



# Under the Dome

**Dunbar United Church of Christ  
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***An Open & Affirming Congregation***

**Weekly Services**

**Sunday Mornings @ 10:00 A.M.**

**Saturday Evenings @ 5:00 P.M.**

# January 2024

## Pastor's Report, January 2024

We just finished one of our Wednesday night Bible Study's and we looked at the passage we will read Sunday from Luke's Gospel. Joseph and Mary brought Jesus for his purification where he was to be circumcised after eight days and two pigeons were sacrificed — all this in accord with Moses' law in Leviticus chapter 12. This detail is important because it shows how Jesus was Jewish and his parents were devout and lived as closely as they could according to Jewish laws and customs. It's crazy that so much antisemitism is rooted in Christianity — in various Christian groups — when Jesus and his family and ancestors -- WERE JEWS!

In this reading, as Jesus was being presented to the Temple, there were two holy people on hand to witness, a man, Simeon, and a woman, Anna. Simeon "praised God" and said: "My eyes have seen your salvation...a light for revelation to the gentiles and for glory to your people Israel. Then Simeon turned to Mary and said: "This child is destined...to be a sign that will be opposed...and a sword will pierce your own soul, too."

The woman, Anna, was 84 and had lived most of her life as a widow (she was married only seven years when her husband died). She also praised God and said to all who were looking that Jesus was "the redemption of Jerusalem."

It's a mixed message, and I suppose it always has been, and will be. Jesus was proclaimed as the salvation and redemption of both gentiles and Jews — of all people. But, as Simeon said, many would oppose Jesus. If Jesus is the salvation that God had planned for the world, much of the world was saying "no." Jesus would be widely rejected, a fate that would be pain like a sword piercing his mother's soul.

The Bible, like life, seems to give such a mixed message. The

prologue of John's Gospel captures this contradiction and confusion wonderfully with its images of light and darkness. Jesus, the light shining God's blessing on creation, and people choosing darkness, craving the shadows more than "the way, the truth, and the life."

And so we head into 2024 as we would march ourselves into a hurricane. Because even if we've just been occasionally glancing at the news and the events that are coming up on the near horizon — there's a storm coming that would cause even the sunniest starry-eyed optimist to collapse in fear and anxiety. The election of 2024. What can we compare it to? It's potentially worse than the Great Depression, Pearl Harbor, D-Day and 9/11 — COMBINED! We are moving into an uncertain future of unimaginable consequence. No — not moving — but sleepwalking. Sleepwalking is the more accurate term that some, like ex-Senator Liz Cheney, have used. Sleepwalking.

Morally, religiously, spiritually we do not seem aware or even to care, as a nation, the direction in which we are moving. The poet said it so well: "The falcon cannot hear the falconer." We are becoming deaf to God's voice of peace (rather than hate), forgiveness (rather than revenge and retribution) and truth (rather than propaganda and conspiracy theories).

"The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity." Yes. There is more fire, more emotion and cheers and growing crowds and poll numbers for a man who quotes Hitler! Where is Lincoln now? Where is the leader who will appeal to "the better angels of our nature." Lincoln told the crowd at his first inaugural address, where seven southern states had already seceded: "We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the

chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.” Where is Lincoln? Where is Martin Luther King? Where is Dorothy Day? Instead, we’ve become enthralled — intoxicated — by a lost soul who claims some are “poisoning the blood.” Just as the one who claimed in 1925 the Jews were poisoning the blood of Germans. Where is Jesus? GOD — WHERE ARE YOU!!!???

I can’t remember any New Year that I have been more frightened to enter than this one, 2024. But love casts out fear, yes? That’s what we’re told in John’s letter. Love casts out fear. And look at the situation of Jesus and Joseph and Mary. They lived under the rule of a foreign dictator, a Caesar. They endured the rule of a wicked king, Herod, and a cruel and violent governor, Pilate. So why should we worry or be anxious for the future. With God, they endured -- so will we.

At the end of our Bible Study we realized that what we need to get through — whatever it is we need to get through — is not some particular leader, or winning 600 million dollars in Powerball, or moving. What we need is faith. In everything we need to trust God, that despite the growing hatred and violence and apparent dissolution of the good in the world, that God is still Almighty. And with Christ alive and growing in our hearts and minds, we do not need to fear or be anxious. Because love and being anchored to that is what matters. So let us not sleepwalk, but walk wide awake into 2024 praying for an even stronger faith, that no matter what, we can — in the words of Teresa of Avila (who spent time in prison during the Spanish Inquisition and knew her share of hardship):

“Let nothing disturb you  
Let nothing frighten you  
All things are passing;  
God only is changeless.

Patience gains all things.  
Who has God wants nothing.  
God alone suffices.”

Grateful to be awake and walking with you and Jesus into the glorious future God has planned,  
All my love,  
George

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*Contact Pastor George @  
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## **H.O.P.E.**

H.O.P.E. would like to thank those that have donated this past month and helped us keep feeding others:

George and Janet Braen

Kathy Straka

Paul Furgalack and Anna Tamborino

Heather Sibley

Barbara Gengarely, in honor of Peter Laffin's 70th birthday!

Joe and Nancy Braen

Rev. George and Janet Manukas

This month we will be donating to the local Meals on Wheels to help with those who can't get out, can't cook healthy meals for themselves and need help. This may seem like just a meal service, but sometimes this is the only social interaction a person in need gets especially in cold weather.

If you would like to make a donation, you can do so by visiting our Dunbar website or send a check to Dunbar with HOPE in the memo.

Please help us keep up Helping Other People Eat.

Thank you again,  
Debbie Laffin

## **Trustees**

The Trustees close out a busy year and are planning for 2024. In 2023 we were gratified that the financial position of the church remained strong and that members continue to be generous in supporting our mission. In addition to capital projects, we also engaged in a number of maintenance-related and unexpected issues (the replacement of a heating system circulator, for instance) and look forward to presenting the budget for 2024 at the annual meeting. We are planning for various potential projects in 2024, such as installing improved walkway lighting, painting the church ceiling.

Respectfully submitted,  
John Donohue

## **Deacons**

The Deacons have prepared our church for the Christmas season, also our choir has been practicing beautiful songs for Christmas Eve.

It was wonderful to see so many of our congregants attend our "Cafe Church". We thank Debbie Laffin for continuing Cafe Church this year. Her delicious food bring us together as a church community.

We are seeing more in-person church attendance this year!

We pray that this community spirit continues to increase in the coming new year.

The Deacons continue to work to support members of the congregation in need. Please don't hesitate to reach out, we are here to help.

Merry Christmas and a Blessed New Year!

Respectfully yours,  
Kitty Donohue

## Women's Fellowship

Women's Fellowship is happy to sponsor a Cafe Church for our annual meeting on January 21 (snowdate January 28)! We will be having breakfast bites with coffee etc. with our service. Then immediately following service we will have a luncheon table so everyone can munch during the annual meeting. (As you know, Peter runs a quick annual meeting).

Hope you all can attend the annual meeting, we need a quorum and everyone of you counts!

Women's Fellowship will be holding their "famous" Souperbowl Luncheon on February 11! Church service will be in our sanctuary with luncheon to immediately follow in Fellowship Hall. Salads and breads will be out by 10:45 with soups to be served starting at 11 a.m. A donation of \$5 is suggested for all the soup, salad and bread you can eat! Usually have at least eight different soups. We will be supplying beverages and desserts as well. Proceeds go to the Hamden Food Bank.

If anyone would like to make a soup, bread or dessert, please let me know so we can coordinate all.

We will be voting on proceeds from our 2023 successful Apple Festival at this time.

This Souperbowl luncheon is open to EVERYONE, please invite your family, friends, neighbors and anybody else to join us! We would love to see all your faces!

Much appreciated ,  
Debbie Laffin, (203) 281-3241

Annual Meeting  
Sunday, January 21 after Café Church  
Snow Date January 28

Women's Fellowship is holding its annual Tag Sale on Saturday, April 20, from 9-12. If you are cleaning out after Christmas, please think of us and save those items. We can store them in the Parish House. Please let me know if you need help dropping off/pick up. Please let me know if you are dropping off independently so I know what is for the tag sale.

Thank you,  
Debbie Laffin

### **Christian Education**

CE hosted a lively Advent Workshop on December 10th. We had many crafts, delicious brunch, a cookie walk and many smiles!!! A BIG thank you to all who helped and participated.

Respectfully submitted,  
Janet Manukas

### **Board of Missions and Concerns**

Missions finished out the year donating to Heifer International, CT Food Share, The Keefe Center for food and fuel and Columbus House. We are looking forward to another year of caring and giving. Wishing everyone a happy and healthy new year.

Take Care,  
Donna and the Missions Committee



## *Dunbar UCC Open & Affirming Statement*

We, the members of Dunbar United Church of Christ, want Jesus to be the center of our lives. Our mission is to practice the New Commandment that Jesus gave us: to love one another as he has loved us (John 13:34). We seek to follow God's will by loving our neighbors, friends and enemies alike. We seek justice for all.

We celebrate the image of God in every person. As an Open and Affirming Church, we welcome all persons into the full life and ministry of our church, and affirm that the grace of God, known especially through Jesus, is a gift meant for people of every race, color, age, ability, and sexual orientation. Worship, leadership, ministry, and employment are open to all.

We are on a journey of faith and invite all people to join us. No matter the church or community where your journey began, you are welcome here.

### **Mission Statement**

“We believe that Jesus calls us to love each other, serve our neighbor, and nurture God's spirit within us.”