



EST. 1639

# First Church of Rowley

*...A voice of hope serving the community*

## DECEMBER STEEPLE NOTES

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(978) 948 3993  
175 MAIN ST ROWLEY MA 01969  
FIRSTCHURCHROWLEY@GMAIL.COM



# PASTORS CORNER

REV. JEFF MACDONALD

## HABITS OF THE HEART GET FORMED IN ADVENT

It's time to prepare for the holidays! What does that mean at your house? Maybe you're crawling through the attic to dig out decorations... or flipping through old cookbooks for time-honored recipes... or testing the time-honored air mattress to see if it'll still hold Uncle Bob.

There's so much to do that if we don't savor the preparation part, we might miss what the season has to offer! Aren't some of the best memories made while fixing meals, baking goodies or hanging lights while singing along to Bing Crosby?

It's true for our spiritual lives as well. On Sunday Nov. 30, we begin the four-week journey of Advent. It's a holy season of preparation for the coming of Christ. In Advent, we recover a shared path, one trodden by ancestors who knew the way.

By design, each week of Advent reinforces a disposition of the heart. We could call them habits. They're ingrained ways of feeling, thinking, believing and responding so that God's grace is perceived, channeled, appreciated and manifest.

Such habits lead to what we call, "Christian virtues." As we weave them through rituals and practice, they clothe our souls and better our community for Christmas and all the years ahead.

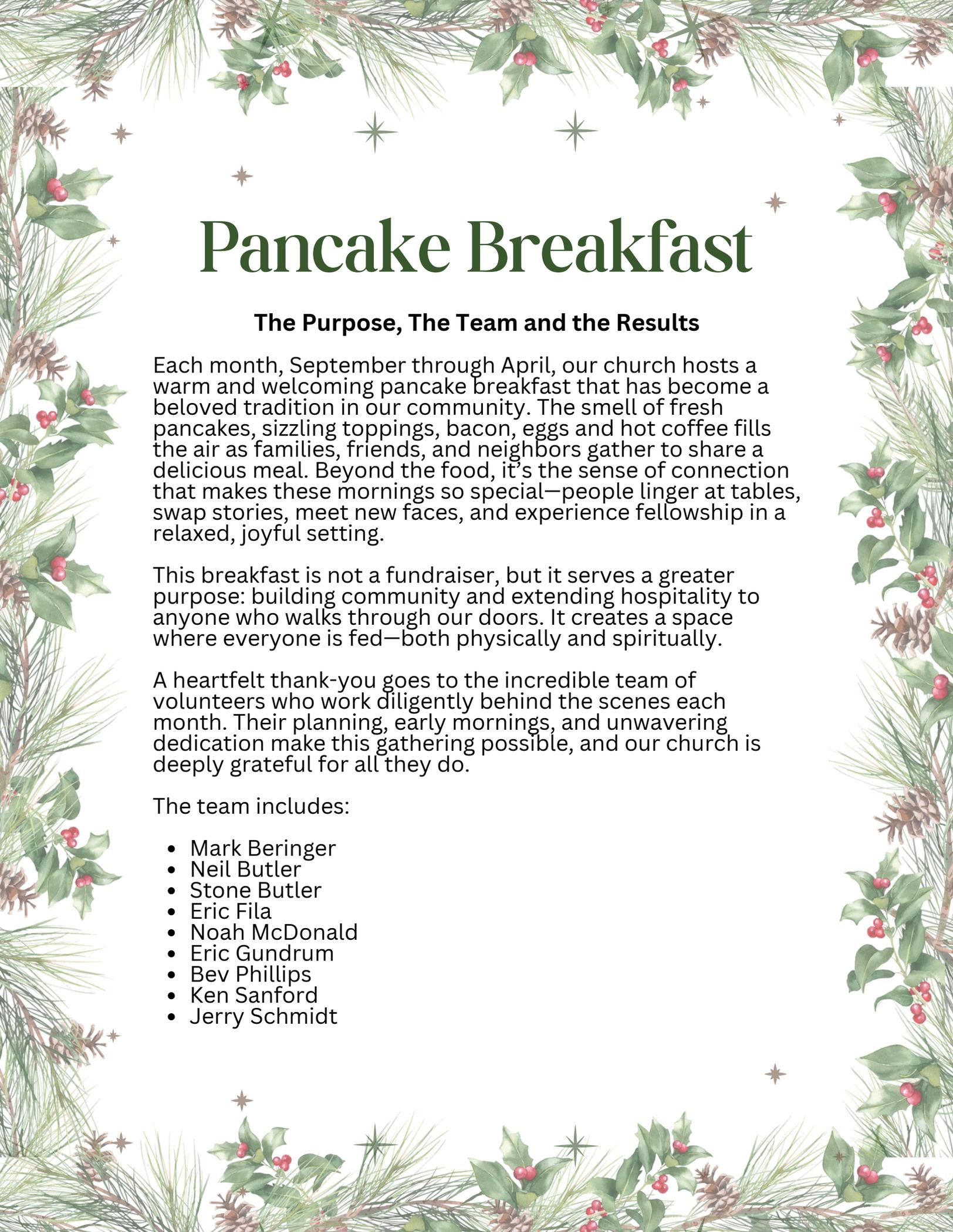
I hope you can join us Sundays at 9:30 AM as we sing hymns, light Advent candles and train our hearts. The sequence goes like this:

Nov. 30: The Hope Habit  
Dec. 7: The Peace Habit  
Dec. 14: The Joy Habit  
Dec. 21: The Love Habit  
Dec. 24, 7:00 PM: The Christ Habit

Enjoy the blessings of Advent, friends. May our shared journey lead to a higher place.

Rev. Jeff





# Pancake Breakfast

## The Purpose, The Team and the Results

Each month, September through April, our church hosts a warm and welcoming pancake breakfast that has become a beloved tradition in our community. The smell of fresh pancakes, sizzling toppings, bacon, eggs and hot coffee fills the air as families, friends, and neighbors gather to share a delicious meal. Beyond the food, it's the sense of connection that makes these mornings so special—people linger at tables, swap stories, meet new faces, and experience fellowship in a relaxed, joyful setting.

This breakfast is not a fundraiser, but it serves a greater purpose: building community and extending hospitality to anyone who walks through our doors. It creates a space where everyone is fed—both physically and spiritually.

A heartfelt thank-you goes to the incredible team of volunteers who work diligently behind the scenes each month. Their planning, early mornings, and unwavering dedication make this gathering possible, and our church is deeply grateful for all they do.

The team includes:

- Mark Beringer
- Neil Butler
- Stone Butler
- Eric Fila
- Noah McDonald
- Eric Gundrum
- Bev Phillips
- Ken Sanford
- Jerry Schmidt



***First Congregational Church, U.C.C.  
Rowley, Massachusetts***

***Notice of Joint Congregational/Cabinet Meeting***

November 15, 2025

To The Members of the First Congregational Church, U.C.C.  
Rowley, Massachusetts

There will be a Joint Congregational/Cabinet Meeting of the church membership, called by the clerk, on Monday, December 8, 2025 at 6:30 p.m.

The purpose of this meeting is to hear and act on the following:

1. To hear and act on a proposal from the Social Enterprise Task Force
2. To hear and act on a proposal from the Governance Task Force
3. To hear a report from the Moderator/Cabinet
4. Any Other Business that May Properly Come Before the Joint Meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

*David E. Irving*

David E. Irving, Clerk



# Megan In Ukraine



Fall 2025

Hello friends!

I am alive and well and very apologetic for the amount of time I have allowed to slip by without an update. I actually wrote one before school started and somehow forgot to send it out. But alas, here we are towards the end of the year. I ask my students who keeps coming in and pushing the clock forward. They reply "It's not us, it's God!" I find it difficult to keep updating because I so long to give an accurate picture of what's going on here- the holding of the unimaginably hard and the insanely beautiful seems impossible to put into words. The wonderful hearts of people, the goodness of God and of life contrasted by the daily attacks of the enemy are so stark.

Last school year ended and I had a summer including an amazing family camp here in Ukraine and then a month in the States during which I able to see some of you which was such a blessing. The beginning of this school year went well and the staff had a great retreat in preparation. My class this year is so very sweet and through the challenges I am grateful everyday for these precious hearts I get the gift of knowing and growing with. They teach me so very much every day. I have 15 second graders and 15 first graders this year. The biggest number of students yet. I was worried about the one new second grader we received 2 weeks into the year, mostly because I know how tight knit this group of students is as most of them have been here since kindergarten and have such a unique bond. They however have blown me away with how welcoming and encouraging they have been to the new boy who was just adopted and speaks no English. Since the first day they welcomed him in and cheer for him and translate for him. There are some big personalities in this class but with big hearts for Jesus and others. Their love for learning, their servant hearts, their curiosity and their prayers both surprise and melt me.

Tears have shown up in the classroom a few times. One of these times, we were doing our morning work when the air raid went off and we grabbed our things and went down into the basement. We continued our lesson alongside another class in a tiny room. We were learning about the long vowel 'y' sound and our question of the day was "Why \_\_\_?" They needed to finish the question. Normally I have them think and each answer and I write their ideas on the board and they copy it down. But since we were in the basement I gave a few examples and let them write their ideas before sharing. I encouraged them to be creative and curious and write whatever questions they had. When it was time to share, almost all of them asked "Why is there war?" I choked back tears as no second grader should have this question. Of course it was asked right alongside typical second grade questions like "Why cant frogs fly?" The fact that they were earnestly asking this as we were in in the basement, with ballistic missiles flying over us trying to wipe us off the earth is mindblowing.

Another trip to the basement began right as I was passing out popcorn for the celebration they earned. I had passed out the popcorn to three people when, I took a deep breath when the siren went off and told them to get their things and file down to the basement. I was angry. The kids didnt complain but simply asked if we would ever get our party. I reassured them we would continue and sure enough we were able to have our celebration at lunchtime. I found myself frustrated at the timing and just another thing taken away from the kids, but also learning from them to not complain. .

I am always shocked at the rate at which these kids learn. Ive been in awe recently at their reading skills and the sheer joy it is to get to be the one to teach them to read. What a JOY!



Recently there have been some major attacks. My apartment has shaken badly, windows rattling, things falling from cupboards, and feeling the shock. One family from the school had their windows blown out but thankfully they were in the hallway and were not injured. These major attacks have been strategically aimed at power sources and so for the past few weeks we have had daily power outages. They have put the city into zones and most days we have 8-10 hours without it, and we get the next days schedule at around midnight. Many places have generators, and everyone just keeps going. Its already very normal to have lights go out while shopping or doing everyday things. I have tripped on quite a few generator wires and when the street lights go out-its so very dark. They say these long blackouts will last all winter. The resilience is incredible but planning and life get tricky in these times.

One morning after a 10 hour attack on Kyiv, students trickled in, it had been a an extremely loud night and the air raid didn't finish until about 8:30 which is when students started coming to school. Not many staff nor students got much sleep, since only a few kids were there when I arrived, we played UNO together. The kids were happy and barely showed signs of what just took place. A bit later in the day the first graders began raising their hands and sharing their experiences of the night before. Holding back tears again as comments came " I stayed up all night and heard every explosion" "My bed was shaking and we were sleeping in the hallway" "I didn't hear anything and slept the whole night".I think I was more sad than angry but anger was there too as no six year old should have to go through this.

October came with some cool opportunities, one of which was I was able to run the Kyiv Marathon. This was such an honor, and a celebration. So much training has happened through blackouts and air raids. And yet every step the Lord was with me. Running with Him has both relieved much and caused much anxiety. But what a gift to have working legs and be able to run for his glory. During the marathon itself, we had two air raids, but were able to keep going. What a gift it was to run alongside those who have sacrificed so much. I ran next to to a firefighter in full gear and also some who have returned from fighting and have prostetic legs- What inspirations! My verse for this race was from Psalm 48 "This God is our God, He will be our guide even to the end."

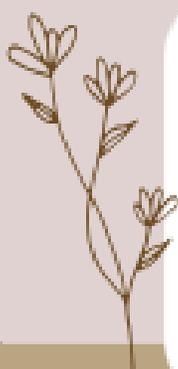
The last few months I have dealt with various health issues and have been to many doctors and doing tests. Please pray that these issues would be resolved and I would be able to be back to myself, as these problems have been cause for many setbacks physically and mentally.

I have been able to see my Ukrainian "brother" a few times since the summer as he was in a hospital nearby and in the fall as again he was back in this hospital. They keep sending him back to the frontlines even though he is in critical condition. They don't have enough men to fight so they continually send those who can not fight to go back. He was able to find the medicine he needs to begin recovery. I have been able to help him with some of the support from you all. Thank you! And after 8 major injuries and 4 years, he just recently delivered the news that they are finally about to let him get treatment and be done on the frontlines for now. Praise God- a HUGE answer to prayer.

Life is hard here. I am learning that I am not as invincible as I thought. I need to stop trying to be in control. God is teaching me that I need to stop trying to be him, I am human and it is okay ro be affected by things. Giving up is not the same as giving it up to him, I can not tell you how many times in the last months I have felt like giving up. And yet he isnt giving up on us and he wants us to give it all up to him. It is not easy trusting God but it is good. He is good amidst all the pain and chaos. He is bigger and stronger than the enemy. I pray that we would all come to realize this each day. May he be our sole source of strength and may the enemy flee. Grateful for you all and for following along on this journey.

**Prayer Requests:**

- The hearts and minds of my students and their families as well as their protection
- An end to this war
- That Petro would recieve the treatment he needs and would be able to be fully healed as well as his documents to be sorted to be able to be released
- For my health issues to be resolved
- For comfort and hope to those suffering, without electricity and without homes, and who have lost loved ones



*Zorana  
Mera*



Our incredible team at the start of the year

First Bell- My dear Second Graders!



Running with some heros!



Silliness on Wacky Tacky Day



"Miss Megan, look we make a Ukrainian flag!"



Our Uno game the morning after an all night attack.



Lunchtime in the basement



These girls opened up a little restaurant for me at recess



# Happy Birthday

12/14 Pam Sanford

12/16 Elizabeth "Liz" Butler

12/21 Karen Merry

12/25 Rhonda Ward

12/30 Margaret Niska

12/30 Matthew Blouin





**DECEMBER 16<sup>TH</sup>**

**ELIZABETH (SOMERS) & BRADLEY REEP**

# Many Hands make light work

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## After Church Fellowship Assignments



January – Compassionate Care Network

February – Thrift Shop

March - Diaconate

April – Missions

May – Music Committee and Inspirational Singers

June – Finance/Trustees

July – Thrift Shop

August - None

September – Missions

October – Finance/Trustees

November - Diaconate

December – Music Committee and Inspirational Singers.

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## Steeple Notes Entry Schedule

January -Compassionate Care Network

February - Missions

March - Deacons (including Christian Ed.)

April - Finance/Trustees

May - Music Committee

June - The Thrift Shop

July - Pastoral Relations Committee

August - Getting to Know Us

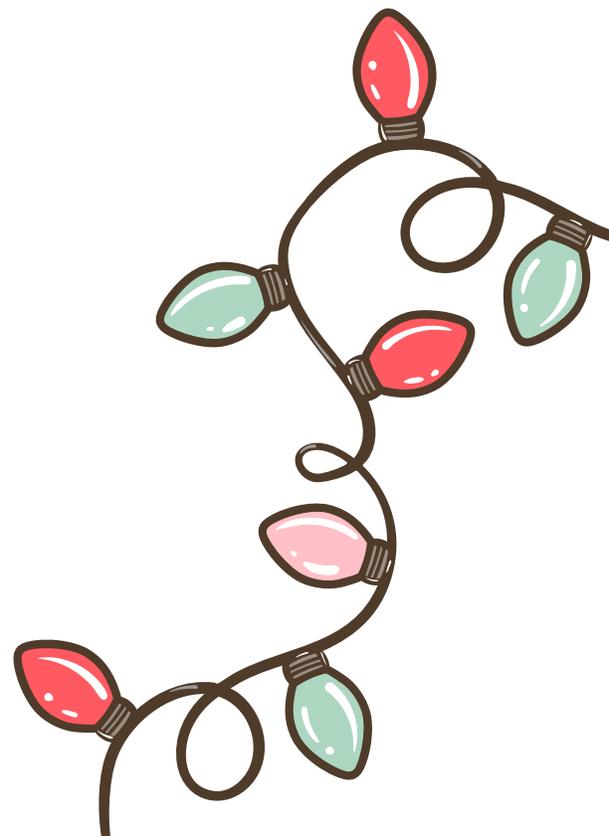
September - Golf Tournament & Flower Committee

October - Old Tyme Country Fair

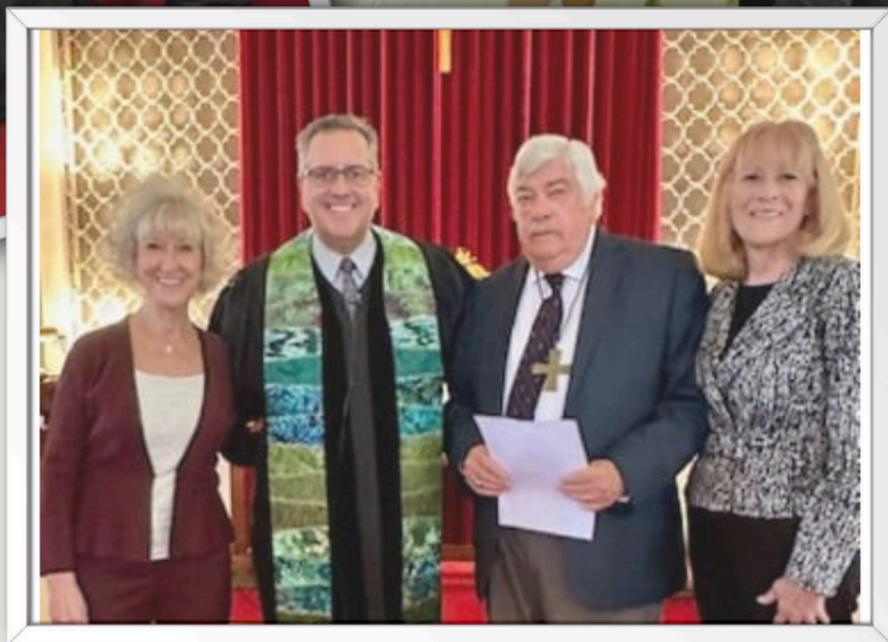
November - Community Dinner Team

December - Pancake Breakfast Team

*Welcoming additional entries as needed!*



Rev. Jeff's 25<sup>th</sup>  
Anniversary of  
Ordination





# Events

AT A GLANCE

**SUN** LAST SUNDAY MONTHLY - DEATH CAFE

**WED** EVERY WEEK - GETTING TO KNOW YOU (

**8TH** CONGREGATIONAL/CABINET MEETING

**13TH** PANCAKE BREAKFAST

**24TH** BLUE CHRISTMAS SERVICE

**24TH** CHRISTMAS EVE CANDLELIGHT SERVICE

**30TH** COMMUNITY CAFE





# PANCAKE BREAKFAST



SATURDAY : DEC 13 : 8-9:30 AM



\$10 PER PERSON  
CHILDREN UNDER 12 EAT FREE



FIRST CHURCH OF ROWLEY  
175 MAIN STREET  
ROWLEY MA 01969





# Blue Christmas Service

**When Christmas Is Hard:  
Comfort for Heavy Hearts**

**Sunday, December 21 • 7:00 p.m.**

**Hosted by:** The Missions Committee at  
First Church Rowley & Community Conversations

This reflective Christmastime service is for anyone carrying grief, illness, caregiving stress, loneliness, or the weight of the holidays. Inspired by Jesus' invitation to the weary, it offers a safe space to pause, breathe, and find a moment of rest.

The service includes Christmas songs, scripture, personal stories of grief and hope, and a candlelight moment where each person can acknowledge whatever they are holding—whether a memory, a prayer, or a burden of the heart.

All are welcome, especially those seeking comfort and connection this Christmas season.

**Matthew 11:28**

*28 Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened,  
and I will give you rest*

**Service Location**

First Church Rowley  
175 Main Street, Rowley, MA

**Info:** [angie@illstandbyyou.net](mailto:angie@illstandbyyou.net)  
**FB & IG** @CommConvosDeathCafe





Please join us for

# *Christmas Eve*

A CANDLELIGHT SERVICE  
OF LESSONS AND CAROLS

Wednesday

\* December 24<sup>th</sup> 2025 \*

7:00 PM



First Congregational  
Church of Rowley  
175 Main Street  
Rowley MA 01969



**FIRST CHURCH OF ROWLEY**



*Community Cafe*

**TUESDAY DECEMBER 30TH**

**9:00 AM - 10:30 AM**

175 MAIN ST  
ROWLEY MA 01969





# GETTING TO KNOW US

MEETING  
WEDNESDAY MORNINGS  
10:00 AM - 12:00 PM  
CORINTHIAN ROOM

*ALL ARE WELCOME*

175 Main Street  
Rowley MA 01969



**ROWLEY'S**

**DEATH**



**CAFE**

**COMMUNITY  
CONVERSATIONS**

*Death, Grief, Living & Loving  
Cake too!*

Location:

First Congregational Church of Rowley  
175 Main Street, Rowley, MA

**NOV 30, DEC 28, JAN 25, FEB 22  
LAST SUNDAY OF EVERY MONTH  
5-6:30PM**

Info: [Angie@IllStandByYou.Net](mailto:Angie@IllStandByYou.Net)  
FB& IG: @CommConvosDeathCafe

