



# The Gargoyle

## The Pastor's Musings

By Reverend Lee Ireland

Advent Greetings to you all!

*Isaiah 9:2-6 "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. ...*

We're here! In that favorite time of year for so many – as we go into Advent and the holiday season. I am looking forward to all the ways we can create the special services this season, guided by the 4 Advent Candles of "Hope, Peace, Joy and Love." The sanctuary is decorated and will come alive this next Sunday morning, **December 3, the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent**, as we receive all the Grammies Jammies and move into our Communion Service. The sanctuary will really come alive at 4 PM as we welcome the Shoreline Ringers to offer their Holiday Concert. Come and experience the wonder of the music they can create with all the various bells and accessories.

**On Dec 10**, we will be coming together for a simpler 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent Worship Service.

**On Dec 17**, we hope you can join us and hear the Musical Gift that the Senior Choir has been rehearsing for months, "The Winter Rose" Cantata.

**Then on Dec 24**, we will gather at **10 am** for the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Advent Worship Service. I know many of you will be traveling to be with your families, but we invite you to join us for the traditional annual Candlelight Christmas Service at 7 pm.

We will have many moments of joy and thanksgiving throughout the month, and then close on the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Christmas on **Dec 31**, New Year's Eve, at 10 am This will be my closing Worship Service as I move into Retirement. It's amazing to me to be writing this closing Pastor's Newsletter article and then move into my new life on New Year's Day. What an amazing experience! For all of you who've known that joy, I look forward to joining the club!

(continued pg. 2)



## In This Issue

Stewardship.....	3
Deacons.....	5
Women's Fellowship.....	6
Missions.....	7
Community Meals.....	7
Historian's Notes.....	8
Christian Education.....	9
Worship Watch.....	18
Calendar.....	19

## Highlights

Birthdays.....	2
Holiday Music Recital...	3
Common Ground.....	6
Retirement Party.....	9
Church Events.....	10
Community Events....	11
Puzzle.....	15
SNEC.....	16 & 17
UCC.....	12 & 13



Groton  
Congregational  
Church

---



**SUE BLAISDELL**

**ANJA BROOKS**

**PETER CHAPPELL**

**RENEE FOY**

**BRETT  
GULLICKSON**

**JAMES KERRIGAN**

**WAYNE SCHAFER**

**HAZEL SHEPHERD**

**PAUL SHINN**

**BETTE THOMSON**

**ANNE VENDITTI**

**JILL WILSON**

## The Pastor's Musings-continued

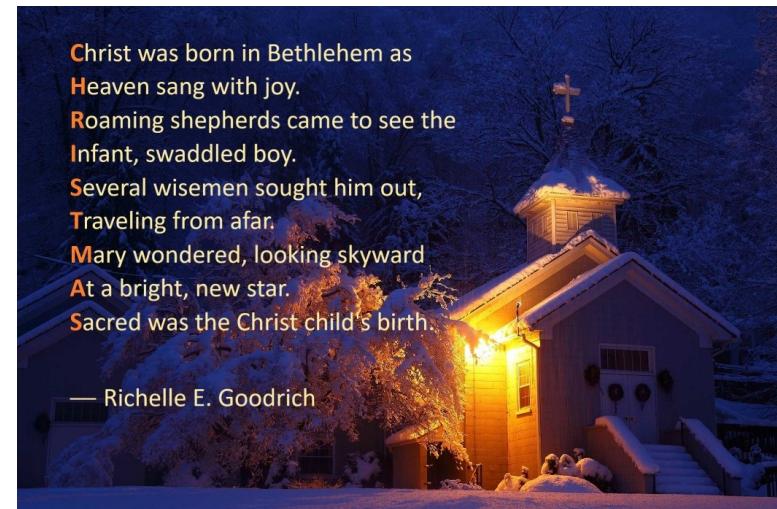
By Reverend Lee Ireland

One of the interesting twists of my life is that with all the different places in which I've lived, I started my ministerial journey as a student pastor at the Niantic Community Church in 1990 where I was trained through many opportunities that launched me into the Interim Ministry work that I've done all these 33 years. I find it almost funny, that I've come full circle back to Niantic and will be worshipping with them again and having the joy of joining their handbell choir. I know Sue Stottlemeyer would like me to stay here and play, but I know I need to honor the pastoral transition and allow the next pastor the joy of leading this congregation and maybe joining the choir as well. I thank you all for the invitation and opportunity to walk with you these past 3.5 years and I wish you well as you move into the future with someone who I hope can help you move into the media technological ways of worshipping as well as bringing more recent developments in ministry that I've not had the chance to learn. May you sense God's leading each day as we go forward and move into the new ways to love and serve as Jesus' disciple.

God's peace and blessings be with you always,

Rev. Lee A. Ireland

revlee4@gmail.com



## Stewardship

By Doris Pulaski

Help us decorate the Church's Christmas tree this year!

If you would like to commemorate or honor friends or family members this Christmas and make a small donation to the church at the same time, we have silver, gold, and blue 5" star ornaments waiting for you!



Poinsettia Donation Envelopes for this fund raiser may be found in your pew pocket or on the table in the passthrough to Dutton Hall.

On the label on a Poinsettia envelope, tell us the name of the person you want to honor, indicate which color star you would like, and how much you are donating. Then place your donation in the envelope and put the envelope in the collection plate or give your envelope to either Sue Stottlemeyer or Doris Pulaski.

Your star with your honoree's name on it will be hung on the Christmas tree in the church. After Christmas, your star will be returned to you.



**Groton  
Congregational  
Church**

*Sanctuary  
Flowers*



Honor that special person or occasion with a floral donation to the Sanctuary. Contact the church office 860-445-7409 .

## Holiday Music Recital

By Janice Kimball



The "Holiday Music Plus" piano recital on Saturday, December 16<sup>th</sup>, at 3 PM in beautiful Dutton Hall! Celebrate the diverse holidays of this season with developing musicians of all ages, as they share a variety of styles and origins of musical expression. As always, everyone is invited free of charge to the performance, and to meet and greet our performers with family-friendly goodies after the music. Hope to see you there!

Janice Kimball, music instructor



**Groton Congregational Church  
Christmas Season Events**

**December 3rd**  
Advent Worship Service 10am  
Shoreline Ringers FREE Concert 4pm



**December 10th**  
Advent Worship Service 10am

**December 16th**  
Holiday Music Recital 3pm

**December 17th**  
Advent Worship Service &  
“Winter Rose” Cantata 10am

**December 20th**  
A Blue Christmas Service 7pm

**December 24th**  
Christmas Eve Worship Service 10am  
&  
Candlelight Christmas Eve Service 7pm



**162 Monument St., Groton, CT**

## Deacons

By Chuck Barnum

### Peace on Earth



Three words – Peace on Earth -- just three words, but they convey and mean so much. Three men, celebrating an American tradition, walking down a street in a city where violence is literally unheard of, enjoying the companionship of their friendship going back many years. Shot! Luckily, they have survived. The time for Peace on Earth and Good Will Toward Men is here. Is now. What happened to their “Peace on Earth”?

Have you read “Lessons in Chemistry” by Bonnie Garmus? Peace on Earth is, again, where?

Our church is returning to the arduous task of the Search and Call process. With the retirement of Rev Lee Ireland on December 31 approaching, let us celebrate her time and talents leading us and her many years dedicated to her call. May we, the Groton Congregational Church, laugh and cry in celebrating Rev Ireland’s time and dedication with us during these last three plus years. And then, as we set forward in the Search and Call process, walking and working side by side with God, move forward - with Peace on Earth.

It is with joyous hearts your Board of Deacons wishes each and every one of you at the Groton Congregational Church and everyone throughout the land Peace on Earth and Good Will Toward Men not only during this joyous season, but every day of the year!

Peace to all of you –



At the **7pm Candlelight Christmas Eve Service** a separate offering will be taken for Veterans of the Cross. This is a fund for retired ministers There are many who have given their lives to help keep Jesus' story alive. We hope you will remember their sacrifice this Christmas.

## Common Ground

By Kevin Measimer



Whether you are talking about religious, political, or other issues, communication starting with common ground is the way to go. Immediate condemnation really gets you nowhere. It doesn't win minds and hearts. It only feeds your own ego. "A noisy gong ... a clanging cymbal" (St Paul/Saul of Tarsus 1 Corinthians 13:1)

<<----->>

"To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some." - 1 Corinthians 9:20-22

## Women's Fellowship

By Sally Turner

The Holiday Bazaar was spectacular! So many beautiful choices of gorgeous baskets, silent auction items, baked items etc. Thank you especially to all the talented crafters and many others who did the detail work we certainly thank those that contributed or purchased items. It was a great day.



Women's Fellowship is looking ahead to spring. We will be planning the Annual Corned Beef Dinner in March & a spring yard sale in May. Dates will be announced.

Our next meeting will be a Christmas Brunch on **December 13th** at 10am followed by a Yankee swap and a short business meeting.

## Community Meals

By Janice Kimball



A special thanks to all our cooks and hosts, with all our sponsors and donors, that worked so hard on Saturday, November 18<sup>th</sup>, to present to our community an amazing Thanksgiving feast, sparing no expense of time or resource! We served 48 people that week, evidently a new record for our Dutton Hall meals in 2023, including the food brought to transportation-restricted members and friends.

What's next? Due to the increased activities around the church in December, we may not be as elaborate during the Advent-Christmas season. However, we will celebrate the story of our Savior Jesus' birth through our candy-cane legend around the tables on **December 23** and feast on roast pork that Saturday. Watch for updates of our schedule in the January GARGOYLE and GOD BLESS YOU ALL FOR YOUR SUPPORT OF THIS MINISTRY!!!

## Missions

Thanks to all for their amazing generosity!!! This has been another great year for Adopt a Family and Grammies Jammies. These items will be blessed on Sunday, December 3 and then distributed. It's a wonderful feeling to put a smile on so many peoples faces during the holidays.

Also, thank you for all the donations for the holiday food bank at Groton Human Services. We have dropped off over 60 items.



We appreciate Phyllis Meyer for helping to make Grammies Jammies a success. 😊

Happy Holidays  
Your Missions Committee  
Anne, Beth, Jill and Penny

## Historian's Notes

By Chuck Barnum

History – As I was looking into our history, I found the following. Enjoy!!

December 14, 1955

The Gargoyles on our Church Tower seem to smile alittle at Christmas. Though the winters' cold gives them icicle tusks so that they look like eager walruses, Christmas is a good time to them. You see, gargoyles are creatures of magic. They were born at a cross-roads in medieval times, where superstition and love of fun intersected. To this day, all gargoyles, in every country, love the fun and mystery of Christmas. It is their native environment.

We hope the Gargoyles on our Tower have outgrown the superstitions of their ancestors, to an appreciation of the true mystery of Christmas, but in outgrowing the superstitions, we hope they have not outgrown the love of fun.

For ere this Christmas season closes, we expect that joyous carols and voices of people at play under the gargoyles' shadows will so mingle with the deep religious mystery of Christmas, that the gargoyle on Christmas morn will be caroling to one another, something like Phillips Brooks' "Christmas Carol", and the strains will be caught up in our hearts. For of such is Christmas composed,

<p>The earth has grown old with its burden of care, But at Christmas it always is young, The heart of the jewel burns lustrous and fair And its soul full of music bursts forth on the air When the song of the angels is sung,</p> <p>It is coming, Old Earth, it is coming tonight! On the snowflakes that cover thy sod. The feet of the Christ-child fall gentle and white, And the voice of the Christ-child tells out with delight That mankind are the Children of God,</p>	<p>On the sad and the lonely, the wretched and poor, The voice of the Christ-child shall fall; And to every blind wanderer open the door Of Hope that he dared not to dream of before, With a sunshine and welcome for all.</p> <p>The feet of the humblest may walk in the field Where the feet of the Holiest trod, This, then, is the marvel to mortals revealed When the silvery trumpet.: of Christmas have pealed, That mankind are the children of God.</p>
--	--

The Gargoyle wishes you "A Christmas merry in the warmth of your Father's care".

## Christian Education

By Janice Kimball, pro tem superintendent



At the November meeting of the Church Council, the administrative burdens of the church now greater upon the Boards of Deacons and Trustees because of the impending need to hire a new interim pastor in 2024, it became clear to me that the concerns raised about Christian Education opportunities at Groton Congregational Church had to take a back seat for the near future. Therefore, I resigned as pro tem superintendent to allow the Council to focus on more immediate concerns.

Youth Director, Rachel Measimer-Candee, expressed a need to reduce the Youth Group meetings to once a month, and the Deacons are giving supervision to child care during worship.

Janice Kimball, former superintendent pro tem

## Retirement Gathering

By Anne Campbell

Happy Retirement!!

Please join in celebrating Rev. Lee Ireland's ministry with us at Groton Congregational Church and wish her well on her retirement. A reception in her honor will be held, Sunday, **December 31st in** Dutton Hall following the Sunday service.

*May looking back  
over your ministry  
bring satisfaction  
for a job well done.*

*May looking forward  
to retirement  
bring excitement  
for what lies ahead.*

*God Bless Your Tomorrow!*

## Church Events

**Wonder and Joy**  
A Holiday Handbell Concert By  
**SHORELINE RINGERS**

**Groton Congregational Church**  
December 3, 2023 - 4:00PM  
162 Monument Street  
Groton, CT 06340  
Open To The Public - Free Will Offering

Shoreline Ringers is a community handbell ensemble made up of musicians from all over the state of Connecticut. The group has performed at Carnegie Hall, with Scott Hanev and the "Joy for the Kids Concert" sponsored by WFSB Channel 3 in Hartford, with the United States Coast Guard Band, and been featured guest performers at the Boston Handbell Festival in 2008, 2014 and 2019, and at the Handbell Musicians of America National Seminar in 2021.  
\*\*With the support of the CT Department of Economic and Community Development\*\*

For more information, please refer to the Shoreline Ringers website at [www.shorelineringers.org](http://www.shorelineringers.org)

Come, join the Shoreline Ringers as they present their latest concert program: Wonder and Joy. The program will consist of a variety of holiday favorites. Dec 3 4pm.

**Holiday Music Plus**  
FREE Concert  
Musicians of All Ages Present an Afternoon of Traditional Christmas Songs and More

December 16th  
3pm  
Dutton Hall

Light Refreshments to Follow

**Groton Congregational Church**  
162 Monument St., Groton, CT

### YOU ARE INVITED....

To attend our "**HOLIDAY MUSIC PLUS**," recital of children, youth, and adults on Saturday, **December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2023 at 3 PM**

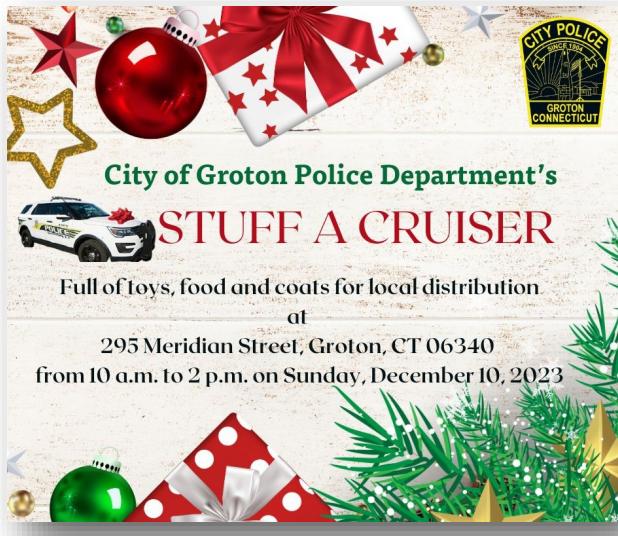


**The "Winter Rose" Cantata** has been moved to December 17<sup>th</sup> during the Third Sunday of Advent Worship Service.



Help us decorate the Church's Christmas tree this year!

## Community Events





## In Place

By Vince Amlin



*Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers. - Romans 13:11 (NRSV)*

The alarm rang. 3am. Karen and I bundled into the clothes we'd set out the night before. No time to waste.

We made our way across town, met up with the group, and headed into the mountains. As the vans got close to our destination, they slowed to a crawl, their lights as low as safely possible. Then twenty of us slipped out into the night, the crunch of snow under our boots the only sound.

We took our places in the park service trailer. No heat. Absolute darkness. No reason to raise the binoculars around our necks.

Half an hour later, people started leaning into their friends, asking, “Is that one?”

“No, I think it’s just a sage bush.”

But in another 15 minutes we could see tiny black bundles, tracing their way across the slightly-less-black ground.

Finally, as the sun lit the plain, we were treated to one of the most incredible spectacles in the natural world: the mating ritual of the Greater Sage Grouse. Dozens of birds strutting through the snow, their tails each a fan of brown spikes, their fluffy white chests puffed out, two yellow air sacs poking through.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Vince Amlin is co-pastor of Bethany UCC, Chicago, and co-planter of Gilead Church Chicago, forming now.

## Praying to the Saint of Tragedy

By Rev. Dr. Sarah Lund



I don't know if there is an official saint of tragedy. I missed the day in Sunday school when they taught us about all the saints of the church. From what I can tell, there seems to be bits of tragedy woven into all the saints' stories: Bridgid was born enslaved, Teresia suffered migraines, and Dymphna was depressed. I find myself wandering over to the aisle of any store that sells votive candles with images of saints. I am drawn to the face of God I see decorating the glass candle container, almost as if the saint depicted there is whispering my name, inviting me to be a light in the world.

I don't know what it is about a candle, but something about its flickering flame gives me hope, even if I am only borrowing hope for an hour or two. Many candles burn in our world today. As the wax from the candles melts and the wicks burn down, I wonder: are we any closer to peace?

Even though prayer alone may not do much good in the world, it does seem to play a role. Just as a pumpkin pie needs both the crust and the filling, we need prayer and action. Perhaps prayer is the pie crust, the dependable container to hold all that is within. And action is the pie filling, giving us something to do, to be, to taste, to see, to know who we are in a world filled with unending tragedies.



Many people this season will light candles. Others will eat pie. Some will pray. May it be that all God's children find ways to act that supports lasting peace in the world. The world needs the light of hope to shine, communion to be shared, hearts to unfold with prayer, and for lives to be guided by peace. These are simple things: a candle, pie, prayer, and peace.

What if we created altars in our churches and homes where we continually held vigil to the Saint of Tragedy? How might we encourage the naming of our collective trauma, releasing it from our bodies/minds/spirits, and transforming pain into power through rituals of communal meaning-making? How might this way of coming together in community strengthen us in the intergenerational work of creating a more just world for all? Can we pray, make pie, eat pie, and work for peace together? One of the greatest tragedies is that we have forgotten God's original blessing for Creation, or maybe we've lost track of God's blessing in the shadows of greed, war, and guns. It is time to put down our guns and turn together toward divine light, to the saints, with prayer on our lips and pie on our plates, and hearts ready to do the work of justice. Church, this is a season of blessings. Let us take our fill and then share it with the world.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Rev. Dr. Sarah Lund is the Minister of Disabilities and Mental Health Justice for the United Church of Christ.

## Tell Me a Story

By Rev. Deborah Rundlett

A Maskil of Asaph.

Give ear, O my people, to my teaching;  
 incline your ears to the words of my mouth.  
 I will open my mouth in a parable;  
 I will utter dark sayings from of old,  
 things that we have heard and known,  
 that our ancestors have told us.  
 We will not hide them from their children;  
 we will tell to the coming generation  
 the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might,  
 and the wonders that he has done.

He established a decree in Jacob,  
 and appointed a law in Israel,  
 which he commanded our ancestors  
 to teach to their children;  
 that the next generation might know them,  
 the children yet unborn,  
 and rise up and tell them to their children,  
 so that they should set their hope in God,  
 and not forget the works of God,  
 but keep his commandments;

Psalm 78:1-7 (NRSV)

### Reflection: Tell me a story!

#### **God made man and woman, because God loves stories. —Hebrew Midrash**

Tell me a story! When our daughter Elizabeth was little, this request often came at bedtime. But it also came at the dinner table and while on long drives. To this day, telling stories is one of our favorite family activities.

We tell of how we long awaited and anticipated her birth. We share in detail the day she was born (nine days late on my birthday) when Drs. Jose and Maria, father and daughter, fought over who got to deliver her. The father won! We describe the snowstorm that blanketed New York and Connecticut on the weekend of her baptism. We report how people came from near and far, in spite of the snow, to celebrate her birth and participate in her baptism. We talk about God's call to make the journey our home, a journey that has taken us from Connecticut and New York to Pittsburgh, San Diego, Ohio, Chicago, and now home.

Not only does Elizabeth love to hear the stories of her life, but those of her parents, her grandparents, her aunts and uncles and cousins. For in the telling, she knows that she belongs. She knows she is loved and a part of something greater than herself.

But as precious as those stories are, they cannot be fully understood apart from knowing the story of God's love for her and for all creation. As John the Baptist reminds us: "The is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life." (John 3:16, The Message).

This is the story that informs her—and our—story. It is the story that gives her life meaning and purpose and direction. This is the story that helps her make sense of life's complexity and challenge. By this story, she knows that her core identity rests in Christ alone. She knows that as she walks in his path her character will reflect the fruit of the Spirit.

As psychologist Daniel Siegel notes, the "sharing of stories reflects the central importance of narratives in creating coherence in human life and connecting our minds to each other. Stories are passed from one generation to another and help keep the human soul alive." (The Developing Mind)

We are a storied people. As the old Hebrew midrash tells us: God made us because God loves stories. What are the stories that have shaped you and made you who you are today? What stories of scripture best inform your understanding of who you are in Christ? We need to share those stories with one another!



## Christmas Fun



B	C	P	I	S	C	E	P	G	Z	Z	T	N	Z	S
N	C	G	N	V	I	U	M	M	G	F	H	R	W	H
P	D	H	N	M	G	L	Y	M	A	F	Z	Y	E	E
D	E	W	R	H	B	M	E	A	A	J	E	I	E	
N	C	B	W	I	E	A	H	N	D	N	G	Z	L	P
C	O	S	S	Z	S	R	B	P	T	V	U	E	M	F
A	R	R	N	A	B	T	A	Y	J	N	E	E	R	H
N	A	S	V	O	N	E	M	L	J	O	I	N	L	A
D	T	M	H	F	W	T	T	A	D	E	S	G	T	Y
L	I	A	D	E	A	M	A	H	S	A	S	E	H	Y
E	O	R	F	O	P	M	A	C	L	S	N	U	P	T
M	N	Y	A	G	N	H	I	N	L	E	T	G	S	H
C	A	R	O	L	S	K	E	L	K	A	H	A	E	W
C	O	O	K	I	E	S	E	R	Y	D	U	E	R	L
X	R	U	D	O	L	P	H	Y	D	Q	N	S	M	D

Christmas Star  
Santa Claus  
Decoration  
Emmanuel  
Family  
Sheep  
Carols

Silent Night  
Baby Jesus  
Shepherd  
Advent  
Donkey  
Cookies  
Manger

Herald Angel  
Bethlehem  
Rudolph  
Candle  
Joseph  
Snowman  
Mary



## Connected Church-Moving Beyond Traditional Polity

By Rev. Dawn Adams

Autonomy, the strength of our congregational polity, may also be its weak leg. We hold dear the idea that while we are connected by covenant to the wider church that simultaneously no one can tell us what to do except ourselves. The downfall of this ruggedly individualistic perspective is that we are expending incredible amounts of energy replicating activities and services repeatedly, we are expecting every pastor in every setting to offer skills that may not be their gift or their interest, and we get so caught up in holding together that we have little time or energy to expend considering what might be. It leaves one wondering how we might lower the walls of autonomy in a way that benefits pastors, churches, ministry, and the world as a whole. Certainly, the idea of collaboration is not new. Sometimes though what is old can be adapted in a way that offers us something new. To this end, I have been pondering what planned continuous collaboration between congregations might look like.

In a landscape where there are more and more smaller congregations, where regular attendance is now defined as once every four to six weeks, where clergy are retiring and leaving the field at unprecedented rates, where finances are stretched to the limit, where church is needed more than ever in the world, and where people's schedules are tapped, we need to be more creative in what church might look like and how it might function.

Tonight, for example, in the church where I serve, there is prayer group. There will be between three and five people on a call, and we will be adding the voices of between 6 and 24 other people who have asked specifically for prayer today. This has been a wonderful program which intertwines outreach and spiritual practices in our community, but I can't help but wondering how many other churches are doing the same thing. How many of my clergy colleagues are taking yet another hour out of their week to host the same event with the same or similar numbers? And I wonder to myself, how many different activities, programs, and events are being replicated over and over in churches around the area? When I consider this, I find myself wondering how much creative juice might be harnessed and how much time might be found if we sought a different way to do things and moved away from our staunchly autonomous model.

I realize that many of our churches hold the ideal of autonomy voraciously and are deeply suspicious of any idea that encroaches on it and that the idea of "working together" is often either limited to one-off activities or is perceived as the start of a forced merger, but what if we could change that perception? What if we continued to expand our covenantal connections in ways that harvested energy, shared resources, and generated connectivity? What if by working together in new and perhaps more permanent ways, we focused on using our clergy's strengths rather than their weaknesses, saved costs, and were able to spread the gospel with more energy and enthusiasm? What if working together meant adding to what we had to offer, not reducing it?

There are currently several churches experimenting in this arena, but we need more, and we need to share what we are learning along the way. As financial pressures and pastoral needs grow, we need to be yet even more flexible and connective. Rev. Dr. Elizabeth "Liz" McGill has been doing some great work on this issue with the very small and micro-sized churches who are poised between closing and finding an alternative way of being together. The bigger churches don't feel the same pressures to consider this step and often already have multiple staff on which they share the load (Although they too might benefit from wider collaboration.).

I have been pondering how this might work for the rest of us: the mid-sized churches. The churches where the funds are getting tighter, the time is getting cut, and the work is more than the time or energy allows. The churches where we don't need less of anything, but more of everything to fill the needs.

For these churches, I wonder what it would look like if we took down our autonomous walls and shared resources in new ways. What if we built bridges to create collaborative PODS of churches? What if multiple pastors and congregations collaboratively worked together on an ongoing basis? How might we create a conference clearinghouse list of ways people might share and work together?

## Connected Church-Moving Beyond Traditional Polity

By Rev. Dawn Adams

It seems that as resources get tighter, we tend to focus more and more on the Sunday morning experience. I know in my setting, we have the Sunday service crowd, but there is a much larger peripheral group that attends and appreciates other programming. As the schedules, availability, and energy of our congregants is changing, we need to think more flexibly, not more rigidly.

Interestingly, adding programming and other aspects of church that can be used in multiple settings does not necessarily add to the overall workload. In fact, by sharing and incorporating other groups, we perhaps could generate a more conducive and hospitable atmosphere for participants; and, as an added bonus, this larger collaborative group can help build a wider louder message about God's expansive love in the region.

A perfect example of potential collaboration that would take little or no more energy to accomplish might be the half-day Leadership Retreat that I'm planning for my church this weekend. Currently, there are eight scheduled attendees, but what if other churches were invited that we were in regular relationship with? On occasion, some of us think of inviting others but usually we're so busy getting the work done, we forget to share outside our system. If we were working together on a more regular basis, sharing such opportunities would happen as a natural by-product.

Now, many respond to such ideas by saying that the support for such programming and work should come from the laity; and this collaboration, by no means, excludes laity. In fact, their participation is more welcome than ever. However, in my experience, our laity is more exhausted than ever. They too are overextended. I think some are even avoiding church because they are afraid of what they might be asked to lead or take charge of. Church has become for them another place to be asked to be in charge of something, rather than the place for spiritual refuge that they are seeking.

With all of this in mind, several years ago, I began a collaborative experiment with Reverend Kathy Light at Elm Street Congregational in Southbridge, MA and Reverend Karen Fournier of the First Congregational Church of Oxford, MA. Both are UCC sister churches. We began a limited experiment of collaboration and have expanded each year since by coming together to plan Advent and Lent. Together we share in planning and creating worship and other activities during these liturgical seasons. We split the Bible study up, share in the creation of take-home pieces, and have even had digital music sharing between the congregations. It wouldn't take much to imagine an ongoing pulpit rotation or the sharing of other activities between the churches; perhaps even a shared Administrative Assistant who might have the blessing of one full-time job with benefits rather than three part-timers doing the same basic work in three separate locations. This year we even came together for one shared worship where everyone got to see one another. The congregants were delighted to see and feel that they were part of a wider church.

Now, there are some real challenges to taking this model to a full-time collaboration between multiple settings. In addition to the fear of lack of autonomy, there is also the dreaded financial conversation about compensation and the need for pastors of those congregations to come together in a way that often cannot be planned or dictated, or which may degrade when new pastors come into the mix. That said, it can also be exciting and fun.

Frankly, I'm not sure that any perfect model can be offered; however, it is possible to set forth a vision and open a wider conversation. This idea may have different iterations in different locations. The hope would be that we move from occasional experiment to a more covenantal, more permanent collaboration in PODS of churches; whereby, our clergy and our congregations might benefit from the added energy, a wider talent base, and ongoing support so that we might continue to practice and enact God's vision of care for one another and the world.

This article is a summary of my presentation at the PINNE Symposium that was written about in the October edition of Innovation Now. Personally, I would love to hear more from anyone who is already using a model similar to this in an ongoing way so that we might explore more about where the hiccups come in and where the blessings are. Please reach out to me so that we might get some coffee and chat. [pastordawnadams@gmail.com](mailto:pastordawnadams@gmail.com). Stay tuned for a future article in which we will consider the importance of imagination and flexibility in any innovation.

## Worship Watch

### December Worship Services

#### **First Sunday of Advent**

**December 3, 2023**  
“Keep Awake”

Isaiah 64:1-9      Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19  
Mark 13:24-37

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

#### **Second Sunday of Advent**

**December 10, 2023**  
“Prepare the Way”

Isaiah 40:1-11      Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13      2 Peter 3:8-15a      Mark 1:1-8

#### **Third Sunday of Advent**

**December 17, 2023**  
“The Cantata”

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11      Psalm 126      **or**      *Luke 1:46b-55*  
1 Thessalonians 5:16-24      John 1:6-8, 19-28

#### **Fourth Sunday of Advent**

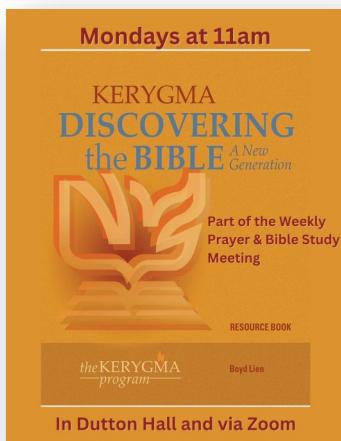
**December 24, 2023**  
“Nothing Will Be Impossible”

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16      Luke 1:46b-55      **or**      *Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26*  
Romans 16:25-27      Luke 1:26-38

#### **First Sunday after Christmas Day**

**December 31, 2023**  
“Led down paths not planned to take”

Isaiah 61:10-62:3      Psalm 148      Galatians 4:4-7      Luke 2:22-40



**Every Monday Morning** beginning at 11am.  
Come to Dutton Hall or join us via Zoom.

## December 2023



Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					1	2 Community Meals Noon to 1pm
3 <b>Advent</b> Worship 10am	4 Prayer & Bible Study 11am	5	6	7 Handbells 6:30pm Choir 7:30pm	8	9 Community Meals Noon to 1pm
10 <b>Advent</b> Worship 10am	11 Prayer & Bible Study 11am Deacons 5:30pm	12 <b>Trustees</b> <b>6pm</b>	13 <b>Women's Fellowship</b> <b>10am</b>	14 Handbells 6:30pm Choir 7:30pm	15	16 Community Meals Noon to 1pm
17 <b>Advent</b> Worship & Cantata 10am	18 Prayer & Bible Study 11am	19	20 <b>Blue Christmas</b> <b>7pm</b>	21 Handbells 6:30pm Choir 7:30pm	22	23 Community Meals Noon to 1pm
24 <b>Christmas Eve</b> Worship 10am & Candlelight- Service 7pm	25 <b>Office Closed</b>	26 <b>Office Closed</b>	27	28 Handbells 6:30pm Choir 7:30pm	29	30 Community Meals Noon to 1pm
31 Worship 10am						



### **Our Vision**

To continue our three-hundred year tradition of spiritual presence and service to the community

To live and grow in the spirit of Jesus Christ

To share our time, talents and resources in support of community and other missions, through which Jesus Christ might be made known to others

To welcome into the Groton Congregational Church family all those who share our love of Jesus Christ and our mission of community service.

To continue a tradition of caring, comfort and support for all those within the Groton Congregational Church family.



162 Monument Street  
Groton, CT 06340  
860-445-7409  
[www.grotonucc.org](http://www.grotonucc.org)  
[office@grotoncongregational.org](mailto:office@grotoncongregational.org)

**Bring Your Family to Our Family.  
We are Here to Celebrate Jesus Christ with You.**

Located near historic Fort Griswold, by the banks of the Thames River, Groton Congregational Church, an Open & Affirming Church, welcomes you with open hearts, minds, and arms. We offer a warm and progressive environment for worshippers from all walks of life. Our motto is; *No matter who you are or where you are Life's Journey you are always welcome here.*

If you want to know the love of God and the wonderful plans God has in store for you, come and celebrate the love of Jesus with us through the spoken word and the joy of music.

**Sunday Worship begins at 10am.  
Stay for After Worship Coffee Hour**



PLEASE  
PLACE  
STAMP  
HERE

Mailing Address Line 1  
Mailing Address Line 2  
Mailing Address Line 3  
Mailing Address Line 4  
Mailing Address Line 5