

**THE**  
**Federated Church**  
**OF SYCAMORE**



What do  
you fear?  
INSISTING ON HOPE

Advent - Epiphany

# Responding to God's Invitation: Prayer Stations

*Advent is an invitation to journey into our deepest longings; to move toward those places in our world and within ourselves shrouded in darkness. Here, we hear the whispers of angels delivering a surprising message: "do not fear." Rather than denying our fears, these prayer stations invite you to hear this as an invitation to move through—and thus beyond—them; this is what it looks like to insist on hope. During this time (~10 min), we invite you to freely visit these virtual prayer stations. Take your time. This is a "pilgrimage of the soul." Rather than trying to visit every station, linger where your heart feels called.*

*Virtual prayer stations indicated in **blue** can be found at [this link](#) or at the end of the bulletin. Join us in worship to experience the additional prayer stations.*

**Dwelling in the Darkness:** *Advent is a time of watchful waiting. Such seasons can be agonizing. Yet even in this darkness, God is present. In your pew, meditate on the poem and prompt inserted in the bulletin (p.6-7).*

**Divine Seeing:** *Pause to look more deeply at the artwork (p.8-9) inspired by today's scripture. Consider the artist's statement as you look at the art.*

**Prayer Candles:** *Light a candle and offer a prayer for a loved one or a people / place around the world who are weary, afraid, grieving, or suffering.*

**Naming our Fears:** *Write a word or phrase of something you fear.*

**Welcoming Angels:** *On the angel, write a response to the prompt, which will change with each week. (p.10)*

**Alternative Nativity:** *Because we've heard the Christmas story so many times, it can lose its power. Encounter the story anew as it is juxtaposed with contemporary images.*

**Table of Offering:** *Place your [donation](#) to support our ministries or Mission Offering.*

**Guiding Stones:** *Pick a black stone. Use an acrylic marker to write a word or short phrase that helps guide you out of fear. Leave it for the season as a guide for others.*

**Practices for Moving through Fear:** *Use these resources to help you move through fear this season. Some are more personal and intimate; others are opportunities to dispel fear by acting in faith, hope, and love with/for others. Specific resources will change throughout the season.*

## Order of Worship | December 07, 2025

*Today we will be taking communion. We invite you to participate how ever you're best able. Feel free to use whatever you have for the "bread and cup"—whether it's bread & grape juice or a cookie & coffee. God takes our ordinary offerings, whatever they are, and blesses them as we share them together!*  
*All music can be found at the back of the bulletin. Please join in reading those parts printed in **bold**.*

### Prelude

"Before the Throne of God Above" Vicki Cook/arr. M. Kim

### Welcome & Lighting of the Advent Candles

In a world full of fear,

Where do you see glimmers of peace?

**We see glimmers of peace in the quest of early morning,**

**When people shake hands,**

**When loved ones say they're sorry,**

**And when the church sings together.**

You are right.

Even in a fear-filled world,

**Peace is all around us—if we have hearts to see.**

So, today we light the candles of hope and peace

As a reminder of this good news.

*the candles of HOPE and PEACE are lit*

May this flicker of light help us remember:

**Even in a fearful world, peace is present.**

**Thanks be to God! Amen!**

### Passing the Peace

*We invite you to like the video and/or say "Hi!" in the comments to let us know you're here.*

### Gathering Hymn "O Come, Emmanuel" (p.3)

### Prayers of the People

### Silent Prayer & The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father/Mother/Parent who is in heaven, hallowed be your name.**

**Your kin(g)dom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.**

### Song of Illumination "Do Not Fear" (p.3)

**Scripture** [Isaiah 43:19-21; Matthew 11:1-11](#)

**Sermon** “Is It Even Worth It?”

**Musical Meditation** “God Who Sees Us” *Gloria Fanchiang*  
*Solo by Fe Gould*

**Responding to God’s Invitation: Prayer Stations** *(see inside bulletin cover)*

## **Holy Communion**

*We practice an “open table”—everyone is welcome to receive God’s gifts. There is no age you must be or dogma you must believe. God meets us where we are—amidst our questions, fears, and failures—and offers us nourishment and a blessing on life’s journey.*

**Invitation & Words of Institution**

**Sharing Bread & Cup**

**Prayer of Thanksgiving**

## **Our Shared Life: Offering Invitations**

**Sending Hymn** #476 “My Life Flows on in Endless Song”

## **Benediction**

**Postlude** “Song of Hope” *arr. M. Kim*  
*Thank you for joining us for worship today!*

† † †

## **WORSHIP NOTES**

*Serving us this morning:*

**Pastor:** Rev. Eric J. Ogi | **Ministers:** All of us! | **Music Director:** Gary Mattin  
**Children’s Church Director:** Bill O’Hagan | **Childcare Support:** Janis Schnurr-Trebe  
**Liturgist:** Sheldon Turner | **Ushers:** Pam Wagener and Chris Borresen

*Ushers for Sunday, Dec. 14: Ruth Olle and Gip Seaver*

*All music is used with permission: CCLI Copyright: #3234671; CCLI Streaming: #22467093*

## **CONGREGATIONAL NOTES**

*Church Leadership for August 2025 – August 2026:*

**Moderator:** Gip Seaver | **Assoc. Moderator:** Bill O’Hagan | **Past Moderator:** Chris Borresen. | *Should you have any questions concerning the church, how to get involved, or who to contact about something, please reach out to one of them or Pastor Eric, and they will get you the information you need or connect you to someone who can.*

## “O Come, Emanuel”

lyrics by Avery Arden | [BoundaryBreakingWorship.com](http://BoundaryBreakingWorship.com) | tune: “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”

### Verse 1

O come, o come Compassionate Divine,  
And ransom captive Palestine  
That mourns with tears that will not be soothed  
Till empires fall and nations' hearts are moved. *(to refrain)*

### Refrain

***Rejoice! Rejoice! God's justice is at hand  
To liberate the people and the land.***

### Verse 2

O come, o bright and ever-burning star;  
Bring Gaza comfort from afar!  
Dispel from her the shadow of death  
That murders dignity and chokes out breath. *(to refrain)*

### Verse 3

O come, o Wisdom from on high,  
Take up the outcast's cause, the captive's cry.  
Guide us to build your kingdom on earth  
Where all faiths flourish, and the last are first. *(to refrain)*

### Verse 4

O come, o King of Peace and Justice, break  
All weapons down, and from them ploughshares make.  
Let all tears dry, all peoples respond:  
“We are each other's magnitude and bond.” *(to refrain)*

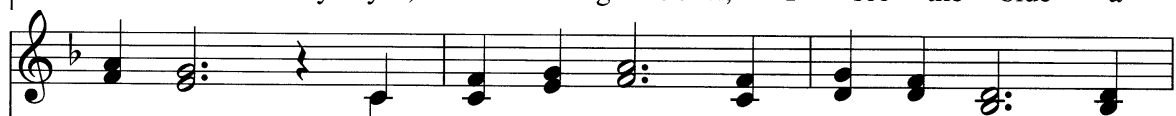
## “Do Not Fear” by Hannah Rand

Do not fear: I am here. I know you by heart. Just  
as you are, you are Mine. I know you by heart. Your  
name is written on the palm of My hand.  
Do not fear: I am here. I know you by heart.

# **“My Life Flows on in Endless Song”** *by Robert Lowry/Doris Plenn*



1 My life flows on in end - less song; a - bove earth's lam - en -  
 2 What though my joys and com - forts die? My Sav - ior still is  
 3 When ty - rants trem - ble, sick with fear, and hear their death knells  
 4 I lift my eyes; the cloud grows thin; I see the blue a -



ta - tion, I hear the sweet, though far - off hymn that  
 liv - ing. What though the shad - ows gath - er 'round? A  
 ring - ing; When friends re - joice both far and near, how  
 bove it; And day by day this path - way smooths, since



hails a new cre - a - tion. Through all the tu - mult  
 new song Christ is giv - ing. No storm can shake my  
 can I keep from sing - ing? In pris - on cell and  
 first I learned to love it. The peace of Christ makes



and the strife, I hear the mu - sic ring - ing; It  
 in - most calm, while to that Rock I'm cling - ing; Since  
 dun - geon vile our thoughts to them are wing - ing; When  
 fresh my heart, a foun - tain ev - er spring - ing; All



finds an ech - o in my soul— how can I keep from sing - ing?  
 Love com - mands both heaven and earth, how can I keep from sing - ing?  
 friends by shame are un - de - filed, how can I keep from sing - ing?  
 things are mine since I am Christ's— how can I keep from sing - ing?

# ANNOUNCEMENTS

## **Stewardship Pledge Drive | *Turn in by Monday, December 8***

There is still time to get your pledge in to help us sustain our growing ministries in 2026. Additional forms are available at the back of the sanctuary. Completed forms may be placed in the offering plate or mailed to or dropped off at the church office.

## **Holiday Wishes & Christmas Cards | *Today***

Several Christmas cards and holiday note paper have been placed in Dutton Hall. Please stop by to sign a card and/or write a note to be sent to our members and friends who are unable to come to church often.

## **Luminary & Candlestick Making Workshop | *Wed., Dec. 17, 5-7PM***

Sign-up by December 14 for this meditative, intergenerational activity. Dinner provided.

## **Preschool Annual Cookie & Candy Sale | *Fri., Dec. 19, 9AM-3PM***

The Federated Preschool is holding their 30<sup>th</sup> Annual Cookie & Candy Sale. Stop by to purchase your holiday treats! Donations of cookies (no chocolate chip cookies), candies, and baked goods may be dropped off at the Preschool on Dec. 17, and Dec. 18.

## **Christmas Eve Worship | *Wed., Dec. 24, 5:30PM***

Join us for a special evening service of lessons and carols, poetry and candlelight as we reflect on the Christmas story and bring it alive in fresh, new ways.

## **Sunday After Christmas—a Pickup Pageant | *Sun., Dec. 28, 10AM***

We're excited to try a new thing on the first Sunday after Christmas: *a no-rehearsal, quite silly, somewhat accurate, intergenerational pickup Christmas pageant!* If you'd like to participate, see Mr. Bill or Pastor Eric before 12/28.

## **Weekly eNews**



Scan the code at the left  
to see the most recent  
eNews & to subscribe.

## **Church Calendar**



Scan the code at the right  
to see the church's  
Master Calendar of events.



## **Waiting in the Darkness**

### **“God in the Kitchen”**

I called home my first semester of college.  
I told my mom I was fine, but I was homesick.  
She must have heard the truth in my voice.  
The ache ate at me. It was a long, slow song, a million tiny ants  
slurping the juice from a peach.  
I was tender and bruised, in the doldrums of it all.  
But she could hear all of that. So three states away,  
she preheated the oven. Three states away,  
she tossed blueberries in a thin layer of flour. Three states away,  
she dusted a layer of streusel over the soft peaks  
of a dozen warm muffins. And three days later,  
I unboxed a package from home—  
a dozen blueberry muffins, a love letter with my name on it,  
a reminder that I was not alone.  
If you're running out of hope, count to three.  
God is in the kitchen. She's just waiting for yeast to rise.

by Rev. Sarah Speed

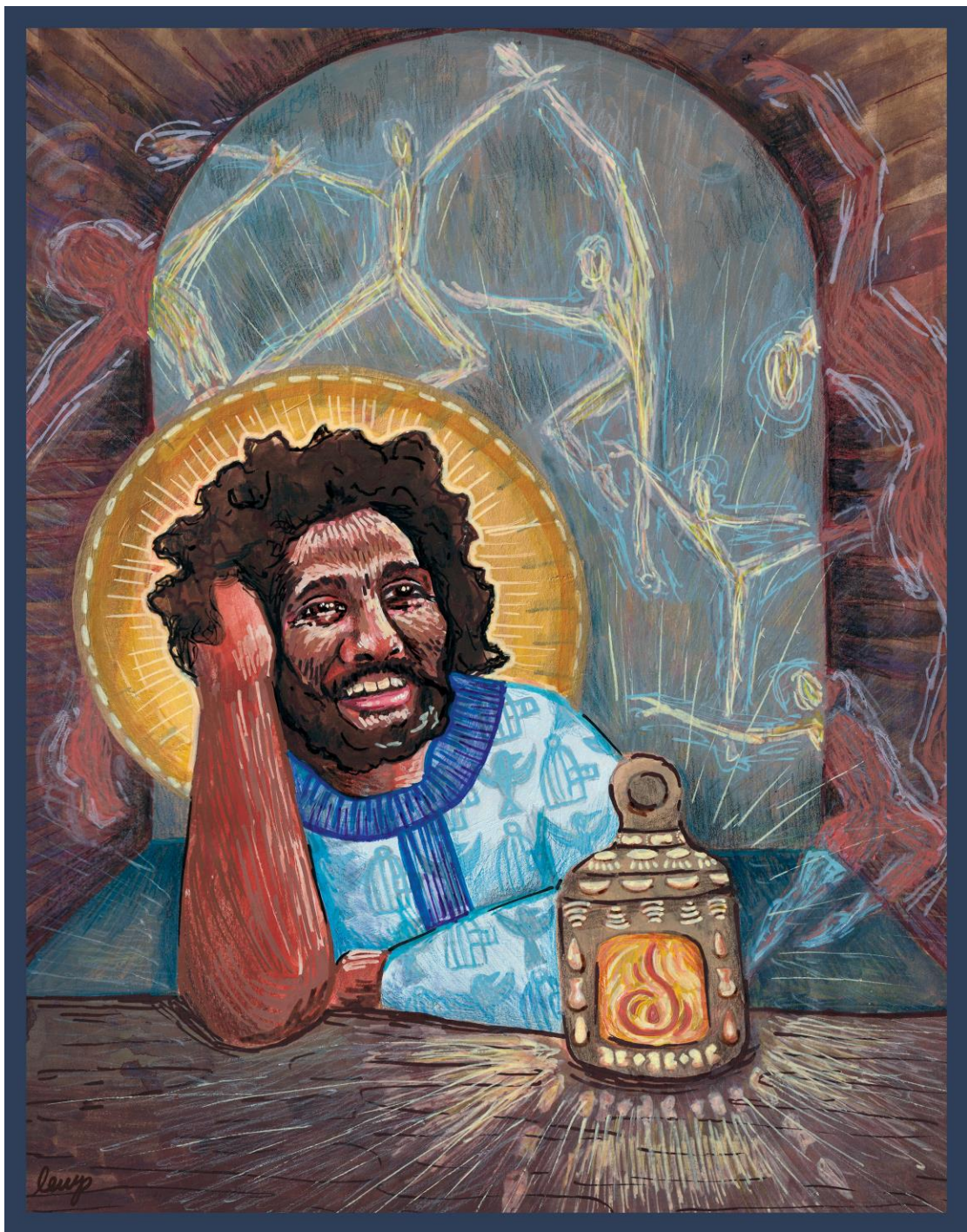
# When we're running out of hope, God is at work

*Reflect silently and/or journal:*

What makes you feel hopeless? Offer your emptied hope to God.

Then name where you perceive the unfolding of God's dreams.

What do you hear? What do you see?





WHEN WE'RE RUNNING OUT  
OF HOPE, GOD IS AT WORK

## “Hope Like A Dancer”



John the Baptist was thrown in prison after publicly questioning the legality of Herod's marriage (Mt 14). He was not afraid to go toe-to-toe with the powerful, and perhaps he expected Jesus' ministry to look more confrontational and politically strategic. In questioning Jesus, I wonder if John sought a particular answer to hang his hope on, that maybe the Messiah would be how he'd imagined him. Maybe Jesus would bust him out of jail and take things straight to Herod, but Jesus

offers something else.

In this image, John sits in prison, letting the disciples' testimony settle in. People with hearing, visual, and physical impairments experience new senses and mobility. Those with skin diseases are cleansed. Those with little material comfort are offered irrepressible hope, and the lungs of the dead are filled with the breath of life.

I imaged this good news through the dancing light of a lantern in John's prison cell. I chose dancing figures because dancing feels like a primal response to the radical healing taking place outside the prison walls. As these six dancers illuminate the cell, I imagine John, even if for a moment, breaking into laughter at the magnitude of Jesus' ministry. Jesus was quite literally doing the unimaginable. He was removing barriers so that the marginalized were no longer reduced to begging and sitting on mats, shoved to the edges of society. He was not only healing physical ailments; perhaps more importantly, he was restoring people to community.

Out of all the miraculous actions mentioned, the news did not include “release of the captives” (Luke 4). With this message, John would know he was not going to be freed, and so, the number of dancers would remain one short of seven. As we know all too well, God's work isn't completed in Jesus' time. We are still woefully short of realizing the fullness of God's desire for all of creation, and the work is ours to see through. Until then, let us keep our eyes peeled for the glimmers of hope dancing all around us and work toward a day when all can join in that dance of wholeness.

In the Bible, “angels” are messengers from God inviting us to move toward something necessary—but also scary—which is why they always say, “do not be afraid.” In fact, “do not be afraid” may be *the* message they bring.

How will we spend these days of waiting for God’s Love to be born? If we answer the angels’ call, we’ll spend it acting on hope, not fear. We’ll proclaim peace when others exploit our anxieties. We’ll cultivate courage and joy, undeterred by the powers of evil.

*Advent II:*

*When John is running out of hope, Jesus points him to signs that God is still at work. When you are running out of hope, what “signs” remind you that God is still at work?*



# OUR FEDERATED VALUES

## **We believe in God**

At the center of our faith is the surprising, unsettling, and deeply personal God found in the Bible, most profoundly revealed in the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus. At Federated, our primary interest is not merely talking *about* God but *encountering* the Mysterious Force at the heart of the universe. This is a God who who comforts us where we need to be comforted and challenges us where we've become complacent. This is a God who will not be confined to dogmatic teachings, nor even to the Bible. We believe that we are invited to encounter this God everywhere: in nature, science, one another, and in other religious traditions as well.

## **We believe each person is on a unique spiritual journey**

We value faith as a journey rather than a destination. We recognize that each person is at a different place on their journey, so we focus on “testimonies” of faith rather than “tests” of faith; stories of how we are being transformed, rather than dogmas we must affirm. Here, you are welcome to belong, question, explore, and lead whether you grew up in church and loved it, or you've had a painful relationship with Christianity; you are welcome whether you feel your faith is unshakeable or you're not sure if you believe in God at all. You are welcome to join a community of people “on the way”: encouraging and caring for one another, learning and growing together, and serving alongside each other as we build, in some small way, the world we believe God dreams of.

## **We believe in building authentic community across our differences**

We are an “Open and Affirming” congregation, which is our way of saying that we value diversity. In a time of deep division, we believe it is paramount to gather people across lines of difference—race, class, culture, citizenship status, gender, sexuality, age, and ability—not merely to tolerate each other, but to build authentic relationships and true belonging. We believe the simple but courageous work of showing up in this way is one necessary element in healing our nation and world's deep divisions.

## **We believe in working for peace through solidarity & justice**

At Federated, conversations about racism, sexism, transphobia, poverty, immigration, hunger, and a host of other issues are commonplace—from the pulpit and around the table. With Dr. King, we believe we are all “caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny,” and that “none of us can be free until all are free.” In this spirit, *in 2025 our Leadership Board initiated a series of conversations with the congregation, and together we discerned a mission priority for the church to act for “immigrant justice,” adopting this covenant to guide us: “As a community of faith, we commit to protecting our migrant neighbors through acts of sanctuary, solidarity, and justice. We will not stand by in the face of unjust enforcement. We will act, love, and speak as our faith commands—with courage and compassion.”*

# ***“Welcoming Any, Loving All”***

*The Federated Church is affiliated with two national denominations:  
the United Church of Christ & the Unitarian Universalist Association*



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