

Mountain Reflections

Rangeley Congregational Church, United Church of Christ

P.O. Box 218 Rangeley, Maine
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Rev. Leslie Chatfield

Advent is fast approaching!

Good heavens, First Advent is early this year - this coming Sunday, November 28th. It's upon us! Decorations and bright, shimmering, sparkling red, blue, green and white lights are in full blaze already in dooryards nearby!

At Advent, the time of the new liturgical year on the church's liturgical calendar, we gather prayerfully to hail our regal focus on hope, peace, joy, and love. All that said, 'Tis the season of spiritual and worldly contradictions: exuberant *hope* - our lively anticipation in the face of seemingly endless, ongoing waiting; the seeking of *peace*, generosity and kindness in a world replete with strident opinion; the spreading of *joy* and joyous tidings in the presence of profound widespread human illness and suffering; and the single minded focus on *love* for others when so many tend their own precious self interest.

No wonder the early church set aside a time for us - Advent - to re-center and re-orient our spiritual compass. Timeless human propensities.... In the midst of ordinary life, we are called to rise to be the people of God.

Advent is that time; it's time to renew our commitment: we are God's people. Yes.

In the church, Advent's blue color is the symbol of the shimmering light on the horizon in the darkness just before the dawn. It is no wonder that so many churches are now choosing to adorn their churches, during Advent, with blue paraments on the pulpit, lectern, and/or communion table, rather than the somber deep purple and violet paraments used more typically during Lent, the season of sacrifice, - the purple serving as a representation of a penitential color.

The lovely dawn blue of Advent characterizes our sense of anticipating light, that gentle shining color on every sunny day's horizon, just before the rising of the sun. It's in that shimmering pale blue sky where we await, with hope and joyful anticipation, the coming of the sun's light... or, in Advent, is it the Son's light?

Advent is, indeed, upon us.

And, to be sure, we are the Advent people ... as we sift through our daily lives remembering that, as people striving to attend to our faith lives, we are often inadvertently tripped up by life's inevitable challenges, and swept up into our own earthly concerns and worries, forgetting our



promise of daily spiritual pilgrimage to the stable where the light of God's love, so tender and fragile, awaits. At our spiritual core and center, we know well God's love is ever present, even when seemingly hard to recognize, in the midst of life's most ferocious challenge; God offers hope, peace, joy and love, boundlessly. It is so easy to lose the awareness of God's abundant, enduring love among the boulders of our own worries, fears, downhearted moments, and challenging experiences.

Let's re-orient ourselves to focus on God's love for us as best we can during these four weeks of Advent. We will each make our own efforts of pilgrimage, day by day, to approach the holy one in the manger, -in prayer or even symbolically in our daily life- to look into the eyes of the most vulnerable one before us: the one who believes we will commit to the work before us, the one who expects us to share the kind comfort of God's tenderness, the one who needs our care and compassion, the one who, we know, will be treated unfairly by the world, the one who will love without counting the cost. And when we depart from the manger, spiritually renewed and refreshed, we will choose whether or not we will go home by another way to continue to live as God's Advent people, quietly without fanfare, as the ones who spread hope, peace, joy and love as gifts of wisdom in a needy world.

In spite of our different locations, each of us is one of the many-pilgrim magi on the move, bringing our gifts to God's service; we travel together, yet ever separately, on pilgrimage as the wise seeking God's way, striving to live God's way. Always ready to start again, always renewing our commitment,...again and again...

So through these days of Advent ~ Go, while waiting, in peace with heartfelt joy, to reach out to those whom God puts before you during these Advent days.
Remember why you seek.

Wherever you take a breath of God's spirit, wherever you show courage, wherever you show your faith in God's love and mercy, ~ God's light will shine through you to brighten the world's darkness. There is always time to show God's compassion, kindness or mercy on your pilgrimage.

May these Advent days bring you peace and joy, love and hope.

And ~ May your pilgrimage this Advent be one of holy resolve.
Travel well.

Blessings on your Holy Way,

+Leslie

Wishing you a very Merry Christmas!



Rick Baker

As I write this the local mountains (“hills” if you’re from out west) are shrouded in snow clouds and it’s sleeting. Those of you in warmer climates can now say “I told you so” to those of us here.

The Rev Leslie, The Deacons and Sue are working on ways we can come together for our Christmas Eve Service as well as during Advent so please look out for those events and join us.

I wish I could be as “cheery” about the Covid-19 numbers in our state and especially Franklin County. RCC’s Executive Committee (Minister, Head Deacons, Moderator) met and reviewed the data again. Most sites have a one to two day lag in the data assessment. We follow a number of data reporting sites: The Maine CDC, Fed CDC, NY Times and CovidActNow. The later site, CovidAct Now for Franklin County is the easiest to read and you don’t have to do your own calculations plus their data for daily cases, Infection Rate and Positivity percentage is easily found.

All four sites regularly report and their numbers are usually very close to each other. When we returned in person on June 13 Franklin County was averaging 6.7 cases per day for seven days per 100K population) (which put the Community Infection Risk Level at “Mid-Moderate”. For the last 7 days it has been 59.1 average cases per day for seven days per 100K population which is in the “High” risk level (it should be less than 10/100K). It has been improving but it has a ways to go yet. If it continues to improve we can always have a spontaneous Service in the Church.

The plan is that when we reach a Level 2 or Moderate 7 day average for 100K population and the Infection rate is close to 0.8 and Positivity Rate is close to 3% those will be indicators suggesting we can be back in person.

It’s not easy or fun making these decisions but rather than making the decision based upon “gut feeling” we want to fall back on the science and the data.

It is important that we not go from week to week in deciding about in person or zoom only services. Those involved with the services need lead time to plan. So for the month of December the plan is that we will be Zooming our Services. In person services will be assessed as time moves on.

The credit for our continued Zoom Services goes to the talent and flexibility of Rev Leslie, Sue, Sam and his crew and the Deacons. Thank you so much.

So please hang in there. Be safe.

Peace

Rick Baker



Music Notes

Sue Downes-Borko

Thank you to our musicians who shared their gifts in November through Zoom worship: Erin Smith, Kit Caspar, Kelsey Meehan, and Sam Meehan.

All are invited to hear the Rangeley Ringers Ecumenical Bell Choir at the Walk to Bethlehem on December 12 and at the Chorus Concert on December 17.

May music help you find joy, comfort, and peace during the Seasons of Advent and Christmas!



Production Committee

Sam Meehan

As we find ourselves coming into the holiday season-we are back at it full time on Zoom each week. Dan, Dave and Sam continue to share time behind the curtain to bring church to a screen near you! We are working hard to make sure you have a constant and high quality experience attending the RUCC services. Stay safe and warm!



Mission Board

Sue Downes-Borko

Don Miller

Thanks to the generosity of our church family, the Neighbors in Need offering collected during November brought in \$665! The UCC will pool our donations with other churches to strategically assist those greatest in need, especially the homeless this year.

Our church's final 5-for-5 collection for the calendar year is the Christmas Fund. The Christmas Fund has been caring for active and retired clergy and lay employees of the United Church of Christ for over 100 years, providing emergency grants, supplementation of small annuities and health premiums, and Christmas "Thank You" gift checks each December to our lower-income retirees. If you feel moved to contribute to this offering, please mail a check to Rangeley Congregational Church, PO Box 218, Rangeley, ME.



Finance Committee

Paula Hatfield

Merry Christmas to our RCUCC family and friends! We hope that this newsletter finds you well, and anticipating the celebration of Christ’s birth. We are blessed to have continued receiving faithful contributions during these remote worship times. We sincerely appreciate and thank you for your faithful contributions as they allow us to continue the work of this church.

The Finance Committee has met monthly via Zoom to review and discuss financial activity and reports. This year in-depth analysis is being done on a quarterly basis in light of the projected budget deficit. The analysis of activity through September 30, 2021 shared with the Council at the October meeting shows that we are on track for our projected income and expenses at this point. Our YTD Pledged Contributions include multiple prepaid pledges, both 100% paid and partial prepaids. This requires that we subtract the amount of prepaid pledged contributions that are intended to be applied towards our remaining annual expenses to get an accurate picture of our income YTD. The adjusted balance equals YTD Pledged Contributions of \$39,560 less annualized prepaid pledge amount of \$22,368 resulting in an adjusted YTD Pledged Contributions of \$17,192. Below is a summary of as of September 30, 2021.

YTD Total Income	\$45,089.99
Less prepaid pledges	<u>\$22,368.00</u>
Adjusted YTD Total Income	\$22,721.99
Less YTD Total Expenses	<u>\$25,904.26</u>
Difference as of 9/30/21	\$ -3,182.27

Note that this is less than our budgeted YTD deficit of \$6,228. This is due in large part to heating expenses that occur between October to May but are budgeted equally over 12 months. Some expenses may end up less than budgeted YTD due to COVID closures.

The mid-year financial review and analysis will be done at the end of December, with results shared at the January Church Council meeting and subsequent newsletter in February. Any contributions which you would like to have included in these first six months need to be received by December 31st. Please consider increased mailing time when you mail your contributions to Rangeley Congregational Church, PO Box 218, Rangeley, ME 04970. If you’d like to know where your fiscal YTD giving stands in relation to your annual pledge, please email Kathy Brittain, our financial secretary, at rangeleyuccfinance@gmail.com. If you’d prefer that she call you instead of emailing the information, please include that in your request.



This December the members of our Mission Committee will invite you to participate in a special Christmas Fund offering. If you wish to donate, you can send a separate check to our church or designate an amount on the memo line of your check. Simply write CF (for Christmas Fund) on the memo line of your check and what portion you would like to contribute to that offering.

As always, your input and participation are welcomed at our monthly meetings on the second Monday of each month at 3:45pm. We continue to meet via Zoom so if you'd like to participate, please email Paula Hatfield at rangeleyuccfinance@gmail.com to request a Zoom invite.

With Christmas Blessings,

The Finance Committee

Submitted by Paula Hatfield, Treasurer



Sue Downes-Borko

Rangeley Ecumenical Food Pantry

This year's Thanksgiving boxes were distributed on Monday, November 22nd. Thirty-five boxes were either delivered or picked up at Good Shepherd Church. Each box contained the family's choice of turkey or rotisserie chicken, carrots, potatoes, buttercup squash, stuffing mix, apples, mini-pies, cranberry sauce, and butter. Heidi Nute organized the food, and the reps from each church were on hand to fill boxes and help deliver. The IGA helped by supplying some of the food. Clyde Chapman supplied fresh apples, squash, and potatoes. Thank you for supporting our food pantry!





Kelsey Meehan

Claire Chase



Deacon News

While we have all been praying and hoping to be back in the sanctuary for this Advent season, it is clear we as a congregation need to continue to monitor our region's Covid status. With the numbers as high as they are sadly, we are going to continue to zoom with an eye on the weekly numbers until we can safely return to in person activities. For this advent season there will be a mixture of in person services and zoom services. Pastor Leslie will be offering a Tuesday evening Taizé service at 6:30 PM during Advent on November 30th, December 7th, and December 14th in person at the church. All windows and doors will be opened so please dress warmly and please wear a mask! A Blue Christmas service will be held on December 20th at 6:30 PM over zoom. At this time, we are planning our Christmas Eve service to be in person outside behind the barn. The service will be at 6:30 PM with a back up plan to be on zoom if the weather does not cooperate. Details to follow!

Our Deacon of the Month for December is Claire Chase and our Deacon of the Month for January is Zenna Inness. Please reach out to any Deacon with any needs or suggestions.





Nancy Zambraski

I hope this finds you all happy and healthy and looking forward to the holiday season. Since we were unable to hold the Holly Fair again this year, we have decided to continue with our “other” tradition of placing a small Christmas tree on the porch of the Barn with a sign “Need one, Take one.” It is decorated with hats, mittens, scarfs for anyone to take as they need. It was a big success last year. There are a few special women’s fellowship “elves” who are in the Rangeley area that will help keep the tree “stocked” and upright (see picture). Plus, if you have any items to donate, just let me know.



With the success of our two summer festivals, we have the ability to donate a substantial amount of money to the charities of our choice. As per usual, we will hold a meeting (via zoom) immediately following church service on December 17. Look for an announcement for that Zoom meeting as the date gets closer. If you have any charity that you would like to bring forward, please let me know (or just mention it during the meeting).

We have recently restocked the prayer shawl cabinet with yarn. If you need yarn, contact me and I can arrange for yarn pick up or delivery. For our “summer” ladies who took extra shawls with them, please let me know the names of who you gift them to, so we can keep our records straight.

And as a reminder, join us for a Zoom baby shower for Baby Meehan on Sunday, December 5 at 3 pm. Expect a zoom invite prior to the date. If you have a gift you would like delivered to the Meehan’s, please take it to the Barn immediately following church service on Sunday, Dec. 5.

Let us remember that the Holiday Seasons are upon us. The Women’s Fellowship Co-chairs express our deepest gratitude and appreciation for all the fabulous women of our church and would like to pause and be thankful for all of you. Remember the real reason of the season that is coming.

Blessings to you all,

Nancy Zambraski, Women’s Fellowship co-chair



December Calendar

DATE	TIME	ACTIVITY
Sun. Dec 5	10:00am - 11:00am	Worship Service – Zoom
Sun. Dec 5	11:00am - 12:00pm	Coffee Hour – Zoom
Sun. Dec 5	3:00pm - 4:00pm	Kelsey & Sam Meehan Baby Shower – Zoom
Mon. Dec 6	8:00am - 9:30am	Rangeley Ringers Rehearsal – The Barn
Mon. Dec 6	3:00pm -5:30pm	Piano Lessons w/ Erin – East Room
Tues. Dec 7	6:30pm – 7:00pm	Taizé Service – Sanctuary (no Zoom)
Sun. Dec 12	10:00am - 11:00am	Worship Service – Zoom
Sun. Dec 12	11:00am - 12:00pm	Coffee Hour – Zoom
Sun. Dec 12	5:30pm	Walk to Bethlehem, Starts at Rangeley Inn
Mon Dec 13	8:00am – 9:30am	Rangeley Ringers Rehearsal - The Barn
Mon Dec 13	3:45pm	Finance Meeting – Zoom
Mon. Dec 13	3:00pm -5:00pm	Piano Lessons w/ Erin – East Room
Mon Dec 13	6:30pm	Council Meeting - Zoom
Tues. Dec 14	6:30pm – 7:00pm	Taizé Service – Sanctuary (no Zoom)
Sun. Dec 19	10:00am - 11:00am	Worship Service – Zoom
Sun. Dec 19	11:00am - 12:00pm	Coffee Hour – Zoom
Mon Dec 20	8:00am – 9:30am	Rangeley Ringers Rehearsal - The Barn
Mon. Dec 20	3:00pm -5:00pm	Piano Lessons w/ Erin – East Room
Mon Dec 20	6:30pm	Blue Christmas Service - Zoom
Fri. Dec 24	6:30pm (weather permitting)	Christmas Eve Service – Parking Lot
Sat Dec 25	CHRISTMAS DAY	
Sun Dec 26	10:00am - 11:00am	Worship Service – Zoom
Sun. Dec 26	11:00am - 12:00pm	Coffee Hour – Zoom



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Mon Dec 27	6:30pm	Deacons Meeting – Zoom
Mon Dec 27	3:00-5:00pm	Piano Lessons w/ Erin– East Room
Thur. Dec 30	7:00pm	Spiritual Direction Group - Zoom
Fri Dec 31	NEW YEARS EVE	LET'S WELCOME A NEW YEAR