



SUNDAY WORSHIP SCHEDULE

December 5 Second Sunday of Advent

8:30 a.m. Sanctuary Communion Service
9:45 a.m. Adult Forum
11 a.m. Sanctuary Communion Service

December 12 Third Sunday of Advent

8:30 a.m. Sanctuary Communion Service
9:45 a.m. Adult Forum
11 a.m. Family Worship in the Sanctuary:
"DIY" Intergenerational Christmas Pageant

December 19 Fourth Sunday of Advent

8:30 a.m. Sanctuary Communion Service
9:45 a.m. Adult Forum
11 a.m. Sanctuary Communion Service

December 24 Christmas Eve

4:30 p.m. Family Service in the Sanctuary
7:30 p.m. Candlelight Communion Service
10:30 p.m. Candlelight Communion Service

December 26 First Sunday of Christmas

10:00 a.m. Sanctuary Communion Service

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Jason Lindquist, President	Kevin Reichler
Fred Fenn, Vice President	George Reider
Lanelle Gallo, Secretary	George Spoering
Debbie Steinberg, Asst. Treasurer	Dan Tuve
Bette McIntire	Ben Wright
Jack Pietrick	Pastor Julie Reuning-Scherer
Bill Parchen	Pastor Brian Rajcok

STAFF:

Julie Reuning-Scherer, Lead Pastor
Brian Rajcok, Associate Pastor
Richard Silbereis, Director of Music
Diane Oates, Church Administrator
Roy Zurell, Sexton
Steven Smolnik, Publisher

A LETTER FROM THE PASTOR

We are entering into Advent, the season of preparation for Christmas. As we prepare to enter this holy time, it is good to reflect on our blessings and the greatest gift of all: Jesus Christ born for us. It is also important to remember all those caught in the midst of chaos and violence this holiday season. Let us remember that in the early days of Jesus' life Herod wanted to kill the newborn king. But God warned Joseph in a dream to flee with Mary and Jesus to Egypt to escape the slaughter of the innocents about to occur in Bethlehem. As a helpless child, Jesus had to flee for his life to find refuge in a foreign land.

There are many in our time who, like Jesus, need to flee to a foreign land to save their lives and the lives of their children. This year we have been reminded of the need to help our international brothers and sisters as millions have fled Afghanistan. There continue to be refugees from the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and Central America who long for the safety and freedom we so often take for granted. It is our calling as disciples of Jesus to help our neighbors in need and to share the love of God with all people. We can never forget the Bible's clear and consistent call to care for foreigners and refugees and the fact that our Lord himself was a refugee who needed to flee violence as a child.

In the coming months we will be helping to resettle an Afghan refugee family, working with Valley Community Baptist Church in Avon to form a co-sponsorship team. We are working with IRIS (Integrated Refugee and Immigrant Services) in New Haven, an organization which will train our co-sponsorship team to handle all the needs a family has as they transition to life in the United States. Contact the church office if you feel called to participate as a member of the co-sponsorship team. Donations of time or money are most appreciated. It is an important way we can bear good fruit in the world, as we dig deep, reach out, and change lives in Christ's name. Thank you for your commitment to loving and serving our neighbors in need.

Merry Christmas and God bless you,

Pastor Brian



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.

We Are Here For You A reminder that your pastors are here for you whenever you have a pastoral need. The pastors are fully vaccinated and are making in-person visits. We 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.

FAMILY WORSHIP: CHRISTMAS PAGEANT On Sunday December 12th at 11:00 a.m. worship, we will have a “DIY” Do It Yourself intergenerational Christmas pageant! It will be simple with no rehearsal necessary. Adults and children of all ages are welcome to show up that morning, grab a script and costume, and read your part during service!

MEN’S GROUP The men’s group will meet Saturday December 11th at 8:30 a.m. for breakfast in the Hall of the Evangelists. We are continuing to read Richard Rohr’s *On the Threshold of Transformation* book of daily devotions.



BIBLE STUDY

Bible Study will meet on Thursday December 2nd and Thursday December 16th at 10:00 a.m. in the Hall of the Evangelists. You can also join us virtually via Zoom. All are welcome!

CENTERING PRAYER Centering prayer group meets every Tuesday at 6:00 p.m. and every Thursday at 2:00 p.m. on Zoom. We are currently reading *Invitation to Love* by Thomas Keating. Contact Pastor Brian or the church office and we’ll send you the Zoom link and get you a book! We will not meet the last week of December.



STEWARDSHIP Thank you to all who have turned in an intention of giving card for 2022. Your generosity allows the ministry of St. Matthew to bear fruit in the world and continue our mission of digging deep, reaching out, and changing lives in Christ’s name. If you have yet to turn in your pledge, please do so by December 15th, as it helps immensely in planning our budget for next year. Making a financial commitment to a congregation or any charitable organization is an important spiritual practice, and we thank you for your support of the ministry of our family of faith.



ADULT FORUM

The books of the bible the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles is a story in two parts by the same author. Join us as we examine the narrative arc of this series from Jesus’ birth to the founding of the church to the good news of Jesus spreading throughout the world. We will use brief videos from the Bible Project to introduce the themes for our exploration.

November 21 The Birth of Jesus, Luke 1-2	January 2 Pentecost, Acts 1-7
November 28 The Baptism of Jesus, Luke 3-9	January 9 The Apostle Paul, Acts 8-10
December 5 The Prodigal Son, Luke 9-19	January 16 Paul’s Missionary Journeys, Acts 13-20
December 12 The Crucifixion of Jesus, Luke 19-23	January 23 No Class
December 19 The Resurrection of Jesus, Luke 24	January 30 Bound for Rome, Acts 21-28

ORDER CHRISTMAS POINSETTIAS!

Poinsettias will grace the sanctuary this Christmas season. If you would like to purchase one or more, please email or call Diane at the office with your order by **Monday, December 13**.

You may dedicate them in memory of loved ones, in honor of a celebration, in thanksgiving, or simply for the glory of God! Cost is \$18 each, and can be paid by check to SMLC with "poinsettias" noted in the memo. Checks may be placed in the offering plate or mailed to the church. You may take them home after worship on January 2, 2022.



2022 OFFERING ENVELOPES

It’s that time of year again! If you wish to continue to use offering envelopes in 2022, please respond to this email or call the office at (860) 673-3301 and let Diane know if you’d like us to reserve a set for you. **Currently, automatic giving through Vanco is available. Just reach out to the office to sign up. Coming in 2022: eGiving options through our website and a mobile App!**



COUNCIL UPDATE We are all feeling encouraged with the growth and expansion of St. Matthew, however, the reopening is not without a lot of effort. The Reopening Task Force has given us new guidelines for this period of Covid, to which the council approved.

We have also discussed new ventures such as details surrounding the development of a new playground, creating a team at St. Matthew to co-sponsor with Valley Baptist to support resettlement of refugee families, and revisiting the strategic plan to expand our work in communications and marketing.

NOMINATIONS FOR CONGREGATIONAL COUNCIL– DUE JANUARY 8

The Congregation Council is accepting nominations for 2022! Council members are elected spiritual leaders of the congregation, who promote the mission of the congregation and provide financial and organizational oversight.

Please give prayerful consideration as to who you think would make a good Congregation Council member and submit their names for consideration. Our Nominating Committee will follow up with all nominees in January to ascertain who is willing to serve. The official vote will occur at our Annual Meeting which is scheduled for Sunday, January 30th.

Nominations can be submitted in person in the receptacle in the Gathering Space, or remotely by calling the church office at (860) 673-3301 or emailing office@stmatthewavon.org. A special thank you goes to Debbie Steinberg as she completes six years on Council as a member, and for her extraordinary service as Treasurer and Assistant Treasurer spanning two decades!

Congregation Member responsibilities:

- a. Actively communicate with members of the Congregation to both convey information about the direction of the church and to listen to people's feedback on all aspects of our community life at SMLC.
- b. Regular attendance at monthly Council meetings.
- c. Participate in one annual Saturday morning retreat per year.
- d. To serve as Council Liaison to one standing Church Committee, to be assigned annually

ADVENT DEVOTIONS

Pastor Bill Carter has written an Advent devotional called "*But Mary Kept All These Things*" It's available at Barnes & Noble [here](#) or at Amazon [here](#).

We will also have Advent devotions from theologian Henri Nouwen available for pickup in the narthex.



GOOD THINGS:

We have continued to intentionally reopen St Matthew ministries in November, including:

- ✦ 15 confirmation students meet weekly, masked, in the Hall of the Evangelists.
- ✦ Mutual Ministry re-engaged as a committee, and is conducting annual reviews for each staff member. Family Worship services moved inside, and enjoyed both packing gift boxes for Operation Christmas Child and making Christmas cards for homebound members.
- ✦ 600 people attended the Christmas Cottage craft fair over three days the Hall of the Evangelists.
- ✦ The Tido Holtkamp Jazz Trio led worship on All Saints' Day.
- ✦ 6 new members joined our fellowship. Please welcome Greg Boyd, Naseema Masood, and Mike, Alexa, Kinsley and Sloan Zammett!
- ✦ The committee formed to plan a new playground has been meeting weekly.
- ✦ Prepaid pledges and lower expenses in all categories, with the exception of staff costs, mean that we have not needed to take endowment or restricted funds to balance our budget so far this year. We expect greater expenditures as the church reopens. Thank you for your continued generosity!

God is good. All the time!

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	
December 2021 Notes:				1 7:00 Mutual Ministry	2 10:00 Bible Study 2:00 Centering Prayer	3	4 9:00 Yoga + Sharing Circle
5 Second Sunday of Advent 8:30 Sanctuary Communion Service 9:45 Adult Forum 11:00 Sanctuary Communion Service	6 1:00 Staff Meeting 7:00 Finance 7:00 Confirmation	7 6:00 Centering Prayer 7:00 Church Council	8	9 2:00 Centering Prayer	10	11 8:30 Men's Breakfast 1:00 Valley Ballet Performances	
12 Third Sunday of Advent 8:30 Sanctuary Communion Service 9:45 Adult Forum 11:00 Family Worship in the Sanctuary: Christmas Pageant	13 7:00 Confirmation	14 10:30 Foley Baker/ organ Tuning 1:00 Staff Meeting 6:00 Centering Prayer	15 VOICE DEADLINE	16 10:00 Bible Study 2:00 Centering Prayer	17	18 9:00 Yoga + Sharing Circle	
19 Fourth Sunday of Advent 8:30 Sanctuary Communion Service 9:45 Adult Forum 11:00 Sanctuary Communion Service	20 1:00 Staff Meeting	21 6:00 Centering Prayer	22	23 2:00 Centering Prayer	24 Christmas Eve-Office closed 4:30 Family Service in the Sanctuary 7:30 & 10:30 Candlelight Communion Service	25 Christmas Day No services	
26 10:00 Sanctuary Communion Service	27 Office Closed	28 6:00 Centering Prayer	29	30 2:00 Centering Prayer	31 New Year's Eve		

December 2021

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



REOPENING TASK FORCE UPDATE

The Reopening Task Force (RTF) is pleased to present this update as follow-up to the RTF report in the November VOICE. Please see the November VOICE RTF report for further context.

The RTF has continued to monitor COVID infection data in Connecticut over this past month, with ongoing focus on the four towns (Avon, Canton, Farmington, Simsbury) in which the majority of our St. Matthew family resides. The RTF has continued to evaluate these data in context of:

- ELCA theological practices
- Physical safety for all who wish to attend St. Matthew services, small group meetings, and related activities in-person.

Based on the Church Council discussion during its November 16th meeting, the following protocol is effective Sunday December 5th relative to in-person Sunday services in the Sanctuary:

- **Masks continue to be required upon entering and exiting the building.**
- **All individuals attending Sunday services in the Sanctuary are required to wear masks as you enter the Sanctuary and find your seat in the pew. Mask wearing is required again at the close of the service, as you exit the Sanctuary.**
- **For those individuals currently vaccinated:**
 - **Continued mask wearing throughout the service is highly recommended.**
 - **If you choose to, you may remove your mask while you are in the pew.**
- **For those individuals not currently vaccinated:**
 - **Mask wearing throughout the service continues to be required.**

The seating plan in the Sanctuary will continue as presently configured, to preserve social distancing during the services.

Live stream of the 8.30 a.m. services will also continue, for those who prefer to worship via on-line technology.

This collective approach is designed to further enhance our Lutheran theological practices in relation to safe public health measures in the Sanctuary.

- As previously reported throughout this year, high quality air filtration and ventilation as well as comprehensive cleaning protocols have continued to protect our St. Matthew congregation, including those most vulnerable to COVID infection, in the Sanctuary and throughout the rest of the building. The ever-increasing access to and utilization of vaccinations by members of the congregations is quite encouraging too.
- As noted above, live-streaming of the 8.30 a.m. Sunday services will continue as a worship option as well.

As always, each of us continues to have an individual choice to attend Sunday services either in-person or via on-line.

The RTF also notes that these in-person plans will continue to evolve, based on COVID data in Connecticut and in the Farmington Valley. There is the possibility that, in the coming weeks or months, the RTF may need to recommend to Church Council a return to required mask wearing for all in-person worshippers in the Sanctuary if COVID conditions become more severe in our region.

We continue to appreciate everyone's patience and support as we all navigate these challenging times. As always, the RTF is pleased to address any questions or concerns.



ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS AT ST. MATTHEW

Lighting of the Advent Wreath and Songs of the Season at all services

November 28, First Sunday of Advent

8:30 a.m. Holy Communion in the Sanctuary

11:00 a.m. Family Service in the Hall of the Evangelists

Crafting Christmas cards for our homebound members

December 5, Second Sunday of Advent

8:30 a.m. & 11:00 a.m. Holy Communion in the Sanctuary

December 12, Third Sunday of Advent

8:30 a.m. Holy Communion in the Sanctuary

11:00 a.m. Family Service in the Sanctuary

"DIY" Intergenerational Christmas Pageant

December 19, Fourth Sunday of Advent

8:30 a.m. & 11:00 a.m. Holy Communion in the Sanctuary

December 24, Christmas Eve

4:30 p.m. Family Service in the Sanctuary

Children's Sermon and Festive Songs of the Season

7:30 p.m. Candlelight Communion Service

10:30 p.m. Candlelight Communion Service

Festive Music of the Season

Pre-registration is strongly encouraged for planning.

December 26, First Sunday of Christmas

10:00 a.m. Holy Communion in the Sanctuary

There is only one service this morning.

January 2, Second Sunday of Christmas

8:30 a.m. & 11:00 a.m. Holy Communion in the Sanctuary

January 9, Feast of the Baptism of our Lord

8:30 a.m. Holy Communion in the Sanctuary

11:00 a.m. Family Service in the Hall of the Evangelists

Baptism Storytelling



*"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"