



**First Church of Christ in Mansfield
(Congregational) United Church of Christ**

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Ministers: All the Members of the Church
The Rev. Charles Ericson, Intentional Interim Minister
Erik Haeger, Organist
Olivia Russell, Worship Circle Coordinator

January 5, 2025 — Second Sunday after Christmas Day & Sunday Before Epiphany

Welcome to Our Guests!

*We're delighted you have joined us for worship; the members are the ministers of this church...
if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask us!*

Playing the Chimes

Greeting and Announcements

Reading

“Wise Women Also Came” by Jan Richardson

Julie Menard

*Wise women also came.
The fire burned
in their wombs
long before they saw
the flaming star
in the sky.
They walked in shadows,
trusting the path
would open
under the light of the moon.
Wise women also came,
seeking no directions,
no permission
from any king.
They came
by their own authority,
their own desire,
their own longing.
They came in quiet,
spreading no rumors,
sparking no fears
to lead
to innocents' slaughter,
to their sister Rachel's
inconsolable lamentations.
Wise women also came,
and they brought
useful gifts:*

*water for labor's washing,
fire for warm illumination,
a blanket for swaddling.
Wise women also came,
at least three of them,
holding Mary in the labor,
crying out with her
in the birth pangs,
breathing ancient blessings
into her ear.
Wise women also came,
and they went,
as wise women always do,
home a different way.*

Prelude

Erik Haeger

Centering in the Spirit

How did you get here?

Left side of the room: I walked, eyes looking up, following the star.

Right side of the room: I ran, lunging for a love that is bigger than me.

Left side of the room: I tumbled and fell, tender step after tender step.

Right side of the room: I ambled like a river, caught up in God's flow.

All: I crawled, kissing the earth below me.

Tell me again. How did you get here?

I am here by God's grace and love's pull.

Welcome home. This is God's house. There is room for you here.

Let us worship our gracious God.

***Opening Hymn**

As With Gladness

CH173

Prayer for Transformation

God of new beginnings,

We admit that we often follow the well-worn path, simply because others have been there before. Sometimes this is holy and humble, but there are days when a new path needs to be tread. On those new-beginning days, O God, give us the courage to follow your star. Give us the courage to go home by another way. Give us the courage to kick up some dust and walk in a new direction for the sake of justice, love, and neighbor. For when you are doing a new thing, we want to have the courage to follow. With hope in our hearts we wander, we travel. Amen.

moment of silence

Words of Grace

Dear travelers, No matter the roads you've taken, the steps you've made, or the paths you've traveled, there is nowhere you could go that would land you outside of God's love. Hear and believe the good news of the Gospel: Regardless of the path we travel, of how lost we may get, or the twists and turns along the way, we do not walk alone. We are loved. We are forgiven. We have every chance to begin again. Thanks be to God for a love like that!

***Song of Praise**

Glory to God

Paul Vasile

Glo-ry to God, whose good-ness shines on me, and to the Son, whose grace has
 end, world with-out end, A - men. World with-out end, world with-out

4 par - doned me, and to the Spir - it, whose love has set me free! As it was in the be-ginning, is
 end, A - men. World with-out e - nd, world with-out end, A - men.

8 now and ev - er shall be, A - men World with-out men!

Reception of New Members

Invitation

Questions

First Church Covenant

(All) We covenant with each other and with God to seek to know the will of God as taught in the Holy Scriptures, and to strive to walk in the ways of the Lord, made known or to be made known to us; to study and to teach the faith of the church; to take part in the business of the church; to support the work of the church here and throughout the world with our labor and our gifts according to our means. We recognize this church as one congregation of the whole Christian Church, and acknowledge that the covenant, which binds us together as a local church, unites us in worship and work with Christians everywhere.

Welcome

(Congregation) We welcome you with joy in the common life of this church. We promise you our friendship and prayers as we share the hopes and labors of the church of Jesus Christ. By the power of the Holy Spirit may we continue to grow together in God's knowledge and love and be witness of our risen Savior.

Prayer

(All) O God, we praise you for calling us to faith and for gathering us into the church, the Body of Christ. We thank you for your people gathered in this local church and rejoice that you have increased our community of faith. Together, may we live in the Spirit, building up one another in love, sharing in the life and worship of the church, and serving the world in Jesus' name.

Hebrew Scripture

Jeremiah 31:31-34

³¹The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ³²It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. ³³But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be

my people. ³⁴No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

Gospel

Matthew 2:1-12

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ²asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." ³When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: ⁶'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'" ⁷Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage."

⁹When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹²And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Reflection

"New Covenants"

Rev. Chuck Ericson

Celebration of the Start of an Interim Ministry

Congregation: Gracious God, you have blessed and sustained us for years, and you have given us sacred symbols of Christian life together in this church community. Be with us now, we pray, as we enter this in-between time. Comfort as we process the emotions of the past, and as we look anxiously toward new leadership in our future. Bless us and guide us as we reflect on our history and as we dream about our future, so that we might prepare one another for the next portion of this congregation's journey. Give us courage, patience, and vision. Strengthen us in our Christian vocation of witness to the world and service to others, through Jesus our Christ. Amen.

Interim Pastor: As we begin this intentional interim time together, we begin new relationships. I have been called as your interim pastor, to support the work God is calling your church to do at this time. As a minister of the Gospel, I will pray for you, listen to you, encourage and challenge you as we move through this time together. As an interim minister, I will assist you in the tasks of this season.

Congregation: We, the people of the First Church of Christ in Mansfield (Congregational) United Church of Christ, receive you as a servant of God and pledge our partnership as we continue to use the gifts God has given us for the ministries of the Gospel in this place: worship, education, witness, service, and stewardship.

Interim Pastor: May God bless us and lead us as we together embark on this interim time. May God's spirit instruct and prepare us for the future mission and ministry of the church in this place.

Call to Prayer

Hear Us O Lord

Don Besig and Nancy Price

Hear us, O Lord, as we come now in prayer, shar - ing our joys, our trou-bles, and our cares.

Help us, O Lord, to be o - pen to your word, and teach us to put our trust in you.

Reading

“Field Notes” by Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed

Julie Menard

*With tears in your eyes,
you name all the bumps
and zigzags your life has taken.
With clenched teeth
and a hummingbird pulse,
you wake up
and wonder—how did I get here?
In the last 40 days of
desert wandering, you say
you haven't heard God's voice once.
You say you miss when God was close,
when God used to sing the harmony line.
So you yell at the sky,
begging God to drop a pin,
to name the road,
to draw you a map.
You lament the way this life isn't easy.
You ask me—was the road ever straight and narrow,
or was that all a lie?
But then you crest the mountain,
and I don't hear from you for a while,
because God was growing
in the lilac field
on the other side of the hill.
God was scattered
among the pebbles
of the road you never planned to take.
Isn't it amazing, you say,
there are a million roads home
and God walks every single one of them.*

Prayers of the People and the Prayer of Jesus

*Please pray the Prayer of Jesus in whatever language is comfortable for you.
The following are offered as examples...*

**Our Father/Mother/Creator,
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/sins/trespases,**

as we forgive our debtors/those who sin/trespass against us.
 And lead us not into temptation,
 but deliver us from evil.
 For thine is the kingdom,
 and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Invitation to Generosity

As the Magi of old, guided by a star in the night sky, brought gifts of homage and gratitude, so we bring our gifts today. May these gifts scatter the shadows of those in need.

Musical Offering

"Show Me The Way" by Ruth Kennerly
 Cheryl Chase, Laurel Thurman, Erik Haeger

*Doxology

Praise God from whom all bless - ings flow; Praise God all crea - tures here be low; Praise
 5 God for all that love has done: Cre - a - tor, Christ and Spi - rit, One. A - men!

*Prayer of Dedication

O God, we come to you seeking to be as wise as the Magi, who gave of their most precious treasures — symbols of the giving of themselves to the Christ Child. May these gifts be a source of light in places where your light and love are needed most. Amen.

Communion Hymn

I'm Gonna Eat at the Welcome Table

CH424

The Service of Holy Communion

For visitors: At the Last Supper, Jesus turned no one away and imposed no restrictions on receiving the bread and the cup. Neither do we here at First Church in Mansfield. Christ's table is open at all, and we extend an extravagant welcome to you to join us. Communion is received by "intinction" whereby each person proceeds down the aisle, takes a piece of bread, dips it in the cup, and returns to their pew or seat. For those who wish to know, the cup contains non-alcoholic grape juice and the bread is gluten-free.

Invitation to Communion

Communion Prayer

Musical Response

Santo Santo Santo

trad. Argentine

San - to, san - to, san - to. Mi co - ra - zon te a - do - ra! Mi
 Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly. My heart, my heart a - dores you! My
 5 co - ra - zon te sa - be de - cir: San - to eres, Se - nor!
 heart knows how to say to you: Ho - ly are you, Lord!

Sharing the Bread and Cup

All are welcome at Christ's table; we offer non-alcoholic juice and gluten-free bread.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Nourishing God, Sometimes we tell ourselves that too much has taken place to begin again. We think the world is too far gone. We think we have made too many mistakes. We tell ourselves that we couldn't possibly begin again. But then we come to this Table and we get a glimpse of your kingdom. We come to this Table and all are welcomed, all are seen, all are fed. And just like that, we have hope. Just like that, we begin again Thank you for the gift of this fresh start. Thank you for planting hope deep in our bones. Thank you for meeting us in ordinary bread and juice to remind us that it's never too late to build your kingdom here. We are grateful. We are so grateful. Amen.

*Closing Hymn

This Is a Day of New Beginnings

CH518

*Benediction

Now may God bless you and keep you;
May God's face shine upon you and be gracious unto you;
May God's countenance be lifted up upon you and give you peace. Amen.

*Passing the Peace

The peace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, is with you always.

And also with you.

Let us share with one another a sign of that peace.

Postlude



Much of this morning's liturgy was written by the Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed for the Advent series "Words for the Beginning." Permission for use has been granted by A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org

About this week's icon and theme:



THE ROAD ISN'T STRAIGHT

The triangles in this quilt square point in multiple directions. Much like the magi's journey, the path that lies ahead isn't always clear or straight. Thankfully, we have the guidance of the Spirit to light our way.

The Invitation to Generosity and Prayer of Dedication were written by the Rev. Debbie Gline Allen, who serves as Minister of Faith Formation for the Southern New England Conference, and as the administrator of its Faith Formation Leadership Program.

THE WEEK AHEAD...

Tuesday, January 7 10:30 a.m. MCNR Monthly Service
Wednesday, January 8 1:00 p.m. Book Group
Thursday, January 9 6:00 p.m. Governing Board
Sunday, January 12 10:15 a.m. Worship and Worship Circle

Save these dates:

Saturday, January 18 7:00 p.m. "Be the Light" Concert
Sunday, January 19 Second Hour Budget Info Meeting
Sunday, January 26 Congregational Meeting immediately after worship

WELCOME TO OUR NEWEST MEMBERS!

Phil Yeagle and Arlene Alpert:

After growing up in Northern Illinois, I was a Chemistry major at St. Olaf College (Minnesota) and a band member. Study abroad at Cambridge University was an enormously important part of my undergraduate days. I started my Ph.D. at Duke in 1971. In 1974 I moved to a postdoctoral position at the University of Virginia. Yes, the science was amazingly fun, but at UVa I met a Ph.D. student in biochemistry, Arlene Albert, who then made the rest of my life worthwhile by agreeing to marry me.

Our first faculty jobs were in biochemistry at the SUNY Buffalo School of Medicine, during which time both our sons were born. Buffalo was a good place to raise our family. Subsequently we were recruited to the department of Molecular & Cell Biology at UConn. After a rewarding decade as head of department, Rutgers University Newark (NJ) recruited me as Dean of Arts & Sciences and then interim chancellor, at which point the stress exceeded the rewards and although good things were accomplished, I retired.

I returned home (Arlene had remained at UConn), glad to live together again the whole week. While finishing my last book, an opportunity arose to help found a new on-line open access journal Science Advances, a sister journal to Science, an exciting and successful project. Both our amazing sons are married and we have five wonderful grandchildren who are a focal point of our lives.

Frank Ball:

I've lived in Windham Center since 2014. I grew up in Colchester. I went to Colchester Federated Church before coming to First Church. I have two brothers, one twin and 1 younger by 3 years. I graduated from ECSU with a bachelor's degree in social work and received a graduate degree in social work at Sacred Heart University. In the future, my goal is to earn my LCSW and work in counseling of some type. I currently work at Windham Regional Community Council as a case manager. In my free time, I like to do anything related to music - singing, listening, playing. I also like to spend time with our cat, Simba.

Eleanor Joyce:

We moved to Windham Center in 2014 from Colchester where we were members of the Colchester Federated Church. My first church memory was at the Bible Protestant Church in Stamford and then the First United Methodist Church in Greenwich. God has always been there through the difficult and joyous times of life for which I am very grateful. I've worked at an opioid use disorder program in Willimantic since 2012 and for the same program 1984-1992 at which time my sons Frank and Martin were born. I love animals, going to museums, doing crafts and visiting my cousin and his wife in North Carolina.

Marj Mollar (associate member):

Marj Mollar is a retired United Methodist minister who served as a hospital chaplain and pastor of two local churches. She and Lois Happe have been partners for thirty-five years. Marj has three children, including Bruce, who died recently, and four grandchildren. She loves the library, enjoys reading, particularly mysteries, listening to music and conversation. Presently, she and Lois live at the Glen Ridge community in Storrs along with an increasing number of First Church members. Marj returns to First Church with deep appreciation for its various ministries and loving congregation.

Kristina Woodley:

Roman (age 6), Luke (age 3), my Mom (Barbara) and I attended this church for the first time on Christmas Eve 2023. The boys and I had recently moved to Mansfield from Florida to be closer to family. I grew up in Mansfield and always drove by the church but never attended. As soon as we walked in the doors we felt a warm and welcoming energy from the congregation. We have been attending ever since. The children's worship circle program is wonderful, the boys (and I) are always excited to come to church! We are so grateful to be joining such a loving community.

Barbara Dobrocki:

I am a visual artist, a retired teacher, and Kristina Woodley's mom and grandmother of Roman and Luke.

Genevieve (Gen) Beebe:

I spent the early part of my life in Western Massachusetts, including schooling, marriage, and having four sons. Our family moved to Maine in 1966 and life went on. Our sons eventually married and moved out of Maine. My husband died in 2021, after almost 63 years of marriage. In April of 2023 I moved to Glen Ridge to be closer to my family. I have four sons and daughters-in-law, six grandchildren, and 2 great granddaughters.

Jeff and Pub Puccini:

Jeff, Pub, and James (2) Puccini happily relocated to Mansfield in the Spring of 2023. James attends Community Children's Center part-time and enjoys being outdoors as much as possible. His hobbies are reading and throwing rocks in lakes. Pub recently completed an MBA and is actively looking for full-time employment. She enjoys hiking, cooking, and eating. Jeff is an educator working for a labor union, and likes camping, golfing, and watching soccer. The Puccinis are new to UCC and feel blessed to have found First Church.

Katie Clauson:

Katie resides in Mansfield Center with her husband and two daughters. She enjoys spending time with family and friends, being part of Mansfield/Tolland Special Olympics, reading, and exploring new places/activities with her family. She looks forward to being an "official part" of the wonderful First Church family she has come to love and enjoy.