



## Parish Visitor

First Congregational Church UCC

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### Merry Advent!

I have given exactly ONE Christmas Eve sermon. It was 1998 and it wasn't very good. It was my first Christmas as a solo pastor. At the previous two churches I served, I was an associate pastor. The senior minister got to preach on Christmas and Easter. When I came to the first church I served as a solo pastor, I got to preach on Christmas Eve, Easter, and pretty much every other Sunday. What surprised me the first time I preached on Christmas Eve was, it is not a service for preaching. It is a night for stories.

Throughout Advent and Christmas, we immerse ourselves in the Nativity story. When we were children, we reenacted it in Christmas pageants, like the one that will take place on the Common after our Candlelight Service of Lessons and Carols. Christmas Eve is the night for the story we have known whole lives, Christmas after Christmas. We know the story and we know the people in it. In my own Christmas pageant days, I got to be a shepherd and a king.

On that first Christmas Eve I was in the pulpit, our youngest Kit, played the baby Jesus. Kit was a big baby Jesus, having been born in June. Still, they were the youngest kid in the church at the time. They wailed all night, and we worried how they would react in front of the congregation. We need not have worried. As soon as they were passed to their teenage babysitter who played Mary, Kit promptly dozed off in Julia's arms and slept in heavenly peace for the rest of the service.

The next year, I started a Christmas Eve practice that I have continued ever since. Instead of writing a sermon, I wrote a story. That first year, I told the Nativity story from the perspective of one of the shepherds who had been watching his flocks by night. I imagined what it must have been like to be a shepherd that night. What was it like to see a multitude of the heavenly host appear in the sky above? Had he noticed the star, marking Jesus' birthplace? What was it like to find and worship the Christ child?

The following year, I thought about telling the Mary's story. Most New Testament scholars believe she must have been a teenager. In a traditional agricultural community of her time, that would be a fairly common age to marry and start a family. The more I mulled the story in my head, the less comfortable I felt writing in the voice of a woman. I decided to put off the Mary story. That year I would tell the story from the perspective of an Angel.

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The angel story was fun to write. Because they are not human. Angels are eternal heavenly beings. As such, an angel is able to describe the events of the Nativity, current events, and anything in between. The Next year, I still was not ready to write the Mary story, but I did move a little closer. I told myself that I would write five Nativity stories and rotate them, using a different one every Christmas Eve. The third year, I told the story from Joseph's voice. As someone who first became a parent by marriage, I have come to think of Joseph as the patron saint of stepfathers. In the fourth year, I told the story from the innkeeper's perspective. Of the first four stories, the speakers were mentioned in scripture, but not named. We know they were there, mentioned in the narrative. However, the shepherd, the angel and the innkeeper were not named in the text. The innkeeper is, actually, only implied. That allowed for a lot of room to compose and speculate and have some fun. I just had to be careful nothing I wrote contradicted what was in the Bible.

So, when I came to the fifth year, I stuck to my plan to limit the series to five stories. I had to face Mary. Mary is a fascinating and beloved person. I had a professor in seminary once ask, "How would you like to be responsible for Jesus religious education?" Though Mary is named in the Bible, we don't really know a lot about her. She is especially venerated among Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christians. For the most part, Protestants have left Mariology (theology about Jesus' mother Mary), largely unaddressed.

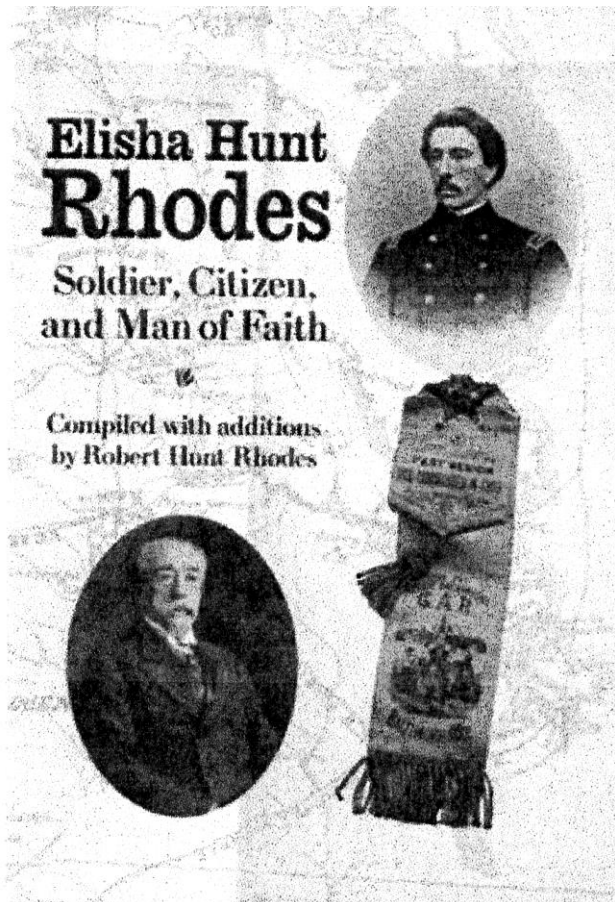
This will be my fifth Christmas Eve in Walpole. I will read the fifth in the series of five Nativity stories. This one is called *Most Blessed Among Women*. It took five years to work up the nerve to write it. You can tell me if it was worth the wait. In the meantime, have a wonderful Advent Season.

In Christ,  
Richard Malmberg



# New in the Library

Bob Rhodes' book about Elisha Hunt Rhodes is now published and he has donated a copy to the library.



It is available for \$29.95 and can be ordered via Rhode Island Publications Society, 1445 Wampanoag Trail, Suite #201, Providence, RI 02915. Tel: 401-272-1776. Fax: 401-273-1791.

Here's a little snippet:

"In June 1861, nineteen year old Elisha Hunt Rhodes of Pawtuxet, Rhode Island enlisted as a private in the Second Rhode Island Volunteers. He fought in every campaign waged by the Army of the Potomac. When the Civil War ended four years later, he was mustered out as a

colonel. Throughout the war he demonstrated leadership and good judgment, as well as the deep humanity that distinguished him throughout his civilian life."

## MISSION NEWS

The Missions Committee had a successful Thanksgiving Food Drive on November 16, collecting a total of 311 non-perishable food items (as well as a bag of apples) and \$190 in cash and checks. Everything was delivered to the Fall Mountain Food Shelf that very afternoon. Betty Prentiss, who is taking a year off from serving on the committee, volunteered to take charge of organizing the event for which we are very grateful. Thank you, Betty!

The Christmas Fund offering, one of our 5-for-5 Wider Mission offerings in the United Church of Christ, will be on Christmas Eve. For over a hundred years, The Christmas Fund has provided directed financial assistance to UCC ministers, church workers, and their families. Last year, over 1,800 congregations joined together to secure the physical, financial, and spiritual health of those engaged in the life of the Church. Many of us remember when this offering was called "Veterans of the Cross".



Look for the "Christmas Fund" donation envelopes in your bulletin and please give generously. If you write a check, be sure to write it payable to First Congregational Church UCC, with "Christmas Fund" in the memo section. Thank you!



Happy Holiday season from the deacons. We had a moving service on

Veterans' Sunday, November 10<sup>th</sup>. The deacons read writings from several conflicts, selected by Pastor Richard. We then read a list of veterans' names who have a connection to our congregation and their families. We were informed that Lester Phillips, Kurt Houghton and Bill Houghton should be added to our list. Thank you for letting the deacons know.

We look forward to December and the special services. We will again purchase gifts and deliver them to the members of our church who cannot attend worship and those who are in nursing homes. Please let us know if you would like us to do this for someone we may not be aware of.

The Deacon of the month for December is Peter Graves, assisted by Becky Pearson.



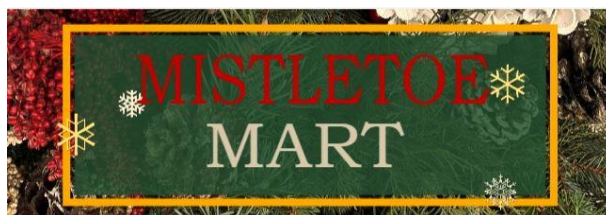
The latest report from Tracey indicates we are in a stable place financially

related to where we are in the fiscal year. That is for the most part due to continued strong support from the congregation, and we are grateful. The recent Mistletoe Mart certainly illustrated that support as well, with all the donations of baked goods, candy, handiwork and white elephant, as well as so many dedicated cooks. We can all feel the joy and good will of the season in this response. Sincere thanks to everyone.

We would also like to thank Chuck Shaw for his regular reports to the congregation via the Thursday emails and the Parish Visitor. It is important to keep everyone informed so we can see our efforts rewarded. Good work, Chuck!!

We will not be meeting this month, but will resume monthly meetings in January 2025, ready to face a new year of challenges.

Holiday greetings to you all!  
Sue Krebs, Chair



I want thank everyone who made this year's Mistletoe Mart a huge success. From the workers who decorated, set up tables and took down tables, to bakers, candy makers

and crafters, the kitchen helpers and those who helped serve: thank you. We made over \$4500 before expenses. On Sunday, we voted to send \$500 to Fall Mountain Food Shelf and the remainder of our pledge (\$1500) to the church. Again, thank you for your support and contributions.

Peg W and Bonnie W  
Co-chairs of Mistletoe Mart



## **DECEMBER** Birthdays & Anniversaries

*To All Mistletoe Mart Bakers,*

Many thanks to all those who helped to make the food/baked goods table for Mistletoe Mart a success. We had a fun day and had very little left at the end. Wishing you all a happy holiday season.

All the best, Ann and Pat

### **ANNIVERSARIES IN DECEMBER**

Mark and Nancy Lightner December 5

### **BIRTHDAYS IN DECEMBER**

Jenny Plante	December 06
Nancy Hamblet Lightner	December 21
Janet Wilson	December 25
Rachel St. John	December 26
Tara Bemis	December 27
Kendra Johns	December 27

**Westmoreland Band  
Christmas Concert**  
December 15, 2024  
4:00 p.m.

Please join us for good music and light refreshments afterward.

This  
**Month's Schedule**



## Church Calendar December 2024

Sunday, December 1	Worship Service w/ communion in the sanctuary and on zoom	10:00 am
Wednesday, December 4	Bible Study on Zoom	4-5 pm
Sunday, December 8	Worship Service in the sanctuary and on Zoom	10:00 am
Wednesday, December 11	Bible Study on Zoom	4-5 pm
Sunday, December 15	Worship Service in the sanctuary and on Zoom	10:00 am
Sunday, December 15	Westmoreland Band Concert, light reception to follow	4:00 pm
Sunday, December 22	Worship Service in the sanctuary and on Zoom	10:00 am
Tuesday, December 24	Christmas Eve Service	5:30 pm
Tuesday, December 24	Live Nativity on the common	6:30 pm
<b>Wednesday, December 25</b>	<b>Christmas - Church office is closed</b>	
Sunday, December 29	Worship Service in the sanctuary and on Zoom	10:00 am

**Friday, December 20th**      **Parish Visitor Deadline**

**Church Office Hours:**      **M-F, 9 am – 12 pm**



December

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PO Box 393  
Walpole, NH 03608

