

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



*“There is nothing so secular that it cannot be sacred,  
and that is one of the deepest messages of the Incarnation.”*

– Madeleine L'Engle

# THE ORDER OF SERVICE FOR THE WORSHIP OF GOD

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

*"No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey,  
you are welcome here."*

December 24, 2023

Fourth Sunday of Advent

10:00 a.m.

GATHERING CHIMES

*Let us be gathered in silence so that we may prepare to worship.*

GREETING AND NOTICES OF PARISH LIFE

PRELUDE

*The Angel Gabriel from Heaven Came*

Anna Laura Page

INTROIT

ADVENT CANDLE LIGHTING

Lee Bowley and Gail Miller

*The congregation may remain seated.*

One: We light candles for the four weeks leading to Christmas in anticipation of the inbreaking of God's love and light in Jesus.

One: In this season of Advent, we wait.

**Many: For the inbreaking God is coming to us.**

One: In this season of waiting, we listen.

**Many: For the inbreaking Word brings us good news.**

One: In the waiting and listening, we watch.

**Many: For the inbreaking Spirit is moving among us.**

One: Now, in the waiting, listening, and watching, we say, "Yes!"

**Many: For the inbreaking God, Word, and Spirit will be born once again in our hearts and in our world!**

*(The four candles of Advent are lit.)*

\*HYMN

*Awake! Awake, and Greet the New Morn*

inside back pages

*Please rise as you are able in body or spirit.*

UNISON PRAYER OF INVOCATION and THE LORD'S PRAYER (unison)

*The congregation may be seated.*

**Holy One, during this season of Advent  
you will shake the heavens and the earth,  
you will cry out in the wilderness,  
you will dream dreams and sing songs of hope,  
you will leap in the womb in anticipation.  
Today we rejoice with Mary and Elizabeth,  
in expectation of the birthing of your light and love.  
Give us the courage to say "Yes" to being carriers of grace.  
May your Spirit be born in us, and in our world.  
God of Advent, today we wait in love,  
knowing that in your inbreaking,  
all are made free and created anew.  
Be present with us, as we pray the words Jesus taught us:**

**Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done  
on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we  
forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is  
the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**

\*SONG OF PRAISE

*Gloria*

**Gloria in excelsis Deo; Gloria in excelsis Deo.**

TIME FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

ANTHEM

*It Came Upon a Midnight Clear*  
Chancel Choir

arr. Joel Raney

\*THE PASSING OF THE PEACE

The peace of God be with you. **AND ALSO WITH YOU.**

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION

THE SCRIPTURE LESSON

Luke 1:26-45

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can

this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

SERMON

"Unboxing Mary"

\*HYMN

*O Little Town of Bethlehem*

No. 43

JOYS AND CONCERNS and PASTORAL PRAYER

*If you have a prayer to share, fill out a prayer card in your pew. Cards will be collected by one of the pastors during the hymn after the sermon, and will be shared during Joys and Concerns.*

CHORAL RESPONSE

INVITATION TO SHARE OUR OFFERINGS

OFFERTORY MUSIC

*Ave Maria*

Franz Schubert

\*DOXOLOGY (Tune: *From All That Dwell Below the Skies*)

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow;**

**Praise God all creatures here below. Alleluia, Alleluia.**

**Praise God above, ye heavenly host;**

**Creator, Christ and Holy Ghost.**

**Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia! Amen.**

\*PRAYER OF DEDICATION (unison)

**Loving, merciful God, we see you all around us, inspiring the sacredness of the Advent season. We thank you for the many ways that we receive gifts from your loving spirit. We ask that you bless these gifts that we have brought today, that they will be a vessel of your hope, peace, joy, and love. As Advent breaks forth into Christmas, remind us of this season of giving motivated by love so that we may be a people who love abundantly all year. Amen.**

\*HYMN

*Go, Tell It on the Mountain*

No. 29

\*THE LIGHT OF CHRIST GOES OUT INTO THE WORLD

\*COMMISSION AND BENEDICTION

\*CHORAL RESPONSE

\*POSTLUDE

*Joy, Joy, Joy*

Bill Cain

*(\*Please rise as you are able in body or spirit.)*

*Permission to podcast/stream the music in this service  
obtained from One License with license #A-731944.*

Sunday, December 24, 2023, 10:00 a.m.



## Christmas Eve Services

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 youth groups and confirmands 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.

### Our Church Calendar

December 24—30, 2023

Some events are taking place virtually. Links are sent out directly by email, and a list of recurring meetings with their links can be found in the member section of our website.

Today	10:00 a.m.	Worship
	11:15 a.m.	Fellowship
	5:00 p.m.	Christmas Eve Family Service
	8:00 p.m.	Traditional Candlelight Service
Friday	12:00 p.m.	Red Cross Blood Drive

# THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF AMHERST, NH, UCC



## A Welcoming, Open and Affirming Congregation of the United Church of Christ



**"No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey,  
you are welcome here."**

*We, the members of The Congregational Church of Amherst, New Hampshire, United Church of Christ, believe God's Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ call us to love all our neighbors as we would want to be loved. We are called to be as one body, seeking to walk together in the full life and ministry of our church.*

*We welcome each individual as a child of God. As covenant members of Christ's church, we celebrate God's love for people of all races and ethnic backgrounds, all mental and physical abilities, all socioeconomic backgrounds, all sexual orientations, all gender identities and gender expressions, and all of the other diverse attributes woven into the fabric of humankind.*

*With God's grace, we invite all to share in the life and leadership, ministry and fellowship, worship and sacraments, responsibilities and blessings of our church.*

We are pleased that you have chosen to worship with us. Our membership is open to all those who choose to walk with us in our witness. Please speak with any of our deacons or pastors should you have any questions regarding our church or our membership.

### Worship Notes:

- Church school is on break this week and will resume January 7. Church school is available for children Pre-K through grade 7.
- Our church nursery is open, but not staffed this week, and is available for parents with young children when they feel the need for a quiet, safe space to go during worship. A monitor is available to watch and listen to the service.
- Joys and Concerns may be written on the cards found in the pews. You are also welcome to submit your prayer request through our website in advance of the worship service.
- Please remember to wear your nametag each Sunday, so that we may all greet our neighbors. If you do not have a permanent nametag, temporary nametags may be found inside the friendship registers. If you are in need of a new, permanent nametag, please see one of the deacons.
- Please join us in the community room for a time of fellowship after the worship service. Coffee and beverages are offered.
- In the event of an emergency, please remain seated until instructions have been given. An emergency plan is in place for the children in the church school.

The church office is open Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 10:00 to 1:00 p.m., and available Monday through Friday by telephone 673-3231 and by email [info@ccamherst.org](mailto:info@ccamherst.org). Please feel free to leave a message and we will get back to you as soon as we can. Visit our church's website at [www.ccamherst.org](http://www.ccamherst.org), and follow us on Facebook.com/ccamherst and Instagram.com/ccamherstnh.

***Grounded in God's Love—Serving Neighbors Near and Far—Welcoming to All***

## PARTICIPATING IN TODAY'S WORSHIP SERVICE

### Members and Friends of The Congregational Church

Rev. Maureen R. Frescott  
Kevin G. S. Marsh  
Sara L. Phelps  
Michael Havay  
Russ Demarest  
Joan and Stephen Egbertson  
Patricia Bodan

Ministers to the World  
Senior Pastor  
Acting Associate Pastor  
Director of Music  
Organist/Accompanist  
Deacon in Charge  
Ushers  
Videographer

**A RED CROSS BLOOD DRIVE** will be held on Friday, December 29 from 12:00 to 5:00 p.m. in our community room. All blood types are needed. To schedule an appointment, visit [RedCrossBlood.org](http://RedCrossBlood.org) and enter sponsor code ACCNH.

**THE WREATHS ON THE FRONT** of our church and the many seasonal decorations have been provided by the Jackson Fund, established many years ago by Robert Jackson to honor his mother's tradition of providing Christmas wreaths for our church. Elizabeth Darling Jackson began this family's tradition of providing the wreaths on the advice of her mother, Louella Darling.

**SHARE FOOD PANTRY** requests for December include pancake mix and syrup, condiments, cooking sauces and seasonings, cooking oils, jelly, and cold cereal. 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!

**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 allows us 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.

The Christmas Fund has been caring for active and retired clergy and lay employees of the United Church of Christ 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 in the memo line.