

## From the Pastor...

*What a blessing it is to have something a little more festive this holiday season. With the availability of COVID testing and booster shots, many of us are able to once again have small gatherings of family and friends at the holidays.*

*Last year I remember gathering with just us 5 Aastuens for Thanksgiving and Christmas. We had all the good food we would normally have at those occasions, just fewer people to eat it all, which wasn't all bad...*

*But I missed the hugs and the singing and laughter and the festive atmosphere that a larger gathering brings.*

*Speaking of larger gatherings, some people have been asking me if we expect more people in worship. See my article in this newsletter entitled "Will they ever come back?" The truth is that we hope many will come back when it is safe to do so, but in the meantime, we gain strength in knowing that "wherever two or three are gathered in my name, I am with them." (Matthew 18:20)*

*This month we continue the sermon series begun the first Sunday of Advent, November 28, on God with Us as we remind ourselves that God is with us, whether we identify most with the skeptical Zechariah, the dutiful Joseph, the faithful Mary or the dismissed shepherds. Looking at the biblical figures of Christmas we will explore all these perspectives as we move through Advent, the season of waiting and anticipation.*

*This Advent we'll also be having people help with the lighting of the Advent candle wreath during worship. Be looking for a few more faces on Sunday mornings as you come to worship in person or online.*

*I feel blessed to be entering the Advent/Christmas season with you. As we focus on the hope, love, joy and peace of this season, let us celebrate this season with love and joy. We have been given the gift of the Christ Child, born to us on Christmas Day. May you have a blessed and loving and healthy celebration as your heart prepares him room.*

*~Pastor Holly*

## Celebrations

### Birthdays

12-2 Carly K.  
12-7 Brooke B.  
12-8 Dolly A.  
12-9 Derik I.  
12-12 Nathan M.  
12-13 Everyn S.  
12-20 Brett H.  
12-22 Lucas P.  
12-27 Buck B.  
Chevelle F.  
12-28 Jane R.  
April L.  
12-31 Dave F.  
Al J.

## Thank You

Thank you to all of you who turned in your Estimate of Giving cards in November. Thanks to you we are able to continue to plan for ministry into 2022 and know we can count on you to keep us building bridges to Christ's love. If you haven't yet sent in your Estimate of Giving card, it's not too late! Please send it as soon as possible. We are so grateful for everyone's generosity and faithfulness!



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## Christmas Offering (by Jane R.)

The 2021 Christmas offering will be going to Strong Missions in Costa Rica. Strong Missions is the organization, run by a United Methodist pastor, Charlie Strong, that our own Dave and Jan F. have been leading mission trips to for years.

Since 2004 Strong Missions in Costa Rica has been working on construction projects including churches, schools, homes for the poor, orphanages, children's parks, and more. In 2006 a feeding program in one of the slums in San Jose was started but it had to be discontinued until 2018 when Dave and Jan along with a team of volunteers (and donations from our church) arrived to help and replenish their funding. Now the mission builds community gardens where fresh vegetables can be grown. Feeding is essential and allows children to concentrate on studies, but food doesn't break the cycle of poverty so the mission started education programs and extra-curricular activities: fine arts, sports, dance, and martial arts. These activities keep kids off the streets and out of gangs, while improving grades, attention span, discipline, and self-esteem. 100% of these programs run on donations from people like us.

On Dave & Jan's last trip to Costa Rica they were able to break ground for a new vegetable garden, rebuild desks for classrooms, expand space at an orphanage for those who were not adopted and had no place to go, built playgrounds, prepared and served meals for feeding programs, taught sewing as well as sewing 23 dresses, 6 quilts, 10 pairs of shorts, 5 shirts, and 8 baby blankets.

In January of 2022, Dave F. will be continuing to serve at Strong Missions as he teams up with a mission group from Detroit Lakes. Strong Missions is approved by the United Methodist Church. Every year our Annual Conference (the bigwigs) ask us if we have supported a missionary in the past year. Because of our helping Strong Missions I can answer YES! Please be generous with your Christmas offering this year! The need in Costa Rica is so great. Many families try to survive on less than \$100/month. You can begin placing your offering in the plates at church any Sunday you are in worship – just mark it "CHRISTMAS." Or mail your gift to the church also marking it "CHRISTMAS." Jan, sadly, is no longer with us, and won't be travelling with Dave to Costa Rica in 2022 but it was a passion of hers for so many years we can help keep alive. THANK YOU!

## Will they ever come back?

I get this question from members of our congregation at least once a month. Will the people that we used to see in worship and are now connected to us online or through mailed sermons or not at all...will they ever come back to in-person worship on Sunday mornings? Pastors of all size congregations in most of our denominations tell us that their in-person worship attendance right now is around 50-60% of what they experienced before the pandemic. Many of those who are absent are young families who are not only tech-savvy, but also have young children who are just beginning to get vaccinated. Others are people who have underlying conditions that make them uncomfortable being around large groups especially during this latest pandemic surge.

While we genuinely hope that attendance levels will increase when we are finally through this pandemic, we aren't clear what church will look like post-pandemic. Many are grateful that they can fully access the worship experience online when they aren't feeling up to making it to worship in person, but we hope and pray that we still will have the blessing of seeing them in person and worshipping with them side-by-side and giving them a hug.

The good news is that we have several new people worshipping with us in the last couple of years who are eager to be new members of our congregation. The good news is that in our combined in-person and online attendance for the months of September and October, we are averaging 65 people in attendance (our average worship attendance for 2019 was 63). The best news is that God is with us through it all and that we are in this together.

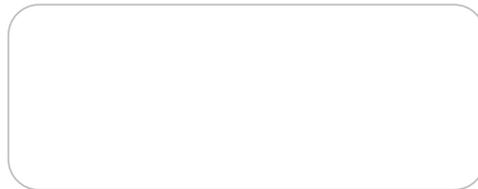
## “Ask the Pastor” Returns

After a year’s hiatus, we are bringing back the tradition of Ask the Pastor on the Sunday after Christmas. This is your opportunity to ask questions you’ve always wanted to ask about the church, the bible, our denomination or any other religious question that comes to mind. We’ll collect the questions from those at that day’s in-person worship and answer them on the spot. At the end of this service, we’ll have some time for Christmas Carols by request.



Color the picture!

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# Wyoming United Methodist Church Messenger

December 2021

## Joy Bells

Thanks to all who have been sending or bringing in your donations for Joy Bells. As we said in last month’s newsletter, we need your Target or Walmart \$25 or \$50 gift cards (brought in person, we don’t want “cash” going through the mail) or your donations (marked “Joy Bells,” checks written to the church) to the church no later than December 5. Thank you for helping make this a Merry Christmas for all!

## Sunday School Students (by Jane R.)

Remember that advent wreath you received last year about this time? I hope you still have it, as it can be used again year after year after year. You could gather some new, fresh greenery from your yard and you can use the same readings as last year! They last forever. Enjoy! I gave you a few new Christmas crafts recently to do at home. Have a blessed and peaceful Christmas! Love from your church family!

## Christmas Eve Worship - New Time!

New this year! We’re moving our Christmas Eve service to 4PM on Friday, December 24, as many of our congregation members are telling us that they have Christmas Eve off from work this year (and those who make Christmas Dinner would be glad for the extra preparation time). Please make note of the new time!



Color the picture!

Our Christmas Eve 4pm worship service will be a traditional service of Lessons and Carols as together we welcome the Christ Child into our hearts. This is a perfect time to invite friends and family to join you online and access our worship service on our YouTube channel or come with you in person. Come, sing the well-known songs of Christmas and celebrate the one who brought light into the darkness.

## December Worship

In this season of Advent, we prepare to welcome Jesus, the Messiah in our sermon series *God with Us*. This year as we wait for the coming Messiah, we will put ourselves in the place of the first people who awaited and celebrated Jesus’ birth. Through their stories, we will learn what it meant for God to be with them and what it means for God to be with us.

### December 5

God with Joseph, the Dutiful  
Matthew 1:18-25

### December 12

God with Mary, the Faithful  
Luke 1:26-38

### December 19

God with the Shepherds,  
the Dismissed  
Luke 2:8-20

### December 26

Ask the Pastor  
Luke 2:41-52