Two Gifts:
Christmas Eve and Christmas Day

If you haven’t noticed already, Christmas falls on a Sunday this year. That means that we will be having a worship on Christmas Eve (at 7:00 p.m.) and also on Christmas Day (10:00 a.m.).

This pattern is something that happens every seven or eight years (depending on how leap year works into this and don’t ask me to explain that because I can’t). It does, however, provide a rare opportunity to have a fuller appreciation for the power of the Christmas event. After all, God gives us primarily two gifts at Christmas; each based on the timing of Christ’s birth. Those gifts are assurance and possibility.

First the assurance. Christmas Eve reminds us that Jesus’ actual birth took place at night. The spiritual ramifications of this are many but suffice it to say that due to this timing, we can be sure that in the nighttime moments of our lives, in the overcrowded times that shut out hope and relegate our dreams to a stable instead of a mansion, that is when God comes to us. There can be no greater gift. There can be no greater assurance at Christmas.

Then the opportunity. Christmas Day reminds us that the world is different now because of Christ’s birth and the incarnation of God among us. The world is no longer like the day before. It is no longer marked by a God somewhere out in the distant heavens. We are no longer alone and never will be again. Divine abandonment is now an impossibility. This new world is full of opportunities to live differently and build a society reflective of such powerful Good News.

I hope you can join us for both worship services to usher in the Christmas season. I trust you will feel the nighttime of assurance and the morning of opportunity in a way that will make Christmas transformative in your life.

See you in church,

Rev. Dominic
NOTE: There will be no Messenger the week after Christmas. Messenger will resume January 3rd, with cutoff date for items of submission being December 30th. Happy Holidays!

GIVING ENVELOPES
Giving Envelopes for 2017 are now available in the Narthex. If your Giving Number is between 001 and 048, we have a set of envelopes for you. If you do not need envelopes anymore or would like a set, please contact Rick Mockler at 781-690-2058 or fcmelrose@gmail.com

Advent Pantry Alert!
For those of you who are filling your grocery bags with food items during the days of Advent, please remember to bring them to church on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day so they can be distributed to the food pantry. If you have forgotten to fill them, don't worry – there are over 10 days left to do so!

Printing Donation
Jim Michelli at Hillside Press on Green Street in Melrose very generously printed all the posters for the Winter Wonderland Fair and didn’t charge us! He does great work, and the turnaround time is quick. So if you have a printing job, consider giving him your business, and tell him “thank you” for his generosity to First Congregational Church!!!
http://hillsidepressllc.com/digital-printing/

Last Sunday a group of 8 youth (4 middle school, 4 high school), packed up cars with our Church’s City Mission Collection and traveled to Winchester Congregational Church to help sort the inventory and pack it up for the various shelters. They were greeted by the organizer who explained to our youth that this project helps the thousands of homeless, or near homeless people, in Boston and surrounding communities. She said many of these folks got behind on 1 electric bill, or water bill and then their problems snowballed and the kids in these families are just like them but with some bad luck. She explained that there are 4,000 documented homeless kids and that does not count the kids they don’t know about and the kids who are living temporarily with cousins etc. and that all their work was directly helping these kids and these families. They worked for 2 hours filling orders of shelters and schools and it was very rewarding. Thank you FCC Youth for making a difference in the lives of others! (For those who still want to donate, Sunday the 18th is our last day to donate. They are in need mostly of new clothes especially men’s clothing and new adult underwear).

Christmas Pageant - Sunday December 18th
All participants should arrive at 9:40 AM for a final review of the pageant (costumes and timing of the service). If you took your costume home, please bring it on Sunday.

Christmas Pageant will be performed during Worship on December 18th.

SUNDAY SCHOOL:
This Sunday, December 18th, there will be no Sunday School, due to the Christmas Pageant.

There is also no Sunday School on December 25th. However, for children too young to remain in Worship, we will have a Christmas video set up in the Library. Parents who choose this option should plan to remain with their children.

On Sunday, January 1, 2017, there will be an Open Classroom activity for children in the K-2 classroom. Older children are invited to remain in Worship.
Christmas Services coming up:
Saturday, December 24
7:00 PM - Christmas Eve Candle Light and Communion Service.
Sunday, December 25
Christmas Day Service will be at 10:00 AM.

Special Offerings
On December 18 will be for Veterans of the Cross
On December 24 will be for the two Melrose food pantries and Bread of Life

CITY MISSION HOLIDAY DRIVE
December 18th
Each year, City Mission Society, a UCC MA Conference mission activity, organizes a Christmas Shop, where needy families and individuals are invited to come and select gifts for themselves and their children.

Circle 10 is proud to be organizing our Church’s collection efforts again this year. Look for our drop-off table before service in the Narthex on December 18. Donate until Sunday, Dec. 18th.

City Mission recommends the following new/unused donations:

- Winter coats, sweaters and sweatshirts (child, teen, and adult-larger sizes especially needed!)
- Hats, mittens, gloves and scarves
- Socks and underwear
- Blankets, and backpacks
- Gift cards – Grocery, Target, Marshall’s, Walgreen’s, CVS or other Merchants or generic VISA
- Toys, games, and books for all ages

Contact Jen Crain at jcrain1@gmail.com or 503-806-1338 with any questions or to arrange a pick-up of a donation.

FAIR FEEDBACK!!!
While the Winter Wonderland Fair is fresh in our minds, we’d like to hear from the congregation about what people observed that went well, and what ideas people have to make improvements. If you could jot down your thoughts and email them to us, it would be very helpful! We’ll have a “De-Brief” meeting on January 29 after worship to discuss things that are brought to our attention. You can send emails to Sallie at shklemm@verizon.net and/or Nancy at ngift@mit.edu

Memorial
Wreaths that adorn the church this year are
In Loving Memory of: Given by:
Marjorie E. Thayer The Thayer Family
Betty Crane Nancy Schurian
Loved Ones Rae Hayward
Our parents, Hans and Sallie Klemm
Karl & Marie Klemm
Francis & Helen Lathrop
**Poinsettias given this Christmas are:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In Memory of:</th>
<th>Given By:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loved ones</td>
<td>Emelie &amp; Bud Burnham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Circle Sisters</td>
<td>Circle 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loved ones always in our hearts</td>
<td>The Cinella family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loved ones</td>
<td>John Curtis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loved ones</td>
<td>Dannbauer family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My husband, Samuel R. Boyson &amp; my Dad, Mother, &amp; brothers</td>
<td>Marilyn Boyson &amp; family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fred &amp; Amy Spollett, Dick &amp; Priscilla Williams</td>
<td>Keith &amp; Martha Williams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becky Mockler</td>
<td>Sarah &amp; Rick Mockler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loved ones</td>
<td>Nancy Schurian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loved ones</td>
<td>The Faro family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marjorie E. Thayer, Harry &amp; Eula Gilbert, &amp; Helen L. Thayer</td>
<td>Donald F. Thayer &amp; Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our grandparents &amp; also our fathers, Kendrick Johnson &amp; Ray Drafts</td>
<td>Darby Drafts &amp; Brian Johnson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. Jim Glasser, Dottie Glasser, Lloyd Toney, Vivian Toney, &amp; Amy Spollett</td>
<td>The Toney/McGill family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents, Annie G &amp; Leonard W. Stevens, &amp; Nanna Boyington</td>
<td>Nancy A. Mader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My son, David R. Wing &amp; niece, Mickala Taylor</td>
<td>Anne Wing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My husband, M. Douglas Robinson</td>
<td>Connie Robinson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loved ones</td>
<td>Jim &amp; Penny Muschett</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My mother, Dorothy Luebbe &amp; my aunt, Nancy Morgan</td>
<td>Betsy Garrett</td>
</tr>
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</table>
There is no Sunday School on December 25th. However, for children too young to remain in Worship, we will have a Christmas video set up in Room 8. Parents who choose this option should plan to remain with their children.
Wait! Before you shop on Amazon, **SMILE** first!
When you shop on Amazon, start at
www.smile.amazon.com and then select First
Congregational Church in Melrose. Amazon donates
0.5% of the price of your eligible AmazonSmile
purchases directly to our Church!
AmazonSmile is the same Amazon you know.
Same products, same prices, same service.

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**Memorial Wreaths that adorn the church this year are**

**In Loving Memory of:**  **Given by:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marjorie E. Thayer</th>
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<td>Francis &amp; Helen Lathrop</td>
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</table>
7:15 PM – Bells rehearsal

9:30 AM – Treblemakers, Room 1

**FOOD PANTRY**

**SUNDAY – December 4**

This mission of our church is a great way to make a difference in the lives of our neighbors! You can involve your whole family by talking about the food you are donating and discussing how it will help others.
Put in for Two weeks, in February/March

Sharing Prayers of the People

Each week during worship, Reverend Dominic invites the congregation to share moments of concern or celebration for people they know. A candle is lit from the Christ candle signifying the light of Christ's love surrounding them. This is a very special and meaningful part of our worship together.

Names of friends, relatives, and co-workers outside of our congregation are often raised during Prayers of the People. It would be comforting for these people to know that their name was raised in prayer here at our church.

If you would like the person(s) whose name you raised during worship to receive a note to this effect, we invite you to write their name and address in the purple notebook on the Card Ministry table in the narthex. Notes will be sent for concerns, not celebrations, and will be signed by Reverend Dominic on behalf of First Congregational Church.

We also invite you to visit the Card Ministry table after the service to sign cards for members of our church family.

We thank you for your help in reaching out to others.

Ginny Altmann and Becky Foth
Co-Deacons of Spiritual Care

By Lighting our Church Steeple in memory or in honor of loved ones, you can help our church financially. Contact the church office (781-665-2111 or info@fccmelrose.org) to sign up for a week beginning on a Sunday. Your gift will be announced in the Sunday Bulletin and “The Messenger”. A $25.00 per week contribution is suggested.
Have you ever considered giving flowers in memory or in honor of a loved one? There is a silk bouquet in the sanctuary at all times that can be “given” in memory. You can make a donation to the Flower Fund of $15 and those flowers can be in memory /honor of your loved one for a given Sunday. If you prefer, fresh flowers can be ordered for you. The cost for fresh flowers is $50 to $75 depending on the size you would like. After the service, fresh flowers can be taken by the donor, or if they prefer, they can be distributed to someone in the congregation that is sick or in need of an uplifting gift. If you would be interested in donating either type of flowers, please call or email Susan in the church office. 781-665-2111 or info@fccmelrose.org.

CASPAR
The CASPAR team brings casseroles, salad, bread, and brownies to Cambridge on the 3rd Monday of each month to help feed the folks at the Cambridge CASPAR shelter. Currently we have six families who take part in this ministry – the Sugrue/Browers, Muschetts, Koniceks, Miners, Pluskeys, and Klemms. Speak to any of these people to find out more about this ministry.

Band of Praise
Are you a musician or a singer? Are you middle school age or older? Would you like to share your talents in Sunday morning worship with contemporary music? Then maybe the Band of Praise is a good group for you to join! We will be meeting in the chapel, after worship on Sunday, September 14 to pray, plan, and jam.

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announced in the Sunday Bulletin and "The Messenger".
A $25.00 per week contribution is suggested.

Coffee Chat—

Reflect and Respond
Rev. Dominic will be hosting a Reflect and Respond session after worship on Sunday, January 25th. This will be held in the Library and will be a time to discuss the themes of the worship experience. All are welcome to ask questions, share, and benefit from the reflections of others. Please let Rev. Dominic know if you would like child care. It can be easily provided if needed.