



# THE VINEYARD

DECEMBER 2025 - JANUARY 2026

LOCKPORT UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

## the Season of Advent

*Come, descendants of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord. (Isaiah 2:5)*

### **HOPE**

*But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father . . . Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.*

- Matthew 24:36,42 -



### **PEACE**

*The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat . . . and a little child will lead them . . . They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain.*

- Isaiah 11:6,9 -

### **JOY**

*My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior . . . His mercy extends from generation to generation.*

- Luke 1:46,50 -



### **LOVE**

*The Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.*

- Isaiah 7:14 -





*Calling All Elves* - Tree Trimming

*Christmas Eve* - Candlelight Service

*Making Merry* - Fellowship Dinner

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*Your Chance to Play Santa*  
Mitten & Toy Collections

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*No Ball Drop*  
Arise in the New Year

## Our Mission Statement

*Open to God's Spirit,  
we reach out in Love to the World  
and invite All to journey with us*

An Open and Affirming Congregation



## HOW TO REACH US

### **Our Website:**

lockportucc.com

### **Church Office:**

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## THE VINEYARD

Newsletter of The Lockport  
United Church of Christ

*The Vineyard is published  
ten times a year to keep  
members and friends  
informed about  
programs of the church  
and news of its people.*

Submissions Welcome

**Deadline for Next Issue:**  
**January 18, 2026**



## *Calling All Elves!*

Tree Trimming - November 30

We are inviting all of our church elves, of all ages, to come and help trim the sanctuary Christmas Tree during our morning worship on the First Sunday of Advent!

We will also be lighting the first candle on our advent wreath – the candle of *Hope*.

Advent services will continue in the weeks that follow, as we prepare for Christmas and anticipate the birth of the Christ child.

Each week, we will lift up the themes of Advent:

*December 8*  
the coming of *Peace*  
into our troubled world

*December 15*  
the *Joy* that Christ brings  
to us and to all people

*December 22*  
the *Love* soon to be born  
for us on Christmas

Please join us for all these special services during this meaningful season of Advent!

Silent Night, Holy Night

Son of God, Love's Pure Light

## *Christmas Eve Candlelight Service*

December 24 - 6:00 pm

On this most holy night, we celebrate the coming of the Christ Child. The Christ candle on our advent wreath will be lit at last, and we will hear the lessons and carols that tell the story of the glorious birth.

Then comes the emotion-filled moment at the end, when we light our individual candles, bringing light to the darkened room, as we sing Silent Night together.

*This is the night when  
the Light overcomes the darkness!*





## *Making Merry!*

Fellowship Dinner  
December 11 - 5:30 pm

Last year's Christmas gathering at the Fieldstone Restaurant was so much fun and so well attended, that we have made a tentative reservation for 30-ish people.

*The More the Merrier  
and Everyone is Invited  
so please come and help us  
pack their banquet room again!*

If you would like to join us, please sign the reservation sheet on the table at church or contact Cyndy by December 7.

### ***Please Note:***

You will be able to order whatever you like from the menu, but we will not be able to get separate checks, so please bring cash or a check to pay Cyndy for your dinner.

## *Feed My Sheep*

Christmas Food Pantry Collection  
December 14

Even as we celebrate the joyous Christmas season, we are mindful that many of our neighbors are unable to fully embrace it. There are families, right here in our community, that are food insecure and will need to rely on the generosity of others to enjoy a Christmas dinner.

On December 14 we will be accepting your donations of non-perishable foods to be shared with a local food pantry. Every item collected will be a blessing to someone else's Christmas meal. (If you would prefer to make a cash donation, those are welcome also.)

In response to our calling as Christians, we are asked to love our neighbor and care for those in need. This is one very tangible way that we can do that!

## *Deck the Halls*

Christmas Poinsettia Memorials

Poinsettias add so much color and beauty to our worship space during Advent and on Christmas Eve!

Plants have been ordered, but a few extras are available. If you would like to order one as a memorial, please contact Cyndy. Memorials will be printed in the Christmas Eve bulletin, after which, you may take your plant home.

The color choices are Red, White, or Pink  
6.5" pot - \$13.00 -or- 8" pot - \$25.00





## *Your Chance to Play Santa*

### Christmas Sharing

Not all children awake on Christmas morning to find a tree-full of presents waiting for them. Some don't even have what they need to keep warm this winter.

Each year, through your generosity, we at LUCC try to make that situation a little better for some of our local neighbors. Here's a couple of ways you can play Santa this Christmas!

***Mitten Tree*** – stands ready to accept your donations of mittens, gloves, hats, or scarves. These will be shared with families through the YWCA's Domestic Violence program.

***Toy Collection*** – for the children through the YWCA. New Toys for any age are accepted. Please do NOT wrap your toys.

*Please bring in your toy and mitten donations by **December 21**, so we can deliver them in time for Christmas.*



### *Tuesday Study Group*

Our Tuesday Bible Study group meets each week at **1:00 pm**. They are a lay-led group that discusses the lectionary scripture readings for the week. Please see Nancy Sy if you would like to join them or need more information.

### *Disciple Discussion Group*

The Disciple Group is taking a break for the holidays, and will not meet in December. Classes will resume on January 8, when we will begin a new 6-week series – “Parables: Putting Jesus’s Stories in Their Place.”

The group meets on **Thursdays, 5:30 to 7:00 pm**. New folks are most welcome any time! If you'd like to join us, please let Cyndy Corrieri know in advance so that we can have study materials prepared for you.

### *Bible 101 Class*

Pastor Hope leads a Bible 101 class on the **First and Fourth Sundays** of the month, following the morning worship service. This is a basics of the Bible course for anyone who is new to the Bible or wants a refresher. If you are interested in joining, please see Pastor Hope to get homework/study materials.

## *Story Time*

### Christmas Serial Series

Does anyone remember the story series that the Union-Sun used to publish at Christmas time every year? (This was when I was a kid, so I guess I'm asking the older folks now.)

Each year was a new story, and there would be an installment in the paper each day. I always looked forward to reading them every day as the story unfolded over a couple of weeks!

I thought it might be nice to revive that tradition – for adults in this case – by sharing a story with you all over the next four weeks. It will appear in the Weekly Vine, over the weeks of Advent.

The story I've chosen is entitled "Father Martin." It is set in a small French village, where an old shoemaker lives, and is excited when Jesus promises to visit him on Christmas Eve.

So, if you'd like to read the story, watch your email for the *Vine* during Advent. (If you don't get the Weekly Vine and would like to, let me know.) I hope you enjoy it! – Cyndy



## *Feeding Our Neighbors*

In December, we will deviate from the usual 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday schedule for the Neighborhood Dinner.

It will be on **Tuesday, December 23**. The menu will include a quart of homemade soup, with crackers and cookies.

In January, we will resume the normal schedule, with dinner on Wednesday, **January 28**.

Both dinners will be free as usual, and served at Emmanuel UMC as take-out, from 5 to 5:30 pm.

In your Holiday Giving, we hope you will remember our Church. Your donation helps us continue our ministry and mission throughout the year.



Special offering envelopes are available at the church. Your gift may be placed in the collection plate throughout December, or mailed to the church. *Thank You!*

## *Our Church Cemetery*

Plots in St. Peter's Cemetery are available for \$800 each. If you would like to purchase plots, just call Dan Holler and he will be happy to help you with that.





## *The Light of Christ!*

*"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." - John 1:5*

Light is a warm and comforting image, isn't it? Darkness can be frightening. Problems that seem overwhelming at night often seem less so in the morning light. So it is fitting that this season uses the imagery of Christ coming to us as a Light shining in what can sometimes be a dark world.

*Lights on our Christmas tree  
Candles on the Advent wreath  
Candles lit on Christmas Eve  
Stars that lead shepherds and  
wise men to the baby Jesus  
Lights that lead US to the Christ*

*Then Epiphany . . .*

Twelve days after Christmas is Epiphany, which comes from the Greek word for "manifestation" or "revelation". It signifies Christ being revealed as the Son of God to the world. Epiphany traditionally marks the visit of the Magi to the infant Jesus – again following a Light, a star that leads them. The Season of Epiphany then continues until Lent, and celebrates the ways God's Incarnation continues to be revealed.

So don't be too quick to take down those lights after Christmas. The Light of Christ continues to be revealed through Epiphany . . . and beyond!

## *Prayer for Epiphany*

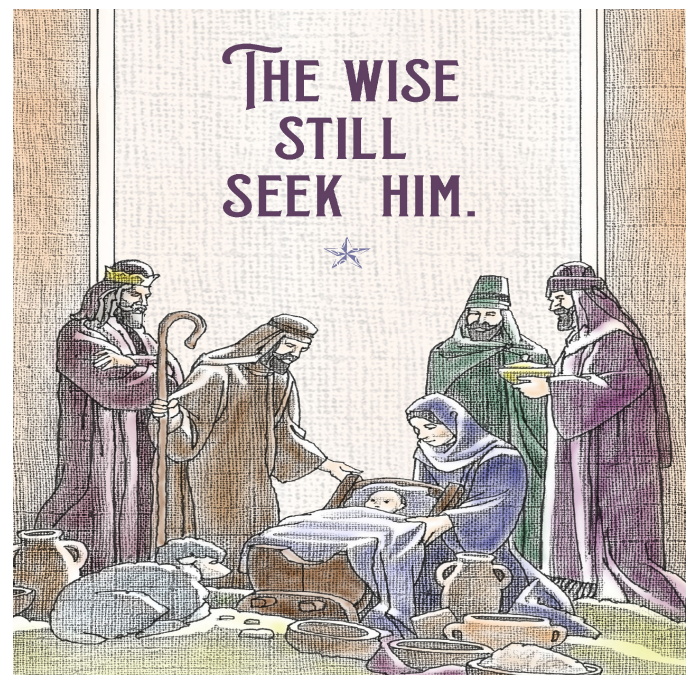
Cameron Bellm

I wonder sometimes  
if one of the stars that lit Abraham's night  
was the one that led the Magi to Jesus  
A canvas speckled by the most generous brush  
– what an improbable promise to an old man  
But our God has never been daunted by  
the unlikely, the impossible

What a sight for the Magi, too,  
a baby resting on hay, his cries  
mingled with braying and bleating  
I like to think they heard in those  
everyday sounds a holy chorus,  
saw in that noisy tableau a Creator  
serenaded by His creation,  
all of it embodied, enfleshed – all of it good

And when we've left our gifts  
for this implausible King,  
may we, like the Magi,  
go home by another way  
Having encountered the holy,  
may we protect it, guard it,  
trail its light behind us wherever we go

A sacred arc transposed from heaven to earth,  
may we ourselves become the star,  
leading the way to Emmanuel . . . Amen





## *Thanks for Pledging!*

Our pledge drive for 2026 is wrapping up, and we want to thank everyone who made a pledge. Thank you for your commitment to the mission and ministry of Lockport UCC!

If you have not yet made your pledge, it's not too late. Cards may be dropped in the collection plate or mailed to the church.

## *Annual Meeting*

January 18

Our annual congregational meeting is at the heart of the governance of our church. In our UCC denomination, it is the members of the congregation that ultimately make the decisions for the church. We set the agenda for our future!

Following worship on January 18, you are invited to stay for the review of annual reports and election of officers.

This year, the Council and Pastor Hope will also be presenting a proposal for our church to become a "Just Peace" Church.

The meaning and process will be explained and discussed. Then we will make a decision, as a congregation, whether or not we want to pursue this in the months ahead.

## General Fund Financial Summary

October 20 thru November 16

Income from	
Pledges & Offerings	3,276.00
Other Income	77.50
Total Expenses	4,672.62

## *What Does it Mean to be a Just Peace Church?*

Becoming a Just Peace church is of spiritual value to a congregation's Christian practice. Christians live by faith, God's promises, and living out their covenants. To make a covenant that will consider justice, peace and the sacredness of creation in your church's decisions and life is a big commitment, but it is what the Gospel calls us to do. This was clear in Biblical times, as well as for us today. When we go about our faith practice with the deep belief that this societal engagement within culture does make a difference in God's world, we become aware of God at work in the societal/political setting and in the entire natural world. We open ourselves to truly hearing God's call to join in God's full mission not only to individuals but also to the structures of a world that God loves.

*(This is just a brief description from the UCC's Just Peace handbook. It will be explained and discussed in much more detail at the annual meeting.)*





*Merry Christmas  
and Happy New Year*  
To Our Shut-In Members

**Lucinda Hohle**  
Absolut Care  
4540 Lincoln Dr.  
Gasport, NY 14067

**Linda Layer and  
Kevin O'Connor**  
Mt. View Assisted Living  
5465 Upper Mountain Rd.  
Lockport, NY 14094

**David Payne**  
Lockport Rehab  
& Health Care Center  
909 Lincoln Avenue  
Lockport, NY 14094



*Birthdays & Anniversaries*

**December Birthdays**

7	Debra Mullaney
11	Richard Dodge II
14	Elizabeth Dodge
18	Cheryl Turner
18	Rol Sy
27	John Wright
27	Linda Layer

**December Anniversaries**

12-05-1981	Carl & Linda VanderWeide
12-30-1967	Rol & Nancy Sy

**January Birthdays**

2	Savino Pellegrino
11	Jim Rongo
11	Oliver Mietlowski
12	Gary Henning
15	Christine Derby-Cuadrado
18	Manny Derby-Cuadrado
19	Melody Zuercher
22	George Cruickshank
25	Melissa Gritzmacher
30	Carl VanderWeide

**January Anniversaries**

1-5-1973	Sam & Cyndy Corrieri
1-16-1987	Al & Bobbi Gritzmacher
1-18-1992	Tom & Melody Zuercher

*(If you don't see your birthday or anniversary listed, please get that information to Cyndy so we can include it in the future)*





## The Church in Action

United Church of Christ Corner

ucc.org

### *Help for Low-Income Clergy* The Christmas Fund

Did you know that there are many retired clergy in the UCC that struggle to make ends meet? Some pastors, who served the church faithfully for years, received low salaries and retired with little or no pensions.

*It's true – and the UCC has a fund to help!*

The Christmas Fund has been caring for active and retired clergy and lay employees of the United Church of Christ for over 100 years, providing emergency grants, supplementation of small annuities and health premiums, and Christmas “Thank You” gift checks each December to our lower-income retirees.

The Christmas Fund is one of the UCC's special mission offerings. United Church of Christ congregations and members have blessed the Christmas Fund with their generosity for many years. This year, your care and compassion will be especially appreciated by those servants of the church who are facing a time of need. Thank you!

*If you would like to share a gift of support for this fund, we will be accepting donations throughout the month of December. There are offering envelopes at the church, or you can just mail your gift to the church. Checks should be payable to Lockport UCC.*

### *Mission to Lesotho*

Lesotho is the only sovereign country in the world surrounded by another country. Even though relations with surrounding South Africa have improved since South African majority rule was established in 1994, resource-poor Lesotho still depends upon South Africa for all industrial goods. In exchange, more than 100,000 men (out of a total population of 1.7 million) work in South Africa's gold mines. The massive exodus of Lesotho's males for work in South Africa means that most households are run by women. Lesotho is classified by the United Nations as one of the world's “least developed countries.”

Global Ministries (of the UCC and DOC) has a number of ongoing projects to assist the people of Lesotho. They work in cooperation with the Lesotho Evangelical Church (LEC) in Southern Africa, which is one of Africa's oldest Protestant churches, founded in 1833.

Several projects assist with desks, books, sanitation, and other supplies for the LEC operated schools (which are free to students) and working with the Christian Health Association to provide health care.

*The Lesotho ministries are made possible by your gifts to Our Church's Wider Mission (UCC) and other special gifts at work through Global Ministries.*





*For God so LOVED THE WORLD*  
(John 3:16)

**7 million people.**  
**Worldwide.**  
**One day.**

A group of UCC clergy and I (and about 7 million others) took to the streets and made history at the No Kings 2.0 Rally. While at the rally, I was overcome by the feeling that I was part of **something bigger** than myself. And I was . . . and the thing is, it reminded me of the feelings I have when I am at church. Please note that sharing this with all of you is not meant to focus on the political side of the No Kings Rallies, but an opportunity to highlight the community aspect of the event as it relates to the community aspect of church!

From the very beginning of my spiritual journey, I was overcome by the feeling that I was about to become part of **something bigger** than myself. And I was . . . I was becoming part of God's purposes and plans and promises for the world. This feeling became stronger and stronger and stronger as I spent more and more time in church. Being a part of church or a faith community is an invitation to participate in **something bigger** than ourselves. Together, we gather to be a part of God's big plans and purposes and promises for our world.

All throughout the bible, God asked our spiritual ancestors to be a part of **something bigger** than themselves. Yup, it's true.

But if y'all don't believe me, let me share a few examples with you from the bible:

**Abraham** – In establishing a covenant with Abraham, God was inviting him and Sarah to be a part of **something bigger** than themselves. This bigger thing was to become a nation of blessings to the world, born from his descendants who would be as numerous as the stars. To the invitation to be part of **something bigger**, Abraham and Sarah said yes!

**Esther** – Amid an impending genocide, Esther was called to **something bigger** than herself. On behalf of her people, Esther was invited to speak up and stand up against the violent plans of the Persian Empire. Mordecai offered up these words of wisdom to Esther “perhaps you were called for such a time as this.” To the invitation to be part of **something bigger**, Esther said yes!

**Mary** – An angelic visitation led to an invitation to Mary to be a part of **something bigger** than herself too! The angel offered her the divine blessing of birthing the one who would become the savior of the world! To the invitation to be part of **something bigger**, Mary said yes!

Our spiritual ancestors were invited to be a part of **something bigger** than themselves . . . and we are still being invited to be a part of **something bigger** than ourselves too! Just wait and see, y'all! God has **something bigger** in store for us. It might not be joining a protest or a rally (or it might be!) or it could be being part of **something bigger** in our community to meet an unmet need! Whatever it is that God is calling us to do, let us be a church that says yes to God to be a part of **something bigger** than ourselves! Thanks be to God. Amen.

*Abundant Blessings,*  
*Pastor Hope*





## *A Pastor's Public Image*

That's me. Yup, that fish in the fishbowl in the picture. Life as a pastor is quite a bit like being a fish in a fishbowl. As a pastor, my life is on display for all to see, just like the fish in the bowl. And with it comes

the possibility of judgment, assumptions, rumors, and more. Truth be told, it is hard being the fish in the fishbowl because inevitably someone somewhere at some time will not agree with something I have said, something I have done, or something I have thought.

Because of this, I have been wrestling with about my public image as a pastor. Wrestling with my public image as your pastor has led me to offer all of you five things I am committed to represent in my ministry and in my life. These five categories of representation (listed below) are commitments I am trying to live out each and every day. Yet it must be said that when I go about my life and ministry, there are times when I am representing only one aspect of my ministry and times when I am representing all of my ministry. Church, I want y'all to know what I choose to represent as I go about my life and ministry as your pastor. I choose to represent what it means to be:

**(1) A Good Person** – There are times when I go about my life anonymously (no one knows that I am a pastor or a follower of Jesus or an ordained clergyperson). In those times, I am representing what it means to be a good person, what it means to be human, and what it means to become the best version of myself.

**(2) A Follower of Jesus** – There are times when people know that I am a follower of Jesus (when I am wearing a cross or carrying a bible or walking into a church), and I am representing what it means to follow Jesus in this world. I am choosing to walk in the ways of Jesus more and more and more so that I can become more and more and more like him each and every day!

**(3) Ordained UCC Clergy** – A lot of times people know that I am an ordained clergy person (wearing a clergy collar at a protest, stole at a prayer vigil, or introduced by my title as a reverend at a rally or march), and therefore I am representing the United Church of Christ. My ordination is with the UCC, and therefore whenever I am representing the denomination I am committed to upholding the ministerial code.

**(4) The Pastor of Epiphany and Lockport UCC** – Sometimes, people know that I am the pastor of Epiphany UCC and Lockport UCC (preaching in the pulpit, introduced as such, or on my business card) and therefore I am representing Epiphany UCC or Lockport UCC.

**(5) A Social Justice Advocate** – On the front lines of activism and in the work of justice and in prophetic and public proclamation, I am representing what it means to be an advocate of social justice and an ally of the marginalized in our world.

Because of this, there are times when I represent all those roles and there are times when I represent only one of them or a few of them. Did y'all notice something missing from what I choose to represent in this article? As I go about my ministry, I choose to not represent any political party or politician or partisan ideology. Although I am registered with a particular political party (so I can vote in the primary election), my allegiance is first and foremost to Jesus and the kingdom of God. In all I do, I seek to represent what it means to follow the ways of Jesus above all else . . . not to represent a political party or a political candidate.

As y'all watch me in my little itty bitty fishbowl, please know that the example I am trying to set for all of you, the example I am trying to be for all of you, and the example I am living out to the best of my ability is first and foremost what it means to follow Jesus. If there is any judgment, if there are any rumors, if there are any whispers, let them be about how little or how much Jesus others see in me. With God's help, may y'all see more Jesus in me than anything else.

*Abundant Blessings, Pastor Hope*

## *No Ball Drop*

*The "Church Year" is not the same as the secular year. (I'm sure you all know that!) It doesn't start with champagne, fireworks and a ball drop . . . It starts with the First Sunday of Advent.*

*Either way, we are on the threshold of a new year – November 30 for the Church Year, and January 1 for the secular year – and new possibilities.*

*The Hope and Peace and Joy and Love and Light of Advent and Christmas sets the tone for the new year ahead. Each new year is, in a way, a reset. We can enter with renewed Hope that this year, progress will be made toward the Peace, Joy, Love and Light of God's Kingdom on earth. May it be so!*

## *Arise in the New Year*

by Joyce Rupp

I arise with **amazement** at the presence of the Holy Spirit.

I arise with **gratitude** for life.

I arise with **hope** that all shall be well.

I arise with **courage** to meet what will be difficult.

I arise with **conviction** to do what is life-giving.

I arise with **eyes ever alert** for beauty.

I arise with **openness** to greater truth.

I arise with **desire** for continued transformation.

I arise with **compassion** for the hurting ones in the cosmos.

I arise with **eagerness** to live with depth and quality.

I arise with **a sense of kinship** with all whom I love.

I arise with **respect** for others who mentor and deepen my vision.

I arise with **determination** to make good choices in using my time.

I arise with **willingness to help** those who will need my care.

I arise with **hesitation** as I think about pain that may come.

I arise with **longing** for ever greater inner freedom.

I arise with **happiness** knowing I am invited to live life fully.

I arise with **love** for the Holy One, my intimate companion.

*Compassionate Companion and Faithful Friend, thank you for the opportunity to walk into another year of life. Help me to be faithful, to be generous, to be yours. Amen.*

