

ALDERSGATE ADVOCATE

December 2025

Pastor's Column Advent Greetings Church!

This week we begin a brand-new year (on the church calendar, at least)! The church is beautifully decorated, there's an energy and hum of activity that is positively infectious about this place, and I can feel the anticipation building behind all of that bustling. Something exciting, something life-giving is taking hold in our midst! And yet, even as I write that down, I find myself disappointed by what my own words are able to express. I've used them all before and words like these tend to get used quite a bit at this time of year when we're all trying to reach for the very best of what our words can do. It seems to me that something more is required. You know, as I began to say this past Sunday morning, there's something special about a season of signs and symbols like Advent because at least *this season* seems to understand that there's a limit to our words and that there's something else we need to get beyond them. Sometimes that's a picture, sometimes it's a metaphor, sometimes it's a paradox that, as Dr. Suess says, gets "our puzzler puzzling."

In Advent this year, I want to see if we can't get our puzzlers puzzling for Christ. The prophet Isaiah (as I mentioned on Sunday) has a way with that sort of thing. He put before his people and before us mountains that are moving, tree stumps that are sending forth shoots, a young woman giving birth to a child named "God is With Us"—Isaiah too, it seems to me, was of a mind to get his people's puzzlers puzzling. And, in fact, if we step back and look afresh, we might appreciate that in this season we are especially surrounded by signs and symbols meant to get our puzzlers puzzling. Will we allow them to puzzle? Will we let them stir our hearts and imaginations? Will we take the invitation to crack that nut and see what's inside? Advent is about churning and reigniting our hopes and expectations, about awakening faith's imagination again, and preparing a new way in our hearts as we wait—wait with John the Baptist—to see when and how the Lord will walk the straightened way. I wish you all a spiritually-engaged advent. As your hands are moving and your find yourselves busy with activity on this and that, as your feet carry you through busy days—through holiday gatherings, choir practices, and soup kitchens—may your puzzlers also be puzzling the sign of this season and the ways they are calling to you. May they make themselves new for you! May they refresh the Spirit's life in you! May they bring you to the great feast of Noel with ready and joyful hearts!

The very deepest of blessings as you step into the season!

Pastor John

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 (aldersgatechelmsford.com) shortly after the service; live-streams and recordings will include the Silent Night and the 7:00 pm Christmas Eve services.

Upcoming Events in December

December 5, 1:00 pm-8:00 pm; December 6, 10:00 am-2:00 pm: Christmas Faire

December 9, 7:00 pm: Silent Night Service

December 21, 10:45 am: Christmas Pageant

December 24, 4:00 pm, 7:00 pm, 10:00 pm: Christmas Eve Services

December 27, 9:00 am – 2:00 pm: Red Cross Blood Drive

December 28 - One Service at 9:30



Silent Night Service, Tuesday, December 9 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 Pageant, Sunday, December 21 at 10:45 am

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

Christmas Eve Schedule, Wednesday, December 24 4:00 pm Family Service

This is an abbreviated worship for wiggly ones! It will include the retelling of the Christmas story and a time for children.

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 in the pews and the candle-lit singing of "Silent Night."

Sign Up for Small Gatherings with Pastor John!

One way Pastor John wants to get to know us is through small informal gatherings, hosted by members of the congregation. Look for sign-up sheets in the Welcome Area with the date, time, host family, and location of these gatherings. The number of entries for each gathering is the maximum that can be accommodated, so please use one line per individual when signing up, e.g., couples should use two lines. Depending on the demand, more gatherings may be added.

60th Anniversary Concert Available

Due to copyright licensing restrictions, we are unable to make the recording of the 60th anniversary concert held on November 2 widely available, e.g., on our church web site or YouTube channel. However, there is one copy of the video on a thumb drive and one copy of the audio on a CD that can be borrowed from the church office by contacting Betsy (Aldersgatechelmsford@verizon.net or 978-256-9400).

Directory Photos Are Here!

For those families who had Val Shupe take their photo for our upcoming directory, the photos are ready! The digital version of your photo has been emailed to you, so please let us know if you did not receive it. The hardcopy of the package you ordered is available to be picked up after each service in the Fellowship Hall this Sunday, November 30. As part of your payment for your photo package, \$400 was given to Junie's Place, Inc, a local nonprofit that provides support to families journeying through the grief of pregnancy/infant/child loss and to champion grief awareness. If you have questions, please contact Rick Newcomb (rnewcomb@comcast.net, 978-828-1455).

2026 AUMC Budget Approved at Church Conference

The Church Conference approved the 2026 AUMC budget on November 30, 2025 as presented by the Finance Committee. The budget includes a 3% pay increase for all staff. The recommended \$410,414 budget is, for the sixth year in a row, a deficit budget, with estimated expenses exceeding expected income by more than \$37,800. That is a deficit of 9.2%.

We recommend applying the *remaining* funds that we received due to some very generous unexpected donations during the pandemic to decrease the 2026 deficit to 4.4%. **NOTE**: This year, in 2025, we started the year with an even bigger deficit of 11.7% and benefited from the generosity of the congregation, as well as unallocated funds, to substantially decrease this year's deficit to approximately 2%.

Please pray for continued wise stewardship in managing our financial resources to further Aldersgate's ministry!

Church Conference Held November 30

Aldersgate's annual Church Conference was held Sunday, November 30, in conjunction with our brothers and sisters from West Chelmsford UMC and the UMC of Westford. Our District Superintendent, Rev. Megan Stowe, presided. At the conference, we approved the 2026 church budget – see the article elsewhere here for more info – that included the compensation for the pastors and other church staff. We also approved the slate of committee nominations for the coming year. We spent time brainstorming how the three churches could better use our combined resources and how to more effectively reach out in our communities to help others. If you have ideas in these areas, please contact Pastor John or Peter Smyton, Church Council.

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 21st

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 John, Betsy, Rev Maylis, Lee, 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 (Dan Ward, Clewis Howe, Lee Pender, Steve Johnson, Jay Turchinetz, Scott Henderson).

In Christian Love and Spirit, The Staff Parish Relations Committee

OUTREACH...

Vou can cahadula vous annointment for the next Pland Drive

You can schedule your appointment for the next Blood Drive for December 27th from 9am-2pm

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 and search under December 27th to schedule an appointment. For more information call or email Cate Lehan or Robin Dye or the church office.

Santa Giving Tree

Annual Chelmsford Santa Giving Tree is up in the entrance way. Tags are hung on the tree for your selections. Christmas gifts are due by Sunday December 14th.

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 14th of December. Please bring in hats, gloves, socks, and mittens as well as toiletries. There is a box in the welcome area.

Single Ladies Dining Out



Single Ladies Dining Out will have **lunch** together on December 20th at 1pm at Ocho Café, Route 110, Westford, MA.01863. Please RSVP by Thursday December 18th to Betsy Campbell at 978-256-9400 or <u>aldersgatechelmsford@verizon.net</u> 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.

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!

Book Club in the Concord Room and on Zoom



Dec 30th –"The Phone Booth at the Edge of the World", by Laura Imai Messing. Robins pick

Jan. 27 "My Friends",. Judy's pick

Feb. 24th "Yada Yada Prayer Group. Deb's pick.

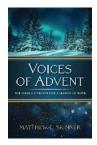
If you have a suggestion for an upcoming book let Deb Benson know. 978-604-0288

Early Bird Advent

The Early Bird Advent theme will be 'Another Look at the Messages of Christmas.' It will be an exploration of some of the familiar Christmas passages with 'eyes of anticipation' for messages which we might have missed or overlooked. The first of these will be a consideration of Matthew 2:1-12. Join in the discussion on Tuesday mornings at nine o'clock via Zoom.

2025 Advent Study Voices of Advent by Matthew Skinner

Advent begins today. Hurry to pick up a copy of *Voices of Advent*, by Matthew L. Skinner. Skinner examines biblical texts to show how they influence our lives and Christmas traditions. Through voices from Jesus, John the Baptist, faithful believers, angels, and visionaries, *Voices of Advent* guides readers to find hope in their messages and experience Advent as both the beginning of the Christian year and an introduction to the story of Jesus. This study includes short video segments to watch together and discuss. The Sunday 9:45 AM class will begin on Dec. 7.The Thursday



10 AM class will begin Dec. 11. If you can't make it to a group meeting, you can watch the videos on your own any time on Amplify Media. Call Betsy in the office for access code.

CHURCH SCHOOL NEWS

<u>Christmas Pageant</u> Sunday, December 21, 10:45 a.m.

The church school will be presenting this year's Christmas Pageant during the 10:45 a.m. worship service for the congregation, neighbors, and friends! Lee Williams will be visiting the church school classes on December 7 to sign up children and youth for different parts.



The pageant practice for all participants will be on Saturday, December 20, at 10:00am in the sanctuary.

NO CHURCH SCHOOL ON SUNDAY, DECEMBER 28 MERRY CHRISTMAS!

Epiphany Sunday



The Wise Men will visit our church school classes on Sunday, January 4, and will share the story of their journey to find the new king. We will also distribute cupcakes. Whoever picks the cupcake with a coin in it will be an honorary King for the Day!

Thanksgiving Baskets - Thank You!

Thank you to all the Church School families for your generous donations of rice, canned fruit, apple juice, green beans and cranberry sauce! These were added to our Thanksgiving baskets to help families in our community enjoy a nice holiday dinner. Each basket included a personal touch - a Thanksgiving card decorated by one of our Church School children and youth with their best wishes!







Advent Mission Program

Thank you to all who participated in our Advent Mission Program on the first Sunday of Advent. Each of our activities was connected to one the Advent Conspiracy principles of: Worship Fully, Spend Less, Give More and Love All. We *loved all* by putting together 120 "snowman soup" kits for St. Paul's Feeding Program. A nativity scene ornament reminded us to *worship fully*. We made Advent Calendar chains with ideas to *spend less* while giving more of ourselves this season. We also made and decorated a barnyard bank to help *give more* for our Advent Mission Project, the Yambasu Agriculture Initiative.









YOUTH GROUP NEWS

In November, the Senior Youth made care packages for our college students, while the Junior Youth went bananas at Banana Night! Thanks to the combined youth groups for helping to prepare and serve a meal at St Paul's. The combined youth groups also attended the CHS musical, *Oklahoma!* It was great to see members of our Senior Youth in the cast, orchestra, and crew!







JUNIOR YOUTH UPCOMING EVENTS

This fellowship group is for youth in grades $5^{th} - 7^{th}$ grade. Friends are always welcome!

Christmas Faire

Friday, December 5, 4:00 – 8:00 p.m. and Saturday, December 6, 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Please sign up for a time to help with the youth table on the sign-up sheets in the area. We will offer cookie decorating – please let Lee Williams know if you can bring 1 dozen sugar cookies.

<u>Junior Youth Christmas Party!</u> Friday, December 12, 6:30 – 8:00 p.m.

Come join us as we celebrate the coming of Christmas! We will have lots of fun playing games, decorating cookies and making a craft. We will need a parent helper to assist.

SENIOR YOUTH UPCOMING EVENTS

All youth in grades 8 - 12 are welcome to join us at any time.

Christmas Faire (7th graders will join us) (fundraising points) Friday, December 5, 4:00 – 8:00 p.m. and Saturday, December 6, 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.



Please sign up for a time to help with either the kitchen or the youth table on the sign-up sheets in the welcome area or let Lee Williams know if you can help. We will offer a variety of children's crafts at the youth table.



Christmas Party

Sunday, December 14, noon – 1:30 p.m.

Come join us as we celebrate the coming of Christmas!



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 have selected as our Advent Mission the UMC Global Ministries *Agriculture and Food Ministry* program: the Yambasu Agriculture Initiative.

You are welcome to take one of the special ornaments on our Mission tree in the front lobby area beginning November 30.

On Epiphany, also known as "Kings' Sunday" - January 4, we will bring our monetary gifts from the savings we have made and will offer them to support our Advent Mission: the Yambasu Agriculture Initiative.





UMC Global Ministries Agriculture and Food Ministry Program

Yambasu Agriculture Initiative

Will you join us during Advent in offering the gift of food security this Christmas Season? Global efforts to eliminate hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition are meeting more roadblocks because of the elimination of many U.S. foreign aid programs. In Africa, UMC Global Ministries is expanding the **Yambasu Agriculture Initiative** to help communities improve their food security through agricultural training and capacity building.

Named for the late Bishop John K. Yambasu of Sierra Leone, the Yambasu Agriculture Initiative works with United Methodist annual conferences and episcopal areas in Africa to lead agricultural projects that build self-sustaining communities.

Project Examples

- expanded growth of crops such as maize, cassava and rice
- cultivating seed projects to expand future crop output
- · honey and secondary product sales
- poultry, rabbit and piggery projects, among others

You can find out more about this organization at:

<u>umcmission.org/story/food-security-from-the-ground-up-yambasu-agriculture-initiative</u> and <u>umcmission.org/work/humanitarian-relief/agriculture-and-food-security</u>

Bring your gift on January 4, as we celebrate King's Sunday and offer our gifts of love for the world Christ loves and came to save.

Middlesex Community College Student Receives Aldersgate Scholarship

Aldersgate has established a scholarship in the church's name at Middlesex Community College (MCC). The scholarship of \$1,000/year is to be given to a deserving BIPOC – black, indigenous, or person of color – student each fall. Thanks to the Mighty Men, who established the scholarship, and income earned from our Endowment Fund, the total funding we have provided enables the scholarship to be given annually in perpetuity. This fall, the MCC selection committee selected Mayi Nakiyngi. Mayi is currently a Liberal Studies major and hopes to be accepted into the Nursing program at MCC within the next year, with the ultimate goal of transferring to UMASS Lowell for her BSN (Bachelor of Science in Nursing). Her current GPA is 3.51. From her application essay, we learned that she emigrated to the US on her own, was homeless for a year, living in the women's shelter, eventually got small jobs cleaning houses and went to school to get a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) certificate. Mayi is working two jobs to make ends meet and has survived a cancer scare. Her award certificate was announced at a ceremony at MCC on November 6. (Dawn Jones, Isabelle Cole, and Peter served as evaluators of the applications for MCC.) Congrats Mayi!



Birthdays and Anniversaries – December

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





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



Christmas Faire and Festival

DECEMBER 5, 2025 1pm - 8pm DECEMBER 6, 2025 10am - 2pm



Hear Ye – Hear Ye! See below for Table Information and Workshops Schedule! Joyfully we welcome the community and share our amazing gifts and talents – plus yummy food and baked goods! With many unique and one-of-a-kind crafts, food and gifts – your generous donations and shopping blesses others and our church witness to the community.

Christmas Faire and Festival is this Friday and Saturday, December 5 &6

Our annual Christmas Faire and Festival is this Friday, Dec 5, 1:00 pm – 8:00 pm and Saturday, Dec 6, 10:00 am – 2:00 pm. The Faire is an important fellowship and financial event, and we need everyone's help to make it a success! Please share your plans for donations of items to sell and soup(s) you will provide to the kitchen, or volunteer to staff a table on the sign-up sheets located in the Welcome Area. Contact Bonnie Marden at BonMarden@gmail.com or 978-846-1260 if you have questions.

Spread the word by posting the Faire Flyers located in the Welcome Area at your office or area businesses.

Christmas Faire and Festival is December 5 and 6

Faire Wreath and Swag Workshops: Sunday Nov 30 from 2 to 6pm, Monday to Wednesday Dec 1 - 3 from 10am to 4pm. Wednesday Evening set up, Thursday bake table and all item delivery starting at 10 am. Friday Faire Elves circle at 12:30.

Please contact Bonnie Marden at 978-846-1260 if you can join us in Rooms 1 and 2 and so we can update you on any updates to our schedule.

Wreaths and Swags will be available Sunday November 30! Back parking lot.

Attention Chili and Soup Makers

Awesome Cooks - (1) Chili, (2) Chicken Soup (frame?), (3) Lentil Soup.

Nothing too fancy, just your best batch Eva! See Greg Piper or reach out @ gpipes01@gmail.com Thank you for your help. Please drop it off at the Church on Thursday or Friday morning the 4^{th} or 5^{th} .

Calling all cooks and helpers for Santa's Kitchen

If anyone would like to help in the kitchen for the church fair - either Friday night or Saturday - please contact Mike Kane or Greg Piper.

Attention All bakers

We are in need of baked goods for the Faire. Please drop them off at church on Friday Morning the 5^{th} . Thank you for sharing your talent.

Christmas Faire and Festival is December 5 and 6

Our annual Christmas Faire and Festival is **this week**, on Friday, Dec 5, 1:00 pm - 8:00 pm and Saturday, Dec 6, 10:00 am - 2:00 pm. The Faire is an important fellowship and financial event, and we need everyone's help to make it a success! Please share your plans for donations of items to sell or volunteer to staff a table on the sign-up sheets located in the Welcome Area. Contact Bonnie Marden at BonMarden@gmail.com or 978-846-1260 if you have questions.

2025 Workshop Schedule

Nov 30 - Dec 3 10am to 5pm Greens and Centerpiece Workshop Days All are welcome to drop by and pitch in as you are able!

Dec 3 - Afternoon and Evening Fellowship Hall Set Up

Dec 4 - Bake Table Donations Delivery and All Table Set Up Completion

Dec 5 - Bake Table Donations Delivery and Final Set Up
12:30pm Volunteers Check-In for 1pm Opening!
6:00pm - Caroling - if Choir and Musicians available! (check with Maylis!)

Dec 6 10-2pm Faire open (Invite a Friend to boost traffic on Saturday!)

Dec 7 Faire Items available after worship services

KRINGLE'S KITCHEN: Calling all "Cooks and Gourmet Elves!" This year our focus for Friday afternoon and evening meals will be on "Soups, Chili's, and Stews!" We are looking for volunteers to prepare a batch of their finest dish. Chili, Turkey or Chicken Frame Soups or your favorite stews will be greatly appreciated! The kitchen activities will be very similar to years gone by, with the exception of short order cooking. We'll need order takers, runners, servers, waiters, waitresses to help serve and clean.

For Saturday morning, the target meal will be scones, muffins and possibly AUMC Egg McMuffins. Same support required. Signup Sheets for the kitchen help and volunteer meal preparation are available in the church entryway. Please contact Greg Piper at gpipes01@gmail.com or (978) 985-6535 for an elf spot on the team or an offer to donate your favorite dish!

SLEIGH BELLS SILENT AUCTION: Our Silent Auction offers gift and theme baskets, quilts and high-quality items or services for auction. The Auction closes Saturday at Noon! If you have a donation, theme basket or talent to share with others (such as a home cooked dinner), please contact Melinda Goodick 978-256-3983 mggoodick@hotmail.com.

COUNTRY STORE & BAKERY: Cookies, cakes, bread, pies, candy – this is where it's at! Slice it, dice it, bake it, taste it! AUMC Bakers are outstanding, offering festive treats and sweets for the season. Sample Betsey's Scones and other delicious treats. Betsey Driscoll 978-852-8761 betseyLLL@yahoo.com

JINGLING JEWELRY: Share your new or barely used jewelry and holiday gift items at our Jingling Jewelry! We offer a responsible way to pass it on our treasures! Let Marcia know if you have donations or want to help! Marcia Dana marciadana@gmail.com

GRACIOUS REGIFTING: Offering gently-used or new items, this table is stewarded by Jane Vooys. Bring in your donations early to help us set up!

For any other general questions, contact Bonnie Marden, 978-846-1260 BonMarden@gmail.com



Safely and joyfully we will share, prepare, shop and sing together as we ring in the Holy Season!





Saturday, December 6th 9 am to 3pm

West Chelmsford United Methodist Church

242 Main Street, N. Chelmsford (978) 251-4834 www.wcumc.us

HANDICAP ACCESSIBLE

The WCUMC Annual Holiday and Craft Fair offers something for everyone!

Our kitchen will be open throughout the fair, serving breakfast and lunch.

Take a break from shopping in our "bistro" and have a delicious homemade pastry, gourmet coffee or hot lunch.

Shop for holiday gifts at our craft, jewelry and gift tables.

Select a homemade treat for your holiday table!

Shop for Gifts and crafts!

Gift Baskets
Homemade cookies,
pies, cakes
Candles
Mary Kay
LipSense
Stampin' Up
Purses, tote bags
Hand knitted gifts
Tastefully Simple
Original artwork
Jewelry
Artisan Breads
Hand dipped Chocolates

Stop by our Bistro for:

Delicious breakfast pastries Gourmet coffee Hot. homemade lunch!

Visit our Kids Room!

Holiday crafts
Staffed by Christian Ed team
Child free shopping

White Elephant!

Gently used bargains!
Holiday Decorations
Jewelry & Gifts
Great for that Yankee Swap!