



FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

THE BELL

1 Gilligan Road, East Greenbush, New York 12061-1780

VOLUME 22 ISSUE 11

DECEMBER 2020

At Church on Sundays:

- ♦ Early Informal Service
 - ♦ 8:30 am
- ♦ Regular Service 9:30 am in the sanctuary and
 - ♦ Via Facebook
- ♦ Sunday School to be determined

Visit us on the Web:

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Rev. Sundar R. Samuel,
Pastor

Gail Welkley,
Administrative Assistant

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

I wonder if you have ever given any thought to the extent of the preparations involved when a new President of the United States is elected. Have you ever thought of the preparations involved when the President of the United States makes a visit to a local community? Secret Service agents are the advance people or "advance men" who check all aspects of the route to be travelled.



Jesus had an advance man-someone who was in charge of preparing the way for his coming -- John the Baptist. John wasn't hired by Jesus for this task. The prophet Isaiah assigned him to this task some 400 years before. The appearance of John the Baptist in the wilderness was the most important event in the life of the nation of Israel for more than four hundred years.

Two things may surprise us about John the Baptist. One is how popular John was. The other is his role in the drama of the first Christmas. Luke begins his version of the Christmas story not with Mary and Joseph but with a couple named Zacharias and Elizabeth who were childless late in life. One day Zacharias was visited by angel Gabriel to announce that Elizabeth will bear a son, and they are to call him John..."

John the Baptist's ministry was a stunning success. Untold numbers of people from all over the area came to be baptized by him in the river Jordan. Many of those who were baptized became his disciples. In spite of great success as a preacher, John was willing to direct attention not to himself but to Jesus. That kind of humility is a rare commodity even today. It was not his intent to draw attention to himself. His greatest desire was to glorify Jesus. John willingly took on the part of a "second fiddle".

John was a man of humility and great courage. Just as impressive, however, was his determination to bear witness to the light. John bore witness to the light in his preaching.

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A Reconciling Congregation

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He bore witness in his life; on the banks of the Jordan he proclaimed that Jesus was the Lamb of God. He was to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah.

So, as you celebrate this Christmas season, as you think about all the import figures and events of that first Christmas, give a little thought to another small child born six months before Christ to a deeply devout couple named Zacharias and Elizabeth. Their son was not the Messiah. He simply bore witness to the Messiah. There was no star shining over the house where he laid, just a mute old man beaming down at him with pride and great joy. It was the joy of one who had lived to see the promises of God fulfilled. That was John the Baptist—humility, courage and a commitment to bear witness to the light of God.

During this pandemic when we are gripped with fear and uncertainty all around us, each one of us who are followers of Jesus Christ is called to a bold commitment to bear witness to the light of God. May you and yours have a wonderful advent season!



Blessings, Pastor Sundar

LECTIONARY FOR DECEMBER

December 6—2nd Sunday of Advent—Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; 2 Peter 3:8-15a; Mark 1:1-8

December 13—3rd Sunday of Advent—Isaiah 6::1-4, 8-11; Psalm 126; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24; John 1:6-8, 19-28

December 20—4th Sunday of Advent—2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38

December 24—Christmas Eve—Isaiah 9:2-7; Psalm 96; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-20

December 27—1st Sunday after Christmas—Isaiah 61:10-62:3; Psalm 148; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:22-40

December 31—Watch Night/New Year's Day - Ecclesiastes 3:1-13; Psalm 8; Revelation 21:1-6a; Matthew 25:31-46

A NOTE FROM THE CHURCH COUNCIL CHAIR AND REOPENING TASK FORCE:

Like everyone else, we are concerned about the rising rates of COVID infections in our area. As a result, we are urging that everyone join us for worship on Facebook rather than coming into the sanctuary for worship services. In addition, it is recommended that in-person meetings be limited in both frequency and the number of attendees to as few as possible. We are hoping that the vaccines will enable us to return to a "new normal" in 2021!

Len Finke, Chair, Church Council

The Reopening Task Force: Dave Caneen, Patty Chartrand, Jackie Krahforst, Herb Lamb, Colleen Rumsey, Deb Samuel, Sundar Samuel, Jean Sheviak, Amber Telford, Amanda Trainor

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Advent and Christmas at FUMCEG

Advent services will be live streamed at 9:30 am each of the Sundays of Advent, November 29, December 6, December 13, and December 20. During each service the Advent candles will be lighted by church families.

On **December 5** the **Blue Christmas tree** will be in the church entryway rather than in the sanctuary as previously announced. Stars and markers will be available from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm for those who wish to come and sign a star to hang on the tree in memory of loved ones or in recognition of other losses. Please wear a mask when you come. We are asking that only one person at a time be in the entryway. We invite you to visit the outdoor chapel if you would like some quiet time after hanging your star.



December 20 is our annual "Cookies and Carols" program of Christmas music and readings is being recorded this year and will be added to the church Facebook page at 3:00 pm on December 20. The recording will be available to enjoy throughout the Christmas season.

December 24 join us for a drive by living Nativity illuminated by luminaries. This will be presented by the Sunday School and youth of the church in the church parking lot from 3:30 pm to 5:00 pm.

The **Christmas Eve candlelight and Communion service** will be live streamed beginning at 7:00 pm on the church Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/FUMCEG/>. Only those people involved with the production and presentation of the live stream service will be physically in the church. There will be no in-person attendance.

SUNDAY SCHOOL

Sunday School will be going virtual for the month of December. Since COVID-19 cases are climbing and our families might be traveling or having visitors for the holidays, the Church wants to make sure we are keeping everyone's health a priority this Christmas season. We will follow the same format we have been following in person online. We will start with a lesson, followed by Youth Group. Zoom links will be sent out via e-mail.



We are looking for donations and volunteers for our live Nativity on Christmas Eve. The living nativity will be in lieu of the family Christmas Eve service since it can take place outside and we will easily be able to social distance from one another. The live nativity will feature the holy family, shepherds, an angel, the innkeeper and pre-recorded music from our choir. We will be lighting up the church grounds in luminaries and festive decorations. We also will be displaying a tree that anyone can add the name of someone they would like to send a prayer to and have a wrapped book for children to take home. In terms of donations, we will need empty sauce or mason jars and tea light candles for luminaries. We are also in search of volunteers to act, set up, assist with logistics and clean up. Please contact me if you are interested. Any donations of tea lights or containers can be left outside of the church near the TSL entrance.

Confirmation will still be happening this year (via zoom for now). The books have been ordered, as soon as they come in I will be contacting all families who emailed me that they were interested in order to coordinate getting the materials out.

God Bless and Merry Christmas, Amanda Trainor
(518) 368-5724 egchristianedfumc@gmail.com

YOUTH GROUP

Youth Group is going virtual for December. With numbers climbing, our number one priority is safety. I have enjoyed the few Friday Night Alive Worship services together and mission projects. We will continue to do them virtually. I am excited for the projects I have planned for December. This month we are focusing on our church in youth ministry, mission projects for each other. Sometimes we spend so much time on common missions we forget about our neighbors right next door.



Please look out for zoom links on Friday, December 4 and December 18 for Friday Night Alive.

There is a Bingo Board for things we can do for our neighbors. On December 6, 2020 from 10:30 am -11:00 am I will have a curbside pick up a Kindness BINGO Board and supplies for all items you may need to bring kindness to our neighbors. Complete the Kindness Bingo Board and send a picture of it completed to youthleaderamber@gmail.com. (If your unavailable for curbside pick up, please let me know so I can drop it off to you, weather permitting on December 6). BINGO Boards are due by December 31.

Attention Youth, and Church Goers / Members / All my Church Peeps!

Extra Special Project!! This includes all in the Church! I know I've missed all church friendly faces and feel disconnected at times. I would like to set up prayer partners in church .. Prayer partners are like pen pals. I will match a youth up with a participating adult, they can write letters to each other encouraging God's Love, praying for each other, send cards etc.

Please send a picture (optional, but it will be a nice way to pray) of yourself with your address that receives mail(yes we might already have your address but this will make sure we have the up to date address). I will coordinate partners. All pictures with addresses can be sent by email @ youthleaderamber@gmail.com or dropped off in my mailbox in the office.

If you would like to keep your address private, please note that as well. I will collect the letters and mail them to you. I am looking for everyone in church to be a part of this prayer partner. If you would like to participate please have all information to me by December 13. Let's stay connected.

Blessings, Amber Telford

UNITED METHODIST WOMEN

The United Methodist women are going to have a Christmas Party on December 7 at 6:30 pm in the Choir Room. We are going to have Christmas music and games. Also our cookie exchange. Come and enjoy our fun!



FINANCE COMMITTEE UPDATE – DECEMBER 2020

Thank you for your participation in our Financial Commitment Campaign for 2020. We hope the messages you heard show you how much your gifts mean to our church and the ministries it supports. As I mentioned when I spoke on Sunday morning in November, we face difficult times ahead. We don't know exactly how long life will continue as it is apart. And as you can imagine, not having a regular worship service has had an impact on our finances. Nevertheless, so many of our members and friends have continued their giving to our church even though they aren't here in person. We have also seen our online giving grow during this time. Thank you all so much for the continued giving. I know that many people are struggling financially and that your continued giving is so encouraging. If you haven't returned your pledge card yet, it's not too late. I urge you to consider making a pledge to support our church next year.

The Finance Committee continues to work on the 2021 Church Budget. We hope to present a budget at the December Church Council meeting. We will need to continue to monitor the church's finances throughout the upcoming year and adjust, depending on when we are able to resume our typical Sunday morning worship services. Please pray for the Finance Committee as we work on this difficult task.

Again, thank you all for your continued support of our church. May you and your families enjoy a blessed holiday season. Merry Christmas!

Colleen Rumsey
Chair, Finance Committee

MISSIONS

The Missions Ministry would like to thank Justin Naef and Gary Klee for heading up our recently completed **Flood Bucket Project**. Fifteen buckets were filled with cleaning supplies for victims of hurricanes and other natural disasters. We also thank Carrie Larson, Robert Thomsen and John Schmidt for helping to fill the buckets as well as everyone who donated so generously to make this project possible.



THREE KINGS CELEBRATION NEEDS YOUR SUPPORT

For several years now, our church has joined forces with The Church of the Covenant in Averill Park, St. Paul's in Castleton, and The Delmar United Methodist Church in support of Iglesia Cristiana Emmanuel (Emmanuel Faith Community), a ministry that reaches out to the Hispanic/Latino population of the Capital Area. Pastor Mariana Rodriguez has asked if we would consider once again donating new and gently used toys for children up to 12 years of age for their Three Kings Celebration, in January. If you are willing and able to help make a child's Christmas season a little brighter this year, there will be a box marked for donations of toys, books, stuffed animals, make-up, and games in the church hallway near the office. Gift cards from Wal-Mart in ten- or twenty-dollar denominations would also be appreciated for the older children. (Please turn in gift cards directly to the office, or to John Schmidt for safekeeping). **Please do not wrap or tag the toys.** Thank you for your assistance.



iFeliz Navidad!

Missions & Social Responsibility Ministry

Holiday Giving

The Missions Ministry would like to suggest using a Reverse Advent Calendar like this one for your consideration this holiday season. Beginning on December 1, set aside a food item which could be donated to one of our local food pantries, either CoNSERNS-U in Rensselaer or The Anchor in Castleton just before Christmas. Imagine how thrilled those in need will be with a box full of nutritious food thanks to your generosity! If you need assistance delivering, contact John Schmidt at 518-477-6736. Thanks and Merry Christmas!



December



HOLIDAY ECO-TIPS

Reduce, reuse, recycle and rejoice during the holidays by following these [tips for caring for our common home](#).

Remember to save your batteries and Styrofoam for our next recycling event on January 3rd. Please discard corroded batteries and Styrofoam containers used for food or drink. Please bring only Styrofoam that is clean and remove tape and staples.

JOSEPH'S HOUSE AND SHELTER

Can you help provide lunch for a homeless person living on the street? While the church kitchen is closed due to COVID-19, it is difficult for us to provide dinner for the 80 people sheltered at Joseph's House during the winter season. So, we are supporting Joseph's House by preparing lunches for their outreach program. Outreach staff drive a van stocked with water, sandwiches, blankets, clothing and personal supplies to people staying outside in and around Troy. Each Monday, we are in need of a volunteer to prepare and deliver 17 sandwiches, along with vegetables or potato chips and a dessert. Assistance with deliveries is available if needed and you can be reimbursed for purchased food. If you can help with this ministry on a given Monday, please contact Kevin Conley for more details (e.kevin.conley@gmail.com, 518-253-4907).

CROP WALK UPDATE

Twenty-one people from our church and Emmanuel Reformed Church of Castleton participated in the 2020 Castleton Crop Walk this October. Together we raised \$4,471!

COMMUNITY SOLAR

By enrolling in community solar to supply electricity for the church building, the church has saved \$231 in the first six months. More important than the money we saved, our transition to solar power has forestalled the output of 8900 pounds carbon dioxide, equivalent to the amount of carbon dioxide that 186 trees would remove in one year! That is just for the church building. We also enrolled the parsonage in community solar and that offset the equivalent of 27 trees.

But our environmental impact will not stop there. Six families have signed up for community solar using the [church link](#). The first five will start receiving solar credits by next month and the latest enrollee will start receiving credits by March. Each will be replacing energy largely generated from petroleum with clean solar energy. These six join at least eight other church families who have installed solar panels or enrolled in community solar previously.

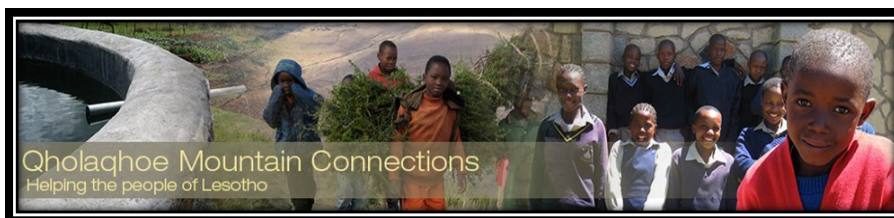
Each of the first ten families who enroll in community solar using the [church link](#) will receive a \$50 incentive. The church will also receive a \$50 incentive for each of the first ten enrollments, and if we successfully enroll ten families, the church will receive an additional \$500 incentive. Please contact Kevin (518.253.4907, e.kevin.conley@gmail.com) if you have questions or need assistance with enrollment.

QHOLAGHOE MOUNTAIN CONNECTIONS

The following is an excerpt from Lynn Minderman's November update. Please visit the QMC website www.qmconnect.org for more information or to make a donation. Donations may also be made through on-line giving at the church website www.fumceg.org

Dear Donors and Sponsors,

At the time of our last work trip in March, the COVID 19 health pandemic had fully entered Lesotho. Although board members can no longer travel, we are relying on and appreciative of the help from our partners and friends in Qholaghoe, which in spite of the extreme setbacks and



difficulties, is working well. When the virus entered, Lesotho was unable to handle the health crisis as hospitals, clinics, medical doctors and nurses are limited in number and equipment. Virus cases have been centered in the capital, Maseru; there have been

no cases in Qholaghoe or in the province of Butha-Buthe. No roads, electricity or running water in extremely rural Qholaghoe does provide social distancing.

It is the never-ending reverberations of this health pandemic that has and is affecting the lives of people in Qholaghoe. South Africa, surrounding Lesotho, has the highest virus rates in sub-Saharan Africa. As SA is the leading employer of Basotho people, many fathers and mothers in Qholaghoe have lost their jobs and have been forced to return home. The World Food Program estimates that 80,000 Basotho are on the verge of starving. One of our QHS scholarship students, Moleihi, wrote in a letter to her sponsor: "Some students survive by eating at school, so as schools are closed it means they have nothing to eat."

School closed in early March and remained closed for six months. Classes have now resumed for two grades, Form C and E, in order to prepare students for national exams. Principals and the Teachers Union have requested that schools reopen for all students on November 4.

It is a difficult time around the world and the severity of our world-wide health pandemic is often incomprehensible. **Our work in Qholaghoe helping children receive an education has been our goal for over twelve years, and we are determined that even now when our energy and financial help is needed for our own families and neighborhoods, we have decided to continue.**

Lynn Minderman

"GIVING TUESDAY", A GLOBAL MOVEMENT

December 1 is **Giving Tuesday**. Established in 2012 as a response to commercialization and consumerism in the post-Thanksgiving season, it always falls five days after Thanksgiving. December 1 is also World AIDS Day. The United Methodist Board of Church and Society would cheer for you when you support their wide-ranging work on Giving Tuesday. Go to <https://www.umcjustice.org/> to do so. You can support the UM Global AIDS Fund, Advance "982345, through Church and Society. Want to support AIDS related work locally? How about the Albany Damien Center? You can donate at <http://www.albanydamiencenter.org/donate.html>.