

Sunday Announcements for January 14, 2024



January 1, 2024

A Timely Message from the Magi

Over 70 years ago, a one-act opera was commissioned by NBC as a special Christmas broadcast to premiere on Dec. 24, 1951. *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, composed by Gian Carlo Menotti, is a fantasy based on the Gospel of Matthew's account of the wise men. The plot includes a poor widow and her young son (with a disability) who get a surprise visit from these exotic travelers.

As a child, I was smitten by this wondrous tale, and later in high school, I was part of a chorus that served as shepherds in a local performance. Still later I taught this opera to my elementary vocal music students. And much, much later, I served as a sign language interpreter for this timeless opera for my Deaf congregation.

These musical Menotti magi continue to follow the star of my heart every year during the season of Epiphany. As I mature and consider people of other faith communities and the diverse cultures from which they come, my understanding continues to evolve.

As I write this, the Middle East is in the throes of a devastating war between Israel and Hamas. Jews, Muslims, and Christians have experienced and are experiencing tragic losses — bombings, kidnappings, and embargoes.

Across the globe people are drawing up sides. Anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic hate crimes are on the rise. Social media is full of slanderous mischaracterizations of Jews and Muslims. University campuses are staging protests, and in Vermont, three young Muslim men were shot.

What is our response to these atrocities? As people of God, we regret the loss of life and the anti-Semitic and Islamophobic violence and hate speech. But what else can we do?

According to our *Book of Resolutions*, we as United Methodists “corporately are called to be neighbors with other faith communities, and to work with them to create a human community, a set of relationships between people at once interdependent and free, in which there is love, mutual respect and justice” (Paragraph 3291).



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Who are your neighbors? Where are the opportunities for you to forge interreligious relationships? Seek them out.

Here are some more specific approaches from our *Book of Resolutions*:

1. Identify the various faith communities and familiarize your congregation with them.
2. Initiate dialogues with different faith communities, remaining sensitive to areas of historic tension. Be open to the possibility for deepened understanding and new insight.
3. Work with persons of other faith communities to resolve economic, social, cultural, and political problems in the community.
4. Plan community celebrations with an interreligious perspective together with persons of other faith traditions.
5. Develop new models of community building that strengthen relationships and allow people to dwell together in harmony while honoring the integrity of their differences. (Paragraph 3291)

All of this takes some intentionality. Like the magi seeking an encounter with the newborn king of the Jews, let us diligently seek ways of understanding those of other religious communities. It is part of our Christian witness to respect, dialog, and fellowship with fellow pilgrims on this earth.

Don't be quick to put your wisemen figurines back in the box after Christmas Day. Keep them and their message on your mantle through Epiphany. Play a recording of *A mahl and the Night Visitors* for a bit of musical inspiration.

May this season of Epiphany be a time of deeper relationship building and mutual admiration for the many faiths of our communities.

Resource: Wikipedia "Amahl and the Night Visitors"

Special Prayers for these Wesley Family, Friends, and Others...

Pinamang Boateng, John Davis (Ronna's husband), Dot Ellis, Earl Flagg, Jim Hoffman, Dorothy Norcross, Grace Woode, Baby "T" with a heart condition (friend of Carol Samanen), Beverly Grimshaw, Don Prior, Peter Woodcock, Joseph Boateng, Anne Burrows, Ray Cournoyer (friend of Bill Robbins), Al D'Ambra, Barbara Fletcher, Kathy Freeburn (friend of Linda D'Acri), Don Johnson (Phil's brother), Charles & Samira Kiefer, Sandra O'Driscoll, David Samanen, Alysia Simoneau, Janet Terzian, Donald Tremblay, Barbara, Frank & the Vietze Family; Laura Zoldak, Susan (friend of David Potts), Malika Gujarati (family of Jim & Judy Hoffman), Margie (Linda Keister's sister), Page (Allison Hansen's sister).
Those who struggle with depression, anxiety, and alcoholism.

Elizabeth Osei-Boateng and family on the death of her older brother, Dan Adusei-Poku, who passed away in Ghana at the age of 90.

Tower & Rose Window Lightings & Altar Flowers

The Rose Window lighting for January is given in loving memory of Mrs. William B. Smith by the United Women in Faith.

The Tower lighting for January is given in loving memory of my parents, Mary & Normal Fletcher, and my brother, David Fletcher by Barbara Fletcher.

The altar flowers today are given in loving memory of Mrs. William B. Smith by the United Women in Faith.

The February Tower Lighting and Rose Window Lighting and the March Rose Window lighting are available for dedication. The cost of each is \$40 for the month. If you are interested, please email me (office@wesleyworc.org) or call the office and let me know.
Thanks, Debi Reynolds

The 2024 altar flower calendar is now available. If you'd like to order altar flowers in honor, celebration or memory of a loved one, come to the Welcome Office and sign up in the book. Please take a form to complete and return it to the office with your payment. It's \$60 for both arrangements on the altar.

Announcements

Office Notice: The church office will be closed on Monday, January 15th in observance of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday.

February Herald: *There are always extra copies of the Herald in the Narthex by the Welcome Office.* The February Herald will be part of the February 4th bulletin; however, it will be posted by February 1st. Please send all articles to me no later than Friday, January 26th. *Thank you, Debi*

On-Line Bulletins... We'd like to know if you view or print the online bulletin that is posted each week. If you do, would you please let me know. You can email me or call the office (office@wesleyworc.org or 508-799-4191, ext 102). If I do not hear from anyone by January 28th, we will stop posting a bulletin online starting February.

United Women in Faith to Honor Margaret Watson at Noon, January 14 Annual Meeting

All women of Wesley are welcome to our annual meeting scheduled for Sunday, January 14 after church. Join us for a light lunch and program, which will include a speaker from RIA (Respond Inspire Act), Chantha Carter, who will discuss the organization's services for trafficked women. Their Worcester office is located at Wesley.

We will also honor the life of our former president, Margaret Watson, together with our traditional recognition of all Wesley women who passed on in 2023.

Bring a few Margaret stories and come to our lunch meeting on the 14th.

UWF to host January 27 Community Supper

The United Women in Faith unit at Wesley traditionally hosts the January community supper. We will be looking for volunteers to prepare, serve and clean up the meal of meatloaf, potatoes, mixed vegetables, and rolls. We also would like donations of home-baked goodies.

Please let Allison Hansen know which shift(s) you can help with -- 1 p.m. prep, 3 p.m. serve, or 6 p.m. clean up at AChis4788@aol.com.

Here's a Chance to Prevent Homelessness

It's a simple idea -- buy your groceries (or your coffee or toiletries) and help a local family stay in their home. You'll be joining area stores in contributing to a fund that gives grants to families facing eviction. One back rent payment, utility bill or storage unit fee can keep families out of the shelter system and all the disruption to their children's schooling.

Here's how it works: When you purchase gift cards from Big Y, Shaw's, Stop & Shop, CVS, Dunkin Donuts, Panera, Starbucks, Amazon, Target or TJ Maxx/Marshalls/Home Goods, a percentage of that card's value is donated by those stores to Central Mass. Housing Alliance. Families come to CMHA seeking assistance, and since this program began, hundreds of families have received aid.

Look for the birdhouse in Brewer Hall -- at a table near the stage -- after church services. Cards are for sale every Sunday and by email to AChis4788@aol.com. Order by Monday, January 15 for pickup on Sunday, January 21 pickup after the morning service.

Come choose a Sunday to help with card sales -- it takes a team to tackle a challenge as big (and fast-growing) as homelessness.

Mission Matters

Volunteering for Wesley's IHN Week-- Sunday, Jan. 28 to Sat., Feb. 3

Please let Betsy Pennino know if you are able to provide coverage for the evening shift (5:30 to 8:30 pm), or the overnight, (8:30 pm to 6:30 am) during Wesley's week at IHN. In the Hour of Need Family Shelter (IHN) is a temporary home for families who have recently lost their homes. If you would like an explanation of how to do either shift, please tell Betsy. A sign-up sheet will be on the now re-located Mission Bulletin Board.

Currently volunteers may choose to stay in the IHN office or interact with the families. Volunteers no longer provide dinners but are encouraged to bring food to prepare their own.

The Mission Committee will give Hope for Housing cards to pay for food and housing staples during Wesley's Jan. 28 to Feb. 3 week. Your donating Big Y cards would save money to give to another mission.

God Moment

No God Moment was contributed recently. If you have a story to tell and would like some assistance in getting it to read the way you want, Betsy Pennino is happy to help. (betspenn35@hotmail.com)

DID YOU KNOW?

Whenever we celebrate the sacrament of baptism, we probably take it for granted that the baptismal font is located in a prominent position in our main worship space, but did you know that there was a time when there were separate buildings for the administration of baptism? During New Testament times and through the second century, gatherings for worship occurred in private homes, and baptism was administered in rivers, lakes, and pools. Once more formal architectural settings for worship were introduced, so were special places for the rite of Christian initiation. Such a place is called a *baptistry* (sometimes also spelled *baptistry*).

In ancient times the term *baptisterium* referred to a place for bathing, and the form of early baptisteries for Christian initiation were based on models provided by the bathing apartments of the pagans. Originally in the third and fourth centuries, these baptisteries were either totally separate from the main church building or only loosely attached, and this pattern of construction continued as late as the fourteenth century. It was not until the later Middle Ages that the font was placed within the church itself, in recognition of the public nature of Christian baptism. Generally, at this time the font was placed in the nave of the church near the main door as a symbol that baptism itself is the means of entrance to the church. In some cases, a simple railing was placed around the font as a means to define a space that recognized the importance of baptism as the first sacrament of the church.

Over the course of time various traditions arose regarding the location of the baptismal font. Many denominations continue to use the historic location of the baptismal font in a separate chapel or near the entrance to stress baptism as the entry rite of the church. Other arrangements emphasize the concept of baptism as incorporation into the community of faith by placing the font in a location (such as at the front of the nave or sometimes at a central crossing in the middle of the congregational seating area) where it is visible to much of the assembled congregation, thus allowing for more congregational participation in this sacrament.

In the sanctuary at Wesley our primary furnishings of worship—the font symbolizing our initiation into the community of faith, the altar/communion table reminding us of the death and resurrection of Christ, and the pulpit reflecting the revelation of the word of God—are all located at the front of our worship space where they serve as tangible reminders of the essential components of our faith and our worship.

Submitted by, Deborah O'Driscoll