

The Bell Rope

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL
CHURCH OF VERONA, NJ
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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President's Column

This Christmas, take **time**. Take **time to worship**. Avail yourself of the many opportunities we offer during Advent and Christmas. Or, if you will be away, take time to worship at a church near you. Worship should be at the heart of your Christmas celebration. Wherever you are, take time each day to read an Advent devotional from *This Year Will Be Different*, a booklet and daily calendar available at church or by calling the church office at 973-239-3212.

Take **time to enjoy your family and friends** during the Christmas season, and your church family as well. Join us for our Christmas potluck on December 18th. Remember that the memories you make with people are much more important than whether you found the gift that is just right for each of them or whether your decorations are perfect.

Take **time to help others**. The Bell Rope is filled with opportunities to do so, and lots of others are available in your community.

But most important, **take time to listen**. People are so needy during the Christmas season, and not just the poor. Frantic, harried people, those recovering from the loss of a loved one, those struggling to make do with less money or with failing health all need someone who will listen to their problems and their pain. As a discipline this Advent, I invite you to begin each day by asking God to show you the person you should listen to that day. Perhaps it's the person who sits next to you on the bus to work, or your neighbor, or a friend who would welcome your call or email. You don't need all the answers, just be a sympathetic listener. Maybe you even will be able to point to an answer for them by saying, with the apostle Philip, "Come and see. Come to church and encounter the God who listens to all our prayers."

See you in church!

Marge

Fair in the Square

Once again, the Verona community will observe its annual Fair in the Square on the first Saturday of December (rain date on Sunday) from noon to 4:30 pm, and once again our church will be there, sharing some holiday spirit with people in our community. This year, in addition to telling about our church, distributing information about events during Advent and Christmas and selling crafts from African countries and other developing nations, we will be selling yummy Comfort Soup made by church members, and Ashley Farms cheesecakes and coffee rings. We will also hold a drawing for a free cheesecake.

Advent and Christmas Worship

Advent worship services this year will include a Hanging of the Greens service on December 11th during which we will decorate the sanctuary while recalling the symbolism of the various decorations. On December 18th, Christmas Sunday, we will celebrate a Festival Christmas Worship with our multimedia presentation, Welcome the Child. It's an inspiring blending of lovely and provocative images with glorious music. This service will be followed by a holiday potluck lunch. On Christmas Eve, we will gather at 5:00 PM for a service honoring the coming of the Light of the World. On Christmas morning, we will have a brief, informal service including carols, prayers, reading the Christmas story in the Biblical and a modern version, and sharing thoughts on the meaning of Christmas. Plan to attend all these services, and bring your friends and neighbors as we celebrate the birth of our Savior.

Advent Peace Services

Some moments of peace during Advent. Isn't that what we all need at this busy time of year? Join us at 7:00pm on Wednesdays, Dec. 7th, 14th, and 21st, and spend a little time in the peaceful darkened sanctuary, with music, prayer, and meditation. We trust that it will provide some balance to the most frenzied month of the year.

Christmas Flower and Music Fund

One way to remember or honor a loved one at Christmas is to make a donation to the Flower and Music Fund in their name. Your donations will be used to purchase plants to decorate the sanctuary and hire soloists to enrich the music in our worship on the last Sunday of Advent and Christmas Eve. To make a donation, bring or send your check to church with a note of the name of the person(s) being honored. These funds will supplement the generous annual donations made by the Hentz family each year in memory of Bud and Mildred Hentz.

Alternative Christmas Sale

You've survived Black Friday (which now starts on Thanksgiving evening), Black Saturday and Cyber-Monday as well. Whether you took on the malls or stayed at home and cyber-shopped at your computer, or whether you are just dreading starting your Christmas shopping, you may have wondered whether there is a better way to celebrate the birth of our Savior than to engage in this holiday madness.

One way is by Alternative Shopping. Instead of giving gifts to family and friends who already have everything they want, you make a donation to a charitable cause in their name. Another is to purchase gifts that make a real difference in the lives of craftspeople in developing nations. To make this alternative shopping a little easier for members, friends, and families who use our building, our church is again sponsoring an Alternative Market. This year, it will be held after church on Sunday, Dec. 4, and on Monday and Tuesday, Dec. 5 and 6, from 11:30 AM to 7:30 PM. The market will include some suggested gifts to our church as well as other charities we support, as well as gifts from SERRV, Bridge of Faith African Crafts and other Fair Trade groups.

Opportunities to Share

At First Congregational, helping those in need is a year-round activity. However, Christmas is a time to give extravagantly, in celebration of God's extravagant gift of Jesus. Traditionally during this season we provide opportunities to give to others in several ways. This year we're adding a new one, as well.

Mitten Tree

Decorate the Christmas tree in the Founders' Room with mittens, gloves, hats, and scarves in all sizes. They can be new, store-bought or hand-made, or gently used. In January, they will go to the Human

Needs Pantry in Montclair, to keep people warmer all winter long.

Christmas Cards and the Veterans of the Cross Offering

Instead of sending Christmas cards to church friends, bring a card for our card display in the Founders' Room, along with a check for the money you would have spent on cards and stamps, or any other amount you want to donate. Proceeds will go to the Veterans of the Cross special offering which helps retired clergy on very low incomes as well as clergy in financial crisis. This year, we have a special connection to this fund as our own Heather Ayers is now a staff person for this program.

Food Collection

The collection of non-perishable foods held during November is back by popular demand, demand for food, that is. With one out of ten New Jersey families using food stamps, the need at food pantries is greater than ever. A box is available in the Founders' Room for donations of non-perishable food. Please think of those who are less fortunate when you do your grocery shopping.

Cookies for All

It is easy as we celebrate Christmas with family and friends to forget that some people must work so that others can celebrate. This year, we will provide some Christmas cheer for those workers. After our Christmas Eve and Christmas Day coffee hours, we will prepare plates of goodies that members can deliver to the Christmas workers they pass on their way home, along with a note wishing them a Merry Christmas. Such workers may include police officers, gas station attendants, hospital and nursing home staff, convenience store clerks -- you get the idea. You can participate by bringing a few extra Christmas goodies on Dec. 18th, 24th, or 25th, by suggesting places for our workers' list, and by volunteering to deliver one or more plates of Christmas cheer.

Deaths in the Family

Since the last Bell Rope, we mourn the passing of several long-time members of our church including Jean Fried, Marge Riso, Ruth Nuse, and Barbara Taylor. All of them were active in our church for many years and will be missed greatly. They were remembered with white roses on the communion table during our service for All Saints Day.