

**First Congregational Christian
UNITED CHURCH of CHRIST**

January 2025



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From the Pastor – January 2025

Ambrose Bierce, in his (in)famous literary classic, *The Devil's Dictionary* (1906), defines a year as “a period of three hundred and sixty-five consecutive disappointments.” We seem to be off to that kind of start.

Wars have already rendered parts of the earth, including Jesus's birthplace, to be nothing short of apocalyptic landscapes. In recent days we've seen violence in New Orleans and Las Vegas. Closer to home, a news story broke on New Year's Day of the FBI's largest ever homemade bomb seizure.

An Isle of Wight resident had prepared more than 150 explosive devices in his home. A confidential source told investigators that the man had spouted right-wing conspiracy theories, expressed support for political assassinations of Democratic officials, and was fortifying his home.

Disappointed yet? We're not even to January 20th yet!

As a pastor I feel that our Advent and Christmas discussions have been important for reframing the “shaking out” of our world into a cosmic battle between good and evil. Things that were concealed are now being revealed. People's real commitments are becoming clearer. Oppressive forces are on the move and people's well-being – in many cases their very lives – are at stake.

As we roll up our metaphorical sleeves and gird our proverbial loins for the work of resistance that continues and awaits us, I feel caught by a still small voice that is quieter than the din of headlines and news notifications, and yet far more arresting than all their clamor. It says, “heal”.

I don't believe that this message exempts me from the work of Gospel resistance, but it does remind me that in the work of resistance there is a temptation to self-righteousness that the work of healing itself resists. When that healing is directed to the self, it reminds us of our humility and to have compassion for our “enemies” as we have for ourselves. When that healing is directed toward others we remember why the work of resistance is important and that it is not only about ourselves.

As it happens, MLK Day falls on the same day as the presidential inauguration. Dr. King's life reminds us of how to do what we find so difficult to do today: how to love one's enemies and retain their humanity while not internalizing their monstrosity; how to hold friends account when they recoil at the boldness of resistance work; and how to hold together the work of healing and the work of resistance for the good of the world.

I'm also reminded that even though there is plenty of ill to obsess over (Matthew 6:34), that God is also on the move and we are promised that the gates of hell will not prevail against God's people. That is no disappointment!

JANUARY WORSHIP CALENDAR
Sundays at 11:00 AM

Services are also streamed via Facebook live at www.facebook.com/1stUCC

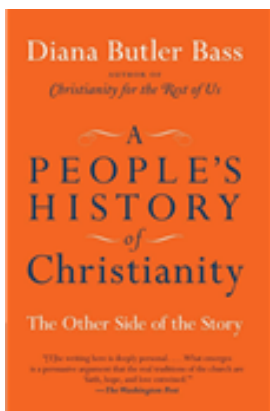
- January 5** **Second Sunday of Christmas (Epiphany observed)**
Holy Communion
Matthew 2:1-12; "Home by Another Way" with Rev. Willson
- January 12** **Baptism of our Lord Sunday; Service of Baptismal Remembrance**
Luke 3:15-22; "The Order of the Baptized" with Rev. Willson
- January 19** **2nd Sunday of Epiphany**
John 2:1-11; "When Jesus Brings the Party" with Rev. Willson
- January 26** **3rd Sunday of Epiphany**
Luke 4:14-21; "What Would Jesus Fulfill?" with Rev. Willson

Service of Baptismal Remembrance

On January 12, on the Sunday known as "Baptism of Our Lord", we will have a special morning worship service of baptismal remembrance to consecrate the year ahead. In addition to rehearsing baptismal vows there will be a time of baptismal remembrance (similar to an Ash Wednesday service but with a drop or two of water instead of ashes). Those wishing to be baptized during Holy Week or on Pentecost Sunday are encouraged to speak to Rev. Willson.

ADULT FAITH FORMATION

Sunday Mornings at 9:30 AM



We will be continuing our discussion "A People's History of Christianity" by Diana Butler Bass through Jan 12. It is never too late to join us, even if you have not read the book! We will start a new discussion/study topic on Jan 19; stay tuned for details.



Congregational Meeting – Jan 26

On January 26 after worship will we have our annual congregational meeting to consider "The State of the Church." What are things to be celebrated? What causes for concern do we have? What direction(s) do we want to go in the next year? Please plan to stay after worship for this brief but important gathering.

All 2024 Annual Reports from the various Boards and Committees should be sent to [June Conner](mailto:June.Conner@1stucc.org) by January 8, 2025.

January Birthdays

Lorraine Martin	1/01
Sean Shipman	1/08
Liliana Lopez	1/13
Lee Gunn	1/14
Madeline Meszaros	1/13
Sam Parker	1/19
June Conner	1/21
Hallie Hartman	1/21
Donna Foss	1/21



Along with all of "Metro Richmond at Prayer," during January let's pray to overcome in Christ's name the heritage of racism in Metropolitan Richmond.



We continue to hold our monthly Black Lives Matter vigils on **Sunday mornings immediately after worship.** We have plenty of signs available. Have a

snack at our hospitality time, and then join us along Courthouse Road in front of the church on **January 19.** What better way to observe the MLK holiday weekend?!

Unhanging the Greens – Jan 9

Come and help us take down and put away the Christmas decorations on Thursday, Jan 9 starting at 3 PM. Many hands make light work!



Women's Fellowship

Women's Fellowship will meet for a post-Christmas holiday brunch on **Saturday, Jan 11 at 11 AM.** Thanks to Rhoda Blocker for hosting this gathering! Please bring a dish to share and let Rhoda know if you are coming (Rhoda.blocker.123@gmail.com.) Her address has gone out by email. We will need a few minutes to discuss mission donations and next month's "Souper Bowl", otherwise we will party like it's 2025! (Rhoda says men are welcome too!)

Men's Fellowship

Men's Fellowship Breakfast will be **Saturday, Jan 18 at 9:00 AM** at Southern Taste Diner, 9951 Hull St Rd. in the Oxbridge Square shopping center.

RISC updates



RISC is now in the "research to action" phase of their annual program. Anyone is welcome to participate in any of these upcoming meetings. It's a great way to learn more.

Healthy Homes Meeting with Phil Storey, Virginia Poverty Law Center
Thursday January 16th 6:15-8:15 pm
Sacred Heart 1400 Perry St.

Affordable Housing & Healthy Homes Meeting with Staff from city's Department of Housing & Community Development: Tuesday, January 21st, 1:15 - 3:15 pm
Holy Rosary Catholic Church (3300 R Street)

Gun Violence Meeting with Deion Sumpter and Team from Philadelphia GVI Program: Thursday, January 23rd, 1:15 - 3:15 pm, Location TBD

RISC Issue Committee Night
Thursday, January 30th, 7 - 8:45 pm
Bon Air Presbyterian Church
9201 W. Huguenot Road

December Highlights from Church Council and Congregational Meeting

The 2025 slate of officers and the proposed 2025 budget were both approved by the congregation. This year's budget (\$142,700) reflects a deficit of \$40,251, which will have to be covered by additional donations and drawing down our savings. In addition to the expenses for a full-time pastor, there have been significant increases in insurance premiums and costs for utilities and building maintenance. At present we have 19 pledges turned in for the year for a total of \$62,379 and the balance of our combined savings is \$94,457.

Don Hall addressed issues with the church's heating units. One of the two roof units – heating the rear of the sanctuary - is not working. The units are 6 years old – 1 year out of warranty. Don is trying to do much of the work himself to save money; parts have been ordered and this repair may cost approximately \$2,000. Don is also working with a repairman to address an under-performing unit for the church offices. Pastor Daniel raised the issue of our solar panels, which are now quite old. He suggested that we investigate whether there are better and more efficient panels available and whether there are programs through the UCC to assist with the cost of replacement.

Pastor Daniel discussed his desire to bring expanded diversity to the worship service, finding our authentic voice and trying to rethink our vision for worship in the future, including ways to be more inclusive and multicultural. He would also like to expand our music ministry. If anyone has ideas or musical talents to volunteer, please let him know.

We decided to resume having a designated greeter on Sunday mornings to make sure that visitors, as well as regulars, are welcomed. There is a sign-up sheet in the Narthex – please pick a Sunday and sign up!

Several members of the congregation recently volunteered during an evening shift at the Latino Food Bank in the 360 West Shopping Center on Hull Street. If there is enough interest, this is something that we could participate in again, perhaps even on a regular basis. Contact Gail Christie if you are interested in helping.

"Faith gives us the strength to confront the injustices of the world and to seek a better way."

-Jimmy Carter