



# THE ROLLING STONE

## Rollstone Congregational Church

United Church of Christ  
199 Main Street, Fitchburg, MA

Pastor: Rev. David B. Hanks 978-821-9571  
[www.rollstone.org](http://www.rollstone.org)

DECEMBER, 2022



### *Pastor's* **REFLECTION**

## Warning, Christmas Ahead!

**W**arning, you are about to enter a season that will leave you confused and even angry – you are now entering

ADVENT. What is Advent? It is the preparation period leading up to Christmas. For those of us that are Christian this is an important season as we await the Messiah and the fulfillment of God's promise.

It can be said that we live today in a post-Christian era or a post-Christian culture. It is true, but it does become a little convoluted in that period in the weeks between Thanksgiving and December 25. During these roughly four weeks, the United States is anything but a post-Christian culture. It is a decidedly Christian one, even with all the trappings of the commercialism and consumerism that happens all around us.

How do we know this? Because this is the one time of the year when atheists, the ACLU, and certain cynical types for whom the sight of a Nativity Scene on public property causes heart tremors, they get their knickers in a twist. If we truly lived in a post-Christian culture, occasional "Christian" intrusions such as the aforementioned nativity scene, or the accidental playing of "Joy to the World" over the public address system in a county courthouse or a Target store, would be regarded as astonishing aberrations and dismissed as not worth the paper

necessary to file a court brief.

Yet when Thanksgiving rolls around the secularists, anti-Christians and separation-of-church-and-state people go on red alert. The fact that Grinches or modern "Herods" do so tells me that they do not really believe that we live in a post-Christian era at all. Civil religion may be all but dead in America, but during the weeks prior to Christmas Day, the pale corpse of Christmas past seems to come alive once again.

I have no problem with those who want to remove Christmas from the public square or town common, for whatever reason. I say, let Christmas be celebrated by Christians. The rest, let them celebrate the "holidays."

What puzzles me is why and for what reason is this "Christ-less" holiday observed by the religion-less? What do non-Christians, secularists and atheists celebrate during this festive holiday season? Is it just an opportunity to drink spiked eggnog and make fools of themselves at the office party? Why do they put up the Christmas tree and sling lights along the gutters of their houses, or put-up decorations and Santas on the front lawn? Why do they shop for presents and run up enormous charges on the credit cards, and spend the time to wrap presents and put them under the tree? For what? Why go to all the trouble for something as innocuous as what they call

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

# CHURCH SCHOOL NEWS

DECEMBER 2022

**Happy December everyone,**



Calling all decorators and architects!  
Join us: Sunday December 4th, after  
worship, for a fun activity — building  
gingerbread houses.  
No need to bring anything, just your  
creativity...



The Church School invites all to experience the Living Nativity at Our Savior Lutheran Church in Westminster on Saturday, December 3rd at 6:00 (WEATHER PERMITTING - DRESS WARMLY). It is all outdoors and a beautiful way to experience the Real Christmas Story in action.

**We will be having our Christmas Pageant during worship on Sunday, December 18th.**

Please see Beth if you, your grandkids, or others want to participate. All are welcome to join even adults.

Another special way you can participate is to donate one small/medium stuffed animal that we can add to the Creche Scene - they will be donated to our area Police and Fire Departments. These can be ready to help comfort a child if needed as the first responders answer family calls.

Sunday, January 1st will be a "Family Sunday" (no church school classes), children are welcome to stay for the service with their parents.

At fellowship there will be a Brunch to ring in the New Year.

**Happy New Year and a  
Blessed 2023 to ALL!!**





## PASTOR'S REFLECTION

Continued from page 1

the “holiday” season? Happy Holidays? What holiday? Well, Christmas, they say.

Exactly.

Some may answer that question (“What holiday?”) by saying Hanukkah, or Kwanzaa. Fine. But really, for most folks the holiday is Christmas, right? As for those who want to completely expunge Christmas from any observance that might be funded by the taxpayer, just what exactly is their holiday? At least they could come up with a name for it. They could title it as the All-American “Let’s go into debt event.” The use of “Holiday” is so lame, and hardly a reason to spend so much money.

If you have ever been traveling in a foreign country during the Christmas season there are some odd things, you might encounter. It is really odd to be in a Muslim country, for example, and see the Christmas decorations all around. It has been observed that in a Swiss Hotel in Istanbul you might hear a choir singing “Silent Night, Holy Night” in the lobby. In Bethlehem, Christmas, of course, is huge. In a large department store in the People’s Republic of China, where Party members are not allowed to have any religious affiliation, you can listen to a carol being piped through the P.A. system. Young Chinese voices were singing in English: “Joy to the world, the Lord is come, let Earth receive her King; Let every heart prepare Him room, and heaven and nature sing ...”

Muslims, Jews, and political atheists apparently are not as sensitive to this stuff as are secular Americans. They are much more willing to let Christians have their moment.

There are some Christians who will attempt to being an occasional troublemaker. If they get wind of a national department or big-box store that has forbidden their employees to greet people by saying “Merry Christmas” or will not play Christmas carols in their store, they will think of ways to throw dirt on their parade — which you have to admit is not a very charitable impulse, but sometimes we just get angry and need to vent. There are some constructive ways to let you point be known but be careful to not start the next cultural revolution. You might walk into their store wearing a T-shirt which boldly says, “Jesus Is the Reason for the Season,” or “Merry Christmas,” or you might hum the words to a Christian carol such as “What Child Is This?” And you may decide to never say “Happy Holidays” or “Season Greetings.”

We are Christians and whether in the marketplace, my church, or my home,

I am not celebrating the “holidays;” I am celebrating the birth of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And I think it is cool that people who hear me say “Merry Christmas” might correctly assume I am a Christian — not something else.

And, frankly, I hope that you do not get jittery when a Muslim friend and Jewish friend are celebrating their holidays, and if there were religious displays for Yom Kippur or Ramadan that were to appear on the courthouse steps, you should not object to our tax dollars being spent to support this.

But remember that all of us are different and react differently. And hopefully we totally get that others do not agree, and that there is a valid argument against this practice.

But please, let us not harass each other. And if we are Christians, then let us as Christians teach our families what Christmas is all about. At the very least this involves watching or attending a Christmas Eve church service. This means developing some family Christmas rituals. This means reading the Christmas story around the Christmas dinner table. This means getting out to go caroling in the streets.

Let us stop complaining about those who want to remove Christmas from the culture. Let them. That is what they do. It is high time for Christians to recover the practice of Christmas observance. Going in debt to buy Christmas presents has nothing to do with it, and today I would urge Christians to stop this practice altogether. Let us find other ways to experience Christmas as a religious and theological event and holy day. Buying a new smartphone or some other gadget is not necessary to experience the day.

Join us for the Christmas Eve Service.

*Merry Christmas!*

*Pastor Dave*



# Rollstone Church Visioning Exercise

*These notes come from a visioning session at Rollstone Congregational Church on Oct. 30, 2022. They represent the best thoughts, wishes and ideas of members of Rollstone Congregational Church. Approximately 30 parishioners participated, organized in five tables with a discussion leader/note taker at each table.*

*Five members of the Church's Church and Pastoral Relations Council led small groups of church members in the discussion. They are: Mary Anne Smith, Marie Stansel, Linda Gallant, George Sammet and Eileen Berger*

*The ideas come from the discussion leaders' notes. They are listed here without prejudice but in an order to make them easier to consider.*

*Participants in the visioning exercise realize that we will need both short-term and long-term congregational plans to reach our goals. Next step will be the development of teams to pursue both a five-year plan and a 10-year plan to build back our church.*

## Goals

1. Aim to fill one-half of the Church's pews each Sunday (in five years? 10 years?).
2. Embrace/seek out greater diversity
3. Build a leadership position among Fitchburg Churches

## How to Get There:

### Annual Planning

- Agree on slate of yearly and long term goals
- Agree on leadership team for each of annual goals (at least two to a team).
- Develop 5-year and 10-year plan for pursuing goals
- Meet semi-annually to review successes and renew or revise goals

### Make Church Entrance More Inviting:

- Clean up Main St. entrance
- Open front doors for services
- Change signage regularly
- Clearly Indicate that entrance and parking are in the back
- Display Rollstone's historical information
- Station greeters at Snow St. entrance each Sunday
- Make Snow St. entrance more inviting
- Renovate/beautify parking lot
- Special bi-lingual greeting for visitors at entrance way

### Introduce Visitor Welcoming Protocols

- At services, introduce visitors and invite them to join in Fellowship activities
- Get visitors info in sign-in book
- At Fellowship make effort to engage visitors in conversation, encouraging questions about Rollstone
- Follow up with letter providing list of upcoming activities, inviting them to return.
- Use Spanish language in signage

### Special Events/Community Use In the Church:

- Schedule Community Dinners
- Plan monthly family entertainment programs. Ex: craft night with kids, family cooking night, family budgeting (Kim Bourque's program) etc.
- Evening events for homeless (Free pizza)
- Thursday night meetings for lay leaders
- Back-to-School Fair providing supplies to needy kids
- Movie night, local theatre events
- Fashion Show
- Dance for young people
- Information for young families (Kim Bourke's program).
- Community Speaker Series – Representatives from other worship groups; local civic and non-profit organizations etc. perhaps one Sunday a month.
- Encourage members to join local civic and cultural groups and share news from these activities at church services
- Encourage Community use of Church for:
  - Arts Events
  - Music Events



- As a community meeting or celebration place: wedding receptions, baby showers, Non-alcoholic New Years' Eve party.
- Integrate more modern practices into church service
  - Music: Consider using a mix of contemporary music, sacred music traditional and Gospel music (Bill Gaither, David Phelps)
  - Guitar, fiddle and accordion music (using extended church family musicians, piped in music).
  - Visit Evangelical and Pentecostal worship events for ideas on how to build congregation.
  - Consider two Sunday services. One with traditional sacred music and one with mainstream music
  - Restart Choir
  - Contact community leaders to find out how Rollstone can be more the helpful
    - Local government leaders (Sally Cragin), arts groups (Stratton Players, Fitchburg Historical Society, etc.)

### **Educational Programs in the Church**

- After-school program for latchkey children
- After-school tutors or homework helpers, perhaps one day a week
- Religious instructions or Bible Study for children, adults, perhaps engage a seminary intern to develop an educational programs
- Invite local politicians to provide updates on Fitchburg's growth plans
- Personal self-help events

### **Communications tools**

- Small informational pamphlet for Neighborhood Outreach
- More in-depth pamphlet for interested visitors
- Neighborhood flyers for Church Special Events
- Flyer for Church Connection with Wellville
- Press Release on Church news and special events
- Develop plans for better use of social media (Tic Toc, etc.)
  - Provide education for members who want to better use social media

### **Provide Group Transportation for out-of-church events**

Examples: Bowling at Putman Land, University and local theatre productions, cultural events in Boston, etc.

### **Organize for Growth**

- Outreach, Outreach, Outreach
- Assign two-person outreach teams for various audiences; Each team will submit a one-year outreach plan to Church Council
  - Areas:
    - Personal (families, seniors, school children, businesses, higher ed institutions, LGBT, handicapped, etc.)
    - Neighborhoods (West Fitchburg, Cleghorn, Schools, Higher Ed etc)
  - Explore how the Wellville-Rollstone connection can help build our congregation.
  - Plan for recruiting members from new, downtown apartment living spaces as they open up.
  - Develop a public relations/external communications committee

### **Increase Revenue/Reduce Financial Burdens**

- Sell the current building and move to a smaller more economical space.
- Agree on policy for managing our renters (so far, we have been doing this ad hoc)
- Rent available space to activities: Baby showers, bridal showers, rummage sales
- Share the building with another church or Fitchburg State
- Offer parking lots to University on weekdays for pay.

*Eileen Berger*

**Chair**

**Church and Pastoral Relations Council**

# Join us on December 4<sup>th</sup> following worship for a **Miniature Gingerbread House Building event.**

This is for all members young and old.  
We will supply the materials, you supply  
the Christmas Spirit!!!



**Help your church family ring in the New Year  
as we celebrate with an All-Church Brunch.**



**This will take place on January 1<sup>st</sup>  
immediately following worship.**  
*(This will be in place of our regular fellowship hour.)*

Please indicate on the sign-up sheet in Cookman Hall  
if you plan to attend. Also donations to help defray the  
costs will be greatly appreciated by either monetary  
gifts or the giving of various food items needed.

*Thank You and Happy New Year!!!*



# SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS



**We will be supporting  
Our Father's Table  
this Christmas season  
by providing  
Christmas Dinner for  
5 families.**

Per the agency request we will be providing identical baskets which you can contribute to by making monetary donations in the envelopes provided by December 11<sup>th</sup>.

---

**We are collecting new stuffed animals  
to be used during the  
Christmas Pageant on December 18<sup>th</sup>.**

All animals must be new with the original tags still attached.

All stuffed animals will be donated to the Fitchburg Police Department for their children's comfort program.



# Lessons



# & Carols

Join us for a special performance by  
the Students of Groton School

January 8, 2023  
2:00 PM

Rollstone Congregational Church

Freewill Offering will be received.

— *Open to the public* —





Dear Rollstone! It's December!  
A very happy month  
In this there is GOOD CHRISTMAS!  
And then the year is done!

Let's have a happy Advent!  
And sing some carols, too!  
To celebrate this Christmas,  
We all could sure use you!!

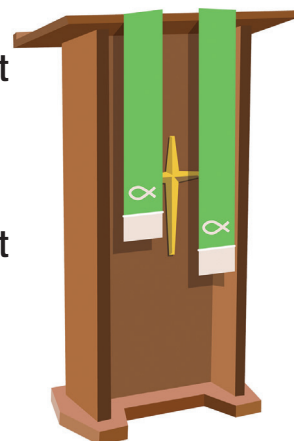
For us at blessed Rollstone  
Let's celebrate a lot!  
We definitely are blessed,  
With all we've really got!

- *Sarah Kee*




# Liturgists Schedule for December and January

December 4th	2nd Sunday of Advent	Marie Stansel
December 11th	3rd Sunday of Advent	Dianne Sammet
December 18th	4th Sunday of Advent	Kathy Rowe
December 24th	Christmas Eve	Lois Schrader
January 1st	1st Sunday of Christmas	Dianne Sammet
January 8th	1st Sunday After Epiphany	Marie Stansel
January 15th	2nd Sunday After Epiphany	Jean Suomala
January 22nd	3rd Sunday After Epiphany	Beth Porell
January 29th	4th Sunday After Epiphany	Lois Schrader

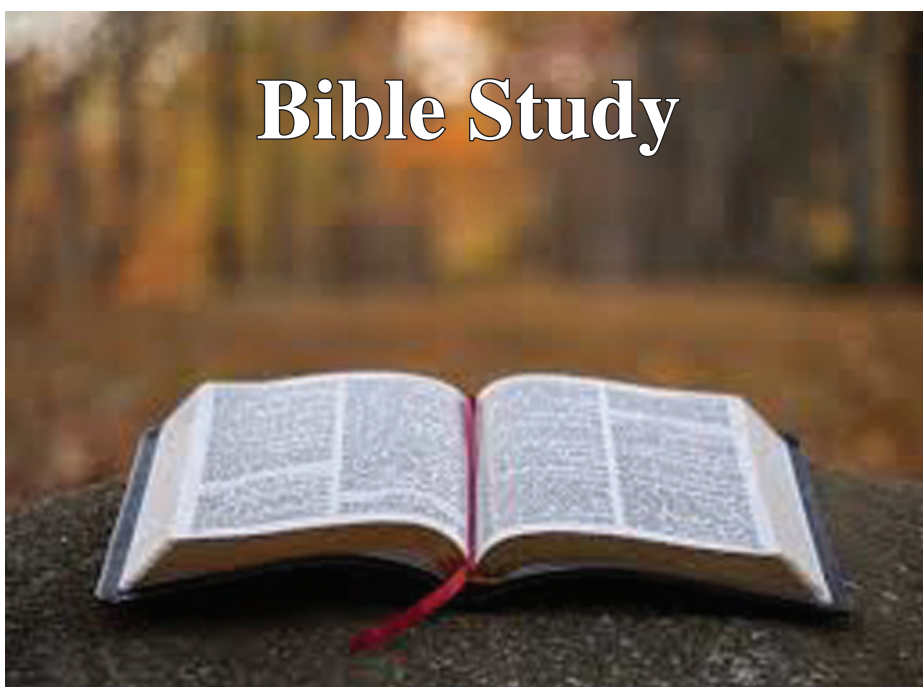


## Advent Wreath Readers

November 27th		1st Sunday of Advent	Lois Schrader & Linda Haas
December 4th		2nd Sunday of Advent	Ron Smith and Family
December 11th		3rd Sunday of Advent	Marie Stansel & Amy Larsen
December 18th		4th Sunday of Advent	Dianne Sammet & Jean Suomala

Bible Study is held every Wednesday morning at 10:00 AM. All are invited to join as you are available. Currently we are studying the Pauline Epistles (those books and letters of the Apostle Paul). We have been studying the history, the purpose, and the theology of Paul's letters. The basis of Paul writing these letters was to provide guidance, encouragement, and pastoral care to the young Christian church. The readings are following the chronological order in which they were written. We hope to complete the following before the end of the year as we study: 1st Corinthians, Philippians, Philemon, and 2nd Corinthians.

If you want any details just ask Pastor Dave. Reading from other versions/ translations of the bible is encouraged as we learn from the Word of God.





# EVENTS IN DECEMBER

Rollstone Congregational Church

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
27 <b>Advent</b> 10:00am Worship Services	28 9:00am Office Hours	29 9:00am Office Hours 2:00pm FHD Vaccination Clinic	30 9:00am Church Office Hours 10:00am Bible Study	1 5:30pm Boy Scouts Meeting	2	3
4 10:00am Worship Services 11:15am Family Fellowship - Gingerbread Event	5 9:00am Office Hours	6 9:00am Office Hours	7 9:00am Church Office Hours 10:00am Bible Study	8 5:30pm Boy Scouts Meeting	9	10
11 10:00am Worship Services	12 9:00am Office Hours	13 9:00am Office Hours	14 9:00am Church Office Hours 10:00am Bible Study	15 5:30pm Boy Scouts Meeting	16	17
18 10:00am Worship Services	19 9:00am Office Hours	20 Rolling Stone Deadline 9:00am Office Hours	21 <b>First Day of Winter</b> 9:00am Church Office Hours 10:00am Bible Study	22 5:30pm Boy Scouts Meeting	23	24 6:00pm Christmas Eve Service
25 <b>Christmas Day</b>	26 Office Closed	27 9:00am Office Hours	28 Annual Reports are now due 9:00am Church Office Hours	29 5:30pm Boy Scouts Meeting	30	31



# Special Offering

This year a decision was made to change the way that we honor the memory of loved ones in the decorating of the sanctuary. We have chosen to create a few floral pieces to decorate the front of the sanctuary in place of the myriad of poinsettias that would be placed upon the altar. Our reasoning is threefold: First is a cost savings to each of you as we suggest the donations be \$10, or if you can, any additional will be appreciated. The second reason is that the pricing of plants and availability have become unpredictable. And finally, the third reason is that we throw away close to 90% of the poinsettias as nobody wishes to take them home. While many of you have suggested that we take them to the shut-ins, there are just too many to do that. So please bear with us as we try to beautify the sanctuary in a responsible and cost-efficient manner.

*Merry Christmas and may the memory of our loved ones live on during this season.*

## Christmas Flowers 2022

*If you would like to donate towards the christmas flowers, the suggested donation is \$10.00, or if you can, any additional will be appreciateed.*

Given by \_\_\_\_\_

In Memory or Honor of \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Please make a separate slip for each donation and enclose payment to:  
Rollstone Congregational Church

