



ALDRSGATE ADVOCATE

December 2023

Pastoral Letter for December 2023 “Finding Home”

Home. What a wonderful word! It is a word that instantly creates feelings of warmth, coziness, and relaxation for many of us. It is a word mentioned more often when Christmas approaches. Families gather for the meal on the table. Young people from colleges come home excited to see their parents and siblings. Little children rush downstairs to find their gifts under the Christmas tree. Family members gather around the fireplace with marshmallows in one hand and hot cocoa in the other hand. Grandmother tells the stories to her grandchildren while knitting. And grandfather snoring on his rocking chair. At least, that is the image that comes to my mind when we say “home,” especially in the Christmas season. We feel secure and comfortable at home.

While the home provides a sense of security, comfort, and peace for many of us, there are also many who do not share the same feelings. Several years ago, when my wife was pregnant with Joshua, her nurse called her regarding her pregnancy. The nurse asked her, “Do you suffer any physical, emotional, or sexual abuse from your spouse?” As Sungha answered, “Of course not,” her nurse said something that shocked her. “I wish there were more women who can answer the same.” There are many who find their home far from the place of safety, comfort, and rest. There are also many who flee their homes globally in search of a new home. According to statistics by the U.N., there are at least 89.3 million people who fled their homes today, and many of them are minors under the age of 18.

I know that many of us may not want to talk about such a topic as refugees, asylum seekers, or migrants when Christmas is a time to celebrate our family, gifts, and home. However, the nativity story tells us that Jesus was also a refugee whose family was forced to live in a foreign land. After the three magi did not come back to tell him where the Messiah had been born, Herod became furious and ordered his soldiers to kill all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under. Having been warned in his dream, Joseph took Jesus and Mary, escaped to Egypt, and stayed there until Herod died. As an immigrant myself, I can imagine that Joseph and Mary struggled with the foreign language and culture, trying to get any jobs they could find and raising their newborn son.

In response to such a global crisis, United Methodist Church encourages its members to “commit ourselves as a Church to the achievement of a world community that is a fellowship of persons who honestly love one another” (§ 165). We are invited to share the resources of the world to “provide basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, education, health care, and other necessities” (§ 165). I am glad that the church council of Aldersgate UMC attempts to live out such a spirit of hospitality, justice, and love for our migrating neighbors by supporting New Refuge and Immigrant Resettlement Fund by Greater Lowell Community Foundation. This fund will support those in need with “housing, employment, transportation, food, acculturation, and other related assistance.”

Christmas is a season that Christ came and found a home on this earth. In a world filled with oppression, violence, and tragedy, Christ came to his people as “Emmanuel” – God is with us. When

people felt alienated from the presence of God in their suffering, Christ was born as a meek baby, bringing the message of peace and hope, meeting people where they were. He found a home on this earth, calling Joseph his father, and Mary his mother. He grew up wonderfully being loved by his parents, siblings, and neighbors in his hometown. But he also revealed how far our “home” is from the “Home” revealed in the kingdom of God where strangers are welcomed, sinners are forgiven, and death is conquered.

May we also find our home where the joy and peace of God overflows and also help to create a home for others whom God loves as God’s precious children.

Pastor Bob

Charge Conference at 10:30 am on December 31

We will be holding a Charge Conference after the one service, around 10:30 am, on December 31 to vote whether to approve the proposed 2024 budget. The balancing of the budget needed to be done after the Church Conference on 11/15, once the pledges were received and were compared with the proposed 2024 expenses. The proposed budget includes a 3% pay increase to the church staff. We will also vote to approve the candidacy of our seminary intern, Veejay Strama, for ministry. All church members are invited to attend this short meeting to review and vote on these two important items.

Prayer Wall in Fellowship Hall

The Church Council recently created a prayer wall on a rolling partition in the Fellowship Hall, asking you to post prayers of what our church will look like as a result of the on-going Inclusion discussions. The Council recently decided to expand the purpose of the wall and we invite you to post prayers on **any** topic that you wish to have other members of our church family pray about.

Sponsor a book for our College Students!

Adult Ed in partnership with Cheryl O. and Pastor Bob, would like to give a copy of *Jesus and the Disinherited* by Howard Thurman to our college students. The books are \$20 and we would like to gift them over the Winter Break when they all gather together again. You can sponsor a book and create a link to the next generation! You can find a donation envelope by the literature rack in the lobby.

Confirmation Class 2024

We plan to offer the confirmation class starting from January. Please pick up the registration in the welcome area and return it to Cheryl Ortolf, our director of Christian Education. There will be 8 classes this spring and 1 retreat. For more info, please see Cheryl or Pastor Bob.

Inclusion Discussions

We continue to be in dialog on how we as a church family can be more inclusive to all regardless of age, race, nationality, ethnic background, gender, sexuality, ability, and physical appearance. The Council discussed next steps at our last meeting and heard from those who facilitated our small group listening conversations in late October. One of the facilitators, Charles McCrea, provided the following perspective that the Council affirmed and agreed to share with the congregation:

Over the course of the past several months the congregation has engaged in conversations on how it might be more welcoming and inclusive of all persons, most especially the LGBTQI+ persons.

These conversations have taken the form of small groups, informal conversations, open forums in the fellowship hall and Zoom meetings.

The conversations have been open, informative and in many instances heartfelt and personal. They have served to increase our awareness and understanding of some of the needs and challenges of various marginalized communities. Additionally, they have also highlighted our need as a faith community to be more intentional in how we welcome and disciple all of God's children.

As a faith community, for more than sixty years Aldersgate has welcomed the mainstream and marginalized, young and old, singles and families, those born in this country and those who are immigrants; those of differing ethnicities; and those of various socio-economic stations.

This church has sought to live out being 'the church with the warm heart.'

Some who raised this challenged us as a faith community to do more.

After thoughtful discussions and prayer, there is more which we can do.

We will embark upon a church-wide effort to increase our collective awareness of how we live out and fulfill the greatest and second commandments and the Great Commission. They are God's command to love God and love one another; and Jesus Christ's command to make disciples of all persons.

We will use Scripture, sermons, adult and youth education, small and large groups and other methods and means to understand what it means to welcome and disciple all who come to our church seeking.

It is our sincere hope that this church-wide undertaking will move Aldersgate even further along in its commitment to live out our command to love God and love one another.

Our hope and fervent prayer is not only will all persons feel and be welcomed here but having experienced the love of Jesus Christ through contact with any and all of us that they will not leave

here as they came. And we in turn will be better able and equipped to live out our faith beyond the church walls.

Watch for more information as we roll out these next steps.

All Are Welcome at Aldersgate

As a United Methodist congregation, we affirm that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God. We affirm that we are an open, welcoming, fully accepting congregation supportive of all, regardless of age, race, nationality, ethnic background, gender, sexuality, ability, and physical appearance. In agreement with our New England Conference Open Spirit Task Force, we are committed to safeguarding the sacred worth and dignity of all persons in our churches and communities, including those who identify as LGBTQI+ persons.

We are a church that supports every individual's full participation in the life, ministry, sacraments, membership, and leadership of the church at any level. We celebrate the blessings of gender and cultural diversity in our pastors and leadership team.



WHAT WOULD JESUS WANT FOR HIS BIRTHDAY?

Just as the Wise Ones traveled great distances to bring precious gifts to the child Jesus, so too, we want to give gifts this Holy season that would make the heart of Jesus glad.

Again, this year, we are following the principles of *The Advent Conspiracy*:

- * Worship Fully
- * Spend Less on things people do not need
- * Love all
- * Give more of ourselves, our time, our lives

We are encouraging each other to save the money we would have spent on gifts that those we love really don't need, and instead give a life-giving gift that truly matters.



This year our church council and outreach committee has selected the Greater Lowell Community Foundation Refugee and Immigrant Resettlement Fund.

This fund will support the efforts of Greater Lowell organizations to help ensure those in need are welcomed and connected with housing, employment, transportation, food, acculturation, and other related support.

You can find out more about this organization at: www.glcfoundation.org.

You are welcome to take one of the special ornaments on our Mission tree in the front lobby area.

On Epiphany, also known as "Kings' Sunday" - January 7, we will bring our monetary gifts from the savings we have made and will offer them to support our Advent Mission: Greater Lowell Community Foundation Refugee and Immigrant Resettlement Fund.

Christmas Faire News

Thank you for supporting our Faire this year. Wreaths and swags have begun decorating homes!

We are looking forward to being together in person this year during the Faire on **Friday, December 1, 1:00 – 8:00 pm** and **Saturday, December 2, 10:00 am – 2:00 pm**. It will include any remaining wreaths and swags as well as baked goods, craft items, centerpieces, knitting items, collectibles. And the kitchen and dining area returns this year! Join us for some traditional fun and fellowship!

Visit the Fellowship Hall on Sunday December 3rd. The remaining Faire items will be available for purchase. Thank you for a wonderful event and beautiful gifts shared and consumed this year.

The Faire Elves are grateful for the blessings we create together.



ADVENT GREETINGS



Our Aldersgate family wishes to extend to you the opportunity to participate in the giving of a Congregation Gift for the Staff: Pastor Bob, Betsy, Cheryl O., Cheryl C., Rev Maylis, Sherri, Deana and Mirna.

Aldersgate is truly blessed with a dedicated and talented staff. The Congregation Gift is a wonderful opportunity to share of ourselves and acknowledge our love for their gift to us throughout the year.

If you would like to contribute you may do so by dropping your donation off at the church, mailing it to the church and marking it with a "Staff Gift" note, or giving it to an usher or any member of the SPRC (Roger Whitehead, Marcia Dana, Jay Yang, Dan Ward, Angela Hughes, Jane Vooy, Michelle Mescall, or Ray Brown).

In Christian Love and Spirit,
The Staff Parish Relations Committee

Christmas Poinsettias



Once again we will decorate our sanctuary on Christmas Eve with five beautiful poinsettias. We will purchase larger plants that will be present for the Christmas Eve service.

We are again inviting people to make a donation toward the cost of the poinsettias in celebration of someone or in memory of a loved one (suggested donation of \$10). There is a form on the welcome desk that you can fill out and either put in the offering plate or mail to the office. You can also call the church office and leave a message and Betsy will return your call to follow up with you. Betsy will also include the form in the Worship email. We will include the names in a printed attachment to the Christmas Eve service and will show the names on the video during part of the recorded service, if possible. We want to honor each family's preference...so please indicate your preference on the form as well. **Deadline for Poinsettias will be on December 17th.**

Join Us for a Special Advent Season

We hope you can join us, either in-person or remotely, for our special services this Advent season. In-person worship is at 8:30 and 10:45 am each Sunday. The 10:45 service is live-streamed (preceded by church announcements) and a link to the recording is available on the church website (aldersgatehelmsford.com) shortly after the service; live-streams and recordings will include the Silent Night and the 7:00 pm Christmas Eve services

Silent Night Service, Tuesday, December 12 at 7:00 pm

Join us for this special service in the middle of the busy Christmas season. The service features beautiful scripture, reflections, and music that speaks words of peace and comfort during what can be a time of sadness. You will also have an opportunity to light a candle of hope as we await the coming of Christ, the Light of the World. A brief fellowship reception will follow in the Fellowship Hall.

Christmas Eve Morning, Sunday, December 24

Will be the Children's Pageant at 9:30 am (One Service)

The church school will be presenting this year's Christmas Pageant during the Sunday worship service for the congregation, neighbors, and friends!

Christmas Eve (no 4 pm service)

7:00 pm Intergenerational Christmas

This service will retell the story of the first Christmas in scripture and carols. It will include a time for children and conclude with the candle-lit singing of "Silent Night."

10:00 pm Communion and Candlelight Christmas Eve

This service includes scripture, carols, a Christmas meditation, Holy Communion and the candle-lit singing of "Silent Night."

that truly matters.

Join Us for Dinner and a Pop-up Adult Bible Study on Monday, December 11 and Monday, December 18

On December 11 and 18 (both Mondays), we'll join the children and youth for supper at 5 p.m. and follow the meal with a Bible study at 5:30 p.m. We will be learning from Dr. King's sermon, "A Knock at Midnight."

If you'd like to listen to Dr. King preach the sermon before we meet, you can find it here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GDRQTzNzu1I>

Please email Cheryl Ortolf (aumc-education@verizon.net) or Suzanne Hevelone (shevelone@gmail.com) if you'd like to come, so we need to know how many people to plan to feed. Everyone is welcome!

CHURCH SCHOOL NEWS

Thanksgiving Baskets - Thank you to all the church school families for their donations towards our Thanksgiving baskets. Thank you to the 6th – 12th grade youth that helped put our Thanksgiving boxes together!

Advent Mission Program – Thank you to all who participated this Sunday! We put together snowman soup cups for St. Paul's Feeding Program. We made cute candy cane reindeer to include with the santa tree gifts. We made special cards to go to servicemen. We also decorated ornaments connected to our Advent Mission Project, Greater Lowell Community Foundation Refugee and Immigrant Resettlement Fund.



Church School Christmas Pageant Sunday, December 24th

The church school will be presenting this year's Christmas Pageant during the 9:30 a.m. worship service for the congregation, neighbors, and friends! Cheryl Ortolf will be visiting the church school classes the next couple of Sundays to sign children and youth up for different parts.

**NO CHURCH SCHOOL ON
SUNDAY, DECEMBER 24TH and December 31st
MERRY CHRISTMAS!**

Epiphany Sunday



The Wise Men will visit our church school classes on Sunday, January 7th and will share the story of their journey to find the new king. We will also distribute cupcakes – will you pick the cupcake with a coin in it and be an honorary King for the Day!

MUSIC OPPORTUNITIES

Children and Youth Supper & Singing Time

This music opportunity is for children and youth ages 4 years old – 12th grade.

Mondays, December 11th & 18th from 5:00 – 6:00 p.m.

We will have supper from 5:00 – 5:30 p.m. and music singing time from 5:30 – 6:00 p.m.

Children and Youth Chime Time



This music opportunity is for children and youth in 3rd – 8th grade. They will learn how to play the chimes.

Sundays, December 10th & 17th from noon – 1:00 p.m. We will have lunch from noon – 12:30 p.m. and practice chimes from 12:30 – 1:00 p.m.

Mondays, December 11th & 18th from 4:30 – 5:00 p.m. (*before pizza and singing time*)



Everyone together for pizza time!



Art time during music!

YOUTH GROUP NEWS

Junior Youth Christmas Party!

Friday, December 8th from 6:30 – 8:00 p.m.

All youth in grades 5 – 7 are invited to participate, friends are always welcome.

We will have lots of fun playing games, decorating cookies and making a craft.

Senior Youth Christmas Party

Sunday, December 10th from noon – 1:30 p.m.

All youth in grades 8 - 12 are invited to participate. Come join us as we celebrate the coming of Christmas! We will make Christmas tree shaped pizzas, bake cookies, and play games!



Senior & Junior Youth Bowling!

Single Ladies Dining Out

Single Ladies Dining Out will have dinner together on **November 9th** at 1:00 pm at Longhorn Steak House, 1900 Andover St. Tewksbury, MA, 01876. Please RSVP by Thursday Dec 7 th to Betsy Campbell 978-256-9400 or by email to aldersgatechelmsford@verizon.net so that she can reserve a table large enough.

If you are a single lady and would enjoy a dinner out and lots of fun conversation, we would love to have you join us. Please talk to Betsy for more information.



Book Club in the Concord Room and on Zoom

Tuesday, January 2 (changed from December 26) Comfort & Joy by Kristen Hannah (Deb's pick)

Tuesday, January 30th, Rough Sleepers by Tracy Kidder (Melinda's pick)

Tuesday, February 27th Remarkably Bright Creatures by Shelby Van Pelt (Liz's pick)

Women's Daytimers Breakfast Club

We meet once a month, Friday mornings at 10 am at a local restaurant for breakfast and socializing. Please contact Chantale Shepard at 978-250-9573 for more details or if you are interested in being added to the email list. We welcome new members

Birthdays and Anniversaries – December

It has been a whole year of Celebrations for our Church Family.

We celebrate a Happy Birthday and a Happy Anniversary for the following:

When you see them, you can celebrate with them or send them a card on their special day.

December Birthdays

December 5 – Holly Fipphen

December 8 – Bethany Ward

December 12 -Chris Sargent

December 20 -George Cole

December 20 – Lee Pender

December 22 – Charles Kinnett



December Anniversaries

December 23 -Aldo & Maylis' Wedding Anniversary

December 23 – Betty and Vern Champeaux



If we have missed your big day, please send them by email, to Betsy in the office at aldersgatechelmsford@verizon.net or call 978-256-9400 so she can add your names and dates to the lists for the Advocates for the coming months. We can then recognize the milestones in your life and celebrate with you.

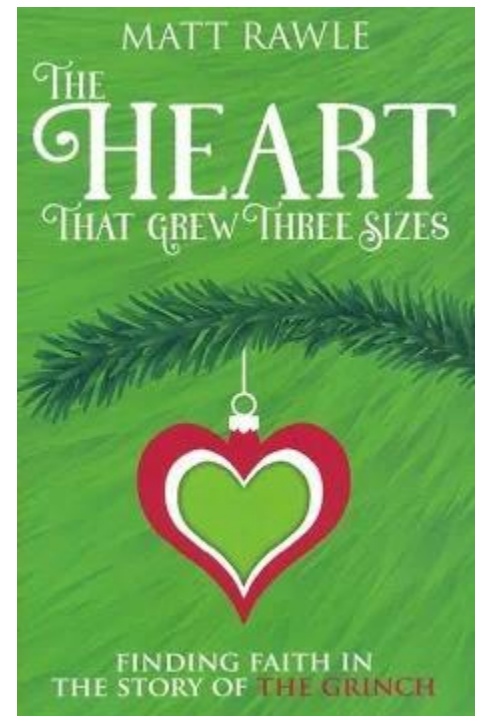
ADULT EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

Advent Study Begins December 3rd and 7th

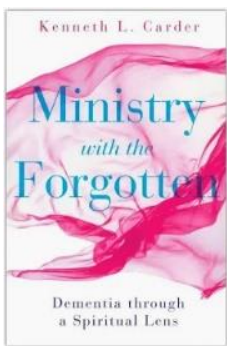
This year, we take a deeper look at a children's book that delights all ages in the Christmas season. *The Heart That Grew Three Sizes: Finding Faith in the Story of the Grinch* by Matt Rawle will be the Advent material for the Adults AND some of the kids Sunday School classes.

“Rediscover the gift of Advent that comes without packages, ribbons, and bows. We don't know why the Grinch hated Christmas. We just know he did. If we're being honest, there's probably something within the Christmas season celebration that awakens a Grinch within all of us. Maybe the gift we unwrap was all wrong, or memories that were supposed to be joyful never were. When everything seems wrong in the world, even joyful celebrations are much too loud. We don't know why the Grinch hated Christmas. We just know he did. In this new Advent study, Matt Rawle explores the faith themes in the Christmas classic, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* including, how did the Grinch's heart grow three sizes come Christmas morning? How did Christmas save the Grinch? Could it be that the very thing we think we hate is the one thing that changes our lives? This Advent and Christmas season, look at a familiar classic through the lens of faith and see how Christ speaks to us through our culture.”

Be a Grinch and get your copy of the book at your favorite bookseller! We will save a place around the circle for you on **Sunday morning at 9:45 and Thursday morning at 10:00 in the Concord Room and on Zoom**. See the weekly bulletin e-mail for Zoom links.



COMING IN JANUARY 2024



Many of the ones we love, inside and outside our congregation, are confronting dementia and Alzheimer's disease. Pastor Bob has recommended *Ministry with the Forgotten* by Kenneth L Carder as a resource. You can get it online or at your favorite bookshop. We invite you to read and discuss it together on **Sunday mornings at 9:45 in the Concord Room beginning January 14**.

Unable to meet at our usual time? Let us know- we'd like to host time for anyone interested in attending. Email Kim Ward at mikdraw@aol.com so we can investigate setting up another group time.

“Can Persons Who Forget God, Know God? Can one who forgets who Jesus is be a Christian disciple?”

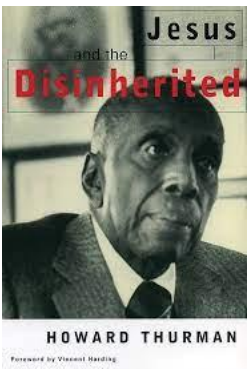
Dementia diseases represent a crisis of faith for many family members and congregations. Magnifying this crisis is the way people with dementia tend to be objectified by both medical and religious communities. They are recipients of treatment and projects for mission. Ministry is done

to and for them rather than with them.

While acknowledging the devastation of dementia diseases, Ken Carder draws on his own experience as a caregiver, hospice chaplain, and pastoral practitioner to portray the gifts as well as the challenges accompanying dementia diseases. He confronts the deep personal and theological questions created by loving people with dementia diseases, demonstrating how living with dementia can be a means of growing in faith, wholeness, and ministry for the entire community of faith. He also reveals that authentic faith transcends intellectual beliefs, verbal affirmations, and prescribed practices. Carder asserts that the Judeo-Christian tradition offers a broader lens, defining personhood in relationship to God's story and humanity's participation in God's mighty acts of creation and new creation; thereby contributing to hope, community, and self-worth.

Pastors and congregations will be better equipped to minister with people affected by dementia, receiving their gifts and responding to their unique needs. They will learn how people with dementia contribute to the community and the church's life and mission, discovering practical ways those contributions can be identified, nurtured, and incorporated into the church's life and ministry."

COMING IN FEBRUARY 2024



Jesus and the Disinherited by Howard Thurman.

Spend a few weeks reading and discussing the book Pastor Bob recommended and Cheryl will gift to our College Age Young People. Get your copy today at your favorite bookseller and plan to join us Sunday mornings at 9:45 in the Concord Room.

If you'd like to donate to the gift for the College kids, you can find an envelope by the literature rack.

"In this classic theological work, acclaimed theologian and religious leader Howard Thurman demonstrates how the gospel may be read as a manual of resistance for the poor and disenfranchised. Jesus is a partner in the pain of the oppressed, Thurman writes. The example of Jesus' life of suffering, pain, and overwhelming love offers a solution that ends our descent into moral nihilism. Although Jesus was scorned and forced to live outside society, he advocated a love of self and others that defeats fear and the hatred that destroys our souls and the world around us. *Jesus and the Disinherited* reaches past anger and distrust toward a vision of unity.

Howard Thurman (1900–1981) was the first black dean of Marsh Chapel at Boston University and cofounder of the Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples in San Francisco, California, the first interracial copastored church in America. Life magazine called him one of the great preachers of the 20th century, and Thurman was a spiritual adviser to Martin Luther King Jr."

SUPPORT FOR DEPLOYED SOLDIERS

Ken Bair's grandson, 1st Lt Jasper Swan, will be spending the holidays deployed with his Army unit. We'd like to send some goodies for him and his fellow soldiers to enjoy.

You can send a box directly to Lt Swan at the address below or give Dan & Kim Ward some things to add to the boxes they're sending. Contributions to help pay for shipping are also welcome.

Not sure what to send? Nonperishable food is always a hit (cookies, candy, granola bars, powdered drink mixes, gum, tea). Jasper particularly likes goldfish crackers and gummy worms. Travel-size toiletries for men and women are also very helpful (bar soap, deodorant, floss, shampoo, razors, toothbrushes, toothpaste, feminine hygiene supplies). Playing cards, paperback books, and comic books are fun, and so are [LEGO figure](#) single packs. Tuck in a happy note of thanks or some handmade art from your kids!

No alcohol, flammable items, lithium batteries, perishable food, or plants.

Shipping time is generally 2-3 weeks but can get longer during the holidays.

Thanks for helping to make the season a little brighter for our military members far from home!

1st Lt Swan, Jasper

Task Force Viking, A BTRY 5/5 ADA

CMR 1782

APO AE 09807

Ringling in the Season!

A group of our bell ringers rang on the first day of the Tyngsboro Festival of Trees, Friday, November 24. Beautiful ringing for a beautiful community event! Thank you to the ringers and our cheerful Aldersgate supporters!



OUTREACH...

A Big Thank you from Outreach

Your Outreach team would like to thank you all for the support of our Thanksgiving boxes. Because of all your help in donations and turkeys we were able to give 53 boxes away with turkeys and all the fixings. We are truly blessed with our church family.

Santa Giving Tree

Annual Chelmsford Santa Giving Tree will be up in the entrance way on Nov 19.

Tags will be hung on the tree for your selections. Christmas gifts are due by Sunday **December 10.**

Thank you for helping create a better holiday for local families who need some assistance. God is Good, all the time.

Hats, Gloves, Mittens, Socks, and Toiletries for St. Paul's

Outreach will be collecting items for St. Paul's by the 17th of December. Please bring in hats, gloves, mittens, socks, and mittens as well as toiletries. There is a box in the welcome area.

A Big Thank you for the VBS Habitat Quilt

Thank you to Debbie Smyton, Vera McCrea, Jane Vooyoys, Sue Chapin, Melinda Goodick, and Margaret Brown for creating the beautiful "Hands of Love" quilt! This colorful quilt is now on display in the church stairwell. It was a project started during VBS by the children, youth helpers, and adult helpers. Everyone decorated a quilt square using their handprint. Then came the hard part of turning the squares into a finished quilt. Thank you all for contributing your time and talent to create the lovely piece. We plan to present the quilt as a gift to a local Habitat for Humanity family, to keep them warm and let them know Aldersgate is sending them love.



Many Thanks to Aldersgate Card Makers



I want to thank everyone who contributed to our **Holiday Cards 4 our Military**. The cause sent its 1,000,000th card yesterday. What an accomplishment to brighten the holidays for our soldiers around the world.

Thank you for all who attended our workshop, took cards home to hand write messages.

Thank you to Christine Kelley and her youth group, to Elaine Brown and her DAR chapter and to each and everyone who made this such a success.

Aldersgate made and sent 300 cards.

Susan

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May you celebrate the thanksgiving day with love in your heart, prosperous vision in your mind, and gratitude in your being. Thanksgiving wishes to everyone!

Happy Thanksgiving from Sookim from Singapore

If you would like to send her greetings here is her email.

sookimlee2@gmail.com

