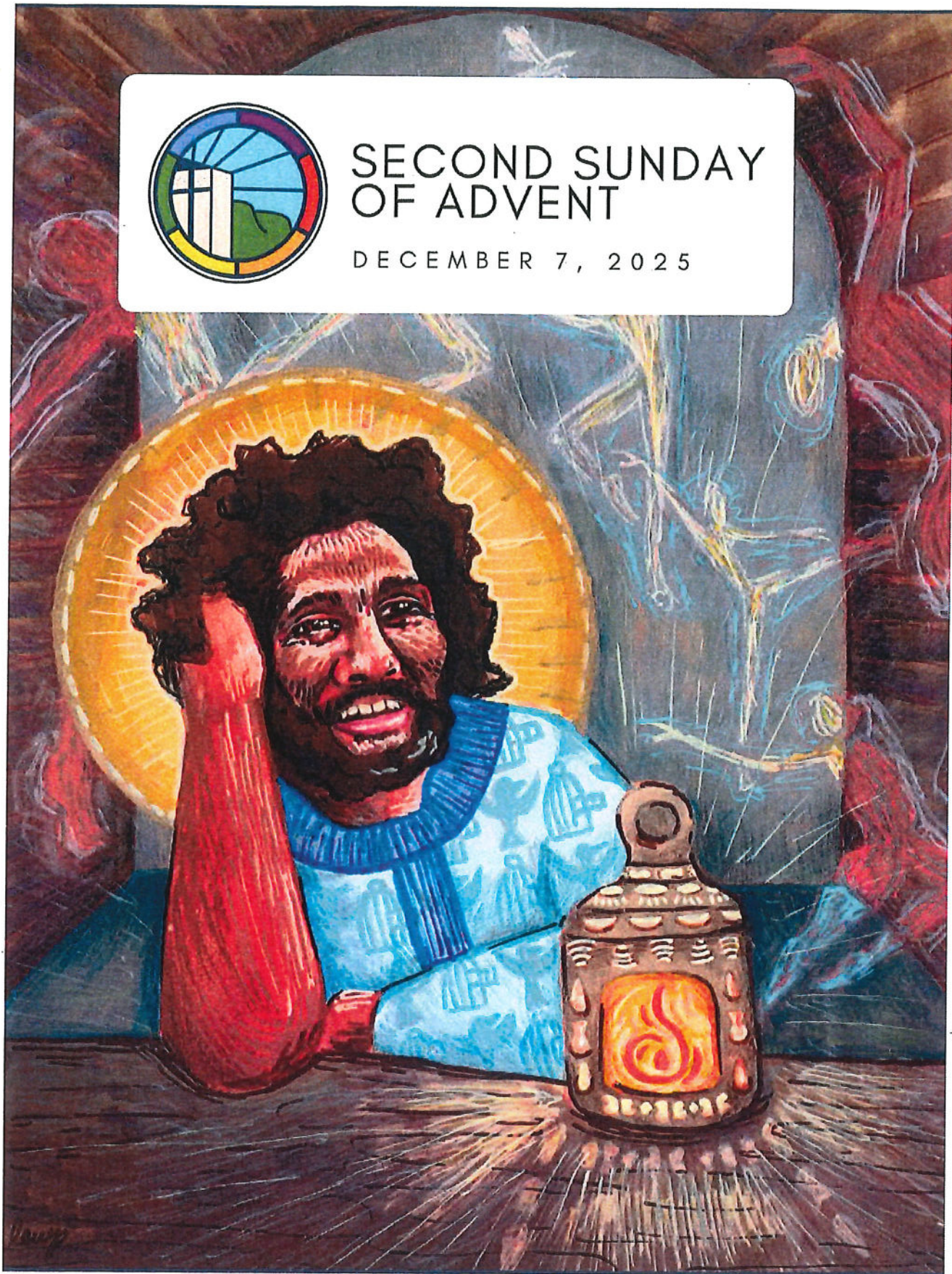




SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

DECEMBER 7, 2025



Welcome! The mission of First Congregational United Church of Christ is to: **Live by faith, embody love, proclaim hope, and seek justice.** If you are worshipping with us for the first time, we hope that you will find God's presence among us. When the Friendship Folder is passed during the announcements, please sign it, and then pass it back across the pew to the inside aisle.

All are welcome. Jesus called us to welcome all into God's family. Join our Fellowship Hour after worship where everyone is invited to enjoy refreshments in the Community Room. A restroom for families and all bodies is in the narthex.

Children are welcome in worship! Activity bags are available in the narthex. There is an area for parents and children at the front of the sanctuary which allows children to be close to the action in worship. Our staffed nursery (downstairs) is an option as well; all kids workers have undergone a background check. Today, the children will go to their classrooms after the Word for Children.

Livestreaming Notice for Worship. We strive for worship to be accessible for all, so we livestream our worship services on our YouTube channel, First Congregational UCC, La Crosse. Your voice and/or image may be visible in the broadcast. These recordings are publicly available at the church's discretion. If you prefer not to appear, we invite you to sit in the sanctuary's last six rows, which are not shown on camera.



Please ask an usher if you would like a large print or sensory friendly bulletin, or if you need directions or any other assistance. A Hearing Loop system is available. Turn your hearing device to the "T" setting.

Serving in Worship Today

Leading Worship & Preaching.....	Laura Wright
Leading Worship & Faith Formation.....	Mary Runyon
Organist, Pianist, & Choir Director	Nancy Allen
Soprano Sax.....	Steve Mann
Reading Scripture.....	Sue Heuer
Head Usher	Randy Breeser
Ushers	Julie Mannion, Dawn Kay
Greeter	Diane Breeser
Communion Assistants	Diane Breeser, Kathy Storlie
Nursery.....	Zali Stanton
Fellowship.....	Creation Care

* In the order of service indicates all who are able, please stand.

Gathering

in the presence of God

Gathering Music

"How Great Our Joy!"

Nancy Allen
Arr. by Koury

Welcome and Announcements

Thank you for joining us today. Please pass the Friendship Folder, fill out the information you wish to share, & note those worshipping in your pew so you can greet them by name.

Prelude Music

"In the Bleak Midwinter"

Nancy Allen
Arr. by Boyles

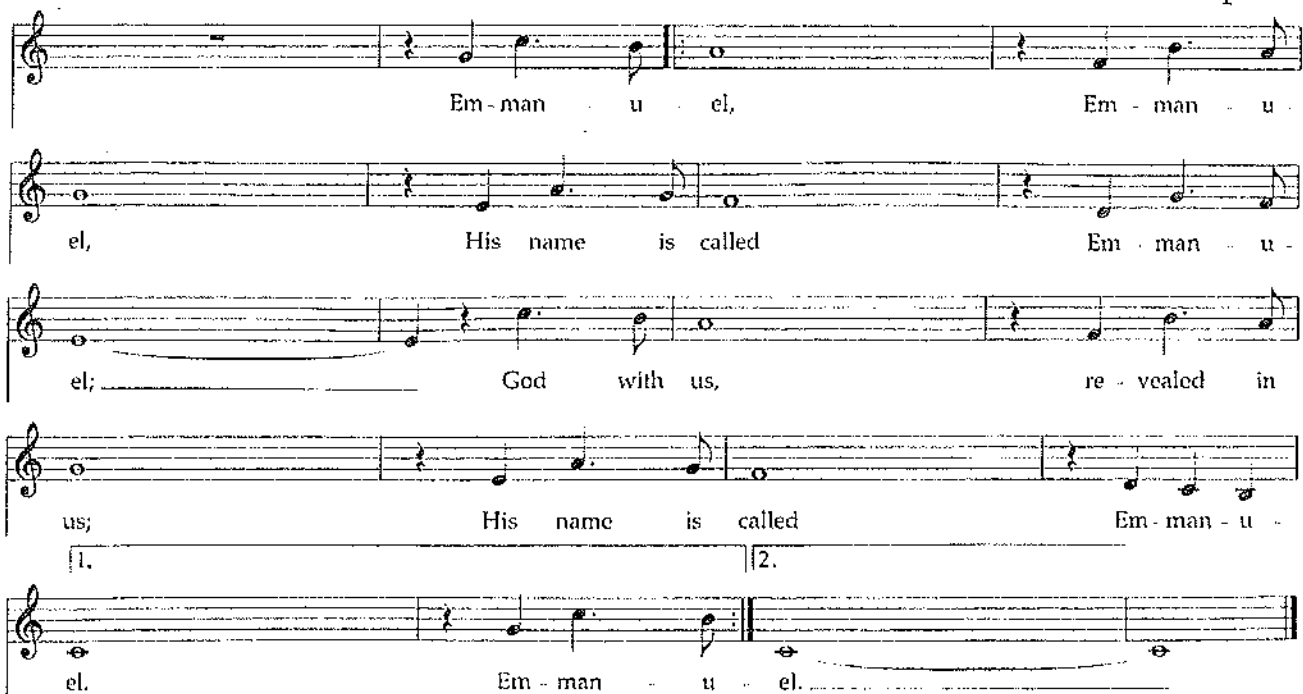
*Call to Worship & the Advent Candle of Peace The Brouwer Family

One: In days when questions outnumber answers, when uncertainty presses in and peace feels out of reach, Jesus comes with signs of peace breaking into our world.

Light Bearer: O God, we light the second candle of Advent & name it Peace. We seek the peace Jesus offers — peace that quiets our anxious spirits, strengthens the weary, and grows even in the wilderness.

All: **Loving God, we thank you for your promise of peace that steadies trembling hearts and makes paths through our deserts.**

One: Let us raise our voices in thanks to the One who comes with peace:



Em - man u - el, Em - man - u -
el, His name is called Em - man - u -
el; God with us, re - vealed in
us; His name is called Em - man - u -
|1. |2.
el. Em - man - u - el.

Moment of Silence

Take this moment of silence to be still and listen for God.

*Hymn 160 (All join in singing the hymns.)

"Awake! Awake, and Greet the New Morn"

Rejoice, Rejoice

*Sharing the Peace

One: The peace of the Christ child be with you.

Many: **And also with you.**

Please greet those near you with a wave or bow and with words such as: "Peace be with you. / And also with you."

Listening

for the Still-speaking God


The Word for Children

Children will join the pastor in the center aisle as we walk forward for the Word for Children. Kids will go to their classes after the Word for Children.


Acclamation (Sung by all.)

Halleluja

All:



Hal-le-Hal-le-Hal - le - lu - ja. Hal-le-Hal-le-Hal - le - lu - ja.



Hal-le-Hal-le-Hal - le - lu - ja. Hal-le-lu-ja. Hal-le-lu - ja.

The First Lesson

Isaiah 43:19-21

Diane Breeser

The Psalter

Psalm 126 (Reading is based on The Message.)

One: It seemed like a dream, too good to be true,
when God returned Zion's exiles.

Many: **We laughed, we sang,
we couldn't believe our good fortune.**

One: We were the talk of the nations —

"God was wonderful to them!"

Many: **God was wonderful to us;
we are one happy people.**

One: And now, God, do it again—
bring rains to our drought-stricken lives

Many: **so those who planted their crops in despair
will shout "Yes!" at the harvest,**

One: so those who went off with heavy hearts
will come home laughing, with armloads of blessings.

The Gospel

Matthew 11:1-11

Sermon

"Hope in the Wilderness"

Rev. Dr. Laura Wright

Responding

with the voice of hope

Anthem

"Winter's Rose"

The Sanctuary Choir
Steve Mann, Trumpet
Arr. by Gregory Pysh

The Community Invited into Prayer

Prayers of the People

Leader: God, in your love,

All: hear our prayer.

The Prayer of Jesus (*Said by all. Use language that reflects your view of God.*)

**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 trespasses,
as we forgive those who 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,
for ever and ever.
Amen.

∞ Thanksgiving

for the gifts of God

Stories of Generosity

Music at the Offertory

*As the Gifts Are Presented: Sing to the tune of Old 100th (Hymn 34).
(All who are able are invited to stand and sing.)

Praise God from whom all blessings flow.
Praise God, all creatures high and low.
Praise God, for all that love has done,
Creator, Christ, and Spirit, One!



Prayer of Thanksgiving

*The Great Thanksgiving

One: God be with you.

Many: **And also with you.**

One: Open up your hearts and minds.

Many: **We open them to God, who unites us across time and space.**

One: Let us say thank you to God.

Many: **It is right and our greatest joy to give God thanks and praise.**

One: It is truly right and our greatest joy ... Therefore, we join our voices with the people of God. We join with their voices to sing forever:



All:

no. 2.3

1 Ho-ly, ho-ly, ho - ly! Lord God Al-might - y!

5 ear - ly in the morn - ing our song shall rise to

8 thee; ho-ly, ho - ly, ho - ly! mer - ci - ful and

12 might-y! God in three per-sons, bless-èd Trin - i - ty!

The Congregation may be seated.

One: On the night before Jesus was betrayed... Then Jesus said after supper, "This cup that is the new covenant poured out for you and for many, for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, remember me." And so, with the saints before us and the saints beside us, we proclaim:

All: **Christ has died;
Christ is risen;
Christ will come again.**

One: Holy Spirit, come—fill this bread and cup with your presence, and fill us with the hope of those who came before us, that we might live as your people of love and courage. Let us eat and drink with gratitude, remembering that God provides for all, and that the Spirit of Christ is here among us.

Sharing Communion

This is the table of Christ, not of this church. All are welcome and encouraged to join in the sharing of communion at Christ's Table, regardless

of age or tradition, for it is this meal which binds all of us, different as we are, together.

We will receive communion by intinction (dipping the bread into the cup). All bread is gluten-free to welcome all at the table of Christ. Please come to the front of the church by way of the center aisle and return by the side aisles. If you need to receive communion where you are seated, please let an usher know.

Thanksgiving after Communion

Going

to be messengers of good news

***Hymn 152** *(All join in singing the hymns.)*

"Prepare the Way, O Zion"

Bereden väg för Herran

*The Blessing

Postlude Music

"Praise Him! Praise Him!"

Arr. by Leatherman

Acknowledgements: "Emanuel," words and music in the public domain. "Awake! Awake, and Greet the New Morn," words and music © 1983 GIA Publications. "Prepare the Way, O Zion," words © 1982 Hope Publishing Company and music in the public domain. Hymns and music reprinted and streamed with permission under Onelicense.net #A-728014.

Cover Image: Lauren Wright Pittman, "Hope Like a Dancer," gouache, paint pens, colored pencils, and ink on paper. This image has been used as part of the Sanctified Arts devotional entitled "What do you fear? Insisting on Hope this Advent." Our congregation is using this devotional in worship and in our Connection Groups that meet in congregants' homes.

*Flowers today are given in honor of
Mary Ruth Peterson by her family.*

First Congregational UCC Ministry Team

All the Members Ministers
Rev. Dr. Laura Wright Senior Pastor
Rev. Mary Runyon Associate Minister of Faith Formation
Nancy Allen Organist & Choir Director
Sue Retzlaff Bell Choir Director
Michelle Logan Office Manager

Contact Information: First Congregational UCC, 2503 Main Street, La Crosse, WI 54601,
608-784-8137 or office@firstcongolax.org, or visit us on the web at www.firstcongolax.org.

What gifts did you give God this week?

Can we share your gift to God with the congregation?

Yes _____ No _____



Is This Yours? It was found in the Sanctuary

This little gem was found in the sanctuary about a week ago—could it be yours? It has “Henry Ford Health System” embossed on the cover, and it looks like it might be something special to someone. If it belongs to you, please stop by the office to pick it up.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

This Week in our Church:

Second Sunday in Advent

WAFER Sunday

Sunday, December 7

- 10:00 am Worship w/Holy Communion
- 10:00 am Nursery
- 10:20 am JAM
- 11:00 am Fellowship (CR)
- 11:00 am Confirmation (L)

Monday, December 8

- 7:15 pm Christian Ed Meeting (Zoom)

Tuesday, December 9

- 5:00 pm Creation Care Meeting (Zoom)
- 6:00 pm Advent Connection Group
(At the Wright/Sersch House)
Advanced Sign-up is required

Wednesday, December 10

- 10:00 am Advent Connection Group (P)
Advanced Sign-up is required
- 6:00 pm Building & Grounds Meeting (CR)
- 7:00 pm Church Council Meeting (CR)
- 7:00 pm Advent Connection Group
(At Vickie's House)
Advanced Sign-up is required

C = Chapel, J = JAM Rooms, L = Lounge, N = Narthex,

Thursday, December 11

- 5:45 pm Service & Worship Meeting (CR)
- 7:00 pm Sanctuary Choir (S)

Friday, December 12

Office Closed

- 10:30 am Bell Choir Rehearsal (CR)

Saturday, December 13

- 10:00 am Advent Connection Group
(At the McQueen/Mieden House)
Advanced Sign-up is required

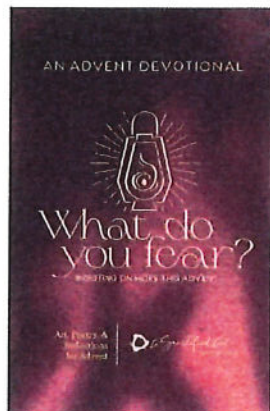
Sunday, December 14

- 9:00 am Faith Forum: Blue Christmas (C)
- 10:00 am Worship
- 10:00 am Nursery
- 10:20 am JAM
- 11:00 am Fellowship (CR)
- 12:00 am Missions & Social Justice Meeting (L)
- 2:00 pm Church Wide Caroling

Peace

CALENDAR KEY

CR = Community Room, P = Pastor's Office, S = Sanctuary



Let's Build a Community One Connection Group at a Time!

This week our small **Connection Groups** continue to explore the Advent Devotional "What Do You Fear?" We looked at how Zachariah met his fear when God's angel brought him good, but surprising news. We used his story to dig deeper into what we fear, and why!

Feel free to pick up a book in the Narthex and dig into this devotional. It can be done as a family, or as your personal devotional.





Giving Tree – Sharing Christmas Joy!

It's getting to be time to return the gifts!

Please return the gifts:

- *Unwrapped*
- *With the tag attached to the gift,*
- To the church by **December 10th.**



Stewardship Update



Great progress is being made on the 2026 pledge drive! **Seventy-four individuals and families have pledged \$255,489**, and **seven more** have committed to give as they are able. This brings us to **nearly 50% of our goal of 150 pledges** and **63% of our financial goal of \$405,000.**

As we continue through this transition in Faith Formation leadership, we are reminded how essential it is to have strong funding for our

Faith Formation staff position. Your pledge helps ensure vibrant programming for our children and supports the future of this vital ministry. We hope you'll take this opportunity to prayerfully consider how you can contribute.

Please turn in your pledge this week!

Dream with God about our church's future!

Together with joy and gratitude,

The Stewardship Committee

Sunday, December 14th at 2:00 p.m.



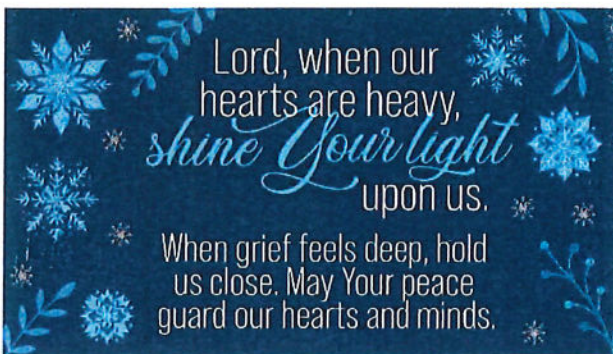
Celebrate the season with an afternoon of **spreading holiday cheer!** We'll meet at the church and carpool to Havenwood and Eagle Crest South retirement communities and go caroling for about an hour. If you're at Eagle Crest South or Havenwood, stay put & we'll come to you with Christmas carols!

Afterward, we'll head back to church to warm

up with **cookies and hot chocolate.** All ages are welcome—just bring your holiday spirit and your *singing* voices! If you have extra space in your car, please email Pastor Laura know at Laura@firstcongolax.org.



Honoring Grief and Loss During the Holidays



When: Sunday, December 14, 2025

Time 9:00 - 9:45 a.m.

Place: The Chapel

Offered by the *WISE Mental Health Committee*

Christmas is supposed to be "the most wonderful time of the Year," but for many it is a time of

sadness, struggle, grief and loss - a time when we feel that we are supposed to be joyful even if our hearts are aching from the loss of a beloved family member, friend, pet, job, or other lost treasure. We invite you to join us in a service that allows us to honor the "less than joyful" feelings we may be experiencing this time of year. We will hold our sadness, loneliness, anger, hopes and fears in a time of sacred prayer, reflection, and ritual. Together we will discover that hope is possible even in the darkest of times. This special service, offered by our church's WISE Mental Health Committee, will be held in the Chapel prior to the 10:00 am worship service. Please join us.
