



RIVER ROAD Connections

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
loving people to life **December 2023**

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**November/
December Upper
Room Devotionals
are available in
the Welcome
Center, and
Narthex.**

THE UPPER ROOM
DAILY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

The Advent season here. This is the beginning of the Christian calendar year, the period of preparation and anticipation for the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. The word "Advent" is derived from the Latin word "adventus," meaning "coming" or "arrival."

Advent is a time of reflection, prayer, and spiritual preparation for the celebration of Christmas. How are you preparing your heart for Christmas? St. Ignatius of Loyola developed the daily examen as one of his spiritual practices at the end of his day to help him see God's hand at work in his whole day. This practice can be useful at this time of the year as we Christians reflect on God's presence in our lives. We can look back as see how the Spirit moved in our lives over the past year. Here is how to pray the examen;

1. Place yourself in God's presence. Give thanks for God's great love for you.
2. Pray for the grace to understand how God is acting in your life.
3. Review your year. Maybe write some notes down of the some of the highlights, but also some of the low lights. What were specific moments of the year that you remember? What were you feeling at the time? Now that some time has passed, how has the Spirit acted in that situation? What can you see more clearly now?
4. Reflect on what you did, said, or thought or how you reacted in those instances. Were you drawing closer to God, or further away? How has the Holy Spirit made God's presence known to you throughout the year? Where did God show up that you did not expect?
5. Look toward the new year. Think of how you might collaborate more effectively with God's plan. Be specific. Where do you need to grow? What burdens do you need to let go of? How will you prepare your heart for the coming of Christ in fresh ways in the new year?

Christmas is not just a day on the calendar, it lives in our hearts throughout the year. It serves as a reminder to be always mindful of the significance of the birth of Jesus and also to prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ. We Christians live in the "both/and;" we both remember the birth of Christ and anticipate Jesus coming again, as affirmed in Scripture. So Advent, like Lent, is a time to reflect and remember but also to prepare our hearts for our Savior. So this Advent, once again, will you invite the Holy Spirit to examen your heart? "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me." (Psalm 51:10) Then offer that clean heart and renewed Spirit as your Christmas gift to Jesus?

Pastor Sarah Sealand

Advent Worship: Genes of Jesus

Dec. 3 Tamar: Tragedy & Triumph

Dec. 10 Rahab: Jesus is the One who Gives Us Reconciliation

Dec. 17 Ruth at 9am

Children’s Christmas Program at 11am

Dec. 24 Mary

One morning service at 10am in the Sanctuary

On Christmas Eve, we will have two (2) services:

4:00pm—Contemporary Service

7:00pm—Traditional Service with Holy Communion

Dec. 31 Lori Alford preaching

December Birthdays

December 1

Debbe Harless
Angela Messer

December 2

Ed Flippen
Saja Alexander

December 7

Mac Dirom

December 8

Sally Beth Reaves

December 12

Virginia Ritenour

December 15

Diana Hudson

December 16

Linda Bartlett
Karen Willis

December 17

Julie Lewis

December 18

Milton Franklin

December 19

Zachary King

December 21

Brenda Anderson
Jeff Williams
Abby Craig

December 22

David Stuckey

December 24

Tom Traylor
A.C. Little
Andrew Markey

December 25

Fiona Betzhold

December 26

Bob Sledd
Joy Moretti

December 27

Teddy Cunningham

December 28

Donna Johnson

December 30

Martha Narron
Jun Chang

December 31

Susie Rothenberg
Brenda Kleinholz





I am writing this in mid-November, and I have already seen plenty of Christmas decorations in stores, heard a carol or two, and started my Christmas shopping. Our culture loves Christmas! No matter how “un-Christian” or “post-Christian” our culture becomes, Christmas still matters to our community. For this reason, we usually see a spike in church attendance during the holiday season and especially on Christmas Eve. With that in mind, we want to share some very practical ways you can extend hospitality at church this season:

Choose a different parking spot. If you are able, park farther away from the church entrance. Not only will you get in more steps to work off those Christmas cookie calories, but you will also make closer parking spaces available for newcomers or those who find it physically difficult to get to our doors.

Sit in the middle of the row. It’s natural to want to grab the end seat when you arrive for worship, but when a first-time guest has to walk past (or climb over) 3 or 4 people in order to get to a seat, it can be awkward and uncomfortable. Leave the seats on the ends of the row open for newcomers (and latecomers).

Introduce yourself to someone new. Make this your challenge for every Sunday in December (and on into 2024). You may meet a first-time visitor or make a new connection with someone who worships beside you every Sunday. Either way, your kindness will go a long way towards creating an environment of welcome and belonging.

These simple acts of hospitality help to create a warm and inviting first impression of our church. This is just one of the ways we are loving people to life this Christmas.

Lori Alford

Director of Engagement Ministries

Prayer & Praise Service

Do you find yourself needing a mid-week “pick-me-up” ? Do you need a minute to reset your mind, heart and spirit? Come join us at the Prayer and Praise Service, Thursdays at 10:00 a.m. in the Prayer Chapel. We come together for an hour of celebration for God’s work, contemplate scripture and pray for each other, as well as the needs of our friends, community, nation and the world. We share in Holy Communion as well. Come as you are. Find peace and fellowship. All are welcome. I look forward to meeting you there!

Rhoda Howell

YOUTH



Loading trucks for Thanksgiving



Youth Night Out at Christmas Town



Church Bus Help for Fall Fest!

Shopping and packing for Hearth of Henrico



Adult Discipleship

Advent upon us! We plan to have two opportunities to engage with a small group study during this time in December. You can sign up in the welcome center, online, or with Tom York. Hope you can join in a small study group during this special time of the year.

- **Genes of Jesus.** Pastor Sarah Sealand will lead a weekly discussion diving deeper into the Sunday Sermon Series during Advent. During this series, we will explore the lives of the women in Jesus' genealogy: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Mary and how their unique stories show faith and integrity amidst a broken world, not so unlike our own, that is in need of a Messiah, in need of a Savior. Two sessions available each week:
 - o Mondays - Dec 4, 11 and 18 at 10:00 AM. In-person at church in Room 205/207
 - o Wednesdays - Dec 6, 13, 20 at 7:00 PM. Via Zoom.
- **Advent Devotional: Almost Christmas.** This 4 week DVD and book study from 4 Methodist leaders will be a modern exploration of the 4 pillars of advent - Peace, Joy, Love and Hope. Class to be held during the Sunday School hour in room 202 on Dec 3, 10, 17 and 24.

CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

Join us Sunday mornings!

River Road Kids Discipleship Hour will be at 10 AM in the Sunday School wing and Children's Church will be held at the 9 & 11 AM worship services in the Sunday School wing.

Preschool Discipleship for December:

Christmas is such a special time of year! Preschoolers will experience a lot of excitement and wonder. We all do! But as they get older—and as we take time to stop and remember—we hope that the good news that God gave us Jesus will become the most wonderful part of Christmas. So get ready because we are hopping aboard the CHRISTMAS TRAIN, and it's carrying the true story of Christmas!

Memory Verse for December:

“GOD LOVED THE WORLD SO MUCH THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY SON.” JOHN 3:16, GNT

K-5 Discipleship for December:

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN CHRISTMAS AND GOD'S CHARACTER, AS SHOWN THROUGH
GOD'S BIG STORY

With the busyness of the Christmas season, it's easy to lose sight of why we celebrate in the first place. We forget that at the time of the first Christmas, God's people were anticipating a Rescuer who would come and save the world. That's what makes a countdown like an advent calendar so powerful. It allows us daily moments to stop and reflect on God, who loved us so much and sent Jesus to be our Savior. This December, we're “decking the halls” and taking the whole the month to focus on nothing but Christmas by celebrating Jesus, God's greatest gift! We can't wait to shine a spotlight on crucial moments in the story of Jesus' birth as we count down to Christmas. Because of Jesus, it's possible for us to have a relationship with God that will last forever. As we take this month to count down to the fun of Christmas Day, let's take time to remember the reason we celebrate in the first place: Jesus, the greatest gift the world has ever known.

Memory Verse For December:

“A CHILD WILL BE BORN TO US. A SON WILL BE GIVEN TO US.”

ISAIAH 9:6, NIRV

STAFF UPDATES

The River Road staff structure is changing a bit, but you will still see the same friendly faces around that you have come to love. Tom York has chosen to cut back his hours beginning January 1, 2024. He will remain the Youth Director at River Road, but will not be the Adult Discipleship staff person anymore. He will continue to serve the youth with the West End United Methodist Church Circuit. We will still see Tom most Sundays in worship and leading youth Sunday School. Lori Alford, who is currently the Director of Engagement, will assume the Adult Discipleship role. Lori will also be graduating from Fuller Theological Seminary, and we will acknowledge that accomplishment in worship on January 21, 2024. In acknowledgment of her graduation, God's call on Lori's life, and her new duties, her new job title will be Minister of Discipleship and Engagement beginning January 1, 2024. Let's celebrate the work God is doing in Tom's and Lori's lives as we move into this next chapter at River Road UMC.

WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP 2.0 – Some folks are asking what is 2.0? We're so glad you asked! As defined by Oxford Languages, 2.0 is used to denote a superior or advanced version of an original concept product, service, etc.

That's the plan. It's going to be BETTER and it will offer MORE! Exactly what that means is up to you, to us, the women of RRUMC. Let's meet and get to know one another. Let's serve others together. Let's share Devotions and learn more about and praise GOD. The gatherings, events, service projects and meetings will be an opportunity for lots of fun and wonderful fellowship. Let's dream it together.

Here are just a few things the former Frances Allen/Alice Weed Circle has been up to:

- Collected kitchen essentials for CARITAS (Congregations Around Richmond Involvement To Assure Shelter)

- Monthly Ladies' Breakfast at various area restaurants – we like variety

- Sending holiday, birthday and thinking of you cards to At Home members

- Collected coats for donation to CARITAS and other local agencies

- Created and gave 14 staff Christmas gifts

- Assisted Open Table providing needed items for current friend

- Filled 35 Valentine's Day treat bags for residential students at CFHC (Child & Family Healing Center) at UMFS (United Methodist Family Services)

- Provided annual salad luncheon for Open Arms Preschool and RRUMC staff

- Offer two women's book clubs – 1st Monday in the evening, 2nd Monday in the afternoon

- Numerous monetary donations have been given to multiple organizations and nonprofits

Imagine what this list can look like in the years to come. What will the new mission statement be? How about -

Gathering in God's love for fellowship and service ...

The next meeting is on Tuesday, December 12th at 10:00AM in room 205/207.

BOOK CLUBS

Daytime Meeting:

We will NOT meet in December.

The Exiles by Christina Baker Kline will be our Monday, January 8, selection, presented by Bess. This is a story of grace born from hardship, the unbreakable bonds of female friendships, and the unfettering of legacy.

All are welcomed to 11129 Woodbaron Court to join our stimulating discussions at 1:00 pm. Call me Bess at 804-747-7494 for questions, directions or suggestions. It is great to rest from the busy months ahead with a good book. Enjoy!

Evening Meeting:

On the first Monday of each month, Book Club meets at 7 PM at Ann York's home, 2800 Chancel Lane, 907-748-0446. If you are interested in being a part of this group, please call Ann and you will be placed on the email list that goes out to remind everyone of the meeting. On Monday night Book Club meets December 4 to discuss *Island of Sea Women* by Lisa See led by Beth Bertenneau. We will not meet January 1, New Years Day, but will meet January 8. The discussion will be *Lucy by the Sea* by

Elizabeth Stout. It is the third book in a trilogy, so you might want to also read *My Name is Lucy Baton* and *Oh William*. They are reportedly short and quite a fast read. So, keep reading!! See you in December. If you wish to be a part of this lively discussion group, call Ann York, 907-748-0447, and you will receive an email reminder.

Gifts for the Manger: November 26 – December 24



“Gifts for the Manger” is how our congregation celebrates Christmas. Gifts for the Manger allows us to give God what we believe God wants for Christmas. Below are the highlighted mission efforts that you can donate to in memory of, in honor of, or as a Christmas present. Gifts for the Manger information and gift cards are in the Welcome Center and Narthex. The causes being supported this year are:

Food Ministries (Local)

Food Pantries – RRUMC supports three food pantries at Ginter Park UMC and St. Paul Catholic Church on the Northside of Richmond and Belmont UMC on the Southside. In addition, we provide food to Safe Harbor, which provides the support that survivors of sexual and domestic violence and human trafficking need to overcome their crisis and to transform their lives.

Housing (Local)

Virginia Supportive Housing, founded in 1988 by our own Karl and Jane Bren houses 1600 formerly homeless persons, including the chronically homeless and veterans. Their new building in Eastern Henrico will house 85 formerly homeless and contains office space for two of its largest programs. The office space will be named the Karl and Jane Bren Center. Donations will go to fund this new space in memory of Karl and Jane who gave so much to RRUMC and many other missions in the community.

Disaster Relief (National & International)

United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) Disaster Recovery – UMCOR is the humanitarian relief and development arm of The United Methodist Church, and is working in areas devastated by weather events and wars. Your donations will be sent to UMCOR to assist in its ongoing disaster relief efforts in the United States and internationally. www.umcor.org

Children (International)

Helping Children Worldwide - As Emmanuel Nabieu (Nabs) told us in September, HCW equips and empowers 2000 vulnerable children and their families in Sierra Leone. Families are strengthened with solutions to overcome extreme poverty and achieve self-sufficiency to insure that their children live in safe, strong, nurturing families.

There will be tables in the Welcome Center and the Narthex to provide information as well as inserts in the bulletins throughout Advent. **Donations may be made at the table, placed in the offering plate, or made online at the church website.** Christmas cards for Gifts in Honor and informational card inserts are available at the display.

HOLIDAY MISSIONS

Angel Tree angels are available on the tree in the Welcome Center and online via the signup genius. Show a child and incarcerated parent the love of Christ this Christmas. Gifts are due back by December 15.

THANKSGIVING BOXES

Thank you for all of the donations of food and funds for Thanksgiving boxes. Collectively we donated 80 boxes to those in need of food for a Thanksgiving meal, surpassing our goal and blessing 80 Henrico families. We are grateful to Laurel Via and Michael English for leading this mission.

“And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.” Hebrews 13:16.

Thanks be to God for leading us to love our neighbors. For more missions information, contact Ann Hodges, ahodges@richmond.edu or 804-339-9440.



**RIVER ROAD
UNITED METHODIST**
LOVING PEOPLE TO LIFE

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December 2023

**Articles for the
January 2024
Connections are due
December 18, 2023.**



We're on the web at
www.riverroadumc.org

STAFF LOVE OFFERING

The annual Staff Love Offering is an opportunity for us to express our appreciation and gratitude to our gifted, dedicated, hard-working staff for all they do to serve the needs of River Road United Methodist Church as we seek to build disciples for Christ.

There are multiple ways to participate. For check donations, please make your check payable to River Road UMC and write "Staff Love Offering" on the memo line. You may place your love offering in the collection plate or drop it by the church office through the end of this year.

For online donations, please select "Love Offering" in the Designation field drop-down menu in the online giving form. [Click here](#) to access online giving.

Thank you for your generous support of our staff.

The Staff Parish Relations Committee



Open Arms Christian Preschool

It's a busy time of year at Open Arms Christian Preschool! The children have been learning about the blessings that we have been given, and how we can bless other people. The children and families at OACP collected many boxes of pasta, cans of spaghetti sauces, and other much needed food to replenish the food pantry. Their generosity and kindness will go a long way this holiday season and for that we are so very grateful!

We are currently accepting waitlist applications for those families/students interested in joining our program in the 2024-2025 school year. Please contact the Preschool Director, Nora Hamlet, at 804-754-0227, or email her at openarms@riverroadumc.org for more information for the 2024-2025 school year.



**OPEN ARMS
CHRISTIAN PRESCHOOL**

Helping children grow with open hearts, open minds and open arms.