



This Week @ First

Advent Schedule

Sunday, December 17: Session meeting after worship
Sunday, December 24: Service of Communion at 11 AM; service of lessons and carols at 5 PM (no late evening service)

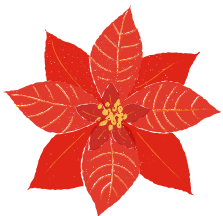
Advent Lunch and Learn Series: Encounter — Experience — Action

Join the collaboration of three downtown churches as we conclude our lunch and learn series on the intersection between faith and the unhoused.

Wednesday, December 20: Taking Action for Those Who Are Unhoused. Host: Trinity United Methodist Church, Moor Hall. Participants will help fill backpacks with food and necessities and then go into the community to distribute them.



The Hannah Circle with the 2023-24 confirmands after wrapping Elder Elf gifts



Poinsettias

Some sanctuary poinsettias are still available! To purchase a poinsettia in honor or memory of a loved one, please contact Norma Meier, nmmth@gmail.com.

Health Precautions

If you are wondering what our Covid-19 protocols are, we recommend following the CDC guidelines for when to isolate and take other precautions. You can find them [here](#).

Worship & Music

To watch our Sunday worship at 11 AM, connect with us on [YouTube](#) (find the bulletin [here](#))! Click the bolded words to follow the links each week.

Spiritual Formation

Adult Church School: The adult class will meet in the Westminster Room, with a [Zoom](#) option. This Sunday we will continue our reflection on the incarnation and embodied wisdom by engaging Resmaa Menakem's book, *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies*. There is no need to have read it before coming to class on Sunday. Bible Study will resume in 2024.

The **children's class** will meet in room 306.

All classes begin at 9:30 AM.

Compassion & Social Justice

We will continue collecting the following items for **Capital City Youth Services** throughout Advent: mens/boys new or gently used clothing; winter hats and gloves; sleeping bags, blankets, small tents, tarps, flashlights, batteries, backpacks, camping pillows, Straight Talk (pay-as-you-go) phones, hand/body warmers, and hygiene items such as shampoo, soap and deodorant. Bring items to church services throughout the month.

Worship Ministry Team

We are in need of volunteers to usher as well as elders — you need not currently be on session — to serve communion. The next communion "training" session will be on **Sunday, January 7 at 10 AM**. Please email **Carolyn Bradley** (carolynbradley@gmail.com) for ushering, or **Martha Kutter** (mkutter@maclay.org) for serving or setting up communion.

First Presbyterian Church

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Caroling at Westminster Oaks



Thank you to the volunteers who packed snack packs after worship on December 10! We were able to put together 300 packs and will begin distributing them each Wednesday at church starting on January 3rd.

Pastor's Note

“Have a heart that never hardens, and a temper that never tires, and a touch that never hurts.” — Charles Dickens

A heart that never hardens is a tall order. Scripture proclaims prophetic calls against such hardening. In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus explains why he teaches in parables by quoting Isaiah, “For the hearts of these people are hardened, and their ears cannot hear, and they have closed their eyes — so their eyes cannot see, and their ears cannot hear, and their hearts cannot understand and they cannot turn to me and let me heal them.”

Gary Haugen, the founder of Intergenerational Justice Mission, a graduate of Harvard, describes testimony of people of faith as critical to his calling to justice work. People asking, exploring, and listening about what it means to be a Christian in a world of hurting and suffering led him to his life's work. He realized early in his life, “God was in all the places of human suffering.”

Wednesday, with the help of Vicar Rachel, the tenacity of Carol Weissert, and a cadre of First members gathered by Debbie Gibson, the Westminster Room overflowed with people from First Baptist, Trinity Methodist, and Grace Mission. The unsheltered gathered with the privileged and shared a meal, listening and seeing. This is heart softening work that turns the privileged to Christ who says, “Come to me, and I will give you rest.” Christ who says to the unsheltered, “You are my beloved, and with you, I am well pleased.”



Embodied Light is Christ's Light. It shines into the places where we most need to be present. It is the Light that teaches us to acknowledge our rushing, avoiding, and blaming and instead asks us to turn, and to open our eyes and our ears to see the truth of human pain and suffering. To trust in taking breath with Holy Breath, who will ease the pain and suffering; to trust in taking a step together along the path, loosened in Christ's love. Give [this song](#) a listen, and see how it leads your heart.

God's peace,
God's presence.
Anne

Why is there one pink candle?

I did not grow up with the tradition of the Advent wreath; that tradition I learned at First Presbyterian. It is a tradition that has anchored worship and reflection for me and my family for decades now. Indeed, the entire season of Advent redirected my children to anticipate something so much more interesting than Santa — or, depending on their ages, something at least as interesting. Ole Saint Nick visited our home and we expected him with great excitement and happiness. But Advent allowed us to expect Emmanuel with awe and wonder and the patient beauty of a candle lit in the darkness. We had an Advent wreath at church and an Advent wreath on our table at home and we daily waited and marked our waiting.

Now that the Advent wreath tradition has saturated my bones, I can confess that I have misunderstood the pink candle all these years. I was told it was the Mary candle and was to be lit on the third Sunday of Advent when the scriptures showed us Mary and her Magnificat. I remember singing Mary's Magnificat on the third Sunday after the pink candle was lit. But now I find debate on which Sunday is Mary's and another story for the pink candle.

The Catholic Church tells [this story](#):

A pink candle that signifies joy makes sense since it is lit on Gaudete Sunday — named for the entrance antiphon for that Sunday's Mass: "Rejoice (gaudete) in the Lord always, again I say, rejoice." The joy is subdued, however, as the penitential violet of the other weeks lessens to rose as we move closer to Christmas.

The Methodists include in their explanation ways the culture shaped [this tradition](#):

This shift in context from home to public use also made it important in the eyes of some for the candles to be given a meaning more than simply marking time and increasing light. This led to special ceremonies being developed for lighting these special candles each week.

As this practice began to catch on by the mid-twentieth century, several church supply houses who sold Advent wreaths and candles for public worship also developed resources, banners, and bulletin covers assigning a theme to each week, and thus each candle, based on scriptures from the one-year lectionaries used at that time. Those themes were Hope, Love, Joy, and Peace, in that order. Today, almost no one uses those one-year lectionaries, so those themes may not always fit the scriptures we hear in worship. The one exception is the Third Sunday of Advent, where the current lectionaries have continued to support the centuries old observance of "Gaudete" or "Joy Sunday." That is why church supply houses often offer rose or pink colored candles for the wreath for use on this day.

We Presbyterians claim Advent as a between time, reiterating that we are awaiting something that has already begun.

In Advent we expectantly wait for the One who has already come. We anticipate the promised justice of God's new world, yet we praise God who raised the "righteous branch" to rule with justice and righteousness. We hope for the restoration of the afflicted, the tormented, and the grieving, yet we delight that healing has come in Christ. We long for the beating of swords into plowshares, yet we rejoice that the Prince of Peace has appeared. We yearn for the barren deserts of our inner cities to flourish, yet we laud the desert Rose that has bloomed. We dream of the land where lions and lambs live in harmony, yet we acclaim the child born to lead us into the promised land.

The waiting time of Advent continues to feed my faith and lighting Advent candles — pink and purple ones — is a tradition I value. As we light the pink candle this week, I suspect joy will come to some in the images of Mary and to others in memories of justice and to a few in visions of the Church triumphant, but I am certain joy will come. Indeed, joy is already here.

Peggy Wright-Cleveland

