



CONGREGATIONAL CLARION

First Congregational Church ~ Salt Lake City, Utah

December 2023

December Worship Services

Services Held at 10:30am

Dec. 3

1st Advent ~ Peace Communion Sunday

“Christmas with the Grinch:
When Everything is Wrong”
Taizé @7pm

Dec. 10

2nd Advent ~ Hope

“Christmas with the Grinch:
When Christmas Isn’t
Christmas”

Dec. 17

3rd Advent ~ Love Lessons and Carols

“Christmas with the Grinch:
When You’re Sure
You’re Right”
Taizé @7pm

Dec. 24

4th Advent ~ Joy Children’s

Christmas Pageant
in All Saint’s Sanctuary

Christmas Eve Service @7:30pm in

All Saint’s Sanctuary

“Christmas with the Grinch:
The Heart That Grew
Three Sizes”

Dec. 31

New Year’s Eve

“The After-Grinch Party:
Grace at the Table”

If You Take That Away, Is It Still Christmas?

By Rev. Doug Gray

I am really excited about our Advent series on the story of the Grinch! My prayer is that the worship, music and praying will help us think differently about Christmas. It’s interesting to think about who is the Grinch in the Christmas story, or to consider the ways in which I might be “Grinchy” when it comes to Christmas. Love the twists and turns!

But the really key movement in the story of the Grinch is how the Grinch fails to stop Christmas from coming. He takes away all the presents and the food and the decorations...and still Christmas comes. And that got me thinking: what makes Christmas Christmas? Or looked at another way, if we were to take away pieces of Christmas, at what point would it stop being Christmas? If we don’t have a Christmas tree, is it still Christmas? Yeah, I think so. Christmas is more than a tree that symbolizes God’s “evergreen” life in the midst of a cold winter. If we take away giving gifts, is it still Christmas? Yeah, I think this is true too. Even if we didn’t give or receive gifts that remind us of the wisemen’s gifts, Christmas could still be great. We could take away our favorite Christmas foods, or our favorite Christmas albums, or the beauty of glittering lights in the darkness—and we would miss knowing how sweet and worth savoring our Lord is, how beautiful and uplifting the angel’s song must have been, or how hope springs up when the lights shine in the darkness—but we could still have Christmas. Ah! But take away Jesus, and what do we have? An overly commercialized, cultural holiday. Almost all the things we do symbolically point to Jesus, to the gift God gives us—his Son, born to set us free, born in a manger, Light for a darkened world.

As we ponder Christmas again this year, I am reminded of the extended family times that we had to skip because of the pandemic, of how we couldn’t really get away for the holidays, and I am grateful that we are getting more of that back this year. This year, may our Christmas be marked with thanks and joy for the One who came down, and who gave His life for us.

Advent Worship Schedule

Finding Faith in the Grinch Story

The run up to Christmas—for some it’s magical, for others it’s dreadful. The iconic Dr. Seuss story, *The Grinch Who Stole Christmas*, seems to capture both of those with a great sense of fun. Starting December 3, we will let the Grinch (and God’s Word) guide us to deeper faith through worship, Sunday School and Sunday Adult Formation. In all three, we will enjoy this iconic story, and find God can speak into our lives about the true meaning of Christmas. A great chance to invite a friend!



Sunday Adult Formation

9:15–10:10a • Conference Room

Across from Office

Want to get closer to God? Want to understand how God is working in your life and our world? Sunday Adult Formation is a great way to do both! In December, we will spend time with the classic Christmas story, *The Grinch Who Stole Christmas*, and Matt Rawle’s book, *The Heart That Grew Three Sizes*.



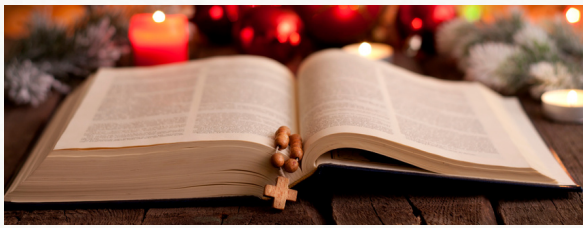
Taizé Worship with All Saints

December 3 and 17, @ 7pm

Worship is meant to be experienced with all our senses, to involve our whole body in praising and honoring God. The Taizé worship experience is designed to do just that. Twice a month, All Saints Episcopal hosts Taizé worship—meditative music, prayerful chanting, thoughtful message, and Biblical worship all rolled into one! Why not give it a try!

Dec. 3	1st Advent – Peace Christmas with the Grinch: When Everything Is Wrong Taizé 7pm	Amos 5:21–24 Matthew 2:1–12
Dec. 10	2nd Advent – Hope Christmas with the Grinch: When Christmas Isn’t Christmas	Zechariah 7:4–10 Romans 5:1–8
Dec. 17	3rd Advent – Love Lessons and Carols Christmas with the Grinch: When You’re Sure You’re Right Taizé 7pm	Luke 1:26–38; 50–55
Dec. 24	4th Advent 1 – Joy 10:30am Children’s Christmas Pageant in All Saint’s Sanctuary	Luke 2:8–20
Dec. 24	Christmas Eve Service 7:30pm in All Saint’s Sanctuary Christmas with the Grinch: The Heart that Grew Three Sizes	Various
Dec. 31	New Year’s Eve The After-Grinch Party: Grace at the Table	Isaiah 65:17–25 Matthew 2:13–23
Jan. 7	Epiphany Communion Sunday	





Bible Study! Friday Lunch Bunch @ Noon

Want to know more about the Bible? Come dig in with us! At Noon each Friday, we will gather for 45–50m (longer if people have the time) of exploring how the Bible can change our lives. Our weekly Bible Study sessions are open to all and provide an opportunity to explore the scriptures, discuss their relevance in our lives, and grow in faith together. You can join us on Zoom or in person, and bring your lunch! We can share a meal and a good Word for our day.

Dec. 1 – Hope in Prophecy and Matthew

Scriptures: Matthew 1–2

Dec. 8 – Peace in Prophecy and Luke

Scriptures: Luke 1–2

Dec. 15 – Love in Prophecy and John

Scriptures: John 1:1–18

Dec. 22 – No Friday Lunch Bunch

Dec. 29 – No Friday Lunch Bunch



Kristi's Family Vacation Plans

I am excited to announce I will be traveling to my favorite place on earth with my favorite people on earth... you guessed it Disneyland with my extended family. 30 people decked head to toe in Disney Swag ready to see Mickey and Minnie Mouse. This trip is a 2020 do-over. As you all know, my niece, who passed away in 2019, loved Disneyland as much as I do. This is a memorial trip to celebrate her and her amazing life she lived in her short 18 years here on earth.

Rev. Doug will be holding down the fort while I am away. Please reach out to him if there are any needs that arise while I am away.

Breakfast Feeds the Soul

Special December Men's Breakfast

December 6 at 7:30am – Bob Baird will be cooking his famous Ebelskivers (Danish Pancakes) We will be meeting upstairs at ASEC Parish Hall. We will be wrapping up by 9:30am to allow for clean up. **All the Men and Women of FCC are invited.** Come share breakfast with us. Conversations are always good and the food is always tasty. Not all are members of the church, but all of us are trying to live lives marked by grace.



Women's Breakfast

Ladies, mark your calendars! We are thrilled to invite you to a Women's Breakfast on December 8 at 9am, we are meeting at IHOP on 5300 S. and State Street. It is going to be a fantastic opportunity for us to come together, enjoy a delicious meal, and connect with one another. We will be making this a regular monthly event, held on the 2nd Friday of every month, so if you can't make this month, we hope to catch you next month.



Building Requests and Calendar Updates

Please direct all building use requests through the church office by email at firstcongregationalslc@gmail.com or by leaving a written note. This will help eliminate any building conflicts. If you have any items that need to be added to the church calendar, please also let the office know by email.

Congregational Conversation Report for Nov. 12

On November 12, members of our congregation gathered for worship and then a potluck meal. As we gathered around the tables, we discussed the following topics:



1. What are our strengths and essential character traits as a faithful community?
2. What makes us different from other faith communities?
3. What drives us to come to church? What do you appreciate most about FCC?
4. Do you think we have enough social connections between church members? Are there ways you would like those to improve?

The food was amazing—we had more than we could eat!—and the conversations were stimulating. Like most conversations, they circled about as we thought about things together, so here is a summary of the thoughts from the day. I (Pastor Doug) have reorganized the answers for clarity, as some answers appeared under more than one question.

Qualities of Our Congregational Life

- Welcoming, friendly and open — Strong sense of community
- Tolerant and accommodating of differences — inclusive of gender, politics and socio-economic class. No judgement/guilt from others
- Informal and fun — We like each other and laugh together, esp. in worship.
- Courageous (in the face of change) and imaginative
- Compassionate and supportive — Seeing the needs in our fellowship and our community and doing something about it
- Faithful — We hang in there together. Our fellowship is strong.

How Our Church “Does Church” Together

- More freedom — No hierarchies, no top-down direction. Part of an association not a denomination.
- Democratically select our leaders — The congregation decides how God is leading our church. The Minister is a guide and shepherd, not a boss.
- Free to form individual faith journey — Interpret Bible in our own way. We have no dogma or creed one has to sign on to. Requires more of a personal commitment to figure out what to believe – no right answers.
- We listen to each other — Accommodate differences of theology and perspective
- We have an “open table” at communion. We don’t exclude people from other religions from participating.
- We look to our surrounding community to see where we can help — Outreach
- Enjoy interacting with other churches

Who Is in Our Fellowship

- We have a disproportionate number of members from helping professions (healthcare, teaching, social work, etc) and technical careers.
- We are geographically spread out

Why Do I Come? What Motivates Me?

- Contagious enthusiasm
- Positive worship and message. After service, I go home feeling good.
- Relationships. Seeing friends and family. We have great relationships. Sharing “joys and concerns” helps us stay connected.
- Fulfill our commitments
- Reinforce our beliefs: God accepts us how we are. Gives us room to grow. We do not feel pushed. Not going to be judged
- Feels like home

What’s Working and How Could We Improve Our “Connectedness”

- What’s working: Really glad we have the breakfasts for Men and Women. Like the weekly emails and monthly newsletter. Hikes/Walks
- Where we might improve: Joint activities with All Saints. Could do more with social media. More informal, social events to socialize — Shrove Tuesday and Maundy Thursday were mentioned. We don’t pay much attention when people stop coming. Need to create better visibility for FCC in the community. Maybe we could offer Civility Training and how to express our differences lovingly? Do better at extending personal invitations to people who haven’t been participating

If you were unable to come to the Congregational Conversation and Potluck in November, we would still love to hear from you. You can jot some ideas down on a notepad or email and send them off to the church. We will add them to our summary, and they will add clarity to our future conversations.

Please do make time to join us on December 10 for the next Congregational Conversation and Potluck!

Again, we are having a strategic conversation, this time about whom God is calling us to serve, and when we say, “community,” who are we talking about? Who are the people we have a passion to serve? While we generally have the answers to the first set of questions from our experiences together, this second set of questions may just help us figure out the underlying questions we need to ask to move forward effectively. Pastor Doug says: “For example, I wonder about the demographics and needs of our neighborhood. I think we are going to have a fascinating conversation that’s really going to help us catch a glimpse of how God is calling us into the future.”



December Outreach - Becky Bishop, Chair

Our Outreach Food Donations will support Hildegard's Pantry which is located at St. Mark's Cathedral, 231 E 100 S., Salt Lake City, UT 84111. This Episcopal operation is supported by area Episcopal churches, including All Saints Episcopal Church. Please bring your non-perishable food donations on Sundays during December. Thank you for supporting this vital ministry to the community.

The following information is taken from their website: <http://stmarksutah.org/foodpantry> "The Pantry serves around 2000 households a month... We partner with local organizations like Utah Food Bank, Welfare Square, and Grocery Rescue to bring thousands of pounds of food to Utah residents in need each year. We believe in taking the Church to the world in providing this outreach ministry. We also invite the world to St. Mark's Cathedral by promoting a greater awareness of the needs of Utah residents who are without adequate food. Parishioners and community members volunteer thousands of hours and donate food items, personal care items, and fresh produce throughout the year as well as provide financial support to people in need."

How Hildegard's Pantry Spends its Funding

"The Pantry Director salary and a portion of the salary for the Deacon of St. Mark's Cathedral are paid from the Hildegard's Pantry restricted accounts (monies donated specifically for the pantry)... In addition, funds are used for special food items, such as holiday foods (chickens and turkey hams), miscellaneous pantry supplies, gas for volunteer delivery five times per week, lunch one time per week for Monday volunteers who are at the pantry an average of 5 hours unloading trucks, breaking down pallets, stocking shelves, and refrigerator and freezer and cleanings."

Hours of Operation

The pantry is open on Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday, from 11:00-1:30 and Thursday from 5:00-6:30.

Holiday Season ~ November and December

"Holiday food giveaways happen in November and December. Dates vary by year. We believe in caring for people and the Earth."



"Share the Warmth" Tree is back! Please bring new or gently used items to place on or under the tree. The tree will be decorated with donations each week, with the donations removed each week. The challenge each week is to make the tree look as beautiful as the week before! The recipient of our donations and our monetary funds will go to the VOA (Volunteers of America). These suggested items come from the VOA Urgent Winter Donation List. Bring: Adult Hoodies, Winter Hats (Beanies), Water-resistant gloves, Scarves, Winter Socks, Winter Boots, Adult Winter Coats, Blankets, Adult sneakers with decent tread, Adult Thermal Underwear, Adult Men's Pants, Leggings, Handwarmers/toe warmers. For more information about the VOA: voaut.org

December 2023

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					1 Bible Study Lunch Bunch @Noon	2 Kristi out of town through December 10 th . She will be back in the office on the 12 th .
3 1 st Advent Adult Formation @9:15am Choir Rehearsal @9 :30am Worship @10:30am	4	5	6 Special Men's Breakfast shared with the Women. 7:30am in ASEC Parish Hall	7 Super Thursday Board Meetings @1:30pm Choir Rehearsal @7pm	8 Women's Breakfast @9am Bible Study Lunch Bunch @Noon	9
10 2 nd Advent Adult Formation @9:15am Choir Rehearsal @9 :30am Worship @10:30am Congregational Conversations and Potluck Following Worship	11	12	13	14 Choir Rehearsal @7pm	15 Bible Study Lunch Bunch @Noon	16
17 3 rd Advent Adult Formation @9:15am Choir Rehearsal @9 :30am Worship Lessons and Carols @10:30am	18	19 Council Meeting @2:30pm	20	21 Choir Rehearsal @7pm	22 No Friday Lunch Bunch	23
24 Christmas Eve 4 th Advent Choir Rehearsal @9 :30am Worship @10:30am Christmas Eve Service in ASEC Sanctuary @7:30pm	25	26	27	28 Choir Rehearsal @7pm	29 No Friday Lunch Bunch	30
31 New Year's Eve Choir Rehearsal @9 :30am Worship @10:30am						

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

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