



*“The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.” John 1: 15*

This verse is the centerpiece of our Star Sunday celebration and this past year, it was also a key phrase in our weekly ritual to light the candles on the Advent wreath. It has always been a favorite verse of mine because it speaks to God’s promise to never leave us alone when the world outside our doors feels sinister and scary. As I write this, we are enduring frigid cold in our area lingering on day after day. And, on the West Coast, fires are burning out of control in Los Angeles and Oregon. Wars still rage in the Middle East and Eastern Europe and Covid is experiencing a surge in our area. Then of course there is much anxiety as a new administration comes into Washington and while some folks are excited others are not. So much is unclear about so many different situations happening in our world these days, it makes sense that darkness feels like more than a metaphor. It feels like a kind of new reality we must endure until new possibilities become clear once again. That, dear ones, will happen. This is what I believe the author of John’s Gospel was trying to get at for folks in his time, and in our own. Such is the timeliness of God’s message of hope for the living of these days.

What I confess to being saddened by in recent days is the writings of a few UCC colleagues who decry the use of this light dispelling the darkness metaphor because they feel it adds an extra burden to folks of color. In other words, they understand this light and darkness as inherently assuming the darkness is always seen as bad and therefore folks with dark skins are somehow inherently less than us “light” folks. First of all, I have only ever seen in this text the power of God’s love as the light being referenced and all the fears, worries and challenges faced by all of God’s Creation in these troubled days as what is meant by the darkness metaphor. Second, I worry that this kind of “angels dancing on the head of a pin” theological debate is interesting and important for theologians and clergy as we work on our own sensitivity on issues such as racism. But it is not even on the radar screen of

most of the folks coming into our churches. By worrying about this turn of phrase as being seen as excluding others from important conversations, I think we missing the point. We all need to do the hard work of discovering what and how God’s light means to us as it breaks into our individual lives. We also must discern carefully the dark places in our own lives and hearts. Why so quick to judge others and how they understand the world? Why are we quick to overlook some injustices and still ignore others? How can we move beyond fear into the full glory of God’s abiding presence? These are the questions I find embedded in this short and powerful verse. How about you?

On a related note, I would like to invite you to join me in a simple act of solidarity with all the folks in our communities to help us celebrate what we have in common instead of arguing about all the ways we are different. I am leaving one of my Christmas window candles in the center window of my living room and it will always be lit, from now until 2026 begins. My own way of helping the light to shine into the darkness, into all those places where God is waiting for us to be enfolded in the abiding love God gifts to us all, every moment of every day. If you wouldn’t mind, let me know if you decide to do this. And a photo would be nice too!

Your sister in faith and sibling in Christ,

**Pastor Ruth**



**MARK YOUR CALENDAR!**

**THRESHOLD RETREAT 2.0**  
Saturday, February 15, 9am - 3pm  
At the church  
Details to follow

## Rev. Ruth's Community Office Hours

Come visit me at Martin House Books (in the old Savoy Bookstore space!) from 1:00 PM – 3:00 PM on Thursday, January 9<sup>th</sup> and Thursday, January 23<sup>rd</sup>.



## Worship Schedule

Our Sunday morning worship service begins at 9:45am in-person and live on Facebook.

**Sunday, January 5<sup>th</sup>** –

Epiphany Star Sunday Service

**Sunday, January 12<sup>th</sup>** – Sermon series on the UCC Statement of Faith begins

- Church Council Meeting at 11:00AM

**Sunday, January 19<sup>th</sup>** – Sermon series continues

- Stewardship thank you notes written during Fellowship

**Sunday, January 26<sup>th</sup>** – Sermon series continues

- Annual Meeting & Potluck Brunch

*Please speak with Rev. Ruth if you would like a hard copy of the weekly sermon.*

## Call for the 61<sup>st</sup>

## ANNUAL MEETING

UNITED CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF WESTERLY, UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

The Annual Meeting shall be held on January 26, 2025 immediately following worship in the sanctuary. All are welcome to attend; only members of the church are able to vote.

The purpose of the meeting shall be to receive the yearly reports of Officers, Boards, Committees, Organizations and Departments; to elect officers; adopt the annual budget; set up plans for the new year; and vote on any other business that may come before the congregation.

The Treasurer's Report, duly audited, shall be presented.

Respectfully submitted,  
Cathy Gray, Clerk



## Diaconate Schedule for January

Jan. 5 - Lynn Murray (401) 450-9249

Jan. 12 – Bethany Foster (401) 539-4003

Jan. 19 – Allana Allik (860)599-5212

Jan. 26 – Lynn Murray (401) 450-9249

*Please know you can call any Deacon at any time with your joys, concerns, and prayer requests.*

## News From the Deacons

Many thanks to those who participated in the Advent services, from the readers to the decorators. The Blue Christmas service, which is usually held outdoors, was cancelled this year, due to weather & Pastor Ruth's health. As always, we appreciate feedback on any of the services. We also appreciate Pastor Ruth's calendar flexibility to accommodate our special services.

A couple of things the Deacons have been tossing around, and will discuss more at our next meeting on January 7<sup>th</sup>:

- It has now been a year since the passing of Linda Evans. We would like to have a way to recognize all her time and dedication to the church. We know how much she loved sea glass, so we will be looking into purchasing some sort of memento, either with memorial funds or if that's not possible, perhaps deacon funds. If anyone has any ideas about ideas or placement, please speak to any deacon.

- We realize that this year's bazaar was a record breaker! So many folks spent so much time, effort, and yes, money, working on all the projects that resulted in such a successful year. In the past, the funds have gone into the general fund. The deacons have been tossing around the idea of using this year's funds toward a more permanent sign our by the road. Our reasons: all our hard work can result in something physical that we can all see on a regular basis. Also, it will be more visible out by

the road than the one that blows over in the wind, and, to be honest, looks temporary. One possible benefit could be that it could attract visitors and possibly new members. I think we would all be even more proud of our bazaar efforts if we got to see something permanent each time we are there.

Once again, many thanks to the donations to the Deacons fund. We used some recently to assist one of our families going through a tough time.

Respectfully submitted,  
Lynn Murray

### Trustees Notes

Pledges for November were \$5,564, \$54 more than the anticipated pledge amount of \$5,510. Thanks to all those who are able to keep up with their pledges! Total income for November was \$27,042. Total expenses for November were \$8,076.

Should you notice something in the building that needs attention, please speak to any trustee.

### From the Financial Secretary



#### ***Happy New Year!***

Thank you for your pledges for 2025.

Each month, this column will highlight timely special collections of the United Church of Christ and our own Mission Committee.

One of UCC's "Five for Five" offerings is usually collected in January. If you use offering envelopes, you will find one dedicated to "Yearly Per Capita Dues for the Southern New England Conference of the United Church of Christ" (SNEC UCC). The official UCC name for this offering is "Our Church's Wider Mission," but at some point, our own church leadership decided to make this a Per Capita Dues, as it is hoped by the UCC that each member contribute to this fund. The Per Capita Dues

are used to support local youth programs, pastor training and education, and the work that helps our local SNEC UCC churches support one another, such as maintaining a substitute pastor supply and promoting ethical practices. Of the five UCC offerings, this one is the most "close to home."

Since less than half of our members use envelopes to make offerings, I like to make us all aware of this "first of five offerings." The suggested donation is \$20.00 per member. Of course this is voluntary, but our church does make up the difference to SNEC UCC in order to equal \$20.00 per member. By paying your own Per Capita Dues, it helps our church save some funds.

If you so choose, you may also make a \$12.00 offering to support our church newsletter, The Beacon. Most of us now receive this via email, however, many of our older members still receive The Beacon by post. Your donation will help pay for the copy paper, ink, and postage required to print The Beacon for our at-home members. Copies are also made for guests to pick up while attending worship. I know we all enjoy reading the news of our church, Reverend Ruth's monthly spiritual message, and being able to plan along with the calendar. Consider a Beacon donation to support this communication and outreach.

Once again, thank you all for your generous financial support of our church- whether it's on-site, local, national, or international! What we share makes a difference!

Jenny Brummund

### An Update from our Music Ministries



#### ***Choir Rehearsal***

- Wednesdays 7:00 – 8:00 PM
- Join us in the Sanctuary, all are welcome!

***AA Battery Donations*** are always appreciated! Duracell, Energizer, and other major brands are preferred.

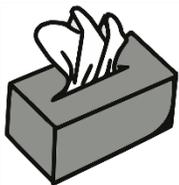


## Thinking Ahead While Cleaning Out!

Doing some after-Christmas cleaning and organizing? If you find things you do not want or need anymore, please consider giving them to the church. We use donated items in our Attic Treasures sale, our Silent Auction at the Christmas bazaars, and sometimes for our gift-basket creating. If you have items, box them up and bring them to church. You can leave them in the middle level hallway or in Fellowship Hall, marked as “Donations”. *(Sorry, we cannot take large pieces of furniture, electronics, mattresses, or broken items.)*



## Missions for January



Happy New Year to all! As the New Year begins, Missions has decided to have a collection for paper products. So, you may ask, what paper products would be helpful for this collection? Well, when you see the cost of toilet paper at the food store, you realize that a necessity has become an expensive purchase! So, we have decided that toilet paper, paper towels, paper napkins and tissues will be of the most benefit to those in need. Of course, if you think of anything else that you would like to add, it will be most appreciated. We thank you for your donations! Our church community is always wonderful in response to those in need!

## Operation Fresh Start

### *Holiday Wrap-Up*



Oh, my heavens, what a successful holiday season we had! Our community never ceases to amaze us with its never-ending generosity. Our Adopt-a-family initiative brought a constant flow of angels through the doors of the OFS office/work space at UCC Westerly. Over the span of just a few weeks, 79 families, which included 273 children, were “adopted” by so many groups and individuals in our community. In addition, over 700 individual gifts were donated through OFS to the North Stonington Giving Closet, Stonington Human Services, and Foster Care agencies. And let’s not forget the multiple boxes of toys that we donated to the Stonington Police Department’s Stuff-a-cruiser event. Even though there was one fewer week between Thanksgiving and Christmas this year, the traffic through the OFS spaces reflected increased giving but, unfortunately, increased need. Thanks go out to everyone who participated in these annual events.

January is a month of renewal in so many ways. As community members make room in their homes for their new Christmas gifts, the donations of their used things to OFS begin to pile up in our workspace. Organization is key right now, as is replenishing supplies for our Welcome Baskets. Stay tuned for news about our exciting, upcoming projects.

We welcome 2025 with gratitude and enthusiasm.

Thanks to UCC Westerly for adopting one of our largest families-a mom, dad, and six kiddos!



# BOOKS

**UCCW Books** is an on-going discussion group ministry of UCCW. We are a group of folks who love to read, talk about what we read, or just talk. Everyone is welcome!

## Our next gathering...

**Wednesday, February 19th @ 12:00PM**

This gathering will take place in the parlor at church. Please bring a bag lunch and a beverage for yourself. Dessert will be provided!

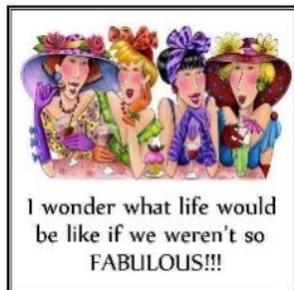
## What we're reading...



*The Guncle* by Steven Rowley

Books are available to borrow through your local library or for purchase through your favorite local bookstore.

## UCCW Ladies Who Lunch



This is a fellowship group for the ladies of our church with no agenda other than fun! We meet approximately once a month for lunch, conversation and general frivolity.

Due to the busy holiday season, our next gathering will be in January.

## Our next gathering...

**When:** Wednesday, January 15 at 12PM

**Where:** *S&P Oyster House*, 1 Holmes St. Mystic, CT

A Sign-up sheet will be posted on the bulletin board outside Fellowship Hall mid-December. Hope to see you there! Advance registration a must!

## Prayer Tree

Our church has a very active and vital prayer ministry which involves our Prayer Tree. If you would like to be a member of our prayer team or if you would like the team to pray for you, please speak with any Deacon.



## Brighten Someone's Day...



**A few suggestions of folks who might enjoy a card or note!**

- Sandra Hoffman – 22 Horne Drive, Westerly, RI 02891
- Charlotte Korean – c/o Westerly Healthcare Center, 280 High Street, Westerly, RI 02891
- John & Lucy Werner, 4300 Theall Road, Rye, NY 10580



## January Birthdays

Peter Hainsworth

Douglas D. Brummund

Carolyn LeRoy

Elizabeth Walker

Jaime Foster

## January Anniversaries

None

***Please add in your special days by calling the church office at (860) 599-1226***

*We are no longer providing specific birthday dates as an added measure of confidentiality for folks. Hope you understand.*



### **Our Staff**

**Pastor:** The Rev. Ruth Shilling Hainsworth

**Organist & Choirs Director:** David Cranmer

**Office Assistant:** Jerin Peloquin

**Address:** 9 Castle Hill Road, Pawcatuck, CT 06379

**Telephone:** (860) 599-1226

**E-mail:** [uccwesterly@gmail.com](mailto:uccwesterly@gmail.com)

**Website:** [www.uccwesterly.org](http://www.uccwesterly.org)

### **Office Hours**

Tuesday, Wednesday, & Thursday

9:00 AM – 1:00 PM

*Please be aware that the format and spacing for the Beacon may appear differently on your computer or device. Thank you for your understanding!*