



ELMHURST
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH

DECEMBER 2019

Newsletter

A NEWSLETTER FOR MEMBERS AND FRIENDS OF ELMHURST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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PASTOR'S + CORNER

REV. TRACI SMITH



Perhaps you've heard of the Texas style chili *chile con carne*. It means "chili with meat." Carne is meat in Spanish. It's the same root from which we get the word incarnation. When we say that Jesus was God "incarnate" we mean God "made flesh." At Christmastime we celebrate this mystery that God, the all-knowing, all-powerful, all-present God became flesh to live and dwell among us. It's remarkable, really, to think that God would choose to become humble in order to live among us. As we move into the Advent season, take a moment to reflect on God's decision to be born as a tiny helpless baby, taking on all of the experiences of humanity, so that he might understand what it means to be human. It's one of the most perplexing and wonderful miracles of our faith.

The mystery of the incarnation, and the idea that God has chosen to dwell among us is not the prevailing message of December in the United States. The loudest message in the United States in December is this: shop, shop, shop. Buy, buy, buy. We can't escape it. This year we'll be following along with the Advent Conspiracy movement as we design an advent experience that runs counter to consumerism and materialism.

The four tenets of Advent Conspiracy are:



WORSHIP FULLY



SPEND LESS



GIVE MORE



LOVE ALL

To learn more about the Advent Conspiracy, visit: adventconspiracy.org/about/

Advent can be a time of deep spiritual reflection and growth as we consider God made flesh.

Happy Advent to all. May God continue to bless us as we move forward in faith, together.

With gratitude,

Pastor Traci

UPCOMING» EVENTS

HAPPENING IN DECEMBER »»»

1-24

SEASON OF ADVENT

The season of Advent is a time for us to prepare our hearts and minds for the coming of the Christ child into the world.

1

LEADERSHIP BREAKFAST | 9:15 - 10:15 am

Please join us from 9:15 - 10:15 am on Sunday, December 1 for breakfast. Committees will be meeting and doing some planning. If you're not on a committee, you are still invited to come and learn about the committees that are present and what they do. Please let Pastor Traci know if you'd like more information.

8

ADVENT COZY INN (Kids Only!) 12 - 2 pm

This Christmas season, let your kids create while you rest and recharge. There will be crafting, baking, and singing. Register at Elmhurstchurch.org.



15

ADVENT POTLUCK | Following Church

To honor the spirit of sharing and community - please sign up to bring your favorite dish for a time of food, fun, and friends.

24

CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE | 5 pm

All ages worship.



family ministry calendar

DECEMBER 8

ADVENT COZY INN | 12 PM

After church, all kids are invited to make Christmas crafts, sing carols, bake cookies, and enjoy the Christmas spirit! Sign up on the website at elmhurstchurch.org.

DECEMBER 22

CHRISTMAS PAGEANT

All kids and youth are invited to tell the best story ever—the Christmas story. We'll be staying after church (for 30 min.) on the 8th and 15th to practice our lines and placement! If you're interested in helping us tell this holy story, ask Emily Culella for volunteer details!

DECEMBER 24

CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE | 5 PM

Calling all adults and children! If you want one of the 12 roles (no need to memorize or wear a costume!) come see Emily Culella for details. We are excited to show the community that Elmhurst Presbyterian likes to have fun with each other and to celebrate the days of this sacred season!

“ But Mary treasured up all these things, and pondered them in her heart. ”

Luke 2:19

This time of year can be one long careening train, headed towards exhaustion. Concerts and parties and out-of-town relatives and buying gifts and work meetings and baking and travel, sometimes conspire to separate us from our families or make time with them less rich. It can't always be helped. How is it that this special time of year can be drowned out by its own noise? Once, during a particularly stressful patch, my youngest told me that he wanted to “do something fun.” I asked him what this meant, fully expecting to hear “go to Chuck E. Cheese's” (my personal nightmare). Instead, he asked if we could sit on the couch, all four of us, and watch a movie.

Some years, we have time for two-carved out sacred hours. Other times, we are holding onto ourselves by the tips of our fingernails, sliding towards Christmas morning. The best and worst thing about this holy

time of year, is that it happens with or without us. The incarnation, the baby, the shepherds and angels, they happen. Sometimes we are there in the fields, quietly watching the angels, sometimes we are the innkeeper missing out because we are too full up. Or sometimes, the incarnation happens within ourselves for a tiny moment. Maybe we stop to watch the snow fall. Maybe we listen to sounds of a happy coffee shop, for a moment, instead of our headphones.

These small moments deserve to be pondered and held dear for what they are, small patches of the mystery of Christmas. Otherwise, they pass in a blur of red and green. Long ago, Mary observed and pondered, deep in her heart, this magical, beautiful, stressful, loud, and quiet night. And she treasured what she saw.

What
We're
Learning
Downstairs

We are finishing up talking about Moses and the Israelites before heading into our Advent learning. We've learned about the Nile river (and why it's no place for babies in baskets), the parting of the Red Sea, the Ten Commandments and more! The kids memorized 2 verses of scripture and learned them in sign language. This is one of their favorite parts of Sunday School.

The kids are enjoying their new space and making it their own. We are excited to decorate our trees with ornaments we make!

OUR ART PROJECTS HAVE INCLUDED:

The burning bush, the pillar of fire, the cloud in the desert, and the stickering of pumpkins.

CHRISTMAS MUSIC

BY SUSAN SMENTEK

One Chicago radio station rang in the Christmas music season on November 5 by turning on their 24/7 holiday music playlist. I know this because, that's the day I banned said station from my car radio. Not because I don't like holiday music. I'm personally singing in five Christmas Concerts before mid-December. The radio playlist, however, is limited and, there are just only so many cover versions of Wham's *Last Christmas* that one can listen to in a day. Plus, the Twelve Days of Christmas are December 25 - January 5.

Of course, listen to the holiday station if you like. I don't want to ruin your chances of winning the *All I Want for Christmas is You* Mariah Carey office karaoke contest. I'm simply stating the obvious: The ultimate point of commercial holiday radio is to get consumers to buy more stuff, before December 25.

The Advent hymns and songs and Christmas carols that we sing during Worship at EPC are about us, our congregation, collectively worshipping God. We will sing about hope, waiting for Emmanuel, light in the darkness, and the joy that we feel as we ultimately arrive at Christmas, celebrating the birth of Jesus.

One of the songs that we will sing this year, *Baby Born Today*, comes to us from Ruth Crawford Seeger's *American Folk Songs for Christmas*. Published in 1953, Ruth joined the WPA Federal Music Project in 1936, where she worked alongside the famed Lomax family of musicologists to save American folk music from extinction by sifting through 10,000 field recordings in the Library of Congress archives, sorting, transcribing and notating songs.

About the Christmas songbook, Ruth Crawford Seeger wrote, "These songs grew out of and were used in the old-time American Christmas, a Christmas not of Santa Claus and tinsel trees but of homespun worship and festivity.... They have been chosen for their excellence as songs but even more for the genuineness with which they express the Christmas attitudes and values of the people who sang them and the communities of which they were part. They are fresh, rhythmically buoyant: singing them, it is easy to remember that clapping, foot tapping and religious dancing have been their

frequent accompaniment. They are simple and without pretense. They exist because there was a need for them. A considerable number—the response songs, particularly—stem from vigorous traditions of group spontaneity in singing, work and worship."

Baby Born Today is a "shout"—a traditional part of the all-night Watch Night services held on Christmas Eve at churches in

the South. We will all learn the refrain, "O, Jerusalem in the morning", to sing in between simple verses detailing the Christmas story of Mary, Joseph, shepherds, angels and the baby born today!

No matter what your favorite seasonal songs are, I hope that you will enjoy the hymns and contemporary praise music that have been selected for Advent, 2019. Please join in and raise your voice in song. We'll sing many beloved carols at EPC on Christmas Eve at the 5 pm service.

**WE WILL SING ABOUT HOPE,
WAITING FOR EMMANUEL,
LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS, AND
THE JOY THAT WE FEEL AS WE
ULTIMATELY ARRIVE AT
CHRISTMAS, CELEBRATING THE
BIRTH OF JESUS.**

UPCOMING EVENTS

A festive poster for the 'Advent Cozy Inn' event. The background is a dark teal color with white snowflakes and two large red and white striped peppermint candies at the top. Two gingerbread men are featured: one on the left standing on a small blue snowdrift, and one on the right holding a large mug of hot chocolate with a swirl of white cream. The text is centered in white.

Elmhurst Presbyterian Presents

Advent Cozy Inn

December 8th, 12-2. Kids Only!
This Christmas season, let your kids create while you rest and recharge. Crafting, baking, singing.
Register at Elmhurstchurch.org

A poster for the 'Advent Potluck!' event. The background is dark with a decorative border of green leaves and red berries. The text is in a mix of white and red fonts.

ELMHURST PRESBYTERIAN
PRESENTS:

Advent Potluck!

December 15th, After Church
Sign Up in the Nelson White Room (lobby)

WELCOME TO THE NEW FORMAT OF THE EPC NEWSLETTER!

We hope this space will continue to be a place where members, friends, and visitors can learn about the happenings of Elmhurst Presbyterian Church! If you'd like to contribute something to the newsletter, please make sure you submit your article to epc@elmhurstchurch.org by the 14th of the month!

SESSION NEWS

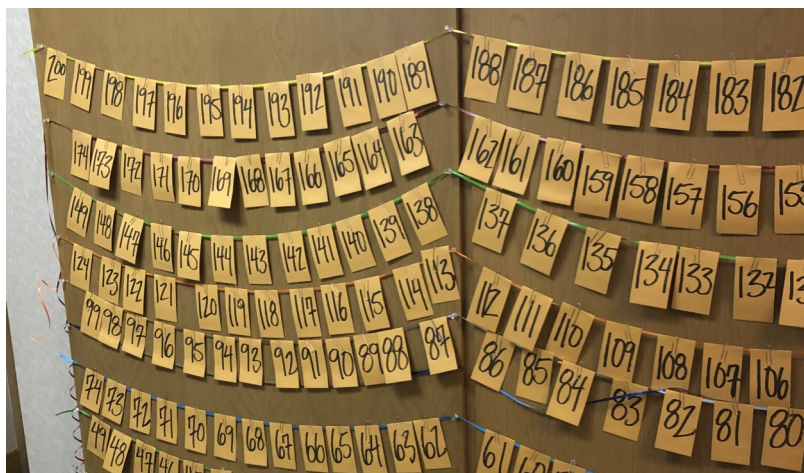
THE SESSION HAS BEEN BUSY THIS FALL! HERE ARE SOME OF OUR RECENT ACTIONS:

- » We approved a **quarterly forum series** where we will talk about issues that are important to us and the community. Our first forum happened at the end of November when we hosted a community conversation on Gun Violence.
- » We've talked at length about the need for our congregation to adopt a **broader funding model** than simply to rely on pledges alone. We're looking at fundraising, service income, interest income, and other creative ways of financial sustainability. More to come on this in the future! Session has approved a new rental fee schedule and is looking for rental partners as we seek to be good stewards of our space.
- » One of the most exciting things the Session does is to **approve new members**, and we had the opportunity to approve the membership of Amy, Steve, and Leah Mortensen and Lena Baumann.
- » We've moved forward on **quarterly leadership meetings** where committees meet to get business done and talk with each other. All committee Sundays are an opportunity to invite new leaders to committees.

The Session is here to serve EPC to the best of our ability. If you ever have questions about our work or ministry, please don't hesitate to contact Pastor Traci or me.

Respectfully Submitted,
Liz Johnson, Clerk of Session

WALL OF ABUNDANCE



Many thanks to everyone who participated in our Wall of Abundance. Thanks to your generosity, we raised over \$5,000 to help balance our budget for this year.

DEACON NEWS

Deacons have had a very busy fall! We kicked off the fall season with an incredibly successful fall picnic. Food was bountiful, and everyone enjoyed the friendship and fellowship. In November we hosted Grace Café, a free meal for the community for all who are interested in receiving it. We welcomed over one hundred guests this year, a record number!

Deacons are here to serve our church family. If you know someone who is in need of special care and attention, please let Pastor Traci or one of the Deacons know. We are eager to help! Thank you to all of those volunteers who helped with both Grace Café and the Picnic. We couldn't have done it without you.

With gratitude,
Mary Ellen Hayes



Hosting Grace Café for the community

TRUSTEE NEWS

December is a busy time for the Board of Trustees. We take a look at our income and expenditures and work to create a balanced budget that is faithful to our goals and priorities for the year ahead. To those of you who have already turned in your pledge cards, a big "Thank you!" Pledge cards help us plan for the year to come and make reasonable predictions about what income we can expect for the year. If you've not turned in a pledge card yet, please do so at your convenience. It's not too late!

In addition to preparing the budget, Trustees also make decisions about our building and approve expenditures related to building maintenance and upkeep. Often the maintenance of our building can seem "hidden" as the things we need to do to keep our building in good shape aren't always noticeable. For example, the Trustees recently approved a repair

of a drain in our parking lot that was a safety hazard, as well as a large stormwater separation system that will help our building drain water more effectively and prevent flooding. We also were grateful to approve a large LED replacement project. If things look brighter at EPC recently, it's because they are! The lights in our building have been replaced with energy efficient and brighter LEDs. These lights will help save the church money over time.

Trustees are always looking for volunteers to help with building maintenance issues and serve in a variety of capacities. If you're interested in helping, please reach out!

Greg St. Laurent
Chair, Board of Trustees



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