

THE IVY VINE

December 2021

God is Still Speaking Volume 16 Issue 11

United Church of Cloverdale



Dear Church Family & Friends,

“The word ‘Advent’ means coming or arrival. It’s the season of actively waiting and preparing for Jesus to be born, broadening our hearts and minds to welcome Jesus anew, and paying close attention to the ways Jesus is already coming into the world, God’s Word made flesh. The Christian year begins not with the lilies of Easter, or the poinsettias of Christmas, or the stirring winds of Pentecost – but rather with Advent, four weeks in the shadows of despair, conflict, sorrow, and hate. For it’s here, in the shadows, that the God of grace will arrive. Waiting, longing, and preparing for that arrival, we light candles of hope, peace, joy, and love. Poetry can help us as we wait. As poet Mary Oliver often emphasized, the best poems help us notice and feel things we might otherwise miss, both the depths of despair and the heights of hope.” #1



Throughout the Advent season, which officially began on November 28, we will be utilizing both scripture and the poetry of Mary Oliver. As “our guides, together” they will “point us toward weekly practices (see inside Ivy Vine for these) that can help deepen and enrich our experience of the season – a perfect way to prepare for the hope, peace, joy, and love of Christmas day.” We hope you’ll join us either in person or on-line as “week by week, we’ll make our way to Bethlehem, attending with care to the lights and shadows as we go.” #2

Additionally, I invite you to pray the following prayer with me throughout the month of December:

O Holy One, During this holy season of Advent, help us to see you in all whom we encounter. God of Hope, we seek you. We seek you in the crude manger, a child born to save the world. May your hope be a comfort to all who long for justice. God of Hope, we seek you. May your hope fill our hearts and grace our lips so that we might reflect your hope for all the world. Amen. #3

Blessings and love to each of you,
Pastor Jen



(1 & 2) From the Introduction to The Poetry of Advent: An Advent Companion to Mary Oliver’s ‘Devotions.’ Salt Project. Used with permission.

(3) <https://www.bread.org/blog/advent-hopeful-prayer>

**DAILY PRACTICES from The Poetry of Advent:
An Advent Companion to Mary Oliver's 'Devotions.'**



Week One of Advent: "Hope"

- Light a candle of mindfulness. Keep it close: as you do dishes, eat a meal, read a book...
- Lift someone's spirits this week. Call or connect with a relative or friend who lives far away, and let them know how much you appreciate them, and why.
- Conversation starters: On your most difficult days, what gives you hope? What signs of hope, near or far, have lately come to your attention? Poet Mary Oliver contends that "it is not hard to understand where God's body is, it is everywhere and everything"; where have you glimpsed God's body this week?
- In this season of giving, remember your favorite organizations who are doing the essential work of giving people hope: food and shelter assistance, mental health care, job training, justice in the legal system, or crafting legislation to help make a more hopeful world. Visit them (online or in person) to learn more. Challenge yourself to give generously of your time, talent, and treasure – all for the sake of hope!
- Whatever your age, connect this week with someone considerably younger than you are, and ask them what their hopes are for the world. Better yet, form an alliance of hope and support.
- Following Mary Oliver's advice, take a "Yes! No!" walk this week, sharpening your imagination and your attention. Say "Yes!" to all the "dark lanterns" of beauty around you. And say "No!" to the temptations of apathy, self-absorption, inattention, distraction, and worry. "Serenity," Oliver insists, isn't something we "just find in the world" – rather, it's something we cultivate with care and mindfulness.





Week Two of Advent: “Peace”

- Light two candles: a candle of mindfulness, and a candle of shalom. Keep them close, and look for ways to make peace this week.
- Run a warm bath or shower and remember your baptism (or Jesus’ baptism). Experience it as a time of solitude, serenity, and tangible grace.
- Identify a relationship in your life where you could use some peace-making and take a step toward shalom. Send a handwritten note, reach out, or call – and if you can, spend some time together (online or in person).
- Conversation starters: Painting pictures of peacefulness, poet Mary Oliver writes of a woman in the Ganges, and also of the first snow of the season. What does the essence of “peace” look like for you? What images come to mind? What steps can we take to make these images a reality, for ourselves and for our neighbors?
- Choose a day this week (or part of a day; or part of every day this week) to intentionally fast from screens and devices, an unplugged sabbath time of peaceful retreat and restoration. Let “the questions / that have assailed us all day” fall away for a while...
- Most mornings, Mary Oliver rose early and took a peaceful, attentive walk. She also regularly took night walks under the moon and stars, for “the heavens still hold / a million candles” – and we get a glimpse of a night walk in “First Snow.” Follow her lead this week, rising early or walking in moonlight, attending to the answers found in “silence and light.”





Week Three of Advent: “Joy”

- Light three candles: candles of mindfulness, shalom, and delight. Keep them close. Let them remind us to be generous and just, and to let our little lights shine!
- Take John the Baptizer seriously: participate in a clothing drive; contribute to an organization fighting for food security or economic justice; and look for tangible ways in your own life that you can carry out your callings with decency, integrity, and kindness.
- Conversation starters: Describe one of the most joyful times you’ve ever experienced, a moment that, to paraphrase poet Mary Oliver, “more or less killed you with delight.” What connections can you draw between joy, justice, and generosity? What joy do you long for in your life? What joy do you wish for others?
- Here’s a joyful one: Order some “flash paper” online (or in a local magic shop); “flying wish paper” can also work. When you light your three candles this week, write on the flash paper the “chaff” you want the Spirit to burn away: a resentment, a burden, a fear, a sense of apathy or discouragement. Say a prayer for liberation – and then simply touch the paper to a flame, and watch the “chaff” vanish in a flash of joyful light!
- Mary Oliver writes, “I have given a great many things away, expecting to be told to pack nothing.” Give something away this week (or a great many things!): to a friend, a neighbor, or an organization serving people in need.
- Inspired by Mary Oliver, try an imaginative writing exercise. Take a walk and identify three creatures in the world that seem to you to be praying (see Oliver’s “prayers that are made out of grass”). Then imagine the prayers, and write them down: What might the grass be praying? The trees? The stones? The “untrimable light”?





Week Four of Advent: “Love”

- Light four candles: candles of mindfulness, shalom, delight, and compassion. Keep them close. Pray to become a kind of candle yourself, a beacon, a lantern of hope, peace, joy, and love.
- Make a playlist of songs for singing along this week: love songs and justice songs. Sing loud and proud, into the night – inspired not only by Mary Oliver’s chat, but also by her contention that the essence of living is “more than the beating of the single heart. It’s praising.”
- Conversation starters: If Jesus’ mother were around today, who would she be? Where would she live? What parts of the world need to be turned upside down? And if you were in her shoes – to whom would you go “with haste” for sanctuary and support?
- Now that this latter question has brought that special person to mind, take time this week to write them a “love letter,” letting them know how much they mean to you.
- What birds are in your neighborhood? Draw or paint simple portraits of them on index cards, and add them to the Christmas tree.
- In honor of Mary Oliver’s “The Chat,” plan a music night: listening and singing and playing. And if you don’t consider yourself musical, fear not! Oliver didn’t either, and she sang anyway! Sing along with both Mary’s, those bold and exuberant poets...





**We invite you to join us for our Christmas Eve service
which will be held in the sanctuary at 5:00 pm.**

All our COVID 19 protocols on church campus will remain in place until further notice and we will meet again in December.

- **Coffee Hour temporarily suspended**
- **Saturday and Wednesday morning breakfast are temporarily suspended**
- **Mask required**
- **Practice social distancing**
- **Self screening for symptoms before coming on church campus**
- **Hand sanitize and wash hands often**

Please Note: These apply to everyone, whether you have been vaccinated or not.

1. If you are not feeling well please do not come to the church campus for any reason.
2. If you have been around anyone who has tested positive for Covid-19 (**this also applies to having contact with someone who has potentially been exposed**) please refrain from coming to the church until one of the following has occurred:
 - a. Get a Covid-19 test (With Negative results); or
 - b. Stay at home for 10 days.
3. Wear a mask at all times when on the church property.
4. Maintain safe social distancing between individuals from different households.
5. Wash your hands and/or use hand sanitizer on a regular basis.
6. Office is Available by Appt. Please knock on the door or window to be let in or met outside.

***Thank you for helping us maintain our commitment
to provide a safe place for all!***

Rooted in LOVE

They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season. Psalm 1: 3a

Submitted by Linda Clapp, Stewardship Chair



We gather here because our church draws people who love God’s openness and acceptance. God’s love is shown through the congregation’s warmth, kindness, benefit of the doubt, support, loyalty, and grace. We give thanks for everyone who walks through our door because your presence is God’s gift to us. So come as you are because every quirk and wrinkle is a reflection of God.

During this Stewardship month, we touched on four weekly topics starting with “Money follows Values”, then “Rooted in Love” and our favorite Taizé song with the same title. The third Sunday touched on “In awe of Grace” and our last Stewardship Sunday discussed “Planted by Streams of Water”. I enjoyed the discussion on the back of the November 14th bulletin, explaining that our English “planted” means “transplanted” in Hebrew. I found this very apt for us as at least half of our members are transplants from other churches. And, to thrive when transplanted, we need the power of love to develop deep roots in our church and community.

The pledges each family makes to the church helps the Finance committee and Session members build a budget for this next year. Thank you to every family who has turned in your pledge and thank you for every family that will be turning in your pledges in the coming weeks and a final thank you to the families who will be pledging for the first time for this coming year. Taking these financial steps for our church is faith in action and a show of love for the community of our congregation.

I also offer a heart-felt *Thank You* to Jilloni Hopkins for her assistance with this project.

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<p>FOR CHURCH RECORDS Envelope # _____ (for office use)</p> <p>Name _____</p> <p>Address _____</p> <p>City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____</p> <p>I plan to give \$ _____ each <input type="checkbox"/> week <input type="checkbox"/> month beginning _____</p> <p>for an annual total of \$ _____ (date and year)</p> <p><small>I understand that this commitment can be changed at any time by giving notice to the appropriate church officer.</small></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I would like to talk with someone about including the church or church-related institution in my will.</p> <p>Signed: _____ Date: _____</p>  <p><i>They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season. Psalm 1: 3a</i></p> <p>Rooted in Love</p>	<p>FOR YOUR RECORDS</p> <p>Date: _____</p> <p><small>With others in my congregation, I commit myself to give in proportion to what I have for the ministries of the church and the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ.</small></p> <p>I plan to give \$ _____ beginning _____ (date and year)</p> <p>Each <input type="checkbox"/> week <input type="checkbox"/> month</p> <p>Annual Total \$ _____</p>  <p>UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST</p>
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“Bring your whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says God, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough to store it.” (Mal. 3:10)



The Giving Cycle by Pastor Jen

During our recent sermon series on Stewardship, I shared the three parts of what I refer to as the ‘giving cycle.’

Part 1: What is our motivation for giving? It is my invitation to each of you to consider the difference that it **will** make when our motivation to give is rooted in our experiences of God’s unconditional and unchanging love.

Part 2: Responding to God’s love through the giving of our time, talent, and treasure. Our response of gratitude for God’s love is intended to be very personal and based solely on what we are each individually able and motivated to give. This part of the cycle is all about responding **TO** God’s love versus it being a requirement to earn God’s love. If this is not your practice already, you will find that your personal response to God’s love will naturally follow when your motivation to give is rooted in your personal experiences of God’s love.

Part 3: God’s response. When we trust God with the **uncertainties** that can be attached with giving, we can have the **certainty** that God **will** bless and multiply whatever we are able to give while God also continues to provide what we need in our own everyday lives as well. Our ‘giving cycles’ truly come full circle with God’s personal response to the gifts we are motivated to give in response to our experience of God’s love and provision!

In summary, when we are intentional about incorporating this ‘giving cycle’ into our lives, it **will** become a perpetual cycle rooted in God’s love where each turn of the cycle will make it easier-and-easier to trust that God’s loving abundance will continue to bless others through us while also providing all our needs as well. May we find assurance in knowing that **whatever** we entrust of ourselves to God, God **will** help us follow through with that commitment.

No matter where you find yourself on the giving spectrum...it is a very personal journey that has far-reaching impact! Whatever God is calling you to contribute, God will take and multiply it...so that you and we, the United Church of Cloverdale, will be sustained and provided for.





Fall Photos taken in Cloverdale by Lavonne Blucher-Nameny



Norma Reilly enjoying a day out getting her nails done!
Photo by Lavonne Blucher-Nameny



Food Pantry Drive-Thru Success!
UCC volunteers pictured getting everything ready back in October!
Photos by Polly Lile





- 12/10 10:30am Personnel Committee Mtg, Fellowship Hall
- 12/11 Memorial Service for Sheryl Shafer, Sanctuary
- 12/19 Pennies From Heaven (during worship services or online giving)
Council Meeting, after church
- 12/24 5pm Christmas Eve Service, Sanctuary
- 12/24 - 1/3 Office Closed for Christmas Break

Weekly Activities

- Thursdays & Saturdays Thrift Shop Open 10-2
(Thrift Closed Dec 23 & 25 and Dec 30 & Jan 1)
- Tuesdays & Fridays NA Meeting 7:30pm Education Bldg.
- 10am Sundays In-person Church Services in the sanctuary
(also available on Zoom and our YouTube Channel)



- Louise Graddy 12/03
- Annika Lewis 12/12
- Sara Duke 12/13
- Henry Magnusen 12/24



Happy Anniversary
Craig & Sharon Bilbro 12/29



Online giving available thru
our website at
uccloverdale.org.



DEC 3 INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES



Wednesday Prayer at 10 AM



Subscribe

If you have a story you want to share and/or any photos please submit to uccoffice@sbcglobal.net We would love to share it in the next newsletter!

Hold In Prayers
The Wolter Family; Barbara Goepel; Norma Reilly
We continue to hold in prayer all our church family

NOURISHING HOPE THROUGH COMMUNITY
FRIDAY 1:00 - 3:00 PM
202 COMMERCIAL STREET
(COMMERCIAL AT SECOND)
CLOVERDALE, CA



Everyone is welcome to access the food Pantry
No ID or income verifications required!

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Articles for The Ivy Vine? submit to the uccoffice@sbcglobal.net by the 20th of the month preceding the publication date. Articles submitted after the deadline without prior approval will be published the following month.