

The Congregational Church  
United Church of Christ  
Amherst, New Hampshire

# VILLAGE SPIRE

December 2018



## Woman's Association Festive Christmas Luncheon

Monday, December 3  
10:00 a.m. in the vestry



All women are invited to attend the annual WA luncheon to celebrate the successful Holiday Fair and the arrival of the Christmas season. We will gather for coffee at 10:00 a.m., followed by an old-fashioned Yankee Swap. Bring a wrapped gift: found, hand-crafted, created or new (no more than \$5.00).

Also bring food: a main dish casserole, salad, mini-croissants, or dessert. Sign-up by calling Anne Riehl 213-6058.

We will end the luncheon with a carol sing led by Sara Phelps.

## SHARE Food Pantry

The SHARE Food Pantry continues to be busy. Please know your donations are needed and truly appreciated.



December Pantry Requests:  
toothbrushes, toothpaste,  
deodorant, shampoo,  
conditioner, bar soap,  
feminine hygiene  
products, diapers  
and wipes

Donations may be left in the cupboard in the narthex, or in the marked containers near the community room. Thank you for your continuous support!

## "Lights, Please"

Maureen Frescott, Acting Senior Pastor  
December 2018

*"Fear not. I bring tidings of great joy, for unto you is born this day in the city of David a savior, who is Christ the Lord, and this shall be a sign unto you."*

When those of us of a certain age encounter these words from the Gospel of Luke we can't help but hear a familiar voice speaking them aloud in our head - the voice of Linus from the Charlie Brown Christmas Special. For those of us who've watched this iconic television special year after year, Linus and the Christmas story are forever entwined in our minds and hearts, because in the chaos of holiday preparations Linus is the one who reveals the true meaning of Christmas. While Snoopy is caught up in getting the light display on his doghouse just right, and Lucy is trying to convince Schroder to play Jingle Bells on his piano, and Charlie Brown is stressing out over the fact that no one seems to know what Christmas is really all about, it's Linus who calls for the spotlight and tells the simple story of the Good News from the Gospel of Luke: "Fear not. I bring you tidings of great joy, for unto you is born a savior."

This is the story we strain to hear in our world. In our wider culture, the Christmas story is about red-nosed reindeer, magical snowmen, and TV commercials that try to convince us that Santa wants us all to wake up on Christmas morning and find a brand new car in our driveway. As we know, this is not the real Christmas. It may be the Christmas we remember from our childhood - when we'd lie awake at night anticipating Santa's arrival while visions of candy canes, tinsel, and toys danced in our heads. And it may be the reality of the Christmas we celebrate as adults - where we run ourselves ragged trying to find gifts for everyone on our list, and eat too much, drink too much, and spend too much, all in our search for holiday cheer.

Continued on page 3

## Breakfast With Santa



This year's Breakfast With Santa will be on Saturday, December 15 with two sittings: 9:00-10:30 a.m. and 10:30-noon. Tickets for the event are \$10 per person, with under 12-months free. Admission includes a hot breakfast, games, crafts and a visit with Santa, as well as a photo taken with Santa. Each child will receive an age-appropriate book from Santa's library.

There are two ways to register. Visit our website [www.ccamherst.org](http://www.ccamherst.org) and follow the directions to register and pay (credit card or debit). You may also pay in the church office, open Monday-Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. (checks, exact cash, credit or debit all accepted). A limited number of registrations are available for each sitting, and Santa comes regardless of heath! No refunds on registrations.

## VILLAGE SPIRE

A Parish Newsletter  
Editor, Andrea Cyr

The Congregational Church  
United Church of Christ  
11 Church Street  
Amherst, NH 03031

Sunday Worship Service 10:00 a.m.  
July & August Worship 9:00 a.m.

Church school and nursery care available.

How to reach us:  
Office Phone (603) 673-3231  
[www.ccamherst.org](http://www.ccamherst.org)  
[Facebook.com/ccamherst](https://www.facebook.com/ccamherst)

The church office  
is open Monday–Friday,  
from 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Send in all news by the  
15<sup>th</sup> of the month.

Announcements  
for the Sunday bulletins  
are due Thursdays.

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### OUR CHURCH STAFF:

Maureen R. Frescott  
*Acting Senior Pastor*  
[pastormaureen@ccamherst.org](mailto:pastormaureen@ccamherst.org)

Katherine Rogers  
*Acting Associate Pastor*  
[pastorkate@ccamherst.org](mailto:pastorkate@ccamherst.org)

Andrea Cyr  
*Church Office Administrator*  
[andrea@ccamherst.org](mailto:andrea@ccamherst.org)

Sara L. Phelps  
*Director of Music*  
[kalben1@comcast.net](mailto:kalben1@comcast.net)

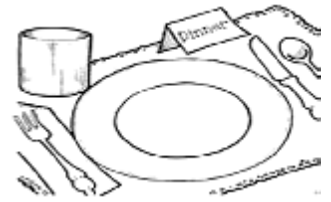
Michael Havay  
*Organist*  
[michaelh117@gmail.com](mailto:michaelh117@gmail.com)

Wendy Valeri  
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[wendylazott@tds.net](mailto:wendylazott@tds.net)

Marilyn Gibson  
*Church School Coordinator*  
[mgibson@ccamherst.org](mailto:mgibson@ccamherst.org)

## Church School

Serving Neighbors Near and Far brought our church school children to the Mill Apartments in Milford for our November mission project. Each year our children prepare center pieces, turkey soup, finger sandwiches and desserts to share with the residents on the Sunday after Thanksgiving. The residents, children and chaperones share a warm meal and quiet conversations. This is an event rich in history and spiritual growth for all who participate.



AND

Serving Neighbors Near and Far as church school children continue their outreach with our mission project to the Shriner's Hospital in Springfield, MA. At the 5:00 p.m. Christmas Eve service, the Christmas pageant is performed. Children are invited to donate new stuffed animals for patients in the hospital's care, regardless of the family's ability to pay.

AND

Serving Neighbors Near and Far is to volunteer to teach during the winter term, a very special season to be with our church school children. Advent is a warm, welcoming and a meaningful season of the year. It begins with the promise of redemption, the news of Christ's birth, and is heralded in with our Christmas pageant on Worship for All Ages Sunday, December 16. Christian Formation, church school, provides the winter term schedule, where you can discover your opportunity to teach or assist. The most rewarding experience is sharing the stories of Christianity with our children.

### Information for Gift Return for Christmas Drives

All gifts are due back to the church no later than end of worship, Sunday, December 9.

If your gifts include any gift cards, we encourage you to buy those from our SUCCESS program – this benefits the gift recipient AND CCA.

If you can get gift receipts, please include those in an envelope with your returned item(s).

Crestwood gifts should be returned unwrapped in a gift bag with the original tag attached to the bag.

SHARE Children's Gifts should be unwrapped but with wrapping paper or gift bag included and original tag included.

SHARE Family Gifts should be wrapped and have the original label and inventory of item(s) attached. Family gift cards can be placed in an envelope with the family number on the outside of the envelope.

### NEW Parents Group

Prayerful Playgroup—  
Faith Formation and  
Fellowship for Parents  
and Guardians



First and third Fridays,  
9:00 to 10:30 a.m.,  
Vestry/Nursery

Calling all parents and guardians! Join us every first and third Friday of the month for fellowship and faith formation. Your child can play in the nursery while we explore questions of life and belief together through study, discussion, and shared experiences.

All are welcome to join this bi-weekly group of young parents seeking to form deeper relationships in faith—whether you go to this church, or any church, or not at all! In the UCC we say, "No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here."

**“Lights, Please,”** continued from page 1

That’s the Christmas we celebrate in the secular world. But it’s not the Christmas we celebrate in our community of faith. Which is why many people find their way to church sanctuaries on Christmas Eve. What draws us in – beyond the music, the candle light, and the tradition – is the story. This story of a baby being born on a cold winter’s night. A baby who was destined to save the world, with the power of compassion, love, and grace.

These are powers that we tend to undervalue in our culture, and in ourselves. When we become enmeshed in the events of today that invoke fear, distrust, and hate in our hearts, our instinct is to respond with even more fear, distrust, and hate. We’re not conditioned to respond to fear with compassion, to respond to distrust with grace, or to respond to hate with love. Yet we’ve all witnessed how acts of compassion, grace, and love have the power to change hearts, minds, and the outcome of events that could have gone so differently.

Last December, police in Orem, Utah showed up at the home of a woman to arrest her for shoplifting. Expecting to find a stash of stolen goods, the officers were taken aback when instead they found a single mother with two children living in a nearly empty apartment, with no furniture, no TV, no books or toys, and nothing on the walls, except for a picture of a Christmas tree on which the kids had hand colored ornaments and decorations. What the woman had stolen was a few cans of food for her children. She had taken nothing for herself. In response, the Orem Police collected money and furniture donations amongst themselves in order to help the struggling mother. When word of their charitable act got out, the police began receiving cards and money from strangers who also wanted to help. They received enough money to buy the family a real Christmas tree, presents for the kids, and bags and bags of groceries. Grace and mercy were more powerful than distrust and judgment.

Stories of random acts of kindness can’t help but warm our hearts, at any time of the year. But what we often don’t realize is that acts like these are much more common than we think. While our attention tends to gravitate towards acts that feed feelings of fear, distrust, and hate, there is a quiet revolution happening all around us – one that is born out of our God given drive to embody love, to feel compassion, to exhibit grace.

The Christmas story is our annual reminder that we have it in our nature to come together and celebrate all that is good in us and the world. The Christmas story reminds us that each one of us has within us a power that is greater than all our fears put together. Every year at Christmas time, when Linus steps out on that stage and recites the story from the gospel of Luke, we can’t help but lean in and listen – and feel drawn to the hope and promise that this simple story of a baby born in a manger brings into our lives. For a brief moment all the other things clamoring for our attention fall away. For a brief moment we get a glimpse of who we are and who we were created to be.

Peace and blessings,  
*Pastor Maureen*

## Advent Vesper Service

**Wednesday, December 12**  
**7:30 p.m.**



**Mary said “Yes!”** when God told her she would give birth to the savior of our world. We are not Mary. But in the busy weeks that lead up to Christmas we sometimes forget that we too have the option of saying “yes” and “no.” We can say “no” to the many commitments that keep us from taking the time and space we need to experience Advent – a peaceful time of anticipation, joy, and hope. And we can say “yes” to the part of ourselves that is longing to slow down, to take a breath, to *be* instead of *do*. We are not giving birth to the savior of the world, but Advent provides the space we need to allow Jesus to grow in our hearts.

Join us for at time of quiet prayer, reflective readings, candle lighting, and meditative music. Come experience Advent and take a break from the busyness of saving the world. Come as you are and just be.

### Poinsettia Orders



Help decorate the church for the Christmas services. Donate a poinsettia plant in celebration of Christmas or in memory of a loved one. Names with your message will be printed in the bulletins. You may take the plant after the last service or donate it to someone in need of some cheer.

Orders will be taken in the community room after church on Sundays, December 2, 9 and 16. Or stop by the church office to place your order with Andrea. Orders close on December 17.



## Small Groups Bring Us Closer Together and Closer to God!

Our theme this year is The Lord’s Prayer – the familiar words which encompass so much of our human experience and our relationship with God.

In December, our focus verse and theme is “Thy Kingdom Come: Inviting Change.” What is the Kingdom of God? Is it a utopian world God is creating for the future in some far off place, or is it a just and loving world we’re co-creating with God, right here, right now? What changes would we need to invite, and embrace, to build God’s Kingdom? When we pray and work for change, how willing are we to accept the discomfort that comes with change? To bring about change in the world, what do we need to change in ourselves?

### December Meeting Schedule:

First Tuesday Group  
December 4, 1:30 – 3:00 p.m.

Sunday Group  
December 9, 11:30 a.m.- 1:00 p.m.

### Upcoming Group Discussion Topics:

- January: Thy Will Be Done:  
Discernment
- February: Give Us This Day:  
Trust & Certainty
- March: Forgive Us Our Debts:  
Guilt & Shame
- April: As We Forgive:  
Neighbors & Enemies
- May: Into Temptation:  
Addictions & Distractions
- June: Deliverance From Evil:  
Dark Forces

If you’re interested in joining one of our groups please contact Pastor Maureen at 673-3231 x14 - [pastormaureen@ccamherst.org](mailto:pastormaureen@ccamherst.org).

## Teamwork and Leadership: An Interview with Doug Topliffe

By Sue Spiess

“We can do anything we put our minds to. The talent pool is absolutely stellar—really impressive. Our old and new members have special talents.” Doug Topliffe is referring specifically to our congregation’s response to the Capital Campaign, but he could also be referring to the recent reorganization of the church leadership, or to the everyday work of the church inside the building or outside in the community.



Doug is quick to stress the teamwork of the church members, but all who know him or have worked with him would say the description applies to him as well. He shares his considerable talents, does anything he puts his mind to (which is a lot!), and is an integral part of the life of this church today. He became a member about 11 years ago, when he starting attending with his wife Adrienne, a longtime active member, found it meaningful, and jumped right in. Dick Stout first recruited him to be a member of the Stewardship Committee. His four years as a deacon were “wonderful.” He really loved it, and found it a terrific way to support the service and to meet the congregation. When the leadership was reorganized, he became the Resource Ministry Team Leader, coordinating the work of the Trustees of the Facility; the Budget & Finance, Fundraising, Investment Funds & Memorial Gifts, Stewardship and Personnel teams.

As an electrical engineer for 43 years, Doug understands the details of the electrical, plumbing, and mechanical systems of our 240-year-old building. Beginning in early 2016, he and the Trustees of the Facility determined that the church buildings needed critical repairs necessary for safety and preservation. A two-year process ensued, and this spring the congregation voted to support *Our Time, Our Turn*, an \$850,000 capital campaign.

Doug jumped in again, and became co-chair of the campaign. Many remember the January 2018 congregational meeting to approve the replacement of the fire suppression system and to fund a Feasibility Study for the campaign. His photoshopped picture of the church burning down won the day. As a result, we hired Full Harvest Fundraising to help with both the study and the campaign, and we are more than halfway toward our campaign goal.

Doug insists that our success is due to the incredible number of people who have stepped up to volunteer, visit, and pledge. “What seemed daunting at first has become a very rewarding experience. Susan Lewis and Peter Heinrichs, of Full Harvest Fundraising, have made all the difference in the world,” he says. “They have the experience to direct us, guide us, and encourage us.”

The cooperation, enthusiasm, and talent of the congregation are critical to any undertaking. However, it requires enthusiastic leadership and commitment for success, and someone who believes we can do anything we put our minds to. We are so fortunate to have Doug Topliffe as one of our leaders. Thank you, Doug!



## The Christmas Fund

The Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund is a unique special mission offering of the United Church of Christ that affords us an opportunity to recognize and honor those who serve our beloved church. One of the special aspects of the Christmas Fund is that the funds do not support programs, make grants to institutions, or fund advocacy programs, but rather, they provide direct financial assistance to individual UCC clergy and lay employees.

*"It wasn't easy picking up the telephone to share with you my present situation. In fact it was one of the most humiliating experiences of my life although it reminded me that grace still happens. Sometimes we as clergy persons lose sight of God's grace when the negative stuff comes into our lives."*

*"...thanks so much for sharing your time and ministry with me. Your most gracious gift is appreciated more than words can say as I continue to live in the 'meantime.'"*

These eloquent words are from a pastor who is the recipient of the caring and concern of those who contribute to the Christmas Fund offering.

The United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance, a ministry of the Pension Boards, hears similar stories on an almost daily basis as active and retired clergy and lay employees turn to them for help.

You have the opportunity to be a part of this ministry that cares for the active and retired clergy and lay employees of the United Church of Christ through your participation in this year's Christmas Fund offering.

Your gift to the Christmas Fund will not only assist pastors like the one above, but also provides for the supplementation of small annuities, supplementation of health premiums, emergency grants, and provides Christmas "Thank You" gift checks next December to low-income retirees.

Your gifts are needed more than ever to help the growing number of retirees whose low-income annuities make it difficult to meet increasing living costs. This is your opportunity to participate in God's promise of renewal by enabling this ministry of compassion and care.

Please consider contributing to this special fund. Donation envelopes will be available this month during Sunday services, or you may donate online at any time at [www.christmasfund.org](http://www.christmasfund.org).



## Bakers Needed for Community Supper



The next FREE community supper at our church will be on Friday, December 7 from 6:30 to 8:00 p.m. We are co-hosting with the Amherst Lions Club after the town's annual tree lighting ceremony. A delicious spaghetti supper is being planned.

At this time, because we are co-hosting the community supper with the Amherst Lions Club, our needs are baked goods. Please leave desserts in the church office with your name and a note indicating it is for the December 7 supper.

If you can help, please contact Bob Miskelly at [robertmiskelly@comcast.net](mailto:robertmiskelly@comcast.net) or 554-8789; or Bob Gibson at [gibson@myfairpoint.net](mailto:gibson@myfairpoint.net) or 672-7244.

## NEW: Lectionary Bible Study

Sundays 8:50 a.m.

&

Second and Fourth  
Wednesdays 2:00 pm

Ever wonder where the pastors come up with the scripture readings for Sunday morning? Ever wish you knew a little more about the text before you head into worship? Do you crave a deeper understanding of the Bible or more space to talk about its meaning and message for our lives?

Join us for Lectionary Bible Study with Pastor Kate! Whether on Wednesday afternoons or Sunday mornings before church, come talk about the text for the upcoming worship, learn about the history and culture of the Bible, and grow deeper in your faith and Biblical literacy while you're at it! All are welcome to come take a dive into our preaching text for the week.



## A Few Words About the Weather...

Church Closings Due to Bad Weather:

As we all know, New England weather is ever changing and at times quite unpredictable. In case of bad weather and the need to cancel a worship service, we will do our best to get the word out. Tune in to WMUR Channel 9 television, WZID 95.7 FM radio, WMLL 96.5 FM radio, or WFEA 1370 AM radio to check for a cancellation notice. We will also leave a recorded message on the church answering system (673-3231), and will post a notice on our website and our Facebook page.

Beware of Falling Snow and Ice:

It is that time of year again when we must remind everyone that snow and ice may fall from our roof at any time. Please use caution when in our driveway, and do not walk too close to the building.

## Altar Flowers Always Needed



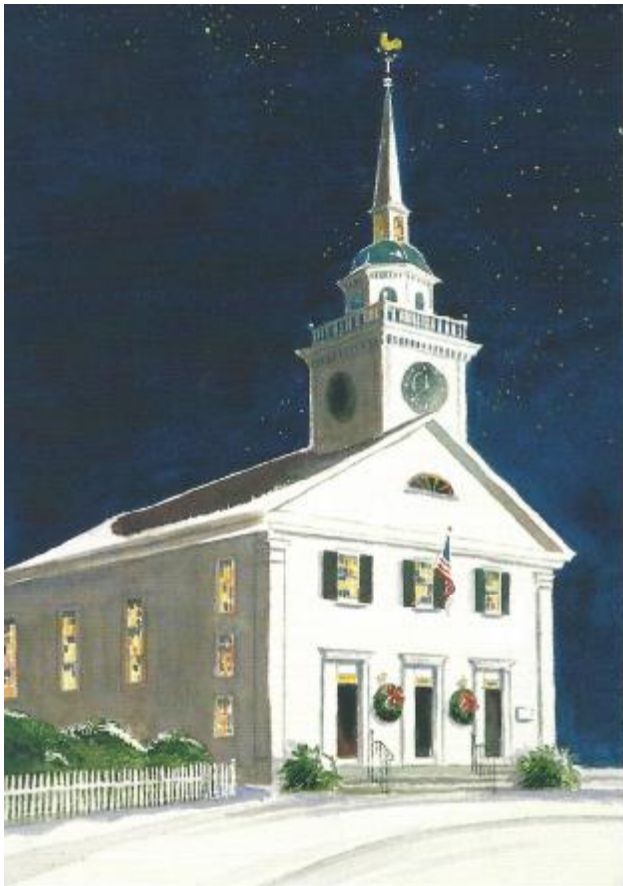
Donated altar arrangements are always welcome. Flowers can be given to remember a loved one or to celebrate a special occasion. The donor arranges with a local florist to have their chosen flowers delivered. After the service they may take the flowers home or donate them to someone in need of some cheer. There are many openings in the coming months. Please call Anne Krantz (673-9684) to schedule a Sunday.

## December with SHYG

Senior High Youth Group has a wonderfully busy month planned for the holiday season! December has always been a joyful time to be a teenager at the Congregational Church of Amherst. Join us on December 7, when we help the Lions Club wrap up their annual Spaghetti Dinner after the tree lighting on the green. Play games, help serve breakfast, and see the light in little one's eyes at our Breakfast with Santa, bright and early on December 15. And of course, ring in the joy of Christmas by leading the SHYG Christmas Eve service at 7:00 p.m. on December 24! With regular meetings interspersed, we have so many opportunities for fun, rest, and fellowship during this eventful season. Check out our calendar below and email Pastor Kate at [pastorkate@ccamherst.org](mailto:pastorkate@ccamherst.org) for more details.

### December Schedule:

- December 2: Meeting 6:00 p.m., wrapping SHARE gifts
- December 7: Spaghetti Dinner with the Lions Club
- December 9: Meeting 6:00 p.m., Christmas Eve planning and Advent sanctuary time
- December 15: Breakfast with Santa
- December 16: Meeting 6:00 p.m., Christmas Eve Rehearsal
- December 24: CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE 7:00 p.m.
- December 30: NO MEETING (Happy New Year!)



## Christmas at Midnight

Local artist and church member, Marley Watton (d. 2015) painted this unusual nighttime painting of our church, *Christmas at Midnight*. Marley graduated from Park College, MO in Art History with graduate work in the studio arts at the Kansas City Art Institute. Professionally she exhibited and sold her watercolors at several galleries, and was a member of many juried art associations. Among them were the NE Watercolor Society, and the NH Art Association. Marley passed away on September 22, 2015 at the age of 91.

Notice the two huge wreaths hanging from the lights in front of the church. The tradition of these wreaths was started many years ago by Elizabeth Darling Jackson, on the advice of her mother, Louella Darling. Elizabeth originally made the wreaths on hula hoops. The wreaths are now paid for by the Jackson Family Wreath Fund, established years ago by Robert Jackson to honor his mother's tradition.



## More Good News: *Our Time, Our Turn* UPDATE



A lot has happened in one month's time! In the November *Spire*, your Capital Campaign team was in the midst of the Phase 2 visitation process. We were urging everyone to connect with a visitor, share questions and concerns, and consider a pledge to make *Our Time, Our Turn* a success.

As this edition of the *Spire* goes to press, most members have been visited. Both the visitors and the visited have learned a lot about each other, the congregation, and the campaign. The feedback has been invaluable and will be shared (anonymously) with the pastors and leaders, so we can continue to grow together as a community of faith.

Now for more *Good News*: We have raised more than \$500,000 pledges and gifts, and continue to receive more each day. Because we have had a good response to our internal fundraising, we are now confident that we can reach out with integrity to the Amherst community and to grant organizations for their help in reaching our goal of \$850,000. Barbara Williams and her Grants team are researching opportunities for additional grants from preservation-minded organizations. We have received two grants so far.

We are excited and grateful that the Amherst Community Foundation (ACF) wants to support our renovation and restoration plans, and has partnered with us to raise outside funds. Travis Warren, ACF treasurer, and Paul Spiess, CCA member, have joined together to approach community members for their support. Travis says the ACF is committed to help because "there is no building or structure in the town that more truly represents our community heritage and history than the church meetinghouse." The Amherst Historical Society has lent its voice of support as well.

We look forward to additional community support over the next couple of months and remain mindful that—as members of this church—it is still *Our Time, Our Turn* to raise the lion's share of our goal. If you have already committed to help us, we wholeheartedly thank you! If you haven't considered a pledge or donation yet, we hope you will prayerfully consider doing so. Many community members, groups, and foundations understandably want to see broad support from members of the congregation before committing funds of their own. While large pledges and gifts are always needed and welcome, *every gift of every size* makes a difference!

We hope that the January issue of the *Spire* will include even better news—an All Church End of the Campaign!

Your Campaign Team:  
Doug Topliffe, Susan Holden, Anne Krantz, Will Redway, Kathy Skoglund, Todd Whitney, Vicky Leknes, Sue Spiess and Pastor Maureen

## Amazon Smile

If you use ever use Amazon (and let's face it most of us do) you can raise funds for CCA without doing anything but using AmazonSmile! AmazonSmile is a website operated by Amazon with the same products, prices, and shopping features as Amazon.com. The difference is that when you shop on AmazonSmile, the AmazonSmile Foundation will donate 0.5% of the purchase price of eligible products to the charitable organization of your choice. Follow the instructions below to sign up and use Amazon Smile:

1. Visit [smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com)
2. Sign in with your existing Amazon.com credentials.
3. Search for and select The Congregational Church of Amherst as your charity to receive donations.
4. Start shopping!
5. Add a bookmark for [smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com) to make it even easier to return and start your shopping at AmazonSmile.

THANK YOU!

## Meals on Wheels Volunteers Needed



Meals on Wheels needs volunteers to deliver meals to homebound senior citizens and disabled adults in communities throughout Hillsborough County. Just a few hours of your assistance on the weekday of your choice from 10:30 am to 12:30 pm can help the elderly and disabled remain healthy and live independently at home. Training is provided. Please call Outreach Program Manager Jillian Toce at 603-424-9967 or email [jtoce@SJCSinc.org](mailto:jtoce@SJCSinc.org). You can visit their website at [www.mealsonwheelsnh.org](http://www.mealsonwheelsnh.org).



*Wise Men and Women. Still Seek Him*

The Congregational Church  
11 Church Street  
Amherst, NH 03031

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## Join Us for Worship on Christmas Eve

### **Children's Service 5:00 p.m.**

This is a service tailored for families with young children and for the young at heart.

### **Candlelight & Starlight Service 7:00 p.m.**

This spirit-filled, candle-lit worship will feature traditional carols, special music and readings from our Senior High Youth Group, and a Christmas Message by Pastor Kate.

Come experience the magic of Jesus' birth in word and song.

### **Traditional Candlelight Service 9:00 p.m.**

Our traditional candlelight service with lessons and carols, featuring music from the bell and chancel choirs. As the sanctuary gradually fills with candlelight and the sounds of *Silent Night*, we proclaim the birth of Jesus, the light of the world! *O Come, All Ye Faithful!*

**Everyone is warmly welcome!**

