

**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.4-6).*

**Divine Seeing:** *Pause to look more deeply at the artwork (p.7-8) 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.9)*

**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 21, 2025

*All music can be found at the back of the bulletin. Please join in reading those parts printed in **bold**.*

**Prelude**                      “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing”                      Mendelssohn/arr. M. Hayes

### **Welcome & Lighting of the Advent Candles**

In a world full of fear,

Where do you see the presence of love?

**We see love all around us.**

**We see love when people hold open the door.**

**We see love in a warm embrace, a homemade casserole, and**

**A phone call after a long day.**

**We see love in random acts of kindness,**

**and intentional acts of empathy. We see love all around us.**

You are right.

Even in a fear-filled world,

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

So today we light the candles of hope, peace, joy, and love

As a reminder of this good news.

*the candles of HOPE, PEACE, JOY, and LOVE are lit*

May this flicker of light help us to remember and notice:

Even in a fearful world, love is here.

**Love is transforming the world all around us.**

**We only have to look for it.**

**Thanks be to God for a love like that! 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**    “Come, O Long Expected Jesus” (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 41:5-10; Matthew 1:18-25](#)

**Sermon** “The Call of the Angels”

**Musical Meditation** “Angels Hovering’ Round”

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

**Our Shared Life: Offering Invitations**

**Sending Hymn** “I Can Celebrate You” (p.4)

**Benediction**

**Postlude** “O Come, Little Children” J.A. Schule/arr. M. Hayes  
*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:** Ryan Washabaugh | **Ushers:** Pam & Nate Kitterman, Linda Mason, & Allison Stahl

*Ushers for Sunday, Dec. 28: Paula von Ende, and Bev & Skip Schramer*

*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 or connect you to someone who can.*

## “Come, O Long Expected Jesus” *by Charles Wesley*



1. Come, O long-ex-pect-ed Je-sus, born to set your peo-ple free.  
 2. Born your peo-ple to de-liv-er, born a child, you ca-me to reign



From our fears and sins re-lease us; grant us your true li-ber-ty  
 born to reign in us for-ev-er, come be known to u-s a-gain



You, our strength and con-so-la-tion, come sal-va-tion to im-part;  
 By your own e-ter-nal Spir-it come to claim us as your own



dear de-sire of e-vry na-tion, en-ter e-vry long-ing heart.  
 by your all-suf-fi-cient mer-it let us share your cross and crown.

## “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 writ-ten on the palm of My hand.



Do not fear: I am here. I know you by heart.

## "I Can Celebrate You" by Anna Strickland/Gustav Holst

## AT A GLANCE: COMING UP AT FEDERATED

Christmas Eve worship with Candlelight | Wed., 12/24, 5:30pm

A No-Rehearsal, Quite Silly, Somewhat Accurate Intergenerational  
Xmas Pageant | Sun., 12/28, during worship: *Little more info in the enews.*



Life in Gaza, Life as a Refugee in the US | Sunday, 1/4, after worship

Ahmed Elqattawi will speak about his life as a Palestinian from Gaza, what it's like to be a refugee in the United States right now, and what we can do to support people like him. Beyond listening, *there are two ways we are aligning our Mission Priority of Immigrant Justice with a special Mission Offering for the month of January.*

1. Ahmed has \$5,000 in lawyer fees related to his asylum case. Through our January Mission Offering, we hope to offset as much of this as possible.
2. Ahmed has worked with his family living in Gaza to create a mutual aid project delivering clean, drinkable water to their entire neighborhood. Ahmed will also share about this project and invite you to donate. Donations of all sizes welcome. 100% of money raised goes to purchase and deliver the water.





## **Waiting in the Darkness**

### **“Tethered”**

When we were children, we fell asleep  
with walkie talkies tucked under our pillows.  
All that separated us was a bathroom,  
a hallway, a few feet of empty space,  
but as children, even small distances can feel like miles.  
So after the parents whispered prayers over our skinned knees  
and spelling tests, after they kissed our sweaty foreheads  
and tucked us into bed,  
we'd pull the walkie talkies out from under our pillows.  
We'd roll the dial on the top of the transceiver.  
We'd sputter that invisible tether to life.  
And with a few crackles in the quiet of the night,  
you'd whisper my name.  
I'd press down the button.  
I'd promise I was close.  
As an adult, I don't know what ever happened  
to those blue-grey walkie talkies.  
But I know,  
that even today,  
if the monsters in the closet feel too real,  
and you whisper my name,  
I promise I'll be close.

by Rev. Sarah Speed

When you're afraid,  
give me your hand

*Reflect silently and/or journal:*

When have you been a companion to someone through a fearful and challenging time?

When has someone offered you the gift accompaniment?



*What are my eyes most drawn to?  
What emotions/feelings does this bring up for me?  
What might God be saying to me through all of this?*





WHEN YOU'RE AFRAID,  
GIVE ME YOUR HAND

## “In Too Deep”



My inaugural contribution to *A Sanctified Art* in 2023 focused on the relationship between Mary and Elizabeth. After having a challenging pregnancy of my own, I used my art to explore the divine connections of people who carry pregnancies and how that special type of relationship benefits the community. But even after reading these pregnancy stories time and time again, I have struggled to sit with Joseph and how he processes all of this change with his new wife. Somehow life is always in alignment with the text, and now, as I process a divorce, I think more often of what it would feel like for someone else to come in and try to fit into my established family system.

This made me think of a Joseph who can't sleep well at night, as his mind is uneasy with the words of Gabriel in his ear. I wanted Joseph to have an uncomfortable sleep form with a clenched fist that shows us he is tense even while he dreams. His foot is raised up in a way that looks almost as if he could pop up at any moment. Funny enough, this is how I slept throughout my own pregnancies. His hair, while luxurious, has flowy movement to it, leaning into the uneasiness. The soft spiral pattern in the background also implies movement. We don't see Joseph often in holy art. We receive the occasional holy family portrait, which is often not detailed, but Joseph does not really get his own place in the story. He is almost like the forgotten father after Jesus comes of age, so his time is really now. I don't think his position needs to be a cornerstone for the birth story; however, as my own life changes, I can appreciate the importance of his devotion and obedience to God.

In the artwork, the angel Gabriel is talking to Joseph as he sleeps, with silver locs reminiscent of God from the children's book I illustrated, *God's Holy Darkness*. This is a nod to my own work, which honors holiness as brown, coarse textured, and wise. Why wouldn't an angel both resemble God and the people they are called to speak to?

The dreamy pregnant body we see in the top left is styled in an outfit that is a nod to Beyonce's 2017 Grammys performance costume for the song, "Love Drought." Pregnant with twins, Beyonce performed this song about experiencing betrayal, heartbreak, and reconciliation. In my painting, the pregnant belly is celebrated with rays beaming from it followed by soft clouds, reminding us this is a dream. The color choices are bright, detailed, and whimsical to keep us in the fantasy. There is vibrancy here because, while Joseph is uncomfortable, this is still something to be celebrated.

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 IV:*

*Write the name of someone who has offered you the  
gift of accompaniment during a difficult time  
(reach out this week to let them know!)*



# 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*



Follow us on  
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