

# VILLAGE SPIRE

December 2020



## Christmas Eve worship is online this year!



Join us for our  
Traditional Candlelight Service  
premiering at 5:00 p.m.  
on Christmas Eve

on YouTube, Facebook and  
our church website: [ccamherst.org](http://ccamherst.org)

A service of lessons and carols featuring music from our organist, Michael Havay, our Music Director, Sara Phelps, our Bell Choir Director, Wendy Valeri, and members of our virtual Chancel Choir, along with readings from our Senior High Youth. We'll hear a Christmas Message from Pastor Maureen and Pastor Kate, and sing "Silent Night" and "Joy to the World" by candle light.

For our traditional  
Christmas Pageant  
tune in to our December 20 Sunday  
service at 10:00 a.m. or watch it with  
your family on Christmas Eve!

All are welcome as we worship  
and celebrate the birth of Jesus  
together even as we're apart!

## Christmas Is Coming—Virtually

Rev. Maureen R. Frescott  
December 2020

In a "traditional" year, this December issue of the *Spire* is where I wax poetic about the joys of Advent. It's where I encourage us all to take a step back from all the decorating, shopping, baking, partying, and general rushing about, and take a breath. "Slow down!" I say, "Take the time to truly experience this season of waiting and anticipation. Imagine what it was like to be a sleepy shepherd or wandering wiseman on that first Christmas Eve and take some time to sit in the darkness as we await the coming of the light of Christ in the world." I would then proceed to list all the things that we have coming up in the Advent season to keep us joyfully busy as a church – the Breakfast with Santa fundraiser, the Choir Concert, our community suppers, the Advent Vesper service, the Christmas gift drives for our neighbors in need, the church school pageant, and the three wonderful services that we have to choose from on Christmas Eve. In a "traditional" year, Advent is a paradoxical season where we "slow down, and wait," by being ever increasingly busy and stressed by all that there is to do and get done by Christmas Day.

In this very "non-traditional" year, the paradox remains but in a different form. Many of us feel like we entered Advent last March – right smack in the middle of Lent. When COVID-19 shut-downs and social distancing forced us into a time of waiting and anticipation and slowing down from our usual breakneck pace. Now nearly nine months later, on the threshold of the actual season of Advent, we're tired of waiting and anticipating. We've "been there, done that," and it's exhausting. Many of us are craving busyness. We've had too much space to take a breath. We want the shopping, decorating, baking, partying, and general rushing about – not because it keeps us busy and we're happier when distracted, but because these are the things we do in preparation for what we're really longing for: connection with those we love.

*Continued on page 3*

## Light a Candle for Christmas Eve!

We're hoping to LIGHT UP our virtual Christmas Eve service with images of all of you holding up your lighted candles just as we traditionally do in our sanctuary on Christmas Eve. Send us a photo or short video of yourself or your family either holding a lit candle, or lighting each other's candles, just as we do on Christmas Eve. Tip: take your photo or video in the evening, or with the lights dimmed (not in complete darkness as we want to see you as well!). Send your photo or video to [pastormaureen@ccamherst.org](mailto:pastormaureen@ccamherst.org) by Sunday, December 20, and we'll include you in our candle lighting montage as we sing *Silent Night* during our online Christmas Eve service. If you prefer, we can also record you or your family lighting your candles in our sanctuary in front of our Christon Tree. Reach out to Pastor Maureen to schedule a recording time, anytime before Dec. 20!



## 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.

Church school available.

How to reach us:  
Office Phone (603) 673-3231,  
(603) 673-6848  
[www.ccamherst.org](http://www.ccamherst.org)  
[Facebook.com/ccamherst](https://www.facebook.com/ccamherst)

The church office is available  
by phone and email Monday–Friday,  
from 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Send in all news by the  
fifteenth of the month.

Announcements  
for the Sunday bulletins  
are due Thursday morning.

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### OUR CHURCH STAFF:

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

Rev. Katherine R. Kennedy  
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[wendylazott@tds.net](mailto:wendylazott@tds.net)

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

## Adult Ed Series A NEW Look at the OLD Testament

Wednesdays,  
December 2 and December 16  
10:00—11:30 a.m. on Zoom



Is the OLD Testament still relevant today? Who wrote it and why? From the Creation story to the Exodus, the stories of the great Kings and Judges, the writing of the prophets, the poetry of the Psalms, the wisdom of Proverbs, and the suffering of Job, the Old Testament is familiar yet mysterious to many of us. We'll take a NEW look at the OLD Testament through this video lecture series produced by the Great Courses. Each 25-minute lecture offers a fresh perspective and sheds new light on one of the world's most beloved books.

We'll gather on Zoom to watch the lectures together and have a group discussion afterward, facilitated by Pastor Maureen. This series has 24 episodes, which we'll watch from October to June, meeting every first and third Wednesday at 10:00 a.m. All are welcome! Please RSVP to [pastormaureen@ccamherst.org](mailto:pastormaureen@ccamherst.org) to receive the Zoom link, or access the link on our church website in the Members Section under "Wednesday Adult Ed."

## Capital Campaign Update

Your Capital Campaign team continues to work diligently behind the scenes and remotely. Despite the fact that we unfortunately did not receive a grant from LCHIP, work continues with the money we have already received from members of the congregation, the community and other grants.

The methodical and thorough kitchen design process continues. A Formal Request for Proposal (RFP) package, detailing the kitchen design and a statement of work to be performed, has been completed. Three vendors have been selected to bid on the kitchen based on this RFP. Their proposals, including pricing, is expected in early December. Once proposals are received, we look forward to presenting kitchen recommendations to the congregation for review.

This month marks the end of the second year of the campaign pledge drive. The success of the campaign to date has been due to the generous support of all who pledged. The end of the year is an excellent time to take advantage of tax savings while fulfilling your pledges. More information of this can be found in this month's *Spire*.

## Spam Emails Circulating

We continue to see on occasion spam emails circulating that disguise themselves as being from Pastor Maureen. If you receive one of these suspicious emails, please do not click on any links or reply to the email – just delete it.

This spam email is one that many pastors and churches are dealing with these days. The scammer takes public information and pretends to be someone you trust.

If you are unsure if an email you received appearing to be from us is fake, just hover over the sender's name/email with your mouse. If it is legitimate, the return email address will show that is from [@ccamherst.org](mailto:@ccamherst.org). If you don't see that, it is not from us.

We are sorry for any inconvenience this may have caused.



## Christmas Is Coming—Virtually, continued from page 1

In this non-traditional year, when it's likely we won't see much of our family, friends or church community during the Advent or Christmas season, we're longing for connection even more. Therefore, during this season of "waiting" I'm singing a different tune. I encourage you to NOT hold off on the decorating or the caroling or the longing to leap into Christmas right after Thanksgiving without pausing to appreciate what Advent has to offer. Surround yourself with the joy of the season. Play Christmas music in your home. Put up the tree on December 1st (if you haven't already). Set up virtual gatherings with family and friends (if you can handle more screen time). Send Christmas cards, make phone calls, bake all of your traditional goodies and drop them off on your neighbor's doorsteps.

There are many things that we traditionally "do" as a church during this season that continue in a re-imagined, virtual way. Our Christmas gift drives for our neighbors in need continue with virtual tags that still require physical gifts that will bring very real joy on Christmas day. We'll celebrate the four Sundays of Advent with our online worship, where you'll see our sanctuary decorated with our Chrismon Tree, light candles with our Advent Wreath lighting families, sing carols along with our virtual choir, and watch our children participate in a virtual Christmas pageant with traditional roles and costumes as they tell the familiar story of Jesus' birth in a very non-traditional way.

On Christmas Eve, we'll have one recorded worship service that will premiere on YouTube, Facebook, and our website at 5:00 p.m. and will weave together our traditional 7:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m. services, with lessons and carols featuring readings by our senior high youth and our wonderful music team of Sara, Michael, Wendy, along with members of our virtual choir. Pastor Kate and I will offer a Christmas message, and we'll sing "Silent Night" as we invite all of you to dim your lights and light your candles at home. We're also inviting all of you to send us photos and videos of yourselves holding a lit candle (before Dec. 20!) that we'll incorporate into a video montage that will play as our Bell Choir Director, Wendy Valeri, rings.

One of the great joys of Christmas Eve in our church is looking out at the darkened sanctuary and seeing the faces of those we know and love each lit by the light of a single candle, as we sing "Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright..." We then break the silence by launching into a rousing chorus of "Joy to the World" as we gather our coats, extinguish our candles, wish one another a "Merry Christmas" and head out into the cold night air anticipating the fun, food, and family awaiting us on Christmas Day.

In this non-traditional year, we won't be gathering in our sanctuary, and many of us won't be gathering with those we love at home. But the joy of Christmas – the connection we long for with others and with our God, is as unwavering as ever. In many ways we have a better understanding of what those sleepy shepherds, wandering wisemen, and curious onlookers experienced on that first Christmas Eve. As the joy they had long anticipated arrived in the manger with a powerful promise to pull them out of a time of uncertainty and fear. Silent Night, Holy Night, all is calm, all is bright. For us, the wait for Emmanuel is over. God is with us. Always.

Peace and blessings,  
*Pastor Maureen*



## Creative Worship Sunday, December 20, 10:00 a.m. Fight for the Powerless

Creative Worship happens on the THIRD SUNDAY of every month, with special music, an engaging message presented in a creative way, and a focus theme to frame our worship. This year our overarching theme is BE THE CHURCH – the bold statements issued by the United Church of Christ to inspire us to live our faith in the world. In December our worship theme is "Fight for the Powerless." As we celebrate the Fourth Sunday of Advent we'll hear the familiar song of Mary as she sings her "Magnificat" – where she joyfully anticipates the birth of her son, Jesus, and the changes he will bring for both the powerless and the powerful! We'll also celebrate with our annual Church School Christmas Pageant, this year re-imagined virtually! We hope you can join us online!

## 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, bar soap,  
deodorants, shampoo,  
conditioner, feminine  
hygiene products,  
diapers, wipes

Donations should be brought directly to the SHARE Center in Milford; if you are unsure where, please call their office at 673-9898. Many thanks for your continuing support!

## Pastoral Care Concerns

If you have a pastoral care concern and need to get in touch with Pastor Maureen or Pastor Kate the best way to do so is to call their office phones or send an email:

Pastor Maureen Frescott  
673-3231, extension 11  
[pastormaureen@ccamherst.org](mailto:pastormaureen@ccamherst.org)

Pastor Kate Kennedy  
673-3231, extension 14  
[pastorkate@ccamherst.org](mailto:pastorkate@ccamherst.org)

If you leave a voicemail your recorded message is sent to our pastors via email, so they will receive it even if they're out of the office.

*Note:* Because of schedule changes during this time, both of our pastors are now taking MONDAY as their day off and won't be checking email or phone messages.

If you have an immediate pastoral care concern on a MONDAY please contact Andrea in our church office (673-3231) or Sara Phelps at [kalben1@comcast.net](mailto:kalben1@comcast.net). They will reach out to our pastors to notify them as needed.



## Sundays in Print

Would you like to receive printed copies of Sunday's sermons via US Mail? If you're unable to access our online worship services and would like to receive a packet of our printed Sunday bulletin, scripture, sermon and prayer concerns, let us know! Contact Andrea in the church office and we'll add you to our mailing list!



## What is Small Group Ministry?

Small Group Ministry is where 8-10 people meet with the intention of establishing deeper connections with each other and with God.

The groups meet once a month from October to June, and are led by lay members of the congregation.

The group meetings run 1.5 hours and include a check-in, a short topic reading, discussion of the topic, and closing prayer.

We have a weekday group, an evening group, and a weekend group to allow members to pick a time that best fits their schedule.

### This year we're focusing on *Short Stories by Jesus*

Using the book by Amy-Jill Levine as a guide, we'll explore the parables of Jesus and the many ways they have to guide, comfort, inspire, provoke, and change us!

There's no need to purchase the book and no prep-time is needed! The readings and discussion questions for each month will be emailed ahead of time and are short enough to be read when the group is gathered.

## Schedule for 2020-2021

October:	The Good Samaritan
November:	The Rich Man
December:	The Persistent Widow
January:	The Laborers in the Vineyard
February:	The Talents
March:	The Prodigal Son
April:	The Sower
May:	The Mustard Seed
June:	The Lost Sheep

## Choose a Group!

First Tuesday, 1:30–3:00 p.m.

First Sunday, 12:00 –1:30 p.m.

All groups will meet on Zoom until further notice.

## How To Get Involved

You may join a group at any time of the year as long as your choice is still open. Each group is limited to ten members.

Sign up online at [ccamherst.org](http://ccamherst.org) or contact Pastor Maureen at 603-673-3231 x11

[pastormaureen@ccamherst.org](mailto:pastormaureen@ccamherst.org)

## Organ Recital First Church Nashua

Our organist, Michael Havay, will be featured on the "Fridays at First" recital series at First Church in Nashua (1 Concord Street) on Friday, December 4. The free, 30-minute concerts start at 12:15 p.m. and feature the church's historic 1926 Austin pipe organ of 60 ranks and over 4,000 pipes. The program will include works of Couperin, J.S. Bach, Buxtehude, Sowerby, and Mendelssohn. COVID protocols are in place at the church including the wearing of masks, seating restricted for social distancing, and limited audience size.



## 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 provide direct financial assistance to individual UCC clergy and lay employees. Here are some examples from the 2019 drive:

- \$260,500 in Christmas Thank You Checks to 521 retired UCC clergy/lay employees. Retirees with limited financial resources receive a gift at Christmas time as a way of saying "thank you" for years of service to the United Church of Christ.
- \$1,347,419 in Pension Supplementation to 350 lower-income retired UCC clergy/lay employees. Retirees with limited financial resources receive monthly payments to bring their household income up to a minimum level so that they can afford basic needs such as food, utilities or medical expenses.
- \$374,577 in Health Benefits Supplementation to 144 lower-income retired UCC clergy/lay employees. Retirees with limited financial resources receive assistance to pay their UCC Medicare Supplement Plan premiums.
- \$123,727 in Emergency Grants to 69 active/retired UCC clergy/lay employees. Sometimes those who serve the Church face unforeseen circumstances that create financial need. Our help and emergency funds are available to assist in covering those costs.

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. You can donate online at any time at <https://www.ccamherst.org/> - please go to the *Donate* page under the *Giving* menu and make sure to put 'Christmas Fund Appeal' in the 'other' line. Prefer not to donate online? Please You send in a check to the church, 11 Church St., Amherst, NH 03031 and put 'Christmas Fund' in the memo line.

For more information visit <https://www.pbucc.org/index.php/christmas-fund-home/how-the-funds-are-used>



Christmas Past, in the chancel, photo by Marti Warren

## Have a SUCCESSFUL Christmas

Gift cards purchased through our SUCCESS program make excellent Christmas gifts and stocking stuffers. They are available in many denominations to suit all budgets. Visit [www.shopwithscrip.com](http://www.shopwithscrip.com) to see the variety of stores and restaurants available, including favorites like LL Bean, Old Navy, Panera, Walmart, Starbucks, Home Depot, Marshall's, CVS, Domino's, Macy's, Shaw's, Amazon, Dunkin Donuts, Target and many more. It's easy and quick to create an account on the site so you can order online, and for more convenience consider setting up a PrestoPay account with the company. This enables you to purchase e-cards on your computer or your phone, even on the go! If you don't have PrestoPay, you can still order and pay by check to the church.

Every card you purchase earns money for our church at no extra cost to you. We bundle orders for plastic cards to save on shipping, so plan ahead and get your order in by December 6. They will arrive a few days later and be distributed. E-cards can be ordered any time and are available immediately. This ongoing program has earned the church over \$15,000 and counting!

### Red Cross Blood Drive



Wednesday,  
December 30  
12:00 to 5:00 p.m.

## Church School

### ADVENT

Ad = Latin prefix – toward  
Vent = Latin root word – come

The season of Advent in the church consists of the four Sundays before Christmas Day. It is the time when Christians “come toward” the birth of their Savior, Jesus.

Church School presents the four Sundays:

November 29 – Advent wreath construction. Materials are bagged and in the church school bin outside the entrance to our church, available November 29.

December 6 – “Angels Visit” – Brown Bag Lesson

December 13 – “Mary Visits Elizabeth” – Brown Bag Lesson

December 20 – Virtual Christmas Pageant; church school children and families are telling the Christmas story virtually during worship service.

Christmas Story – Coloring pages available at:

<https://ministry-to-children.com/advent-coloring-book/>



## Middle High Youth Group

Sunday, December 13,  
2:00—3:30pm.

Happy Advent, MHYG! This month we are going to continue our tradition of meeting outside, weather willing! Your MHYG advisors and I are planning a meeting full of activity, so that we can be safe AND in person AND warm all at the same time.

MHYG is a group for 5-8<sup>th</sup> graders, where middle schoolers gather for fun, fellowship, and faith formation. MHYG meets once a month, and is open to ALL 5-8<sup>th</sup> graders, whether they attend this church, any church, or none at all! Friends always welcome. For more information, email Pastor Kate.

## Year End Gifting Ideas



As we approach Christmas and the New Year, now is a good time to think about how we will handle our year-end charitable giving. This year is quickly coming to a close, and for many, it can't come soon enough. As challenging as 2020 has been, those of us who own stocks, IRAs or 401Ks have seen significant appreciation this year as reflected in near record highs in stock market indices including the S&P 500, Dow Jones, and NASDAQ. The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act enacted by Congress earlier this year has additionally provided some new one-time tax savings opportunities worth considerations. Below are a number of tax saving suggestions you may want to consider while you plan your year-end giving.

### Key Gifting Provisions of the CARES Act

Additional \$300 deduction is available to non-itemizers. Normally a deduction is not offered to those who take the standard deduction rather than itemize their tax return.

Required minimum distributions (RMDs) from retirement plans waived for 2020. While RMDs are waived in 2020, if you are 70½ or older, you can still make a tax-free qualified charitable distribution to the church and/or the capital campaign from your IRA.

### Other Ways Your Gift Can Make an Impact at Year End

Gift of Appreciated Securities: By donating appreciated securities, you can avoid capital gains tax while also receiving a possible tax deduction for the current market value of your stock.

These suggestions are accurate to the best of our knowledge, but *please* consult your own legal or tax counsel prior to making a gift.

Many of us have made pledges to the church for either the annual operating budget, the capital campaign, or both. Giving toward those pledges in the manner outlined above can be a real win-win for both the church and you. You will get a full deduction for the value of the transfer on the date it is received, while we strengthen the financials of both our church's programs and facilities.

Time is short to be able to take advantage of these tax savings. Securities or RMD transfers must be received by the church on or before December 31, 2020 to be applied for the 2020 tax year. Make sure you contact your broker or brokerage account soon to make sure the transaction is executed in time. It is a straightforward process to transfer security shares or RMD distributions to the church account. Contact Andrea Cyr, our church office manager, at 673-3231 or [andrea@ccamherst.org](mailto:andrea@ccamherst.org) for the information needed to accomplish the transfer.

## Reopening Information

Our ad hoc Reopening Team has been hard at work thinking through and putting in place plans for our congregation to regather in person for worship and small group meetings.

Are you wondering where things stand? Through the members section on our website, we have a page dedicated to communicating with our church family on both current policies and procedures for use of the building during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the progress of our ad hoc Reopening Team. Documents will be posted as they are made available. If you have any questions or concerns about any of this information, please reach out to any member of the team: Pastor Maureen Frescott, Jessica Greer, Pastor Kate Kennedy, Keith Lammers, Susan Manchester, Kathy Skoglund, Paul Spiess, Kate Thompson, Doug Topliffe, Sue Werst, Tom Werst.

## Operating Better When Busy:

### An interview with Meredith Dart

Interview by Sue Spiess

The photo of Meredith Dart raking leaves on Levi Sunday with her 5-month-old happily looking on while strapped in a backpack says it all. Nothing slows Meredith down!

Meredith credits her parents for nurturing in her a strong work ethic, a sense of community, and the need to give back. She says that it is "God's gift" that she has a lot of energy. Growing up in Catholic and a Congregational Church family, she attended services in both churches. She found the freedom to question, to interact, and to be herself in the Congregational setting, and was drawn to CCA when the family first moved to Amherst almost 15 years ago and then joined the church family with young children.

She and the congregation "clicked from the beginning" because our family-oriented church makes it easy to become involved, and there are so many ways to contribute to the greater good and to "make it your own." Meredith applauds Pastors Maureen and Kate, who continue to enhance our worship services, outreach, and programs, especially during these challenging COVID times.

As chair of the fellowship committee, Meredith enjoys reaching out to all generations and credits her team for working together really well, whether managing coffee hours after church or planning social events. The Darts' love hosting summer outings at their home on Baboosic Lake, especially the church family gatherings.

With three girls, Oriannah (11 yr), Mariellah (9 yr), and Netaniah (5mo), and two working parents, the Dart household is a busy one. It takes team work to make it all happen. The girls' sports schedules and Sunday church attendance require a complicated balancing act, but they do the best they can to attend church as regularly as possible. There are other ways to make connections and to "dial it up a different way," she notes. There are many educational and social opportunities. Oriannah enjoys Middle High Youth Group, and Meredith credits Pastor Kate with reaching out, asking thought-provoking questions, and engaging the youth even while enduring COVID restrictions. Mariellah was excited to do a recent bible verse reading as part of her involvement with the church school program coordinated by Marilyn Gibson.

Meredith says she operates better when busy. She sees challenges as opportunities and her enthusiasm is contagious. She says the "church makes it easy" to be involved. Raking on Levi Sunday with a 5-month-old may not seem easy to everyone, but Meredith makes it look that way!



The Congregational Church  
11 Church Street  
Amherst, NH 03031

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