world, to declare Christ's redemption, to reveal the mystery, to make known God's wisdom, but perhaps most important, to mirror and imitate Christ's love and deeds of mercy. And this is our individual mission as well.

Each of us has a new road ahead of us in the new year. It's another road, a different road than any we've traveled on before. As we step off down that road, not knowing what we may find, not knowing exactly where we're going, we can be comforted in knowing that for sure, the light goes with us, leading us, guiding us, showing us the way. God will be with us on our journeys down that new road ahead. Even now God is calling to each of us, whoever we are, whatever our circumstance, calling us to get up off our hands and knees, to stop creeping, and rise and shine, and continue on the journey, giving God our praise, and sharing the Good News with others along the way.

A New Year's Eve poem I came across concludes with these words: "With courage we face the future, with warm memory we sing the old year out. With hope in our hearts and voices we face the sunrise of God's new dawn. May hope dwell in our hearts and voices, and may that sunrise, the light of Christ, shine brightly on each of us as we journey on the new road we'll be traveling upon in this new year. Amen."

TREASURER

Category	Year-To-Date	Budget-To-Date	Percentage
R21—Freewill	\$ 4,232.25	\$ 1,375.00	308%
R22—Pledges	\$ 17,223.00	\$ 17,416.67	99%
R23—Contributions	\$ 6,289.00	\$ 4,812.50	131%
R24—Fund Raising	\$ 11,660.62	\$ 9,533.33	122%
Capital Campaign	\$ 2,590.00	\$ 2,750.00	94%

Thru November 30

CHURCH COUNCIL

The following was reported:

- Treasurer Report: All bills paid and checkbook looks good for rest of year
- Clerk Report: Ken's name has been added to the Deacon's Fund account. The number of people attending services for the last 10 weeks have been consistent averaging 24 adults and 7 children.
- Trustee Report: The boiler inspection on the water heater in the parish house was completed and passed. Most of the fall workday tasks have been completed anything that was missed will be addressed in the spring. Still looking into filling cracks and sealing upper parking lot more to follow. We decided to keep the internet as the bill would not be much cheaper without it. We changed our insurance billing from annual to quarterly.
- Financial Secretary: We have received 15 pledges for a total of \$20,895.68, there is still time to consider a pledge for 2025!
- Christian Education: A Christmas Pageant will be Dec. 22nd during service. Nursery going well but we would like to have a couple more volunteers to man it periodically. We have 13 students registered and average 7 per week. We have many activities planned in the future.
- Missions Committee: Thanks to all who donated we delivered 12 \$25.00 dollar gift cards that will be distributed for Christmas.

These are some of the items discussed at our December meeting

Bruce Ladr
Moderator

TRUSTEES

Hey everyone, on Sunday December 15th when we arrived to church we learned that we had lost water in both buildings. Our plumber Joe came out the next day and after investigating a slightly frozen area in our water pipes he did some testing and learned that our well pump had gone. Since he doesn't pull pumps anymore we had Banner Water come replace the pump for us. The initial goal and estimate were to pop our manhole cover and drop a pump in for \$2200, but sadly when they looked in the manhole it had nothing to do with our well system. So the following day they located the well and did some excavation. They checked all ground wires, pressure switches etc and replaced what needed to be replaced. After that they got the materials they needed to install steel piping underground and conduit, put in a new casing and drop a submersible pump 200 feet into the ground. They also put a new cover in that area with 4 bolts for easy access if we need work done in the future. There is a bit of dirt that will wash away and then we can decide to cover with asphalt or some other means. Due to the extra work the final cost was an even \$5000.00. They worked quickly and we had water back on the 29th. They will be including a diagram of location and breakdown of our new pump so we can easily have issues resolved in the future. Copies of that will be in the Secretary's Office, Pastor's Office, and Trustees folder. They will also be putting in an automatic low water cut off for no additional cost.

Respectfully submitted Andrew Greaves, Trustees Chair

MISSIONS

Once again you have proven to be a very generous and giving church family. December is a busy missions month and we are very grateful for all that we could do. With your generous offerings we were able to take \$300 worth of Aldi gift cards to the Crystal Lake food pantry so they could be distributed to families in need for their Christmas dinners. Along with that, we dropped off four pounds of groceries.

We received eight names of children in town through Stafford Social Services and we were able to deliver gifts to the eight chosen children. In addition we were able to give a grocery bag full of stocking stuffers to help make the childrens' Christmases a bit brighter.

Our Christmas Eve service was well attended and during the collection in total we were able to receive \$107 which will be sent to the UCC for them to use as needed to help retired ministers. Again we thank you for your generosity. Together I believe we were able to add a little Christmas joy to the families in need.

The winter outerwear donations will be taken to the Stafford Thrift Store in a very short time to be distributed to folks in need of coats, hats, mittens, gloves, scarves and ski pants. Thank you for your generous donations.

Judy, Michele and Linda

IN AND AROUND THE CHURCH ...

Our Hearts and Prayers reach out to our Brothers and Sisters who have various needs and struggles: safe travel for Aiden ... prayers for the family of Ann Hepner on her passing ... prayer's for Pastor Bob's family ... continued prayers for Sarah, Donna, Doris and Lucy ... prayers of healing for John ... continued prayers for Carey Crawford ... prayers for Michael Moran and family on the passing of their 16 year old son ... prayers of safe travel for upcoming family vacation ... prayers of peace ... praise and thanks for all our blessings ... prayers for all who suffer with mental illness and addiction and their families ... prayers for Shirley in healing and finding peace ... prayers for health, happiness and healing for my family ... prayers for friend Shirly in hospice ... continued prayers for Bertrand and Claire and family ... prayers for all who struggle emotionally and financially at this time of the year ... prayers for my friend Cindy ... prayers for Eric's father ... prayers for my nephew's friend Josh, recovering from major surgery fighting cancer ... prayers for Rod prior to his surgery ... prayers for Ed's successful surgery ... prayers for a good report from upcoming biopsies ... prayers for Evelyn ... prayers remembering about loved ones ... prayers to all who are not feeling well this holiday season ... prayers for the Joyal family on the passing of their mother ... prayers for healing for Isaiah ... prayers for Great Grandmother Wentworth in hospice and very grave... Celebrations: Lucy celebrating her 100th birthday ... joy for the celebration of birthdays for Bob, Butch and Cathy ... joy and thanks for holidays with family ... joy for nephew Cliff on his 7th birthday ... prayers for LuLu for a successful delivery and a healthy baby girl ... joy for this beautiful weather ...

A LIGHTER MOMENT. . .

The easiest time to add insult to injury is when you are signing someone's cast ...

I want to die peacefully in my sleep, like my grandfather ... not screaming and yelling like the passengers in his car ...

What superpower do all middle children have ... invisibility ...

What is a ghost's favorite airline ... scare Canada ...

What did the farmer say when his cows escaped? ... That barn door!

What did the squirrels say to each other on Valentines day? ... I nuts about you!

BIRTHDAYS AND ANNIVERSARIES

January Birthdays

January	3	Michael Gowdy
	6	Flo Demars
	6	Deanna Hirsch
	15	Amy Lingley
	16	Isabella Ostrowski
	24	Samantha DelBene
	24	Aidan Ladr
	27	Ruthanne Talamini
	29	Dorraine Parker
	30	Aiden Sedor

January Anniversaries

None

ANNUAL MEETING

Just a reminder that the Annual Meeting of the Second Congregational Church will be held on Sunday, February 2, 2025 in Fellowship Hall at 11:00 AM. All members and friends of Second Congregational Church are invited, although only members will be allowed to vote.

Annual reports are due January 12, 2025 to Ken May and the Annual Report should be posted to the website on or about January 19, 2025.

PULPIT SUPPLY FOR JANUARY

January 5 — Sarah Roman Greaves
January 12 — Sarah Roman Greaves
January 19 — Reverend Nina Schmid
January 26 — Sarah Roman Greaves

SUNDAY SCHOOL

We want to say thank you again to our Sunday School kids, numerous parents/guardians and teachers who participated in our Christmas pageant. It was a lot of fun and we look forward to doing another one next year. Mitchell did a great job as director and we are just so proud of this class in and out of the classroom. Happy New Year and here's to a fun packed year ahead!

-Andrew, Judy, and Kathy

A Joyous and Happy New Year to All!

January 2025

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednes- day	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1 New Years Day	2	3	4
5 Worship Service 9:30 AM Deacon's After Church	6	7	8	9	10	11
12 Worship Service 9:30 AM Food Bank Sunday	13	14	15	16	17	18
Annual Reports Due						
19 Worship Service 9:30 AM	20	21 Church Council 6:30 PM	22	23	24	25
26 Worship Service 9:30 AM	27	28	29	30	31	