

THE SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH in the CITY OF NEW YORK
Pastoral newsletter for December 2020

THE SEASONS OF ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS



Though we're not back in the sanctuary, thanks to Sexton Pete our Advent decorations are.

Dear Friends in Christ,

This will be a strange Christmas, indeed – as it was just a strange Thanksgiving. Strange – but not so bad, actually. I don't know what your Thanksgiving was like, but though I missed my large family, there was Zoom. And not having to travel over the river and through the woods to grandmother's house (or, in my case, via I-84 and I-90 to Boston) made the day more restful, and left time to deliver meals to local families who would otherwise have done without. Though I ate well, not having to overeat, lest I offend any of the myriad cooks, was a great relief. (There were just 4 of us – plus, we ordered half the meal delivered!) Getting to enjoy a walk up Madison Avenue while it was still light out (and such a mild day, to boot) was such a pleasure – and window shopping is free!

A young man, telling me about his Thanksgiving, said his wife had talked of the blessings they've found this year – even though he'd spent over two months hospitalized with Covid last spring. Jose said, "A year ago, on most days, I'd be in one room doing something, my wife would be in another, the boys would be up in their room. Now – we spend time together. In the same room. Turns out, we like being together! It's a blessing in disguise."

Yes, it will be a strange Christmas. Though I doubt it can be any stranger than that first Christmas – the unexpected pregnancy, the unexpected government decree, the travel, the lack of shelter, the uncertainty. The fear. But it seems there was also joy, and beauty and grace and glory. As we look forward to the coming of the light of Christ into an especially frightened and divided world, what blessings will we discover this Christmas that we can carry into the future? What glimpse of grace and glory will inspire us, and give us hope?

Mission Discernment Discussions

The Mission Study Team is holding two Zoom gatherings to continue our conversations in discerning our mission: Wednesday, December 2, at 5:30 p.m., and Sunday after worship, on December 6. Feel free to attend either one (or both!).

Our last meeting in September was extremely productive in offering ideas and laying out concerns. In this next gathering, we want to move toward defining our mission in concrete terms, roughly broken down into two areas:

What is our mission in terms of our direction or focus? For example, is there a particular issue or concern we wish to address, such as hunger or mass incarceration? Do we seek to serve certain populations, such as children, the elderly or immigrants?

Second, what should our mission statement say? We will consider words, phrases, ideas that come to mind.

Our Mission Study has been approved by the Session and is being sent to the Presbytery's Commission on Ministry on Tuesday. Approval of the report is needed before we set up a Pastor Nominating Committee. So we're getting closer!

~ The Mission Team – Elaine Song, Nancy Hughes, Gordon Bakoulis

RSVP to Elaine Song at esong701@gmail.com - though please attend even if you can't RSVP! **The Zoom info for December 2 will be sent to the congregation that morning – it will be the same as Sunday worship.**

IDEAS FOR ADVENT – and BEYOND

Here are a few ideas for adding some spiritual exercising to your Christmas preparations this year:

- Read the Bible – every day! If you do already, read a book you don't usually read or have skipped over.
- Make a prayer garland – we've done this in the past at church, but you can do it at home. Cut strips of colored paper (red and green are nice) and write on them the names of people or concerns you are praying for. When you have a few, paste or staple together to make a garland, and hang in a window or across a mirror.
- As Christmas cards arrive during December, place them in a basket or bowl. Once a day, pull out one card and pray for that person or family. Or do that with cards from organizations that do Christmas appeals, whether or not you give them money. You could keep the Christmas card basket out all year and pray regularly for others.
- Try a prayer app! Sacred space (<https://www.sacredspace.ie/and>) and Pray as You Go (<https://pray-as-you-go.org/>) are two I like.
- Unplug for Christmas! Make your own cards, or gifts, or cookies or popcorn and cranberry garlands. Make some music. Or enjoy some silence.

Qualities of Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC) Members

As noted above, the church Mission Study Report has been sent to the Presbytery's Commission on Ministry. One COM approves the report, it will give Second Presbyterian the go-ahead to elect a Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC). Therefore, it's a good time to share with you the qualities recommended for PNC members, according to *On Calling A Pastor*, the PC(USA)'s manual for churches seeking pastors:

In considering nominees for the PNC, the congregation's nominating committee should strive for a PNC that is representative of the whole congregation. It should consider church members of integrity who are:

- knowledgeable about the church and community and about Presbyterian theology and government;
- spiritual leaders within the congregation and are active in the life and work of the congregation;
- able to make a significant commitment of their time, energy, and very best wisdom;
- willing to accept this as a task of spiritual discernment, not being easily influenced by personal desires or congregational politics, but rather listening for the voice of God
- able to honor confidentiality.

The congregation must give careful and prayerful attention to the election of persons to serve in this important role.

Does this describe you? Or someone you know? It's time to think about it...

DECEMBER AT SPC

All worship and meetings continue by Zoom.

Wednesday, December 2, 5:30 pm: Mission Discernment Discussion

Sunday December 6: 10 AM Mini Sunday School; **10:15 AM** 2nd Sunday of Advent Worship Service with **Communion** AND **A Zoom Advent Pageant Presentation**, which will feature stories about the origins of our Christmas traditions (sometimes more myth than history!). If you have a particular tradition that's not mentioned, there will be time in the service for you to tell us about it! **11:30-ish**: After a short break, there will be another **Mission Discernment Discussion**

Sunday December 13: 10 AM Mini Sunday School; **10:15 AM** 3rd Sunday of Advent Worship Service with Virtual (pre-recorded) **Confirmation and Baptism**, as the congregation welcomes Miranda Ewing and Daniel Ruben into the fold.

Wednesday December 16: 12 noon, Zoom Prayer Meeting. Contact Vivian, Karen or Lindsay for details. **Date subject to change, so stay tuned!**

Sunday December 20: 10 AM Mini Sunday School; **10:15 AM** 4th Sunday of Advent
Worship Service AND **Music Sunday!**

Thursday December 24, 6 PM: Christmas Eve Worship service. Come all ye
faithful!

Friday, December 25: Christmas Day!

Sunday December 27: 10:15 AM Worship Service on the 1st Sunday of Christmas.
Lindsay, Eunjung and Joel will be off - more details to come! **And if you're interested
in helping to lead worship, just let Lindsay know!**

*The beautiful season of Advent is one of expectation and hope, so I share this quote
from Henri Nouwen, reminding us of the difference between hope and mere optimism:*

"Optimism and hope are radically different attitudes. Optimism is the expectation that
things – the weather, human relationships, the economy, the political situation, and so
on – will get better. Hope is the trust that God will fulfill God's promises to us in a way
that leads us to true freedom. The optimist speaks about concrete changes in the
future. The person of hope lives in the moment with the knowledge and trust that all of
life is in good hands. All the great spiritual leaders in history were people of hope.
Abraham, Moses, Ruth, Mary, Jesus, Rumi, Gandhi, and Dorothy Day all lived with a
promise in their hearts that guided them toward the future without the need to know
exactly what it would look like. Let's live with hope."



God be with you, until we meet again.

love and light,
Rev. Lindsay