



ALDERSGATE ADVOCATE

January 2024

Pastoral Letter – January 2024 “What Makes Us New?”

A few weeks ago, I got a call from my health coach who works for my health insurance company. He said, “You set your goal at the beginning of this year that you would lose 5 pounds. Have you achieved your goal?” With guilt in my voice, I answered, “No, not really.” I guess he did not want to discourage me, so he said cheerfully, “No worries. We can move this as your new goal for 2024. Would you agree?” I answered unconvincingly, “Yes, sure.” Just like that, my old resolution that had been the same for the past years became the new resolution again. How about you? What is your resolution as we face 2024? Maybe some of us are thinking about eating healthier and exercising more regularly. Some of us wish to spend some more time with our family.

Whatever our resolution is for the new year, the Bible tells us that we can become new genuinely only through our relationship with God. In 2 Corinthians 5:17, Paul instructs us, “So, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” John Wesley interprets, “One has new life, new sense, new faculties, new affections, new appetites, new ideas and conceptions. One’s whole tenor of action and conversation is new, and one lives, as it were, in a new world.” (Wesley’s Explanatory Notes) In other words, it is not the new year that makes our lives new. Instead, Christ is the One who shines his light on us and makes our lives anew. As God’s new creation, we live our lives in the order of God’s new world – peace, love, justice, and joy.

As the new year approaches, it seems that people always search for something new. We are constantly exposed to TV commercials that promote diet and exercise. “Discover your new self today!” We are forced to look at ourselves and feel unhappy. “It is a time to get a new smartphone!” Although the salesperson tries to convince us why we need to update to a new phone, we do not recognize much difference between our new phone and the old phone. We are driven by the world to believe that we can become newer by buying more, exercising more, and working more. However, St. Augustine remarks insightfully in his *Confession*, “You stir man to take pleasure in praising you, because you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.” (I)

On Christmas Eve in 2011, I visited the state prison in New Hampshire to worship with the inmates. As a police chaplain, I had asked the prison chaplain to worship with them and assisted him with the music. The chaplain had told me, “Most of these inmates are young men in their 20s. Many of them do not have places to go so they often commit petty crimes. They come here so that they can get food, medical treatment and find shelter.” While singing the carols, I felt like the wall between them and me collapsed as we sang the birth of Christ among us. After the sermon by the prison chaplain was over, one of the inmates raised his hand and said, “You mean, I can

really start my life new if I believe in Jesus?” The chaplain answered with conviction, “Yes, you can.” The young man asked again, “Can we sing Amazing Grace?”

According to the Christian liturgical calendar, we have already started the new year with Advent and Christmas. It is not the new year January 1 that starts the new year for us. It is the coming of Christ that starts something new in us. If you are hungry spiritually, always yearning for something new, why don't we allow Christ to come into our heart and renew our relationship with God and our neighbors this year? Why don't we say yes to Christ who can change us, to do something wonderful through us? May God bless you, your family, our church, and God's world as we begin a new year in God.

Pastor Bob

2024 Budget Approved

Thanks to everyone who attended the Charge Conference on December 31st where the 2024 church budget was approved. The budget includes estimated income of \$352,904 and budgeted expenses of \$389,803, for a deficit of \$36,899. Our major source of income is from congregational pledging. There are 74 pledges, including 7 new pledges, totaling \$309,704. This is an increase of \$27,240 from 2023 to 2024. Thank you for your generous giving to Aldersgate's ministries! The Finance committee is looking for ways to reduce the 2024 budget deficit. If you have suggestions, please contact the Finance chair, Wendy Baker (wbaker15@comcast.net).

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.

Confirmation Class 2024

We have four youth that will participate in Confirmation Class this year! They will also each have a mentor to work with them during class time. There will be 8 classes and 1 retreat in May. We will have a confirmation orientation meeting on **Sunday, January 21st** at noon in the Library. Please reach out to Pastor Bob or Cheryl if you have any questions.

Interested in Learning How to Record Worship?

We are looking to add to our friendly team of volunteers who live-stream and record our worship services. We take turns so everyone gets an opportunity to participate. We schedule the two-person crew weekly based on everyone's availability. Training is provided. If you are interested in learning more, please contact Peter Smyton (617-893-9669) or Jim Ortolf (978-995-0614).

Christmas Faire Gratitude!

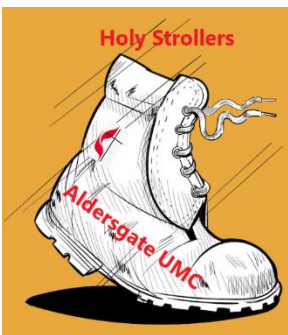
AUMC welcomed the community and shared our talents last December. Thank you to all who baked, cooked, crafted, created, and shared so generously. It was a wonderful part of the Advent season! Mark your calendars for December 6 and 7, 2024!

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.

Aldersgate Holy Strollers



Did you overeat during the holidays? Did you make a New Year's resolution to get more exercise? Come and hike with Aldersgate's Holy Strollers hiking group. The group hikes once a week on local conservation land in Bedford, Billerica, Carlisle, Chelmsford, Lowell and Westford. The hikes are usually 2.5 to 3 miles or about 1 to 1.5 hours on wooded trails which often have rocks and roots. We occasionally hike on paved paths, too, especially if there is snow on the ground. The group usually hikes on Thursday at 1:00 pm when the weather is cold or 9:00 am when the weather is hot. If the Thursday weather forecast is rain or snow, the hike will shift to another weekday. On Sunday night or Monday morning an email is sent out to the group indicating the day, time and location of the hike. The email also includes a Google map link to the trailhead and a link to the trail map. A person from the group will meet at the church for anyone who wishes to carpool to the trailhead. You don't need to commit to every week, hike when you can. If you wish to join us and be included on the email notification for the hike or want more information contact Rick Newcomb, email: rnewcomb@comcast.net or Peter Smyton, email: thesmytonfamily@comcast.net.



Music Notes

Happy New Year 2024!

We have been blessed with a beautiful Christmas season and countless meaningful moments of music throughout the year. We are so grateful for the musicians who make it happen!

THANK YOU for your commitment, dedication, and sharing of your love of music with all of us.

Singers:

Peter Boettcher, Tara Boettcher, Elaine Brown, Garth Brown, Lauren Colella, Cheryl Cruickshank, Holly Fipphen, Peter Fipphen, Melinda Goodick, Faith Jameson, Marti Kane, Mike Kane, Susan Lewis, Dottie Newcomb, Rick Newcomb, Kirby Nichols, Carol Prasad, Sofia Rodriguez, Jane Vooyoys.

Bell ringers:

Jill Angel, Alyxis D., Evelyn Heinrich, Marti Kane, Mike Kane, Susan Lewis, Kelly Mongiovi, Dottie Newcomb, Rick Newcomb, Jay Nichols, Kirby Nichols, Carol Prasad, Gabriel R., Samuel R., Sofia Rodriguez, Perry Villanueva, Jane Vooyoys, Vicki Vooyoys, Wendy Xu, Jay Yang.

Additional musicians:

Sara A., Kate C., Amelia Hughes, Finn H., Charles McCrea, Kelly Moore, Veejay Strama, Jenna Ward.

May God continue to bless and guide our lives and ministry here at Aldersgate!



Single Ladies Dining Out

Single Ladies Dining Out will have dinner together on **January 13th** at 1:00 pm at Bahama Breeze. Please RSVP by Thursday Jan 11th to Betsy Campbell 978-256-9400 or by email to aldersgatehelmsford@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

Here are the upcoming book picks for January, February and March. If you haven't yet picked, think of your pick and let me know

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

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

Tuesday, March 26, Mad Honey by Jodi Picoult (Robin'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 – January

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.

January Birthdays

January 4 – David Jones

January 7 – Janice Shumbata

January 15 - Janet Marson

January 22 – Gideon M.

January 30 – Sofia Rodriguez

January 31 – Deb Benson



January Anniversaries

January 7 – Dan and Kim Ward

If we have missed your big day, please send them by email, to Betsy in the office at aldersgatehelmsford@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.

CHURCH SCHOOL NEWS



Thank you to all the children and youth of our church school for sharing the Christmas story with us in worship!

Epiphany Sunday



The Wise Men will visit our church school classes on Sunday, January 14th 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!

Junior Youth Upcoming Event

Roller Skating Fun!

Friday, January 19th 6:30 – 8:30 p.m.

The junior youth will go to Roller Kingdom in Tyngsboro, MA for a fun night of roller skating. More info to come.

Senior Youth Upcoming Event

Pizza Time with College Students

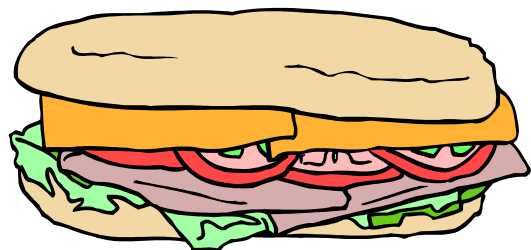
Sunday, January 14th noon – 1:30 p.m.

The senior youth are inviting college students to join us for pizza and games.

Supper & Singing Time

We will kick off the children & youth supper & singing time in February – please watch for the upcoming updates and information!





Super Bowl Sub Sale!

TYPES OF SUBS:

Italian, Turkey, Falafel & Vegetarian

Gluten Free rolls are available too

Each sub comes with chips & soda

The Senior Youth group will be taking orders on the following Sundays:

January 21st & 28th, February 4th

Place your orders in the basket located in the hallway

or e-mail your order

to: aumc-education@verizon.net

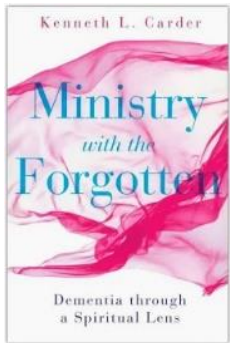
Pick-up: February 11th

(after each service)

***DONATIONS WILL GO TOWARDS OUR YOUTH MISSION
TRIP THIS SUMMER***

ADULT EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

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.

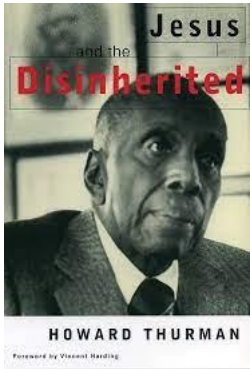
“Can Persons Who Forget God, Know God? Can one who forgets who Jesus is be a Christian disciple?”

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.”

OUTREACH...

Reminder to schedule your appointment for the Blood Drive – February 24 from 9-2

Please sign up if you can help this important cause. There continues to be a national shortage!

Please call 1-800-RED CROSS (1-800-733-2767) or visit [RedCrossBlood.org](https://www.redcrossblood.org) and search under February 24th to schedule an appointment.

For more information call or email Cate Lehan or Robin Dye or the church office.

Blessings, Outreach.

Welcome to the Pulpit Veejay Strama.





New Members 12/10/2023

Veejay Strama with sponsor Peter Smyton
Lauren Colella with sponsors Dottie Newcomb and Wendy Xu
Ed and Donna Ryalls with sponsors Joe and Deb Benson
Ann Isler with sponsors Chris Sargent and Betsey Driscoll

Welcome to Aldersgate. We are so happy to have you as members of the Aldersgate Family



Thank you to the Choir

A very big thanks to the Choir for visiting Jean and Chuck Piper along with Bruce and Gabriel Sargent on Saturday December 16th for Christmas Caroling at the Kennedy Meadows. Such wonderful, heartfelt and very moving music. The entire community was able to enjoy the music with a handful of residents joining in. Such a wonderful gift for all.

Thanks so much! From the Piper, Sanborn and Sargent families!

Thank you from Ken Bair

Jasper received the packages a few days before Christmas. It was a nice holiday surprise and he was able to distribute items to his soldiers. They all enjoyed the treats and the care items where much appreciated. It has been a challenge to get enough sleep, work, and get food when the canteen is open. Since they all work odd hours having extra snacks has helped considerably. Thank you everyone for contributing -the packages are a bright spot in a difficult time and place. Jasper checked in this morning and said they are well and plugging along.

Kim and Dan will continue sending out packages to Jasper and the troops. If you have anything that you would like to send please let them know or check with them to get a list of items.