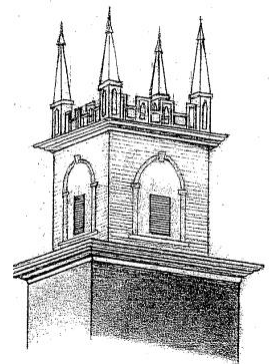


+ **N.E.W.S. CONNECTION**
Pittsford Congregational Church
United Church of Christ
121 Village Green
PO Box 570
Pittsford, VT 05763



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Message from the Pastor

Once our exterior church sign is repaired, our motif for Advent will read:

Give
In the
Season
Of Giving

Placement of text on a line, particularly when viewed from afar, does make a difference in how the message is perceived. We have learned that as cars zoom past the church, a shorter message with an economy of words is more effective. If **Give** were paired with In, it would read “**Give in,**” and that is not the sentiment which I wish to impart.

There is much about Advent that is counter to our contemporary culture. As the church season of Advent evolved in the Middle Ages, the four Sundays before Christmas marked a time of penitence, austerity, and reflection. While these are sound qualities for Christians at any time of the year, they are difficult for us to embrace when we are already decked out with garlands and wreaths. So, how do we achieve characteristics of Advent in our church community? Give!

These weeks before Christmas do inspire us towards generosity that extends widely. Often what we do for others—a visit, a tray of cookies, a handmade craft, a card, a meal to someone housebound—does far more than simply writing a check or dropping coins in a bucket. As December days grow shorter, our schedules seem to fill up more quickly. Are we busy in the way we want to be? Keep in mind that how we choose to spend time says a great deal about our values.

In Advent worship services, we engage in the uniqueness of this short season with Advent hymns, prayers, petitions, and time-honored traditions like the lighting of the candles in the Advent wreath. An important vestige from the distant past also lies in the changing of liturgical colors from green to violet. Interpretations vary in terms of what this color means. Royal purple signifies the kingship of Christ, and this ritual unites us with the worship practice of other Christian denominations who observe Advent.

While honoring Advent, my longings and expectations will culminate on Christmas Eve. In donning my teacher’s hat [never far away!], I pose a three-part question to you: What do Adolphe Adam, Placide Cappeau, and John Sullivan Dwight have in shaping an emotional Christmas Eve memory for many of us?

You may recognize Adolphe Adam as the composer of *O Holy Night* [*Cantique de Noel*] which debuted in Rocquemaure, France, in 1847. Adam, composer of operas and ballets, is probably best known for this single work with its cascading chords, soaring melody, and triumphal choruses. Lesser known but integral to the story is Placide Cappeau, a local wine merchant who presented Adam with his original poem for the latter to set to music. One bishop at the time thought it was a sacrilege that the words of a tradesmen were being sung on

Christmas Eve, but his demurring remained powerless in stopping the popularity of the carol. When the piece crossed the Atlantic to our shores, Boston native and one-time Congregational minister, John Sullivan Dwight wrote a free translation in words we sing as “O Holy Night, the stars are brightly shining....” My favorite of Dwight’s verses is the third and last, one that we do not hear often. Writing in the decade before the Civil War, Dwight’s principles as an Abolitionist shine in these lines. The poetic beauty expressed here is timeless and serves as a prayer that transcends its place on Christmas Eve:

Truly He taught us to love one another;
His law is love and His Gospel is Peace
Chains shall He break, for the slave is our brother
And in His name, all oppression shall cease
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we
Let all within us Praise His Holy name
Christ is the Lord; O praise His name forever!
His power and glory evermore proclaim
His power and glory evermore proclaim

With all the blessings you share with me and I with you,

Michael F. Dwyer, Pastor