

The Congregational Church of Amherst, NH,
United Church of Christ
Amherst, New Hampshire

VILLAGE SPIRE

December 2022



Christmas Eve and Christmas Day Services



Christmas Eve 5:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m.

Our **5:00 p.m. Family Service** is tailored for families with young children and for the young at heart. Come hear the Christmas story as told by our Church School children and Confirmants in our traditional Christmas Pageant. We'll raise our child-friendly glow stick "candles" as we sing *Silent Night* and *Joy to the World* together!

Our **8:00 p.m. Candlelight Service** tells the Christmas story through lessons and carols with music from our Bell and Chancel Choirs. As the sanctuary gradually fills with candlelight and the singing of *Silent Night*, we proclaim the birth of Jesus, the light of the world!

Both services will be livestreamed on Facebook and will be available on our website after 9:30 p.m.

Christmas Day 10:00 a.m.

Join us on **Christmas Day at 10:00 a.m.** for our Sunday worship as we sing carols, celebrate the spirit of Christmas, and welcome the Christ Child into the world!

O Come, All Ye Faithful!

Listening for Christmas

Rev. Maureen Frescott, Senior Pastor
December 2022

*"Do you hear what I hear?
(Do you hear what I hear?)
A song, a song high above the trees
With a voice as big as the sea
With a voice as big as the sea."*

The carols we sing in the weeks leading up to Christmas carry the spirit of Christmas itself. As the words and melodies transport us back in time to family gatherings gone by, to Christmas mornings past spent lingering around the tree, to Christmas Eve services from long ago, where we spilled out into the midnight air with joy in our step and a lightness in our heart. It's this lightness and joy that many of us anticipate with each coming Christmas as we seek to recapture the often fleeting feelings of the season. The memories we carry of Christmases past may stir within us as we sing the songs and listen to the story yet again, but it's the hope this season carries for the future that we're listening for as well.

Thankfully, we have an entire season in itself to contemplate and sit with all the longings and looking ahead that Christmas brings - the season of Advent. We get the name of the season from the Latin *adventus*, which means "coming" or "arrival." With every arrival there is a time of waiting - the time "before" where we anticipate what is to come. The season of Advent is often presented as a time to slow down, to take a breath, to be intentional about preparing a space in our hearts for the coming Christ Child. But as we know, the season of Advent typically has us doing the opposite. As we deck the halls, bake the cakes, wrap the gifts, and pack our schedules with holiday gatherings, seasonal events, and travel plans. But all this busyness is not without its purpose. For many of us, this is our way of preparing for what is to come. There's no shame in busying our hands and feet as we hang the greens, decorate the cookies, and run to the shops. As long as we take the time to listen as we go.

Listen to the carols. As they carry us back to a time spent with loved ones no longer with us. Listen to the ringing bells of kitchen timers. As they have us anticipating holiday meals spent with loved ones in the present. Listen to the familiar stories of scripture. As they have us peering into the manger, yet again, finding hope, peace, joy, and love wrapped up in a tiny bundle.

"Listening" is our *Why We Worship* theme for the month of December. As we bend our ears to stories of the scripture that tell us of the coming of God into our world - in human form. To remind ourselves that God knows what it is to be one of us, and to remind us that hope is born anew every time we anticipate the coming of Christ.

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VILLAGE SPIRE

A Parish Newsletter

The Congregational Church of
Amherst, NH, 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
[Facebook.com/ccamherst](https://www.facebook.com/ccamherst)
[Instagram.com/ccamherstnh](https://www.instagram.com/ccamherstnh)

The church office is open
Monday, Wednesday and Friday
from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., and
is available by telephone and email
Monday through Friday.

Send in all newsletter articles
by the fifteenth of the month.

Sunday bulletin announcements
are due Thursday morning.

OUR CHURCH STAFF:

Rev. Maureen R. Frescott
Senior Pastor
pastormaureen@ccamherst.org

Rev. Katherine R. Kennedy
Associate Pastor
pastorkate@ccamherst.org

Andrea Cyr
Church Office Administrator
andrea@ccamherst.org

Sara L. Phelps
Director of Music
kalben1@comcast.net

Michael Havay
Organist
michaelh117@gmail.com

Wendy Valeri
Bell Choir Director
wendylazott@tds.net

Larissa Riley
Church School Coordinator
churchschool@ccamherst.org



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.

Allows for deeper conversations that we can't always have in committee meetings or during coffee hour.

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.

Choose a Group!

First Tuesday 1:30-3:00 p.m.

First Sunday 11:30 a.m.-1:00 p.m.

All groups will meet in-person or on Zoom as needed.

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 or contact Pastor Maureen at 603-673-3231 x11,
pastormaureen@ccamherst.org



This year our Small Groups will focus on the WHY WE WORSHIP theme that is guiding our Creative Worship and other church programs. Each month we'll focus on a different aspect of our worship and how it connects with our faith journey!

Schedule for 2022-2023

December:	Listening
January:	Praying
February:	Healing
March:	Giving
April:	Discerning
May:	Singing
June:	Nurturing



Listening for Christmas, continued from page 1

December brings with it many opportunities for us to listen as a church family. Our Breakfast with Santa fundraising event on December 10th brings the laughter and joy of children and the volunteers who help make it happen. On December 11th, our Chancel and Bell choirs led by Sara, Michael and Wendy, will provide a feast for our ears at our Family Concert and Sing Along. Our Advent Vesper Service on Wednesday, December 14th will have us "turning down the volume" a bit as we make space for quiet reflection, prayer, readings, and music, while also acknowledging that not all of us experience joy at this time of year.

On December 18th, the Fourth Sunday of Advent, we'll listen to our Church School children tell the story of Jesus' birth in our traditional Christmas Pageant, and they'll tell it again at our 5:00 p.m. Christmas Eve Service. If you're looking for a more contemplative listening experience, at our 8:00 p.m. Christmas Eve service we'll hear the Christmas story come to life with Lessons and Carols, our choirs, and candlelight. Finally, on Christmas Day, which falls on a Sunday this year, we will gather in our sanctuary for our 10:00 a.m. worship – to listen to the story told anew and to sing the songs that carry us back to Christmases past while also bringing forth hope in what is to come.

Throughout this season of Advent, we'll continue to listen for the voice of our Still Speaking God. In the carols, in scripture, in the story we've heard many times before, and in the voices and presence of one another. God is always speaking – always telling us to have hope, always telling us that we are loved, always telling us to reach for peace, always telling us that joy is coming, again.

*Said the king to the people everywhere
Listen to what I say! (Listen to what I say!)
Pray for peace, people, everywhere
Listen to what I say! (Listen to what I say!)
The Child, the Child sleeping in the night
He will bring us goodness and light
He will bring us goodness and light!*

Peace and blessings,
Pastor Maureen



Advent Vespers Service

**Wednesday, December 14
7:00 p.m.**

In the busy weeks that lead up to Christmas we can sometimes lose sight of "the reason for the season" of Advent. Advent is meant to be a peaceful time of anticipation and preparation, a time of joy and hope. Advent is also a time for those who aren't feeling joyous to find a space for their uncertainty, apprehension, and grief. Advent gives us permission to honor the part of ourselves that is longing to slow down, to take a breath, to be instead of do. It also provides us an opportunity to find comfort in the darkness. Join us for a time of quiet prayer, reflective readings, candle lighting, and meditative music. Come experience Advent and take a break from the busyness of Christmas. Come as you are and just be.



The Sunday **Joys and Concerns** are emailed to those who want to include them in their daily personal prayers. If you would like to receive them each week, please let Andrea in the church office know: andrea@ccamherst.org.

Celebrating the Season of Giving



Thank you to everyone who signed up through our giving tree to provide gifts to those in need. All the gift names were taken.

All gifts are due back to the church no later than end of worship on Sunday, December 4.

Crestwood gifts should be returned unwrapped in a gift bag, with the name of the resident clearly visible on the bag, and gift wrap included.

Family Promise gifts should be wrapped and returned with a tag with the name/age of the child.

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!

Meet Our New Members!

On Sunday, November 13th we welcomed five new members into our church family!

Patricia Harris lives in Hollis with her husband, Tom. She is a retired Minister of Christian Education, commissioned by the Hillsborough Association of the United Church of Christ. Pat served in that role for many years at the First Church in Nashua. Pat has also served on our Association's Committee on Church and Ministry and on the Executive Committee. She started worshipping with us in September, and has already joined our Wednesday New Testament class and hopes to join our Tuesday Small Group Ministry as well. She loves reading, gardening, walking, and spending time with her grandchildren.

Maggie and Paul Schellenberg started worshipping with us in the fall of 2021. They live in Milford and have two grown children and two grandsons. Both are retired and are longtime volunteers at SHARE in Milford. Paul helps run our livestream on Sundays. He loves to golf and travel, and enjoys running, and reading. Maggie also loves to travel and enjoys knitting, mahjong, and blogging (that's journaling on a computer for the non-tech savvy). The couple spend their winters in Florida, and travel in the fall, but look forward to being with us when they're home!

Barb and Ken Wolfe live here in Amherst. They were married in our sanctuary in 1988. They moved back to Amherst before the pandemic hit and began worshipping with us in September. Both are now members of our Chancel Choir! Barb is a Customer Service manager for CNC Software - she loves music of all kinds, she enjoys cooking, hiking, and traveling, and she also enjoys knitting, although she says her "skills are questionable." Ken works in sales for an injection molding company. He enjoys fly fishing, hiking, traveling with Barb, all things outdoors with their grandchildren, and making hard cider.



Altar Flowers 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, or can create their own arrangement and deliver it on Sunday. 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. Contact Andrea in the church office to schedule a Sunday.



Adult Ed Series

Understanding the New Testament

**Wednesdays, December 7 and 21
10:00-11:30 a.m. on Zoom**

Why do we have four Gospels? Why do they contradict each other at times? What was the purpose of Paul's letters? What is the Book of Revelation really about? Beginning this fall, we'll take a year-long look at the New Testament through this 24-part video lecture series produced by the Great Courses. These dynamic lectures, given by Professor David Brakke, Chair of Christian History at Ohio State University, start with the earliest writings of the NT - the letters of Paul, and then move on to the Gospels and Revelation. We'll examine the original contexts of these writings and the people who wrote them, giving us a new perspective on these ancient texts.

We'll watch the video together as a group and then have a discussion facilitated by Pastor Maureen. The class meets every first and third Wednesday at 10:00 a.m. from September through May. We'll meet on Zoom because we've found this to be a more inclusive way to be together! All are welcome! Please RSVP to pastormaureen@ccamherst.org to receive the Zoom link, or access the link on our church website in the Members Section under "Wednesday Adult Ed."

Understanding the New Testament - Series Schedule

December 7 - 1 and 2 Corinthians: Community Conflicts

December 21 - Paul's Congregations

January 4 - Paul's Theology on Slavery

January 18 - Adapting Paul's Teachings to New Situations

February 1 - Gospel of Mark: Jesus as the Suffering Son of Man

February 15 - Gospel of Matthew: Jesus as the New Moses

March 1 - Gospel of Matthew: The Church

March 15 - Gospel of Luke: God's Salvation

April 5 - Luke and Acts: Luke's Inclusive Message

April 19 - Acts: The Apostles and the Church

May 3 - Gospel of John: Jesus as the Divine Word

May 17 - Gospel of John: Jesus and the Jews



Creative Worship
Sunday, December 18 at
10:00 a.m.

"Listening"

Mark your calendars! "Creative Worship" is on the third Sunday of Advent this month! The theme for our church year is WHY WE WORSHIP - each month we'll focus on a different part of our worship and explore why it's a part of our service and how it connects with our faith journey.

In December, our worship theme is "Listening" and the part of worship we're celebrating is the Scripture Reading. Even the most familiar scripture passages can take on new meaning when we look at it with fresh eyes, consider its original context, and listen for our Still Speaking God. In this service, we'll be listening to the familiar story of the birth of Jesus, as told by our children in our annual Christmas Pageant. We hope you can join us in-person or online!



A Few Words About the Weather...



Church Closings Due to Bad Weather:

As many know, New England weather is ever changing and at times can be quite unpredictable. In the case of bad weather and the need to cancel an in-person worship service, we will post announcements on WMUR Channel 9 television, and on our website and Facebook pages.

Of course, that doesn't mean you will miss out on Sunday morning worship. Our live streamed service will still be available for folks to tune to at 10:00 a.m. on our Facebook page, and we will continue to upload the recorded service to our website by noon.

Beware of Falling Snow and Ice:

During the winter months, we want to 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.

Next Generation Leadership Initiative—Reporting Back

Dear CCA,

In November, I went to Chicago to join my cohort of the UCC Pension Board's Next Generation Leadership Initiative in exploring post-pandemic Church Vitality. For five days, 30 young clergy went around the city learning from all kinds of traditional and non-traditional faith communities about how they remain vital, thriving places in a world that seems to insist that the mainline church is on the decline.

In preparation for the week, we read *Divergent Church: The Bright Promise of Alternative Faith Communities* by Tim Shapiro and Kara Farris. The authors present six core practices of divergent, or vital, churches: shaping community, conversation, breaking bread, artistic expression, community engagement, and hospitality. Each church highlighted in the book embrace these practices in deeply contextual and spirit-led ways, as did each of the churches we visited throughout our time in Chicago. It's a relatively skinny book—I recommend it if you'd like to read about some churches thinking outside the box.

Throughout the week, the group spoke with many wonderful leaders in the UCC, including Rev. Dr. Brad Braxton, President of Chicago Theological Seminary; Rev. Julian DeShazier, Pastor of University Church; Rev. Dr. Cynthia Linder, Director of Ministry Studies at University of Chicago Divinity School; Rev. Vince Amlin and Rev. Rebecca Anderson, Co-pastors of Bethany UCC and Gilead church, just to name a few. Each of our speakers addressed (at least) two topics: how they understand church vitality and where they've seen it in their work, and one spectacular failure in their career. These were inspired and grace-filled conversations, and I know our work together as a church will benefit from the wisdom and experience I gleaned from these leaders.

Thank you, church, for giving me this time for continuing education. It has nourished my spirit! I would love to share details with you about this week of learning, so please feel free to reach out to hear more.

Peace,
Pastor Kate

Financial Summary

(as of October 31, 2022)



	YTD <u>Actual</u>	YTD <u>Budget</u>	<u>Difference</u>
Income	\$184,209	\$179,829	\$ 4,380
Expenses	\$177,154	\$179,563	\$(2,409)
Net Income	\$ 7,055	\$ 266	\$ 6,789

Numbers have been rounded to the nearest whole dollar; as such, some columns may not appear to total correctly. We hope you are finding this information helpful. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to anyone on the Finance Team: Keith Lammers, Paul Spiess (Treasurer), Doug Topliffe, Todd Whitney and Tim Wiegand.



Church School December/January Schedule

We will have some changes to our regular schedule, as there will be a few Sundays without church school.

December 4: Regular church School during worship, followed by Youth Choir.

December 11: Regular church school during worship, followed by pageant rehearsal.

December 18th: Creative Worship with Children's Pageant (no church school), children stay in worship—either participating in the pageant or enjoying the pageant with their families.

December 24: 5:00 p.m. Christmas Eve Family Service with Children's Pageant. (no church school) The service will be similar to the 18th, with a few added elements including glowstick candles while *Silent Night* is sung.

8:00 p.m. Christmas Eve Traditional Service with choirs, candles, etc. (no church school)

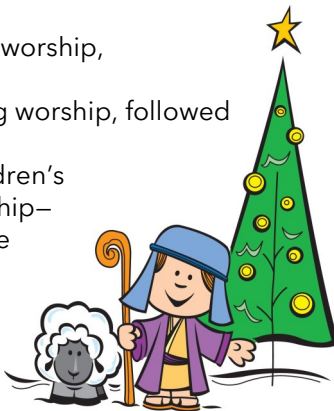
December 25: Christmas Day Worship Service: (no church school)

January 1: New Year's Day Worship Service: (no church school)

****Regular Church School Classes will resume on January 8th!****

Children's Christmas Pageants:

Our pageants will take place on Dec. 18 during the 10:00 a.m. service and on Dec. 24 during the 5:00 p.m. service. Children may participate in one of the pageants or both. We have many opportunities for non-speaking, costumed roles (all ages) and some for narrators (fourth grade and up). There will be a pageant rehearsal after worship on December 11th for all participants. **Please contact Larissa Riley (churchschool@ccamherst.org) by December 5th if your child would like to participate or if you have any questions.**



Middle High Youth Group

MHYG meets on December 4th from 2:00 to 3:30 p.m. This month, MHYG is getting in the spirit of Advent! 5-8th graders are invited to join us to learn about the meaning of advent, play games, and celebrate the season. Don't forget our Christmas gift exchange! Bring a gift that is made, found, or cost less than \$5.

At a time in life when most tweens are figuring out who they are, what they like, who to be friends with, and what to believe, MHYG is a sacred space to learn, grow, and have fun. MHYG offers kids a safe place to explore their spirituality, form deep relationships, and let loose through fellowship, games, check-ins, and sanctuary time. All middle schoolers are invited, and bringing friends is strongly encouraged!

Email Pastor Kate for more information.



The Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund

"Overwhelmed with joy!" Matthew 2:10

Our joy at Christmas is a response to God's promise of new life through the birth of Jesus. It is a joy we are called to share widely through our witness and gifts, both to loved ones and to distant neighbors.

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. The Christmas Fund has been caring for active and retired clergy for over 100 years, providing emergency grants, supplementation of small annuities and health premiums, and Christmas "Thank You" gift checks each December to our lower-income retirees.

United Church of Christ congregations and members have blessed the Christmas Fund with their generosity for many years. This year, your care and compassion will be especially appreciated by those servants of the church who are facing a time of need. Thank you!

This appeal will run for the month of December. To donate, visit our online giving page (in the Missions text box please type *Christmas Fund*); or send a check to the church office (11 Church St. Amherst NH 03031) with *The Christmas Fund* noted on the memo line.

Senior High Youth Group

'Tis the season to come to SHYG! Throughout December, SHYG is celebrating Advent by giving back and going deep. SHYG meets on Sundays from 4:00 to 5:30 p.m. and will be volunteering at church events throughout the month, too!

SHYG is a time of fellowship, fun, and faith exploration. As always, friends are welcome, whether they attend this church, any church, or none at all! SHYG is a place for high school kids to connect socially and spiritually, no matter who they are or where they are on life's journey.

Get in touch with Pastor Kate by text or at pastorkate@ccamherst.org for more information!



**CONGREGATIONAL
CHURCH OF AMHERST**
United Church of Christ

Family Christmas Concert and Singalong

SUNDAY

December 11, 2022

7:00 pm

11 Church Street, Amherst NH

FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

CHANCEL CHOIR - SARA PHELPS, DIRECTOR

HANDBELL CHOIR - WENDY VALERI, DIRECTOR

ORGANIST/PIANIST - MICHAEL HAVAY

GUEST MUSICIANS

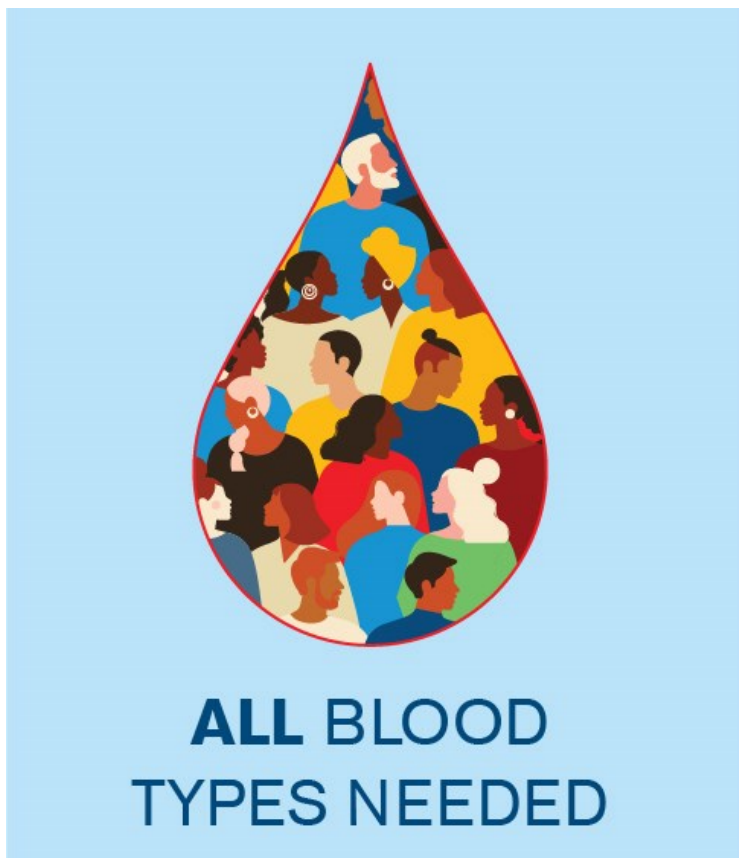
Enjoy beautiful sacred choral and handbell selections, along with much-loved popular favorites of the season. Everyone gets to participate in the merry singalong songs!



The Congregational Church
of Amherst, NH, UCC
11 Church Street
Amherst, NH 03031

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U.S. POSTAGE
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Address Service Requested



**American
Red Cross**

Blood Drive

**Amherst
Congregational
Church**

Community Room
11 Church St
Amherst, NH 03031

**Friday, December 30, 2022
10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.**