



The Trumpet

JANUARY 2026

A publication of the East Woodstock Congregational Church, UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

BLESSINGS TO BEGIN THE YEAR

Either on Twelfth Night (January 5), the twelfth day of Christmastide and eve of the feast of the Epiphany, or on Epiphany Day (January 6) itself, many Christians in Europe chalk their doors with a pattern such as this, "20 + C + M + B + 26". The numbers refer to the calendar year (20 and 25, for this year); the crosses stand for Christ; and the letters have a two-fold significance: C, M and B are the initials for the traditional names of the Magi (Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar), as well as an abbreviation of the Latin blessing *Christus mansionem benedicat*, which means, *May Christ bless this house*. Taken together, this inscription is performed as a request for Christ to bless our homes and stay with those who dwell in them throughout the entire year.

The chalking of the doors is a centuries-old practice throughout the world, though less well-known in the United States. It is, however, an easy tradition to adopt, and a great practice for dedicating our year to God and asking for our Creator's blessing on our homes and on all who live, work, or visit them. The prayer above is adapted from a house blessing I was invited to several years ago. It in turn was adapted from a longer prayer in Celtic Daily Prayer which you might want to use for your own house blessing.



A Blessing for Your House

*God who is Three, God who is One,
give blessing to the house that is here.
Bless it from roof to floor,
from wall to wall, from end to end.
May your Spirit dwell within these walls,
to bring joy and laughter to all
who enter here.
We call upon the Sacred Three
to save, to shield, and surround
this home.
The circle of God around it,
the peace of Christ within it,
the life of the Spirit above it,
this day, this night, and every night.
May the Triune God be the guardian
of this place.
Peace be here in the name of the
God of love, welcome be here in the
name of the Christ of peace,
joy be here in the name of
the Spirit of life.
God who is One, God who is Three
to welcome, guide, and nurture all
who enter here, the circle of God
around friend and stranger,
the peace of Christ within
guest and host,
the life of the Spirit above all
who stand at the door,
this day, this night,
and evermore.*

Adapted from a blessing in Celtic Daily Prayer
Illustration by Dusit Chomdao



The renowned 19th-century Presbyterian theologian Charles Hodge remarked that “the church is called to be a school.” Contained in this statement is that we must *learn* to be a church. The church is a school of spiritual formation.

We often assume that “Christian Education” refers only to the Sunday School and Confirmation Class. But the educational ministry of the church extends to every person whose name is listed on the membership rolls, who is present at worship services, or who is involved in any mission sponsored by the church.

Every Christian is called to grow spiritually. This means that every Christian should be involved in some educational aspect of the church. It is almost impossible to grow spiritually by oneself, without communing and interacting with other Christians. Even if that is purposefully done, it cannot be called *Christian* education. Followers of Christ are called to learn in a group. Jesus followed this practice, gathering disciples who journeyed with him and learned in a group setting. But Jesus did not invent this model of social learning.

The ancient Hebrews practiced this model long before Jesus. They believed that education was the principal means whereby the faithful would grow into obedient servants of God. This spiritual growth would best take place in a communal setting with a spiritual teacher who would meet regularly with a group of pupils. To make the point even more obvious, for the past 2000 years, followers of the Jewish religion have referred to

their theological leader as *rabbi*, which means “teacher.” The Jews understand that their spiritual shepherd is primarily a teacher. So should we. Every ministerial candidate in the United Church of Christ is ordained a “pastor and teacher.”

As with anything else in life, we must *learn* to be a Christian. It does not happen automatically. The church father Tertullian stated that “Christians are made, not born.” This was to be done through catechesis, from which we get the word *catechism*. In our Congregational tradition, we generally do not teach our children and youth through the use of a *catechism*, but we do seek to educate, not only our children, but all of our members through an intentional process, whether that be through a sermon, a Sunday School lesson, a Bible Study, Movie Matinee, a Lenten Series, a Membership Class, or some other structured educational gathering.

As Christians, we are called to understand God, ourselves, our world, and our place within the world. This involves the acquisition of knowledge, which is best done in a group setting with other Christians. But this kind of knowledge is not primarily an intellectual enterprise. Here is where our spiritual ancestors, the Jews, showed their wisdom over the ancient Greeks. For the Greeks, knowledge was for its own sake, so that we might become like God, who is the omniscient (all-knowing) One. The highest calling in life for the ancient Greek was the intellectual contemplation of God, best represented by Aristotle. He believed that God was “Thought thinking Itself.” And so, if that is what God is and does (and who is more content than God?), then that is what we mortals should also be doing in order to achieve happiness. But this kind of knowledge is purely theoretical, not for any purpose other than for its own sake. The Hebrew (and Christian) understanding of knowledge is more experiential and practical, for a purpose other than for itself. The Christian’s attainment of knowledge is for the purpose of serving God and others.

Any school involves disciplined habits of study. That goes for the church as well. The commitment to grow spiritually must be intentional. It must involve a deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort. And it must involve sacrifice: sacrifice of time, study, and service.

We have a very committed group of women (where are the men?) who attend Bible Study every Wednesday morning at 10:30am. We are currently studying the Apostle Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians. We are only in the third chapter of a letter sixteen chapters long. Most of the letter awaits our examination, so it’s not too late to join us. We have Movie Matinee once a month on the third Sunday following the worship service. Some of the films we have watched and discussed together are *Groundhog Day*, *Sister Act*, *Field of Dreams*, and *Places in the Heart*. On January 18, we will be showing *Lars and the Real Girl* (see the advertisement for it elsewhere in this newsletter). This is a very entertaining way to grow in our faith. Everyone loves to watch films. I choose films that have a spiritual or ethical lesson that we can talk about after our viewing. It’s a lot of fun! Ask anyone who attends. There’s plenty of

PASTOR'S MESSAGE CONTINUED

room for more moviegoers in Fellowship Hall. During the six Sundays of Lent, beginning on February 22, we will have a Lenten Series where we will view and discuss videos that will help us to grow in our faith. Last year we watched and discussed Adam Hamilton's *Twenty-Four Hours that Changed the World* about the last 24 hours of Jesus's life. It was very rewarding for all who attended. If you have an idea about what you would like to study during this year's Lenten Series, tell me about it! I hope to see you at one or more of these educational opportunities!

All of you who have joined the church or who attend some ministry, mission, or program of our church have attached yourself to a school, a school of spiritual formation. How far along in your Christian education have you progressed?

New Year's Greetings and God's Richest Blessings for 2026,

Pastor Gary

My family and I want to thank everyone for their many acts of kindness shown to us after the death of our Uncle Kenny Marvin. This quiet and unassuming man certainly has left an emptiness in all of us. Our dear friend Chally Wooten said it best "I can't imagine a world with Kenny Marvin not in it." Here is one of the poems he asked to have it his service.

Susan Converse

Another soul has left today.
My heart is filled with sighs.
I wish to also go unto
The Land of "No Good-byes"
A land of only "Hi, Hello-
Good to see you again, at last."
A land where I see family, friends,
Dear souls from my own past
Yes! There I meet my closet, dearest ones.
And perhaps souls I wished to meet,
For they had all directed me
To a better life complete
Complete in serving God
And those He sent me to,
To bless in some simple way
As best as I could do.
So, have no heavy hearts today
For me- I've been blessed,

To serve God – and hopefully you-
My best work will earn my rest.
God loves us all-and me,
Among my sisters and brothers.
So, to the land of no good-byes
I travel – as have many others.
In missing me- for days or years,
Shed no tears or sighs,
Just know, through God's own love,
We'll be together – and No Good -Byes.

Richard Van Doren

STAR GIFT SUNDAY

Several years ago, we began celebrating Epiphany with a new tradition of receiving "Star Gifts", over 200 different words

printed on colorful star-shaped paper.



During the service, each person picks one star—without looking! When we receive our Star Gift, no matter what it is, we are asked to contemplate the meaning of that word in our lives during the course of the year. Join us on January 4th and pick your star!

worship & prayer

Continuing to pray for...

- Diane Billings, recovering from a broken wrist
- Joel Morse, continuing to heal
- Ann LaMountain, recovering from wrist surgery
- Sue Foster's parents
- Lisa Gould, in recovery from a stroke
- Lucy Wong, after a recent hospitalization
- McDerra, as he struggles for clarity in recovery
- Patsy Converse & the Cardwell Family, as they grieve for Sara
- The May Family on the loss of their beloved mother & grandmother, Sally
- The Looby Family on the loss of beloved father & grandfather, George
- Our church community as we continue to move forward in this transition to a settled pastorate.

God hears our prayers and surrounds those we pray for with comfort, strength, and compassion in difficult times.

SEARCH & CALL NEWS

The search and call team has been very active since we started meeting in October 2025. We have now received seven applications for our settled pastor position. Six of these were not good matches and are no longer candidates. The most recent application was just received and will be scheduled for an interview in January. It is expected that in the next few weeks there will be fewer applications & then there will likely be an increase in interest in the late winter or early spring. We have worked on increasing visibility about our opening by posting information about it at five seminaries (Andover-Newton at Yale; Eden Theological Seminary, St Louis, MO; Lancaster Theological Seminary, now merged with Moravian Seminary, Bethlehem, PA; United Seminary of the Twin Cities, New Brighton, MN; Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Hamilton, MA) and it is also now included as a link on our church website. We are also exploring the use of social media to expand visibility. As of now, we do not see any barriers to meeting our target date of selecting a new pastor by Fall, 2026.

MEMBERSHIP CLASS OFFERED

Though every Christian is a member of Christ's universal Church, local church membership is important. Have you ever thought about becoming a member of East Woodstock Congregational Church? Membership allows you to join the Board of Deacons, Society, or the Nominating Committee. It allows you to vote at congregational meetings. It allows you to serve on the Search and Call Committee to nominate a ministerial candidate to become the Settled Pastor of the church, and then to vote on that candidate. Membership allows you to hold any of the offices of the church: Clerk, Treasurer, Chair of Church Council, and Moderator. Being a member of East Woodstock Congregational Church allows you fully to participate in the life of the church so that you can experience all its benefits. It will enable you to use the gifts, talents, and abilities with which the Holy Spirit has endowed you for the building up of God's



A CALL TO THE ANNUAL MEETING

A call for the annual meeting of the East Woodstock Congregational Church which will be held on Sunday, January 25, 2026 immediately following our service of worship to:

1. Hear and act on officer and committee reports;
2. hear and act on the report of the Society Committee regarding the 2026 budget;
3. hear and act on the report of the Nominating Committee;
4. hear and act on any other business to come before the meeting.

Called by the Church Council
Christine Armstrong, Clerk

EWCC GOOGLE WORKSPACE

Training Session - January 4th - following the service

For the past several months, the Society Committee has been working to implement Google Workspace, an online productivity suite, for our church. Workspace will enable us to easily collaborate and share files, access necessary cloud file storage, manage church calendars, and conduct online meetings. *All for no cost!*

All committees are currently set up with Shared drives, which are Drives and Folders that allow files to be created and shared with members. All files within the Shared Drives are owned by EWCC, providing us with excellent storage capability for our busy committees' files.

Presenters Jeff Wong, Jess Reed, and Glen Lessig will present highlights of Workspace and answer questions.

MEMBERSHIP, CONTINUED FROM COLUMN AT LEFT

people. If interested in taking this class, contact Pastor Gary. A suitable day and time will be decided on to conduct the class. Normally three sessions will suffice, but more might be required.

LADIES BENEVOLENT SOCIETY - HOLLY FAIR UPDATES

We had a fantastic Holly Fair this year. We grossed \$10,425.96, slightly less than last year's \$10,998.29. The primary difference was that we chose not do soup/chili take out. We still have expenses to pay for advertising and table cloths. *It was a very good year!*

I want to thank everyone who was involved in making the Holly Fair a success, with special thanks to Donna Baldyga who Chaired the event and ensured that everything was taken care of.

The table chairs who ensured that we had a spectacular event also merit a big thank you. They are:

- Christmas Décor Donna Baldyga, Lynn Hescheles, Cris Waldron, Judith Wong
- Baked Goods Taryn & Andy Tomkins
- Baskets Kerstin Forrester & Judith Schumacher
- Candy Diane Morin and family
- Crafts Diane Billings & Barbara Hackett
- Jewelry Marilyn Rath & Carrie Walker

There are so many people who donated everything that we had available to sell! The Basket Social is a big draw because of all the incredible baskets and donations. The Church Committee baskets were amazing and very generous. Andy & Taryn baked for a week or more and received many contributions from our Congregation. The Décor was plentiful because so many people donated early this year and we actually had to request "no more". The Morin crew made more than 700 Buckeyes and many different kinds of mouthwatering candies. You donated jewelry that filled the Chapel and Marilyn and Carrie spent countless hours sorting, cleaning, fixing and displaying the jewels!. Hand made items were displayed beautifully in our craft room and the variety was amazing. We thank the following local businesses for their donations:

- Echo Farms
- Fairholm Farm
- Mamma Italia Ristorante
- Sprucedale Gardens

It takes a dedicated community to make this all happen and we were rewarded, not only with the dollars, but with many compliments about this being the nicest fair in the area.

Kerstin Forrester

OUTREACH

Food pantries all over are experiencing a greater need for those dealing with food insecurity; EWCC is no exception. Currently, our food pantry is in need of the following items: canned soups; tuna; tomato sauce; coffee, frozen vegetables. *We appreciate your generous support of our efforts to help feed those in need in our community.*

Food contributions continue to be gleefully accepted for **CARING CONTINUES** for our Woodstock families & children in need of food security: grape jelly and spaghetti sauce (in small plastic containers) are so very helpful. *Your generous contributions truly make a difference! Thank you!*

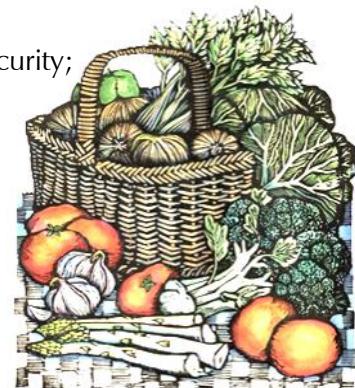
THANK YOU & PLEASE...

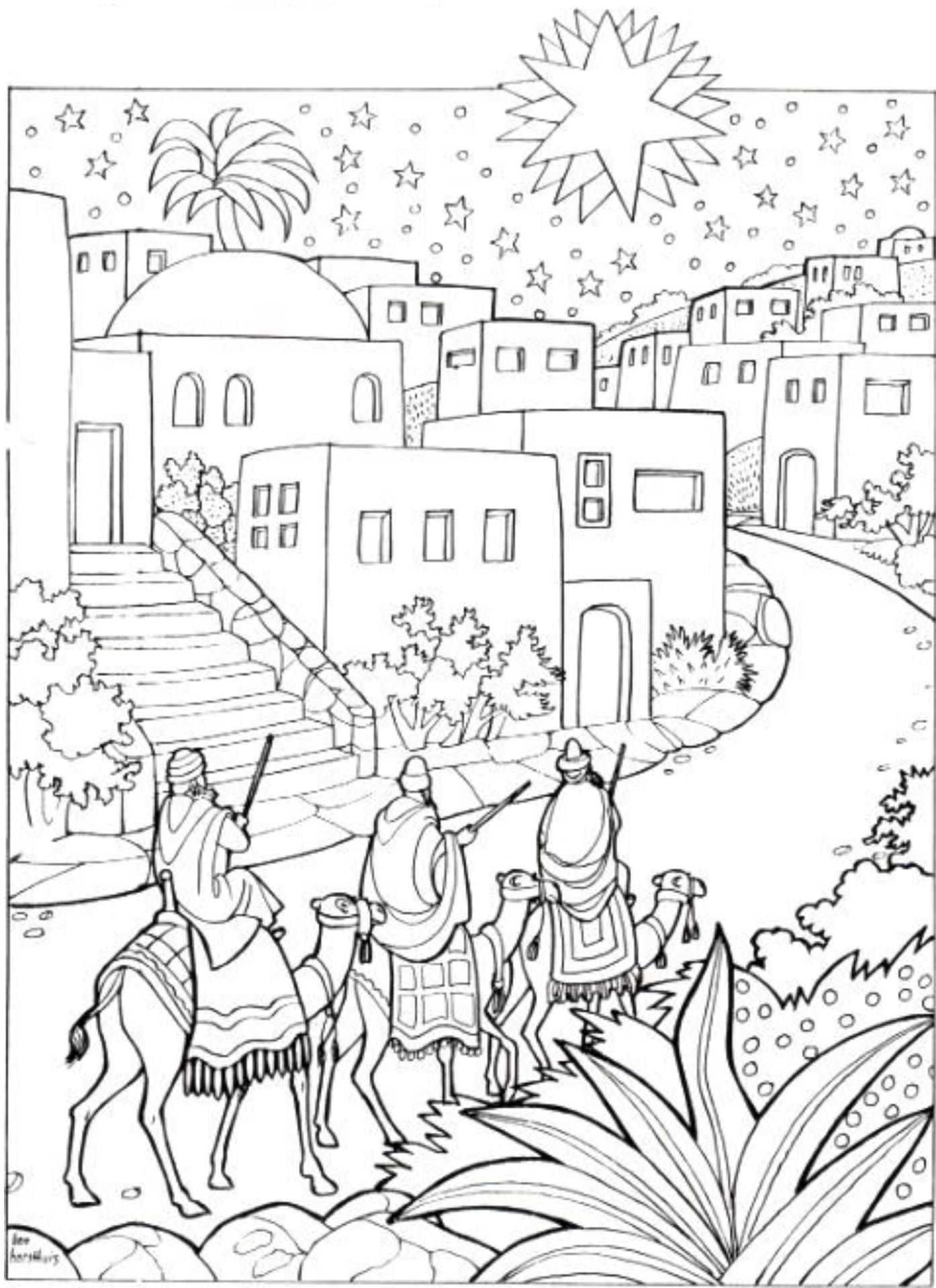
LBS is thinking about all of you this Christmas season. Everyone was so generous with your donations last year after the holidays and we were hoping as you go through and put your Christmas decor away, you may come across items that you would like to replace or just de-clutter. The Holly Fair was such a huge success and fund raiser for the church and we are hoping to do the same next year. If you would like to donate any decor for Christmas and Thanksgiving, items can be left in the Hospitality Room (off the kitchen) and our crew of elves will gladly claim them. Thank you again in advance and have a Merry Christmas!

*Donna Baldyga
Co-Chair LBS*



MOVIE MATINEE presents *Lars and the Real Girl* How far will a community go to show love to one of its own? A delusional young man (Ryan Gosling) purchases a life-sized doll on the internet with whom he develops an unusual relationship. Thus begins this offbeat and endearing story about how a small Minnesota town seeks to support one of its quirky residents without casting judgment upon his odd choice of a "girlfriend." *Lars and the Real Girl* will be shown following the worship service of **January 18** in Fellowship Hall. Grab a snack, chat with others, and then find a seat for this very amusing 2007 film. A discussion of the film's spiritual and ethical themes will follow. It is rated PG-13.







JANUARY

[Online Calendar:](#)

<https://www.eastwoodstockchurch.org/calendar/>

SUN

MON

TUE

WED

THU

FRI

SAT

					1	2	3
REMINDERS: January 9th: Reports due for Annual Report January 20th: Deadline for Trumpet Weekly: Monday 12PM Items for Wednesday Reminder Wednesday 12PM Items for Sunday Bulletin					New Year's Day	First Friday Food Fair, 9AM	
Communion Worship 10AM Epiphany / Star Gift Sunday Google Workshop following service	4 5 Community Kitchen, 9AM Tai Chi, 11AM Diaconate 6PM	6 7 Choir 7PM	Bible Study 10:30AM Al-Anon, 7:30PM	8 Search & Call 6PM Zoom Bells 7PM		9	10
11 Worship 10AM	12 Tai Chi, 11AM Outreach 6PM	13 Choir 7PM	14 Bible Study 10:30AM Al-Anon, 7:30PM	15 Bells 7PM		16 Memorial Service & Reception 11AM	17
18 Men's Breakfast 8AM Worship 10AM Movie Matinee following the service	19 Tai Chi, 11AM Society 7PM	20 Choir 7PM Council 7PM	21 Bible Study 10:30AM Al-Anon, 7:30PM	22 Bells 7PM		23	24
25 Breakfast Church, 9:45 Arrival for Worship 10AM Fellowship Hall ANNUAL MTG	26 Tai Chi, 11AM Book Discussion 7PM	27 Choir 7PM	28 Bible Study 10:30AM Al-Anon, 7:30PM	29 Bells 7PM		30	31 Private Event pending 2-5PM



East Woodstock Congregational Church
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
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East Woodstock, Connecticut 06244



The following are the scripture readings for the month of January: You are invited to read them as part of your daily devotions and as preparation for worship.

January 4

Second Sunday after Christmas

Jeremiah 31:7-14 or Sirach 24:1-12

Psalm 147:12-20 or Wisdom 10:15-21

Ephesians 1:3-14, John 1:[1-9] 10-18

January 6

Epiphany *Isaiah 60:1-6, Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14*

Ephesians 3:1-12, Matthew 2:1-12

January 11

Baptism of Christ

Isaiah 42:1-9, Psalm 29, Acts 10:34-43

Matthew 3:13-17

January 18

Second Sunday after the Epiphany

Isaiah 49:1-7, Psalm 40:1-11, 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

John 1:29-42

January 25

Third Sunday after the Epiphany

Isaiah 9:1-4 Psalm 27:1, 4-9, 1 Corinthians 1:10-18

Matthew 4:12-23

