



224 Lovely Street, Avon, CT 06001-4018
(860) 673-3301 www.stmatthewavon.org

DECEMBER WORSHIP SCHEDULE

December 3: 1st Sunday of Advent

9:00 a.m. Sanctuary Communion Service
10:20 a.m. Intergenerational Advent Workshop

December 10: 2nd Sunday of Advent

9:00 a.m. Sanctuary Communion Service
10:20 a.m. Sunday School & Adult Forum

December 17: 3rd Sunday of Advent

9:00 a.m. Christmas Pageant Service
10:20 a.m. Parsonage Open House

December 24: 4th Sunday of Advent

Christmas Eve

9:00 a.m. Sanctuary Communion Service
4:30 p.m. Family Christmas Eve Service
7:30 p.m. Christmas Eve Service
10:30 p.m. Christmas Eve Service w/ Choir

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Jack Pietrick, President
Sheila Jarka, Vice President
Meg Kraft, Secretary
George Spoering
Pastor Brian Rajcok

Ellen Ericson
Fred Fenn
Rick Hanson
Jason Lindquist
Kevin Reichler
George Reider

STAFF:

Brian Rajcok, Pastor
Sarah Schiener, Director of Music
Ryan Heckman, Director of Christian Ed.
Paul Martin, Church Administrator
Roy Zurell, Sexton
Steven Smolnik, Publisher



A LETTER FROM THE PASTOR

Thank you! It feels great to be officially installed as St. Matthew's lead pastor. Thank you all so much for the wonderful installation service and reception, it meant so much to me and to my family. I am excited for the opportunity to be called to this special congregation and for the ministry we can do together. I look forward to the years to come and the opportunity we have to grow together and make a positive impact in our community. St. Matthew is an amazing congregation and I thank you for being such a blessing to me!

We have had a lot going on here these past few months. We've had Oktoberfest, Trunk or Treat, my Installation, St. Matthew's Tag Sale, Operation Christmas Child, and Avon's Interfaith Thanksgiving Service. It seems every day there's something new happening! Also, we recently welcomed Ryan Heckman as our Director of Christian Education; I'm excited about the blessing he will be to St. Matthew. On top of all that, the parsonage project is nearing completion and I'm so grateful to all who donated and worked on the project. All these things are reflections of what a vibrant congregation St. Matthew is, a community with great energy and life. While a lot of churches are struggling, we are truly blessed to be in the position we are. Thank you for being part of the exceptional ministry we are doing together.

As we enter the season of Advent, the beginning of the church year, I invite you to reflect on the beginning of something in your life. It could be the newness happening at St. Matthew or some new beginning you are experiencing personally. Or it could be an ending you are going through, with an unknown new beginning around the corner. God invites us into periods of beginnings and endings and new beginnings continuously. Advent is a time to pay special attention to these transitions and invite the Holy Spirit to help and guide us along the way.

In the coming year I pray that we will be open to the newness of the Spirit's presence in our midst and seek new ways we can love and serve the world. As your newly installed lead pastor, I am hopeful for all the new movements of the Holy Spirit that we will encounter together. Thank you for the trust you have put in me and for the opportunity we have to follow God's call together!

Have a blessed Advent,

Pastor Brian



We Are Here For You A reminder that your pastor is here for you whenever you have a pastoral need. The pastor is fully vaccinated and is making in-person visits. He can also talk and pray with you over the phone, in a Zoom meeting, outside, or socially distanced indoors at church. Please call the office if you have a pastoral need.



BIBLE STUDY

Bible Study will meet at 10:00 a.m. in the conference room on the first and third Thursdays of the month: Dec. 7th and 21st. All are welcome!

CENTERING PRAYER



Centering Prayer group meets on Zoom Thursdays at 2:00 p.m. Join us for a time of silent contemplative prayer followed by a time of *lectio divina* and conversation. All are welcome!

MEN'S GROUP

Our monthly men's breakfast will be Saturday Dec. 16 at 8:30 a.m. RSVP by Thursday Dec. 14 so we know how many to prepare for. See you there!

UPLIFT THE PARSONAGE

The parsonage renovation project has been going extremely well. Here is a list of some of the updates we've completed so far:

- ◆ Mold remediation: completed
- ◆ Central AC: completed
- ◆ Fall landscaping: completed
- ◆ Guest bathroom: in progress
- ◆ Cement garage floor & new garage door: completed
- ◆ Second floor laundry room, new washer & dryer: completed
- ◆ 14X14 three-season porch: completed
- ◆ Master bathroom & closet: completed

SUNDAY SCHOOL

Sunday School will be hosting an Advent Workshop after worship on December 3rd at 10 a.m. where the children will help the congregation learn about the season of Advent.

December 10 will be our Christmas Pageant rehearsal taking place after worship (10 a.m.) in the sanctuary.

On December 17, the children's Christmas Pageant will take place during worship and there will be no Sunday School after worship.

Finally, December 24 is Christmas Eve; there will be no morning Sunday School, however there will be Christmas Eve services in the afternoon and evening where children and their families are invited to worship and celebrate Christmas! Please check the calendar online for more details soon.

Looking ahead, Sunday School will meet every Sunday in January after worship from 10:20—11:20a.m.

CONFIRMATION

Confirmation will meet on December 3 and December 17 at our regular time: 5:00 p.m.

On December 10, we will meet at 5:00 p.m for Christmas Caroling - a special email will come with more information.

There will be no confirmation class on December 24 and December 31.

POINSETTIA SEASON!

Get into the festive spirit and help us adorn our Christmas Eve services with the beauty of poinsettias! Starting today, we are opening sign-ups for those interested in purchasing these lovely plants for \$20 each. Your contributions will enhance the holiday ambiance. Don't miss this chance to participate in our holiday traditions; the sign-up deadline is December 12th, so secure your poinsettias and let the Christmas spirit bloom!



You may sign-up by using the sign-up sheet in the Gathering Space, or emailing the office. Please try to write your dedications as clearly as possible, so they can easily be typed into the bulletin. The checks can be made out to St. Matthew Lutheran Church with "Poinsettia" written in the memo line.

INTRODUCTION FROM NEW DIRECTOR OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION, RYAN HECKMAN

I am thrilled to have the opportunity to work with this vibrant and exciting community at St. Matthew as your new Director of Christian Education. I am a recent graduate of Luther Seminary where I earned my Master of Divinity and spent many loving hours studying our scriptures and our Lutheran catechism. My classmates ended up calling me the “Super Lutheran” in our cohort of graduates because I worked hard to learn the deep connection that our Lutheran tradition has with our scriptures and with the history of our global church.

As the Director of Christian Education I will be focused on the faith formation of all of you, the members of St. Matthew, with particular focus on the children and youth at St. Matthew. You may wonder, “what is faith formation?” It’s a ‘churchy’ phrase that tries to capture all the ways our church works to educate people about the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran teaching (the catechism) in ways that are accessible to all ages and abilities and prepares you all to become active participants in what Martin Luther calls “the priesthood of all believers.” Faith formation includes Sunday School, Confirmation and Youth Group (three major programs I’m charged to focused on at St. Matthew). Faith Formation also includes adult education hour, retreats, bible study, social events and service events within the wider community. It is a life-long process of learning and growing together as part of Christ’s Holy Church.

My prayer is that the Holy Spirit will work among us as we study our Holy Scriptures and our Lutheran teachings to help us form a strong faith in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, who reveals to us the grace-filled promises of forgiveness, love, and abundant and joyful life which God promises to all of us.

I look forward to getting to know the community at St. Matthew! I can’t wait to see how the Holy Spirit is leading us together into our learning and then back out into the world to serve God’s creation and all of God’s people.

In great hope and expectation,
Ryan

COUNCIL HIGHLIGHTS

- The **Uplift the Parsonage committee reported that work is nearing completion.** Pastor Brian and the committee will host a Parsonage Open House on Sunday Dec. 17 following worship that morning. Coffee and refreshments will be provided at the parsonage for coffee hour and the committee will give tours of the recently completed renovations. All are welcome!
- The **Stewardship campaign will begin this month** and once pledge cards are submitted, the finance committee will begin work on the 2024 budget.
- **Ryan Heckman began work on November 1 as our new Christian Education Director.** Be sure to welcome him to St. Matthew.
- This month the **nominating committee will begin looking for nominations for Church Council.** Elections will be held at the Annual Meeting in January. There will be a box in the Carter Gathering Space after Christmas.

CHRISTMAS CHOIR ANNOUNCEMENT

The St. Matthew Choir will be singing for the 10:30 p.m. service on Christmas Eve, and we would love to welcome additional voices! We ask that you try to attend 2 of the upcoming Wednesday rehearsals, but you are also welcome to discuss alternative arrangements with Sarah Schiener-Redenz. Our upcoming rehearsals are...

Wednesday, December 6, 7:00-7:45 p.m.

Wednesday, December 13, 7:00-7:45 p.m.

Wednesday, December 20, 7:00-7:45 p.m.

Sunday, December 24, 9:30-10:00 p.m.

Please come join us as we raise our voices to celebrate the birth of our Savior!

2024 ELCA YOUTH GATHERING - NEW ORLEANS

Mark your calendars for the ELCA Youth Gathering! It will be July 16—20, 2024 and St. Matthew is inviting all 8th-12th graders to consider going to this extraordinary event! The Youth Gathering takes place every three years and it draws more than 30,000 young Lutherans from around the country to one place to worship, dance, learn about their faith, and serve the local community. It is transformative!

Ryan Heckman, Director of Christian Education, is planning to lead a group of young people to the Youth Gathering. There will be more details in the coming weeks - including an information session. For now, we wanted to make sure you marked your calendars.

If your family is interested in the Youth Gathering, you can contact Ryan to express your interest!

A VIEW FROM THE PEW:**LIGHTS**

It's hard to believe, in the gathering gloom of winter, that, in a scant few weeks, the days will start getting longer. By Christmas, our hearts will make their annual pilgrimage to Bethlehem, while our New England minds often dwell on memories of summer. The season of preparation begins with its own light in with the Hope candle.

Our conversations will more frequently include the phrase "Remember when" followed by a cheerful anecdote from the beach, the mountains, or the back porch. We were guided by the sun, not so many months ago. Now, the night sky beckons our attention.

The Beginning, as meticulously described in the First Chapter of Genesis, is all about God's creation, with one conspicuous linguistic exception. In 1:1, God created (Hebrew *bā-rā*) the heavens and the earth. God goes on, then, to establish the light and the darkness, Heaven, the seas, and the fertile Earth. The creation story attributes the light and the dark, the sea and the sky, and the fertile soil and its products, to God's very imagination. However, the next specific act of Divine creation (Hebrew, *way-yiḇ-rā*) doesn't occur, importantly, from a literary standpoint until, verse 20 with the creation of the sea creatures.

In verses 14-19, the story takes a different direction. God's will is that the heavens include lights to separate the day from the night. In verse 16, God *makes* or *completes* (Hebrew, *ʿāśâ*), as distinguished from the action of creation of the very heavens and the earth from nothingness, the "two great lights – the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night, and the stars."

It is essential to observe that the notion in Genesis of the formation of the sun and moon is not presented here as out of nothingness. Indeed, the deliberate choice of the language of making instead of creating with reference to the two great lights of day and night provides us with a powerful insight into the purpose of the calling of the people of God.

The origin story extends a critical rhetorical device to those telling and retelling the tale over millennia. God's formation, fashioning, and making of the moon and sun was not an invention of these heavenly bodies. Rather, the author of Genesis wants us to know that our God is clearly separate from the old Egyptian texts identifying the sun and moon by their pagan personifications, Ra and Thoth.

In other words, the lights in the sky have been dedicated to God's purposes.

Humans have no dominion over the lights in the sky. Rather, these lights, verse 18 tells us, "rule over the day and over the night." We humans are under their authority. Perhaps that slips our collective consciousness as the days begin to lengthen again and we slowly, slowly, recover our sense of temporal prerogative.

The full moon provides its luminescent reassurance the day after Christmas this year. We'll gather to tell the stories, old and new, of that time last summer, or a long ago summer, when we thought, for a moment, that the heavenly lights were our servants – over evening walks, cookouts, and evenings with a book in a lawn chair –and that they worked to our purposes. And then we'll pause to tacitly admit that we've always known it's just the other way around.

Get ready.

— Dan Smolnik

Dan Smolnik is a member of Spring Glen Church in Hamden, CT.

ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS AT ST. MATTHEW

December 3, First Sunday of Advent

9:00 a.m. Holy Communion in the Sanctuary

10:20 a.m. Intergenerational Advent Workshop

December 10, Second Sunday of Advent

9:00 a.m. Holy Communion in the Sanctuary

10:20 a.m. Sunday School & Adult Forum

December 17, Third Sunday of Advent

9:00 a.m. Christmas Pageant Service in the Sanctuary

10:20 a.m. Parsonage Open House

December 24, Fourth Sunday of Advent & Christmas Eve

9:00 a.m. Holy Communion in the Sanctuary

4:30 p.m. Family Christmas Eve Service

Children's Message and Festive Songs of the Season

7:30 p.m. Christmas Eve Service

Festive Music of the Season

10:30 p.m. Christmas Eve Service with Choir

Festive Music of the Season

December 31

9:00 a.m. Lessons & Carols

With Holy Communion

*"Look there at the star! I, among the least,
Will arise and take A journey to the East.*

But what shall I bring

As a present for the King?

What shall I bring to the Manger?

I will bring my heart And give my heart to Him.

I will bring my heart. To the Manger."

—Langston Hughes, from "Shepherd's song at Christmas"



ST. MATTHEW MISSION STATEMENT

St. Matthew Lutheran Church is a worshipping community called to proclaim God's love for all and to grow spiritually together. Challenged by Jesus' example, we strive to connect people of all ages, abilities, and needs, and to nurture them to be disciples of Christ. Guided by the Holy Spirit, we reach out to the wider community and welcome our neighbors to a life of worship, preaching, teaching, Christian care, service, and spiritual growth.

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
 <h1>December 2023</h1>					1	2
3 FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT 9:00 Sanctuary Communion Service 10:20 Intergenerational Advent Workshop 5:00 Confirmation	4	5 7:00 Finance & Church Council Joint Meeting	6 9:30 WW Meeting 5:15 WW Meeting 7:00 Overeater's Anonymous 7:00 Choir Rehearsal	7 10:00 Bible Study 2:00 Centering Prayer	8	9
10 SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT 9:00 Sanctuary Communion Service 10:20 Sunday School & Adult Forum 5:00 Confirmation Caroling	11 7:00 Finance Committee	12 7:00 Church Council	13 9:30 WW Meeting 5:15 WW Meeting 7:00 Overeater's Anonymous 7:00 Choir Rehearsal	14 VOICE Deadline 2:00 Centering Prayer	15	16 8:30 Men's Breakfast
17 THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT 9:00 Christmas Pageant Service 10:20 Parsonage Open House 5:00 Confirmation	18	19	20 9:30 WW Meeting 5:15 WW Meeting 7:00 Overeater's Anonymous	21 10:00 Bible Study 2:00 Centering Prayer	22	23
24 FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT: CHRISTMAS EVE. 9:00 Sanctuary Communion Service 4:30 Family Christmas Eve Service 7:30 Christmas Eve Service 10:30 Christmas Eve Service with Choir	25 CHRISTMAS DAY. OFFICE CLOSED	26 OFFICE CLOSED	27 OFFICE CLOSED 9:30 WW Meeting 5:15 WW Meeting 7:00 Overeater's Anonymous 7:00 Choir Rehearsal	28 OFFICE CLOSED 2:00 Centering Prayer	29	30
31 NEW YEAR'S EVE 9:00 Lessons & Carols w/ Holy Communion 10:30 Sunday School & Adult Forum						

December 2023

SAINT MATTHEW LUTHERAN CHURCH
 224 Lovely Street, Avon, Connecticut 06001-4018

