Pastor’s Notes in the Key of D – Christmas on the Down Low

One of the biblical texts we often hear in December is the song Mary offers when she finds out she is pregnant with Jesus. She sings:

“(God) has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.”

There’s not a lot of nuance in these lyrics. The one she carries in her womb, this “Holy infant, tender and mild,” will one day grow up to proclaim that when you care for the least of these - the hungry, the sick, the outcast, the imprisoned, the hopeless – it’s as if you’re caring for God.

I love Christmas, with all the carols, the lights, the cookies, and the stories that surround it. And this year, I find myself needing these rituals more than usual. But more than these, I love the intensity and world-turning power of passages like Mary’s song, which point toward this One who will lift the lowly and fill the hungry. It is not at all a “meek and mild” message; in fact, I have often worried how that line “the powerful will be brought down and the rich sent away empty” might apply to me. But if fear is my take-away from this song, then I am missing the point.

In a famous exchange with a young Anakin Skywalker (who will later become Darth Vader) Yoda says, “Fear is the path to the dark side. Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering. I sense much fear in you.”

Fear destroys our ability to be in true community with one another. It also destroys our ability to see the deeper message of Christmas. Jesus comes to us not to fill up the space under our trees with wrapped boxes, but to open our hearts to the humble gifts of love and grace, the gifts that really matter. The truth is, the greatest work of God rarely takes place in the halls of power. Moses was born to a Hebrew slave. Jesus was born in a barn, surrounded by peasants. Moses grew to lead a great nation. Jesus grew to break the chains of injustice and redefine how humans might relate to one another, and to God.

In these politically, socially, and pandemically challenging times, we all could use a sign that dispels our fear. Somebody once said, “If you have not seen God, perhaps you haven’t looked low enough.” As our congre-
gation looks for God this season, even as we may be physically apart, may we grow in our ability to be comfortable in the ambiguity of all that surrounds us. That’s far from easy, I know. But God’s promise in Jesus is that no matter what happens we will not be left alone.

Into the darkest of days, into the bitterness and divisiveness of our public sphere, into the fear that seems all around us, a promise is spoken: a child will come, whose name is Emmanuel, God-with-us.

I know it might not seem like much, but what God wants us to see is this: the solution to the world’s deepest longings and dreams is already here. This season, take the time to look around you – to really see the people who are before you – and I promise that you will see the hope of the world reflected in the faces and places where love is dared.

In faith and hope,

Dan

KEN’S KORNER
submitted by Ken Moore, moderator

Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved. Psalm 80:3

This Advent will surely be different at our church this year because of the pandemic. Perhaps God will come to us in fresh new ways in 2020.

In Psalm 80, the psalmist keeps expanding the way that God is called upon from “O God,” in verse 3, to “O God of hosts,” in verse 6, and finally “O Lord God of hosts,” in verse 19. Each of the verses goes on to include the appeal “let your face shine, that we may be saved.” The entire psalm revolves around the desire to be saved and how again and again and over and over when Israel needed to be saved, God responded.

Any person or nation could rewrite this psalm, substituting their own historic or personal predicaments. Some would not credit God for their deliverance, but that would be an omission. God has not justified every action of any of us, nor has God corrected every misstep. What God has done is to love and bless all persons, offering an expanded menu of possibilities for those who walk with God.

As we enter the season of Advent, we come seeking and needing God’s restoration. Each of us has endured a wilderness time, a time of captivity, and our own hunger and thirstiness. As with Israel, we come trusting in God’s faithfulness and prepare with longing, hopeful hearts for an infusion of blessings and new possibilities delivered by the coming Christ.

BECCA’S NOTES
Director of Children, Youth, Family Ministries
Christian.education@1ccauburn.org

Children, Youth, and Family Ministry schedules for December:

Christmas Pageant update:

Production on the 2020 Christmas pageant is underway! Email Becca asap at: Christian.education@1ccauburn.org if your child would like to take part. This year’s production will be entirely digital, so all participants will be recording their parts and sending them to Becca to put the whole thing together.

If you, your child, or even your whole family would like to participate in the music for the pageant, please email Becca at Christian.education@1ccauburn.org as well.

Youth Group Update:

Youth group is now meeting virtually every 2nd and 4th Sunday of the month. Jr. high meets at 11:00 and Sr. High meets at 12:00.

Please email Becca at: Christian.education@1ccauburn.org for an invite to the Google Meet if you haven’t been receiving her emails.
A CHRISTMAS MIRACLE THANK YOU

On behalf of the social workers at the Placer County Children’s System of Care, a big thank you for pulling off a Christmas Miracle.

Once again the generosity of our congregation provided $2,645 in gift cards to foster children. Blessings to bother the givers and receivers of the Christmas Miracle.

CHRISTMAS FUND

Our Christmas offering is one of the special mission offerings of the United Church of Christ, given to provide direct financial assistance to those who serve the church and are facing financial difficulty. Active and retired clergy, lay employees, and their surviving spouses may be eligible for assistance in the form of small annuities, supplemental health premiums, emergency grants &/or Christmas “Thank You” gift checks. Many clergy had served small churches, had little income, and have little or no pension. Your gifts for this special offering give them much needed assistance and show love, caring and compassion toward them.

This special offering will be received Sunday, Dec. 20, but can be given earlier in December, and is over and above our regular tithes and offerings. Make your checks out to the church, with Christmas offering in the memo line.

Thank you for prayerfully considering giving to help those in need, those who are and have served Christ’s church.

HAVE YOU EVER VISITED OUR WEBSITE?

The above picture is the home page. This is what you first see when you go to: 1ccauburn.org

This is the place where you can find current updates regarding worship services and other activities. Please keep this bookmarked, and check it often. Thank you.
ALTERNATIVE CHRISTMAS GIVING IDEAS
submitted by June Haugen, Board of Community Ministries

The Board of Community Ministries is again offering alternative Christmas Giving ideas for your consideration this season. Below are two extremely worthy nonprofits that are both in need of support this season especially with the world-wide devastating effects COVID has had on rural communities. We can also provide a special Gift Acknowledgment if you like, letting the recipient know the blessing this gift brings to those in need.

**BRINGING HOPE IN UNCERTAINTY**

The onset of COVID-19 has drastically impacted Hope of the Pokomchi’s ability to improve the well-being of the rural Guatemalan Pokomchi through our ministry programs.

Poor rural families are the ones suffering the most because of governmental restrictions put in place to prevent spread of the virus. The greatest need of these most vulnerable families is a portion of daily food. In an effort to address this need, Hope of the Pokomchi started a Food Bank program and since July 2020, food packages have been delivered monthly by our staff to the doors of 100 of the neediest families, which includes our chronically ill patients.

We invite you to join us in this effort. The total cost per package is $13.00 US.

Monthly packages include these essential items:

- 400g of rice
- 400g of pasta
- 2 lbs. of black beans
- 1kg of sugar
- 220g of milk
- 900g of Incaparina (nutritional supplement)
- 10 lbs. of corn (for making tortillas)
- A “Jesus Loves You” booklet with both pictures and words, or other gospel message booklet.

We are hoping to continue this Program until at least June 2021, since we don't know how long the COVID restrictions will be in place. To contribute, please make a check out to “Hope of the Pokomchi” and mail to 120 Belmont Drive, Auburn, 95603.

We have seen that reaching out to others through sharing food is not just an act of physical provision. It speaks to the heart as well. Thank you for your support! For more info visit: [https://www.hopeofpokomchi.org/food-bank-project](https://www.hopeofpokomchi.org/food-bank-project)

**GROWING HOPE GLOBALLY**

Submitted by Susan Moore, Board of Community Ministries

In the Montes do Maria region of northern Colombia, local markets are closed, streets empty, and many families feel the pangs of hunger after skipping meals. Covid has brought increased challenges to vulnerable communities here and around the world. Those who already live in poverty are suffering the most.

But there is hope, especially for the families and communities in the Growing Hope Globally programs, thanks to the training they have received. They are using sustainable practices to grow more than enough food to meet their needs, and using new marketing strategies to sell their surplus produce. Now others want to learn these methods, so they too will have enough food during these challenging times.

For more than 20 years Growing Hope Globally has worked alongside partners like One Great Hour of Sharing and Church World Service, helping people improve their incomes and food security. It is a Christian response to world hunger, with the United Church and many other denominations being their partners. Loving our global neighbors by investing in their God-given gifts and encouraging them to build upon their resources has been the right approach. Now in the face of a world pandemic, working toward lasting, sustainable solutions is still the best approach. In 20 years over 2 million people around the world have become food secure due to the efforts of Growing Hope Globally.

Growing Hope Globally offers us an opportunity to live out our faith and give people around the world the dignity of providing for themselves and leads to positive change for a lifetime. A gift of $55 provides a farmer with training and tools for a better future.

***UNTIL THE END OF THE YEAR THERE IS A 2:1 MATCH FOR CONTRIBUTIONS***

Prayerfully make a check out to the church, with Growing Hope Globally in the memo line. More information may be seen at: [growinghopeglobally.org](http://growinghopeglobally.org)
GLOBAL MINISTRIES
Submitted by Cathy Tolman, Board of Community Ministries

Please pray for the following Mission Coworkers and Global Mission Intern. Learn more at: www.globalministries.org

Danielle Murry-Knowles: Mission Coworker in Lesotho. Danielle is the Planning Officer for Lesotho Evangelical Church in Southern Africa, the oldest church in Lesotho, dating back to 1833. In this capacity, she serves on the Planning Commission. Such service has been a lifelong passion for Danielle having served in India during college, and serving in the Peace Corps in Paraguay where she met her husband. They both serve the Lesotho Evangelical Church. Some of the challenges of those living in this area include HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, unemployment, violence, corruption, and climate change. She notes that there is a symbolic importance of congregational hymn singing of up to 12 hymns during a service!

Maria Bakalian: Mission Coworker in Lebanon. Maria works to promote the work of Haigazian University, the only Armenian University outside of Armenia. She works with their campus ministry which was damaged during and after the civil war there from 1975 – 1990. She has long ties with the Armenian Evangelical Church. She and her husband serve together. One of the greatest challenges is the departure of many Christians from the region. Fewer and fewer people are left to support the work while costs skyrocket. The situation perpetuates itself as many of the brightest, most talented, and most principled youth seek to emigrate from Lebanon to pursue their careers and life goals.

Jeffrey Mensendiek: Mission Coworker in Japan. The United Church of Christ in Japan is a minority church. Only one percent of the population is Christian and there is discrimination. Jeffrey is the son of UCC missionaries and has worked for 22 years with the church. He has lived in Japan since he was 2 years old. He now will be working as the chaplain at Kwansei Gakuin University, speaking out for peace and justice concerns, especially for victims of radiation in Fukushima and promoting a culture of inclusion and tolerance.

Ignacio Salinas: Global Service Worker in Nicaragua. Ignacio tells of his arrival in Nicaragua, 25 years after he was there as a child. He explains the tension that he encountered upon arrival going through immigration and finding the person from the church to certify that he was entering legally. He has been there for nearly 2 years now. Issues he sees are the difficulty of movement throughout the country, the absence of stable work, the high cost of living, the stagnation in education and the enormous impact of the current crisis affecting Nicaraguans and their everyday lives, as well as their participation in church activities. The goal of the Christian Mission Church in Nicaragua is to fulfill the mandate of continuing the work of Jesus.

Green Team Gift Ideas:

Two new books offer a hopeful perspective on climate change.

Attenborough is an award-winning broadcaster who offers a scientifically based account of the changes that are taking place on our planet. In her book, Jane Fonda explains why she has become passionately engaged in Climate activism.

Attenborough writes: "The Earth’s life-support machine, the thing we humans rely upon for everything we need, runs on its biodiversity. Yet the way we live on Earth now is sending it into a decline. I have been a witness to this decline. This book contains my witness statement, and my vision for the future – the story of how we came to make this, our greatest mistake, and how, if we act now, we can yet put it right."
**PRAYER REQUESTS**
*Submitted by Barb Grandstaff*

Please keep the following members of our church family in your prayers.

- Julie Keith
- Sonda Sandstedt
- Linda Cline
- Vicki Elmgren
- Sylvia Epperly
- Betty Roby
- Jan Tiller
- Mida June Deal
- Roger Griess
- Gage and Kim Morrow
- Gunter Vogtmann
- Patt Bennett
- Duane Jeppson
- Addah Owens
- Doris Slaydon
- Ardella Boots

The following church family members are residing in nursing homes or care facilities.

- Elaine Harte—ART skilled nursing
- Ruth Jackson
- Jean Reymann

**MEDITATION MOMENT**
*submitted by Doni Kay*

“The Light Within”

The Christmas Season is upon us, and with it the beautiful Biblical imagery often read this time of year: “The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” (John 1:5). Where do we find this Light? Through prayer. Quaker mystic Thomas Kelly describes prayer as attending to “the secret places of the heart” where “the Inner Light, the Inner Christ,” dwells. This attention can be as simple as closing one’s eyes and expressing gratitude for life and love; or repeating a simple refrain like, “The Lord is my shepherd.” Taking regular time to turn one’s inward gaze towards that Light, we come to trust that God is at work in us, and through us, to share this Light with the world.

Amen.

**BIBLE STUDY**

*Zoom Bible Study classes meet Tues. at 9am. We are studying the Gospel of Mark.*

The Zoom contact information is sent out in an email before each class. A video of the class will be available on our website later. Contact the church office if you would like to receive more information.

**FUTURE CROSSWORD DEADLINES**

December 21
January 25, 2021

**PRAYER MINISTRY**
*submitted by Jane Wurst*

Dear Prayer Partners,

Have you thanked a teacher lately?

Think of our healthcare workers, firefighters and first responders… our teachers and school staff are also frontline workers and heroes, giving their all in these very challenging times. They too are exhausted and overburdened and feel the responsibility and pressure to meet the diverse needs of students during these unprecedented times.

So, let’s all double our prayers and find ways to encourage and support these dedicated professionals.

Thank you Everyone… and may your hearts be open to see the grace, blessings, and love during the Christmas season.

With light and love,  
*Jane*
### December Birthdays

- 02  Jean Reymann
- 03  Don Roby
- 03  Rebecca Jeppson
- 05  Diane Fowler
- 08  Janine Wilson
- 09  Nate Paiva
- 11  Gabe Kreiner
- 11  Tara Campbell Miller
- 13  Donna Griess
- 14  Norm Van Horne
- 15  Jim Tellesen
- 17  Courtney Roeder
- 22  Marilyn Chambliss
- 25  Tai Batov
- 28  Darlene Baldwin

### December Anniversaries

- 03  Boyce and Darlene Baldwin
- 31  Marty and Theresa Roeder

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### Financial Report—November 2020

- **Actual Budget Receipts received through 10/31/20**: $291,354
- **Estimated Budget Receipts through 10/31/20**: $296,820
- **Actual Budget Expenditures through 10/31/20**: $286,367
- **General Reserve Balance as of 10/31/20**: $50,013

Report prepared by Barbara Hooker, Bookkeeper

If you are fairly new to our church community, we may not have your birthday and/or anniversary. Please email or call the office with this information if you want it included here.
First Congregational Church of Auburn Staff

Pastor .................................................................Rev. Daniel Spacek
Ministers ...........................................................................The Congregation
Office Manager & CrossWord Editor ....................Barbara Grandstaff
Bookkeeper ..................................................................Barbara Hooker
Music Director ..........................................................Richard March
Pianist ..............................................................................Jane Roach
Director of Children, Youth and Family Ministry ....Becca Kreiner
Youth Group Leader ..................................................Becca Kreiner
Custodian ........................................................................Geno Wood

Office Hours: As our church facilities are slowly opening during this time of COVID-19, please check our website for updates about church services and Sunday school. www.1ccauburn.org