

The Mustard Seed 2021



“Ready or Not”

As I write this, snowflakes are zipping about, carried on the wind and making their way to the ground. We know what that signals: a changing season. And whether we’re ready or not, the next season comes.

In the church year, the season of Advent marks the change for us. Advent is a season of hoping, preparing, waiting and watching. Advent is the season of watching and waiting for Christ, both to come and to come again. And whether we’re ready or not, Christ comes. Of course, we know Christ is already here, but Advent also helps us look with hopeful expectation to that day when Christ will come and gather all creation to himself.

To help us mark our waiting amid the excitement of Christmas, we have some visuals we’ll use. We have the Advent candle up front, with its four candles and the Christ candle in the center. We’ll light a candle each week and sing an Advent song.

Our banners will also help us wait and watch. Each week, we’ll add a banner to the walls, and each banner has a story to tell. Come and see what each week’s theme might be! By the time we get to Christmas, we will have the walls adorned and our hearts more readied for the Christchild.

Advent is a season that’s also easy to overlook because there is so much happening: school programs and papers and tests, oh my! Baking and shopping and wrapping, oh my! Gift-giving and cards and pictures, oh, my!

In the midst of it all, though, it’s worth trying to find a quiet moment: maybe at the end of the day or at its beginning. Maybe as you’re driving (yet again!) from Point A to Point B to Point C. Maybe if you notice the sunrise or the sunset or the twinkling stars—or even those flurrying flakes. Advent gives your permission to pause, to linger, to look at and for the goodness of God—born for you and all creation.

And so, beloved of God at St. John’s, ready or not, God is already here and God is still coming. A Blessed Advent and a Merry Christmas to you and yours!

~Pastor Beth



From the staff and leadership of St. John’s, Bennington: We wish you a Blessed Christmas and a meaningful celebration of Christ’s birth!

Church Leadership

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The Staff

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| <u>President</u> | Izzy Hesse |
| <u>Vice President</u> | Elli Teisinger |
| <u>Secretary:</u> | TBD |
| <u>Treasurer:</u> | Alivia Stafford |

Church Council Meeting Highlights, Nov. 14, 2021

The St. John's Church Council met after worship on Sunday, Nov. 14 and tackled a full agenda.

Complete minutes are posted on the bulletin board in the small conference room. Below are highlights of the meeting.

Meeting called to order and opened with prayer. Secretary and treasurer's reports were given and approved.

President's report included an update on memorial monies and possible uses: moving to ELW (the cranberry hymnal), upgrading to LED lighting and adding some trees on the north side were all possibilities. Discussion with congregation will help determine next steps.

Trustees reported that there is a new burn barrel in place.

Pastor reported that she has been teaching, visiting, working on music and worship and also that she's within her range of hours for a part-time call.

Under old business, these items were shared:

1.) Vanco offering system is now in place. This is an online offering opportunity, and there is an active link on the church website.

2) Further conversation about LED lighting; decision was made to start with narthex. (Editor's note: lights were in place on Sunday, Nov. 21. The difference was noticeable!)

3) Copier issues were discussed; will explore options for repair/replacement.

4) Worship updates include starting Setting 10 in the new year and learning the blue book setting of Service of Word and Prayer.

5) Education updates: Christmas Eve planning to start in coming week; Pastor is also thinking about Lenten adult education option.

6) Constitution review team to be established to update SJB constitution.

New items for business included:

1) As part of the idea of getting used to having a pastor again, Pastor Beth addressed the need for healthy communication, to be able to talk directly with each other and the desire to be remembered and/or included in the planning process of parish events.

2) Conversation about outreach and guest follow-up. Deacons to be more intentional about greeting guests.

3) Council had a conversation about Covid awareness and keeping the congregation safe. Part of that will include looking at what the school system is doing.

4) Budget and stewardship meeting to be held in December. Also, "Opportunity for Giving" envelopes to be established for LSI-Bremwood, Lutheran Chaplaincy Outreach at UIHC, and the St. John's education fund.

5) M/S/C that \$700 from Helping Hands fund be sent to NE Iowa FoodBank for their Thanksgiving meal program. Council to revisit distribution of additional HH Funds in December.



6) Newly elected LYO President Izzy Hesse and Vice-president Elli Teisinger addressed council about financial assistance for a sledding trip to Boone. M/S/C providing cost of admission for all attending the event when it gets scheduled. Council also appreciated treats the LYO group shared.

7.) Treat bags will be prepared for 100 for Christmas Eve; Jerry to secure peanuts for treat bags.

M/S/C to adjourn. Meeting closed with The Lord's Prayer. Next meeting is Dec. 19 after church.

Elf-Helpers Needed: Making Christmas bright for others

WELCA is leading us in helping brighten Christmas for 3 area families. The three families have 7 children among them. Cash gifts and checks may be left at church or checks may be mailed to Kim Ala at PO Box 116, Dunkerton, 50626.

Please have your gifts in by Dec. 5, and then be watching for the time to be an elf-helper by wrapping the gifts. See the flyer on page 4.



Worship Updates

In November, we started learning the blue book "Service of Word and Prayer," a lovely setting for worship on non-communion Sundays. We will implement this setting fully on **Nov. 28**. We will then use it on Dec. 5 and Dec. 26.

Dec. 12 and 19 will be communion Sundays, so we will use the LBW communion setting we're familiar with. On both of those Sundays, we will also welcome our first communion students to God's table. Please keep these students and families in your prayers.

Next steps in our worship life will be to start learning Setting 10 from the cranberry hymnal. The worship team liked how the liturgy songs of that setting have a lot of familiar tunes but with new words. That learning will start in the new year.

That word "liturgy," by the way, means "work of the people." These are the parts that the congregation does, often in response to some part of the service. When it comes to learning new liturgies and songs, though, we'll all be working together, pastor and people.

On December 12, Pastor Beth will officially be installed as the next pastor of St. John's, Bennington. Pastor Brackett will be with the installing pastor, and WELCA will host fellowship.

Christmas Eve worship will be at 6 p.m. The children will tell the Nativity story and share music as part of the worship. We will also have candles, carols and communion. Our older students will also make the candlelight cross.

December 26, we will continue our celebration of Christmas.



St. John's Youth Group News

On November 14, 2021, 11 youth and 3 advisors met to plan events and elect new officers. Elected leaders of the group are Izzy Hesse, president; Elli Teisinger, vice-president; and Alivia Stafford, treasurer. A secretary needs to be elected yet.

The group is currently conducting a toiletries drive for the Salvation Army free clinic and will get those items delivered after the collection deadline of November 21.

Coming events include these possibilities: ringing bells for the Salvation Army, hosting a bowling party on Dec. 12 and a snow-tubing party in Boone after the first of the year. Further down the road, the LYO will look into volunteering at the food-bank and transitioning into a new room once the cranberry hymnals have been distributed.

The group expressed their appreciation to WELCA for the donating the 11/14 Noisy Offering to LYO. Also, the president and vice-president approached the council, meeting in the adjacent room, about sponsoring the snow-tubing trip. (Editor's note: council agreed to cover admission cost per guest.)

(Information gleaned from notes provided by Kelli Snyder.)

Christmas Eve: Come and worship!

St. John's Bennington will celebrate Christmas Eve worship at 6 p.m.

The children will share the message through their annual Christmas program.

Candles, carols and communion are also part of the evening, and this year, the youngest worshipers among us will be given a glowstick for worship that they can take with them to carry Christ's light into the world.

The older youth will make the familiar and beloved candlelight cross, we'll sing Silent Night, and treat sacks will be shared at the end of worship.

Plan now to worship with family and friends!



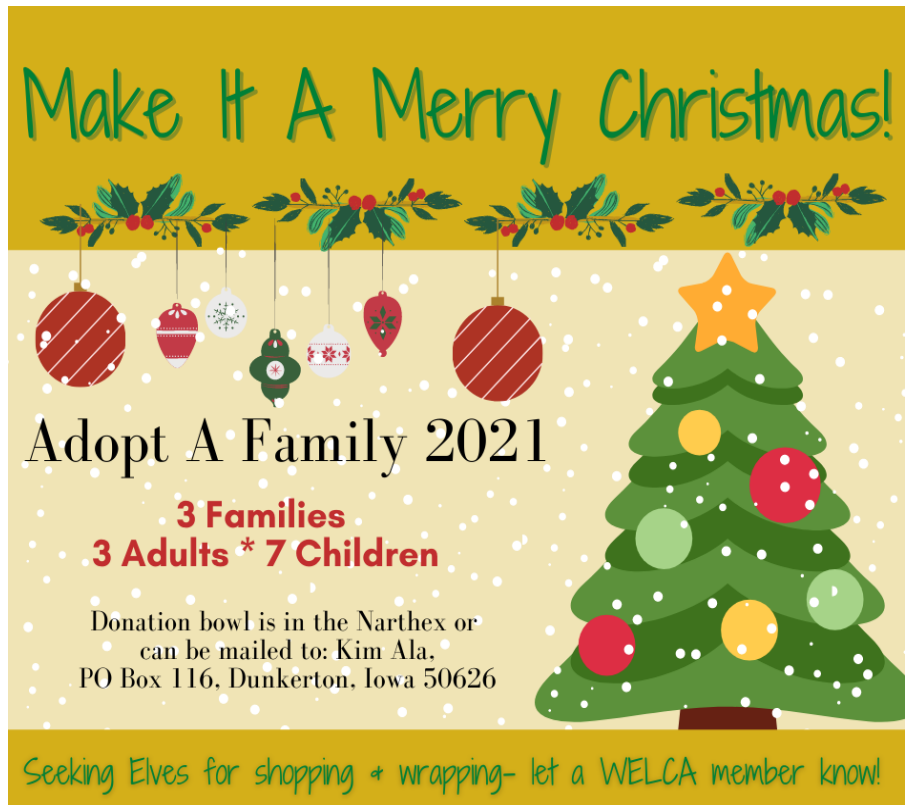
Giving to God through SJB

It's no secret that there's a lot on many Sunday calendars. Making it to church every week rarely happens.

Now there's a new way you can support the mission God calls us to even if you can't be at church.

Because we believe people want to support the work God calls us to and through here at SJB, we now have an online link on the church website for automatic giving.

Go to www.stjohnsbennington.com and look for the offering link. Sign up and give in a way that works for you, and be encouraged by the fact that you are helping make mission and ministry possible with your gifts.



The Mustard Seed

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