

# First Congregational Church Weekly Newsletter

East Longmeadow, MA

December 17, 2025



PASTORAL MEDITATION Reverend Thomas Hawkins

## O CHRISTMAS TREE

A few weeks ago, on a frigid Friday evening, I stood in the snow outside the church's front doors and watched the tall tree on the rotary light up as a Christmas parade finally drove up and Santa disembarked to the cheers of the families and children gathered to watch this annual event. Several evenings since then I've driven by this tall, beautiful tree and with its colorful, twinkling lights.

Boston Common also has a tall, beautifully lit tree each Christmas. I'm hoping to see it before the season ends. It is 45-feet tall and has 5,000 lights. Around it on Boston Common are another 50,000 lights through which visitors can stroll. Boston's Christmas tree has a special history that has an important reminder about the meaning of Christmas.

The story behind Boston's Christmas tree begins in Halifax, Nova Scotia. On December 6, 1917, a French cargo ship carrying explosives to the war effort in Europe collided in Halifax Harbor with a small Norwegian boat carrying relief supplies destined for war refugees. The resulting explosion was the largest man-made blast prior to nuclear weapons. Nearly 2.9 kilotons of explosives blew up in a crowded harbor, killing an estimated 2,000 people and injuring another 9,000. More than 12,000 buildings within a nearly two-mile radius were destroyed or damaged. Buildings 60 miles away shook and the sound of the explosion was heard more than 100 miles away.

A telegram stating that Halifax needed emergency assistance arrived in Boston later that same morning. By 10 p.m. that night Boston's mayor had dispatched a relief train with medical teams and supplies, not yet fully realizing the extent of the devastation. The train was slowed but not stopped by a blizzard sweeping across northern New England and finally arrived in Halifax on the morning of December 8. Boston's supplies and medical teams were the first to arrive in Halifax following the disaster and continued to support the people of Halifax throughout their recovery.

Out of gratitude for Boston's quick and lasting response to their needs, the citizens of Halifax provided Boston with a Christmas tree in 1918. With a few interruptions here and there, the tradition has continued since then - with Nova Scotia providing the Christmas tree that graces Boston Common each year. It is a sign of the relationship of gratitude and care that binds the two cities together.

The story of the Christmas tree on Boston Common reminds us that Christmas is about more than the gifts we buy and exchange. It is about the relationships that bind our lives to one another. These relationships sustain us in moments of crisis and in times of celebration; and in times in between when nothing seems to be happening. It's easy to become so focused on what is on our gift list that we forget the why of our giving. Christmas is about relationships: God's loving relationship with the world and its peoples, a love so deep and enduring that the Source of all things living and non-living chose to enter into our messy and complicated human flesh. Christmas is technically entitled "the feast of the incarnation," a celebration of God's coming to become one with our flesh and blood so that we no longer look in the sky above for the Holy One but into the faces of each other. At Christmas we celebrate these people and the relationships that sustain and support us. Most of all, however, each December 25 we celebrate the One who desires to bind the divine life to our own lives so much that God descends and dwells within and among us to show us how to love and care and serve both neighbors and strangers around us.

On the Journey to Bethlehem with you, Pastor Thomas

**SUNDAY WORSHIP** in the sanctuary or livestream link: <http://www.facebook.com/churchontherotary/>

### **IT IS THE JOYFUL SEASON OF GIVING**

We hope to make the holidays special for several families in need right here in East Longmeadow. When you are out shopping, please pick up a gift card, or 2, or 3. YOU decide... Walmart and Target offer the recipients a huge variety of options, but any gift card from a restaurant, the grocery store, the gas station, the pharmacy. YOU can decide! Please hang or just tuck your gift card(s) on the Giving Tree in the sanctuary in the red or green envelope we have provided. The staff at the East Longmeadow Council on Aging (The Senior Center) will then determine what and to whom the cards will be distributed to throughout the year. Your generosity will brighten the day, and perhaps lighten the load for others less fortunate and in need not just at Christmas time, but throughout the year.

We will need your gift cards on or before this **Sunday, December 21**. Thanks for always caring and sharing.

### **KEEPING CHILDREN WARM**

What child doesn't lose a hat or a pair of mittens **at least once** during the cold winter? Please help us fill the basket in the breezeway with new or gently used hats, gloves, mittens and scarves for the children at Kensington School to keep them warm...because we care. Neighbors helping neighbors in need, it's what we do so well. Thank you so much!

### **HOW ABOUT DOING A PUZZLE???**

It's that "indoor" time of year when the nights are VERY long. In my need to keep busy, I started doing puzzles, especially in the cold winter months! I find this activity to be quite relaxing and some even say it's good for your brain, too.

Several are currently on the shelves in the breezeway. Just take one home and when you are done, put it back or pass it along so someone else can do it. Enjoy!!!

### **THANK YOU NOTES**

Hi Friends,

Thank you for your generosity and response in contributing to flowers to honor. The flowers were prominently displayed during the calling hours and the memorial service. I have included some pictures from inside the church.

Thanks to your generosity, there are funds to support future flowers for a Sunday service, which will be planned to honor....

Appreciatively,

I would like to offer a heartfelt, thank you to my church family. So many of you have been wonderful at sending notes, cards, texts, bringing food and just general well-wishing me in my recovery from surgery. The good news, I am doing well and getting back to my baseline. I am truly blessed to have you all in my life!

Much love,

### **PRAYER CONCERNS**

#### **PRAYER**

This week's prayer is a Christmas Prayer by Robert L Stevenson:

Loving Father,  
Help us remember the birth of Jesus,  
that we may share in the song of the angels,  
the gladness of the shepherds,  
and worship of the wise men.

Close the door of hate  
and open the door of love all over the world.  
Let kindness come with every gift

and good desires with every greeting.  
Deliver us from evil by the blessing  
which Christ brings,  
and teach us to be merry with clear hearts.

May the Christmas morning  
make us happy to be thy children,  
and Christmas evening bring us to our beds  
with grateful thoughts,  
forgiving and forgiven,  
for Jesus' sake. Amen.



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