



THE VOICE

THE NEWSLETTER OF ST. MATTHEW LUTHERAN CHURCH, AVON, CT December 2020

"In Christ, we are digging deep, reaching out, changing lives."

STAFF:

Julie Reuning-Scherer, Lead Pastor
Brian Rajcok, Associate Pastor
Richard Silbereis, Director of Music
Diane Oates, Church Administrator
Steven Smolnik, Publisher

St. Matthew Lutheran Church
224 Lovely Street
Avon, CT 06001-4018
(860) 673-3301

Website: www.stmatthewavon.org

If you need to stop by the office for any reason, please call (860) 673-3301 and Diane will be happy to receive you. You can mail contributions and communications to the church via USPS and drop off donations for outside organizations in the bins by the office door. Thank you!

DATES TO REMEMBER:

- December 1, 8, 15, 22:** Tuesdays Together in December: Virtual Prayer, 10:00 a.m.
- December 3 & 17:** Bible Study: 10:00 a.m.
- December 6: Second Sunday of Advent, St. Nicholas Day**
 - Sunday School: 10:00 a.m.
- December 8 & 10:** Centering Prayer via Zoom
 - December 8: 6:00 p.m.
 - December 10: 2:00 p.m.
- December 13: Third Sunday of Advent**
- December 14 & 21:** Confirmation Mtg: 7 p.m.
 - December 14: In-Person
 - December 21: via Zoom
- December 15:** January VOICE submissions deadline.
- December 17:** Women's Christmas Party 7:00 p.m. via Zoom
- December 19:** Men's Breakfast 8:30 a.m. via Zoom
- December 20: Fourth Sunday of Advent**
 - Lessons & Carols: Zoom, led by Sunday School Children: 9:00 a.m.
 - In the Sanctuary, Led by Organ and Voice: 11:00 a.m.
- December 24:** Christmas Eve Services:
 - Drive-In Service: 4:00 p.m.
 - Candlelight In-Person Service: 5:30 p.m.
 - Zoom Service: 7:30 p.m.
 - On-Demand: Prerecorded Service & Children's Sermon on website 12/24 AM
- December 25:** Christmas Day!
- December 27:** Christmastide Service w/ Music & Carols of the Season.

A LETTER FROM THE PASTOR

The Advent Wreath

One of the best-known customs for the season is the Advent wreath. It began among German Lutherans in the 16th century, symbolizing the Light of Christ coming into the world. In the darkest of seasons, the wreath is a sign of hope, as an additional candle is lit each week.

The Advent wreath seems an especially appropriate practice this year. We feel the darkness of worry, uncertainty, and loss. But Christ shines light into this darkness too, dispelling our fears and giving us hope. There is light at the end of the tunnel, and that light is Jesus.

Since most of us won't be participating in the lighting of the Advent wreath as a congregation, you can create a simple Advent wreath for your home. First, choose your candle holder. Candle holders can be mason jars, serving trays, or flowerpots. Next, select four candles. Traditionally purple candles were used, as a sign of penitence, with one pink candle to represent joy; in recent decades, many churches have moved to using royal blue candles as a sign of hope. You can use white or gold candles as well. Lastly, decide what to use for the greenery. You can trim a few branches from your Christmas tree, or from evergreen or holly bushes in your yard. Complete your wreath with artificial greenery, ribbons, pinecones, perhaps even a few Christmas ornaments.

And lastly, light your wreath! Choose a time to light it on a nightly or weekly basis. Use the litany at the end of this newsletter as you pray for Christ to come—for yourself, for those you love, and for the world.

Pastor Julie

Pastor Julie



ST. MATTHEW MISSION STATEMENT: *St. Matthew Lutheran Church is a worshipping community called to proclaim God's love for all and to grow spiritually together. Challenged by Jesus' example, we strive to connect people of all ages, abilities, and needs, and to nurture them to be disciples of Christ. Guided by the Holy Spirit, we reach out to the wider community and welcome our neighbors to a life of worship, preaching, teaching, Christian care, service, and spiritual growth.*

WHO WAS SAINT NICHOLAS?

The giver of every good and perfect gift has called upon us to mimic God's giving, by grace, through faith, and this is not of ourselves.

—Nicholas

'Jolly ol' Saint Nicholas' was not originally a big guy in a red snowsuit. He was actually a fourth-century bishop of Myra, a city on the coast of what is now Turkey. Saint Nicholas was born to a wealthy family but became an orphan at a young age due to an epidemic that took his parents' lives. Being a devout Christian, Nicholas used all his inheritance to serve the sick, poor, and needy of his day. Stories of Saint Nicholas feature him sharing food in a famine, protecting children, and saving sailors in a storm at sea. Throughout Europe people have commemorated Saint Nicholas on his feast day, December 6. It has been a time for gift giving, especially for those in need.

St Nicholas' feast day falls on a Sunday this year, and we will remember his story in the children's sermon on December 6. In addition, I invite you in your Christmas preparations to join the spirit of Saint Nicholas by giving a gift to someone who is in need. **ELCA Good Gifts**, (<https://community.elca.org/elcagoodgifts>) is a beautiful way to give a gift of sustainable livelihood to someone who needs it, while honoring a loved one. The gifts in the catalog fund projects of ELCA ministries, such as the ELCA Fund for Leaders, ELCA World Hunger, and Lutheran Disaster Response. Another opportunity is to participate in **Saint Matthew's Mitten Tree** this year. Donations of mittens, gloves, hats and scarves can be left in the bin labeled Mitten Tree behind the white bench by the office door, or you can call the office to arrange a time to drop off your gift. Please get them to the office by *Thursday December 17*. Donations go to Grace Lutheran, The Village for Children and Families in Hartford, and Gifts of Love here in the Valley.

Together we can shine God's love into the shadows of our world and help our neighbors feel the warmth of Jesus' love.

Pastor Julie

Pastor Julie

STEWARDSHIP: ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER

The stewardship team wishes to thank you for your support and generosity in this year's stewardship campaign! Your commitment and generosity are what keep St. Matthew a vibrant faith community. God has blessed our congregation incredibly, and we are continually encouraged by you! As of Monday, November 23rd, we've received 52 pledges totaling \$241,312.04. This is a promising number to see in November, especially considering the circumstances of this year! If you have not yet submitted an intention of giving card, it's not too late! You can mail it into the office anytime this month. Thank you all for your gifts of time, talent, and treasure, and for your commitment to this family of faith and the mission we share. Because of your commitment to this congregation, we can continue to dig deep, reach out, and transform lives!



SUNDAY SCHOOL

Sunday School will meet on Zoom at 10:00 a.m. Sunday December 6th. This will be our last meeting of the calendar year. But we will be leading Zoom worship two weeks later on December 20th. This is the Fourth Sunday of Advent and so it will be a special Christmas themed service!

TUESDAYS TOGETHER

Every Tuesday at 10:00 a.m. a group of St. Matthew members meets on Zoom for our Tuesdays Together session. It is a period of devotions, prayer, and fellowship. We cover something different every week, so newcomers are able to jump right into the conversation and there's absolutely no commitment to come every week. Just come once and check it out. Please note there will be no meeting on Tuesday, December 29. Hope you'll join us!

BIBLE STUDY

Bible Study meets every first and third Thursday at 10:00 a.m. on zoom. This month that will be December 3rd and December 17th. A link will appear in the weekly Constant Contact for all who wish to attend. Newcomers always welcome!



CENTERING PRAYER

Centering Prayer will meet our typical second Tuesday of the month, which will be Tuesday December 8th at 6:00 p.m. For our Thursday meeting, we will meet the second Thursday of the month, which will be Thursday December 10th at 2:00 p.m. Both sessions will be on Zoom; a link will be sent out before the meeting in our weekly Constant Contact. Newcomers always welcome!



MEN'S GROUP

Men's breakfast will meet virtually on Saturday December 19th 8:30-9:30 a.m. This is the third Saturday of the month, since the fourth Saturday falls on Christmas weekend. Join us with your coffee or breakfast. An email will be sent out with the Zoom link prior to the meeting in our weekly Constant Contact. Newcomers always welcome!

COUNCIL HIGHLIGHTS FROM NOVEMBER

- ◆ The Assistant Treasurer provided Council with an overview of the budget development for 2021.
- ◆ The Capital Campaign Chairpersons reported that we have in hand \$110,017 and that additional funds have been pledged. We are \$15,000 dollars short of our goal at this time. They expressed appreciation for all the congregation has done.
- ◆ The Fall Stewardship Campaign details were outlined; it began in November. Pledge cards can continue to be submitted any time during the month of December.
- ◆ An update from the Reopening Task Force reported that the first indoor service will be November 15th; the procedures for attending were outlined.
- ◆ The Annual Meeting will tentatively be held January 24, 2021 and will be a Zoom meeting.
- ◆ This year's Nominating Committee is Prasad Panthagani, Missy Lindquist, Carol Rider, and Sheila Jarka.

GOOD THINGS: So many good things happened at St. Matthew this past month!

- ✦ Diane Oates joined us as our new Church Administrator! Welcome Diane!
- ✦ Several of our young people received their First Communion!
- ✦ We had our final outdoor worship service which saw our highest attendance so far!
- ✦ We had our first indoor worship service since the pandemic began!
- ✦ We celebrated All Saints Day and remembered all those from St. Matthew who died in the past year.
- ✦ Sunday Schoolers led our Zoom worship again the third Sunday of the month!
- ✦ Sunday School and Confirmation collected shoeboxes filled with gifts for Operation Christmas Child!
- ✦ Confirmation students wrote cards to some of our homebound members and to all those who lost a loved one in the past year.
- ✦ Members told impact stories during worship, sharing how St. Matthew has been an encouraging and transformative community for them. Thank you Kurt Saenger-Heyl, Deb Brodeur, Kris Pearson, Anne Fenn, Greg Boyd, Zoey Hatinen, Kathy Alsgaard, George Reider, Fred Fenn, Margaret Byrne, and Perry Hasson.
- ✦ Members made intention of giving commitments for the year 2021, thank you all!
- ✦ We continue to be ahead of budget in offerings received through October, which has been a huge help in maintaining our strong financial position throughout this year. Thank you for being faithful in your giving!

God is good, all the time!

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
December 2020		1 10:00 Tuesdays at 10: Virtual Prayer via Zoom.	2 7:00 Reopening Task Force	3 10:00 Bible Study	4	5 4:00 Zoom Worship Rehearsal
6 Second Sunday of Advent St. Nicholas Day 9:00 Virtual Worship live via Zoom 10:00 Sunday School via Zoom 11:00 In-Person Worship	7 1:00 Staff Meeting 7:00 Finance Committee	8 10:00 Tuesdays at 10: Virtual Prayer via Zoom. 6:00 Centering Prayer 7:00 Church Council	9 7:00 Reopening Task Force	10 2:00 Centering Prayer	11	12 4:00 Zoom Worship Rehearsal
13 Third Sunday of Advent 9:00 Virtual Worship live on Zoom 11:00 In-Person Worship	14 1:00 Staff Meeting 7:00 In-Person Confirmation Meeting	15 VOICE Deadline 10:00 Tuesdays at 10: Virtual Prayer via Zoom.	16 7:00 Reopening Task Force	17 10:00 Bible Study 7:00 Women's Christmas Party via Zoom	18	19 8:30 Men's Breakfast 4:00 Zoom Worship Rehearsal
20 Fourth Sunday of Advent 9:00 Lessons & Carols led by Sunday School live via Zoom 11:00 Lessons & Carols in the Sanctuary led by Organ & Voice	21 1:00 Staff Meeting 7:00 Confirmation Meeting via Zoom	22 10:00 Tuesdays at 10: Virtual Prayer via Zoom.	23 4:00 Christmas Eve Zoom Rehearsal	24 CHRISTMAS EVE 4:00 Drive-In Service 5:30 In-Person Service 7:30 Zoom Service. On-demand: Pre-recorded Service.	25 CHRISTMAS DAY Office Closed	26 4:00 Zoom Worship Rehearsal
27 Christmastide Services w/ Music & Carols of the Season: 9:00 via Zoom 11:00 In-Person	28	29	30	31	All in-person events are tentative and may be changed. 	

December 2020



SAINT MATTHEW LUTHERAN CHURCH
224 Lovely Street, Avon, Connecticut 06001-4018

REOPENING TASK FORCE OPENS SANCTUARY FOR WORSHIP

The Reopening Task Force has completed a comprehensive review of COVID-based safety measures over these past few months. The review has included research findings and protocols from the CDC and the CT Department of Public Health, which in turn has permitted the Task Force to develop and implement a plan to safely open our sanctuary for worship. The first indoor, in-person worship service was held on November 15th, with 22 people in attendance.

Among the steps taken to insure the safety of our parishioners is the evaluation of the HVAC system. New filters have been installed in order to meet requirements for safe worship in the sanctuary. Cleaning and related protocols are in place as well, and the sanctuary has been prepared for worship according to safety guidelines. Ushers have been trained to assist parishioners attending worship in person, and pre-registration online or by calling the church office is required.

The Task Force continues to monitor COVID epidemiologic data in CT, with focus on the Farmington Valley. Based on this ongoing assessment the Task Force will continue to make adjustments as needed in order to keep our congregation safe in the coming months. A reminder that the church office is closed to the public at this time, but parishioners are welcome to call the office and make a time to stop by.

The Task Force supports offering weekly Zoom worship as a continuing option throughout the pandemic. As always, feel free to contact the Pastors or members of the Task Force with any questions or concerns.

THANK YOU FROM GIFTS OF LOVE

Gifts of Love thanks St. Matthew “for your gift of food, received on 10/21/2020. You are helping us meet our clients’ most pressing needs right now – food and hope. Your donation supports working families in the 30 towns we serve who are experiencing financial hardship every single day. More people than ever before need the sense of hope and comfort they receive through Gifts of Love’s important services – thank you for helping to fulfill that need.”

NOMINATIONS FOR CONGREGATION COUNCIL - DUE JANUARY 11

The Congregation Council is accepting nominations for 2021! Council members are elected spiritual leaders of the congregation, who promote the mission of the congregation and provide financial and organizational oversight. We have one open seat for the coming year.

Please give prayerful consideration as to who you think would make a good Congregation Council member and submit their names for consideration. Our Nominating Committee will follow up with all nominees in January to ascertain who is willing to serve. The official vote will occur at our Annual Meeting which is scheduled for Sunday, January 24th.

Nominations can be submitted by calling the church office at (860) 673-3301 or by emailing office@stmatthewavon.org. Due to the pandemic, we will not be collecting hard copies of nominations. A special thank you goes to Ann Eberhard as she completes her term for her years of participation on the Council and for her excellent service as our Council Secretary!

Congregation Member responsibilities:

- a. Actively communicate with members of the Congregation to both convey information about the direction of the church and to listen to people’s feelings on all aspects of our community life at SMLC.
- b. Regular attendance at monthly Council meetings.
- c. Participate in one annual Saturday morning retreat per year.
- d. To serve as Council Liaison to one standing Church Committee, to be assigned annually.
- e. Council members worship regularly and are encouraged to serve as worship leaders.

YOUNG ADULTS YEAR OF SERVICE

The ELCA Young Adults in Global Mission program invites ELCA young adults ages 21-29 into a transformative, year-long journey in international service. As they offer themselves in service, ELCA young adults are shaped by the witness of our global neighbors. They share in the journeys of companion churches and organizations in one of ten countries around the world.

A year of service through the Young Adults in Global Mission program invites young adults to become the hands and feet of Jesus in the world, providing critical support to ministries and projects in communities of need. It also invites volunteers into a journey of self-reflection, providing space to consider their sense of identity, God's work in the world, and their place within it all.

Applications are being accepted now for the 2021-2022 program year, and the deadline for application is Jan. 15, 2021. More information is available at [ELCA.org/YAGM](https://www.elca.org/YAGM).

ADVENT MATERIALS AVAILABLE FOR PICKUP!

During this season of Advent, we would like to bless you and your family with Advent calendars and Advent devotions. They are available for pick up outside the south entry door. Take an extra one to share with and encourage a friend!

Christmas from St. Olaf: All Earth is Hopeful

Sunday, December 6, 2020 at 3:30 p.m. CT (4:30 p.m. ET)

St. Olaf College is pleased to announce [All Earth is Hopeful](#), a digital concert celebrating the Advent-Christmas-Epiphany season, premiering on Sunday, December 6, 2020, at 3:30 p.m. CT.



Although we are unable to gather in person this year for the annual St. Olaf Christmas Festival, this musical program is intended to offer healing and hope to thousands during the holiday season. All Earth is Hopeful will showcase music captured from recent Christmas Festival programs plus favorites from festivals not seen in many years. Due to practical limitations, this year's ensembles unfortunately do not appear on the program.

"We felt All Earth is Hopeful was a strong statement and an aspiration for not only the St. Olaf community, but for our country and the world as well," says Anton Armstrong, artistic director of the St. Olaf Christmas Festival. "I want people to feel a sense of hope, that we can have a life beyond COVID-19. The virus has taken so much from people around the world, and in our own community. This holiday season, many of us won't have the opportunity to be together with family, friends, and those we love most. I hope this music can provide people with healing and some of that lost hope and joy."

Join us at <https://www.stolaf.edu/multimedia/play/?e=3196> to watch the program live, comment along with other viewers, and experience a communal celebration of the holiday season.

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LIGHTING THE ADVENT WREATH

Written for two leaders (L1 and L2).

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

1 O come, O come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear.

4 O come, O Branch of Jesse, free
your own from Satan's tyranny;
from depths of hell your people save,
and give them vict'ry o'er the grave. *Refrain*

Refrain
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to you, O Israel.

5 O come, O Key of David, come,
and open wide our heav'nly home;
make safe the way that leads on high,
and close the path to misery. *Refrain*

3 O come, O come, O Lord of might,
as to your tribes on Sinai's height
in ancient times you gave the law
in cloud, and majesty, and awe. *Refrain*

6 O come, O Dayspring, come and cheer;
O Sun of justice, now draw near.
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
and death's dark shadow put to flight. *Refrain*

Week 1-SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 29

Song: O Come, O Come, Emmanuel ELW 257, st. 1

Litany:

L1: At every beginning there is a yearning for the one who is coming. O Emmanuel, **Wake us up to your coming.**

L2: We gather together to expect the unexpected and imagine the unimaginable. O Emmanuel, **Wake us up to your coming.**

L1: We wait for the day when God will recycle tanks into tractors and transform minefields into soccer fields. O Emmanuel, **Wake us up to your coming.**

L2: We stay awake by telling stories that offer a glimmer of a future and agitate dormant hope within us. O Emmanuel, **Wake us up to your coming.**

L1: Jesus, we welcome your presence now with the lighting of this candle, whose flame brings warmth to winter and fills this place with the glow of hope. **Amen.**

Light the first candle.

Song: O Come, O Come, Emmanuel ELW 257, st. 3

Week 2-SUNDAY, DECEMBER 6

Song: O Come, O Come, Emmanuel ELW 257, st. 1

Litany:

L1: At every beginning there is a yearning for the one who is coming. O Emmanuel, **Prepare us for your coming.**

L2: We gather together to get ready for what? Only heaven knows. O Emmanuel, **Prepare us for your coming.**

L1: We wait for the day when God will create a prevailing peace on the earth, and natural-born enemies turn into newborn friends. O Emmanuel, **Prepare us for your coming.**

L2: We get ready for God to come close by laying our lives open to Jesus, asking him to sort through all our mixed motives. O Emmanuel, **Prepare us for your coming.**

L1: Jesus, we welcome your presence now with the lighting of these candles, whose flames bring warmth to winter and fill this place with the glow of hope. **Amen.**

Light two candles.

Song: O Come, O Come, Emmanuel ELW 257, st. 6

Week 3-SUNDAY, DECEMBER 13

Song: O Come, O Come, Emmanuel ELW 257, st. 1

Litany:

L1: At every beginning there is a yearning for the one who is coming. O Emmanuel, **Open us up to your coming.**

L2: We gather together to allow our deeply held hopes to be reshaped by God's promises. O Emmanuel, **Open us up to your coming.**

L1: We wait for the day when God will make for us a future that is no longer predicated on our fear. O Emmanuel, **Open us up to your coming.**

L2: We find a new receptivity within us that desires God's will over our own will and relies on God's justice and mercy to accomplish it. O Emmanuel, **Open us up to your coming.**

L1: Jesus, we welcome your presence now with the lighting of these candles, whose flames bring warmth to winter and fill this place with the glow of hope. **Amen.**

Light three candles.

Song: O Come, O Come, Emmanuel ELW 257, st. 4

Week 4-SUNDAY, DECEMBER 20

Song: O Come, O Come, Emmanuel ELW 257, st. 1

Litany:

L1: At every beginning there is a yearning for the one who is coming. O Emmanuel, **Surprise us by your coming.**

L2: We gather together to let God's good news reorient our lives. O Emmanuel, **Surprise us by your coming.**

L1: We wait for the day when all the world will see the sign that God is with us. O Emmanuel, **Surprise us by your coming.**

L2: We are shocked by how God comes close, even at this very moment. O Emmanuel, **Surprise us by your coming.**

L1: Jesus, we welcome your presence now with the lighting of these candles, whose flames bring warmth to winter and fill this place with the glow of hope. **Amen.**

Light all four candles.

Song: O Come, O Come, Emmanuel ELW 257, st. 5

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WORSHIP FOR THE CHRISTMAS SEASON

This Christmas season, we will offer three in-person worship services in the sanctuary, as well as a variety of other worship formats including Zoom, on-demand, and drive-in worship in the parking lot. We encourage parishioners to try one or more of the new formats this year, as seating in the sanctuary is limited due to social distance requirements. A reminder that signing up with the names of all worshippers for in-person sanctuary and parking lot worship is essential. Thank you for helping us protect our community by observing all quarantine requirements before attending in-person worship.

Sunday, December 20 Christmas Lessons and Carols: A Meditation on the Birth of Christ

9:00 am *via Zoom* Led by the Sunday School Children

Traditional Christmas reading and carols.

11:00 am *In-Person* Led by Organ and Voice in the Sanctuary

Thursday, December 24 Christmas Eve: “Tidings of Comfort and Joy”

4:00 pm *In-Person* A Drive-In Worship Service

Worshippers park facing the church and stay in their cars for a short service of Christmas readings and carols.

5:30 pm *In-Person* A Candle-Lit Christmas Eve In the Sanctuary

A small gathering in the sanctuary to celebrate the birth of Christ.

7:30 pm *via Zoom* A Community Christmas Eve

Celebrate the birth of Christ with the St Matthew family.

On Demand A Christmas Eve Worship Service Recorded in St. Matthew Church

A pre-recorded service available at our website December 24 AM.

On Demand Children’s Sermon: “If You Give a Moose a Manger”

Pre-recorded and available at our website December 24 AM.

Sunday, December 27 The First Sunday of Christmas

9:00 *via Zoom*

A Christmastide Service With Music and Carols of the Season

11:00 *In-Person*



*These are a few of my
favorite things...*

**Join the Women of St. Matthew as we
virtually celebrate the holiday season
with games, fellowship and sharing our
favorite holiday traditions.**

**Dress in your festive clothes and be
ready to share your favorite recipe,
decoration, or holiday activity.**

December 17, 2020 / 7PM

Watch the weekly emails for a Zoom link.

Any questions...contact Meg Kraft

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